

My Hockey Alpha #Chapter 81: The Watcher - Read My Hockey Alpha Chapter 81: The Watcher

Chapter 81: The Watcher

Enzo

The lodge that we were supposed to stay in for the duration of the first match of the tournament was old and dusty, but that wasn't the most disconcerting thing about the place.

The most unsettling thing was that I sensed a shifter somewhere very close. Were the Crescents already starting to spy on us? I suspected that they would start spying and plotting some sort of sabotage at some point, but not this early on in the tournament.

I decided to ignore it and not mention it to Nina for the sake of not scaring her. Instead, for our first day at the lodge, I tasked everyone — myself included — with cleaning the place up. If the state of this place really was intended to throw my team off our game so we wouldn't perform well in the match, I wasn't about to let that happen.

"Alright," I said, clapping my hands together once everyone had time to look around and bring their things inside. "Let's clean this place up."

My team looked a bit shocked, but no one complained. We started by opening up all of the doors and windows to let in some fresh air, then got to work sweeping, dusting, and scrubbing. Matt played some music on his bluetooth speaker, and soon enough, we were all dancing around and singing to the music while we worked. Even Nina seemed to be having fun, which made me smile as I had been secretly worried about her since the last time we spoke. As I watched her quietly humming to herself as she cleaned, I could almost still feel our kiss in the rain on my lips...

She must have felt me watching her, because she suddenly looked up and met my gaze. I quickly averted my eyes back to cleaning the bar, trying to push the memories of our last kiss out of my head. It hurt like hell to be so distant with one another, but I had to do it. There was no way out of this arranged marriage.

We finished cleaning by the time the sun went down, finally relaxing into the comfortable couches in the living room and resting our tired limbs. There was still no electricity, but Nina started a fire in the fireplace and found a stash of candles, which illuminated the lodge and created a cozy atmosphere. Soon, everyone had either retired to their rooms to get some sleep or had fallen asleep right there on the couch.

I looked over at Nina, who was nestled into a large armchair with a book in her lap and her feet curled up on the couch like a cat. She had fallen asleep at some point while she was reading, and the book was beginning to slip out of her fingers.

Making sure to stay quiet so as not to wake her, I slowly stood and grabbed a blanket off of the couch before walking over to her. She looked so peaceful as she slept in the firelight, as though she didn't have a care in the world. I wished that I could find a way to make her feel that same peace during her waking hours.

A pang hit my chest as I realized that the only peace I could offer her would be if I walked out of her life.

I shook my head, dismissing the negative thoughts from my mind, and gently took the book out of her hands and placed it on the coffee table I laid the blanket over her, hesitating for a moment as I looked down at her

"Mm..." she muttered, nuzzling down into the blanket. I quickly stepped away, feeling my face get hot, as her eyes fluttered open. "Enzo..."

"Sorry," I whispered, backing away. "I didn't mean to wake you.' "

"It's okay," she whispered, sitting up in her chair and rubbing her eyes, yawning. "Sleeping in a chair all night probably isn't the best idea."

"Yeah, probably not," I said with a quiet chuckle. "Do you need help getting to your room?" Nina shook her head and stood, wrapping the blanket around her like a cape. She flashed me a sleepy, yet adorable, smile before waddling off toward the stairs.

I stood in the middle of the living room as she started to ascend the stairs. She stopped halfway up, pausing and staring down at her feet before suddenly turning toward me with rosy cheeks.

"Are you going to bed, too?" I nodded. "I was planning on it."

My eyes widened at her next words. "Will you stay with me tonight?" she asked. "I don't like sleeping in new places." I hesitated for a moment, staring up at her, as I wondered what to say. Was she inviting me to sleep with her as a supportive friend, or something more?

"Nina, I—"

"It's nothing sexual. I just don't wanna sleep alone. But it's okay if you don't want to," she said. The way she was wrapped up in the blanket like a burrito, with her head of dark hair poking out and her big brown eyes, made her look almost childlike

I shook my head. "It's okay," I said, walking over to the stairs and climbing them to meet her "Come on. You can sleep with me "

Nina and I walked up the stairs the rest of the way and made our way down the hall toward my room. I opened the door and went in, gesturing for her to follow. She stayed by the doorway, looking at me almost warily.

“Hey, you’re the one who wanted to sleep with me,” I said. “Your room is right down the hall if you’ve changed your mind already.”

Nina shook her head. Stifling a chuckle, I walked over to the opposite side of the bed and sat down, removing my shoes. I felt the mattress move next to me and glanced over my shoulder to see her curled up as far on the edge as she could get, still wrapped up in the blanket I had given her

Before I could ask her if she wanted a real blanket and not just a throw blanket, I heard a soft snore escape her lips.

She was asleep already I wasn’t sure how long I was asleep when I was suddenly awoken by the feeling of being watched. I jolted awake, feeling my eyes glow as I scanned the dark room, it was empty and quiet, save for Nina’s gentle breathing beside me. I looked down at her, feeling a sense of protectiveness as I looked at her sleeping body and the way her chest moved up and down in the moonlight with each breath.

I still had the feeling of being watched, though, there was no doubt about it, and it was the same sensation that I felt earlier when I sensed the shifter nearby. It must’ve been the same shifter. I moved slowly, keeping my eyes fixed on the open window, and quietly made my way over to look out

It was still quiet and peaceful outside as ever I took a deep breath, feeling the breeze on my face, but I couldn’t shake that feeling... There was a shifter out there, and they were close.

But as I looked harder, scanning the forest with my night vision, the shifter must’ve seen me looking for them. The feeling of being watched quickly faded, replaced only by the emptiness of the quiet night and the sound of Nina rolling over in bed.

Chapter 82: Friends in unlikely Places

Nina

I woke up early the next morning with a yawn as the sunlight streamed in through the open window, and nuzzled down into the warm arms around me, only for my eyes to shoot open and for me to jump out of bed. I didn’t remember going to sleep with Enzo the night before, but it seemed that we had slept together.

As I looked down at myself, I realized that I was still fully clothed and began to remember that I had asked Enzo to keep me company the night before. We had fallen

asleep far apart on the bed, not touching one another, but must have rolled closer in the night.

Enzo was still sound asleep, even snoring lightly, so I decided to take my opportunity to sneak out of the room and go to my own room to get ready for the day.

“Alright, everyone. This is just the first game out of six in this tournament I know we’re missing Justin, but you guys have all been training really hard lately and I’m proud of you. This team thought they could throw us off our game, but they couldn’t be more wrong. Let’s get out there and start this tournament off on a high note!”

Enzo’s short speech in the locker room right before the hockey match was met with whoops and hollers from the team members. I stood on the sidelines, avoiding Enzo’s gaze, as they began to file out into the arena. A surprisingly small crowd had gathered in the stands, I’d expected this team to have lots of fans since Enzo said that they were well-known, but as I walked out to the bleachers and noticed all of the empty spots, I realized that he was wrong.

What was even more surprising was how poorly the other team performed. Enzo had told me all of the ins and outs of the Half-Moon Tournament, wasn’t each team supposed to have a werewolf captain? Why was this captain performing so poorly?

Enzo and his teammates quickly defeated the other team, resulting in a short game. I watched as the other team left on their side of the rink at the end, looking utterly exhausted.

I walked up to Enzo with my brow furrowed he looked equally as confused.

“I thought you said they were well known,” I replied, then lowered my voice so no one else could hear “Plus, isn’t their captain... You know...”

Enzo shrugged and glanced over his shoulder “Yeah. I mean, he definitely is a you-know-what I can smell it. But Something seems off.”

I glanced around Enzo to watch as the other team sat on their benches looking defeated and exhausted, then decided with conviction that I was going to go over there and talk to them. I pushed past Enzo and the rest of the team, much to their surprise, and walked around the outside of the arena to see the other team.

“You’re the captain, right?” I asked as I walked up to a tall, skinny guy with blue eyes and dark circles.

He nodded, looking me up and down warily. I watched as he glanced over my shoulder at Enzo and the rest of the team, who were all looking on in shock. “Yeah. Can I help you?”

"I'm Nina, the Mountainview team. doctor," I replied.

"I'm Jason." The other captain stuck his hand out for me to shake it, and I did.

"Please don't take this the wrong way," I said, feeling my face get hot, but... Are you guys okay? You seemed a little weak out there, and I'm saying this purely out of concern as a team doctor."

The other captain, Jason, was silent for several long moments as the rest of his team looked on from behind him. They were all still sitting on the benches, sweat caked to their faces and dark circles under their eyes. One player even had his head in his hands as he sat, as though it would take too much

effort to sit up on his own. I half expected Jason to blow up at me for being so rude as to suggest his team was weak despite their obvious appearance, but then he sighed and spoke, his shoulders drooping in defeat.

"No, actually," he said quietly. "We're not okay."

"What's wrong?" I asked in a concerned tone, cocking my head to the side.

"The team owner — my dad, actually — cut our funding big time. We've been eating like shit for weeks now, and he's making us train harder than ever We're fucking exhausted."

I furrowed my brow, thinking back to the state of the lodge. Was it possible that the lodge wasn't cleaned up for our arrival because they simply didn't have the funds or the energy to do so? It was strange to me that a father would put his son through torture like this, but maybe he was directing funds elsewhere...

I glanced over my shoulder and back at Enzo, who was watching me like a hawk, then had an idea and turned back to face Jason.

"We're throwing a party at the lodge tonight," I said. "There'll be lots of home cooked food, and there's plenty of space to sleep so you guys can just spend the night if you want. You should come."

The captain's tired blue eyes lit up." Really?" he said. "You'd host your opponents?"

I nodded and started to head back to

Enzo, walking backwards as I continued to face the opposing team." Everyone deserves to eat and relax," I said with a smile. "Come by around eight, alright? It'll be fun."

My team was a bit hesitant at first at the idea of hosting our opponents for dinner, but one pleading look at Enzo was all it took to convince him.

"Alright," he said once I explained the situation. "It's not a bad idea. You're right; everyone deserves to eat."

So, later, Enzo and I took the old pickup truck that was parked at the lodge and made our way into town to buy groceries for the meal.

"I'm thinking of making roasted potatoes and burgers," I said, typing a list into my phone as Enzo drove and quiet radio music played in the background. "We'll get snacks, too, and beer."

"You do realize that the captain of that team is a Crescent, right?" he said, sounding almost a little jealous, as he guided the truck around a curve in the road. "You know... My pack's sworn enemies? The faction we're supposed to be competing against?"

"Of course I realize that," I replied as I leaned forward to change the station on the radio. "But he's no different from you. He's just a kid our age who's been forced to compete by his dad. Don't you think it would be unfair to just leave without doing something good?"

Enzo was silent for a few moments, but I saw a slight smile twitching at the corners of his lips as he drove. "I guess you're right," he said quietly over the staticky sound of the music on the radio. "Just... Don't go dating this rival hockey captain too, alright?"

"Hey!" I shouted, throwing a punch at Enzo's arm. He grinned and dodged my punch, laughing.

I smiled, but then my eyes widened as I saw something jump out into the road.

"Watch out!" I shouted.

Enzo slammed on the brakes, making the truck come to a screeching halt. We jolted in our seats at the sudden stop, breathing heavily as we stared face-to-face with...

A shifter in the middle of the road.

I recognized those eyes. They were the same eyes I saw when we got to the lodge, staring at me from the woods.

"That's..."

"I know," Enzo said, throwing the truck in reverse and hitting the gas. We sped backwards, then he put the truck back in drive and swerved around the shifter just before it attempted to make a slash at the vehicle.

I turned around in my seat and watched with wide eyes as the big brown wolf became smaller in the distance, then leaped off into the woods.

Chapter 83: Breaking Bread

Nina

"It's been watching us," Enzo said once we were a ways down the road, finally out of harm's way of the shifter "I think it's a Crescent. A spy, maybe."

I shuddered and turned back around in my seat to face the front, my eyes wide as the image of the brown wolf was burned into my mind. The wolf had looked oddly familiar as it stood motionless in front of the pickup truck for what felt like an eternity, frozen in time. It was as if it was looking for us, watching us, waiting for the right moment, and I was grateful for Enzo's quick thinking. I certainly recognized it as the wolf that had been staring at me from the woods the day before when I stood on the balcony at the lodge, but it was deeper than that. It felt more familiar to me than just a single shifter sighting in the woods — as if I had known this world for months, years, even.

Aside from the image of the wolf's yellow eyes and brown fur, something else was burned into my psyche, too... Not an image this time, but a smell.

"Did you smell that?" I said, scrunching up my nose at the distinct, strange odor. "Maybe it was just from hitting the brakes so hard. I don't know 33

Enzo continued to drive down the road, but seemed to be keeping one eye on me at all times. When I looked over at him in the dim light of the surrounding sunset, concern was written across his face.

"What did it smell like?" he asked.

I shook my head and looked down at my lap as I fiddled with the hem of my red sweater. "I don't know exactly. Nothing I've ever smelled."

"It's possible you were able to pick up the werewolf's scent," he replied. " Maybe you really are one of us, after all."

"I don't know," I replied, thinking back to the photograph that had gone mysteriously missing after my mom came to visit. It made me wonder,

again, if my mother knew something that she wasn't letting on. Or, maybe it was just a coincidence that it disappeared on the same day. Maybe I just misplaced it. I thought, then, back to the photograph of the old Hockey club that Tiffany showed me before, how my mother had been a part of that, and how she had never even once mentioned to me that she had attended Mountainview University when she was my age.

Maybe my mother really was hiding a lot from me that I didn't know about

I fell silent as we continued to drive down the winding country road. The town started to come into view. Biting my lip, I finally tore my gaze away from the white line on the side of the road and said what had been burning in my mind all day.

“About last night...”

Enzo shook his head. “It’s better not to talk about it. I know you’re a bit scared of the dark. We don’t have to say that it was anything more than that.”

I didn’t know what else to say, and by that point, we were already pulling into the grocery store parking lot. We hopped out of the pickup truck and headed into the little country store to quickly buy the supplies I had on my list. Soon enough, the task at hand of preparing a huge feast and throwing a party at the lodge quickly outweighed both the tension between Enzo and myself as well as the shifter sighting,

and besides: if it really was just a Crescent spy, it couldn’t be that dangerous since the two factions had agreed to be peaceful... right? Or was it just wishful thinking?

Either way, I needed to distract myself, and preparing this feast would accomplish that.

As we walked together around the small country store with a cart for our supplies, picking up bags of potatoes, meat for hamburgers, buns, snacks, and anything else we might need for the party, I began to feel almost like a real couple for the first time. If I really distanced myself from all of the drama and terror surrounding us, if I pretended that the Fullmoons and the

Crescents didn’t exist, and if I pretended that a werewolf hadn’t tried to drag me through a strange, spinning portal just a month earlier, I could imagine that we were just a couple of normal college students going grocery shopping for a party with our friends. I liked to think that Enzo craved that normalcy, too.

Enzo paid for the supplies before I could even get my wallet out, and soon we were on our way back to the lodge. The sun had gone down completely now, casting the forest that lined either side of the road into inky darkness, but as we pulled up to the lodge and saw the orange glow of the fireplaces and the candles inside, and heard the sound of music blasting on Matt’s portable speaker, suddenly I didn’t feel so afraid.

We made it back to the lodge just in time to start preparing dinner. Matt helped Enzo and I to get the grill started, where we made a couple dozen burgers and lots of roasted potatoes for everyone. The rest of the team found a few long folding tables in the lodge’s storage room and set them up with tablecloths and candles for the feast.

At eight o’clock on the dot, Jason and his team pulled up to the lodge with a couple of pickup trucks and came inside carrying twelve-packs of beer and bags of popcorn and chips. Soon enough, the table was laden with plates full of hot food, and both teams sat down and ate together in one big, smiling group.

“Thank you so much for this,” Jason said, raising his plastic red cup full of beer in a toast. “I know we’re supposed to be opponents, and opponents are supposed to hate each other, but you’ve been so

kindhearted...” His eyes darted between Enzo and I. “Really, thank you. We won’t forget this. I won’t forget this.”

There was a bit of a silence at the end of Jason’s toast, as both teams were no doubt a bit baffled by Jason’s strange use of language Enzo and I, however, being the only others who knew about the Crescents and the Fullmoons, couldn’t help but grin happily at the opposing captain’s speech and his subtle promise for friendship.

As we all began to eat and drink, the room filling with the sounds of talking and music and laughter, I looked over at Enzo with a smile on my face.

“Maybe making a Crescent friend wasn’t all that bad of a move,” Enzo’s voice echoed in my head, clearer than anyone else’s voice at the dinner party.

I only nodded subtly in response and happily bit into my burger.

Chapter 84: The Spy

Nina

The party went even better than I expected. As it turned out, Jason and his team had a lot of the same interests as Enzo and his team, and a bit of friendly competition started between the two groups of boys. Eventually, the dinner ended and the drinking games started. Several heated rounds of beer pong eventually turned into horseshoes outside, followed by charades in the living room, and various other games.

By the end of the night, everyone had a blast and my party was a success. Jason and his team took up residence on the couches and the floor of the living room while Enzo’s team eventually retired to their rooms, but I felt too energized to sleep just yet

It seemed that Enzo felt the same way, because when I walked out onto the upper balcony, I saw him sitting by the lake by himself under the moonlight with a glowing joint in his hand. He must have felt me looking, because he looked up suddenly and gestured for me to come.

I hesitated for a moment, biting my lip as I considered staying in my room or going out to see him, but the alcohol in my body made me feel brave. I grabbed my sweater and slipped my shoes back on before quietly heading down the stairs that were attached to the back of the lodge, the ones that connected the upper balcony to the ground. It was chilly out, but the breeze felt nice on my skin, and the alcohol that was still in my system made me feel warmer.

“That was quite the party,” Enzo said, holding the lit joint out for me as I approached. “I can’t believe we just had a party with a member of the Crescents. Did you mean for that to happen?”

I shook my head and took the joint, taking a long drag and holding it for a few seconds before letting it out again, watching as the fragrant smoke rose into the air “Not really. I just wanted to help them.”

“Well, either way, I think we may have made an unlikely friend,” Enzo replied. “This could come in useful if the Crescents ever decide to break their promise to solve issues peacefully.”

I thought back to the shifter we saw in the road, the one that had obviously been stalking us since we got here, and wondered if it really was a Crescent. If it was, did that mean anything truly sinister? Or was it just keeping an eye on us? What if the Crescents were just as wary of the Fullmoons as the Fullmoons were of them?

I sat beside Enzo, staring out over the edge of the lake. The water looked pitch black aside from the bright reflection of the moon on its surface way out in the center, illuminating the gentle ripples that spiraled outward from the soft breeze. The sound of the crickets combined with the sound of the trees rustling made for a soothing atmosphere, a nice change from all of the noise of the party earlier.

“I have an idea,” Enzo suddenly said, standing. I watched in shock as he pulled his shirt off, then kicked off his shoes and unbuttoned his pants.

“What are you doing?” I asked, stifling laughter and averting my eyes. “You never told me that a little weed turns you into a stripper.”

“Oh, hush” he said, turning to face me. His muscles appeared even more chiseled in the moonlight “You’ve seen it all before.” His words made me blush.

“Well, yeah, but isn’t it a little cold?” I asked, taking another drag of the joint

Without answering, Enzo merely grinned and jumped into the water with a splash. I jumped up from the rock where I sat and stood on the shore, staring at the spot where he jumped in with wide eyes as he stayed under for several long moments, so long, in fact, that I started to get a little worried.

“Enzo?” I said shakily as I stepped closer to the edge. Had he hurt himself under the water? I imagined his foot getting tangled in the reeds below the surface, keeping him from coming up for air, and I started

to panic.

Suddenly, just as I was ripping off my jacket and kicking off my shoes with the intent to dive in after him, he burst out of the water with a gasp and, with a mischievous grin, grabbed me and pulled me into the water.

“Hey!” I shouted as I came back up for air, sputtering. “You asshole! I was worried about you! You’re lucky I didn’t have my phone in my pocket.”

As retaliation, I splashed Enzo in the face as hard as I could, watching with satisfaction as he sputtered and pushed his soaked hair out of his eyes.

“Worth it,” he said, grinning and swimming away from me. I couldn’t help but laugh, but it was still cold, so I clawed my way out of the pond. I stared down at myself as my clothes dripped onto the ground, then decided that splashing him wasn’t enough so I walked over to the pile of his clothes and held them over the water.

“No, I’m sorry!” Enzo said, trying to desperately grab the clothes out of my hand as I yanked them out of his reach. “Please, those are my only clothes to get home tomorrow!”

An evil grin took over my face as I held the clothes over the water, tempted to let Enzo feel the pain of having his own clothes soaked with cold lake water.

All of a sudden, the sound of a twig snapping underfoot alerted us. We jerked our heads up. I spin around, expecting that one of the guys from either hockey team was coming to see what we were doing, but as Enzo jumped up in front of me and began to snarl, I knew it was something else.

I felt a knot form in my throat, my heart pounding as I saw what Enzo was looking at.

Yellow eyes were staring at us from the shadows.

A massive brown paw stepped out from between the trees, followed by a head and a body...

It was the shifter that had been stalking us!

Suddenly, and without warning, the shifter leaped forward but it wasn’t headed for Enzo. It was headed for me. It somehow dodged Enzo and leaped onto me, throwing me to the ground with so much force that the wind got knocked out of me. I gasped for air and groaned, struggling to breathe as I pushed against it with all my might, its sharp teeth gnashing for my throat.

It was going to kill me before Enzo could shift. A tear escaped my eye and rolled down my cheek as I struggled against the wolf, its jaws getting closer to my neck...

But then, it was no longer a wolf.

Just as suddenly as it leaped out of the woods with the intent to murder me, it became human again beneath my touch ... Just as it had with Justin on the night that we discovered that he was a rogue.

This wolf wasn't just a rogue, though.

It was a fully-fledged werewolf, albeit smaller and not as strong as Kor Ronan. It couldn't be Justin, then. As it shifted back to its human form, I immediately recognized the familiar head of blonde hair.

It was Lisa.

Chapter 85: Mad Wolf Girl

Nina

In the blink of an eye, I went from having a giant brown werewolf trying to bite my neck to now having a thrashing and very human Lisa clawing at me with her manicured nails.

"What the fuck?!" I shouted. Enzo, who had just shifted into his own wolf form, shifted back into his human form and lunged forward, grabbing Lisa by the back of her shirt and yanking her off at me as she continued to snarl and flail her limbs like an animal.

I sat up, panting, with wide eyes.

Lisa was a werewolf?

But... Enzo had cured her!

Enzo pinned Lisa to the ground. She finally relaxed when she saw him above her, but her eyes were feral, so wide that I could see the whites all the way around her irises.

"What the hell happened to you?!" Enzo snarled, his voice low so as not to alert the sleeping humans inside.

Lisa panted for a few moments, her wild eyes darting between Enzo and I, before answering. "You guys are pathetic," she said. There was almost a hint of laughter behind her squeaky voice. "I've been watching you for days now. It's hilarious watching your little game of back-and-forth. Remember when we used to do that, Enzo? God, it was fun."

Enzo rolled his eyes, his grip still firm on Lisa's shoulders as he continued to pin her against the ground.

"That's not what I'm referring to," he said.

Lisa giggled. “Oh, you mean my new threads?” she said, referring to her newfound wolf form like it was just another outfit. “I’m a mad wolf, baby.”

If Lisa didn’t sound utterly insane before, she sure did now. Enzo glanced up at me, frustration and puzzlement drawn across his face.

“Did someone give you the serum, Lisa?” I said, walking up to them now that I had caught my breath and

crouching next to her. As I looked into her eyes, I noticed now that they were entirely bloodshot. She licked her lips hungrily as she stared at my neck, like she was just dying to sink her teeth into my flesh. I could see that her canine teeth were much longer and sharper now than they had been before.

“Oh, the Mad Wolf serum?” she replied, her tone of voice mocking. “Of course. How could I refuse?”

I sighed and made eye contact with Enzo for a second. “Who gave you the serum?” Enzo asked.

Lisa coughed a bit and replied in a whiny tone of voice, “I’m not gonna attack you, alright? Whatever your ugly new girlfriend did to me just now made sure that I can’t shift. Can you loosen your grip a bit so I can breathe, at least?”

Enzo hesitantly loosened his grip on Lisa, but still held her firmly to the forest floor in case she tried to sneakily shift again.

“Answer his question,” I said.

Lisa rolled her eyes. “Look, I don’t know exactly who it was,” she said, keeping her eyes on Enzo. “I knew something happened to me during those days when you had me locked up in your house — which, by the way, was pretty hot if you ask me — and then after that, it was like something was missing... I needed my fix, you know? So when I got a cute little package with a bow and everything

that said that drinking what was inside would make me feel better, and also make you fall in love with me again, I couldn’t help myself from giving the serum a try And I’ll tell you what — I feel better than ever. Or at least I did, before she ruined it just now.” Lisa glanced over at me, her eyes projecting pure fury as she began to struggle again to come after me.

Before she could get to me, Enzo suddenly pressed his thumb into Lisa’s forehead and whispered something under his breath. Her body went limp and her eyes closed, her chest rising and falling steadily and deeply as though she had just fallen into a deep sleep.

“That should keep her sedated until the morning,” Enzo said, standing and staring down at Lisa’s limp body. I bit my lip as I stared at her as well, my mind racing with a million thoughts. First and foremost, whoever gave Lisa the Mad Wolf serum was likely also the same person who gave the serum to Justin.

Secondly... How did I make both Lisa and Justin shift back into their human forms?

Enzo must have read my mind, because he held his hand out for me. I took it, and when I stood, he furrowed his brow as he looked at me. “You somehow made both of them lose their wolf forms,” he said, shaking his head. “Temporarily, at least. Either way, that’s a really powerful and rare ability, Nina.”

I narrowed my eyes, unable to come up with the right words. It seemed that every day, my werewolf heritage was becoming more and more concrete.

Would it only be a matter of days now before I was suddenly able to shift, too?

What if someone gave me the Mad Wolf serum, and that was why I had all of these abilities all of a sudden?

As I stood there and thought about the serum, something else came to mind. I had nearly forgotten about it with so much going on, but now that I thought about it...

“Oh my god,” I whispered, taking a step back from Enzo and looking down at Lisa as my mind raced.

“What?” Enzo said in a concerned tone.

I shook my head. “I just remembered – – I almost forgot — I was going into the chemistry lab the other day, and Edward came out just as I got there. He put something in his pocket and was acting strangely.”

Enzo furrowed his brow, then it was as if a lightbulb went off above his head. ”

You know, now that you mention it, he seemed to be hiding something on the night that we found Justin in the woods,” he said. “You don’t think...”

“What if Edward is supplying the Mad Wolf serum?” I asked, starting to pace back and forth. “I mean, it’s a bit of a stretch since he was the one who was wiping people’s memories at the beginning of the semester... But maybe things changed...”

Just then, Lisa let out a loud snore. Enzo sighed and crouched down, scooping her up. “We should get her inside,” he said. I nodded and followed him, and together we headed back to the lodge and carried her up to our room. I laid out a couple of spare blankets and a pillow on the floor and he laid her down.

“I don’t know how I’m gonna explain this one,” he whispered.

I bit my lip, thinking for a moment.

There really was no viable explanation for Lisa’s sudden appearance. She came with no vehicle in the middle of the night, and there was no telling whether or not she would suddenly decide to shift again in the morning and reveal her true nature to everyone.

“Maybe it’s time,” I whispered, looking up at Enzo. He turned toward me, his brow furrowed.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“I think it’s time you tell your team about werewolves.”

Chapter 86: The Whole Truth

Enzo

When Nina first suggested that I tell my team about my true nature, I thought she was utterly insane.

But as I lay awake that night, staring at the ceiling and trying to figure out how I was going to both explain Lisa’s sudden appearance as well as keep her from shifting in front of everyone or telling the truth herself, I realized that Nina was right.

It had been years since I started attending Mountainview University, and equally as long since I had started being the hockey captain. I had known most of my teammates for that entire time, and considered many of them to be my closest friends... And now, with Justin gone because of his werewolf curse, I knew it was only right to tell them.

I just hoped that they would believe me, and that I could trust them not to tell a soul about this.

I woke up first thing in the morning, just after dawn. Lisa was still soundly asleep under the dazing spell I had put on her, and would remain asleep for the next few hours which meant that I had enough time to figure out the best way to tell my team about werewolves.

By the time I got dressed and headed downstairs, Jason and his team were already awake and were getting ready to leave.

Jason smiled when he saw me.” Morning,” he said with a friendly smile. “Enzo, can I talk to you outside?”

I nodded and followed the Crescent hockey captain out to the back deck, watching as he closed the sliding door behind us so we could speak privately. He came over when he was done and leaned on the railing, looking at the ground for a moment before looking back at me.

"I always thought that all Fullmoons were just arrogant assholes," he said. "I thought that we would get our asses kicked during that game and go home feeling like shit, but you guys treated us like brothers."

"You can thank Nina, really," I said. "It was her idea."

Jason shrugged and smiled. "I know, but you, the son of the Fullmoon Alpha, agreed to do it knowing fully well that our factions are supposed to hate each other... And that meant a lot to me. Really. If you ever need anything, my team and I are here for you."

"Thanks, man," I said, smiling as Jason clapped me heartily on the shoulder. I paused for a moment, watching as he turned to head back inside, but suddenly had an idea.

"Hang on," I called out. Jason stopped and turned around as I chose my next words carefully. "Does your team know about..."

"Werewolves?" Jason said, finishing my sentence as my voice faded. I nodded. "Of course they do," he said. "Why? Does your team not know?"

I shook my head. "Nope. I haven't told them yet."

Jason chuckled, shaking his head. "You have to tell them. You guys can't be a team if you're not all on the same page, especially if you plan on winning the Half-Moon Tournament. You know that, right?"

I nodded slowly, feeling almost embarrassed that I hadn't been more open about my true nature with my teammates sooner.

"I was wondering..." I said hesitantly, "would you help me prove it to them before you leave?"

A little while later, both teams were downstairs. Nina had prepared stacks and stacks of pancakes, and while everyone was eating and chatting, I was thinking about the plan I had formulated with Jason on the back porch. Lisa was still asleep upstairs, so I knew I would have to address that — but I wanted to

make sure that I had a chance to reveal everything on my own terms before her craziness came out to play.

"Hey, I'd like everyone's attention," I said, standing. Everyone looked up, their mouths full of syrup and pancakes, as they waited patiently for what I was about to say. Jason

had already told his team about my plan, so they already knew what to expect, but how my team would react to their world being turned upside down was still up for debate.

I paused for a few moments, my heart racing. Maybe I should just say something else, I thought to myself This is a bad idea.

But then, I felt Nina's gaze on me, and her supportive smile gave me the courage to continue.

"I don't really know how to say this without sounding insane, so I'm just gonna rip off the bandaid," I said, looking around at my teammates. "I'm a werewolf."

Matt immediately burst out into

laughter, accidentally spitting bits of pancake onto his plate. There was a long, uncomfortable silence as he continued to cackle as though I had just told the funniest joke known to man.

"He's serious," Jason chimed in, standing from his seat

Everyone's heads swiveled around to look at Jason. Matt's laughing stopped almost immediately, replaced by a look of pure confusion.

"What?" Bryce said, looking around confusedly from me to Jason, then to the rest of Jason's team, who were all nodding in agreement with Jason. This is insanity. You can't be serious."

"I am," I said. "I can prove it. If everyone will please join us outside..."

I pushed my chair back and stepped away from the table. Jason, Nina, and Jason's team followed, and after a few moments of silent disbelief, my own team followed with Bryce at the back, his arms folded as he muttered about how silly we were being.

We headed out onto the back lawn. Jason and I stood a few feet apart from one another and faced the rest of the group.

Then, giving each other a nod, we both shifted.

As we stood there in our wolf forms, my team was silent for several painstaking moments before it erupted into a cacophony of choice curse words, screams of terror, and excited cheers (the cheers came mostly from Matt). Jason and I stood there like that for a couple of minutes, allowing my team to approach us and touch our fur, our paws, and our ears. My eyes were only on Nina, however, who stood off to the side leaning against one of the tall pine trees, her hands hidden in the pockets of her dark denim jacket as the cool autumn breeze ruffled her black hair. There was a sparkle in her eyes as she looked at me, and for an extremely brief moment, I vividly imagined us

together in our wolf forms. Her fur was red like the sunset, and her eyes were a bright green. Her wolf was so colorful, such a stark contrast from my own silver wolf

The vision ended just as quickly as it began, but, at that moment, I knew: Nina would have a wolf. I could sense it, and I knew it was close. It would only be a matter of time now before she shifted for the first time.

I knew something else for certain, too.

I had to make Nina mine once and for all, and there was no doubt about it. As I looked at her, smiling at me beneath the dotted morning sunlight breaking through the tall pines, I felt more connected to her than I had felt about anyone else in my entire life. I had to find a way for us to be together.

Chapter 87: Human Skin

Nina

After Enzo revealed his true nature to the hockey team with Jason's help, and once the hockey team had calmed down a bit, we started to pack up to head home.

Enzo and I headed upstairs to wake up Lisa, but as we opened his bedroom door, we were both shocked and terrified to find that the spot where Lisa had been sleeping...

Was empty

We checked everywhere: the closets, underneath all the beds, even the kitchen cabinets, but she was gone.

"She probably took off," Enzo said as the bus driver impatiently honked the horn outside "Hopefully she won't cause any more trouble"

Thankfully, as we drove home, she didn't. There was no sign of Lisa, although I kept looking out the window afraid to see her running next to the bus in her wolf form, but she never appeared.

Enzo made his team swear that they wouldn't tell a soul about werewolves. They all promised that they wouldn't say a word, but there was one — Bryce — who seemed a bit more pensive about the situation than the rest.

I chalked it up to his naturally introverted demeanor and didn't think much of it. If Enzo trusted his team with this information, then I did, too. And Jason was right: if Enzo wanted to win the Half-Moon Tournament, he couldn't keep his team in the dark about the true reasons for the tournament.

When we arrived back at the campus, our next move was to figure out whoever was giving people the Mad Wolf serum. We both had our suspicions that Edward had something to do with it, but we couldn't

prove it just yet — and, to make matters worse, neither of us exactly had the time at the moment to be stalking Edward.

So, we went to the one person who had all of the time in the world.

Luke.

Enzo called Luke to his apartment using their mindlink. A few minutes later, there was a knock on the door and he let Luke in, glancing warily down the hallway in either direction before quickly closing and locking the door behind us.

"What's all this about?" Luke asked through his sunglasses and surgical mask. "I've barely seen you guys in, like, two and a half weeks and now you're suddenly calling me here and acting really suspicious."

Enzo stammered to formulate his words, so I stepped in and explained everything to Luke for him.

"Remember how Justin was turned into a rogue?" I asked. It all still felt a bit strange to be talking so comfortably about rogues and werewolves, especially to a talking skeleton, but it was quickly becoming less foreign to me by the day.

Luke nodded.

"Well," I continued, pacing a bit, Lisa showed up while we were on that hockey trip just now... And she's been turned, too. They both mentioned something called a 'Mad Wolf serum' that was given to them by a stranger

Luke scoffed, and if he had any eyes, he likely would've rolled them. "You know, kids during my time didn't just take drugs willy-nilly—"

"It doesn't matter," I interrupted,

feeling a bit annoyed. "Someone is intentionally giving students a serum that's turning them into shifters. We have to figure out who exactly it is, and we're both pretty sure that we know who: Edward. But we're not entirely sure and we need proof before we do anything, because if he's the one doing it, then he might very well be working for someone else..."

"Which means that he could alert them about our knowledge of it and they could cover it up before we have a chance to prove it, or worse," Enzo chimed in. "They could really hurt someone as revenge, for all we know."

Luke paused for a few moments, folding his bony arms across his ribcage.

“So I take it you want me to do the investigating?” he asked.

I nodded. “Please, Luke,” I said. “We really need your help. Enzo has to focus on this Half-Moon Tournament, and I need to focus on school.”

Luke sighed. “Just when I was really getting into origami,” he muttered, causing both Enzo and I to raise our eyebrows. “I’ll help you, I guess.”

Enzo and I both let out sighs of relief, but were quickly cut off by Luke before we could say anything else.

“But... My disguise isn’t gonna work for much longer People are starting to notice the weird, skinny guy walking around campus in baggy clothes with his face and hands covered at all times.”

I cursed inwardly. I hadn’t thought of that...

“I can help you,” Enzo suddenly blurted out. “I did promise to get you a better disguise. I’ll admit that I got distracted by more than a few things along the way, but I’ll really help you now. Can both of you meet me at the cabins in the woods tonight, at midnight?”

I didn’t have much of a chance to ask Enzo what his plan was before he ran off to “get everything ready”, in his words, but I trusted him to do whatever was necessary to make this all run smoothly

So, at midnight, Luke and I walked to the cabins in the woods together.

When we arrived, Enzo was standing in the center of the circle of cabins. There was a fire in the fire pit, and there was a strange, yet beautiful, woman standing beside him.

“This is Ginna,” Enzo said as we approached warily “She’s a witch... And she’s going to give you your human skin. Luke ”

I raised an eyebrow. Human skin?

Luke, however, seemed to know already. He walked up to Ginna and dropped to his knees. “Thank you,” he said quietly, looking up at the beautiful witch. She wore clothes that appeared to be entirely handmade: a dark green dress with long, vine-like decorations hanging down around the skirt, a belt with various bottles and a knife attached to it, and a leather shoulder piece on each side. Her hair was long and thick, and jet black. In the firelight, there was something both terrifying and beautiful about her.

Enzo stepped away from Ginna and Luke and came to stand next to me.

“She’s gonna perform a ceremony to give Luke a human disguise,” he whispered while Ginna pulled a bottle of what looked like salt off of her belt and walked around Luke, sprinkling it in a circle “He’ll still be undead, a , and the disguise won’t be permanent, but he’ll appear human for a while.”

We watched as Ginna then started placing various small crystals around the circle. Then, she kneeled in front of Luke and took his hands, whispering incantations in a language that I didn’t understand.

Suddenly, Luke became enveloped in a blanket of what looked like fire. I jumped, clapping my hand over my mouth as Enzo reached out and pulled me to safety in his arms. We could feel the heat emanating from Luke even from where we stood, but he didn’t even seem to react.

Ginna continued to say her incantations, this time louder, as she threw various powders into the fire that was Luke.

I thought for sure that he was going to burn to dust... But then, as quickly as it began, the fire stopped. Luke was no longer a skeleton in baggy clothing, but he was now a young man with blonde hair and pale skin, curled up in a fetal position in the middle of the circle.

And he was naked.

Ginna gestured for Enzo to come. She handed him a small pouch and said something quietly, to which he nodded; then, she disappeared into the woods without a trace.

I watched in shock as Enzo grabbed a blanket from a nearby chair and wrapped it around Luke, then helped him to stand. Luke looked down at his hands, turning them this way and that as he admired his flesh, then turned his face up toward the moon and closed his eyes, smiling

The magic was broken, however, when I felt my phone buzz in my pocket I pulled it out to see my mother’s name on the screen, why was she calling me so late?

“Hello?” I answered quietly, walking a bit away from Luke and Enzo.

“Nina,” my mother said, her voice shaking. “It’s Taylor. He’s in the hospital.”

Chapter 88: The Hospital

Nina

“Nina... Taylor is in the hospital.”

I felt my heart drop as I registered what my mother just told me over the phone. Everything, from the Half- Moon Tournament to the Mad Wolf serum to Luke's sudden transformation, seemed like nothing now.

"I'll be there as soon as possible," I said hastily, hanging up as a knot formed in my stomach.

"Nina? Is everything okay?" Enzo asked from behind. I turned around to see him still standing by the fire, looking at me with a concerned expression on his face. Luke was pulling on a pair of jeans behind him, but was also looking at me as he did so. It felt odd to see Luke with an actual expression on his face, and for there to be meat and flesh on his bones, but right now it hardly registered to me.

"I-I have to go," I said, taking a few steps backwards. "It's my brother. He's in the hospital."

Both Enzo's and Luke's eyes widened. Enzo jogged toward me. "I'll take you on the motorcycle," he said.

"No," I replied. "I'll borrow Lori's car I'll keep you updated, though. Just focus on Edward and the Half- Moon tournament."

Enzo nodded, and before either of them said anything else, I turned on my heel and ran back toward the campus. Lori was thankfully still awake when I got home, playing a video game on the TV

"Can I borrow your car for the night?" I asked breathlessly as I ran through to my room and began stuffing clothes and toiletries in my backpack.

Lori paused her game and turned around on the couch to face me. "Uh... Sure, I guess?" she responded. "Is everything okay?"

"It's my brother," I replied, running out of my room with my bag haphazardly packed already. "He's in the hospital."

Lori jumped up and grabbed her keys out of her purse, her face drawn with worry. "Here," she said, tossing them to me. "Be careful, okay? And keep me updated."

"I will," I responded, giving my roommate a quick hug before sprinting out of the dorm and out to her car.

It was two o'clock in the morning when I arrived at the hospital where Taylor was staying. I was certain I had broken several traffic laws on the way, but thankfully there was no one on the roads with it being so late, so I managed to make it without getting into an accident or getting a ticket.

My mother was sitting in the waiting room and jumped up when I burst in through the double doors.

For the first time in my life, my mother's usually-cold face was full of worry. I, however, was just angry with her for not getting Taylor the help he needed and for letting it get to this point. I was mad at myself, too, for not being there for him.

"Where is he?" I asked.

My mother called a nurse over, who led us to the hospital room where Taylor was staying.

When I entered, my heart dropped into the pit of my stomach like a ball of lead.

My brother was hooked up to so many machines. There was a breathing tube down his throat, his eyes were closed, and his body was pale, thin, and very limp.

"Oh, Taylor," I whispered, dropping my bag on the floor and running over to the side of his bed. I gripped the bed rail with one hand and squeezed his arm with the other as tears welled up in my eyes

"I'm very sorry," the nurse said quietly "His symptoms were so severe that the doctor had to put him under a medically-induced coma."

"Do you know what's wrong with him?" I asked.

The nurse shook her head. "We're running a blood panel as we speak. His x-rays came back inconclusive. As far as we're aware, he doesn't seem to have any sort of tumor or anything like that I furrowed my brow as I continued to stare down at my brother. The tears in my eyes turned him into a shapeless blob.

The nurse muttered another word of apology before leaving, shutting the sliding door behind her to give us privacy. Once we were alone, I felt my mother's hand on my back. I shrugged her off and whipped my head up, glaring at her

"I can't believe you'd let it come to this," I growled, feeling rage bubble up inside of me. "He's been telling you for years that he's been in pain, and you did nothing."

"I did what I could, Nina," my mother responded, walking around the hospital bed and sitting in the folding chair across from it as the methodical beeping of the machines and the hum of the fluorescent lights filled the silence.

"You did nothing," I repeated. I realized that my grip was tightening on Taylor's wrist and I let go before I hurt him, my hands shaking. "You did nothing and now he's in a coma."

“Nina, listen to me,” my mother whispered. There were tears in her own eyes and her lower lip was quivering.” It’s not that simple...”

“What is it, then?” I asked. “What’s so difficult about getting your son the medical help he needs before it devolves into something like this?”

My mother didn’t answer. I felt a sob catch in my throat as I looked at her and I quickly looked away, back down at my brother. He was so much thinner than he had been the last time I saw him. His cheeks were gaunt and his eyes were sunken in. As I reached out again to take his hand and stroke it with my thumb, I could feel the bones protruding in his fingers and wrists.

The boy who I had grown up with, who had once climbed trees and played cowboys and bandits and given me piggy back rides when we were little, now looked as though he wouldn’t even be able to support his own bodyweight.

I was quiet for some time as I held my brother’s hand and silently cried, cursing myself inwardly for not taking him away from my mother, for not taking the initiative to get him help. Even if I couldn’t afford his medical care, I would’ve found a way...

“Ungh...”

Both my mother and I jerked our heads up as we heard something that sounded like a groan escape Taylor’s mouth, through the breathing tube.

I watched in shock as I felt his hand twitch in mine, and his eyes started to move beneath his eyelids.

Without a moment of hesitation, my mother jumped up and flung the door open, calling for a nurse.

Taylor was awake.

The doctor told us that Taylor’s condition seemed to have vastly improved all of a sudden. While he was still mostly unconscious, they were able to remove the breathing tube and informed us that he would be able to go home by the end of the week.

My mother and I stayed in the hospital overnight, neither of us sleeping as we sat in the dark hospital room and stared at Taylor as he slept. I kept my hand on his for the rest of the night, somehow, I knew that my touch was keeping him alive... I thought back to the night that I kept Ronan from dying, and what Enzo had told me. If I could just stay with Taylor, and keep holding his hand, I knew deep down that he would recover.

My mother noticed.

“Nina,” she said in a whisper after a couple of hours of silence. The clock was already showing 4:30 in the morning.

“What?” I responded, not lifting my gaze from Taylor. I was still furious with her for not getting him help sooner, and wasn’t sure if I would ever forgive her

Her next words, however, shocked me enough to look away from my brother.

“Are you showing werewolf abilities?”

Chapter 89: The Blanket and the Photograph

Nina

My eyes widened at my mother’s words. “What?” I asked, momentarily pulling away from Taylor as my hands started to shake. “How do you—”

My mother sighed and bowed her head. She was silent for several long moments that felt like an eternity before looking back up at me with tears in her eyes and speaking again. There’s so much I haven’t told you, Nina,” she said. She patted the seat next to her

I stood there for a few moments, blinking incredulously, before slowly and warily sitting down. My mother turned toward me in her chair and took both of my shaking hands, squeezing them gently as she leaned closer to me.

“I found the baby picture in your room when I went to visit you,” she said, reaching into her pocket with one hand and producing the photograph. I snatched it away and stared at it for several moments before looking back up at her.

“Why didn’t you say anything then?” I asked.

My mother sighed again. “I wanted to be sure before I said anything that might scare you,” she replied, then reached out and tapped the part of the photograph that showed the blanket with the oddly familiar pattern on it.” You were wrapped in that blanket when I found you. This picture was tucked into your basket, too. It was burned like this already, though, if it wasn’t, I would’ve found your real parents by now” I didn’t know what to say.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner,” my mother said quietly. “I immediately recognized the pattern on the blanket as being something related to werewolves, but I wanted to be completely sure that you were one before I scared you. You never showed any signs of being one, so I thought it was just a

coincidence. But when I saw the way Taylor’s condition improved just now, I knew it was because of you. Because of your gifts. They’re finally blossoming.”

“So you’ve known about werewolves all along,” I muttered. And to think that I felt so alone at the beginning of this semester when I first learned about werewolves being real, when I could have had my mother there to guide me. If only she had been open about things with me, I would’ve maybe felt even remotely comfortable telling her about my predicament.

My mother nodded. “I’ve never told anyone. Not even my first husband, before we got divorced when you were little.”

“How did you know?” I asked.

“I knew werewolves in college When I was your age, actually,”

My eyes widened as I suddenly remembered the photograph that I had seen in Tiffany’s office; the photograph that contained my mother, looking happier than I had ever seen her. Had the knowledge of werewolves killed the light in her eyes, or was it something else?

“You went to Mountainview University,” I said suddenly “I saw a picture of you with the hockey club.”

I watched as my mother’s eyes widened for a moment before she reluctantly nodded. “Yes. I went to the same university you’re attending now.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because...”

Just then, Taylor groaned and caused us both to jump, halting our conversation in its tracks. I scrambled to my feet and ran to his bedside, grabbing his hand again. As I did, his eyes fluttered open.

“Taylor,” I whispered, bending down to him and brushing a bit of brown hair out of his eyes. “It’s me. Nina. I’m here”

Taylor stared at me for a few long moments as his eyes came into focus before a slight smile twitched at the corners of his lips.

“Hey... Big sister...” he croaked, licking his dry lips. I grabbed a cup of water and lifted his head to help him drink, then laid him back down gently

“You’re gonna be okay,” I whispered, taking his hand again. I noticed now that our mother was standing on the opposite side of him, holding his other hand, but I didn’t look at her. I couldn’t, not after what she had just told me. She kept my true identity hidden my entire life... And she hadn’t even had the decency to ever show me the two things that may have linked me to my past the picture and the blanket with the strange

pattern on it None of that mattered now, though. What mattered was that my brother was going to be okay For now

"I'm always okay," Taylor said with a sly smirk "I'm a superhero Remember?"

I smiled, thinking back to the game we always used to play when we were kids We made up our own superheroes when we were little and would play as them day in and day out, pretending to save the world from evil, only stopping when it was time to go home for dinner. Even as teenagers, we would still talk about our game. Taylor always liked to draw, so he often drew our superheroes, saying that one day we really would save the world.

"Yeah," I said, laughing through the tears in my eyes. "You are a superhero."

The doctor came in then with two nurses, interrupting our emotional reunion.

"Sorry to barge in," she said, walking up to the end of Taylor's bed. "But now that the patient is awake, we need to run some tests. Is that alright?"

My mother and I nodded and reluctantly stepped away from the bed while the two nursed unhooked Taylor from the machines and wheeled him away. Soon, we were alone again.

I looked down at my phone for the

first time since I had gotten the initial call from my mother saying that Taylor was in the hospital and noticed that I had over a dozen missed calls from Enzo, Jessica, and Lori. They must have all been worried sick since I had been in such a state when I left, and I had completely forgotten to tell them that I made it to the hospital safely.

What I also realized as I looked at the date was that I had an anatomy presentation in just three hours, and it counted for 25% of my grade.

"Shit," I whispered, slipping my phone back in my pocket and looking at my mother "I hate to say this, but I have a presentation," I said.

My mother furrowed her brow. "Are you sure you'll be okay driving? I can drive you, if you want."

I shook my head. "No, I actually feel fine," I said. Maybe my newfound werewolf abilities were helping me to stay awake... Or maybe it was just the leftover adrenaline in my system from worrying that my brother was going to die, and that I would suddenly become exhausted on the highway and fall asleep behind the wheel. I hoped that wasn't the case.

“Okay,” my mom said, coming over to me and squeezing my shoulder “I’ll keep you updated on Taylor.”

I nodded, grabbing my bag and heading for the door. Just before I left, I stopped to glance over my shoulder at my mother, who stood in the middle of the now-empty room. She looked so small now that

the room was devoid of Taylor’s bed, like a scared child, and I realized that maybe I was too harsh with her, and that she was just as distraught as I was over Taylor’s hospitalization.

“Hey,” I said quietly to get her attention. She looked up from the floor, tears in her eyes. I love you mom.

Chapter 90: Strike One

Enzo

Our second hockey match in the Half- Moon tournament came all too quickly. I felt as though I had absolutely no time at all to figure out the situation with Edward or, more importantly, talk to Nina about what happened with her brother before I was forced to train for the next match, which would be at the end of the week.

All of the intense training was starting to wear on me and my teammates, too.

Even though it was a relief to tell my teammates about my true nature and to know that they supported me, the rigorous training that was forced on us by my father was almost unbearable. He started coming to all of our training sessions, and eventually he basically took over as team captain, completely overshadowing me and undermining my abilities.

By Friday, the night of the second match, I was exhausted. At least we would be competing on our own rink, but knowing that the team we would be playing against was really good only made tensions even higher

As my team and I skated out onto the ice, the cheers of our classmates in the stadium gave me some energy. It didn’t help that Lisa was back as the cheerleading team captain and was going to be there the whole time, in all of her evil werewolf glory, but at least Nina’s soft brown eyes looking at me from the sidelines were enough to make me forget my insane ex-girlfriend’s presence for the time being I just wished it was enough to also make me forget about my father’s icy stare from his spot in the box seats up above

We started the game. The other team was as good as I had been warned really, really good. They didn’t post as much of a threat as Ronan did, but playing against other werewolves was something that I hadn’t experienced before; Jason didn’t really count,

in my eyes, since he and his team played so poorly, nor did he seem to give two shits about the Half Moon Tournament.

At the end of the first round, the other team was ahead of us by two points. I skated off to the sidelines and chugged some water, breathing heavily after the intense round, and glanced up at the VIP box seats where my father sat to see him glaring down at me with extreme disappointment on his face. He slowly shook his head; I could practically feel the anger emanating off of him as he looked at me

“Hey,” Nina said, walking up to me. Don’t look at him. Just play.”

I managed a weak smile and nodded,

skating back out onto the ice for the second round. Drinking a bit of water and being near Nina seemed to give me some strength, allowing me to feel connected to the game. Her words echoed in my mind the entire time. Just play.

The second round ended just seconds after I made a final goal that put us ahead by one point, causing our side of the stadium to erupt into cheers while the cheerleaders performed a victory routine.

Just one more round.

I looked up at Nina’s face as I gathered my teammates to a huddle. She shot me a gentle smile and a thumbs up, which gave me the strength to absolutely demolish the other team in the third round.

We finished the game with a landslide victory. As the excited Mountainview University students funneled out of the crowded stadium, leaving behind a mess of spilt popcorn and empty soda cans in their wake, I exhaustedly pulled my skates off of my feet on the bench and let out a sigh of relief.

“Hey, who wants to go get drinks to celebrate?” Matt said, tucking his helmet under his arm with a triumphant look on his face.

The rest of the team agreed in unison, as did I.

“No, you will not.” my father’s gruff voice said sternly from behind me.

I narrowed my eyes and slowly turned to face him. The rest of the team fell silent.

“What?” I said, standing.

“You heard me. You’ve all got training in the morning. I won’t have you all hungover when you should be focusing.”

“So we’re not allowed to have one drink and relax?” I snarled.

My father chuckled. “Not after that performance, you’re not

“Sorry, Mr. Rivers, but... We won, Matt chimed in, but quickly backed away when he saw my father’s icy stare slide over to him.

“We did win,” I said. “By a landslide, too.

“Only in the final round,” my father replied. “The first round was deplorable. You got lucky in the second round. Do you think that sort of performance is going to help you win the Half-Moon Tournament?”

I scoffed, not knowing how to respond, and not wanting my teammates to be verbally abused by my father. “You guys can go change.” I said.

I glanced over my shoulder to see them still standing there, as though my father’s time spent trying to take over as the role of hockey captain had already taught them not to listen to me “Go!” I shouted, making them all jump a bit “I’ll be in soon. And we will celebrate our victory

My team slowly and tentatively retreated to the locker rooms. I turned back to look at my father, whose face was turning beet red with fury. I felt anger bubble up inside of me, as well, and felt my hands curl up into fists at my sides.

“You’re not our drill sergeant, you know,” I growled

For the duration of this tournament, I am,” my father replied. “And I can replace you at the drop of a hat with someone who knows how to take orders.”

I was taken aback. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

My father gritted his teeth and took a step toward me “Consider your performance and your indignation tonight to be strike one,” he said quietly “You get three strikes, once you pass that point, you’re done. Trust me, I’ve already got someone else lined up for your place.”

I felt a knot rise up into my throat My hands itched to throw a punch straight at my father’s hard jaw, but I controlled myself and walked away without a word

“Two more strikes!” he shouted after me. “Two more, and you’re out of here!”

As I entered the locker room, the soft muttering of my teammates abruptly stopped. I silently walked past them. toward my locker and opened it, starting to change out of my hockey gear

“Go on,” I said. “Keep gossiping”

I was met with only more silence

As though the silence was the straw that broke the camel’s back, before i could stop myself, I flung my helmet across the locker room, denting a locker with it and causing my team to jump up in surprise

“Enzo Rivers!” Nina’s voice suddenly called from the doorway.

I looked up from my rage to see her rushing toward me, her hand raised She went to slap me and I supposed I deserved it for my behavior but stopped, lowering her shaking hand.

“Just because your father is an asshole doesn’t mean you need to be,” she growled. There was a long, palpably palpably tense silence before she turned, then, to address the rest of the team.

“You guys did amazing tonight. Get your shit together and get to the bar. We’re celebrating.”