

My Hockey Alpha #Chapter 181 The Return of a Friend - Read My Hockey Alpha Chapter 181 The Return of a Friend

Chapter 181 The Return of a Friend

Nina

A couple of hours later, I arrived at the diner with Lori, Jessica, and the hockey team to volunteer. Even though I was exhausted from my night of sleeping in the freezing cold in the woods, the thought of having something like this to distract me and help my community gave me something to look forward to, and the hot coffee that Phil offered us helped sweeten the deal as well.

Soon enough, we were all working hard to provide food to our community. Phil had a couple of the hockey players drive around town and post signs, and the dean sent out a campus-wide text announcing the food drive. Before I knew it, we were busily giving plates of hot food to students and Mountainview residents alike, and we were having a bit of fun while doing it as well. I didn't even realize it at the time, but hours went by without worrying about Enzo.

Around noon, another familiar face showed up to volunteer at the food drive. It was Justin.

"Um... Hey, Nina," he said, walking up to me with his hands in his pockets. "Can I help with the food drive?"

I couldn't help but smile. Justin had never really been the type to volunteer as long as I had known him, so this sudden change in attitude was a welcome discovery. I happily agreed and handed him an apron.

"You can help us hand out food," I said, gesturing to the table that was set up outside beneath a pop-up tent. I then led him inside to the kitchen, where the other volunteers were working hard to prepare hot meals for people. There were various meals to choose from, all of which were packaged in cardboard takeout containers for people to take: pancakes, eggs and sausages, soup and bread... Anything that Phil still had in the freezers. He even had us handing out cookies and slices of cake with each meal, and there was a constant stream of fresh, hot coffee and tea being handed out in takeout cups.

Justin helped me carry a few more trays of food out to the table, then stood beside me and helped me hand them out. The line of hungry students and Mountainview residents stretched all the way across the parking lot, and having an extra pair of hands to help was much appreciated.

"You know, I think it's really awesome that you're doing this," Justin said as he worked alongside me. "This town really needs you."

I shrugged. "It was Phil's idea. I'm just here to help."

"Yeah," Justin replied, then gestured around at the tables and all of the other volunteers. "But you've taken charge so easily. You're really good at stuff like this, Nina."

I couldn't help but blush a little at Justin's kind words. I hadn't actually meant to take charge; it just sort of happened. But back at the beginning of the semester, I wouldn't have been able to take charge like this so easily even if someone had begged me to do it; maybe everything that happened did help me gain some confidence. Either that, or seeing how the Fullmoons refused to be of any real help gave me the drive to pick up the slack and fill in where they were lacking. Regardless, I supposed that it was a positive change in some ways. I just wished that the circumstances behind my confidence gain were different.

"Um... Thanks," I said. I paused, handing a student a box of food and a wrapped cookie, then directed her over to the coffee table for a hot drink. She smiled and thanked me meekly, then shuffled away and the next person came up to the table. "What made you want to volunteer, by the way?" I asked, glancing over at Justin.

Justin pursed his lips and shrugged. He paused then and turned to look at me; when he did, his eyes were genuine and sweet, much like the boy who I had first met — before he cheated on me. And before Edward brainwashed him.

"I dunno. I know that I've always been a bit of an ass," he said, hanging his head a bit and staring at the pavement as he spoke. "I was selfish. But... After everything that happened this semester... After seeing your kind, smiling face when I was stuck as a rogue... I guess your kindness imprinted on me somehow. And I want to be different now. I want to be better, and it's all because of you."

As Justin spoke, my heart fluttered a bit in my chest. I couldn't help but smile at his words. It was so unexpected to hear Justin talk like this, and for a moment, I was reminded of our nights spent together hanging out on the hockey bleachers or behind the arena. If only it hadn't been sullied by his cheating... I really did care for him back then. But now, I loved Enzo.

And even if I never met Enzo, I didn't think that I could ever get over what Justin did to me, no matter how much he changed.

...

The food drive went on for the better part of the day, until all of our food supplies were finally depleted. Once the tents and the tables were put away, I sent all of the other volunteers home and decided to stay behind on my own to clean up the kitchen while

Phil worked in his office to order more food — assuming that the shipping companies could even get here, if all of the surrounding towns were really overrun. There was still no local news coverage thanks to the local satellite stations being knocked out by the Crescents, so we had no real way of knowing for sure, and it was too remote out in these parts for outsiders to even know what was happening. But at the very least, there was some comfort in knowing that the rogues wouldn't be able to spread easily. We were located on an island and the only way off was via ferry or airplane. I hated that fact most of the time, but right now, it was a blessing in a way. I just wished that we weren't so isolated, so that we could get help.

While I was working and thinking about all of this, I suddenly heard the bell on the front door chime. I looked up and opened my mouth to tell the guest that we were all out of food, but when I looked through the kitchen window, my eyes widened.

It was Luke.

I didn't waste a moment. I threw down my dish towel and bolted out of the kitchen, running around the counter to throw my arms around him.

We hugged each other tightly for several long moments before we finally pulled away. When we did, there were tears in both of our eyes.

"What happened?" I said, wiping my tears away and gesturing to him. I thought that he had reverted to being a skeleton, but he stood in front of me now in full flesh. "Enzo told me you lost your human disguise. And Edward..."

Luke shook his head, smiling. "I sent Edward running for the hills," he said. "And after that, I found a witch. She gave me a new disguise and opened a portal for me."

I couldn't help but grin and throw my arms around my friend again. A wild laugh escaped my throat; not only was I thrilled to have Luke back, but it was also a good sign. If Luke could return, then so could Enzo.

"Where is Enzo?" Luke asked once we pulled away again, looking around.

It was then, however, that my tears of joy turned into tears of sadness. I couldn't stop it; my face twisted into a sob, and I felt my heart sink just thinking about Enzo.

"What's wrong?" Luke asked, his eyes widening. "Is he okay?"

I didn't know where to begin; Luke had so much to be caught up on. So, we sat in a booth and I explained everything. When I was finished, Luke's face was shocked. He reached across the table and took my hand while I sniffled quietly, and looked deeply into my eyes.

"We'll find him," Luke said gently, squeezing my hand. "I promise."

Chapter 182 Loyalty

Enzo

After Selena touched me, I blacked out. I didn't wake up again until much later, when the sun was shining through my window.

My head was still stuck in a thick fog as it reeled dizzily. Once the dizziness began to pass, I groaned and pushed myself up to a seated position as I took in my surroundings; slowly, I began to recognize the room I was in now as the bedroom I had been given the last time I was at the Alpha King's mansion. There was a pounding in my head, however, leaving me wondering how I even got in this room. The last thing I remembered was leaving the Alpha King's study with Selena. I remembered that my father had been acting strange, as though he didn't even know how or why I left and had no recollection of helping me escape, and when I tried to say something about it, Selena must have used some sort of spell on me to keep me from speaking.

Suddenly, as I slowly came to my senses, I began to notice something shifting beside me in the bed. I slowly turned my head, my eyes widening. Selena was lying next to me.

How did she get here? I didn't remember anything after she touched my forehead with her thumb, right after we left the Alpha King's study...

Almost as though she hadn't even been sleeping at all, her eyes suddenly shot open and looked straight at me. A lazy smile spread across her face and she stretched, showing off her midriff in her shirt, and rolled over onto her side to look at me.

"Good morning, handsome," she cooed, her voice low and thick like molasses. "That was amazing."

I frowned as I tried to rack my brain. "What are you talking about?" I asked, feeling myself begin to panic ever so slightly despite how hard I tried to keep myself calm. "What was amazing?"

Selena chuckled. "Well, last night, of course!" she replied with a wry chuckle. "Don't you remember, silly? I thought you wanted to wait until marriage... What changed your mind?"

My eyes widened. No... I couldn't have had sex with Selena. I didn't remember anything from the night before. I quickly jumped up and backed away from the bed, shaking my head vigorously. "We didn't have sex," I said, feeling my heart begin to race and my stomach start to turn. "We couldn't have."

Selena's smile turned into a pout. She pushed her lower lip out like a child and batted her eyelashes. "You... You really don't remember?" she said, her voice quivering theatrically. "It was our first time. I thought it was special..."

I paused. I couldn't believe that I would have been unfaithful to Nina. No... I simply wouldn't believe it. But I also couldn't alert Selena to anything being awry, so once again, I had to play into her game. I furrowed my brow as though I was thinking, then forced a smile and approached the bed again.

"You know what?" I said, sitting on the edge of the bed. "I do remember. I'm sorry... I'm just tired."

Selena grinned once more and sat up. She was wearing a tight little shirt and shorts that practically looked like underwear, and I hated to say it, but she looked... hot. In fact, the longer I looked at her, the less Nina's face showed clearly in my mind.

It was only for a split second, but I swore as I looked at Selena's body that the name "Nina" wasn't even a name I'd heard before... Who was Nina?

No! I thought to myself, shaking my head and tearing my gaze away from Selena. She was clearly using some sort of spell on me. Of course I knew who Nina was; she was the love of my life, and I wouldn't have had sex with Selena because I loved Nina and only ever wanted to be faithful to her. I had to get my father and get out of this place so I could return to Nina, who would be my mate once I paid the witch to lift her curse. I couldn't let Selena's magic make me forget so easily. I had to fight it.

"So," Selena said, breaking my train of thought, "what do you want to do today? I wanna go on a date. We can go shopping, or go to the movies, or..."

I shook my head, still keeping my gaze away from her. "I'm really tired, actually," I said as I tried to keep my tone of voice as nonchalant and innocent as possible. "I'm sorry. Maybe we can go tomorrow?"

Selena paused. I felt my heart leap into my throat as I wondered what she would say or do next, but much to my surprise, she didn't fuss over it.

"No problem," she replied in an almost sing-song voice. She then sauntered over to the door; I could see the way she swung her hips seductively in the corner of my eye, but I kept my gaze glued to the floor in front of me so as not to be compelled by her tricks again. "Tomorrow, then. Get some rest... I'll see you later tonight for round two."

I nodded, forcing out an uncomfortable chuckle. "Sure thing," I lied, although I knew fully well that I would somehow get my father and get the hell out of here before that happened. "I'll see you later."

As soon as I was alone, I began pacing and scheming ways to get out. I couldn't waste any time, but I also had to be tactful about it. Maybe, if I just waited a little bit and then found my father, making it look like I was just sitting with him for lunch or something, I could use it as my chance to tell him what was going on and get him out of here. But would he even believe me, or were Selena's spells already too deeply ingrained in his

mind? I almost began to wonder if I should just make a run for myself and find someone to open a portal for me in the nearest town, but I just couldn't bring myself to leave my father like that. Not only that, but Selena was sure to be watching me like a hawk. I was such a fool for thinking that she actually bought anything that I said the night before in the woods. If anything, I was the one who got led into her trap.

But there had to be something I could do.

Suddenly, I had an idea: the Alpha King. I was supposed to meet with him this morning to discuss the wedding. If I could get there a little early and tell him everything, he was sure to believe me.

Without another moment wasted, I quickly got dressed and flung the door open to go and find the Alpha King before the meeting began.

But, as it turned out, I was right about Selena watching me like a hawk. She must have made her wolf retract her scent, just as I had the night before, because I didn't pick up her scent through the door. And she was still standing there with a big grin on her face.

"Naughty boy," she said, placing her hand on my chest and shoving me back into my room. "I knew you'd be up to no good. But that's okay; I know how to handle bad boys."

Chapter 183 Stood Up

Nina

"Don't worry," Luke said from across the table as he squeezed my hand gently. "We'll find Enzo. I promise."

Luke's kind words were a comfort, but even so, I had no way of getting to Enzo. "I don't know anyone who can open a portal," I said, "and before you offer, I'm not gonna let you lose your disguise again just so you can do it for me. I know how happy it makes you to not have to hide yourself and to be able to show expressions, so I won't let you do it."

Luke frowned and shook his head. "I could care less about looking like a human," he insisted. "Finding Enzo is more important. If everything you said about that Selena girl is true, then Enzo could be in serious danger. How many days has it been now?"

"Two," I replied.

"Enzo would have come back by now if it was a simple matter of getting his dad and coming back. His dad's an Alpha; he can open portals on his own. They would have been here by now."

My friend's words, although well-meaning, hit me like a ton of bricks and instantly made me feel as though I would cry again at any moment. "You really think so?" I whimpered. "You think Enzo is in trouble?"

Luke shook his head again. "I can't be entirely sure. But we can find out. I promise; we'll be in and out in no time, we'll find Enzo and his dad, and we'll come back."

I sighed, thinking about this possibility. It was risky, but if my dreams about Enzo were true... If Selena really was controlling him and somehow making him forget about me... Then I needed to find him. Maybe, if I walked right up to the Alpha King and showed him to his face that I was his lost daughter,

then I could stop anything truly horrible from happening to Enzo. I just wished that I still had my wolf here to help guide me. I couldn't even follow Enzo's scent.

"Alright," I finally said with a sigh. "Let's do it."

"Good." Luke stood with a confident smile on his face. "First thing in the morning, at sunrise. Meet me out in the woods behind the hockey arena. Wear something dark with a hood, and shoes you can run in if you need to. Oh, and bring some supplies, just in case we need to travel a bit."

I nodded. This was very sudden, and it was a lot to take in, but if it would help me bring Enzo home safely, then I would do whatever it would take.

"Can I bring Lori and Jessica?" I asked then.

Luke paused, biting his lip, then shook his head once more. "I think it's best if we keep it to a minimum," he said quietly. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay."

I sighed as I watched Luke leave; he seemed so full of vigor, as though he was almost too confident that this would work despite the fact that so many things could go wrong. But maybe, I thought to myself as I finished cleaning up the kitchen, it wouldn't hurt to have such a positive outlook of my own.

...

That night, I explained everything to Lori and Jessica when I got home; we did promise, after all, that we would no longer lie or hide anything from each other, and I wanted them to know what was happening in case things didn't turn out as planned.

"You're doing what?" Lori asked, her voice practically a growl. "Are you insane?"

I sighed, staring down at the floor. My bag was already packed and sat by the door, waiting for me so I could just get dressed and leave first thing in the morning.

"Nina, it's only been two days," Jessica said, a bit more gently than Lori. "He'll be okay. I think you're jumping the gun a bit here."

I shook my head and finally met my friends' gazes. "No," I insisted. "Something is wrong. I... I can sense it, somehow. I keep having these dreams that feel like omens. I have to look for him."

"At least let us come with you, then," Lori said with a frown as she folded her arms across her chest.

"I can't let you guys go," I replied. "Luke and I need to be fast, and we need to get in and out without being seen. We can't have too many people with us, and besides... If something happens, I need you two here so you can tell the Fullmoons what's going on."

There was a silence. I knew that my friends were royally pissed at me, but what could I do? Besides, I did have Luke with me. He fought off Edward on his own, and he could open portals. Plus, he knew his way around the werewolf realm well. I would be safe with him.

Finally, my friends seemed to understand.

"Alright," Jessica said, sounding rather reluctant. "But you have to swear that you'll come back. If you don't, I'll kill you."

"And then I'll kill you again," Lori added, although there was a bit of a playful smirk on her face when I looked up to meet her gaze.

I nodded and hugged my friends tightly. "Thank you guys," I said, blinking away the tears in my eyes. "I love you both."

...

Early the next morning, I made my way to the woods behind the hockey arena, just as Luke said. Lori and Jessica came along to see me off and keep me company while I waited.

But, as it turned out, we wound up waiting for a lot longer than we expected. Before I knew it, it was already an hour past the time that Luke was supposed to meet me. To top it all off, I had no way of contacting him or knowing where he went. Had he gotten caught up with something? Did Myra or one of the other Fullmoons catch him and make him stop before he could open the portal for me?

“Um... Are you sure he’s coming?” Jessica asked, glancing at the time on her phone. “It’s been a while.”

I shifted my backpack on my shoulder and stood my ground. “He’ll come. He said he would.”

“Yeah, but...” Lori pushed herself off of the tree she was leaning on and came over to me. “Maybe he had a change of heart. Or maybe he decided to go by himself so you wouldn’t be in danger.”

Hot tears began to prick at the backs of my eyes. I pursed my lips and shook my head. “No,” I insisted. “He’ll come.”

Eventually, after another hour and a half of waiting, Lori and Jessica got tired of standing around for nothing and said their goodbyes before leaving. I stood my ground, however, holding onto the shred of hope that Luke would come and open the portal so we could find Enzo.

But he never came.

It was almost dark by the time I finally let go of that small shred of hope. Tears streamed down my cheeks as I slowly made my way back toward my dorm, cursing Luke in my mind for getting me all excited for nothing. Surely there had to be a reason for this. If not... Why would he stand me up like that?

As I walked across the quad, feeling the tears dry on my cheeks and the hope leave my body, I suddenly heard someone calling my name.

“Nina!”

“Luke?” I whispered, jerking my head up excitedly.

But it wasn’t Luke. It was Justin.

“Hey, Nina!” Justin called, jogging up to me. “I’m glad I found you. I wanted to ask— Hey, is everything okay? You look like you’ve been crying.”

I blinked quickly and nodded, staring at the ground. “Yeah,” I lied. “I’m fine. What’s—”

But before I could finish speaking, Justin’s arms suddenly wrapped around me. I stiffened for a moment, feeling myself tense up beneath his touch.

And yet, for a brief moment, I couldn’t help but relax into his arms as he comforted me there on the quad

Chapter 184 Remembrance

Enzo

I woke up to the sun streaming through my window and the sound of the birds chirping outside. There was a soft smile on my face as I held the love of my life in my arms, and as I listened to her gentle breathing, I couldn't help but bend down and kiss the dark hair on top of her head.

"Mmm... Enzo..."

Her voice was soft and gentle, like music to my ears. It made my smile widen, and I pushed myself up onto my elbow, planting a kiss on her nose. I watched her eyes flicker open below me, and she smiled up at me.

"Good morning, Selena," I whispered.

Selena grinned. "Good morning, handsome."

I planted another kiss on her forehead, then sat up fully and rubbed my tired eyes. Our wedding day was ticking closer, slowly but surely, and I couldn't be more excited. This morning, we were supposed to meet with her father, the Alpha King, to discuss the mating ceremony.

"Did you sleep well?" she asked, sitting up and leaning her chin on my shoulder while her finger traced circles on my back, sending shivers down my spine.

I nodded. "I slept very well," I said. "Although... I had a weird dream..."

"Hmm?" Selena responded, furrowing her brow. "Is everything okay?"

"Yes, of course," I replied, closing my eyes against the warmth of the sun as I pictured my dream. "It was just... Well, it was stupid. I shouldn't even bother."

"Come on," Selena insisted. "Please tell me."

I nodded and let out a sigh. "Okay. Well... I dreamed that you put a spell on me. There was this other girl, and she looked a lot like you. I think she was your twin or something? Anyway... In my dream, this girl was supposed to be my mate or something, but you put a spell on me to make me forget her and you were holding me captive here. Isn't that dumb?"

I let out a chuckle. When I opened my eyes and turned to face Selena, however, she was not laughing; in fact, her face was twisted into a pained scowl. "What do you mean?" she whimpered, scooting away from me and folding her arms across my chest. "D-Do you really think I would do something like that? W-Would you leave me for another girl?"

“What?” I responded, spinning around to face my bride-to-be. “Of course not, baby! I would never think either of those things! You know how much I love you.”

Selena paused, pouting for a moment, and stared down at her lap. I heard her snuffle, and it made my heart ache. I knew I shouldn’t have told her about that dream. It was meaningless, and it only hurt her feelings.

“Baby...” I cooed, wrapping my arms around her and pulling her closer, “you know it was just a dream. It doesn’t mean anything. In fact, the longer I stay awake, the less I can even remember it.”

Selena was silent for a few moments. I gently rocked her back and forth and kissed the top of her head until she finally tilted her head back and looked up at me with her big, round eyes.

“Promise?” she whispered?

Her eyes were so mesmerizing as I looked into them... So blue and hypnotic... In fact, now that I thought about it, I couldn’t even remember what I had said just now to begin with.

“I promise,” I responded with a smile. “You’re my one and only.”

...

That morning, we got ready for breakfast. I put on the suit that Selena picked out for me and met her down in front of the dining hall, where the Alpha King, the Luna, and my father awaited us. Today was a big day; today, we would be choosing the location of our mating ceremony.

I had only recently returned to the mansion. Just a few days prior, I was off fighting against the evil Crescents, an opposing faction of werewolves that wanted to take over the world. We won a bloody battle, and finally I returned home. The entire time I fought, I only kept thinking about Selena’s beautiful face waiting for me, praying for me to come home safely. Sometimes, I got her eye color a little confused — I think it was just the stress from all of the fighting, but I sometimes pictured her as having brown eyes instead of blue eyes — and sometimes I accidentally messed up her name, thinking that she was called Nina. When I told her this after finally coming home, she only laughed and gave me a special tea that she said would help with the stress of the battle. When I drank it, I stopped making these mistakes for the most part, although I did occasionally have a strange dream here or there, or a moment where I thought that Selena was up to something sinister. I knew, however, that it was just from the fighting. I was only home for a few days, and I was already beginning to feel much better; soon, I wouldn’t be having these issues at all.

The servants opened the doors to the dining hall. Selena and I smiled at each other before walking in, holding hands. I strode over to the table ahead of her and pulled her chair out before taking a seat myself.

"It's so nice to see young love, isn't it?" the Alpha King asked, turning to face the Luna. "Remember when we were like that?"

The Luna only shrugged. I didn't think that she liked me very much; whenever she looked at me, she was incredibly cold. I could sense a bit of hatred behind her eyes, and I wasn't entirely sure why. But she didn't ever seem to act on that hatred, so I didn't pay it much attention.

Selena grinned, not noticing her step-mother's coldness, and placed her hand on my thigh.

"Enzo and I were talking, and we think we might want to have the mating ceremony out by the big pond," she said. "You know, the one out in the woods a little ways."

"Ah." The Alpha King smiled amicably and cut his sausage with a fork and knife. "That's a beautiful spot. Maybe today we can ride out there and take a look. All of us. Wouldn't that be nice?"

My father, who had been incredibly quiet as of late, only nodded. I glanced over at him; he hadn't yet touched his food.

"Are you okay, dad?" I asked, leaning over and patting his shoulder. "Tired?"

My father simply shook his head. He'd been pale lately, and getting thinner by the day. He even looked several years older; if this went on for long, I wanted him to see a doctor, but Selena and the Luna both insisted that he was fine. I couldn't help but believe them; they were both skilled with medicine.

But as my father sat there, speechless and shivering, his gaze slid over to me.

And there was more behind his eyes than just exhaustion.

He looked terrified, and his eyes seemed to be pleading for me to run away as fast as I could.

But why would I run from the love of my life

Chapter 185 Lost Hope

Nina

A few more days passed, but I couldn't get Enzo out of my head no matter how hard I tried. I knew that something was wrong; I could sense it. Luke never returned, either, and no matter how many times I wandered the campus and the town in search of him, I couldn't find him. I didn't know what happened to him exactly, but I somehow suspected that Selena had something to do with it. Was she watching me? Did she know that I planned to get to the werewolf realm, and made sure that my chances of accomplishing that were destroyed?

Finally, I decided that I had had enough. I needed to talk to the Fullmoons; Richard was still their Alpha, and Enzo was their Alpha's son. They needed to find both of them before it was too late. Even though Enzo insisted that Selena didn't have the capacity to kill anyone, I wasn't so sure.

When I arrived at the Fullmoon camp out at the cabins one afternoon, I was shocked to find that all of them were sitting around the fire. No one seemed to be patrolling, which was what they were supposed to do. Did they really think that we were so safe here? Did they honestly think that the Crescents couldn't return at any time once they got wind of the fact that the Fullmoons' Alpha was missing?

As I approached, Lewis looked up and his face went dark.

"Hello, Nina," he said, taking his last bite off of the chicken leg that he was eating and tossing the bone into the fire. "Can I help you?"

I stopped in front of the fire and folded my arms across my chest, willing myself to have the confidence to stand up for myself. "Enzo and Richard still haven't returned," I said, staring down my nose at him. "Aren't you concerned? We need to go after them."

Lewis only chuckled. A few of the other Fullmoons chuckled along with him, which astonished me. "They'll be fine," he said, sounding amused. "They're with the Alpha King. In fact, they're probably

drawing up plans as we speak. You don't need to worry."

My eyes widened with incredulity. "You have to be kidding," I replied, dropping my arms and balling my hands up into fists at my sides. "You're not even a little concerned? Seriously?"

"Don't you have something better to do?" Lewis said, standing. Even standing, he wasn't much taller than me, but he was still intimidating. "I thought you and your little 'pack' were gonna take things into your own hands. If you're so concerned, why don't you go and look for him yourself?"

My gaze slid over then to Myra, who only stared at me with wide eyes from the other side of the fire. It felt as though she was the only one who didn't approve of Lewis' sudden takeover of the pack. "Maybe we will," I said, tearing my gaze away from her to

stare up at Lewis with confidence. "And when Richard returns, you'll be in a whole lot of trouble."

Lewis only scoffed, but I didn't care. If he was going to mock me and be so indifferent toward his own Alpha, then he could rot for all I cared. The New Peacekeepers had taken things into their own hands before, and we would do it again. Without another word, I turned on my heel and stormed off into the woods, back to the place where Myra last opened the portal for Enzo. Somehow, I knew that she would follow me.

And I was right.

I was standing there for barely twenty minutes before I heard the sound of dry leaves crunching underfoot, and looked up to see Myra approaching. She seemed hurried, and kept glancing over her shoulder in a paranoid manner.

"We have to be quick," she said as she walked up to me. "I'm going to help you. I'm just as worried as you are."

I nodded, feeling relieved at least that someone was on my side in this.

Myra took a deep breath as she stood in front of the open space between two trees, then began to make the swirling motion with her fingers to open the portal.

But nothing happened.

She tried again, and still nothing happened. The portal wouldn't open.

"What the hell?" she muttered, staring at her fingers.

"What's going on?" I asked, my eyes wide with concern.

Myra shook her head. "I don't know. I can't open a portal for some reason... This has never happened before." Slowly, she looked up to meet my gaze. We stared at each other for several long moments in shock. First Luke going missing, and now this? Selena was surely doing something to keep me from getting to Enzo. I was sure of it.

I felt utterly stranded and hopeless.

...

Soon, a week passed. Then, another week. Before I knew it, it had been three weeks since Enzo left, and no matter how much I tried to find a way to get to him, all of my attempts were stopped in some way. My pack, the New Peacekeepers, were just as baffled as I was. Even Matt and the others tried to learn how to open portals, but all of their attempts failed.

We truly were stranded here with no way to get to Enzo.

But even so, there was still much to do. The Fullmoons were clearly not planning on helping our surrounding towns, and there were even rumors floating about that they were planning on leaving soon,

which would leave us mostly defenseless. The New Peacekeepers and I would be the town's only source of protection, and we were extremely low on Tiffany's antidote.

Every day, I spent my time from sunrise to sunset in the infirmary. Not only did I have to take over Tiffany's job, but I also had to try and figure out how she made the antidote, and my only guide was a small, handwritten note that she had left. The notes were incomplete and hard to read, and her laptop had been destroyed during the attack, so I couldn't look through her digital files for any help.

Because of this, my attempts to replicate the antidote consistently failed. As time ticked on, I slowly began to grow more and more hopeless. Enzo was gone, Luke was gone, Tiffany was gone, and my wolf was gone. Even though I still had the love and support of Lori, Jessica, Matt and the others, I still felt alone. At least Tiffany would have been able to help with all of this; but we couldn't even find her body. I just wished that I could build a time machine and go back to the beginning of the semester, before all of this began. But I supposed that even then, the Crescents still would have come and tried to ruin us all. There was no stopping that.

And especially now, with Lewis clearly taking over the Fullmoons — who were supposed to be our one last hope, our one last chance at saving everyone — with no real intention of actually helping, we really were out here like sitting ducks, just waiting for the Crescents to return.

And yet, night after night, I didn't dream of the Crescents returning. I only dreamed of Enzo, and woke up every night where that portal last opened, praying for his return

Chapter 186 Strange Familiarity

Enzo

Weeks passed by, and my highly anticipated wedding with Selena ticked closer. We decided to hold off a little bit until New Years' Eve; Selena didn't specify why, exactly, she wanted to wait, but I didn't complain. I was just happy to be getting married to the love of my life.

One day, I was sitting in a chair by the big window in my bedroom when Selena came in with a grin on her face.

"Hey, handsome," she said, coming up to me and sitting on my lap.

I smiled and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "Hey," I said. "What's up?"

"Well..." She paused for a moment, her eyes studying my face. "I was thinking it might be fun if we went on a little trip together. Just you and me. I thought it might be nice to get away from the mansion for a little bit."

"Sure," I replied, my smile widening. "Where do you want to go?"

Selena pursed her lips, thinking for a moment, before she seemed to have an idea. "Have you ever heard of a town known as Mountainview?"

I furrowed my brow. The name was somewhat familiar, but... "No," I said, shaking my head. "I don't think I've ever heard of it."

Selena grinned and jumped up from my lap. "Perfect, then," she said. "It'll make it even more fun. But, there's a catch."

"What is it?" I asked, cocking my head.

I watched as Selena paced back and forth a little bit. She tapped her chin as she walked, thinking, before she finally stopped and turned back to face me again. "We'll have to wear disguises," she said. "I don't want anyone to know that I'm the Alpha King's daughter. It might draw too much attention and ruin our fun."

"Okay..." I leaned back in my chair and intertwined my fingers on my lap curiously. Selena hadn't expressed concern over being recognized in public as long as I had known her, but maybe this town of 'Mountainview' was different in some way.

"Of course, they'll be magical disguises, so we'll still look the same as we always do to each other," she said in a sing-song voice. "But no one else will recognize us. Oh, and let's use fake names, too. I'll be... hmm... I'll call myself 'Sadie', and you can go by 'Eli'. Does that sound good?"

I was still admittedly a bit confused by all of these precautions, but I wasn't going to argue with my fiancée. If it would make her happy to hide our identities like that, then I would do it for her. I nodded and smiled in agreement, and with that, our plans were set.

...

A few days later, Selena and I were all packed up and ready to go to 'Mountainview'. We were going to stay for a couple of weeks, which I felt was a long time, but I didn't complain. The mansion did get stuffy at times, so I was excited to go. Besides: Selena explained to me that this town was known for hockey, which was something I always enjoyed. I hadn't skated much in years, but I used to skate all of the time as a kid...

Or, wait, I thought as we prepared to leave. Didn't I play on a hockey team recently?

I shook my head. No. It must have been another one of my moments of confusion from all of the fighting. I hadn't played on a hockey team since high school.

Either way, I was excited to go. Selena, who also wore a wig for reasons unbeknownst to me, prepared our disguises with a potion that we both drank. I felt a tingling sensation in my body after a few moments, which meant that it must have been working. Even though I still looked exactly like myself in the mirror, Selena assured me that no one would recognize me. Apparently, the potion would change my scent as well. Once again, I thought that extra precaution was a bit odd, but I decided not to think about it too much. Instead, I chose to just be excited for a vacation with my fiancée.

Once we were ready, Selena opened a portal. We stepped through the portal and out into a small apartment.

The apartment was oddly familiar. I furrowed my brow as I looked around at the kitchen and the living room, but that sense of strange familiarity grew even more as I stepped into the bedroom. A strange scent filled my nostrils there, leaving my head feeling dizzy.

And for the briefest of moments, I pictured myself here, living my life as a college student.

But... That couldn't be true. I never went to college, and I had never seen this apartment before.

"I know it's not the fanciest," Selena said, opening the curtains and looking out the window over what looked like a college campus. "But I figured it would be fun to immerse ourselves here for a little while. You know... To really feel like college students. Wouldn't that be fun?"

I nodded and walked up behind Selena, wrapping my arms around her as I looked down at the brick quad below. The campus seemed a little shabby, as though it had recently been struck by some kind of disaster. Maybe the Crescents came here at some point? Either way, it looked fine now.

And for some reason, seeing that this strange campus seemed to be alright comforted me. In fact, the more I thought about it, the happier I became; it was as though I had been hoping all along that this place would be okay, as though I had been worried about it. But that was silly.

That evening, Selena got dressed in one of my favorite outfits: a tight sweater, a short skirt with tights, and her hair up. I loved when she dressed like this, and I couldn't stop myself from wrapping my arm around her waist as we walked to the hockey arena, where there was supposedly going to be a game.

We purchased VIP tickets and made our way up to the box seats. As we got settled, I couldn't help but feel another strange sense of familiarity, but I brushed it off as just having nostalgia for my time on the hockey team when I was in high school.

"Oh, how cute," Selena said, nuzzling into the crook of my arm as we sat and watched the hockey team skate out onto the ice.

I nodded, but I couldn't deny the lump in my throat. For the briefest of moments, I swore I recognized all of the players. I recognized them well, as though we were old friends. And, during those moments, I felt Fio — my wolf — react strongly inside of me, as though he recognized them, too.

But that moment quickly faded. The game began, and Selena and I were on the edges of our seats, watching intensely.

Something else caught my eye, however. Something other than the game; a girl. She was standing by the side of the rink with a medical bag by her feet, and the longer I looked at her, the more I realized that she looked almost exactly like Selena...

And when she looked up at me and caught my gaze, I swore I knew her

Chapter 187 Transfer Students

Nina

Every day, I met with Myra in the forest to try and open a portal. But each time we met, she still couldn't do it — and by that point, her absences were being noticed by the Fullmoons. Eventually, if we weren't careful, Lewis would catch on. We didn't want that to happen because both of us knew that he couldn't be trusted. For some reason, he clearly didn't want Richard and Enzo to return, and I was certain that he would keep us from getting to the werewolf realm for good.

So, we eventually had to stop. I threw myself into replicating the antidote as a way to distract myself and give myself purpose. Night after night was spent sitting up in the infirmary until all hours, trying recipe after recipe to no avail. No matter what I did, I just couldn't replicate that bright blue color. Even with Lori, Jessica, and Matt's help, I couldn't figure it out. And yet, in a strange way, it almost felt as though I didn't even want to figure it out; because if I figured it out, then I wouldn't have anything to distract me from Enzo anymore. And if I thought about Enzo too much, I was certain that I would go insane from missing him.

Finally, the day of the dean's hockey game arrived. I really didn't want to go as even setting foot into the arena reminded me relentlessly of Enzo, but it was my duty to go as the team doctor. And, admittedly, I was intrigued.

I was intrigued because there were rumors that morning of two new transfer students, named Sadie and Eli, who were coming to the hockey game. For some reason, I almost couldn't help but secretly hope that these two new students were somehow linked to Enzo, but I knew that was silly. They were just regular transfer students, after all. I was probably only having these strange thoughts because I still couldn't stop dreaming about Enzo, and I was losing a lot of sleep because of it. Surely I wasn't thinking logically.

But even then, I couldn't help but wonder why two transfer students would even want to transfer here after what happened, to begin with. Something about it made me uneasy, and I wanted to see these students in the flesh.

The game was held on a cold Friday night, three weeks after Enzo disappeared. It wasn't really an official game, but rather a simple friendly scrimmage. Our team — with Matt as the new captain while Enzo was gone, and Justin was back on the team to fill in the gap — would split up into two smaller teams, and they would play against each other. It was just something fun and distracting to raise morale, and judging from the fact that every student and towns person seemed to be showing up as I sullenly walked over to the arena, I supposed that it was much needed.

I stood in my usual spot along the side of the rink while the team got ready and the crowd got settled.

"Hey," Lori said, striding up to me with her hands in her pockets. "Room for one more?"

"Make that two more," Jessica said as she jogged up to us. Her cheeks were red from the cold, but she was dressed up for the first time since before the attack. She was wearing her usual all-pink getup, with a short pink skirt and a pink jacket. It was almost comical, seeing as how Lori was always dressed in all black, but it worked somehow. Their relationship made me happy, and I was glad that they finally realized their feelings for one another during that fated camping trip. Deep down, however, I couldn't deny the fact that I was a bit jealous. I wanted that same relationship with Enzo, but it seemed that the universe just kept getting in the way of that.

"Sure," I said with a smile, scooching my medical bag over so they could sit on the bench. It felt nice to have my friends beside me, and I was just grateful that they had turned out okay during the attack. If I didn't even have Lori and Jessica, I didn't know what I would have done with myself by now. Without Lori, Jessica, Enzo, Luke, or even James — before he went utterly insane — I probably would have lost my mind.

"You know, if you think you can't handle being in here at any point, we totally get it," Jessica said, putting her arm around my shoulders and rubbing my arm. "I can fill in if you need it."

I shook my head and looked down at my lap. I blinked away the tears in my eyes, then forced a smile and looked back up at my friends. "It's okay," I lied. "I think this is good for me."

Neither of them were convinced.

"You don't have to lie to us," Lori insisted. "We know it's been tough on you. But you have to keep holding out hope. Enzo is tough and smart; he could be home any day now."

"And if he doesn't come home," Jessica chimed in, "just know that you'll be okay. It'll be horrible, I'm not denying that; but you're even tougher and smarter than he is. I know you can get through anything."

I was silent for a few moments, processing what my friends said. I knew that they were trying to be helpful, but right now, it wasn't working. But it didn't matter, because the team skated out onto the ice and the announcer started up.

The team split up into two, and the game began. Even though it was odd watching them play without Enzo, I did eventually find myself getting distracted by the game. Matt made a good team captain, and would swap back and forth between the two miniature teams before each set to make things fair. They all seemed to be having fun while they were playing as well, which I was certain was nice for them after having to focus on the Half-Moon Tournament all semester. But, at the same time, not having Enzo there left a glaring gap.

At one point, however, I suddenly felt the hairs on the back of my neck raise as though someone was looking at me. I rubbed my neck nervously and glanced around, but I didn't see anyone. The crowd was solely focused on the game. Maybe it was just my nerves getting to me, I thought, and returned to watching the game with Lori and Jessica.

But that feeling of being watched lingered. I tried to ignore it at first, chalking it up to my exhaustion, but finally I couldn't let it go on for any longer and straightened in my seat, looking around once more.

My eyes scanned the crowd for someone, anyone, who might have been looking at me — but there was no one.

At least, that was what I thought until my eyes fell on the VIP box.

There were two people in there who I didn't recognize: a guy and a girl. The girl was happily watching the game with a grin on her face, but the boy...

The boy was looking straight at me.

And his eyes were wide and disbelieving, as though he recognized me. Our gazes locked, and in that instant, I swore I felt something strange pass over me. It was as though I recognized him too, like we had known each other for ages, but I didn't recognize his face in the slightest. He was the new transfer student; a complete and utter stranger.

Yet... I knew him, somehow. And the longer I looked at him, the faster my heart raced until I was sure it would burst

Chapter 188 An Uneasy Feeling

Nina

As I stared up at the new transfer student in the VIP box, I swore I somehow knew him even though I had never seen his face before. He was tall and skinny, with short black hair and wide-set eyes, and looked nothing like anyone who I knew. And yet, I really felt as though I knew him.

The new boy and I just stared at each other with wide eyes for what must have really only been a few moments, but it felt like an eternity. My heart began to race more and more with each passing second, and at the same time, I felt as though I was coming closer and closer to putting my finger on who this boy was. It was as if his face was morphing, shifting into someone who was very familiar to me. Someone who I loved and missed very much...

"Enzo?" I murmured out loud.

"Uh, Nina?" Lori asked then, poking me in the arm and breaking my concentration.

"Earth to Nina? Are you good?"

I blinked rapidly, shaking my head for a moment as I returned to my senses. I definitely didn't know that transfer student, and he definitely wasn't Enzo. I realized that now. He didn't even look remotely like him, and besides; if Enzo was here, why wouldn't he be coming to see me and his friends right away?

"Wh... What?" I asked as I finally tore my gaze away from the new transfer student. "Did I miss something?"

"Not really," Jessica said with a laugh. "The game is over, though. You were really out for a minute, huh?"

I shrugged, feeling my face get hot. "Yeah, I guess," I replied. "I'm just tired."

The three of us stood as the hockey team skated off of the ice. I forced a smile as they approached, not wanting to ruin their fun; they were all too red-faced and happy to be playing hockey again for me to get in the way with my sullen attitude.

But then, suddenly, something completely unexpected happened.

Justin skated up to the barrier and reached over, grabbing my hand. He took me by surprise and pulled me forward, then kissed me deeply over the barrier.

Both the team and the crowd gasped in astonishment. Some of the townspeople cheered and clapped encouragingly at this display of young love, but I was fully taken aback. When we finally pulled apart, my face was beet red, and so was Justin's.

"S-Sorry," Justin muttered, releasing his grip on my hand while I continued to stand there in total shock, still feeling the taste of his lips on mine. "I got a little carried away."

"Ya think?" Lori said, storming up to Justin. "It's only been three weeks since—"

"It's fine, Lori," I interrupted, putting my hand out to stop her. "Don't worry about it."

Justin's face went even more red. He skated over to the exit and stepped off of the ice, joining the rest of the team in taking their skates off. I was still stunned from our kiss, but I decided not to linger too much on it. Justin had been changing a lot recently. Ever since the night in the woods when I discovered that he was a rogue, I could tell that he was working on himself. And lately, he had been incredibly sweet and kind, and we had spent a lot of late nights talking in the infirmary. I didn't want to admit it, but his presence was a comfort when I needed it the most. I of course didn't want to take things any further, however — not with Enzo's disappearance being so fresh for all of us — but I wasn't going to drown out the possibility of us getting back together far down the road. And he did apologize for getting too carried away, so I decided to let it go.

"Hey, ladies," Matt called from the bench as he yanked off his skates and his helmet. Lori and Jessica finally ripped their incredulous stares away from me and turned with me to look at Matt. "We're going out for some drinks. You guys should come."

The three of us exchanged another glance, then nodded. "Sure," I said, shoving one hand in my pocket while I gathered my medical bag with the other. "That could be a good idea."

...

Later, we all gathered at a corner table in the local bar for some drinks. Things had slowly been returning to normal. Some townspeople who got wind of the fact that Mountainview was safe were returning and bringing news along with them from the neighboring areas. Apparently, it wasn't as bad out there as we thought, which was a relief. I supposed that that explained why those two new students transferred here; maybe they just needed to get away from the Crescents. I couldn't help but wonder if more transfer students would come to Mountainview in the coming weeks.

Since people were returning to town, some of the businesses reopened; one of which was the local bar. And because of that, the bar was packed tonight as people celebrated the first hockey game since the big attack. People were calling it the “apocalypse”, which was a bit over the top, but I didn’t blame them. It really did feel like an apocalypse at the time. But once again, I was amazed by peoples’ resilience and ability to bounce back after something like that. And if people in the neighboring towns were finding ways to fight back against the Crescents, then I knew that there was hope. It made me think back to that one Crescent captain who we made friends with at the beginning of the Half-Moon tournament, and made me wonder if empathetic werewolves like him were scattered all around, helping people. The thought of it made me smile.

But my smile quickly faded as the two new transfer students suddenly walked through the door. The pit of dread grew in my stomach once again as I locked eyes with the boy — but even more than that, I felt

my heart sink when I locked eyes with the girl next. There was something sinister behind her eyes. The way that she looked at me made me uneasy, as though she knew exactly who I was and that she had her eye on me. But the thing was: I didn’t know her in the slightest. What was up with these people?

As they walked in and headed to the bar, the girl gave me one last snobby look before tossing her hair over her shoulder. She then turned to face the boy and grabbed his shirt, pulling him down to her height for a deep, wet kiss.

“Ew,” Jessica said, making a face. “Right in front of everyone.”

“What, are you jealous?” Lori asked as she leaned toward Jessica and puckered her lips. “Come on. Kiss me like that.”

Jessica made a disgusted sound and pushed Lori away, causing the rest of the group to laugh. But I wasn’t laughing.

Because, for some reason after watching those two students kiss, I was terribly, hopelessly sad. Not only that... But I was also jealous, because deep down, I swore that I loved that boy somehow

Chapter 189 The Diner Waitress

Enzo

The way that that girl stared back at me almost seemed to awaken something in me. It was as though we knew each other somehow, as though we knew each other really well. In a strange way, I felt incredibly sad looking at her. It seemed as if she felt the same way, too. But what was even more odd was that she somehow looked almost exactly like Selena, as though she was Selena’s twin.

“Baby?” Selena said, causing me to tear my eyes away from the girl. “What are you doing?”

I quickly turned back to face the hockey game, shaking my head. “Nothing,” I said. “Just thought I saw someone I recognized.”

Selena laughed. “That’s silly,” she replied, squeezing my arm. “You’ve never been here before.”

“I know.”

At least, I thought I knew. But even as the game ended and we headed out to have a drink at the local bar, I still couldn’t stop feeling as though all of this was oddly familiar to me. In fact, the longer I thought this way, the more I began to realize that I did know this town, and I did know that girl. Her name was...

But I couldn’t remember her name. Maybe I was just seeing things after all.

Selena and I made our way to the local bar. The town seemed quiet and cozy, which I enjoyed. It was one of those towns where everyone went to the local bar after dark, and everyone seemed to know each other. Maybe, I thought to myself, that was why that girl looked at me in such a strange way. Maybe she was just trying to figure out who these two strange students were, coming into her close-knit town.

When we stepped into the bar, it was packed to the brim with students and townspeople. I glanced around while Selena led me over to the bar to order our drinks; my eyes eventually landed on a table in

the corner, and there she was again. The girl.

She was with a group of other people. I recognized them as the hockey team. The boy who had kissed her after the game had his arm on the back of her seat. Was he her boyfriend? For some odd reason, thinking about their kiss made me oddly jealous — but that wasn’t the only thing. As I studied the faces of the other people that the girl was with, I couldn’t help but feel as though I knew all of them, too. What was happening to me?

Suddenly, Selena grabbed me by the shirt and pulled me down to her level. She locked our lips together tightly, pushing her tongue into my mouth almost too roughly. When we pulled away, there was a look in her eyes that almost seemed jealous and angry, but it was mesmerizing at the same time.

And when I glanced back at the girl in the corner, I realized now that I really didn’t know her at all.

...

Selena and I spent the night together in that dorm on campus. I still found it odd that she wanted to stay there instead of a hotel or something, but I decided not to question it. If this made my fiancée happy, then I didn't mind one bit. Besides, this dorm seemed familiar, and I felt oddly comfortable in it.

The next morning, Selena woke me up early. I had a hard time sleeping the night before with all of this strangeness going on in my mind, and would have much preferred to sleep in a little longer.

"Baby, wake up" she whined, shaking my shoulder and causing me to wake with a jolt. "I want coffee. Let's go out."

I rubbed my eyes and sat up, yawning. Before I could ask her to give me a few minutes to wake up fully, Selena was already jumping out of the bed and getting dressed. Without a word, she tossed some clothes down on the bed for me and waited impatiently while I got dressed myself.

"I heard there's a cute little cafe around here," she said, tugging me along by my hand as we made our way across the campus and toward town once more. "I want coffee from there."

"Anything for you, love," I said, although I was still rather sleepy.

Now that it was daylight outside, I could see that some of the stores in town were boarded up, which solidified my theory that the Crescents must have had something to do with the state of the town. But the people here seemed to have bounced back relatively well, which made me oddly more happy than I expected it to. It really did feel as though I had some sort of connection to this town.

The cafe was warm and comfortable when we arrived. Selena slid into a window seat and waited grumpily with her arms folded across her chest while I got us coffee and something to eat; she had never been much of a morning person, so I bought her a sweet pastry to cheer her up.

As I walked back to our table, however, my eyes suddenly caught something through the window.

It was the girl, walking on the other side of the street. She was wearing what looked like a blue waitress uniform underneath her coat and had a leather satchel slung over her shoulder. There was a bright red scarf wrapped around her neck, billowing in the wind as she walked briskly. She looked like she was going to work.

She didn't look at me; of course, she couldn't see me. But I couldn't tear my eyes away from her — at least, not until Selena suddenly banged the table with her fist, causing me to jump and nearly spill our coffee.

“Why do you keep staring at her?” she snarled, her blue eyes slightly glowing with rage. “I don’t like it.”

“I-I’m sorry,” I muttered, shaking my head as I set down our food and drinks. “It’s just... That girl kind of looks like you, doesn’t she? It’s uncanny.”

Selena whipped her head around to get one last glance at the girl before she disappeared from sight, then scoffed as she turned back to glare at me. “You really think I look similar to a lowly diner waitress?” Her voice was low, almost a whimper, and she was pouting now with her arms folded across her chest.

Once again, I shook my head vehemently. I slid into the booth seat next to her and wrapped my arms around Selena, pulling her close and planting a kiss on the top of her head. “Of course not, my love,” I whispered, putting my hand under her chin and lifting her face to meet my gaze. “You’re nothing like any girl I’ve ever seen.”

Selena’s frown turned into a smirk then. She reached up and planted another wet kiss on my lips before returning to her coffee and her pastry. “Ooh!” she exclaimed, clapping her hands together excitedly. “Pain au chocolat! My favorite.”

While Selena ate happily and drank her coffee, however, I couldn’t seem to stomach mine. I kept catching myself staring out that window in the direction of where that oddly familiar girl disappeared to. And each time I did, I felt more and more sad. In an inexplicable way, I wanted to leave Selena here and follow the girl who looked strangely like her.

I just wished that I could understand why I felt this way about someone who I had never met

Chapter 190 Imagination Run Wild

Nina

As I sat there in the bar, seeing the two new transfer students kiss like that made me feel not only sad, but also jealous for some strange reason. I didn’t understand it; why would I feel jealous over two new students who I had never even met?

That feeling wouldn’t go away, either. I found myself hardly able to enjoy the evening, and eventually decided that I needed to get out.

“I’m gonna go home now,” I said, pushing my chair back once I’d finished my second drink. “I’ll see you all later.”

My friends frowned up at me. Justin checked his watch. “It’s not even ten o’clock,” he said. “You’re really leaving now?”

"Yeah. I have work in the morning," I replied, which wasn't a lie. I did promise Phil I would work at the diner in the morning. With things getting back to normal in town, businesses were opening back up and he was even able to get a shipment of food so he could get the diner running again. I needed the money, too.

"I'm actually pretty tired myself," Jessica said. She glanced at Lori, who nodded in agreement, and they both stood. I could tell that they weren't actually tired and really just wanted to be there for me as my friends, but I wasn't complaining. It made me feel better to have them by my side; I just needed to get out of this bar.

As we began to walk home in the cold winter air, it seemed that my suspicions were correct as Jessica immediately began questioning me.

"So," Jessica said, "what's going on with you? You kept staring at those two new transfer students all night."

I shrugged. "I don't know exactly," I replied. "Maybe they remind me of me and Enzo. I'm not sure. But... Don't you think there's something a little, I don't know, off about them?"

Lori furrowed her brow and exchanged glances with Jessica. "They seem pretty normal," Lori said with a shrug. "I even talked to the girl a little bit at one point when I went up to the bar. She seems nice enough. A little full of herself, maybe, but that's about it."

"Did they mention where they came from?" I asked. "I mean, why would two new students suddenly transfer here now, not only almost at the end of a semester, but also right after what just happened? That doesn't raise any red flags for you guys? I mean, what if Selena sent them—"

"Nina." Jessica stopped and took me by both arms, staring at me intensely. "You're just being paranoid. We know you miss Enzo and you're worried about him. And if he doesn't come home soon, then we promise we'll all do everything we can to find him and bring him back. But for now, you need to try to take a chill pill and have a little faith that maybe not everything is doom and gloom. Maybe, just for once, two students just like Mountainview and wanted to come here."

I swallowed as I processed Jessica's words. Sure, maybe she was right that the new students were here without any sort of ulterior motive or connection to Selena; but I just couldn't shake off that strange feeling about those two students. And even more so, I couldn't stop thinking about how I swore, for even just the briefest of moments as I locked eyes with that boy in the VIP box, that Enzo was staring back at me. Had Selena and Enzo returned, somehow? Was it possible that they were wearing disguises?

"When I look at that boy for long enough, I swear he looks just like Enzo," I said, feeling hot tears begin to prick at the backs of my eyes. "You guys don't see it?"

Lori sighed then and stepped forward. She took my hand and squeezed it with concern drawn across her face. "I think you're imagining things, Nina," she whispered. "You've barely been sleeping. All you do is sit in the infirmary all day and all night, trying to replicate Tiffany's antidote. Don't you think that maybe it's starting to get to you? The lack of sleep? Hell, even the fumes from all of that chemical mixing you do all day?"

I felt my heart sink. Lori was right; I hadn't been sleeping, and I had been spending my days mixing chemicals in the infirmary. Maybe it really was just starting to get to me, and besides: why wouldn't Enzo come and see me or his friends right away if he was here. Unless Selena somehow made him forget...

No, I thought to myself as I realized that I was starting to reach for answers again. I need to stop this.

Maybe I did just need some sleep, and then I would feel better. I couldn't find Enzo, Luke, or create the antidote if I was so exhausted I was hallucinating that Enzo and Selena were right here, in Mountainview.

...

The next morning, after somehow managing to get almost a full night of sleep, I made my way to work. Cleaning the diner and serving customers gave me a sense of normalcy that made me feel a bit better, and a few hours into my shift, I started to feel like myself again. In fact, the longer I thought about it, the more I realized that Lori and Jessica were right; I was just imagining things. And somehow, coming to this realization filled me with more drive to find Enzo; I already had plans to do another sweep of the town after my shift ended to look for Luke so that he could open a portal for us.

Around noon, my shift was coming to an end and I was excited to get to work in the infirmary. But only twenty minutes before my shift ended, the door opened and Justin walked in with a grin on his face.

I was standing behind the counter, wiping it down with a wet cloth, when I looked up to see Justin standing there. He was holding what looked like a big white piece of posterboard in his hands.

"Hey, Nina," he said, smiling and blushing like a teenager. "I wanted to ask you something."

I furrowed my brow and set down the cloth I was using to wipe up the counter. "What is it?"

Suddenly, Justin turned the sign around with an even wider grin. On the sign were big letters, written carefully and neatly, that read: "Nina, will you go to the dance with me?"

I couldn't help but blush a bit. It was honestly cute seeing how much effort Justin had put into the sign, and the sweet look on his face made me smile.

"Well?" he asked. "Will you?"

I hesitated for a moment, biting my lip. I wasn't even planning on going to the dance, as I needed to focus on the antidote and trying to find a way to get to Enzo; but at the same time, seeing how excited Justin was made me soften a bit. He was beaming like a little kid as he held the sign.

I didn't want to be with Justin as long as I knew that Enzo was out there somewhere, but maybe a night of fun would be necessary to clear my head. I supposed that we could go as friends, at least, and I knew that Enzo wouldn't want me to kill myself with exhaustion.

Finally, I nodded. "Sure," I said, managing a stiff smile. "I'll go with you."