

# **My Hockey Alpha #Chapter 301 - Read My Hockey**

## **Alpha Chapter 301**

### **Chapter 301**

Chapter 301

Bonus 1: The Perfect Dress

Nina

The sun had already slipped below the skyline by the time I entered “Belle Ame Bridal,” with Jessica and Lori by my side.

We were on a mission—a mission that I had been avoiding like the plague.

Finding the perfect wedding dress, something that should have been exciting, was a stark reminder of my mother’s absence. She was somewhere overseas, unreachable, and it felt like a part of my heart was missing.

No matter how often I called her, no matter how many voicemails I left and letters I wrote, I didn’t get a response. It was both worrisome and depressing at the same time, and as my wedding with Enzo ticked closer, I just felt worse and worse by the day.

I kept telling myself that she was safe; she was likely busy and forgot to change her number over to the international line. Maybe she and Taylor bought a house or rented an apartment and didn’t update their address yet.

But there was another little voice inside of me... Something telling me that because she wasn’t my “real” mom, that she had decided to abandon me.

I knew my biological father now. I never got the chance to meet my biological mother, but I knew who she was now.

But it didn’t make my love for my adoptive mother any less potent; if anything, after all this time that I had spent learning about both my past and her past, I felt more love for her than ever. Our history together wasn’t the best, but I was prepared to spend the rest of my life making up for that with her. I wanted a real relationship with my adoptive mother, one in which we could actually get to know each other for once instead of hating each other.

I couldn’t do that, however, if she wouldn’t talk to me.

“Nina, you can’t avoid it any longer,” Jessica reminded me gently as we walked into the little bridal store, which had only recently reopened its doors after the Crescent debacle. “Enzo and you are getting married in less than a month.”

I gave her a nod, acknowledging her words but not my readiness. "I know, Jessica. I just... I wish my mom were here. That's all."

Before anyone could offer another comforting statement, Lori interrupted. She was always more stoic than the rest of us, but right now, I think that I actually kind of needed that sort of attitude.

"Alright, enough talking, more shopping," she said, grabbing me by the shoulders and pushing me over toward the racks of dresses. "Nina, you're going to look stunning no matter what you wear."

In the bridal shop, the walls were practically lined with tulle and silk. The dresses sparkled under the soft, flattering lighting.

I let Jessica and Lori pick out gowns for me, trying on one after the other without feeling any real connection. A stunning mermaid dress made me feel like a wrapped up candy, an A-line with a lace overlay made me itch, and a ball gown made me feel like I was playing fairy princess dress-up rather than preparing for my own wedding.

"I don't... I don't think this is working, guys," I finally admitted, feeling my throat tighten with unshed tears. I was standing on the little platform in front of the mirror, wearing a silky blush pink dress that looked more like a nightgown than anything.

Surrounding me was a pile of rejected dresses, and my heart was only growing heavier with each unsuccessful try.

Lori rushed over, her arm sliding around my shoulders. "Hey, it's okay, Nina. Your mom would be proud, you know. And she'd want you to be happy."

"Both of your moms," Jessica corrected, lifting a finger. "They'd both be proud."

I nodded, but it didn't lessen the ache. One mother was dead before I ever even got to know her, and it felt as though the other mother had just decided to abandon me.

"I think I should come back tomorrow," I said, picking my skirt up and stepping down off of the platform. "I'm getting too tired to think straight."

Jessica and Lori shot each other a quizzical look, but neither of them said anything as I walked back over to the dressing room.

Just then, however, a shimmer from the corner of the shop caught my eye. I paused for a moment just as I was about to step into the dressing room and peered over at it.

Intrigued, I moved towards it, pulling out a gown that was unlike the rest.

Its design was simple yet elegant; an off-shoulder cut, with a fitted bodice that flared out slightly from the hips, trailing into a beautiful sweep train. There were intricate lacy floral patterns sewn into the fabric, lending an ethereal touch.

"This one..." I murmured, unable to take my eyes off it.

The shop owner, a woman named Marta, who'd been assisting us all afternoon without batting an eye at my indecisiveness, turned to look.

"Ah, that dress," she said, a hint of surprise in her voice. "That's been sitting here for years. It's a one-off design from a local designer that never gained popularity. No one's ever chosen it."

As I held the dress against myself, it was like seeing my reflection come to life. The way it draped over my frame seemed almost custom-made. Without another word, I hurried back to the fitting room, the whispers of Jessica and Lori fading behind me.

Slipping into the dress was like slipping into a different version of myself. The woman looking back at me from the mirror was radiant and confident.

The dress hugged my body perfectly, accentuating every curve, yet still managing to feel incredibly comfortable. I gave a small twirl, the train swishing softly behind me. For the first time in a long while, I felt normal, like a girl simply excited about her wedding.

I stepped out of the fitting room and watched as Jessica and Lori both gasped. Their eyes watered, and I found my own vision blurring. I wiped at the tears with a shaky laugh.

"What do you think?" I asked, my voice thick with emotion.

"You look...you look breathtaking, Nina," Jessica managed to get out, her smile trembling. The reflections in the mirror agreed

with her, and I found myself unable to stop the broad grin that spread across my face. This was it. This was my dress. Everything from the delicate lace overlay, the full skirt, the long sleeves and the sweetheart neckline made me feel like an actual, real princess; not a fairy tale princess.

I felt mature and beautiful, and for just a moment, I felt as though I could look at myself and see more than the ghosts of the past several months weighing down on me. Everything about the Crescents, all of the fighting, the pain, the heartbreak... None of it mattered to me during those brief moments.

I turned to Marta, tears still clinging to my lashes. "I'll take this one," I said, the certainty in my voice making the final decision all the more real.

The dress was not only a step closer to #Bonus 1: The Perfect Dress my wedding with Enzo, but it was also a balm to the ache of my mother's absence. It was a silent assurance that even though she wasn't physically present, a part of her was here with me, guiding me through this milestone. And in that moment, that was enough.

## Chapter 302

### Chapter 302

#### Bonus 2: House Hunting

Nina

The whisper of the wind and the distant hum of the campus came as a backdrop to our conversation. Enzo and I were sitting on the steps of our university dorm, a stack of housing catalogs spread out around us, dog-eared and underlined with no luck.

Enzo ran a hand through his hair, frustration clear in his furrowed brows. "Nina, none of these places feel right. They're not...us."

I looked at the houses in the brochures, all perfectly manicured lawns and cookie-cutter designs, and I had to agree with him. There was nothing that I hated more than a white picket fence and a perfectly mowed back lawn.

For the past couple of weeks, we had been house hunting almost nonstop. Neither of us wanted to continue living in our campus dorms once we were married. We craved the true privacy of a home, and we planned on staying in Mountainview for a long time, so we figured that now was as good a time as any to officially settle down and buy a home.

But the movies and TV shows made house hunting appear to be much easier than it really was. I always thought that it would just take a few houses and a good real estate agent before we would find the house of our dreams, but that wasn't the case.

Everything that we looked at felt too cramped between other houses, too bland, and nothing had enough character to suit our unique lifestyle.

We both wanted space to run in our wolf forms, trees outside our windows, and the feeling of the ocean breeze on our skin; but it seemed that all of the houses that were available in the area were the exact opposite of that.

At this point, we were left with no choice but to either stay in the dorms or get an apartment downtown, and neither of us wanted that, either.

There was one more option, though; it was something that I had been hesitant to bring up because I knew that it was a soft spot for Enzo, but now, it seemed as though it finally needed to be talked about.

“Enzo,” I started, my voice almost tentative, “have you thought about your father’s house?”

I saw him stiffen at my words, and I could almost feel the pain radiating from him. His father had passed away hardly more than a month ago, leaving Enzo his oceanside house.

We hadn’t been back since, not after finding it ransacked and destroyed by Lewis and his followers.

Now, it was just sitting all alone up there on the cliff, dark and empty. It was like a coffin. Even just thinking about it made me shudder.

“Nina, you know how the house looked last time,” Enzo replied, a hint of despair in his voice. “I haven’t had the strength to fix it up. Plus, I don’t love the design of it.”

“Maybe we can change it, make it our own,” I suggested, meeting his brown- eyed gaze. I was convinced we could breathe life back into the house, turn it into a home.

But Enzo just shook his head, causing a stray brown curl to fall into his eyes. ” No, Nina,” he replied, his voice soft and low. “I’m sorry, but... The wedding is so close, you know? We won’t have any time to get anything done before then.”

Enzo seemed uncertain, but I reached out to hold his hand. His thick, calloused fingers felt warm and comforting laced between mine. “Let’s go look at it, just once. Maybe it’s not as bad as we remember.” as

Reluctantly, he agreed, and the next day found us standing in front of the towering beach house. With its gray and square exterior and massive windows, it looked dark and almost frightening.

But when I looked at it, I saw potential. I saw our future.

Holding Enzo’s hand tightly, I led him around the property, describing my vision for each room, how we could play with the natural light, the open spaces, and the amazing view of the ocean. I explained my ideas for renovations, for turning the old- fashioned architecture into a blend of rustic and modern design.

“Picture this,” I said, pausing in the large archway to the kitchen. We can paint it a bright color. Something rustic and cozy. We can replace all of these metal cabinets with nice wooden ones, and we’ll put in a large counter island with lots of stools for people to sit at when we have dinner parties.”

Enzo said nothing just yet, but I continued, and led him over to the dining room next.

“Here, we can get rid of this cracked glass table, and put in a big farmhouse table. With benches, maybe, instead of chairs... And over here, in the living room, we can get rid of all of this awful gray furniture and replace it with warm, soft, cozy sofas and armchairs.”

I didn't say it out loud, but there was a tiny voice in the back of my head that wanted me to picture this place filled with a family, too. Kids... Lots of them. A whole little pack of pups. The thought of it made me blush, but I decided to keep it to myself for the time being and went on with my visions.

Next, I led Enzo upstairs. “We can change out the bed in the master bedroom,” I said, walking into the massive room. “Imagine it with a little table and some armchairs in that big window... We could sit here in the mornings and have our coffee while we watch the ocean...”

While I rambled on about color schemes and furniture, I watched as Enzo's initial hesitation gradually gave way to quiet contemplation, his gaze becoming more introspective. I could see him painting mental images, transforming the broken down rooms in his mind, just as I was.

Finally, when we stood on the porch, looking out at the sprawling ocean, I turned to him, silently urging him to see what I saw. The sun was setting, and the play of oranges and purples in the sky added to the raw beauty of the scene.

“Well?” I asked, my voice hardly audible above the sound of the crashing waves below. “What do you think, Enzo? Want to make this place our home?”

“Nina...” he began, and his voice was low and hard to read. I felt my heart sink a bit as I expected him to deny it again, to tell me that he would sell this place and we would have to live on campus until we could find a house.

But he didn't. Instead, with a small smile playing on his lips, he said, “I like your vision, Nina. I think we can do this. We can clean it up, renovate it... make it ours.”

My heart soared at his words, at the acceptance and resolve in his voice. The excitement bubbled up within me, and without thinking, I jumped into his arms, peppering his face with kisses.

He laughed, his arms coming around me to hold me tight, his eyes sparkling with a joy that mirrored my own.

“We'll make it beautiful, Nina,” he whispered against my hair. “And we'll get to wake up to this view every day.”

In that moment, wrapped in Enzo's arms and looking out at the ocean, I felt a sense of home that no picture-perfect house in any brochure could ever offer.

We were taking something broken and making it whole, just as we had done with each other. It wasn't going to be easy, but together, we were ready to build our future, one brick at a time.

## **Chapter 303**

### Chapter 303

#### Bonus 3: The Color of Love

Nina

Even though sleep was a luxury neither Enzo nor I could afford these days, I found myself energized by the whirlwind of wedding preparations and home renovations.

Thanks to the help of Enzo, all of our amazing friends, and a fantastic group of contractors, we were making huge strides with the renovations on our new home.

Now, all that was left was picking out paint colors for the various rooms in the house; something, anything, to cover that ghastly gray color that made the whole house feel like a depressing little box.

However, exhaustion was slowly creeping in-and with it came snappiness, moments of impatience, and a few disagreements we wouldn't have had otherwise.

One such argument unfolded during yet another trip to the hardware store.

We were standing in the paint aisle, as we had been doing almost every day for the past week, surrounded by countless paint swatches that neither of us could seem to agree on.

"I still say we should go with yellow," I insisted as I tapped my finger against a bright buttercup-yellow color on the paint swatch. "That kitchen really needs some color."

Enzo grimaced, shaking his head. "Nina, I can't stand yellow. Besides, it's too... bright, too flashy for a kitchen. It reminds me of the color of melted butter, or... or jaundice. What about this color?"

I watched as Enzo pulled out a millionth swatch, one which contained the color of slate blue. It wasn't far off from the color that the kitchen was painted already. It was pretty on its own, but a whole room like that? It would only blend into the gray and blue landscape of the ocean.

I pursed my lips, crossing my arms right after I rubbed my exhausted eyes with my fists. "Blue is too gloomy, Enzo. A kitchen is supposed to be cheerful!"

Enzo let out a low, annoyed growl. He

had dark circles under his eyes, probably even worse than mine. But I wasn't backing down, and neither was he.

"Blue is better than yellow, at least," he hissed.

I frowned deeply. "If you're gonna insist on painting the kitchen blue, then what is even the point of painting it at all?" I asked, throwing up my hands in exasperation. "That color you picked out is hardly any different from that awful gray color that's already in there. Maybe you're more like-"

I stopped myself. I knew what I was going to say, and so did Enzo; that he wasn't all that different from his father after all. But I stopped myself.

Even in my exhaustion, I knew that that wasn't the right thing to say, and I didn't really mean it. Richard's death was still too fresh, too raw to be making comparisons like that. And besides, despite Richard's short-lived redemption at the end, it still wasn't fair to compare them.

Enzo said nothing about my almost- comment about his father. Instead, he pulled out another swatch, one which contained an even more sickly blue hue that could be likened to the deathly pallor of a fresh corpse.

"Here!" he said, shoving the little paper swatch in my face. "This is better isn't it? Can we just pick a color so we can go home? I'm starving."

I grimaced, snatching the swatch out of his hands, my frown deepening as I studied the color.

"No way, Enzo. This is awful! What about..."

The argument escalated, and soon our voices echoed off the store's high ceilings.

Bystanders began glancing our way, a couple of them offering amused or sympathetic smiles, others giving us sidelong looks of disapproval. Neither Enzo nor I paid them any mind, too caught up in our silly paint color dispute.

Suddenly, and seemingly out of nowhere, a croaky voice intervened.

"Why not paint it green?" Both Enzo and I turned to find a small, elderly lady smiling at us, her eyes twinkling with a mix of mischief and wisdom.

"Green?" Enzo asked, his eyebrows shooting up in surprise.



"Green," the woman confirmed with a nod. "It's the perfect compromise, a mix of yellow and blue. And a lovely color for a kitchen, if I may say so myself."

She shuffled towards a display, her frail hand pointing at a particular shade of sage green. It was a color we had overlooked in our heated exchange.

We both stared at the suggested color, exchanging tentative looks. I couldn't deny it; the green was indeed soft, warm, and welcoming-a gentle embrace of our two opposing preferences.

Tentatively, I reached out and grabbed the swatch down off of the shelf to look at it more closely. It really was a pretty color; it reminded me of the color of the sea foam during sunrise. I liked it- a lot.

"You know," I started, a slow smile spreading on my face, "I actually really like this."

I held the swatch out to Enzo, who snatched it out of my hand with a somewhat-annoyed huff. But as he studied it, his face turned from an expression of annoyance into one of peaceful acceptance.

"Well?" the old lady asked, chortling a bit as she leaned on her cane."

Enzo stared at the color a moment longer, then broke into a grin. "You know what, Nina?" he murmured, tapping the card on his palm. "I really like this one, too."

I couldn't help but laugh; and neither could Enzo.

Our laughter rang out in the store, a shared acknowledgement of the silliness of our argument. It was a moment of lightness in the middle of our hectic schedules and sleep-deprived irritability.

With a grin, Enzo took the swatch over to the counter for the attendant to mix, leaving me alone with the old woman.

"Thank you," I said to the old woman, holding the can of sage green paint. We really needed that."

Her eyes crinkled as she smiled. "I could tell," she murmured, patting me on the shoulder. "Young love... Compromise is a skill that you'll pick up over the years, and I can tell that the two of you will have many of those."

I couldn't help but blush at the old woman's words. My eyes wandered over to Enzo, who was leaning on the counter and watching intently while the attendant mixed the color for our kitchen

Sage green Like sea foam at sunrise.

But right now, I wasn't looking at the color, I was looking at Enzo, at my future with him. I couldn't tear my eyes away from him, from his handsome form as he leaned on the counter, the way that his curly

hair fell into his sleep-deprived face.

I pictured him like that for years to come, standing in our sage green kitchen. I pictured the two of us cooking countless meals there, laughing and getting flour on our faces as we baked birthday cakes for our children.

When I finally opened my mouth to say something to the old lady, she was gone.

We paid for our can of paint, and as we left the store hand-in-hand, I couldn't help but feel a surge of fondness for the afternoon. Despite the exhaustion, the stress, and the occasional argument, these were moments I would cherish.

The old lady's intervention, the shared laughter, and Enzo's hand securely holding mine brought a sense of balance in our chaotic lives.

It wasn't just about painting the kitchen anymore; it was about creating a home-our home-where every shade of our lives, blue, yellow, or green, had its place.

## **Chapter 304**

### Chapter 304

#### Bonus 4: Missing Ingredients

Nina

Anxiety was bubbling its way up in my chest as I stared down at the phone in my hand.

Once again, the attempt to call my mother proved to be futile.

I couldn't even count how many times I had tried calling her over the past three weeks, all of which had gone unanswered. This time, however, it even went straight to voicemail; either she had hung up when she saw my name pop up on the screen, or her phone was officially shut off.

"Don't worry, Nina," Enzo said, wrapping his strong arms around me from behind as he planted a kiss on the top of my head. We were standing in the kitchen; our beautiful sage green kitchen. "She probably just hasn't switched to an international number yet. She'll call you soon; I can feel it." I nodded and turned around in Enzo's arms, inhaling his scent and letting his warmth emanate through me as I buried my face in his chest.

"You're probably right," I said quietly. "I just wish that she could be here in time for the wedding. Maybe we should ." I bit my lip, stopping myself from saying what I had said a million times over the past few weeks; that we should put the wedding off until I could get in touch with her.

"Don't even say it," Enzo replied. " Trust me, Nina. She'll be there."

"You really think so?" I asked, looking up to meet his soft brown gaze. "You 4 think she'll show up at the wedding?"

Enzo nodded and shot me a gentle smile. I felt my cheeks tinge pink as he planted a gentle kiss on my lips before he walked off to the dining room.

With the wedding imminent, her silence was deafening. I was desperate silence was deafening. I was desperate to hear her voice, to share the details of our preparations, our excitement.

One such preparation was our upcoming engagement dinner. Enzo and I had been working tirelessly to transform our once drab, gray house into a warm, inviting home.

The renovations had made the house brighter, more comfortable, and it was filled with anticipation for the celebration.

It was the eve of the party, and we were in the midst of finishing up the final touches on our house. All that was left was to finish putting together some furniture that we had purchased, and then this house would finally become our home.

I stood there in the kitchen for a few minutes, smiling softly as I watched Enzo putting together a dining chair. The entire first floor was open now after we had knocked down a few walls, and it felt much more airy and comfortable inside.

It was nice being able to see everything from where I stood in the kitchen.

Most of the furniture that we had now had been purchased secondhand, giving the house an eclectic, vibrant look.

I liked how the plant pots and pictures in the living room were all mismatched and colorful, and I had found a few stunning armchairs at a local estate sale that each had a history of their own.

The dining room furniture, however, had to match; I couldn't bring myself to have an entirely mismatched dining set, and so we had made a last-minute trip to Ikea for a set of chairs and benches

to go around our enormous farm-style table that practically stretched the entire length of the downstairs.

Suddenly, I had a thought. We had an array of food prepared for our engagement dinner, but nothing for dessert.

“Enzo,” I began, “I think I should bake a cake for the dinner.”

His eyebrows shot up, a surprised grin stretching across his face as he deftly twisted a screw into the bottom of one chair and then set it down on the floor when he was finished. “A cake? You sure, Nina?”

I nodded, feeling a rush of excitement. ”

Yes. I’m craving sweets and I just realized that we don’t have anything for dessert.”

“Alright then,” he chuckled, slipping the parts for another chair out of their cardboard prison. “What do you need? I can run to the store.”

I opened the kitchen cabinet to take stock, expecting to find baking essentials. My heart sank when I saw the empty shelves. “Oh no,” I muttered. “We’re out of supplies.”

His laughter filled the kitchen, making me smile despite my disappointment.” Well, looks like we’re going shopping after all. Let me just put this one chair together and then we can go quickly.”

“No,” I protested, grabbing my keys from the counter. “I can go. You finish up here. Besides, I want to pick out everything myself.”

“A woman on a mission, I see,” he teased, offering a mock salute. “Good luck, soldier. And get a good cake mix. None of that cheap stuff. I like chocolate cake, for the record.”

“Got it,” I replied with a grin, saluting him back. “Chocolate cake it is. I’m feeling peanut butter frosting.”

Chuckling, I left the house, feeling a surge of enthusiasm despite the hiccup in my plans. The winding country roads, flanked on either side by tall pine trees through which I could see the ocean lapping against the shore in the distance, made for a relaxing scene.

I quickly forgot about my anxiety surrounding my mother as I turned the radio up high and danced and sang along to the music.

My enthusiasm quickly deflated, however, when a raccoon darted out onto the road. I let out a surprised shriek, followed by a jerk of my steering wheel that sent me straight into a ditch.

My heart pounded in my chest as I sat in the sudden silence of the car, a cloud of dust settling outside my window.

The raccoon, equally as surprised by

me as I was of it, twittered anxiously and scooted off into the darkness between the trees.

When I came to my senses I groaned, resting my head on the steering wheel. I knew I had to call Enzo, knew that he'd likely never let me live down my raccoon encounter.

"You fucker," I whispered, watching the fat little creature with my eyes. "Why did you have to run out into the road just when a car was coming?"

The raccoon, of course, didn't answer; he was a raccoon, after all, and well out of ear shot.

I sighed and climbed out of the car to take a look at the damage..

Thankfully, my little car, which I had purchased only a couple of weeks ago from an old man down the road, wasn't damaged at all. But it was stuck deep in the ditch, and there would be no pulling it out on my own.

I would have to call the local tow company to come and get me out, but right now, I didn't have the time; our engagement party was in just a few hours, and I had a cake to bake.

Sighing once more and cursing to myself, I took a deep breath as I pictured Enzo's teasing grin over my raccoon scare. With a disbelieving chuckle at this nice little mess that I got myself into, I pulled out my phone to dial his number.

## **Chapter 305**

### Chapter 305

#### Bonus 5: The Tease

Enzo

Dust and sweat clung to my skin as I wrestled with the new living room furniture.

It was a final touch to the renovations we'd been slogging through for months, transforming our once dull house into a vibrant home. Despite the exhaustion tugging at my muscles, a sense of satisfaction washed over me as I looked around the house. Our house.

Just as I was finishing up on the final bench for our massive dining room table, my phone buzzed in my pocket.

A picture of Nina lit up the screen, her smile making my lips curve in response. "Hey, love," I answered, using my cleanest elbow to press the speaker button.

"Enzo," she started, and I could already hear the hesitation in her voice.

"I... uh... had a little run-in with a raccoon. I maybe... sort of... kind of got myself stuck in a ditch."

The last part of her sentence came out all at once like an avalanche. I could tell immediately that she was embarrassed. And I was a man; it was my job to capitalize on her embarrassment. What good would it be if I didn't tease my fiancée a little?

I couldn't help but burst out laughing. A raccoon?" I chortled. "Are you telling me you swerved off of the road because of a little raccoon?"

"Yes, okay! It was scary, alright? And I didn't wanna hit it!" Nina huffed on the other end of the line. I could almost see her pouting, her arms crossed in defiance.

I couldn't stop myself from teasing her relentlessly; to think that Nina Harper, the strong and independent woman who pretty much single-handedly saved the entire town of Mountainview from the Crescents, survived on her own with a bullet hole in her leg, got spooked by a little raccoon.

"Oh, Nina, I don't know if I should leave you alone anymore," I continued to tease as I stood and wiped the sawdust off of my hands. "Raccoons today, and what's next? Squirrels tomorrow?"

"I need you to come pick me up," she said, ignoring my jabs. "And we still need cake supplies."

"Alright, alright," I sighed, trying to smother my laughter as my voice took on a more serious tone. "I'm on my way. You're okay though, right?"

"I'm fine," Nina replied, letting out a small sigh of relief. "Just annoyed, both at myself and that damn bastard of a raccoon."

With a promise to pick up Nina, I hung up and prepared to leave. Just as I was heading out the door, however, a glint caught my eye. I frowned as I approached the little hallway table that sat near the front door.

It was a photograph of my mother in a cracked frame, forgotten in the whirlwind of renovations. I picked it up gently, tracing the image of her smiling face. I missed her. It wasn't fair that she wouldn't be there for my wedding with Nina, for all of the moments that I wanted to share with her.

My father, too. As much as he could be a bastard sometimes after my mom died, I still missed him. I wanted nothing more than to make up for those lost years, to finally come to a respectful understanding with my father.

I wondered if either of them would have liked the renovations we made on this house; my mother likely would have loved the bright colors and the eclectic furniture. I think that my father would have liked it, too, although he seemed to pick up a fondness for the color gray after my mom died.

But I didn't think that he ever actually liked the color gray. I think that it was really just a way for him to punish himself, a way to convey the feeling in his heart that his life had become void of color since my mom died.

Sighing, I placed the photograph down and made a mental note to pick up a new frame while we were out.

With a last, satisfied look around the nearly finished living room, I grabbed

my keys and headed to the car. Not even ten minutes down the road, I spotted her. As I pulled up next to Nina's car in the ditch, I found her sitting on the hood with a stubborn pout on her face.

Despite my concern, her sulky expression struck me as comical, and I couldn't suppress a chuckle.

"Nina versus the raccoon," I quipped as I climbed out of my pickup truck – it was really my father's truck, but I decided to use it rather than let it sit in the garage and collect dust. It was a nice truck, too.

It baffled me that Lewis and his followers didn't bother to steal it, but then again, they didn't seem to steal much of anything. The act of ransacking my dad's house was more of a way to show their disrespect than anything else. They may as well have spat on his grave. But I supposed that it was a good thing that they didn't know where he was buried. "I think we can safely declare the raccoon the winner," I continued, my lips curling up into a teasing grin as I approached.

Nina's chocolatey brown eyes narrowed, but I could see a smile tugging at her lips.

"Just wait till I bake the best cake you've ever tasted," she hissed as she jumped down off of the hood of the car.

"Then we'll see who's laughing."

"Alright, alright." I threw my hands up in surrender as Nina strode up to me. She was small, but I had to admit that she could be a little scary at times. If she ever truly got mad at me... Well, then I might just have to flee the country.

Nina, smiling and shaking her head, brushed past me with a kiss on my cheek and climbed into the passenger side of my truck. I walked around and inspected her car for damage; it was fine, just as she said.

But the sun was getting lower in the sky, and I didn't have a tow package hooked up to my truck.

We would have to call the local tow company and have them take her car back to the house, but for now, we needed to get to the store and get that cake... and I had a secondary mission, too.

I turned back to the truck, where Nina was staring at me through the windshield. Even from where I stood, her brown eyes sparkled in the golden hour that was glowing around us.

I couldn't help but stop on the side of the road, our eyes connecting through the windshield. In her half-disheveled look, after spending weeks preparing for our wedding, renovating our new home, and preparing for our engagement dinner, she looked more beautiful than ever; even more beautiful than when she took on the evil Luna.

I knew there was no other place I'd rather be. Despite the day's setbacks and my fleeting sadness, the joy of our shared life was far more compelling.

We were building a home, piecing together a life filled with love, laughter, and yes, even confrontations with raccoons. This was our life, and I wouldn't change a thing.

## **Chapter 306**

### Chapter 306

#### Bonus 6: Shopping Trip

Nina

Enzo's laughter was infectious as I jumped down off of the hood of my car.

The raccoon incident, the nearly-abandoned cake mission, and now my car being towed-it was absurdity that could only happen to me.

"Ridiculous," he chided, grinning as he dialed the tow company and climbed into his truck. With the tow truck on its way, he put the truck in gear and began to drive down the road toward town, an unspoken agreement between us that the cake plan was still on.



As we drove, I leaned forward and turned on the radio. I smiled as the radio crackled to life, filling the truck cab with the rhythm of one of our favorite songs. I couldn't help but sway in my seat, mimicking the dance moves we had mastered in our living room.

After everything, after all of the pain, we now lived a life in which we could dance freely in our bright and cheery living room, holding each other's hands and singing out of key to our favorite songs, twirling and dipping until we were so out of breath and covered in sweat that we fell down onto the plush couch.

Enzo caught on quickly, bobbing his head to the beat while maintaining a watchful eye on the road.

Our laughter echoed in the small space, dissolving the tension from the raccoon showdown. The spontaneity of our little dance-off was like a soothing balm to the frantic pace of our preparations, a reminder of the joy we found in each other's company. "You think we could sneak this song into our wedding playlist?" Enzo asked when the song was over, his eyes sparkling with mischief.

"Absolutely," I replied, laughing. "The guests would love our dance routine."

Enzo made a face. "Maybe they'd love your dance routine," he chuckled. "Not mine. I've got two left feet."

I couldn't help but laugh. Enzo, despite all of his grace on the ice, was a clumsy dancer. My father insisted that we perform a traditional dance during our reception, which we had been practicing relentlessly for.

But even our instructor, who came to our house three times a week to give us lessons on the dance, seemed to have resolved that Enzo would be a lost cause. He was going to step on my toes" and mess up the moves to the dance, and everyone would just have to live with that.

"It's so close," I said in a wistful tone of voice as I looked out the window. The pine trees rushed by us on either side, almost as fast as our wedding was approaching. "You sure we're not moving too fast?"

Enzo was silent for a moment. I glanced over to see that he was gripping the steering wheel tightly with his free hand. He shook his head. "No such thing," he replied warmly. "I love you, Nina. I don't wanna wait to make you my wife."

Enzo's words made me smile. I still couldn't quite quell that melancholy feeling in the pit of my stomach over the fact that my mother likely wouldn't be attending my wedding; but Enzo seemed firm in his promise that she would come, and so I decided to trust him. I did tell her repeatedly in my letters and voicemails that I was getting married, and I sent her an official invitation. The wedding was only a couple of weeks away now; maybe she was packing her bags to come and visit at that exact moment.

“We did pretty good, didn’t we?” he asked, a proud look on his face. “After everything...”

I nodded before Enzo could finish.

“We sure did,” I agreed, picturing our vibrant, welcoming home. It was a necessary balm to the pain of everything that had happened that year; a new beginning, a suture to close up the open, bleeding wounds of everything that the Crescents and the Luna did.

Now that those wounds were held shut, they could begin to heal. The bleeding had already lessened, and it would only be a short matter of time before they clotted, and eventually scabbed over.

Maybe we would give into temptation and pick at the scabs, yearning for the pain, yearning to rip the sutures out so we could experience that grief in order to not let go of the people we had lost.

But we wouldn’t. We would let those wounds heal. We would bandage our hands, clip our fingernails short so we couldn’t rip at our delicate flesh. Then, someday, there would be nothing but faint white lines.

Little scars, white mounds of flesh that traced along our veins.

We would never forget, but it would hurt less and less over time.

The grocery store was a quick affair. I was on a mission, dashing through the aisles to gather the baking supplies we needed. Enzo trailed behind, his laughter following me as I filled our cart with bags of flour, sugar, and a variety of cake mix options.

The cake, I decided, was going to be the highlight of our engagement dinner. Chocolate with peanut butter frosting; an overly sweet delicacy. The sugar would linger in our mouths for hours. I needed something sweet like that.

The journey back was a joyful continuation of our trip, our conversation filled with shared dreams and laughter. But as we neared our house, Enzo unexpectedly veered the truck into the hardware store’s parking lot.

“What are we doing here?” I asked, a quizzical look on my face.

“Just need to pick something up. Wait here,” he said, leaving me in the car.

As I watched him disappear into the store, I found myself humming along to the soft melody playing on the radio. my mind wandering to the cake I would bake.

A few minutes later, he returned, a small bag clutched in his hands. The light-hearted demeanor was gone, replaced with a somber expression that hadn’t been there before.

He climbed back into the truck without a word and gently set the bag down in the back seat; I couldn't see what was inside.

I wanted to ask, to fill the silence that had replaced our laughter, but I held back

The forlorn look on his face gave me pause. Maybe his wound was more open than mine was, somehow. Maybe he had lost more blood. I could sense that he didn't want to talk about whatever was in that bag, that whatever was in that bag was an extra suture to close up the corner of his wound that was bleeding the most.

As he started the truck and steered it towards home, I took his free hand in mine and gave it a squeeze.

The gesture, although small, was a silent promise of my presence; no matter what, no matter how much blood he lost and no matter how many times he would pick at the scabs, I would be there by his side.

It was what fated mates were for.

## **Chapter 307**

### Chapter 307

#### Bonus 7: Frame Job

Nina

I got to work as soon as we reached home.

Mixing bowls, a whisk, a dusting of flour and sugary sweetness in the air that I could taste on my tongue-the kitchen was my sanctuary, and I relished in the task at hand. Making the cake wasn't merely a chore; it was a testament to our love, a sweet delight to mark our engagement.

It was a meditative practice, too; a way to unwind after everything. As I worked lovingly on the chocolatey batter, I found myself thinking that I would be spending a lot of time baking in this kitchen over the years.

In my peripheral vision, I noticed Enzo fiddling with something in the hallway. Curiosity nudged at me, so I wiped my hands on my apron and tiptoed to the corner.

"Whatcha doing?" I started to ask, but the words died in my throat as I saw him carefully aligning his mother's picture in a new frame. He didn't hear me approaching, and so his mannerisms remained natural, fluid, oblivious to my presence.

I watched, transfixed, as he gingerly hung the picture on the wall and took extra care to assure that it was hung straight. There was a sense of finality in his movements, and it finally occurred to me why he had looked so forlorn when he retreated from the hardware store.

This new frame was a final resting place for one of the few remaining relics of his mother, the woman who I had never met. I suddenly felt guilty for whining so much about my mother, who was alive and well, when he had lost both his mother and his father.

A lump formed in my throat. The moment was far too intimate for interruption, and so I quietly retreated to the kitchen, a soft smile playing on my lips as I left Enzo to his somber yet loving task.

Minutes later, Enzo joined me in the kitchen, his eyes brighter, his shoulders relaxed. "Picture looks good on the wall, right?" he asked, not waiting for my response before plunging his finger into the cake batter just as I was about to place the tray in the hot oven.

"Hey!" I laughed, slapping his hand away. "That's for the cake, not for your sampling."

"Oh, c'mon. Can't a man taste the fruits of his fiancée's labor?" he quipped, grinning broadly as he licked the chocolate batter off of his finger.

"Only when they're ready and not full of raw eggs," I retorted, matching his playful tone. Our laughter echoed in the kitchen, filling the room with warmth. "Well, it's delicious, raw eggs and all," he murmured, licking his finger clean.

After setting the timer for the cake, I turned to find Enzo watching me, a soft look in his eyes. He moved closer, lifting me onto the counter with an ease that still surprised me.

"The picture does look lovely on the wall," I murmured as I wrapped my arms around his neck and rubbed my nose against his. It occurred to me then that maybe he did notice my presence earlier, but he was too enthralled in his careful work to acknowledge me. I didn't mind, though.

Enzo said nothing. His face took on a far -away look, which was only broken when he blinked rapidly and shot me a warm smile. \*

"Enzo?" I asked, a hint of surprise in my voice.

"I just..." He sighed, pulling me closer so that our bodies were pressed up against each other. "Today was one of those days, you know? A bit crazy, a bit perfect. I just needed to do this."

With that, he leaned in, capturing my lips with his in a soft, languid kiss. His lips tasted like chocolate, sweet and sticky. His fingers traced a path down my sides as his kisses began meandering down from my lips to my neck.

“What time is everyone coming?” he murmured in between kisses, his voice thick and sweet like the cake batter.

I bit my lip as I stifled a soft moan. “Seven,” I replied. “It’s five-thirty now.”

Enzo paused his kissing, and shot me a mischievous look. “So we’ve got time.”

I opened my mouth to respond, to tell him that I still had to make the frosting and we still had to get ready for the party. But before I could answer, Enzo plunged his face back into my neck and began kissing and nibbling with more vigor.

I gasped, taken aback by the suddenness of it all. But then I melted into him, my hands winding into his hair. We stayed there, lost in our little world while the aroma of the baking cake filled the air. We didn’t need words; our actions spoke volumes, each touch a testament to our love. Our bodies intertwined into one as we gingerly peeled enough layers of our clothes away to feel one another. We had already made love that morning, and I was sore, but Enzo was gentle as he worked himself into me. The sounds of our moans and labored breaths slowly rose into the air along with the sweet smell of the chocolate cake in the oven.

When we were finished, we both sank down onto the kitchen floor and leaned against one another, closing our tired eyes for a few moments of respite before we would have to finish baking the cake and start getting ready for the party.

I felt Enzo’s fingers work their way into mine, his thumb tracing lines back and forth across my knuckles. Behind my closed eyes, I could feel him leaning over to lock my lips into one last wet,

passionate kiss.

When Enzo finally pulled away, I was breathless, my heart pounding in my chest. He rested his forehead against mine, a content sigh escaping his lips. I reveled in the warmth of the moment, in the love that was palpable between us.

“Today has been quite a day, hasn’t it?” he murmured, his eyes locked onto mine. His statement was simple, but it held a world of meaning. Our shared laughter, our dreams, our arguments, even our mini-disasters—they were all a part of our journey together.

“Definitely,” I responded, laughter bubbling up again as I remembered the raccoon incident. “You’d better not tell anyone about what happened to my car.”

“Nina, you know I can’t promise anything,” he retorted, his face taking on a mischievous grin. “Besides, we’ll need some good conversation topics at dinner. And it was a memorable experience, wasn’t it?”

Memorable indeed. This day had been a whirlwind, full of unexpected surprises and sweet moments. I knew then that our life together wouldn’t always be smooth sailing. We would face hurdles, perhaps even more bizarre than a raccoon causing a car crash.

But as long as we were together, facing it with love, laughter, and an unwavering spirit, I knew we could weather any storm.

Enzo’s voice broke through my thoughts. “Ready to make some peanut butter frosting?” he asked, his eyes twinkling with mischief. “I’m feeling peckish again.”

I couldn’t help but laugh, ready to dive back into our chaotic, delightful life. As we playfully bickered over the peanut butter frosting and I tried-and failed -to keep him from taste testing it, I realized that this was just the beginning of our adventure together.

I couldn’t wait to see what else life had in store for us.

## **Chapter 308**

### Chapter 308

#### Bonus 8: The Cake

Nina

As I swirled the final dollop of icing atop the cake, the doorbell chimed, announcing the arrival of our first guest. The warmth of anticipation ignited in my chest. I dusted off my hands and went to greet them.

Before I could even open the door, Jessica and Lori burst in.

“Nina!” Jessica exclaimed, brushing past me as she looked around the house. “Holy shit! This place looks so much better!”

I blushed a bit, hugging Lori while Jessica continued to snoop around.” Thanks,” I murmured, walking over to pull Jessica into a tight hug as well. ” It’s finally done. I feel like we can relax now... Sort of.”

“Don’t worry,” Lori chimed in, patting my shoulder. “The wedding will be over soon, too. Then you guys can have your honeymoon. And then you’ll get a whole month before classes start up again.”

I had to laugh. Deep down, I wasn't sure if I wanted the wedding to be over anytime soon. I loved the process of preparing, the anticipation of it all. It was a feeling that I wanted to cherish.

"Here." Jessica shoved a bottle of champagne into my hand. There was a bow on the neck of the bottle. "A housewarming gift."

"More like a belly-warming gift," Lori teased. "You'll let us stay here tonight, right?"

I nodded, smiling as I set the bottle down on the counter. "Of course. I wouldn't let my friends drive drunk."

Enzo and I had already planned to have most, if not all, of our guests stay the night.

We had prepared with tons of blankets, and even purchased a couple of air mattresses that would certainly come in handy in the future; not to mention our guest bedroom, which was reserved for Lori and Jessica, seeing as how they were the only other couple other than Enzo and I.

At least, that was what I thought. But when none other than Luke burst in a few moments later with a beautiful woman on his arm, my opinions changed.

"Luke!" I exclaimed, running over to them. "Who is this?"

Luke's face turned a deep shade of red. "Remember that cute witch that I told you about ages ago?" he asked. "This is her."

I had to rack my brain for a minute, but then I remembered Luke mentioning a witch once when I was trying to get to Enzo in the werewolf realm. She really was cute; she had long, wavy black hair that fell down past her butt, a slender and tall figure, and wore a lilac purple dress.

She had a choker around her thin, pearly white neck that, upon closer inspection, had a tiny, delicate bird skull attached to it.

"It was ethically sourced," she said, touching the bird skull with her slender fingers, "I found it. Poor little thing must have fallen out of the nest. I'm Melania, by the way."

Melania's voice was low and soothing, and the way that her vibrant blue eyes lit up and her plump lips twisted when she spoke made me instantly realize why Luke was so smitten with her. I introduced myself, noticing how cool and smooth her hand was when I shook it.

More guests trickled in, and soon the house came alive with chatter, laughter, and the clinking of wine glasses. Friends, both old and new, flooded the rooms, and the energy



was infectious. We feasted on a homemade meal, reminiscing about the old times and sharing stories.

“Remember when Enzo thought he could beat me at a beer chugging contest?” Matt recalled, and the table erupted into laughter. His face was red from the alcohol; all of ours were. Even Melania’s face, which was naturally the color of an iridescent pink pearl, had deep red splotches on her cheeks from the wine.

“And he passed out halfway through!”

I added, and Enzo playfully rolled his eyes.

“Hey, at least I can handle my liquor,” Enzo chimed in. “Beer is for chumps.”

“Aw, hush,” Matt chided, grinning.

You’re basically a middle-aged wine mom.

As the evening wore on, the atmosphere grew more relaxed and cheerful, fuelled by a combination of good food, wine, and company. Of course, Enzo recounted my entire raccoon extravaganza to everyone, which resulted in a red face on my behalf and a peal of laughter from everyone else..

Eventually, it was time for the cake.

“Make way for the baker!” Enzo announced, helping me carry the cake to the table. The room filled with cheers and applause.

After cutting the cake and a champagne toast, we dug in. The creamy peanut butter exterior made way for the warm, moist chocolate interior, and the table was all but silent aside from the scraping of forks and mumbled words while everyone enjoyed the cake.

Enzo and I grinned at each other, holding hands beneath the table, our faces red from the wine and the champagne.

When we were finished, we all made our way to the living room, where the even evolved into games of charades, karaoke battles, and Pictionary.

However, as the night wore on, Matt suddenly suggested a change of scenery. “Let’s take this party outside!” he declared, pointing towards the window where soft snowflakes were silently covering the ground.

“Are you out of your mind? It’s freezing!” Jessica protested, but Matt was already pulling his shoes off.



“Snow’s perfect for a party!” He threw the door open and ran outside barefoot, whooping with joy.

“You’re drunk, Matt,” Lori laughed, equally as drunk as he was and also the first to follow him despite her words. Jessica, grumbling, followed soon after.

Melania followed after her, lifting her skirt with her hands and stepping delicately into the white snow with her little white feet. She hardly even left footprints in her wake; and of course, Luke followed closely behind her.

Unable to resist the contagious energy, one by one, we all followed, stepping out into the soft blanket of snow.

For a few moments, we all stood there in the backyard, overlooking the ocean -not that we could see it in the darkness as the snow fell on us and dusted our hair. The air was silent, all sounds dampened by the thick snow.

But that silent was immediately broken by Matt, who hurled a snowball at Enzo’s face with the force of a thousand suns. A gasp of surprise fell over the group while Enzo slowly wiped the cold, wet snow off

of his face.

“Hey, Matt...” Enzo took a step forward, reaching down into the snow to pick up a huge handful. He continued approaching Matt, who was backpedaling away now as Enzo balled the snow up in his hands. “Come here.”

The air erupted into laughter as Enzo hurled the enormous snowball at Matt.. The atmosphere broke into chaos after that; we chased each other around, leaving footprints in the pristine white snow, our breath misty in the night air.

“I haven’t seen you this red since you lost to Matt at chugging beer!” I teased Enzo, noticing the flush on his face from the cold and laughter.

“I haven’t seen you this giddy since... well, I guess you are always this giddy,” he teased back, pulling me closer for a quick kiss.

“Cheers to that,” I laughed, raising an imaginary glass.

Surrounded by our friends, in the house we had turned into a home, our laughter echoing in the quiet snowy night, I realized that this was it. This was our beautiful, chaotic, perfect life, and I wouldn’t change a thing.

Just as I thought that, a snowball hit me squarely in the face. I sputtered, wiping the snow from my eyes to see Enzo laughing.

“You’re so going to pay for that!” I warned, a grin spreading across my face as I scooped up a handful of snow.

The night wore on, filled with laughter, playful banter, and so much love. And even as my face grew numb from the cold and my sides ached from laughing, I knew I would treasure this night forever.

After all, it wasn’t every day one got to engage in a snowball fight with their fiancé and friends on the eve of their engagement party. Life was truly beautiful in its unpredictable, chaotic way.

## **Chapter 309**

### Chapter 309

#### Bonus 9: A Call

Nina

It was well after the party, and everyone else had gone to sleep. ]

Lori and Jessica took over the guest- room after all due to the fact that Melania, using her magic, conjured up an amazing little hut outside. When we walked into the hut, we were all astonished to see that it was bigger on the inside, although I was more astonished to see the loving look in Luke’s eyes when the attractive witch performed her trick.

The hockey team took up residence on the floor of the living room, and now Enzo and I were lying in our bed, too energized to sleep. We had a movie playing quietly on the television, but neither of us were watching it. We had ... more important things to do in bed.

As the credits rolled on the screen,

Enzo and I lay comfortably entwined in the bed, a blanket draped lazily over our nude bodies.

The peaceful silence was broken only by the low hum of the movie soundtrack and our quiet breaths syncing in harmony. It was the calm serenity of shared solitude, a comforting quiet that came with the understanding that it was enough to just be in each other’s presence.

A slow smile was creeping across my face as I traced patterns on Enzo’s chest with my finger.

Suddenly, the shrill ring of my phone pierced the tranquility and caused my smile to fade.

I glanced at the screen, an unknown number flashing brightly. I furrowed my brows, expecting an annoying spam caller at this late hour. With a sigh, I picked up the call, ready to hang up at the first sign of a recorded message.

But the voice that greeted me was far from mechanical. It was warm, familiar, and it brought a lump to my throat. "Nina?" The voice was shaky, hesitant.

"Taylor?" I asked, sitting up abruptly. "I can't believe it's you," I whispered, the surprise and emotion clear in my voice. "Why haven't you and mom been answering my calls?"

"I know it's been a while," Taylor replied. "We've been really busy, and mom's phone hasn't been working properly. I'm sorry that you haven't heard from us, but we have received your voicemails and letters."

Relief washed over me. "It's alright," I replied. Enzo sat up behind me. I felt him stand and watched as he walked over to the bathroom, tugging on his boxers as he went, "I'm just glad you're alright, Taylor."

I could hear the sounds of cars honking and people talking in the background, but I knew fully well that Taylor didn't own a cell phone. "Are you at a phone booth?" I asked.

"Yeah." He chuckled. "They're still a thing over here. It's actually awesome. You know I always hated cell phones."

I had to laugh. "Yeah," I replied. "I remember."

Once, when Taylor and I were teenagers, he got so frustrated with his cell phone ringing too often that he threw it in the street and watched with satisfaction as the school bus ran over it.

He was always a little more old-fashioned than I was. I always teased him and said that he should just start using telegrams to communicate with people, and he was open to the idea.

"So... What happened?" I asked, wanting to know why he and my mom had been radio silent for almost a month now.

Taylor let out a long, exasperated sigh. "We've just... been busy," he replied. He almost sounded as though he had more that he wanted to say, but he couldn't bring himself to say it. "Listen, Nina... I know you're getting married soon. But I don't think we can make it. I'm really sorry."

The disappointment washed over me like a wave. I had been clinging to the hope of my family being there on my special day. But understanding and love for my brother quelled the rising storm of sadness within me. He was sick, after all. I swallowed hard, forcing a smile into my voice.

"I understand, Taylor," I murmured. "I'm just glad you and mom are okay. I'll come to visit soon, okay?"

I could hear Taylor's smile through the phone. "Good," he replied quietly. "I promise we'll see each other sooner than you realize."

There was something almost cryptic about Taylor's words, but I decided that I was just imagining things, and decided to change the subject.

Taylor said that he only had a few minutes left on the payphone and, not knowing when I would get a chance to talk to him next, I wanted to make the most of those few minutes.

Our conversation flowed, revisiting shared memories, love and longing stitched into every word. Our words, echoing with years of lost time and connection, painted a bittersweet picture. By the time we hung up, tears were already blurring my vision.

I fell back onto the bed, the phone call leaving a hollow ache in my chest.

Enzo, who had laid back down and put on another movie, turned to me, his brows creased with concern at my tear-streaked face. I sank into his arms, seeking comfort in the familiar scent and

warmth.

"What happened, Nina?" Enzo asked, his voice soft as a whisper, his hand running through my hair in soothing strokes.

"They're okay, but they can't come," I replied, my voice trembling with the weight of unshed tears. "I don't know why, exactly. I think they're just too busy, and it's too far. Taylor is sick, after all, but still..."

Enzo held me tighter, his silence giving me strength. He didn't need to say anything. His presence, his arms wrapped around me, spoke volumes.

I let myself cry, the tears staining the sheets as he held me through my sorrow. It wasn't a dramatic outburst, but a gentle release of pent-up emotion, shared in the intimacy of our quiet bedroom.

Eventually, my sobs subsided and were replaced by a comforting silence.

"It'll be okay, Nina," Enzo whispered, kissing my forehead gently. "We'll see them soon."

I nodded. "I know," I replied quietly. I shook my head then. "I'm sorry for being dramatic. I shouldn't be complaining when..."

My voice faltered. We both knew what I was going to say; that Enzo had lost both parents. Neither his mother nor his father would be attending our wedding, and not because of extenuating circumstances.

He wouldn't be able to see either of them, not ever. My biological mother was long dead, but I never knew her; my adoptive mother was my real mother, in that aspect. I could see both her and my biological father whenever I wanted to, and here I was, whining about my mom not being able to come to my wedding.

Enzo narrowed his eyes. "Nina-"

"I'm sorry," I murmured. "I didn't mean to be rude."

Surprisingly, Enzo shook his head and just pulled me closer. "You're not being rude. I was only going to say that you're allowed to be sad over this. Just because my parents are gone doesn't mean that you have to push down your feelings about your mom."

Enzo's words were an odd source of comfort to me. Without saying anything else, I nuzzled down further into his arms.

I realized that this was what love meant -holding each other up during times of heartache, sharing in the other's sorrow, providing a sanctuary in the midst of the storm.

As I drifted off to sleep in Enzo's arms, lulled by his steady heartbeat and the soft movie in the background, I couldn't help but feel grateful. Grateful for the love I had found in Enzo, for the conversation with Taylor, for the chance to move forward while cherishing the past.

Life was full of surprises and hurdles, but as long as I had Enzo by my side, I knew we could weather any storm.

The phone call was a reminder of that- a testament to the ties that bind, the love that heals, and the strength we find in each other."

## **Chapter 310**

### Chapter 310

#### Bonus 10: Two Days Before

Nina

It was two days before my wedding. The house was quiet, a lull of calmness in the storm of preparation. I was at home that evening, half lost in the endless list of last-minute arrangements and half lost in daydreams. Enzo was out, running some errands.

I didn't expect anything out of the ordinary. But as it turned out, I was in for a huge surprise.

A knock echoed through the house, the sudden sound pulling me from my musings. I opened the door to find Jessica and Lori grinning mischievously.

"Hey, guys," I said, opening the door a little wider. "I wasn't expecting you-"

"Grab her!" Jessica shouted.

Before I could react, Lori grabbed me by both arms. A bridal sash was thrown over me, a tiara was plunked on my head, and I was unceremoniously dragged out of my house.

I glanced over my shoulder, certain that Enzo would come home and think that I was kidnapped. And technically, I supposed that I was kidnapped.

"Wait, what's going on?" I stammered as they pulled me into a car, laughing at my confused state.

"You'll see." Jessica winked as Lori began to drive down the road.

It wasn't long before we were pulling into town. My confusion quickly dissolved into shock and then bloomed into delight as we parked alongside the local club. Lori and Jessica put their hands over my

eyes and guided me inside, where they pulled their hands away and shouted, "Surprise!"

There, amidst a sea of familiar faces was a large sign that read, 'Nina's Bachelorette!'

"You guys!" I exclaimed, whirling around to face Lori and Jessica. "What's all this?!"

"What do you think, dummy?" Lori teased, punching me in the arm. "Your wedding is in two days. Obviously you have to get piss drunk and dance the night away before Enzo steals you from us.

Before I knew it, a strong drink was shoved in my hand and I was pushed unceremoniously into the throng of familiar faces. Alongside Lori and Jessica, I recognized several classmates who I was acquaintances with.

"Come on, Nina!" Jessica hollered over the loud music, taking my hand and twirling me around.

I laughed, letting myself be swept away, by the rhythm, my feet moving almost on their own. My tiara twinkled under the neon lights, a beacon of my soon-to-be-married status.

The DJ dropped a crowd favorite, and a cheer erupted around us. The atmosphere was electric, a palpable energy that coursed through everyone, uniting us in our shared revelry. We formed a circle, each of us taking turns to step into the center, showing off our most ridiculous dance moves amidst laughter and cheers.

Melania, the newest addition to our group, was there without Luke; I felt oddly transfixed by her ethereal beauty as she swayed on the dance floor, moving and gyrating in sync to the music like a flower swaying in the breeze.

The night transformed into a blur of dancing, laughter, and well-wishes. I found myself lost in the rhythm, soaking in the happiness that radiated from everyone. But, in the midst of it all, I felt a tap on my shoulder.

I turned around to see Enzo, a look of surprise mirroring my own.

“Enzo?” I asked, my voice barely audible over the loud music. “What are you doing here?”

“I could ask the same question,” he shouted back, grinning with a drink in his hand. “Did you get dragged here against your will, too?”

I nodded. Just then, the hockey team, including Matt and Luke, suddenly appeared out of the crowd. Our two respective parties practically froze in surprise. Jessica stomped up to Matt, jabbing her finger into his chest.

“I told you we were having the bachelorette party here!” she shouted.

“You were supposed to go somewhere else!” Matt, however, shot her a confused look. “I thought you said that you weren’t having it here!”

Enzo and I watched, unable to control our laughter as Jessica and Matt bickered. It wasn’t long, however, before Melania eventually found Luke and pulled him back toward the dance floor. I watched with a grin as his head disappeared into the crowd, and I did the same with Enzo.

Before we knew it, both parties had converged on the dance floor.

Our laughter melded into the thumping music. The night took an unexpected turn, our separate parties merging into one epic celebration. Friends from both sides joined in the revelry, the club reverberating with the amplified cheer of our combined groups.

The rest of the night was a whirlwind of music, laughter, and non-stop dancing. Our friends formed a raucous conga line, weaving through the club with Enzo and I at the helm. Drinks flowed freely, toasts were made, and stories were shared.

At one point, Enzo pulled me aside. He led me over to the bar for a refill on our drinks, the contents of which had sloshed out onto the floor more than they had actually wound up in our bellies.

Taking a breather from the dancing, Enzo leaned on the counter and held up two fingers to the bartender, who nodded. I didn't even know which drinks the bartender would bring us next; I just knew that he would bring two of them..

"Did you ever imagine our bachelor and bachelorette parties combining?" Enzo asked as he looked over at me, his eyes twinkling with mirth and his face red from a combination of the alcohol and 317 the dancing.

"I didn't even know I was having a bachelorette party until an hour ago!" I laughed, leaning against his shoulder. I tucked a stray strand of sweaty hair behind my ear and let out a peaceful sigh.

His laughter rang out, adding to the symphony of joy that filled the room. "Well, this is definitely a night to remember."

A few moments later, the bartender brought us our two mystery drinks. Enzo handed mine to me, then we clinked our plastic cups together and took a big gulp.

"Mmm," I said, grimacing as I swallowed the bitter yet also somehow sickly sweet flavor of vodka and cranberry juice. "Tastes like shit."

Enzo chuckled. "Yeah," he said. "See why I prefer wine?" As the night wore on, the energy never waned. We danced until our feet ached, laughed until our sides hurt, and celebrated like there was no tomorrow. The surprise had turned into an unexpected delight, a night filled with memories we'd cherish forever.

Finally, as the music died down and the first light of dawn peeked through the windows, we all stumbled home.

Tired, but exhilarated, we all said our goodbyes, promises to see each other at the wedding echoing in the cool morning air before Enzo and I practically fell into the back of the Uber that was waiting to take us back to our house.

And as I fell into bed just as the sun began to rise, Enzo's arm wrapped itself snugly around me. I couldn't help but think of how truly magical the night had been.

I closed my eyes, a smile on my face, knowing that tomorrow would be another day filled with love, laughter, and unforgettable memories. And after that...



We would finally be married.

The Novel will be updated first on this website. Come back and continue reading tomorrow, everyone!