

My Hockey Alpha #Chapter 51: Breaking News - Read My Hockey Alpha Chapter 51: Breaking News

Chapter 51: Breaking News

Nina

I went to work that night with a smile on my face. It felt good to get back to work, and the diner was surprisingly busy, which kept me busy after

spending so much time in my head for the past couple of weeks. It was refreshing to feel like my life was getting back to some sense of normalcy; no Lisa, no skeleton bodyguard as far as I could see, and no strange attacks from feral werewolves.

Halfway through my shift, however, it seemed that the universe simply couldn't exist without throwing some sort of drama in my face.

I was cleaning up dishes and wiping down tables after the dinner rush. It was quiet in the diner now, with only a few people seated here and there. I was whistling along to the music playing on the radio, and smiling to myself, just happy to be back in my old routine.

My smile faded when I heard the bell on the door jingle and looked up to see a familiar face walk through the door.

It wasn't Enzo, or Justin, or Lisa, or even Luke. If it had been any of them, I would've been annoyed.

Instead, I was terrified.

It was K.

I knew he came looking for me specifically, and that this wasn't just a crazy coincidence, when he walked in and immediately looked directly at me.

Seeing his face nearly made me drop the bin of dirty plates I was holding, but I somehow managed to maintain my composure.

"S-Sit anywhere you like," I said with a forced smile despite my racing heart. "I'll be right with you." K smiled back and nodded, taking a seat at a booth in the corner. I took a deep breath and scurried into the kitchen, setting down the bin of dishes next to the dishwashing station and smoothing down my apron with shaking hands.

Part of me considered running. The back door beckoned to me; I could just run out of the diner and never come back... but I really needed this job.

I considered calling Enzo as well, but I also couldn't do that for two reasons: for starters, my phone was in my bag, which was under the counter out front, meaning that K could potentially see me calling for help and do something horrible. I barely knew this guy, and it seemed as though he was stalking me if he knew where I worked and exactly what time I would be on shift... Hell, for all I knew, he could've been a mass murderer of humans, not just werewolves!

Besides, I couldn't tell Enzo because then Enzo would think that I had been in cahoots with a supposed werewolf hunter. K might've killed someone that Enzo knew personally; there was no way of knowing, and there was no way I could tell him about my meeting with K.

I was stuck talking to K.

Telling myself that this was all just a big coincidence, I steeled my nerves and headed out into the dining area.

Time felt as though it was moving in slow motion as I made my way over to K's table. The whole way there, he was staring directly at me — unblinking, unmoving. Like a hawk waiting to strike its prey.

"F-Fancy seeing you again," I said, taking out my notepad to take his order. "W-What can I get for you?"

"No theatrics," K said abruptly, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a folded up piece of newspaper. He unfolded it and smoothed it down on the table, then slid it to me. "You still not interested in having your Lycan problem solved?"

With shaking hands, I reached out and took the paper, my eyes widening as I read the headline.

"BREAKING NEWS: Hiker finds man brutally murdered in abandoned house on Newburgh hiking trails — Locals claim supposed 'werewolf' attack."

My hands started shaking even more. I raised my gaze up from the paper.

"Newburgh is—"

"Just a town over, sweetheart," K interjected. "Now you tell me that that werewolf wasn't your precious Lycan friend."

"There have been a lot of Lycans around lately," I said. "It could be anyone." I didn't want to believe that Enzo would ever do such a thing. He had sat here, right in this very booth, and told me with all his heart that he was not a killer.

K merely shrugged and stood. He was big and towered over me, and it made me feel like a scared little field mouse in the shadow of a mountain lion.

“Whether it was your Lycan boy or not, creating one less of those monsters would be doing the world a favor,” he said. “Come with me and we’ll find out. Once you get a taste of how good it feels to watch the light go out of their eyes... You won’t be able to get enough of it.”

I took a few steps back, my eyes wide as I shook my head vigorously in horror. “No,” I replied, my voice shaking. “I can’t. I’m not...”

“Not a killer?” K said.

I was too frozen to respond.

K merely chuckled and left me with the newspaper.

I watched through the window, still frozen in my spot from shock, as K climbed into a beat up pickup truck and drove away. After what felt like an eternity, I finally became unfrozen and quickly stuffed the newspaper into my apron just as Phil hobbled up to me.

“Why did he leave?” Phil asked, leaning on his cane and peering out the window.

I shrugged. “Changed his mind, I guess,” I lied.

“Hmph.” Phil grumbled and hobbled off.

When I got home that night, I had so many things swirling around my mind.

Was it truly a werewolf that killed the man in the town over? Was it possible that the werewolf was... Enzo?

No. I refused to believe that Enzo was a killer.

I stayed up far too late that night, pacing back and forth across my room and chewing my nails down to stubs as the newspaper clipped stared at me from its spot on my desk. I must have read it over and over again a hundred times, looking for some sort of proof that it wasn’t a werewolf attack...

But the information was too spot-on. Several locals claimed that they saw a giant wolf on the night the man may have been killed. When his body was found, it had been covered in gashes. Not just one here or there, but always three or four in a row. Like claws.

The wounds were so vicious that the police were still trying to identify the body. All they could identify was that he had been wearing a business suit.

I read the article again one last time, reading quietly aloud to myself, when I came to a sudden and horrifying realization:

The man was killed right around the time that Enzo had been gone for several days.

Right after I was drugged by a man in a suit.

Chapter 52: Camping Trip

Nina

Somehow, I managed to fall asleep for a couple of hours that night. Those few hours of sleep were fraught with nightmares, but at least I slept. When I woke up the next morning, I knew what I needed to do.

I couldn't mention any of this to Enzo or Luke, because I knew that I wouldn't get a truthful response. All of the clues were pointing to them; they had done something horrible to that man who drugged me.

Even though that man was a terrible person who only wanted to hurt me that night, it didn't mean that I wanted anyone to be killed!

It was around eight o'clock in the morning when I climbed out of bed and started packing. I would need a change of warm clothes, granola bars, a flashlight, a sleeping bag... Anything that would be useful for camping.

I was going to go camping in the forest outside of Newburgh and investigate this murder myself.

But I couldn't go alone. Not only would it be dangerous, but it would also be too suspicious if I just took off to go camping by myself over the weekend in the exact place that Enzo and Luke had likely killed the businessman from the club.

I had to convince Lori and Jessica to go with me.

When I walked out into the living room dressed in a flannel, sweater, jeans, and hiking boots with my backpack slung over my shoulder and my sleeping bag in my hand, Jessica and Lori both gave me a puzzled look.

"Uh... want a waffle, Wilderwoman?"

Lori said, holding up a plate of waffles that actually looked tantalizing

“Sure,” I said, dropping my stuff on the floor and walking over to the kitchen. I took a waffle and smothered it in butter and syrup while my friends ate in silence, still staring at me.

“You going camping or something?” Jessica asked.

“I was planning on it,” I replied, trying my best to sound nonchalant. “You guys should come.”

Lori and Jessica looked at each other, then at me.

“Like... right now?” Lori said with a mouthful of waffles.

I nodded as I cut into my waffle. “I mean, you guys can take your time getting ready. There’s no major rush. I just wanna get out there today.

“What made you wanna go camping all of a sudden?” Jessica asked. “You never struck me as such an outdoorsy type.

“Actually, my parents took me camping all the time growing up,” I replied, which was true. Many of my childhood summers had been spent visiting national parks, exploring the wilderness, and getting bitten by mosquitoes. I actually really enjoyed being out in nature, but eventually my dad started having heart problems and couldn’t risk being out in the middle of nowhere for days on end with no hospital in sight, so we stopped going. Then I started college as a premed student and never found the time for it, anyway. I was glad that I kept my camping supplies, though.

Jessica and Lori looked at each other again, then shrugged.

“I’ll bring the weed,” Lori said.

“I suppose I could use some fresh air,”

Jessica added. Knowing that Jessica and Lori would be so willing to come with me made me happy and nervous at the same time. Assuming that Enzo and Luke were the ones to kill the businessman from the club, I knew it would be safe for me and my friends. They wouldn’t hurt me or the people who were close to me. But if it wasn’t Enzo and Luke who killed the man, and just happened to be a different werewolf, then...

I would be putting my friends in grave danger.

I thought back to before I met K, when I was doing research on werewolves. It may have just been an old wives’ tale, but the general consensus that I found on cryptozoology forums — even those that were mostly frequented by casual lovers of the genre and not die-hard believers seemed to be that silver bullets were the best option for killing a werewolf.

“Lori, can I borrow your car while you guys get ready?” I asked, shoving the last bite of waffle in my mouth. “I just wanna run out and grab a couple supplies.”

“Uh, yeah, I guess,” Lori said, pointing to the key hook by the door. “My keys are over there.”

“Thanks.” I quickly washed my plate in the sink and grabbed Lori’s keys, leaving my friends still somewhat confused.

I took Lori’s car and made a beeline for the gun shop just outside of town. It wasn’t the most reputable place, but that was exactly what I needed; I didn’t have any permits to carry a gun, I didn’t have a lot of money, and I didn’t need someone to question why I wanted a shotgun and silver bullets on a Friday morning.

The bell on the shop door jingled when

I entered. It was dark inside, and while my eyes adjusted from the bright sun, I heard the gruff voice of an older woman who sounded like she’d been smoking cigarettes for fifty years call out to me.

“Mornin’, hun,” she said.

My eyes adjusted so I could finally make out the woman. She was short and stocky, with gray hair pulled up into a neat bun on the top of her head, and was wearing a beat-up flannel tucked into jeans with a quilted vest on top.

“Morning,” I said, sheepishly approaching the counter. “I’m here to buy a gun.”

“Yeah, I kinda gathered that, this bein’ a gun shop and all,” she said with a gravelly chuckle.

I felt a bit embarrassed, realizing now that I had no clue what I was doing. It seemed that the woman noticed, too.

“Self defense, huntin’, or both?” she asked, leaning on the counter as I approached.

“Um... Both, I guess,” I replied, looking around at the gun displays that lined the walls.

“Hm... Tiny girl like you, clearly inexperienced...”

I gritted my teeth, expecting her to tell me that she wasn’t going to sell me a gun and to get the hell out of her store.

“...You’re gonna want somethin’ that don’t got a lotta recoil and that’s easy to reload,” she said, turning and walking over to the display behind the counter. I relaxed my

shoulders and let out a quiet sigh of relief as she scratched her chin and walked back and forth, searching for something.

Finally, the old woman grabbed a box off of a shelf and carried it over to the counter, setting it down in front of me.

“This will probably do just fine for a little thing like you,” she said, which was almost comical considering the fact that she was shorter than me. ” Bolt action rifle. A step up from a squirrel gun, but if it’s self

defense you’re lookin’ for, it’ll get the job done. Not bad for huntin’, either.”

“How big of an animal could it kill?” I asked.

The old woman raised an eyebrow. ” Don’t go shootin’ a moose or a bear, that’s for sure,” she said. “Why? What’re you plannin’ on killin’?”

I bit my lip as I tried to come up with a response. Before I came up with anything, however, she waved her hand and spoke again.

“Nevermind. That’s your business. Hang on a sec. I’ll be right back.”

The woman grabbed the box and disappeared into the back of the store, returning a few long minutes later with a different gun. My eyes widened when she set the box down on the counter.

“Pump-action shotgun. You know, like in those old western movies. The recoil will hurt your shoulder like a bitch, but this’ll take down just about anything with the right ammo.”

“How about silver bullets?” I blurted out.

The old woman paused, her eyes widening, like she knew exactly what I was planning on killing if the need arose. She looked around, as if checking to make sure this wasn’t some sort of prank, then wordlessly reached under the counter and pulled -out a box of ammo.

It was unlabelled, but we both knew what it was.

“Thank you,” I said, handing her a wad of all the cash I had on me. “This is all I have. I hope it’s enough.”

The old woman shook her head. “No. Keep your money. Just... be safe out there, kid. You hear me?”

A couple of hours later, Lori, Jessica and I were packing up Lori’s car for the camping trip. I wrapped the gun and ammo in a blanket and stashed it under the back seats,

hoping that I wouldn't have to use it, then ran to the grocery store and picked up firewood and food for the weekend. Soon, we were ready to go.

Just as I was about to get in the car, I could've sworn I saw Luke's hoodie peering out at me from behind a building, watching me.

It didn't matter, though.

I would be long gone before they even knew where I was going

My Hockey Alpha #Chapter 53: It's a Small World - Read My Hockey Alpha Chapter 53: It's a Small World

Chapter 53: It's a Small World

Enzo

I had only just woken up after a mostly sleepless night of wishing I could just explain everything to Nina without either scaring her or pushing her away, when I heard banging on my front door. Groaning, I dragged myself out of bed and opened the door to a surprise: Luke.

"She's up to something," he said, without so much as a greeting, and pushed his way past me into my living room.

"What? Nina?" I asked, still rubbing the sleep from my eyes as I watched the anxious skeleton pace back and forth across my apartment. It was times like this that I was glad to not have roommates.

"I don't know exactly what she's doing, but she's definitely up to something that is very much not good," he said, a little too quickly for me to fully comprehend exactly what was going on in my tired mind.

"Wait... Luke, slow down. What's happening?" I asked.

Luke stormed over to me and took me by both shoulders, shaking me back and forth.

"Nina is being lured into a trap!" he shouted.

There were a few moments of silence as we stared at each other, the reality of the situation slowly sinking in.

Finally, I understood what was going on; panic mode started to set in.

“Where is she? How do you know? Is she alone? Is she hurt? Tell me what’s happening, god dammit!” I shouted as I ran around my apartment like a madman, throwing on yesterday’s dirty clothes as images of Nina being brutally murdered or kidnapped by a crazy person flashed through my mind.

“If you would give me a chance, I would tell you!” Luke shouted, his usual monotone voice now bellowing so loudly it shook the glass of water on my nightstand.

I stopped and took a deep breath. Luke was right; running around like a chicken with its head cut off wouldn’t solve anything.

“I saw a strange guy in a beat up pickup truck pull up to the diner last night while she was at work,” Luke said. “He sat down in a window booth. When she went over to him, she looked terrified; he gave her a piece of paper, they talked, then he left. This morning, she drove to the gun shop outside of town — that’s right, a gun shop and walked out with a shotgun. The last I saw of her, she was driving out of town with her roommates with a car full of camping supplies.”

My heart raced as I pictured Nina with a shotgun... Why on earth would she need a dangerous weapon like that? And who was that man that Luke mentioned?

None of that mattered, though, because right now my sole purpose was to find Nina and protect her in any way I could.

“Do you know where she went?” I asked, grabbing a duffel bag from my closet and starting to fill it with necessities.

“I’m not sure exactly,” Luke replied, pulling a folded up piece of newspaper out of his hoodie pocket, “but I broke into her dorm after she left and I found this. The newspaper that the guy in the diner gave her. My best guess is that she’s trying to investigate... Because she probably thinks that we did this somehow.”

I furrowed my brow and snatched the newspaper away from Luke. My eyes widened as I read the article.

“This is...”

“Yeah,” Luke said, nodding, “It’s him. The guy who drugged her at the club. Someone must’ve found where I had him and they did him in. I’m not sure why, exactly, but my only guess is that that guy who showed up to the diner last night had something to do with it.”

“How do you know?” I asked. “Why would he have given her this if he was the one who did the killing?”

“When he went into the diner last night and I saw how terrified Nina looked, I got suspicious,” Luke replied. “So I looked through the windows of his truck. There was a business card on the dashboard. It had blood on it.”

“Fuck,” I exclaimed, stuffing the newspaper article in my pocket and continuing to pack. “How long ago did she leave?”

“Only about ten minutes ago,” Luke said. “If we go soon, we might be able to catch up with her and stop her before it’s too late.”

I quickly finished packing up my camping supplies, formulating a plan as I did so. I couldn’t just randomly show up in the woods and drag Nina home; for starters, I didn’t want to get shot, and secondly, I couldn’t have her friends getting suspicious. I had to figure out a way to make it seem like it was all just a coincidence.

I called Matt from the hockey team once I finished packing — he was the only one on the team who I knew would agree to a last-minute camping trip like this, plus he had a car — and told him to pack quickly and meet me at the quad. Just as I suspected, he agreed enthusiastically.

“Totally, man!” he said. “I can be out there in, like, ten minutes. Oh, and is it alright if I bring my roommate? He’s going through some stuff so he could use a camping trip... You’ll like him though.”

“Sure, whatever,” I said, rolling my eyes, and hung up the phone.

Ten minutes later, I was standing on the quad when I saw Matt and his roommate walking toward me.

I almost audibly groaned when I recognized his roommate immediately. It was the guy that Nina had been going on dates with.

“Enzo, this is my roommate James,” Matt said.

James smiled and stuck out his hand. “Nice to meet you,” he said, a perfect picture of politeness.

I forced a smile and shook his hand back.

Even though I wanted to throttle this guy for stealing Nina away from me, I didn’t have the time right now to be dealing with this. It looked like I’d just have to grin and bear it for Nina’s sake.

We hopped in Matt’s car — I insisted on driving — and started to head toward Newburgh. I knew exactly where Luke had kept the asshole who drugged Nina; it was

just a matter of figuring out where she decided to set up her camp, because it likely wasn't far.

I took risks driving at breakneck speeds around the back roads, much to Matt's dismay, and soon enough we were in Newburgh.

And, sure enough, Fio sensed her nearby.

"Park here," Fio said. "I can smell her. She was just here; she's not far."

I did as Fio said and parked along the side of the road. We got out and grabbed our things — I tried my best to ignore Mr. Perfect, James, who came fully prepared with a fancy hiking backpack, hiking boots, expensive outdoorsy clothes, and all of the camping supplies we could possibly need — and then we got on our way.

"Thanks for inviting me, by the way," James said as we walked, not realizing that Fio was guiding me to the perfect spot. "I really appreciate it."

"No problem," I lied through my teeth. "It's a good weekend for it."

"Sure is," Matt said, inhaling the forest air. "What made you wanna go camping so last minute, Enzo?"

I shrugged, stepping over a fallen tree; Fio was telling me that Nina was very close now. "Just been a long week," I replied. "Needed to get some fresh air."

A few minutes later, we found a decent camping spot that was close enough to Nina's campsite for my plan to go into action.

"I wanna scout around for a couple minutes before we set up just to check for bear droppings," I said. "You guys wait here, alright?"

Matt and James nodded and sat down on a log while I hiked off into the woods.

I knew that there were no bears around; even if there were, I knew I could handle it. Instead, I was headed straight for Nina's campsite. I picked up some small logs along the way to make it look like I was out collecting firewood not that Nina would believe me anyway, but at least her friends would fall for it.

When I heard the girls talking and laughing nearby, my stress dissolved. I had made it in time before anything bad happened. Nina could be mad at me all she wanted, but I could explain everything later.

"Shh- Do you hear that?" Nina said, quieting her friends as I approached.

Not wanting to frighten them, I called Out: Hello? I stepped out into the clearing where the girls had set up camp and smiled.

“Oh, hey!” I said. “Fancy seeing you ladies here.”

Chapter 54: No Coincidences

Nina

Jessica, Lori and I had begun setting up camp not far from where the businessman had been murdered when I heard twigs and leaves crunching in the forest.

Someone was coming.

“Oh my god,” Jessica complained as she fiddled with her tent poles, “this is impossible! Lori, I need help!”

“Guys,” I said, but they didn’t hear me.

“I just helped you two minutes ago,” Lori said, standing and walking over to Jessica with her hands on her hips while Jessica whined.

“Shh!” I said, which made them finally go quiet. “Do you hear that?”

My heart raced as I listened to the footsteps. They were getting louder, and definitely headed directly for our camp. I glanced over at my tent, which had the shotgun inside-
11 I could just get over there before anything bad happened.

“Hello?” a male voice called out from the woods.

I knew that voice anywhere; it was Enzo.

And hearing it didn’t make me any less terrified.

He stepped out into the clearing, holding a bundle of firewood with a backpack on his back and a big, stupid grin on his face.

“Oh, hey!” he said, as if he hadn’t followed us out here. I knew I should’ve stopped Luke! “Fancy seeing. you ladies here!”

“What a surprise!” Jessica said, practically squealing with delight. Despite what she had said in the cafeteria the other day about Enzo, she couldn’t hide her fangirl nature around him.

“You’re camping, too?” Lori said while I only continued inching toward my tent in silence, trying to get closer to the shotgun in case Enzo suddenly decided that we knew too much and that he’d need to kill us, just like he did with the businessman.

“Yeah,” Enzo replied. “Me and a couple other guys. It’s a nice weekend for it.” He looked over at me just as I was about to reach into the tent for the shotgun, his eyes flashing red for a split second as if to warn me not to do it. I swallowed, my heart practically beating out of my chest.

“Ooh, you guys should camp with us!” Jessica said.

“Jessica!” Lori growled, glancing at me.

“What?” Jessica replied. “It’ll be fun. You’d be okay with it, right, Nina?”

I felt betrayed that Jessica would be so dumb at the first sign of a hot guy to forget all of our morals, but her nonchalance toward him in the cafeteria the other day made me wonder now if he was using some sort of werewolf powers to make Jessica say these things... And when I saw how focused his eyes were on hers, and how her eyes seemed almost glazed over, I knew it to be true.

Enzo was manipulating Jessica into inviting him over.

“Uh... Sure, I guess,” I said, knowing that there was no way out now. Regardless of what I said, he would find a way to get close to us.

Enzo flashed another grin at my response, then looked up at the sky.

“Sun’s setting,” he said, walking over to our fire pit and setting down the firewood he had so nonchalantly collected on his way to stalk me. “I’ll just go get Matt and James, and we’ll be over in a minute.”

James? As in... Graduate student James?

What sort of game was Enzo playing with me?

Before I could ask, Enzo disappeared.

Lori turned toward me, her eyes wide.

“What the fuck?” she said, to which I shrugged in return. There was no use discussing it now.

“I’m sorry,” Jessica said. “I don’t know what came over me just then.”

"You're boy crazy, that's what it is," Lori growled, stomping back over to her tent and continuing to set it up while she grumbled to herself.

"It's okay," I said, knowing that it wasn't Jessica's fault. "Maybe it will be fun."

Or we'll all be dead in the morning, I thought to myself.

Soon enough, the boys returned; and, much to my dismay, James was in fact with them.

"Oh! Hey, Nina," James said as they entered the clearing with their things. I blushed, mumbling a quiet "Hey", and quickly looked away as I felt both James and Enzo's eyes on me at the same time.

"I call this spot," Matt said, walking over to an empty spot next to Lori's tent, unaware that he would be barking up the wrong tree if he tried to get with her. James picked a spot opposite my tent, keeping a respectable distance that I wished

Enzo could learn from.

Meanwhile, Enzo walked over to me while I pretended to be fiddling with my backpack.

"Hey," he said quietly.

I kept glaring at the ground, pretending I didn't hear him. He crouched down in front of me and pulled something out of his pocket, handing it to me; my eyes widened when I saw that it was the newspaper clipping. I had left that in my room! How did he even have it?

"I would never do something like this, Nina," he said quietly while I continued to stare in shock at the ground.

When I didn't answer, he sighed and stood, walking away to set up his tent a little ways away from the circle of other tents.

I was relieved that he was at least setting up his tent away from mine, but I still didn't believe him.

If he was so innocent, then why did he follow me all the way out here?

The sun had gone down by the time everyone finished setting up their tents. I got the fire going because it was a good excuse to not socialize, although I couldn't shake the feeling of Enzo's eyes on me all of the time.

Soon enough, we had the fire going. We roasted hot dogs over the fire and shared a case of beer that Matt brought. I tried not to drink too much in case I needed to be alert, but I couldn't deny that the alcohol helped to ease my nerves a bit.

Was Enzo telling the truth?

He had insisted that night in the diner that he would never kill anybody.... And, so far since I'd known him, he had never given the indication that he could actually be dangerous. If anything, he'd protected me from danger on multiple occasions.

Maybe it was just the alcohol, but as the forest grew dark and the fire blazed between us, our eyes locking across the flames every so often, I started to wonder if I should trust Enzo again.

After dinner, we roasted marshmallows and made s'mores, slowly finishing off the case of beer.

Lori, Matt, and Jessica all started to get thoroughly drunk. I was tipsy, and James seemed to be tipsy as well judging from his rosy cheeks and drunken poetry reading, which made Enzo roll his eyes. Even with Enzo there, however, I couldn't help but blush a bit at how confident James was with his poetry reading.

Meanwhile, Enzo stayed completely sober.

At some point during the night, Jessica had an idea that made my heart drop. and "Hey!" she said, standing up and grabbing an empty bottle from the case of beer and returning to the circle, holding it up for everyone to see.

"Who wants to play Spin the Bottle?"

Chapter 55: Spin the Bottle

Nina

Everyone went silent when Jessica suggested that we play Spin the Bottle.

"C'mon, guys!" she said, her pretty face flushed from the beer. "It's just a game."

"I'm down," Matt chimed in. Lori shrugged, which was usually a sign of consent. James, Enzo and I, however, all stayed silent.

"James?" Jessica said, shaking the bottle gently. "What do you say?" I wanted to groan, because I could tell that Jessica secretly wanted James and I to kiss, even though Enzo was there. Why did she get like this when she was drunk?

“Oh, alright,” James said, throwing his hands up in surrender. “I guess it could be fun.” His eyes flickered over to me briefly, and I could tell that the idea of us kissing made him a bit excited.

I wasn't excited, however.

“Well, looks like we have a majority vote here,” Jessica said, setting the bottle down in the middle of the circle, right next to the fire pit. “Sorry, Nina and Enzo. You guys don't have to play if you don't want to.”

“I'll play.”

Enzo's firm decision took me by surprise. I looked over at him with wide eyes; he was staring right at me from across the fire pit. I couldn't tell if it was just the light from the fire or his werewolf eyes that made his irises look red from here. Judging from how my heart started racing all of a sudden, I figured it was the latter.

“Yay!” Jessica said, clapping her hands lightly. “Nina, you're playing, right?”

I didn't answer for a few moments. I really didn't want to, but between the peer pressure and the alcohol, I finally conceded. “Sure,” I said quietly.

Jessica grinned. “I'll go first.” She spun the bottle.

The bottle spun around several times, then finally landed on Matt, who looked devilishly pleased as Jessica leaned over to him and gave him a peck on the lips. I could tell that he wanted more judging from the way he leaned closer as she pulled away, which made me smirk a bit.

“Lori, you go next,” Jessica said.

Lori sighed and spun the bottle. It spun for several long moments; she had spun it hard and fast, and it went around quite a few times before finally landing on its target.

Jessica.

“Oooh!” Matt said, grinning while Jessica's and Lori's faces both went bright red.

“I-Uh- I didn't- You don't have to, Jessica,” Lori said nervously.

Jessica's face shifted into a shy smile as she absentmindedly twirled a strand of blonde hair around her finger. “I don't mind,” she said.

We all watched in awe as Jessica and Lori slowly leaned toward each other, then kissed.

It wasn't just a peck, either.

I had always thought that Jessica was straight, but lately I had been wondering if something had changed ever since she said she hadn't been feeling interested in guys for a while that day in the cafeteria. Now, as I watched my two friends kiss, both of their faces flushed as they pulled away, the

way that Jessica seemed so excited to see Lori in the cafeteria that day was all beginning to make sense.

It made me happy to see that maybe Lori's dream of being with Jessica could possibly come true, but that happiness didn't last long as it was now my turn to spin the bottle.

Feeling like I was gonna puke, I took in a deep breath and spun the bottle.

While it spun, the only thing going through my head was the hope that it wouldn't land on James or Enzo... Anyone else would've been fine, just a peck and it could be over with.

But it seemed that the universe didn't ever have anything good in store for me, because the bottle landed on Enzo.

Everyone else gasped, except for James, who sat still like a statue, gazing into the fire. I glanced over at Jessica and Lori, who both shot me apologetic looks. When I looked at Enzo, his eyes seemed to glow red even more than before. I gulped.

"Ooh, you could cut the tension with a knife it's so thick," Matt said.

"Shut up!" Jessica growled, smacking him on the back of the head.

Enzo stood and walked around the fire, stopping in front of me. I looked up at him, my heart racing a mile a minute, half of me hoping that he would just walk away and the other half of me secretly excited to feel his lips again.

Everyone watched with bated breath as Enzo crouched in front of me and placed his hand under my chin. His glowing red eyes were locked on me like I was a helpless little rabbit in his lair, but something about it turned me on.

He kissed me, swift and hard, and his lips lingered on mine for several long moments before we slowly pulled away.

Without another word, Enzo stood and walked back to his spot on the other side of the fire.

James continued to stare silently into the flames.

put a bit of a damper on the festivities for the night, so everyone started returning to their tents one-by- one.

I let out a soft sigh of relief when Enzo went to his tent, because soon I planned on secretly walking to the location where the businessman was killed to look for clues.

Once I was certain everyone else was asleep and the fire had burned down to nothing but embers, I quietly pulled my boots on and grabbed my flashlight. I grabbed the gun and slipped the strap around my torso, then slowly unzipped my tent and looked around to make sure no one was around before silently stepping out and sneaking off into the forest.

I didn't get far, however, when I heard the sound of twigs and leaves crunching underfoot behind me.

Cursing to myself, I darted behind a tree; but it was too late.

"Nina? Is that you?" James called out quietly, walking toward me and shining his phone flashlight in my direction.

I gulped and stepped out from behind the tree. James relaxed when he saw me, letting out a deep breath.

"I'm glad it's just you. I thought we weren't alone out here," he said, shutting off his flashlight so only the moon gave us light.

"What are you doing out here?" I asked abruptly.

James looked taken aback. "I had to pee. What are you doing out here, and with a gun no less?"

I cringed inwardly, having forgotten about the gun.

"I... also had to pee," I replied. "And I'm paranoid."

Thankfully, he bought it. "Fair enough," he said. "Hey... I know it's not really my business, but..."

Oh no. I knew what he was going to ask.

"...do you and Enzo have a history or something?"

I wanted to lie, but I knew that it was too obvious from the way that everyone reacted when we played Spin the Bottle, so it was no use.

“Um... Yeah,” I replied, looking at the ground. “We had a thing at the beginning of the semester. But we agreed not to let it go anywhere.”

“Oh.” He sounded incredibly disappointed and hurt, but what could I do? “Is that why you couldn’t stay the other night in the library? Because of him?”

I didn’t know what to say, because it was true. I could only nod as tears welled up in my eyes.

James was quiet for a few moments before speaking again. “I know how it said quietly, stepping closer to me and making my heart race. “Let me help you sort those feelings out.”

James cupped my cheeks in his hands and leaned in to kiss me.

Suddenly, we were both alerted by the sound of someone — or something walking toward us.

I spun toward the direction of the sound, grabbing my gun off my back. I couldn’t make out what it was in the darkness, but the glowing yellow eyes told me all I needed to know.

Chapter 56: Portal

Nina

“James... Run.”

“What?” he said. “I’m not gonna leave you out here.”

I cocked my shotgun as the yellow eyes continued to stare at me from the darkness, accompanied by the sound of a deep, horrifying growl.

“You have to run, James,” I said, raising the barrel of the gun to point it at the creature in the forest. “Get Enzo.”

James grabbed my arm. “C’mon,” he begged. “It’s not safe!”

“Go NOW!” I yelled, spinning around and pointing the gun at him, tears in my eyes. James threw his hands up in surrender and backed away, then turned on his heel and ran off toward the camp.

I turned back toward the creature, which was now emerging from the woods; it was a werewolf.

Not a rogue like the one I saw that night when I was running from Luke, though. Instead of some mangy, mutt- looking creature that appeared half human, this one was a huge, brown wolf that towered several feet over me. Its paws were bigger than my head, and the teeth that it bared were at least five or six times as big as the one that K had shown me around his neck in the coffee shop.

Had he even truly shown me a werewolf tooth, or was it all a lie?

My hands shook as I pointed the gun at the werewolf.

“Stay back!” I yelled, backing away. It only continued to approach me, saliva dripping from its massive mouth.

Suddenly, the giant wolf pounced.

Instinct took over. I shot the gun, the recoil slamming me hard in the shoulder and sending me to the ground in agony. The wolf yelped in pain; I just barely managed to roll out of the way before it fell on top of me, blood pooling on the ground beneath it.

It was dead.

Or, so I thought.

The wolf began to shift, massive legs and paws turning into human hands and arms and legs, its fur disappearing to reveal...

I gasped and scrambled to my feet, backing away. He groaned and rolled onto his back, clutching his chest. I watched in horror as the hole where the bullet had buried itself in his chest began to close.

“You’re such a fucking idiot, girl,” he growled as he healed, standing and walking toward me as if he hadn’t just Chapter be Portal had a silver bullet shot straight into his chest. I kept the muzzle of the gun focused on him, but as he approached me, I went into too much shock to shoot again.

He walked up to me and grabbed the barrel of the gun, yanking it out of my hands with ease and throwing it to the ground several feet away as he cracked his neck.

“It’s gonna take more than one of those to kill me.”

He grabbed me by the hair and started dragging me into the woods. I tried to fight, but he was so much stronger than me even in his human form that I felt helpless. All I could do was scream and hope that Enzo would come for me.

K put his hand out flat in front of him like he was pushing on a wall and started whispering some strange incantation while I struggled against him.

Something started to happen that I couldn't explain. It was small at first, but grew larger and larger; a big, swirling portal in front of us.

"Where are you trying to take me?" I cried, tears streaming down my cheeks.

K looked down at me with a maniacal look in his eyes. "Unfortunately, I was asked to bring you back in one piece," he replied, hoisting me kicking and screaming up onto his shoulder like I was nothing but a sack of potatoes.

He put one foot in the portal.

This was it. I was going to be whisked away to another dimension for all I knew, and I had no idea what was going to happen to me. No one would be here in time, and there was nothing I could do about it.

Except...

Just like how instinct kicked in when I shot the gun, instinct kicked in again, but in a slightly different way.

I wrenched my head around and bit K as hard as I could in the neck.

"Fuck!" he cried out, dropping me as blood gushed out of his neck. I spat out a wad of blood and flesh on the ground, scrambling to my feet and starting to run away.

The portal started to close.

"Get back here, you bitch!" K yelled, grabbing my ankle and sending me to the ground. I hit my head on my way down and my vision blurred, but I kicked and clawed with all my might and somehow kept him from dragging me away long enough for Enzo to make it.

"Get off of her, asshole!" Enzo's voice called.

I looked up from my thrashing to see him running toward me. With the moon shining above him, he looked like a dark angel coming to my rescue. I reached my hand out toward him, sobbing as K continued to drag me toward the portal. I felt my foot go in... It was strange, and cold.

Enzo leaped forward and grabbed my hand, pulling me toward him with all his might and releasing me from K's strong grip just as the portal closed.

I fell on top of Enzo, heaving and sobbing into his shirt with the taste of blood in my mouth.

"I thought- I thought-" I stammered, but Enzo only held me and stroked my hair, rocking me back and forth.

“Shh,” he said. “It’s okay. I got you. He’s gone.”

I looked up at Enzo then. He wiped away my tears and the blood on my mouth.

“I bit him,” I whispered.

He nodded, rubbing my back. “I know. You did good.”

Enzo held me there for a while longer then eventually stood and carried me back to the camp in his strong arms. The feeling of his heartbeat against my body as he held me calmed me; I was a bit disappointed when he set me down by the fire pit when we arrived back at camp.

“Where is everyone?” I whispered, surprised to see that everyone seemed to still be in their tents. Hadn’t they heard the screaming and the gunshot?

“An old Lycan trick,” Enzo said softly. “In the morning, they’ll wake up and won’t remember a thing after we all went to bed.”

I nodded, relieved at least that I wouldn’t have to explain werewolves to my friends that night. I turned toward Enzo and looked up at him. “I’m sorry,” I whispered. “I thought it was you who killed that man... I should’ve trusted you more.”

“It’s alright,” he said softly. “Do you trust me now at least?”

“Yes,” I replied, nodding. “But I have to ask: did you plan on hurting the man who drugged me?”

Enzo was silent for several moments before answering. “I don’t know what I was planning,” he said. “I had Luke take him out here and put him under a spell to make him sleep until I figured out whether I wanted to turn him in to the police or let my father deal with him. I did want to hurt him, but I chose not to.”

“What changed your mind?” I asked.

“You,” he replied, gently touching my cheek for a moment. “I have a lot to learn from you, Nina Harper.”

Chapter 57: The Cumb

I was awoken by the gunshot just seconds before

James came running back to camp.

“Enzo!” he yelled. “Enzo! Nina’s in trouble! There’s something out there!”

I didn't need to hear any more. I quickly unzipped my tent and ran out, having kept my clothes and shoes on in case of an emergency.

Unfortunately, the other campers were also awoken by the gunshot, and were already coming out of their tents with panicked looks on

their faces.

"What's happening?" Jessica asked, rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

I cursed to myself as I realized that I would have to wipe all of their memories of this night. I wasn't nearly as good at it as Edward, but I

had no choice. I couldn't have them following me out into the woods and potentially seeing a shifter, or worse; I couldn't have them getting

killed.

"Get back in your tents and go to sleep," I said as I borrowed Fio's power to daze the group all at once.

They all stopped moving in unison, their eyes widening as they began

blinking slowly. I hadn't used this ability in so long that I had forgotten how easy it was to daze humans; the fact that Nina couldn't be

dazed, even by Edward, was solid proof that she couldn't possibly be entirely human.

"This was all just a dream," I said.

The group collectively nodded. James shuffled back to his tent in a daze and climbed inside while everyone else slowly zipped their tents

back up. Once I was certain that they were under my spell, I cursed to myself once again and turned on my heel, sprinting into the woods

and using Fio to help me track where Nina was.

I found her just in time. She was fighting with all of her might against a man who I couldn't identify as he tried to drag her through an open

portal to the Lycan realm.

"Get off of her, asshole!" I yelled, pushing myself to run even faster. He was fully through the portal now aside from his arm, which was

dragging Nina by the ankle. When she saw me, she reached for me, her teary eyes begging for help as her foot started to disappear

inside the rapidly-closing portal...

I leaped forward and grabbed her by the hand, yanking with all my might and freeing her from the stranger's grip.

She fell on top of me in a sobbing heap while the portal finished closing.

The next morning, everyone woke up as the sun rose. I stayed awake all night, watching Nina's tent; she hadn't asked me to stay with her, although I would have if she had asked. Instead, I chose to keep watch through the window of my own tent to make sure she was okay. I had put a protective barrier around the camp when I first got here that would keep out any unwanted visitors, but I worried that Nina would wake up frightened in the middle of the night. I had to be there for her if that happened.

Although, judging from the dark circles under her eyes when she came out of her tent in the morning, she didn't look like she slept either.

"Ugh, I had the weirdest dream," Lori said as she came out of her tent, rubbing her eyes.

"Me too," Jessica replied.

"Really? I slept like a baby," Matt said as he emerged from his tent with a grin. I'd observed him on enough overnight hockey tournament trips to know that he was a heavy sleeper. I couldn't help but smirk a bit at the oaf.

"I'm starving," Nina said, pulling her boots on. "I'm gonna go collect some firewood so we can cook breakfast."

I wasn't about to let her go alone, so I followed her while everyone else was still rubbing the sleep from their eyes. She didn't seem to mind the company; surely, after what happened the night before, she

wouldn't push me away quite so much anymore.

"Thank you for last night," she said quietly once we were far enough away from the group. "I don't know what would've happened if you hadn't shown up."

"I told you that I'd always protect you, didn't I?" I asked.

Nina bit her lip as she bent down to pick up a piece of wood on the ground. She always looked cute when she bit her lip like that, and it made me want her.

We collected wood in silence for a minute, but I had burning questions that needed to be answered.

“You knew that guy, didn’t you?” I asked.

She stopped and sighed, nodding. “I did. I didn’t know he was a werewolf. He lied to me... serves me right for meeting strangers on the internet.”

So that was the guy Luke said she met up with in the coffee shop weeks ago?

“Why did you meet him to begin with?” I asked, calming my nerves so that I wouldn’t reprimand Nina for being so stupid.

She looked almost embarrassed while she answered. “When you first told me you were a werewolf, I didn’t believe you,” she said. “So I did research and found this guy on a forum he called himself K — who claimed to have proof that werewolves exist. I know it was stupid, but I was desperate, so I met up with him. He claimed to be a werewolf hunter, and said some awful things.”

“Like what?”

“Like... You’re all monsters. But I know now that he was the very monster he warned me about.”

I saw tears welling up in Nina’s eyes and decided not to pry any further. Setting down my bundle of wood, I walked up to her and took the wood from her hands, then pulled her into a tight hug. Much to my surprise, she relaxed into me. I thought I felt her sobbing quietly into my shirt, but she didn’t show it.

“I’m sorry,” she said finally, pushing herself away from me and wiping her teary eyes with her sleeve. “I shouldn’t be acting like this, not with you and Lisa back together.”

I let out a sigh. “Nina, we’re not back together,” I replied. “When will you learn that I’m not interested in her?”

“But I saw you that night-”

“I know,” I said, “but if you’ll just let me explain everything, you’d understand what was really happening.”

Nina paused for several long seconds, staring at the ground as she did so, then finally nodded and looked back up at me.

“Do you remember how Lisa was acting when she attacked you? Like she was on something, right?” I asked. Nina nodded, so I

continued. "It wasn't drugs. She was bitten by a rogue."

Nina's eyes widened. "So does that mind that Lisa is..."

"No," I replied, shaking my head. "Thankfully not. I was able to get her help in time to reverse the effects. before it was too late. But that

was why I was with her; I took her to my father's house for a few days until she was strong enough, then took her home that night.

Nothing ever happened between us."

An expression came across Nina's face that I couldn't quite read, but at least she seemed to understand now.... Hopefully she believed

me..

Without another word, she continued collecting firewood.

When we returned to camp with our firewood, everyone was dressed and complaining of hunger. Nina made a fire I was impressed at her

ability to do it so well — and cooked sausages and flapjacks over the fire. After everything that happened the day before, the delicious

food was much- needed.

"We should go on a hike," Jessica said when we finished eating. "It's really nice out "

Although I was exhausted, I agreed — only because Nina agreed to go and I wasn't planning on letting her leave my sight for the

remainder of this trip.

So, once everyone was ready with their water and their granola bars, we started on the trail.

James, Mr. Perfect with his fancy hiking gear, took charge and led the group. I walked at the back and watched, fuming, as he kept

glancing at Nina. She didn't seem to be reciprocating, but it made me wonder why they were out in the woods together the night before.

What made me fume even more, though, was that Mr. Perfect left Nina out there by herself with a fucking werewolf. She was lucky I got

there when I did; he certainly wouldn't have been able to save her.

We walked along the hiking trail through the forest for some time, following the signs to a small mountain nearby. James claimed to have

hiked it many times, although I suspected that he was full of shit. Nonetheless, in order to not rock the boat unnecessarily, I followed the

group quietly.

Finally, we made it to the base of the mountain.

Now it was time to climb.

Chapter 58: Peak

Nina

"Man," Matt said, huffing as we slowly made our way up the mountain, "who knew hiking was such a workout?"

"I'll say," Lori chimed in. By this point, she had piled her black hair on top of her head and was flapping her ratty black band t-shirt to cool herself off as we climbed

"You guys are a couple of wimps," Jessica said, her long and slender legs allowing her to climb the mountain with ease. She was wearing tight leggings and an even tighter long-sleeved workout top that zipped up the front, and didn't have a bead of sweat on her entire body. Her ponytail swung back and forth, its curls from the day before still somehow perfect after a night of sleeping on the ground.

"Says you," Lori grumbled. "You're built like a gazelle."

It wasn't often that Jessica's nerdy side came out in front of other people, but this was one of those rare times. "Actually," she said, sounding somewhat full of herself and making everyone groan, "gazelles are better suited for flat terrain, like plains. If anything, you should be the one who's best at climbing like this, because you're short and muscular. Like a mountain goat."

There was a collective silence.

Finally, Matt was the first to burst out laughing, which started the chain, I even heard Enzo chuckle behind me, and thought I saw a smirk on James' face in the front while Lori fumed, clearly trying not to laugh.

Lori folded her arms across her chest and stuck out her tongue.

We kept climbing, taking breaks here and there for water and to catch our breath as the climb slowly got more difficult. An hour later, we were all getting annoyed at James for claiming that the hike was

“easy” – except for Enzo, who stayed mostly quiet behind me, his brown eyes focused on me the entire time– but he kept promising that we were almost there.

Finally, just as we were considering turning back, we reached the peak

We climbed up one last large rock face, having to help each other climb up. Enzo quickly came over as I tried to climb up the rock and boosted me up while James scrambled to be the one to take my hand, making me blush at the two of them practically competing for my affection

When I finally got up, however, the last thing on my mind was guys

The view was absolutely stunning The way that the afternoon light shone across the colorful autumn leaves, mixed with the deep green of the pine trees, took my breath away. No matter how much we groaned on the way up, the view made it all worth it.

“You can see everything from here!” Jessica exclaimed, throwing her arms up and running over to the edge excitedly.

“Hey, be careful,” James shouted after her “You shouldn’t get so close to the edge”

“Oh, it’s fine,” Jessica said. “Hey, can someone take a picture for me? I have got to post this to I* *m.”

No one else volunteered, so I sighed and pulled out my phone to snap a picture of Jessica. She grinned and struck a pose with one foot up behind herself and two peace signs with her hands.

I snapped a few pictures and was putting away my phone when, all of a sudden, a strong gust of wind blew across the summit and made Jessica lose her balance

It all happened so quickly, but felt like slow motion at the same time. She started to fall backwards over the edge of the cliff, her arms windmilling wildly as her face filled with panic Lori and I both screamed, running for her, but we were too far away. We wouldn’t make it in time

Suddenly, there was a flash to our right.

Enzo moved so quickly he was like a lightning bolt. He shot forward and grabbed Jessica around the waist just before she fell

Everyone let out a collective sigh of relief, too grateful that Jessica hadn't fallen to her death to notice that Enzo had moved at an inhuman speed to save her. Jessica practically swooned in his arms, throwing her arms around his neck and hugging him tightly.

"Thank you!" she cried, tears streaming down her cheeks. "You saved me."

Enzo put her down — away from the cliff this time and shook his head.

"Listen to people next time," he said sternly

Jessica blushed and nodded.

"You IDIOT!" Lori shouted, storming over to Jessica with her hands balled up into fists. "You could've died!" She took the whimpering Jessica by both shoulders and shook her, shouting obscenities. But then she did something else that none of us expected.

She kissed Jessica.

Matt broke out into laughter again. Beside me, James started to laugh as well while Enzo flashed me an amused look. I couldn't hold in my amusement either and burst into laughter with my friends, my eyes locked on Enzo's the entire time

Jessica's face was beet red when Lori finally pulled away

"Don't scare me I mean, us— like that again," Lori growled, to which Jessica nodded sheepishly

We spent some more time at the summit, enjoying the view and basking in the sun on the rocks. Despite everything that happened the night before, as well as Jessica's near-death experience, it was a lovely afternoon. Jessica and Lori stayed practically conjoined at the hip, while Matt tried to see how far he could throw stones, much to James' dismay.

I laid on the rocks and closed my eyes against the warm sun, letting its rays wash away my stress — and when I felt Enzo's hand brush a strand of hair out of my eyes when no one was looking, I didn't mind at all.

"I think it's time to head back," James. said after some time as he looked out at the horizon. The sun was beginning to set, and none of us wanted to hike back to camp in the dark, so we gathered our things and started to make our way. back down.

Going down was significantly more difficult than going up, and I eventually found myself lagging behind the group since I was so exhausted from what happened the night before. I wished. that James had warned us of that before suggesting that we climb this mountain, but I knew that I would remember that view forever, so I figured that it was

worth the struggle “Here, let me help you,” James said, holding out his hand as I struggled to climb down a small but steep rock face. I glanced up ahead at Enzo, who was with the rest of the group and thoroughly distracted by Matt trying to sword fight with him with a stick while he was also trying to help Jessica climb down a small ledge at the same time.

I took James’ hand and he helped me slide down the rock face, landing on my feet at the bottom. It wasn’t as bad as I expected, when you’re looking down from the top of a mountain, everything seems far away and terrifying.

“Thanks,” I said, brushing myself off and continuing to walk. James walked beside me. He was quiet for a few moments before he spoke.

“Hey, about last night...”

My heart leaped up in my throat. Did he remember almost kissing me? Did he remember the werewolf? Why did Enzo’s spell work on everyone else except for James?

“...I hope I wasn’t too weird during Spin the Bottle.”

I let out a small sigh of relief and shook my head. “You were fine,” I replied. “It was just an awkward game all around. Jessica gets drunk and does dumb stuff sometimes.”

James took a deep breath. “You and Enzo-”

“I know what you’re going to ask,” I said, stopping and turning to look at James. “Yes. Enzo and I-”

“I’m gay, Nina,” James suddenly blurted out.

My eyes widened. “But I thought-”

“I know,” he replied. “It’s not the first time it’s happened. Lots of girls have thought that I’m interested in them,

but that’s not the case. And I wanted to tell you before you got the wrong idea.”

I furrowed my brow, but felt oddly relieved.

“I think that you and Enzo really have a spark between the two of you,” he said quietly. We continued to walk behind the group, watching them goof around ahead of us. Even Enzo finally conceded and picked up a big stick, chasing Matt with it while Lori and Jessica laughed loudly. I chuckled a bit, too; it was refreshing to see Enzo being anything other than serious for once. Sometimes I forgot that being a werewolf didn’t exactly mean that he wasn’t still a college-aged boy

“Thank you, James,” I replied with a smile “I think we do, too.”

The next morning, we were all anxious to get home after spending two nights sleeping on the forest floor, so we started to pack up.

Even though I came out here with the intention of killing a werewolf, got attacked and nearly dragged to another dimension by that very werewolf, I was glad that everyone was here. It was a wonderful weekend — minus the werewolf part.

While Matt and Lori were fighting over their choice of diner, Enzo was getting our bear bag down out of the tree a ways out of camp, and James was frustrated at his futile attempts to get his sleeping bag back into its bag, it started to rain.

Thus marked the end of our harrowing camping trip.

Chapter 59: An Even Match

Nina

By the time the first few days of the week passed, everything seemed to be back to normal.

Midterms were coming up in a few weeks, not only did I have to prepare for exams, but I also had several projects and papers to write, so I was completely swamped with classwork. It was probably a good thing, though, since I would have spent far too much time agonizing over what happened in the woods.

Why had K been so hell-bent on capturing me? He had said that he had instructions to bring me back alive... Back to who?

Whenever these thoughts came up throughout the week, I pushed them back down. I had work to focus on.

On Friday night, the hockey team had a game; naturally, I would have to attend, although these days attending the games wasn't so much a chore as it was enjoyable. For the first time all semester, it seemed that there was no drama — with guys, at least

Lisa was also out for the next couple of weeks, from what I heard, the dean suspended her from the cheerleading team because of the attack, although I suspected it was really from the werewolf bite. Either way, I wasn't complaining. Her friends would always be annoying, but Lisa was worse. Not having her around, at least temporarily, was a relief.

Tiffany and I stood on the sidelines Friday night watching the game, on call in case of any injuries. Enzo scored a goal and the crowd went wild, but it had already been a tough match so far

“You seem nervous,” Tiffany said, nudging me with her elbow. I realized that I had been chewing my nails and quickly put my hands in my pockets.

“It’s a close game,” I replied, looking at the scoreboard. The score had been tied for the entire game; Enzo’s last goal only put our team ahead by one point.

Tiffany nodded. “This team is usually easy for them. But that captain is new... He’s really good. Much better than the last one.”

I watched as Enzo and the other captain raced for the puck, colliding and nearly knocking each other over. Out of all of the games I had seen so far, I had never seen anyone come even close to matching Enzo’s speed and ability.

The other team scored another goal, and the referee called for the second and final intermission. If our team didn’t get ahead in the third round, we’d have to hope for victory during overtime.

“I’m gonna get a drink,” Tiffany said. “Want anything?”

I shook my head, watching in awe as the team returned to the bleachers to rest and refuel after such a grueling match. I could hear Enzo berating them, so I approached out of curiosity.

“These guys were a walk in the park last year,” he said, removing his helmet and tucking it under his arm as he stood in front of his tired team. “You guys have got to get your heads in this game.”

“That new captain is way too good, Enzo,” Matt replied, his hair clinging to his forehead from sweat. “Who is he, anyway?”

Enzo glanced over his shoulder at the other captain, who was sitting on the other side of the arena while the rest of his team moved about excitedly, seeming thrilled to even be tied with our team.

“I don’t know,” Enzo replied, turning back to face the team, and noticing my presence now. His eyes met mine and flickered red for the briefest moment, for some reason, I got the hint that maybe he did, in fact, know who this other player was.

Enzo’s eyes lingered on me for another moment before returning to his team.

“Either way,” he said, “if we don’t win this, we’re not gonna make it to the next round of the tournament...”

It was like watching a commander with his troops.

The intermission ended a few minutes later and the team returned to the ice, Tiffany still hadn't returned, but I didn't think much of it.

I watched with bated breath as the game continued. Just like the first two rounds, it was a perfect tie Enzo and the other captain stayed neck and neck the entire time while the crowd grew more and more heated.

Finally, the twenty minutes were up... and it was still a tie, even in the third round.

My heart practically leaped out of my chest during the five minutes of overtime as Enzo and the other captain continued to battle for the winning point, but no one scored. The referee blew his whistle and gathered both teams to the center of the rink

"Oh, no," Tiffany said, finally returning after disappearing for so long She didn't have a drink, and her makeup looked a little smudged I hid my smirk as I wondered if she secretly met someone during intermission Looks like they're gonna do a shootout."

"What's a shootout?" I asked.

"It's a last-ditch attempt to resolve a tie," she replied. "Each team takes turns trying to shoot a puck into the opponent's goal while the goalie tries to deflect it. Whoever has the most points wins the game."

As the teams skated away from the referee, I watched closely Enzo, Matt, and Justin stood together, while the other captain and two of his teammates stood together as well.

The crowd cheered as Matt was the first to line himself up with the goal.

I held my breath, letting out a sigh of relief when the puck made it past the goalie.

My relief dissipated, however, when the first shooter on the other team made a goal on our side as well.

Next, Justin was up. Students from our school cheered as he skated up to the shooting point, then cheered even louder when he made the puck in.

The next shooter on the other team, however, also made it in, now it was just Enzo and the other captain.

As Enzo skated up to the goal, the crowd went silent. I found myself biting my nails again as I watched intensely, praying for our victory.

He took a deep breath, centering himself. Everything moved in slow motion as he lined his stick up with the puck... shot... and scored!

The crowd went wild with cheers again, but it wasn't the end just yet. The other captain still had to shoot I watched as our goalie focused intensely on the puck, putting himself in his best defensive stance The other captain aimed... The arena was so silent you could hear a pin drop. He shot...

Our goalie put all of his effort into defending our goal. He leaped toward the puck...

And just missed it by a hair.

The puck slid under him and went into the net.

The other team broke out into cheers, while our team stood in shock and disappointment.

"What happens now?" I asked, turning toward Tiffany

She shrugged. "Up to the coaches, I guess. Probably a rematch at some point if they don't want to do another shootout."

It seemed that a rematch was the decision as Enzo, the referee, and the other captain skated to meet in the middle of the rink. They spoke briefly, then shook hands and skated away.

"And it looks like we'll be seeing a rematch between these two amazing teams next week, folks," the announcer said a couple of minutes later. "Come back next Friday for the tie -breaker match.

The disappointed crowd started to flood out of the stadium as the teams got off the ice. Justin, in a fit of taje. threw his helmet down on the ground by the bleachers.

"Hey!" Enzo said, storming over to him. "Pick that up."

Justin glared back at him for several seconds before conceding and picking up the helmet, storming off to the locker rooms by himself while the rest of the team looked on in disbelief. Enzo rolled his eyes and sat down on the bleachers to take his skates off

"Well, I've gotta dash," Tiffany said, squeezing my arm. "See you on Monday."

I watched as she walked off, trying to see if she met up with anyone on her way out — maybe her long- lost love that she told me about — but I didn't see anyone

"Hey," Enzo said from behind me. I turned around to face him; surprisingly, he was smiling despite the outcome of the game. "Wanna grab some drinks ?

Chapter 60: Mystery Captain

Nina

“Wanna grab some drinks?” Enzo asked with a warm smile.

I was a bit surprised by the offer, since I expected Enzo to be too disheartened after the match to want to do anything; if anything, he actually seemed excited about the rematch. Maybe finally having some real competition was refreshing for him.

“Um, sure,” I said, grabbing my bag. Where do you want to go?”

“I was just thinking the bar in town,” Enzo replied. “Wait here. I’m just gonna go change and then we can go.”

I nodded, blushing a bit as I watched Enzo jog off toward the locker rooms.

“What was that about?” Lori’s voice suddenly said from beside me. I nearly jumped out of my skin.

“Jesus!” I said, clutching my chest. “You have got to stop sneaking up on people like that. And it’s nothing. We’re just gonna grab some drinks.”

Lori smirked. “I thought you were staying single for a while,” she said.

I rolled my eyes. “I am,” I replied. “Enzo and I are just friends.”

“Yeah, okay,” Lori said sarcastically. “Who knew friends could make you blush so much?”

My face turned even more red at her words, but I didn’t let it get to me. I could have said a number of things about how Lori pined away for Jessica for two years, but I chose not to mention it.

“Well, have fun,” Lori said as Jessica spotted her from the crowd and started waving to her “I’ve got a hot date of my own.”

I watched with a smile as Lori ran up to Jessica and they walked out together, holding hands.

Enzo returned a couple of minutes later. “Alright,” he said, dressed once more in his usual flannel and jeans attire. “Ready?”

I nodded and we headed out of the almost-empty stadium. It was a nice night out, so we were able to walk to town with no trouble.

“That was an interesting match,” I said as we walked. Enzo nodded, his hands in his pockets.

“Yeah,” he replied. “It’s funny That team has always been kind of shitty, but that new captain seems like he really whipped them into shape.”

“It doesn’t seem to bother you,” I said.

A small smile tugged at the corners of Enzo’s lips. “I guess it’s nice to have a little competition for once. Not that I won’t be devastated if we don’t win the rematch.”

“Do you think you guys will be able to win the Blizzard Tournament?” I asked. The Blizzard Tournament was the biggest hockey tournament in the region, and a lot of really impressive teams played hard to win. I had no doubt that Enzo’s team would do well, but it was still an incredible feat to win the entire tournament.

“That’s the goal,” Enzo replied. “This tournament will really put us on the map.”

“Won’t playing in the tournament interfere with your studies, though?” I asked.

Enzo sighed and looked over at me for a moment before averting his gaze again. “I could honestly care less,” he replied. “My dad was the one to make me come to this school. It was just a scheme to help his business get more standing in the human world, winning the Blizzard Tournament would certainly help that, so it’s not like he’ll give a shit if I flunk out of school for hockey.”

I stopped suddenly, looking up at Enzo. There was a constant underlying sadness about him that was only more prevalent in the amber glow of the streetlamps.

“Do you want to play in the tournament?” I asked.

Enzo froze. He looked as though he was at a loss for words; it made me wonder if anyone had asked him what he wanted before.

“I think so,” he said finally, smiling again. “It’ll be hard, but... I really love hockey.”

The bar was crowded when we got there, but we managed to find a spot at a corner table. I often forgot just how small of a town this place was until nights like tonight, when it seemed that the entire town was at the bar watching the recap of the hockey game on the local TV station as if it wasn’t just a college team.

“I’ll get us drinks,” Enzo said over the din of the loud music and talking customers. I nodded and watched as he walked away, then pulled out my phone to check Twitter; thankfully, the days of the creepy Twitter account seemed to have passed since Lisa was bitten, which only solidified my theory that it was her who took those photos.

As I was scrolling on my phone, I felt someone sit down on the bench next to me. I looked up to see one of Lisa’s friends glaring at me; she was from the cheer team, still in her uniform from the game, and looked thoroughly drunk.

“You’ve got some real balls,” she said, swaying a bit in her seat and slurring her words

“God,” I said, scooting away from her. “The game just ended. How did you get so drunk already?”

“It doesn’t matter!” she replied. “What matters is that you got Lisa suspended from the cheer team, and now you’re coming here with her boyfriend? You’re disgusting.

I raised an eyebrow. “First of all, Enzo isn’t Lisa’s boyfriend anymore,” I replied. “Second, I didn’t do anything. Lisa attacked me.”

“Well, you deserved it,” her friend replied, standing. “You should just make everyone happy and drop out already.”

“Alright, Erica,” Enzo said, returning

with our drinks and setting them down on the table. “You’re drunk. Go home and defend your queen bee another day.”

Erica glared at Enzo for a long few seconds before speaking. “You should be ashamed of yourself,” she growled, getting in Enzo’s face. “Leaving Lisa for some ugly nerd.”

“Since we’re calling names,” Enzo replied, “you’re a bimbo who only gets through classes by sleeping with the professors.”

Erica gasped. “You’re such an asshole!” she shouted, gathering the attention of nearby bar patrons, then turned toward me and poked her finger into my chest. “And you will never be anything but Enzo Rivers’ pitiful little puppy dog, following him around like that.”

Before either of us could respond, Erica stumbled off and stormed out of the bar

Enzo shuddered and sat down next to me “God, those cheerleaders are like a hivemind,” he said, taking a swig of his drink

“I’m glad to know it’s not just my school that has cheerleaders like that. a deep male voice said from behind us. Both Enzo and I turned around to see none other than the captain of the other team walking toward us with a drink in hand.

He stuck out his hand “I’m Ronan, by the way,” he said with a polite smile That was some impressive playing back there”

“Uh, thanks, Enzo said, shaking

Ronan’s hand “You too.

“And your name is Ronan said. looking at me then.

I felt my face go red beneath his oddly captivating gaze. There was something strange about him that I couldn't quite put my finger on; maybe it was just the alcohol. “Nina,” I replied.

“Nice to meet you, Nina,” Ronan said, before nodding politely at us and heading back to the bar

“That was strangely polite,” I said quietly to Enzo, who merely shrugged and took a swig of his drink.

We sat in the bar for a while and chatted while we finished our drinks. Eventually, it got late and I was both tipsy and tired, so I decided to go home.

“I'll walk you home,” Enzo said, standing

As we left, however, I noticed Enzo discreetly glance over his shoulder to glare at Ronan.