

Grace of a Wolf –

Chapter 59: Caine: Took Everything She Had to Give

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CAINE

Grace's limp body fuels a new feeling, something old and unfamiliar. It's an emotion I haven't felt since I was a young pup, long before I came into strength and power.

Terror.

What is it? Fenris asks. He's been silent, politely blocking himself off from our intimacy, even when that rainbow-haired chit was banging on the door.

She's unconscious.

"Grace."

I shake her shoulder, the skin under my palm cool to the touch. Too cool.

"Grace, wake up."

Her head lolls as I jostle her, hair splaying across the pillow in bleached golden waves. Not a flutter of eyelashes, not a twitch. My stomach drops with dread.

"Grace!" My voice sharpens with command, an alpha's order.

Nothing. Just her pale face, lips slightly parted, chest rising and falling in shallow breaths.

What's wrong with her? Why isn't she waking?

Fenris explodes into panic, his howl ripping through my mind and air both. Strange voices join in, but they're the least of my worries.

You killed her. You killed our mate!

"Shut up," I growl, placing two fingers against the pulse in her throat. It flutters weakly beneath my touch. "She's alive."

The sudden crash of the door flying open makes me whip around, a snarl building in my throat as I storm around the corner and into the hall, Grace still limp on the daybed. Just moments ago, she'd been so alive, so vibrant, with the scent of her climax filling the air.

Now...

"Your dick better be put away—" The rainbow-haired nuisance halts as soon as she sees my face, and her eyes flick behind me.

"Call a human ambulance," I order, trying to contain the panic edging into my voice. A Lycan King doesn't panic. We're calm and composed at every moment.

Fenris howls again, a wild, uncontrolled yodel of pain.

Lyre blinks at me. Something shifts in her strange eyes, until her pupils become slitted. It's exactly what Jack-Eye had mentioned before, but the mystery of her identity is no longer a priority. Grace needs help.

"You idiot," she growls, rushing forward to shove past me with surprising strength for her diminutive, humanoid size. "You couldn't hold back?"

My chest aches with the accusation. Did I demand too much of her fragile human body?

I stumble against the wall as she rushes to Grace, pushing me aside as if I'm not the most dangerous predator she'll ever encounter. As if I haven't killed for less.

The floor sways with all of our movement.

The woman Grace calls Lyre doesn't look at me again, her focus entirely on Grace. She presses two fingers to my mate's wrist, then leans close to her face, watching her breathe.

Under normal circumstances, it would bother me she can see Grace's naked torso.

Under this circumstance, it... still bothers me. I dash past Lyre to yank a corner of the comforter over Grace, protecting her from the other woman's view.

"What happened?" she demands, her voice as sharp as any Lycan's. The command within it is no less than an alpha's.

"We were—" The words stick in my throat.

"Having sex, I got that part." Her fingers press gently along Grace's throat, examining the skin with a scowl. There's no mark there. Not yet. "When did she pass out? Before, during, after?"

"After." I rake a hand through my hair, hating how dependent I am on this strange woman to care for my Grace. "She was fine. Then she just... went limp."

"Ambulance. Right." Lyre mutters, fishing a phone from her pocket. "This far out, it'll take thirty minutes minimum."

Thirty minutes. My chest squeezes painfully. "That's too long."

"No shit." She punches in numbers, holds the phone to her ear. "We could drive her, but moving her might—"

She breaks off, attention shifting to the call. "Yes, medical emergency. My friend, a young woman, is unconscious and unresponsive after..." A quick glance at Grace's shorts, still on. She frowns at me. "After intercourse."

There's a volley of questions, and Lyre answers them decisively as I pull Grace's limp body into my arms, fighting a growl when she reaches out to check her pulse.

"No, no visible trauma," Lyre says, and I flinch.

Do they think I...? No. It wasn't like that.

I stroke Grace's hair, noticing Fenris behind Lyre. He's flat on the ground, his eyes never leaving Grace.

Will she be okay?

My heart constricts at the question. I'd just accepted this tiny, frail little human as mine. And now...

It's only proof humans can never be mates with a wolf.

No, Fenris murmurs. *Our bond would never hurt her.*

And yet it has.

Lyre sits beside me, rubbing her hand down Grace's back. Her phone's on the couch across the room; she must have hung up.

She's not panicked. Angry, yes. The acrid scent of fury radiates from her. But she's not afraid.

"She'll be okay," Lyre says confidently. "Probably going to need some fluids to help stabilize, though."

My eyes narrow. She knows something. "What's wrong with her?"

Lyre's multi-colored hair falls forward as she leans closer to Grace, and I fight back the growl trying to escape my chest. "Her energy is... depleted. Dangerously so."

"What does that mean?" I demand.

"It means you took too much." She shoots me a venomous look. "You didn't hold back. Just took everything she had to give, you brainless sack of muscle."

"I didn't—"

"You did," she cuts me off. Then she pauses. "Maybe not intentionally. But you did."

She places a hand on Grace's forehead, then over her heart. The touch, though clearly medical, makes Fenris snarl. I swallow the sound before it can escape.

"Why didn't you warn me?" I snap. Better to be angry with someone. It's easier to handle anger.

Lyre laughs—a harsh, humorless sound. "Oh, I'm sorry. Was I supposed to give the terrifying Lycan King sex education before he fucked her senseless? My bad."

My temper flares hot and dangerous. "You left us alone, but you knew this could happen, didn't you?"

Lyre meets my rage with a flat, unblinking stare. Those cat-slitted eyes don't waver, don't flinch. Something in her gaze—the absolute absence of fear—makes my anger shrivel like a flame doused with ice water.

It isn't from backing down.

It's from the blame her stare lays on my shoulders. Blame rightfully placed.

I did this, somehow.

"I never expected the big, bad Lycan King to be so fucking useless he'd drain his own mate," she says, her voice low and deliberate. "Guess that's on me for assuming basic competence."

Chapter 60: Caine: Fiddleback

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CAINE

"Put Grace down," Lyre says.

"No."

No, Fenris echoes.

My arms tighten around my limp mate, clutching her to my chest. I refuse to let her go. My lips press against her temple, feeling how cool her skin is. Her breathing's shallow. Her pulse is weak.

The thought of letting her go—even for a moment—stabs through me like silver.

"Put. Her. Down," Lyre orders, as if commanding the Lycan King is something she can do on a whim. "Your emotions are all over her right now. She doesn't need your panic seeping into what little energy she has left."

"No."

Lyre's slitted eyes narrow further. "Do you *want* to kill her?"

Of course not. She's the other half of my soul. The fated connection I'd denied is burning bright in my chest, rattled by the thought of losing her.

Losing a mate is hard, but the thought of losing Grace is... impossible. Dying would be preferable.

Lyre sighs and stomps out of the room, shaking the camper with each step. A short while later, she's back, with a soft white t-shirt. "Here. You can put this on her."

Grace's torn shirt is still on the floor, and shame washes through me at the evidence of my lack of control. Everything that happened between us had been perfect, transcendent—until it wasn't.

Pathetic fool. I should have held back. It was obvious a human couldn't handle what we have between us.

She can handle it, Fenris insists. Something is wrong. It isn't our bond. The Goddess would not allow it.

With the greatest reluctance, I lower Grace back onto the bed. Lyre doesn't waste time, pushing in beside me to slip the shirt over Grace's head. She's like a ragdoll, without even a hint of resistance.

Even the scent of blueberries is faint, hard to pinpoint in the mix of other smells.

"I need to stay with her." My hands hover uselessly above Grace's still form. "I need to fix this."

"She'll be fine. She needs rest more than anything. But you..." Lyre frowns, smacking my hands away. "You have something else to do. Go put your clothes on."

I want to snap at this strange enigma of a woman, but Grace holds her in great affection. If I hurt her...

The thought of Grace's beautiful, grass-green eyes staring at me with accusation makes my stomach quiver. It seems I've acquired many new fears today.

Deciding upon magnanimity, I ignore Lyre's audacity and grab my shirt off the floor, pulling it on. The fabric feels restrictive, unwelcome against my skin.

A strange emptiness gnaws at me—something beyond the paralyzing fear of losing Grace. My body feels different. Lighter. As if something coiled within me for years has loosened its grip.

Even Fenris's presence feels... clearer, somehow.

"I'll explain what's happening to her when there's time," Lyre says, not even glancing my way. "But there's something more important you need to deal with right now."

"Nothing is more important than her." The words tear from my throat in a feral snarl.

Lyre doesn't flinch. Doesn't blink. Just stares at me with her uncanny eyes. Then she shakes her head with a sigh.

"Get outside and deal with who you brought here with your pointless display of dominance." Her voice drops to a hiss. "Or they'll be breaking down my door, and I promise you don't want that."

"What are you talking about?"

"Your little tantrum summoned an audience. Your beta's dealing with them right now, but you need to deal with it."

Ah.

I can feel it—the press of unfamiliar wolf energy against the periphery of my awareness. A pack. Territory holders. A presence I would have noticed immediately, if I wasn't so focused on Grace.

I growl through clenched teeth.

"Indeed." Lyre places her hand on Grace's forehead. "The ambulance will be here soon, so take care of them before they scare off the EMTs. I've got Grace. Go be a king."

One more look at Grace, memorizing the curve of her cheek, the scatter of faint freckles across her nose, the slow rise and fall of her chest.

"I'll be right back," I whisper to her. "I promise."

Lyre sighs. "Just go."

Outside, Jack-Eye stands at the foot of the RV steps, his broad back a barrier between what's mine and a semicircle of wolves—eight of them, various ranks within their pack, all bristling with restrained aggression.

Their alpha isn't here, but the one might be their beta.

"Sir," Jack-Eye says, relief evident in his voice. "The Fiddleback Pack was concerned about our... presence."

I should be enraged. I should want to tear through these lesser wolves for daring to interrupt when my mate lies unconscious. Even Fenris should be clawing at my control, demanding blood for this intrusion.

But Fenris remains by Grace, silent in my head, leaving it to me.

And I feel... contained. A strange lucidity courses through my veins where molten fury should be. I can still access my anger—it's there, simmering beneath my skin—but it no longer threatens to consume me whole. The sensation is so alien I nearly stumble.

Jack-Eye studies my face with a frown.

I give Jack-Eye a curt nod, sidestepping him to face these interlopers directly. My shoulders square, stance widening—the posture of a king who refuses to acknowledge any challenge as legitimate.

The moment they catch my scent, and the light dominance rolling through the air, their faces grow pale. Jack-Eye's presence should have been enough, but not all wolves are smart enough to recognize a Lycan. Especially when they're weak.

"Where is your alpha?" My question cracks through the air.

The wolves shift uncomfortably, exchanging glances. This pack was clearly unprepared for a direct confrontation with the Lycan King. Their discomfort saturates the air, the forced bravado of those who've stumbled into something far beyond their capabilities.

A female wolf steps forward from their ranks. Mid-thirties, compact build, with sharp features and calculating eyes. Not their alpha, but someone of authority.

"High Alpha." She keeps her gaze fixed somewhere near my collar, avoiding direct eye contact. Smart. "I am Elizabeth, of the Fiddleback Pack."

I incline my head. "Why are you here?"

Elizabeth squares her shoulders, her face grim. "Until we felt a surge of alpha dominance unlike anything we've experienced before. In human domain. Our protocols require investigation of unusual shifter activity, especially this close to human populations."

My jaw tenses. "You do not recognize the authority of the Lycan Throne?"

"We do," she assures hastily. "We recognize your authority, High Alpha. We were just... unaware of your presence until now. I apologize for interrupting..." Her eyes flick to the camper. "Your pleasure."

I can feel Jack-Eye's amusement behind me, though his face is likely impassive. It's a sixth sense borne of years of friendship.

"Was my beta's presence not enough for you?"

"My apologies, High Alpha. It is our first experience with Lycans in our territory."

I grimace. The reasoning is fair; packs like Fiddleback are small, based in rural areas. "Now you know. Now leave. My business here is my own."

Elizabeth regards me for a moment, then clears her throat. "We mean no offense, High Alpha. The Fiddleback Pack would be honored to offer you hospitality during your stay in our territory." She straightens her posture, schooling her features into a mask of deference. "Our compound has suitable accommodations for you and your entourage."

A heavy hand smacks down on my shoulder. I don't have to look; I already know Jack-Eye's grinning like a fool. He loves anything free; he calls it an occupational hazard, after helping with our pack finances for so many years.

"We'll take you up on that generous offer," he says, voice warm with charm.

A growl builds in my chest. I'm not leaving Grace.

We need somewhere to stay, anyway, Jack-Eye pack-links directly to me. His mental voice is pragmatic. *And it means we can keep Andrew away from her.*

My shoulders relax. Yes, distance between the two would be ideal.

My gaze drifts beyond the confrontation. Andrew stands by my car, arms folded across his chest, eyeing the wolves with suspicion. Thom hovers beside him, nervously fiddling with his copper-wired glasses. Behind them sits a pile of our belongings—the collapsed tent, sleeping bags, some bags of unknown provisions. Everything already packed up and ready to move.

How long was I in that camper with Grace? Long enough for them to break down our entire camp.

"Jack-Eye, take Andrew and Thom to the compound. I will stay here."