

My Hockey Alpha #Chapter 231 - Read My Hockey Alpha Chapter 231

Chapter 231

Chapter 231: Close to Death

Enzo

When I saw my father's gaunt, pale body and his glassy eyes, I reacted purely out of instinct. My eyes went wide and I stumbled backwards, clamping my hand over my mouth in order to keep myself from yelling out.

We had gotten here too late. Whatever Selena was doing to my father had already run its course, and he was going to die soon. I knew for certain from the way that Nina froze while she was looking at him, then slowly turned to look at me with an apologetic look in her eyes. If anyone was going to be certain about these sorts of things, it would be Nina. She knew what happened to the body shortly before death.

"Enzo, I'm so sorry," she whispered, her voice shaking. "We're too late."

I couldn't speak. The knot in my throat was too thick and heavy for me to get any words out. All I could do was stare, wide-eyed and in shock.

Selena got what she wanted. My father was going to die, right in front of me, and there was absolutely nothing that I could do about it. All I could do was stand there and watch in abject horror as Selena's poison worked its way through my father's veins, causing him to have a slow, painful death.

At first, I didn't understand why she wanted to do this to me. My father had never done anything to her. He was always supportive of our union, and only helped me that one time when he opened a portal for me. He should have been considered innocent in her eyes; I was the one who pushed him to help me. She should have punished me instead.

But now, as I saw my father laying there limply while his chest struggled just to rise and fall, I realized that she had punished me after all.

By refusing to be her mate, Selena had killed my only living parent. She used him to punish me, and therefore his death was all my fault. Even years from now, assuming Selena didn't kill us all, I would never let go of the guilt associated with this. And in the end, she would still win. Even if she died, she would still win because I would still live with that guilt.

Selena was far more evil than I had ever even thought possible.

That must have been part of the reason why she wanted to take me back to Mountainview. If she really didn't want me to remember Nina or my friends, she would never have taken me back to Mountainview. She easily could have kept me hostage in the mansion, and eventually I would have succumbed completely to her spells and would have never remembered my past. But she decided to take me back to Mountainview as a test, and when I failed that test, she made my father wither away.

"Enzo."

Nina's voice was stern. I hadn't realized it, but she had walked over to me and was now standing in front of me, her hands firmly wrapped around my wrists. When I finally broke out of my daze and looked down at her, she was staring up at me with fire in her eyes. "Lori texted me. Selena is coming. We have to go now."

Nina's words broke me out of my haze and I nodded. I walked over to my father's bed and scooped him up; even if he was going to die soon, I didn't want to leave him here. As I picked him up, his eyelids fluttered slightly and he looked up at me through his milky eyes. He was so light now that he was practically a skeleton.

"Enzo...?" he muttered.

"It's okay, dad," I whispered, even though I knew that it was a blatant lie. "I'm taking you home." Another lie.

My father nodded weakly. I turned to see Nina and Luke standing in the doorway, waiting for me, and I followed them. We quickly and silently made our way through the corridors to leave the way we came, and thankfully no guards spotted us even in our haste. I held my father close to my chest, not wanting to shake him around too much, but I knew that there was no way he would be comfortable anyway. Selena had made sure to poison him with something that would cause him the most pain. I was able to use a bit of my healing abilities to ease his pain, but it would never be enough and I knew that.

We made our way back over to the narrow steps that we walked up before and ran down them, taking a little less care this time to be quiet. Luke led the way through the maze-like hallways with Nina between us. I made sure to keep her in my line of sight the entire time as we ran, because there was something else that scared the hell out of me tonight.

I knew that Nina planned on fighting Selena. And part of me realized, from the look in her eyes, that she knew that she wouldn't survive it.

Nina would kill Selena. I was sure of it. But there was also a good chance that Nina would die, too. I didn't want that to happen; screw the Alpha King. Of course I didn't want to come back here now that we had my father out, and I just wanted to run away

with Nina and our friends and get away from all of this forever. But at the same time, I knew that it wouldn't happen like that.

There was a legend about two twin sisters. One made of light, and the other made of darkness. One could not live without the other, one could also not live with the other. They would be fated to die together. The death of the dark sister would bring about the end of the apocalypse, but a little bit of innocence — the light sister — would die, too.

I had always thought that it was just a myth, but the story of Selena and Nina was too similar. It was bound to happen, and I think that both of us knew that it would happen tonight.

But that didn't mean that I wasn't determined to change the course of fate. I had a plan of my own for when that time came, and I wasn't going to tell Nina about it.

I just hoped that it would work.

Finally, we managed to make our way out of the winding corridors and into the servants' quarters. We then sprinted through the hallway there, and finally burst out into the cool night. None of us cared at this point if anyone saw or heard us; within just a few moments, Nina would open a portal and we would get out of here.

We sprinted across the road to meet our friends, who were supposed to be waiting for us just inside the edge of the forest.

But as we ran, I sensed already that something was off.

And when we reached our meeting point, all of us stopped in our tracks when we saw that our friends were not waiting for us... Not like they were supposed to be. Instead, all three of them laid motionless on the ground.

Above their bodies stood two cloaked forms.

Selena and the witch.

Chapter 232

Chapter 232: Like a Shockwave

Nina

Enzo's face was as white as a sheet when I turned around to look at him. We all knew that Richard was going to die, but Enzo seemed completely out of it — and for good reason, of course. Even though Enzo and Richard had their differences, he was still Enzo's father.

I wished that I could comfort Enzo during those moments, but I couldn't. Because as I looked at Enzo's pale, shaking face, I felt my phone buzz. I pulled it out, my eyes widening as I saw Lori's text on the screen.

They had seen Selena outside. She was coming, and we needed to get out of here before she caught us.

"Enzo," I said, storming up to him and grabbing his wrists. It pained me to force him to move now when he was in shock, but it had to be done. "Lori texted me. Selena is coming. We have to go now."

Enzo's eyes snapped back to reality, and recognition flashed across his face. He nodded before rushing over to Richard's bed and scooping him up. I heard Richard mumble Enzo's name, and Enzo responded with some words of comfort, but I stood by the door with Luke to give them some privacy.

We made our way through the corridors, back down the stairs and then through the maze once more. Luke led the way with Enzo carrying Richard at the back, and the three of us moved quickly through the dark mansion. Finally, we pushed our way back out into the cool night, and made a run for it across the road to where Matt, Lori, and Jessica were waiting.

But when we arrived, my worst fears had become a reality.

Matt, Lori, and Jessica laid limp on the ground. Standing over them, dressed in dark cloaks, were Selena and the witch.

Selena slowly looked up at me as we approached. Her eyes were wide and full of insanity as they glinted in the moonlight, and the haggard old witch stood behind her like a minion.

"Hello, sister," Selena said in a sing-song voice. "Fancy seeing you here."

A gasp caught in my throat as I stared in shock down at my friends. I didn't see any blood, but they weren't moving.

"What did you do to them?!" I shouted, balling my hands up into fists. I started to storm toward Selena, but she casually put her hand up and that somehow caused me to stumble backwards, as though an invisible force was holding me back.

"Shh," she said, flashing me a toothy grin. "They'll be fine. They're just sleeping."

Suddenly, Matt stepped forward. He still had Richard's frail body in his arms. "What do you want, Selena? What do you want from us?"

Selena chuckled. It was a low, sinister chuckle; the kind that I only ever heard in horror movies. I couldn't fathom that there was a real person who was actually like that, let alone the fact that she was standing right in front of me.

Then, Selena shrugged. Her face fell. "I want you, Enzo." Her voice was now low and even. "I want you to come with me and be my mate. And I don't want you to ever even think about her again." She pointed at me then.

But I wasn't convinced. Selena had much more sinister intentions than simply wanting a boy to love her. I knew that secretly, she wanted me out of the picture because I posed a threat in more ways than

just love. She knew that I was destined to kill her, and she also knew that she couldn't kill me unless she also wanted to die. Either both of us needed to live, or neither of us could live.

As Enzo and Selena stared at one another, I felt Luke subtly nudge my arm. I slowly slid my gaze over to him without turning my head, then saw him nod his head toward Matt, Lori, and Jessica. They were beginning to wake up, which meant that I could open a portal and get us all out of here. Then, I looked down at Luke's hands. He was slowly, subtly creating symbols with his hands and muttering something under his breath. I wouldn't have known that he was even saying anything if it weren't for the fact that I was close enough to see his lips ever so slightly moving.

He was putting his hex on Selena, which would give us our opportunity to escape.

"And if I do go with you?" Enzo said, somehow oblivious to our opportunity here; or maybe he was just trying to stall. I couldn't tell if he was even clear headed enough with his father's current state to think about stalling Selena.

"If you come with me, I can save your father," Selena replied with a toothy grin. "And I'll let all of your friends go."

I knew that she was lying, but I wasn't so sure if Enzo realized it. He was too out of it because of his father, and I realized now that the false promise that his father and the rest of us could live if he listened to Selena was clouding his judgment. But I wasn't worried; as they spoke, as my friends slowly began to wake up and as Luke discreetly put his hex on Selena, I was also slowly and subtly opening a portal. I didn't use the formation that Luke taught me, but somehow I knew that it would work regardless. It must have been true after all that I possessed greater powers than I ever realized.

Enzo began to set his father down. My eyes widened.

"Enzo." Richard's voice was hardly more than a croak. I was surprised that he was even remotely conscious as to what was going on, and it seemed that Selena was as well judging from the way that her face drained of all color. Richard then slowly shook his

head. He didn't need to speak, but as he looked up at Enzo, his face conveyed everything that needed to be said. He was telling Enzo not to trust Selena.

"Get them!" Selena suddenly shouted, her voice shrill and angry. She pointed at Enzo and Richard, and the witch began to charge at them.

I didn't know what happened next. It was as though something instinctual took over me, and I lunged forward with only one goal in mind.

I screamed. But it wasn't just a scream.

It was like a shockwave, and it was so powerful that it threw both Selena and the witch up into the air and backwards several feet, sending them to the forest floor a ways away. My friends stared at me with wide eyes, but it didn't matter. During that time, the portal had not only opened but Matt, Lori, and Jessica had woken up more, and I ran over to them.

The witch and Selena scrambled to their feet, dazed from the loud boom caused by my shockwave. I hurriedly helped my friends get up along with Luke's help, and ushered them through the portal. With each of my friends that leaped through the rapidly closing portal, I felt a wave of relief wash over me.

Selena was close now. Enzo, still carrying Richard, ran over to me. Luke leaped through, and now it was only Enzo and I.

Enzo gestured for me to go first, but I wasn't going to give him a chance to stay behind and fall for Selena's tricks. Gritting my teeth, I shoved him as hard as I could, and he and Richard disappeared.

Selena grabbed my wrist, screeching, and caused me to fall to the ground. I wrenched myself away, kicking her as hard as I could, and felt a bit of satisfaction as my shoe met her jaw. Then, scrambling backwards on the forest floor, I just barely managed to fully squeeze through the portal right before the witch's hand clamped around my ankle.

Chapter 233

Chapter 233: The Death of a Father

Enzo

At the last moment, Nina shoved me through the portal before I had the chance to try to stay behind. I knew, logically, that Selena was completely and utterly lying when she said that she would let my father and my friends live if I went with her. But my judgment was so clouded from the grief of my father's imminent death that I wasn't thinking straight, and if it weren't for Nina's quick thinking, I would have made the worst decision of my life.

But at the same time, for the briefest of moments, I resented her for that. I wished that I could have tried, even if it failed. Even then, however, I loved her all the same, and I knew that she did the right thing in pushing me through that portal.

My father and I didn't always get along, especially after my mother died years before. That didn't mean, however, that I didn't love him. In fact, quite the opposite was true: I loved my father dearly. I just wished that I had realized that before it was too late.

And now, I was out of time.

I fell to the ground on the other side of the portal along with my friends. Nina came through just seconds after me and fell down to the ground beside me, panting heavily. The force of our fall caused me to drop my father, and when I came to my senses on the forest floor, I looked up to see him lying on the ground a few feet away. His body was so frail and limp, and I instantly felt panic rise up in my throat as I wondered if the impact was enough to kill him. I scrambled over to him on my hands and knees and grabbed his shoulder, rolling him onto his back.

His eyes were open and blinking, and he was breathing. But he wouldn't be for long.

I scooped my father up into my lap as he stared up at me. I had always heard that people would often have moments of lucidity right before death, almost as though death was giving them the chance to say goodbye. Someone who could barely breathe and was basically a living corpse just moments earlier could suddenly sit up and have a full conversation with their loved ones.

My father was too weak to sit up, but I knew that he was fully lucid as he looked up at me.

"Enzo," he said quietly, his voice sounding cracked and dry. "You're a good kid. I'm sorry I never told you that sooner."

"It's okay, dad," I replied, feeling the pit of dread in my stomach open even wider. Around me, my friends were groaning and coming to their senses. I could hear Matt, Lori, and Jessica speak in confused, but hushed, tones. They were waking up from Selena's spell and were certainly confused about what happened and where they were.

But none of that mattered to me right now. I only had eyes for my father. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Nina sitting up on her knees close to me, but she gave us space and privacy for our last moments together.

"I'm so sorry, dad," I said. My throat felt as though it was closing around my words, and it caused my voice to come out sounding choked. Part of me wondered if I would die along with my father from a lack of air to my lungs. "I should have tried harder."

My father only shook his head. "You did the best that anybody could have possibly done. And besides... I've had a good life. Now, I'll finally get to be with your mother."

The pit of dread in my stomach opened even wider than before, and I felt my heart drop into it. I felt so heavy that I thought that I could simply drop through the earth now, boring a hole straight out to the other side.

I wished that there was something I could do. Maybe if I had found my father just a day or two earlier, he would be okay now. Maybe if I had fought back against Selena that day that she took my father hostage, none of this would have happened. Maybe... Maybe...

My father was always too astute for his own good, and he instantly saw my guilt-ridden face. He reached up and clamped his hand around the back of my neck and held me firmly, forcing me to look into his eyes. His hand was cold and his fingers were bony.

"Don't feel guilty, Enzo," he said sternly. "You couldn't have stopped this. No one could. But now, you can stop it before more people die."

I shook my head, squeezing my eyes shut for a moment. "But how?" I said, almost in a whimper. "How am I supposed to stop her?"

My father then looked over at Nina. I followed his gaze to see that she was now kneeling over our friends, inspecting each of them for injuries. She was in full-blown doctor mode. Part of me wished that she would have done the same for my father, but we both knew that he was beyond saving. Now, it was just a matter of saying our goodbyes, and making sure that our friends were safe.

"She's the key to everything," he said. "She's the missing princess. I realize that now. If you can bring her to the Alpha King, everything will be okay."

"But the legend," I whispered. "The legend of the two sisters..."

My father shook his head. "Legends aren't facts. You can change them, bend them to your will. I know that the two of you will find a way if you just stick together. She's your fated mate... That is stronger than any twin bond—"

Suddenly, my father's voice sputtered, and he coughed. A bit of spit foamed at the corners of his mouth, and his eyes rolled back for a moment. I knew that he wasn't going to last for much longer, and all I could do was pull him closer in my arms, cradling him gently. I let my wolf use some of his healing abilities to ease my father's pain, to make his passing more gentle.

"I love you, Enzo," my father whispered, so quietly his voice could have been mistaken for the wind. "Don't forget that."

“I love you too, dad,” I replied.

But he was already gone. His eyes drifted up to the sky, and that was it.

I didn't move for a very long time. It could have been an eternity for all I cared. I felt numb, and all I could do was hang my head as I held my father tightly in my arms, as though holding him there would suddenly bring him back.

At some point, I could feel my friends circling around me. They sat down around me, their hands reaching out to touch me and rub my back, but no one said a word. Or maybe they did, and I was just too far away from my body to hear it.

All I knew was that eventually, the sun somehow came up when I thought it never would rise again, just as it always did... And my father was still dead, even in the golden light of the morning.

Chapter 234

Chapter 234: The Sun Always Rises

Nina

Richard died in Enzo's arms that morning, just before sunrise.

For a long time, Enzo just sat there holding his father with his head hung low. He didn't say a word, nor did he even look up as the rest of us quietly sat around him and reached out to comfort him. No one else spoke, either.

I couldn't help but cry a bit. I hardly knew Richard, and the only times where we met each other were turbulent, but it still made me sad to see Enzo in such a depressed state. Richard was his father, after all. And, right before the end, Richard had a change of heart and tried to make up for the horrible things he said and did. That alone was enough to make me forgive him for the times that he made me scared and threatened me. I wondered if I should tell my mother, as well; she had, after all, known him for years, not to mention the fact that she told me in her last letter that Richard wasn't the one who put the curse on Taylor after all.

Finally, Enzo slowly looked up from his father's stiff body as the sun rose and began to shine through the trees. His eyes looked red and puffy, and I knew that he had been holding back tears all morning. But Enzo was too strong to ever cry. Part of me wished that he would just let go and allow himself to cry, but at the same time I was impressed by his fortitude.

“I want to bury him,” he said suddenly, his eyes fixed on the ground a few feet in front of him, unblinking.

I nodded, then glanced over at our other friends. They all looked just as exhausted as I felt, but they also nodded in agreement and stood. I knew that they wouldn't leave Enzo alone during a time like this, despite everything else.

Thankfully, no one had been hurt by Selena or the witch. I was glad that she really did just put them under a sleeping spell. Selena was certainly aware of the power of the twin bond, and I thought that that was why she didn't kill them; she knew that if she killed or even hurt my friends, I would either kill her or myself, and she would die either way. She didn't want that to happen.

Maybe, I thought to myself as we slowly and silently followed Enzo deeper into the woods, I could use that to my advantage at some point. Selena clearly didn't want to die; maybe I could somehow threaten to do something that would cause her to die, which would make her rethink doing something horrible. Just maybe...

While the rest of us followed Enzo deeper into the forest to bury his father, Matt took off at a sprint to retrieve a shovel from the tool shed on campus. He was faster than ever now that he was a werewolf, and returned quickly. I noticed that Matt slipped something secretly into Enzo's hands as well when he returned; I didn't know what it was, but I didn't ask.

Then, we all took turns digging a grave for Richard.

Enzo wrapped Richard's body in a large canvas tarp that Matt also retrieved from the tool shed. The rest of us then stood nearby, sniffing and wiping away our tears, as Matt and Enzo slowly lowered Richard's body into the freshly dug grave.

...

When it was all finished, after we all stood in silence over the grave for some time and then slowly piled the dirt back on top of Richard's body, Enzo seemed to be filled with a new determination. I didn't know what Richard said to him before he died, and neither did anyone else. We all decided to give them privacy during those moments, and I wanted to keep it that way.

But whatever Richard said to Enzo changed something in him. Before, I could tell that he didn't want to return for the Alpha King. I always had a sinking feeling that he would try to just run away with me and

our friends and get away from it all, and I didn't blame him. But I had to go back for the Alpha King if I wanted to stop Selena from taking over the world, and I would have been willing to go on my own if Enzo refused to do it.

However, now I could tell that Enzo had the drive to go.

When he buried his father's body, it was as if each shovelful of fresh dirt filling the grave also filled Enzo with more and more determination. And when it was all finished, he wiped his dirty hands on his pants and turned back to face the rest of us.

"My father ordered me to stop Selena before it's too late," he said, his voice surprisingly clear and strong despite his grief. "That's what I'm going to do."

Enzo then looked over at me. I could see now that his eyes were still full of pain, but there was a bit of a sparkle there as he met my gaze. Without a word, I slowly walked up to him and slipped my hand into his, never breaking my gaze from his face. "We can do it together," I said quietly.

I could tell that Enzo wanted to tell me not to come. He chewed the inside of his cheek for a moment, his brown eyes searching my face. He opened his mouth and then closed it again, as though he was going to say something — he was likely going to say that he would go alone — but decided against it. Instead, he only pursed his lips and nodded.

"We have to go now," he said quietly, turning to look at the rest of the group then. "Selena will only cause the Alpha King and everyone else she comes into contact with to meet the same fate as my father."

The rest of the group stared back at us, silent and pale. They all looked utterly exhausted. Jessica and Lori were leaning against each other a little for support, and even Matt and Luke stood behind them with somber, drawn faces and gaunt cheeks. They all had dark circles under their eyes.

I was sure that Enzo and I looked the same, but we had no choice. The rest of our friends, however, didn't need to come with us. I didn't want to endanger them again.

"We believe in you," Lori suddenly said. Her voice was hoarse, and so low it was almost a whisper. At first, I thought that she was referring to both Enzo and myself. But then I noticed, however, that she was only looking at me. So were the others; even Enzo was only looking down at me.

And when I looked up at Enzo's soft brown eyes, he only nodded. Now that I looked up at him, I realized that he wasn't going because he thought that he could take down Selena; he was going because he wanted to be my backup. I felt his body lean into me a little bit, and I chose to support him.

After all, I knew it was my job to be the steady pillar that my friends needed at a time like this. And I believed in myself, too. I was the only person who could ultimately stop Selena.

Besides... With Enzo there as my bodyguard, I felt confident that I could take Selena on.

That morning, I was prepared to die.

Chapter 235

Chapter 235: Return Together

Nina

Enzo and I had to return to the werewolf realm only minutes after we buried his father.

We didn't have time to rest or regroup, or to even gather fresh supplies. No matter how badly I just wanted to lie down in my bed for hours or take a hot shower to ease the soreness in my muscles, I knew that we needed to leave as soon as possible. There was a possibility that Selena and the witch were already hot on our trails, as we had spent so much time that morning taking care of Richard's funeral. I didn't know how long Luke's hex would last; it could have been wearing off at that exact moment, for all I knew — which meant that Selena could easily open a portal at any second and kill all of us.

Except for me, of course. She couldn't kill me, and she knew that; but she would make sure to make me suffer.

There was no way to stop Selena if we didn't act quickly. Already, I imagined that she was probably fuming, and would likely find a way to get her revenge if we didn't hurry. But my friends were exhausted, and I didn't want to put them in any more danger than they already had been that night.

"We can go with you," Matt said, stepping forward from the rest of the group despite the fact that he looked just as battered and exhausted as everyone else. "I will go, at least."

Enzo shook his head.

"You guys need to stay here and protect the town," Enzo said firmly. Even amidst his grief, he was the perfect picture of a strong and powerful Alpha. I thought back to the way that he was at the beginning of the semester, and how different he had been. All of us had been so different then... But was it for

better or for worse? Did everything that we experienced bring us together and cause us to mature, or did it only hollow out our insides and make us cold and pessimistic? At this point, I couldn't even tell. I felt too numb in preparation for my upcoming fight with Selena to feel anything. It was like I was an outsider watching myself from far away. Just a puppet being yanked around by the strings of fate.

Matt frowned and furrowed his brow. "You expect us to just let you two go alone? Selena is crazy!"

“We’re going with you,” Lori said firmly. When I looked at her, she was swaying slightly in her spot from obvious exhaustion, but her eyes burned brightly despite of it.

Then, Jessica chimed in as well, her voice high and shaky. “We won’t let you—”

“As your Alpha, I command it,” Enzo suddenly interrupted. His voice was even more stern now, and it boomed across the forest clearing. Even the morning birds that sang around us went silent for a few moments. But then he softened a bit, and I felt his shoulders slump slightly beside me. He looked at Matt then and addressed him firmly. “You’re my Beta. I need you here, protecting the rest of our pack.”

Finally, after some consideration, Matt nodded and stuck his hands in his pockets. Meanwhile, Lori and Jessica stood off to the side and stared at us with a combination of shock and sadness. I could tell that they knew that Enzo and I had to go, but at the same time they wanted us to stay here.

I wondered if I would see my friends again, or if this would be the last time I would ever see them. I didn’t even know if I should tell them that there was a chance that I wouldn’t come back... Maybe it was best, I thought to myself, if I let them go on thinking that I would return at some point. Maybe if I said a real goodbye now, it would only make it all too real for me.

I decided to keep my fate to myself — although whether it was for my friends’ sake or my own sake was a mystery to me.

“What do you want us to do while you’re gone?” Luke asked, always the stoic one. His face was drawn; being an undead meant that he didn’t need much sleep or rest, but it didn’t mean that the entire experience didn’t make him utterly exhausted. And yet, even in his exhaustion, he still needed some sort of order to keep himself busy.

Enzo looked down at me. I swallowed. My throat felt cracked and dry from the scream that escaped my lips earlier — the strange scream that created a shockwave that was strong enough to throw both Selena and the witch several yards away from us. I still didn’t know what that was, or where it came from. It just felt instinctual, like I always knew I could do it somehow. It made me wonder how many other powers I had, just lying dormant inside of me.

“The antidote,” I said suddenly. “I... I wrote down the recipe. It’s on the computer in the infirmary. You guys need to make more.”

My friends’ brows furrowed almost in unison. I realized that what I said set off some red flags; it implied that I wouldn’t be returning anytime soon, if ever. But none of them said anything, except for Jessica, who nodded and spoke up. “We’ll take care of it, Nina,” she said quietly.

I managed a weak smile. So did Jessica. Beside her, Lori only stared at me with that same knowing, solemn stare that she had always been good at.

Suddenly, Matt walked forward. He stopped in front of Enzo and myself and stared at us both for a few moments before finally reaching out and punching Enzo's shoulder with a crooked, cheeky grin.

"See you guys soon," he said. "Real soon."

There was something in his eyes, though, when he looked at me, that indicated that he didn't fully believe that he would see us soon. However, he didn't say anything else. Enzo merely nodded in response, then looked down at me.

It was time.

I turned, taking a deep breath, and held my hand out.

The portal opened much faster this time; I had gotten better at it. I didn't even need to do the full motion, almost as though the portal was just waiting for me, as though I could have simply opened it with my mind. I wondered if the portal would take us directly back into Selena and the witch's grasp, or if it would take us somewhere else. I couldn't decide which outcome I would have preferred; both would end in the same way. Selena and I would likely kill each other. It didn't matter where or when it happened. As the swirling, purple vortex spun in front of us, I took one last look at my friends.

But through the tears in my eyes, I couldn't see any of them anyway. They were nothing but a group of shapeless blobs. I swore I heard a sob escape Jessica's throat, but I couldn't be certain whether it was hers or my own.

Enzo's hand slipped into mine. Together, we stepped into the portal.

Chapter 236

Chapter 236: The Search for the Dark Princess

Nina

With one last teary-eyed look at my friends, Enzo took my hand and we stepped through the portal together.

When we came out on the other side, we were in a different place than before. I still hadn't perfected my portal skills, and so I had no way of knowing where exactly a portal that I made would open to. This time, we weren't even in the forest.

In fact, as I looked around with confusion, I saw that we seemed to be on the outskirts of a town.

“Where are we?” I asked, glancing around at our surroundings with my eyebrows scrunched together. “This isn’t the forest.”

Enzo looked around as well. “I know this town,” he said. “But... It’s several hours away from the Alpha King’s mansion. Even longer on foot.”

I felt anger begin to bubble up inside of me, and I cursed annoyedly. This was supposed to be simple. I was supposed to get as close to the Alpha King’s mansion as possible so I could get all of this over with quickly, but now we were stranded far away from the mansion with no vehicle. The town was small, too, and appeared to be in the middle of nowhere. In fact, the town was hardly even a town at all; it was more of a roadside pit stop than anything. All I could see was a gas station, a general store, a bar, and a few houses. Mountainview was tiny, but this place made it look huge.

“It’s alright,” Enzo said, although I wondered if he truly meant that or if he was just trying to make me feel better. “Let’s go and ask around. Maybe we can find a ride.”

I didn’t think that anyone from such a small town would be so willing to give two strangers a ride to the Alpha King’s mansion, but it was too late. Enzo was already pulling me toward the gas station.

As we approached the main road of the tiny little town, it felt like a scene out of one of those old western movies; only this town was located in the middle of a pine forest, and not the middle of the desert. The energy was the same, however. It was so quiet that I could have heard a pin drop, and there were no cars or other people. If it weren’t for the old man who was standing and looking at us through the window of his house with a sullen expression on his face, I would have thought that no one even lived here.

The way that the old man looked at us through the window made me uneasy.

“Enzo, we don’t know if these people are welcoming to strangers,” I said nervously as he pulled me across the road. “They might have guns.”

“They’re all werewolves,” Enzo replied matter-of-factly. “They don’t need guns.”

I knew that Enzo was trying to make me feel better, but it actually only made me feel worse. Before, I was worried about getting blasted off the face of the planet by a shotgun, and now I was just worried about getting ripped to shreds by an angry werewolf in its wolf form.

At least I had Enzo with me.

We crossed the street and walked up to the small gas station. It had a flickering neon sign in the window that faded in and out, and much to my surprise, the sign indicated that the gas station was open twenty-four hours a day. For a town this size, I expected the gas station to be open one day a week.

When we stepped inside, I was immediately accosted by the smell of booze and cigarettes. It was an unexpected smell for the inside of a gas station, and I had to resist the urge to pull my shirt up over my

nose. There was an attendant behind the counter — a middle-aged woman with a ponytail and too many wrinkles, probably from all of the smoking — who just stared at us warily as we entered. Enzo, clearly not wanting to raise any alarms, led me over to one of the coolers. He grabbed two bottles of water, several bags of various snacks, and handed everything to me while he then filled two cardboard cups with coffee. We then walked up to the attendant and dropped everything down on the enamel-coated counter.

The attendant scanned our items slowly, never breaking eye contact with us. The intense smell of cigarettes was definitely coming from her. It was so strong now that it almost made me gag, and I felt my eyes begin to water.

“Seventeen-fifty,” she said, her voice hoarse and gravelly. Enzo handed her a twenty dollar bill. “You want a bag?”

“Yes, please,” Enzo replied, trying to sound casual. The attendant made a bit of a face, but retrieved a plastic bag from beneath the counter and began shoving our things in it. Enzo cleared his throat. “Erm... You happen to know if there’s a bus stop or anything around here?”

The woman paused, her eyes slowly sliding up to look at Enzo. She let out a sharp snort. “Ain’t no buses out here.”

“W-What about a place to rent a car?” I asked sheepishly.

The woman then turned to glare at me. She looked me up and down, chewing a bit of tobacco in her mouth, and made another face. “Where are you from?”

I opened my mouth to answer, but before I could, Enzo interrupted. “Listen,” he said, somewhat sternly, “we really need a ride. We’ll pay for gas and for their time. We just need to hurry.”

There were several moments of silence. The woman seemed put off by Enzo’s sudden demand, and looked him up and down in the same way that she looked at me. She looked like she was about to tell us to fuck off, but then a gruff voice suddenly spoke up from behind us.

“Where ya headed?”

Enzo and I whipped around. My eyes widened as I realized that the man standing in front of us now was the same old man who had just been staring out his window at us. He was wearing a thick flannel coat, a beat-up pair of jeans and an even more beat-up

pair of work boots. He was thin, a little too thin for someone that age, but I could see from the leathery and sinewy look of his wrists that poked out from his rolled-up sleeves that he must have worked really hard his entire life. His face was dark from days spent working in the sun, and he had deep lines all around his eyes from squinting. But his eyes... His eyes were a bright yellow peering out at us from beneath his trucker hat.

“We’re...” Enzo paused, seemingly appraising the old man, and for some reason he seemed to trust him enough to tell him exactly where we needed to go. “We’re going to the Alpha King’s mansion.”

There was a long silence.

Then, suddenly, the old man snorted — much like the attendant behind the counter, but much louder and more abrasive. The attendant also let out a low, condescending chuckle.

“Why’re a couple’a kids like you headed to the Alpha King’s mansion, hm?” the old man chortled.

Enzo opened his mouth to speak, but before he could, I stepped forward and swallowed my fear.

“Listen, mister,” I said, trying to sound tougher than I really felt, “it’s important. If you take us, we’ll pay you whatever you want.”

The old man stared at me for a long time, his yellow eyes searching my face. Then, finally, he shrugged and jerked his head toward the door.

“C’mon. I got my truck out front.”

Chapter 237

Chapter 237: A Strange Place

Nina

“C’mon,” the old man said, jerking his head toward the door. “I got my truck out front.”

The old man turned and walked out of the store without waiting for us. Enzo and I paused for a moment and shot each other an uncertain look before collectively deciding that this strange old man from the middle of nowhere was probably our best bet at getting to the Alpha King’s mansion in time, and so we decided to follow him.

The aforementioned truck was incredibly rusty and worn down. We had walked past it on our way into the gas station, but it was so beat up that I had assumed that it was abandoned. However, when the old man opened the door and looked at us through the

windshield with his yellow eyes peering out from beneath his tattered trucker cap, I realized that I was wrong.

When we opened the passenger side door, it was one of those old style trucks with the bench seat. There was no back seat, so I shot Enzo another uncertain look before I decided to slide into the middle. Enzo climbed in behind me and kept his arm firmly wrapped around my shoulders as the old man stuck the key in the ignition and the truck sputtered to life.

Soon enough, we were on the road. The old man pulled out onto the dirt road that ran straight down the middle of the tiny little town, and he followed that road for a while. It eventually wound through the forest, with rows of pine trees on either side. If I looked closely enough into the forest, I was certain that I could see quite a few sets of yellow eyes looking out at us. It made my blood run cold.

“Rogues,” the old man said, noticing my apprehension. “They won’t bother with a vehicle. If ya were on foot, though...” His voice faded and dropped away. I could only imagine what he meant by that, and it made me glad that we didn’t try to walk to the Alpha King’s mansion after all.

“Um... Are rogues common around here?” I asked, squeezing my hands tightly between my knees to hide the fact that I was shaking slightly out of nervousness.

The old man nodded. “Yup.”

No one said anything else for a while. Soon, the road widened and the trees became sparse on either side. And, finally, after crossing a little bridge that ran across a narrow river, the road became paved. The old man picked up the pace. I was surprised that the beat up old truck was even running at any speeds greater than ten miles per hour, but I wasn’t complaining.

Even though the old man was silent and gruff and the truck felt as though it would fall apart, there was a certain air about the old man that made me feel oddly comfortable around him. I couldn’t explain it; it almost was the same as the strange couple who found me when James shot me. The old man was more stoic than the couple, but he had the same sort of energy to him. He felt almost paternal. Maybe that was why I felt comfortable asking him questions, and maybe that was why I ignored Enzo’s apprehensive looks.

“What’s your name?” I asked the old man. I glanced over at him to see that he was driving steadily with one knotted old hand on the steering wheel, and the other resting on his knee. Looking at him, I could imagine what he looked like when he was younger; he was lanky and a bit hunched over now in his old age, but the sinewy muscle on his forearms and the sparse stubble on his face made me think that he was probably a hard worker his entire life. He was probably tall and muscular at one point, like Enzo. The way that he clenched and unclenched his jaw while he drove seemed a bit like Enzo,

too. Or at least it did, until I realized that he was actually chewing tobacco as he rolled down the window and spit a big ball of brown spit out into the air while he drove.

“Frank.”

He didn't ask what my name was. In fact, he didn't say anything else. I bit my lip, and decided to pry a little bit more out of curiosity. If we were going to be sitting in this vehicle for a few hours with this old man, I wanted to at least try to make some conversation.

“So... What do you do for a living?”

Frank made a hmph sound. Enzo's hand tightened on my shoulder, and when I glanced over at him he was somewhat glaring at me.

But, suddenly, Frank spoke up.

“Where are you two from, anyway?” he asked without tearing his eyes away from the road, his knuckles tightening around the steering wheel.

“P-Pardon?” I asked, somewhat sheepishly. “Why do you ask?”

“Yer clearly not from 'round here. I know yer a werewolf.” He jabbed his thumb in Enzo's direction, still without looking away from the road. “But you...” His voice sounded almost a little accusatory. I knew that, without my wolf's presence, I still smelled human. It occurred to me then that maybe these people didn't trust humans for one reason or another, but that wouldn't have explained why Frank decided to give us a ride after all.

Neither Enzo nor I knew what to say. We both shot each other another wary glance. Frank, noticing this, chuckled. His laugh sounded like an iron poker being raked over hot coals.

“It's alright. Ye don't need'a tell me nothin'. Hey.”

Frank suddenly pointed up ahead. On the side of the road, there was a big neon sign hoisted up onto a tall pole that came into view. It was a sign for a 24/7 diner; the type of place that truckers usually stopped at in the middle of the night when there was nowhere else to get a hot bite of food to eat.

Although... This place was so rural that I figured it wasn't just a place that was frequented by truckers, and judging from the row of other old beat up pickup trucks in the gravel parking lot, my suspicions were confirmed.

Without waiting for a response, Frank suddenly slowed down and pulled into the parking lot. He put the truck in park, then turned to look at us for the first time throughout the

entire trip. He stared at us for a few moments, then down at the meager bag of water and snacks between Enzo's feet.

"You two are on an important journey, eh?" Frank asked. Once again, Enzo and I didn't know whether we should say yes or no, but Frank didn't wait long for a response anyway. "Look, I dunno what yer up to exactly... But yer gonna need more food than that. C'mon. This place's got good food. Nice 'n hot."

Once again, Enzo and I looked at each other, then down at our bag of snacks. Frank was right; we hadn't eaten in over twenty-four hours at this point, and I knew that we were both starving. If we were going to fight Selena, no matter the outcome, we couldn't do it on such empty stomachs.

Finally, Enzo nodded and opened the passenger side door.

"Sure, Frank," he said, sounding a lot less apprehensive than he seemed earlier; maybe Frank's kindness made him relax after all. "We could eat."

Chapter 238

Chapter 238: A Stop on the Road

Nina

Enzo and I followed the old man, Frank, into the diner.

We were short on time, but Frank was right; we had an important journey ahead of us, and we couldn't accomplish our goals on nothing but coffee and potato chips. Neither of us had eaten in over a day by now, and we were both starving.

Frank opened the door to the old retro diner, causing the little bell to hit the glass and jingle loudly. This diner was a lot like the one that I worked at; there were some vinyl-covered booths in the windows along with a long, enamel counter lined with stools. Everything seemed to be either a shade of sky blue or cream white — even the waitress's uniform. It was, essentially, the quintessential North American diner. Aside from the fact that the people here were all werewolves or some other form of occult, it didn't really even feel as though I set foot outside of Mountainview.

Without waiting for the waitress, Frank led us over to a booth in the corner and slid into the seat with a grunt, as though his old bones felt strained just from the process of sitting down. Enzo and I slid into the seat across from him.

A few moments later, the waitress — who was wearing a blue dress with a white apron, almost exactly like the one that I wore at the diner in Mountainview — came up to us and poured steaming black coffee into three thick mugs without a word. She plopped a

small pitcher of creamer down on the counter. There was no sugar anywhere to be found.

“Hey, Frank,” the waitress said with a bit of a sigh. “Good day for driving.”

“Yup.” As usual, Frank was a man of few words. I quickly began to realize that maybe that was just the way he talked to everything, and that it wasn’t just because Enzo and I were outsiders.

The waitress then slowly turned her head to look at Enzo and me, and looked us both up and down deliberately. She was chewing a piece of gum, and smacked her lips with it as she stared at us.

“Who’re you?”

“Uh...” I began, feeling small beneath the waitress’s glare. Enzo, however, stepped in for me.

“We’re just passing through,” he said. He almost seemed to take on the same cadence that these people had. It made me realize that Enzo really was from this place, after all, and maybe the way that he spoke back in Mountainview wasn’t natural to his normal way of speaking. I supposed that living in a place for several years could do that to someone.

“Hm.” The waitress nodded slowly, then pulled her notepad out to take our orders. I hated to admit it, but I appreciated the fact that these people didn’t ask too many questions. Whether or not they simply didn’t care or they genuinely didn’t want to get involved in the doings of outsiders was a mystery to me. Maybe it was a combination of both.

“Three burgers,” Frank suddenly said. “Extra cheese.”

“Mhm. Fries?” the waitress asked.

“Yup. Thanks, Louise.”

“Mhm.”

The waitress walked away without another word, leaving Enzo, Frank, and I alone at our booth. There was a long, awkward silence; I didn’t know what to say at this point, because after our brief

conversation — if one could even call it that — in the truck, I had learned that Frank wasn’t the chatty type.

However, I simply couldn't contain my curiosity. As I discreetly glanced around at the other diner patrons, I realized that everyone had a similar look to them. The men were all dressed in ragged work clothes, and the women weren't dressed much differently. There was even one woman dressed in a diner uniform sitting at a table with a man and a toddler, indicating that she was probably sitting with her family for her lunch break. And if the town that we met Frank in was any indicator in combination with the way that everyone else dressed, it certainly seemed as though this area wasn't the most financially fortunate.

"Can you tell us at all about this place, Frank?" I asked, feeling unreasonably confident.

Frank froze. I felt Enzo's hand tighten on my leg beneath the table, but I wasn't afraid. Frank, just like everyone else around here, was just a normal working man. In fact, he had done nothing except prove that he was incredibly kind, in his own way. Sure, he seemed a bit rough around the edges, but he went out of his way to give two strangers a ride and was even willing to sit down and have a meal with us.

Finally, licking his cracked lips, he spoke.

"Yer goin' after the Luna, aren't ya?" he suddenly asked.

Both mine and Enzo's eyes widened.

"N-No," I responded, which wasn't a lie. We weren't going after anyone except Selena. I didn't even know anyone who was named Luna.

Frank shrugged. "I know what yer thinkin'. This place is as run down as can be."

"Well, no, I—"

"It's alright. Ya know, it used to be a good town. A hard workin' town full'a good people. A lumber mill... I was the Beta, actually."

Enzo raised his eyebrows. "Really?" he asked. We were both surprised at the old man's sudden candidness.

Frank nodded. "Yup. Sure was."

"Well... What happened?" I asked, leaning forward with my elbows on the table. "Did something change?"

There was another pause. Frank seemed to be thinking hard, as though he wanted to choose his words carefully. I could tell that he didn't want to say anything too revealing.

“I’ll just say this,” he said. “Ever since that new Luna married the Alpha King all those years ago, things ain’t been good for us little people. But we’re mostly good. Even the ones who turned to crime to feed their families... They’re good.”

I thought back to the eyes that we saw peering out at us from the woods. “The rogues,” I said quietly.

Frank nodded. “Yup. Matter o’ fact, ye had a few of ‘em followin’ ya earlier.”

My eyes widened. When we first walked into that town, I remembered seeing Frank staring out his window at us. I didn’t know it at the time, but I suddenly realized that he wasn’t watching us with distrust; he was watching us for our own safety. If Frank hadn’t offered us a ride, we probably would have been attacked.

Suddenly, our food came. Three burgers, dripping with grease and cheese, with mountains of French fries on each plate. The waitress didn’t offer any ketchup or anything else of the sort, but when I took the first bite, I realized that it didn’t need it.

“This is...”

“Delicious,” Enzo finished for me, his mouth full of burger.

I couldn’t help but laugh. Even Frank let out another gravelly chuckle and stuffed three fries into his mouth at once. “Told ya,” he said.

The three of us ate in silence, but it wasn’t uncomfortable; instead, it was the sort of silence that only came about when the food was simply so good that everyone was too focused on eating to even think about talking. And, when Enzo and I finally finished our massive burgers, I swore that I could eat another.

“Listen,” Frank said suddenly, after finishing his last bite and wiping his mouth with a brown paper napkin. He looked up at me then, and his eyes were burning an even brighter shade of yellow than before. I got an odd feeling then; it almost felt as though my brain had been scrubbed, like someone had gone through it with a fine tooth comb and picked out all of my thoughts, one by one. Frank’s eyes narrowed a bit, and I felt a lump rise in my throat.

“I’m listening,” I said, finding myself unable to break away from my gaze.

And then, all of a sudden, his voice echoed in my mind without his lips moving an inch.

“No one needs to die. You can fight the dark sister without anyone getting hurt.”

Chapter 239

Chapter 239: The Kindness of Strangers

Nina

My eyes widened even more as the old man's words echoed in my head.

"No one needs to die. You can fight the dark sister without anyone getting hurt."

"How... How did you..." I began to stutter, but before I could get anything coherent out of my mouth, the old man suddenly slapped a wad of money down on the table and stood, adjusting his hat.

"Ah," he said, patting his rounded belly. "Good burger."

Enzo gave me a confused look, but said nothing. I didn't know what to say; how had Frank read my mind like that? It must have been a werewolf ability, but... it was so powerful. I supposed that he was a Beta, after all.

But what did he mean when he said that no one would need to die? How did he know for sure?

I had so many questions, but no time to ask them. Frank, without another word, headed out of the diner with Enzo and I on his heels. Enzo shot me another look, but I only shook my head ever so slightly. After that, we climbed back into the car and were on the road again.

As Frank drove, I was still too taken aback to talk about it again. If he was somehow right, and that I could defeat Selena without anyone having to die, then that changed things drastically. But how? How could she be stopped without violence? She was so powerful thanks to her witch powers in combination with her werewolf abilities that I couldn't possibly think about any other scenario to stop her that didn't involve violence.

But if Frank was right when he said that I could stop Selena without anyone getting hurt, then that gave me some hope.

And maybe hope was what I needed more than anything else.

We eventually made our way onto a highway. The steady droning of the truck's engine and the lack of curves in the road made it easier to relax, and with a belly full of food, I felt myself drifting off. Even Enzo seemed to be nodding off when I glanced up at him, and it made me feel safe. I didn't feel afraid to put my head on Enzo's shoulder and let sleep take over me for the first time in almost two days as we drove, and Frank didn't say anything to break the silence. Soon enough, I had fallen into a dreamless slumber that was much needed after going so long without proper rest.

However, I was awoken some time later by the feeling of the truck pulling over onto what felt like gravel.

Enzo and I both jerked our heads up to see that Frank had pulled over on the side of a road. We were no longer on the highway, but had seemingly returned to the country roads that were thickly wooded with pine trees on either side. The air felt cool and fresh, even inside the truck, and there was a light mist that had settled on the ground. The mist wasn't thick enough to obscure our sight, but it was just enough to create an oddly calming yet also spooky atmosphere.

"Where are we?" I asked, sitting up and looking around. I didn't see the Alpha King's mansion anywhere around — I couldn't even see the tops of the massive spires poking up above the trees.

"Sorry," Frank said, putting the truck in park. "This is as far as I'm willin' to take ya."

Enzo looked around, then looked over at Frank. "How far out are we?" he asked.

Frank shrugged. "About an hour's walk. I ain't goin' any closer. Yer business ain't mine, and I've gotta get home before it's dark."

Frank was right. When I glanced at the clock on the truck's dashboard, it was already late afternoon. Considering the fact that we had returned to the werewolf realm before lunchtime, it had been a long day of traveling. And, now that winter was upon us, the sun would be going down soon. The thought of walking out in these woods in the dark again freaked me out too much to even want to think about it, and I just wanted to get to the Alpha King's mansion before that happened.

"Thanks, Frank," I said, managing a weak smile. "We really appreciate your help."

"Yup."

Enzo reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet, then rifled through it for some cash and held the wad out to Frank. "Here," he said. "For the gas and the food."

Frank chuckled again, like more iron pokers raking over more iron coals. "Keep yer money," he said, shaking his head. "Just..." He paused then, and for the first time I saw the old man's yellow eyes fade. They weren't yellow after all; they were hazel. And, for the first time, his face looked tired and sad. "Just... Get it done," he said quietly. His hands were still on the steering wheel, and his knuckles were white from gripping it so hard.

I didn't need to ask what Frank meant. He wanted us to stop Selena and whoever this "Luna" was. It was clear that people like Frank were suffering because of the things that those two did.

I nodded, and reached out to squeeze the old man's knotted hand. As I did, his hazel eyes met mine, and I swore I saw a ghost of a smile flashing across his thin lips.

“We’ll try our best,” I said.

After that, Enzo and I got out of the truck. I still had my backpack from my first excursion into the werewolf realm, so we shoved our water and our snacks into it and waved our goodbyes to the old man before we started heading down the road.

As we walked, Enzo and I didn’t let go of each other’s hands once. It almost felt as though we both seemed to be of the belief that if we let go of each other for even a second, we would lose each other again. And neither of us wanted that to happen.

I just hoped that Frank was right. I didn’t want to leave Enzo behind... and if I could find a way to keep that from happening, while still stopping Selena, I would figure something out.

But I still didn’t know who this “Luna” was.

“So... What did he say to you earlier, in the diner?” Enzo suddenly asked as we walked. “I know he said something telepathically.”

I bit my lip and stared at the paved road beneath my feet while I walked. I didn’t want to tell Enzo the truth about what Frank said, because it would only reveal that my original plans when coming here were to die with Selena. I was worried that if Enzo found out, he would force us to leave. And I needed to stop Selena, one way or another.

“Well?” Enzo asked.

“He just said that he knows I’m the missing princess,” I lied. “And he wished us luck.”

“Oh.” I couldn’t tell if Enzo believed me or not, but he didn’t pry any further.

“By the way,” I asked, “who is Luna? I’ve never heard of her before.”

Enzo let out a bit of a chuckle. “That’s not her name,” he replied. “It’s an honorary title. It’s the same as a queen.”

I raised my eyebrows, mulling over this information for a bit, before speaking again. “So, this Luna... Do you think that she and Selena are working together?”

Enzo shrugged. “Maybe. I honestly never heard anything bad about the Luna, but, if I’m being honest... I guess I was raised in a pretty privileged way. I never had to worry about things like Frank described.”

I nodded. It sounded as though this Luna — who was essentially my stepmother as well, I supposed — wasn’t treating the lower classes very well. But why not? What would her purpose be behind that? And why would the Alpha King allow it?

And then, it finally dawned on me: the Luna must have been manipulating the Alpha King. Chances were, she was working with Selena after all.

If that was the case, then this only became that much more sinister.

Chapter 240

Chapter 240: Pure Instinct

Nina

Enzo and I walked for a long time after that. Frank said that it would only be an hour by foot, but it felt much longer. Maybe it was just my own perception of time getting the best of me; after all, as the sky began to darken it started to feel more ominous in the misty woods, and so every second felt like an eternity.

However, at least I had Enzo. And, we didn't run into any danger while we walked. In fact, it was quiet and peaceful, and we even began to talk a bit. We had a good amount to catch up on.

"So... You and Justin," Enzo began, sounding a bit somber. I knew where this was going.

"That was never going to happen," I interrupted. I stopped on the road and turned to face Enzo, still holding his hand firmly. "He tried to take advantage of my loneliness, but I didn't let him."

"Good." Enzo's face darkened a bit. I hadn't seen or heard from Justin since the dance, and I wanted to keep it that way. Justin was back on the hockey team, though, and it made me wonder if Enzo would kick him off again when — or if — he eventually returned. I couldn't decide if I wanted Enzo to kick him off or not. On one hand, I was hurt by how Justin treated me. On the other hand, I didn't know if I necessarily wanted him to get kicked off of the team.

However, none of that mattered. After everything that had happened, all of that stuff felt like petty drama. All of the times that I couldn't decide whether I wanted to be friends or lovers with Enzo, all of the arguments and threats from Lisa... None of it even felt real anymore.

Enzo opened his mouth then to say something, but before he could I suddenly felt my heart begin to beat faster. I whipped my head around to either side, looking up and down the road frantically.

"Nina?" Enzo asked, furrowing his brow. "Are you oka—"

"Shh."

I couldn't explain it, but something had caught my attention. It was like a sixth sense. It was like pure instinct had kicked it, and somehow...

"Something's coming," I whispered. Before Enzo could even process what I said, I suddenly grabbed his hand even more tightly and bolted off of the road with him in tow. I jumped down into the ditch, then quickly scrambled up the other side and ran into the woods before diving behind a large fallen tree. Enzo followed suit, but he looked obviously confused the entire time. The thing was, though, I couldn't even explain it to him. I couldn't smell or hear anything; I just sensed that someone — or something — was coming.

And, a few seconds later, Enzo's eyes widened. He sniffed the air for a moment, his eyes beginning to glow red. Crouching beside him, I dug my fingers into the soil and slowly peered over the fallen tree.

They came into view.

Rogues.

There must have been at least six or seven of them. It was a large pack, with an obvious leader that was the biggest of them all. I clamped my hand over my mouth and watched with wide eyes as they walked down the road, then stopped where we had just been standing.

The leader sniffed the ground for a long time. Enzo and I looked at each other, wondering if we should run or try to fight. Surely they smelled us... Surely they knew that we were here, and it would only be moments before they pounced on us. Enzo could shift if he needed to, but I was useless, and without the help of the antidote or my own wolf, I wasn't sure if we would stand a chance. Their leader was huge, almost Enzo's size; in fact, he didn't even look like a normal rogue.

There was something different about him. He wasn't a regular werewolf, but he wasn't entirely a rogue, either. He was too big and strong to be a rogue, and his glowing orange eyes were too smart and aware. Most rogues didn't seem to have nearly as much order and concentration as this wolf; but he looked smart and calculated.

Enzo slowly reached over, his hand sliding on top of mine. He nodded his head in the opposite direction, indicating for us to run. I nodded in response, and began to mentally prepare myself for what could be the most harrowing chase of my life.

But then...

The rogues kept moving. They didn't seem to smell us or hear us. As I watched them continue walking down the road and eventually fade away into the mist, I was in complete shock.

“What... How...” I muttered, turning to look at Enzo with wide eyes. Did his wolf retract his scent, like it did when the Crescents were looking for us during the initial attack? But how did that explain the fact that my own human scent wasn’t discovered? Unless... My wolf was able to cover my scent, somehow. It was the only logical explanation.

Unless, of course, they were toying with us.

Enzo and I stared at each other for a long time. Neither of us seemed to be able to make sense of it, and we were both in such a state of fight or flight that we didn’t even know what to do.

But as I looked at him, I couldn’t contain myself.

Maybe it was the adrenaline. Maybe it was my wolf, flickering somewhat to life. All I knew was that, at that moment, I wanted Enzo badly. And he seemed to want me, too.

For no logical reason whatsoever, I suddenly lunged at Enzo, sending him toppling to the ground. My lips met his in a flurry of passion, and I felt him moan into my mouth — or maybe it was more of a growl. I couldn’t tell.

His hands moved down my waist, then pushed up beneath the hem of my shirt and came into contact with my skin. I felt myself let out a deep sigh at the feeling of his cold hands on my waist. It instantly made me wet. I felt feral. Was this what it was like to be a werewolf? Did my instincts take over now, just as they had when I felt the rogues coming? And now, was this my primal urge to mate taking over?

I reached down, biting Enzo’s lip so hard I felt the slight metallic taste of blood hit my tongue, and frantically worked at his belt buckle. He reached up to cup my breasts beneath my shirt as I worked, and once his belt was undone I ripped into his jeans and slid my hand down his pants to touch his throbbing cock. It was warm, and filled my hand. I wanted Enzo to fuck me right here on the dirty forest floor.

Enzo moaned beneath my touch. He took one hand out from inside my shirt to wrap his fingers around my throat, and at that moment I felt the same low, almost growl-like sound escape my lips.

But then, suddenly, both of us stopped when we felt the patter of rain begin to fall on our skin. It came all of a sudden, taking both of us by surprise, almost as though the forest was bringing us back to our senses and reminding us that we had a mission.

I pulled my hand out of Enzo’s jeans and climbed off of him, sitting down on the forest floor and breathing heavily from our shared passion. He reluctantly buckled his belt again before sitting up. To think that we had gotten so caught up in our passions that we nearly forgot about our task at hand made me laugh, and when Enzo saw my smile, he let out a chuckle as well before standing and holding out his hand for me.

As the rain grew heavier and the sky began to darken, we cautiously made our way back out onto the road and began to walk again. Once again, Enzo held my hand firmly as we walked.

His fingers were an unending reminder of the fact that I might never get to be intimate with him again if things went south.

I was just glad that the rain covered my tears.