

My Hockey Alpha #Chapter 41: The Calm Before the Storm - Read My Hockey Alpha Chapter 41: The Calm Before the Storm

Chapter 41: The Calm Before the Storm

Enzo

I was just sitting down to watch a movie and drown my sorrows in a bowl of popcorn when my door suddenly burst open.

“What the fuck?!” I shouted, jumping up from my couch and spilling popcorn everywhere.

My eyes widened as I saw Luke come in, his skull exposed, carrying a limp Nina in his arms. He ran over to the couch and shoved me out of the way, laying her down while I stood there in complete shock.

“What did you do?!” I said.

“I saved her from getting sexually assaulted,” Luke said, stepping away so I could crouch down to Nina and feel her forehead. She was clammy and delirious, mumbling nonsense under her breath.

“Who did this and where is the fucker?” I growled, looking up at Luke, who was covering his skull again.

“Some asshole from the club,” he replied, sounding just as angry as I was. “Don’t worry. I got him in the back of my car. Well, not my car, technically. A car that just happened to be unlocked with the keys inside.”

He pulled a set of keys out of his pocket and jingled them.

I stood and rubbed my forehead with my hand, sighing. “You can’t just steal cars,” I replied. “But... Thank you. Can you get him somewhere secluded? I won’t let some asshole who drugs girls, especially Nina, walk around as a free man.”

Luke nodded and walked back toward the door, taking one last glance over his shoulder at Nina before pulling his hood up and darting out of my apartment.

“Ugh...” Nina groaned, holding her stomach like she was about to puke. I cursed under my breath and ran over to the kitchen to grab a trash bag, but by the time I returned it was too late. She had already vomited all over herself, my couch, and the floor.

“Shit...” I whispered, turning her on her side in case she puked again and running for a damp towel to clean up the mess. When I returned, she was fast asleep again.

I wiped up the mess, holding my nose, then decided that I couldn't let Nina just lay there with crusted vomit all over her and gently slid her shirt off over her head. I wiped her down with a clean, wet towel and soap and then put one of my shirts on her.

under any other circumstances, I would've found her to be incredibly cute in one of my shirts. She was so small that it was like a dress on her, and I was able to remove her dirty skirt as well without violating her privacy any further than it already had been tonight and tossed her clothes, along with the vomit-covered towels, straight into the washing machine..

While I was doing all of this, I fumed about the asshole who had done this to my Nina. How could anyone do this to her? I just wanted to hold her and protect her.

Once I finished cleaning her up and getting her into a clean shirt, she was starting to seem better already. She was still sleeping, but the color had already come back into her face and she stopped sweating, which was surprising. Didn't drugs like this make people sick for hours? Then again, Nina was proving more and more every day to be out of the ordinary. Seeing her heal so quickly made me wonder if she was even human at all. Could she be a hybrid? They were fairly common in the human world, but most people had no idea about their hybridism since it was extremely rare for one to have any sort of supernatural powers.

Deciding that now was not the time to agonize over whether Nina was human or not, I let out a deep sigh and scooped her small body up in my arms. I walked over to my bedroom and laid her down in the

bed, pulling the covers up to her chin and placing a trash can, a glass of water, and her cell phone on the nightstand.

I looked down at her for a few moments, watching her sleep peacefully.

I hated myself for letting her get hurt.

If I hadn't been such a fuck-up that pushed her away and ruined our chances of being together, I could've been there and none of this would have happened.

It was too late now, though. The damage had been done, and I had been such an asshole. I had to make things right for her. If she wanted to just be friends, we would be friends. I couldn't push her anymore like I had been. I needed to be there for her. I needed to protect her.

I decided that it was best if I just let her rest for now, so I tucked her in and headed back to the living room, leaving the door cracked just in case she needed me.

When I sat down on the couch, my phone buzzed in my pocket. I opened it to two texts: one from Luke, telling me that he had the asshole who hurt Nina tied up in an abandoned barn with a spell on him to keep him asleep, and one from Lewis. There was a picture attached to the text from Lewis. I raised an eyebrow and opened it.

The text read: "Been doing some more digging. Found this. The pattern looks familiar... I can't find anything else on the girl, though. Sorry I can't be of more help."

The image that was attached to it was a picture of an old, yellowed photograph with burnt edges. The burn marks destroyed most of the image, except for the figure of what appeared to be someone holding a baby swaddled in a blanket. I squinted and looked closer; the figure's face was burned away, so I couldn't make out who it was ... But Lewis was right. The pattern on the blanket was familiar.

It was a burgundy colored blanket, with little golden rabbits on it that looked like something out of a storybook that my mom used to read to me when I was a kid. It was a folk tale about a rabbit and a wolf putting aside their differences and becoming friends, but it was only something I had ever heard in the werewolf world. As far as I knew, humans didn't know this story.

How, though? If this was Nina in the picture, or someone related to her, then how would a human family be in possession of a blanket with a werewolf pattern on it?

Before I had enough time to think about the strange picture, my phone suddenly started blaring. It was a typhoon warning. It looked like a bad one, too, judging from the weather report that popped up when I opened the warning.

I sighed and stuck my phone back in my pocket, hitting play on the scary movie that I had been planning on watching tonight as the wind began to howl and rain started to beat against the sides of the building.

Chapter 42: Eye of the Storm

Nina

I woke up to the sound of thunder and howling wind in a dark bedroom that was not my own.

Where was I?

I slowly sat up, peering through the cracked door that led to another room. I could make out the silhouette of a man on the couch. He was watching a scary movie on the TV.

It sounded like there was a hellish storm outside, but I was willing to go out there if it meant getting away from the man who drugged me.

I stood as slowly and quietly as I could, realizing now that I was only dressed in an oversized men's t-shirt and my clothes were nowhere to be found. Did this lunatic have his way with me already? I shuddered at the thought, tears pricking at the backs of my eyes as I scanned the room for some sort of weapon. Maybe if I could sneak up on him and hit him over the head, it would knock him out long enough for me to grab my things and get the hell out of here.

Bingo! There was an umbrella hanging on the back of the door. It would take a lot of force, but I could do it. Surprisingly, I felt strong despite the drugs in my system.

I grabbed the umbrella off the door and slowly creaked the door open, stepping forward to strike....

He suddenly whipped his head around. I stood frozen like a deer in headlights with the umbrella poised over my head to hit him.

It was Enzo.

"Jesus!" he said, jumping up from the couch. "How are you even up right now?"

Enzo drugged me?

"You asshole!" I yelled, circling around the couch with the umbrella still ready to strike him. "You drugged me!" Enzo backed away, knocking into a

barstool and toppling it over with a crash. "I didn't drug you," he said, but I didn't believe him. K was right. Enzo was a monster. I swung at him with the umbrella, but he caught it before it hit him.

"Nina, calm down!" he said, yanking the umbrella away. I backed away, weaponless, scanning the room for my things so I could grab them and run. Hell, I didn't even care about that anymore. I just needed to get out. I turned on my heel and ran for the door, my heart racing as I heard Enzo running behind me.

"Nina, Luke brought you here!" he said, catching up to me and placing his hand on the door just as I was about to open it. I stopped.

"Luke...?" I furrowed my brow, straining to remember what happened before I blacked out.

"Yes, Luke," he said, tossing the umbrella down on the floor. "You know, your skeleton bodyguard. He found you with some psycho who was trying to hurt you and brought you here."

My heart was still pounding out of my chest, but when I looked up at Enzo, his face was hard and serious.

All of a sudden, my head started to

throb and I felt like I was going to pass out from all of the exertion. I stumbled backwards. Enzo leaped forward and caught me just before I fell, wrapping his strong arms around me and scooping me up with ease as a wave of dizziness took over me. He quietly carried me over to the couch and sat down, still holding me tightly.

“You know I’d never hurt you,” he said, feeling my forehead with the back of his hand as a concerned expression drew across his face.

As Enzo held me, rocking me gently, the memories started to flood back in. I remembered an older businessman at the bar... He carried me to a broom closet, and.... I didn’t want to think about it any more.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered when I finally felt like I could speak. “It was just...”

“I know,” he responded. “You woke up in an unfamiliar place right after someone tried to hurt you. I’m sorry, too. I should’ve left you a note or something.”

I sat up and slid off Enzo’s lap and onto the couch, tucking a strand of messy hair behind my ear. “I need to go home,” I said, standing; but as I stood, another wave of dizziness came over me and I fell back down on the couch.

“I’ll take you home when you’re able to walk without collapsing,” Enzo replied, his words immediately followed by a sudden crash of thunder that made the TV flicker. “Also, there’s a typhoon.”

I shuddered and pulled my knees up to my chest. Wordlessly, Enzo stood and grabbed a throw blanket from a chair. He came over and wrapped it around me with a gentle smile on his face, then headed toward the kitchen.

A few minutes later after some banging around in there, he returned with a tray and set it down on the coffee table.

“Bon appetit,” he said with a grin, sitting down next to me. “I figured you might be hungry. We’ve got popcorn, hot chocolate, grilled cheese, and there’s a vending machine down the hall if you want me to get you anything else. I’d order us a pizza, but...” He gestured to the window, through which we could see the treetops swaying in the intense wind.

I couldn’t help but smile.

“This is perfect,” I said.

Enzo grinned and picked up one of the sandwiches, handing the plate to me.

“I’m not much of a cook,” he said. “I usually just order food when I want something.’

I took a bite of the sandwich, which was surprisingly delicious. As we ate and watched the scary movie on the TV, I found myself becoming more relaxed. We made fun of the dumb characters who kept getting themselves killed, and when the movie was over, we still weren’t tired so we put on another scary movie. This one was a lot scarier, especially with the storm raging outside, and I hid my eyes and grabbed Enzo for comfort a few times.

At some point, I’m not sure when, I felt myself start to nod off with my belly full of popcorn and hot chocolate and my dreams full of Enzo.

When I woke up, it was surprisingly bright outside. I felt warm with the sun shining through the windows and smiled a bit, nuzzling into Enzo’s chest.

Wait..

Enzo and I had fallen asleep cuddling on the couch. When did that happen?

My face turned red as Enzo’s eyes opened and he looked over at me with a soft smile.

“Morning,” he said, his voice low and gravelly with sleep.

I sat up without a word and swung my legs over the side of the couch, standing. Enzo sat up behind me with a confused expression on his face.

“You okay?” he asked. I nodded. “I just... I should get home before my roommates get too worried,” I said.

“Oh... Okay,” Enzo replied. He sounded disappointed, but didn’t say anything else. I walked into the bedroom to look for my phone and my clothes. My clothes were folded on the bed while my phone’s notification light flashed on the nightstand; no doubt I had dozens of texts and missed calls from Jessica and Lori, who probably thought I either died or ditched them for a one night stand.

Sighing and trying not to think about how lovely it felt to wake up in Enzo’s arms, I quickly got dressed, grabbed my phone, and headed toward the door.

Enzo was standing by the door when I approached. His eyebrows were turned up a bit in the middle in a slightly sad expression. I half expected him to beg me to stay, to be his girlfriend... but he just opened the door for me with a sad smile.

“Be safe,” he said quietly. “I had a lot of fun with you last night.” I nodded, averting my gaze to the floor.

“Me too,” I replied. Part of me wanted to kiss him goodbye, but I didn’t. I had to stick to my decision to just stay friends, and that boundary had already been crossed from a night spent cuddling.

As I left the dorm and headed home on my walk of shame, I couldn’t help but feel disappointed that Enzo didn’t come running after me.

Chapter 43: Mean Girls

Nina

When I got home, Jessica and Lori were both furious.

“Where were you!” Jessica yelled as soon as I walked in the door. I didn’t even have a chance to hang my jacket up.

“You totally ditched us,” Lori chimed in, folding her arms across her chest. “We thought you got kidnapped or something. Then that freak typhoon hit and you still weren’t answering your phone.”

“Okay, mom and dad,” I said, tossing my bag down on the counter. “I’m sorry. Just, you know... I was lonely, and there was a cute guy.”

Jessica let out a big sigh. “Well, you could’ve at least let us know you were leaving,” she said. “But I know with everything going on lately, stuff like that happens.”

Meanwhile, Lori didn’t seem convinced at all. She had always been more intuitive than Jessica and could always see through a lie, but she didn’t say anything this time. Still, seeing her hurt expression made me feel awful for lying and I couldn’t let myself walk away like this.

I took a deep breath. “Actually,” I said, looking at my feet, “that’s not what happened. I did something really stupid, and honestly I’m lucky that it didn’t turn out worse than it did.”

Jessica and Lori were silent. When I looked up at them, they both looked concerned and confused. I sighed and continued.

“I didn’t watch my drink at the bar and I got drugged.”

Jessica gasped and clamped her hand over her mouth, her eyes wide. Lori, without a word, ran over to me and threw her arms around me.

No one said anything for a few moments. The longer Lori held me, the more I felt like I was going to cry until I couldn’t hold it in anymore and I started sobbing into Lori’s shoulder. Jessica came over and rubbed my back, tears in her eyes as well.

“You weren’t at that asshole’s place all night, were you?” Lori asked finally, pulling away a bit to look at me. The smudged makeup under her eyes from the night before made her expression even darker.

I shook my head. “No. It didn’t get that far. Thankfully, a friend of mine saw what was happening and stepped in and took me to the hospital.”

My roommates both let out a sigh of relief. I didn’t feel as bad not telling them that I was actually picked up by a talking skeleton and carried to a werewolf’s apartment, so I just left it at that.

Lori smiled up at me through her tears. “I’m glad you’re okay,” she said.

I didn’t see Enzo or Luke at all for a few days. By Wednesday, I started to wonder if they were avoiding me, or if... They were doing something to the guy who tried to drug me. The thought haunted me all day, but I choked it down in order to get through classes and work.

On Wednesday night, I had just finished up work with Tiffany and was heading home. We had spent the day in her office treating students, since there was a flu outbreak on campus. Needless to say, after hours of tending to feverish and vomiting students, I was exhausted and just happy to be going home.

The air was cool and brisk, a welcome relief after being cooped up in an office all day, and the campus was quiet. I enjoyed nights like this more than anything; feeling the cool autumn breeze on my skin and hearing the leaves crunch under my boots.

Unfortunately, it seemed that the universe had something else in store for me, because Lisa was crossing the quad and heading directly for me.

I stopped in my tracks as she approached. She looked strung out on something, storming toward me with her fists balled up at her sides and her hair a mess. She was wearing her skimpy cheerleading uniform with no jacket, which was odd considering how chilly it was outside.

“Uh... hey,” I said nervously with a little wave when I realized that she was indeed headed straight for me.

“Hey, bitch,” she growled, not hesitating for a second before her hand flew forward and grabbed one of my braids, yanking me toward her.

“Ow!” I yelped, trying to wrench my hair free from her surprisingly strong grip. “What are you doing?!”

“I saw you leaving Enzo’s apartment the other day, you dirty, pathetic little slut!” she yelled, yanking my hair so hard that tears came to my eyes.

“I didn’t– It’s not what you–” I said, but she didn’t seem to care. She clearly just wanted to fight.

Lisa released her grip on my hair and shoved me hard enough to send me to the ground, my laptop and notebooks falling out of my bag and slamming on the concrete. I groaned and attempted to stand, but she was on top of me in a flash like some sort of demon, clawing at me with her sharp, manicured nails.

“You fucking bitch!” she screamed, spit flying out of her mouth as she attacked me.

I saw flashes of light as Lisa grabbed me by the throat and throttled me, hitting my head on the sidewalk. I grabbed her wrists and attempted to stop her, but it was no use. It was like she was on something, or possessed.

Her grip tightened around my throat. I couldn’t breathe.

I flailed my arms as I tried to get her off of me, but the longer she choked me, the weaker I became.

My vision started to fade...

“Stop!” I heard someone else scream. I heard the sound of people running toward us and saw two guys grab Lisa by her arms and yank her off of me, kicking and screaming like a feral animal.

I rolled over onto my hands and knees, coughing and sputtering as I held my sore throat with one hand while blood dripped down from my face onto the pavement. As I pushed myself back onto my knees and gasped for air, I saw a flash of a familiar baggy hoodie dart behind a building...Luke?

Within a few moments, I heard a police siren and saw flashing red and blue lights pulling up to the quad. Two officers, one male and one female, jumped out and beelined for Lisa, who was still thrashing while the other two guys who had come to my rescue held her. They cuffed Lisa and put her in the back of the police car, then came over to me and helped me up.

“Can you come down to the station to give a statement?” the female police officer asked, rubbing my back once I was finally able to breathe properly. I really just wanted to go home, but I agreed anyway.

At the station, the female police officer took me to a private room and took my statement. I explained everything, which really only consisted of three things: Lisa thought I slept with her ex, she saw me walking home after work, and attacked me like she was on drugs. The whole time, the female officer nodded with a concerned expression on her face and took notes, then let me go with an ice pack for my face after I insisted that I didn’t want to go to the hospital.

I walked out into the lobby with the ice on my swollen face, tapping at my phone to use my last bit of money to call an Uber.

“No need for that,” a familiar voice said. I looked up to see Enzo looking down at me.

“How did you-”

“Luke,” he responded.

I knew I saw Luke running away. He must’ve gone to get Enzo.

“C’mon,” Enzo said, putting his strong arm protectively around my shoulder. “I’ll drive you home.”

Chapter 44: Not-So-Bad Boy

Nina

I didn’t want to admit it, but I was relieved that Enzo was here. I accepted his offer to drive me home and followed him out to the police station parking lot.

As we walked out to the parking lot, my stomach audibly growled. I had forgotten how hungry I was due to the fight, but now that my adrenaline was calming down I realized that I was starving. Enzo, must have heard it, too, because he looked down at me with a frown.

“Sorry,” I said, blushing. “I didn’t eat lunch today.”

Enzo stopped in his tracks and frowned even deeper. “Why not?”

I shrugged. “I was busy,” I replied...

Wordlessly, Enzo handed me his spare helmet and climbed onto the motorcycle. He gestured for me to get on behind him, and once I was situated, he started the bike and pulled out of the parking lot.

Except... He drove in the opposite direction of the campus.

“Where are we going?” I asked, nervously holding onto his waist as we went around a corner. The smell of his leather jacket mixed with the smell of the cold night air and filled my lungs.

“You’re hungry,” he said over his shoulder. “I’m hungry, too.”

“But I don’t have any money-”

“I don’t care,” Enzo replied.

Before I could answer, we picked up speed on an empty back road and I knew he wouldn’t be able to hear me anyway; not that I would have protested. As the dark forest of tall pine trees on either side of

us sped by and I leaned against Enzo, feeling the warmth of his body, I felt like all of my other worries washed away.

No, I told myself as I started to get too relaxed. We’re just friends. That’s it.

In a few minutes, we pulled into the diner parking lot as it was the only restaurant in this small town that was open this late. I bit my lip nervously as I climbed off the bike.

“What’s wrong?” Enzo asked, taking off his helmet and shaking his curly hair loose like a model.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” I replied.

Enzo frowned. “Tell the truth.”

I looked down at my feet, embarrassed to say. “I... Was sort of let go from here,” I said sheepishly.

“What? Why?” Enzo asked, his frown deepening.

Lisa, actually, I said. She and her friends came in here a few weeks ago and broke some glasses. They made it look like it was my fault.”

“And your boss fired you over a few broken glasses?” Enzo asked, furrowing his brow.

I shrugged. “Technically he said to ‘take some time off’. But that’s just code for ‘you’re fired’.”

Enzo scoffed and, much to my surprise, walked toward the diner anyway. “You coming?” he called over his shoulder.

I really was hungry, so I jogged after him.

The diner was almost entirely empty, save for a couple of other tables at which sat sleepy students who either had the late-night munchies or who were last-minute cramming for exams. We grabbed a booth

in the corner, and my old coworker, Millie, came over.

“Fancy seeing you here,” she said with a smile as she took out her notepad to take our order. “Where have you been?”

“Ask Phil,” I responded sheepishly. Millie seemed to get the message and scrunched up her nose.

“What can I get for you?” she asked.

“I’ll have a coffee,” Enzo replied. “And a grilled cheese. Extra cheese. And fries.”

“Same for me,” I said. Millie smiled and walked away to put in our orders and get our coffees.

“You’re a nighttime coffee drinker too, huh?” Enzo asked with a smirk.

I nodded. “All of the late nights studying in the library have conditioned me to it,” I replied.

Enzo’s face softened a bit, and there was a slight twinkle of red in his brown eyes. “I think it’s impressive how hard you work,” he said quietly, averting his gaze to the table. “I’ve never been all that studious. I wish I could be more like you.”

His words made me blush. I always expected a guy like Enzo to tease me for being so academic, but he was genuine.

“What’s your major, anyway?” I asked.

“Business management,” he replied, rolling his eyes. “As requested by my dad.”

I raised my eyebrows. I had heard rumors that Enzo’s dad was a CEO of some foreign company, but I didn’t know that Enzo was connected to it in any way. I supposed it made sense, but I could tell that Enzo wasn’t interested in that life.

“What would you be doing if your dad let you choose anything?” I asked..

Enzo’s brown eyes widened a bit, like he had never been asked this question before.

“Um... I don’t know, honestly,” Enzo replied. “I’ve never thought about it.”

“C’mon,” I said, feeling intrigued now. “There has to be something you like. And don’t just say hockey. There has to be more to Enzo Rivers than hockey.”

For the first time since I had known him, Enzo seemed taken aback. He stammered to come up with a reply and his face turned red. “U-Um...” he muttered, running a hand through his curly hair as Millie brought us our coffee, “I don’t know... I wanted to be at musician when I was little.”

Enzo Rivers, a musician?

“Do you play any instruments?” I asked.

Enzo nodded. “Yeah. Guitar. But I’m not all that good.

For some reason, the thought of Enzo playing the guitar made my heart flutter a bit. “I’m sure you’re better than you realize,” I said quietly. “I’d like to hear you play sometime.”

Just then, Millie returned with our food. I was so hungry that my mouth watered a bit when she set my plate down. We ate in silence for a couple of minutes, but it wasn’t uncomfortable. Maybe it was just because I was starving and the food was delicious, but I didn’t mind the silence.

“By the way,” Enzo said, having regained his composure after my personal questions, “I’ll take care of Lisa. I promise she won’t bother you any more.”

I swallowed a bite of grilled cheese and frowned, my heart racing as I thought about what probably happened to the guy who drugged me. K’s words swirled around my head.

They’re all monsters... I’ve hunted enough of ’em to know that for a fact...

“Please don’t kill her,” I blurted out, then immediately regretted my words when I saw the shocked expression on Enzo’s face.

“What?” he said, looking thoroughly hurt. “I would never kill anyone. Why would you even say that?”

I suddenly felt like the biggest asshole in the entire world, and I couldn’t even explain myself. What was I supposed to say? “I met up with a crazy dude from the internet with a giant fucking tooth that might’ve honestly been fake, and he said that your kind are all killers”?

I looked down at my plate, blinking away tears.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I just... I don’t know how this whole werewolf thing works quite yet.”

Enzo let out a sigh. “I know the rogues that have been coming around make it seem like we’re all killers, but they’re just that; rogues. Most of us are perfectly normal, and quite frankly pacifist.”

I looked up at Enzo to apologize again, but his brown eyes were soft. He didn’t seem angry, although I still felt stupid for believing some stranger from the internet over him.

We finished eating and Enzo paid the bill, then drove me home on his motorcycle.

When he pulled up to the dorms, I hopped off his bike.

“Thank you for dinner,” I said quietly, to which he merely nodded in response. I nodded back and turned to head into the building, but stopped a few feet away and turned back to look at him.

“Hey, about the other night-”

“Don’t worry about it,” Enzo said. “I know we’re just friends. And I’m okay with that.”

Right, I thought to myself as I headed inside and watched him drive away on his motorcycle. Just friends

Chapter 45: Microscope Microcosm

Nina

After Enzo dropped me off, I went upstairs and went straight to bed.

That night, I had dreams about Enzo. In the dreams, he wasn’t just a human but a huge wolf with silver fur and red eyes. I sat on his back while he walked through the forest, my fingers tangled in his fur. Something about it felt comforting. —

When I woke up the next morning, I realized that I had missed my alarm!

I jumped out of bed, cursing, and threw on the first thing I could find in my dresser, combed my hair without even bothering to braid it, and brushed my teeth before running out of my dorm and flying down the stairs with my loose hair flowing behind me.

A few minutes later, I burst into class, completely out of breath..

The professor raised an eyebrow at me as several students turned around to see what the commotion was about.

“Sorry,” I muttered, squeezing my way through a row of desks to find a seat next to Jessica, who had saved me my usual spot. She glared up at me and moved her jacket out of the way so I could sit

“It’s not like you to be late,” she whispered while the professor continued giving his lecture. I took out my notebook and tucked my wild hair behind my ears.

“I was up late,” I whispered back.

Jessica frowned at me. “I saw his motorcycle driving away. I thought you were done with him and interested in someone else?”

“Ladies, please,” the professor said annoyedly, folding his arms across his chest and facing us. “Please save your conversation for after class... Especially you, Miss Harper. You’ve

already missed enough this morning.”

“Sorry, professor,” I replied, averting my attention to my notebook.

Jessica and I headed toward the dining hall for lunch after class.

“Do you really think Lisa was on something?” Jessica asked after I explained what happened last night.

I shrugged my shoulders. “I don’t know. Sure seemed like it. Her pupils were like saucers.”

“Well, good riddance,” Jessica said. “Maybe now she’ll quit bothering everybody.”

“Maybe,” I replied, although I couldn’t help but feel a little worried for Lisa. If she was on hard drugs, she was probably really struggling. Addiction is a bitch.

“Still,” Jessica said, looking over at me as we walked into the dining hall, “you should be careful about Enzo. You said yourself that it would be toxic between the two or you.

“I know,” I replied. We got in line at the sandwich shop. “I thought you were his biggest fan, though? It seems unlike you to say anything bad about him.”

Jessica shrugged. “He played with your feelings,” she replied. “Besides, I just... haven’t been that interested in guys lately.”

I raised an eyebrow, confused by my friend’s sudden change in demeanor. As long as I had known her, she had been boy crazy and was almost constantly talking to a new guy. Why the change of heart?

Jessica looked around while we waited in line, twirling a strand of blonde hair around her finger, then grinned and waved excitedly at someone. I turned and looked over to see that she was waving at Lori.

Both of their faces were blushing.

Was Jessica interested in Lori?

It couldn’t be...

But still, I could hardly contain my smile.

After lunch, I had to go to work with Tiffany. I said goodbye to my friends, who seemed perfectly content with sitting alone together, and headed over to the health office as I downed the last of my coffee in a pathetic attempt to wake myself up after everything that happened the night before.

When I entered Tiffany's office, she was sitting at her desk looking through some papers.

She looked up from her desk when I entered and smiled.

"Afternoon," she said in her usual sweet tone of voice. "Ready for another fun day?"

I nodded, hanging my bag and my jacket on one of the hooks in the back of the room.

"I'll be leaving in a few minutes for a performance review with the dean," she said, rubbing her eyes. She looked like she was up late the night before, too "Think you'll be okay in here without me if any students come in?"

"No problem," I replied with a smile. By this point, I had been working here long enough to feel fairly comfortable with my tasks. Besides, when it came to waiting on students in the health office, the majority of what I would be doing was simply handing out condoms and cold medicine.

"Awesome," Tiffany said, standing. "If you need anything, you have my number."

I nodded in response, and when Tiffany left, I sat down at the tall lab table to get some studying done while I was waiting for students.

A few minutes later, the door opened. I looked up from my work expecting to see a student, but felt my face get hot when James walked in instead. We hadn't seen each other since our study session at the coffee shop, and by this point I had really begun to think that I scared him away with my wolf nonsense.

It seemed that James wasn't scared away at all, however, when he came over to me with a big smile on his soft face.

"Long time no see," he said, setting his bag down on the table. "I thought you got swept away by that typhoon."

"Almost," I replied, pushing my night with Enzo out of my mind the best I could.

"I'm actually glad you're here," James said. He walked over to a cabinet and pulled out a microscope and a baggy with slides in it, then came over to the table and set it up. "With the recent flu outbreak, I got curious and took some samples to look at under the microscope. You should take a look. I've never seen anything like it."

He turned the microscope toward me. I raised an eyebrow and peered in to look at the virus.

“What about it?” I said, pulling away from the microscope and looking up at James.

“You didn’t see it?” he said, his smile fading. He pulled the microscope to himself and looked in, muttering to himself as he fussed with the dials. ” No, I swear it was... What the... That’s odd...”

“What’s wrong?” I said, leaning over out of curiosity and accidentally brushing our shoulders together.

“I swear this was not an ordinary influenza sample,” he muttered, looking up from the microscope.

When he locked eyes with me, I realized now that our faces were incredibly close... Close enough to kiss.

My face turned beet red, and so did his. I pulled away quickly and cleared my throat, averting my gaze back to my notes.

“U-Um... Maybe you got the slides mixed up?” I said, trying to act nonchalant.

“Y-Yeah,” James replied. “Maybe.”

Suddenly, the door swung open and a sick student came hobbling in, holding her stomach. I let out a small sigh of relief now that I had an excuse to escape the awkward atmosphere and jumped down from my stool, walking over to her.

James and I didn’t get any alone time for the rest of my shift, what with the almost constant stream of sick students coming in. Before I knew it, my shift was over.

“Hey,” James’said just as I was about to leave with my things. “When are we gonna have that study date?”

My face turned red when I heard James refer to our study session as a date, and I stammered to come up with a reply.

“U-Um, I’ll let you know,” I said hurriedly, which resulted in a disappointed look from James.

This is all too much, I thought to myself as I scurried out of the health office with my heart racing. Truthfully, I liked both Enzo and James... How could I possibly choose?

Chapter 46: The Cheer Captain’s Secret

Enzo

After I dropped Nina off at her dorm on the night she was attacked by Lisa, I immediately returned to the police station.

“I’m here to take her home,” I said, nodding my head toward the cell where Lisa was being held. She was sitting on the cot, visibly uncomfortable and covered in sweat. I had had my suspicions before, but now that I saw her, I could instantly tell what happened to her from a mile away: she had been bitten by a rogue werewolf. It would only be a matter of time before she turned into one herself and broke out of that cell, killing everyone in here. I had to get her to a witch before it was too late.

The female officer sitting at the front desk turned around and looked at Lisa, then looked back at me.

“It’s Enzo, right?” the officer said. “I’ve watched your hockey games. You’re really good!”

I sighed and repeated my statement. “I’m here to take her home. Is she free to go?”

“She’ll be free to go in the morning,” she replied. “Her toxicology report came back clean, but we think it’s best if we monitor her.”

“Listen,” I said, rubbing my tired eyes, “she’s my... girlfriend. She was traumatized as a child and has these episodes sometimes. Keeping her in a cell isn’t gonna help her come out of this episode.”

“We can have her transferred to the hospital,” the officer said, picking up the phone.

“No doctors!” I yelled, causing the officer’s eyes to widen and kicking myself for being so abrupt. “I mean... That won’t help, either. I think it’s best if I just take her home. She needs a familiar place, you know?”

The officer sighed and looked over her shoulder again at Lisa, then back to me and nodded, standing. “I’m not really supposed to do this, but since the other girl didn’t want to press charges, I guess I’ll let you take her,” she said. I let out a sigh of relief as she walked over and unlocked Lisa’s cell.

“You’re free to go home,” the officer said to Lisa, who didn’t even acknowledge her at all and just continued to stare blankly at the wall. “Um... Miss?”

“It’s alright,” I said, stepping past the officer and into the cell. “I got her.”

I walked over to Lisa and crouched in front of her. When she saw me, her eyes focused on me; her gaze was cloudy and distant, but she was still in there. Somewhere.

“I’m gonna help you, okay?” I said softly. She slowly nodded, then let me scoop her up off the cot and carry her out of the cell.

“Thanks, officer,” I said as I passed.

“Oh, it’s no problem,” the officer replied with a smile. “Anything for Enzo Rivers.”

More, now than ever, I was glad for the teleportation ability that had been passed down to me from my father; as soon as I was out of sight of the police station, I parked my bike along the side of the road, took Lisa in my arms, and in the blink of an eye I was at my father’s house.

Lewis and the rest of the pack were sitting around the fire pit once again, as they did every night, when I arrived.

“Holy shit!” Myra, the newest recruit, who also happened to be my cousin, said when she saw me holding Lisa.

Lewis jumped up and ran over to me, his eyes immediately showing recognition of the situation. “She was bitten, wasn’t she?” he asked.

I nodded. They all knew Lisa — my father had forced me to be in a relationship with her for quite a while, after all and knew what would happen if a human was bitten by a rogue.

“Someone get a witch here, now!” Lewis yelled.

“Which witch?” Myra asked.

Lewis rolled his eyes. “I don’t care. Find a witch and bring her here.”

Myra took off she was the fastest one in the group, even faster than me while Lewis and I carried Lisa up to my bedroom.

“Where’s my father?” I asked.

“Still overseas,” Lewis replied as we gently set Lisa down on the bed. She had already begun convulsing and we turned her on her side in case she vomited. “Won’t be back for another couple of weeks.”

“This shifter situation is getting out of control,” I said. “The dean won’t do anything except wipe students’ memories.”

Lewis nodded, his eyes fixed on Lisa. “I’ll send the pack out there to patrol for rogues as soon as I can. I wonder why they seem to be so fixed on that campus...”

“It’s gotta be Nina,” I replied. ”

Something about her is drawing all sorts of shifters to campus. Not to mention that Lisa here made a beeline for her as soon as she got bitten.”

“Must be her scent,” Lewis muttered. ” But she’s just a human. Why?”

Before we had a chance to discuss any further, Myra returned with a rather stunned-looking witch. As soon as the witch saw Lisa, she pushed both Lewis and I out of the way and started whispering some sort of incantation while she searched Lisa’s body for the source of the bite; when she lifted up Lisa’s shirt, I nearly gagged when I saw the wound. How had the police officers missed this?

The witch pulled a vial of something off of her belt and dumped its contents into her hands, rubbing them together then pressing them into the wound. Lisa arched her back and screamed at the pain.

“Hold her down,” the witch said. Lewis and I nodded at one another, holding her down by the shoulders and ankles while she continued to scream.

A little while later, it was all over and Lisa was soundly asleep in my bed.

Lewis paid the disgruntled witch for her services. She gave him an extra vial of whatever potion she used on Lisa’s wounds, then disappeared into the night.

While Lewis and the rest of the pack went to investigate the source of the rogues and hunt them down, I stayed with Lisa for the next two days.

She woke up on the third day, completely dazed and confused. Thankfully, she didn’t remember anything about being bitten, so I lied and told her that she got attacked by a bobcat.

She believed it without question.

Lisa was strong enough now to go home, so I took one of my father’s cars and drove her home on the evening of the third day. She whined and held her stomach the whole way there; when we pulled into the parking lot, she turned toward me and pushed her lower lip out in a pout.

“I can’t walk, baby,” she whimpered. Can you please take me home?”

I sighed and nodded; no matter what sort of history Lisa and I had, I wasn’t going to simply drop her off and drive away after she had been bitten by a fucking werewolf. She was past the dangerous stage now and it was safe to say that she was not at any risk of shifting into a rogue, but I still wanted to keep an eye on her.

I got out of the car and walked around, opening the door and helping her out. She leaned on me, holding my arm, as I walked her back to her dorm.

When we crossed the quad, however, I saw a familiar face from the other side of the fountain.

It was Nina.

Shit.

She stopped in her tracks when she saw Lisa and I together, her brown eyes widening. I stopped as well, opening my mouth to say her name, but before I could, she turned on her heel and stormed away.

“What’s wrong, baby?” Lisa whined, tugging on my arm.

I wanted to run to Nina, to tell her that it wasn’t what it looked like, but it was too late. She was already gone.

Chapter 47: Late Night Library

Nina

I felt like a harpoon pierced me straight through the heart when I saw Enzo walking with Lisa across the quad. She was leaning on him and holding his arm

He glanced up and saw me, our eyes locking across the quad. I froze. He froze, too, for a moment, his brown eyes focused on me with an expression that I couldn’t quite read. I hadn’t seen Enzo in a few days since the night we went to the diner... Had he been with Lisa this whole time, even though she attacked me like a madwoman?

The longer I stood there, frozen, the more tears started to well up in my eyes and the hotter my face became. I couldn’t bear to see him with her like this.

Before he could say anything, I turned on my heel and walked away. no, ran—

When I got home, the apartment was dark and empty. I slammed the door behind me and leaned on it, sobbing silently in the darkness, eventually sinking down to the floor and burying my head in my knees. I had told Enzo that I just wanted to be friends, but I knew that part of me still had feelings for him and seeing him with Lisa only solidified that.

I wasn’t sure how long I sat on the dark kitchen floor in tears, but eventually, the tears stopped coming and my face hurt from crying.

“God, I’m so stupid,” I whispered to myself, leaning my head back against the door. I sat there for a few minutes longer as my mind spun from all the crying.

Just then, my phone buzzed in my pocket. Pursing my lips, I pulled it out and squinted against the bright light of the screen. There was a text from Enzo.

“Can you talk later? I can explain.”

I rolled my eyes and shut off my phone, deciding not to answer. I didn’t want to hear explanations; I had grown tired of them at this point. If Enzo wanted to get back together with Lisa, that was his decision to make.

After a few more minutes of wallowing on the floor, I finally stood and decided that maybe it was best if I get out of the apartment and occupy myself. Besides, I had an exam the next day; some studying at the library would do me some good.

The campus was quiet as I walked to the library. I passed by a few students who were out on walks or heading to their night classes, but the quad was mostly empty — just how I liked it. The moon was nearly full and there was a gentle breeze blowing across the campus that kicked up some of the fallen leaves, and a light fog had begun to settle. It made for a spooky atmosphere, perfect for fall, and got me excited for Halloween in a couple of weeks.

When I got to the library, it was mostly empty aside from a few late-night study sessions here and there and the nighttime librarian. I always preferred the library at night; not only was it more empty and quiet, but the dim lights made the tall wooden bookshelves, stone floors, and gothic architecture feel even more cozy. I always felt like a character out of a book when I came here at night.

I looked around for a table and found one in a quiet spot behind some bookshelves. The moon shone through a window above it, creating a calming atmosphere that allowed me to feel relaxed enough to get some studying done.

I was there for at least an hour already, fully absorbed in my work in an attempt to drown the image of Enzo and Lisa out of my mind, when I heard something behind me.

“Psst!”

I looked over my shoulder to see James peeking out from behind a bookshelf with a grin on his face. He came over to me.

“What are you doing here so late?” he whispered as he approached.

I shrugged. “Just wanted to get out of my apartment.”

James nodded understandingly and bit his lip. The moonlight illuminated his soft features, which made my heart feel a little less broken for a moment.

“You wanna sit with me?” I asked, gesturing to the spot across from me at the table.

With a smile, James sat down and pulled out his books. I peeked over my laptop to see that he was reading a book on genetics. The cover looked old and dusty, and the pages were yellowed. He saw me looking and smiled.

“Your question about DNA the other day at the coffee shop got me thinking,” he said. “It’s all sort of silly, but the author of this book actually thought that there may have been humans at some point in our history who bred with animals and created all sorts of human-animal hybrids. It’s a fun read, if you shut off the logical part of your brain.”

Yeah, I thought to myself as I studied the worn cover of the book, real silly.

I didn’t tell him that there were, in fact, human-animal hybrids — they were just created from a curse, not breeding. Although, after everything I had learned about the supernatural lately, I wondered if that was a possibility, too.

“Can I read that when you’re done?” I asked. “It does sound sort of... interesting.”

“Of course,” James replied with a nod. “I’ll bring it to you when I’m finished.”

We didn’t talk much more than that, both too absorbed in our work to pay much attention to each other. It was nice just to have the company, though; it felt good to be around someone platonically who shared similar interests, and it took my mind off of what I saw earlier between Enzo and Lisa.

Eventually, the clock struck midnight and the librarian announced that the library was closing over the PA system.

I sighed and started packing up, not wanting to go home and be alone with my thoughts.

“You alright?” James said as he started putting his books back in his satchel.

I shrugged. “I just wanted to stay, that’s all,” I said. “I don’t really feel like being home tonight.”

James raised an eyebrow. “Why? Everything okay?”

“Oh, um,” I replied, scrambling to come up with a lie that didn’t involve Enzo and Lisa, “I just... had a fight with my roommate, so I don’t really feel like being there. That’s all.”

James smirked. Part of me worried that he was going to invite me over to his place or something, which would only add to the confusion of everything going on; but his next words took me by surprise.

“So, let’s stay, then,” he whispered, leaning across the table.

I cocked my head. “But the library is closing.”

“So?” James said, his eyes suddenly mischievous. “C’mon. Follow me.”

The librarian announced that the library was closing again. I bit my lip as James stood and scurried off behind a bookshelf. This felt wrong — I had never broken rules like this before — but it also sounded... fun.

I looked around in case anyone was watching before standing and following James. He was hiding behind the bookcase and put his finger over his lips, taking my hand and leading me toward the staircase that led to the basement. No one ever really went down there, since the basement mostly

contained rare books and random items on display, so when we descended the stairs and saw that it was completely empty, it came as no surprise.

We heard the librarian walking around upstairs as she turned off the lights, and James pulled me underneath the stairwell to hide. I suppressed a giggle as we heard the librarian walk up to the top of the basement stairs.

“Anyone down there?” she called. James and I held our breath, smirking at one another. The librarian waited for a few moments, then muttered something to herself and shut off the lights; leaving us in darkness.

We stood there in darkness for a few minutes until we were certain that the library was now completely empty before James turned on his phone flashlight; when he did, I realized that we had been holding hands this entire time. We both blushed and quickly pulled away.

“Now what?” I asked.

James shrugged. “I dunno. Back to studying, I guess?”

The mixture of James’ innocence and studious nature almost made me laugh. I had expected that he would suggest another rule-breaking activity, like breaking into the locked restricted section for professors only, but he had suggested simply going back to studying...

And I didn’t mind that at all.

Chapter 48: Running with the Wolf — Part I

Nina

The next day, I headed to work with Tiffany.

She was evaluating a sick student when I arrived.

“Good morning!” Tiffany called over her shoulder when I entered. I started to take off my jacket, but she stopped me. “Don’t get too comfy,” she said. “We’ll be heading out right after this. Did you wear athletic clothes like I asked?”

“I did,” I replied, keeping my jacket on. Tiffany had texted me early before my shift to tell me to dress appropriately in athletic clothes and sneakers today — she didn’t explain why, but I complied and put on my only real athletic clothes, which was a pair of leggings and a tight zin-un ton with long sleeves. I had purchased them the semester before when I thought I was going to be one of those girls who was into yoga, but one yoga class with Jessica changed my mind. Jessica was graceful and flexible with excellent balance and I... fell on my face. A lot.

Tiffany finished evaluating the student. “Looks like you’ve got a nasty case of strep throat.” She walked over to her desk and scribbled on a notepad, then ripped the page out and handed it to the student. “Take this to the pharmacy for some antibiotics. Avoid overusing your throat and try to drink lots of tea with honey. Can you come back in a week for a checkup?” The sick student nodded miserably and left, coughing into her elbow.

“Alright,” Tiffany said, grabbing her coat and medical bag. “Let’s go.”

We headed out the door. Tiffany turned the sign to ‘closed’ and then headed off toward the athletic fields with me on her heels.

“Where are we headed?” I asked, almost jogging to keep up with Tiffany’s quick stride.

“We’re gonna be making the rounds for all of the sports teams today,” she replied, her breath making little clouds in the chilly morning air as she spoke. “Football, soccer, rugby, and hockey.”

I almost groaned when she mentioned that we’d be visiting the hockey team, but kept it to myself.

“By the way,” she said as we walked, “you don’t have to tell me if it’s too personal, but I’m just curious; what’s going on between you and Enzo now? And James, too?”

I sighed and shrugged. “I don’t know, honestly.”

“Can I give you a bit of advice, from onewoman to another?” she asked.

“Please,” I replied. “I need it.”

Tiffany stopped and turned toward me, taking me by both shoulders. She was shorter than me, but still had a protective and comforting air with the way she held herself.

“Don’t ever try to force a spark. Even if you’re heartbroken and lonely and you think you won’t be able to ever find the right person, it’s not worth it if you have to force it. I made that mistake with my ex husband... When you meet the right person, you’ll just know.”

I paused for a moment as I considered Tiffany’s words. Was I forcing a spark with James or Enzo? At this point, I didn’t know the difference between real feelings or just infatuation.

“Have you ever been with someone who just feels right?” I asked. “How do you know?” Tiffany sighed and started walking again. “I have,” she replied quietly, her usually-bubbly voice now low and somber. “It was a lot like you and Enzo, actually. We met here, in college. It was a confusing back-and-forth that went on for far too long, all because of me. He pissed me off. I argued with him. When he finally got sick of my games, he got together with a girl just a few days later; they got engaged by the time we graduated... I couldn’t accept his love when I had the chance, and I still regret it.”

“Where is he now?” I asked, my curiosity getting the best of me.

“He’s a professor here, actually,” she responded. “Still married to her, with two kids now. Needless to say, I avoid him like the plague.”

I didn’t have a chance to ask Tiffany anything else before we got to the football field, and even if I had, I probably wouldn’t have pried anymore anyway.

We spent the morning visiting various sports teams that were training. We would take notes on their performance, attend to any injuries or concerns that the players had, and I watched Tiffany teach them new stretches to help with their performance. It was fun to see how each team trained differently, but I dreaded visiting the hockey team. I just hoped that I could get it over with without having to interact with Enzo too much.

At the same time, however, Tiffany’s words struck a chord with me.

What if, in twenty years, Enzo was married to Lisa with two kids and I was still pining away for him? Would I regret letting him be the one that got away, just like how Tiffany regretted pushing her love away years ago? By late afternoon, after taking a funner break, Tiffany and I made our way to visit the hockey team. My heart pounded as we got closer to the arena and I just wanted to run away, but I willed myself to be strong and just focus on my work.

When we reached the arena, the team was already outside on the athletic field behind it. I didn't know that the hockey team ever trained outside.

Tiffany waved to Enzo, and he came jogging over. My face turned red as I took in what he looked like; he was wearing athletic shorts that showed off his muscular legs, and had on a tight-fitting shirt that looked as though his biceps would burst out at any moment. As he jogged toward us, he looked both graceful and powerful at the same time. My mind flashed back to the day he ran shirtless on the treadmill, and suddenly I felt as though I wanted him badly.

"Afternoon, ladies," Enzo said with a smile, stopping in front of us. He was acting incredibly polite, which was a surprise considering how I yelled at him the day before. However, when his brown eyes flickered over to me, I saw the briefest flash of red in them. Was it attraction or resentment?

"Training outside today?" Tiffany asked.

Enzo nodded. "Figured we could all use some fresh air since it's so nice outside. We were planning on running along the forest trails, if you'd both like to join. us."

"My poor old knee is acting up today, otherwise I would," Tiffany said, then turned to me. There was a hint of playfulness in her eyes; I knew where this was going. "Why don't you go, Nina? Do you like to run?"

My face turned even more red. "U-Um, I'm not the best runner," I said. "I'd probably just hold all of you back."

Truthfully, I hadn't attempted funning since high school.

"Nonsense," Enzo said, placing his hands on his hips. "Half of these guys have the stamina of a tortoise. C'mon, it'll be fun."

I looked over at Tiffany, who was only grinning back at me with that same glint in her eyes. She knew exactly what she was doing, and I knew that there was no way I could get out of this.

"Alright," I replied, my heart

practically pounding out of my chest. " I'll run with you."

Enzo smiled and jogged back toward the team. I shot Tiffany a look, to which she only punched my arm playfully and gestured with her head for me to go. With a deep sigh, I set down the medical bag and

started to jog over to meet up with the team.

Why did it seem as though the universe wanted Enzo and I to be together so badly?

Chapter 49: Running with the Wolf — Part II

Nina

I caught up with the team in the middle of the athletic field. They were stretching for their run. I tried not to look at Enzo as he stretched, because watching his muscular form only made me want him more. Regardless of what Tiffany said about her college love, I still felt hesitant about Enzo with everything that had happened since I met him. Besides, I had to focus on school and work. Now was not the time to be worrying about boys!

The team looked up when I joined them on the athletic field as they stretched. Feeling a bit nervous, I started to stretch, too; most of them seemed excited that a girl was joining them on their run today — including Justin — but apparently my presence bothered one player. His name was Bryan. “You’re running with us?” he asked, standing up from his stretch.

“I suppose so,” I replied with a sheepish nod.

Bryan frowned and folded his arms across his chest.

“You’re not gonna slow us down, are you? Everyone knows girls can’t run as fast as guys.”

Before I had the chance to respond,

Justin stepped in at the same time and defended me.

“Hey, don’t say that about her!” Justin said, balling his fists up at his sides.

Meanwhile, Enzo simply stormed up to Bryan and glared down at him. Bryan wasn’t a small guy in the slightest, but Enzo still towered over him and made him look dwarfed.

“How dare you be so rude to our team doctor,” he said, his low voice practically a growl. “Just for that, you can drop and give me fifty push-ups. Right now,”

“Fifty?” Bryan whined.

“We can make it a hundred if you keep up the attitude,” Enzo replied.

Bryan grumbled and got down on the ground to do his pushups.

“If anyone else has a problem with Nina joining us on our run today, speak now,” Enzo said. No one made a peep. “Alright,” he continued, “let’s go. Bryan, catch up when

you're done. Maybe you can use this time to think about why you have such a bias against women."

Bryan continued to do his pushups, grumbling to himself, as the team started running. I bit my lip and followed behind.

We made our way toward the line of trees that sat at the end of the field. There was a small trail that broke through the trees, which made its way through the forest. There were a lot of these trails all around campus for students to hike on — and while I was a bit nervous that there could be another shifter out in the woods, Enzo didn't seem terribly worried about it. His strong demeanor gave me a bit of confidence.

I jogged along at the back of the group, matching their pace, and kept to myself as the guys talked and joked with each other. While I jogged behind them, I couldn't help but observe Enzo's form; he ran with an impressive amount of stamina, leading the group, just like how he ran that day on the treadmill. Back then, I had been confused and astonished at his superhuman capabilities, but now I knew that it was the werewolf in him that gave him so much strength and stamina. Regardless, it was still impressive to watch him run... And I couldn't stop myself from being attracted to him.

We made our way through the forest, running over small hills and jumping over fallen trees. Somehow, although I hadn't run like this since high school PE class, I eventually found myself running at the front of the group with Enzo and Justin while the rest of the team started to tire out and lag behind.

"And you said you would hold us back," Enzo said, slowing down just a little bit to match my pace so he could run beside me. "You run like a natural. Did you run on the cross country team in high school or something?"

I shook my head. "Nope," I replied. "I've never really been sporty at all. My parents made me play on the junior tennis team for one semester in middle school, but I hated sports so much that they gave up and let me drop out of the team."

"I've always thought you were naturally pretty athletic," Justin suddenly chimed in, running faster to keep up on my other side. I looked over at him and saw him shoot a competitive glance at Enzo, who merely clenched his jaw and kept his focus on the trail.

"Uh... Thanks," I replied, feeling a bit uncomfortable now as I was sandwiched between two guys who I had a history with.

"Hey," one of the other teammates, Matt, called from behind us. "We should race. Nina against... hmm..."

"I'll do it!" Justin blurted out, stopping. Enzo stopped as well. There was a slight frown on his face, but I could also see a hint of amusement behind his eyes.

“Up to you, Nina,” Enzo said with a shrug.

“Oh, I don’t-” I replied, but was suddenly cut off by Justin.

“C’mon, it’ll be fun!” Justin said. “Sort of like old times. Just you and me having fun together.”

I had a feeling that Justin was trying to get some sort of angle here, but as the rest of the team started chanting for us to race, I felt obligated to give it a shot.

“Alright,” I conceded, throwing my hands up in surrender. “Just one race.”

Justin grinned and drew a line in the dirt with his foot, standing behind it poised to run. “From here to that tree,” he said, pointing at a tree several yards away.

I hesitantly nodded and got into my place while Matt came over and started counting down.

“On your marks... Get set... Go!”

It all happened so fast that it was a blur. Justin got ahead of me first, and honestly I didn’t care to win, but all of a sudden it was as if something clicked. I picked up speed, gaining more and more as I ran. The team’s cheers behind me faded into the wind as my legs pumped...

I ran to the tree within a few seconds and touched it, turning around with a grin and expecting Justin to be right behind me.

He was still only halfway there!

“Holy shit!” Matt yelled over the team’s cheers. “Nina is really fucking fast!”

I didn’t even feel out of breath. Justin gave up and stopped, throwing his hands up in the air in defeat, even seeming a little annoyed at my surprising victory.

How did I do that? I had never been athletic, and hadn’t run at all in years.

Was it just a stroke of luck?

The team charged at me suddenly, taking me by surprise and lifting me up on their shoulders as they chanted “Nina! Nina! Nina!”

I couldn’t help but grin and laugh at the stupidity of the situation.

As they jumped around with me on their shoulders, making me laugh, I looked over to see Enzo still standing in his place with his muscular arms folded across his chest...

He was staring at me with glowing red eyes.

Chapter 50: Unwelcome Help

Nina

“Alright, alright, that’s enough,” Enzo said, the red in his eyes fading back to a soft brown. “Get back to training.”

The team grumbled and set me back down on the ground, then started running again. I was still amazed at my landslide victory in the race, and stood there for a moment as they ran ahead.

Enzo walked up to me now that we were alone and gazed down at me with a half-smile on his face.

“You’re quite the runner,” he said.

“I guess so,” I replied. “I don’t know what came over me.”

For a few moments, neither of us spoke. We were standing close enough that I could smell his sweat mixed with his cologne. Involuntarily, we were both leaning closer to each other. Close enough to kiss...

Enzo stepped back and shook his head. He drew in a sharp breath before speaking.

“What you saw last night-”

“Whatever it is, it’s none of my business,” I interrupted. “We’re just friends. You’re allowed to do whatever you want.”

Enzo opened his mouth to speak, but before he could say anything, the team started getting annoyed and calling for us to catch up. Turning on my heel, I ran to join the group so Enzo couldn’t see my tears.

He lingered at the back of the group for the rest of the run.

When we finished our run, we came back out at the same spot we went into the woods, having gone in a big loop. Tiffany was sitting on the bench and flipping through some paperwork when we returned.

“Have a good run?” she asked, standing as I jogged up to her.

“It wasn’t bad, actually,” I said, praying that the blush on my face would just seem like it came from all of the exertion and not from the feeling of Enzo’s red wolf eyes on me.

“Good,” Tiffany replied with a smile, sticking her paperwork in her bag and hoisting the bag onto her shoulder. “I’ve gotta head back to the office. You did good work today. Go get some rest.”

I nodded and watched Tiffany walk away. Then, taking one last glance over my shoulder at Enzo and the rest of the team, I started to head in the direction of home. My shower and my bed were calling to me after that run.

“Nina!” Justin called from behind me.

I pursed my lips and turned around, not wanting to be rude but also not wanting to give my ex any more false hope than he already seemed to have. “What’s up?” I said.

“Can I walk with you for a minute? I just wanna talk.”

Sighing, I nodded and started walking again. Justin followed along like a lost puppy.

“I just wanted to apologize again for everything I’ve put you through this semester,” he said as we walked. “I know I’ve been shitty to you, and I’ll totally respect it if you just wanna be friends. But I also want you to know that I’m gonna work real hard to change and be better from now on.”

I thought back to the way Justin looked in the coffee shop that day. He had been dressed eerily similar to Enzo; in fact, he was even dressed a lot like Enzo now in his athletic clothes, and seemed to have grown his hair out a bit to look like Enzo’s.

“Are you trying to be like Enzo?” I blurted out, stopping and looking at Justin.

He stared back at me with wide eyes and stammered out a response. “N-No ... W-What makes you think that?”

I raised an eyebrow and folded my arms across my chest for a moment as I eyed Justin up and down, but then sighed and relaxed when I saw how he looked like a deer in headlights.

“Listen,” I said softly, “I liked you just fine before, and I think you should just be yourself.”

A slight smile started to play on Justin’s lips. “Does that mean...” he started to say.

“No,” I replied, vehemently shaking my head. “Justin, the fact of the matter is that you cheated on me. I don’t resent you, but... I don’t see any way in which I can keep my dignity as a woman and get back together with you.”

Justin looked sad, but nodded nonetheless. “I understand,” he said. “I promise though that I’ll keep working on myself. Can we at least be friends?”

I sighed.

“Sure,” I replied. “If you really do plan to work on yourself, we can be friends.”

I just hoped that he wasn't only working on himself because he thought we still had a chance.

As I walked away from Justin, I took one last glance over my shoulder to see Enzo watching me from the athletic field.

The next day, I was walking to my next class of the day when my phone started buzzing. I looked at it to see that it was

Phil, from the diner, calling me.

“Hello?” I answered.

“Nina,” Phil said, sounding chipper. “I hope you've been doing better.”

“I have, actually,” I replied. Was he going to ask me to come back to work? I really needed the money, but I didn't want to beg.

“Listen,” he said, “we're really missing your help over here. I'm sorry I jumped to conclusions before... If you're not too mad at me, and if I gave you a raise to make up for it, would you be interested in coming back to work?”

“Yes!” I blurted out, then covered my mouth and cringed at my overly enthusiastic response. “I mean... Yeah, that would be good. When do you want me to come back?”

“Can you come in tonight?” Phil asked.

I had promised Lori I would hang out with her, but I knew she would understand. I really needed the money; I'd been living on the free meal plan food and instant noodles for the past two weeks.

“I'll see you tonight,” I said.

Later, I explained the situation to Lori. and she understood completely. I had just enough time after my last class to shower and get changed into my uniform before I had to go to work, and I was honestly excited to be back; not to mention the pay raise.

I was walking to work, however, when I ran into none other than Enzo on the quad.

He looked me up and down and smiled.

“Back to work?” he said.

“Yeah,” I replied, blushing when I saw his eyes flicker down to my chest, which I had always thought looked quite good in my retro diner uniform.” Um, Phil called earlier and I guess he had a sudden change of heart. He even gave me a raise.”

Enzo smirked. “Good,” he replied. ” You deserve it. I’m glad he took my advice.”

I was about to say something else, but my words caught in my throat as I realized what Enzo had just said.

“Wait,” I said, taking a step backwards. “Did you... Did you talk to Phil?”

Enzo looked a little embarrassed, but nodded. “Yeah,” he admitted. “After you told me everything that happened with Lisa, I thought it would help the situation.”

I didn’t know what to say. I was happy to have my job back, but a part of me was also hurt that Enzo felt the need to take care of me.

Enzo must have seen me struggling. I’m sorry,” he said. “I know I should’ve asked you first. I just thought... I don’t know. I thought it would be a nice surprise. Something to make up for how shitty I’ve been.”

I shifted my bag on my shoulder and nodded pensively as I looked at the ground. “I do appreciate it,” I replied. ” Thank you. Just... In the future, let me handle my own affairs, please. I can take care of myself.”

Enzo seemed visibly hurt by my words, but before I could take back what I said, he nodded and started to walk away. “It won’t happen again,” he said, sticking his hands in his pockets. “Good luck at work tonight.”

I bit my lip as I watched him walk away.. I couldn’t let him leave like this.

“Enzo!” I called after him.

He stopped and turned around, and when his sad gaze met mine, my heart skipped a beat.

“Really,” I said softly. “Thank you.”

A soft smile tugged at the corners of Enzo’s lips. Without a word, he nodded and walked away.