

Claimed by the Alpha's Love - Love Demands Real Courage Author: Michael Anderson 81

Chapter 81

Tori's POV:

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"Yes, surprisingly well, I admitted. "And... thank you for last night."

A slight smirk curved his lips.

"And how exactly do you plan to thank me?"

Heat rushed to my cheeks. "I-I didn't mean-

He chuckled, the sound deep and rich, sending an unexpected shiver down my spine.

Lucas took a deliberate step closer, invading my personal space just enough to make my pulse quicken. The subtle cedar and mint scent of him intensified, making Tracy practically purr with interest.

"No?" His voice dropped lower, a dangerous glint in his silver eyes as he tilted his head to study my reaction. "That's a shame. I was looking forward to seeing what you had in mind."

His fingers brushed mine as he reached for my empty mug, the brief contact electric against my skin.

I swallowed hard, suddenly finding it difficult to maintain eye contact.

"Relax, Tori," he finally said, pulling back with that infuriating smirk still playing on his lips. "Just seeing you safe is thanks enough."

His expression grew serious. "Though I'd prefer if you didn't try to throw yourself in front of silver weapons in the future."

I stared into my tea, remembering how I'd instinctively moved to shield Daniel.

"It was just... reaction. I couldn't let someone else get hurt because of me

Lucas set his mug down with a decisive click.

“Your safety matters too, Tori. Don’t ever forget that.’ His tone left no room for argument.

“Next time you find yourself in a situation like that, call me immediately. Don’t try to handle it alone.’ His silver eyes held mine, the intensity in them making it clear this wasn’t a suggestion. ‘Promise me.”

I nodded, unable to refuse when he looked at me that way.

“Good,” he said, seemingly satisfied Jack will drive you to school. I have meetings this morning.

An hour later, I walked through Moonridge High’s main entrance, my mind still replaying Lucas’s parting words.

I’d barely made it to my locker when a familiar voice called my name.

“Tori! Daniel Cole hurried toward me, concern etched across his features

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“Are you okay? When I came to after passing out, you were gone. I looked everywhere for you.”

His eyes searched my face anxiously. “I was worried sick when no one knew where you’d disappeared to.”

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“I’m fine,” I assured him, suddenly aware of how abruptly I’d left. “Just a little shaken up. Thank you for what you did.”

His eyes softened. “I couldn’t just stand by. When I saw him cornering you. Daniel ran a hand through his sandy hair.

He looked around, lowering his voice. "What happened after? Everything's blur. I remember feeling this overwhelming pressure, like a massive wave of power hit me, and I think I saw Trent get thrown across the room before I passed out completely."

I considered my response carefully, not wanting to explain the complexity of my relationship with Lucas.

"A friend showed up and intervened," I said simply. "He made sure we were safe."

Daniel nodded, shifting his backpack. "I was wondering... would you like to have lunch together today?"

I hesitated briefly, considering his invitation. He did save me from Trent last night, or at least tried to. The least I can do is have lunch with him.

The thought made my decision simple.

"Sure," I replied with a small smile.

That counted for something. Morgan's not here today anyway with that terrible hangover she texted me about this morning. Poor thing couldn't even look at her phone screen without wincing. At least I won't be abandoning her to eat alone.

When lunchtime came, Daniel led me to a quiet corner of the school's cafe

Unlike the boisterous groups around us, he seemed focused entirely on my wellbeing.

"You look tired," he observed, pushing a bottle of water toward me. "Are you sure you should be in school today?"

"I've managed through worse," I said with a slight smile. "Besides, I can't afford to miss classes."

Daniel leaned closer and lowered his voice.

"The Enforcement Division sent out a notice this morning. Trent apparently went feral and attacked the guards last night. When they subdued

him..."

He paused, his voice dropping even lower, "They shattered all four limbs. s severe-compound fractures. The healers say he'll likely never run as a wolf again. Fitting punishment for someone who's terrorized Omegas or years."

I stared at him, stunned. "Went feral and attacked guards? That doesn't sound like Trent."

Despite being awful, Trent had always been calculating, not someone who lose control so completely.

Daniel shrugged.

'Details are murky. His family stormed the Division headquarters this morning demanding answers, but there's apparently an issue with the

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monitors. The footage only shows Trent going berserk, not how the guards responded."

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"His family thinks the Enforcement Division used excessive force, so they're at a standstill, Daniel continued. "I hear his family has close ties with the Morris pack. I wonder if the Morris family will step in to help them. That could complicate things further.'

Something about this story felt off.

The timing was too convenient-Trent attacks me, then hours later suffers career-ending injuries in custody? A face flashed in my mind unbidden: Lucas's cold, calculating expression when he promised to "deal with Trent.

"Would he go that far? The thought was both terrifying and... something else I didn't want to examine too closely.

As if my thoughts had summoned him, I glanced out the window and froze

There, standing beside a sleek black car in the school parking lot, was Lucas Grayson himself.

His eyes fixed directly on our table. Even from this distance, I could feel the intensity of his stare.

*I-I should go, I stammered, gathering my things. "Thank you for lunch, Daniel."

He looked confused. “Is everything okay?”

“Yes, I just remembered something I need to take care of.” I offered an apologetic smile. “See you tomorrow?”

He nodded, offering a small smile despite his obvious curiosity. “Sure. Thanks for having lunch with me. Take care, Tori.”

“You too,” I replied, already halfway out of my seat. “And thanks again... for last night.”

I hurried out of the café, my heart beating faster with each step toward Lucas.

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Chapter 82

Tori's POV:

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I hurried across the parking lot, my heart hammering against my ribs as I approached Lucas.

His tall figure leaned casually against his sleek black car, blue eyes tracking my movement with predatory focus.

“What are you doing here?” I asked, trying to keep my voice steady.

Lucas's gaze flicked toward the cafeteria window where Daniel still sat, his jaw tightening slightly before returning to me.

“Did I interrupt your little lunch date?” The question carried an unmistakable edge.

“It wasn’t a date,” I replied, fighting the urge to roll my eyes.

God, he’s such a jealous Alpha. As if I can’t have a simple meal with someone without it meaning something.

“He helped me last night, I explained. “Sharing lunch seemed like an appropriate thank you.”

“I don’t like seeing you so comfortable with other males,” Lucas said flatly, his eyes narrowing. “Especially not when you run from me at every opportunity.”

“Lucas-

“Don’t worry about owing him anything,” he continued, gaze drifting back toward the cafeteria. “I’ll handle whatever debt of gratitude you think you owe. Consider it paid.”

I glanced around nervously, noticing several students starting to stare in our direction.

“Can we talk somewhere else?” I asked quietly. “You’re drawing a lot of attention, and I’ve already had enough of being the center of gossip.”

Something in his expression softened marginally. “Get in the car, Tori.”

I climbed into the passenger seat, expecting him to drive somewhere nearby. Instead, we left the school grounds entirely, heading toward the outskirts of town.

“Where are we going?” I asked as unfamiliar surroundings passed by my window.

“My place, he replied simply, not taking his eyes off the road.

“Your place?” I echoed in disbelief. I can’t just leave school-I have after on classes!”

“I’ve already spoken with administration. You’re excused for the day. He opened the passenger door, waiting. We need to talk about Trent.”

The mention of Trent’s name sent an involuntary shiver down my spine.

“You may become a target for retaliation. You’re coming with me to my private residence until this blows over.”

“What?” I stared at him in disbelief. “I can’t just-

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He started the engine. “Your safety isn’t negotiable, Tori.”

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Lucas’s private residence was located on the northeastern edge of Grayson territory, nestled against the foothills where dense forest began its

climb toward the mountains.

The modern glass and stone structure seemed to emerge organically from the landscape, simultaneously imposing and perfectly at home among the surrounding pines.

As we stepped inside, his scent enveloped me again.

“I can’t believe I’m back here so quickly,” I muttered, glancing around at the minimalist decor I recognized from this morning.

“The arrangement for tonight,” I began hesitantly, turning to face him. “Where exactly will I be staying?”

Lucas gestured toward the hallway, pointing to the bedroom where I had awakened just this morning. "You'll stay there tonight."

I frowned in confusion, looking from the hallway back to him. "But isn't that your bedroom? Where will you sleep?"

The corner of his mouth lifted slightly, his eyes glinting with something that made my pulse quicken.

"This is my private space, Tori. Where do you think I'll sleep?"

Heat rushed to my cheeks as implications crashed through my mind.

"I should go back to my dorm," I said quickly, moving toward the door.

Lucas was faster. His hand closed gently but firmly around my wrist, stopping me in my tracks. The contact sent a jolt of electricity up my arm.

"Running again?" His voice lowered to a rumble. "I noticed you haven't use the card I gave you. Why is that?"

I stared at his fingers encircling my wrist, unable to meet his gaze. "I don't need your money."

"Your pride is admirable, but foolish." His grip tightened slightly. "If you had proper resources, you wouldn't need to work in dangerous places."

My eyes snapped up to his. "I can take care of myself."

The air between us seemed to shift, growing heavier with each heartbeat.

Lucas stepped closer, his body nearly pressing against mine as I found myself backed against the wall.

"L-Lucas... My voice trembled, the words barely making it past my lips.

His blue eyes lowered to mine, cold and calculating as his lips curved into the faintest of smiles.

"If you don't start behaving, he murmured, voice dropping to a dangerous rumble, I can't promise my wolf won't do something impulsive tonight."

Understanding the meaning behind his words, I felt my spine stiffen with par, all resistance draining from my body as I stopped struggling

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against his grip.

“Why must you be so distant with me?” Lucas asked, his eyes boring into mine from above, clearly frustrated by my stubbornness.

I didn’t dare challenge him now, swallowing hard before conceding, ‘I-I’ll try to be...’

“You’ll try?” His face lowered until our breaths mingled, his lips hovering just inches from mine.

Heat flooded my face, spreading down my neck as my heart hammered wildly against my ribs.

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“What I mean is...” I adopted a more placating tone, desperate to defuse the tension between us. “If it’s necessary, I will use your money to take care of myself. Is that acceptable?”

The answer seemed barely sufficient.

Lucas said nothing more, but he didn’t immediately release my wrist either. He simply stared at me, his gaze dark and unfathomable.

I felt a chill run down my spine under the intensity of his scrutiny.

After what felt like an eternity, he finally released my wrist. "Go take a shower and get some sleep."

I hurried to what appeared to be a bathroom adjacent to the living area and locked the door behind me.

Leaning against the cool surface, I tried to steady my breathing as Tracy placed anxiously within me.

Outside, I heard Lucas's low chuckle. "Little wolf isn't very obedient, is she?" he murmured, seemingly to himself.

Then came the sound of his phone ringing, followed by his clipped voice answering what must have been an urgent pack matter.

I remained frozen until I heard the front door close, signaling his departure.

Only then did I allow myself to look around the bathroom-and froze.

On the counter sat an array of high-end female toiletries, still in their packaging.

A silky pale blue nightgown hung from a hook on the wall, next to a fluffy robe in the same shade. In the shower, I found women's shampoo, conditioner, and body wash.

Everything was new. Everything was exactly my size..

This hadn't been a spontaneous decision to bring me here. Lucas had played for this.

I sank down onto the edge of the bathtub, my mind racing.

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Courage Author: Michael Anderson 83**

Chapter 83

Lucas's POV:

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Once she disappeared into the bathroom, I strode down the hallway to my private study and locked the door behind me.

She's safe now. Focus on eliminating the threat.

My desk, a solid piece of black walnut, dominated the center of the room. I activated the encrypted communication system, and Jack's face

appeared on the screen within seconds.

"Report," I commanded, my voice clipped.

Jack reported. "I've already pulled the security footage from Moonlight restaurant as you requested. It's ready for your review.

"Good. Show me what happened before I arrived," I ordered, leaning forward in my chair.

The screen split to show multiple camera angles from the restaurant.

I saw Trent approach Tori. The lascivious gaze he fixed on Tori made my blood run cold. His eyes raked over her body in a way that made Duke

snarl with rage inside me.

I watched as he leaned into her space, his hand reaching toward her, his intentions unmistakable.

My eyes narrowed to silver slits, temperature dropping in them until they resembled frozen lakes. A low growl escaped my throat as Duke

pushed against my consciousness, demanding immediate retribution.

"Sir, there's something else," Jack continued, his expression grave. "Trent's parents have been making calls to the Morris family. They're seeking

their support against you."

The corner of my mouth lifted in a cold smile. "So they want to cover up this matter."

"Yes, Alpha. Should we take preventive action?"

I leaned back in my chair, fingers steepled before me.

If they want to play with the big wolves, Jack, then let's give them something to truly fear. My voice was quiet, almost conversational, which

made the threat all the more ominous. "Make sure they understand what happens when someone targets what's mine."

Jack nodded, a glimmer of understanding flashing across his face.

'Got it, Alpha.'

After ending the call, I closed my laptop and checked the time..

Tori had been in the shower for nearly twenty minutes.

I removed my tie and unbuttoned my collar, deciding to check on Tori before retiring to the guest room.

I walked back to the bedroom, but the shower was still running.

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Rather than disturb her, I headed to the balcony off the main living area for some fresh air.

I extracted a cigarette from my pocket.

The smoke curled upward as I contemplated my next moves. Patience had never been my strong suit, but with Tori, I needed to tread carefully. Her past trauma, whatever it entailed, had left deep scars. Pushing too hard would only drive her away.

The soft click behind me broke my reverie.

I turned, immediately catching sight of Tori standing there. The warm glow illuminated her damp hair and delicate features, making her appear

almost ethereal in the blue silk pajamas.

Our eyes locked, and I felt something electric charge the air between us.

Neither of us spoke for a long moment, as if the silence held something too fragile to disturb. Duke stirred within me.

I recovered first, allowing a slight smile to tug at the corner of my mouth.

“Couldn’t sleep?” I asked, my voice sounding deeper and rougher than usual in the quiet night.

“I needed some air,” she replied, shifting slightly. I noticed how she suddenly seemed conscious of her thin pajamas and damp hair. “I didn’t realize you’d be out here.”

I took a final drag of my cigarette before extinguishing it, not wanting the smoke to bother her. “The balcony connects to both rooms. I should have mentioned it.”

She nodded, and I could sense her uncertainty, as if she was debating whether to stay or retreat. The wolf in me hoped she would stay.

My gaze drifted to her bare feet, then back to her face, taking in how the moonlight softened her features. “The pajamas suit you,” I said, allowing myself the small pleasure of complimenting her.

I watched as heat crept up her neck at my casual compliment, finding her reaction both endearing and satisfying.

“Thank you for having clothes ready,” she replied. “It was... thoughtful.”

‘Margaret takes good care of my guests,’ I responded.

My eyes moved past her to the bedroom, where her undergarments hung sibly on the chair. I couldn’t help the smirk that formed on my lips.

“Though I see you’ve made yourself quite at home.”

Her face flamed with embarrassment, the scent of her distress spiking in the air.

‘I-I didn’t think she stammered, and I found her flustered state unexpectedly charming.’

“Relax, little wolf. I’m teasing you,” I said, enjoying her reaction more than should.

My smile faded as I remembered why she was here in the first place.

“After what happened with Trent, I’m assigning Jack as your personal security when I can’t be with you.”

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The abrupt shift in topic seemed to catch her off guard.

“That’s not necessary. I can take care of myself,” she insisted, her chin tilting up slightly in that defiant way I was beginning to recognize.

“Clearly,” I replied, my voice dry. “That’s why you nearly became Trent’s victim tonight.” The memory of Trent approaching her made Duke

growl within me.

“That was different. I was caught off guard,” she countered, her stance becoming defensive.

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“And next time? When it’s not Trent but someone more dangerous?” I stepped closer, using my height advantage as she tilted her head back to

maintain eye contact.

My voice softened as I reached for her hand, my thumb tracing small circles on her wrist.

“Tori. Don’t make me worry about you more than I already do.”

Before she could respond, I scooped her up in one fluid motion, cradling her against my chest.

The suddenness of it made her gasp, her body going rigid in my arms.

“L-Lucas! What are you- she stammered, her hands instinctively grabbing onto my shoulders for balance.

I enjoyed the feel of her slight weight in my arms, the way her scent intensified with her surprise. Her silver-gray hair cascaded over my arm as

I carried her back into the bedroom, savoring how perfectly she fit against me despite her stiffness.

Setting her down gently on the bed, I didn't immediately step back.

Instead, I leaned forward, one hand planted beside her head, my face hovering just inches from hers. I could hear her heartbeat accelerating, could smell the mix of nerve and something else.

Her eyes widened as I leaned closer still, her breath catching in her throat

Just when I sensed she was about to break, I allowed a mischievous smile curve my lips,

'Next time, remember to wear slippers,' I murmured, my voice deliberately low and intimate. "The floor gets cold at night."

Relief and embarrassment washed across her features in equal measure as she straightened up, putting distance between us once more.

"Goodnight, little wolf," I said, moving toward the door. "Sleep well."

I closed the door behind me, leaning against it for just a moment as I listened to her still rapid heartbeat on the other side. Duke rumbled with satisfaction within me, pleased with the lingering scent of her that clung my clothes.

Walking away was harder than it should have been.

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Chapter 84

Tori's POV:

The soft click of the door echoed in the darkness as Lucas left the bedroom

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I remained motionless on his bed, my ears catching every detail of his departure.

The small lamp near the bathroom door cast a warm glow across the unfamiliar space, illuminating just enough for my enhanced vision.

I released a shaky breath, finally allowing my racing heart to calm.

The memory of being carried in his arms, of his face hovering so close to mine, sent a fresh wave of heat through my body. My wolf, Tracy,

stirred within me.

Why did you make him stop? We need him, Tracy whined, pushing against my consciousness with undisguised longing.

Not now, not like this, I mentally responded, my cheeks burning at her directness. It's not the right time.

Tracy retreated with reluctant acceptance, though I could still feel her confusion at my conflicting emotions.

Why me? I wondered, staring at the shadows dancing on the ceiling.

What could Lucas Grayson, the most powerful Alpha in Moonhaven, possibly want from a disgraced Omega like me?

Sleep came in fitful bursts, my dreams filled with blue eyes watching from darkness.

Morning arrived with sunlight filtering through partially drawn curtains.

I stretched cautiously, my muscles stiff from yesterday's tension.

After washing up, I ventured into the living room where Jack Green stood attention, his posture straightening as I entered.

“Good morning, Miss Sullivan,” he said formally. “Alpha had to attend to pick business but asked me to ensure you have everything you need.”

I nodded warily.

“He also instructed me to inform you that I will be your personal security detail going forward, Jack continued, his tone making it clear this wasn’t a request. “And here’s the medication from Elena that he arranged for you.”

He handed me a small container of herbs.

The glass felt cool against my fingers as I accepted it reluctantly.

Lucas had thought of everything—a bodyguard, medication, probably even breakfast waiting.

Part of me felt a strange warmth spread through my chest at being so thoughtfully cared for, something I hadn’t experienced in years.

Yet another part rebelled against these arrangements made without my input. I couldn’t decide whether to feel cherished or controlled—perhaps it was both.

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Chapter 84

Thank you.” I finally said, swallowing my pride.

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she breaks, lack the mean mige School.

The familiar tabs pie sme mit after the distenting meeting in Lucas’s apartment. I slipped into my seat just as the bell rang

grateful that at least my academic routine remained unchanged

Reoveen classes. Camel Cole approached me with unusual excitement igating his normally composed features.

He glancet cum beture leaming cirsen.

Have you heard the revs.” he astet teeing is wice low

The Mum’s family is falling apart. Someone sent an amus report to the Elder Council with excidence of their corruption.

I be my dextrous halfway into my bag. What kind of evidence

Sapnency, dreye been tribing enforcement officers, Daniel explained are wasting to build a case against you, working with Trent’s

Terens

His eyes stume with mici. But now the Council has launched a full vestigation. There’s solid proof of their collaboration with corrupt

When did this happen.” I asked my voice barely shove a whisper.

The report vent in yesterday, but the evidence goes back tears. grandcher sits on the minor council-de sus the Morris family is

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Camel smilet. “Your luck is incredible, Tori. It’s like the Moon Goddess self is clearing your path. First, Trent loses his ab, and now this

I nodded mechanically, but my mind was mong

The wasn’t luck or done unnerventum.

City one person had bath the motive and the power to orchestrate such events

That evening, lacas armed to deler Elema s barbal medicine personal

I climbed to the passenger seat of his sleek black car acutely aware of presence beside me.

Even just afting there, doing nothing but breathing the same as made my cheeks flush with heat

Since the night he cared me to his bedroom, our encounter was charged with unspoken teasin

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traced the severe, regal lines of his profile as he gazed toward though the windshord I thought about the Mortis family's sudden

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Chapter 84

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"Daniel told me something interesting today," I ventured. "He said the Morris family is being investigated. Apparently, they were working with

Trent's parents to build a case against me, but someone reported them to the Elder Council."

Lucas remained silent, his expression unchanged.

"Isn't it strange how everything's falling into place?" I continued, watching his reaction carefully.

"First, Trent loses his ability the same night he threatened me. Then the Morris family, who had attempted to help Trent, found themselves

facing corruption charges."

I leaned slightly closer. "It's almost as if someone is systematically removing every danger in my path."

I held his gaze steadily. "Who do you think would do something like that?"

Lucas turned to me then, his silver eyes reflecting the streetlights.

The corner of his mouth lifted in that not-quite-smile that made my heart race.

"Who do you think?" he countered softly.

I thought back to our brief history-how we'd barely interacted at first, yet each time we crossed paths, he'd inserted himself into my problems, solving them with an ease that should have been terrifying rather than comforting.

I looked away, feeling heat creep up my neck. "I suspect it's someone with ulterior motives who's trying to get close to me."

“Ulterior motives?” Lucas repeated, amusement coloring his voice.

“You’re getting bolder,” he finally said, his deep voice rumbling with approval.

I realized with a start that he was right.

Since the night he’d rescued me from Trent, I’d gradually lowered my guard around him.

The Tori from a month ago would have been too intimidated to even hint such accusations. Now here I was, practically teasing an Alpha about his behind-the-scenes manipulations.

Instead of retreating back into my shell, I decided to press forward. If he could play games, so could I.

“Well,” I said with newfound confidence, meeting his silver gaze directly, my life lately.” I reached for my backpack at my feet. “But whoever it is...

don’t know who’s responsible for all these fortunate coincidences I’m grateful. More than they probably realize.”

A flash of surprise crossed Lucas’s face before it transformed into something warmer, more appreciative.

“I should go,” I said quickly, hand already on the door handle.

‘I have class in fifteen minutes, and Professor Blake doesn’t tolerate tardiness, even from her star students.”

Before he could respond, I slipped out of the car and into the crisp evening air, feeling strangely happy.

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Courage Author: Michael Anderson 85**

Chapter 85

Lucas's POV:

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Tori slid out of my car, created an aureole of light around her face.

I watched her walk toward the school entrance, noticing how she'd begun to hold herself differently in recent days-less hunched, more assured. The change pleased me a lot.

She'd taken only a few steps when she abruptly turned and hurried back to my car.

I lowered the window, curious.

"Lucas," she said, her silver eyes meeting mine with unusual directness. "Thank you for everything you've done for me." She paused, a hint of color touching her cheeks. "I'll... I'll repay you someday. I promise."

Before I could respond, she spun around and hurried toward the school gates, her backpack bouncing against her slim frame.

I watched her disappear into the building, a smile tugging at the corner of my mouth.

My wolf, Duke, rumbled with satisfaction inside me.

She's starting to trust us, Duke observed.

Slowly, I agreed, putting the car in drive. But it's progress.

The promise in her words lingered in my mind as I navigated through traffic.

Repay me? The very thought was amusing. What could she possibly think he owed me that would equal what I'd gained just by having her in my life?

By the time I reached GoldMoon Club, I was thirty minutes late for the Alha meeting.

Jack had messaged that the others had already arrived, which meant I'd have to weather their questioning looks. Being punctual was typically a point of pride for me, but today, I couldn't bring myself to regret the delay

Seeing the spark of determination in Tori's eyes had been worth it.

The private room at the back of the club exuded old money and power-dk wood paneling, leather chairs, and the subtle scent of expensive

cigars.

Three pairs of eyes turned to me as I entered.

“The great Alpha Lucas finally graces us with his presence, Dylan said, his silver eyes twinkling with amusement. ‘Did you forget how to operate that fancy car of yours?’”

I nodded a greeting to each of them-William Sullivan, Dylan Freeman, and a new face.

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“Some matters required my personal attention,” I replied smoothly, taking my seat at the head of the table.

Dylan Freeman’s nostrils flared slightly, and a knowing smile crossed his face.

“Some Omega matters, I’d guess, judging by the scent you brought in with you.”

I kept my expression neutral despite the sudden tension in my shoulders. ad I underestimated how much of Tori’s scent clung to me after our

brief interaction?

“My private affairs aren’t on today’s agenda,” I said coolly, effectively ending that line of conversation. “What have I missed?”

William cleared his throat. “I was just about to present the main item for discussion. A project I’ve been developing for some time.”

He slid a leather portfolio across the table toward me.

“The Lunar Phase Research Institute.”

As William outlined his vision, I studied the materials before me with growing interest.

The institute would focus on researching how lunar phases affected werewolf abilities and developing technologies to enhance our natural powers. It was ambitious-possibly revolutionary.

“We know that the full moon strengthens us all, but we’ve never truly understood why certain bloodlines respond differently to lunar influences, William explained. “Some, like your Arctic lineage, seem almost immune to the moon’s pull, while others are completely at its

mercy.”

My thoughts immediately went to Tori and her remarkable ability with lunar calculations.

This was precisely the kind of environment where she might thrive.

*How will you recruit talent?” I asked, careful to keep my tone merely professionally interested.

William’s eyes brightened. “We’ll scout from universities, of course, but our primary pipeline will be the Moonhaven Werewolf Competition. Young wolves with mathematical and scientific aptitude-particularly those with sensitivity to lunar energies.”

I nodded slowly, thinking of how Tori’s silver eyes.

“And the investment required?”

William gestured to the young woman beside him. “Charlotte will explain the financial requirements. She’s been instrumental in developing the funding model.

I studied Charlotte more carefully as she leaned forward.

This was William and Susan’s adoptive daughter, strategically positioned between two powerful packs. A controversial existence that had been the subject of much speculation in our circles.

“The initial investment would be ten million moonstones,” she stated confidently, with an additional fifteen million phased over three years. Her posture reflected the polish of someone groomed for leadership. “The returns, both financial and strategic, are projected to be substantial.”

Dylan Freeman leaned back in his chair. “Our Pack must respectfully decline. Our resources are committed to the urban fringe development.”

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Chapter 85

Three sets of eyes turned to me expectantly.

I closed the portfolio, my mind already made up.

“The Grayson Pack will cover the initial investment,” I stated. “Ten million moonstones. I believe in this project’s potential.”

William looked momentarily stunned. “That’s... extremely generous, Lucas But I’d advise you to take some time to consider-

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“I’ve considered,” I interrupted. “The research aligns with interests I’ve been exploring myself. Sometimes one must trust instinct in business as

much as in hunting.”

What I didn’t say was that I was already calculating how this might benefit Tori-creating a place where her gifts might be recognized and

developed.

“Well then,” William smiled, clearly pleased. “I promise I’m not just selling moonlight in bottles here.”

“I trust your vision,” I replied simply.

Charlotte rose gracefully from her chair. “This calls for a proper celebration, don’t you think?” Her voice was honey-smooth as she moved

toward the bar cabinet in the corner.

She returned moments later with crystal glasses and an aged bottle of whiskey, pouring a measure into each glass with practiced elegance.

“To productive partnerships,” she said, raising her glass and leaning in closer.

The crystal clinked lightly as we brought our glasses together.

You’re providing for her, Duke rumbled approvingly. Building her a path.

She’ll earn her way there, I corrected him silently. We’re just removing the barriers.

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Claimed by the Alpha's Love - Love Demands Real Courage Author: Michael Anderson 86

Chapter 86

Tori's POV:

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The cafeteria buzzed with lunchtime chatter, but I kept my focus on the moon phase book.

With graduation approaching, I was determined to pass successfully. My grades had improved since returning to school, but I still felt the need

to make up for lost time.

“Tori! Tori!” Morgan’s excited voice cut through my concentration.

I looked up to see her racing toward me, waving a glossy flyer like it contained the secrets of the universe.

She skidded to a stop at my table, slightly out of breath. “You have to see his!”

“What is it?” I closed my textbook as she thrust the paper into my hands.

“The Lunar Phase Research Institute is hosting a competition! It’s called the ‘Lunar Calculation Championship’ and it’s open to everyone-no restrictions on age, bloodline, or rank.” Her eyes sparkled with excitement

“The first prize is fifty thousand moonstones!”

My fingers tightened on the flyer as I read the details.

The competition would test participants’ ability to calculate complex luna phase impacts on werewolf abilities-exactly the kind of calculations I’d been doing since childhood.

“But that’s not even the best part,” Morgan continued, practically bouncing in her seat.

“The winner gets a guaranteed position at the institute! Can you imagine working at the most prestigious research center in Moonhaven?”

Something stirred inside me—a flicker of hope I hadn’t allowed myself to feel in years.

“The preliminary round is next week, Morgan said. “You’re entering, right. This is practically designed for you!”

I stared at the paper, remembering the competitions I’d qualified for before my imprisonment. Opportunities lost, dreams destroyed.

This time, I would grasp this chance with everything I had. Chances to turn my life around were rare, especially ones that matched my abilities

so perfectly.

And if I was honest with myself, there was another motivation too—being the institute would bring me closer to Lucas’s world.

If I ever wanted to stand beside him more confidently, I needed to narrow the vast gap between us. An Omega needed extraordinary

achievements to stand beside an Alpha like him.

“Yes,” I said quietly. I’m entering.

That afternoon, I visited Sarah Blake’s office to register for the competition

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17:49 Wed, Feb 11 G D G

Chapter 86

She looked up from her computer as I explained my intention.

“The Lunar Calculation Championship? Her eyebrows rose. “That’s extremely competitive, Tori.”

“I know,” I replied, maintaining eye contact. “But I’d like to try.”

She studied me for a moment, then nodded.

“Your skills in this area are exceptional. Might as well give it a try. She helped me complete the online registration, then added, “The preliminary round is next Friday. I’ll arrange for you to be excused from afternoon classes.”

I felt a small spark of hope at her confidence.

“Did you know William Sullivan founded that institute? He’s the most skilled lunar phase analyst in all of Moonhaven,”

Mrs. Blake continued. “If you win, you might get to work with him directly And when you do her eyes twinkled, -don’t forget to get me an

autograph.”

I smiled, recognizing her encouragement for what it was.

Mrs. Blake had always found ways to push me forward without making it feel like pressure.

I nodded, though internally I recalled the day Morgan had pointed William Sullivan out at Howling Plaza.

I’d only glimpsed him from a distance, but there had been something odd familiar about him. Surprise that we shared the same talent for

Lunar phases.

In the evening, I made my way to the Grayson estate.

Arabella was there, carefully cataloging texts as sunlight streamed through the tall windows.

“Tori, she greeted me warmly. “Leo was just asking when you’d be coming for his next lesson.”

I took a deep breath, my hands clasping together nervously.

“I’m really sorry, but I need to temporarily step back from tutoring Leo, Haid, feeling a pang of regret.

She had given me a rare opportunity, and the income had been helping with my hardship. Walking away felt like burning a bridge I couldn’t afford to lose. ‘I’ve enjoyed working with him so much, and I hate to disappoint him, but...”

'Is this about the Championship?' Arabella interrupted, her silver eyes studying me with keen interest.

"Yes, actually. How did you know?" I blinked in surprise. 'I've entered the near Phase Championship, and I need to focus all my energy on preparing."

Recognition dawned in her eyes. "The institute's competition? That's perfect for you."

"You know about it?"

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Chapter 86

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"Of course. This is a big deal. Her lips curved into a small smile. "Don't worry about the tutoring. This is far more important for your future."

As I thanked her and turned to leave, she added softly, "The Grayson family always supports talented wolves in pursuing their own paths,

especially those with exceptional gifts like yours. We admire determination, Tori.

Her words wrapped around me like an unexpected embrace.

Coming from Lucas's sister, this felt like more than mere politeness-it felt like genuine recognition.

I walked out of the library with renewed purpose, my steps lighter than before.

Perhaps I could forge a future beyond what society had prescribed for someone of my rank.

The remaining time passed in a blur of calculations and formulas.

I spent every free moment studying, often working late into the night when the moonlight was strongest and my abilities peaked.

“You’re going to make yourself sick,” Morgan said one evening, finding me surrounded by papers covered in complex lunar equations.

It was past midnight, and my eyes burned with fatigue.

“I’m fine,” I insisted, though my hands trembled slightly from exhaustion.

“When’s the last time you ate a proper meal?” she demanded.

I couldn’t remember.

“This competition matters,” I finally said. “It’s one of the few things in my life I can actually control.”

Morgan’s face softened. “I know. Just... take care of yourself, okay?”

When the notification came that I’d qualified for the finals, I felt a surge of satisfaction. The preliminary round had been challenging, but my calculations had been nearly perfect.

The preliminary round had been challenging, but my

Now I just had to prepare for the final competition in three weeks.

I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror and noticed how my clothes hung looser on my frame. The demanding schedule had taken its toll, but I pushed the concern aside. There would be time to recover after the competition.

Fortunately, Lucas had been occupied with inter-pack politics. I wasn’t sure I could handle his scrutiny right now.

The Moontouch Medical Center was busy when I arrived for my pre-competition medical examination.

Now the finals were just two weeks away.

All finalists were required to undergo a standard health screening before being cleared to compete.

3/4

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Chapter 86

I sat in the waiting area, mentally reviewing lunar cycle variations while waiting for my name to be called.

“Well, if it isn’t Tori Sullivan.”

I looked up to see Fiona Price standing before me, her hand resting protectively over her stomach.

The gesture was deliberate, meant to draw attention.

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Claimed by the Alpha's Love - Love Demands Real Courage Author: Michael Anderson 87

Chapter 87

Tori’s POV:

12%

“Well, if it isn’t Tori Sullivan.”

I looked up to see Fiona Price standing before me, her hand resting protectively over her stomach.

The gesture was deliberate, meant to draw attention.

“What a coincidence seeing you here,” she continued, her voice carrying the same false sweetness I remembered.

“I just finished my checkup. The doctor says my baby is developing beautifully!”

Her right hand caressed her abdomen in an exaggerated gesture. I watched her performance silently, my silver eyes betraying nothing.

“Eight weeks along,” she continued, making sure everyone in the waiting area could hear. “We’re all so excited! Ethan is absolutely thrilled, you

know.”

I met her challenging gaze with calm detachment.

Four years ago, words like these would have pierced my heart like knives. Now, I merely nodded slightly and returned my attention to my

notes.

“Aren’t you going to congratulate me?” She moved closer, her perfume growing stronger with proximity.

“Oh, I forgot-this must be difficult for you. After all, it could have been your position.”

I slowly closed my notebook and looked directly at her.

‘Congratulations, Fiona. Is this enough? Can you leave me alone?’

A flicker of disappointment crossed her face.

“How interesting,” she stepped closer, lowering her voice. “Are you pretending to be strong, or do you really not care anymore? Have you

forgotten Ethan so quickly?”

I suppressed a sigh. I was genuinely tired of the Price sisters making appearances in my life every few days, as if their sole purpose was to

remind me of their existence.

“Fiona,” I said, my patience wearing thin, “is there something specific you need from me? Because honestly, I’m getting tired of you or your sister showing up.”

I studied her face carefully, noticing the slight tightness around her eyes, the way her fingers nervously caressed her stomach.

There was anxiety there-something deeper than her usual spite.

“What’s wrong? Is your supposedly secure marriage not making you happy I asked, genuinely confused. If everything’s so perfect, why do you

care about my reaction at all?”

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Chapter 87

Fiona’s face flushed with anger, my comment clearly hitting a nerve.

“How dare you! Ethan and I are perfectly happy! Why else would we be bringing a child into the world?’ Her voice rose defensively. “We’re creating a family together-something you’ll never have with him.”

“Oh, congratulations then,” I said calmly. “I wish you both well.”

Fiona stared at me, searching for any emotional reaction, any sign that I still cared about Ethan. But she found nothing.

“You don’t need to pretend to be magnanimous,” her tone turned sharp. Don’t blame me for taking Ethan away. The Grayson family would

never accept someone like you anyway.”

12%

Her words struck like a blade, but not at my feelings for Ethan. Instead, they pierced straight through to my feelings for Lucas. I felt my chest

tighten.

He doesn’t think that way, Tracy whispered in my mind.

“You have no right to speak for the Grayson family,” I finally responded, my voice calmer than I expected. “And there’s no need to probe my feelings for Ethan. That ended long ago.”

“Miss Sullivan,” the nurse’s call broke our tense atmosphere. “The doctor will see you now.”

Without giving Fiona one last glance. I stood up, gathering my backpack and leaving.

After my examination, sunlight streamed brightly over Moonhaven’s street

I walked along the sidewalk, my mind swirling with thoughts.

Fiona’s words echoed in my ears: “The Grayson family would never accept Homeone like you.”

The realization hit me with sudden clarity.

The Graysons probably despised Ethan’s ex-girlfriend, the Omega, who wa allegedly involved in the death of Noah Morris.

Four years ago, after the incident, no one believed my side of the story.

No one had believed I was tricked into going there.

Everyone thought I had willingly gone to meet Noah, that I had somehow wanted what happened.

Fiona’s lies had been so convincing, painting me as an Omega who used pheromones to lure an Alpha And with Noah dead, there was no one to contradict her version of events.

What would Lucas think of me if he knew the details? Did he believe the mors like everyone else?

I squared my shoulders, determination flooding through me.

It didn’t matter what anyone thought. I would prove my innocence. Somehow, I would find evidence of what really happened that night-

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Chapter 87

evidence that Fiona had set me up.

One day, I would find the evidence to clear my name.

One day, Fiona would pay for what she'd done to me.

<12%8

My phone rang just as I closed the door to my dormitory room. Morgan's name flashed across the screen.

"Hey, I answered, setting my bag down on the bed.

"Tori! Thank goodness you picked up." Morgan's voice bubbled with excitement. "I went to your dorm earlier but couldn't find you anywhere!"

I sank onto the mattress, suddenly aware of how exhausted I felt.

"Sorry, I had my medical exam at Moontouch. What's up?"

"Did you hear? Elizabeth Grayson is hosting a big celebration tomorrow night for Fiona's pregnancy," she announced. "Want to come with me?"

I froze. A pregnancy celebration? For Fiona?

I hadn't expected Fiona's pregnancy to be such a major event for the Graysons, but thinking about it logically, it made perfect sense. Lucas was 31 and still hadn't found his Luna. As the Alpha's nephew, Ethan's child would be significant to the pack hierarchy.

Of course, Elizabeth Grayson would celebrate the continuation of their bloodline.

"Morgan, I really don't think I should go," I said firmly. "Fiona and I... well you know our history. Me showing up at her pregnancy celebration would just make everyone uncomfortable."

"Don't worry about Fiona, Morgan dismissed with a scoff. "Elizabeth is the one hosting it, and she specifically left an invitation for you. She actually told me to make sure you come with me.

I sat up straight, stunned. "Wait, what? Elizabeth left an invitation... for me?"

"Yes! She specifically mentioned your name," Morgan said excitedly. "She told me to make sure you attend. So you see, you have to come now?"

"Come on!" she insisted. "You've been studying so hard for that championship, you've practically forgotten to eat.

Had I? I glanced down at my wrist, noticing it did seem thinner than before

“Besides,” Morgan continued, her voice turning mischievous, ‘Mom says the food at Grayson celebrations is incredible. All kinds of delicacies you can’t find anywhere else in Moonhaven. It would be a shame to miss it.’”

My stomach growled at the mention of food, betraying me.

‘I’ll... think about it,’ I said noncommittally. “Let me get back to you.”

After ending the call, I sat staring at my phone. Lucas had been out of town on business for several days.

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Chapter 87

Before I could overthink it, I typed out a quick message: Will you be at tomorrow night’s celebration for Fiona?

I barely had time to set my phone down before it rang.

Lucas’s name appeared on the screen.

“Hello?” I answered, my heart racing inexplicably.

“Missing me already?” His deep voice carried a hint of playfulness.

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Claimed by the Alpha's Love - Love Demands Real Courage Author: Michael Anderson 88

Chapter 88

Tori's POV:

12%

I hadn't expected Lucas to call so quickly after my text.

His voice sent an unexpected warmth through me.

"I was just wondering if you'd be at tomorrow's celebration," I replied, trying to keep my tone casual.

"Are you planning to attend?" he asked instead of answering.

I hesitated, twisting a strand of hair around my finger. "Elizabeth specifically invited me. Morgan says she left instructions to make sure I

come. Would it be rude to decline?"

"You seem surprised," Lucas noted, a smile in his voice.

"I am, I admitted. "I've only had dinner with her once. I didn't think she'd remember me."

"You should go," Lucas said decisively. "You'll be part of the family soon enough anyway."

My cheeks flushed with heat. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means," his voice deepened, "I'll try to return as quickly as possible. Wouldn't want to keep you waiting too long when you're so eager to see

me."

"I never said- I started to protest, but stopped myself. The truth was, I did miss him, though I wasn't about to admit it.

"It's alright, little wolf," he said softly. "I miss you too."

His confession left me speechless, my heart pounding in my chest long after our call had ended.

The next evening, I stood before my dorm mirror, critically examining my appearance.

After much deliberation, I'd finally put on the dress Lucas had sent over this morning—a stunning silver-blue gown that caught the light with

every movement.

The note attached simply read, "For tonight.-L.."

The fabric felt impossibly soft against my skin, and the cut was perfect, tailored specifically for my measurements.

I wondered briefly how he knew my size, but dismissed the thought quickly.

The dress wasn't flashy in an obvious way, but its quiet elegance spoke of expense and taste that my usual wardrobe couldn't hope to match.

You look beautiful, Tracy murmured in my mind, my wolf's presence warm and reassuring.

A knock at my door announced Morgan's arrival.

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Chapter 88

She wore a burgundy dress that complemented her warm brown hair, and her eyes widened when she saw me.

"Wow, Tori! You look amazing!" She circled me, admiring my outfit. "That color brings out your eyes,"

"Thanks," I smiled weakly. "Let's get going quickly."

<12%8

The car Morgan's mother had arranged for us was sleek and comfortable, but as we drew closer to Grayson territory, my stomach tightened with each mile.

The trees grew denser, the road more exclusive, until finally, an enormous wrought iron gate appeared before us.

Despite having visited the estate several times, this felt entirely different.

Tonight, the Grayson manor was transformed-every window ablaze with light, the long driveway lined with colorful lights, security personnel stationed at regular intervals.

I'd never seen the property so alive, so formal in its grandeur.

Two guards approached, their postures rigid with authority.

They bent to examine us through the window, and I felt their gazes linger on me. After checking our invitation, they stepped back, and the

massive gates swung open.

The Grayson estate sprawled before us, a breathtaking display of wealth and power.

"It's incredible, isn't it?" Morgan whispered beside me. "I've lived on the property all my life, but the main house still takes my breath away."

I nodded, unable to find words.

As we approached the entrance, more guards stood at attention.

The grand entrance hall opened into a ballroom already filled with guests

Crystal chandeliers cast prismatic light across the gathering, illuminating the finest clothes and jewelry in Moonhaven. The room smelled of expensive perfumes, rich food, and pheromones.

Heads turned as we entered, conversations pausing briefly. I felt the progression of their reactions: curiosity at the newcomer, appreciation for my appearance, followed by subtle dismissal when they detected my rank.

Ignore them, Morgan whispered, stepping closer to me. Her presence beside me offered some buffer against the stares.

"Miss Sullivan, a gentle voice addressed me.

I turned to find Elizabeth Grayson herself standing before us.

Her silver-streaked hair was arranged elegantly, and her posture radiated thurity without effort.

'Mrs. Grayson,' I replied, lowering my gaze respectfully. "Thank you for inviting me

'Please, call me Elizabeth," she said, her voice warm. I'm delighted you could join us.

2/4

17:49 Wed, Feb 11 GDG

Chapter 88

I couldn't believe that on such an important occasion, Elizabeth Grayson would take time to personally greet Morgan and me.

The attention made my skin prickle with both warmth and unease.

"And Morgan, dear, how lovely to see you," she added with a smile before returning her gaze to me. "Tori, I must say, you have the most remarkable eyes."

"I understand you've been helping Arabella with young Leo," she continued "She speaks very highly of you."

'Leo is a bright child," I replied politely.

I reached into my small handbag, withdrawing a carefully wrapped package. "I brought this for you, as a thank you for your invitation."

Elizabeth accepted the gift, her fingers working carefully at the wrapping.

12%

When the paper fell away, revealing a set of moon phase crystal jewelry-earrings and a pendant that captured and refracted light in a pattern

mimicking the lunar cycle.

"This is..." she stared at the crystals, transfixed. "Where did you find these

"I bought the raw crystals with some of my scholarship money," I explained, feeling suddenly self-conscious. "I processed and arranged them

myself. I... I hope you like them."

Elizabeth's finger traced the delicate silver wire that held the crystals in their perfect arrangement. "This is remarkable craftsmanship.

She looked up at me, her eyes intense. "Thank you, Tori. This is incredibly thoughtful. I adore it."

After a few more pleasantries, she smiled warmly at Morgan.

'Dear, why don't you show Tori to the refreshment tables? You should definitely try the food.'

"Food!" Morgan's eyes lit up instantly. "Come on, Tori!"

She grabbed my wrist, practically dragging me across the ballroom. I barely had time to offer Elizabeth an apologetic smile before being whisked away.

'Morgan, slow down,' I whispered, conscious of the amused glances we were attracting.

"You don't understand," she replied with dramatic seriousness. "The Grays celebrations are legendary for their food. Last time, they had these little chocolate truffles with gold dust on top that literally melted in your mouth. I've been dreaming about them for months!"

I had just taken my first bite of a delicious pastry when my phone vibrated in my clutch. Hannah's name flashed across the screen.

I scanned the crowded ballroom, suddenly alert.

If Hannah was calling, it likely meant the Price family was here somewhere. The last thing I wanted was an encounter with Fiona or Mia-or

Hannah herself.

Without hesitation, I declined the call and silenced my phone.

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Claimed by the Alpha's Love - Love Demands Real Courage Author: Michael Anderson 89

Chapter 89

Hanna's POV:

The crystal champagne glass felt cold against my fingers as I watched Elizabeth Grayson communicating with Tori.

My jaw clenched involuntarily.

Why did Tori always manage to charm everyone so effortlessly? First Lucas then little Leo, and now Elizabeth herself. What made her so special?

"Hannah, darling, you seem tense," Alexander whispered beside me, his hand finding the small of my back.

I forced a smile. "Just worried about being on my feet too long in my condition," I lied, placing a protective hand over my pregnancy.

His eyes softened immediately. "Perhaps we should find you a seat."

"In a moment," I murmured, my attention fixed on Elizabeth as she gestured animatedly while speaking to Tori.

The way Elizabeth looked at her-with such genuine interest and warmth made my stomach turn. She was clearly taken with Tori.

Just thinking about Tori-Ethan's ex-girlfriend-boldly parading around at this event made my blood boil.

I couldn't fathom what tricks she'd used to secure an invitation.

12%8

Whatever her methods, I wouldn't allow her to destroy what Fiona had built with Ethan. More importantly, I couldn't let Tori infiltrate these

elite circles.

If she got too close to the right people, certain secrets would become impossible to keep buried.

When Elizabeth finally moved on to other guests, I excused myself from Alexander's side.

I pulled out my phone and dialed Tori's number, intending to summon her for some fabricated emergency-anything to get her away from the

Graysons.

The call quickly cut off. She'd hung up on me! Fuming, I tried again only to be sent straight to voicemail. That ungrateful girl had silenced her

phone.

My mind raced as I scanned the crowded room. I needed to act quickly.

My gaze landed on Garrett Woods, a middle-aged Alpha businessman who had been watching Tori from across the room with poorly disguised

interest.

He was known for his taste in young Omegas, offering them 'protection' and opportunities in exchange for their companionship. His shipping business gave him considerable influence in certain circles.

Perfect.

I approached him with calculated casualness, two fresh champagne flutes in hand.

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17:49 Wed, Feb 11 GOG

Chapter 89

12%

"Hannah Price," he greeted me, accepting the offered drink. "Lovely party."

"Indeed," I replied, standing close enough that no one else could hear. "I noticed you watching my daughter."

His expression shifted, becoming guarded. "I wasn't aware-"

“Oh, don’t apologize,” I cut in, my voice honeyed with false warmth.

“Tori is quite striking, isn’t she?” I took a sip of champagne before continuing.

Garrett’s eyebrows rose with interest. “Her beauty is quite rare among Omegas.”

“She’s looking for protection, you know,” I whispered, leaning closer. “A strong male to help her regain her footing. She’d never admit it, of course-too proud. But an Omega in her position...” I let the implication hang between us.

His eyes darkened with predatory interest. “Is that so?”

“She is very interested in you, I added. “Always talking about how she wishes she could meet you.”

Garrett straightened his tie, his chest puffing slightly. “Perhaps I could speak with her.”

“What a wonderful idea,” I said, spotting Tori wandering toward the crystal display. “She’s right over there.

I touched his arm conspiratorially. “Let me introduce you.”

Moving quickly through the crowd, I intercepted Tori before she could disappear again. Her body tensed as I approached, those silver eyes-so

like her father’s-narrowing with suspicion.

“Tori, darling,” I said loudly enough for her to hear. “There’s someone you imply must meet.”

“I was just heading to find Morgan,” she replied coolly.

“This will only take a moment,” I insisted, gripping her elbow firmly and springing her toward a quiet terrace away from the main ballroom.

I felt her initial resistance, but she quickly relented, clearly unwilling to use a scene by pulling away from a pregnant woman.

Her eyes flickered briefly to my midsection before she allowed herself to led away.

That subtle glance confirmed what I already knew-Tori wouldn’t risk appearing to manhandle an expecting mother, especially not in such a

public setting.

The cool night air carried the scent of moonflowers and forest pine as I led her to where Garrett waited.

"Tori, this is Garrett Woods. He owns Woods Shipping-the largest independent shipping company in the Northeast. Mr. Woods, my daughter.

Tori."

Garrett's smile didn't reach his eyes as he took Tori's hand, holding it longer than necessary. "A pleasure to meet such a lovely young woman."

Tori withdrew her hand quickly, her posture stiffening."

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Chapter 89

"Not interested. Can I leave now?" she said, her tone neutral but wary.

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"Mr. Woods was just telling me about his interest in lunar phases and their effect on maritime shipping," I lied smoothly. "I mentioned your

research and calculations, and he was fascinated."

"Is that so?" Tori's voice was flat, her eyes darting between us.

"Oh, I just remembered -I promised to bring Alexander a fresh champagne Excuse me while you two chat."

I turned toward Garrett, giving him a meaningful look. "Don't let her slip away too quickly. She's quite shy about her talents."

As I walked back toward the ballroom, I heard Garrett's voice drop to a lower, more intimate tone. "Your mother tells me you've had a difficult

time since returning to society..."

I didn't look back. Instead, I positioned myself near the terrace doors, close enough to intervene if absolutely necessary, but far enough away to

maintain plausible deniability.

I sipped my champagne, a cold satisfaction spreading through me.

It would be quite entertaining to see everyone's reaction once they discovered Tori entangled with someone of Garrett's notorious reputation.

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Chapter 90

Tori's POV:

12%8

Hannah's hasty introduction still echoed in my ears, her seemingly innocent suggestion that we get to know each other" laced with an

undercurrent of malice I couldn't ignore.

"So, Tori Sullivan, Garrett's voice slithered closer as he edged toward me, is cologne overwhelming my sensitive nose. "I've heard... interesting

things about you."

I stared at the man before me, immediately deciding I wanted nothing to do with whatever scheme Hannah had concocted.

“I’m sorry, but I have friends waiting for me inside,” I said firmly, not bothering with pleasantries as I moved toward the balcony doors. “I need to get back.”

Garrett smoothly stepped into my path, blocking my exit with his broad shoulders.

“Why rush? Hannah mentioned you might appreciate some... company. H gaze traveled down my body, lingering in ways that made my wolf

Tracy growl defensively.

“It’s not every day an Omega like you gets invited to a Grayson event.”

The implication in his words hit me like a slap.

My stomach turned as I realized what Hannah had done-she hadn’t just introduced me to a random guest; she was trying to set me up as some desperate Omega looking for attention from any willing male.

The sheer cruelty of it stunned me. I’d known she disliked me, but to go this far? To essentially offer me up like some commodity to a

stranger?

Tracy snarled in our shared consciousness, her anger mirroring my own.

My fingers curled into fists at my sides as I struggled to maintain my composure.

“You misunderstand, I’m only here to attend a party,” I said coldly, straightening my spine. ‘I have no other intentions, and I certainly don’t

want to get entangled with you. Now if you’ll excuse me-”

His hand shot out, gripping my wrist.

‘You should be grateful for my attention. An Omega with your... history doesn’t get many offers.”

I stared at his hand on my wrist, then raised my eyes to meet his.

“This is Grayson territory,” I said quietly, each word clear as crystal. ‘Are you really sure you want to touch me here?”

He laughed, the sound grating against my nerves.

“What, you think they care about an Omega? His grip tightened.

My stomach lurched with disgust as he leaned closer, his free hand reaching for my neck.

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1/4

17:50 Wed, Feb 11 GDG.

Chapter 90

+12%

The nauseating scent of his cologne mixed with something sour in his natural odor made me recoil. I jerked away violently, twisting my wrist

to break his grip.

“Don’t touch me, I hissed, my lip curling in revulsion.

“I promise to be gentle, he whispered, his breath hot against my ear. “Consider this a gift.”

In that moment, Tracy surged forward in my mind, our instincts perfectly #ligned.

Without hesitation, I grabbed the cup of hot tea from the nearby table and flung it directly into his face.

Garrett’s eyes flashed with fury as he wiped tea from his face, his features ontorting with rage.

“You little bitch, he snarled, his Beta nature emerging as his canines elongated.

“Hannah was right about you-wild and dangerous. I’ll teach

you respect.”

As he lunged forward, I braced myself, desperately looking for anything else I could use as a weapon.

Two months, I thought suddenly. My mandatory restriction from shifting had ended exactly two weeks ago.

I didn’t care anymore about the social catastrophe of shifting at a formal rayson event. I refused to be a victim again.

As Garrett closed in, I felt the familiar burn begin in my spine, the precursor to transformation.

Tracy surged forward in our shared consciousness, eager for release after years of suppression.

A low growl rumbled from my chest-not human at all-as my eyes began to shift, my vision sharpening as silver replaced brown.

The first bones in my hands began to crack, preparing to reshape themselves.

“Back. Off.” My voice had dropped to an inhuman register, the words barely intelligible through partially transformed vocal cords.

Garrett’s eyes widened momentarily before his expression twisted into a cel smirk.

“An Omega thinking she can challenge me?’ He laughed, the sound grating against my enhanced hearing. “Know your place, little wolf. You’re nothing but-

I didn’t let him finish. Tracy’s rage fueled my movements as I surged forwd with unexpected speed.

My partially transformed hand connected with his chest, sending him flying backward with force that surprised even me. He crashed into the balcony’s glass table, shattering it into a thousand glittering pieces that ght the moonlight like falling stars.

The sound of breaking glass echoed through the night air, cutting through the music and conversation inside

Suddenly, all activity at the doors ceased as dozens of shocked faces turn toward us Garrett lay sprawled among the glass shards, his expression stunned as he struggled to process how an Omega had just thrown him across the balcony

Gasps and murmurs rippled through the gathering crowd.

“She attacked him!”

2/4

17:50 Wed, Feb 11 G D G

Chapter 90

‘An Omega just took down a male...’

“Did you see that?” a woman gasped.

“Her fur... it’s silver-white!” another voice exclaimed.

12%

“An Omega with Arctic coloring? That’s impossible...”

Then the atmosphere changed.

“What is happening here?”

The regal, commanding voice cut through the murmurs like a silver blade.

The crowd parted immediately as Elizabeth Grayson glided onto the balcony, her white-gold hair gleaming under the moonlight, her presence

silencing every whisper.

Tracy retreated within me, our shared panic forcing the transformation to reverse.

Painful cracking sounds filled the air as my bones reshifted, fur receding into skin, leaving me standing there in my now-rumpled dress, feeling

like a child caught misbehaving.

Elizabeth’s piercing gaze swept over the scene-Garrett sprawled among glass shards, the shattered table, my disheveled appearance.

I lowered my eyes, unable to face her directly, waiting for the inevitable judgment.

“Oh my goodness, Tori!” Fiona’s voice cut through the tense silence as she pushed to the front of the crowd, her hand protectively cradling her

barely-visible pregnancy.

Her eyes widened with exaggerated shock. “What happened? How did you end up out here alone with Garrett?”

The emphasis she placed on ‘alone’ was unmistakable, dripping with insinuation. Her concerned expression didn’t reach her eyes, which gleamed with malicious delight.

‘I started, but words failed me as I spotted Hannah lingering at the edge of the gathering.

Her lips were curved in a satisfied smile, eyes bright with triumph as she watched her plan unfold.

Something cold and painful twisted in my chest as our eyes met briefly.

I would never understand how she could hate me so completely-her own laughter.

What kind of mother orchestrated public humiliation for their child? Wha had I ever done to deserve such calculated cruelty?

3/4

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Claimed by the Alpha's Love

Editorial board

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