

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 101 - 102 [2,023 words]

Chapter 101: Chapter 102

ELODIE'S POV~

Liora stepped aside, watching her mother's car idle in the driveway.

The butler's brow furrowed. "Madam, it's quite late. You're leaving, already?"

Elodie didn't offer much explanation. Her voice was light. "Yes. I have something to handle."

Then she paused.

"It's cold out," she added. "Get inside quickly."

"Understood, Madam." The butler nodded, placing a gentle hand on Liora's shoulder.

Liora waved at the car with her small hands and big eyes.

"Bye, Mom."

The car began to pull away while she watched until the taillights disappeared around the corner.

Then she went inside.

The house was warm and quiet when little Liora stepped in. It was that particular kind of quiet that came with having so many expensive architecture and too much space.

Liora looked up at the butler. "Where's Daddy?"

"The study, I believe."

She nodded and headed for the stairs.

The study door was open when she reached it and it was unusual. Normally her father kept it closed when he was working.

But he wasn't working.

Dante stood by the window, his tall figure was silhouetted against the night sky. A cigarette between his fingers, the smoke curling upward in lazy spirals.

He was looking out at something.

The driveway, maybe.

Where Elodie's car had just been.

"Daddy."

He turned. His expression was unreadable.

"Mm?"

Liora padded into the room. "Mommy had something to do. She left right after dropping me off."

Dante stubbed out his cigarette in the crystal ashtray on the windowsill, slowly.

"I know." His voice was quiet. "I saw."

He'd been watching.

He had been standing at this window, watching his wife drive away without coming inside.

Liora didn't notice the weight in his words. Didn't catch the way his jaw tightened almost imperceptibly.

She just wrinkled her nose. "Mommy's been so busy lately. She's almost as busy as you now."

Dante's lips curved. But it wasn't quite a smile.

"Mm."

He didn't correct her. Didn't explain that her mother wasn't busy with work.

That she was busy avoiding him.

That something had broken between them.

Liora yawned dramatically, "I'm going to shower and sleep." She rubbed her eyes. "Goodnight, Daddy."

"Goodnight." His voice softened. Just slightly. "Sweet dreams."

She shuffled out of the study, her footsteps fading down the hallway.

And Dante stood there, alone. The cigarette still smoldering in the ashtray.

I came home that night with nothing left in me.

No tears. No anger. Just... this hollow kind of tired that sits in your bones and refuses to leave.

I washed up, went through the motions, my face wash, moisturizer, the silk pajamas I always wore because they felt like the one small luxury I allowed myself and then I crawled into bed.

The sheets were cold.

They were always cold now.

I used to hate that. Now I've grown used to it. Isn't that the saddest part? How quickly we adapt to loneliness when it's the only thing that stays consistent?

I stared at the ceiling for a while. Didn't think about anything specific. Just... existed.

And then sleep came, the way it always does when your body is too exhausted to let your mind keep torturing you.

The next morning, I went to work on time.

Cole Technologies had become my sanctuary in ways I never expected. It all made sense here. Unlike my marriage. Unlike my family.

Here, I was just Elodie.

Not Dante Bellini's unwanted wife. Not the woman whose husband chose her half-sister. Not Liora's mother who somehow became a stranger to her own child.

Just... Elodie.

Johnny dropped a coffee on my desk around ten, the way he always did.

"You look like hell," he said, not unkindly.

"Thanks. You really know how to make a girl feel special."

He grinned. "It's a gift."

I wrapped my hands around the warm cup and let the heat seep into my palms. Small comforts. That's what life had become, a collection of small comforts strung together to get me through each day.

In the afternoon, things got interesting.

And by interesting, I mean the universe decided to test me again.

Simon gathered the technical team for a maintenance run. And the location? Wilson Corporation.

Of course it was.

I sat in the van with the rest of the team, staring out the window as the city blurred past. My reflection looked back at me calmly.

Good. That's exactly what I needed to project.

Walking into that building felt like walking into enemy territory. Every employee who glanced my way all reminded me of what I used to be. What I almost had. What was taken from me piece by piece until there was nothing left.

But I kept my head high.

I did my job.

And I didn't see Dante.

I didn't see Sienna either.

Part of me was relieved. The other part, the small, pathetic part I tried to smother, felt something else. Disappointment? No. That couldn't be right.

Why would I want to see them?

I finished the maintenance work, packed up my equipment, and left without looking back.

The days blurred together after that.

I worked. Stayed home. Slept. Repeat.

Thursday came, and with it, my weekly obligation, cooking for Liora at the villa.

Nonna had suggested it months ago, back when she still believed this marriage could be saved. "A mother should cook for her child," she'd said, her old hands clasped around mine. "It's how we show love when words fail us."

I didn't have the heart to tell her that my love had never failed. It was Liora who stopped receiving it.

I arrived at the villa around five, ingredients in hand. The house was quiet...too quiet.

"Where's Dante?" I asked Sabina, as I set the grocery bags on the kitchen counter.

"The Alpha has personal matters to attend to. He won't be home for dinner."

Personal matters.

I almost laughed.

Was it a date with Sienna? A romantic dinner at some exclusive restaurant where he'd look at her the way he never looked at me? Or maybe they were at her apartment, tangled in sheets that should have been mine—

No.

I stopped that train of thought before it could derail me completely.

It didn't matter. Whether it was business or pleasure, whether he was signing contracts or whispering promises into Sienna's ear, it didn't matter.

I was here to cook for my daughter.

That was all.

Friday evening, I was contemplating dinner options, something simple, maybe takeout from that Thai place Johnny recommended when my phone buzzed.

Liora's name lit up the screen.

I answered on the second ring. "Hey, sweetheart."

"Mommy." Her voice was flat. Not cold, exactly, but not warm either. The voice of a child who had learned to tolerate rather than love. "Daddy won't be home this weekend. When are you coming back?"

So.

This was how it worked now.

Dante had "personal matters" again, whatever that meant and suddenly, Liora needed me. Not because she wanted me, but because I was the backup option. The second choice. The mother who only existed when her father and beloved aunt weren't available.

I swallowed the bitterness rising in my throat.

"I'll be there soon," I said, keeping my voice light. "Have you eaten?"

"Sabina made me a snack."

"Good. I'll bring dinner."

"Okay."

She hung up without saying goodbye.

I stood there for a moment, phone still pressed to my ear, listening to the silence.

Then I grabbed my keys and left.

Dinner that night was quiet.

Liora picked at her food, grilled salmon with vegetables, her favorite, or at least it used to be while I watched her from across the table. She looked so much like Dante. The same dark hair, the same sharp features, the same guarded expression that revealed nothing.

When did my daughter become a stranger?

"Is there anywhere you want to go this weekend?" I asked, trying to fill the silence.

Liora paused, her chopsticks hovering over her plate. For a moment, something flickered in her eyes, a thought, a wish, a longing she quickly suppressed.

Then she shook her head. "I don't have any special place I want to go."

She was lying.

I could see it in the way she wouldn't meet my eyes, the way her shoulders slumped just slightly, the way her fingers tightened around her chopsticks.

She wanted to be with Dante and Sienna.

Wherever they were, whatever they were doing, that's where Liora wanted to be. Not here, in this cold villa, eating dinner with the mother who had somehow become irrelevant.

I should have been used to this by now.

I wasn't.

"What about horseback riding?" I offered, keeping my voice casual. "You haven't been in a while."

Something shifted in her expression. Interest. Genuine interest.

"Yes!" she said, and for one brief, beautiful moment, she sounded like my little girl again. "I want to go!"

I smiled, and it almost didn't hurt.

"Then we'll go tomorrow."

Saturday morning came immediately.

I drove us to the equestrian club with the windows cracked open, letting the cool air fill the car. Liora sat in the passenger seat, quietly. Maybe the promise of riding had softened her. Maybe she'd simply run out of ways to push me away.

Either way, I'd take it.

The club was elegant and understated, a favorite among the elite families of the Bellini Pack. I'd been here before, years ago, when Dante and I were newlyweds and he still pretended to care.

"Don't be afraid," he'd murmured. "I've got you."

Lies.

All of it, were lies.

I shook off the memory and focused on the present. Liora was already walking ahead, eager and impatient, and I quickened my pace to catch up.

The changing rooms were in a separate building near the stables. I sent Liora ahead to meet with her instructor while I changed into my riding clothes, a fitted black pants, a cream blouse, tall leather boots. I pulled my hair back into a low ponytail and checked my reflection.

I looked composed. The picture of a woman who had everything under control.

If only they knew.

I made my way to the practice arena, and then I stopped.

Liora's voice drifted through the open doorway, bright and animated in a way it never was with me.

"My dad and one of my aunts are amazing at horseback riding," she was saying. "They're so cool! Too bad they couldn't come with me today..."

My hand froze on the doorframe.

'My dad and one of my aunts.'

Not my parents. Not my mom and dad.

My dad... and my aunt.

Like they were a unit. Like they belonged together. Like I didn't even exist in whatever fantasy Liora had constructed in her head.

I stood there, just out of sight, and let the words wash over me.

They shouldn't have hurt. I'd heard worse. I'd endured worse. I'd watched my husband hold another woman, kiss another woman, choose another woman over and over again while I stood there and said nothing.

But this—

This was my daughter.

The little girl I'd carried for nine months, the baby I'd held in my arms and promised to protect forever. The reason I'd stayed in this godforsaken marriage for as long as I had.

And she wished Sienna was here instead of me.

I pressed my palm flat against the wall, steadying myself. Breathed in. Breathed out. Counted to ten the way I always did when the grief threatened to swallow me whole.

You will not break.

Not in front of her.

When I was certain my face betrayed nothing, I stepped into the room.

The instructor noticed me first. He stood quickly, offering a polite smile. "Miss Miller."

Liora turned, and for a split second, something flickered across her face. Guilt? Shame? It was gone before I could name it, replaced by that familiar neutral expression.

I nodded at the instructor.

The instructor asked, "Should I call someone else to assist you, Miss Miller?"

I nodded. "Yes, please."

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 102 - 103 [1,265 words]

Chapter 102: Chapter 103

ELODIE'S POV~

The thing is, I actually know how to ride.

Most people assume I don't. They see me being quiet, and reserved, always hovering on the edges of things and assume I'm the type who watches from the sidelines. The kind of woman who holds purses and takes photos while everyone else has fun.

But I learned years ago. Before Dante. Before all of this.

When Liora was younger, I used to bring her here all the time. She was obsessed with horses for a while, the way kids get obsessed with things, completely and all-consumingly. So every weekend, I'd drive her out here and spend hours watching her learn to trot, to canter, to sit up straight in the saddle.

I never rode much myself back then.

My attention was always on her. Making sure she was safe. Making sure she was happy. Making sure her helmet was strapped on right and her instructor was paying attention and she had water when she got thirsty.

That's what mothers do, right? We disappear into the background so our children can shine.

It's been three or four years since I've ridden seriously.

But the body remembers.

The instructor assigned to me was young. Mid-twenties, maybe. Polite in that slightly nervous way people get when they're dealing with someone connected to the Bellini name.

He started explaining the basics, how to hold the reins, how to mount, and the proper posture.

I let him talk for about thirty seconds.

Then I put my foot in the stirrup and swung myself onto the horse in one smooth motion.

He stopped mid-sentence.

"So... Miss Miller can ride?"

I gathered the reins in my hands, adjusting my grip. The leather was smooth and familiar against my palms. "Yes."

He blinked.

I let him guide me for a few minutes anyway, just to shake off the rust, get a feel for the horse beneath me. She was a white mare, calm and well-trained, and responsive to the slightest shift in weight.

Then I took the reins myself.

One light flick of the whip, and she neighed and started to run.

God, I'd forgotten how this felt.

The wind in my face. The rhythm of hooves against packed earth. The way everything else fell away. Dante, Sienna, the cold looks from his family, the daughter who didn't want me anymore, all of it was gone, replaced by nothing but speed and motion and the simple, primal joy of moving.

I rode lap after lap, pushing faster, leaning into the turns.

For a few minutes, I wasn't Elodie Bellini, the unwanted wife, the forgotten mother. The woman who had somehow become a ghost in her own life.

I was just... me.

Eventually, I slowed down.

My heart was pounding, my cheeks flushed from the wind. I patted the mare's neck, murmuring a quiet thank you, and turned her toward the other field.

Toward Liora.

I wanted to see how she was doing. Maybe watch her ride for a bit before suggesting we get lunch. There was a café nearby that served decent pasta, that she used to love their carbonara, back when she still loved things I introduced her to.

I was about ten meters away when I stopped.

Just... stopped.

Like someone had grabbed my reins and yanked.

It was them. Dante and Sienna.

They were here.

I don't know how I didn't notice before, maybe I'd been too focused on riding, too lost in that brief moment of freedom. But there they were, standing by the fence, and Liora was with them.

She was hugging Sienna's leg.

Both arms wrapped around it, her face tilted up, laughing at something Sienna had said. That bright, happy laugh I'd heard when I first arrived at the estate. The one that was never directed at me anymore.

Sienna was warmly smiling down at her. Her hand resting on Liora's head like it belonged there.

And Dante... of course Dante was watching them with an expression I barely recognized.

It was soft and content. As though he was content with the scene he was seeing.

The way he used to look at me, once. Before I became furniture. Before I became a name on legal documents and nothing more.

I sat frozen on my horse, watching them from a distance.

They hadn't noticed me.

Why would they? I was just a figure in the background, another rider in the crowded club. Nobody important. Nobody worth looking at.

Sienna then mounted a horse. And I watched her.

Liora climbed up in front of her, her small body fitting perfectly against Sienna's, and Sienna wrapped one arm around her waist to keep her steady.

Dante mounted another horse beside them.

And then they started riding.

Side by side. The two horses were moving in easy rhythm, and matching pace. Liora was saying something, I couldn't hear what and both Dante and Sienna laughed.

All three of them were laughing together.

From where I sat, they looked exactly like a family.

Father. Mother. Daughter.

Like a complete, happy family.

The picture I had spent years trying to create and never could.

I watched them ride away, their figures growing smaller, the sound of their laughter fading into the distance. They turned a corner and disappeared behind a grove of trees, and I was left sitting there alone, my mare shifting restlessly beneath me.

I don't know how long I stayed like that.

A minute. Maybe two.

Then I turned the horse around and headed back toward the stables.

The changing room was quiet.

I stripped off the riding clothes mechanically.

I pulled on my regular clothes, which was just jeans and a soft sweater.

Then I sat down on the bench and took a sip of water.

The bottle was cold against my lips. I focused on the temperature, the faint plastic taste, the way my throat moved when I swallowed.

Trying so hard to not let my brain wander back to Dante and Sienna.

My phone suddenly rang. I glanced at the screen and saw it was Dante.

For a moment, I just stared at his name. The letters glowing white against the dark background. Then before I hesitantly answered.

"Hello."

"I'm at the equestrian center." Dante's tone was flat. Businesslike. The same voice he used for employees and service staff. "I'll take Liora with me."

"Okay," I said.

The line went dead.

No goodbye. No pause. Just the sharp click of disconnection, and then silence.

I lowered the phone and stared at the screen until it went dark.

I'd been waiting for that call, anyway.

Some part of me had known, from the moment I saw them together, that this was how it would end.

That was my role.

I grabbed my bag and stood up.

My legs felt strange. Hollow. Like they belonged to someone else. But they carried me out of the changing room, through the lobby, past the reception desk where a woman smiled and said "Have a nice day, Miss Miller!" in a voice that was too bright, too cheerful, too unaware.

I smiled back.

"Thank you."

And then I walked out into the afternoon sun, got into my car, and sat there for a long moment with my hands on the steering wheel.

Not crying.

I wasn't going to cry.

I'd made that decision years ago, and I was sticking to it.

But I sat there anyway. Breathing hardly. Letting the silence settle around me.

Then I started the engine and drove away.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 103 - 104 [1,273 words]

Chapter 103: Chapter 104

ELODIE'S POV~

I drove away from the equestrian club with no destination in mind.

Just... away.

The road stretched out in front of me, and it was all sun-dappled and winding, and I followed it without thinking. Left turn here. Right turn there. Does it matter? Not really. Anywhere was better than standing in that parking lot, pretending I wasn't shattered.

Cara had plans today. Some date with a guy she'd been seeing, she'd mentioned it yesterday, all excited, with her cheeks flushed. I wasn't about to interrupt that with my mess.

Johnny was probably working on something. He always was. The man lived and breathed that company.

I thought about going to my grandmother's place. She'd welcome me with open arms, make tea, fuss over me the way she always did. But showing up without Liora? She'd ask questions. She'd worry. And honestly, I didn't have the energy to explain why my daughter was currently riding horses with her father and the woman he actually loved while I drove around aimlessly like some pathetic ghost.

So I kept driving.

The wetland park appeared on my left, almost out of nowhere.

I slowed down without meaning to.

The parking lot was dotted with cars, and beyond them, I could see families spread out across the green.

Couples on blankets, laughing, feeding each other snacks. Children running between them, shrieking with joy. A father lifting his daughter onto his shoulders while the mother took photos.

And there, an older couple walking slowly along the path. The man had his arm around the woman, guiding her carefully, and she was leaning into him like he was the only solid thing in the world.

I watched them.

Couldn't look away.

Something twisted in my chest. Envy, maybe. Or bitterness. Probably both, all tangled up together.

That could have been me. Should have been me.

A husband who looked at me like I mattered. A daughter who wanted to spend time with me. A family that felt like a family instead of a performance I wasn't even cast in.

But instead, I was sitting in my car on the side of the road, watching strangers live the life I'd been promised and never received.

I pulled back onto the road and kept driving.

I don't know why I called.

One moment I was staring at my phone, my thumb hovering over her contact. The next, it was ringing.

The director answered on the third ring. "Miss Brown. How can I help you?"

"Hello, Director." My voice came out steadier than I expected. "How is my mother doing?"

A pause. The kind of pause that never meant good news.

"The same as before," he said carefully. "No change."

"I'm coming to visit," I said. "I'll be there in about an hour and a half."

"Of course. We'll be expecting you."

—

Lotus Sanatorium sat on a hill overlooking a small lake.

It was a beautiful place, objectively speaking. I'd chosen it specifically because it didn't feel like an institution. It felt like a home.

Not that she would know the difference.

I parked and made my way to the main building, stopping briefly to pick up the bag of books and supplies I'd brought. Her favorite author had released a new novel. I didn't know if she could still read, if she even wanted to but I bought it anyway.

The courtyard was quiet when I arrived.

Late afternoon light painted everything gold and amber. A few residents sat scattered around the garden, some alone, some with caregivers, enjoying the last warmth of the season.

And there, on a bench near the fountain, sat my mother. Sally.

I stopped at the edge of the courtyard, half-hidden behind a pillar, and just... looked at her.

She was thin. Thinner than last time. The bones of her wrists jutted out beneath papery skin, and her cheeks had that hollow, gaunt quality that never failed to make my stomach drop.

Her face was turned toward the fountain, but her eyes weren't seeing it. They were somewhere else. Somewhere far away, trapped in memories or nightmares or whatever private hell she'd built for herself over the years.

She used to be so beautiful.

I remembered her from childhood before the breakdown, before Logan left, before everything shattered. She'd had this warmth about her. This light. She'd sing while she cooked, dance with me in the living room, tell me stories at bedtime until I fell asleep with her voice still in my ears.

Now she sat alone on a bench, barely recognizable, unable to interact with anyone from her past without spiraling into another episode.

I couldn't even say hello.

If she saw me, if she recognized me, it would undo her. The doctors had explained it years ago. Something about trauma and triggers and the fragile architecture of a mind that had already broken once. Seeing me reminded her of everything she'd lost. And that reminder was enough to send her back into the darkness.

So I stood there. Watching her.

Loving her from a distance because that was all I was allowed.

"It's the same as before," the director said softly, appearing beside me. "No change."

I nodded, not trusting my voice.

"She has calm periods more often now," he added, perhaps trying to offer comfort. "She sleeps better. Eats a little more."

Small mercies.

I watched her for another moment. She shifted slightly, adjusting the blanket on her lap, and for one terrible second, I thought she might turn around. Might see me.

But she didn't.

She just kept staring at the fountain, lost in whatever world existed behind her eyes.

I left before she could notice me.

It was better that way. Safer if you ask me.

I found the director and the staff who looked after her near the main entrance, and pressed the bag of books and supplies into their hands.

"I'll leave her in your care," I said. "Please take good care of her."

"Miss Brown, you're too kind." The head nurse smiled gently. "It's our duty."

I glanced back one more time, through the glass window, I could see her still sitting there, and then I turned and walked away.

The drive back felt longer than it should have.

My hands gripped the steering wheel, knuckles white. My chest felt tight, that familiar pressure building behind my ribs.

I didn't cry.

I never cried anymore. Not about any of it. The tears had dried up years ago, leaving behind something harder. Something that ached but refused to break.

When I passed the wetland park again, I saw kites dancing against the blue sky.

A child's laughter drifted through my open window, high and pure.

I slowed and stopped.

And then, without really deciding to, I turned the car into the parking lot.

The park was even more crowded than before.

Families everywhere. Couples holding hands. Groups of friends sprawled on picnic blankets, passing around bottles of wine and containers of food.

And me.... Alone.

I found a bench near the lake and sat down, wrapping my coat tighter around myself. The breeze was cool but not unpleasant. The sun warmed my face. Somewhere nearby, someone was playing guitar and their friends were laughing at them.

I watched the kites.

Watched the children running after them, screaming with delight every time the wind caught and lifted them higher.

Watched the parents chasing after the children, pretending to be annoyed but smiling anyway.

And felt, for the first time in a long time, just how alone I really was.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 104 - 105[1,339 words]

Chapter 104: Chapter 105

ELODIE'S POV~

The kite stall was a riot of colors.

Dragons. Butterflies. Eagles with wingspans wider than my arms. Cartoon characters I vaguely recognized from shows Liora used to watch. Back when she still let me sit with her. Back when Saturday mornings meant pancakes and cartoons and a little girl curled against my side.

I ran my fingers over a simple red kite, trying to decide if I was really about to do this.

Buy a kite. Fly it alone. In a park full of families.

God. How pathetic could one person get?

But the alternative was me leaving. Going back to the empty apartment. Sitting in silence while my mind replayed every moment from the equestrian club, about Liora's arms around Sienna's leg, Dante's soft expression, the three of them riding off together like I'd never existed.

At least here, there was noise here. Some distraction.

I was reaching for the red kite when something small and warm wrapped around my finger.

It was a tiny, soft hand actually, tugging gently.

"Auntie."

I looked down.

Big black eyes stared up at me. Round cheeks. Pigtails slightly lopsided, like someone had tried their best but didn't quite have the knack for it.

My heart stuttered.

"Daisy?"

She nodded sweetly, her little fingers still curled around mine like she had no intention of letting go.

I hadn't expected to see her here. Hadn't expected to see anyone I knew. This was supposed to be anonymous, just me and a park full of strangers.

"Daisy—"

"You came here to have fun too?"

I looked up.

Harry Becker stood a few feet away, tall and quiet, something uncertain flickering across his face. He'd stopped mid-stride when he saw me, like he wasn't sure if he should approach or give me space.

"Mm." I managed a small nod.

He walked closer, with his hands, casually in his pockets. "Did you bring Liora along?"

The question was a normal one. The kind of thing anyone would ask.

It shouldn't have hurt.

I lowered my eyes, kept my voice light. Like it didn't matter at all.

"No. I came by myself."

Silence fell.

I could feel him processing that. Could feel the unasked questions hovering in the air between us. Why alone? Where's your daughter? What happened?

He didn't ask any of them.

Thank God.

I should leave.

That was the smart thing to do. The safe thing. We weren't friends, Harry and I. We'd crossed paths a few times because of strange coincidences, nothing more.

We were acquaintances at best. Strangers who happened to keep running into each other.

I didn't owe him a conversation. Didn't owe him an explanation for why I was standing in a park alone on a Saturday afternoon with shadows under my eyes and a heaviness I couldn't quite hide.

I opened my mouth to make an excuse, 'nice seeing you, I should go, had things to do' when Daisy tugged my finger again.

"Auntie."

I looked down at her.

"Let's fly a kite together."

Her voice was so hopeful. Like flying a kite with me was the best thing she could possibly imagine doing with her afternoon.

When was the last time anyone had looked at me like that?

"No, Auntie still has some things to do."

The words came out automatically. But I knew how distant it sounded.

Daisy's face fell.

Not dramatically. She didn't cry or throw a fit. Just that quiet, devastating disappointment that children wore so openly, without any of the masks adults learned to hide behind.

"Oh..."

She let go of my finger.

And I felt like the worst person in the world.

"Let's do it together."

Harry's voice was low with no pressure behind it.

I looked at him.

"It's just the two of us anyway," he said, shrugging slightly. Then, as if he could read every hesitation running through my mind, he added, "I'll watch from the side and won't disturb you. You can just think of it as having one more playmate for Daisy."

I should say no.

I should make an excuse and leave and go back to being alone because that was easier.

But Daisy was looking up at me again, hope creeping back into those big black eyes.

And the truth was... I really didn't want to be alone right now.

I really, really didn't.

"Okay," I heard myself say.

Daisy's whole face lit up.

We then picked a blue butterfly kite.

Daisy spotted it immediately, bouncing on her toes, pointing with barely contained excitement. "That one! The blue one! Auntie, look, it's so pretty!"

It was pretty with delicate paper wings in shades of cerulean and sapphire, painted with patterns that caught the light.

"You like butterflies?" I asked her.

She nodded vigorously. "They're my favorite. Uncle Harry says butterflies mean good luck."

I glanced at Harry, who was paying for the kite before I could reach for my wallet.

"It's true," he said, catching my look. "In some cultures, anyway."

I didn't argue about the payment. Didn't have the energy for that particular dance.

We carried the kite to the open field, Daisy kept chattering the whole way about butterflies she'd seen, butterflies she wanted to see, a butterfly garden her uncle had promised to take her to someday.

Her warm voice did nothing but kept me smiling as well.

I'd flown plenty of kites before.

When Liora was younger, we used to come to parks like this all the time. I'd taught her how to read the wind, how to hold the string, how to run at just the right moment to catch the lift. She'd laughed every time the kite soared, her little face tilted toward the sky, pure wonder in her eyes.

I was good at this. Experienced.

But the butterfly kite was bigger than I'd realized, and Daisy was so small. Her arms weren't strong enough to handle the pull, and my own arms were tired from a day of pretending to be fine.

The kite caught the wind, jerked upward and immediately dove toward the ground.

"Pull, Daisy! Pull the string!"

She yanked with all her might, but the physics weren't on our side. The butterfly crashed into the grass, the wings crumpling.

Daisy's lower lip trembled.

"It's okay," I said quickly, jogging over to scoop up the kite. "It happens. We just need to try again."

We tried again.

And again.

The damn kite kept fighting us. Kept dipping and diving and refusing to stay in the air for more than a few seconds. Wind was fine. Technique was fine. It was just too big, and we were struggling, and I was starting to feel that familiar frustration building in my chest when a shadow fell over us.

Harry didn't ask permission. Didn't wait for an invitation. Just stepped up beside me, took the kite from my hands, and started adjusting something on the frame.

"Bridle's off," he murmured, his fingers working efficiently. "That's why it keeps nosing down."

I watched him work. His hands were steady. The hands of someone who knew what they were doing.

A few more adjustments then he looked at Daisy. "Ready?"

She grabbed the spool with both hands, determination replacing disappointment.

"Ready!"

This time, when we launched it, Harry ran with us. His long legs covered ground easily, one hand on the kite frame, steadying it until the wind caught properly.

And then it flew.

The blue butterfly soared upward, climbing higher and higher, wings catching the golden afternoon light until it glowed against the endless blue sky.

Daisy shrieked. "It's flying! Auntie, look! LOOK!"

I looked.

And something in my chest cracked open.

Not pain this time. Something else. Something lighter.

Daisy was jumping up and down, the string clutched in her tiny fists, her whole face radiant with joy. The kite danced above us, blue wings fluttering, free and beautiful and alive.

I smiled a real smile.

The kind I'd forgotten I was capable of.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 105 - 106 [1,541 words]

Chapter 105: Chapter 106

Seeing the smile on Elodie's face, Harry's eyes darkened.

There was something about that expression that was soft, unguarded, and genuine on her face that made his chest tighten in a way he couldn't quite name. It was the kind of smile that didn't belong on someone who carried shadows in their eyes the way she did. He'd seen those shadows before, lingering just beneath the surface whenever she thought no one was looking. But right now, with the afternoon sun catching the edges of her hair and Daisy's laughter filling the air between them, those shadows had retreated.

And Harry found himself wanting to keep them at bay for as long as possible.

Elodie noticed his gaze and, unsure of what to make of it, asked, "What's wrong?"

Her voice pulled him back. He blinked, realizing he'd been staring.

"Nothing."

The word came out rougher than he intended, but Elodie didn't press. She simply turned back to Daisy, who was tugging on her hand, chattering excitedly about the kite they'd just launched. Harry watched them walk a bit farther along the lakeside path, the little girl's ponytail bouncing

with each enthusiastic step she took, Elodie's posture relaxed in a way he suspected was rare for her.

He stayed nearby, keeping a respectful distance but close enough to intervene if needed. Not that he thought he'd have to, because Elodie moved with a quiet competence that suggested she was used to handling things on her own. Still, he didn't leave. Couldn't, really. Something about the scene held him there, watching without interfering.

After tiring of flying the kite, Elodie and Daisy gravitated toward the lake's edge. They settled onto the wooden dock, their legs dangling over the side, fishing rods in hand.

Later, they crouched by one of the vendor's small water pools, nets in hand, trying to catch the tiny fish darting between the rocks. Daisy squealed every time one slipped through her fingers. Elodie laughed, actually laughed and the sound was so unexpected, so unrestrained, that Harry felt something shift in his chest. He committed the sound to memory without quite understanding why.

Soon, it was noon.

Harry had originally just planned to take Daisy out for a walk. Unlike other families who came prepared with picnic baskets and blankets, they'd brought nothing. Now that it was mealtime and Daisy's stomach was starting to rumble audibly, Harry suggested they eat at a small restaurant nearby.

Elodie had relaxed over the past couple of hours, her shoulders no longer carrying the rigid tension he'd noticed when they'd first arrived. Her mood was lighter, more open. She didn't refuse his suggestion, just nodded and helped Daisy gather her things.

The restaurant was modest but clean, tucked into a corner of the park with outdoor seating that overlooked the water. They settled at a table beneath a faded umbrella, Daisy immediately claiming the seat next to Elodie.

At lunch, Elodie mostly chatted with Daisy.

She leaned in when the girl spoke, giving her full attention in a way that made Daisy's face light up. They talked about everything and nothing, about the butterflies they'd seen, which flavor of ice cream was best, whether fish could see color. Elodie's responses were thoughtful, never condescending, treating Daisy's observations with genuine interest.

Harry watched them, something warm and unfamiliar settling in his chest. Seeing how well they got along stirred memories of Daisy's earlier loneliness, how she'd struggled to connect with people after everything she'd been through. But with Elodie, it was effortless.

He didn't push to join their conversation. Instead, he quietly moved the dishes they seemed to favor closer to them, the grilled vegetables Daisy kept reaching for, the soup Elodie had unconsciously touched twice but hadn't served herself yet.

While Elodie was absorbed in explaining something to Daisy, she didn't notice his small adjustments. Or if she did, she gave no indication, too focused on making the little girl smile.

After a while, Harry's phone rang.

The vibration cut through the comfortable atmosphere. He glanced at the caller ID and saw it was Levi, and felt a flicker of irritation at the interruption. Still, he stood, turning to Elodie with an apologetic expression.

"I'll take this call."

"Okay." She barely looked up, already turning back to Daisy.

Harry walked several paces away, far enough that his voice wouldn't carry back to their table, before answering.

"What's up?"

"Where are you now?" Levi's voice was enthusiastic in that way that usually meant he wanted something. "Have you eaten? My friend just sent me some fresh seafood. Want to come over and have some? Dante and the others will be here too."

At the mention of Dante's name, something cold slid down Harry's spine. He glanced back at Elodie, who was laughing at something Daisy had said, completely unaware of the conversation happening several feet away.

His jaw tightened.

"We've already eaten," he said, "Maybe next time."

"Alright, then do you have any plans for tonight?" Levi pressed on. "There's a cruise party tonight. Dante and the others have confirmed they're coming. You can bring your little niece along. We haven't really met her, so this would be a good chance to introduce her to us."

Harry's grip on the phone tightened. The last thing he wanted was to subject Daisy or Elodie, if she happened to still be around to an evening with Dante Bellini and his crowd.

"She's shy," Harry said. "There'll be too many people on the cruise. I'm afraid she won't be comfortable."

"No worries, Isabella will be there too." Levi's tone suggested he thought he'd solved the problem. "They're about the same age, they'll probably play together."

Before Harry could formulate another refusal, Levi added, "Seven o'clock. Don't forget."

The line went dead.

Harry stared at his phone for a long moment, jaw clenched, before finally pocketing it. When he returned to the table, Elodie glanced up briefly, a silent question in her eyes, but he just shook his head slightly and reclaimed his seat.

They stayed there a while longer.

After lunch, Elodie and Daisy chased butterflies through the meadow adjacent to the lake.

Later, they rented bicycles and rode along the paved path that wound around the water. Daisy wobbled occasionally, but Elodie stayed close, one hand hovering near the handlebars, ready to steady her if needed but never actually grabbing on unless necessary.

They continued until they were both tired. Only then did they stop.

By the time they returned to the parking area, Daisy's steps had slowed. Her eyelids were drooping, and she leaned heavily against Elodie's side.

"Someone's exhausted," Elodie murmured, smoothing back the girl's hair with a tenderness that made Harry's throat tighten.

Daisy managed a small nod before her eyes slipped closed completely. Within minutes, she'd fallen asleep, her small body going limp.

Elodie adjusted her hold carefully, making sure Daisy was comfortable, before looking up at Harry.

"I should head home," Elodie said quietly, mindful of Daisy's sleep. Her voice carried a note of reluctance that she probably didn't intend him to hear, but he caught it anyway.

Harry helped her get Daisy settled, though the girl barely stirred. When everything was arranged, Elodie paused, one hand on the open car door, and met his eyes.

"Thank you," she said simply. "For today. I..." She trailed off, seeming to struggle with words before settling on, "I needed this."

Harry nodded, something unspoken lodging in his chest. "Anytime."

He watched her car pull away, the taillights growing smaller until they disappeared around a bend in the road. Even after she'd gone, he stood there for a long moment, hands in his pockets, staring at the empty space where her car had been.

After a short while, he also left.

Some time later, Daisy woke up.

She blinked slowly, taking in her surroundings with the confusion of someone who'd fallen asleep in one place and woken in another. Her small brows furrowed as she looked around, searching.

"Where's Auntie?" Her voice was small, disappointed in a way that tugged at Harry's heart.

"She went home."

Daisy's face fell, her lower lip pushing out slightly. "Oh..."

She was quiet for the rest of the drive, staring out the window with an expression far too melancholy for someone so young. Harry glanced at her several times, wanting to say something comforting but unable to find the right words.

At 7 p.m., Harry boarded the yacht on time.

The vessel was impressive. Already, music drifted from the upper deck, and the murmur of conversation suggested there was a decent-sized crowd had already gathered.

Dante and the others had already arrived.

Harry spotted them almost immediately, a cluster of well-dressed figures holding crystal glasses, their laughter moving across the deck. Dante stood at the center, as he always did, commanding attention without seeming to try. Even from a distance, Harry could read the easy confidence in his posture, the way people orbited around him like he was the sun and they were merely planets.

Seeing him, Levi waved his hand, gesturing Harry over with an enthusiasm that felt exhausting.

Harry took a breath, schooled his features into neutrality, and headed toward the group.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 106 - 107[1,409 words]

Chapter 106: Chapter 107

When he saw Daisy, Levi laughed first, and the sound was warm. "I guess this must be the beautiful Daisy. Hello, little beauty, I'm your uncle Levi..."

His enthusiasm was genuine, but perhaps a bit much for someone Daisy's age meeting a stranger. The yacht was already crowded with people. Daisy pressed closer to Harry's side, her small hand finding his. She was indeed a little shy, her eyes wide as she took in the unfamiliar faces and the overwhelming sensory input of the party around her.

After Levi finished introducing himself, Sienna led Liora over.

When Harry saw them approach, he hesitated for a moment.

Something cold settled in his stomach, a complicated knot of emotions he didn't want to examine too closely. Because this wasn't just any child. This was Liora. Elodie's daughter. The little girl who, according to everything he'd observed and overheard, had been slowly pulled away from her

own mother and into Sienna's orbit. The child who now called her mother's half-sister "Auntie" with more warmth than she probably showed Elodie anymore.

And now she was here, with Sienna's hand resting on her shoulder like a claim of ownership.

Knowing that Daisy was shy, after Liora introduced herself with politeness, she took the initiative and extended her hand. "There are a lot of children over there. Would you like to come with me and play?"

It was a kind offer. Liora gestured toward a section of the yacht where several other children had gathered.

Daisy looked up at Harry, uncertainty written clearly across her small features. She wanted to say yes, he could see the curiosity in her eyes, the desire to play with someone her own age but she needed his permission first.

After he nodded, she mustered up the courage to follow Liora, her steps tentative at first but growing more confident as the two girls moved away.

Harry watched them go, his jaw tight. There was something deeply wrong about this picture, Liora, who should have been with her mother tonight, was instead here playing hostess-in-training alongside Sienna. Playing the role of Dante's perfect daughter while Elodie existed somewhere else entirely, probably alone.

The thought made his hands curl into fists before he consciously relaxed them.

Once the two children walked away, Levi smiled and asked, his tone teasing, "How does it feel to be a 'dad' for the first time?"

"Not bad."

Harry's response was brief, but honest. His little niece was shy and reserved, yes, but she was well-behaved in a way that suggested someone had loved her carefully before circumstances had changed. Taking care of her wasn't too much trouble for him. If anything, her presence had given his days a purpose they'd been lacking.

Dante handed him a glass of wine. "Have a drink?"

The offer was casual, but Harry couldn't help the way his body tensed slightly. Being this close to Dante Wilson, the man who treated Elodie like she was invisible, who paraded her half-sister around like a prize while his actual wife existed somewhere in the margins of his life, required more self-control than Harry had anticipated needing tonight.

Harry looked at Dante, paused for a moment as he wrestled his expression back into neutrality, then took the glass. "Thank you."

The word tasted bitter in his mouth, but his voice gave nothing away.

The two clinked glasses. They drank while chatting. After a while, Dante suddenly looked at him more intently.

Harry raised his eyes, meeting Dante's stare calmly. "What's wrong?"

Levi chimed in before Dante could respond, his head tilted slightly as he studied Harry. "You seem... off today."

Dante's smile was slight, barely a curve of his lips.

Harry remained calm, his voice even as he replied, "Is that so?"

He took another sip of wine, letting the liquid sit on his tongue for a moment before swallowing.

Levi raised an eyebrow, clearly not buying the deflection. "Really?"

Harry took a small sip of his drink and said nothing.

At that moment, someone came over to greet them.

It was one of Dante's business associates from the European Packs, a man whose name Harry couldn't quite remember but whose face was vaguely familiar. The conversation shifted.

Harry used the distraction to check his watch discreetly.

Once the person left, Harry glanced at the time again, realizing Daisy might be hungry. The sun had fully set now, and they'd been on the yacht for over an hour. Just as he was about to go check on her, when a movement caught his eye.

Daisy and Liora returned, weaving through the clusters of adults.

Daisy's earlier shyness had faded somewhat with Liora's influence, probably.

Daisy asked, her voice small but hopeful, "Uncle, can I go eat those little cakes over there?"

She pointed toward a dessert table filled with

pastries and confections that probably cost more than most people's weekly groceries.

But Daisy had a sensitive constitution and could not eat many things.

Harry responded gently, "You stay here. Uncle will bring them to you."

That way he could select items he knew were safe, avoid the ones with ingredients that would cause problems later.

"Okay."

Daisy accepted this without argument, settling onto a nearby bench to wait.

Liora, on the other hand, was more independent and had a good appetite. She went to fetch whatever she wanted, moving through the crowd with confidence, selecting items from the buffet.

She even asked Dante, holding up a small plate, "Dad, do you want some?"

Dante rubbed her head. "No, thank you."

The two kids sat together eating, their small heads bent close as they talked. Sienna, who was eating something from a small appetizer plate, also shared with Liora, offering her a bite of something that looked well prepared.

Liora happily accepted "Thank you, Aunt Sienna."

Daisy looked up at Sienna with confusion, her small brow furrowing as she processed what she'd just heard. Then she asked Liora, "Liora, isn't this aunt your mom?"

At that, the entire place fell silent.

The conversation around the, which had been a comfortable murmur of voices discussing Pack business and social gossip, stopped abruptly. Several heads turned toward the children.

Harry felt his entire body tense. His eyes cut immediately to Dante, whose expression had gone carefully blank in a way that was somehow more telling than any obvious reaction would have been.

Liora paused for a moment, a small bite of pastry halfway to her mouth. Then she shook her head. "No."

Daisy, bless her innocent heart, cautiously asked, "Don't you have a mom either?"

Liora shook her head again. "No, I do have a mom."

"Oh..." Daisy seemed to accept this, nodding slowly as she processed the information.

But the adults around them were processing something entirely different.

Sienna's expression remained pleasant, but something had tightened around her eyes and mouth.

Levi looked genuinely surprised, his usual easy demeanor faltering slightly as he glanced between Dante, Sienna, and Liora.

And Dante's face was carefully blank, which somehow felt more dangerous than if he'd shown actual emotion.

On the yacht, they were handing out souvenirs.

Daisy was quite fond of one particular crystal keychain. It was beautiful, catching the light in a way that threw tiny rainbows across her palm when she held it up. She picked out two of them, cradling them carefully in her small hands like they were treasures.

There were only two of those keychains available.

Liora liked them too as they were objectively the prettiest items being offered. Seeing that Daisy had taken both, she couldn't help but ask, "Daisy, could you give one to me? I want to give it to Aunt Sienna."

Daisy hesitated for a moment, her fingers tightening protectively around the crystals. She was unwilling to part with either one, and the conflict showed clearly on her face.

But then she said, her voice small, "I... I also want to give one to my Auntie... Today, Uncle and Auntie came with me to fly kites, fish, ride bicycles, and chase butterflies... Auntie is so pretty. She will definitely like this crystal..."

Her voice was filled with such pure affection, that it struck Harry somewhere deep in his chest. This was how a child should talk about a day spent with someone they cared about, breathless and happy and eager to share every detail.

Sienna, Levi, and Dante all turned to look at Harry.

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Chapter 107: Chapter 108

Levi leaned forward in his seat, his eyes gleaming with the kind of mischief that came from stumbling onto something juicy. "Harry, what's going on? Or is there something already going on?"

His tone shifted, sharper now, more curious. He didn't even wait for Harry to answer before firing off another question. "When did this happen? How come you didn't tell us?"

Dante just smiled one of those slow, knowing smiles and turned his gaze toward Harry. He didn't say a word, but the look said enough. Go on. Let's hear it.'

Harry stayed calm, his expression unreadable as he responded, "We just ran into each other by chance."

"Is that so?" Levi clearly wasn't buying it. Something seemed to click in his mind, and his grin widened. "So you must have had lunch together, right? No wonder you're handling the kid so easily. Seems like you have a helper!"

Harry didn't respond. He didn't need to.

Dante's smile deepened, and he delivered the final blow with all the casualness of someone stating a fact. "You like her."

Harry paused. His mouth opened, just slightly, like he was going to say something, or deny it, or brush it off, or make some joke to deflect. But in the end, he said nothing.

Sienna, who had been sitting quietly beside Dante, felt something cold settle in her chest. Her smile didn't disappear entirely, but it faded just enough that someone paying attention might notice. She wasn't sure why it bothered her. It shouldn't. Harry was Dante's friend, not hers. And yet—

"Wait, it's actually true?" Levi had only been teasing before, poking at Harry the way friends do when they're bored. But now his expression shifted into genuine surprise. He sat up straighter, leaning in like he'd just discovered a secret. "Who is she? Do we know her? Why didn't you introduce us?"

Harry said nothing. He just took a slow sip of his drink, his face as calm as ever.

Levi seemed to take the silence as confirmation that there wasn't a clear status yet, that there was nothing official, nothing worth announcing. Harry wasn't the type to talk about things before they were set in stone. Fair enough.

Still, Levi wasn't about to let it go entirely. He chuckled, crouching down beside Daisy with the kind of exaggerated curiosity that made kids feel important. "Daisy, how many times have you met the aunt you had lunch with today? Do you know her name?"

Harry's grip on his glass tightened. Just slightly. Enough that his knuckles went pale. "Levi!"

His voice was low. A warning.

But Daisy didn't catch it. She wasn't tuned into the undercurrents of adult conversation yet to notice the subtle shifts in tone, the unspoken rules about what you could and couldn't say. She tilted her head, thinking hard, and then said without hesitation, "Three times!"

Levi's grin widened. "And what's her name...?"

Daisy frowned, her little face scrunching up in concentration. When Harry had run into Elodie earlier, he hadn't called her "Miss Miller" or anything formal like that, so Daisy hadn't caught her name. She looked up at Harry, her eyes big and hopeful. "Uncle, what's Auntie's name?"

Harry lowered his gaze. His jaw tightened, just for a second, before he answered. "Next time you see her, you can ask her yourself."

Daisy's face lit up. "Okay!"

Levi sighed dramatically, shaking his head. "...So stingy. A very stingy man."

Harry ignored him.

Sienna looked away, her fingers brushing absently against the stem of her wine glass. She told herself it didn't matter. It didn't. But something about the way Harry had avoided saying her name like it meant something, like it was something to protect, made her stomach twist in a way she didn't like.

Daisy, oblivious to all of it, turned her attention to Liora, who was sitting beside her and staring at the crystal keychain in Daisy's hand with wide, admiring eyes. Daisy hesitated for a moment, her fingers closing around the little charm. She liked it. A lot, and it was pretty and sparkly and special.

But Liora looked so happy just looking at it.

Daisy sighed, a small, reluctant sound, and then held out one of the keychains toward Liora. "Here. You can have one."

Liora's face broke into a wide, delighted smile. "Thank you, Daisy."

Sienna glanced down at Liora, her expression softening. "Say thank you properly, sweetheart."

"Thank you, Daisy," Liora repeated, clutching the keychain like it was treasure.

Sienna smiled, her voice warm. "That's very sweet of you, Daisy."

Daisy warmly replied, "You're welcome..."

She watched Liora turn the little crystal keychain over in her hands, the way it caught the light and threw tiny rainbows across her palm. Liora looked so happy. It made Daisy feel warm inside, even though she'd given away something she really liked.

After a moment, Daisy tilted her head, curious. "Liora, aren't you going to get one for your mom too?"

Liora paused. Her fingers stilled on the keychain, and something shifted in her expression, something small and hard to name. Her voice came out softer, quieter. "I'll get one later..."

"Oh..." Daisy nodded, accepting that answer without question.

Back at Elodie's Place~

After dinner, Elodie read for a while. The apartment was quiet in that particular way it only got at night, no traffic sounds filtering up from the street, no neighbors moving around. Just the soft hum of the refrigerator and the occasional creak of the building settling.

She liked it. The stillness. It gave her space to breathe.

Eventually, she set the book down and headed to the bathroom for a shower. The hot water felt good against her shoulders, washing away the tension that seemed to live there permanently these

days. She stayed under the spray longer than she needed to, letting her mind go blank, letting the steam fill her lungs.

When she finally stepped out, wrapped in a towel with her hair dripping onto her shoulders, her phone was ringing.

She grabbed it off the counter, glancing at the screen.

It was her uncle, Jason.

"Mag, I just saw Lauren in the neighborhood."

Elodie froze, the towel slipping slightly in her grip. Lauren? Sienna's aunt?

For a second, she didn't process it. Her brain felt slow, sluggish, like it was trying to catch up to what he'd just said.

Jason didn't wait for her to respond. His voice came through again, faster now, a little sharper. "At first, I didn't pay much attention, but after I entered the house, I realized she went into that villa across from ours. The one that's under renovation."

Elodie's face went cold.

She sat down on the edge of the bed, hard, like her legs had given out. Her wet hair dripped onto the comforter, but she didn't notice.

Jason was usually calm. Always steady. He was the kind of person who didn't let things get to him. But right now, his voice was tight, and she could hear the anger beneath it. "They... they must have done it on purpose!"

Dante's help in establishing the Brown family's position in the capital city was widely known in business circles. Everyone knew it. It wasn't a secret.

Jason wasn't naïve. He kept up with these things, even if he didn't talk about them much. But for Elodie's sake, he'd stayed quiet. He hadn't brought it up, hadn't made her think about it more than she already did.

But this?

If the Brown family wanted to settle in the capital and buy property, fine. Jason could understand that. The capital was full of opportunities, and Dante had given them the connections to make it happen.

But everyone knew where the Miller family lived. The pack's capital was huge, sprawling, endlessly. And yet they had chosen to buy the house directly across from them?

If that wasn't intentional, who the hell would believe it?

Elodie understood exactly what he meant.

She clenched the phone tighter, her knuckles going white. Her voice came out steady, but only just. "I... I'll call Dante."

"Alright."

If it were any other matter, Jason would never have let her reach out to Dante. He hated the idea of her asking that man for anything, hated the way Dante made her feel small. But this was different.

If Lauren and her group really moved in across the street, they would be right there. Constantly. Creating a presence, making sure they were seen. And Nonna's health wasn't great, she couldn't handle that kind of stress, that kind of provocation.

Elodie ended the call and sat there for a moment, staring at her phone.

Her chest felt tight. Her hands were trembling, just slightly, and she hated it. Hated that this still got to her. Hated that after everything, she still had to go to him.

But she didn't have a choice.

She pulled up Dante's number and hit call.

The phone rang once. Then twice.

Then it was answered.

"Hello."

It was Sienna's voice.

Elodie's breath caught.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 108 - 109 [1,539 words]

Chapter 108: Chapter 109

ELODIE'S POV~

When I heard Sienna answer the phone, I wasn't surprised.

I should have been, maybe. But I wasn't.

After all, Dante and Sienna had become so close that there was no longer any distinction between them. His phone was her phone. His space was her space. What was his was hers.

So what was wrong with me calling my own husband?

I kept my voice calm and steady. "I'm looking for Dante."

Sienna's tone shifted immediately into something colder, and sharper. She knew it was me. Of course she did. "He's taking a shower. If you have something to say, you can talk to me."

Talk to her?

I almost laughed. Almost.

But the thing was, this matter did concern Sienna, didn't it?

Uncle Jason had seen Lauren in the neighborhood, but the person who'd actually bought that villa across from our house? That was probably Logan. My father. Sienna's father. 'Our' father, though he'd never really felt like mine.

If Logan had bought that house, it was likely to honor Sienna's grandmother, his mother-in-law now. It was a gesture. A statement. Another way to show the world how much he valued that side of the family.

So if I told Sienna about this, would she stop her aunt's family from moving into that villa?

No.

She wouldn't.

And honestly? I didn't believe for a second that Sienna was unaware of the plan. She had to know. Logan wouldn't make a move like that without telling her. He never did anything without considering Sienna first.

So telling Sienna about this would be useless. Worse than useless, actually. It would probably just make things worse.

I stayed silent for a moment, my thumb hovering over the screen.

Then I hung up without any explanation. No goodbye.

Over an hour passed.

I sat on the edge of my bed, staring at my phone, waiting for it to light up. Waiting for Dante's name to appear on the screen.

But it didn't.

I wasn't sure if Sienna had failed to tell him about my call, or if Dante simply didn't want to return it.

At this point, it made no difference to me.

I told myself that, anyway.

I picked up my phone again, fingers moving on autopilot, and dialed his number.

This time, it didn't even ring.

"The number you have dialed is currently switched off."

My grip tightened around the phone until my knuckles went white.

Switched off.

He'd turned his phone off. Or someone had done it for him.

I sat there for a long moment, just breathing. In and out. Slowly and controlled. My chest felt tight, like someone had wrapped a band around my ribs and was pulling it tighter with every breath.

After a while, I forced myself to calm down.

I couldn't afford to fall apart. Not over this. Not over him.

I called the housekeeper instead.

She picked up on the second ring. "Hello, ma'am?"

"Are they at home?" I asked, keeping my voice even.

"No, why?"

"Nothing," I said quickly, and ended the call before she could ask any more questions.

That night, I didn't sleep well.

I kept waking up, my mind churning through everything. Lauren moving in across the street. Sienna answering Dante's phone like it was hers. The way he'd turned it off afterward, like I was some kind of nuisance he needed to block out.

By the time morning came, I felt hollowed out. Exhausted in a way that had nothing to do with lack of sleep.

But I got up anyway. Showered and got dressed and drank my coffee.

At a little after 9 a.m., I dialed Dante's number again.

This time, it rang.

Just once though.

Then it was immediately disconnected.

I stared at the screen, my jaw tightening.

I didn't know if it was Sienna who'd hung up, or Dante himself.

I didn't want to think about it. I didn't want to dig into what that meant, who had seen my name flash across the screen and decided I wasn't worth the trouble of answering.

I grabbed my phone and my bag and left the house.

Twenty minutes later, I pulled up to Dante's villa.

Our villa, technically. Though it hadn't felt like mine in a long time.

The housekeeper was outside when I arrived, trimming the hedges near the front entrance. Her face lit up when she saw me.

"Luna, you're back?"

"Yes," I said, forcing a small smile.

She set down her shears and wiped her hands on her apron, looking genuinely pleased. "Would you like to have lunch here? I can have someone prepare it for you."

I hesitated for just a second.

Then I nodded. "Yes. Thank you."

Because if Dante wouldn't answer my calls, then I'd make him face me in person.

Then I went upstairs. When I reached the second floor, I paused for just a second, my hand resting on the banister, before I turned and entered the master bedroom.

I set my bag down on the dresser and sat on the edge of the bed, my eyes scanning the room.

Everything was the same. Nothing had changed. The same heavy curtains, the same furniture, the same faint scent of his cologne hanging in the air like a ghost. But my skincare products, the ones I'd left behind the last time I'd stayed here to be with Liora, were back in their original places on the vanity. Perfectly arranged. Like someone had taken the time to put everything exactly where it belonged.

Even the clothes I'd changed out of had been returned to the wardrobe, hanging neatly beside Dante's.

It looked like I'd never left.

I stared at the closet for a long moment, my jaw tightening.

I didn't bother calling Dante again. He still hadn't returned my call from earlier, and I wasn't about to beg.

Dinner came and went. I ate alone in the dining room, the housekeeper hovering nearby, asking if I needed anything else. I thanked her and sent her away.

To be honest, I'd considered asking Nonna for help. She was one of the few people in this family who actually treated me like I mattered. But if I involved her, the situation would only get messier. It would turn into a family drama, arguments, ultimatums, all of it. And even though Dante respected his grandmother, whether he actually listened to her was entirely up to him. He did what he wanted. He always had.

After dinner, I went back upstairs, opened my laptop, and resumed my work. The glow of the screen was the only light in the room. I lost myself in it, into the lines of code, problems with clear solutions, a world where logic actually meant something.

The night grew deeper.

The house was so quiet I could hear the hum of the air conditioning, the occasional creak of the floors settling. I'd almost convinced myself that Dante and Liora wouldn't be coming back tonight when I heard the sound of a car pulling into the driveway.

My fingers stilled on the keyboard. I didn't get up. Didn't look out the window. I just sat there, listening.

A car door opened. Then another.

Then I heard Liora's bright and excited voice, cutting through the quietness. "Oh, it's Mommy's car! Daddy, Mommy is home!"

My chest tightened.

"Mm," was only what Dante replied.

I closed my laptop slowly, and started packing up my things.

Downstairs, I could hear Liora asking the housekeeper, "Where's Mommy?"

"Madam is upstairs."

"Okay!" Her footsteps thundered up the stairs, fast and eager.

I had just stepped out of the master bedroom when she came running down the hallway and threw herself into my arms. "Mommy!"

"Mm." I patted her head gently, but I didn't hug her back. Not really. My hand just rested there, lightly and detached.

She didn't notice. She was too caught up in her own excitement, chattering away about where they'd been, what they'd done, how much fun she'd had.

I listened, nodding in the right places, keeping my expression calm.

Then I heard slower and heavier footsteps on the stairs that belonged to Dante.

He reached the top, and our eyes met.

For a moment, neither of us moved.

His expression was neutral. Unreadable. He didn't look surprised to see me. Didn't look annoyed, either. Just... indifferent.

I kept my face just as calm. I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of anything else.

I turned back to Liora, who was still talking, and gently placed a hand on her shoulder. "Let Aunt Sabina help you with your bath. Mommy needs to talk to Daddy."

Liora's face fell slightly. She'd been in such a good mood after two days of fun, and now I was cutting our reunion short. But she didn't argue. She just nodded and headed back toward her room, where Sabina was already waiting.

I watched her go, then turned back to Dante.

He was leaning against the wall now, fiddling with his phone like I wasn't even there. Like I wasn't worth his full attention.

My jaw tightened.

"Shall we talk in the room?" I said, keeping my voice calm.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 109 - 110 [1,441 words]

Chapter 109: Chapter 110

ELODIE'S POV~

"Mm. Let's go."

I entered the room first, and when Dante followed, I said, "Close the door."

I didn't want our argument, if it came to that, to disturb Liora.

Come to think of it, though we'd been married for years, our relationship was far from good, yet we'd never had a loud argument. Not once. Dante had always been too indifferent to engage in something like that, let alone argue with me.

And as for me? I'd treasured every moment with him, back when I still thought there was something worth treasuring. I couldn't bear the thought of fighting with him then.

Now, though? Now it felt different.

Dante casually closed the door, then turned to look at me, his expression unbothered. "What are we talking about?"

I got straight to the point. "Sienna's aunt bought the villa across from my uncle's house. They've been renovating it for some time now, and it's likely they'll move in soon."

Sienna's mother was surnamed Green. Janice Green.

But the complicated history between the Miller family and the Green family didn't start with Janice and my mother, Sally Miller.

It started long ago, between our grandmothers, when they were young.

They'd once been close friends.

Sienna's grandmother had a difficult marriage and a hard life. My grandmother often helped her, gave her food when she had none, clothes when she needed them, shelter when things got bad. And later, their granddaughters, Sally and Janice, also became good friends.

The Miller and Green families were well-matched back then, and my father and mother had a love marriage. They had a good relationship at first. But things began to change after my mother returned from university.

In order to help my mother rise in status, Sienna's grandmother's family had already torn their ties with mine.

Over the years, whenever they ran into each other outside, the Green family adopted a condescending attitude toward my uncle and grandmother. No trace of the humility and sincerity they'd once shown when they were seeking refuge with my family. No gratitude. Just arrogance.

The complicated relationships between the Miller, Brown, and Green families had been ongoing for years. Even though I hadn't gone into detail, I believed Dante knew all about it.

And I believed that by now, he understood exactly what I meant.

Dante did understand.

He pulled out a cigarette, paused as if thinking, and then asked, "Do you want me to make them move out?"

"Yes."

He took a drag from his cigarette but didn't speak right away.

The heavy and suffocating silence stretched between us, and I could feel my pulse in my throat, my hands clenching into fists at my sides.

This matter was especially important to me. There were other things I could ignore, had ignored, for years. But not this. Not my grandmother. Not my uncle. Not the people who'd actually stood by me when everyone else had turned their backs.

My eyes stung, and I hated it. Hated that I was on the verge of tears in front of him. But I couldn't help it.

I looked at him, my voice trembling despite my best efforts to keep it steady. "Please. Just agree. Whatever condition it is, I will—"

Before I could finish, I heard him say, "Okay."

I froze.

For a moment, I didn't move. Didn't breathe. I just stared at him, trying to process what he'd just said.

"What?" The word came out softer than I intended.

Dante took another drag from his cigarette, his eyes still on me, his expression unreadable. "I said okay."

I blinked, my mind scrambling to catch up. I'd been prepared to beg. Prepared to negotiate, to offer him something, anything, in exchange. I'd been bracing myself for a fight, for him to dismiss me or make some cruel comment about how it wasn't his problem.

But he'd just... agreed?

I hadn't expected him to agree so decisively.

The tears welled up before I could stop them, blurring my vision as my mind went completely blank. I'd been prepared to beg. Prepared to negotiate, to offer him whatever he wanted in exchange. But he'd just... said yes.

I blinked rapidly, trying to pull myself together, and hurriedly said, "Thank you, then you—"

Before I could finish asking about the conditions, because there had to be conditions, there were always conditions with Dante, he suddenly moved his cigarette away and reached out.

His hand was warm against my cheek as he gently wiped away the tear that had slid down. The touch was so unexpectedly tender it made my breath catch.

"Get some rest," he said quietly.

Then he turned and walked out of the room.

I stood there, stunned, watching his retreating figure. For a moment, I forgot how to react. My cheek still tingled where his fingers had been, and my heart was doing something strange in my chest, something I didn't want to examine too closely.

By the time I snapped out of it, I found myself unsure of what to do next.

Dante had told me to rest early. Was that his way of suggesting I stay here for the night?

Though I'd moved out, we hadn't officially divorced, so staying for one night wasn't such a big deal.

But if I stayed in the master bedroom...

I hesitated, my eyes drifting toward the bed we used to share.

No. That felt wrong. Too intimate. Too much like pretending things were normal when they absolutely weren't. I couldn't lie in that bed, breathing in the scent of his cologne on the pillows, and pretend my heart wasn't breaking.

After a moment, I grabbed my things, packed a change of clothes and some toiletries, and headed to Liora's room.

That night, I slept in Liora's room, curled up beside my daughter, listening to the soft rhythm of her breathing and trying not to think about the man down the hall.

The next morning, I woke up before 7 a.m.

I lay there for a while, staring at the ceiling, my mind churning through everything that had happened the night before. Dante's agreement. His hand on my cheek. The way he'd looked at me, just for a second, like maybe I still mattered.

I shook the thought away. I couldn't afford to read into things that weren't there.

Not long after, Liora stirred beside me and woke up, immediately clinging to my neck and playfully asking if I could take her to school.

I smiled, brushing a strand of hair from her face. "Of course."

After washing up, we went downstairs for breakfast.

The dining room smelled like fresh coffee and toast. The housekeeper had already set everything out, the fruit, yogurt, scrambled eggs, all of it were perfectly arranged.

Not long after we sat down, Dante entered the dining room and took his seat across from us.

Liora's face lit up. "Good morning, Dad!"

"Good morning," Dante replied, his tone warm as he looked at her. Then his gaze shifted to me, lingering for just a moment before he looked away and quietly started his breakfast.

I didn't say anything. I just picked up my fork and focused on my plate, cutting my food into smaller and smaller pieces even though I wasn't particularly hungry.

Even though Dante had agreed to help me with the matter, that didn't mean things between us would change. Our relationship remained as it always had been, distant and detached. This was just a temporary truce, nothing more.

I couldn't let myself forget that.

After breakfast, I took Liora to school, watching as she ran off toward her classroom with her backpack bouncing on her shoulders. Then I headed to the office.

Since attending the tech exhibition, both Johnny and I had come up with a lot of new ideas. But because of our busy schedule with the Wilson Tech collaboration, we hadn't had the time to dive deeply into our plans.

Now that we had some breathing room, we were focusing on finalizing everything and figuring out how to push forward.

So we had a lot to do today.

I'd planned to order takeout for dinner and stay late at the office to work, but around 6 p.m., when I was still buried in code and hadn't even had time to think about food, my phone rang.

I glanced at the screen and saw it was Dante.

My stomach tightened. I excused myself from the meeting, stepped outside into the hallway, and answered. "Hello?"

"Nonna's here," Dante said, his voice calm and matter-of-fact. "Come home early."

My breath caught.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 110 - 111[1,736 words]

Chapter 110: Chapter 111

ELODIE'S POV~

I barely had time to process what he'd said before the line went dead.

I stood there in the hallway, my phone still pressed to my ear, staring at the blank screen. Typical Dante. Dante never wasted words, never lingered on a call longer than absolutely necessary. Especially not with me.

I shook it off and headed back to the meeting room. Johnny glanced up when I walked in, his expression shifting to concern.

"I need to go," I said, already reaching for my bag. "Something came up."

He started to ask, but I cut him off before he could. "Can you compile everything we covered today? Notes, issues, all of it. Send it to me later and I'll go through it tonight."

I didn't want to be the reason we fell behind. Not when we were this close to finalizing everything.

Johnny studied me for a beat, then gave a small nod and waved me toward the door. "Already done. Now get out of here before I change my mind."

I managed a grateful smile and left.

—

Thirty minutes later, I pulled into the driveway of the villa.

Dante's car was already there, that sleek black SUV he preferred, parked perfectly as always.

So he'd come home early.

I sat in my car for a moment longer than necessary, my hands still gripping the wheel, trying to steady the strange flutter in my chest. Nonna was inside. That was good. That was safe. But it also meant I'd have to sit through dinner pretending everything between Dante and me wasn't falling apart.

I took a breath and got out.

The moment I stepped through the door, I saw Dante, Nonna, and Liora, all sitting together on the sofa, in mid-conversation. They looked so natural, so comfortable, like a real family.

Dante noticed me first.

His eyes lifted, meeting mine for the briefest second before he looked away, his expression giving nothing.

But Nonna... Sweet Nonna's whole face lit up. She rose from her seat with that warm, familiar smile that always made me feel like I mattered. "Mag, there you are! We've been waiting for you."

"Sorry I'm late," I said softly.

She crossed over and took my hand, her touch gentle and reassuring. "Don't apologize, sweetheart. You must be starving. Come, dinner's ready. Let's eat before it gets cold."

"Alright."

We moved into the dining room, and this time Dante didn't wait for Nonna to tell him what to do. He pulled out the chair beside him without a word, his movements was smooth and automatic.

I hesitated for just a second, then sat down.

Nonna immediately began piling food onto my plate, her brow furrowing as she looked me over. "You're getting too thin, Mag. Don't tell me you've been skipping meals again."

She shot a pointed look at Dante as she said it.

He didn't flinch. Didn't even blink. But a moment later, he reached for the serving dish and added more vegetables to my plate without being asked.

I blinked, caught off guard. "Thank you."

He said nothing. Just picked up his fork and started eating like it was the most natural thing in the world.

Nonna wasn't done. She launched into a lecture about how she'd brought half a pharmacy's worth of supplements from the Bellini Pack and how both Dante and I were going to take them whether we liked it or not. She went on about bone broth and herbal teas and all the remedies she'd learned during her time in the Yonsei Pack, back when she was young and adventurous.

I didn't have the heart to refuse her. I never did.

So I nodded along, murmuring agreement, even though I knew most of those supplements would probably end up forgotten in the back of a cupboard somewhere.

After dinner, Nonna insisted on heading into the kitchen herself to sort through everything and prepare the first batch. I offered to help, I wanted to help, needed something to keep my hands busy but she waved me off like I was being ridiculous.

"You've been working all day. Go sit down and rest. I'll call you when it's ready."

There was no arguing with her.

So I found myself back in the living room, sinking into the sofa with nothing to do but sit in the strange, heavy quiet.

Liora was on the floor, bent over a mechanical puzzle, her little fingers working carefully to snap the pieces into place. Dante was on the opposite end of the sofa, scrolling through something on his phone, his work emails, probably. His face was unreadable, his posture relaxed but distant.

No one spoke.

I pulled out my own phone and pretended to be busy, but I wasn't really looking at anything. My mind kept drifting, my eyes wandering between Liora's focused expression and the sharp line of Dante's jaw as he read.

My phone buzzed with a message from Johnny. I glanced down, skimming through the details he'd sent over, and fired back a quick response.

I was so absorbed in typing that I didn't notice Nonna coming out of the kitchen until she was already standing in the doorway, wiping her hands on a towel.

Dante had already set his phone down by then, his attention shifting toward her.

I quickly put mine away, straightening up. "Nonna."

She looked at the three of us, me on one end of the sofa, Dante on the other, Liora still lost in her puzzle on the floor and let out a long, weary sigh. "You all..."

She trailed off, shaking her head like she didn't even know where to start. Then she walked over and settled down beside me, her eyes curious. "What's keeping you so busy?"

"Just some things at work," I said vaguely.

Nonna let out a short, disapproving huff and jabbed a finger in Dante's direction. "If you're drowning in work, why don't you ask *him* for help? What's he doing just sitting there like a statue?"

I froze.

I didn't bring up the fact that I'd already left Wilson Group. That I didn't work for Dante anymore. That asking him for help wasn't exactly an option.

Instead, I glanced over at him.

He was watching me, his expression unreadable but... not cold. For once, he didn't look annoyed or indifferent. If anything, he seemed almost relaxed. And when Nonna made her comment, he didn't correct her. Didn't mention that I'd resigned.

It hit me then. He was probably worried that if he brought it up, Nonna would launch into a lecture and insist I come back to Wilson Group. And neither of us wanted that conversation.

Nonna moved on quickly, changing the subject and suggesting we all take a walk through the garden with her.

We did. The evening air was cool and pleasant, the garden lit softly by lanterns along the pathway. Nonna walked slowly, her arm looped through mine, talking about everything and nothing, about her trip here, the weather, how the jasmine was blooming beautifully this year.

It was peaceful in a way I hadn't felt in a long time.

When we came back inside, Nonna stretched and yawned, clearly exhausted. "I'm going to take a shower and lie down for a bit. The soup will be ready soon, make sure you both drink it while it's hot."

I opened my mouth to agree, then stopped.

The way she said it, 'you both' implied I'd be staying here tonight. I looked over at Dante, uncertain.

He caught my gaze and waited until Nonna had walked a little farther down the hall before saying quietly, "She's planning to stay for a while."

"What?" I blinked, caught completely off guard.

He didn't elaborate. Just said, "I'll be in the study," and headed upstairs without waiting for a response.

I stood there for a moment, processing, before Liora came bounding down the stairs and grabbed my hand, tugging me toward her room. She wanted help with her Rubik's Cube, and I couldn't say no.

We spent over an hour working on it together, her little brow furrowed in concentration, until Sabina appeared in the doorway holding a bowl of steaming soup.

"Madam, the soup is ready."

"Thank you," I said, taking it from her carefully. The bowl was warm against my palms.

"Mrs. Wilson said to make sure you drink it while it's still hot."

"I will. I'll drink it now."

Sabina nodded and left to bring the other bowl to Dante.

I sipped the soup slowly, savoring the rich, earthy flavor, while gently nudging Liora toward the bathroom for her bath.

Once she was settled with Sabina's help, I realized something with a sinking feeling.

Since Nonna was staying, I couldn't sleep in Liora's room tonight.

Which meant I'd have to go back to the master bedroom.

After Liora finished her bath and was tucked into bed, I made my way down the hall, my stomach twisting into knots.

Dante wasn't there. Probably still in the study.

I let out a breath I hadn't realized I was holding.

I still had a few things to finish up from Johnny's earlier messages, some tricky issues I needed to think through, so I sat on the edge of the bed and worked through them on my phone. But my brain felt sluggish, and I kept hitting dead ends.

Frustrated, I decided a shower might help clear my head.

I grabbed a change of clothes and headed into the bathroom, letting the hot water wash away the tension in my shoulders. I stayed under the spray longer than I needed to, letting my mind wander, trying to solve the problem piece by piece.

When I finally stepped out and dried off, slipping into my sleepwear, I realized with a jolt of panic that I'd forgotten to bring my sleep pants.

The ones I'd taken off earlier were draped over the counter, slightly damp from when I'd washed my face.

I stood there for a moment, debating.

Dante probably wasn't back yet. He usually spent hours in the study when he was working.

After a beat of hesitation, I cracked the door open and stepped out.

And immediately locked eyes with Dante.

He was standing near the dresser, his tie loosened, his shirt unbuttoned at the collar. He'd clearly just come in.

We both froze.