

# Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 111 - 112 [ 1,650 words ]

*Chapter 111: Chapter 112*

ELODIE'S POV~

A wave of embarrassment hit me, but I forced myself to stay calm.

We were still married, after all. And even though things had been strained between us lately, it wasn't like we hadn't shared a bed plenty of times before.

I'd never actively tried to seduce him, despite the foolish hope I used to carry that maybe, just maybe, he'd fall in love with me someday.

But I'd always known it was pointless. So I never acted on it.

My usual sleepwear was modest, which was a loose, two-piece set with a simple collar. Today was no different. I was wearing a similar style, an oversized shirt that hung long enough to cover me decently.

Even without the pants, I didn't think it looked inappropriate.

Still, to avoid any awkwardness or worse, him thinking I was trying to pull something, I quickly said, "I just forgot to grab my pants..."

What I didn't realize was that my top, as modest as it seemed to me, didn't quite account for the rest. My legs that were long and bare were on full display from mid-thigh down. And the loose fabric, instead of hiding my shape, seemed to accentuate it in all the wrong ways. The way it skimmed over my hips, the way it shifted when I moved.

My skin was still warm and slightly flushed from the shower, and my hair was damp, clinging to my neck and shoulders.

I looked like I'd just rolled out of someone's bed wearing their shirt.

And that realization hit me a second too late.

Dante's eyes lingered on me for a moment, just a moment, before he looked away, his jaw tightening slightly. "Hmm."

That was it. Just a low hum of acknowledgment.

I let out a quiet breath of relief. At least he didn't seem to think I was doing this on purpose.

Without another word, I walked past him toward the walk-in closet, acutely aware of how exposed I felt under his gaze, even though he wasn't looking anymore.

I grabbed a pair of sleep pants and pulled them on quickly, my hands fumbling slightly with the waistband.

When I came back out, Dante was still in the room.

I paused, unsure if he had something to say. But he didn't look at me, didn't acknowledge me at all.

So I didn't say anything either. I just walked past him and sat down at the vanity, reaching for my skincare products.

Behind me, I heard him move. He got up, crossed the room, and disappeared into the walk-in closet. A moment later, the bathroom door closed.

I exhaled slowly and focused on my reflection in the mirror, smoothing serum onto my skin in slow, deliberate motions.

By the time I finished, it was already late. I climbed into bed, pulling the covers up to my chin, and stared at the ceiling.

I was exhausted, physically, emotionally but sleep wouldn't come. My mind kept replaying the day. Nonna's unexpected visit. Dante agreeing to help with the villa situation. The way he'd wiped the tear from my cheek last night.

The night before, I'd slept peacefully beside Liora, her little body warm and comforting next to mine. But tonight, lying in this bed, knowing Dante would be here soon, my emotions were a tangled mess.

I heard the bathroom door open. A few moments later, the lights clicked off, plunging the room into darkness.

The mattress dipped slightly as Dante settled onto his side of the bed.

I could feel the distance between us that was vast, even though we were only a few feet apart. He didn't say anything. Didn't move closer. Didn't acknowledge me at all.

The room was silent except for the faint hum of the air conditioning and the sound of our breathing.

It took a long time, longer than I wanted to admit before my thoughts finally blurred and I drifted off to sleep.

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The next morning, I woke up to find myself alone in the bed.

The space beside me was empty, the sheets cool to the touch. Dante had already gotten up.

I rubbed my eyes and sat up slowly, my body still heavy with sleep.

After washing up and getting dressed, I headed downstairs.

Nonna was already awake, sitting in the dining room with a cup of tea in her hands. She looked up when she saw me, her face brightening.

She was about to say something when the front door opened.

Dante walked in, dressed in a gray athletic outfit, his hair damp and slightly disheveled from sweat. He must have just finished a morning run.

He nodded at Nonna, his voice calm and even. "Morning."

Nonna looked at the two of us with clear displeasure. "You both woke up so early?"

I blinked, surprised. I would have thought waking up early was a good thing.

But before I could think too much about it, Dante, his expression calm and unbothered, spoke up. "I've studied pharmacology. That soup you made last night? It doesn't work on me."

Then he turned and walked upstairs without waiting for a response.

I stood there, frozen, as the meaning of his words slowly clicked into place.

The soup.

Nonna had put something in it. Something to... encourage things between us. And Dante had figured it out. Worse, from the sound of it, he hadn't even drunk his.

I hadn't expected Nonna to do something like that.

My frown deepened, and I opened my mouth to say something, anything at all but Nonna let out a long, dramatic sigh before I could.

"Sometimes knowing too much ruins everything," she muttered, shaking her head. "I just want another grandchild, is that so wrong? Mag, if you get the chance, you and Dante should really try harder, you know?"

I stood there, completely speechless.

Try harder?

Even if Dante had agreed to help me last night, I knew better than to think there was any romantic possibility left between us. That ship had sailed long ago, if it had ever existed at all.

If something had actually happened between us last night because of that soup? That would have been a disaster. A humiliating, awkward disaster.

And as for having another child?

Absolutely not.

Before I could spiral any further, Liora came bounding down the stairs, her backpack already slung over one shoulder.

When she saw me, her expression softened just a little, though I could still see the shadow of her admiration for Sienna lingering behind her eyes.

During breakfast, Dante once again sat down beside me without a word. We ate in silence, neither of us initiating conversation.

Yesterday, I'd taken Liora to school. But today, she turned to Dante with hopeful eyes and asked if he could take her instead.

He didn't even hesitate. "Sure."

Nonna glanced at me, then back at Dante. "Take Elodie with you. You're both heading in the same direction anyway."

I jumped in quickly. "No need, Nonna. He has too many meetings and social engagements. He's barely at the office. I don't have a car there, so it would be inconvenient."

Nonna waved me off like I was being ridiculous. "He can go to his meetings. And if you need a ride home, just call the driver."

Before I could protest further, she nodded decisively. "It's settled."

I stood there for a moment, looking at Dante.

He said nothing. But his silence spoke volumes, he'd agreed.

After breakfast, I had no choice but to follow him and Liora out to the car.

Liora, familiar with the routine, happily climbed in. The fact that both Dante and I were taking her today seemed to make her especially cheerful.

But for me? I couldn't remember the last time I'd ridden in Dante's car. It had been months. Maybe longer.

As Liora settled into the backseat, I moved to follow her in but Dante suddenly spoke up.

"Sit on the other side."

I froze, heat creeping up my neck.

I hesitated, then walked around to the passenger side, where the driver opened the door for me.

The car felt cramped with Liora between us in the back, wait, no. She wasn't between us. I was in the front. Alone.

Dante was in the back with Liora, already pulling out his phone and typing away at something. He looked completely absorbed, his expression unreadable.

I stared straight ahead, trying to ignore the awkwardness pressing down on me.

Behind me, I heard Liora shift, and a moment later, her voice piped up. "Ah, it's Auntie Sienna!"

My stomach clenched.

Dante responded with a casual "Mm," not even looking up.

I could feel Liora glance at me from the corner of her eye, gauging my reaction. But she didn't say anything else about whatever conversation Dante was having with Sienna.

After a while, Liora seemed to grow bored. I heard her fidgeting, then the sound of the storage compartment clicking open.

I wasn't trying to snoop, I really wasn't to be honest but as she rummaged through it, my peripheral vision caught a glimpse of what was inside.

A lipstick.

A small designer handbag.

And a little backpack that Liora used to carry around.

It didn't take a genius to figure out that the lipstick and handbag belonged to Sienna.

The realization hit me like a punch to the gut.

That's why Dante had told me to sit on the other side.

That seat, the one I'd almost sat in, was Sienna's seat. The one she always occupied when she rode in this car with him.

He didn't want me sitting there.

He didn't want me anywhere near it.

I turned my head and stared out the window, my jaw tight, my hands clenched in my lap.

I told myself it didn't matter.

But the ache in my chest said otherwise.

## Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 112 - 113[ 1,354 words ]

*Chapter 112: Chapter 113*

ELODIE'S POV~

As soon as the realization settled in, a wave of sharp bitterness rose in my throat, that was unwelcomed.

The air in the car suddenly felt thick, and suffocating. I needed fresh air, needed to breathe but my hand hovered over the window button, trembling slightly.

In the end, I didn't press it.

Instead, I turned my head and stared out the window, watching the city blur past, trying to focus on anything other than the ache spreading through my chest.

I wasn't sure how much time passed before the car finally slowed to a stop.

We'd arrived at Liora's school.

I unbuckled my seatbelt and got out, walking around to help Liora with her backpack. Dante stayed in the car, his phone still in his hand.

Liora glanced back at him, her little face hopeful. "Dad..."

She wanted him to come with us. I could see it in her eyes.

"I've got something to handle," Dante said, his tone clipped.

"Oh..." Liora's shoulders sagged, and she turned back toward the school, following her teacher inside without another word.

I stood by the car for a moment, watching her disappear through the gates. Then I turned back toward Dante, my hand resting on the roof of the car.

Despite everything, despite the awkwardness, the tension, the humiliation, I wasn't going to make this harder than it needed to be.

"You can go ahead," I said evenly. "I'll grab a taxi to the office."

Dante glanced at me briefly, his expression unreadable. "It's on the way."

I hesitated.

I didn't want to get back in that car. Didn't want to sit in the front seat alone while his phone buzzed with messages from Sienna. I didn't want to pretend this was normal.

But he didn't seem to care one way or the other. And if he didn't care, why should I let it bother me?

So I said nothing.

After watching Liora until she was safely inside, I turned and got back into the car.

The silence was heavier this time. Oppressive. Dante was still on his phone, his fingers moving quickly across the screen. I pulled out my own and opened the documents Johnny had sent earlier, forcing myself to focus.

Before I knew it, the car had stopped.

"We're here."

I looked up, startled. We were parked in front of Cole Technologies, the sleek glass building towering above us. The luxurious Bentley was already drawing curious stares from people passing by.

I grabbed my bag quickly, not wanting to linger. "Thank you."

Dante glanced at me, his expression as neutral as ever. "Mm."

Then he nodded to the driver. "Let's go."

The car pulled away before I'd even reached the entrance.

I walked into the building, trying to shake off the lingering unease that clung to me.

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At lunch, Johnny had arranged a business meeting with some potential partners. I went along, grateful for the distraction.

As our car pulled into the restaurant's parking lot, I spotted Dante.

He'd just gotten out of his car, his tall frame unmistakable even from a distance. And then, a second later, Sienna stepped out from the passenger side.

Of course.

Johnny parked the car and let out a low sigh, rubbing his forehead. "What a coincidence."

"Mm." I kept my voice neutral, unbothered.

Then I noticed two more figures approaching them. It was Logan and Lauren. They must have arrived earlier and were now walking toward Dante and Sienna with warm, familiar smiles.

One big happy family.

"Should we wait until they leave?" Johnny asked quietly, his eyes flicking toward me. "Or do you want to get out now?"

I didn't hesitate. "Let's get out."

I hadn't done anything wrong. I wasn't going to hide in a car like I was ashamed.

Johnny nodded and opened his door.

I took a breath, smoothed down my jacket, and stepped out into the open air.

The moment my heels hit the pavement, I felt their eyes on me.

When Dante and Sienna saw us, they both noticed immediately.

Dante's expression remained calm, his gaze sliding over me for just a second before he turned away. Like I was part of the scenery.

Sienna, though? Her entire demeanor shifted the moment her eyes landed on me. The polite smile she'd been wearing for Logan and Lauren vanished, replaced by something colder.

My heart sank.

In the past, Sienna had been cold toward me, dismissive, even. But she'd never been openly hostile. Not like this.

I had a pretty good idea why.

Dante must have told her about the villa situation. About how I'd asked him to intervene and stop Lauren's family from moving in across from Uncle Jason's house.

He'd agreed to help me, and Sienna had probably gone along with it. But that didn't mean she was happy about it.

To her, this wasn't about the villa. It was about the fact that I'd reached out to Dante. That I'd asked him for something. That there was still some connection between us, however fragile.

And Sienna clearly didn't want that.

Her expression grew even icier.

Logan noticed her reaction and followed her gaze, his eyes landing on me. His brow furrowed slightly, and I could see the gears turning in his head. But he said nothing. Just looked away, as if I wasn't worth the effort.

Lauren, on the other hand, looked almost smug. She knew how much Dante valued Sienna. She knew exactly what this looked like, me standing here, irrelevant and unwanted, while Sienna stood at Dante's side like she belonged there.

But Lauren was smart enough not to say anything. Not in front of Dante.

Sienna walked forward, but she didn't come toward me.

She went straight to Johnny.

"Mr. Gray, what a coincidence!" she said brightly, her smile warm and genuine. "We keep running into each other, don't we?"

Johnny's smile was stiff, polite. "Yeah. Quite the coincidence."

"I've been meaning to invite you to lunch," Sienna continued, her tone light and breezy. "But things have been so hectic lately, I just haven't had the time."

Johnny's jaw tightened slightly. "Miss Brown, no need to be so formal. We all know how busy you are."

The sarcasm in his voice was subtle, but it was there.

After all, if she'd really wanted to meet with him, she would have made the time by now. It had been over a month since the exhibition.

Logan saw an opening and jumped in, greeting Johnny warmly and making small talk. He was clearly trying to build rapport, to establish a good relationship.

Then his gaze flicked back to me, lingering for just a moment before he turned away and followed Dante and Sienna toward the restaurant entrance.

The entire group walked past me without a second glance.

Like I wasn't even there.

Johnny watched them go, then let out a frustrated sigh and rubbed his temples. "They really know how to pretend you don't exist."

I shrugged, keeping my voice even. "Mm."

Then I looked at him and said, "Let's go. We shouldn't keep our guests waiting."

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That evening, I ended up working late.

Around 7 p.m., my phone buzzed. Nonna's name flashed across the screen.

I hesitated for a second, then answered. "Hello, Nonna."

"Elodiw, sweetheart, when are you coming home?" Her voice was warm, but I could hear the underlying question, the gentle prodding.

I glanced at my laptop screen, at the half-finished work still staring back at me. I knew I should go home earlier, especially with Nonna staying at the villa. But there were still so many things I hadn't sorted through, and I hated leaving work unfinished.

After a moment of hesitation, I said, "I'm sorry, Nonna. I have to work overtime tonight, so I'll be home later."

Nonna let out a long, weary sigh. "Dante's busy. You're busy. The two of you are always so caught up in work... when are you ever going to make progress?"

I froze..

She meant with our relationship. With our marriage.

I closed my eyes, my chest tightening.

## **Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 113 - 114[ 1,866 words ]**

*Chapter 113: Chapter 114*

ELODIE'S POV~

I was halfway through closing my laptop when Nonna's voice came again through the speaker, warm but laced with something I couldn't quite place.

"Will you be home for dinner, tesoro?"

My fingers stilled on the keyboard. There was a pause that was too long, and then she added, almost casually, "Your husband might be late as well."

Might be. As if she didn't already know. As if Dante's schedule wasn't carved into stone and delivered to everyone but me.

"Nonna, I'm really sorry. I have a few things to wrap up here—"

"Don't apologize to me, sweetheart" Her sigh was gentle, resigned. "Just make sure you eat something real. Not coffee and air."

I smiled despite myself. "I promise."

"Good. And Elodie?"

"Yes?"

"Don't work yourself into the ground for people who wouldn't notice if you disappeared."

The line went dead before I could respond.

I sat there staring at my phone, her words sitting heavy in my chest like stones. Then I shook it off, and ordered takeout, and shoved my feelings back into whatever dark corner they'd crawled out of.

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The pasta arrived twenty minutes later, and I ate it standing up, barely tasting it. I just took the food as fuel to my body. Just something to keep my body running while my brain worked through lines of code that were starting to look like a foreign language.

By the time I looked up again, the office was dark except for my desk lamp, and the clock on my screen read 9:47 PM.

Shit.

I'd called the driver earlier, so he should've been downstairs by now. I packed up quickly, slung my bag over my shoulder, and headed for the elevator. The building felt like a tomb at this hour and it was silent, echoey, too aware of itself.

When I stepped outside, the car was already waiting.

But the moment I saw it, something in me went still.

That wasn't my driver.

That was his driver. And Dante was in the backseat.

I froze on the curb, my brain short-circuiting. \*Turn around. Call a cab. Fake your own death. Anything.\*

The window slid down with a soft mechanical hum, and Dante looked at me like I was a mild inconvenience.

"Nonna sent me."

Those four words simply mean there was no room for judgment.

Of course she did. Nonna and her meddling, her well-meaning, impossible-to-refuse requests.

I didn't answer. Didn't trust my voice not to betray me. I just walked around to the other side and got in, sliding into the same seat I'd occupied this morning.

The car pulled into traffic, and the silence that followed was suffocating.

Dante's eyes were glued to his phone, his thumb scrolling in that mechanical, detached way that made it clear I wasn't even a blip on his radar. His jaw was set, his shoulders tense. He looked like a man with a hundred things on his mind.

And none of them were me.

I stared out the window and counted streetlights. One. Two. Three.

Then I remembered.

"Did they agree?"

My voice came out steadier than I expected. I was asking about Sienna's uncle and his little entourage, whether they'd backed off from buying the villa across from my family's place. I'd seen Sienna at lunch today, and she'd looked like someone had pissed in her champagne. So I was fairly certain they'd caved.

But I needed to hear it.

Dante didn't even look up. "Yeah."

His word sounded boring.

I swallowed the irritation rising in my throat and pushed forward. "Then... I want to buy it. The villa. Can I?"

This time, he paused. His thumb stopped mid-scroll, and he glanced at me briefly, assessing, like he was trying to figure out if I was serious or just making noise.

"You can do whatever you want, Elodie."

There was something sharp in his tone. It was not cruel, exactly. Just... dismissive. Like he couldn't be bothered to care one way or the other.

"Thank you," I said quietly.

"Mm."

And that was it. He was back to his phone. Back to pretending I didn't exist.

I turned back to the window and watched the city blur past, all neon signs bleeding into the night.

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When we pulled up to the house, Nonna was waiting in the entryway, her robe wrapped tight around her small frame. Her face lit up when she saw me step out of the car, and she reached for my hand, squeezing it like I'd just returned from war.

"Brava, you're home safe."

She shot Dante a pointed look, the one that said see? That wasn't so hard and then shuffled off to bed, leaving us standing in the driveway like strangers.

I went upstairs and called Uncle Jason first, updating him on the villa. He was relieved. Then Johnny called, because apparently the man had a sixth sense for bad timing, and spent twenty minutes rambling about some database issue that could've absolutely waited until tomorrow.

By the time I hung up, it was nearly eleven.

I opened the bedroom door and stopped dead.

Dante was already there.

He was freshly showered. His hair still damp and curling slightly at the ends. Sitting on the edge of the bed in a plain white T-shirt and sweatpants, a book open in his lap.

He looked up when I walked in. Our eyes met.

And then he looked away like I was just a ghost passing through.

I stood there for a second too long, my bag still on my shoulder, trying to figure out what the hell I was supposed to do with this.

When things were awful between us, when he was ice and I was invisible, I already knew how to navigate it. I knew how to move through a room without disturbing the air. I knew how to exist next to him without actually existing.

But this? This weird, halfway thaw where he wasn't hostile but wasn't warm either?

I had no idea what to do with this.

So I did what I always did.

I grabbed my things and locked myself in the bathroom.

The shower was too hot, the way I always ran it, and I stood under the spray until my skin turned red and my thoughts finally stopped screaming. When I came out, my face was already washed, hair damp, my armor back in place and Dante was still reading and still silent.

I climbed into bed, keeping to my side like there was an invisible line drawn down the middle. The lamp on his nightstand cast shadows on the ceiling, and I stared at them, listening to the sound of pages turning.

This is fine, I told myself.

But my pulse was too fast, and my chest felt tight, and I hated that I couldn't tell if it was because he was here.

With that thought settling in my chest like a stone, I slipped under the covers and tried to will myself to sleep.

The moment my head hit the pillow, Dante closed his book. He reached over and clicked off the lamp, and suddenly we were drowning in darkness.

Then he got into bed.

I lay there, frozen, staring at the ceiling I could no longer see. My brain did this stupid thing where it started spiraling. Had he been waiting for me? Was that why he'd stayed up reading, because he didn't want to turn off the light until I was settled?

I squeezed my eyes shut. Stop. You're reading into nothing. He probably just finished his Chapter.

My mind eventually quieted, the exhaustion pulling me under. I fell asleep faster than I expected.

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The next morning, Nonna was at it again.

"Dante, why don't you drive Elodie to work today?"

I didn't even look up from my coffee. "Nonna, I have meetings outside the office today. It'll be easier if I have my own car."

It wasn't a lie. I did have meetings. But honestly, I would've said anything to avoid another silent car ride where I had to pretend my chest didn't feel tight every time he breathed.

Nonna's brow furrowed, and she glanced at Dante, her eyes practically screaming, 'say something, you stubborn man.'

Dante, for his part, continued eating his breakfast like we were discussing the weather. Toast. Eggs. Not a flicker of acknowledgment.

I kept my head down, focusing very intently on my coffee cup. The ceramic was warm against my palms.

Nonna sighed, clearly giving up. "Well, of course. You know best, cara."

I nodded, offered her a small smile, and finished my breakfast in silence.

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The day passed in a blur of code, conference calls, and passive-aggressive emails. Nothing unusual.

By the time I glanced at the clock, it was nearly 9 PM, and the office had emptied out hours ago. I saved my work, grabbed my bag, and drove myself home, the city lights streaking past my windshield.

When I pulled into the driveway, I noticed something odd.

Dante's car was already there.

I sat in my car for a moment, staring at it. He was never home this early. Not unless something had happened. Not unless—

I shook my head and climbed out. Stop overthinking everything.

---

The house was quiet when I walked in. Too quiet.

I headed upstairs, expecting to find Dante in his office or maybe downstairs with Nonna. But when I pushed open the bedroom door, the room was empty.

I flicked on the light, dropped my bag onto the chair, and was about to check on Liora when something on the vanity caught my eye.

A red folder. I stopped mid-step.

It was sitting there, perfectly centered on my side of the vanity. Not his. Mine.

Dante and I had an unspoken rule. The left side of the room was his. The right side was mine. We didn't cross into each other's territory. His watch, his wallet, his cologne, all on his side. My skincare, my jewelry, my notebooks, all on mine.

So this? This folder sitting squarely in my space?

It wasn't an accident.

My heart started beating faster, and I didn't know why.

I walked over slowly, like the thing might explode if I moved too quickly. When I got close enough, I saw a property deed.

My breath caught.

I picked it up with shaking hands and opened it, my eyes scanning the document even though I already knew, or I thought I already knew what it was going to say.

The villa. The one across from my uncle's house.

And under the ownership section, in clean, official print: Elodie Miller.

Not Elodie Wilson. Not a joint ownership. Just me.

I stared at it, my pulse roaring in my ears, my chest doing something strange and tight and unbearable.

He'd bought it. And he'd put it in my name.

"You found it."

I spun around.

Dante was standing in the doorway, leaning against the frame with his arms crossed, watching me with that same unreadable expression he always wore. But there was something else there too. Something I couldn't quite name.

## **Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 114 - 115 [ 1,813 words ]**

*Chapter 114: Chapter 115*

ELODIE'S POV~

I heard his footsteps behind me and turned around, the property deed still clutched in my hand.

"I saw this," I said, keeping my voice steady. "Thank you."

He stopped a few feet away, his tie already loosened, the top button of his shirt undone. For a second, he just looked at me, and I couldn't read a damn thing on his face.

Before he could say whatever dismissive thing was forming on his lips, I pushed forward. "I don't have the money right now, but I'll pay you back. Every cent."

The villa was old, sure, but the location was prime. In the heart of the Bellini Pack's territory, properties like that went for hundreds of millions. Money I didn't have sitting in my bank account. But I'd find a way. I always did.

Dante's hand paused on his tie, and one eyebrow lifted, just barely. Like I'd said something mildly amusing.

"You want to give me money?"

There was something almost mocking in his tone, but not quite. More like... curious. Like he couldn't figure out why I'd bother.

"Yes, I—"

"No need." He pulled the tie free completely and tossed it onto the dresser. "I can afford it."

Just like that.

He set his watch down next to the tie and walked past me into the bathroom without another word.

I stood there, staring at the space he'd just vacated, my mouth still half-open with whatever argument I'd been building.

What the hell was that supposed to mean?

I looked down at the deed again, at my name printed in bold letters, and something that was sharp and uncomfortable twisted in my chest.

In all the years we'd been married, I'd never asked him for anything. Not money, not favors, not even his time. I didn't want to owe him. Didn't want to give him another reason to resent me.

But this?

This was the first thing he'd ever given me without being forced. Without Nonna nudging him or obligation hanging over his head.

And I didn't know what to do with that.

I swallowed hard and slid the deed into the drawer of my vanity, closing it with a soft click.

Maybe it can be a keepsake, I thought bitterly. Something to remember this disaster of a marriage by.

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The next few days blurred together in a haze of meetings, deadlines, and too much coffee, trust me when I tell you that. Dante and I were both swamped, which meant we barely saw each other. Which was fine. Easier that way.

But it also meant I hadn't spent nearly enough time with Liora.

On the fourth day, my phone rang during lunch. Liora's name lit up the screen, and guilt hit me like a punch to the gut.

"Hi, sweetheart."

"Mommy, are you busy?" Her voice was small, and careful. Like she was afraid of the answer.

"Not too bad today. Why, baby?"

"It's just... you haven't picked me up from school in a while." There was a pause. "I miss you."

My throat tightened. "I miss you too, Lio. How about I pick you up today?"

"Really?" Her voice brightened instantly, and I could practically hear her smile through the phone.

"Really. I'll be there."

"Okay! Oh, and Mommy?"

"Yeah?"

"Can you make that pasta thing you used to make? With the cheese and the—"

"The one you always burn your tongue on because you can't wait for it to cool down?"

She giggled. "Yeah, that one."

I smiled despite myself. "Deal. See you soon, baby."

After I hung up, I cleared my schedule and left work early for the first time in weeks. When I got home, Liora practically tackled me in the hallway, and for a few minutes, the world felt lighter.

We changed into comfortable clothes, and I headed to the kitchen to start cooking. Nonna wandered in at some point, looking pleased as punch to see me home early.

"Elodie sweetheart, you're cooking! How wonderful." She watched me for a moment, then pulled out her phone. "I'm going to call Dante. He should come home for dinner."

I froze mid-chop. "Nonna, he's probably busy—"

But she was already dialing, waving me off like I was being ridiculous.

I heard her side of the conversation from across the kitchen.

"Dante, come home for dinner."

A pause.

"I don't care what you have at the company. Your wife is cooking."

Another pause. Longer this time.

Nonna's face pinched. "Fine. \*Fine.\* But you still need to eat."

She hung up and turned to me with a determined look that made my stomach drop.

"Elodie, you'll take the food to him later."

I blinked. "Nonna, if he's busy, we shouldn't—"

"He still has to eat, doesn't he?"

"Nonna—"

"It's settled." She turned to Sabina, who was prepping vegetables nearby. "Make a few extra dishes. Elodie will bring them to Dante."

Sabina nodded without question, and I stood there holding a knife, wondering how my life had turned into this.

I didn't argue. There was no point. Nonna had made up her mind, and short of faking my own death, I wasn't getting out of this.

But here's the thing: I had no idea where Dante was.

He'd said he had something at the company, but that was vague as hell. He could be at the main office, at a site visit, at a meeting halfway across the Pack. And knowing him, he probably had other plans, dinner with investors, drinks with his friends, maybe even... Sienna of course.

I shoved that thought down before it could fully form.

Point was, showing up with food would probably just annoy him. Or worse, embarrass me.

Once the food was packed and Nonna was distracted, I slipped upstairs and called him.

He picked up after three rings.

"What?"

Straight to the point. No greeting. Classic Dante.

"Nonna wants me to bring you dinner," I said, skipping the pleasantries. "Do you have other plans? If you do, just say so and I'll tell her."

I was giving him an out. Hoping he'd take it. Hoping he'd say yeah, I'm busy, don't bother so I could go back downstairs and avoid this entire awkward situation.

There was a pause on the other end.

"Tell Nonna—"

Here it comes.

Before Dante could finish whatever brush-off he was forming, I heard Sienna's voice in the background.

"Dante, the food's here."

My entire body went still. The phone felt cold against my ear, and for a second, I forgot how to breathe.

"Alright," Dante said, not to me. To her.

Then he came back on the line, his tone unchanged. "I've got dinner covered here. Just let Nonna know."

Of course he does.

"Okay," I heard myself say. My voice sounded normal. Like I hadn't just had my chest cracked open. "I'll tell her."

"Mm."

The line went dead.

I stood there in the bedroom, staring at my phone screen as it faded to black, and something bitter crawled up my throat.

Stupid. You're so stupid.

What had I expected? That he'd actually want me to bring him dinner? That he'd be sitting alone in some office, grateful for the gesture?

No. He was with her. Of course he was.

I shoved the phone in my pocket and headed downstairs, my face carefully blank. Nonna was in the dining room, arranging the dishes Sabina had prepared, looking far too pleased with herself.

"Nonna," I said, keeping my voice light. "Dante already has dinner plans. He said not to worry."

Her face fell. "What? He can't take a break to eat what his family made for him?"

I forced a smile. "He's busy. You know how he is."

She muttered something in Italian that I was pretty sure involved cursing Dante's work ethic, but she didn't push it further.

I didn't tell her about Sienna's voice. Didn't tell her that Dante wasn't drowning in paperwork, he was having a cozy dinner with my half-sister.

What would be the point?

---

That night, Dante didn't come home.

The next morning, Nonna was livid.

"That boy! Even if work is demanding, doesn't he need to \*sleep\*?" She paced the kitchen, waving her wooden spoon like a weapon. "What kind of man doesn't come home to his own bed?"

I sipped my coffee and said nothing.

The kind of man who has a better bed to sleep in, I thought bitterly.

Nonna kept ranting, but I tuned her out. It wasn't worth the energy. If Dante wanted to stay out all night, that was his business. We were married on paper only. He could do whatever, whoever, he wanted.

I just wished it didn't feel like swallowing glass every time I thought about it.

---

The next few days passed in a blur of work. Johnny and I finally locked down Cole Technologies' major projects for the next two years. It had taken weeks of planning, revisions, and late nights, but we'd done it.

Still, neither of us felt totally confident until we sent everything to Professor Nolan for feedback.

Nolan was brilliant, unpredictable, and brutally honest. He also had a schedule that made Dante's look relaxed. We figured it'd be at least a week, maybe two, before he got back to us.

So when my phone rang that same afternoon and his name flashed on the screen, I nearly dropped my coffee.

"Professor?"

"Not bad," he said, his voice flat and unimpressed as always.

Johnny's head snapped up from across the table, eyes wide. I put the call on speaker.

"You've covered the fundamentals and the recent developments in AI. It's thorough. Pretty good work."

My chest warmed. Coming from Nolan, "pretty good" was practically a standing ovation.

But then his tone shifted.

"That said, you've been lazy, Elodie."

I winced.

"In this field, if you're not moving forward, you're falling behind. And right now? You're regressing."

"I know, Professor," I said quickly, my throat tight. "I'll make up for the time I lost. I promise."

"Mm."

That was it. Classic Nolan. Say your piece, then move on.

But he didn't hang up, and I saw my chance.

"Professor, do you have time tonight? I'd love to take you to dinner."

Johnny's eyes lit up, and he nodded frantically. "Yes! We haven't seen you in forever, Professor."

There was a pause.

"I already have plans."

My heart sank.

"Oh," Johnny said, deflating. "Right. Of course."

I opened my mouth to ask when he'd be free next, maybe set something up for later in the week, but Nolan's voice cut through the line before I could.

"The person I'm meeting," Nolan said, his tone as dry as ever, "is Dante Wilson."

I froze. Johnny's jaw dropped.

For a second, neither of us said anything. The words just hung there, suspended in the air.

# Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 115 - 116[ 1,770 words ]

*Chapter 115: Chapter 116*

Elodie's POV~

Johnny went still beside me. Then he leaned forward, his voice dropping to a whisper like Nolan could somehow still hear us. "Professor... why does Dante want to meet with you? Can you tell us?"

There was a pause on the other end. Brief. Detached.

"He said he wanted to introduce someone to me."

And just like that, the line went dead.

I stared at my phone, the screen going black, and felt something cold settle in my stomach.

Johnny turned to me, his face tight with realization. "You don't think..."

"Sienna," I said flatly.

"Shit." He dragged a hand through his hair. "The Brown family has their own tech company, right? And Sienna wanted to work with us on cuap before—"

"Before Dante blocked her from joining Cole Technologies," I finished. My voice sounded hollow, even to my own ears.

Cuap. The programming language the world thought Professor Nolan's team had developed. The one Sienna had been \*so\* eager to get her hands on. The one she'd probably been whining to Dante about ever since I'd shut her down.

Johnny's jaw clenched. "So now Dante's going to introduce her to Nolan directly. Get her in through the back door."

I didn't answer. I didn't need to.

It made perfect sense. Dante couldn't let his precious Sienna suffer, could he? Couldn't let her feel like she'd lost something because of me. So he'd found another way. A better way.

He was handing her my professor. My mentor. The one person in this world who'd seen me for what I could do, not who I was married to.

"Elodie..." Johnny's voice was tight, angry on my behalf. "If she's actually talented, if Nolan thinks she's worth teaching—"

"Then he'll take her on," I said, cutting him off. My throat felt tight, but my voice stayed steady. "Nolan doesn't care about personal history. You know that. If she's good, he won't turn her away just because she's..."

Because she's the woman sleeping with my husband.

I didn't finish the sentence.

Johnny looked like he wanted to punch something. "This is such bullshit."

"Maybe." I closed my laptop and stood up, grabbing my coffee even though it had gone cold. "But it doesn't change anything. We keep working. We keep getting better."

That was all I could do. Focus on myself. On my work. On the things I could actually control.

Everything else? The constant humiliation, the stolen moments, the way Dante kept chipping away at the few things I had left?

I couldn't think about that. Not if I wanted to survive this.

---

I stayed late at the office that night. Later than usual. By the time I got home, Nonna had already gone to bed, and the house was dark except for a single light in the hallway.

Dante's car wasn't in the driveway.

Of course it wasn't.

He was probably still out with Nolan. And Sienna. Playing the doting boyfriend, showing off how brilliant and charming she was, paving her way into yet another space that used to be mine.

I climbed the stairs slowly, exhaustion pulling at my bones.

But when I pushed open the bedroom door, I froze.

Dante was there.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, still in his dress shirt and slacks, scrolling through his phone like it was any other night.

My steps faltered. For a second, I just stood there, staring at him like he was a mirage.

He glanced up, our eyes meeting for a brief, unreadable moment.

I gave him a small nod, barely a greeting and headed straight for the bathroom.

I didn't ask him about Nolan. Didn't ask how dinner went. Didn't ask if Sienna had charmed my professor the way she'd charmed everyone else in my life.

I didn't want to know.

And Dante didn't offer.

He just looked at me for another second, then got up and walked past me into the bathroom without a word.

The door clicked shut behind him, and I stood there in the empty room, listening to the sound of running water and wondering how much more of this I could take.

---

The next morning, I woke up late.

My alarm had gone off, but I'd hit snooze one too many times, and by the time I dragged myself out of bed, the sun was already too high in the sky.

I threw on clothes and headed downstairs, my brain still foggy with sleep.

Nonna's voice hit me before I even reached the bottom step.

"Last night, I was in bed by ten, and you still weren't home!" She was standing near the dining table, hands on her hips, glaring at Dante like he was a misbehaving teenager. "I thought you weren't coming back at all!"

Dante sat across from her, calm as ever, sipping his water like she hadn't just verbally torn him apart.

He didn't respond. Didn't defend himself. Just drank his water and stared at some spot on the table like this conversation wasn't even happening.

Nonna rapped her knuckles on the table, her expression somewhere between furious and fond. "Say something! Stop sitting there like a statue!"

Dante set his cup down with this deliberate slowness, his eyes flicking to me as I reached the bottom of the stairs. Our gazes met for half a second before he turned back to Nonna.

"Didn't you say I had to come back and keep you company this morning?"

"Hmph!" Nonna crossed her arms. "I thought you'd ignore me like you do everything else!"

"I wouldn't dare."

His tone was so flat, so utterly devoid of emotion, that it almost sounded sarcastic. But his face gave nothing away. No guilt. No discomfort. Nothing.

Nonna looked like she wanted to throw something at him, but instead she just huffed and waved me over. "Come, cara. Sit. Eat."

I slid into my seat quietly, keeping my head down.

"Grandma," I said, reaching for the coffee pot, "are you going out later?"

"Not just me, we!" She beamed at me, her irritation with Dante momentarily forgotten. "We're all going together. Where would you like to go, tesoro? Nonna will follow your lead."

I paused, cup halfway to my lips.

I was possibly the most boring person alive. I couldn't think of a single place that sounded fun or interesting or worth dragging everyone to. My idea of a good time was staying home with a book and pretending the world didn't exist.

"I'm fine with anything," I said carefully. "Whatever you want."

Nonna's smile widened, like she'd been waiting for me to say that. "How about the hot springs? Last time we were supposed to go, but we never made it. I ended up sick from the disappointment." She shot Dante a pointed look. "And someone owes me for that."

Dante didn't even flinch. He just sipped his tea like Nonna hadn't just publicly called him out. Like it didn't matter. Like I didn't matter.

Because to him, I never had.

I looked away, focusing very intently on my breakfast.

I'd already been to the hot springs. With Harry Becker's family, no less. It wasn't exactly a thrilling prospect to go back. But Nonna looked so pleased with herself, so hopeful, that I couldn't say no.

"Alright," I said, forcing a small smile. "Sounds good."

---

After breakfast, I went upstairs to pack.

I grabbed a small suitcase from the closet and started pulling things together, my comfortable clothes, toiletries, and a book I probably wouldn't read. Just like the usual.

But I only packed for myself. Not for Dante.

My hands stilled for a moment as I stared at his side of the closet, at the perfectly pressed shirts, the expensive watches lined up. It would've been easy to grab a few things for him. That's what a wife would do, right?

But I wasn't really his wife.

Not in any way that mattered.

He was Sienna's. And I had no interest in touching his things, organizing his life, pretending we were something we weren't.

So I zipped up my suitcase and left his side of the room untouched.

Sabina was handling Liora's things, and normally I would've hovered, double-checking everything, making sure nothing was forgotten. But today, I didn't.

I just grabbed my bag and headed downstairs.

Liora and Dante came down a few minutes later. Liora was chattering excitedly about the hot springs, clutching a stuffed animal she'd insisted on bringing. Dante followed behind her, his phone already in his hand.

We piled into the car, and the drive was quiet except for Liora's occasional excited squeals.

When we finally arrived at the resort, Dante immediately peeled off, his phone pressed to his ear, and his voice low and clipped as he walked toward the gardens.

I watched him go, something bitter curling in my chest, then turned and followed Nonna inside.

---

I was in my room, unpacking my things and trying not to think about how Dante had barely looked at me all morning, when Nonna knocked and slipped inside.

She was holding a box.

A fancy one. Wrapped in tissue paper with a little ribbon on top.

"Tesoro," she said, her eyes twinkling with mischief. "I got you something special. You have to wear it when we go to the hot springs later."

I stared at the box, my stomach sinking.

I already knew what was inside.

"Nonna..."

"No arguments!" She pressed it into my hands, her smile widening. "You're a beautiful woman, Elodie. It's time you reminded certain people of that."

She gave me a pointed, knowing look and I realized exactly what she was trying to do.

She wanted me to make Dante notice me.

My throat tightened. "Nonna, I don't think—"

"Just trust me, cara." She patted my cheek gently. "Trust your Nonna."

And then she walked some steps back, and left me standing there with the box in my hands and a knot in my chest.

I set it on the bed and stared at it for a long moment.

Part of me wanted to throw it away. To tell Nonna thanks, but no thanks. That I wasn't interested in playing dress-up to get Dante's attention, an attention he'd never given me, and probably never would.

But another stubborn part of me wanted to open it.

Wanted to see what Nonna thought could make a man like Dante Bellini look at me twice.

So I did.

I lifted the lid.

And my breath caught.

Oh, Nonna.

What the hell are you trying to do to me?

## **Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 116 - 117[ 1,588 words ]**

*Chapter 116: Chapter 117*

Elodie's POV

I felt my stomach twist. "Nonna, I already brought my own—"

"Don't worry, tesoro. It's nothing inappropriate. Open it and see for yourself."

I lifted the lid slowly, like the box might bite me. And there the Lingerie was.

My face went hot immediately. Of course it was lingerie. What else would Nonna put in a fancy box and tell me to wear to the hot springs?

But as I looked closer, I realized it wasn't as bad as I'd feared. It was actually... pretty similar to what I usually wore. A simple, elegant set. Nothing over-the-top.

I let out a breath I didn't know I'd been holding.

Nonna's smile widened, like she could read every thought racing through my head. "Make sure you wear it, cara."

I hesitated, the fabric soft between my fingers. "...Alright."

The door opened.

I looked up, and there was Dante, standing in the doorway, his eyes immediately landing on the box in my hands.

I slammed the lid shut so fast I nearly caught my fingers in it.

Dante paused. Just for a second. Then his expression smoothed over into that infuriatingly blank mask he always wore, and he turned to Nonna like he hadn't just walked in on the most awkward moment of my life.

"Nonna, did you need something?"

"Yes! I came to hurry you both along." She swatted at his arm, shooing him toward the bathroom. "Go change into your robe. We're going to the hot springs!"

Dante didn't argue. He just nodded, grabbed something from his bag, and disappeared into the bathroom.

A few minutes later, he emerged wearing a bathrobe, his hair still damp from a quick rinse, the belt tied loosely around his waist.

I didn't look at him. I just grabbed my own things and locked myself in the bathroom before my brain could spiral any further.

---

I stared at myself in the mirror.

The lingerie Nonna had given me looked... fine. At first glance, it seemed almost identical to what I usually wore.

But when I looked closer, really looked, I realized the fabric was thinner. Way thinner. Almost sheer in certain lights. And the underwear? It was barely there.

It wasn't inappropriate, exactly. But it was different. More sexy.

And it was red. Bright red.

And against my pale skin, it looked... I don't know. It looked like something a woman would wear if she was trying to get someone's attention.

I felt my cheeks heat up as I stared at my reflection.

Nonna, what are you doing to me?

But I didn't hate it. And that was the worst part.

I didn't hate the way it looked. Didn't hate the way it made me feel, like maybe, just for a second, I was someone worth looking at.

So I pulled the bathrobe on over it, tied the belt tight, and stepped out before I could change my mind.

---

Dante was gone by the time I emerged.

I stood in the empty room for a moment, clutching the edges of my robe, trying to steady my breathing.

Then Nonna appeared in the doorway, practically glowing with satisfaction.

"Dante's already in the small pool on the left, cara. Go join him."

I blinked. "The small pool?"

"Yes! It's very cozy. Private. Perfect for the two of you."

Oh no.

I knew exactly which pool she meant. I'd seen it when we checked in. It was a tiny, intimate space tucked away from the main baths. Barely three square meters. If two people sat in it, they'd be close enough to touch without even trying.

Nonna was setting me up.

And she wasn't even being subtle about it.

"Nonna, I don't think—"

"Go." She gave me a gentle push toward the door. "Don't make him wait."

I wanted to argue. Wanted to tell her this was a terrible idea, that Dante didn't want me anywhere near him, that this whole thing was pointless.

But Nonna was already steering me down the hallway, and I didn't have the energy to fight her.

---

The pool was tucked behind a bamboo partition, steam rising from the water in lazy curls.

And there was Dante, sitting in the pool, his bathrobe discarded on a nearby bench, his back against the stone edge. His eyes were closed, his head tilted back slightly, droplets of water clinging to his neck and collarbone.

He looked... relaxed. Almost peaceful.

Until he heard my footsteps.

His eyes opened, and his gaze landed on me.

I froze.

For a second, neither of us moved. He just looked at me, his expression unreadable, and I stood there like an idiot, clutching the edges of my robe.

Then his eyes dipped lower, just for a second and I realized what he was looking at.

The robe had shifted slightly when I walked, and the red fabric underneath was peeking through.

My heart slammed against my ribs.

Damn it, Nonna.

I quickly adjusted the robe, tying the belt tighter, and forced myself to move forward.

Now, standing at the edge of the pool with my bathrobe still on, I could feel his gaze on me still.

And all I could think about was what I was wearing underneath.

Don't be weird. Just act normal.

I put my things down on the stone bench, took a breath, and untied the robe.

The fabric slipped off my shoulders, pooling at my feet.

And there I stood. In Nonna's carefully selected red lingerie. Fully visible.

Dante went still.

I could see the way his eyes tracked over me, briefly. Taking in the thin fabric, the color against my skin, the way it clung to me in the humid air.

I knew what he was thinking.

He probably assumed Nonna had put me up to this. That I was trying to seduce him or something equally ridiculous. That I'd worn this hoping something would happen between us.

But that wasn't it at all.

I wore it because I liked it. Because for once, I wanted to feel like something other than invisible. And if Dante wanted to read into that, twist it into something it wasn't, that was his problem, not mine.

I wasn't going to avoid wearing something I actually liked just because he might misunderstand.

So I didn't flinch. Didn't cover myself or make excuses. I just stepped into the water like it was the most natural thing in the world, settling onto the stone seat two spaces away from him.

Dante's gaze shifted away.

The silence stretched between us, and I could see him out of the corner of my eye, the water lapping just below his collarbone, his chest lean and defined, droplets sliding down his skin.

I looked away.

This is fine. This is totally normal.

I was trying to convince myself of that when Dante's voice cut through the quiet.

"Do you want something to eat?"

I blinked, surprised. He pushed a small bowl of snacks toward me that was filled with pastries, fruit, things the resort had left for us.

"...Thank you," I said quietly.

He didn't respond. Just leaned back against the edge of the pool, his eyes half-closed like he was already retreating into his own world again.

I picked up one of the pastries and took a small bite. It was good, flaky, sweet but I had no appetite. After finishing one piece, I pushed the bowl back toward him.

The water was so clear I could see everything beneath the surface.

And as I slid the bowl across, my eyes accidentally, just accidentally dipped lower to Dante's lower body.

And I realized, with a sinking, humiliating certainty, that there was no reaction. None. Not even a flicker.

If it had been any other woman sitting here in red lingerie, maybe she would've thought he just wasn't capable. That something was wrong.

But I knew better.

It wasn't that he couldn't. It was that I didn't do anything for him. Never had. Probably never would.

This had nothing to do with what I was wearing. It had everything to do with who I was.

Or rather, who I wasn't.

I'm not Sienna.

The thought hit me hard, but I swallowed it down and pulled my gaze away before he could notice.

I'd already known this. We were getting divorced. There was no future here. No point in wanting something that was never mine to begin with.

I wore the lingerie because I knew it wouldn't affect him. Because I knew I was safe from the heartbreak of hoping.

The water was warm, soothing, and after a while I started to feel drowsy. My body melted into the heat, my eyelids growing heavy.

But I didn't let myself fall asleep.

Instead, I stood up, water streaming off my skin, and reached for my robe.

"I'm going to head out," I said quietly.

"Mm."

That was it. One sound. No are you okay or \*

see you later or even glance in my direction.

Just... mm.

I tied the robe around myself, grabbed my things, and walked away without looking back.

---

I was heading toward the elevator when I nearly collided with Nonna.

She looked surprised and a little disappointed.

"Finished already, cara?"

I forced a smile. "Yeah. I was getting a little tired."

Her eyes searched my face, like she was trying to read between the lines. "And Dante?"

"Still in the pool."

"Hmm." She frowned, clearly unsatisfied with how things had gone.

## Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 117 - 118[ 1,384 words ]

*Chapter 117: Chapter 118*

Before Nonna could say anything more, she noticed Dante emerging from the corridor, already changed out of his bathrobe and back into casual clothes.

Nonna had been hoping, praying, really that something would happen between him and Elodie in that intimate little pool. Some spark. Some connection. Something that was anything romantic.

But looking at the careful distance they kept from each other, the way neither of them even glanced in the other's direction, it was painfully clear that nothing had changed.

She sighed, her disappointment settling heavy in her chest.

"I just got a call from a friend who's here for treatment," Nonna said, patting Elodie's hand gently. She turned to Dante, her expression sharpening. "I need to head back for a bit. You two stay and enjoy yourselves." She pointed a finger at her grandson. "And no bullying Elodie, you hear me?"

Dante's expression remained infuriatingly neutral. "Got it."

At that exact moment, another elevator dinged open.

And Levi stepped out.

Elodie's eyes widened slightly. She hadn't expected to see him here, of all places.

But neither Nonna nor Dante seemed surprised. Clearly, they'd known he was coming.

When Levi spotted Elodie, one eyebrow lifted in that trademark smirk of his. Then he turned to Nonna, his whole demeanor shifting to something warm and affectionate.

"Nonna, you're leaving already? Don't you want to stay for lunch before you go?"

The Davis and Bellini families went way back. Nonna had practically watched Levi grow up, so she smiled fondly at him. "No need, caro. You all have fun."

They walked Nonna to her car, watching as it pulled away down the winding resort road.

The moment the car disappeared, Liora bounced over to Levi, her face lit up with curiosity. "Uncle Levi! What are you doing here?"

Levi crouched down and gave her cheek a playful pinch. "Your dad asked me to come. I checked in with Nonna first, then came straight over. Pretty loyal of me, right?"

"Oh! So Dad invited you?" Liora's eyes went wide with understanding.

"Yep." Levi grinned, then continued intentionally, his eyes flicking toward Elodie. "And since I heard your great-grandmother was leaving, I went ahead and let Uncle Harry and Aunt Sienna know. They're on their way here now. Should be arriving any minute. Isn't that exciting?"

His tone was casual. Too casual.

And the way he looked at Elodie when he said Aunt Sienna made it crystal clear who that little announcement was really for.

Liora's face brightened immediately. She opened her mouth to respond with enthusiasm, but then she hesitated, her eyes darting up to Elodie.

Elodie caught the look and felt something twist in her chest.

But she didn't let it show.

Instead, she reached down and ruffled Liora's hair gently, her smile soft and practiced. "You all have fun, sweetheart. I'm going to head back to my room."

She didn't look at Dante. Didn't look at Levi. Just turned on her heel and walked away, her spine straight, her expression unreadable.

---

Dante watched her go.

Her face had been completely blank. Cold, even. None of the tension or unease she used to show whenever Sienna's name came up. No flinch. No hesitation.

It was like she didn't care anymore.

And for some reason, that bothered him more than he wanted to admit.

Liora was still standing there, so he couldn't say anything. But Levi, never one to miss an opportunity, leaned in close and lowered his voice.

"What the hell is going on with you two?"

Dante's expression didn't change. His tone stayed flat. "Did you come alone?"

Levi blinked, caught off guard. Then he grinned. "Of course not. Who comes to a hot springs resort alone? I brought my precious little firecracker with me."

He started to elaborate, but then paused, narrowing his eyes at Dante. "Wait a minute. You're changing the subject."

Dante didn't deny it. He just tilted his head slightly toward the entrance. "Your precious one just arrived."

Levi turned.

And sure enough, walking toward them with long, confident strides, was a tall, curvaceous woman wearing nothing but a bikini under a white bathrobe and with a smile that could stop traffic.

Levi's grin widened. "There she is."

But Dante wasn't looking at her.

He was still staring at the spot where Elodie had disappeared, his jaw tight, something unreadable flickering behind his eyes.

Back in her room, Elodie had changed into comfortable clothes, soft leggings and an oversized sweater and settled at the small round table by the window. Her laptop was open in front of her, screen glowing with research notes from the recent tech exhibition.

She was digging deeper into the exhibits, cross-referencing data, looking for patterns. Looking for something.

Half an hour later, after combining everything she'd gathered over the past few days, an idea struck her.

She grabbed her phone and called Johnny.

"Are you free?"

There was loud music in the background, laughter, the clink of glasses. "I'm at a masquerade party. What's up?"

Elodie explained her idea quickly, her words tumbling out faster than usual because she knew... knew this could be something.

Johnny's voice shifted immediately. Turned serious and excited. "Hold on. I'm heading back right now."

"Okay."

She hung up and dove back into her work, her fingers flying over the keyboard.

Time slipped away unnoticed.

Then she heard voices drifting up from downstairs. They were loud and familiar.

Elodie paused, her hands stilling over the keys.

Harry and Sienna must've arrived.

She stood, walked to the window, and closed it. Shutting out the noise. Shutting out the reminder of who was down there and why.

Her stomach growled.

She hadn't eaten since breakfast, and the pastry at the hot springs barely counted. She picked up the internal phone and ordered a meal to be sent to her room.

The staff agreed immediately.

---

Downstairs, the staff member was walking through the lobby with a covered tray when he crossed paths with Dante and the others.

Levi glanced at the tray, then at the staff member. "Who's that for?"

The staff straightened slightly, clearly aware of who he was addressing. "It's for Madam."

Madam. Only Elodie would be called that here. Only the Alpha's wife.

Levi's eyebrows lifted, but he didn't press further. Neither did the others. They let the staff continue on his way.

But once he was out of earshot, Levi turned to Dante with a grin. "Guess we won't have to invite her down for dinner after all."

Dante's expression didn't change. His voice was calm. "We should still invite her."

Sienna froze mid-step, her eyes flicking to Dante.

Harry and Levi both looked at him, surprised.

Levi recovered first, laughing it off. "Right, right. Nonna did tell you to take care of her. If we all eat without inviting her, and Nonna finds out? We're screwed."

After all, this was the Bellini family's private resort. Nonna had people everywhere. Any movement they made would likely get back to her.

Sienna's shoulders relaxed slightly. She'd thought just for a second that Nonna's matchmaking efforts were actually getting to Dante. That maybe he was starting to care about Elodie.

But Levi's words reminded her: this wasn't about care. This was about obligation. About keeping up appearances.

She pressed her lips together and said nothing.

Harry looked away, his jaw tight.

Just then, Liora came bounding back from wherever she'd wandered off to, her face flushed with excitement.

Dante reached down and ruffled her hair. "Go upstairs and ask your mom to come down for dinner."

Liora froze.

Her smile faltered, confusion flickering across her face. "You want me to ask Mom to come eat with us?"

"Yes."

Liora opened her mouth like she was about to say something, then stopped. Her gaze shifted to Sienna, uncertainty written all over her face.

Because the truth was, Liora didn't understand.

She didn't understand why her dad wanted her mom there when Aunt Sienna was already here. She didn't understand why things felt so complicated all the time. She didn't understand why her mom always looked so sad, even when she smiled.

And she didn't know how to ask.

Dante noticed the hesitation. His expression didn't change, but his voice softened, just barely. "Go on, Lio."

## **Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 118 - 119 [ 1,414 words ]**

*Chapter 118: Chapter 119*

Liora didn't want her mom to come down. She really didn't.

If Elodie joined them, there would be tension. Awkwardness. The kind of heavy silence that would settle over a table like fog, making it hard to breathe. Her mom and Aunt Sienna in the same room

never ended well, and Liora had learned, even without anyone ever telling her directly, that it was just easier when they stayed apart.

Sienna smiled warmly at her, her voice encouraging her. "Go ahead, sweetheart."

Liora hesitated for just a moment longer, then turned and headed upstairs.

When she reached her mother's door, she pressed the doorbell and waited, shifting her weight from foot to foot.

Inside, Elodie had already started eating. She glanced at the monitor in the living room and saw her daughter standing outside.

She set down her bowl and walked to the door, opening it with a gentle smile. "Liora?"

Liora bit her lip, looking up at her mom with wide, guilty eyes. "Dad told me to ask you to come downstairs and eat with us."

Elodie's smile didn't falter. She shook her head lightly. "I've already started eating, sweetheart. You all go ahead."

Relief flooded Liora's face immediately. Her shoulders relaxed, and she nodded quickly. "Okay. I'll tell Dad you're eating."

Elodie could see the relief, the eagerness to get back downstairs where the laughter and warmth were. Where Sienna was. She watched her daughter's expression carefully, keeping her own face soft and unbothered.

"Mm. Go ahead," she said quietly.

Liora smiled brightly and turned to leave. But after two steps, she paused, glancing back over her shoulder.

"Mom... are you sure you're okay by yourself? Do you want me to stay with you?"

The offer hung in the air between them.

Liora's tone was careful. Forced. Like she was saying the words because she thought she should, not because she wanted to. Her eyes kept darting back toward the stairs, toward the sound of voices and laughter drifting up from below.

Elodie could see it all so clearly. The guilt. The obligation. The part of her daughter that wanted to be a good girl, a good daughter but also wanted to be downstairs, where things were easier, where she didn't have to navigate the minefield of her parents' broken marriage.

And Elodie didn't want that.

She didn't need forced company. Didn't need her daughter sitting with her out of pity or duty, watching the clock and wishing she were somewhere else.

She crouched down, her smile was soft and genuine, and touched Liora's cheek gently. "It's fine, baby. I actually like being alone sometimes. You go have fun."

Liora's guilt visibly melted away. Her smile returned, widely. "Okay! I'm going then."

"Go ahead."

Liora turned and bolted down the hallway.

Elodie stood there for a moment, watching her daughter disappear around the corner. Then she closed the door quietly and returned to her meal.

---

Downstairs, Liora ran up to Dante, slightly breathless. "Dad, Mom's already eating, so she's not coming down."

Levi raised an eyebrow, a smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth. Smart move, Elodie.

Harry looked down at his plate, his jaw tight, saying nothing.

Sienna's lips curved into a subtle smile, satisfaction flickering in her eyes.

She'd known all along that Elodie wouldn't come down. Why would she? No one here truly wanted her. And even if she had come down, all she would've gotten was cold stares and barely concealed contempt. Whispers behind hands. Levi's sarcastic comments. Liora's discomfort.

Better to stay upstairs. Better to hide.

Like a turtle retreating into its shell.

Sienna's smile deepened.

Dante nodded once, his expression unreadable. "Alright. I understand."

He didn't push. Didn't insist. Didn't even glance toward the stairs.

He just turned to the others and said flatly, "Let's eat. No need to wait."

Sienna's smile widened as she gracefully slid into the seat beside him, her hand brushing his arm briefly, just enough to stake her claim.

Levi watched the whole thing with thinly veiled amusement, lifting his glass in a silent toast.

Harry stared at his plate, his knuckles white where they gripped his fork.

After finishing her meal, Elodie cleared the dishes to the side and returned to her laptop. The screen glowed in the dim room, several lines of code and research notes filling the display.

Her phone buzzed and Johnny's name lit up the screen.

"I'm home," he said immediately. "Walk me through it again."

Elodie launched into her explanation, her voice gaining momentum as she outlined the new ideas that had crystallized in her mind over the past hour. The connections she'd made. The potential applications. The way everything could fit together if they just follow some protocols.

"Oh my GOD!" Johnny's voice exploded through the speaker, so loud that Elodie had to yank the phone away from her ear. "GENIUS! You are an absolute GENIUS in this field! I knew it! I knew you still had it!"

She could hear him pounding his desk on the other end in joy, the sound echoing through his apartment.

Then his voice shifted, dropping into something more bitter. "Seven years, Elodie. Seven years. If you hadn't run off to get married, our company could've been world-famous by now. We could've been—"

He stopped himself.

There was a heavy pause, and Elodie could practically hear him wincing at his own words.

"Sorry," he muttered. "That was... sorry. Let's just focus on the work."

Elodie's jaw tightened, but she didn't respond to the apology. What was there to say? He wasn't wrong.

Johnny cleared his throat and pushed forward. "Alright. To pull this off, we can't do it alone. We need the team."

Within minutes, he was calling in the others, Simon and a few other colleagues from Cole Technologies. Johnny explained that while their expertise in AI wasn't quite at his and Elodie's level, they were solid. Competent. Eager.

And after Johnny walked them through the core concepts, their excitement became evident even through the screen.

They were all in.

Ideally, they would've met in person for something this complex. Face-to-face discussions were always better for ironing out details. But getting everyone back to the office would take at least two hours, and the momentum was too good to waste.

So they set up a video conference instead.

As the others logged in one by one, their faces popping up in little squares on Elodie's screen, Johnny suddenly asked, "Wait. Are you alone in your room right now?"

"Yeah," Elodie said, not looking up from her notes.

"What about your husband? And everyone else?"

"They're eating, I think."

"Just him and Liora?"

"No. Sienna, Levi, Harry, they're all there."

There was a beat of silence.

Then Johnny's voice came through, filled with incredulity. "They're all downstairs, and you're up here by yourself?"

"They invited me," Elodie said calmly. "I said no."

Another pause.

"Well," Johnny said slowly, his tone grudging, "at least Dante had the decency to invite you. That's... something, I guess."

Elodie's lips pressed into a thin line.

She didn't feel the same way.

Dante hadn't invited her because he wanted her there. He'd done it to cover his bases. To make sure that if Nonna asked later, he could say he'd tried. That he'd done his duty.

And even if she had gone downstairs, it wouldn't have mattered.

With Levi's sarcasm, Sienna's smug smiles, Harry's careful indifference, and Liora's divided loyalty, Elodie would've been surrounded by people who either didn't want her there or didn't know what to do with her.

She would've sat at that table, invisible and unwanted, while everyone else laughed and talked around her like she was a piece of furniture.

So no.

She didn't think Dante inviting her was particularly considerate.

She thought it was performative.

And she was tired of performing.

"Let's just get to work," Elodie said quietly, pulling up the presentation she'd been building.

Johnny must've heard something in her tone, because he didn't push.

"Yeah," he said. "Let's do this."

And for the next few hours, Elodie lost herself in the work. In the ideas. In the one thing that had never let her down.

Downstairs, they were probably still laughing. Still eating. Still pretending she didn't exist.

But up here, in the quietness of her room, and surrounded by people who saw her for what she could do instead of who she'd failed to be... She felt alive.

## **Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 119 - 120 [ 1,628 words ]**

*Chapter 119: Chapter 120*

Elodie's POV~

After four hours of nonstop work, my brain felt like it was going to short-circuit. The screen had started blurring together, and even Johnny's voice was beginning to sound like white noise.

"Alright, let's take a break," he said, and I could hear the exhaustion in his tone too. "We'll pick this up again in two hours."

"Sounds good," I muttered, closing my laptop and rubbing my eyes.

I sat there for a moment, staring at the wall, trying to process everything we'd just covered. My thoughts were tangled, overlapping, refusing to settle into any kind of order.

I needed air.

I grabbed my coat and decided to head outside. Maybe I'd pick some apples while I was at it, then bring them back for Johnny and the others tomorrow. A small gesture, but it felt like something normal to do. Something that didn't involve divorce papers or cold marriages or half-sisters stealing my life.

The resort was massive, sprawling across the mountainside. I had no idea where Dante and the others were, and honestly, I didn't care. I slipped downstairs without running into anyone, which felt like a small mercy.

The sky was still light, painted in shades of gold and pink as the sun started to descend. I grabbed two staff members to help me with the baskets and headed up the mountain trail.

The air was crispy there, it was biting at my cheeks, but I was bundled up in a thick coat, so the cold didn't bother me much. If anything, it felt good. Like it was washing away the fog in my head.

We picked apples for a while, the staff helping me fill two or three crates. My hands got sticky with juice, and I could smell the sweet, earthy scent of the fruit mixing with the pine trees around us.

When we finished, I didn't want to go back down just yet.

The sunset was too beautiful to waste.

So I sat down on a flat rock near the edge of the trail, pulled my knees up to my chest, and just... watched as the sky bled orange and red, and the mountains dark silhouettes against the fading light.

For a moment, I let myself breathe.

Then I heard footsteps and a familiar, bright voice that belonged to a child and I turned around.

And there was Harry Becker.

He stopped mid-step when he saw me, his eyes widening just a fraction. Clearly, he hadn't expected to run into me either.

The tiny and excited voice came again through his phone. "Auntie!"

I blinked, realizing he was on a video call. The camera was pointed at the apple trees, and I could just make out the outline of a little girl on the screen.

Oh... it was Daisy.

Harry had been showing her the apples, telling her he'd bring some back tomorrow. And now here I was, sitting in the middle of his shot like some kind of awkward extra.

I felt my face go blank immediately, my walls slamming back into place.

We'd met a few times now. He'd helped me more than once, at the car accident, at the hot springs when I'd pulled Daisy out of the water. But that didn't mean I wanted to be close to him. Didn't mean I wanted to let him in.

I didn't let anyone in anymore.

But then I heard Daisy's voice again, calling out happily, and something in my chest softened.

Just a little though.

Harry must've noticed the shift in my expression, because he stayed where he was, a few meters away, respecting the distance.

"Daisy wants to talk to you," he said carefully. "Would you be willing?"

I hesitated. But then I remembered her sweet, little, chubby, cute face that seemed to melt my own heart. Her innocent eyes tugged at my soul's string and made me want to pull the little girl into my own body and merge her with me for some unknown reason but I couldn't. I couldn't because... oh well...

And I appreciated how kind that little sunshine had been to me, that had been more than I could put into words.

So I nodded.

Harry walked over slowly, holding out his phone. But he didn't come too close. He stopped a respectful distance away, like he knew I needed space.

I took the phone and angled it so Daisy could see my face.

"Hi, sweetheart," I said, and my voice came out softer than I expected.

Daisy's face lit up on the screen. "Auntie! You're there! Uncle Harry didn't tell me you were coming!"

I smiled despite myself. "I didn't know he'd be here either."

She giggled. "Are you picking apples too?"

"I just finished, actually. Got a whole bunch."

"Can you show me?"

I turned the camera toward the crates behind me, and Daisy made an exaggerated gasp. "Wow! That's so many!"

We talked for a while, about the sunset, about her grandmother, about how she wished she could've come to the resort but had to stay home this time. Her voice was bright, and for those ten minutes, I felt... lighter.

Like I wasn't carrying quite so much weight.

When we finally said goodbye, I handed the phone back to Harry.

Our fingers brushed briefly, and I pulled my hand back quickly, shoving it into my coat pocket.

Harry looked at me for a moment, his expression unreadable.

Then he said quietly, "Thank you. For talking to her. She really likes you."

I shrugged, looking away. "She's a good kid. You don't even need to thank me."

---

By the time they made it back to the resort, the sky had turned completely dark. But the mountain path was lit with soft, golden streetlights that made the descent easy enough.

Elodie hesitated for just a moment at the top of the trail, then turned and started walking down.

Harry followed.

He didn't say anything. Didn't try to fill the silence with small talk or pleasantries. He just walked a few paces behind her, keeping his footsteps quiet on the stone path.

The silence between them wasn't uncomfortable. It wasn't warm either. It just... was... there.

Neither of them spoke the entire way down.

As they approached the entrance to the resort, the warm glow of the lobby spilling out onto the pathway, they were about to step inside when a figure appeared in front of them.

Sienna.

She stopped dead in her tracks, her eyes widening as she took in the sight of Elodie and Harry, walking side by side down the mountain, alone together in the near-darkness.

Her lips pressed into a tight, thin line.

Elodie didn't even glance at her. She just walked past her, her expression blank, her shoulders straight, and disappeared into the lobby without a word.

Sienna stood there, staring after her, her jaw tight.

Then she turned to Harry, her brow furrowing. "Harry, you two..."

Harry's expression didn't change. His tone was calm, unbothered. "We ran into each other on the mountain."

Sienna knew he'd been on a video call with Daisy earlier, showing her the apple trees. So it made sense they'd cross paths if Elodie had been up there too.

Still, something about it gnawed at her.

She relaxed slightly, but before she could press further, Harry cut in. "Where is everyone?"

"By the pavilion," Sienna said, her voice smoothing out. "The bonfire feast is ready. They were about to call you."

"Got it."

The two of them walked toward the pavilion together, the gravel crunching softly under their feet.

---

The bonfire was already roaring by the time they arrived, the flames licking at the night sky, the sparks dancing upward.

The long table beside it was loaded with fresh ingredients, filled with thick cuts of meat, skewers of vegetables, bowls of marinated chicken, burrata salad glistening with olive oil. Everything was prepped and ready to go.

Levi and a few others had already started eating, dipping pieces of spicy bobo chicken into the broth and stuffing their faces with zero shame.

When Harry and Sienna arrived, Levi looked up, grinning. "Finally! We were about to send a search party."

Sienna slid into the seat beside Dante, her hand brushing his arm briefly as she settled in.

Dante glanced at her, nodded once, then turned his attention back to the fire.

Levi took another bite, chewed thoughtfully, then looked around the table. His gaze landed on the empty seat across from him.

He frowned.

"Wait," he said, turning to Liora. "Lio, can you go upstairs and get your mom? Tell her we've got good food down here. She should come eat with us."

He doubted Elodie would actually come down, just like she hadn't at lunch but they had to at least try. For appearances. For Nonna.

Sienna understood immediately. She looked at Liora, her smile encouraging this time. "Go ahead, sweetheart."

Liora's face fell.

She didn't want her mom to come down. She really didn't.

If her mom joined them, it would get awkward. Tense. Everyone would be walking on eggshells, and the whole vibe would shift. It was easier when she stayed upstairs. When she wasn't there.

But everyone was looking at her now, waiting.

She sighed and started to put down her drink, resigning herself to the task.

Then Dante spoke.

"I'll go."

The words landed like a stone dropped into still water and everyone froze.

Levi's fork stopped mid-air. Sienna's smile faltered, her eyes snapping to Dante in confusion. Harry looked up sharply, his gaze narrowing.

Even Liora stared at her father, her mouth slightly open.

Dante stood, brushing off his jeans, his expression as unreadable as ever. "I'll bring her down."

## **Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 120 - 121[ 1,556 words ]**

*Chapter 120: Chapter 121*

Dante stood without another word and walked toward the stairs.

The silence that followed was thick, and awkward. Everyone at the table exchanged glances, unsure of what to make of it.

After a beat, Levi broke the tension with a grin. "Well... it's definitely more sincere when Dante does the asking."

It was true. When a kid asked, it could sound halfhearted. Obligatory. But when the Alpha himself went upstairs to personally invite someone? That carried weight.

Sienna understood the logic.

But she wasn't concerned. Not really.

Dante's purpose was simple: to cover his bases with Nonna. Going upstairs to call Elodie didn't mean anything beyond that. It was just another performance. Another box to check.

He'd never had feelings for Elodie. And he certainly didn't now.

She relaxed slightly, picking up her drink.

But Liora wasn't relaxed at all.

Her small hands gripped the edge of the table, her lips pressed into a tight, anxious line. She was worried. Really worried.

Because if her dad was the one asking, her mom might actually come down.

After all, her mom had always listened to her dad. Even when it hurt her.

---

Upstairs, Elodie had ordered a light meal to her room and was back at her laptop, fingers flying over the keyboard as she refined her notes.

She was so absorbed in her work that she didn't hear the door open at first.

Then the sound registered.

She looked up.

And there was Dante, stepping into the room with a key card in his hand.

She assumed he'd come back to grab something, his phone, maybe, or a jacket, so she gave him a quick glance and returned her attention to the screen.

But before she could type another word, he spoke.

"The bonfire feast downstairs is pretty lively. You should come join us."

Elodie's hands stilled on the keyboard.

She looked at him properly this time, her expression carefully neutral.

Just like Levi, she assumed Dante had only come upstairs to appease Nonna. To say he'd tried. To check the box so he could report back later that yes, he'd invited her, and no, it wasn't his fault she didn't come.

It didn't mean anything.

And even if it did mean something, she didn't care anymore.

"I still have work to do," she said evenly. "So I won't be coming down."

Then, as if to make it easier for him, she added, "Don't worry. If Nonna asks, I'll back you up."

For a moment, Dante said nothing.

Then, to her surprise, he smiled.

It was a small smile that was fleeting. But it was there.

And his eyes, those dark, unreadable eyes of his lingered on her in a way that made her stomach twist.

Elodie felt a flicker of unease.

They'd known each other for years. Been married for even longer. But she still couldn't read him. His emotions were always veiled, locked behind walls she'd never been able to scale.

She had no idea what he was thinking.

In the past, she might have tried to figure it out. Might have searched his face for clues, asked careful questions, tried to decode the mystery of Dante Wilson.

But now?

Now she didn't have the energy.

She pressed her lips together and held firm. "Thank you for coming to get me. But I don't want to go."

Dante's smile deepened just barely and something flickered in his eyes. Something she couldn't name.

"Understood," he said quietly.

And then, without another word, he turned and left the room.

The door clicked shut behind him, and Elodie sat there, staring at the space he'd just occupied, her heart beating a little too fast.

What the hell was that?

---

By the time Dante returned downstairs, everyone was already eating, their plates piled high with grilled meat and salad.

They all looked up when they saw him walking back alone.

Surprise flickered across their faces.

They'd expected that since Dante had personally gone upstairs, Elodie would've come down. That she wouldn't have been able to refuse him.

Harry set down his drink, his brow furrowing slightly. "She didn't come?"

"No," Dante said simply.

Then he turned to one of the staff members standing nearby. "Please bring a portion of the barbecue, a pancake, and the burrata salad to my wife's room."

The words landed like a bomb.

‘My wife.’

Sienna’s entire body went rigid.

Her lips pressed into a thin, tight line, her fingers curling around her glass hard enough that her knuckles went white.

Levi’s eyebrows shot up, but he said nothing.

Harry looked away, his jaw tight.

Elodie not coming downstairs and Dante having food sent to her room didn’t really mean anything.

At least, that’s what Sienna told herself.

But still... She didn’t like the way he’d said it. ‘My wife.’

Like he was claiming her. Like he was acknowledging that Elodie was his wife, even though everyone knew they shared nothing beyond a legal document and a cold bed.

Sienna’s fingers tightened around her glass.

But then, after a moment, logic settled back in.

The staff probably didn’t know Elodie’s name. If Dante hadn’t said "my wife," how else would they have known who to deliver the food to?

It was practical. Nothing more.

She relaxed, just slightly, and took a sip of her drink.

---

Upstairs, Elodie was starting to feel the hollow ache of real hunger.

She’d been so absorbed in her work that she’d barely noticed the time slipping away. But now her stomach was making itself known, insistent and impossible to ignore.

The doorbell rang.

She stood, stretched, and opened the door to find a staff member waiting with a covered tray.

"Your meal, ma’am," he said politely, wheeling a small cart into the room.

Elodie frowned. She’d ordered something simple earlier, a soup, maybe a sandwich. But as the staff began uncovering the dishes, her confusion deepened.

Pancakes. Burrata salad glistening with olive oil and herbs. Perfectly grilled skewers of meat, still warm and fragrant.

The rich aroma filled the room, and despite herself, Elodie's mouth watered.

But this wasn't what she'd ordered.

"I think there's been a mistake," she said, stepping closer. "I didn't order these."

The staff member shook his head with a polite smile. "No mistake, ma'am. These were sent up for you."

Elodie blinked. "Sent up? By who?"

"By the Alpha, ma'am."

Her stomach did a strange little flip.

Dante.

She stared at the spread of food, her mind racing. Why would he send this? Was it guilt? Obligation? Another performance for Nonna's benefit?

She didn't know.

And she hated that she cared.

The staff finished setting everything out and left quietly, closing the door behind him.

Elodie stood there for a moment, staring at the food.

She should've refused it. Should've sent it back.

But it smelled so good.

And she was so hungry.

Fine, she thought. I'll eat it. But only because I'm starving.

She sat down, intending to eat quickly and get back to work.

But the food was incredible.

The pancake was fluffy and rich, the salad fresh and tangy, the grilled meat perfectly seasoned. These were high-quality ingredients, things she rarely treated herself to.

Before she knew it, she'd eaten far more than she'd planned.

By the time she finally set her fork down, the meeting time was approaching, and she was still chewing her last bite.

She wiped her mouth, pushed the dishes aside, and opened her laptop.

Johnny's face popped up on the screen immediately.

"Elodie! I need those files—" He stopped mid-sentence, his eyes widening. "Wait. What are you eating? That looks amazing."

Elodie angled the camera slightly so he could see the spread still laid out on the table.

"Holy shit," Johnny breathed. "Is that burrata? And wait, is that grilled lamb?"

A few of the other team members joined the call, and their reactions were similar with shock, envy, and immediate curiosity.

"Are you just starting to eat?" one of them asked.

Elodie smiled faintly. "No, I'm almost done."

Johnny leaned closer to his screen, squinting. "You're eating all that by yourself?"

Elodie hesitated. "I didn't order it."

Johnny's expression shifted immediately. Understanding dawned. "Your husband ordered it for you?"

"Mm. He had someone bring it up."

There was a pause.

Then Johnny grinned. "Well, at least he's got some conscience."

Elodie didn't respond to that.

She knew the truth. This wasn't about concern. This was about keeping up appearances. About making sure that if Nonna asked, Dante could say he'd taken care of her.

It didn't mean anything.

She pushed the thought aside and focused on the screen. "Let's get started."

The meeting ran late, well past 10 p.m. but no one seemed willing to stop. The energy was good, the ideas flowing, and Elodie was fully immersed in the work, her fingers flying over the keyboard as she pulled up files and charts.

She didn't hear the door open.

Didn't notice someone step inside.

It wasn't until Johnny's voice cut through the discussion that she looked up.

"Uh, Elodie? Is someone there?"

She turned. And there was Dante.

Standing just inside the doorway, his hands in his pockets, his dark eyes fixed on her.

Her heart did a stupid, traitorous little jump.

The room suddenly felt smaller.