

My Hockey Alpha #Chapter 71: The Wolf Doctor - Read My Hockey Alpha Chapter 71: The Wolf Doctor

Chapter 71: The Wolf Doctor

Enzo

I watched as Ronan lay there, his breathing shallow and labored. I knew he was dying, and I couldn't help but feel a sense of relief. Ronan was cruel and utterly insane for what he did. But then Nina stepped forward, her medical skills kicking in as she tried to keep Ronan alive. Her kindness and compassion for someone who had caused so much pain and suffering was truly admirable. It made me love her even more.

"Call for help," she ordered as she pressed her shirt into Ronan's wound to put pressure on it and stop the bleeding. "I won't lose two lives tonight."

"Two lives?" I asked, but Nina was too busy tending to Ronan to hear me.

I pulled out my phone and called Lewis, hoping he could come and take Ronan away before it was too late. Nina worked tirelessly to keep Ronan alive; her healing abilities seemed far superior to that of a human, medical school or no medical school. Something was extraordinary about her.

"Go to the ravine a little ways that way," she said, gesturing with her head. "I found the stalker... She fell."

My eyes widened. I wanted to ask more, but I saw the tears in Nina's eyes and knew that something horrible happened that she likely wouldn't want to talk about just yet, if ever.

Nina stayed behind to tend to Ronan, while I went out in search of the stalker. It didn't take me long to find her, thanks to my ability to see in the dark; her lifeless body lay at the bottom of the ravine. Her neck had clearly been broken from the wall.

Sighing, I climbed down the ravine and walked up to the body.

I recognized her immediately. She was my father's assistant, Veronica.

Why was my father's assistant the one that was stalking Nina? I couldn't wrap my head around it just yet, but I knew now that he had something to do with it. I soberly collected her broken body and headed back to where Nina was waiting for me with Ronan; Lewis was already there when I arrived.

Lewis looked up from where he was crouched next to Ronan, his eyes widening when he saw Veronica in my arms.

“Veronica?” he whispered, standing and coming over to me. I nodded.

After a moment of silence, Lewis spoke up. “We need to get Ronan back to your father’s house. He might be able to help him.”

I nodded, understanding the urgency of the situation. I picked up the dead girl’s body and held Nina’s hand, teleporting us to my father’s house.

When we arrived, Lewis already had. Ronan laid out on the dining room table. Nina looked like she was going to be sick.

“Sit down for a moment,” I said gently, gesturing with my head toward the couch while I held Veronica’s body in my arms. “The first time teleporting is always the worst. The nausea will pass.”

Nina nodded and stumbled over to the couch. I watched her lay down, then carried Veronica out to the patio and gently handed her to another member of the pack. “Treat her body carefully,” I said to the shocked pack.

I returned to the dining room. Lewis was hovering his hands over Ronan’s wounds, working his magic; he had always had the best healing abilities of the pack.

“Where’s my father?” I asked, glancing over at Nina, who was still laid out on the couch with a sickly look on her face.

“Where do you think?” Lewis replied. “Away on business, as usual.”

“Is he ever even home anymore for more than a few hours at a time?” I asked.

Lewis shook his head. There was a long silence while he worked his magic before he spoke again, this time whispering. “You realize she healed him, right?” he said.

I furrowed my brow. “She is a medical student,” I responded.

“No,” Lewis replied. “She healed him. Not completely, but enough to keep him alive. I really don’t think she’s human, Enzo.”

I looked over at Nina again. As she lay on the couch with her eyes closed, her face was wrought with worry and Chapter T The Wolf Doctor

sadness. I knew she must have been overwhelmed by everything that was happening... No doubt she blamed herself for Veronica’s death. I stared at her for a few moments, piecing together everything I had learned about her so far; her scent that attracted all sorts of shifters, her impressive speed, and now healing.

“Do you think she’s one of us?” I whispered, thinking back to what she said in the woods about her knee. Had she healed herself in her sleep the night that she hurt her knee?

Lewis shrugged. “Possibly. Hybrid, maybe. She doesn’t have a wolf, right?”

I shook my head. Despite everything that Nina possessed that was supernatural, there was no evidence that she had a wolf. Not yet, at least..

Nina groaned then, holding her stomach. I left Lewis to his work with Ronan and walked over to her, crouching next to her as she laid on the couch. I took her small hand and pressed it to my lips, which

seemed to ease some of her discomfort. As I watched her, the camera around her neck caught my eye.

“May I?” I whispered. She cracked

open her eyes to look at me, registering what I was referring to for a moment, then nodded and let me slip the camera off over her head. I switched it on and started clicking through the pictures, the anger bubbling up inside of me as I saw just how many photographs Veronica had taken of Nina; some of them were even taken from incredibly close range while Nina was sleeping, completely violating her privacy and personal space.

Had my father hired Veronica to do this? Was this his way of driving Nina and I apart so he could go through with his twisted plan to marry me off to some other CEO’s werewolf daughter? I couldn’t think of any other reason as to why he would’ve done something like this.

“I killed her,” Nina whispered suddenly. I looked up from the camera to see her looking at me with tears streaming down her cheeks. Sighing, I reached out and wiped them away with the back of my hand.

“It wasn’t your fault,” I said reassuringly, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. “Don’t blame yourself.”

“Alright,” Lewis said then, walking into the living room and drying his bloody hands with a towel. “He’ll be out cold for a bit, but he’ll be fine.”

I thanked Lewis. He merely nodded and walked outside, and once he was gone, I stood. “Come on,” I said, standing and holding out my hand for Nina to take. “You need some sleep.”

Chapter 72: Midnight Swim

Nina

Enzo took my hand and led me upstairs. The house I assumed it was his father's — was spacious with a modern design, and had huge windows that looked out over the ocean below. Enzo led me down a dimly lit hallway and opened a door to a large bedroom.

The bedroom had a king-sized bed, another massive window that took up the entire wall facing the ocean, and even had an electric fireplace that Enzo turned on with the flick of a switch. He gently led me over to the bed and sat me down, getting on one knee to slip off my shoes.

“Put your arms up,” he whispered once he had my shoes off, then slipped my shirt off over my head when I did as he asked. His eyes lingered on my breasts in the moonlight for a moment before he got to work on my pants, which I was just now realizing were covered in mud from my trip down into the ravine. I felt his hands brush the skin on my thighs as he pulled my pants off, which gave me goosebumps.

When he was finished, he looked up at me, still on his knees in front of me as his hands squeezed my thighs. His red eyes were looking at me in such a way that I knew exactly what he wanted.

“Do you still want me?” I asked, my voice barely above a whisper.

Enzo slowly nodded his head, never breaking eye contact with me. I leaned forward and grabbed his shirt, pulling it up and over his head to reveal his chiseled abs and chest muscles. He stood when I was finished and unbuttoned his pants in front of me, sliding them down as his erection strained against his underwear.

Seeing him like this, with the moonlight shining through the window as he stood in front of me looking like a god, instantly made my panties wet. I couldn't resist him anymore and grabbed his hand, pulling him down to me. As our lips locked together and our tongues began exploring each other's mouths, all

I could think of was that this felt... right. All of the tension, the pushing and pulling between us all semester, felt so silly now.

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

I shot Enzo one last, lustful look before taking his cock in my hand and sliding it into my mouth. I heard him moan as I worked my tongue around it, familiarizing myself with its shape and size until I felt comfortable enough to start moving my head up and down. His hand made its way up to the back of my head as I pleased him, his fingers tangling in my hair in a way that made my body tingle.

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

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

I clapped my hand over my mouth in shock, but Enzo smirked and pulled it away as he eased himself in.

"Don't hide it," he said, his voice low and sultry. "I like it when you're loud." I felt my face go red at his words

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

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

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

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

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

"Nina," he said out loud, his eyes rolling back in ecstasy. I felt a smirk play on my lips as I pushed him down onto his back and began riding him, my hands pushing into his chest.

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

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

“Should we shower?” I whispered after some time, rolling off of him and onto the bed. Sweat was caked on the back of my neck, making my hair cling to my skin.

Enzo sat up, breathing deeply and thinking for a moment, before shaking his head and standing. He held out his hand as a smirk tugged at the corners of his mouth.

“I have a better idea,” he said.

Feeling puzzled, I took his hand. He led me to the door, still fully naked.

“Wait,” I said, taking a step back and covering my breasts with my arms as he swung the door open. “I’m not covered.”

Enzo smirked and turned toward me, grabbing my arms and pulling them away from my breasts. “It’s okay,” he said. “Everyone else is asleep by now.”

“Are you sure?” I responded, peering out into the hallway. Enzo nodded and took my hand again, pulling me after him. We quietly walked down the stairs and out the back door into the cool autumn night air. The cold breeze instantly made my nipples hard as he led me to the pool.

I watched by the poolside as Enzo walked down the steps into the pool, turning around and looking at me once he was fully submerged with a grin on his face.

“It’s heated,” he said. “Come on. It feels nice.”

Glancing over my shoulder one last time at the dark house, I walked down the steps into the pool. The warm water felt almost like a bath, enveloping me in its refreshing embrace. I felt a smile spread across my face as I let the water wash over me, as if it was washing away all of the pain of what happened in the forest.

Enzo swam over to the edge of the pool that faced the ocean, leaning his elbows on the rim. I looked at him for a moment, taking in the shape of his body under the light of the moon, before swimming to his side.

The ocean was calm, the breeze creating ripples on its surface as it lapped against the rocks below.

“Did you grow up here?” I asked.

Enzo shook his head. “No. My dad only built this place a few years ago.... After my mom died.”

I raised my eyebrows and turned to look at him. His jaw was set hard as he looked out at the ocean; there was a sadness in his eyes that I had never seen before. “I’m sorry,” I said, touching his hand. “I didn’t know your mom died.”

Neither of us said anything else for the duration of our swim. I wasn't sure exactly how long we spent there, looking out at the ocean and feeling each other's bodies beneath the warm water, but eventually we grew tired.

The cold night air made me shiver as we got out of the pool.

Wrapping his arms around me, Enzo picked me up and carried me to bed.

Chapter 73: Good Cop, Bad Cop

Nina

I woke up the next morning to the sun streaming in through the massive window as it rose over the ocean. My night of ecstasy with Enzo made me temporarily forget about the horrors that happened in the forest the night before, but as I rolled over and realized that Enzo was no longer there, I suddenly sat up and remembered everything.

Feeling a pit in my stomach as I worried where Enzo might have gone, I quickly crawled out of the enormous king-sized bed and looked around for my clothes.

After I looked around for a minute, I finally found my clothes; they had

already been washed and dried, and were folded neatly on a chair by the window. Had Enzo done this for me? I couldn't help but smile a bit as I put on the clean clothes, my smile growing as I realized that they smelled like him now. He had left one of his hoodies for me as well on the chair. I put it on gratefully and inhaled his scent.

"Enzo?" I called, poking my head out of the bedroom door once I was dressed. I looked both ways in the dark hallway and didn't see anyone, but I heard voices downstairs.

When I walked downstairs, Lewis and another man were talking in the kitchen in hushed voices. I couldn't quite make out what they were saying, but by the time I was close enough to be able to hear anything, they both snapped their heads up as I approached and halted their conversation.

"Good morning," I said timidly, hoping that they hadn't heard my moans the night before and that they hadn't seen me naked in the backyard during our midnight swim. "Have either of you seen Enzo?"

Lewis turned around to look at me. His face appeared weathered from years of hard work, but his green eyes were still bright, a stark contrast from his

tanned skin. He wasn't much taller than me, but he had broad shoulders and a muscular build. He wore jeans and a dirty denim jacket, as though he was dressed to do manual labor. The other man was dressed similarly, although he was much taller and lankier.

“Your prisoner woke up a little while ago,” Lewis replied, nodding his head toward the basement door. “Enzo is down there questioning him.”

I nodded and muttered a word of thanks, turning and walking over to the door. Lewis called after me: “I wouldn’t go down there if I were you, kid,” he said sternly. “It might not be pretty.”

I lingered for a moment with my hand on the doorknob, wondering if I should just turn back and wait for Enzo, but decided against it. “It’s alright,” I said, opening the door. “I’m the one Ronan was hunting, anyway.”

Lewis didn’t stop me as I headed down the basement steps, but I heard him pick up his conversation where he left off with the other man. Did I hear him whisper something about a hybrid?

As I descended into the cool basement, I heard the sound of Enzo’s muffled voice coming from a room in the back. Biting my lip, I quietly walked toward the door to listen in on what he was saying.

“Tell me who sent you, or I’ll take your finger,” I heard him growl, followed by a chuckle that sounded like it came from Ronan.

“I’m not telling you shit,” Ronan replied.

I heard the sound of skin hitting skin and a grunt, as if Enzo was punching Ronan. My eyes widened as I leaned closer to the door, horrified at what I heard on the other side.

Suddenly, the noise stopped. I heard the sound of approaching footsteps on the cement floor and jumped back just in time for Enzo to yank the door open with a concerned look on his face.

“I figured you were out here,” he said quietly, barring me with his body from seeing Ronan. “I don’t want you seeing this. It’s no place for a girl like you.”

“A girl like me?” I asked, folding my arms. “You think I can’t handle blood? I’m the one Ronan was hunting; I think I have the right to be here while you interrogate him.”

Enzo paused for a moment. There was blood on his knuckles and sweat caked to his forehead. Finally, after I glared at him for several seconds, he sighed and stepped out of the way. I walked past him to see Ronan tied to a chair in the middle of the room. He had a bruise on his cheek, but otherwise seemed fine.

“Ah, Nina,” Ronan said in a sing-song voice as I entered the room. “Lovely to see you. Would you be so kind as to tell your boyfriend that he’s wasting his time trying to get me to talk? It’s not gonna happen.”

Frowning, I glanced over my shoulder at Enzo to see him still standing in front of the door with an angry expression, his red eyes fixed on Ronan as he clenched and unclenched his jaw. I turned back to face Ronan, narrowing my eyes at him. "Why not?" I asked, slowly approaching him.. I could feel Enzo's eyes on the back of my head, but for some reason, I felt wholly confident that I could get

Ronan to talk. It was almost as if there was something inside of me, giving me strength and confidence that I didn't always possess before this moment.

I walked up to Ronan and placed my hands on the arms of the chair leaning over him so that our faces were mere inches apart. His eyes flashed orange as I stared into them, but there was a small amount of fear behind his gaze.

"Tell me why you've been hunting us," I said, my voice low.

Ronan swallowed and glanced over my shoulder. I shot my hand out and grabbed his face, holding it still so he was forced to look into my eyes. Now, the fear in his eyes was even greater. I couldn't explain how I was making him so afraid, but whatever it was seemed to be working, because he spilled the details only moments later.

"Listen," he said, his voice shaking as I continued to stare into his eyes. "I'm just the middleman. I'm only doing this because she paid me well."

"She? Who is she?" I growled.

"The witch," he replied. "Rhea. She said I need to bring you to her. She says the last guy failed, and if I fail too, she'll kill me like she did to him."

My mind raced with a million thoughts. Was he referring to K? Had K also been hired by this Rhea woman to bring me to her?

"Why?" I asked. "Why me?"

Ronan shook his head vigorously. "I don't know. She wouldn't tell me; she just said to find you and bring you to her."

I let go of Ronan's face finally and stepped back, turning to look at Enzo. He was still standing by the door, his arms folded across his chest. I nodded, walking up to him. "He's telling the truth," I whispered as I glanced over to see Ronan, the man who I had once viewed as tough and manly, now sobbing uncontrollably out of fear with his chin on his chest.

"How do you know?" Enzo asked.

I shrugged, pushing past him to open the door." call it a sixth sense."

Chapter 74: The Crescents and the Fullmoons

Enzo

After I watched Nina somehow make Ronan spill the truth faster than I had managed in two hours, there was no doubt in my mind that she was a werewolf. If she was a hybrid, she was a powerful one — but a huge part of me believed that she wasn't a hybrid, but rather a full-blown werewolf. If she was, though, where was her wolf? Why hadn't it shown itself yet?

Before I had much time to think about it, I heard a familiar voice upstairs: my father. Shit, I thought to myself as I locked Ronan in the basement room once more and started to head upstairs. There was no doubt that my father had just unceremoniously met Nina, judging from the sounds of their voices mixing together.

When I emerged from the basement,

Nina was standing in the living room. She glanced over at me with wide eyes before my father stepped into view.

"Ah, Enzo," my father said, folding his arms. "Good to see you. I had thought for a moment that your girlfriend came here alone."

"I can explain," I began, to which my father interrupted me with a raise of his hand and a shake of his head.

"No need," he said. "I've been watching you — and I must say, you've done well with bringing Ronan here. He'll be dealt with accordingly." There was a long, uncomfortable pause before he turned to address Nina, and it was now that I finally noticed the dark circles under his eyes.

"Join me for dinner tonight," he said. "Both of you."

That night, much to my dismay, Nina and I got dressed and headed downstairs for dinner with my father. He had prepared steak and mushrooms, which was surprising considering the fact that he hadn't cooked a single thing since my mother died. He had always been the cook of the household when I was growing up, but almost as soon as my mother died, I didn't see him for a single meal ever again. It was strange to come downstairs and see him setting the table.

"Take a seat," he said over his shoulder. "Dinner will be ready in a moment."

Nina glanced at me before sheepishly pulling out a chair and sitting down. I sat next to her, feeling protective of her in case my father decided to start berating her or belittling her, and squeezed her hand gently.

My father finished preparing dinner and set the plates down in front of us, then poured red wine into each of our glasses before sitting down. I watched hesitantly as he raised his glass for a silent toast before he began to cut his steak.

“Do you know the story of the Crescents and the Fullmoons?” he asked as he cut into his steak.

That old wives’ tale?” I asked.

My father scoffed and took a sip of his wine.

“It’s not just an old wives tale,” he said, crossing his legs and leaning back in his chair with a serious expression on his face. “It’s history. A hundred years ago, the Crescents and the Fullmoons the two factions of werewolves fought for the place of — Alpha King. It was a bloody and brutal battle, but the Fullmoons eventually came out on top. The new Alpha King of the Fullmoons beheaded the Crescent chief, and the war ended.”

“Why are you telling us this?” I interrupted, beginning to feel a little irritated at my father’s beating around the bush.

My father looked up at me with an annoyed glare. “She’s aware of our.... heritage, correct?” he said.

Nina, before I could say anything, finally spoke. “Yes,” she said quietly. ” I know that you’re werewolves.”

“Good,” my father said with a slight smile. “It’s important that you’re aware, if you’re going to be involved with my son... Because the war that may wage soon will wage in your very home.’

I felt my eyes widen. “What do you ‘mean?” I asked quietly. “You’re not saying...”

“All of the attacks on campus are omens of the Crescents’ return.’

I scoffed. “You’re just saying that to scare her.”

My father shook his head and began cutting into his steak again. “I’m afraid you’ve already foiled my attempt to scare this human girl away from you,” he said, gesturing with his fork while he chewed. “Veronica was a good assistant, you know.”

Anger began to bubble up inside of me as I abruptly pushed my chair back and stood.

“So that was you!” I said, slamming my hands on the table. “Why did you send her to stalk Nina like that?”

My father was silent for several long minutes, as though my outburst meant nothing to him. I felt Nina practically shaking behind me before she eventually stood and quietly walked out of the dining room. I cursed under my breath as I heard the front door open and close.

Finally, my father took a sip of his drink before speaking. "You shouldn't be obsessing over that human girl, Enzo. She's not one of us, and you know our kind doesn't mix with humans."

I resisted the urge to clench my fist, feeling my anger rising. "She's not human," I said. "And besides, mom would have supported me no matter who I got involved with," I growled.

My father's expression turned sour and he slammed his fork and knife down on his plate, glaring up at me with glowing silver eyes. "Don't you dare speak about your mother," he snarled.

There was another long pause. I watched as his eyes faded back to their usual gray-blue color and the tension slipped away from his shoulders.

"I'm sorry," I muttered, straightening and stepping away from the table. "I just miss her."

"I miss her, too," he said. "But you must understand that your mother would have wanted you to do what's best for our family."

"What do you mean?" I asked, feeling my heart jump up into my throat as I began to fear the worst.

"I've arranged a marriage for you, Enzo. The daughter of a Crescent chief. And regardless of your feelings for Nina, you have to end things with her."

I felt my blood run cold as my father spoke. "But, dad, Nina has to be my mate," I said, my voice shaking.

"This union will end the upcoming war before it ever begins," my father interrupted. "I know you're angry with me, but not everything is always about mates. Think about the future of your pack."

I could feel my anger boiling over at this point. "I won't be a pawn in your game, Dad. I won't let you dictate my life and who I love, war or no war."

My father simply shrugged, his body language so nonchalant it made me sick. "I'm afraid you don't have a choice in the matter, son," he said quietly, taking another sip of his wine. "The deal has been

made. End things with the human girl before I have to end them for you."

Before I could answer, my father pushed his chair back and stood. I watched, my body trembling with anger, as he calmly began to clear the dishes away from the table. Neither Nina nor I had even touched our food or wine.

There were so many things I wanted to say, but nothing seemed to be able to come out. I felt betrayed by my own father... Nina was my fated mate — I had known it since we met in the bar at the beginning of the semester, and it was only solidified now in knowing that she was at least part werewolf- and he didn't even care. To him, my life was nothing but a playing card. Had my mother's death stripped him of any empathy he had?

Without another word, I turned on my heel and stormed out the door to find Nina.

Chapter 75: Runaway

Nina

Enzo's father admitted to hiring the girl named Veronica to stalk me. He said it as though I was in the way, as though my very presence was making the situation worse.

Maybe he was right.

Maybe my presence in Enzo's life was nothing but a burden, a hindrance.

These thoughts swirled around in my head as I walked out of the house and headed toward the ocean, silent tears streaming down my cheeks. I knew that I loved Enzo, but... was I in the way of something greater? Was this looming war between the werewolf factions so important that my presence in his life would only make it worse?

I stopped at the edge of the cliff and leaned on the fence, letting my tears drip onto the ground as I gazed down at the ocean below. The wind was blowing fiercely and making the waves crash even harder against the rocks.

"Don't listen to him," Enzo's voice suddenly said from behind me. I didn't look up as he came to stand by my side. His warm hand touched my back, giving me some comfort, but also making me feel even worse; what if I would no longer be able to feel his touch?

"Am I in the way?" I whispered, my voice barely audible above the sound of the wind and the ocean.

Enzo tensed up and grabbed me by both shoulders, turning me so that I was facing him. His eyes glowed red as he stared into mine.

"Of course not," he said, tucking a stray strand of hair behind my ear. My dad's just an asshole. He's only looking out for himself."

“But... The Crescents...” I began. Enzo stopped me and pulled me closer into a hug.

“None of that matters,” he whispered. “It’s just stupid politics. We can run, you know. We can run right now and never look back. I’ll take you anywhere you want to go. Just say the word.”

I sniffed and pulled away, looking up at Enzo with my brows knit together. “You mean just... Run away together?”

He nodded. “Yes. Just you and me. We can leave this whole world behind. We can make a new identity for ourselves.”

I paused for several moments. The idea of running away together, starting a new life somewhere else and leaving all of this mess behind, was tempting. Images of Enzo and I running off to some foreign land and living like nomads, exploring the world with only each other, floated through my mind.

It was a beautiful image, but it wasn’t realistic. “No.”

Enzo furrowed his brow. “Why not?” he whispered. “This place has done nothing for us.”

I shook my head. “You’re wrong,” I replied. “This place is our home. We have roots here, friends, family. I promised to myself that I would complete medical school.”

“You can transfer to a new school, then,” Enzo said, his voice sounding a little desperate now. “Somewhere far away.”

“But I can’t!” I said, pushing him away and taking a step back. “I promised my brother that I would take care of him, and I plan to follow through on that promise.”

Enzo shot me a puzzled look. “Your brother? You never told me you had a brother,” he said.

I sighed. “I do have a brother. Taylor. He’s... sick. And our adoptive mother never cared to get him the right medical attention, so I made a vow that I would do everything I could to take care of him myself. So, no. I can’t leave. I won’t leave my brother behind. Everyone else has left us; we only have each other.”

Enzo was silent for several moments before finally speaking again. “I’m sorry,” he said softly. “I had no idea. I was so outraged by my dad’s behavior that I didn’t bother to ask what you wanted.”

I fell silent again and turned back toward the ocean, leaning on the fence once more. After a few moments, Enzo leaned on the fence next to me. Our hands brushed, and I intertwined my fingers with his.

“Nina, I have to tell you something,” he said after a bit of a silence.

I looked up at him expectantly.

“I think you’re a werewolf.”

I couldn’t help but laugh. “That’s ridiculous,” I said with a scoff. “Don’t tease me like that.”

Enzo shook his head. “I mean it. Your speed when running, your intelligence, the way your knee suddenly healed on its own, the telepathy, your ability to not only keep Ronan alive when he should’ve died but to also get him to tell the truth when no other methods worked... At the very least, you’re a hybrid.”

I stood up fully once more, taking another step back and shaking my head vigorously. “No,” I said. “I can’t be,”

“Your parents adopted you, right?” Enzo asked, standing as well and turning to face me. “How did that come to be?”

I swallowed hard. “They... They said that I was left on their doorstep one night. That’s it.”

Enzo splayed out his hands as if to say “There you go”. His face was nothing but completely serious. I thought, then, about all of the strange occurrences lately... The healing, the speed and stamina despite not having exercised much in years, the animalistic feeling when I was with Enzo...

“If I’m a werewolf, then why can’t I shift?” I asked.

“Some people don’t get their wolves until they’re older,” he replied. “Or, if you’re a hybrid, you might not get one at all... But your abilities lead me to believe otherwise.”

I paused for several long moments, processing what Enzo had just said as I chewed the inside of my cheek nervously. Before I said anything else, he stepped forward and wrapped his arms around me once more. I relaxed into him, feeling the warmth of his body against the chill of the ocean air, and shut my eyes.

“So, if I’m a werewolf,” I said into his chest, “does that mean that I’m your mate?”

Enzo tensed and looked down at me. I looked up and met his red-eyed gaze. Neither of us said anything else — we didn’t need to. It was as if our bodies just knew. I felt as though we were each a piece of a puzzle that fit together perfectly.

Now that Enzo’s father had Ronan in his custody and the mystery of the stalker had been solved, Enzo took me home that night on the back of his motorcycle. He didn’t say

much about. what was said between him and his father after I walked out at dinner, but repeatedly reassured me that everything would be okay. If I truly was a werewolf and Enzo was my mate, nothing could drive us apart... Right?

As we pulled up to the campus and Enzo dropped me off at my dorm, it was already nearly midnight.

"I'll talk to you tomorrow," he said quietly as I got off of his motorcycle. I blushed as he took my hand and kissed it, his warmth emanating through my palm and into my body. My expression turned puzzled, however, when he slipped something into my palm.

It was a photograph of someone holding a baby wrapped in a blanket with a strange pattern on it.

Somehow, as I looked at it, I knew that the baby was me...

And something deep inside of me recognized that pattern.

Chapter 76: Mother Knows Best

Nina

I got home that night after Enzo drove me home and stashed the strange photograph in my bedside table. I was kept awake for a long time as I puzzled over the photograph and the events of the past day, Veronica's untimely and unnecessary death, Ronan's wolf form, and the history of the Crescents and the Fullmoons. Enzo's father had not only informed me that some war between werewolf factions was looming over this small town, but Enzo also told me that he thought I was a werewolf

myself Between all of those things + and the strangely familiar pattern in the photograph, it felt as though my entire world had been turned upside down for the millionth time since the beginning of the semester

Eventually, I managed to fall asleep. I woke up early the next morning and rushed to get ready for class, midterms were starting next week, and I had hardly prepared at all with everything going on lately. I would have to spend every spare minute I had studying this week.

After classes, I headed home to gather my things before I would be going to the library to spend the rest of the day studying. My legs felt tired and heavy as I walked up the stairs to my suite, and I was just considering laying down for a brief nap when I walked into my kitchen to see Jessica and Lori both standing there looking confused and worried.

"What happened to you two?" I asked, setting my bag down on the counter

“Um, you might want to see for yourself,” Jessica replied under her breath, pointing to my room with a shaking hand.

I narrowed my eyes and walked past them toward my room, as I approached, it became obvious to me that my door was wide open. and there was someone inside

“Mom?”

My mother spun around from where she stood in front of my closet, an almost cheeky grin spread across her face “Darling!” she said, stretching her arms out as she walked toward me. I stiffened as she wrapped me in a tight hug

“What are you doing here?” I said over her shoulder I pried myself free and took a few steps back, folding my arms as I looked around the room. “And what were you doing in my room?”

“I got a call that you got injured a couple days ago,” she said in a sing-song voice. “I had to check on my baby”

I could feel my heart leap up into my throat as anger bubbled up inside of me My adoptive mother and I never had the best relationship; as soon as I graduated high school, I couldn't wait to move out and go to college Going home for the summer and winter break was always a challenge We never saw eye-to-eye on anything, and her dismissal of Taylor's chronic pain only made me resent her even more

“Why didn't you just call me like a normal person?” I asked.

My mother tsked and shook her head. “You know, you could be happy that your mother went out of her way to check on you,” she replied. “There's no need to be nasty.”

I let out a sigh. “I'm sorry. I'm not trying to be nasty. It's just... unexpected.” I wanted to yell at her, to tell her that I was sick of her crossing my boundaries and sticking her nose where it didn't belong, but at this point I just wanted to not cause a scene and hope that she would just leave soon. without an altercation.

“Well,” my mother said with a huff, folding her arms and looking around my room. “I must say, you've decorated this shabby little place quite well. Although, I could've sworn I raised you to be a bit neater

than this.” She gestured to the side of my bed, where there was a pile of dirty clothes on the floor, and the side table was covered in books and coffee cups.

“I've been busy,” I replied curtly. “Medical school and all.”

“Hmph.”

I watched with narrowed eyes as my mother wandered over to the window. and peered out.

“How are Taylor and dad?” I asked.

My mother merely shrugged, not even bothering to look at me. “Same old, same old,” she said with a dismissive wave of her hand. “You know how they are. Your father can’t seem to accept the fact that his book will never get published, and, well... Taylor is Taylor.

“Did you take Taylor to a doctor yet?” I said, my voice almost a snarl.

“Hah!” my mother exclaimed, turning around finally to face me. It was bright enough outside that she was silhouetted against the window, turning her into a dark blob as I glared at her. Her features came into focus as she sauntered up to me, revealing her cold eyes and aging face.

“I take that at a no, then,” I said,

“Sweetheart, there’s nothing wrong with Taylor,” she said, reaching out to touch my shoulder. I moved out of the way, causing her to drop her hand back to her side and frown before she turned on her heel and headed toward the door. “I’m not sure when you’re going to realize that he’s clearly just faking his symptoms for attention. Whatever hovel you two came out of seems to continue to haunt you to this day.”

At this point, the anger began to overflow, and the string of words that came out of my mouth felt unavoidable.

“I’m not sure when you will realize that my brother is in pain, and that your dismissiveness only makes it worse. Maybe if you had been a mother just once during all the years we lived under your roof, you would know that.”

I watched as my mother stood in the doorway, her tense back turned to me as she clenched and unclenched her fists at her sides. Then, like a puppet on a string, she simply relaxed and walked away.

When I heard the front door open and close, I, too, felt the tension slip away. I walked back out into the kitchen to see Lori and Jessica still standing there, speechless.

“I’m so sorry,” Lori said. “She just squeezed her way in. She said she was your mom and she was just coming to surprise you.”

“It’s alright,” I replied, rubbing my tired eyes. “She’s just manipulative.” I turned around to head back to my room, but as I did, Lori called after me.

“Oh, and Nina?” she said, her voice sounding sheepish. “I’m sorry for saying those awful things yesterday. I didn’t mean it.”

A slight smile stretched across my lips, and I walked over to pull my friend into a hug. “It’s okay. Just know that the stalker won’t bother us any more.”

As I held my friend, choking down my pain over what truly happened to the stalker, my mind flickered next to something darker, more sinister... The looming war that would rage right here, on this very campus, and potentially put my friends’ lives in serious danger.

Chapter 77: The Half-Moon Tournament

Enzo

The very next afternoon following dropping Nina off at her dorm after the unceremonious dinner at my father’s house, my phone rang; it was my father. Rolling my eyes, I picked it up.

“I just left,” I growled, still angry with him for everything he had said at dinner. “What do you want?”

“Hello to you, too,” he said in his usual condescending manner. “You need to come home.”

“Why?” I asked. “You gonna marry me off already?”

“Just Come home, Enzo,” my father said. He sounded almost as though he was holding himself back; as though someone else was there

I let out a sigh, nodding instinctively even though I knew he couldn’t see me “Alright,” I said. “I’ll be there soon”

I was sitting on my couch and processing everything when he called me, so I reluctantly stood once I hung up and got dressed. A little while later, I stood outside my father’s house, my frown deepening as I saw an unfamiliar sports car in the driveway. I shoved my hands in my pockets and walked through the front door.

“That must be him,” I heard my father’s voice say from the dining room as I entered. Furrowing my brow as I wondered who he was talking to and why they needed me here, I approached the dining room.

My eyes widened when I saw who was there

Sitting at the table, aside from my father, were three people the dean, a man I didn’t recognize, and Ronan.

My father stood and gestured for me to come in

“This is my son, Enzo,” he said, then turned to me. “Enzo, you know Dean Cynthia and Ronan. This is Ronan’s father, Marcus. The Alpha of the Crescent pack.” Marcus, who was a shockingly large and muscular middle-aged man — around my father’s age with tanned skin, jet black hair, and striking blue eyes, stood and held his hand out for me to shake.

“So, this is the young man who captured and tortured my son,” he said as I shook his hand. I felt my face get hot and I pulled away, glancing over at Ronan.

Marcus merely chuckled. “It’s alright,” he said with a hearty grin as Ronan continued to glare at me silently with an icy stare. “My son was acting out of line Scuffles happen.”

Ronan met my gaze, his eyes flashing momentarily as his voice echoed in my head.

“Don’t say anything,” he said. “He doesn’t know.”

“What, your own father doesn’t know that you’re working with some mystery lady to kidnap my friend?” I replied, still using our mindlink.

“Nope. And I’d like to keep it that way.”

“Sit down, Enzo,” my father said, breaking Ronan’s and my silent conversation. I hesitantly walked over to an open chair next to my father and sat down. “Now that we’re all here,” he continued, clasping his hands on the table, “we can make this official.”

“Make what official?” I asked, narrowing my eyes.

“When Richard contacted me about my son, I half expected there to be another bloody war between our two factions,” Marcus said, leaning back in his chair and folding his arms across his chest. “But we all know that it’s not the old ages anymore. We can’t just go killing each other with wild abandon,

especially now that there are far more humans in the world than there used to be. Richard and I are businessmen, after all. It’s about time we settle our disputes in a civil manner”

My father nodded. “The town of Mountainview has been a point of contention for over a hundred years. Since it’s right on the border between the werewolf realm and the human realm, having roots there would put one at a great advantage ” He paused, clearing his throat. “Our grandfathers fought tooth and nail to decide who could lay claim over the town, but we believe so much bloodshed is unnecessary... which is why I proposed a tournament. A hockey tournament.”

I raised my eyebrows and glanced over at Ronan again, who still sat silently across from me with his eyes fixed on mine “A hockey tournament to decide which faction gets to run the town?” I asked.

Marcus grinned again. “It’s much more fun to decide things this way, don’t you think?” he said. “Not only will it not raise any red flags for the human residents of Mountainview, it will also allow us to decide a victor without any unnecessary harm.”

I didn’t know what to say. A hockey tournament to decide the fate of the town? I stammered to come up with a response, but before I could, the dean – who had been silent up until now — suddenly spoke up.

“I do have the safety of my students to worry about,” she said. “As a hybrid and the granddaughter of the school’s founder, it’s my duty to watch over the school. A neutral zone, if you will. I don’t want any bloodshed on my campus.”

My father nodded vigorously. I felt as though I was at some sort of insane business meeting between a bunch of CEOs, not werewolves whose factions hated each other with a burning passion.

“This new tournament we’re calling it the Half Moon Tournament will start exactly two weeks from now Teams that are evenly split between the Crescents and the Fullmoons will compete in the tournament Each team will be primarily human, with a werewolf captain, and at the end of the tournament, the captains of all of the remaining teams one team comprised entirely from the Crescent faction and the

other from the Fullmoon faction will play head-to- head to decide which faction will be the Alpha pack of Mountainview for the next generation.”

“So,” Ronan said all of a sudden after being silent for so long, leaning his elbows on the table and fixing his eyes on me “What do you say to another rematch?”

I glanced over at my father, who had a fervent look on his face. The more I thought about it, the more it made sense, hockey was such an important part of the town that it was only logical to decide such a thing with a hockey tournament, and while it was shocking for my father to make this proposition, it was better than an all-out bloody war

Without a word, I stuck my hand out to shake with Ronan.

Later, after Ronan, Marcus, and the dean left, I was alone with my father again.

“Do you really believe in this?” I said quietly, staring down at my hands on the table

My father sighed. “It’s worth a shot. It’s better than war, Your mother” His voice faltered, and he fell silent for some time.

“Does this mean I don’t have to marry that other woman?” I asked finally after several long minutes of silence.

“It’s not that simple, Enzo,” my father said coldly, standing from the table. ” What’s done is done. The marriage has been arranged. She’s your fated mate ”

I felt my heart catch in my throat at his words, and involuntarily shook my head. “No,” I said, thinking of Nina, thinking of her soft brown eyes and her gentle smile and her kind heart. “She’s not. She can’t be—”

“Enough!” my father suddenly shouted, slamming his fists on the table We stared at each other, wide- eyed, for several moments before he spoke again, his voice shaking this time. “I’m going to be monitoring your performance from now on. We have to win this tournament.”

Before I had the chance to respond, my father straightened once more and walked from the room without another word.

Chapter 78: Group Photos

Nina

I tried calling my mother after I discovered that the baby picture was missing, but unsurprisingly, she didn’t answer Cursing to myself, I hung up the phone and decided that it was too late now to worry about it, the damage had already been done, it was late at night, and I had work in the morning.

The next morning, I awoke with a start to the sound of my alarm and rain pattering against the window I crawled out of bed, showered, dressed, and made my way to Tiffany’s office with a cup of coffee from the dining hall in my hand. It was so hot that it burned my hand a bit through the cardboard, but I was too focused on getting out of the rain to care

“Good morning!” Tiffany called from her desk when I entered, her voice chipper as usual I managed a tired smile and shook my umbrella off before coming in the rest of the way and hanging my jacket on the hooks at the back of the room.

“Morning,” I said, wincing as I burnt my tongue on a sip of the scalding hot coffee. “What’s on the agenda today?”

Tiffany squinted her eyes to look out the window before looking back down at the pile of paperwork in front of her with a frown. “Well, I was going to suggest making our rounds to the sports teams today,” she said, “but it looks like the weather decided to throw a wrench in that plan. So, I guess we’ll just try to get through this paperwork.”

I nodded and pulled up a chair. If I was being honest, I was glad to just spend the morning in Tiffany's office; I didn't particularly feel up to walking around all morning and dealing with sweaty football players who would, no doubt, be asking questions about my "relationship" with Enzo.

Tiffany must have been able to read my mind, because thankfully she didn't ask any questions either, allowing us to work in silence for a while.

After a couple of hours of silently scouring through physical exam records, health reports, and statistics, Tiffany threw her pen down on the desk and leaned back with a sigh. I looked up from my work to see the attractive middle-aged blonde rubbing her eyes and yawning.

"Didn't sleep much, either?" I asked.

She shrugged. "I've been a bit busier than usual these days," she said, pushing her rolling chair back and standing. She walked over to the window and clasped her hands, lifting them over her head and bending to each side in a stretch as she watched the rain. "Lots of students coming in at all hours complaining about fevers, mood swings, and, if you'd believe it..."

Oh no. I knew what she was going to say before she even said it: feral dog bites.

"Mad wolf."

I clapped my hand over my mouth as I realized that I just spoke out loud, albeit under my breath. Tiffany, thankfully, didn't seem to hear me or at least, she pretended not to. I quickly lowered my hand as she turned back around.

"You know," she said in a somewhat dreamy, thoughtful voice, "when I went to school here, there was a similar string of illnesses. We called it Lupine Syndrome. It was really a rabies outbreak, though. At least, that was what the head doctors here said at the time."

My eyes widened momentarily as a million things started to race through my mind. Had werewolves been biting people back then, too? I felt my curiosity get the best of me.

"Can you tell me more about what it was like when you went to school here?"

Tiffany paused, humming to herself for a moment as she looked thoughtfully up at the ceiling. "It wasn't much different than it is now, really," she said finally with a shrug. "I was a lot like you, actually. I had a

wonderful group of friends in the hockey club. I wish I stayed in touch with more of them, but... c'est la vie."

Images of a younger Tiffany floated through my mind as I pictured her with her group of friends. Something about it made me smile; Tiffany was so youthful and full of life now, that it made me wonder what she was like when she was my age.

“Oh! Actually, hang on,” Tiffany exclaimed suddenly I watched with raised eyebrows as she scurried over to a tall metal cabinet at the back of the room, opening the doors and standing on her tiptoes to grab a shoebox off the top shelf. She turned back toward me with a smirk and carried it over to the table with both hands. It was dusty and the cardboard was crinkled around the corners from age. She opened it with a grin to reveal a pile of polaroid photographs, handwritten notes, and various other tchotchkes.

“I haven’t looked in here in ages,” she said with a cough, waving away a cloud of dust that was floating in front of her face from abruptly opening the box. I smiled and leaned forward on the table, sitting on my knees in the chair. I felt like a child again, asking my mother to show me an old scrapbook — except this time, my wishes were actually granted instead of being told that scrapbooks were silly and that no one should keep “useless old junk like that”.

“Can I?” I said, reaching for the box. Tiffany nodded enthusiastically and slid it closer to me. I reached in and pulled out a pile of photos, flipping through them as the smile on my face widened. There were so many pictures of Tiffany and her friends; pictures from Halloween parties where she wore matching tiger costumes with her friends, pictures of them sitting around a campfire with bottles of beer in their hands, pictures of her smiling and laughing as they gave each other piggyback rides.

One picture caught my eye, however. It was a photo of the entire group together — the hockey club, judging from the handmade banner they held up with big, cheesy grins on their faces. Tiffany was right in the center, surrounded on either side by her smiling friends, one of which was oddly familiar...

I felt my heart leap up into my throat as I recognized the white-blond hair and piercing blue eyes that belonged to none other than my adoptive mother.

My mother had never once mentioned that she came to this school. Why?

As I intensely scanned the photograph, my eyes caught something else. A jagged edge that looked like it had been torn apart, judging from the little white line from the underlayer of the photo paper being exposed. I held the photo closer to my face and studied it harder, noticing a hand draped over Tiffany’s shoulder.

“Was this torn?” I asked, handing Tiffany the photo. She furrowed her brow and took the photo from me, her eyes momentarily flashing with an emotion that I couldn’t quite read before she abruptly cleared her throat and put it back in the box, snapping the lid shut.

“Oh, look at that!” she said in a weak voice, pointing at the clock. “Your shift is over”

I glanced over my shoulder at the clock, then back at Tiffany “I’m supposed to be here for a couple more hou—”

“Go home, Nina.”

I was taken aback by Tiffany’s sudden out of character behavior and I stammered to respond, but she had already turned her back and was shoving the box back into its spot on the shelf. I felt tears well up in my eyes as I stood and gathered my things, heading for the door.

“I-I’m sorry, Tiffany,” I said quietly as my hand rested on the doorknob. “I didn’t mean to—”

“It’s fine,” she said, obviously wiping her eyes before turning back to face me with a soft smile. “I’m just tired. I’ll see you on Wednesday.”

I nodded silently wishing I could say more, but nothing else would come out and stepped back out into the rain.

I had learned so many things these past two days... The Crescents and the Fullmoons, my possible werewolf heritage, the baby photo, and now I had learned that my mother had gone to #Chiopher Group Photos this very school during a time that people were possibly being bitten by werewolves. What was my mother hiding? Furthermore, who was the person that Tiffany ripped out of the photograph, and why did she get so upset that I mentioned it?

“Hey,” a familiar voice said, breaking me from my thoughts. I looked up from the ground to realize that I had already made it back to the quad, but was so deep in thought that I hadn’t even noticed, and Enzo was now standing in front of me

He looked down at me, his hair and his leather jacket wet from the rain, with a strange look in his eyes.

“Can we talk?”

Chapter 79: New Beginnings

Nina

Enzo’s eyes were full of a mixture of anger, sadness, and what also oddly seemed like moderate excitement as he looked down at me. His hair and leather jacket were soaked from the rain, but he didn’t seem to care

“Can we talk?” he said.

“Uh, sure,” I replied warily, glancing over his shoulder to see a couple of girls exiting another building and staring at us, no doubt preparing themselves to start another gossip train about how I was stringing Enzo along or something. “Are you okay?”

“It’s my dad,” he said, turning and walking with me as he paid the girls no mind. He had his hood up to keep himself dry from the rain, but it didn’t seem to be helping much, so I held my umbrella out for him. We slowly made our way to a private spot in an alley between the hockey arena and the building where the indoor basketball courts were located, where no one would see us talking and start more rumors. It was also, actually, where Justin and I used to meet up secretly back when we were still together. Being here momentarily made me wonder if Justin was okay. “And the Crescents, and the Fullmoons...” Enzo continued. “And Ronan, and Ronan’s dad, and the dean...”

“Hold on,” I said, looking up at him from where I stood with a puzzled expression on my face. “One thing at a time. What are you trying to tell me?”

Enzo sighed and ran a hand through his damp hair. “So, my dad called me home yesterday. When I got there, it was like a meeting between all of them. Ronan and his father were there. They’re both Crescents. And apparently, they struck a deal between the Crescents and the Fullmoons, and they’re gonna settle this war with a hockey tournament, of all things.”

I furrowed my brow and ran a hand through my hair. “That’s a good thing, isn’t it?” I asked. “No fighting or bloodshed.”

“In theory, yes,” Enzo replied. He leaned against the side of the building and stood there with his head hung for a moment before pushing himself off of the wall and starting to pace in the rain. “I don’t know if it’ll really work, but they kept talking about how the factions need to take a more modern approach to the whole thing...” He raised his hands and made quotation marks in the air with his fingers. “They said ‘We’re businessmen. Let’s be civil about this,’ but... I don’t know. I feel like it’s all for show. I feel like the Crescents are gonna do something much more sinister than play in a hockey tournament, and my dad’s being a fool. Not to mention whatever Ronan is up to. You know, he secretly told me that his father doesn’t know about the deal regarding you, and he asked me to keep it that way.”

“Or,” I said, walking over to Enzo and choosing to ignore the part about Ronan’s deal with the mystery woman, “they’re being truthful and genuinely trying to work out their differences without putting anyone in harm’s way.”

Enzo shook his head and turned on his heel, walking away for a moment toward the edge of the alleyway. He stood there for a while, looking out at the rain, before turning back to face me.

"I don't trust Ronan," he said in a low voice. "I don't trust him or his father, and I don't like this business with the mystery woman trying to capture you. We might just be friends, Nina, but it doesn't mean that I'm not worried as hell about you."

Enzo's words hit me like a ton of bricks and made my heart leap in my chest. Hearing him speak about me like that made me soften toward him, but I stopped myself from getting too attached to that feeling.

"So tell your dad," I said. "Don't you feel like he should know about all of this? Maybe he can be of help to us."

I watched curiously as Enzo bit his lip and stared down at the wet concrete for a moment. "I can't," he said. "I can't trust him entirely, either Especially when it comes to you. I'm afraid..."

"Afraid of what?" I asked softly, walking up to him and placing my hand on his shoulder. "He's your father What's the worst he'll do? We're not together, either, so it's not like he has any real reason to hate me."

"It's not just that!" Enzo exclaimed, abruptly pulling away from me with pain in his eyes.

I was shocked by his sudden outburst and took a step back, frowning, "What is it, then?" I asked, cocking my head.

Enzo was silent again for several moments. I could see him clenching and unclenching his jaw as well as his fists, like he was trying to find the right words but his brain was just a tangled mess of thoughts.

"Just tell me," I said. I was frightened now by what he might say, and could feel tears welling up in my eyes for reasons unknown to me

"He wants me to marry someone," he croaked "An arranged marriage He says..

I felt my heart jump again, this time into my throat as an enormous, gut- wrenching knot formed in the depths of my stomach.

"He says that she's my fated mate. And we're supposed to be married on New Year's eve."

I didn't know what to say. New Year's eve was a few months away, but it felt so close now. Too close. Would I ever even see Enzo again after that? Would I even be able to call him my friend after that?

A sob caught in my throat as the thought of Enzo being married to someone else crossed my mind. I knew we were just friends, and it would never work between us — especially if he had a true fated

mate — but hearing him say those words still hurt like a knife straight through the heart

Suddenly, without speaking, Enzo rushed toward me and pulled me into his arms, pressing his lips fervently against mine for what felt like an eternity. I was tense at first, but felt the umbrella slip from my hand as I eventually relaxed into him, letting the rain pour over us.

When he finally pulled away just enough so that our lips weren't touching, our foreheads pressed together, I noticed that my cheeks weren't just covered by the rain, but were now coated in my own tears.

I took in a sharp breath and pulled away. "Enzo, I can't... We can't do this. Especially not now, not if..."

He shook his head, making a bit of water drip on us from his wet hair as he started to take a few steps backwards. "I know. It's stupid... I'm sorry"

Before I could stop him, he turned on his heel and stormed out of the alleyway and disappeared in the rain as it began to fall even harder from the sky, leaving me alone again.

I leaned my head back against the wall and turned my face up toward the sky, closing my eyes as the rain fell on my face.

Chapter 80: The Lodge

Nina

The next week went by in a blur. I was so busy with midterms and catching up on classwork that I hardly even noticed that the leaves had almost entirely disappeared from the trees, and the days had already gotten shorter. By the time midterms were over, it was cold enough outside to have to wear a thick jacket and a beanie everywhere I went.

Enzo and I didn't see each other at all, which thankfully ended the rumors floating around campus about our 'relationship' even though it hurt to not see him after our fateful kiss in the rain. It also seemed as though Enzo must have started telling people that we weren't together, which helped the situation. It felt nice to not be stared at and talked about everywhere we went, although there were still those who shot me angry glares —such as Lisa and her friends.

Soon, it was time for the Half-Moon Tournament to begin. The campus began to stir with excitement at the prospect of a new tournament to fawn over, and the first match was set to be played a few towns over. I didn't intend on going after everything that happened, just wanting to focus on school, but I was unfortunately forced to go after Tiffany conveniently fell 'ill' just one day before the match.

“I’m so sorry,” she said over the phone, her voice sounding nasally and congested. “I would go if I wasn’t so sick.”

“It’s fine,” I replied as cheerfully as I could while simultaneously holding in a deep, heavy sigh. “I’ll go and make sure that no one gets hurt.”

As we filed onto the bus that would take us to the match, I could feel the mixture of tension and excitement in the air. Enzo’s teammates had no idea that they were participating in something so important, to them, it was just a new tournament to replace the old one. They were confused about the sudden switch, but didn’t seem to ask too many questions.

As the team bus pulled away from the campus and began to make its way to our destination, however, it seemed that there were tensions throughout the team regarding something that had nothing to do with the Half-Moon Tournament.

“I wish Justin was here,” someone said suddenly, about an hour into the trip, taking the rest of us by surprise. I felt my face get hot as I pretended to be too absorbed in my book at the back of the bus to listen.

“Me, too,” someone else said. “Our team feels unbalanced without him.”

Does anyone even know where he went?” Matt chimed in. “He was just here one day, then gone the next...”

“He went home to stay with his parents,” Enzo spoke up in a stern tone of voice. He was seated at the front of the bus, as far away from me as he could get. It admittedly hurt for him to be so distant when we were supposed to be friends, but maybe it would be better this way. If he was supposed to marry someone else, I didn’t blame him for wanting to give himself time to sort out his feelings.

One of the players who I had rarely ever spoken to, seeing as how he was the quietest one, his name was Bryce — suddenly spoke up for the first time on that trip, not even turning to face Enzo or anyone else from his seat.

“Convenient timing,” he said. There was a hint of resentment in his voice.

“Oh?” Enzo said curiously. “How so?” Bryce shrugged, slowly turning his head to face Enzo and I. “I just think it’s funny that Justin gets kicked off the team and disappears, and then all of a sudden you’re kissing his ex-girlfriend at a huge hockey game,” he said.

I subconsciously dropped my book into my lap, not caring that I just lost my place where I was reading. There was a palpable silence on the bus as Bryce’s words sunk in. I felt a lump rise in my throat as I

stared out the window.

“That’s bullshit and you know it,” Enzo snarled, standing from his seat and walking over to where Bryce sat. Those two things have nothing to do with one another ”

Bryce merely shrugged again. “I’m just saying,” he replied. “It’s an interesting coincidence But hey. What do I know?”

Enzo glared down at Bryce for several long moments before suddenly whirling around to face the rest of the team. I could see the anger written across his face. “Does anyone else have anything they want to say?” he said.

He was met with silence.

“Good,” he growled. “Whatever has happened between Nina and I is between us. If anyone else has a problem with it, you can come to me. I’ll set you straight and teach you not to gossip.”

Without another word, Enzo sat back down in his seat. I watched over the top of the seat in front of me as he turned his head to look out the window. No one brought up Justin or my past relationship with Enzo for the remainder of the bus trip.

We finally arrived at the place we would be staying for the duration of the match. As we got off the team bus, all of us were equally as surprised at the state of the place.

It was located out in the woods, which would have been completely fine if not for the fact that it was an old, run- down lodge that appeared as though it hadn’t been used or cleaned in years. The windows were caked with dust and Enzo had to use his body weight to force open the decrepit old door to reveal an equally dusty, dingy interior. Cobwebs lined the vaulted ceilings of the once-beautiful old lodge while the furniture sat covered in dirty white sheets that exploded with plumes of dust when we pulled them away.

“This is gross,” Matt said, walking over to the built-in bar at the back wall and running his fingers along the dusty surface “I thought you said this team was known for their money, Enzo.”

“They were,” Enzo replied darkly as he flicked the light switches to find that there was no electricity

“You don’t think they did this on purpose to throw us off our game, did you?” someone else chimed in.

I flicked on my phone flashlight to illuminate the area in front of me as I climbed the curved stairway, imagining how beautiful this place probably once was. It was possible that the team was trying to throw them off their game the sake of the Half-Moon for

Tournament, but something about the state of disarray of the place led me to believe otherwise. If this team was known for their funding, why would their lodge appear as though it hadn't been kept up properly in years?

The team's voices faded as I slowly walked along the narrow hallway upstairs, opening each door that I passed to reveal bedrooms that were all equally dusty with their furniture covered with those same dirty white sheets. At the end of the hallway, there was a set of double doors — and when I opened them, sunlight came streaming into the hallway, practically blinding me after standing in the darkness

I walked out onto a small balcony, my mouth dropping open as I looked out at the stunning view below. All around us, there was nothing but a wide expanse of tall pine trees. There was a small lake below with a rowboat pulled up onto the shore and a dock that looked like it would be perfect to jump off of if the weather was warmer

Just as I was about to turn to call for everyone to come and look at the view, however, something caught my eye

It was faint, but the way that my body instantly broke out in goosebumps told me all I needed to know

Way out in the forest staring at me Way out in the forest, staring at me from the shadows, was the outline of a massive wolf's head. At the center of it, two glowing yellow eyes peered out at me.

This was no ordinary wolf.

it was a werewolf.