

My Hockey Alpha #Chapter 21: Pariah - Read My Hockey Alpha Chapter 21: Pariah

Chapter 21: Pariah

Nina

The morning after my motorcycle ride with Enzo, I woke up to dozens of Twitter notifications. Still blinking the sleep out of my eyes, I scrunched up my eyebrows as I opened my phone and started to read all of the notifications.

“Wowwww @ninaharpi, alone time with Enzo, huh?”

“Enzo must be joking if he’s hanging around with that ugly nerd @ ninaharpi!!”

“What a slut, messing around with two boys from the hockey team at once. Save some for the rest of us @ ninaharpi!”

I sat up in bed, my eyes glued to the phone as I opened Twitter and realized that someone snuck pictures of Enzo and I last night. There were pictures of me talking to Justin in the parking lot, a picture of me as I shoved Justin to the ground, Enzo wiping the tears from my cheek, and getting on his motorcycle together.

I knew I shouldn’t have trusted him. This was just another step in the game he was playing with me!

As I looked at the time, I realized that I had class in twenty minutes. I jumped out of bed and threw on some jeans and a t-shirt, quickly braided my hair and brushed my teeth, and ran out of my room.

Jessica was standing in the kitchen when I came out of my room. She looked up from making her coffee briefly, then looked back down. Even in that brief moment, I could see tears in her eyes.

“It was really nothing,” I said, assuming that she already saw the photos. “Justin was harassing me and Enzo just happened to show up. He drove me home.”

“Enzo seems to just magically appear around 1 you a lot lately,” she grumbled as she poured her coffee.

I sighed and adjusted my bag on my shoulder. "It was just a coincidence," I said.

Jessica suddenly slammed the coffee pot down, sloshing coffee on the counter. "Bullshit," she said, glaring at me as tears streamed down her cheeks. "What is your relationship with him, really?"

I looked down at the floor and bit my lip. "I'm just the team doctor," I replied. "But not for long. I'm gonna talk to the dean today and get reassigned."

"Nina, I've seen the way he looks at you," Jessica said, her lip quivering."

You told me that there was nothing between you before, and I had a hard time believing it then. Now I know something is going on without a doubt. I just wish you were honest with me, that's all."

Truthfully, I wanted to be honest with Jessica about everything, but right now I had to get to class.

"Look," I said, "I'll tell you everything later. But I'm gonna be late for class."

Jessica sniffled and nodded, then turned away and grabbed a paper towel to start cleaning up the coffee she spilled. Without another word, I ran out the door.

By the time I got to class, I was already exhausted from all of the dirty looks and whispering from other girls. I kept my head down and sat in the back of the lecture hall; the girls who I sat next to got up and moved seats when I sat down, making me feel even more like a pariah. I just tried to keep my head down and pretend like I was looking at my notes.

As I was looking at my notebook, someone sat down next to me. I looked up to see Lisa sitting beside me with an angry expression on her face.

"Not today, please, Lisa," I said, rummaging through my bag for my pen.

Lisa scoffed. "I told you to stay away from both of them," she growled. "We had a deal, remember?"

"I remember," I replied. "But all of this is out of my control. I didn't ask to be the team doctor."

Lisa stood and huffed, folding her arms across her chest. “Who knows what sort of dirty deal you made to be the team doctor?” she said, raising her voice. “For all I know, you probably slept with someone to get that position just so you could fuck the whole team by the end of the semester. You’re such a little slut!”

The other students started whispering amongst themselves. Lisa, pleased with herself, stomped off to sit back with her gaggle of bitchy friends.

After the lecture, I was the first to leave the room so I could get ahead of Lisa and her minions.

Thankfully, I ran into Lori in the quad, who seemed to be the only person at this stupid school who didn’t hate me right now.

“Thank god,” I said, rushing toward her and walking with her. “I can’t take this anymore. I feel like I’ve got a bullseye on my back.”

Lori looked me up and down. “Well, not a bullseye exactly,” she said, pulling a piece of paper off of my back. “Just this.”

I grabbed the paper and winced. ”

Cheap slut! \$5 blowjobs,” the paper said. I whirled around to see a group of students snickering nearby.

“You think this is funny?!” I said, waving the paper in the air. “Fuck you!”

Lori wrapped her arm around my shoulders and guided me away. “Ignore them,” she said, grabbing the paper from my hands and crumpling it before throwing it in a trash can. “They’re not worth your time. It’ll pass.”

“I never should’ve gotten involved with Justin or Enzo,” I said, fighting back tears as Lori led me away from the quad.

“I told you,” she replied. “That whole team is a bunch of no-good jerks.”

I returned to my dorm after a morning full of dreadful classes, finally relieved to be able to hide in my room and not have to deal with any of the bullying. So long as I didn’t look at my phone or open Twitter, it would be okay.

I still had to talk to Jessica, though. I could hear music coming from her room so I walked over and knocked on the door.

“Come in,” she said from inside. I opened the door and stepped in, shutting it behind me. She was sitting at her desk, surrounded by notebooks and papers as she worked on an assignment.

“Hey,” I said. “Can we talk now?”

Jessica put down her pencil and nodded hesitantly.

I took a deep breath. “I’m sorry I wasn’t honest with you,” I said. “It’s just that... I made a mistake, the night #Chapter 21 Pariah

Justin cheated on me. I was angry and drunk, and I just wanted to fill the void. Enzo was at the bar and offered to give me some company. I didn’t think that it would go any further than that, but.... He’s been pursuing me ever since then.”

Jessica looked down at her lap and tucked a strand of blonde hair behind her ear, biting her lip before speaking.

“So what are you two now?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know. I want to say we’re friends, but part of me still feels like all of this is some huge prank that Enzo and Lisa are playing on me. I can’t comprehend any other scenario in which someone like Enzo would ever want an ugly nerd like me.”

Jessica stood up suddenly and stormed over to me. For a second, I thought that she was going to hit me for sleeping with Enzo, but she didn’t. She grabbed #Chapter 21 Pariah

my shoulders and stared into my eyes.

“You are not ugly,” she said softly. “You’re gorgeous, and smart, and any guy would feel lucky to have you. Don’t you dare call yourself that.”

Jessica’s words struck me to my core. Tears welled up in my eyes and I collapsed into her, crying into her shoulder while she rubbed my back.

“I didn’t want any of this,” I sobbed into Jessica’s shoulder. “None of this would have happened if I had just never slept with Enzo.”

Once I couldn't cry anymore, Jessica and I hung out for a while until I felt too exhausted to stay up any longer. I went to my room that night and fell asleep, dreaming about standing by the ocean with Enzo.

Chapter 22 Osteology 101

Nina

I woke up the next morning feeling slightly more rested than the day before, although my eyes still burned from crying so much last night.

I dragged myself out of bed, and after a shower and some coffee, I felt much better. I still avoided looking at my phone just in case there was more outrage over my photos with Enzo, and got dressed in a nondescript outfit to go to class.

People still stared at me and whispered about me all day, but I tried my best to ignore it. I just kept repeating what Lori told me in my head: this would pass. All I had to do was keep my head down, focus on school, and wait for the bitchy girls at this school to move on to the next bit of drama to gossip about.

After my classes, I decided that I had to return to the anatomy lab to finish my project, as it was due in two days and I had hardly even started. I really didn't want to go back after what I saw in there last time, but I just kept telling myself that it was all in my head and that it would be fine now... I still didn't feel like it was all in my imagination, but I had to tell myself that in order to get my work done.

It was getting dark out by the time I made it to the anatomy lab, which only made the environment seem even more spooky. I steeled my nerves before opening the door and stepping in.

The room looked perfectly normal and quiet. Taking a deep breath, I crossed over to my locker and put on my lab coat and goggles, then put on a pair of plastic gloves before pulling my cadaver out of the mortuary cabinet and pulling back the sheet.

Just as I figured, the cadaver was perfectly normal. He was still completely healed, as though I had never cut into him to begin with... had I just imagined the whole thing? Had I passed out, or dissociated, when I thought I was performing an autopsy?

While I studied the cadaver, I was suddenly alerted to the sound of something rattling. I took in a sharp breath and whipped around, only to see absolutely nothing. I shook my head and returned to my work. Surely my nerves were just making me overly sensitive to sounds.

I got my tools ready and started to cut into the cadaver's abdomen. I cut down to the belly button, then began to shakily peel back the layers of skin and muscle as I prepared myself for potentially seeing more strange mutations inside.

There was nothing out of the ordinary.

Just a regular human body, with regular human organs. I let out a sigh of relief.

I heard the sound of rattling again. It sounded like... bones? I turned around toward the direction of the sound and shrieked when I saw the skeleton that was used for osteology... moving! It was off of its stand and staggering directly toward me with its bony hands outstretched toward my throat.

I stumbled backwards, tripping over a table leg and falling to the floor. The skeleton continued to lurch toward me, clacking its teeth while I screamed in terror. I scrambled to my feet and over to the door, but when I tried the handle, it was locked somehow and I couldn't get out.

I fumbled for my phone in my pocket, but it wasn't there; it was halfway across the room, on the floor where I fell. The skeleton was already past it now, and there was no way I could get around it to grab my phone. I was cornered.

While the skeleton continued to advance on me, I shut my eyes and shook my head.

"This isn't real... This isn't real..."

The sound of bones rattling toward me was replaced by the sound of those very bones being kicked to the floor.

I opened my eyes to see a large figure in the dark, wearing a hoodie with the hood up, standing over the skeleton as it writhed and kicked on the floor. It swiped a bony hand at the figure and slashed it in the thigh, but the figure retaliated by picking the skeleton up by its throat — well, where its throat would have been, if it had flesh.

“Who sent you?!”

I suddenly realized that the dark figure was Enzo as soon as I heard his voice.

How did he get in here? I looked over to see that the window was open... but we were on the third floor!

“I’ll never tell...” the skeleton croaked, its voice sounding like nails on a chalkboard. I didn’t know how it was speaking without vocal chords, but somehow it was.

Enzo stormed over to the rack where the skeleton previously hung and hung it back up. I watched in wonder as he whispered some strange incantation that I couldn’t understand, and the skeleton went limp.

“Enzo...?” I said, my voice shaking. This had to be a dream. There was no way this was real.

Enzo ran over to me and pulled off his hood. He grabbed me by my shoulders, looking me up and down with a concerned expression on his face. “Are you alright?” he said. “Did it touch you?”

I nodded. “I’m fine,” I said. “Your leg ...” I pointed down at his leg, which had a large, bloody gash through his jeans.

“Don’t worry about it,” he said, pulling me into a hug. “I’m just glad you’re alright.”

“How did you get in here?” I asked when we pulled away from each other. “And... what was that?”

Enzo sighed and passed his hand over his face, walking over to one of the lab tables and sitting down on a stool. I kept darting my gaze between him and the skeleton, half expecting the skeleton to jump off of its stand again and kill us both..

“There’s a lot I have to tell you,” Enzo said softly, his eyes fixed on the floor. “There’s a whole world out there that you weren’t supposed to know about.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

Enzo looked up at me all of a sudden. His eyes had shifted to that strange, glowing red color that I had seen the night we hooked up and a couple of

times after that. They were stronger now, though, more red and glowing even brighter so bright, in fact, that — I could see them perfectly in the dim light of the room as though they emanated a light of their own.

“Nina...” Enzo said, staring at me intensely with those red eyes. “What you saw in here the other day wasn’t in your head. There are creatures in this world... creatures that aren’t human nor animal, but both.”

I furrowed my brow, too stunned to speak.

“I’m a werewolf, Nina.”

Chapter 23: Monster

Enzo

Nina’s eyes widened when I finally told her the truth.

“No,” she said, pacing back and forth and rubbing her head. “This isn’t real. Werewolves aren’t real. Talking skeletons are not real!”

I sighed and stood, walking over to her.

“Look,” I said, pulling aside the torn fabric of my jeans to show her my wound. It was already healing. The torn flesh from the skeleton’s attack was rejoining without leaving so much as a scar. Even the blood disappeared.

When Nina saw my leg heal, she stumbled backwards into the wall, her chest heaving as she breathed heavily.

“I have to be dreaming,” she said. I watched quietly as she pinched her arm to try and wake herself up.

“This is real, Nina,” I said. “You’re awake.”

“Well then, I must be going insane,” she said as a tear rolled down her cheek.

I walked toward Nina and took her by the shoulders, stooping to look her in the eyes.

“You’re not crazy. Everything you saw is real. Don’t I feel real?” I took her hand and placed it on my chest, right over my heart so she could feel my

heartbeat. She let her hand linger there for a few moments, then shuddered and pulled away.

“If you think I’m a monster, so be it,” I said. “But I won’t stop watching you, because someone — or something — has sinister plans for you, and no human can protect you.”

I could practically see the gears turning in her head. She shuddered again, but didn’t say anything. Before I had the chance to stop her, she ran out of the room.

“She’s afraid of us,” Fio said.

“I know,” I replied out loud. “She is a human, after all.”

I sighed and turned back to face the skeleton. The incantation I used on him would only last for so long before he reanimated again. Some witch must have put a spell on this skeleton, but for what purpose, I didn’t know. I crossed the room toward the skeleton.

Something crunched under my foot. I looked down and cringed when I saw Nina’s phone on the floor, its screen cracked now. “Shit...” I whispered, stooping to pick it up. I’d have to replace that.

When I looked up from the broken phone, the skeleton was starting to twitch again. I stormed over to it and grabbed it off the stand, pinning it, down to one of the tables by its neck.

“Who sent you, and why?” I growled, to which the bewitched skeleton only chuckled.

“No one sent me,” the skeleton said.

“Bullshit,” I replied, tightening my grip around the skeleton’s throat. “What would an undead like yourself want with an ordinary human girl?”

The skeleton didn’t respond, but I had to know the truth. My only option was to force an answer out of it. With my hand still on its neck, I reached over to a table next to me and grabbed the first instrument I could think of: a bone saw.

I brandished the bone saw so the skeleton could see it, then began to lower it.

“Which one should I start with?” I said, gliding it along the skeleton’s ribs. ” Your arm? Or maybe I should go big and start with a leg.”

The skeleton squirmed beneath me, but I was far stronger. Skeletons were the lowest form of the undead; without muscle or flesh, they were incredibly weak compared to most other supernatural beings. Becoming an undead skeleton was a punishment brought about by angering a witch, not a blessing of eternal life like a vampire – although, some would argue that vampires were more cursed than blessed.

“I think I’ll start with a leg,” I said, lowering the bone saw to the skeleton’s femur. I let the blade graze the bone.

“No! Wait!” the skeleton cried out. “I swear no one sent me. I was attracted to the girl’s scent.”

I lifted the blade away from the skeleton’s leg and furrowed my brows. “What scent?” I said.

She has a scent,” the skeleton replied. “And a strong one at that. Strong enough to make me go a little... crazy.”

“But she’s only a human,” I replied.

The skeleton shook its head. “She’s not human,” it said. “I don’t know what she is, but she’s definitely not human.”

I frowned, but the skeleton might actually have been onto something. The way that Fio latched onto her from the beginning made me think that she was a bit out of the ordinary, but I hadn’t thought that she was supernatural in any way. She didn’t show any signs of magical abilities.

“He’s telling the truth,” Fio said. “I can’t sense any binding spells on him or Nina that would make him attack her.”

I sighed and tossed the bone saw down on the table, but kept my grip on the skeleton’s neck. I wasn’t entirely done Chapter 22 Monster

with him yet.

“You realize you have to be punished for attacking her,” I growled.

“I never meant to hurt her,” the skeleton whimpered. “I just wanted to touch her. I can’t explain why, but my intuition told me that she could save me from this undead curse.”

“I don’t care,” I said. “You frightened her, and I won’t let you go without repercussions.”

I thought for a moment, pondering my options. I could continue to torture the skeleton, or turn him in to my father’s pack to become their servant... Or, I could use him for more personal matters. Nina clearly needed protecting, especially with the influx of shifters on campus, but I couldn’t watch her all of the time. Between hockey, school, and keeping my relationship with Nina private from my father, I just didn’t have the time to keep an eye on her 24/7.

“From now on, you answer to me,” I said, tightening my grip on the skeleton’s neck and yanking him up to a sitting position. “You’re to be her bodyguard until I say you’re done. If you don’t do exactly as I say, I’ll make sure that your lowly existence is full of pain.”

The skeleton nodded fervently. “I’ll do anything,” he said.

“Good.” I released the skeleton’s neck. “From now on, your name is... Luke.”

After my conversation with Luke, I teleported him to my dorm and locked him inside while I went to talk to the dean. I explained the situation to her, and while she was skeptical at first, the stack of cash I handed her changed her mind. She enrolled Luke as a student and promised not to tell a soul.

I returned to my room and gave Luke baggy clothes to hide the fact that he was... well, a skeleton. He wore baggy sweatpants, a hoodie, a scarf to hide his neck, and gloves. I made sure he hid his face with a surgical mask, sunglasses, and a hat until I could find a witch to put a charm on him that would make him appear human. So long as no one looked closely at him for too long, it worked for now.

Now, I only had to convince Nina to trust me enough to let an undead skeleton be her bodyguard.

Chapter 24: Just a Dream...

Nina

I didn't want to believe Enzo.

I couldn't believe Enzo! Werewolves? Talking skeletons? None of that was real. Surely this was all a daydream or a hallucination. I just needed to get home, sleep, and destress. A good night of sleep and a hot shower would make me feel better and I would realize that all of this was just in my head.

After nothing but nightmares all night, I resolved to march straight over to see Edward and see if he could help me. I was resistant to his therapy before, when I had the incident with the cadaver, but now I was completely open to it. There was no way any of this was real. I needed serious help.

I crawled out of bed and put on a university sweater, jeans, and my glasses; lately, my contacts were burning my eyes from lack of sleep, so I had given up on them altogether. Besides, people looked at me less with my glasses on. They helped me blend into the nerd crowd, so the popular girls who wanted my head on a pike for being caught with Enzo would leave me alone.

Once I was dressed, I went into the kitchen. Lori and Jessica were still asleep, so I slipped out without having to interact with anyone and made my way across the quad toward Edward's office.

Edward let me into his office and had me lay down on the sofa.

"More nightmares?" he said. I nodded and explained to him what I saw last night.

Edward sighed after hearing about my encounter with the talking skeleton and Enzo and sat in his chair across from me. "Close your eyes... Good. Now I want you to repeat after me. There is no such thing as werewolves."

"There is no such thing as werewolves," I repeated.

"There is no such thing as talking skeletons," Edward said.

"There is no such thing as talking skeletons," I repeated.

Edward had me continue repeating the mantra while he turned on a metronome. The slow ticking of the metronome lulled me into a somewhat dazed state. Next, he described images to me; peaceful scenery, like the ocean at sunset, or a field of flowers, to help me relax. I started to breathe

deeply and felt my heart rate slow down, and soon I was completely susceptible to Edward's hypnosis...

By the end of the session, the hypnosis seemed to be helping. Everything that I saw in the anatomy lab was becoming a blur, like it was all a dream. Edward seemed pleased with my progress and told me to come back if I needed more help. Feeling much better, I sat up, rubbing my eyes after being in an almost dreamlike state for the past half hour, and then left for my internship.

Tiffany was waiting for me outside her office when I arrived.

"Are you alright?" Tiffany said, looking concerned. "You look like you haven't slept in a week."

I shrugged, pushing my glasses up on my nose. "Just stressed," I replied. "Lots of projects."

"Yeah, medical school will do that to you," Tiffany said. We walked together to the arena.

"The boys are starting their tournament soon so we'll be doing lots of physical exams for the next few #Chapter 24 Just a Dream.

weeks," Tiffany explained as we walked in the chilly morning air. The leaves had finally begun to fall and it was really starting to feel like autumn now. With the morning fog and the smell of autumn in the air, I was feeling a lot better now.

Before we went into the arena, Tiffany stopped me outside and smiled warmly at me. "I just want to say that I'm glad you've stuck around so far," she said. "You're a great worker and I really appreciate your

help."

I bit my lip and looked at the ground. I had still been planning on talking to the dean for a reassignment, but now I was reconsidering that decision.

Besides, at this point the dean probably wouldn't even let me pick a new internship since we were already a quarter of the way through the semester. Maybe things would calm down soon and I could actually enjoy this internship, because I really did like the work.

With another smile, Tiffany opened the door to the arena and we went inside. The team was already practicing their drills when we entered. Justin was too focused on his form to pay any attention to me thankfully, and Enzo only shot me a quick glance before returning to training the team.

Tiffany and I walked over to the bench and started preparing a spot for physical exams.

“The exams won’t be nearly as intense as the last ones,” she explained. “Just basic stuff. Checking for injuries, that sort of thing.”

I nodded and got to work as Tiffany started calling over the hockey players one by one for their exams. She stood off to the side for most of it, taking notes on my performance while I did Chapter 34 Just a bream

most of the work. At this point, I was getting surprisingly good at being the team doctor, and even started to joke around with some of the players while I examined them. Even Justin was cordial with me, and by the time I was finished, I had almost completely forgotten about my dreams about the anatomy lab.

The last player to examine was Enzo.

He came over and sat down on the bench, his brown eyes fixed on me the entire time while I checked his pulse, felt his muscular back and legs for injuries, and shined my little flashlight in his eyes. My heart raced while I examined him, partially from the romantic tension between us as he gazed at me and partially from the vague memories of my dream about him. I felt silly now for ever believing that he was a werewolf!

Once I was done, Tiffany helped me clean up while the team went to the locker room to change out of their gear and go to class.

“You did great today,” she said, patting me on the shoulder. “I’ll see you tomorrow?”

I nodded, feeling a little bashful that I was starting to fit into this job better than I expected. “Yeah,” I replied. “See you tomorrow.”

Tiffany smiled and left with her medical bag. I opened my phone to see a text from Lori:

“Lunch?” it read. I tapped out a quick reply agreeing to meet her at the quad, then, walked over to the door and flicked off the main lights. Just before I left, though, I heard a sound behind me and looked over my shoulder to see Enzo skating by himself in the rink.

He was skating around with his stick, flicking the puck this way and that before hitting it into the net while I watched from the darkness. He went and retrieved the puck, then repeated the same routine. His form, under the single light above him, made him appear even more handsome... and a little solemn, in a way.

Enzo flicked the puck into the net again, then stopped halfway across the rink as he went to retrieve it and looked straight in my direction. Even though I was standing in the dark, somehow he saw me.

He smiled at me, and my heart fluttered.

Chapter 25: Romance on Ice

Nina

Enzo skated over to the edge of the rink, gesturing for me to come. I felt strangely magnetized to him and walked over to meet him at the railing, which he leaned on. As he leaned and gazed at me with his shining brown eyes, I felt my heart skip a beat.

“Skate with me,” he said, his voice a little stern.

I blushed and looked around. “I... I don’t know how,” I said.

Enzo simply shrugged, his lips turning up a bit at the corners in a bit of a smirk. “I’ll teach you,” he said. “Don’t worry.” He gestured toward the rack in the corner where the rental skates were.

I hesitantly walked over to the rental skates and picked out a pair in my size, then sat down on a bench to put them

It was hard to lace up the skates and get them tight enough; Enzo must have seen me struggling, because he came off the ice and got down on one knee in front of me.

“Give me your foot.”

My face was officially beet red now as I stuck my foot out and watched Enzo lace up my boots. When he was finished, he stood and held his hand out for me to help me up. I put my hand in his, noticing how small mine was in his palm and how light I felt when he helped me stand.

We walked over to the rink and he got on the ice ahead of me. My knees were shaking, partially from the nerves of potentially falling on the ice, but also because of being close to Enzo like this.

“Don’t worry,” Enzo said softly, taking both of my hands as I nervously stepped onto the ice. “I’ve got you.”

I bit my lip and put one foot on the ice, then the other... and immediately slipped.

“Woah!” Enzo caught me in his strong arms with a chuckle. He held me there for a few moments before helping me stand upright. I could feel his heartbeat against me as he held me, and the campfire scent that always surrounded him filled my senses. I hated to admit it, but I suddenly got a bit wet at the thought of his muscles beneath his hockey uniform.

Once I was able to stand without my feet slipping out from under me, Enzo slowly started skating backwards and holding both of my hands. I felt like an awkward baby deer on the ice as I hobbled forward, but Enzo was encouraging.

“You’re doing great,” he said. “Keep your weight shifted forward. There you go. Now shift from one foot to the other, keeping the skates on the ice.”

I followed his instructions, and soon, I felt a little more confident and wasn’t quite as shaky as before. I started skating while only holding one of Enzo’s hands for a bit.

“See?” Enzo said. “You’re a fast learner.” I blushed again and kept my head down, focusing on not falling.

Suddenly, Enzo dropped my hand. I nearly fell from the shock of it, windmilling my arms to keep myself up, and frowned at him as he skated a little ways away from me.

“Where are you going?” I said angrily, curling up my fists at my sides.

Enzo laughed and smirked at me.

“You’ll be fine!” he said, stopping several feet away. “Just try to come to me.”

“I can’t!” I said, tears welling up in my eyes.

“Yes you can,” Enzo replied.

It seemed that I had no choice; it was either skate all the way back to the rink entrance, which we had gotten far away from now, or skate a few feet to Enzo and hope for the best.

Deciding that the latter was the better option, I shakily took one stride forward. I nearly slipped without

Enzo’s support, but managed to keep myself upright before taking another stride forward. Another stride, and I was feeling more confident... but as I took my fourth stride, I realized that Enzo was skating backwards away from me!

“Hey!” I said, skating after him. “You’re moving away!”

Enzo didn’t reply, only grinned and kept going, increasing his speed while I skated after him.

I didn’t realize it, but soon we were skating quickly around the rink as I chased him, and I wasn’t nervous at all.

Enzo suddenly stopped after our second lap. I didn’t know how to stop, so I crashed directly into him, toppling him onto the ice on his back as I fell on top of him. We were both laughing and out of breath, not caring that we fell at all.

After laughing until my belly ached, I fixed my glasses then lifted myself up and looked down at Enzo, who was now gazing up at me with his big brown eyes. He reached up and brushed a strand of hair out of my eyes and tucked it behind my ear. His gaze slipped down from my eyes to my lips, and I couldn’t help but stare at his, too.

I leaned closer to him, just wanting to taste his lips.

But when I closed my eyes to kiss him, the memories of what happened last night suddenly came flooding back. The skeleton, the way Enzo’s leg healed on its own, his glowing red eyes... It wasn’t a dream. It was real.

I scrambled to my feet, my eyes wide as Enzo propped himself up on his elbows and looked at me.

“Nina, are you afraid of me now that you know what I am?” he said. There was a tone of sadness in his voice.

I didn’t know how to respond. All Enzo had done thus far since I met him was watch over me and protect me, but...

“Yes. I’m afraid of you.”

Before Enzo could say anything else, I skated away and kicked off the rental skates once I was outside of the rink. I grabbed my bag and my shoes, not even bothering to put them on before I ran out of the arena.

I went home that night and cried myself to sleep.

Why couldn’t things just go back to normal? I felt like I was cursed to have nothing but terrible relationships; first being pranked by a playboy in high school, then being cheated on by Justin, and now falling for a... monster?

After crying myself to sleep, I had strange dreams that night. I dreamed about shapeshifters, witches, and glowing red eyes. I dreamed that I was being chased through the forest by a strange creature, only to be caught in the end.

I awoke with a start from my nightmare, my chest heaving and cold sweat coating my back. It was still dark outside; when I looked at my phone, it was nearly six o’clock in the morning. There was no way I

would be able to get back to sleep, so I decided to just get ready for the day. I crawled out of bed and sat down at my desk to check my emails, since my phone was still missing — likely still laying on the floor of the anatomy lab, so I reminded myself to take the risk later and go over there to check.

When I opened my laptop and checked Twitter, however, my eyes widened.

Someone had taken new pictures; pictures of Enzo tying my laces, us holding hands while we skated together, and falling on top of one another. They were all posted to an anonymous Twitter account called “@ nerdynina”.

Someone was stalking me. But who?