

Claimed by the Alpha's Love - Love Demands Real Courage Author: Michael Anderson 191

Chapter 191

Tori's POV:

I turned to face him.

"Lucas, what is it? You've been... different since I mentioned Susan's invitation."

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For a long moment, he simply looked at me, his silver-blue eyes searching my face as if memorizing every detail.

The bond between us thrummed with his internal struggle.

Then he moved, his hands cupping my face with infinite gentleness. "Tori, he began, his voice carrying a weight that made my heart race, "do you want to know who your biological father is?"

The question hit me like a physical blow. My breath caught.

"My... father?" The word felt foreign on my tongue.

Lucas's thumbs traced gentle patterns on my cheeks. "I know who he is, no long ago, little wolf."

My hands gripped his wrists, needing the anchor of his touch as my world tilted. How? Why didn't you tell me immediately?"

"Because," he said softly, "I wasn't sure if knowing would help or hurt you. And I wanted to be certain before I said anything."

My mind raced through possibilities, connecting dots I hadn't known existed.

Olivia's reaction when she'd first seen me-that strange, arrested look in her eyes, as if she were seeing a ghost. You have his eyes, she'd said

about William.

And the lunar calculations. My gift with moon phase mathematics, the way the numbers had always come so naturally to me. William Sullivan was renowned for that same talent, his research into lunar patterns legendary among the Packs.

For one breathless, dizzying moment, hope flared in my chest.

What if I was William and Susan's daughter?

But reality crashed down just as quickly. I had a mother. Hannah Sullivan, who'd raised me with cold indifference, who'd made it clear my entire life that I was a burden she'd never wanted.

And Lucas's expression when I'd mentioned Susan-not just concern, but something darker. Guilt, maybe. Or pity.

The conversation with Grandmother Eileen came flooding back. Your mother made a terrible mistake with a married man. And Aunt Janet's carefully chosen words: He had a wife. A family. Your mother destroyed that

I was the product of an affair. The living proof of Hannah's betrayal. The reason Susan had lost everything.

The pieces fell into place with sickening clarity, and the brief spark of hope died, replaced by a cold, heavy understanding.

I couldn't speak. Couldn't move.

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The air seemed to thicken around me, pressing down on my chest until breathing became a conscious effort.

Through our bond, I felt Lucas's concern spike, felt him reaching for me emotionally even as his hands remained steady on my shoulders.

"That person..." My voice came out as barely a whisper. "Is it William Sullivan?*

Lucas's silence was answer enough. Through our bond, I felt his confirmation before he even nodded.

"The DNA test was ordered by Alpha William, Lucas explained, his voice steady despite the emotional storm I could feel raging within him.

"The results were conclusive. William Sullivan is your biological father."

I stepped back, my legs suddenly unsteady. Lucas moved with me, his hands shifting to my waist to keep me upright.

I thought of Susan's wheelchair, her invitation.

The brief flare of excitement died instantly, extinguished by a wave of crushing guilt.

"Does she know?" I asked. "Susan-does she know about me?"

"Not yet. William didn't want her to know." Lucas's voice was carefully controlled.

My hand instinctively moved to my still-flat stomach.

"I can't... Lucas, I can't face her now. How can I look at her knowing that I'm the reason-

"Stop." His hands caught my shoulders, firm but gentle, forcing me to meet his eyes.

"Listen to me, Tori. What happened twenty-two years ago

-none of it was your fault. You were an innocent child. You are innocent.

"But her daughter died because-

Lucas interrupted, his voice hard with conviction. "Those were their choices, their sins. Not yours. You don't carry their guilt, little wolf."

I wanted to believe him. God, how I wanted to believe that I wasn't somehow responsible for that tragedy. But the weight of it pressed down on

me, making it hard to breathe.

"I just told her I'd go to her exhibition, I whispered, my voice breaking.

Lucas's expression softened, his thumbs tracing gentle circles on my shoulders. "Then don't go. You can make an excuse," he said firmly.

A moment of silence stretched between us. Then Lucas spoke again, his voice careful.

"Owen Sullivan approached me tonight at the Elder Council dinner. He knows about your identity. He wants to bring you back into the Sullivan

Pack.

I froze, my breath catching. "He... what?"

"He made a formal proposal," Lucas continued.

My mind reeled. Going back to them-becoming part of the Sullivan famil-would mean facing Susan every day. My very presence would be a constant reminder of her husband's betrayal, of the daughter she'd lost. I wouldn't even have to do anything. Just existing would be enough to

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hurt her.

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"The Sullivan Pack is in turmoil right now," Lucas said quietly. "Your appearance will inevitably cause upheaval. And you're pregnant, little wolf.

The last thing you need is to be caught in the middle of their family politics and power struggles."

Through our bond, I felt his protectiveness surge-sharp and fierce.

He'd already made his position clear to Owen Sullivan, I realized. He'd rejected the proposal.

"That's my personal recommendation," he added, his voice softening. "But you want to return to your blood family, if you want to know them

-that's your choice to make. I won't stand in your way."

His hands moved to cup my face, tilting it up so I had to meet his eyes. "Whatever you decide, remember this: I'm here. I'm with you. Always."

The words wrapped around me like a shield, solid and unwavering.

But as I stood there in his arms, feeling the warmth of his touch and the steady beat of his heart through our connection, I knew what my answer would be.

I was silent for a long moment, letting the weight of the decision settle. Then I wrapped my arms around his waist, pulling myself against his solid warmth, anchoring myself to the one constant in my chaotic life.

"I have you," I said quietly, my voice muffled against his chest but steady with conviction.

'I have you and our baby. That's enough. I don't need anyone else.'

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Olivia's POV:

The heavy oak door of my study closed with a decisive click as Owen entered, his silver streaked hair disheveled, his expression a storm of

frustration and indignation.

He senses something was wrong before he even crossed the threshold,

he refused, Owen said without preamble, his voice tight. Alpha Lucas refused outright. Wouldn't even consider bringing the girl back to the

family

I set down my teacup with careful precision, the delicate porcelain making barely a sound against the saucer.

"Tell me exactly what he said, I requested, keeping my tone measured despite the frustration building in my chest.

Owen began to pace, his movements agitated, hands gesturing sharply as he recounted the conversation.

He was cold, Olivia, Dismissive. When I explained the benefits of bringing Tori into the Sullivan Pack-the political alliance, the strengthening of ties between our families-he looked at me as if I'd suggested something obscene."

"Did he give reasons?"

Reasons Owen's laugh was harsh. "He said the last thing Tori needs is to be 'caught in the middle of Sullivan family politics and power struggles. As if we would harm our own blood!"

I released a slow breath, my emotions tangling into something complicated and bittersweet.

Part of me felt a flutter of warmth. Lucas truly cared for her. Protected he Loved her in the fierce, uncompromising way an Alpha should love

his Luna.

But another part of me, the part that had lost one granddaughter and only just discovered another, felt the sharp sting of loss. She was so

close, yet still beyond my reach.

"He's not entirely wrong," I said quietly, the admission tasting bitter on my tongue.

"That girl has been through hell. And we did nothing. We didn't even know she existed."

"That's precisely why we need to bring her home now," Owen insisted, coming to stand beside me. "To make amends. To give her the protection

and status she deserves as William's daughter."

I could feel his sincerity, his genuine desire to right past wrongs.

I was silent for a long moment, weighing options, consequences. Then I straightened my shoulders, decision crystallizing clarity.

"If Lucas won't listen to reason," I said quietly, "then perhaps I'm going to contact Tori myself."

"Not to manipulate her, not to pressure her. But she deserves the truth. She deserves the choice."

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The next morning.

Light slanted through the tall windows of my study, casting long shadows across the Persian rug.

I sat at my desk, fingers hovering over my phone screen, Tori's number glowing like a beacon of hope and uncertainty.

I pressed dial before I could change my mind.

The phone rang once. Twice. Three times. My heart hammered against my ribs, each beat a prayer and a plea.

"Hello?"

Her voice washed over me like a balm.

"Tori, dear. It's Olivia Sullivan."

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I heard her sharp intake of breath, the slight rustle as she straightened. Through the phone, I could almost picture her—those expressive eyes widening, that careful control settling over her features.

"Mrs. Sullivan," she said, and I could hear her trying to maintain composure. "This is a surprise."

"I hope not an unwelcome one." I kept my voice gentle, warm, trying to convey everything I couldn't yet say. "I've been thinking about you since our tea together. About how much I enjoyed our conversation."

"I was wondering," I continued carefully, each word chosen with precision, if you might have time to meet with me again. Perhaps for lunch?

The silence that followed felt weighted, significant. I held my breath, waiting.

Then her voice came, quiet but firm: "I'm sorry, Mrs. Sullivan. I'm very satisfied with my life as it is right now. I have no plans to change my current situation, and I don't think it would be appropriate for us to meet

She had known. The words hit me like a physical blow.

My hand tightened on the phone, knuckles going white.

"Tori..." My voice cracked despite my best efforts. "Are you blaming me for not bringing you home sooner? That's my fault. I should have found you earlier. I should have-

My throat closed up, tears burning behind my eyes.

"You don't have to acknowledge me as your grandmother," I said, the words tumbling out in a rush of desperation and grief. "I just... I just want

to see you."

I drew a shaky breath, my voice breaking. "Can't you even grant me one meeting?"

The silence on the other end stretched, and I pressed my hand to my mouth, trying to contain the sobs that wanted to escape.

"Mrs. Sullivan..." Her voice was softer now, conflicted.

"Please, I whispered. "Just one meal."

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Another long pause. Then, so quietly I almost missed it: "All right. One meeting."

Relief flooded through me so intensely I had to grip the edge of my desk to steady myself. "Thank you. Thank you, dear."

We arranged the details-tomorrow, noon, at the Moonhaven Grand Hotel restaurant.

After we hung up, I sat trembling in my chair, emotions churning through me in waves.

I arrived at the Moonhaven Grand Hotel early, my wolf pacing restlessly beneath my skin.

I stood near the entrance, my cane gripped tightly in one hand, watching every person who entered the lobby.

My heart leaped at every dark-haired young woman, only to settle back into anxious waiting when they passed by.

Then I saw her.

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Tori stepped through the revolving doors, and the afternoon light caught in her hair, making it shimmer like moonlight on water.

“Tori!” I called out, unable to contain myself. My hand rose in an eager wave, and I found myself moving toward her faster than my old legs should allow, my cane tapping rapidly against the marble floor.

She turned at the sound of my voice, and for a moment, our eyes met.

I saw wariness there, but also something else—a flicker of the same longing I felt, quickly suppressed.

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Olivia's POV:

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I reached Tori and, without thinking, grasped her hand in both of mine.

"Thank you for coming," I said, my voice breaking slightly.

"Mrs. Sullivan," she replied, her tone carefully neutral.

"Olivia, please." I couldn't bring myself to release her hand, not yet. "Come, I've arranged a private room. We can talk more comfortably there."

I'd reserved a private dining room on the top floor, away from curious eyes and listening ears.

As we rode the elevator up, I studied her profile in the mirrored walls. The resemblance was undeniable now that I knew to look for it.

The dining room was intimate, with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking Moonhaven's skyline. I'd ordered her favorites-or what I'd learned were her favorites through discrete inquiries. Fresh salads, grilled salmon, the berry tart from the bakery near her school.

"Please, sit. I gestured to the chair across from mine.

The waiter poured water and wine-juice for Tori, I'd specified then disappeared with practiced discretion.

As our meal arrived, I found myself unable to stop serving her-adding salmon to her plate, ensuring she had enough salad, refilling her juice glass before it emptied.

"You need to eat more, dear," I said gently, watching her pick at the food. You're far too thin.

"Thank you, but really, I'm fine." She gently moved her plate back, a polite but firm gesture.

Her silver eyes met mine with quiet directness. "If there's something you want to say, please just say it."

The words were gentle, but they cut through my nervous fussing like a knife.

I set down the serving spoon, caught between admiration for her perceptiveness and shame at my own transparent anxiety.

I paused, the words I'd been holding back finally breaking free. "Tori... won't you reconsider? Won't you come home to Sullivan Pack?"

She set down her fork carefully, and I saw her defenses rise like a wall.

"Olivia." She drew a breath. "I appreciate what you're offering. I really do. But I can't accept."

"Why not?" The question came out more desperately than I intended. "You're William's daughter. You belong with us. The pack would welcome

you, protect you-

'I can't.' Her voice remained gentle, but there was steel underneath. I'm the living reminder of William's betrayal. The reason Susan's daughter

died.

I opened my mouth to protest, but she continued, her words measured and thoughtful.

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Lucas has endured so much criticism because of me,' she said quietly. "When we first got together, people called me a murderer. After my appeal succeeded and that label was removed, they started talking about my past with Ethan instead."

Her hand moved unconsciously to the mark on her neck-Lucas's claim. "I stood by me through all of it. He's never complained, never asked

me to hide or change. But I know what it costs him."

“Tori-

“Being an illegitimate daughter’ carries its own stigma,” she continued, meeting my gaze directly. “Even if it’s the Sullivan Pack’s illegitimate daughter. In the eyes of high society, I’d still be... tainted. Especially given what Hannah did-what she took from William and Susan.”

The truth of her words hit like a physical blow.

She was right, of course. The whispers would never stop. The judgment would follow her everywhere.

“I’ve already brought Lucas enough trouble,” Tori said softly. “I won’t add to it by dragging him into Sullivan Pack politics. I won’t let my

parentage become another weapon for people to use against him.”

“But Tori,” I leaned forward, desperate to make her understand, “if you joined Sullivan Pack officially, you could inherit the Sullivan Pack. Do

you understand what that means? The power, the resources, the security it would give you and your child?”

She smiled then-a small, knowing smile that reminded me achingly of William at his most stubborn.

“What belongs to me, I won’t be shy about claiming. But what isn’t mine, won’t reach for.”

I stared at her, seeing the finality in those silver eyes. She truly believed the Sullivan legacy wasn’t hers to take.

The contrast struck me with unexpected force.

Charlotte, whenever inheritance was mentioned, would lean forward with barely concealed hunger in her eyes. She’d speak of “securing the family’s future” and “maintaining Sullivan Pack’s position,” but underneath the diplomatic words was raw, burning ambition.

I’d always told myself that ambition was good-that Charlotte’s drive would make her a strong leader.

But now, looking at Tori’s quiet dignity, I wondered if Charlotte lacked something essential-a certain kindness, perhaps.

Please, I found myself thinking, almost like a prayer. When Charlotte learns the truth, let her be kind. Let her see Tori as family, not as a threat.

“You’re stubborn,” I said finally, my voice thick with emotion. “Just like William.”

I released a long breath, letting go of the dreams I’d been harboring.

“All right then. I won’t push. As long as you’re happy, that’s what matters.

Tori’s hand moved to her stomach in that unconscious protective gesture noticed earlier. “Right now, my biggest wish is just to carry this

baby safely and give Lucas the family he deserves.”

The words took a moment to register. Then-

“You’re pregnant?” The question came out as barely more than a whisper.

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She nodded, a soft smile touching her lips. “Ten weeks.”

Joy exploded in my chest, so sudden and overwhelming that tears sprang my eyes. ‘Oh, Tori. Oh, my dear girl.’”

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I reached across the table, covering both her hands with mine. “Then that settles it. You need to focus on your health, on the baby. Everything else-Sullivan Pack, official recognition, all of it-can wait.”

“Olivia-

“No, I mean it. I squeezed her hands gently. “You’re carrying my great-grandchild. Nothing is more important than ensuring you both stay healthy and safe. The rest... the rest doesn’t matter.”

Her eyes glistened. Thank you for understanding.”

“Thank you for telling me. I blinked back my own tears. “And Tori? If you need anything-anything at all-you call me. Promise me.”

“I promise,” she said softly.

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Charlotte's POV:

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I stood beside the conference table in William's office, watching Susan flip through the energy projection charts with her characteristic

precision.

The morning sun streamed through the floor-to-ceiling windows, casting sharp shadows across the polished mahogany surface.

“The lunar phase alignment creates optimal conditions for cross-pack energy sharing,” I explained, pointing to the highlighted sections. “If Shepherd Pack and Sullivan Pack coordinate our resources during the waxing moon periods-”

A sharp knock interrupted my presentation.

William looked up, surprise flickering across his face. "Come in."

The door swung open, and Olivia swept into the room, her face absolutely radiant.

I'd never seen her look so... joyful.

Her silver-white hair seemed to glow in the morning light, and her eyes sparkled with barely contained excitement. She moved with the energy

of someone bursting to share wonderful news.

What on earth could make Olivia look like that?

My curiosity sharpened immediately. Olivia was always composed, always controlled. This unguarded happiness was completely out of character.

"William," she began, her voice bright with enthusiasm, "I hope I'm not interrupting, but I simply had to-"

Then she saw us.

Her expression transformed in an instant. The radiant joy vanished behind a mask of polite courtesy, and I watched her physically pull back, as if tucking away whatever news she'd been about to share.

Damn it. Whatever it was, she clearly wasn't going to reveal it in front of Susan and me.

I immediately rose with a welcoming smile, unable to contain my curiosity "Olivia, what wonderful news has you looking so happy?*

Olivia's gaze flickered to me briefly before she smoothly redirected the conversation.

"Charlotte, dear, how are you managing with the cross-pack energy project Getting familiar with all the complexities?"

The question hit a nerve, and I felt my expression darken despite my best efforts to maintain composure.

Ever since William had begun grooming me for a leadership role, the resistance had been relentless.

The Sullivan Pack's board members opposed me on multiple fronts: fear that I'd eventually merge their interests with Shepherd Pack's agenda, resentment over my lack

of direct bloodline connection to William, and Betty Howard's constant sabotage behind the scenes.

Every project I'd tried to launch had stalled before it could properly begin

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William had been clear—he wouldn't intervene this time. He wanted me to prove myself through my own merit, to force those old foxes on the board to accept me through results rather than nepotism.

Only by overcoming these obstacles myself would they truly recognize my worth.

"The project coordination has been... challenging," I admitted carefully, aware of Susan's sharp gaze on me. "Managing both Shepherd Pack's internal affairs and this cross-pack initiative requires significant attention to detail."

"You must be exhausted," Olivia continued, her tone shifting to something almost maternal. "Juggling Shepherd Pack's internal affairs while

also managing this cross-pack collaboration? That's quite a burden for one person to carry."

The words felt like silk wrapped around steel. On the surface, concern. Underneath, a pointed observation.

"I manage," I said carefully, though my pulse quickened.

Was this a test? A warning?

"Perhaps the workload is... excessive? In fact, Charlotte, you look like you're being pulled in too many directions at once. Perhaps you should

focus your energy on Shepherd Pack's core interests? The cross-pack project can wait."

I froze. "Olivia?"

It had taken everything-late nights poring over lunar phase calculations, countless meetings with Sullivan Pack's technical teams, carefully

navigated conversations with resistant board members-just to get William to see me as more than a convenient outsider. To see me as

someone worthy of grooming for leadership.

And now Olivia, with a few gentle words wrapped in grandmotherly concern, was suggesting I step back?

She's marginalizing me. The realization hit with stunning clarity.

"Don't misunderstand, dear," Olivia continued, her tone warm but firm. "I'm only concerned for your wellbeing. You've lost weight recently-

anyone can see you're overextending yourself."

My fingers curled into my palms beneath the table.

Olivia had previously seemed neutral about William's decision to mentor me, neither supporting nor opposing it openly. This sudden

intervention meant something had changed.

But what?

Before I could formulate a response, Olivia turned her attention to Susan.

"What do you think, Susan? Surely you'd prefer Charlotte's full attention Shepherd Pack affairs?"

Susan's response was immediate and cold. "The cross-pack project is Sullivan Pack business. As an outsider, I have no authority to interfere."

The word 'outsider' hung in the air like a blade.

William opened his mouth to speak, but Olivia's warning glance silenced him immediately.

The power dynamics in the room were suddenly, painfully clear.

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By two o'clock, Susan and I were leaving the Institute together.

I gripped the steering wheel so tightly my knuckles turned white as I navigated through Moonhaven's afternoon traffic.

"Why didn't you speak up for me? The question burst out before I could open it.

Susan sat in the passenger seat, her gaze fixed on something outside the window. "Speak up for what, exactly?"

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"In there. With Olivia. With William." My voice cracked slightly. "If you'd said something-anything-William would have listened to you. He

always listens to you."

"Charlotte." Susan's tone was flat.

She sat in the passenger seat, her gaze fixed downward on her legs.

I knew she'd been doing rehabilitation therapy, continuing it religiously since returning to Moonhaven center. She could now stand and walk a

few steps. It was only a matter of time before she fully recovered.

After a long pause, she looked up, her eyes meeting mine in the rearview mirror.

"If it were Shepherd Pack property, I could speak up for you."

The implication was clear: But Sullivan Pack business is not my concern. And neither, truly, are you.

I gripped the steering wheel tighter, staring at the road ahead as darkness crept into my vision-not from the fading light, but from the rage

building inside me.

That damned old woman. With a few carefully chosen words, Olivia had shattered everything I'd worked so hard to build.

Everything I'd sacrificed for.

My hand unconsciously moved to my shoulder, where beneath the fabric lay the ugly, twisted scars—a permanent reminder of what I'd endured

to earn William's trust.

I'd orchestrated that "accident" so carefully, positioning myself to be burned while "protecting" Susan. The scalding liquid had seared my skin, and I'd deliberately let the wound fester, refusing proper treatment to deepen Susan's guilt and William

gratitude.

The scars were hideous, sprawling across my shoulder and upper back like some grotesque map of my desperation. Every time I caught sight of

them in the mirror, nausea rose in my throat.

All of that pain. All of that sacrifice. And she dismisses me with a smile and a suggestion to "focus on Shepherd Pack."

The unfairness of it all pressed down on me like a physical weight.

If only I were William and Susan's biological daughter. If only I carried their bloodline, their legitimacy. If only I were truly theirs, I thought

bitterly, none of this would be happening.

But I wasn't. I would never be.

And that single, unchangeable fact colored every interaction, every achievement, every desperate attempt to prove my worth.

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The moment Charlene and Susan car disappeared down the drive. I term back, my jaw tight with tension I couldn't quite release.

Wocher stood in the way of my stock, still radiating that inexplicable til glimpsed earlier.

ham voce was grace but fem as he chood the study deer Neue need to talk

I moved to the windex looking out over the Sullivan estate grounds without really seeing them.

The afternoon sun cast long shadows the manicured lawns, but all could think about was the DNA report hidden in my desk drawer.

Sissan

snow, de fuked me about the Council meeting, ber voice soft and distant as always. Td barely been able to meet her eyes, terrified she d

the Fuck

y face.

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Wether you shouldn't have said these things to Charlotte, I said, still fading the window. Everyone knows I've been grooming her for a leadership position. I suddenly change course now, it will make her look incompetent. The old foxes on Shepherd Pack's board will make thing ever more difficult for her.

She needs tempering Mother replied, her tone matter-of-fact. If she cant withstand a little setback, how can she possibly shoulder real responsitung Leadership isn't just about ambition. William It's about rasilence. About knowing when to advance and when to step back."

I started to respond, but she cut me off with sudden brightness in ber voice.

Tard is pragment. You're going to be a grandfather.

The words hit me Be a physical blow. I gripped the window frame, my knuckles going white.

They I have our blood” Mother continued, her voice thick with emotion. Sullivan blood, William. Your grandchildren will carry the silver eyes, the connection to the moon phases. They’re ours, whether you acknowledge them or not.

4 strange, overwhelming sensation flooded through my chest. Joy mixed with anguish. Pride tangled with shame.

The Luna ceremony is in May, Mother continued, her tone shifting to practical matters. You need to prepare appropriate gifts. I’ll prepare

something from the family vault as well

“Mother-“My voice came out hoarse.

This isn’t negotiable, William Her tone brooked no argument.

I finally turned to face her, and the determination in her expression made pay chest tighten.

“What about Susan? The question tore from my throat.

Mother’s voice was surprisingly gentle, though her eyes remained hard. “William, the longer you wait, the worse it will be.”

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The truth of her words out deep. I looked away, unable to meet her gaze

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The next morning, I found myself in the car with Mother and Father, heading toward Lucas Grayson’s private residence.

Mother held a carved wooden box in her lap-inside, I knew, was the moonstone necklace that had been passed down through Sullivan women

for generations.

Father carried a leather portfolio containing stock certificates-ten percent of Sullivan Pack holdings, enough to give Tori a voice in family

decisions without threatening the existing power structure.

“Remember, Mother said as we approached the gates, “we’re here to offer, not to demand. Let Tori set the pace.”

I nodded, though my hands were clenched so tightly in my lap that my knuckles had gone white.

Lucas Grayson’s estate was impressive.

The gates opened smoothly as we approached, clearly expected.

A servant met us at the entrance, his expression professionally neutral Alpha William. Elder Olivia. Elder Owen. Please, come in. Alpha Lucas is expecting you.”

We were led through elegantly appointed rooms to a sitting area overlooking manicured gardens. Lucas appeared moments later, his expression

carefully controlled.

Alpha William. Luna Olivia. Elder Owen.” He inclined his head with just enough respect to avoid insult, but not an ounce more. Thank you for

calling ahead.”

“We appreciate you agreeing to see us,” Mother said smoothly. “We won’t take much of your time

Lucas’s ice-blue eyes studied each of us in turn, and I felt the weight of his Alpha authority-and his suspicion. Tori is resting. The pregnancy

has been... demanding

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“Of course.” Mother’s voice softened. “We wouldn’t dream of disturbing her if she’s not feeling well. Perhaps we could leave our gifts-”

Ill ask her. Lucas’s tone made it clear this wasn’t a negotiation. “Wait here.”

He disappeared upstairs, leaving us in tense silence.

“He’s protective, Father observed quietly. “That’s good.”

I couldn’t respond. My throat had closed up, my heart pounding so hard I could hear it in my ears.

Footsteps on the stairs made me look up.

Lucas descended first, his expression unreadable. Behind him, moving slowly, came Tori.

My breath caught.

She was beautiful. Her silver eyes were wary but clear, her hand resting protectively over her still-flat stomach. She wore simple clothes, but there was a dignity in her bearing that reminded me achingly of Susan.

“Tori, Mother breathed, rising to her feet.

Tori’s gaze swept over all of us, lingering longest on me.

Mother's excitement was palpable as she gestured toward the items on the coffee table. "Your grandfather, your father, and I have prepared some gifts for you. Come, look-see if you like them."

Across the room, Lucas stood near the windows, his posture deceptively relaxed but his ice-blue eyes tracking every movement.

Father sat in an armchair, his hands resting on his walking stick, watching the scene unfold with careful attention.

"This is ten percent of Sullivan Pack holdings," Mother said, placing the blue portfolio in Tori's hands. Her voice was warm, eager. "These shares come from your father's portion. They're rightfully yours."

She opened the wooden boxes one by one, revealing the jewelry inside. "And these are antique pieces I've collected over the years. *

The jewelry gleamed in the morning light-moonstone necklaces, silver bracelets inlaid with precious gems, earrings that would catch the light

like stars. Each piece was museum-quality, worth a fortune.

Mother leaned forward, her voice taking on a more urgent tone. "The Luna ceremony is coming in May. When you stand before the Council and

the packs as Lucas Grayson's mate, you should have the confidence that comes with knowing your worth."

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"These pieces are not just valuable-they're a statement. They tell everyone watching that you have family backing you."

Mother's eyes were bright with hope as she watched Tori's face, clearly desperate to see some sign of happiness, of acceptance.

Tori looked down at the stock certificates, then at the open jewelry boxes her expression remained carefully neutral.

Then she closed the portfolio. One by one, she closed each jewelry box with quiet finality.

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10 22 Wed, Feb 25 MB

Chapter 196

'I'm sorry,' she said softly, her voice steady. "I can't accept these."

The words fell like stones into still water.

Mother's face went pale. "Tori-

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I know my refusal must seem ungrateful to you, Tori continued, looking up to meet our eyes in turn, "But this is my honest answer.

Today's visit is just between the three of us, Mother said quickly, her voice tight with emotion. "No one else in the family knows. It won't cause you or Alpha Lucas any trouble-

"My answer is the same, Tori interrupted gently but firmly. "If you want to see me, Olivia, you can call me anytime. But I can't accept these

gifts. I can't be part of the Sullivan family."

Mother stared at her, and I could see the war of emotions on her face-disappointment, frustration, but also a growing respect.

Tori stood at the door with Lucas as we departed, his arm protective around her waist.

I climbed into the car, my hands trembling slightly as I reached for a cigarette.

I lit the cigarette, exhaling slowly as the car pulled away.

Hannah, I thought, watching the estate disappear behind us. Hannah was greedy, manipulative, willing to sacrifice her own daughter for social

status. And somehow, impossibly, she gave birth to a girl with more integrity than I've shown in my entire life.

Comments

Write Comments

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Chapter 197

Tori's POV:

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I stood at the window, watching the taillights fade into the haze, my hand resting unconsciously on the slight swell of my abdomen.

“Do you think I was foolish? The words slipped out before I could stop them.

I turned to find Lucas standing behind me, his ice-blue eyes soft with understanding.

“Refusing all those gifts... most people would think I'm insane for turning down what they offered.”

Lucas crossed the room in three long strides, his presence immediately steadying my racing thoughts.

He cupped my face gently, thumbs brushing across my cheekbones. “You did what felt right to you, my moon. That's never foolish.”

“But the stocks alone- I started, but he pressed a finger to my lips.

“Would have come with strings attached,” he finished quietly. “Expectations. Obligations. Ways to pull you into their world whether you wanted it or not.”

His expression grew fierce, protective. “You only need to do what feels right to you, Tori. Everything else, I'll handle it all.”

His thumb brushed across my cheekbone with infinite tenderness. “Remember, I'm always behind you. Always.”

I leaned into his touch, he pulling me against his chest and wrapping himself around me like a shield.

“Come,” Lucas said now, taking my hand. “Let’s go upstairs. You need to rest.”

We climbed the grand staircase together, his hand warm and secure in mine.

As soon as the door closed, Lucas guided me to the bed.

I sank onto the edge gratefully-my feet had been aching more lately, another reminder of the changes happening in my body.

Lucas knelt before me, his large hands gentle as they removed my shoes.

“What do you think they’ll be like?” I whispered, covering his hand with mine. “Our children?”

Lucas’s expression softened in a way I’d never seen before. “Strong,” he said immediately. “Brilliant, like their mother. *

‘Or your leadership,” I countered. “Your ability to make others feel safe.”

A possessive gleam flickered in his ice-blue eyes. “Not others, he corrected, his voice dropping lower. “This is your exclusive privilege, Tori.

Only you get this side of me.”

The intensity in his gaze made my breath catch.

The air between us shifted, growing heavier, charged with something that made my pulse quicken. His eyes darkened from ice-blue to something deeper, more primal, and I felt an answering heat bloom low in my belly.

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10 22 Wed, Feb 25 M

Chapter 197

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Emboldened by the desire I could feel pulsing through our bond, I reached up and hooked my arms around his neck, pulling myself closer.

His breath hitched, becoming noticeably warmer against my skin.

Tori. he warned, his voice rough. "Don't start something you-

"Dr. Howard said at my last checkup that moderate... activity... is perfectly safe, I interrupted, my cheeks warming even as i held his gaze. "As long as we're careful."

Lucas stared at me for a long moment, something between amusement and hunger flickering across his features.

"Did he?" His hand slid from my stomach to my hip, grip tightening possessively. "And when exactly were you planning to share this medical advice with me?"

"I'm sharing it now," I whispered, feeling bolder than I had in weeks.

A low rumble vibrated through his chest-half-laugh, half-growl. "You've gotten wicked, my moon." But his lips were already descending toward mine, and I could feel the restraint cracking in his carefully controlled demeanor.

"You're a bad influence," I managed to say before his mouth claimed mine

The kiss started gentle but quickly deepened, Lucas's control slipping as I pressed closer.

His hands moved with deliberate care, mindful of my condition even as his touch grew more possessive. When he finally pulled back, his eyes had gone fully wolf-bright, and his breathing was as ragged as mine.

"Are you sure?" he asked, even as his fingers traced patterns along my spine that made me shiver. "I don't want to hurt-

I silenced him with another kiss, pouring every ounce of want and trust and love through our bond.

His answering surge of emotion nearly overwhelmed me-protective and possessive and desperately tender all at once.

What followed was a slow, careful exploration that left us both breathless. Lucas treated me like something infinitely precious, his touch reverent even in passion. And when we finally lay tangled together afterward, his hand once again resting protectively on my stomach, I felt more complete than I ever had before.

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“I love you,” I whispered against his chest, feeling his heartbeat gradually slow beneath my cheek.

Comments

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Claimed by the Alpha's Love - Love Demands Real Courage Author: Michael Anderson 198

Chapter 198

His arms tightened around me. And I love you, Tori. Always.”

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A few days later, Lucas drove me to Howling Plaza himself.

The sprawling luxury shopping district gleamed in the afternoon sunlight, its elegant storefronts catering to the city's elite wolves.

“Remember, Lucas said as he pulled up to the curb outside Silver Moon Couture, “if you get tired at all, call me immediately. I can be here in

ten minutes.

“Lucas, I’m fine,” I assured him, though his concern warmed me. “It’s just shopping.”

His eyes narrowed slightly. “Shopping that involves standing for extended periods, trying on heavy formal gowns, and-”

“And Morgan will be with me the entire time,” I interrupted gently, spotting my friend already waiting by the boutique entrance. “I promise I’ll

be careful.”

He studied me for a moment longer before nodding.

Morgan approached cautiously, clearly sensing the Alpha authority radiating from him.

“Morgan, Lucas said, his voice dropping into that commanding tone.

“Tori is pregnant. She tires easily, though she won’t always admit it. You’ll ensure she sits frequently, stays hydrated, and doesn’t overexert

herself. If she shows any signs of discomfort, you will contact me immediately. Understood?”

Morgan nodded rapidly. “Yes, Alpha Lucas. I’ll take care of her, I promise.

“Good.” His expression softened fractionally. “Thank you.”

As Lucas drove away, Morgan let out a breath and fanned herself dramatically.

“Girl, that man is intense. But also kind of sweet? In a terrifying Alpha way

I laughed, linking my arm through hers. “Come on. Let’s find me something appropriate for a Luna ceremony.”

The interior of Silver Moon Couture was breathtaking—all cream marble, soft lighting, and elegant displays.

A sales associate immediately guided us to a private fitting room where several gowns had already been prepared.

“Alpha Lucas called ahead,” the woman explained with a knowing smile. “I was very specific about what he wanted to see.”

Morgan wiggled her eyebrows at me as the associate left. Very specific, huh? I bet he was.”

“Stop,” I said, but I was smiling as I examined the first dress—a flowing gown in pale silver that seemed to shimmer like moonlight.

Over the next hour, I tried on dress after dress. Each one was more beautiful than the last, crafted from the finest materials and designed to

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Chapter 198

enhance rather than overwhelm

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Morgan provided enthusiastic commentary on each option, her excitement infectious.

That one makes you look like a moon goddess, she declared as I emerged in a gown with delicate beading across the bodice. “Lucas is going to lose his mind when he sees you

You think so? I turned to examine myself in the three-way mirror, my hand unconsciously resting on my small baby bump.

“Are you kidding? The mate bond between you two is so strong I can practically taste it in the air. It’s disgustingly sweet. Morgan grinned. “In the best way possible, of course.”

Heat crept up my neck. We’re not that bad.”

Tori. The man threatened to buy out an entire restaurant because someone looked at you wrong last week. You’re absolutely that bad.” She paused, her expression softening. “But it’s beautiful, you know? Seeing you this happy. After everything you’ve been through...”

I met her eyes in the mirror, feeling a surge of gratitude for this friendship that had sustained me through so much. “Thank you, Morgan. For everything.”

“Oh, stop, you’ll make me cry and ruin my makeup.” She dabbed at her eyes dramatically. “Now try on that ivory one with the train. I want to see if it’s as gorgeous as I think it is.”

We were laughing over Morgan's increasingly elaborate commentary when the boutique door chimed.

I glanced over and felt my breath catch.

Susan Shepherd had just entered, accompanied by an elegant woman I didn't recognize.

For a moment, our eyes met across the boutique. Her gaze locked onto me with an intensity that made my pulse quicken.

I watched as her hand moved unconsciously to her chest, fingers touching a silver pendant that hung there. The gesture seemed automatic, instinctive, as though triggered by something she'd seen in my face.

"Tori?" Morgan's voice seemed distant. "You okay? You look like you've seen a ghost."

Susan was still staring, her eyes moving over my features with an expression I couldn't quite name.

Did she already know?

Comments

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Claimed by the Alpha's Love

Chapter 199

Tori's POV:

My stomach tightened with an anxiety I couldn't explain.

I decided to break the silence first, steeling myself for whatever might come.

Whether Susan knew about my connection to William or not, standing her frozen wouldn't help.

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"Ms. Shepherd," I said, stepping forward with what I hoped was a calm smile. "It's good to see you again."

Susan blinked, and the intense scrutiny in her expression softened into something more polite, more controlled. "Tori, hello." Her voice was gracious, warm even. "Please, I've told you-call me Susan."

"Susan, I corrected, feeling some of the tension ease from my shoulders.

"I'm so glad to run into you," she continued, her companion watching our exchange with quiet interest. "I was quite disappointed when you

couldn't make it to my exhibition last month. I do hope you're feeling better now?"

The guilt hit me immediately. I'd used feeling unwell as an excuse not to attend a convenient lie that had seemed necessary at the time, when

the truth about my parentage was still so raw and overwhelming.

"Yes, much better, thank you," I managed, my cheeks warming slightly. "I'm sorry I missed it. I heard it was beautiful."

After some small talk, Susan's hand touched her pendant again.

"May I ask you something? It might seem odd."

"Of course."

"Do you know your birthday? Your exact birth date?"

The question caught me off guard. Morgan shifted beside me, her protective instincts clearly activated.

"I... no, actually." The admission felt strange, vulnerable. "My mother never told me the specific date."

Susan's eyes widened with surprise, and something that looked like distress flickered across her features. "But then... how do you celebrate? Surely you must mark the day somehow?"

I forced a small smile, trying to keep my tone light. "I don't, really. It's never been something we... celebrated."

Hannah had never cared whether I lived or died, let alone remembered the day I was born.

The only time I'd ever felt acknowledged was on Ryan's birthday, when Aunt Janet and Uncle James would quietly include a small gift for me too—a gesture of kindness that had meant everything to my younger self.

But then Uncle stopped coming around. And then Ryan was gone.

And with them went the last remnant of anything resembling ritual or recognition in my life.

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10 22 Wed, Feb 25 MB

Chapter 199

Susan's expression crumpled with barely concealed heartbreak.

That's... She paused, visibly struggling to compose herself. "I'm sorry, Tor

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You just remind me so much of someone. When I... when I lost my daughter, I used to paint. To cope with the grief. I'd imagine what she

might look like as she grew up."

Susan's gaze traveled over me, taking in the flowing fabric of the dress, and a tear finally escaped down her cheek. You look exactly like one of

those paintings.”

My stomach dropped, a wave of guilt and shame washing over me so intensely I had to fight to keep my expression neutral.

If only you knew, I thought, my throat tightening painfully. If you knew the ruth- that I’m the daughter of the woman who destroyed your family. —

you wouldn’t be looking at me with such tenderness. You’d want me as far away from you as possible.

The irony was cruel. Here was Susan, seeing in me an echo of the daughter she’d lost, finding some small comfort in the resemblance—while I

stood before her carrying the weight of my mother’s sins, a living reminder of everything that had been taken from her.

I shook my head quickly, forcing brightness into my voice. “It’s alright, really.”

My phone buzzed with a text from Lucas: I’m here. Take your time.

“I should go,” I said, offering Susan a forced smile. “My... Lucas is waiting for me.”

“Of course. Susan’s voice was strained, her eyes still glistening. “It was lovely seeing you again, dear.”

Morgan and I turned toward the exit, my friend’s hand supportive on my elbow.

I was so focused on steadying my own emotions that I didn’t notice the two children racing through the boutique behind us, their playful

shrieks growing louder.

“Watch out!” someone shouted.

Before I could turn, I heard a sharp scrape of metal against marble. Susan had launched herself from her wheelchair, moving with surprising

speed to intercept the collision course.

“Susan!” I gasped, spinning around to see her stumbling, her companion rushing to steady her.

I reached her side immediately, my hands carefully supporting her arm. “Are you alright? You shouldn’t have-”

“I’m fine,” Susan breathed, though her face had gone pale. “Are you? The baby-

“We’re both fine,” I assured her quickly, even as my heart hammered.

The little boys who’d caused the commotion stood frozen nearby, their faces pale with shock.

Then William Sullivan appeared seemingly from nowhere, his commanding presence filling the space. The child took one look at the stern

Alpha and his bottom lip began to tremble before he burst into tears.

“Tori.” Lucas’s voice cut through the chaos as he materialized at my side hind William, his hand immediately finding the small of my back.

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Chapter 199

His ice blue eyes swept over me, checking for injuries with barely concealet anxiety. “Are you hurt?”

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“No, I’m fine. But Susan-she jumped up to protect me.” I gestured to where Susan sat in her wheelchair, her companion hovering anxiously

“Her legs-

Lucas's expression shifted immediately, his gaze moving to William, who had already reached Susan's side.

The two Alphas exchanged a brief, weighted look.

"We need to get her to Moontouch Medical Center, William said, his voice tight with concern as he knelt beside Susan's chair. "Now.

"I'm fine- Susan started to protest, but William cut her off with a look that brooked no argument.

Your legs were just beginning to show improvement, he said quietly, his hand gentle on her shoulder despite the steel in his voice. "We're not taking any chances,"

Comments

Claimed by the Alpha's Love - Love Demands Real Courage Author: Michael Anderson 200

Chapter 200

Lucas's POV:

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The sterile scent of antiseptic hit me the moment we crossed through the liding doors of Moontouch Medical Center.

My hand remained firmly on Tori's lower back as we followed William Sullivan's group through the emergency entrance, Susan's wheelchair being pushed at a brisk pace by William.

Guilt radiated from Tori in waves so strong I could taste it on my tongue-bitter and acidic.

Our mate carries too much guilt, Duke observed. Like stones in her pockets, weighing her down.

He wasn't wrong.

Ever since learning about William being her biological father, Tori had been carrying the weight of Hannah's betrayal as if it were her own sin to bear. Now this-Susan's injury while protecting her-would only add another stone to that crushing load.

Through the glass partition separating the waiting area from the emergency treatment rooms, I watched Matthew Howard appear in his white coat, his usual casual demeanor replaced by focused professionalism.

He knelt beside Susan's wheelchair, his hands already glowing with that faint golden light that marked his rare healing abilities as he examined

her legs.

William stood rigidly beside the examination table, his entire body taut with barely suppressed anxiety. I could see his lips moving-questions, probably, though the soundproofing prevented me from hearing the words

Matthew's examination seemed to take an eternity, though in reality it was probably only a few minutes.

Finally, he straightened, his hands losing their golden glow as he turned to address William. Even through the glass, I could see the tension drain from William's shoulders.

The emergency room doors swung open, and William emerged, Matthew following close behind. Both men's expressions had shifted from concern to something approaching relief,

"How is she?" I asked before William could

, feeling Tori tense beside me.

"Nothing serious," Matthew said, his professional mask slipping back into his usual easy smile.

"The impact aggravated some scar tissue from her previous injuries, causing muscle spasms and inflammation. Painful, but not dangerous. I've administered some healing energy to reduce the swelling, and she should be fine with rest."

Tori's relief flooded through our bond so powerfully it nearly staggered me

"Thank God," she breathed.

We followed them back through the emergency room doors into a private recovery room.

Susan sat propped up in the hospital bed, her legs elevated on pillows,

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10 22 Wed, Feb 25 MB

Chapter 200

Despite the pallor of her face, she smiled reassuringly at Tori. "I'm fine, dear. It doesn't hurt at all."

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But Tori had moved closer to the bed, her eyes fixed on Susan's legs where the impact had left visible bruising and swelling beneath the medical wrappings.

Susan, Tori said softly, sitting beside the bed. "You shouldn't be so kind me. I don't deserve-

Her voice caught, and through our bond I felt the overwhelming urge rising in her.

She wanted to tell the truth. Wanted to confess everything-who she was, what her existence meant, the betrayal her very birth represented.

But before Tori could speak, William stepped forward. "It's getting late," he said, his voice carefully neutral but with an edge of steel underneath. "Susan should rest, and I'm sure Alpha Lucas wants to get To home."

Susan's expression immediately shifted to displeasure, her hand tightening on Tori's. "If anyone should leave, William, it's you. I'm perfectly capable of deciding when I need rest."

"Susan-

"I mean it. Her tone was firm despite her weakened state.

William's jaw worked, frustration and something darker flickering across his face.

He strode from the room, his movements tight with barely controlled emotion. After a moment's hesitation, I followed.

I found William on the hospital's outdoor terrace, a cigarette already lit between his fingers. The moon hung low in the sky, casting silver light

across his features as he took a long drag.

He glanced at me as I approached, then wordlessly offered the pack.

“No, thank you,” I said, keeping my distance but close enough to talk. “To doesn’t like the smell, and with her pregnant...”

William’s hand froze halfway through returning the pack to his pocket. Something flickered in his eyes—regret, perhaps.

He tucked the cigarettes away and took another drag from his own, exhaling smoke into the night air.

“I didn’t expect this,” he said finally, his voice rough. “Susan taking to her so strongly, so quickly.”

William’s laugh was bitter. “Ironic, isn’t it? The woman whose life Hannah destroyed, protecting Hannah’s daughter without even realizing it.”

He took another drag. “This can’t last, Lucas. Susan’s too perceptive. Sooner or later, she’ll figure it out.”

“Perhaps. I leaned against the terrace railing, watching the city lights below. “Or perhaps we should let fate take its course.”

William turned to face me fully.

“You’re right,” he admitted quietly.

He was quiet for a moment, then: “Have you never thought about it? Using Tori’s connection to the Sullivan Pack? He let the implication

hang.

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10 22 Wed, Feb 25 MOB

Chapter 200

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'I'm already the strongest Alpha,' I said simply, 'I don't need more power m content with what I have-my pack, my territory, my mate.'

I paused. "But if Tori wanted it, if she decided she wanted to claim her birthright and take her place in the Sullivan Pack, then yes, I would help

her.

William studied me for a long moment, then a small smile tugged at his lips.

A romantic," he said, almost wonderingly. "Lucas Grayson, the Ice King of the North, is actually a romantic. Who would have thought?"

"Not a romantic, I corrected, my voice quiet but certain. "Just someone who finally met the right person."

The smile on William's face softened into something more genuine, tinged with melancholy. "She's lucky to have found you. Someone who sees

her worth, who doesn't try to use her or hide her away."

"No. 1 corrected. "I'm the lucky one."

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