

My Hockey Alpha #Chapter 31: Pity Party - Read My Hockey Alpha Chapter 31: Pity Party Chapter 31: Pity Party

Nina

I knew sleeping with Enzo again would have been a mistake. He didn't even care about me enough to stay for the entire duration. Clearly

he got what he wanted and realized that I wasn't worth his time, so he bailed. When I got dressed and left the cabin, I didn't see him

anywhere at the party; he must have run off.

I jumped down the stairs and started to walk back toward the party so I could find Jessica and Lori and tell them that I was going home,

but stopped when I overheard two of Lisa's friends talking.

"Have you seen Lisa?" one said.

"Yeah," the other replied. "She walked into the woods a little while ago. I just saw Enzo go that way, too."

"Ooh!" the first girl said excitedly. "Do you think they're getting back together?"

The second girl giggled. "Obviously. Have you seen the way he's been looking at her lately? Clearly he regrets messing around with that

weirdo Nina and realizes that he'll never do any better than Lisa."

I didn't want to stick around to hear any more as tears started to well up in my eyes. I just wanted to go home.

I ran down the trail that led back to campus. I kept running until I could no longer see or hear the people at the cabins. The waning moon

was just a crescent in the sky, no longer illuminating the forest like it did the other night, so I pulled out my phone and turned on the

flashlight so I could see.

Eventually, I heard footsteps behind me and whipped my flashlight around to see Luke approaching.

“I figured you’d follow me,” I said annoyedly, turning back in the direction I was going and continuing to walk.

“I couldn’t let you walk through the woods alone,” he replied. “There could be-”

“Werewolves, I know,” I interrupted.

Luke was silent for a moment before speaking again. “Not just werewolves. Other shifters, too.”

I paused and pondered what he said; admittedly, it made me a bit curious. We walked in silence for a bit.

“What other sorts of shifters are there, anyway?” I asked eventually, just wanting to not think about Enzo and Lisa together.

“Oh, all kinds,” Luke responded. “There are low-tier shifters, which are less evolved; like rogues. Those are the most common.”

“What do you mean by ‘less evolved’?”

“They’re like the original werewolves. They’re like regular humans, but at night they shift and go feral. When they wake up in the morning –if they wake up– they won’t remember anything. Most don’t even know that they’re cursed.”

Luke paused for a bit as we stepped over tree roots and started to climb a small hill, then continued. “The next tier are those who can willingly shift into animals, but just regular animals. They still have a conscience while in their nonhuman form, but no powers. Believe it or not, many cats, birds, and rodents in the human world are actually shifters in their animal forms.”

I thought back to my childhood cat, Mimsy. Was she a shifter? She was very clever, and would sometimes disappear for days on end. My parents always said she was just exploring, but now I wondered if she was off somewhere in her human form doing human things.

“What’s after that?” I asked.

“Shifters like Enzo,” Luke replied. “People who can shift into much larger, more powerful versions of animals. It’s not just that they have the ability to shift, but rather that there are two beings inside of

them: their own human conscience, and their animal conscience.”

“Like split personalities?”

“Sort of,” Luke replied. “But both can be conscious at the same time, and talk to each other telepathically. Usually, when a shifter of this caliber comes of age, their animal appears to them, and they share a soul. Their animal — like Enzo’s wolf — can give them some or all of its power.”

“So it’s a spirit animal.”

“Exactly.”

Luke and I finished climbing the hill and came to a small clearing. From here, we could see the campus down below. It looked so small.

I was silent for a while as I took in the view, but then cleared my throat and asked another question.

“So... what are you? Are you a shifter?”

Luke was silent for some time. He looked down at his feet. I couldn’t see his face, not that it would make a difference since he had no face, but I wondered if my question made him sad.

“I’m not much of anything,” he said. “Just a guy who fucked up and was cursed to live for all eternity. But not in a cool, sexy way, like a vampire. Just cursed to slowly rot and erode.

Eventually I’ll just be dust, when these bones start to disintegrate in millions of years.”

“That sounds... lonely,” I said. I couldn’t explain it, but I was starting to feel genuinely bad for this strange talking skeleton.

He shrugged. “You get used to it. That’s why I decided to hang out in that anatomy lab. I like seeing all of the students come and go.”

For some reason, the skeleton’s words made me smile. It was strange to think that a talking skeleton might be becoming my friend.

We didn’t speak for a long time after that. Eventually I started to feel better as we sat together on the hillside, and started to think to myself as I sobered up that maybe it was a good thing that my sex with Enzo got interrupted. It would have been a bad idea and I likely would have regretted it in the morning. Even now, I was regretting even letting it start.

If Enzo wanted to get back with Lisa, she could have him.

Alcohol really makes people do the craziest things!

I returned home that night around midnight and decided to do some more research on my own. If there really was a whole supernatural

world out there like Enzo and Luke claimed, I wanted to gather information from more sources; I guess you could say it was the academic

in me coming out.

I sat at my computer with the lights off for hours, scouring online forums and websites for any traces of information that seemed even

relatively plausible. Most of what I found was either obviously made up or purely speculative, and I was beginning to think that I should

just give up when I found an interesting link several hundred pages deep on G****e.

The link led me to a forum post on an extremely obscure cryptozoology website that looked like it hadn't been updated since 1999. Most

of the forum threads had been abandoned for years, and most of them seemed like utter nonsense.

There was one in particular, though, that caught my eye.

The title of the forum post read: "I'm a werewolf hunter and I have PROOF."

Furrowing my brow, I clicked on the thread and opened it.

"I'm not sure if anyone will take this seriously or even bother clicking, but to hell with it. I've been hunting werewolves for twenty years on

the eastern coast of Canada and I have actual proof that they're real. If you want to give me a chance and see what I have to offer, email

me at the link below. I swear that what I have to show you will rock your entire world."

There wasn't anything else to the post aside from the email link, and there were no replies. It could have been a scam, but something in

me told me to click the link and reach out just to see what would happen..

I clicked the link and typed out my message.

"I saw your post. I believe that werewolves and other cryptids may be real, and I would like to discuss it with you. -N."

Taking a deep breath, I sent the email.

I went to close my laptop, figuring that I would never get a reply, but before I did, my email dinged. My hands shook as I saw that the

anonymous forum poster had replied within moments.

“Hi, N. I’d like to talk. Let’s meet up. K.”

Chapter 32: The Graduate Tutor

Nina

That night, the anonymous poster who referred to himself as “K” sent me his information. He was located a few hours away from me and seemed eager to make the drive to meet up. We’d meet in a public place, of course, and unbeknownst to K, I would have Luke standing guard across the street if anything went wrong. I knew it was stupid to meet up with strangers from the internet so quickly, but K didn’t know my real name or address, and I’d cover my hair and face with a hat, sunglasses, and a surgical mask.

I didn’t tell anyone that I would be going to meet K except for Luke, and even with Luke I kept the information vague.

“I’m meeting up with an internet friend in a couple of days,” I said on the morning of the next day as I walked to get breakfast at the dining hall. “I want you to keep watch from across the street if anything goes wrong. Just in case, you know?”

Luke didn’t question it. He simply nodded and agreed to do whatever I needed.

Once that was all squared away, all I had to do now was wait and think about what sort of questions I would ask K. I hoped that he would have some real information for me and wasn’t a total crackpot. What I would do with that information later was still a mystery to me; right now, my only goal was to just learn as much as I could, and I wanted it to come from a source that wasn’t Enzo or Luke in case they weren’t being entirely truthful. I still didn’t know for sure if I could entirely trust them.

Besides, planning the meetup with K kept me from thinking about my sexual encounter with Enzo at the party last night. It was better not to think about it. I hadn’t heard from him or seen him at all since I left the party, and if I thought about it for too long, images of him having sex with Lisa in the woods flooded my mind.

It was just better if I stayed away.

It was Sunday, so thankfully I didn’t have class, and anyone who was at the party last night was still hung over in their dorms. I would have been hiding in my dorm as well,

but unfortunately, with everything going on lately, my grades were starting to get a bit shaky. I had another exam in a few days, so I had to study.

After I grabbed a quick bagel and coffee for breakfast, I walked over to the library with the intent to study all day.

The library was mostly empty, aside from a few other students who were probably in the same boat as me.] found a table by a window and sat down, opening my laptop and getting out my notebooks to start studying.

“Mind if I study with you?” a familiar voice said not long after I sat down. I looked up to see James, the graduate student from Tiffany’s office, standing at the table. He was looking down at me with a sweet smile on his face and a coffee cup in his hand.

I smiled and nodded, honestly happy to have the company. “Sure,” I replied. “I could use some company.”

James grinned and sat down across from me. He took his laptop and notebook out. I looked up from my laptop for a moment to catch him looking at me, which made him blush a bit and look away.

I couldn’t help but blush, too.

“What are you working on?” he asked, clearing his throat nervously.

“I have a pathology exam in a few days,” I responded. “And admittedly I’m not doing very well in that class right now.”

“Why not?” James furrowed his brow and cocked his head to the side, which made him look sort of cute.

I shrugged. “Just... got a lot going on,” I said. It was technically the truth. I couldn’t tell him specifics, obviously, he’d think I was genuinely insane.

“I passed pathology with flying colors when I was in undergrad,” he said with a warm smile. “Want me to help you?”

I nodded enthusiastically. “Yes, please!” I said. James smiled and stood, coming around the table to sit next to me. When he sat down beside me, I could smell a faint scent of cologne coming from his sweater. It smelled winter like mahogany and old books, and made my heart speed up.

James cozied up next to me and started to point at my notes as he leaned close to me. His closeness made me feel a bit shy as he started to explain a few things. “See, if you look here...”

I looked up at him, taking in his soft face and attractive jawline as I listened to him talk. He was so studious and intelligent in the way that he spoke that it made me feel a new sense of attraction to him. He caught me staring and looked up at me, meeting my gaze.

For a few moments, James held my gaze while he attempted to continue to explain a concept, his voice eventually faltering. "That's why... benign tumors

His eyes flickered down to my lips. I blushed and looked away, pretending to be completely absorbed in my notebook... But I couldn't help but notice the feeling of our shoulders pressed together as we continued to study.

Somehow, we studied for several hours before I realized just how much time had flown by. My stomach growled, and although I was enjoying being this close to James, I knew it was time to call it a day.

"Thank you for your help," I said shyly as we packed up our things. "I'm sorry I took away from your studying time, though."

James smiled and waved my words away. "No worries," he replied. "Just make it up to me by acing that exam. And... study with me again sometime?"

I blushed and looked down at my feet as

I held my laptop to my chest. "I think that would be nice," I said, tucking a strand of hair behind my ear.

"I'll see you around, then," James said, with another warm smile as he backed away. There was something adorably awkward about him, yet he was also incredibly handsome in his knit sweater with his somewhat messy shirt collar sticking out of the top.

I watched James leave, admiring how academic he looked with his leather satchel slung over his shoulder, then let out a deep breath as I headed home with a smile plastered on my face.

My smile faded, however, when I saw a familiar figure walking toward me from across the quad. It was Enzo. I tried to keep my head down and pretend I didn't see him, but I knew there was no way he didn't see me, and when he called my name and started jogging toward me, I knew that I would have no choice but to talk to him.

"Nina!" Enzo called, jogging toward me. "Can we talk?"

He stopped in front of me as I held my laptop even tighter to my chest. "Hey, Enzo," I replied, avoiding eye contact.

“I’m really sorry about last night,” he said. “Lisa-”

“It’s fine,” I blurted out, not wanting to hear any more.

When I looked up at Enzo, his brown eyes were fixed on me. His eyebrows were knit together and he looked a little sad, but I forced myself not to let it get to me. I knew that he ran away from me last night to meet up with Lisa, and I no longer wanted to play this game with him.

“I, um, have to go,” I said, averting my gaze and walking past him.

“Wait!” Enzo called after me. I didn’t stop. I could feel his eyes focused on my back as I walked across the quad, but I just ignored him and let the stream of students coming out for lunch envelop me breaking his view of me.

Chapter 33: The Meetup

Nina

The next day, I ran home after my classes and changed into the most nondescript outfit I could come up with for my meeting with K: a plain black hoodie, baggy black jeans, a plain black hat that I tucked my hair into, sunglasses, and a surgical mask.

“Geez,” Lori said from the couch as I stepped out of my room. “Trying to hide from the paparazzi?”

I realized how ridiculous I probably looked, but I had already prepared an excuse in the event of being seen like this.

“I have to go to Planned Parenthood,” I said.

Lori’s eyes widened. “You’re not... pregnant, are you?” she whispered.

I shook my head. “No, just a regular checkup. But last time I went there were these crazy religious people outside who were ranting about how I was going to hell even though I was just there to get treated for a UTI, so I like to play it safe from now on.”

“That’s fair,” Lori replied, returning to her book.

Satisfied with my excuse, I left the dorms and headed toward town.

K and I planned to meet up at a local coffee shop. He said he would be wearing a red t-shirt. I stepped into the coffee shop and looked around nervously, my palms sweating while all of the worst possible scenarios played through my head. What if he didn’t show up, then jumped me while I was on my way home? What if he stalked me home, snuck into my dorm, and killed me? Even with Luke there to protect me, I didn’t know what this

guy was capable of. For all I knew, he could Chapter 3 The Matu have already been stalking me and knew about Luke. Maybe he even had experience fighting talking skeletons.

I suddenly felt incredibly stupid for doing this and considered turning around and going home, but when I saw a middle-aged man with a beard sitting at a corner table, looking sad as he held his to-go cup of coffee, I didn't feel so afraid anymore. I knew you couldn't judge a book by its cover, but something told me that he wasn't dangerous.

Taking a deep breath, I walked over to the table. He looked up from his coffee and looked me up and down, seeming a bit amused by my hair tucked into my hat and my face fully covered.

"You must be N," he said, gesturing for me to sit down. "I'm not gonna stalk you, you know. You don't need to hide your whole face like that. If anything, you're drawing attention."

I looked around to see that other people in the coffee shop were giving me strange looks, probably wondering if I was going to rob the place. Feeling embarrassed, I took off my sunglasses and mask, and freed my braids from my hat.

"Much better," K said, holding out his hand for me to shake it. His hand was large and calloused as though he had been a manual laborer his entire life, but his grip was gentle when I shook it. When we finished shaking hands, he gestured for the waiter to bring me a cup of coffee.

"Now," he said, leaning back in his chair and taking a sip of his coffee, "you believe they're real, huh?"

I nodded, unsure whether I should tell him about Enzo or not. He did claim to be a werewolf hunter in his forum post, and I didn't exactly want Enzo killed. I just wanted information. Even if Enzo was dangerous, I didn't want to be involved in any killing.

"I think so," I said, "but I'm not entirely sure. I was hoping you could give me some information."

K paused while the waiter poured my coffee, then spoke again when the waiter walked away.

"I've got plenty of information," he said. "Where do you want me to start?"

I bit my lip and fiddled with my coffee cup as I thought. "From the beginning, I guess," I replied. "When did you know for sure that they're real, and how do you know?"

K ran his hand along his beard, stroking it. "My wife and infant daughter were killed by one," he said.

My eyes widened. "I'm so sorry."

"It happened a long time ago," he replied. "Not that I don't still grieve for #Chopter 13 The Meetup them every day."

"Why were they killed?"

"You see, Lycans — werewolves — have this concept that they refer to as a 'mate'. Like real wolves, only the bond is more powerful. They claim to all have one fated mate, their one true love, someone whose wolf is bound to theirs.

When they find this person, they become obsessed. It's sick."

"A werewolf claimed your wife as its mate?" I asked.

K nodded. "Yep. Except, she was human. Which only goes to show that the whole concept is bullshit. When she refused that monster's advances, things got ugly."

I was silent for a few moments. I began to wonder if that was why Enzo was so obsessed with me; did he think I was his "mate"? Would he kill me if I kept refusing his feelings?

"Is there any way a werewo- a Lycan, mean- can break a bond with a mate?"

"Not without the help of a witch," K responded, taking another gulp of his coffee. "If I had known that thirty years ago, my wife and daughter would still be alive today."

If Enzo did think I was his mate, then maybe a witch could help me get away from him.

"Do you know where I can find a witch?" I blurted out.

K shot me a knowing glance. "You got a Lycan problem, huh?" he said. I hesitantly nodded, still fiddling with my coffee cup. K looked around to make sure no one was looking before he reached into his shirt and pulled out a necklace.

Attached to the thin leather strap was a large, yellowed canine tooth; far bigger than anything I had ever seen, aside from saber-toothed tiger skulls that I had seen in museums before. My eyes widened as I realized that this tooth belonged to a Lycan.

"A witch can break your bond, but I can make sure that... that thing doesn't hurt anyone else," he whispered, leaning across the table.

I leaned away, my eyes wide. "What if... they're not all dangerous?" I said.

K scoffed. "No such thing. They're all monsters; I've hunted enough of 'em to know that for a fact."

He noticed my hesitation and tucked the tooth back into his shirt, leaning back in his chair once more. "Listen, I know how these animals tick. They'll lure you in, using their supernatural abilities to make you think that it's safe, that they're just like everybody else, that they truly care for you. Then, at the slightest hint of resistance, they'll kill you in the blink of an eye"

I stood suddenly from the table, nearly toppling over my chair as I pushed it back. "I don't want to kill anybody," I said.

K looked up at me, not moving from his seat, and shrugged "It's either the life of one, or the lives of many," he said. " You know how to find me when you're ready to make the right decision."

As if we were just having a casual conversation this whole time, K pulled out a newspaper and pencil and started doing the crossword. I stood there in shock for a few seconds, then hurried out of the cafe

with my heart racing

Was everything that K said true? Was Enzo truly a monster who was only manipulating me?

I started walking down the street to head back to campus, chewing my fingernails as I considered everything that K had just told me.

But then, like clockwork, I heard the sound of a motorcycle and looked up to see Enzo driving toward me

He pulled up next to me and flipped up the visor on his helmet with a playful smile that made my knees weak.

"Wanna go for a ride?" he asked.

I considered saying yes, my heart skipping a beat as I thought about being alone with Enzo on the beach... laying a blanket down on the sand and undressing each other, not caring if someone caught us.

But I couldn't, not after he had sex with Lisa... and especially not after what K just told me.

I shook my head and backed away. "I can't," I said. "I have a paper to work on. I'll see you around." Before Enzo had the chance to respond, I scurried away.

I could feel his eyes on my back as I ran off, and although I couldn't see his face, I knew that he was suspicious of me.

Chapter 34: Tournament — Part I

Enzo

I watched Nina walk away with a frown on my face.

Just a couple of days ago, it seemed like everything was going to be fine. She seemed to really want me at the party, and we even started to have sex — but I've hardly been able to get her to talk to me for more than thirty seconds since then.

A few moments after Nina walked away, I saw Luke trailing behind her from a distance. He saw me sitting on my motorcycle and came over.

“What’s going on with her?” I asked, nodding my head toward Nina as she disappeared down the street.

Luke shrugged. “I dunno. She met up with someone at the coffee shop just now .

“Who was it?” I asked.

Luke shrugged again. “I didn’t get a good look since she made me wait across the street, but when she told me she was meeting someone she did refer to them as ‘he’. Said she met him on the internet.”

I felt a pang in my chest as I realized what Luke was saying.

Was Nina going on dates with guys she met on a dating app? She had seemed flushed and nervous when I ran into her in the quad yesterday — had she just been on a date? Even though we weren’t technically together, it still hurt me immensely to think about her being with someone else.

Maybe it was revenge for kissing Lisa, in which case I would have to talk to her tonight and set things straight. I wasn’t going to go around any longer and let Nina think that I would ever choose Lisa over

her. Eventually I’d have to finally put my foot down with Lisa as well, because she also seemed to be under the impression that we were going to get back together after I saved her.

But first, I would put on my best show at the hockey game to show Nina that I was superior to whatever strange men she was meeting on the internet. After the game, she would be mine.

Later that night, as I was getting ready with the team in the locker room, I was hyping myself up internally to play harder than ever. Nina was here on shift with Tiffany in case there were any injuries, so I knew she’d be watching closely from the sidelines.

While I got ready, Justin walked behind me and caught my gaze in the mirror. I narrowed my eyes at him and turned around.

“Staying out of trouble?” I asked.

He nodded, avoiding my eyes.

“Good,” I said, slapping him hard on the shoulder. “Keep it that way.”

I turned to walk away, but Justin called after me.

“I know you fucked her on Saturday night.”

I slowly turned back around to face him, feeling Fio start to growl inside of me. I quieted Fio, calming myself at the same time, before I answered Justin.

“And what of it?” I asked. “You guys aren’t together.”

Justin looked more hurt than angry. “I know we’re not together anymore,” he said, “but it’s still pretty fucked up that you fucked her last night.”

I walked toward Justin, my fists curled up at my sides. “You should’ve thought about that before you threw away a really amazing girl,” I growled, glaring at him. The rest of the team had grown quiet by now and were standing nearby, watching. “She deserves better than you.”

Someone on the team cleared their throat abruptly to get my attention. I turned around to face whoever it was; it was Matt, and he was cringing and pointing subtly at the locker room door.

Nina was standing in the doorway holding a clipboard.

Had she heard everything?

“Um,” she said sheepishly, looking at the floor and pushing her glasses up on her nose, “I just wanted to check in to make sure that no one needs anything before the game.”

The rest of the team shook their heads like a flock of stupid sheep, and before I had a chance to ask her to talk in private, she slipped back out of the locker room.

I turned back toward Justin. His eyes were red, but he didn’t say anything else or instigate a fight.

“Alright,” I said, addressing the whole team now as I heard the announcer start talking in the arena. “Let’s play like hell tonight.”

Despite my argument with Justin in the locker room, we did all play like hell. Throughout the entire game, only two things were on my mind: the puck and Nina. I kept her in my peripherals at all times as I gave my all. That night, I skated faster and harder than I ever had in my entire hockey career. I even took some of Fio's strength to perform some difficult tricks, which caused the crowd to erupt in cheers.

I didn't care about the crowd, though. Every time I accomplished a great feat during the game, my eyes only went to Nina. I just wished I could read the expression on her face, because I couldn't tell whether

she was amazed, afraid, or angry. Never in my life had I seen someone with such an impressive poker face.

The game was an easy win with all of my extra effort. The other team skated off of the rink in shame while my team pumped their fists at the crowd and the cheerleaders went wild. I started to skate toward Nina, but as soon as I stepped off the rink, Lisa came barreling toward me and threw her arms around my neck, jumping up and wrapping her legs around me like a parasite.

"Babe! You played so well!" she yelled, loud enough for everyone in the vicinity to hear. I could tell that there was a tone to it that intended to hurt Nina.

Before I was able to pry Lisa off of me, I saw Nina dip into the crowd as people started to filter out. I had to go after her.

"Get the fuck off of me, Lisa!" I shouted, yanking her off and putting her on the ground. "We're not together. Stop calling me babe, and stop clinging to me like a monkey."

Lisa's face turned red and tears welled up in her eyes. With a hmph, she stormed off to go be with the other cheerleaders, who took her in like a sad orphan and glared at me while they comforted her, but I only cared about finding Nina.

I scanned the crowd, thankful for my height as I quickly spotted Nina's black braids bobbing away, and went after her.

"Nina!" I called, but she didn't hear me over the crowd. "Nina! Wait!"

She didn't turn around. In fact, it seemed that she was headed toward someone entirely different altogether.

Standing near the doorway was a tall, lanky guy in a sweater vest. He had a leather satchel on his shoulder and was smiling at Nina, who walked right up to him. I stopped in my tracks and watched as he said something to her, gesturing out the door with his thumb, then the worst scenario I could have imagined happened...

She left with him.

I felt a mixture of rage and heartbreak wash over me. Was this the guy she was seeing? Were they going somewhere to be alone together?

At that moment, my team rushed up to me and jumped on me, excited from our landslide victory while Nina and that guy disappeared before I could run to her.

I couldn't bear to see Nina with anyone else. I had to win her back, but how?

Just then, as I caught a glimpse of Lisa glaring at me from the sidelines, I had an idea that could test Nina's affection for me.

I could make her jealous by pretending to get with other girls.

Buy more items, get more discou

Chapter 35: Just Friends

Nina

When I saw Lisa run and jump into Enzo's arms, I felt my heart break just a little bit. I knew we weren't ever together, but it still hurt to see them being so affectionate with her. I had overheard Enzo saying some really sweet things about a girl in the locker room earlier, but as I saw them together now, I knew that he was talking about Lisa.

Enzo had played so beautifully during the game. Had it all been for Lisa?

I didn't want to stick around any longer, so I left without a word and slipped into the crowd. I just wanted to go home and cry.

"Nina!" I heard a familiar voice call from ahead of me. I picked up my head to see James standing by the exit with a soft smile on his face. Even though my chest ached from seeing Lisa and Enzo together, the pain lifted a bit to see James.

"Hey!" I said, putting on a smile and walking up to him "I didn't know you were here."

"I actually came for you," he said, making my heart skip a beat. "Can I walk you home? I found something that I think you'll wanna see." He gestured toward the door behind him with his thumb.

I nodded and we walked out of the arena together.

We broke away from the stream of students and walked toward the quad.

"Remember how Enzo's PT results were significantly better than anyone else's?" James asked as we walked.

Of course I remembered. "Yeah, I think so," I lied, not wanting to give away any interest I had in Enzo.

"Well, I was looking at some old records," James said, reaching into his bag and pulling out a thin stack of papers. "I noticed that Enzo isn't the first student here to have insane PT results. I thought you'd find it interesting."

He handed me the papers, which I took with wide eyes. Was this more proof that Lycans were real, and that they had attended this school before?

"What's even more interesting is that they've all been on the hockey team," James said, stopping next to the large fountain in the middle of the quad. "I mean, our hockey team has always been the best of the best, usually because there's always one player at a time who has these insane abilities. So I got to thinking, what if there's some sort of conspiracy here? Like drugs or something?"

I tried to hide the fact that I knew precisely that it wasn't drugs as I thumbed through the pages.

"That's really interesting," I said, looking up from the papers to see James smiling down at me. In the soft amber light from the streetlamps, his face looked even softer and sweeter. Part of me wanted to kiss him right now, to let him take me back to his room, but I knew that that was just my brain trying to comfort itself after seeing that Lisa and Enzo were back together.

"You should take a good look at those when you have a chance," James said. "Then, I was hoping... Would you wanna meet up again? To talk about the records, of course." I blushed, and so did James.

"U-Um," I stammered, looking at my feet, "I think I'd like that."

James let out a sigh that sounded like relief and tousled his blonde hair. "Cool," he said quietly, sounding just as nervous as I did. "Wanna grab coffee on Friday?" I said yes

I could hardly sleep that night with so many things swirling around my head.

I was both depressed and relieved to see Enzo and Lisa together again, because while it did break my heart a little bit as I had genuinely begun to develop feelings for Enzo, this could also mean that he no longer thought I was his mate and that I was in the clear. Maybe the end of all of this drama was in sight and I could just be done with this strange supernatural world for good. I'd happily pretend that none of this ever happened at this point.

I was also excited about my upcoming date with James, the studious boy with a sweet smile.

Beyond that, however, I was most fascinated by the records that James had found. He was right, all of the previous people with superhuman abilities were on the hockey team, and there was always one. When one would graduate and leave the team, another would show up almost immediately after. It was strange... Why was hockey so important here that there would always be a Lycan on the team to ensure victory?

There had to be something else to it, and now I was determined to find out.

The next morning, I went to class, Lisa gave me a dirty look when I entered the lecture hall, but she didn't come over to harass me again — probably because she was already satisfied to be back together with Enzo and didn't have to bully me out of talking to him anymore.

Whatever, I thought to myself as I sat down. She can have him.

Even though it hurt to see them back together, I was at least happy to know that I had a chance with James. He was sweet and kind, and loved academia just like I did... And there was nothing complicated about him.

I needed someone uncomplicated

I also needed someone who wouldn't potentially kill me for not wanting to get together with him, if what K said was true.

After class, I had to go to work with Tiffany. We were supposed to be working in the office all day and tending to sick or injured students, so I was relieved to know that I likely wouldn't have to deal with Enzo

"So," Tiffany said in a sing-song voice after a student with a migraine finally left. "You and James, huh?"

I blushed. "We're just friends. Besides, how do you know anything?"

"I'm very observant!" Tiffany said playfully, folding her arms across her chest. "You know, I've been working with him for two years and I've never seen him show interest in anyone... But you're so cute, so I can see how he couldn't resist you."

I blushed even harder and looked down at my work to hide my embarrassment.

Just then, the office door swung open.

"Ah. Mr. Rivers," Tiffany said. "What can I do for ya?"

I felt my heart practically leap up into my throat, my eyes widening as I continued to stare at my work. What was Enzo doing here?

“I think I fucked up my shoulder,” Enzo said. I looked up to see him standing in the doorway, massaging his shoulder with one hand. Tiffany sighed and waved him over to an infirmary bed, where he sat down.

My face turned beet red as Tiffany instructed Enzo to remove his shirt. He stared at me the entire time he took it off, his gaze not wavering while Tiffany inspected his shoulder.

“Hmm,” she said, pressing here and there. Every so often she’d poke a new spot and ask if it hurt.

“More in the middle,” Enzo said, pointing to the middle of his back.

She walked around him to get a new angle, pushing up her sleeves. As she moved, I caught a glimpse of something big and red on his neck.

Was that a... hickey?

Enzo shot me an almost knowing look, as if to say that he knew I saw it. I looked down at my work and pretended

That I didn't see it, although my heart raced and my hands started to shake.

“How about here?” Tiffany asked.

Enzo suddenly stood. “Actually, I think I’m okay,” he said, almost as if he only came in here so I would see his hickey.

“Oh... Are you sure?” Tiffany asked.

“Yeah,” Enzo replied. Must’ve just been a muscle spasm.”

“Well, come back if it starts to hurt again,” Tiffany called after him as he walked out of the infirmary.

I let out a soft sigh of relief as the door shut behind Enzo. That had certainly been a hickey on his neck... But I couldn't get jealous. Even though it broke my heart knowing that he and Lisa were together again, and she had given him a hickey, I couldn't let it get to me.

I had to get over Enzo Rivers.

Chapter 36: Anatomy Ace

Nina

I had an anatomy exam the next day and after my shift with Tiffany I needed to get some studying done. It was nice and sunny out, which was a welcome relief after the weather being gloomy and rainy for the past couple of days, so I decided to find a spot to sit under a tree where there were few people.

A few minutes after I sat down in a spot a little ways out from campus in a quiet park, Luke showed up. He walked over to me and stood right in the way of the light.

"You're blocking the sunlight," I said, not looking up from my notebook.

"Oh. Sorry," he said, stepping out of the way. He continued to stand there, just staring at me. I tried my best to ignore it in the hopes that he would just go away since I was not in a good mood at all after seeing Enzo's hickey, but he didn't budge. Finally, I slammed down my pencil and glared up at him.

"If you're gonna hang around, at least sit down or something," I growled.

"Okay." He immediately plopped down on the ground.

I couldn't help but smirk a bit, amused by his doglike obedience.

"What's so funny?" he asked, cocking his head. As he did so, I could hear the faint rattle of his vertebrae clacking together.

"Nothing," I replied, returning to my work. "You're just... Do you have any thoughts of your own?"

Luke was silent for several moments before speaking. "Of course I do," he said finally.

"Why don't you share them, then?"

He was silent again for much longer this time. After about ten minutes, when I had become reabsorbed in my studying and thought for sure that he had gone dormant or something, he suddenly spoke again.

"I think you made a mistake in your notes."

I looked up suddenly and furrowed my brows. "Huh?"

Luke pointed a gloved finger at my notebook where I had a diagram of a skull with notes scribbled on it. "Right there. You got your terms mixed up. It's occipital bone, not parietal bone. The parietal bone is over here." He pointed to another spot on the skull.

I stared at my notes for a moment, then realized that he was right and erased my notes so I could fix them.

“Thanks,” I muttered.

No problem.

He was silent again for several more minutes. I became absorbed in my studying again, only to notice eventually that he was inching closer and closer so he could see my notes.

“Hmm,” he muttered, rubbing his head.

I sighed and looked up from my work again. “What is it now?”

“Well, the glabella is used for facial expression, not supporting the lacrimal apparatus. That would be the lacrimal bone.”

Once again, I realized that Luke was right. I fixed my work.

“How do you know all this?” I asked.

“I mean, look at me,” Luke said, gesturing to himself. “I am a skeleton, after all. And besides, remember that I’ve spent decades in an anatomy classroom. You pick up on things here and there.”

“I guess you’re right,” I said. “Do you have any other pointers you can give me, then? I really need to pass this exam.”

“Yes, actually...”

Luke and I spent the afternoon together under the tree while he helped me study. He was a surprisingly good anatomy tutor, even going so far as to show me where all of the bones were on his own skeleton. He was incredibly literal and couldn’t take a joke, but it was still surprisingly nice to spend time with someone who wasn’t either trying to backstab me or have sex with me.

By the end of our “tutoring” session, I had gained two things: expert knowledge of anatomy, and a new friend.

The next morning, I woke up bright and early. I felt more enthusiastic about life; while my relationship with Enzo may have come to an end, my date with James was now a day closer and I also felt oddly happy to have made friends with that strange talking skeleton.

I jumped out of bed early, showered, ate breakfast and had my coffee, and then I was on my way to my exam. The sun was shining already, the birds were singing, the autumn air was crisp and cool, and I felt great so long as I didn’t think about Enzo.

When it was time to start the exam, the professor handed out the test sheets.

“There are thirty multiple choice questions and six short answer questions,” the professor, David Bowman, said as he handed the sheets out. He was a stern professor, but he was still friendly and

always asked us to just call him David instead of Dr. Bowman. “Best of luck. You can leave when you hand in your exam.”

I took a deep breath and started to answer the questions. The answers came so easily to me now, all thanks to Luke’s help!

I was the first to turn my exam in, and David raised an eyebrow at me as I handed it to him.

“That was quick, Nina,” he said, checking his watch. “I hope you didn’t. have a cheat sheet.”

I heard snickering behind me and knew it was Lisa, who always sat in the front like a teacher’s pet, but I ignored her.” No cheat sheet,” I replied. “Just a good tutor.”

David smiled and addressed the rest of the class. “I can think of a few of you who could benefit from a good tutor,” he said, which caused a few students to chuckle and a few others to turn red in the face. He looked back at me and smiled. “Good job, Nina. See you next class.”

I nodded and left the room, feeling an extra spring in my step for the first time in ages. I’d have to thank Luke for his help; what did skeletons like for gifts?

When I stepped out of the building and into the sunshine, however, that extra spring in my step faded along with my smile.

“Hey, Nina.”

Enzo was leaning on the railing with his hands in his pockets. He pushed himself up and turned toward me. I swallowed and nervously gripped the strap of my bag in my hand, as if that would calm my nerves.

“Hey, Enzo,” I said, trying to sound casual and not like I wanted to jump off a bridge. “Are you waiting for Lisa?”

He scrunched his eyebrows together.” What? No. I’m here for you.”

I took in a sharp breath and clutched my bag even harder as I prepared myself to hear him tell me that he was sick of chasing me, that I was his mate and he was going to kill me if I kept turning down his advances.

“It’s nice outside. Will you go on a walk with me?” he asked instead.

Chapter 37: A Walk in the Park

Nina

“It’s nice outside. Will you go on a walk with me?”

As if my heart wasn’t already racing enough, it felt like it was going to burst out of my chest when Enzo asked me to go on a walk with him. I hesitated to respond, wondering if this was some horrible prank concocted by Lisa. But he seemed genuine, and I was curious to see what he wanted to talk about. Maybe he would tell me that he decided I wasn’t his mate and that he would leave me alone now.

Maybe he would tell me that werewolves and talking skeletons weren’t real, that all of this was just a joke and that my skeleton bodyguard was just a normal guy wearing a costume. It was unlikely, but wishful thinking never hurt anyone, right? “U-um... Sure,” I responded, still clutching my bag tightly.

Enzo smiled a real, genuine, handsome smile that made my heart skip a beat. I couldn’t deny that he was handsome.

“After you,” he said, stepping out of the way and gesturing down the stairs. We walked across the quad and toward the entrance to the little garden that was located between the two dormitory buildings. Other students sat on the benches in the sunshine as they studied, read books, and chatted with friends. I liked to come here often in between classes to get some fresh air and look at the flowers. Right now, there weren’t as many flowers since it was autumn, but the fallen leaves on the ground and the fall decorations still made for a nice atmosphere.

Our shoes crunched on the pebbly trail as we walked together in silence for a bit. I continued to clutch my bag nervously while Enzo walked casually with his hands in his pockets. Eventually, he stopped under a large cherry tree and turned to look at me. I swallowed, unsure of what was to come.

Enzo stared at me with his soft brown eyes, which practically sparkled in the sunlight, for a few moments before speaking.

“I really like you, Nina,” he said softly, taking a step toward me.

I swallowed again and unconsciously took a step back, not knowing what to say. Wasn’t he back together with Lisa? This had to be a prank, and a mean one at that! What had I done to deserve this sort of treatment, other than to be so silly as to think that the school heartthrob Enzo Rivers would ever genuinely like me?

Enzo stopped and looked at me with a furrowed brow, cocking his head a bit to the side.

“Aren’t you going to say anything?” he said. “You do like me back... Right?”

I blushed and looked down at my feet, biting my lip as I tried to come up with a response. If this interaction was being recorded from somewhere in order to humiliate me some more on Twitter, I wanted to choose my words carefully.

Finally, I looked back up at Enzo again and my heart sank when I saw his painful expression. His normally stoic face, with his sharp jawline and stern eyebrows, was soft and sad now. I realized then that this wasn’t a prank. It couldn’t be. He did really like me.

But he had slept with Lisa, and there was a hickey to prove it.

“I can’t,” I replied, choking up a bit. “I know you left the other night to be with

Lisa. And I saw you after the game with her, and I saw your hickey. I won’t be with a playboy who can’t even commit to me for ten minutes.” Enzo’s eyebrows knit together for a moment, but then a smile started to spread across his face.

“You really think I left you the other night to sleep with Lisa?” he asked, chuckling a little.

I nodded and frowned. “Why else would you have just suddenly run away in the same direction as her and disappear for the rest of the night?” I said.

“Because,” Enzo replied, glancing over his shoulder and lowering his voice, leaning closer to me so no one would hear, “there was a shifter out there. I had to take care of it.”

My eyes widened. “That close to the party?” I said, temporarily forgetting about Lisa. “You don’t think it was coming for...”

“I don’t know for sure,” he replied. “But considering how the appearances of shifters in the area generally seemed to be localized to wherever you are at the time, it’s becoming pretty obvious to me that they’re coming for you.”

“But... why?” I asked.

Enzo shrugged. “I’m still trying to figure that out.”

There was a bit of a silence between us. A couple of students walked by holding hands, talking about what to do after class today. For a moment, I wished it could be that simple for me; to just be able to openly hold hands with someone and casually talk about dinner plans, without all of the werewolf drama.

“So,” Enzo finally said after the students walked past, “what do you say? I really like you, Nina. I want you to be my girlfriend.”

My heart skipped a beat, partially from excitement and partially from sadness.

“You say you didn’t sleep with Lisa,” I said quietly, looking at my feet. “But I saw your hickey. Even if you’re not sleeping with her, you’re sleeping with someone. I may not be the prettiest girl on campus, but I do have some self esteem, and I won’t lower myself enough to let a player interrupt my studies.”

Enzo went silent again, then let out a huge sigh.

“Look at me,” he said quietly. I hesitantly looked back up at him to see him pulling aside the collar of his shirt, where the massive hickey had been earlier. I had been so big and dark that there was no way it would have healed by now, but it was gone.

“I never slept with anyone,” Enzo said, sounding a bit ashamed. “I thought that... I don’t know. I thought that if I used some makeup to put a fake hickey on my neck, you would get jealous and want to choose me.”

“Choose you?” I asked incredulously. I felt hurt and manipulated, and released my death grip on my bag to fold my arms across my chest.

“I saw you talking to someone after the game the other night,” Enzo said. “I wanted to know if you would choose me over him.”

“So you lied to me?” I asked. “Do you realize how manipulative that sounds?”

Enzo looked down at the ground and didn’t say anything for a few moments. “I know it was stupid,” he said finally. “But I only did it because I really like you. And I want you to be mine so badly.”

“Maybe you should learn that you can’t always get what you want, Enzo,” I replied quietly as tears welled up in my eyes. He snapped his head back up to look at me with that same painful expression on his face.

“So this is a no, then?” he asked.

I shrugged. “I don’t know. I like you too, but... I think it’s best if we just stay friends for now,” I said. “A relationship would be toxic between us. You can’t deny it.”

As if a switch flipped, Enzo straightened himself and stuck his hands in his pockets, nodding. “Okay,” he replied. “You’re right. Friends. I’m okay with that, so long as we can at least be... that.”

I could tell that he wasn’t actually okay with it, but it was a relief to hear him agree with me and not threaten to kill me like K said he would. With a sad smile, I stuck out my hand to shake his.

Friends I said.

Chapter 38: Lovelorn

Enzo

Nina and I shook hands and agreed to be “friends” for now.

“You can’t just let this happen,” Fio growled, angry with me for letting it come to this as I watched Nina walk away.

“I know,” I replied with an outward sigh, sticking my hands in my pockets and making my way toward where my motorcycle was parked.

I wasn’t going to let this happen. For whatever reason, Nina Harper was special to me and I had to have her. If being a good “friend” for a while was what it would take to get her to see that I was the best choice, then so be it; but that didn’t mean that I wasn’t going to try in some other ways to gain her affection, too.

I went to hockey practice that day and let out my frustrations by training harder than I had in a long time. My teammates were both surprised and annoyed by the grueling training regimen I inflicted on them, but I was too angry to care.

“Enzo, we’ve been doing drills for two hours!” Matt complained, stopping suddenly in the middle of a drill in the middle of the rink and doubling over with his hands on his knees. The other players stopped as well and started complaining, too— all except for Justin, who was the lone teammate to keep pushing through the drill, skating back and forth with all his might on the rink.

Was he punishing himself too for what he did to Nina, or was he trying to prove something?

Either way, I praised him after practice in front of the whole team.

“The rest of you could have done better today,” I said as we got changed in the locker room, which caused a chorus of grumbles from everyone.

I turned to face the team and folded my arms as I watched them get changed, then shook my head with a sigh and grabbed my bag to leave.

As I was leaving, I heard Justin call my name. He jogged to catch up to me as I walked toward the dining hall.

“Hey, Enzo!” he said, catching up with me and matching my stride. I didn’t slow down, because frankly I didn’t want to be talking to him despite his good performance during practice.

“What’s up?” I said, keeping my gaze straight ahead.

“I just wanted to say I’m sorry for starting that argument with you the other day,” he said. “I’m just angry with myself for doing what I did to Nina. I shouldn’t be taking it out on you. I’m trying to be different from now on. Better.”

I raised an eyebrow, surprised at Justin’s sudden change in demeanor. As long as I had known him, he was always a bit of an insufferable jackass. Did Nina really have such an effect on people? I thought about how I used to be; how I used to sleep around almost every night, using girls as merely a means to let off steam and then discard them, and now I was scheming how to get this ordinary human girl to be my girlfriend.

I cleared my throat and forced a smile, turning toward Justin and patting him on the shoulder. “I’m glad to hear it,” I said, although what I really wanted to say was “Don’t you dare even try to get back together with Nina. She’s mine now.” But I controlled myself.

“Thanks,” Justin said with a somewhat meek smile. “Well, see you tomorrow at practice.”

Yeah, I thought to myself as I watched Justin walk away, narrowing my eyes as I wondered what he was scheming. See you tomorrow.

I didn’t have time to worry about whatever dumbass angle Justin was trying to get, because I had big plans the next day to get Nina’s attention.

First thing in the morning, I rode my motorcycle to town. I got a haircut, bought myself a new set of clothes — a nice flannel, new jeans, and even a new pair of boots — and then made my way over to the florist. I bought a dozen roses with a little teddy bear and a box of chocolates.

After that, I stopped at the liquor store and bought a bottle of wine, then picked up fancy pastries from the bakery. I had never noticed what sort of foods and flowers Nina liked, but how could any girl refuse roses and chocolate croissants?

By this time, it was already almost lunchtime so I had to rush back to the campus to set up what would hopefully be a date. I knew Nina would be heading across the quad to get lunch, so I set up a picnic blanket with everything I got for her and stood nearby with the flowers, waiting for her to cross my path.

Soon enough, there she was.

She looked beautiful. Instead of her usual oversized sweater and jeans, she was wearing a short dress that flowed at the bottom with thigh high socks and boots with a bit of a heel. She had her usual braids in, which I had always liked, and seemed to be wearing her glasses all of the time now — which I also liked. There was an academic,

casual sexiness to her that none of the other girls I had ever been interested in before possessed.

I cleared my throat to call out for her, but before I did, my voice faltered as I saw her walk right past me... and toward someone else.

The same guy who I had seen her leave with after the hockey game the other day.

My heart sank as I watched her walk up to him with a smile on her face.

I wasn't close enough to hear everything, but I could hear snippets of their conversation: something about studying at the coffee shop.

Maybe they are just studying, I thought to myself as I watched them walk off together. Even then, I couldn't contain my jealousy. I had never been the jealous type, and Nina was allowed to see whoever she wanted to see, but it didn't stop my heart from breaking to know that she was repeatedly spending alone time with this guy.

I felt a sharp prick in my palm and looked down to see that I had been crumpling the roses in my hands, and a thorn had made its way through my skin. I felt numb as I looked down at the trickle of blood, not bothering to heal myself.

What was so special about this human girl that I was so enthralled by her? Was I, too, a victim of her strange scent like Luke and all of the other shifters were?

I watched Nina and her friend, or whatever he was to her, disappear behind a building. Choking down my rage, I stiffly walked over to a trash can and threw the roses in. I left the picnic setup for the squirrels or another student to steal and stormed off, blood dripping from my palm.

Whatever this obsession with Nina was, it had to stop... Once and for all.

Chapter 39: Study Date

Nina

I didn't want to admit that it broke my heart to tell Enzo we couldn't be together, but it was the right thing to do. We would be toxic together, and besides there was just too much drama surrounding the pseudo- relationship we already had for a real relationship to be able to blossom.

Admittedly, I didn't know if I even wanted to go on this date with James after everything. Was it even a date, or were we just two friends meeting up to study? Either way, I didn't know if it was a good idea, especially so soon after I told Enzo that we could only be friends.

I told Jessica everything, however, and she convinced me to go.

“Aw, come on, Nina!” Jessica said when I told her about James and Enzo.”

Are you really gonna let a guy who you hooked up with once stop you from going on a date with a really sweet guy who clearly likes you?”

I wanted to explain that it wasn't just a hookup, that Enzo had saved my life multiple times now and that he possibly even thought I was his mate, but I didn't. Jessica would think I had gone totally bonkers,

Lori chimed in then with a smile on her usually-stoic face. “James sounds like your type, anyway,” she said. “Plus, you know how bad of an idea it is to get involved with hockey guys. And you know what they say...”

“The best way to get over someone is to get under someone else,” Jessica said with a grin and placed her hands on her hips.

Lori rolled her eyes. “That wasn't what I was gonna say, but I guess that works, too,” she grumbled, returning to her book.

I couldn't help but laugh.

“Alright,” I said, throwing my hands up in surrender. “I'll meet up with him. But I'm not having sex with him or anything like that. We're just studying.”

Despite the fact that I told myself James and I would just be casually studying, I still got a little dressed up the next day. I put on a flowy dress with a turtleneck layered underneath, along with a pair of thigh high socks and ankle boots. Aside from a bit of mascara, I didn't put on any other makeup or do my hair in any way that was out of the ordinary, I didn't want to seem too dressed up.

After class that morning, I headed to the quad, where I was supposed to meet up with James. He was sitting at the fountain and reading a book, wearing his usual sweater vest and button-down ensemble, when I approached.

“Hey,” I said as I walked up to him. He looked up and shut his book with a smile and stood.

“Hey,” he replied, briefly glancing at my outfit — I could tell that he was trying not to be obvious, but I knew he checked me out and it made me blush a bit. “You look nice.” I blushed even harder and nervously tucked a strand of hair behind my ear.”

Thanks,” I said sheepishly. “Ready for studying at the coffee shop?”

As James and I walked to the bus stop, I felt eyes on the back of my head and glanced over my shoulder.

Was that Enzo I saw storming away?

We made it to the coffee shop and sat down at a window table with our drinks, where we set up our laptops and notebooks to get some studying done.

Over time, as we got more comfortable, we started chatting while studying. James was incredibly smart and wound up helping me a lot with my research, but we also got to know each other a bit better.

“So, what’s your research topic as a PhD student?” I asked, taking a sip of my coffee.

“I’m actually really interested in biomedical genetics,” he replied. “That’s what my dissertation is gonna be on; why we have certain genetic dispositions, mutations, disorders... All of that stuff really fascinates me.”

I stopped for a second, thinking about Enzo’s werewolf DNA; I wondered if James would know anything about something like that, or at least have some sort of interest in the subject, “So let’s say...” I said, choosing my words carefully so as not to sound like a total crazy person, “...let’s say, hypothetically, someone had... DNA that shared traits with certain animals,” I said. “Just hypothetically. Would that be possible?”

James furrowed his brows, making my face turn red. “I’m sorry,” I said. “I probably sound like a lunatic.”

“No, no!” James interjected, reaching out and touching my hand for a moment, then quickly pulling away with an embarrassed look as he realized what he did. “I mean... It’s not that unlikely. We all share DNA with most mammals. Like monkeys. We did come from the same ancestors, after all.”

“What about... wolves?” I asked.

“Oh,” James said, furrowing his brow again. “Well, we do share 84% of the same DNA with canines, and it’s the same with all mammals... But it’s only basic connections, like physical structure. Put a head here, put some legs there, give us a womb, you know. Stuff that would separate us from, say, a jellyfish or a flower.”

I nodded, deciding not to ask any further. It was silly of me to think otherwise; humans didn’t have any close links to wolves. If werewolves truly were real and I wasn’t at the center of a circle of crazies, it

was supernatural. Not genetic.

A few minutes later, James looked at his watch and sighed. "This was fun, but I have to go meet with Tiffany," he said, shutting his laptop. "Would you wanna study again sometime?"

I blushed, glad at least that I hadn't scared him away with my wolf question, and nodded. "Sure," I replied. "I'd enjoy that."

James smiled and stood. "Want me to walk you home?"

I shook my head. "I think I'm gonna study here for a while longer," I said. "It was nice hanging out with you."

As I watched James walk out of the coffee shop, my heart skipped a beat. For some reason, even though our study "date" had been mostly platonic and only minimally flirty, the thought of what it would feel like to kiss him crossed my mind.

Did I have feelings for James already?

I sighed quietly and went back to my studying, only to feel a tap on my shoulder a little while later. Maybe James had forgotten something and came back for it-

But it wasn't James.

It was Justin.

"Oh... Hey," I said, setting down my pencil. "What's up?"

Justin smiled down at me, his face and eyes soft. It was a stark contrast from his usual look, which was generally aloof and careless. I couldn't explain it, but he seemed... different. He wore a relaxed outfit that consisted of a flannel, jeans, and boots, which felt familiar — like he had practically borrowed

clothes from Enzo's closet. He was also holding a coffee, which seemed out of character for him. I had only ever seen him drink water and alcohol before.

"Fancy seeing you here," he said. "Can I sit with you?"

Chapter 40: Girls Night Out

Nina

"Fancy seeing you here," Justin said with an oddly warm smile. "Can I sit with you?"

I bit my lip and glanced around quickly, half expecting Lisa or someone else to be snickering nearby as if this was all a prank — but there was no one else. It seemed as though he came alone. Why was he acting so different all of a sudden and dressed like

Enzo? It all felt a bit weird and I didn't really want to stick around to see what would come of it.

"I was actually just leaving," I said, shutting my laptop and standing as I slipped my things into my bag. Justin looked immediately saddened, but what could I do? He was my ex and I had made it clear, multiple times, that I wouldn't be open to any sort of friendship or relationship with him after I found him cheating on me with

Lisa in my own bed!

"Oh," Justin said with a sad frown, his shoulders drooping. "Well, see you around, then."

I managed a pitiful smile before turning on my heel and practically running out of the coffee shop.

What was all that about?

Jessica and Lori were waiting for me when I got home. Jessica was sitting on the floor with a little handheld mirror as she did her makeup, and Lori was texting on the couch when I entered.

"You're going out with us tonight,"

Jessica said matter-of-factly, not looking up from the mirror..

I stopped in the kitchen and cocked my head. "Oh?" I replied, a bit annoyed that it seemed that my roommates had decided for me already. "And where are we going?"

"Some new club in town," Lori replied. "It's their grand opening. Free drinks."

I sighed, knowing that I wouldn't be able to get out of this if both Lori and Jessica had already made up their minds. I loved them, but they were both extremely stubborn.

"Alright," I said, tossing my bag down on the counter and heading to my room to shower and get changed.

"How was your date?" Jessica asked, looking over her shoulder at me with a smirk. I paused at my door, not wanting to think about Justin randomly showing up like a clone of Enzo.

"It wasn't a date," I replied. "We were just studying. And... It was nice."

Jessica grinned and returned to her makeup.

A few hours later, Jessica, Lori and I were standing in line outside the club, waiting to get in.

"I told you to bring a coat," I said to Jessica, who was shivering and rubbing her arms. She was wearing nothing but a skimpy, sparkly pink dress with heels while Lori and I were both comfortable in the cold with our jackets on over our outfits.

"It's too much trouble," Jessica replied. "I hate having to deal with coat check."

Lori and I looked at each other and rolled our eyes.

"Next," the bouncer said, waving us forward. He let us through without so much as checking our ID's, which he had been doing with all of the girls so far. It seemed that they just wanted as many college girls as possible inside, which was a somewhat gross practice in my opinion.

Once we were inside and handed our coats over to the attendant, Jessica grabbed both Lori's and my hands and dragged us straight toward the bar, where she immediately ordered three shots of some alcohol that I couldn't hear her pronounce over the loud club music. The bartender filled three shot glasses and handed them to us.

"Let's get wrecked!" Jessica shouted over the music, clinking her shot glass with us and downing it like a ditsy sorority girl. Lori and I gave each other another look at our friend's goofy behavior and took our shots.

Next, we grabbed some drinks that we could actually sip and not have to drink all at once, then headed for the packed dance floor. The sweaty mob of horny college students swayed and bounced as one big unit to the music, the flashing lights making them look like they were moving almost robotically. Jessica, of course, wanted to be right in the center of the group and wriggled her way in with Lori and I on her heels. I took a big swig of my drink and scanned the crowd, happy to see that neither Enzo nor Justin were around; or at least, I couldn't see them anywhere, which was a win for me at this point.

Out of sight, out of mind.

The shot we took at the bar started to hit, and soon I was dancing along with my friends. It felt good just to let loose without having to deal with any drama just us three girls. I was glad that I had been paired up with them as roommates in our first year of college.

Soon enough, I finished my drink and decided to head back to the bar for another they were free, after all. I squeezed my way through the dance floor and walked over to the bar, leaning on it and letting my sore feet rest for a little bit. The bartender leaned toward me and cupped his hand around his ear to take my order.

"Vodka cranberry," I shouted over the music. He nodded in response while I looked over my shoulder, smirking as I saw Jessica's blonde ponytail bouncing above the crowd. She was pretty tall for a girl,

and her heels and high ponytail only added to it.

“Vodka cran kinda girl, huh?” a male voice shouted over the music. I turned around to see a handsome man leaning on the bar next to me and smiling at me. He looked a bit older and had a businessman look about him. The bartender had already placed down my drink and the guy next to me had his own drink in his hand. I shrugged and picked up my drink, raising my cup a bit to him before drinking.

“Come here alone?” the guy asked, leaning closer. He smelled like cologne and in my tipsy state, it was tantalizing.

“I came with my friends,” I said, pointing toward the crowd. The man only nodded slowly, almost seeming uninterested despite the fact that he was the one who asked me a question, and took another sip of his drink.

I followed suit and took another sip of my drink before turning to head back to the dance floor. Just as I turned around, however, everything started to spin. I suddenly felt nauseous and started to stumble, but a strong arm wrapped itself around me.

“Gonna throw up?” the man said. It looked like there were two of him standing above me. I nodded, trying to hold down my vomit.

“C’mon,” he said with a smirk. “Let’s get you out of here.”

Inside my mind, I knew that this was

getting dangerous. I knew that this man did something to me, and that he had bad intentions, but I couldn’t fight back. My body felt limp and useless as he half-carried me to the bathroom with an evil grin on his face. The room spun around me as the effect of the drugs became stronger, making me feel so sick I couldn’t even speak or call for help.

He carried me down the hallway to the bathrooms, but kept going past the bathroom and into a broom closet. He shoved me inside, making me stumble and fall on the floor, and looked around for a second to make sure no one was watching before coming in after me and closing the door behind himself. I watched in horror as he propped something heavy up against the door to keep anyone from getting in, then started to unbuckle his belt.

I immediately vomited.

“Ugh,” he said, unzipping his pants. “You’re pathetic.”

I could only groan and lay on the floor as he crouched down and flipped me over roughly, yanking up my skirt so he could have his way with me. I wanted to scream, to

kick and scratch and bite, but I couldn't. I felt like a prisoner in my own body and could only close my eyes and wait for it to be over.

"Hey! What the-" he yelled all of a sudden, jumping up. I heard the sound of a struggle. A shelf toppled over, sending buckets and brooms sliding across the floor..

The last thing I saw before the drugs knocked me out was a familiar skull leaning over me and scooping me up off the ground.

Thank you so much for reading and liking my story. Your support means huge. I'm trying my best to write as fast