

## Silver and Gold

Claws danced across the windows on either side of me. I clutched the splintered remains of my wooden bat. I had thought that I'd use it as a weapon, but all I did was piss one of them off. The other one wasn't as vengeful, but just as dangerous. It would be another few minutes and they would be in here, gutting me open. Fortunately with these guys, all I had to do was make it to sunrise.

I looked down at my watch, only half past four in the morning. I chanced a look out the window, briefly emerging from my hiding spot in the bedroom. The sunrise was actually closer than I thought. The sky was a dull pink. It would only be another half hour or so, maybe less. I almost laughed, but I didn't want to risk being seen. I let a gentle puff of air out of my nose. Who knew they had werewolves in Sweden? And who knew I'd be paid so little to hunt a couple of them down?

I was down to my last throwing knife. In fact, I didn't have much else, just a lighter, a steel-wire garrote, a leather wallet with some spare change, a power bar, and some cigarettes. I gripped the bat in my hands as I heard heavy stomps outside the window. I had the bat too, despite its condition.

A scratching noise came from behind me, like there was something in the wall. It went away after a few seconds. I sighed. I nearly jumped out of my jeans when a hair clawed fist burst through the drywall right next to my head. It grabbed me by the jacket and yanked, ripping me through drywall and a single stud beam. I saw flashes of ugly green wallpaper, then *poof!* I was

outside. I'd definitely feel that in the morning. That is, if I weren't genetically enhanced to take those kinds of blows.

The monster threw me off to the side. I went tumbling down a steep hill into a thicket of pines and firs that grew very close together. I used the momentum to right myself up onto my feet, then kept running in the direction I was thrown. I should have known I would only get so far. The one I hadn't pissed off (it had darker fur and a lankier build) slapped one of my legs, tripping me. I flipped over and swung with the bat. The wolfman caught it in its mouth and bit down hard, shattering the bat to bits. It was like one of those hydraulic presses you see in metal shops; one minute it was there, the next minute it was a million different pieces.

The monster pinned me with one hand and a knee. It sat up, keeping me there while it waited for the other one to join him. I had to act fast. I kicked furiously, keeping its attention on my feet. While it used its free hand to try and grab my feet, I pulled the throwing knife out of my jacket with my free arm and thrust it deep into the creature's inner thigh. It literally howled in pain, grabbing its leg. I could see the other one at the top of the hill. He just noticed us and was about to come down. I had to act fast. I yanked on the knife, but it wouldn't budge. Fuck.

I spun over and kicked myself out from under the beast, the both of us swimming in pine straw. I leapt up and ran, this time finding a tree I could climb. I made it about twenty feet up, then settled on a branch. In my experience, these things had a hard time climbing, something about their joints. I was seriously banking on that knowledge at this moment. I checked my watch. Eight minutes had passed. The other wolf had come down the hill and was aiding his injured friend. I started to light a cigarette that I had pulled from my pocket.

Then, of course, I felt my tree shake. I looked down to find the uninjured and much larger wolfman attempting to climb the tree. It was putting a significant amount of thought into it,

stopping to grab limbs and hoist itself. These had to be the smartest werewolves I had ever encountered. When he shook the tree just hard enough, my cigarette fell out of my mouth. I fingered the box in my jacket pocket, finding only empty space. Just my luck.

I had the garrote, some change, and a lighter. At the pace the wolfman was making it up the tree, I would be screwed before the sun ever came up and outshined the full moon, turning the werewolves back to their human selves. I needed to act fast.

I flipped the wallet open, shaking the change up, looking for anything. No fucking way. I plucked out the most beautiful looking American silver dollar that I had ever seen from my wallet. I acted quickly, positioning my right arm to be free to swing. I pulled the garrote out and began tearing off a bit of my shirt at the same time. After a moment, I had made a makeshift sling. I was going to David-and-Goliath this motherfucker.

The coin would never break the skin alone. I held it over the open flame of my lighter, turning it a glowing pink after a minute. I held it there until I thought it would melt to my skin, then I held it some more. Once I couldn't bear it anymore, I dropped the hot coin in the fabric pocket of my jerry-rigged sling. It quickly caught the fabric alight, so I had to hurry. I stood up on the branch, holding on to one above me. I spun the flaming sling over my head.

I caught the glowing ring of fire from the sling reflected in the wolf's eyes as he looked up. It was like he stared at me with fire in his gaze. With a snarl, he quickened his pace, not caring about the cracking and splitting wood under him. I was only going to get one shot. Just as he got to the branch below mine, he leapt vertically, leading with his mouth. With a roar... I swung that damn silver coin straight into his face.

With an unearthly scream that made me bear-hug the tree trunk, it plummeted back to the pine forest floor. I sat there for so long, just catching my breath. From this high up in the tree, I

could see the sun peek above the horizon. It bathed the tops of the trees with a golden glow. I pulled the power bar out of my pocket, opened it, and slowly chewed on one end as I stared at the horizon. This was my favorite part of the job.