

Chapter 236 The Evil Father

Moana

“Hello, Moana.” Michael’s harsh voice rang so loudly in my skull that I winced and staggered backwards a little.

My eyes widened as I looked down and saw what he was holding so tightly in his hand: the Golden Knife. The knife that was going to kill me. The knife that I felt plunge into my chest over and over again in my visions.

“M-Michael,” I said, taking another step back, “what are you doing? Why do you have that knife?”

Michael slowly took another step toward me. I could see the droplets of rain sliding down the blade of the golden knife in Michael’s hand and the droplets falling off of the sharp, curved tip.

“M-Michael?” I repeated as he continued to approach. My eyes searched wildly for a way to escape, but there was no way around him — not without being able to see more than a few feet in front of me. I didn’t know if anyone else was with him, or what would happen to me if I ran into the mist blindly.

Michael sighed. He lifted the knife up and inspected it in the light, turning it this way and that. I could see how the golden blade glinted, how it sparkled from the rain falling on it. Everything from the wolf head on the handle to the way that the blade curved slightly was exactly the way it looked in my visions.

“I don’t particularly want to kill you, you know,” Michael said, wiping the water off of the blade with his sleeve.

I shook my head. “You don’t have to,” I whimpered. “We can both walk away from here. If you want me to leave your family alone, then I will. I’ll do whatever you want, so long as my baby is safe.”

For a few long moments, Michael just stared at me with his glowing eyes that pierced through the rain and the mist between us. I pleaded with him with my own eyes to just let me go, and all the while I begged my wolf to do something... Anything.

“If Edrick isn’t coming, then we need to shift,” I thought to my wolf.

“I’m trying as hard as I can, Moana,” she replied, sounding just as panicked as I felt. “But it’s too hard. I feel... Stuck.”

“Keep trying!”

Michael took another step toward me, and I felt my heart get caught in my throat. I took another step backwards, but when I glanced over my shoulder I could see the edge of the cliff now as the wind blew the mist around, and I could see that I was dangerously close to the edge.

If there was no other way out... I wondered if I should just jump. Take my death into my own hands, and at least rob Michael of the satisfaction of killing me himself.

“I don’t give a damn about your baby,” Michael growled. “I have to kill you, just like I killed your parents. I should have killed you first, before they had the chance to hide you.”

My eyes widened. “M-My parents?” I whispered. All this time... They left me on the doorstep of the orphanage because they were trying to save me; not because they were ashamed of me. They knew about my true nature, so they did their best by hiding me amongst humans.

Michael chuckled. “What, you still didn’t figure it out?” he asked. “I’ll admit, I didn’t realize who you were the first couple of times we met. I thought you were just a human toy of my son’s, another woman who trapped him with the bastard child in your belly so that you could get rich quick. But I was wrong.”

I shook my head. “But why?” I asked. “Why is it so important to you to kill the Golden Wolf? You would have killed me as a baby to achieve your goal? You willingly left a child as an orphan? And now you’re going to kill a pregnant woman? Why?”

For a long time, Michael didn’t answer. I felt my entire body start to shake as I became filled with an inexplicable rage. “Why?!” I demanded. My voice screamed out like a banshee, echoing across the cliff and landing on Michael. He almost looked taken aback by my rage.

But he only laughed.

“You would never understand,” he said. “Some of us actually have a lot to lose. A good-for-nothing moron such as yourself would never understand the implications behind the Golden Wolf’s existence. Besides... By you and your baby dying now, you’ll be saving generations of pain. The Golden Wolf will always be hunted, and the gene for it is in your blood. If I cut off the bloodline now...”

I felt sick, sicker than I felt before. My lip quivered as I spoke. “You’re disgusting and vile,” I growled, feeling myself gain strength and confidence. If I was going to die now, then I would go with dignity. “What sort of a monster wipes out the entire bloodline of a creature that only exists to bring peace?”

Once again, Edrick’s evil father laughed and took another step toward me. “You know nothing about peace,” he said, his voice so low I could hardly hear it over the sound of the wind and the rain.

I felt my stomach lurch. “Edrick!!” I screamed again, hoping beyond hope that he would be close enough to hear me, and he would know that I needed him now. I continued to push Mina to shift, but her progress was pretty much stagnant by now.

“My son can’t hear you, you dumb w***e,” Michael chided.

I shook my head and scowled. I took one more step back and felt the unmistakable feeling of the rocks on the edge of the cliff crunching under my feet. I felt something give way, and heard the sound of a few small rocks tumbling down into the abyss.

“He’ll know that it was you,” I snarled. “He’ll come for you, and when he does, you’ll wish that you were dead.”

Michael simply shrugged. “You don’t know my son like I do. Above all else, he loves nothing but the money, the luxuries that our status has afforded him. I can guarantee that he’ll take it any day over a single woman such as yourself.”

“You’re wrong,” I growled. “You don’t know him at all.”

“Besides...” Michael went on undisturbed, as though he didn’t even hear what I said. “No one will ever know that I was even here. When — or rather, if — they find your body someday at the bottom of this mountain, they’ll think that you fell. Hell, maybe they’ll think that you jumped. It doesn’t matter to me. No one would ever trace it back to me.”

“Just like how they didn’t trace the death of Ethan’s mother back to you?” I asked.

Michael’s eyes widened ever so slightly. It was only a split second, but during that split second I knew that I struck a chord with him.

“Don’t speak on things you know nothing about.”

Michael took another step forward. There was nothing I could do at this point... I didn't know where Edrick was, or if he even knew that I was missing yet. I had nowhere to run, no way to fight back or protect myself.

All I could do was shut my eyes and pray for my wolf to finally shift.

And if she couldn't do it... Then I would have to jump.

Chapter 237 The Golden Light

Moana

I thought for sure that I was going to die.

“Please,” I begged my wolf, “I need to shift. It’s the only way to save my baby.”

The strong wind whipped against my hair and my clothes, and the rain had soaked all the way down to my skin by now. Behind me, I had nowhere to go but down. My heels already stood on the edge of the cliff, and I was just a small push from falling to my death.

And yet, even then, as Micheel slowly stalked toward me I knew that I would rather jump to my death than give him the satisfaction of killing me himself.

But I did still have a chance; maybe, if I could distract him and stall for just a little bit longer, I would be able to get help. I was certain that Edrick was on his way to rescue me. I could feel it. I just needed to give him the time to find me, and hope that he would be able to pick up my scent by now.

I pointed at the knife, trying my best to hide the violent shaking in my hand.

“That knife,” I said, noticing how Micheel’s eyes followed my finger down to the golden knife in his hand, “why use that to kill me? You could just push me.”

Michael was silent for e moment. His eyes stared down et the knife during that moment, end I decided to take it as an opportunity to start inching to the left. Maybe I could get around him. I could run into the mist, although I didn’t know whet the mist held in store for me. It was better then just standing here end letting him murder me.

Ethan was smart and cunning, and yet my stalling tactics worked on him that night in the warehouse. But there was a difference between Micheel end Ethen: Ethen secretly loved me, end he didn’t went to kill me. Michael, on the other hand, didn’t care about my life. He only saw me as an infestation on the earth that he needed to wipe out.

And along with that, Michael was even smarter then Ethan.

Before I could move two inches to the right, Michael stepped into my way.

“Do you take me for e fool, w***e?” he snarled, taking another step in my direction. “You can’t stall for time or pull the wool over my eyes. Who do you think I am?”

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Moana

I thought for sure that I was going to die.

I tried to swallow, but I couldn't. My tongue felt too thick and hard in my mouth, like I had swallowed a brick.

Next, I decided to try to bargain my way out.

"The Golden Wolf may be a harbinger of peace, but only if it chooses to do so," I said, my voice trembling as I nervously clenched my fists at my sides. "If I promise not to get in the way of any of your plans, whatever they may be—"

"Oh, shut up!" Michael growled. He took another step toward me. I felt myself teeter backwards a bit, making my stomach drop. I managed to right myself.

Michael took another step. Suddenly, I clenched my eyes shut and conveyed all of my fear, my pain, and my urgency to my wolf.

"Mine, we need to shift. NOW."

Suddenly, I felt a surge of power. It was different from all of the times that I felt it before. It was stronger, more potent. I felt it course through my body as though a drug had been injected directly into my veins. It was somehow sickening and enlightening, all at the same time.

"Ahh! No!" I heard Michael groan. I cracked my eyes open, and they widened when I saw Michael staggering backwards, holding his arm up over his eyes to protect himself from the blinding golden light that was emanating from me.

Then, I felt the power surge once more. A gust of wind blew, although I was certain that it came from me and not from the storm. It knocked Michael backwards a little more, and he crouched down, trying to push against it to get close to me.

At that moment, I felt my feet lift off of the ground. I had no wings, and yet some sort of ethereal force was lifting me up, holding me higher and higher above the ground until I stood above Michael's head.

Suddenly, it felt as though a thousand lifetimes of knowledge were shoved into my head, all the way from the first Golden Wolf to my parents. It was as though all of my ancestors who died before me stood around me, filling me with their light.

I saw my parents standing in front of me. I had never seen them before, and yet I knew that they were my parents. My mom's red hair was just like mine... My dad had my smile as he looked at me. I felt tears come to my eyes as I saw their hands intertwined, and their memories floated through my mind, filling me with all of the love that they had for me before they were brutally murdered.

I saw my mom and my dad dancing together in the living room of our little house on the night that I was born. My mom's belly was swollen, and her water hadn't broken yet. They danced along and laughed with each other while music played on the radio.

When my mom's water finally broke, my dad rushed her to the hospital. Just a few hours later, I was born. My mom held me in her arms and kissed my forehead.

"You came so easily, you little thing," she whispered, touching my nose with her finger and making me smile. My dad stood over her, his cheek pressed against her head as he looked lovingly down at both of us. There were tears in his eyes, and he reached down to touch me.

I wrapped my tiny little finger around his and squeezed so tight that my dad yelped and shook his hand away, and they both laughed.

After that, I saw my mom sobbing, carrying the little bundle that was me as a baby up to the front door of the orphanage. She sat me down on the steps and touched my face, then kissed my forehead. I wouldn't let go of

her hand; my tiny little fingers were wrapped too tightly around her index finger.

She reached into her pocket and pulled something out — the tooth — and with a final sob, she yanked her finger away and put the tooth in its place.

I gripped the tooth so tightly and bawled as my mom ran off into the night.

I saw all of this and more during just the few milliseconds that I floated there. I didn't realize that my eyes were closed until I opened them, tears streaming down my cheeks.

Michael stood now in front of me, his grin widening as I lowered back toward the ground. I still hadn't shifted.

But it didn't matter...

Because Edrick was creeping up behind Michael, in his wolf form.

My mate had come to save me after all, and he was poised to attack.

Chapter 238 Buying Time

Edrick

I ran for a long time to try to find Moana. Because of the fierce wind and the rain, her scent got a bit jumbled and my own wolf's tracking abilities were slightly dulled. Not only that, but because of the rain there were multiple small mudslides in the forest, and more than once I found myself slipping and sliding and getting turned around on my path.

I could sense that something was wrong, though. I sensed someone else... And it wasn't Kat or any of the other bodyguards.

Moana seemed to be in distress, beyond what was reasonable for someone who got lost in the rain. And after what Ella told me about my father, I could imagine what was happening.

I just hoped that I would get to her in time.

Finally, her scent became stronger. Before, it was faint and I was even beginning to think that I was going to lose it entirely and that I would never find her. It became a lot stronger all of a sudden, in fact. My senses were suddenly overcome by her scent, and I felt myself being drawn straight to her.

Feeling myself filled with a new sense of hope, I shot forward through the forest in the direction that Moana's scent was emanating from.

“I’m coming,” I thought, pushing myself to run faster than I ever had.
“I’m coming, Moana.”

Suddenly, I burst out from the tree line into a thick mist that had settled on the cliffside. I could hardly see in front of me, so I slowed down and stalked forward, keeping my head low as I sniffed the ground.

Up ahead, something finally came into view: a bright golden light. I felt my heart pump faster as I picked up my pace again and followed it.

When the mist separated enough so that I could see up ahead, I saw her. It was Moana; she was safe.

At least, it seemed like it. I had little explanation for what else was happening.

A bright, golden light was emanating out from her body. She was levitating seven or eight feet into the air, with her head tilted back and her eyes rolled into the back of her head. Her palms were outstretched at her sides, and she just floated there, emanating this blinding light.

But she wasn’t alone; my father was with her.

He was standing in front of her, holding up his arm to shield his eyes from the blinding light, and he had the Golden Knife in his other hand as he tried to push forward to get closer to her.

I knew what was happening now: she was about to shift, which would mean that the Golden Knife would be useless once it finally happened. All I needed to do was hold my father off until she did shift.

I was still in my wolf form, but I used my mind link with my father to call out to him.

“What are you doing?” I asked, stalking a little closer.

My father froze. He was crouching slightly as he struggled against the invisible force that surrounded Moana, but he stood when he heard my voice. I froze, too, and watched as his head slowly turned to look at me over his shoulder.

There was a dark, twisted grin on his face.

Behind him, a bolt of lightning flashed and lit up the dark sky and half of his face. That sudden flash only made him look even more evil.

“Stay out of this, son,” he replied, using our mind link to speak without moving his lips. “You can’t get in the way of this now.”

I felt a low growl start to rumble in the back of my throat. “I won’t let you kill her.”

“Oh, look at you,” my father said, speaking out loud now. “Now, you choose to play the part of the hero? What happened to the Edrick that I knew all that time ago, who agreed that the Golden Wolf should be killed so that we can keep making our money? Hm?”

I took another step closer. “I’ve changed. I don’t want that now... Screw the money.”

My father laughed. “Young people are so fickle. I was like that once, too, you know. I thought that the world could be a better place. But as it turns out, it’s impossible. Humans are evil, stupid, vile little creatures... I know that now. I don’t care if they suffer, so long as we get to keep living our life the way it is, unchanged.”

I couldn’t help but scoff as I stared at my dad. Moana still floated above us, out of reach. She seemed to be in some sort of trance; maybe she was having more visions. I hoped that she would stay up there until she shifted fully, and it would be hilarious to watch my dad have to deal with the fact that she shifted right in front of him, just out of his reach.

“Oh yeah?” I asked. “And what changed your mind about that, hm? It wasn’t a human woman who you knocked up, was it?”

My dad's eyes widened. Of course I knew the truth behind what happened with Ethan's mother; I'd known for years.

I knew that Ethan's mother was a human. Ethan was a half-blood, although he was lucky enough to have a wolf and pass as a werewolf. But when his mother tried to take Ethan away from my father, he killed her and passed it off as a suicide.

Why my dad was so interested in keeping that kid for himself, I didn't know. Maybe it was because my mother wouldn't touch him again after he cheated on her, and he wanted another

heir in case I didn't work out.

"Perhaps it was because of that," my dad said with a smirk. "But it doesn't matter. Oh, look... The Golden Wolf is coming back down to earth after all."

I looked up then to see that Moana was beginning to float back down. Her eyes opened, and it was then that I noticed that there were tears streaming down her cheeks. Her eyes were filled with a sense of melancholy, but when they locked on mine, they filled with hope.

I just needed to keep my dad busy until she shifted... It was bound to happen any moment now.

Another growl rumbled in my throat, and I pushed forward. My father stood unwaveringly in front of me. He was a fool if he thought that I loved our money so much that I would let him kill Moana right before my very own eyes.

"Look away, Edrick," my dad said, chuckling in a monstrous manner with that same sick grin on his face as he twirled the Golden Knife in his hand. Just looking at him made me sick to my stomach and filled me with a rage that I had never felt before, not even for Ethan on the night that he tried to kill Moana and Ella in the warehouse. "This won't be pretty... But I promise that it will be quick for her, if that makes you feel any better. Just

one stab, and then she'll fall from this mountain and the Golden Wolf's
bloodline will be over."

The growl that was rumbling in my throat grew.

"It won't be so quick for you," I said.

Chapter 239 Down to Earth

Moana

I opened my eyes, and started to panic as I felt myself starting to come back down. The shifting process wasn't complete, and although I could feel myself shifting a little more with each moment, I was worried that Michael would kill me before I could shift fully.

However, my eyes widened as I saw Edrick standing **in** the mist behind Michael.

“Edrick!” I called, feeling my heart lift at the sight of him. He came for me after all...

His glowing silver eyes met mine for the briefest of moments.

“Hold on,” he said, his voice reverberating in my skull. “I’ll buy you some time.”

Suddenly, as I came back down, Michael lurched forward with the knife in his hand. I shrieked as I was practically touching the ground now, and held my hands up in self-defense. But Edrick was too fast, and dashed forward.

I watched in horror as Edrick grabbed Michael by the back of his shirt collar and threw him backwards, putting himself between us. He growled and raised his hackles as he stalked closer to Michael, who was scrambling to his feet.

Michael shifted next into a large, gray wolf with a menacing appearance. I gasped at the sight of him; he was even bigger than Edrick, somehow.

“Edrick, no-” I said, reaching out to touch Edrick’s fur. “It’s too dangerous. Let’s just run away.”

But Edrick didn’t seem to be listening. I could tell that his sights were set on taking down his father.

The two wolves faced each other, snarling and pacing around in a circle. I wondered if they were saying something to each other telepathically, but I couldn’t be sure.

Suddenly, a sharp pain overtook my head. I yelped and fell to my knees, clutching the side of my head where the pain rang out. I was starting to shift; I could feel it. The sensation of my bones and my atoms shifting and changing made me almost sick, and I felt as though I could retch right there on the spot.

While I was on the ground, I heard the snarling intensify. Edrick leaped forward and collided with Michael mid-air, and all I could do was watch as they fought viciously in a flurry of teeth and claws and blood.

This was so much more vicious than the fight with Ethan. Michael wanted to kill me so badly that he was willing to kill his own son.

Michael’s large paw made contact with Edrick’s neck, sending Edrick skidding off to the side.

Michael started to run at me, and I shrieked again.

“Edrick!” I screamed. I tried to scramble to my feet, but it was no use. The pain was traveling down my neck, over my shoulders and my arms, and it was slowly working its way down my spine.

The pain seared through my body. I clutched at the dirt with my hands while I shook violently from the ache in my bones, and could only watch in a state of abject horror while Michael charged at me.

But then, all of a sudden, Edrick scrambled back to his feet and slammed into Michael again. The two of them went rolling off toward the edge of the cliff, and I gasped again as they rolled dangerously close.

I could see rocks breaking and falling off of the cliff and into the misty abyss below. All it would take was one shove or one wrong turn, and one or both of them would go flying off of the cliff.

I had to shift.

“Hurry, Mina,” I begged my wolf. “We have to do this.”

She didn’t respond, but I knew that she could hear my pleas. I felt another surge of power course through me, and I screamed again as another flash of pain took over my body. It was so intense that it felt as though the world was spinning around me, and I thought for sure that I would vomit.

“Come on...” I gritted my teeth against the pain and held the vomit down in my stomach.

I heard a loud yelp, followed by a thud. I whipped my head around to see that Edrick had thrown Michael backwards once more, and now they were fighting further away from the cliff’s edge. Edrick seemed to have the upper hand over Michael, which gave me some peace of mind.

But Edrick’s upper hand over Michael didn’t last for long. I could only watch, still in agony on the ground, as Michael clawed at Edrick’s throat and belly. Blood spewed out across the wet ground and mixed in with the mud.

Edrick yelped and howled agonizingly, and fell to the ground.

“Edrick!” I yelled. I managed to climb to my feet and, clutching my pregnant belly, I started to hobble toward him. His fur was caked in mud, and his eyelids were fluttering.

Suddenly, I saw Michael shift back into his human form. I felt another surge of excruciating pain as I saw him pick up the Golden Knife, and I

could only fall to my knees beside Edrick. I dug my fingers into Edrick's fur and held him there as I watched Michael sprinting at a full clip toward me with the knife clutched tightly in his hand.

"It's over now, Moana," Michael said, raising the knife above my head. "Just accept it."

But I knew that I didn't need to because I was shifting. I closed my eyes and pictured my parents there, holding my hands, and then...

I felt myself shift fully. My wolf's immense power surged through me.

A blinding light emanated out of me, even more blinding than the one from before. At the same time, however, I felt a searing pain in my belly. An excruciating scream escaped my lips, and I doubled over, clutching at my stomach.

"Please, no," I whispered, pulling one hand away to see red, sticky blood coating my fingers. "My baby..."

No... This couldn't be real.

I felt another surge of power. The light became even brighter, and I was on the ground now, and my eyelids were fluttering shut...

"No!" I heard Edrick shout. His voice sounded so far away, like it was being carried off by the wind.

I'd been stabbed. Michael got what he wanted.

But something strange happened then.

The golden light burst outward like an atomic bomb. The air felt like static electricity, and there was a loud boom like thunder, followed by silence. A silent wind whooshed all around me, tangling itself in my fur and beating against my face.

The power was too much. I opened my eyes and found myself lying on the ground.

Edrick was no longer beside me, and nor was Michael.

Everything was silent, as though the world was frozen. My eyes opened fully, but they weren't my human eyes anymore; everything was so bright and clear, as though the mist had never even been there to begin with.

"E-Edrick?" I called out. But my voice only echoed in my head. I looked around a little, but all I could see was the golden light.

Was I alive? Did I shift in time and stop Michael from using the knife?

Or was I... dead?

Chapter 240 Shifted

Moana

“Edrick?” I called out.

My voice was only met with nothing but an echo. The world around me was silent... In fact, as my eyes slowly opened, I realized that I was no longer on the cliff. The only thing that I could see around me was a soft, golden light that was somehow blinding yet calming at the same time.

Was this what it was like to be dead?

The last thing I could remember was the blood on my fingers. Michael must have stabbed me and finally got his way, and now I was dead.

I quickly looked down at my hands. There was no blood. No pain... In fact, I didn't feel anything at all. I could hardly tell where my skin ended and the golden light began. My body felt weightless and free, like my entire existence was just a feeling and not a physical mass.

But it was strange. When I was in my coma, everything was just a black void. But now, it was all golden and peaceful.

“No.”

I jumped when I heard my wolf's voice call out from the golden light.

“Mina?” I asked, looking around wildly. “Is that you?”

“Yes, it’s me.” Her voice seemed to be echoing all around me at first, but then it started to coagulate into one place. Finally I could pinpoint where her voice was coming from, and I spun around in that direction.

My eyes widened when I finally saw her standing there for the first time... In the flesh.

“Mina,” I whispered, reaching out my hands as she slowly approached me. “You’re so... beautiful.”

She was everything that I imagined, and more. Her fur was a beautiful, vibrant golden color, like the color of the sun. She had a little white swirl on her forehead that came down her muzzle in a thin line. That same white patch was on the front of her chest.

When I tangled my fingers into her fur, it was so silky and soft. It felt as though I was touching feathers, or nothing at all.

I gasped when I saw her tail. It wasn’t just one tail, but three. She was unlike any wolf I had ever seen before.

“Like it?” she asked, twitching her three tails back and forth.

I nodded, then looked up with wide eyes to meet her gaze. Her eyes were different colors; one was bright blue, like the color of the sky on a sunny day, and the other was green, the exact same shade as my own eyes.

But although I was so fascinated by her beauty, I still felt sad.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

I shook my head and stared down at my feet. “I’m sorry we couldn’t shift in time. I feel like I failed you. Like I failed the world by allowing the last generation of the Golden Wolf to be destroyed.”

Mina gave me a puzzled look. “I said no, though,” she said, chuckling a bit.

I furrowed my brow. “Huh?”

“I said ‘no’. Earlier, you were thinking to yourself that you were dead, but you’re not. You’re just shifting.”

“I am?” I asked. “How? Where am I?”

Mina chuckled again. “Time feels frozen right now, doesn’t it?”

I nodded slowly, then bit my lip. “It feels nonexistent, actually.”

“Well...” Mina flicked her tail and looked around. “This is what it’s been like for me for the past three months. I guess you’re getting to experience it now. Most people never get to visit the place in their mind where their wolf lives, but I guess you and I are special.”

I had to laugh. “I guess so,” I said. “But how do I get out? I need to make sure that Edrick is okay. And the baby...” I suddenly looked down at my belly. Even in this strange nonexistent place, it was still protruding with the little life inside of it. I ran my hand across it, and found that there was no wound.

“The baby is fine,” Mina said. “The knife shattered, and you healed almost instantly since you had already shifted. But Edrick...”

My eyes widened. “Is he okay?”

Mina paused for a moment before answering. “Are you sure you want to go back?”

I felt my stomach drop. “Why? What do you mean?” I asked, storming closer to Mina and staring up at her. “Is he alive? What happened?”

Mina simply shook her head. “I don’t know. But he was incredibly close to you during your shifting process, and the knife shattered right next to him when he was already injured. There is a chance... Are you sure you would want to go back if your fated mate might not make it?”

Suddenly, I felt sick. Tears welled up in my eyes and I clamped my hand over my mouth to stifle my sob. “You’re joking,” I whispered. “He’ll be okay. He has to be okay.”

Mina just stared at me and said nothing.

An uncontrollable, vile scream of pain erupted from my mouth. My throat felt as though it was closing up, and everything started to blur around me. My chest caved in, and it felt as though my heart was plunging into the depths of my stomach.

I couldn’t imagine a life without Edrick.

But Ella... And my baby...

“I can’t just stay here,” I said once I was able to speak. “Even if he’s gone, staying here would mean that all of it would be in vain.”

Mina was silent for a moment. “I could take over for you,” she said. “It wouldn’t be in vain, but you would lose your human form. But you would never have to live in a world without him.”

“So you’re suggesting I just... stay here?” I asked.

Mina nodded slowly. “Only if you want to. Only the Golden Wolf is capable of something like that... If the bearer of the Golden Wolf doesn’t want to bear the burden, they can live here, in paradise. Everything else will melt away, and you’ll have nothing but eternal peace.”

“But it wouldn’t be living,” I said, shaking my head and taking a step back. I touched my belly instinctively, and thought of the little life inside. “I would be robbing not only myself of a real life, but also my baby. And Ella would never understand.”

“So you want to go?” Mina asked. “Do you want to return to the real world now, even if your fated mate is dead?”

Without hesitation, I nodded vigorously and held my head high. “I want to do everything I can,” I said, blinking back my tears. “

Mina simply nodded.

“Very well, then.”

Suddenly, I opened my eyes. The golden light was gone... I was lying on the ground now, in the grass. I jerked my head up and looked around; I was still on the cliff, but it was no longer raining. In fact, it was beautiful and sunny.

“Edrick?” I called out. I instinctively spoke telepathically, and felt puzzled for a moment, until I realized that I had shifted after all. I was not in my human form.

I was the Golden Wolf now.

But somehow, that didn't matter to me. All that mattered was finding Edrick. I looked around wildly until I spotted two human figures lying on the ground in the distance.

They were both motionless.