

My Hockey Alpha #Chapter 131 Part of the Team - Read My Hockey Alpha Chapter 131 Part of the Team

Chapter 131 Part of the Team

Nina

We decided to go to the sports bar in town to celebrate Enzo's victory. I walked along with the rest of the team, but trailed behind with Lori, Jessica, and Luke, who had also all decided to come. All we were missing in our friend group was James; if only I knew where he was and could trust that his intentions were good.

"I have to ask," Jessica said quietly as we walked behind the rest of the group, "What's going on with you and Enzo?"

I felt myself blush and I shrugged, not wanting to go into detail on the specifics of our relationship. How could I possibly explain that I was falling madly in love with a boy who was engaged to be wed to a mystery woman?

So, instead, I shook my head. "Nothing's going on," I said. "We're just friends, as always."

Lori scoffed. "Yeah, sure," she said in a mocking, but not unfriendly, tone of voice. "I see how you two look at each other."

I only blushed harder. Lori and Jessica didn't pry again.

When we arrived at the bar, it was dimly lit and packed to the brim. A local band was playing live music, and as the team walked in, some of the regulars who had watched the game on the TV pounced on them to congratulate them on their victory.

Once everyone settled down enough, we found a table in the corner and all squeezed in together. Some of the team mingled, but Enzo, Matt, Lori, Jessica, Luke, and I all stayed together.

"I'm buying us a round," Enzo said, emanating an attractive amount of confidence as he gestured for the bartender to bring us a round. The team cheered, and I couldn't help but smile. For once, it felt like

we were just a bunch of college students celebrating a hockey victory. I decided, then and there, that I wouldn't think about anything else tonight. Just for tonight, I would pretend that we were normal college kids leading a normal, happy life.

The bartender brought us our beers. Enzo picked up his glass and held it up to make a toast.

“To our last game as a team,” he said. “For now, at least.”

As he said this, the table fell silent. I realized that I hadn’t quite considered yet that he would be assigned a new team soon for the last game, which had to be composed of all werewolves. As I looked over at Matt’s face, as well as the others, I couldn’t help but feel sorry that they couldn’t play together. Enzo was an amazing hockey player and he was strong as a werewolf, but I couldn’t imagine him without his team. To me, they were like a package deal. I only wished that I could do something to help in some way.

Finally, Matt picked up his glass. Much to my surprise, he was looking at me.

“And,” he said, adding onto Enzo’s toast, “to Nina. For being the best team doctor anyone could ask for, and for always being here for us.”

I blushed. Enzo, smiling, instinctively put his arm around me, which only made me blush harder and stare down at the table in disbelief.

“To Nina,” he said.

“To Nina!” Lori, Jessica, and Luke chimed in.

I continued to blush down at the table, so Lori grabbed my hand and shoved my beer glass into it. I couldn’t help but laugh along with everyone else after that, and I drank to the toast. As we drank,

however, there was no denying the fact that Enzo’s arm was still around my shoulders... And it remained there for the rest of the night.

Soon, the drinks began to flow and the entire team was drunk. Maybe it was just the alcohol, but I began to flirt shamelessly with Enzo. I felt my hand press against his leg as we sat together, and he didn’t resist my touch. If anything, it made him move closer to me.

As the night went on, things between us intensified. We eventually got up and danced to the live music, our bodies pressed up against each other. We drank more and more, until we were both tipsy and giggly.

Without any warning, Enzo suddenly leaned in to kiss me in the crowd, his lips soft and warm against mine as we danced. I responded eagerly, my hands reaching up to tangle in his hair. We broke apart for air, grinning at each other in excitement.

“Let’s get out of here,” I said, my voice low and seductive. Maybe I wasn’t thinking straight — but I didn’t care.

Enzo nodded eagerly, and we stumbled out of the bar together, barely able to keep our hands off each other. We walked through the streets, laughing and joking, until we finally made it to my dorm.

Enzo walked me to my door, our arms wrapped around each other. We kissed again, longer and more fervently than before. Enzo was just about to say goodnight when I grabbed his hand, pulling him inside.

The apartment was dark and quiet, but the tension between us was palpable. We kissed again, our hands exploring each other's bodies. For a moment, there was no arranged marriage. There was no Edward, or James, or Richard. There was no Ronan. For a moment, it was as if we had just met again. Enzo picked me up and I wrapped my legs around him, kissing and sucking on his neck as he carried me to my room. Once we were inside, he laid me down on the bed and pressed his body against mine.

But then, he paused. He looked down at me, and I saw now that his red eyes were looking at me in such a way that I knew exactly what he was thinking.

"Is this a bad idea?" I asked, my quivering voice barely above a whisper.

Enzo slowly nodded his head, never breaking eye contact with me, but he didn't move away from me.

"It is a bad idea," he whispered, "but I don't care."

He stood and grabbed the hem of his shirt, pulling it up and over his head to reveal his chiseled abs and chest muscles. He then unbuttoned his pants in front of me, sliding them down as his erection strained against his underwear.

Seeing him like this, with the moonlight shining through the window as he stood in front of me looking like a god, instantly made my panties wet. I couldn't resist him anymore and grabbed his hand, pulling him down to me. As our lips locked together and our tongues began exploring each other's mouths, everything else fell away again. Maybe it really was the alcohol, but as his scent filled my senses, I knew I wouldn't have been able to resist anyway.

Enzo slid his hand down my panties, but something came over me and I grabbed his wrist and pulled his hand away as I flipped him over onto his back. He looked up at me with a shocked expression on his face while I began kissing his neck and chest, slowly working my way down until I reached his groin. I tugged on his boxers and pulled them down to reveal his cock, which throbbed visibly in the moonlight.

I shot Enzo one last, lustful look before taking his cock in my hand and sliding it into my mouth. I heard him moan as I worked my tongue around it, familiarizing myself with its shape and size until I felt comfortable enough to start moving my head up and down.

His hand made its way up to the back of my head as I pleased him, his fingers tangling in my hair in a way that made my body tingle.

I came up for air, and as I did, Enzo grabbed me by the waist and threw me down onto the bed, sliding my panties off with an unexpected urgency before positioning himself between my legs.

He paused. “Are you okay with this?” he whispered, leaning close to me and kissing my ear. I nodded, too enchanted by his body to speak, and let out a loud moan as I felt him push himself into me.

He started thrusting into me, slowly at first, then began picking up speed. With each pump, his groin rubbed against my clit. In combination with the heavenly feeling of fullness inside of me as his well-endowed member thrust back and forth, I felt myself getting closer to orgasm. My moans went from soft and timid to loud and strained, as if I would burst at any moment.novelxo.com fast update

I dug my nails into Enzo’s back and looked into his eyes as he worked himself into me.

“Go on,” he said, his curly hair hanging down into his red eyes as he hunched over me. “Come.”

As if his permission flipped some sort of switch, I felt my body erupt into a million different sensations of pleasure. I arched my back and felt my eyes roll into the back of my head as Enzo continued thrusting, this time faster and harder, which only added to the feeling.

Just as I finished, Enzo wrapped his arms around my waist and pulled me up onto his lap. I grabbed his neck and began twisting my hips on him, getting faster and faster until his muffled moans turned into a low, animalistic growl that only fueled me to work harder.

The moon came out from behind a cloud, illuminating us once more — and as it did, Enzo let out another growl and dug his fingers into my hips, pulling himself deeper as he finished.

I collapsed onto him, our bodies pressed together in a sweating, panting heap. His shaking hands rubbed up and down on my waist as he gently kissed my neck with what little strength he had left.

Maybe this was a mistake brought on by the alcohol — but at that moment, neither of us cared

Chapter 132: Morning After

Nina

I woke up the next morning to the feeling of a pounding in my head from all of the alcohol, but more importantly, I woke to the sound of birds singing outside and the feeling of thick, warm arms wrapped around me. A smile spread across my lips as I rolled over and nuzzled into the muscular chest that lay beside me. I laid there for a while, listening to the sound of Enzo's steady breathing as the memories of what happened the night before slowly flooded back into my mind.

The memories were still hazy from the alcohol, but I remembered dancing at the bar with Enzo. I remembered him kissing me as we danced, and then I remembered the feeling of his hand in mine as we snuck out of the bar together and walked back to my dorm. He tried to say goodnight to me at the door, but I pulled him inside and brought him up to my room, where we fell into a night of passion together for the first real time since the night that we first met and hooked up — only now, after all of the tension and the conflict, it felt even better to be with him.

Just then, Enzo shifted next to me and opened his eyes. I smiled up at him and planted a kiss on his cheek.

"Good morning," I said softly.

He stared at me for a moment, seemingly processing the events of the previous night just as I did, but his reaction was much different from mine.

He suddenly removed his arms from around me and abruptly got up out of the bed.

I sat up, my eyes wide.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"We shouldn't have done that," he muttered as he searched for his pants and then pulled them on. "That was a really bad idea."

My heart started to ache. I knew it was a bad idea, and so did he, but... I had thought that he was willing to make that mistake so we could be together. I climbed out of bed then and ran over to him as he pulled his shirt on over his head.

"I thought you were okay with it," I said, my eyes frantically searching his face. "I thought you wanted to sleep with me, because you cared about me."

"I do care about you, Nina," he replied. As he stared down at me, there was a look of pain in his brown eyes that traveled far deeper than the surface. "That's why it was such a mistake. By sleeping with you, I'm only putting you in danger."

I frowned and shook my head. "Forget about all of that," I pleaded. "Can't we just enjoy one night together? Can't we just have one night of not thinking about the consequences, and just be together?"

Enzo went silent. I felt as though my entire world came crashing down on me at that moment, and I didn't even care as I felt tears begin to stream down my cheeks.

"Please, Enzo," I begged. "Just talk to me. I've been hearing my wolf and feeling her presence; I know she'll emerge soon. I can feel it. We could be mates, and then nothing else would matter."

Enzo's eyes widened as he stared down at the ground. I watched, silently pleading him to say something, anything, but he didn't say a word for the longest time. It felt like an eternity as I stood there, just wishing that everything could be different.

Finally, after several long moments of tense silence, Enzo lifted his gaze from the ground to look at me. "I made a deal with my father," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. "I promised I would go through with the arranged marriage and that I wouldn't get involved with you, and in exchange, he

promised that he wouldn't hurt you or your family, and that your mom and your brother could come home."

I felt a sob start to come, but it caught in my throat.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I choked out.

Enzo merely stared back down at the floor and shook his head. "I care about you more than anything, Nina," he said. "I do want to be with you. But... This person he wants me to marry is extremely powerful and important, and I don't have a choice. If I say no, and if I try to be with you, not only would I run the risk of hurting you in the future when I inevitably start to search for my fated mate, but I will also run the risk of you, your family, and my family getting hurt."

Now, I was the one who fell silent. Of course he was right. Being together would only put our loved ones, and ourselves, at risk. But, at the same time, I couldn't take no for an answer. I could feel my wolf's presence inside of me, and she was willing me to try harder.

"Who is she?" I asked.

Enzo didn't answer.

"I can't tell you, Nina," he said solemnly. "Just trust me when I say that I'm only doing this for your own good." He paused for a moment, his eyes slowly raising back to me. The look of pain in them was even deeper now, and all I wanted to do was pull him in and hug him tightly and never let him go. "I think it's best if we keep our distance from now on," he said quietly. "I don't think either of us can control ourselves around each other. If we get too close again, it'll only make it worse. Goodbye, Nina."

“No. Enzo—” I called after him as he brushed past me. I tried to grab his arm, but he wrenched away from me and slipped out through the door without another word.

When I heard the door close, I fell to the ground in a heap and began to sob uncontrollably. Why did it feel as though the universe wanted us to be apart so badly? When we first met, I’d spent so much time running from his advances and relentlessly puzzled over the reasons behind why it seemed that the universe wanted nothing more than for us to be together, but now it was entirely different. Every step of the way, all we encountered were obstacles to our relationship.

First, it was Lisa who tried to push us apart. Then, it was my inability to trust Enzo. After that, it was Ronan, and Enzo’s father, and now it was fate itself that seemed to be keeping us apart.

Was all of this just punishment for how much I’d pushed him away in the beginning? Would I always live to regret pushing him away?

Or, maybe it wasn’t punishment at all. Maybe I was just doomed to spend my life alone, loveless, just as I thought since high school.

But at the same time, there was a tiny shred of me that wanted to continue to fight for Enzo’s love. That shred was getting smaller by the day, but it was still there — and our night of passion made it just a tiny bit bigger

Chapter 133: The Power of Claiming

Enzo

I spent the next week drowning myself in nothing but hockey in a feeble attempt to keep Nina off of my mind. Fio was furious with me and would hardly speak to me, often spending his days being dormant ever since Nina and I last had sex.

Did I make a grave mistake by pushing Nina away? Her scent was so similar to my mate’s, and it was just as tantalizing despite being much more faint than what I smelled on the scarf. When we had sex, I remembered that her scent came across a little stronger, and I knew that Fio was intrigued by it. Already, I had lost control around her so many times, just from that tiny bit of scent coming from her. But at the same time, I couldn’t take the risk of letting her or her family get hurt. I had to go through with this arranged marriage for everyone’s benefit, and although it broke my heart in a million different ways to say goodbye to her, it simply had to be done.

The final match in the Half-Moon Tournament was set for Saturday. I began to hear rumors that Ronan’s team came to stay in the motel in town, and would be coming to the campus more and more in preparation for the game. My father also informed me that Ronan’s team would be entirely composed of werewolves, which meant that my team would have to be entirely composed of werewolves as well.

On the Monday before the match, my father called me to a meeting. I met him in the VIP box in the arena, and when I entered, he was sitting in a chair looking out over the rink.

"You're late," he said, checking his watch without so much as turning around.

"Sorry," I replied. "I was busy."

"Not busy with that girl, I presume?" he asked. His tone was somewhat mocking, but also deeply serious.

I shook my head and plopped down into the chair next to him as I tried to shove the feeling of dread that came up at the mention of Nina back down into the depths of my stomach. "Nope. I'm still keeping up my end of the bargain, so long as you're keeping up yours."

My father didn't say anything for a few moments. We watched together in silence as the Zamboni driver went back and forth in the rink, prepping the ice for the upcoming practice match that we would be having in a couple of days. I always liked watching that thing go around the rink; it was almost mesmerizing, and it meant that the ice was fresh and slick, perfect for skating.

"I've picked out your new team," he finally said, breaking my trance. "All werewolves, of course. They're tough and strong; just what you need. They should be arriving tomorrow morning."

I frowned. "Are they experienced in hockey at all?"

My father shrugged. "It doesn't really matter, does it?" he said, skirting my question. "Ronan's team isn't particularly experienced, either. Besides, it'll really only be between the two of you, anyway."

I scoffed. "Do you know that his team isn't experienced, or is that what they told you?"

He went silent for a moment, pursing his lips, before he responded. "You're not seriously trying to tell me that you want to keep your human team, are you?" he asked incredulously.

"We've made it this far," I replied. "My team is really good. Superhuman strength and speed doesn't mean jack shit if they don't know anything about hockey."

Suddenly, as though my words offended him, my father stood and buttoned his suit jacket. "Well, you have no choice in the matter," he said. "Unless you plan on somehow turning all of them yourself, which you don't have the ability to do as far as I'm aware, you're stuck with this new team. The rules state—"

"I remember the rules, dad," I interrupted with an exasperated sigh. "I'll see you on Saturday."

...

That night, I called my team — my real team, not my new, shitty werewolf team — to the locker rooms for a meeting to explain the situation and see if we could come up with some sort of plan to play together in the final game.

Everyone fell silent when I asked if they had any ideas.

I sighed, accepting the fact that I would be stuck with this new werewolf team.

But then, a hand shot up. It was Matt.

"Hey, Enzo?" he said tentatively.

I looked up at him, hoping that he had something useful to contribute. At this point, I was willing to take any suggestions.

"Yeah, Matt?" I asked.

"I know I should've said something earlier, but I didn't know what to do... So here goes: I've been having these dreams lately," he said, hesitating for a moment. "About a wolf."

I raised an eyebrow, intrigued but also wondering what exactly he was getting at. My mind began to race with a million different things. Did Matt somehow take the Mad Wolf serum? I thought that it was Edward who was administering it all along, but I supposed that it wasn't entirely impossible. "A wolf, huh?" I said. "What kind of dreams?"

Matt shrugged. "I don't know. They're just...weird. But it's not just the dreams. I've been feeling... different, I guess. Like I have all this energy, and I can run faster and jump higher than before."

My eyes widened. I thought back to how well he'd been performing lately during our matches, and it lined up with what he was saying. "Are you saying what I think you're saying?" I asked.

Matt nodded slowly. "I think I might be a werewolf."

The rest of the team erupted in a collective gasp. I heard some murmuring amongst them, but I raised my hand to quiet them so I could listen to what Matt had to say.

I leaned forward, eager to hear more. "When did this start?" I asked. "You didn't get bitten, did you? Or did you take some sort of strange serum?"

Matt shook his head. “No. I never got bitten, and I wouldn’t take something like that.” He then thought for a moment, biting his lip, before his eyes lit up and he spoke again. “Actually, it all started when Nina was bandaging up my hand that one day after practice,” he said. I cringed at the thought of how abrasive I’d been that day, but he didn’t seem fazed, and he kept talking before I could apologize for how I acted in front of him. That day was the first day that Nina’s strangely tempting scent nearly sent me into a full-on rage.

“I went to the infirmary,” he continued, “but when Tiffany looked at it, my hand was totally healed. I didn’t think much of it — maybe it was just not as bad of an injury as I thought — but then, that night, I started having the dreams. After that, I felt so powerful. And, well... You’ve seen my performance lately.”

I felt a shock go through me at the mention of Nina’s name. Nina was a werewolf, I knew that much, but was it possible that she also had the power of Claiming? Could she turn humans into werewolves with just a touch

Chapter 134: The Claiming Ceremony

Nina

My heart shattered into a million pieces when Enzo left.

I wasn’t sure exactly how long I spent curled up on the floor of my bedroom after he walked out. Why did he sleep with me if he knew that it was a bad idea? Why would he knowingly break my heart like this? I didn’t fully know or understand the answers to these questions, but I had no choice but to move on with my life. At least I could take some solace in the fact that my family would be home soon and would no longer be at risk of danger, but the concept of not even having Enzo as a friend anymore broke my heart even further.

At some points during the next few days, I wished that I had just gone overseas with my mom and my brother. Thankfully, however, I still had my friends; I kept reminding myself of that every time I started to resent Enzo for what he did. At the very least, I still had Lori, Jessica, and Tiffany.

I still had my job, too. I picked up a few extra shifts at the diner to keep myself busy.

However, I quickly came to realize that even the diner wasn’t a safe zone when I was working one day and suddenly heard the door open, only to look up and see Enzo standing in front of me.

I felt my heart drop.

“What are you doing here?” I asked, my fist shaking as I gripped the dishcloth I was holding so tightly as though it was my only lifeline. Even just seeing Enzo made me feel as though I would break down and begin sobbing.

“Nina, I really need to talk to you,” he said frantically as he walked toward me. “Please. It’s really important.”

I frowned and folded my arms across my chest. Instead of looking him in the eyes, I stared directly at his chin, unable to bring myself to meet his gaze.

“What is it?”

“Can I talk to you outside?” he asked. “Please.”

I looked up then to see that there was a look of pleading on his face and a sense of urgency in his eyes. Despite everything, I still cared about Enzo — so, finally, I nodded hesitantly. “Fine. Let’s go.”

Enzo led me outside to the parking lot, then stopped and turned to face me once we were alone.

“You have the power of Claiming,” he said.

I raised an eyebrow. “The power of what?”

“Claiming,” Enzo continued. “You can turn people into werewolves with just a touch. You accidentally turned Matt when you were bandaging his hand in the locker room the other day.”

An incredulous chortle escaped my mouth as Enzo spoke. I rolled my eyes at him, then turned on my heel. “I really can’t believe that you would show up and fuck with me like this after everything,” I growled. “Leave me alone—”

Suddenly, Enzo’s hand shot out and he grabbed my arm. I widened my eyes and looked over my shoulder at him; he was still staring at me with that same frantic, pleading expression on his face. “I’m dead serious,” he muttered. “Look, I know I’ve been an asshole, but we really need you right now. The team wants you to turn them all so they can play during the final match. If they can’t play with me, I’ll be stuck with an inexperienced team that will probably make us lose. Please.”

I froze, my eyes searching his face for some hint of humor — but there was none. I could tell that Enzo was serious.

But, that didn’t mean that I would be willing to help him so easily after what he did.

I wrenched my arm away and frowned. “No,” I said. “Find someone else to help you. When you left me the other day, you forsook any future opportunities for my help or friendship. Get lost.” I turned then and began to storm back to the diner.

“We’ll be at the cabins tonight at midnight,” he called after me. “If you don’t want to help, then fine. But if you do, meet us there. I’m begging you, Nina. We can’t do this without you. We need you. I need you.”

I stopped as my hand rested on the door handle, biting my lip as Enzo’s pleas sunk in. Part of me wanted to give him the finger and go back inside, but I couldn’t deny the fact that there was an even bigger part of me that still cared about him and wanted to help — not to mention the fact that the fate of the town rested on this final match.

“Fine,” I muttered. “Midnight.”

...

Later that night, after spending the entire day wondering if I was making a mistake by opening myself up to Enzo again, I finally decided that it was truly best for the town if I just helped them. So, shortly before midnight, I got dressed and headed out to the forest.

When I arrived at the cabins, the entire team was there. Enzo immediately jerked his head up when he saw me, then came jogging over to me while I tentatively approached with my hands in my pockets.

“I really can’t thank you enough for coming,” he said.

I shrugged. “Just tell me what to do and let’s get this over with.”

Enzo nodded, then led me over to the team. They were all sitting around the fire. Some of them looked frightened, but most of them appeared to be excited.

“Are you all sure you want to do this? Last call.” Enzo looked around at his team as he spoke. Much to my surprise, they all agreed to go through with it. “Okay,” Enzo said, turning to face me. “We all need to stand around the fire in a circle. Then, join hands.”

We did as Enzo instructed, with only Enzo and Matt standing off to the side, seeing as how they were already werewolves.

“Everyone, close your eyes,” Enzo continued. “Nina... I want you to channel your wolf. The rest will come naturally.”

I didn’t know exactly what that meant, but I obliged. I squeezed my eyes shut and let out a deep sigh as I searched for Cora’s presence. Her energy had been incredibly low, practically nonexistent, ever since Enzo had left me. But she was there.

“I need some of your power,” I said to her, internally, when I located her.

She was silent for a moment. “Why?”

“We have to help Enzo. I need to use the power of Claiming on his teammates.”

As I gave her this information, Cora growled. She was angry with Enzo. “Why are we helping him after what he did?”

I shook my head and squeezed my eyes shut harder. “It’s not for him. It’s for the town.”

She was silent again for a while. For several moments, I thought that she would just go back to sleep — but then, finally, I felt her power grow. I clenched my jaw as I felt her power begin to travel through

me, stretching out through my entire body, then extending through my hands.

Her power surged even more. I felt my entire body begin to tingle. There was some slight murmuring coming from Enzo’s teammates as I assumed that they, too, began to feel this tingling.

But then... I began to feel incredibly weak. It came on so quickly that I didn’t have time to adjust to it.

Suddenly, my knees buckled under me, and everything went dark

Chapter 135: Running with the Wolves

Nina

When I came to, the first thing I saw was Enzo’s concerned face.

“Are you okay?” he asked, his eyes wrought with worry.

I groaned and looked around, noticing now that the rest of the hockey team was also bent over me and looking equally as worried. It took a few moments for my head to clear, but then I remembered that I had passed out during the Claiming ceremony.

“I’m fine...” I sat up, rubbing my throbbing head. “Did it work?”

Enzo paused, then looked around at his teammates, who all shrugged.

“I feel a little different,” one of them said.

“Me, too,” another chimed in, looking at his hands with an expression of awe on his face.

Enzo helped me up. I looked around at everyone, then searched for Cora's presence inside of me to ask her if she managed to do it — but she was asleep. It seemed that the ceremony drained her energy, too.

Suddenly, one of the teammates, Bryce, doubled over. The rest of the team huddled around him in shock.

"Bryce, are you okay?" Enzo asked, furrowing his brow and going over to Bryce. I watched as Enzo put his hand on his teammate's back with concern drawn across his face, and for a moment, I forgot that I was supposed to be angry with him for breaking my heart just a few days ago.

Bryce didn't answer right away. He groaned, holding his stomach, and muttered something indiscernible under his breath.

"What did you say, buddy?" Matt asked.

Bryce groaned again. "I said... I think... Something's..."

Suddenly, and without warning, Bryce began to shift. The rest of the team scattered, yelling amongst themselves, but all of a sudden they, too, began to shift. Enzo, Matt, and I stood nearby in awe. Enzo stood in front of me protectively, which made my heart skip, but I wasn't scared.

Once the team finished shifting, they all stood around looking at each other as though they were processing what just happened. Then, they all turned to look inquisitively at Enzo and Matt.

There was a long, palpable silence.

Then...

"Fuck yeah, baby!" Matt yelled, pumping his fist in the air. Enzo whipped around to face me and grinned. I felt my face go red as he grabbed me by both shoulders and shook me.

"Nina!" he said, his face lit up like never before. "You did it! You're amazing!"

My eyes were wide. "I— I don't—"

Before I could stammer out a response, Enzo turned back to face his team and said excitedly, "Come on! Let's go for a run!" The team whooped and howled with excitement in response. I staggered backwards out of the way as Enzo and Matt shifted, then watched in awe as they all took off into the woods as one unit. A pack.

But then, Enzo stopped in his tracks. He paused, thinking, then turned and ran back to me. My eyes widened even further as he trotted up to me and crouched down in front of me, his silver fur glistening in the moonlight.

“Get on,” his voice echoed in my head.

“Oh, that’s okay,” I protested, holding up my hands and shaking my head. “You guys can go without me.”

But Enzo didn’t budge.

I felt a knot rise in my throat, but at the same time, a newfound excitement rose there, too. I felt a smile twitching at the corners of my lips as I approached Enzo, my heart racing. I reached out and took a deep breath, intertwining my fingers with his soft silver fur.

Then, I climbed onto his back.

He stood to his full height, and it was now that I realized just how big he was in his wolf form as I towered above the ground. He waited a few moments, allowing me to get my bearings. I held tightly onto his fur and leaned forward, the smile on my face widening.

“Okay,” I said, my voice shaking with a mixture of fear and excitement. “I’m ready.”

Enzo shot forward like a bullet. I leaned down further into his neck at first as he ran through the moonlit forest to catch up with his teammates, shielding my face from the wind and holding on for dear life. The longer we ran, however, I felt myself begin to relax. I slowly cracked my eyes open to see the forest rushing past us as Enzo carried me through the trees, deftly weaving in and out. He ran smoothly, almost as though he was gliding, and soon I was able to sit up with a bit of confidence.

The smile on my face grew even more. I looked around at Enzo’s teammates as they all ran beside him; it reminded me so much of the day that we ran together during practice, only now, we moved as one single unit, and although I had no wolf form, I felt just as much a part of the pack as the rest.

Suddenly, I saw a ravine up ahead. I felt my heart leap into my throat and I gripped Enzo’s fur again for dear life. He wasn’t stopping, or even slowing down...

“Enzo,” I said, my voice shaking, but he didn’t hear me.

Did he see the ravine? If we didn’t stop, we would surely fall—

But we didn’t.

Enzo leaped over the ravine. For what felt like an eternity, we flew through the air. I felt the wind rustling through my hair, and as we flew, I couldn't contain the wild yell that bubbled up in my throat. Just a few moments ago I was terrified, but now I was taking my hands off of Enzo's neck and holding my arms outstretched freely at my sides, my eyes closed and a smile spread across my face.

I had never felt so free.

...

Eventually, the wild run came to an end. We returned to the cabins, where Enzo let me slide down gently onto the ground before he and the rest of his teammates shifted back into their human forms. The entire team was exhilarated and panting from their run, chattering amongst themselves about the way their bodies felt.

"I really can't thank you enough," Enzo said, turning to face me.

Much to my surprise, his face had reverted back to a look of somber contemplation. He averted his gaze, as did I as I felt my cheeks start to blush. While our wild run had temporarily made me feel free of the pain of our breakup, that feeling quickly returned now.

"No problem," I muttered, sticking my hands in my pockets. "I should get home now, though."

"I'll walk you home."

My eyes widened at Enzo's statement. I felt so confused by his behavior; just a few days ago, he had told me that we couldn't see each other at all. Now, he was offering to walk me home.

"Um... That's okay," I replied, glancing over Enzo's shoulder at his team as they talked and danced around the fire excitedly. "You should stay with your team."

Enzo opened his mouth to say something, but then closed it again and nodded soberly. I managed a weak smile before turning around and making my way back to the trail that would lead me back to campus.

As I walked that night, my heart was full of two things: a renewed sense of vigor from our wild dash through the woods, and a deep and incurable pain caused by my love for Enzo

Chapter 136: Practice Game

Enzo

As I watched Nina walk away, I felt my heart break a little more.

Being around her felt like the most natural thing on earth; being apart from her made me feel as though I could hardly even breathe. But there was nothing I could do about it — I had to keep my distance from her if I was going to keep Nina, her family, and the town safe. As the son of the Fullmoon Alpha, I had to fulfill my duty and go through with the arranged marriage.

And yet, as I watched her form fade into the distance, all I wanted to do was leave my duties behind and run away with her. If only it were that simple.

...

The next morning, I woke up early to head to the hockey arena for our scrimmage with Ronan's team. The arena was quiet when I entered, but my father was waiting for me with his arms folded across his chest. There was no doubt in my mind that he already got wind of the Claiming ceremony, and he probably wasn't very happy about it.

"I see you've found a way to somehow turn all of your teammates," he said with a low voice as I approached. "Care to enlighten me?"

I shrugged. I wasn't about to tell him that Nina, of all people, had the power of Claiming. "I have my ways," I said. "You should be thanking me. I just ensured that we'll win this tournament."

My father sighed, but to my surprise, he also nodded in agreement. "You may be right. The fathers of the young men who I hired certainly won't be happy, but I'll admit you made a good call."

I couldn't help but feel relieved that my father wasn't going to bite my head off for doing what I did.

"Go on," he said, nodding his head toward the locker rooms as the rest of my team started coming in through the front door to the arena. "Show Ronan who's boss today."

I nodded, then headed to the locker room to get ready with my team.

When we re-emerged, the arena was bustling with excited students who had come to watch the scrimmage. I scanned the crowd with my eyes for Nina, eventually landing on her as she sat up in the bleachers with Lori and Jessica. She saw me looking, and her face went red before she quickly looked away.

Then, I trained my gaze on Ronan and his team, who were standing on the other side of the arena. None of them were talking to each other or hyping each other up like my team was doing; instead, they were all standing and staring.

Staring at me.

Ronan had a sick smirk drawn across his face.

The last time I had seen or heard of him was when he fabricated that horrible lie with Lisa to ruin Nina's image and drive us apart. I wanted to throttle him for what he did to her, how he humiliated her... But I knew that I would get my revenge during the game.

A few minutes later, the announcer called the two teams out onto the ice. We got into our places; my team did as I ordered beforehand and kept their heads down, focusing solely on the puck rather than the other team's weak attempt at intimidating us with their dirty stares.

This may have only been a practice match, but it was still extremely important. In just a few days, we would be playing in the final match of the Half-Moon Tournament, and this practice game was our chance to show what we were made of.

The buzzer sounded throughout the arena.

The scrimmage began. I felt a rush of adrenaline coursing through my body. This was it — the moment we had all been working towards.

I took my position on the ice, my eyes fixed on Ronan as he skated towards me. I knew he was the one to watch — the best player on the opposing team, and my biggest rival. We locked eyes for a moment, and then the real game began.

I focused all my energy on the puck, determined to outmaneuver Ronan and lead my team to victory. We played fast and hard, each side trying to gain the upper hand. Ronan and I clashed multiple times, each of us pushing the other to the limit, but my team also worked hard to keep our score ahead. Ronan's team was good — really good — but so was mine. Now that we were all werewolves, it was an equal match.

As the game entered its final minutes, I was in the lead. I could feel victory within my grasp, and my heart raced with excitement. The sounds of the crowd cheering faded away. Suddenly, all that mattered was the sound of my racing heart and the puck sliding across the ice.

But Ronan had one last trick up his sleeve.

He skated up beside me as I flicked the puck back and forth with my stick. I heard a low growl escape his throat, and I made the grave mistake of glancing up to see his sickening grin and his glowing yellow eyes.

Then... I found myself suddenly off balance. I tried to regain my footing, but it was too late. Ronan's stick made contact with my leg, and I felt a searing pain shoot through my body.

I gritted my teeth as I lost my balance completely and slid across the ice. A sudden burst of anger took over me at Ronan's dirty trick, and without thinking, I stuck my own stick out in retaliation and knocked

him over.

The buzzer went off, signifying a time-out, but we didn't listen. Ronan and I were already on top of each other, grappling on the ice. He threw a heavy punch at my head, but I dodged it and hit him with a swift uppercut through the jaw. All I could think about, above the game, above the entire tournament, was how Ronan had hurt Nina.

I head-butted him. Blood splattered out of his mouth, but I only saw Nina's face in my mind, sobbing. I should've been there for her when Edward first took her. I could've stopped him. But Ronan saw to it that we were driven apart.

This fight wasn't about the tournament.

It was about Nina.

I went to punch again... And again, and again, over and over until my fists were covered in Ronan's blood. By this point, the crowd was silent.

Just then, I felt hands on me. Someone wrenched me away from Ronan, shouting something as I struggled against them to get back to the rival hockey captain and continue my assault.

The referee blew his whistle once, twice, three times.

"Disqualified!" the referee shouted, putting himself between Ronan and I as he scowled at me. "Get off the ice, Rivers!"

I snarled as I clamored to my feet, wrenching myself away from the grip of my worried teammates. "Get off of me!"

"Hey, man, just go take ten," Matt said, patting my shoulder. Without a word, I jerked away from him and skated away, ignoring the silent crowd and the angry eyes of my father trained on me from the VIP box. None of that mattered to me, though; I scanned the crowd again for Nina, who only stared back at me from her seat on the bleachers with wide, disbelieving eyes.

Suddenly, Ronan's mocking voice echoed clearly in my head, breaking my gaze from her.

"You're going to lose," he said. "And when you do, Nina is mine."

A growl rumbled in my throat in response. I looked over my shoulder at him to see his team helping him up, but even through all of the blood...

He was grinning at me

Chapter 137: Time to Prepare

Nina

I watched Enzo and Ronan fight in a state of abject horror. Ronan certainly tried to egg Enzo on, and he achieved that goal. Enzo head butted him, causing the crowd to gasp in unison, then began to rain punches down on Ronan from above. His face was twisted into a look of pure anger and hatred. Finally, Matt and one of the other team members came up behind Enzo and yanked him off of Ronan. The referee put himself between the two captains and blew his whistle, signaling the end of the practice match along with a looming, red mark on Enzo's reputation, which was already struggling from his werewolf leak.

All around me, as the other team helped Ronan up and Enzo wrenched himself free from Matt and skated away, I heard the whisperings of my classmates. They were saying that he was a monster, that they knew it all along... And what could I possibly do to change their minds now?

"Well, I'm going home," Lori said suddenly, standing with a frown and hopping down from our spot on the bleachers. "You guys coming?"

Jessica nodded grimly and followed Lori. I stayed put, however, and watched as Enzo's red eyes scanned the crowd and finally became fixed on me. For a long moment, we stared at each other — I was still in a state of shock, while Enzo's face was still contorted with hatred for Ronan, only softening slightly when he saw my face.

But then, he suddenly ripped his eyes away from me and turned to look at Ronan. I followed his gaze, my eyes widening even more as I saw the sinister grin on Ronan's bloody face.

Judging from the way they looked at each other just then, I knew — Ronan was saying something to Enzo telepathically.

"Nina?" Jessica said from below, drawing my attention away. I blinked a few times and looked down at her concerned face, then nodded and jumped down to meet them.

"Geez... This whole werewolf tournament thing sure is serious, huh?" Lori asked as we pushed out of the arena with a group of other disturbed students and stepped out into the cold air. I thought that the tournament was supposed to be a peaceful way for them to settle their differences."

As we walked, I couldn't help but think about what had come over Enzo. Ever since our time spent in the tunnels, he'd been having more difficulties with controlling his temper. I was certain that his attack on Ronan was his way of getting back at him for all of the pain that he caused, but the fact that he did it so blindly in front of the entire school was a shock to me.

I stopped in my tracks then, biting my lip. Lori and Jessica walked ahead a few paces before realizing that I'd stopped and they turned to face me.

"You okay?" Jessica asked, frowning.

"I should go back and check on Enzo," I said. I was the team doctor, after all, and although I was off duty for the practice game, I still felt compelled to check and make sure that he was okay despite the fact that I was still in immense pain for what he did to me. "You guys go ahead. I'll be home soon."

Jessica and Lori frowned, but nodded understandingly.

"See ya later," Lori said, waving. Jessica shot me a soft smile before they turned and continued to head back to the dorms.

I smiled weakly and watched them leave before I turned around myself and made my way back to the arena. There were still students milling about when I entered, rattled from the intense fight and gossiping about how all werewolves were violent, but I ignored them and walked over to the bench

where Enzo's team was packing up their things with concerned expression on their faces. As I approached, however, I realized that Enzo wasn't there.

"Where's Enzo?" I asked as I walked up to them.

Matt shrugged, then nodded his head toward the locker room. "He's moping in there. That Ronan guy definitely started it with that shitty move he pulled, but Enzo's clearly taking the heat for it. I just hope he gets his head together before the actual game..."

I nodded, then pushed past the team. "I'll make sure of that," I said under my breath as I marched toward the locker room.

As I pushed through the door to the locker room, I didn't see Enzo straight away. His bag was sitting on the floor next to his locker, along with his jersey and his helmet. I called his name, but he didn't answer. Just then, I realized that I could hear the showers running, so I cautiously made my way over to the showers to see if he was there; I was more concerned that he was injured and had fallen or something to be concerned about potentially seeing him naked.

Suddenly, I felt a hand on my shoulder.

“What are you doing in here?” he asked. I turned around to see that Enzo was standing there; he had his shirt off, exposing his chiseled abs and chest muscles, but was still clothed other than that. There was a stern, dark look in his eyes.

“I-I came to check on you,” I said, averting my gaze as I felt my face go red. “That fight worried me.”

Enzo simply shrugged. “It was a mistake. I should’ve controlled myself, but—”

“But you wanted revenge on Ronan,” I interrupted, raising my eyes again to meet his. “After everything he did.”

Enzo paused for a moment before finally nodding solemnly. The locker room was beginning to fill with warm steam, and as it did, the image of our bodies pressed together in the shower on the night that we returned from the tunnels flashed through my mind. I wished that I could recreate that scene with Enzo here, if only he hadn’t made that deal with his father.

But then, something else crossed my mind.

“You know, you and your team should really start training,” I said. “Not with hockey, I mean. But... fighting. In your wolf forms.”

Enzo cocked his head now and folded his arms across his bare chest. “What do you mean?” he asked.

“Remember the captain at the last game?” I asked. “The one who clearly was only there to injure you? And now, Ronan intentionally tried to injure you as well — I saw what he did with his stick — and he clearly wanted to instigate a fight with you. I think you should be cautious. This could go further.”

There was a silence before Enzo finally answered, taking in a sharp breath as he did so.

“I don’t think it’ll come to that,” he said quietly, shaking his head. “Not this close to the end. Besides, they wouldn’t take a risk like that.”

“How do you know?” I asked, frowning deeply. “Ronan’s surprised us before with his scheming. For all we know, he could be plotting something else with Edward... And I know he said something to you at the end. What was it?”

Now, it was Enzo who frowned. He shook his head rapidly and abruptly pushed past me, heading toward the showers.

“It was nothing,” he said, his voice dark and cold. “Just go home. I’ll see you at the final match.”

Chapter 138: Outbreak

Nina

“Just go home,” Enzo said. “I’ll see you at the final match.”

I felt my frown deepen. Why was he being so indifferent about this? It was clear to me that Ronan was up to something, but Enzo didn’t seem to believe me. I watched as he stalked away to the showers, then turned on my heel and stormed off toward the exit.

Just as my hand touched the door handle, I heard something. Something loud and abrasive. It wasn’t just one, but many: screams.

My eyes widened. I felt myself freeze momentarily, but then I gathered the courage to crack the locker room door open...

I immediately shut it when I saw the scene unfolding in the arena and began to hyperventilate, leaning my body weight on the door as my mind raced. Outside, there were three rogues attacking people. There may have been more; I couldn’t be entirely sure just from the split second I looked out there.

I opened my mouth to call for Enzo, but decided against it as that ran the risk of being heard, so I instead quickly bolted away from the door and ran to the showers.

“Enzo!” I said as I ran up to him, just as he was about to undress. He stopped and stared at me, looking confused, but his eyes widened as he saw the look of shock and fear on my face.

“What? What’s wrong?” he asked, grabbing me by the shoulders.

I tried to stammer out a response, but nothing would come until finally, I managed a single word.

“Rogues.”

Enzo’s eyes widened even further.

“In the arena?” he asked. I nodded. “How many?”

“I-I don’t know,” I said, my chest heaving as he stormed past me toward the door.

“Three, at least.” I jogged after him and grabbed his arm for support as he approached the door. He cracked it open just as I did, then immediately shut it and took a deep breath.

“The Crescents,” he murmured. “They must be turning people. But why now? Here—” he shoved his hockey stick into my shaking hands, then pushed me away and pointed

toward a door at the back of the locker rooms that led to a supply closet. "Go and hide. I'll come back for you."

I shook my head vehemently as I gripped the hockey stick. "No way!" I insisted. "I'm going with you."

Enzo groaned, passing his hand over his face, then suddenly did something unexpected. He hugged me tightly, his scent filling my entire body.

"I promise I'll be back," he whispered into my hair. "Just stay here and stay safe."

Before I could protest, he suddenly ripped away from me and flung the door open. I yelped as I saw him bolt through, into the fray. In the brief moment that the door was open, I could see students running around, being chased by rogues. There were far more than three now, and they were making more. Just before the door closed, I saw a rogue go to bite a screaming student, but Enzo had already shifted and leaped onto the rogue.

As the door closed, the sounds of the screams became muffled. I stood there for the longest moment, still gripping the hockey stick, as I searched for Cora's presence and urged her to help me shift. I squeezed my eyes shut, pleading to shift just this once so I could be of help, but she didn't have the energy.

I cursed, glancing over at the supply closet.

I knew that Enzo wanted me to hide... But I couldn't. I had to help somehow. Maybe, if I could touch some of the rogues like I had done with Justin and Lisa, I could make them shift back into their human forms...

Finally, I took in a deep breath, the hockey stick shaking in my hands, then flung the door open and ran out.

My blood ran cold at the scene. Several students were huddled in the corners or under the bleachers as several rogues ran around rampant. I watched in one horror as one student shifted after a bite; how were they shifting so quickly? As far as I knew, it usually took hours, even days, to turn after a bite. And now they were shifting within a matter of seconds. It was almost as though these rogues had some sort of enhanced ability to turn people.

As I ran out, Enzo looked up, his red eyes flashing when he saw me.

"I told you to hide," his voice echoed in my head.

But I ignored him.

Letting out a wild yell, I sprinted up to one of the rogues just as it was about to bite a student. I reached my hand out and squeezed my eyes shut as I felt my hand come into contact with coarse, thick fur.

And then...

Skin.

I opened my eyes to see that the rogue had turned back into a confused-looking student. She collapsed onto the ground, swiveling her head around wildly.

"What... What's happening? Where am I?" she said, her voice shaking.

"Get into the locker room," I said to both the rogue student and the one she was about to bite. "Now!"

The two girls nodded and scrambled to their feet. I watched as they ran into the locker room before I turned back and made my way over to another rogue. I ran up behind it and leaped forward, touching its leg for the briefest moment.

But it wasn't enough. Maybe I didn't get enough contact, or maybe my energy was lowered from the first rogue. I wasn't sure, but I did know one thing: this rogue didn't shift back. He felt my touch, then immediately whirled around and snarled loudly. I felt my heart race with fear and a scream erupted from my throat as I put my arms up in defense.

There was a flash of silver fur. The sound of snarling. A thud. I opened my eyes, stumbling backwards, as I saw Enzo pin the rogue to the ground. They scuffled for a moment before Enzo grabbed him by the back of its neck in his jaws, then bit down.

Blood squirted everywhere. A few students nearby screamed and ran toward the locker rooms. Through the pounding of my heart, I heard Enzo's voice echo clearly in my head once more.

"Bar the door. I handle this last rogue."

I nodded, steeling my nerves and ripping my eyes away from the dead rogue who was likely once just a student at this school, and ran over to the door. Meanwhile, Enzo bolted over to the bleachers, where a rogue was terrorizing a group of students who were hiding underneath the bleachers.

"Come inside!" I called out to several students that were nearby outside. "Hurry!"

The students, without a second thought, raced for the door with rogues chasing closely behind. One girl didn't make it; a rogue got her by the ankle and dragged her away, screaming. Another boy narrowly

avoided a slash across the back from a rogue before diving into the arena at the last second, just before I slammed the doors shut and shoved the hockey stick through the handles.

The doors rattled as the rogues tried to get in, but thankfully, the doors held. For now.

“Grab anything heavy you can find!” I ordered. The students that weren’t in complete shock nodded and ran around, grabbing chairs, folding tables, and crates, and began to stack them in front of the door.

Meanwhile, the scuffle between Enzo and the final rogue stopped. I looked up from my task to see that Enzo had the rogue pinned down beneath his massive paws. He glanced up, his red eyes pleading — he didn’t want to kill the rogue if it was a fellow student. I knew what I had to do

Chapter 139: Dangerous Mission

Nina

I dropped the folding chair in my hand and sprinted over to Enzo while the rogue continued to struggle under him. Enzo looked at me, then seemed to nod as he held the rogue down tightly. I took a deep breath and crouched down.

The rogue wriggled beneath Enzo’s weight, but it was no use. This rogue was a bit smaller than the rest, and Enzo was much stronger, especially since he had the advantage over it. I finally let out the air that was trapped in my lungs as the rogue turned its head, its eyes almost pleading as though the person it once was was still trapped inside, begging me to help. To think that the Crescents knowingly were turning students against their will made me sick, but at least I could help a little bit. I felt as though I regained a bit of my strength since the first rogue I’d turned back into her human form, and I was certain I could turn this one back. I reached out and touched the center of its forehead, right between its eyes.

There was a long, pregnant pause. I began to wonder if it was working at all, and began to feel my spirits sink — but then, the rogue finally shifted back into his human form. It was a boy; a freshman, maybe, judging from the fact that he looked a little younger than I was. He looked around frantically, confusion drawn across his round face, then screamed when he saw Enzo pinning him down. Enzo immediately removed his weight from the boy’s body and I grabbed the boy by the shoulders before he tried to scramble away.

“It’s alright,” I said earnestly and calmly. “Everything will be okay. Go join the rest of the group.”

I pointed over to the group, which had grown in size now that the students from underneath the bleachers had joined. The boy nodded and ran over to them; a girl from the group ran out to meet him and threw her arms around him, sobbing.

Then, as Enzo shifted back, I stood and looked over at the one rogue who we couldn't save. I wished that I could go back and find a way to keep such a horrible thing from happening, but as the screams and sounds of growls continued outside, I knew that it was bound to happen. I didn't know how many of our classmates had turned, and I wondered if Lori and Jessica were okay.

While Enzo directed the group to the locker rooms where it was safer, I pulled out my phone and quickly dialed Lori's number. My heart raced as I waited for her to pick up...

But she didn't. I tried Jessica's number next, and it went straight to voicemail. A curse escaped my lips along with a choked sob, and suddenly, I felt the comfort of warm arms wrapping around me. Enzo's scent filled my senses as I looked up to see him gazing down at me with an apologetic look on his face.

"We'll find them," he said gently. "Don't worry."

Suddenly, however, the door rattled again. I felt another yelp catch in my throat as Enzo and I stumbled backwards, but we quickly realized that it wasn't a rogue on the other side of the door; it was someone banging on the door and screaming for help. A boy.

"Help!" his muffled voice screamed through the door. "Please let me in!"

Enzo and I quickly shot each other a glance before running over to the door in unison. We moved some of the barricade out of the way as quickly as we could and opened the door just enough for the boy to squeeze through. Right behind him was a rogue; somehow, I managed to slam the door shut just before the rogue barreled into it, nearly knocking it off its hinges. Right now, I was glad to be inside the hockey arena, where the doors were heavy and made of metal.

"Oh my god... Stand back!" Enzo shouted from behind me as I moved the barricade back. I whipped around to see that the boy was sobbing and holding his side. Blood was soaking through his shirt, and as I approached, I could see that his eyes were beginning to glow.

"He's been bitten," Enzo said, grabbing me and putting me behind himself. "We have to restrain him before it's too late."

I nodded, frantically searching the surrounding area for something — anything — that we could use to restrain him as snarls began to replace his sobs. Finally, I spotted the supply closet. "Over there!" I said, pointing. "Let's get him in there." Enzo nodded — then, just as the boy's bones began to contort as he started to shift, we rushed at him and grabbed him by either arm, dragging him kicking and struggling over to the supply

closet. With a final grunt, Enzo shoved the boy inside, then we slammed the doors shut just before the boy shifted.

“Fuck... Sorry, dude,” Enzo said, sticking a hockey stick through the door handles.

“We need to find Tiffany,” I said, panting from the struggle. “People could be injured.”

Enzo nodded and turned to look at the back entrance of the arena. “She’s supposed to be in town right now, though,” he said quietly. “Assuming she’s still human, or even alive, for that matter.”

I shook my head, thinking back to what she had told us about her history with the Peacekeepers. I was certain that she would have known what to do. For all I knew, she was on her way back now — but I couldn’t be sure.

“You stay with the students and protect them,” I said, bending down to tighten the laces on my shoes. “I’m gonna go and find her.”

“On foot? Are you crazy?” Enzo growled. “You can’t go!”

When I looked up, I saw that his face was frantic, and his eyes were wide and full of worry. I felt a tear come to my eye as I realized that this could potentially be a suicide mission, but we needed Tiffany,

and maybe I could find some of the others along the way. There was no chance that I could possibly protect the group if the rogues got into the arena again, but Enzo could certainly protect them.

“I have to do this,” I said, standing. “Trust me. You know how fast I am. And my wolf... I can’t shift, but I think she can at least give me some extra speed.”

Enzo was silent for several moments. As the rogue on the inside of the supply closet growled and scratched against the door, Enzo and I only saw each other. His eyes were sad and scared, and all I wanted was to kiss him.

So I did. I reached up and threw my arms around him, not caring about the consequences of our kiss. As our lips locked together, all I cared about was being close to him. All I cared about was the feeling of his lips on mine and the feeling of his arms slowly wrapping around me and holding me tight. If this was going to be the last time we kissed, whether it was because of one of us dying or simply because of the arranged marriage, I didn’t care. And it seemed that Enzo felt the same way.

When we finally pulled apart, we lingered close to one another for a long few moments, our foreheads pressed together and our breath mixing between us. I could feel Enzo’s hands stroking my back; I wanted to stay, but I knew that we needed help. Finally, I

stepped away. Enzo nodded solemnly and led me over to the back door — when we cracked it open, we saw that there didn't seem to be any rogues nearby.

Enzo nodded again, then stepped away from the door and pulled me in for one last, deep, passionate kiss. When our lips parted again, he opened the door for me, and I felt my heart leap.

“Run as fast as you can, and come back here safely, Nina Harper.”

Chapter 140: Run

Nina

As I ran across the field toward the line of trees, my heart pounded in my chest. Meanwhile, Enzo's last words echoed in my head.

“Run as fast as you can, and come back here safely, Nina Harper.”

Those words repeated over and over again in my mind, willing my legs to push me faster, willing my heart to pump harder. The line of trees rapidly approached, and finally, I was out of the open without being seen. I could still hear the sounds of people screaming on campus, but it had died down considerably already; there was no doubt in my mind that most of the students, including my friends, had been turned into rogues.

I crashed through the trees, swiveling my head this way and that as I kept a lookout for rogues. As I ran, I felt my wolf slowly begin to wake up, and I begged her to help me run faster. Somehow, she delivered. I felt her power surge through me, pushing me faster and giving me the agility to leap over exposed roots, fallen trees, and large rocks. With fewer leaves on the trees now, I could already see some of the rooftops of the town coming into view.

Suddenly, I heard something. I turned my head toward the sound, and felt my heart leap into my chest as I saw a rogue barreling toward me through the trees. I cursed, pushing myself faster, and weaved around trees to slow the rogue down — but it was no use. I was fast, but the rogue was faster and even more agile, and soon I could practically feel its breath on the back of my neck.

Was this really a suicide mission? Was I going to die out here?

Just then, something collided with the rogue's side and sent it rolling across the forest floor with a yelp. I took in a sharp breath and looked over my shoulder, still running, to see a big, black wolf attacking the rogue. When it looked up at me and I saw its eyes, I immediately recognized it as Matt. But I didn't

have time to stay back and thank him; I had to get to town, and I was almost there. As I pushed myself harder, I heard him scuffle with the rogue — a yowl echoed through the

forest — then... Silence. I wasn't entirely sure if it was Matt or the rogue who went silent, but judging from the fact that the rogue was no longer coming after me, I was fairly certain that Matt was victorious.

Finally, I made it to town. The streets were empty when I arrived; tables, chairs, and trash cans were strewn about, and the road was covered with the black marks of tire treads from people screeching away in their cars. I cursed to myself, looking around wildly, and stepped out into the street to cross to the cafe where Tiffany said she would be that day, when I suddenly heard the sound of more screeching tires headed straight for me. I jerked my head up before shrieking and stumbling backwards as a pink Jeep came barreling down the street.

The Jeep came to a screeching halt, and the window rolled down. Inside, Tiffany sat in the drivers' seat. I felt a wave of relief wash over me.

"Get in!" she yelled. I nodded and ran over to the car, jumping in. She hit the gas and started to drive away, but then I saw Matt running toward us, waving his arms, and I yelled out for her to stop. She hit the brakes — Matt got in — and then we took off again.

"Where is everyone?" she asked frantically as she sped down the road back to campus. Matt panted heavily in the back seat, and when I turned around, he had blood down the front of his shirt. It wasn't his blood, though. It was the rogue's.

"They're in the hockey arena," I said. "We managed to get a couple dozen students in."

Tiffany nodded solemnly. "Good. Is anyone hurt?"

"I'm not sure," I replied. "One student turned into a rogue right after we let him in. They're shifting just minutes after being bitten. Enzo and I managed to lock him in the supply closet, but—"

"Don't worry," Tiffany interrupted. We all lurched to the right as she took a sharp left turn. "I've been working on something. Hold on."

We came around the final bend in the road that led to the campus. Before I could ask what she meant when she said she'd been working on something, Tiffany pushed down all the way on the gas pedal and sent us barreling across the athletic field in a cloud of dust and clods of dirt and grass. As we drove, I looked out the window and saw dozens of rogues lifting their heads and running toward the car. A few of them threw their heads back and howled, which made the hair on the back of my neck stand on end, but the car was thankfully too fast for them to keep up.

"Where's the rest of the team?" I asked Matt.

“They scattered,” he said, still panting. “Several of them went to see who they could find and get into the dorms, but the others... I don’t know. They got scared.”

“Thank you for saving me,” I said. “I would’ve died.”

Matt didn’t answer; I knew that he was still processing the situation. To save me, he’d had to kill someone else. Someone who didn’t sign up for any of this.

“When I stop the car, you guys run in, okay?” Tiffany said as we approached the back of the hockey arena. “Matt, reach into the back there — grab my medical bag.”

“Roger that,” Matt replied as he grabbed the bag.

Tiffany brought the Jeep to a screeching halt. Then, all at once, we flung the doors open and bolted for the arena. As though Enzo was standing there waiting for us the entire time, the door suddenly swung open and he ushered us in, slamming it shut behind us and sliding the deadbolt through. Tiffany didn’t

say a word — she only stormed off toward the supply closet, its doors rattling from the trapped rogue clawing at it. Matt shot Enzo a somber nod before running after her.

I turned to look at Enzo. His face was drawn with relief, and without a word, he pulled me into a tight hug. I felt my adrenaline start to drain away, leaving me feeling empty and weak, and I relaxed into his arms.

“You did good,” he murmured, pressing his lips against my forehead and making me shiver. I was too exhausted to speak, but we didn’t have time; we had to help Tiffany. She was crouched on the floor by the supply closet and was rifling through her medical bag. Enzo and I pulled away from each other, both of our faces red, and jogged over to her just as she finished filling a syringe with a strange, blue liquid.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“It’s an antidote. I haven’t come up with a name for it yet,” Tiffany said, flicking the side of the syringe. “The working title is Were-B-Gone, but that’s just silly. Now... On the count of three, Matt and Nina, I want you to open the doors. Enzo, can you restrain the rogue?” Enzo nodded. “Good,” she continued. “I’m going to inject it with this, and it should cure it entirely.”

I was skeptical about this strange antidote, but I knew I just had to trust Tiffany. Without a word, Matt and I got in our places on either side of the doors. Enzo readied himself to restrain the rogue, and then Tiffany began to count down.

“Three... Two... One!