

## CHAPTER FIVE

### • GRACE •

I watched him.

I lay in the damp underbrush, my tail tucked close to me, sore and wary, but I couldn't seem to leave him behind. The light crept lower, gilding the bottom of the leaves around me, but still, he remained. His shouts and the ferocity of my fascination made me shiver. I clamped my chin onto my front paws, laid my ears back against my head. The breeze carried his scent to me. I knew it. Everything in me knew it.

I wanted to be found.

I needed to bolt.

His voice moved far away and then closer and then far again. At times the boy was so far I almost couldn't hear him. I half rose, thinking of following. Then the birds would grow quieter as he approached again and I would hurriedly crouch back into the leaves that hid me. Each pass was wider and wider, the space between his coming and going longer. And I only grew more anxious.

Could I follow him?

He came back again, after a long period of almost quiet. This time, the boy was so close that I could see him from where I lay, hidden and motionless. I thought, for a moment, that he saw me, but his expression stayed focused on some point beyond me. The shape of his eyes made my stomach turn uncertainly. Something inside me tugged and pulled, aching once again. He cupped his hands around his mouth, called into the woods.

If I stood, he would see me for certain. The force of wanting to be seen, of wanting to approach him, made me whine under my breath. I almost knew what he wanted. I almost knew —

“Grace?”

The word pierced me.

The boy still didn't see me. He'd just tossed his voice out into the emptiness, waiting for a reply.

I was too afraid. Instincts pinned me to the ground. *Grace*. The word echoed inside me, losing meaning with each repetition.

He turned, head bowed, and picked his way slowly away from me, toward the slanted light that marked the edge of the woods. Something like panic rose up inside me. *Grace*. I was losing the shape of the word. I was losing something. I was lost. I —

I stood up. If he turned, I was unmistakable now, a dark gray wolf against the black trees. I needed him to stay. If he stayed, maybe it would ease this terrible feeling inside me. The force of standing there, in plain sight, so close to him, made my legs quiver beneath me.

All he had to do was turn around.

But he didn't. He just kept walking, carrying the something that I'd lost with him, carrying the meaning of that word — *Grace* — never knowing how close he'd been.

And I remained, silently watching him leave me behind.