

## Chapter 35 The Golden Wolf

### Moana

As Ethan mentioned the “Golden Wolf”, I felt Mina react strongly in my head. She didn’t say anything, but I could tell that she was just as intrigued as I was. “I haven’t heard of the Golden Wolf,” I said, shaking my head.

Ethan smiled. “If you want to know more about werewolves, then this will interest you,” he said. He turned and started to walk, nodding with his head for me to follow. As I walked with him, he began to speak, gesticulating with his hands.

“The story of the Golden Wolf is a story that has been passed down through generations and generations of werewolves,” he began. “If I’m being honest, I’m not entirely sure if it’s real or just an old wives’ tale; some werewolves will say it’s real, and others will say that it’s just a legend. Either way, it’s an important story. You see, there was supposedly once an extremely rare, golden wolf that was spotted only once in the forest by a human. He was hunting for his village, long before humans knew about werewolves, and he had his bow drawn to shoot the wolf, thinking it was an elk — but just as he was about to shoot, he realized that it was actually an enormous wolf. The wolf looked into his eyes, causing him to drop his bow and run back to his village. He told his entire village the story of the wolf and led them back to the spot where he found it, but it was gone. There were no footprints, no trace of the wolf. The village

thought that the man was insane. He kept saying that the Golden Wolf would bring the world into the next age, but some people thought that it was an omen of the apocalypse.”

“What happened to the man?” I asked.

Ethan shrugged. “They burned him at the stake. The legend says that he continued to speak of the Golden Wolf, even when his body was engulfed in flames.”

“That’s insane.”

“It is,” Ethan said. “That’s why I don’t think it’s a true story. How could the man know all of this just from one look at the wolf?”

I paused for a moment, turning my head to look at some of the paintings around us before speaking again. “So, this Golden Wolf,” I said, chewing the words thoughtfully on my tongue, “was it ever seen again?”

Ethan shook his head. “The people who claim it was real say that it went into hiding, and that it possibly even went dormant. Some claim that it will present itself again as someone’s wolf. A ‘chosen one’, if you will. But... I don’t know. All of this ‘chosen one’ nonsense is usually just that: nonsense. And if the Golden Wolf was somehow real, it would probably be killed by fanatics before anything could happen.”

“It almost sounds like more of a curse than a blessing,” I said.

Ethan nodded. Just then, one of the staff members came up to him and whispered something in his ear. “Well, I’m afraid I have to go give my speech to end the exhibit,” he said. “Would you be interested in coming to the afterparty with me for some drinks?”

“Um... Sure, why not?” I replied.

“Great,” Ethan said with a smile. “I’ll see you soon — and don’t forget your painting.”

As I watched Ethan walk away, however, I couldn't get the story of the Golden Wolf out of my mind. I reached out to Mina, whose presence I still felt, in the hopes of getting an answer.

"Why were you so intrigued by that story earlier?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," Mina replied, her voice growing more faint by the moment. "I feel as though it's important to me somehow..."

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At the end of the exhibition, Ethan took me out through the back door of the gallery and we got into the back of a waiting car. I held the painting he gave me, which was wrapped tightly in brown paper, and looked out the window as the driver began to take us to the destination of the afterparty.

"I hope I'm not underdressed," I said, looking down at my plain black dress and the high heels that I had stashed in my purse to change into on the way to the exhibit.

Ethan shook his head. "Not at all. You look lovely."

I felt my face redden at the artist's kind words. A few minutes later, we pulled up to the curb outside a bar. Ethan got out and came around to let me out.

As I stepped out of the car and looked up at the fancy bar, I couldn't help but feel as though it was familiar somehow... I couldn't quite place my finger on it, though. This feeling continued as Ethan held the door open for me and led me up the stairway, but I still couldn't quite recall; perhaps I had been here before and simply forgot about it.

"Ethan!" a voice called over the din of the packed room from a table in the corner. "Over here!"

Ethan perked up at the sound of the voice. Smiling, he waved for me to follow. I stood by patiently as he hugged a woman at the table, then shook hands with two other young men.

“Everyone, this is my good friend Moana,” Ethan said with a warm smile. “Moana, this is Haley, Jace, and Logan. They’re good artist friends of mine... I’m going to go get us some drinks. I’ll be right back.”

I nodded politely to the three werewolves, but was surprised to find that they all reacted warmly to me. Haley even scooped out of the way for me to sit, patting the spot in the booth next to her. I felt a bit timid as I sat, but she immediately started fawning over my hair, and I didn’t feel so nervous anymore. “You must be the pretty au pair that Ethan can’t stop talking about,” Haley said. I felt my face get hot. Was Ethan really talking about me like that?

“I hear you’re a hell of an artist, too,” Jace interjected. “Where did you go to art school?”

I shook my head. “Oh, no,” I said. “I’m not professionally trained. I just draw for fun.”

“Well, it certainly sounds like more than just a hobby,” Logan said. “What did you go to school for?”

“Early childhood education, actually,” I replied, raising my voice to be heard over the voices and music of the packed bar. “I know it’s not very interesting.”

“Nonsense!” Haley said. “You should tell us more about it sometime.”

For the first time since I had found myself caught up in the werewolf world, I actually felt like an equal. It was strange to have other people asking about my own interests at first, but by the time I had a couple of drinks in me, I felt right at home.

Eventually, I excused myself to the bathroom. I weaved my way through the crowd, making my way toward the restroom door, when suddenly, it hit me: I had been here before.

This was Edrick's bar.

Suddenly, I felt a hand on my arm — and as I turned around, I met two familiar steely gray eyes.