

My Hockey Alpha

Chapter 9: An Unwelcome Customer

Enzo didn't seem to recognize me right away with my uniform and my hair pulled back. He came in and sat down at the counter while I was pouring coffee for another customer, which I nearly spilled all over the table out of shock.

My hands trembled as I approached the counter. Was he following me, or was this just a coincidence? Now, more than ever, I regretted ever sleeping with him. Why must he insist on playing with my feelings like this? Couldn't he just move on to the next girl?

I walked behind the counter and immediately turned my back to him, pretending to fiddle with the coffee

machine. "Hi, Nina."

So he did recognize me.

I took a deep breath and turned around to face him.

"What are you doing here?"

Enzo looked around and gestured a bit with his hands. "What do you mean? It's a diner. I'm hungry."

I frowned and folded my arms across my chest. "You and I both know that you could have gone to any other restaurant in town, and you chose this one. Are you following me or something?"

Enzo shook his head. "Can I just get a menu, please?"

With a huff, I grabbed one of the laminated menus from behind the counter and tossed it down in front of him.

Just then, my boss came out of the back. He was a kind old man named Phil. He walked with a cane, but his mind was sharp and his hearing was even sharper.

“I hope you’re not being rude to a customer, Nina,” he said.

“No, I-” I started, but Phil cut me off when he saw Enzo.

“Oh!” he said. “Enzo Rivers! Welcome.”

Enzo smiled not smirked, but genuinely smiled for the first time since I met him. He looked handsome when he smiled, and suddenly I had a flash of a memory from Friday night in his bed. I blushed and looked at the floor. “Is Nina being harsh?” Phil asked.

Enzo shook his head. “No. She’s just surprised to see me, that’s all.”

“Hm.” Phil looked up at me then and winked before hobbling off to go count the register while Enzo scoured the menu.

“What do you recommend?” Enzo asked. He glanced up from the menu. His brown eyes were captivating, but I tried not to let them get to me.

I shrugged, somewhat annoyed at his question. He was clearly trying to get me to talk to him more than I needed to, but Phil was watching and I couldn’t be rude in front of my boss.

“I like the grilled cheese,” I muttered.

“A grilled cheese sounds good right now,” Enzo said, handing back to me. “And some fries. Oh, and a soda.”

I pursed my lips together into a sarcastic smile and snatched the menu away, ignoring Phil’s dissatisfied glare, then retreated to the kitchen to put in Enzo’s order. I hid back there while the cook

made his food.

My hands still shook a bit as I carried the plate of hot food back out to the counter. I set it down in front of Enzo, then filled up a glass with ice and root beer for him.

“Mm,” Enzo said, his mouth full after taking a bite of grilled cheese. “This is good... Thanks for the recommendation.”

“You’re... welcome.” I replied when I looked over to see Phil glaring at me from the register. While Enzo ate, I busied myself with pouring coffee for other

customers and clearing tables. I always felt Enzo's eyes on me as I worked, but whenever I turned around, he only seemed to be looking at his phone and his food. It was unsettling to feel like I was being watched, only to find out that I wasn't being watched at all. I chalked it up to Enzo making me nervous, but it felt like there was something else at play here.

When Enzo was finished, he waved me over.

Thank god, I thought to myself. He's leaving.

Enzo handed me a wad of cash, which I took to the register to get his change. Much to my dismay, he followed me to the register; not that that was out of the ordinary for customers, but I guess that I hoped he would keep his distance.

As I counted it, something fell out.

It was a VIP ticket to a hockey game.

"What's thi-"

"Hey, Nina!" Jessica's voice suddenly rang through the restaurant. I had completely forgotten that we had planned to meet up at the end of my shift, which

was almost over. I nervously clutched the ticket in my hand as she approached the counter and sat down. When she sat down and looked over, she nearly jumped out of her skin as she finally noticed that none other than Enzo was standing across from me at the register. "Oh, Enzo!" she exclaimed, jumping up and primping her hair. "What are you doing here?" "Just visiting," Enzo replied. I crumpled the ticket tighter into my hand, my face going red with a mixture of embarrassment and rage. Jessica looked at me, then at my hand, then back at Enzo.

"Actually," Enzo said, reaching into his pocket, "I have another VIP ticket. Here. Now you can both come to the game and get the best seats." He held out the ticket for Jessica, whose eyes lit up. She snatched the piece of paper gratefully with a grin on her face. I had had enough. I threw the ticket down on the counter and folded my arms. "No thank you," I said. "I won't be showing up to your game." Both Jessica and Enzo looked disappointed.

"Alright," Enzo said with a sigh. I handed him his change and he shook his head. "Keep the change. And keep the ticket just in case you change your

mind.” Before I could protest, Enzo turned around and walked out of the restaurant. I could see him get on his motorcycle through the window and drive away. Jessica ran up to me with an angry look on her face, clutching the ticket like her life depended on it. “Are you crazy?” she half-whispered.

“The Enzo Rivers gave us VIP tickets to his game and you decline?” I shrugged and closed the register, sticking the tip Enzo gave me in my apron and leaving the ticket on the counter before walking away to clear off the counter. Jessica grabbed my ticket and followed me. “Nina, you have to tell me what’s going on,” she said. “I feel like you’re hiding something.” My body stiffened at Jessica’s words. There was no way I could tell her the truth; for starters, she would never forgive me for sleeping with her biggest crush. Second, I didn’t exactly want to broadcast the fact that Enzo and I had a one night stand. I wasn’t that type of girl. “Nothing’s going on,” I lied, grabbing the dirty plate and cup off the counter. “Oh, so Enzo Rivers is just inviting you to his team training match for no reason?” Jessica pried. “You seriously don’t think he likes you?” I shook my head vehemently. “No way,” I replied.

“How could he like me? I’m totally not his type. He’s just being nice after what Justin did, so the reputation of the team doesn’t get sullied.” “You really have nothing to do with him?” Jessica asked. “Absolutely nothing,”

I said. “I promise.” Jessica surprisingly seemed satisfied with this response. She let out a sigh of relief and sat back down at the counter while I took the dirty dishes into the kitchen. While I was cleaning up the dishes, Phil entered the kitchen. I could hear his cane tapping on the floor before I heard anything else.

The tapping came closer, and soon he was standing beside me. “Nina, you know I love having you here,” he said. “But your behavior tonight with Mr. Rivers was unacceptable. His patronage here could be useful for business, so I don’t want you driving him away. Understand?” I nodded, biting my lip. Did that mean that I’d have to see Enzo at the diner more often? When I was finished up and my shift ended, I grabbed my jacket and my bookbag from the back and went back out front to meet Jessica. She was beaming, but not only because of the tickets.

“The internship assignments were posted!” she said, holding out her phone. I perked up and jogged over to her, taking her phone from her hand. “Jessica Valdez, children’s hospital,” I read. Jessica squealed. My heart caught in my throat when I scrolled to my name and saw my assignment.

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“Well? What’s your assignment?” Jessica asked.

“Um... sports medicine,” I replied, handing the phone back.

Jessica looked confused. “I thought you wanted-”

“Surgery, yeah,” I said, grabbing my bag and heading for the door with Jessica on my heels. First thing in the morning, I would go to the dean of the medical school and ask for a reassignment.

“And why do you want to be reassigned?” the dean asked as I stood in front of her desk the next day. She was a curly-haired woman with glasses and a hard face.

I swallowed and tried to calm my

nerves. “It’s just... not the direction I was hoping to take,” I replied. “I don’t

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like sports medicine.”

“You can’t just ask to be reassigned because you don’t like the internship,” the dean said. “And besides, you haven’t even tried it yet. How do you know you won’t like it?”

She was right— I couldn’t just ask for a new internship simply because I didn’t like my assignment, and there was no way I could explain the real situation to the dean. How could I tell the dean that I didn’t want to be assigned to the sports medicine internship because I didn’t want to be around Justin and Enzo?

The dean must have seen my pained expression, because she sighed and pulled out a form. “Just go to the first few sessions,” she said as she filled in a portion of the form. “If you still really hate it by then,

come to me and we’ll see about a reassignment. Sound good?”

I nodded gratefully. I was still a bit disappointed that I’d have to go to a few sessions where I’d likely have to deal with the hockey team, seeing as how they were the most likely sports team to be injured, but at least I could get out

after that. Not to mention that sports medicine was totally not even close to the field I actually wanted to work in.

The dean dismissed me and I exited her office. Jessica was sitting outside.

“Well?” she asked. “What did she say?”

“She said no,” I replied. “She wants me to try it first.”

“Hm...” Jessica tapped her chin as we headed toward the cafeteria for lunch. “I know it’s not exactly what you wanted, but look at it this way: at least you get to deal with all of the handsome athletes, so you’ll never be bored!”

“Yay.” My voice sounded anything but excited.

“Aw, c’mon!” Jessica said, nudging me with her elbow. “How could you not be excited about getting to touch hot athletes all day?”

“I just don’t want to be around Justin,” I replied. I wanted to tell her that I didn’t want to be near Enzo either, but kept it to myself.

Justin, aside, whatever was happening between Enzo and I was getting weird. I wondered if he had something to do with my assignment, considering his influence in the school.

After classes that day, Jessica and I went home. Lori was sitting on the floor of the living room with a stained white sheet around her and a canvas that she was painting on.

“Ugh!” Jessica said, covering her nose and mouth with her shirt and running over to open the window. “The fumes!” Lori chuckled. “I didn’t notice anything.”

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“Yeah, that’s because you’re high all the time anyway,” Jessica replied snarkily.

I couldn’t help but laugh at my friends’ interaction.

Later, it was time for me to go and meet my internship mentor for the first time. She sent me an email with her office information; it was located in

between the soccer field and the hockey arena. It was chilly out and getting dark, so I threw my jacket on and headed over.

“Come in!” a chipper voice called when I knocked on the door. I opened it and poked my head in to see a pretty woman with wavy brown hair sitting at a desk. She looked up and flashed me a toothy grin as she waved for me to come in.

“You must be Nina!” she said, standing up from her desk and coming around to greet me. Much to my surprise, she hugged me. I was a bit taken aback by

my mentor’s vitality and warmth; it was not at all what I expected from a person who would deal with sweaty, whiny athletes all day. In fact, even though she was middle-aged, her bubbly personality made her appear ten years younger.

“I’m Tiffany,” she said when she finally pulled away from hugging me. I’m so happy to see another young woman working in sports medicine! We don’t usually get female students in here, so it’s always nice to know that there are other women who are passionate about it.”

I looked down at my feet, unsure of whether I should tell Tiffany that I actually didn’t want this internship or if I should just let her be happy for the time being.

She must have noticed my sad expression, though, because she looked at me with concern on her face. “Are you alright? You seem depressed. You know, I’m not just your mentor with this internship; I’m your mentor with everything!”

I bit my lip as I tried to come up with my response. For some reason, I felt comfortable being candid with Tiffany even though I was usually not the type of person to spill my feelings so easily.

“I hate to say this, but... I was actually hoping for a different internship.”

Tiffany’s face fell. She looked disappointed and a bit hurt, but nodded in an understanding manner.

“That’s okay,” she said. “What were you hoping to do? Did you talk to the dean?”

“I talked to her this afternoon,” I replied. “She told me to give it a try for a few sessions before I made my decision. But...”

I bit my lip again. Tiffany was incredibly kind and I hated to be so rude to her since she seemed so excited

to have me as a student, but now I felt like it was better to just be open about it instead of suddenly withdrawing from the internship in a couple of weeks.

“Is there something else?” Tiffany said. “You can be honest with me. Was it the hug? I always forget that not everyone is a hugger.”

“No,” I replied, shaking my head vehemently. “It’s not you. It’s just that, well, one of the members of the hockey team is my ex boyfriend. And there’s another team member who I had a one night stand with, so it’s just a really awkward situation and I feel uncomfortable.”

Tiffany flashed me a sweet smile. “Sit down,” she said, gesturing to a chair across from her desk while she walked over to a small kitchenette. I sat down and watched as she filled an electric kettle with tea.

“I had drama like that when I was your age,” Tiffany said over her shoulder. “I could tell countless stories from my college years about love gone wrong, week-long flings, unrequited feelings

The water started to boil. Tiffany dropped two teabags into mugs and then poured the hot water over them. She walked over and handed one to me, then sat down at her desk. I gratefully took the tea and let the hot steam waft into my face.

“I won’t be offended if you decide you want to leave after all,” she said. “But I think you should give it a shot. If I had let boys dictate my actions in college, I wouldn’t be working in a field that I absolutely love today, would I?”

Tiffany’s words hit me hard. She was right. Who were these boys to get in the way of my education? Maybe sports medicine wasn’t what I thought I would do, but maybe it could also turn into something that I really enjoyed.

Still I wished that I didn’t have to be

tangled up in this mess between Enzo and Justin. I just wanted to escape from them!

