

## Grace of a Wolf –

# Chapter 161: Grace: Lyre's Lies

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Caine's presence in this camper is unmistakable, almost like he's sucking all the air out of it. Is there such a thing as an air vampire? Because it's kind of what he's doing as he stands there, squared off against Lyre—again.

They haven't even said a word yet and already clashing.

"Kids, go outside with Jack-Eye and the others," I murmur, ushering them off the couches. If these two start arguing, I don't want the kids to hear it. It's why I brought them in earlier, when Lyre and Caine started going at it outside.

Ron pulls Bun from Owen without another word, but Sara and Jer look upset as they stomp outside. They want some time with their father figure, and my heart hurts a little to see their grumpy body language.

"Owen, maybe you should—"

"Look, let's not pretend to be friends here, okay?" Lyre says, breaking the stand-off. "You don't like me. I don't particularly like you or your kind. But we can both work together for Grace, right?"

I blink.

"Right," Caine agrees curtly.

It sounds like they're agreeing to some sort of ceasefire, if you listen to their words. But by their voices, it sounds like they're still ready to stab each other.

Part of me wants to step between them, but another part—the smarter part—knows that's like stepping between two sharks. No, thank you.

"Listen, we need to talk about the kids," Owen says, breaking the stalemate. His calm, measured *I'm-gonna-kill-you*-sounding voice cuts through their tension, and I notice how he positions himself slightly closer to Lyre.

A united front.

"Actually, we need to talk about all of you," Lyre clarifies, her eyes narrowing. "It's dangerous to stay here. People are hunting Grace and the children down."

"Who?" Caine demands. "Halloway?"

Owen shakes his head. "It's more than just Halloway. These kids have been hunted since the moment their existence became known. With the Fiddleback pack decimated, others will come to claim this territory as their own. It'll be a bloodbath before long. We need to get the kids out." He jerks his head toward me. "Grace, too."

Lyre elbows Owen aside. "Look, I think the best solution is for Grace to return to Blue Mountain—"

"No," Caine snaps.

"—because she might gain better control over her powers there."

His face darkens. "You expect me to take her back there? She was running from them."

I blink. Wasn't he here to bring me back in the first place? It sounds silly to argue against it now...

"I agree with—"

"No," he snaps again, not letting me finish.

"I'm not suggesting a social call," Lyre says with a huff. "There's a good chance going will help this situation between you two. Just trust me."

He grunts.

"If she stabilizes," Owen adds smoothly, like they rehearsed this, "the energy feedback between you two might not be as dangerous when you touch."

My eyebrows shoot up. They're working this pitch together like a well-oiled machine. I'm not sure if I should be impressed or terrified at how seamlessly they're manipulating the situation.

I know Lyre said Caine can't know about the App, but... wow.

Caine's eyes flick to mine, suspicion written all over his face. "And you believe this?"

I bite my lip. I'm about to lie to the Lycan King. My heart accelerates, and I wonder if he can hear it.

"I think they're right."

Huh. The lie come easier than expected.

"Ever since Lyre mentioned Blue Mountain, I've had this... feeling. Like I need to go back. There's something there for me, Caine. I can feel it." Mainly because I read it on my phone thanks to some strange celestial app, but whatever.

His eyes rove over my face.

"You rejected that place," he says quietly. "You refused to come back with me."

"I rejected the people," I correct him, glancing at Lyre. "Not the land."

She nods. "Exactly. The territory itself might hold keys to her abilities."

Wow. It's all a bunch of bullshit, but she sounds so damn convincing.

Caine's jaw works, and I can see the conflict in his eyes. He doesn't trust Lyre, that much is obvious. And he's right, because she's lying to him.

But it's all for the greater good.

Even if it doesn't feel great to lie to him. What kind of relationship is built on lies?

My first instinct is to pray for forgiveness, but after all the divine bombs Lyre threw at me, I'm not really sure how prayer and gods work anymore. I'm not even sure if I *want* to pray to them anymore.

But I do want to be able to touch Caine without fainting, so I focus on that.

Once our missions are complete, Lyre can come back and teach me more about arcana.

"And the kids?" he asks finally.

"They'll be safer with you and Grace," Owen says. "Away from here."

Caine exhales slowly. "Fine." The word sounds like it's being dragged out of him. "We'll go."

Relief floods through me, accompanied with dread. I don't want to return to Blue Mountain, and the thought of seeing Rafe and Ellie...

My stomach twists.

Caine has no idea Rafe's come to see me since choosing Ellie. Even since the massacre, and Caine claiming me as his in front of the pack. The two of them seem oblivious to the king's opinion of me—then again, I was, too.

Humans aren't treated well in wolf packs, and I wanted to avoid them. But now there's no choice.

"Good," Lyre says, all business now. "Owen needs to stay with me, but you should take my camper and the truck. We'll take the SUV."

Caine's eyes narrow as he looks Owen over. Then he turns back to Lyre. "Jack-Eye stays with you. He already volunteered."

Lyre scoffs. "I don't need your watchdog. Just the wizard is fine."

He shakes his head. "Keep him with you."

"Fine. If you don't trust me so much, I'll bring your dog."

If Jack-Eye, Owen, and the wizard are going with Lyre... I think about the truck, frowning. "Does that mean Andrew's coming with us?"

Caine's head whips around, his eyes suddenly laser-focused on my face. "Why would you want him to come with us?"

The intensity of his reaction throws me for a loop, and I stammer without meaning to. "I—what? I mean, he lives there, Caine. Wouldn't it make sense?"

Andrew hasn't exactly been friendly to me in the past, so it's not like I'm eager for his company. But the vehemence in Caine's voice... he's jealous, I'm sure.

The muscles in his jaw tighten, and he gets very loom-y in an instant. "There isn't enough room in the truck."

I was thinking the same thing, which is why I brought it up, but—

Lyre, watching this exchange with a hint of amusement, interjects. "His car is probably still at the other campground. Have Jack-Eye take him to pick it up." She waves her hand dismissively. "If it's been towed, use my card to get it out of the lot."

The Lycan King glares at her, but doesn't argue again. It takes only a second to realize why.

Of course—Andrew won't be in the same car.

I sigh. Having a Lycan for a boyfriend is going to involve a lot of emotional management, it seems. I'm still struggling just to deal with myself becoming a pseudo-mother of four. Now I have to deal with Caine's jealousy, which is only going to get worse if Rafe doesn't respect boundaries. Or show basic intelligence.

Shaking off my thoughts, I ask quickly, "When do we leave?"

Lyre exchanges glances with Owen, who looks conflicted before finally giving the slightest nod.

"You should leave today. Better to get on the road as soon as possible. I'll help you get the camper ready."

## **Chapter 162: Grace: Stealing Our House (END BOOK THREE)**

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We're going to be traveling for days.

*Days.*

With a bunch of kids crammed into a truck. There won't be enough room to stretch out, and there are only so many snacks you can cram down a child before they get full.

I'm already nervous.

And Bun doesn't even have a carseat. Worse, even if we buy her one, there isn't room for it.

I gnaw at my lower lip. If we get into an accident, I'll never forgive myself for not having a car seat for the baby... but the idea of sending one of the kids in the car with Andrew unsupervised makes me want to vomit. Or have a panic attack. Or both.

Andrew's been... nice. Helpful. He hasn't complained once about suddenly being under the thumb of the Lycan King—but then again, why would he? It's putting his life on the line for nothing.

So, while he hasn't done anything outright to harm us, I just can't quite trust him. Not with my kids.

When I look up, Lyre's staring out the window again, her body unnaturally still.

"What's wrong?" I ask, abandoning the pile of books I'm trying to cram into a closet. It's more like I was staring at them while thinking about seat arrangements, anyway.

Her cat-like eyes narrow as she points through the glass. "Is that the couple you had dinner with?"

I follow her gaze. "Yeah, that's them. Archie and Doris. They were really sweet."

Lyre doesn't look convinced. She studies their vehicle with unsettling intensity, then raises her phone and snaps a photo.

"What are you doing?" I ask, a cold feeling settling in my stomach.

"People aren't always what they seem, that's all." She tucks her phone away with a casual shrug, but it feels anything but casual. "Paranoia comes with the job, Grace."

I frown, unconvinced.

Sure, the couple was odd—Doris's blessing over dinner had given me goosebumps, and they were both a little too friendly. But dangerous? They're just a pair of retirees who shared their barbecue and taught Jer to play Go Fish.

He's terrible at remembering the rules.

"They're harmless," I say, but doubt creeps in anyway.

"Maybe."

Before I can pester her for more information, a loud, frantic bout of barking erupts outside, followed by the kids shouting.

"Fenris, no!"

"Sara, grab her!"

"Someone get Caine!"

Lyre and I lock eyes for a split second before bolting for the door. I nearly trip on the small step as we rush outside.

Fenris stands with his massive body tense, teeth bared, hackles high, with a deep growl rumbling through the air.

Sadie, the golden retriever, barks back frantically, her body low to the ground in a strange mix of fear and defiance. Ron holds Bun protectively against his chest while Sara tries to position herself between the two animals.

"Fenris, stop!" I call out, stepping toward him without thinking.

Caine materializes from somewhere behind the camper—he was on put-away-the-generator duty—and grabs Fenris by the scruff. The giant wolf doesn't retreat, but he stops advancing.

It's almost comical, if it weren't for the stressed-out children and the terrified dog.

"He says she smells wrong," the Lycan translates, his face impassive as he also stares down the poor dog.

Lyre stands beside me, resting an arm against my shoulder. "Well, it's supposed to," she replies evenly. "You can't blame it for how it smells."

What a strange response.

Caine must think so, too, because he immediately glowers at her. "What do you mean?"

In his moment of distraction, Sadie breaks away from her standoff, zooms in a happy circle around all of us—like this is just some great game—and then bolts straight into the open camper door.

"No!" I cry out, but it's too late.

Jer doubles over, laughing so hard he can barely breathe. "She's—she's stealing our house!"

His older brother sighs. Ron has a specific, Jer-said-something-stupid-again sigh. "How can she steal a house, Jeridiot? If anything, it's a home invasion."

Okay—I don't think this is the point to focus on, though...

Sara, the darling, is the only one of the kids to exhibit the proper reaction. She shrieks, taking off after the dog. "Come back, Sadie! You can't go in there! We're getting ready to leave!"

I press my fingers to my temples, feeling a headache bloom. These children have only one level of volume, and it's MAX. "I'll get her, Sara."

Lyre sighs, removing her arm from my shoulder. "I'm pretty sure it's coming with you."

"What? No." I shake my head vehemently. "She's not our dog. We can't just steal people's dogs."

Caine's jaw tightens as he releases Fenris, who continues to stare daggers at the camper where Sadie disappeared before disappearing like he never existed. "Wolves and dogs don't mix," he grumbles. "I'll get the dog, Grace."

It isn't a surprising statement, coming from wolves. Domestic dogs never hang around pack territories for a reason. Sadie seems to have more courage than most—or less brain cells. I'm not sure which.

He heads into the camper with heavy steps, and I hope he doesn't scare Sadie too much. She strikes me as the kind of dog who might submissively pee when cornered by the Lycan King.

Jer, who apparently has superhuman hearing only when it comes to conversations he wants to join, perks up immediately.

"Then I'll get permission!" he shouts, and before anyone can stop him, he bolts toward Archie and Doris's camper.

Ron's face falls into his typical exasperated expression. "Jer, don't be an idiot! We can't just take their dog!"

My stomach drops as I watch Jer's small figure race across the campground. Wow. We're the strange family with a kid who wants to take other people's pets. "We have to stop him."

Before I can move, Lyre's fingers wrap around my wrist with surprising strength. Her expression has changed, all the casual humor vanishing as she frowns after Jer. "Come on," she says, voice low and tense. "I have a bad feeling about this one."

Oh, that's not good.

Owen appears at her side as if summoned, his silver-gray eyes scanning the campground. His face is grim, and I wonder where the hell he was until half a second ago. "Maybe Grace should stay back," he murmurs.

"No," Lyre shakes her head, pulling me forward. "Just make sure the idiot Lycan doesn't follow."

I glance back at the camper, where Caine still hasn't appeared with Sadie. "Wait, let's grab their dog first—"

Jer's voice cuts through the air, shrill and panicked.

"Holy shit! What the fuc—*Owen!*"

My heart seizes.

Lyre and Owen burst into a run a split second before I do, but they're halfway there before I've taken three strides.

Panic makes my legs feel like jelly and I'm cursing myself for letting a kid run so far ahead while simultaneously praying to the Goddess he's safe. "Jer! Are you okay?!"