

Claimed by the Alpha's Love - Love Demands Real Courage

Chapter 161

Tori's POV:

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I nodded, clutching my silver-wrapped gift for Olivia Sullivan.

'Let's head back. I've got everything I need anyway.' I said quietly, watching Hannah from the corner of my eye.

The last thing I needed was for her to spot us standing there. Given her current emotional state and our complicated history, an encounter

with her right now would be disastrous.

As we turned to leave, my phone buzzed. Lucas's name flashed on the screen.

Ill be picking you up in ten minutes. Mother has requested our presence at the main house tonight.

"Everything okay?" Morgan asked, noticing my expression.

"Lucas is picking me up. I'm having dinner at the Grayson estate tonight," said, trying to keep my voice steady.

Morgan's eyes widened. "Wow. That's such bad timing though-Mom and I are supposed to visit Grandma this evening." She looked genuinely disappointed. "Otherwise I'd totally want to hear all about the Grayson mansion."

"Text me every detail tomorrow," she insisted, giving me a quick hug before we parted ways. "And good luck with the Alpha-Mother-in-Law!"

"It's just dinner," I mumbled.

Exactly ten minutes later, Lucas's sleek black Bentley pulled up at the plaza entrance.

The Grayson estate sprawled across the hillside, ancient oaks framing the main house like silent guardians.

We hadn't even parked when the front door opened.

Elizabeth stood there, regal in a silver-gray dress that complemented her lver hair.

"You've finally brought her," she called out, her voice carrying across the circular driveway.

Lucas placed a reassuring hand at the small of my back as we approached. Mother,"

"Thank you for having me, Elizabeth," I replied, grateful that my voice didn't betray my nerves.

"Come inside," Elizabeth continued, leading us through the grand entrance hall. "I've prepared something special for both of you."

The "something special" turned out to be an ancient-looking silver pitcher filled with a fragrant liquid that Elizabeth poured into ornate glasses.

"Moon-essence tea," she explained, setting a glass before me. "An old family recipe. It strengthens the mate bond and..." she paused, her eyes

twinkling, "enhances certain natural desires between mates."

I nearly choked on air.

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“Mother, Lucas warned, his voice low.

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Elizabeth waved dismissively. “Oh, don’t be prudish, Lucas. I was young one, and the moon is full tonight. It’s the perfect time for

strengthening your connection.” Her gaze shifted meaningfully to me. “And for creating new life.”

The scent of the tea was overwhelming-herbs and something primal. I hesitated, remembering my recent allergic reaction.

Lucas smoothly intervened. “I’ll drink Tori’s portion as well,” he said, taking both glasses. “She was allergic the other day and shouldn’t drink

this.

His mother’s eyes lit up with unmistakable delight as Lucas downed both glasses without hesitation.

I caught the barely perceptible tightening around his eyes.

A sense of inevitability washed over me. With twice the dosage in his system and the full moon tonight, I was definitely in trouble.

“Perfect, Elizabeth declared, looking thoroughly pleased with herself.

The gleam in her eyes spoke volumes-she was already imagining pups in the near future.

After dinner, I wandered around his room, studying the photographs and books that offered glimpses into his life.

The bookshelf held an eclectic collection-business texts, historical volumes, and several books on Pack leadership.

One unmarked light brown leather book caught my attention. Thinking it might be an ancient book, I pulled it out and opened it.

The Complete Guide to Alpha-Omega Bonding

My face instantly heated as I scanned the detailed descriptions and illustrations of mate bond stages and intimate acts. The book fell from my hands, landing with a thud on the hardwood floor.

“Finding anything interesting?” Lucas’s voice came from the doorway.

I stammered, mortified. ‘I-I wasn’t... I thought it was-’

He set the tray down and calmly retrieved the book, placing it on the bedside table.

“It’s informative reading,” he said, a hint of amusement in his voice. “We could explore that book together, if you’re interested.”

My face burned hotter, and I looked away. “Maybe we should exercise some restraint,” I suggested, trying to sound mature despite my embarrassment.

Lucas raised an eyebrow, his lips quirking into a half-smile. “Tori,” he said his voice dropping to a husky whisper, “have some compassion for a

man who’s been restraining himself for thirty-two years. My wolf has been practically hibernating until you came along.”

I couldn’t help the nervous laugh that escaped me, even as my cheeks flamed hotter.

“I think I need some fresh air,” I mumbled, backing toward the balcony doors. “It’s a bit... warm in here.”

I wasn’t just referring to the room temperature, and from the knowing gleam in Lucas’s eyes, he understood exactly what I meant.

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Through the balcony, I saw headlights sweeping across the lawn as a black Audi pulled up to the estate. Ethan emerged.

Lucas noticed my distraction and followed my gaze.

Without warning, he took my hand. The full moon bathed us in silver light as he pulled me against him, one hand cupping my face.

“Lucas, what are you-

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His kiss silenced me, deep and possessive.

Despite my surprise, I responded instinctively as Lucas lifted me, my arm wrapping around his neck.

Lucas scooped me up, guiding my legs around his waist as he carried me toward the house.

The sound of shattering glass echoed from downstairs, but Lucas prevented me from looking down, his grip firm and possessive.

“Don’t,” he murmured against my lips. “Focus on us, Tori. ”

His body burned with an intense heat against mine.

I realized the effects of Elizabeth’s tea were taking hold. The mate bond between us pulsed with intensity, drawing us closer together in the silver moonlight.

“Lucas,” I whispered, feeling both vulnerable and safe in his arms.

He carried me back inside, closing the balcony doors behind us.

The night passed in a blur of emotion and connection, the full moon’s energy amplifying everything between us.

I found myself surrendering to Lucas’s fierce embrace. Tonight he was rougher than usual, more demanding, more primal.

Wave after wave of exhaustion crashed over me. I drifted in and out of consciousness-fainting from intensity, awakening to his touch, only to succumb again.

Eventually, I fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

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Ethan's POV:

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My scream died in my throat as I slammed my fist through my car window glass shattering across the passenger seat.

The image of Lucas and Tori locked in that intimate embrace on the balcony burned into my mind. His hands possessively around her waist, her body melting into his.

I wasn't stupid-Lucas had seen me arrive. That display wasn't coincidence it was a declaration of ownership, a clear message that she

belonged to him now.

I pushed open the front door, not bothering to wipe my feet or announce my arrival.

"Ethan? Oh my God, what happened to your hand?" My mother rushed toward me, her face pale with concern.

I walked past her without a word, heading straight for the stairs. "Ethan! Talk to me. Is that blood? Are you hurt?"

I ignored her, taking the steps two at a time. Behind me, I heard her anxious voice calling after me, but it sounded distant, as if coming from

underwater.

All I could think about was Tori's face when she had looked at Lucas-that soft vulnerability I'd once thought was reserved only for me.

In my room, I slammed the door and leaned against it, sliding down until hit the floor. My bloodied knuckles throbbed in rhythm with my

heartbeat. I deserved this pain and more.

My mother's voice filtered through the door, speaking to my father in hushed, urgent tones.

'Richard, I'm worried about him. He came home with his hand covered in blood, and he wouldn't say a word to me.'

"What do you expect me to do about it, Grace? The boy's been acting like his for months."

"This is different. Something happened tonight. I've never seen him like this."

My father's heavy sigh penetrated the wooden barrier. "First the drinking, now this. Truly pathetic. All this over an Omega, of all things. Is she

really worth destroying himself over?"

I clenched my jaw so hard my teeth ached. They had no idea. None of them did. Tori wasn't just "an Omega." She was... everything.

The only person who had ever seen me-really seen me-beneath the Grayson name.

"At least he's showing up to work," my father continued. "He's doing well at Grayson Enterprise. That's something, I suppose."

"I hope he can move past this soon," my mother's voice dropped lower, but could still make out her words. "I just want my bright, cheerful son

back. I miss how he used to be."

I pressed my forehead against my knees, their words slicing through me like shards of glass. Always Lucas.

Time blurred. I might have dozed off, my body crashing from adrenaline and alcohol.

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A soft knock at my door jolted me awake.

“Ethan? It’s me.”

Fiona. The last person I wanted to see.

“Go away. My voice sounded raw, even to my own ears.

“Please, I just want to make sure you’re okay.”

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I remained silent, hoping she’d leave, but the door handle turned anyway Fiona had never been good at respecting boundaries.

She stepped inside, her eyes widening at the sight of my bloodied hand. Ph, Ethan.” She rushed toward me, kneeling beside me. “Let me help

you clean that up.”

I jerked away from her touch. I said go away.”

“Don’t be like that. Her voice took on that soothing quality she used when she wanted something. “We need to talk about your new position at

Grayson Enterprise. It’s such an opportunity for us-for our future.”

There it was. Not concern for me, but for what I could provide.

Is it in the financial division? You know our father has connections then You could speak to him about-”

“Stop. I and byer off, finally looking at her. Her hand rested protectively over the small swell of her stomach. “Just focus on having your baby.

Don’t worry about anything else.”

Fiona smiled, her expression softening. The baby is doing well. It kicked me several times today.”

She reached for my hand, placing it on her belly.

“Actually, being able to have your child already makes me happy. I don’t expect you to love me, but Ethan, my love for you has never changed.”

"I admit that before, I was jealous and caused you and Toni to separate," he continued, her voice taking on a confessional tone. "I know I was wrong, and I'm willing to make amends. If you can't forget her, after I give birth and secure our child a legitimate place in the family, I'm

willing to step aside for Tori

She leaned closer, her voice dropping to a whimper. "It's not that Toni now has feelings for your uncle. You need to surpass Lucas to make her

notice you again."

Something inside me snapped. I moved so quickly she had no time to seni...

My uninjured hand closed around her throat, not squeezing, just holding her there as I leaned close.

"Do you think I'm stupid, Fiona?" My voice came out as a whisper. "Do we think I don't see right through you?"

Fear flickered in her eyes, genuine for once. "Ethan, you're hurting e-

I was unmoved.

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"We both want things, Ethan," she said quietly. "I want security for our child. A future worth having. And yes, the Grayson name provides that. Is that so wrong?"

I released her, disgust rising in my throat. "At least you're finally honest.

A cold, mocking laugh escaped me.

*Look at you, playing the devoted mother. The child isn't even born yet, and you're already scheming for its future. My voice dripped with

sarcasm.

Fiona stroked her belly, her face radiating smug satisfaction. “Of course m. This baby is my lucky star.”

I stared at her confidence, at the absolute certainty in her eyes.

An internal laugh echoed through my mind, cold and bitter. I couldn’t help but wonder what expression would cross that perfect face of hers when the truth finally came to light. How quickly would that smugness cumble?

“Get out,” I said quietly.

Fiona backed away, but her expression held no fear now-only cold calculation. “Think about what I said. About our child. About your future.”

She paused at the door. “And get that hand looked at. You’re no good to anyone if you bleed to death.”

The door closed behind her with a soft click that seemed to echo in the emptiness of my room.

I collapsed to the floor, staring at my bloodied hand. The physical pain in my hand was nothing compared to the ache in my chest whenever I

thought of Tori.

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Chapter 163

Tori's POV:

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The morning sunlight filtered through the curtains, warming my face as I stirred awake.

Lucas's side of the bed was already empty, the sheets still carrying his woody scent.

Memories of last night's passionate intimacy rushed back, making my cheeks flush hot. Tracy, my wolf, stretched contentedly within me, despite our shared exhaustion.

The sun's already high. We should get up, Tracy urged.

I slipped into the clothes Lucas had left for me and padded quietly down the stairs. As I reached the bottom, I noticed Lucas and Ethan in the living room, seemingly engaged in conversation.

The last step creaked beneath my foot, and Lucas immediately looked up, His expression softening as he spotted me.

Ethan stood nearby, his bandaged hand clenched at his side, blood seeping through the wrappings.

I faltered for a moment at the sight of his injury, but I quickly reminded myself that his well-being wasn't my responsibility anymore.

"Good morning," Lucas said warmly, already moving toward me. "Sleep well" he asked, his hand finding its natural place at my waist.

"Yes, thank you," I answered softly, deliberately avoiding Ethan's pained gaze. "I could use some coffee."

"Of course." Lucas guided me toward the dining room, his fingers pressing gently against my lower back. "Butler has breakfast waiting."

In the dining room, Elizabeth Grayson was excitedly arranging something on the table.

When she spotted us, her face brightened with almost childlike enthusiasm.

"Good morning, dear!" She rushed over, enveloping me in a quick hug before proudly holding up an intricately carved silver vial etched with

lunar phases. "This is last night's special supplement! Perfect for newly bonded mates."

I froze, remembering the effects of last night's tea and the uncontrollable passion that followed. My face burned as I instinctively took a step

back.

“Mother...” Lucas’s tone carried a helpless.

“This is an ancient Grayson family recipe,” Elizabeth continued, completely ignoring her son’s cautionary glance. “It significantly improves your...life.”

She gave me a meaningful look. “You should take some home!”

I froze, not reaching for the vial, my entire posture radiating reluctance.

Elizabeth, noticing my discomfort but misinterpreting it as shyness, turned to a nearby servant. “Take this to Lucas’s car. Put it on the

passenger seat so they don’t forget.”

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I stood there speechless, mortification creeping up my neck as the servant accepted the ornate wooden box with a respectful nod.

After breakfast, Lucas drove me back to his private territory.

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When he opened the passenger door for me, my eyes immediately fell on the elaborately carved wooden box sitting prominently on the seat.

Elizabeth had clearly worried we might “forget” her special gift.

My cheeks burning, I grabbed the box and thrust it into Lucas’s arms. “Please return this to your mother,” I mumbled, unable to meet his eyes.

“Actually, you really don’t... need this, I added awkwardly.

Lucas glanced at me, a hint of amusement playing at his lips. He picked up the vial and placed it in a compartment in the trunk.

“Don’t worry,” his deep voice carried a teasing undertone, “I won’t force anything on you.” His fingers brushed my cheek. “Though my Luna is so enchanting, it’s difficult to... control myself.”

My face flamed instantly, and I turned to look out the window, refusing to engage with his flirtation.

Arriving at Lucas’s private territory, a surprise awaited me.

When he led me to the master bedroom, I stopped in the doorway, stunned. The entire room had been transformed – walls changed from deep gray to my favorite pale blue, bedding and curtains replaced with soft silver-gray fabrics, crystal lamps I’d once admired placed on both nightstands, and my favorite inspirational books arranged in the corner.

“When did you...?” I breathed, taking it all in.

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Lucas stood behind me, arms encircling my waist. "You mentioned liking these colors and styles. This is our room now –

tastes too."

it should reflect your

Somehow, this thoughtful gesture moved me more than any expensive gift could have. I turned and impulsively embraced him, rising on tiptoes

to kiss him. "Thank you."

Lucas pulled me closer, deepening the kiss, but just as the moment grew heated, my phone rang.

Seeing "Grandma" on the screen, I answered immediately.

"Grandma? What's wrong?"

"Tori," Eileen's voice sounded perfectly normal, "Anna's had a bit of a cold for a few days now. We've seen the local doctor twice, but she's still

not feeling better. Janet and I thought we'd bring her to Moontouch Medical Center in Moonhaven for a second opinion. We're not very familiar

with the city though... do you have some time today?"

"Of course, Grandma. I'd be happy to meet you there," I replied without hesitation. "Just let me know when you arrive."

I explained the situation to Lucas.

"Would you like me to come with you?" he offered, concern evident in his eyes.

"No," I shook my head, "I can handle this."

Hours later, I greeted Eileen and my young cousin Anna at Moontouch Medical Center.

Anna looked paler than usual, and her mother Janet clutched her daughter's hand, eyes brimming with worry.

The examination revealed Anna suffered from severe seasonal allergies combined with mild anemia, requiring a two-day observation.

Janet visibly sagged with relief when the doctor explained the diagnosis wasn't serious

"Thank goodness," she breathed, the tension finally leaving her shoulders as she squeezed my hand. "I've been so worried these past few days."

"Just be relaxed," I soothed her. "We know what it is now, and she'll recove quickly."

That evening, Lucas suggested Eileen stay at his territory, but my grandmother politely declined: "Thank you for your kindness, Lucas, but I

wouldn't want to impose."

I arranged accommodations for Eileen at a hotel near the medical center and decided to stay with her. Later, Lucas called, his voice gentle with

understanding:

"I'm okay. You made the right choice, staying with your family."

"Thank you for understanding," I replied softly, warmth spreading through me. "I'll be back soon.*"

"Don't worry," he responded. "I've sent Jack with some essentials for you. Family comes first."

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Anna moved to a regular room. To my surprise, Elizabeth and several Grayson elders came to visit.

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As the days passed, I noticed Grandma Eileen's attitude toward Lucas softening considerably. Her initial wariness was gradually being replaced by cautious approval.

Before long, it was time for Olivia Sullivan's birthday celebration.

Lucas had commissioned a moon-white dress for me, trimmed with rare silver fur, so exquisite it took my breath away.

When we entered the Sullivan estate's grand hall that evening, all eyes turned toward us.

As the companion of the Grayson Pack Alpha, I became the center of attention. Members of the hall cast curious and admiring glances our way, and I straightened my shoulders, trying my best to appear dignified.

Lucas kept one arm securely around my waist while gracefully shaking hands with the various pack members who approached us.

"The Alpha and his future Luna look remarkably well-matched," I overheard someone whisper.

"No wonder Alpha Grayson introduced her so publicly. With those looks and that poise, even I'm impressed," another female voice added.

"I heard she won the moon phase calculation championship. Beautiful and brilliant. Apart from her Omega status and background, she seems worthy of the Alpha."

The murmurs continued around us. Whether their comments were sincere or merely performative, at least they were all giving him the proper deference an Alpha of his standing deserved.

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Megan's POV:

I pressed myself against the wall in the far corner of the ballroom, watching them.

My heart clenched painfully as Alpha Lucas leaned down, his fingers gent adjusting the crystal pendant hanging from Tori's neck.

His touch lingered longer than necessary, his lips curved into that rare smile I'd dreamed would one day be directed at me.

"There," I heard him murmur, his voice carrying across the space between. "Perfect."

Tori looked up at him, her silver eyes reflecting the chandelier light, and something passed between them-something intimate and exclusive

that made me want to disappear into the wallpaper.

His arm slipped protectively around her waist as another group of dignitaries approached them.

I watched as Tori handled the attention with surprising grace. The whispers throughout the room weren't lost on me.

Each word was another needle in my chest.

"Disgusting display," Mom hissed beside me, appearing with two glasses of champagne.

She thrust one into my hand. "That low-class Omega has everyone fooled. Using whatever tricks she learned in Silver Fang to seduce an Alpha

of Lucas's standing."

I took the champagne but didn't drink, watching Mom's face contort with hatred as her eyes fixed on Tori. The venom in her voice shocked me.

"Mom," I said quietly, "maybe it's time to let this go. Lucas Alpha clearly cares for her."

I'd chased after Lucas for years because I thought I at least had a place in his heart-if not as a love interest, then surely as a friend.

But after that humiliating moment when he coldly warned me about speaking ill of Tori, I finally understood the truth: I held no significance

to him whatsoever.

Becoming jealous and bitter over a man who would never love me, transforming into someone I barely recognized-what was the point?

I was Megan Howard, Alpha William's niece, a talented musician who'd earned a spot in Moonhaven's most prestigious orchestra.

My future was bright. There was no reason to destroy myself over one man

Mom's face twisted with disapproval. "You're giving up so easily? This little setback and you're done? How did I raise such two of you!"

She shook her head in disgust. "One wants to be a doctor, the other a pianist. ambitionless and unambitious."

"I need some air."

I didn't want to hear any more of her complaints. I turned away from the ballroom, heading toward the gardens for some fresh air.

The cool night air felt like salvation against my heated skin. I wandered to a stone gazebo, sitting on the cold bench and looking up at the

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three-quarter moon.

Its light bathed everything in silver, reminding me painfully of Tori's unusual eyes.

"Tough night?" a smooth voice interrupted my thoughts.

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I turned to find Fiona Price standing at the gazebo entrance, one hand resting on her slightly swollen belly. Her designer dress flowed elegantly

around her, but couldn't hide the calculation in her eyes.

"Mrs. Grayson, I acknowledged with a nod.

"Please, call me Fiona." She smiled, joining me on the bench uninvited. I couldn't help noticing your... heated discussion with your mother."

Of course she'd been watching. Everyone was always watching everyone else at these events, cataloging weaknesses to exploit later.

"It's nothing." I said flatly.

"It doesn't look like nothing. Her voice lowered conspiratorially. "It's about her, isn't it? About Tori? She practically spat the name. "Seeing

Tori with Lucas must be particularly difficult for you."

I gave her a cool look. I'm sorry, but do we know each other that well, Mrs. Grayson?"

She smiled, one hand resting protectively over her belly. "I just... understand what you're going through. I know what it's like when someone

you love never truly sees you, when their eyes pass right over you to find someone else."

I couldn't help the cold laugh that escaped my lips. "How considerate of you to be so concerned about my feelings."

I had no interest in conversing with Fiona Price. My family had been part of Moonhaven's elite for generations. Fiona, by comparison, was

barely worth acknowledging.

She quickly moved to block my path, her pregnant belly protruding between us.

I stepped back, frowning as my eyes fell to her swollen abdomen. The last thing I needed was some accident involving a pregnant woman that

could be blamed on me.

Noticing my wariness, Fiona smiled. "Don't worry," she whispered, her voice low enough that only the two of us could hear. I'm not trying to

chusera scene, if I have a way to make Tori leave Lucas voluntarily. Would you like to hear it?"

Tit made me laugh, a genuine sound of disbelief. I looked her up and down with undisguised contempt. Mrs. Grayson, you lost Tori's

friendship and couldn't keep Ethan's interest even before your marriage. Now you're offering me advice? *

Watttempted to step around her, but she shifted again, blocking my exit,

Miss Howard, Happiness must be fought for, she insisted. "Elizabeth and the elders have already decided to hold their Luna ceremony by year's end. Her eyes narrowed. Are you really going to stand by and watch the man you love marry another woman?*

Irritation flashed through me. Biting? You certainly did your share of that, didn't you? I stared directly into her eyes. 'So tell me, has all your fighting matter with her?

She froze, clearly caught off guard by my question.

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I knew the rumors. Ethan had been desperately in love with Tori before their relationship imploded. Even after marrying Fiona, many suspected he'd never truly forgotten his first love.

If Fiona were truly happy and secure in her marriage, she'd be focused on her husband and coming child, not scheming against Tori.

"I have no desire to become like you," I said coldly. "Move aside."

Her face darkened with anger, but I brushed past her, leaving her standing alone in the gazebo.

I returned to the ballroom, the warm light and chatter a stark contrast to the tense conversation in the garden.

My eyes found Tori immediately-she stood near the center of the room, surrounded by pack members and dignitaries, all seemingly captivated by her.

What was it about her that drew everyone in? The silver eyes? The Lunar phase talent? Or perhaps it was the quiet strength she carried despite everything she'd endured.

Fiona's words echoed in my mind, and I couldn't help but smile grimly.

Here was a woman sentenced to exile, temporarily spared only because of her pregnancy, and yet she still wasn't content to focus on keeping what she had. Instead, she was plotting against Tori, trying to enlist others in her schemes.

I shook my head slightly. If Fiona was foolish enough to move against To now, with Lucas watching her like a hawk, I'd be interested to see

how quickly her remaining privileges would vanish.

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Tori's POV:

The crystal chandeliers cast a soft glow across the ballroom as I made my way back to my seat after offering Olivia Sullivan my birthday wishes.

I slipped into the chair beside Lucas at the Grayson family table. His hand found mine beneath the tablecloth.

The room quieted as William Sullivan approached the podium, his posture regal as befitting the son of the evening's protagonist.

Elizabeth sighed softly, her gaze following him with something like pity.

"Twenty years, and still Susan won't sit at the same table as him for his mother's birthday," she whispered. "Some wounds never heal, I suppose."

63%

I glanced toward the far corner where Susan Shepherd sat with Charlotte, deliberately positioned as far from William as the room would allow.

The tension between them was palpable even from this distance.

At the dining table, Lucas pulled out my chair, then immediately began selecting items from the various platters.

"You need to eat," he said, placing a perfectly seared lamb cutlet on my plate. "You've barely touched food all day."

My stomach tightened with nerves. "I'm not sure I can eat," I admitted quietly, tugging at his sleeve. "Maybe stop adding more?"

Lucas's expression softened, but he persisted, adding roasted vegetables to my plate. "Just a few bites. You need your strength."

I sighed, picking up my fork. When he turned to respond to a question from another Alpha, I discreetly slid a piece of meat back onto his plate.

When he turned back and noticed, his eyes crinkled with amusement.

"Sneaky," he whispered, but ate it anyway.

From across the table, I noticed Ethan watching us. The pain in his eyes was unmistakable, and he abruptly pushed back his chair and left.

Beside me, Fiona's voice cut through my thoughts..

“Tori, I truly envy how well you get along with everyone,” she said with a practiced smile. “You and Ethan used to be inseparable too, didn’t you? So close, never fighting.”

The atmosphere around the table instantly froze. Several wolves shifted uncomfortably in their seats, scents of anxiety and curiosity mingling in the air.

“Fiona!” Ethan’s mother, Grace, frowned from across the table.

Bringing up my history with Ethan in front of Lucas was clearly stirring trouble.

Fiona’s expression remained perfectly innocent. “I meant nothing by it. I just admire how easily Tori forms connections with people.”

She paused, her eyes gleaming with malice beneath her sweet smile.

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“I remember seeing you two during school, walking together under the moonlight, so intimate with each other. They say first love leaves the deepest mark on each one. I imagine you must feel the same, don’t you, ori?”

I instinctively glanced at Lucas, my heart hammering against my ribs.

His expression remained perfectly composed, not a flicker of emotion crossing his features. But I knew better-the subtle tightening of his jaw,

the almost imperceptible shift in his scent told me he wasn't nearly as unaffected as he appeared.

I took a slow, deliberate sip of my water before responding.

"You know, Fiona," I said calmly, "I've noticed that people who constantly well on the past usually do so because their present isn't particularly fulfilling."

Gasps rippled around the table as I reached for Lucas's hand and deliberately placed it over mine where everyone could see.

"My present and my future," I said clearly, looking directly into her eyes, "belong solely to my Alpha."

Heat rushed to my cheeks immediately after the words left my mouth.

I couldn't believe I'd just said something so intimate in front of everyone. It was the first time I'd openly claimed Lucas this way, and the vulnerability of it made my heart race.

Lucas's fingers wrapped around mine, turning my hand over to interlace our fingers.

When I dared to glance at him, the softness in his eyes made my breath catch.

Yet, the next second, a warning that radiated outward to everyone at the table.

His expression conveyed a clear message: he wasn't looking for trouble, but if anyone wanted to challenge what was his, he would gladly oblige them.

Fiona's face paled as Lucas's cold Alpha presence expanded slightly. She immediately adopted a wounded expression, her eyes seeking out

Elizabeth as though appealing for protection.

Elizabeth glanced meaningfully at Fiona's slightly rounded belly, then released a weary sigh. Her eyes narrowed in silent reprimand toward

Fiona before she turned to Lucas and me.

"Now, now," Elizabeth said diplomatically, her voice carrying the practiced calm of someone who had mediated countless pack disputes.

"Let's not upset ourselves. Fiona is carrying the next Grayson, after all."

The tense moment was shattered by a crash from across the room.

I turned to see a server standing frozen in horror, a hot drink stray tumbling toward Susan Shepherd, who sat with her daughter Charlotte at

the neighboring table.

In a flash, Charlotte lunged forward, shielding her mother. The hot drink made contact with her arm, and she cried out in pain, collapsing to

the floor.

William Sullivan was across the room in seconds, his expression taut with concern.

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12:15 Thu, Feb 19 m

Chapter 166

He reached Susan first, his hands hovering near but not touching her shoulders.

"Are you hurt?" he asked urgently, his voice carrying across the suddenly silent room.

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Susan shook her head, but William's relief was short-lived as his attention immediately shifted to Charlotte, who lay grimacing on the floor, angry red burns forming where the silver had touched her skin.

"Charlotte, he breathed, dropping to his knees beside her.

"Get a medic!" he barked, already carrying her toward the door. Susan watched him go, her face a complex mask of emotions as she followed quickly behind.

Elizabeth's eyes tracked William's retreating figure. "The Shepherd girl is loyal, I'll give her that, she murmured. "Always protecting her mother.

I don't know if it will leave a scar."

The incident cast a somber shadow over the rest of the evening, and shortly after, Lucas suggested we leave.

"Anna's still at the hospital for observation," I reminded quietly. "I should check on her."

Within minutes, we were in his car, the lights of the Sullivan estate fading behind us.

The silence between us grew heavier with each passing mile.

Lucas's profile was rigid in the dim light of the dashboard, his jaw clenched and hands gripping the steering wheel more tightly than necessary.

I couldn't help but wonder if Fiona's calculated words had found their target after all.

I studied him nervously, gathering my courage.

"Lucas, I finally ventured, my voice barely above a whisper. "Is there... anything you want to ask me?"

Lucas turned his head slightly, one eyebrow raised. "What would you like me to ask? His tone was even, controlled.

I lowered my gaze to my hands in my lap.

Fiona had implied that Ethan and I had a beautiful time, and we were the most unforgettable first love for each other...

"Don't you want to know if what Fiona said was true?" I asked, shifting in my seat to face him better.

Comments

Chapter 167

Tori's POV:

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Lucas's expression remained carefully neutral as he glanced between me and the road ahead.

The moonlight filtering through the windshield cast half his face in shadow, making him even more difficult to read.

"I assume you had a life before you met me, Tori," he finally said, his fingers flexing slightly against the leather steering wheel. "What matters is who you choose now."

His words seemed perfectly reasonable and understanding.

If I put myself in his position, I couldn't imagine being so calm about him holding hands, embracing, or kissing someone else.

Yet here he was, acting like it didn't affect him at all. I couldn't tell if he was truly unbothered or just skilled at masking his emotions, not

letting me see what he really felt.

Before I could respond, his phone rang. He glanced at the screen before answering.

“Grayson speaking.” His voice shifted instantly into that authoritative Alpha tone. “When did this happen?... No, tell him I’ll be there in an hour.”

When he finally set the phone down, I asked quietly, “Is everything okay?”

“Nothing, I can’t handle,” he replied, his tone deliberately casual.

I turned to look out the window as the hospital came into view, deciding not to push the issue further. The night air was heavy with the scent of rain and antiseptic as we approached Moontouch Medical Center.

Lucas pulled up to the entrance, the car’s headlights illuminating the glass doors.

As I stepped out and walked toward the entrance, I felt his eyes on me, watching protectively until I was safely inside. Then he left.

Inside the hospital, I made my way to the wing carrying a basket of moon berries and silver leaf herbs – traditional gifts for healing.

The antiseptic smell burned my sensitive nose, making Tracy sneeze internally.

Anna’s room was bright, the specialized wolf-friendly bed surrounded by machines monitoring her vital signs. The soft beeping created a rhythmic background to the room’s soft conversations.

Grandmother Eileen sat in a chair by the bed, gently adjusting Anna’s pillows, while Janet was reading a story from a colorful picture book.

“Tori!” Anna’s face lit up immediately when she spotted me, her small hands reaching out eagerly despite her grandmother’s gentle attempts to keep her still. “You came! Look what I got!”

“Of course I did,” I smiled, approaching the bed and setting my basket on the side table.

Both Eileen and Janet looked up with tired but relieved expressions, clearly grateful for the distraction my arrival provided. "How are you feeling, little one?"

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12:16 Thu, Feb 19 m

Chapter 167

"Better now," she smiled. Dark circles ringed her eyes, making them appear too large in her small face.

I nodded, trying to keep my expression light though my heart ached at her frailty.

I reached into my bag and pulled out a soft gray rabbit plush with long floppy ears.

"Look who came to visit you," I said, placing the stuffed animal in her waiting hands.

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Anna's face brightened immediately, her small fingers wrapping around the toy with surprising strength. "He's so soft!" she exclaimed, pressing it against her cheek. "What's his name?"

"I thought you might want to name him yourself," I suggested, watching as she examined the rabbit's stitched nose and button eyes with serious concentration.

"I'll call him Moon," she decided after a moment, hugging the toy close to her chest.

"Would you like to hear a story about Moon and her adventures in the forest?" I asked, settling into the chair beside her bed.

Anna nodded eagerly, her eyes already wide with anticipation.

I glanced at Eileen and Janet. "Why don't you two take a break? I'll stay with her for a while."

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"Are you sure?" Janet asked, though the relief was evident in her voice.

"Absolutely.

Once they rested aside, I began weaving a tale about Moon the rabbit and his journey through an enchanted forest where the trees whispered

secrets and friendly wolves protected the woodland creatures.

Anna listened intently, her eyelids gradually growing heavier until she finally drifted off, the rabbit plush still clutched in her arms.

I stayed for dinner with them. Janet had gone to get food from the cafeteria.

I glanced at the fruit basket I'd brought. "I'll wash some of these, I told Eileen, who nodded absently, her attention focused on adjusting

Anna's blankets.

The hospital bathroom was pristinely clean, the scent of disinfectant making my nose twitch as I rinsed the moon berries and apples under

cool water.

Comments

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Claimed by the Alpha's Love - Love Demands Real Courage Author: Michael Anderson 168

Chapter 168

By the time I returned with the washed fruit, Janet had already come back with trays of food.

As I approached the door, I caught fragments of an urgent, whispered conversation.

...could have recognized her... silver eyes just like..."

"...Alpha William was right there in the elevator..."

...after all these years..."

63%

Their voices fell silent the moment I pushed the door open.

Both women looked up sharply, their expressions freezing into forced neutrality that didn't match their accelerated heartbeats I could detect.

"Is everything okay?" I asked, setting the fruit bowl on the side table.

Eileen cleared her throat, her hands fidgeting with the edge of Anna's blanket. "Tori, dear, perhaps you shouldn't come to the hospital so often. Janet and I can handle things here."

Her tone was casual but her scent betrayed anxiety.

Tracy stirred within me, sensing the deception.

"What were you two discussing just now?" I pressed gently, looking between them.

"Nothing important," Janet answered too quickly. "Just some old pack business."

Eileen nodded, her eyes not quite meeting mine. "It's getting late, and you have work tomorrow. Lucas will be waiting."

I sensed they were hiding something from me, but their protective postures and the subtle hint of fear in their scents made me hesitate to push further. Whatever they were concealing, it clearly troubled them deeply.

Around eight, I gathered my things to leave, promising Anna I'd return soon.

As I stepped into the hallway, I nearly collided with a group entering the elevator.

"I'm sorry," I apologized, stepping back.

"Tori?" An elegant older woman with silver-streaked hair exclaimed. "What are you doing here, dear?"

I recognized her as Diana Shepherd, mother to Susan and grandmother to Charlotte.

"I'm visiting my cousin Anna," I explained, glancing between them. "She's been admitted for treatment. I assume you're here for Charlotte?"

"Yes, just a follow-up check on Charlotte's burns from Olivia's birthday celebration," Diana confirmed. "Would you like to join us in the elevator?"

The three of us stepped into the elevator together, the small space suddenly feeling even smaller with the mixture of our scents.

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12:16 Thu, Feb 19 m

Chapter 168

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"William has been talking about making Charlotte his heir," Diana remarked casually to Susan as the elevator began its descent. "It's quite obvious he's finally making this decision because she saved you at the party. He's always had a soft spot for loyalty."

Susan's shoulders stiffened. "Mother, please. Not now."

"Twenty years is long enough to hold a grudge, dear," Diana continued, undeterred. "Perhaps it's time you two reconciled."

"I've been perfectly fine on my own all these years," Susan replied coldly. "I don't need William or anyone else."

Diana sighed, lightly tapping her daughter's arm in frustration. "Stubborn as always. I just hate seeing you both miserable when you could at least be civil."

The elevator doors opened to the ground floor, and I left after saying goodbye to them.

Outside, I spotted Jack leaning against a black SUV, his attentive eyes scanning the hospital entrance. He straightened when he saw me.

The drive back to Lucas's territory was quiet.

Lucas hadn't returned yet. I checked my phone-no messages.

I showered and changed into sleep clothes, then settled on the couch with a book, determined to wait up for him.

The hours ticked by slowly. Ten o'clock. Then ten-thirty. Eleven.

Just as I was considering giving up and going to bed, I heard the soft purr of Lucas's car pulling into the driveway. I marked my place in the book and set it aside, relief washing through me.

I waited, listening to the familiar sounds of the front door opening and closing, followed by his steady footsteps through the house.

But when I expected him to enter the bedroom, there was only silence. I looked up to see Lucas's silhouette in the doorway, standing perfectly still, watching me.

"Lucas?" I called softly, setting my book aside. "Is everything okay?"

He didn't answer, remaining motionless in the threshold as if some invisible barrier prevented him from entering. His face was partially shadowed, making his expression difficult to read.

Confused by his hesitation, I slipped out of bed and walked toward him. "What's wrong?"

As I drew closer, the scent hit me—sharp and unmistakable. Alcohol.

"You've been drinking," I said quietly, my voice reflecting my surprise more than judgment.

Comments

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Claimed by the Alpha's Love - Love Demands Real Courage Author: Michael Anderson 169

Chapter 169

Lucas's POV:

63%

The cold air bit at my face as I drove away from the hospital, my knuckles white against the steering wheel.

Tori's scent still lingered in the car. I glanced in the rearview mirror, watching her disappear through the hospital's glass doors. Only when she was completely out of sight did I allow my expression to change.

"Damn it," I muttered, my jaw clenching tight enough to hurt.

I assume you had a life before you met me, Tori. What matters is who you choose now.

My own words echoed in my head, hollow and dishonest.

Duke, my wolf, growled in disagreement. The truth was that every fiber of my being rejected the idea of Tori with anyone else—especially Ethan. My nephew. The thought of them together, his hands on her, his lips against hers...

Duke's growl intensified, and I felt the steering wheel begin to crack under my grip.

The rational part of me knew this was unreasonable. Tori didn't even know she was my fatedmate when she dated Ethan. But reason had little power over the possessive instinct raging through me.

I took a deep breath, forcing myself to focus on the road ahead.

These feelings weren't productive. They weren't worthy of an Alpha. Yet they consumed me all the same.

By the time I reached Grayson Enterprise, the temperature in the car had dropped several degrees. Ice crystals formed along the dashboard—a physical manifestation of my Arctic lineage that only emerged during extreme emotional states.

The receptionist flinched as I strode past, not meeting my eyes. The elevator emptied immediately when I entered, other wolves instinctively clearing my path. I barely noticed.

The conference room fell silent the moment I pushed open the doors.

Fifteen senior pack members sat around the long table, their eyes dropping in submission as my cold energy filled the room.

“Alpha Grayson,” my brother Richard greeted, his voice careful. “We’ve prepared the quarterly reports as requested.”

I nodded curtly, taking my seat at the head of the table. “Proceed.”

For the next twenty minutes, I listened to reports on pack finances, territory disputes, and alliance negotiations. My responses were clipped,

my attention fractured.

Every few minutes, my thoughts drifted back to Tori and Ethan, to the history they shared that I hadn’t been part of.

The room temperature continued to fall as the meeting progressed. Several of the older Betas were now visibly shivering, though none dared

comment on it.

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12:16 Thu, Feb 19 m

Chapter 169

Even my brother, accustomed to my cold nature, seemed uncomfortable.

“Alpha,” one of the younger council members ventured, “about the Luna candidates the Elder Council has proposed-*

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“There will be no discussion of Luna candidates today,” I said, my voice so frigid it seemed to crystallize the air. “Or any day. The only one is Tori.”

The council member paled, nodding quickly. “Of course, Alpha. My apologies.”

After another fifteen minutes of increasingly tense discussion, Richard glanced at his watch. "Perhaps we should adjourn for today. We've covered the essential matters."

The relief in the room was palpable as the council members gathered the materials.

As they filed out, I caught my brother's concerned gaze.

"Lucas," he said quietly once we were alone, "what's wrong? You've never let your control slip like this during a meeting."

"It's nothing," I replied, shuffling papers I wasn't really seeing.

"Is it the Sullivan girl?" he pressed. "If she's causing this kind of disruption to your focus-

"Stop," I said, the words emerging as a growl. "It's none of her business."

I left without responding, my mood darker than when I'd arrived.

Hours later, after stops at a bar that served alcohol potent enough to affect even Alpha metabolism, I returned home.

The house was quiet, but her scent enveloped me the moment I stepped through the door.

I stood in the doorway of the bedroom, watching Tori as she sat up in bed her book forgotten as she registered my presence.

The alcohol had dulled my control but sharpened Duke's demands. Her neck-unmarked, unclaimed-called to me like a beacon.

"Lucas?" she called softly, setting her book aside. "Is everything okay?"

I didn't answer. Couldn't answer. If I opened my mouth now, Duke would take over completely,

She slipped out of bed, walking toward me with concern etched across her features. "What's wrong?"

"You've been drinking," she said quietly.

Something in me snapped. In one fluid motion, I pulled her against me, one hand tangling in her hair while the other wrapped around her

waist.

She gasped, her silver eyes widening as I tilted her head to expose her neck.

“Mine,” Duke growled through my lips as I lowered my head.

My teeth sank into the sensitive juncture between her neck and shoulder, deeper than a casual love bite, marking her as claimed in the most

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12:16 Thu, Feb 19 m

Chapter 169

primal way.

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I tasted the copper of blood and the sweetness that was uniquely Tori. Her body trembled against mine, a small sound-half pain, half pleasure -escaping her lips.

Even with our bond, the wolf inside me couldn't shake the feeling that I needed to make her mine all over again.

“Lucas...” she whispered, confusion and something else-desire?-coloring her voice.

Before I could respond, her phone rang. She jumped slightly, still locked i my embrace. Neither of us moved to answer it, but the sound continued persistently.

“You should get that,” I said finally, my voice hoarse.

She nodded, reluctantly stepping away from me to grab her phone from the nightstand. Her expression shifted to confusion as she stared at the unknown number.

“Hello?”

I could hear the slurred voice on the other end clearly with my enhanced hearing.

“Tori... my moon...” Ethan's voice, thick with alcohol and emotion.

Tori's face paled as she recognized the voice. She looked at me with panic, clearly unsure how to respond.

I held out my hand for the phone. After a moment's hesitation, she passed it to me.

"You're only with him for revenge, right?" Ethan continued, unaware of the change.
"Once I break things off with Fiona, I'll stand in front of you again, and we can-

"Ethan." My voice cut through his rambling like a blade of ice. The temperature in the room plummeted as my control slipped further.

Silence fell on the other end of the line, followed by a sharp intake of breath.

"Uncle Lucas?" Ethan's voice was suddenly smaller, more sober.

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Claimed by the Alpha's Love - Love Demands Real Courage Author: Michael Anderson 170

Chapter 170

Tori's POV:

63%

Lucas stared at me, his eyes lingering on the mark he'd left on my neck.

"She is not yours," he said to Ethan, each word precise and deadly calm. She belongs to me."

He paused, and I could feel the weight of his claim settling over me like a physical thing. “This is the last time I’m warning you, Ethan. Next time, I won’t be so considerate of our family ties.”

He ended the call and handed the phone back to me, his movements controlled but tense.

I couldn’t look away from his face, seeing something there I’d never witnessed before—a raw possessiveness that should have frightened me but instead sent a thrill down my spine.

“Lucas,” I whispered, “your eyes…”

They had shifted to an icy blue.

Lucas didn’t answer. Instead, he stalked toward me with predatory grace, backing me against the wall. His breathing was measured but deep, as though he was fighting for control.

“Duke is angry,” he finally said, his voice a low rumble that I felt more than heard. “He doesn’t like other wolves calling you ‘my moon.’”

I swallowed hard. The expression “my moon” was reserved for mates in wolf culture—not something to be used casually, especially by someone who wasn’t your actual mate.

“Ethan is drunk,” I said softly, trying to diffuse the tension. “He doesn’t mean—”

“He meant every word.” Lucas cut me off, placing his hands on either side of my head, caging me in.

His voice dropped lower, suddenly vulnerable beneath the anger. “I lied earlier today, Tori. When I said your past didn’t matter to me.

His jaw clenched. “I care very much about what Fiona said. The thought of you and Ethan together—intimate—it drives me insane with

jealousy. I can’t stand it. I can’t tolerate you talking to him anymore.”

The raw honesty in his confession caught me off guard. This powerful Alpha, admitting such vulnerability—over me.

A smile tugged at my lips, surprising us both. I reached up and gently ran my fingers through his hair, the gesture both soothing and intimate.

“You’re jealous,” I said softly, not a question but a realization.

“I don’t want Ethan,” I whispered, my voice steadier than I expected. “I just want you.”

Something in Lucas’s expression shifted. The anger didn’t fade, but it transformed into something else—something hungrier, more primal.

“Prove it,” Lucas said, his voice rough with emotion.

Tori stepped closer, her heart pounding. “How?”

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12:16 Thu, Feb 19 m

Chapter 170

“Show me I’m the only one who matters.”

The air between us felt charged, electric.

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I reached up slowly, my fingers trembling slightly as they traced the line of his jaw. His skin was warm beneath my touch, and I felt him tense,

up slowly. every muscle coiled tight as he fought for control.

“Lucas,” I breathed his name like a prayer, watching his eyes darken at the sound. My hand slid into his hair, and he exhaled sharply.

I pulled him closer until there was barely any space between us.

I could feel the heat radiating from his body, smell the pine and winter storm scent that was uniquely his, now mixed with something darker, more intoxicating.

“I am yours,” I whispered against his mouth, feeling bold in a way I’d never been before. “Only yours, Lucas.”

The last thread of his control snapped.

He kissed me deeply, thoroughly, his hands pulling me flush against him. When we finally broke apart, both breathless, the moonlight streaming through the windows cast shadows across his face.

“Say it again,” he murmured against my temple, his arms wrapped secure around me.
“Tell me you’re mine.”

“I’m yours, Lucas,” I repeated, my fingers tracing patterns on his chest through his shirt.
“And you’re mine.”

He lifted me effortlessly, carrying me toward the bedroom. “All night,” he said, his voice rough with promise. “I want to hear you say my name all night.”

The night stretched on, filled with whispered confessions./

Every time his lips found mine, every time his hands traced new paths across my skin, he would pause and wait, his silver eyes holding mine in the moonlight.

“Say it,” he would command softly, and I would obey.

“Lucas.” Sometimes breathless. “Lucas.” Sometimes pleading. “Lucas.” Sometimes laughing softly at his insatiable need to hear his name on my lips.

He was gentle and demanding by turns, patient and urgent, always attentive to every response, every sound I made. When I grew too tired to speak, he would coax the words from me with touches that made my breath catch.

‘I love you,’ I finally whispered in the darkest hour before dawn, the word tumbling out unbidden. ‘I love you, Lucas.’

He stilled above me, his eyes searching mine in the silver moonlight. For moment, I feared I’d said too much, revealed too much of my heart.

But then his expression softened into something achingly tender.

“I love you more.” he said, his voice rough with emotion,

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12:16 Thu, Feb 19 m \ D

Chapter 170

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My body felt heavy with exhaustion, every muscle pleasantly sore in a way that made my cheeks heat as memories of the night before flooded

back.

My phone burred insistently on the nightstand. Morgan's name flashed across the screen.

Tori! You won't believe what happened!" Her voice was breathless with excitement and indignation.

"Morgan, slow down- I started to say, but my voice came out as a hoarse rasp that made me wince.

I cleared my throat and tried again. "Take your time and tell me what's going on."

There was a pause on the other end. "Tori? What's wrong with your voice? Are you sick?"

My face erupted in flames as memories of the night before flooded back-Lucas's commands, my breathless responses, saying his name over and

over until my throat was raw.

"I'm fine!" I said quickly, my voice still scratchy. "Just... just woke up. You know how it is in the morning."

"You sound like you've been screaming all night, Morgan said suspiciously.

I nearly choked. "1-what? No! I just-" I grabbed the water glass on the nightstand and took a desperate gulp, buying myself time. "What were

you calling about? You said something happened?"

Morgan hesitated, clearly not convinced by my deflection, but her news was apparently too important to ignore. "Right! Okay, so you're not

going to believe this, but Fiona had her baby!"

"What?" I sat up straighter, wincing slightly. "Already?"

"Yes! And it's a male pup, can you believe it?" Morgan's voice dripped with bitter sarcasm. "Elizabeth Grayson is practically throwing a parade."

I stayed silent, processing this information.

And get this," Morgan continued, her indignation building, "Richard Grayson announced he's setting aside ten percent of Grayson Enterprises. stock as a birth gift. ten percent! Do you know how much that's worth?"

"A lot," I murmured, my voice still hoarse.

"Exactly! So now Fiona has her golden ticket back into the family. Never mind that she's a convicted criminal who framed you and destroyed your life. She popped out an Alpha baby, so all is forgiven!" Morgan's voice rose with each word.

I closed my eyes. Of course, I had emotions about this-anger, resentment, the bitter taste of injustice. But I have no choice.

Comments

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