

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 121 - 122 [1,602 words]

Chapter 121: Chapter 122

Elodie's pov~

Since my desk was positioned right where the camera could catch the door, I realized immediately that Dante had walked in.

I adjusted the angle quickly, tilting the laptop just enough to keep him out of frame.

But it wasn't fast enough.

The camera had already caught him, his tall, poised, radiating figure that gave that quiet authority he carried everywhere like a second skin. My colleagues couldn't see his face, but they'd seen enough.

I knew what they were thinking.

Most of them had assumed, at some point, that there was something between Johnny and me. The late nights. The easy banter. The way we worked together like two halves of the same brain.

Then they'd found out I was married. With a daughter. A whole life they knew nothing about.

I never talked about my personal life. Never brought it up. Never gave them anything to latch onto.

So now, seeing a glimpse of my husband, my actual husband, they were curious. I could feel it through the screen.

What kind of man marries someone like Elodie?

Beautiful, they'd said once. Talented. Driven.

So what kind of man could handle that?

I felt their eyes on me, waiting for me to say something. Waiting for me to slip.

But before anyone could tease me, Dante spoke.

"Still working?"

His voice was low, and calm. It was a kind of voice that made rooms go quiet.

I turned to look at him, keeping my expression neutral. "Mm."

He nodded once, like that was all the answer he needed. Then he walked past me to the wardrobe, pulled out some clothes, and disappeared into the bathroom.

I stared at the closed door for a second longer than I should have, then forced myself to turn back to the screen.

Two of my female colleagues were already grinning.

"Your husband's voice is so nice," one of them said, drawing out the words like she was savoring them.

I felt my face heat up. Great.

"Thank you..." I muttered, wishing I could melt into the floor.

The meeting dragged on, but I could feel the exhaustion settling into everyone's bones. We'd been at this for hours, and while the adrenaline was still there, we all knew we needed to stop before we burned out.

Johnny finally called it. "Alright, let's pick this up tomorrow. Go get some sleep, people."

There were murmurs of agreement, a few groans of relief, and then one by one, the little boxes on my screen started disappearing.

I was about to close my laptop when I heard the bathroom door open.

Dante stepped out, his hair still damp, a towel slung over his shoulder. He was wearing sweats and a T-shirt, and he looked... relaxed. Almost normal.

I tried not to stare.

I was still working, still had my notes open, still had things to organize, when I heard the sound of little feet running down the hallway.

"Mommy—!"

Liora's voice rang out.

I turned just as she burst through the door, but before I could say anything, Dante cut in.

"Mommy is working."

Liora skidded to a halt, her eyes wide. She looked at me, then at Dante, then seemed to decide that Daddy's word was final.

She walked over to him instead, leaning in close and whispering, though not quietly enough for me to miss it.

"Daddy, can I sleep with Aunt Sienna tonight?"

My hands stilled on the keyboard.

Dante nodded without hesitation. "Sure."

Liora's face lit up, and she threw her arms around his neck, forgetting to keep her voice down. "Thank you, Daddy!"

I closed my laptop slowly, carefully, and stood up.

I was going to say something, ask her if she'd brushed her teeth, maybe, or remind her to say goodnight but then I saw movement at the door.

Sienna. Sienna was standing there, leaning against the doorframe with that soft, knowing smile on her face.

My stomach twisted.

Dante and Liora both noticed her at the same time.

Dante stood, gently setting Liora down, and walked toward the door.

He didn't look back.

A moment later, the two of them left together.

Sienna's laughter echoed faintly down the hallway.

Liora hesitated, glancing between me and the door. She looked like she wanted to follow them, but something in my expression made her pause.

"Mommy..." she said quietly, her voice small.

I forced myself to look away, to focus on tidying the papers scattered across my desk. "Did you shower?"

"Yeah."

I didn't ask who'd helped her. Didn't ask if it had been Sabina or Sienna or someone else entirely.

I didn't want to know.

"Are you tired?" I asked instead, keeping my voice light.

"A little..."

"Then go to sleep, sweetheart."

Liora's shoulders relaxed, relief flooding her face. "Okay. You get some rest too, Mommy."

"Mm, I will. Good night, sweetheart."

"Good night, Mommy."

Liora came over and wrapped her arms around me, squeezing tight for just a second before pulling away. Then she turned and practically skipped out of the room, her footsteps light and happy as she disappeared down the hallway.

I stood there for a moment, listening to the sound fade.

Then I moved.

I grabbed my clothes from the dresser and headed toward the bathroom, already mentally checking out. I needed a hot shower. Clean pajamas. Maybe I'd read for a bit before bed, let my brain decompress from the chaos of the day.

But when Dante and Liora had left earlier, they hadn't closed the door.

I walked over to shut it, my hand already reaching for the handle and nearly collided with Dante.

He was right there. Standing in the doorway like he'd materialized out of thin air.

I stopped short, my breath catching. "Oh—"

He stepped inside without a word, moving past me like it was the most natural thing in the world.

I took a step back, giving him space, assuming he'd come back to grab something. His luggage was still here, after all. Probably forgot his phone charger or his watch or— But then he closed the door.

Not halfway. Not leaving it cracked. He closed it!

My brain stuttered.

Wait. What?

He wasn't leaving. He was staying.

I stood there, frozen, watching as he walked further into the room and sat down on the edge of the bed, completely at ease.

Like this was normal. Like we did this every night.

What the hell is happening?

I opened my mouth to say something, anything, but the words died in my throat because that's when I smelled a perfume.

It was not mine. It was Sienna's. And it was unmistakable light and floral.

My stomach clenched.

I looked at him more closely, my eyes tracing over his shoulders, the back of his neck and there it was.

A smudge of lipstick. Faint, but still visible. Right at the base of his neck, just above the collar of his T-shirt.

The shirt he'd changed into after his shower.

Which meant this was fresh. Which meant—

My brain connected the dots brutally and fast. He'd gone to Sienna's room. Or she'd come to his. And they'd kissed. Maybe more. Probably more.

And now he was here. In our room.

Smelling like her. Marked by her.

I felt something sharp and ugly and hot and suffocating twist in my chest. But I shoved it down. Buried it. Locked it away.

You don't get to care about this. You don't get to feel anything.

I forced myself to move, grabbing my things and heading toward the bathroom.

"I'm going to shower," I said, my voice flat.

Dante didn't respond.

The water was scalding, but I didn't turn it down.

I stood under the spray, letting it burn, letting it drown out the noise in my head.

He kissed her. He came back here smelling like her. And he doesn't even care that you know.

I scrubbed at my skin harder than necessary, like I could wash away the image of them together. Like I could erase the fact that my husband... my husband... had just walked into our shared bedroom with another woman's lipstick on his neck.

By the time I stepped out, my skin was pink and raw, and I felt hollowed out.

I dried off, pulled on my pajamas, and stepped back into the bedroom.

Dante was still sitting on the bed.

But now he was reading a book. No, my book!

I stopped mid-step, my eyes narrowing.

It was one I'd brought with me, it was a technical manual I'd been annotating. Nothing personal, but still. It was mine. And he'd just... helped himself.

Without asking. My jaw tightened.

Dante must've felt my stare because he looked up, his expression calm. Too calm.

"Do you mind?" he asked.

Yes. Yes, I mind.

But I bit back the immediate response and forced myself to breathe.

I looked at the book again. There were a few notes in the margins, nothing sensitive, nothing related to company secrets. Just my thoughts on a few concepts.

"A little," I said finally, my voice tight.

Dante's eyes stayed on mine for a beat longer than necessary.

Then he nodded. "Okay. I'll ask next time."

Next time?

I almost laughed.

There wasn't going to be a next time. This... being stuck in the same room, forced to coexist like some twisted parody of a marriage, this was a fluke. A necessity because Nonna was watching.

Once we were back home, once the divorce papers were signed, there would be no more "next times."

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Chapter 122: Chapter 123

Dante had already turned his attention back to the book, his fingers tracing the edge of a page. Then, almost absently, he said, "Your annotations are quite good."

It was a simple and straightforward compliment. But Elodie didn't acknowledge it.

She grabbed the hairdryer without a word and disappeared back into the bathroom, the door clicking shut behind her.

The sound of the dryer hummed through the wall as Dante sat there, the book still open in his lap, his eyes fixed on her handwriting in the margins.

They were thoughtful. Brilliant even.

He'd known she was smart. But seeing her thought process laid out like this, so raw and unfiltered, reminded him of just how much he'd underestimated her.

Or maybe forgotten.

By the time Elodie finished her skincare routine and climbed into bed, Dante was still reading. She settled on her side, her back to him, and within minutes, her breathing had evened out.

She was asleep.

Dante glanced at her, just once, then returned to the book.

He stayed up longer than he'd planned, reading her notes, following the trail of her thoughts.

And when he finally put the book down and turned off the light, he didn't sleep right away either.

The next morning, Elodie woke to the pale gold light of early sunrise filtering through the curtains.

The room was quiet.

Too quiet.

She turned her head.

The other side of the bed was empty and cold. Like no one had been there at all.

Her jaw tightened.

Of course. He hadn't slept here. He'd gone to Sienna's room instead. Couldn't even last one night without staying away from adultery.

She sat up, threw off the covers, and started packing her things quickly.

By the time she was showered, dressed, and ready to leave, the sun had fully risen, and the house was starting to stir.

She grabbed her suitcase and opened the door and heard Liora's voice down the hall.

"Aunt Sienna is so mean! She promised to sleep with me last night, but when I woke up in the middle of the night, she was gone. She went back to her own room!"

Liora was complaining to Sabina, her voice indignant and pouty.

Elodie stopped in her tracks.

Sienna left Liora's room in the middle of the night.

Which meant she'd gone to Dante's room.

Which meant they'd spent the night together.

Elodie's chest tightened, but she shoved the feeling down, buried it deep where it couldn't touch her.

You don't care. You don't get to care.

Liora spotted her then, her eyes widening. "Mommy?"

Elodie forced a smile, closing the door behind her. "I have work to do, sweetheart. You stay here and have fun with Daddy, okay?"

Liora nodded eagerly, relief flooding her face. "Okay! I'll stay here, Mommy."

Elodie walked past her, wheeling her suitcase toward the stairs.

She made it halfway down before she saw Dante and Sienna. They were standing together at the bottom of the stairs, close enough that their shoulders were almost touching. Sienna was laughing at something he'd said, her hand resting lightly on his arm.

Dante looked up as Elodie descended, his eyes landing on the suitcase in her hand.

"You're leaving?" he asked.

Elodie's expression didn't change. "Yes."

"Did you call for a car?"

"Already done."

He nodded once. "Alright."

That was it.

No are you sure? No do you need help? No I'll walk you out.

Just... alright.

Elodie walked past them both without another word, stepped outside, and climbed into the waiting car. The door closed. And she was gone.

Later that afternoon, Levi finally rolled out of bed and made his way downstairs, looking disheveled and half-asleep.

He dropped into a chair at the lunch table, grabbed a piece of bread, and glanced around. "Where's Elodie?"

Dante didn't look up from his plate. "She left."

Levi blinked. "She left? When?"

"This morning. She had work."

Levi leaned back in his chair, a slow grin spreading across his face. "Work? Again? She was busy yesterday, and now she's busy today?"

He laughed, shaking his head. "Doesn't it seem like she can't function without Johnny Cole around?"

Harry, who had been quietly eating, went very still.

Levi didn't notice. He kept talking, his tone dripping with mockery. "I mean, let's be honest. She got in through the back door. She's not even a major shareholder. If she says she's busy, it's probably just an excuse to avoid being here."

He smirked. "And not even a good excuse."

Sienna, sitting just within earshot, caught Levi's implication immediately. She ducked her head slightly, hiding a smile behind her glass as she continued eating.

Meanwhile, Elodie had no idea what they were saying about her. She'd left the hot spring resort and driven straight to Cole Technologies, where she buried herself in work until the sky outside had turned dark and the office had emptied out around her.

Two days passed in a blur of code, meetings, and late nights.

Finally, just as she was packing up to head home, her phone rang. She glanced at it and saw it was her uncle, Jason.

Half an hour later, she pulled up to the Miller family house. The lights were warm and welcoming, spilling out onto the driveway. Inside, her uncle's family was waiting, his wife, and her two cousins, Xavier and Hugo.

The moment she stepped through the door, both boys lit up.

"Cousin!" they called out in unison, grinning.

Elodie's lips curved into a small, genuine smile. "Hey."

Hugo, the younger of the two, immediately looked past her toward the door. "Where's Liora? Didn't you say she came back to the Bellini Pack? Why didn't she come for dinner?"

"She's still at the hot springs," Elodie said lightly. "She hasn't come back yet."

"Oh..."

Hugo's face fell slightly, but he didn't press further. He probably assumed Liora had gone with Dante and was having too much fun to leave.

Elodie stepped inside, but as she moved toward the living room, something caught her eye.

The villa across the street.

Her villa now. The one Dante had put in her name.

She stopped mid-step, staring at it.

She'd forgotten to bring the keys when she'd gone to the resort. If she'd had them, she could've started clearing out the remnants the Green family had left behind. Could've gotten the renovations started.

Next time, she told herself.

Dinner was warm. Her uncle asked about work, Xavier talked about his latest project, and Hugo kept trying to steal food off everyone's plates.

It was... nice.

By the time they finished eating and moved to the living room for tea, it was nearly 9 p.m.

Elodie stood, smoothing down her skirt. "I should get going."

But before she could reach the door, Old Lady Miller appeared, her small, frail hand reaching out to clasp Elodie's.

"If the Bellini family doesn't want to come," the old woman said quietly, her voice firm despite her age, "don't force them. I'm not desperate for them to attend my birthday."

Elodie's chest tightened.

Her uncle had tried to be discreet earlier when he'd handed her the invitations, lowering his voice so the old lady wouldn't hear. But of course she'd heard.

She always heard.

"I understand, Grandmother," Elodie said softly.

Old Lady Miller and Nonna Wilson had been close friends for decades. Under normal circumstances, Nonna would absolutely attend the old lady's birthday banquet.

But there was a problem.

Nonna was older. And according to local customs, elders did not attend the birthday celebrations of those younger than them even by a few years. It was considered inappropriate.

In previous years, Old Lady Miller's birthday had been a quiet, low-key affair. Just family. A simple meal. Nothing extravagant.

And in all those years, Dante had never once attended.

At first, he'd used work as an excuse. He was busy. He had meetings. He couldn't get away.

But Elodie had known better.

Even when he wasn't busy, even when he had free time and was out with friends or traveling or doing anything but working, he still wouldn't come.

And every year, like a fool, she'd asked him anyway.

Will you be free on this date?

Can you come with me to my grandmother's birthday?

And every year, she'd been disappointed.

This year, she hadn't asked.

She wasn't going to.

But this year was different. This year, Old Lady Miller was celebrating a milestone birthday. And Jason had invited business partners. People from outside the family. People who mattered.

Which meant appearances mattered. And that made everything infinitely more complicated.

Old Lady Miller squeezed her hand gently, her eyes soft and sad. "You're a good girl, Elodie. Too good for that family."

Elodie's throat tightened, but she forced a smile. "I'll see you at the banquet, Grandmother."

"You'd better," the old woman said, her tone turning mock-stern. "And bring that little rascal Liora with you. I haven't seen her in weeks."

"I will."

Elodie kissed her grandmother's cheek, said her goodbyes to the rest of the family, and stepped out into the cool night air.

She stood on the front step for a moment, staring across the street at the darkened villa.

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Chapter 123: Chapter 124

Elodie's POV~

Even if Dante and I weren't officially divorced yet or even if we already were, I'd still have to invite the Bellini family. Nonna and my grandmother had been friends for decades. It was the polite thing to do. The expected thing.

Whether they actually showed up? That was on them.

I'd planned to go back to my own apartment tonight. I'd been looking forward to it, actually. Looking forward toward the silence, solitude, no reminders of everything I was losing over there.

But as I drove, my hands turned the wheel almost on autopilot.

And I ended up at Dante's villa instead.

Our villa, technically. Though it had never really felt like mine.

When I pulled into the driveway, the house was dark. No cars. No lights.

Dante and Liora were still at the hot springs, apparently. And Nonna had left for the old residence a few days ago to handle some Pack business.

I was alone.

I grabbed my bag, kicked off my shoes, and headed straight for the bathroom. The hot water felt like a small mercy, washing away the exhaustion that had settled into my bones over the past two days.

Half an hour later, I stepped out, wrapped in a towel, my skin still warm and pink from the steam.

That's when I heard the low rumble of a car engine and tires on gravel.

They were back.

I sat down at the vanity and turned on the hairdryer, the noise filling the room as I worked through the damp tangles.

I didn't feel anything. Just... this blankness.

Then I heard small, rapid footsteps approaching my direction.

The door burst open, and Liora came barreling in, throwing herself into my arms before I could even set the dryer down.

"Mom! We're back!"

I caught her instinctively, my arms wrapping around her small frame.

And that's when I smelled Sienna's perfume. All over her. My chest tightened, but I kept my face neutral. I turned off the hairdryer and gently cupped Liora's cheek, brushing a strand of hair out of her eyes.

"Have you taken a shower yet, baby?"

She shook her head, grinning. "Not yet."

"It's past ten. You have school tomorrow. Go get your pajamas and take a shower, okay?"

"Okay! But—" She tugged on my sleeve, her eyes wide and hopeful. "Can you help me?"

I hesitated for just a second, then nodded. "Let me finish drying my hair first."

"Yay!" She bounced out of the room, her energy boundless despite the late hour.

And that's when I saw Dante. He was standing in the doorway, watching me.

Our eyes met for a split second, and I felt that familiar sharp jolt but I looked away first, turning back to the mirror and flipping the hairdryer back on.

He walked into the room, his footsteps quiet on the carpet. "When did you get back?"

"Not long ago," I said, keeping my voice flat.

He didn't ask anything else. Just nodded and headed toward the closet, pulling out fresh clothes.

I watched him in the mirror, my hands still moving mechanically through my hair.

Then I remembered the invitation.

I turned off the dryer and stood, crossing the room before he could disappear into the bathroom. I pulled one of the invitations out of my bag and held it out to him.

"My grandmother's birthday is coming up. This is for the Wilson family."

He turned, taking the envelope from me.

And that's when Sienna's smell hit me again and it was stronger this time. All over his shirt.

My stomach twisted in an ugly way. I pressed my fingers to the bridge of my nose, trying to block it out, then took a step back.

Putting distance between us.

Dante didn't seem to notice. He was already opening the envelope, his eyes scanning the elegant script on the invitation.

"Seventy years old?" he said, his tone neutral.

"Yes." I kept my voice steady, not wanting it to break. "It's a milestone birthday. My uncle invited business partners this year, so it's going to be a bigger event than usual."

I didn't ask him if he'd be free that day. Didn't beg him to make time like I used to, year after year, hoping this time would be different.

I just said, "Please let your parents know."

My voice was calm and very detached.

I watched him for any flicker of reaction, maybe surprise, guilt, anything but his face gave nothing away. He glanced at the invitation one more time, then set it aside on the dresser like it was junk mail.

"Got it," he said.

And then he walked into the bathroom and closed the door.

I stared at that closed door for a moment, something bitter coiling in my chest.

That's it? That's all I get?

But I shoved the feeling down, grabbed the hairdryer, and left the room.

Liora was waiting for me in her bedroom, already in her pajamas, her hair wet and tangled from her half-hearted attempt at drying it herself.

"Mommy!" She grinned when she saw me. "You're here!"

I smiled despite everything. "Come on, let's get you cleaned up properly."

I spent the next hour washing her hair again because of course she'd missed half of drying it carefully so it wouldn't frizz, and tucking her into bed with her favorite stuffed animal.

By the time I was done, I was exhausted.

Liora looked up at me with those big, hopeful eyes. "Can I sleep with you tonight?"

I paused.

Given the current state of things between Dante and me, what was I supposed to say?

No, sweetie, Mommy and Daddy share a bed but we don't actually sleep together?

No, because your father will be there and it's complicated and you wouldn't understand?

I couldn't say any of that.

So I just nodded. "Sure, baby."

Her face lit up.

I went back to the master bedroom to grab my things. Dante was sitting on the bed, reading again with his back against the headboard, completely absorbed.

I gathered my phone, my charger, and a change of clothes without saying a word.

As I reached the door, I paused. "I'm sleeping in Liora's room tonight."

He didn't look up. Just hummed softly in acknowledgment.

"Mm."

That was it.

Then I left.

The next morning, I took Liora to school like she'd asked. She had wanted to ride with me instead of the driver, and I wasn't going to say no to that, then I headed straight to the office.

My grandmother's birthday was in a few days, and I still hadn't bought her a gift.

I'd been so buried in work for the past month that I hadn't had time to even think about it. And now I was running out of time.

At lunch, I called Cara.

"Hey, are you free tonight? I need to go shopping for my grandmother's birthday gift."

"Of course!" Cara said immediately. "I'll meet you after work."

I smiled. "Thanks. I owe you."

"You owe me nothing. Just buy me dinner."

"Deal."

After I hung up, I remembered something else.

Amber, Dante's sister. I still hadn't delivered her invitation. I pulled up her contact and hit call.

The phone rang and rang and rang with absolutely no answer.

I frowned, staring at the screen.

She's ignoring me.

I knew Amber didn't like me. Never had. The entire Wilson family had made it pretty clear over the years that I wasn't their first choice or their second, or their third for Dante.

But this was different. This was about my grandmother.

I tried again.

This time, the call was declined immediately.

*lOf course.

I let out a slow breath and opened my messages instead.

*Me: Hi Amber. I tried calling but you must be busy. I have an invitation for my grandmother's 70th birthday banquet. When are you free so I can drop it off?

I hit send and set my phone down.

I wasn't expecting a reply.

And I didn't get one.

That evening, Cara and I hit three different stores, wandering through displays of jewelry, scarves, ceramics, art... everything.

But nothing felt right.

My grandmother wasn't the kind of woman who wanted generic gifts. She valued meaning. Thoughtfulness. Something with a story.

After the third store, Cara sighed and linked her arm through mine. "Okay, new plan."

"What?"

"There's a charity auction in two nights," she said. "High-end stuff. Art, antiques, rare collectibles. The kind of things your grandmother would actually appreciate."

I blinked. "A charity auction?"

"Yep. It's invite-only." She grinned. "Trust me. You'll find something perfect there."

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Chapter 124: Chapter 125

Elodie's POV~

"But I don't have an invitation..."

Cara hesitated, biting her lip. "The invitations for this auction went out half a month ago. It's not easy to get one now, but if you really want to go..."

She didn't finish the sentence. She didn't have to.

I knew exactly what she was suggesting that I ask Dante.

I felt my jaw tighten. The idea of asking him for anything made my skin crawl. But this was for my grandmother. And if swallowing my pride meant finding her the perfect gift, then so be it.

"I'll figure it out," I said quietly.

Cara gave me a sympathetic look but didn't push.

Around 9 p.m., after we parted ways, I drove back to Dante's villa.

The house was lit up when I arrived, which meant he was home. I found him exactly where I expected, in his study, the door half-open, the glow of his computer screen casting shadows across his face.

I knew he didn't like me coming into his study. He'd never said it outright, but I'd learned over the years to read the signs. The way his shoulders would tense. The way his answers would get shorter, colder.

So I stayed in the bedroom instead, curling up on the bed with a book, waiting.

The hours crawled by.

Midnight came and went.

Finally, around 1 a.m., I heard his footsteps in the hallway.

The door opened, and Dante walked in, looking as composed as ever despite the late hour.

I set my book aside and looked up at him.

He noticed immediately, pausing as he loosened his tie. "Is there something?"

I didn't waste time with small talk. "I heard there's a charity auction in two days—"

"You want an invitation," he said, cutting me off.

It wasn't a question.

"Yes."

He pulled the tie free and draped it over the back of a chair. "Got it."

That was it. No hesitation. No questions about why I wanted it or what I was planning to buy.

Just... got it. I blinked, caught off guard by how easy that had been.

"Thank you," I said carefully.

He didn't respond. Just turned and headed to the closet, then disappeared into the bathroom a moment later.

I sat there for a second, still processing, then shook my head and lay down.

The sound of running water filled the room, and exhaustion finally caught up with me.

I was asleep before he came back out.

The next evening, I left work early and headed back to the villa.

Dante wasn't home yet, but Liora was.

The moment she saw me, she launched herself into my arms, her face lighting up. "Mommy! Can you make me something yummy for dinner? *Please?*"

I laughed despite myself. "What do you want?"

"Anything! As long as you make it!"

"Alright, alright. Go wash your hands."

She squealed and ran off, and I headed to the kitchen, rolling up my sleeves.

It felt good. Normal again. Like I was just a mom making dinner for her daughter, and nothing else mattered.

After we ate, I was cleaning up when the butler appeared in the doorway.

"Madam, someone just dropped this off for you."

He handed me a sleek envelope.

I wiped my hands on a towel and opened it, only to see two invitations to tomorrow's charity auction.

Dante had come through.

I stared at them for a moment, something complicated twisting in my chest.

He actually did it.

But if he'd sent them over... did that mean he wasn't coming home tonight?

I was still thinking about it when my phone buzzed twice.

I pulled it out and saw Cara's name on the screen and saw that she had sent in two messages.

I opened them... and just froze.

It was a screenshot. From Sienna's social media.

The image showed her in profile, smiling that soft, dreamy smile she always wore when she wanted to look effortlessly beautiful. Behind her, fireworks exploded across the night sky in bursts of gold and red and blue.

The caption read: The fireworks festival tonight was beautiful.

I stared at the photo.

In the background, I could make out other couples, people holding hands, wrapped up in each other, bathed in the glow of the fireworks.

It was clearly a date spot.

A romantic one.

And Sienna looked happy. Radiant, even in it.

Because she wasn't alone, she was with Dante.

My stomach dropped.

He hadn't come home because he was out with her. On a date. Watching fireworks like they were any other couple in love.

And he hadn't even brought Liora. Just the two of them.

I stared at the screenshot, my face carefully blank, though something cold and bitter was curling in my chest.

I typed back to Cara.

Me: Did you follow Sienna?

Otherwise, how would she even have this screenshot?

Her response came quickly.

Cara: I have a friend who knows her. She mentioned it, so I asked her to send it to me.

What Cara didn't say, but what I could read between the lines, was that her friend was probably envious of Sienna.

Because everyone in their circle knew by now. Sienna had hooked up with Alpha Dante Wilson. And Dante loved her. Treated her like she was precious. Like she was the only woman in the world.

I set my phone down and picked up the invitations again, turning them over in my hands.

Two.

One for me. One for...?

I opened my messages again.

Me: Want to go to the auction with me tomorrow?

Cara's response was instant.

Cara: YES! We MUST go!

I smiled faintly. At least I wouldn't be alone.

That night, Dante didn't come home.

I'd already guessed he wouldn't.

After all, he was out with her. Watching fireworks. Probably doing more than that. Probably having the kind of night I used to dream we'd have.

But at least it meant I could sleep alone in the bedroom without the awkwardness of sharing a bed with a man who didn't want me there.

The next evening, Cara and I got dressed up.

We were wearing nothing too extravagant because I didn't want to look like I was trying too hard but we both looked good. Elegant, at least and put together.

The kind of women who belonged at a charity auction, even if I felt like an imposter.

When we walked into the hall, I could feel eyes on us. Lingering and assessing us. Cara was known in these circles. She'd been to these events before, knew the players, knew the game.

But as for me, I was new. And people were curious.

Who is she? Which family does she come from?

I kept my head high and followed Cara to our seats in the middle-back section.

We weren't early, but we weren't late either. The auction was set to start in just a few minutes.

I was settling into my chair, smoothing down my dress, when I heard a ripple of noise from the front row.

Whispers and excited murmurs filled the air and Cara and I both turned to look.

And my entire body went cold. Lo and behold, as though my life decided to ceaselessly torture me with these two, I saw Dante and Sienna. They were walking in together, side by side, like they owned the place.

Cara's voice was quiet beside me. "It's Dante and Sienna... They're here too."

She turned to me, her eyes wide. "Did you know they'd be here?"

I shook my head slowly, my throat tight. "No."

He hadn't told me. He hadn't even mentioned it.

Hadn't thought I needed to know.

I watched as they took their seats in the front row, the front row, of course, because that's where people like Dante Wilson sat and the whispers around us grew louder.

"At the last banquet, President Bellini spent over three million on her outfit alone."

"And look at her now. That dress is from Imms. You know, the designer who only makes three pieces a year? Each one costs upwards of two million."

"He's spent tens of millions on her in just a few months. He's really willing to splurge on her."

"Lucky woman."

I felt Cara's hand on mine, squeezing gently. But I didn't look at her. I... I just couldn't.

Because I was too busy watching Sienna lean in close to Dante, whispering something in his ear that made him smile.

That small, rare smile that I used to think was mine. But it never was. It was always hers.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 125 - 126 [1,431 words]

Chapter 125: Chapter 126

Elodie's POV~

Sienna was wearing a blue satin gown that shimmered under the lights like water. The fabric clung to her in all the right places, and her jewelry that were diamonds, probably, sparkled so brightly I could see them from where I sat.

She looked like she'd stepped out of a magazine.

And everyone noticed.

The whispers around us grew louder as Sienna and Dante took their seats. Not just in the front row but dead center of it.

The absolute best seats in the house.

"The center of the first row... God, can you imagine? That's reserved for the elite."

"They're definitely going to spend big tonight. I mean, just look at her."

"Stop. You're making me jealous. Some people just live on a different level."

Cara leaned in close, her voice low and tight. "They're sitting in the first row, but they gave us seats in the back..."

She didn't need to finish the sentence.

I knew what she meant.

Dante had gotten me the invitations. But he'd made sure Sienna had the best seat in the house. And me? I was tucked away in the middle-back section like an afterthought.

Like I didn't matter.

Because I really don't.

I swallowed the bitterness rising in my throat and kept my face neutral. "It's fine."

"It's not fine—"

"Cara." I looked at her, my voice steady. "I'm here to buy a gift for my grandmother. That's it. I don't care where I'm sitting."

And I meant it.

Or at least, I was trying to.

Cara looked like she wanted to argue, but she bit her tongue and turned back to face the front.

"Doesn't Dante even know where we're sitting?" she muttered. "He hasn't even looked back here."

I didn't answer.

Because of course he hadn't.

He hadn't looked for me at the banquet. Hadn't acknowledged me at the tech exhibition. Why would tonight be any different?

I was used to it by now.

The host stepped onto the stage, his voice smooth, and the room fell silent.

I pulled out the auction catalog I'd studied earlier and flipped through it one more time.

There were two items I was interested in: a set of emerald jewelry and a piece of embroidered art. Both were beautiful. Both felt like something my grandmother would love.

Which one I'd bid on would depend on how the night unfolded.

The auction started, and I kept my paddle down, watching carefully as items came and went.

Dante and Sienna hadn't bid on anything yet either.

I told myself I wasn't paying attention to them.

But I was.

Then, about twenty minutes in, I saw Sienna's hand go up.

She was bidding on a diamond bracelet.

It was a delicate one, but modern, designed by some internationally acclaimed artist. The kind of thing a young woman would wear to show off.

The kind of thing Dante would buy for her.

The starting price was \$200,000.

Sienna raised her paddle. "\$400,000."

Someone else countered. "\$500,000."

I watched as Sienna leaned in close to Dante, whispering something in his ear. He nodded.

Then she raised her paddle again, her voice ringing out clear and confident across the hall.

"One million."

The room went silent for a beat.

Then the whispers exploded.

"One million?* For that?"

"It's not even worth half that."

"She must really want it."

Cara's jaw dropped. She turned to me, eyes wide. "Is she serious?"

I didn't answer.

I just sat there, staring at the back of Sienna's head, watching as she smiled up at Dante like he'd just handed her the world.

And maybe he had.

Because a million dollars was nothing to him.

Not when it was for her.

The auctioneer's voice cut through the noise. "One million, going once—"

No one else bid.

"Going twice—"

Still nothing.

"Sold! To the lady in blue for one million dollars."

Applause rippled through the room, people looked enviously at Sienna.

As for Sienna? She beamed, turning to Dante and kissing his cheek.

And I felt something crack inside me.

Not break. Just... crack.

Because I'd never had that.

The bracelet was beautiful, I'd give it that. Those diamonds were delicate and set in white gold, the kind of thing that would catch the light every time she moved her wrist.

But one million dollars?

For that?

Even at \$500,000, it was overpriced. But Dante didn't care about the value. He cared about making sure no one else could have it. Making sure she got exactly what she wanted.

So he threw down a million like it was pocket change.

The room buzzed with shock and admiration, whispers rippling through the crowd.

Cara was practically vibrating beside me. "I can't believe it," she hissed, her voice tight with disbelief and maybe a little envy.

I didn't say anything. I just watched as Sienna's face lit up, as she turned to Dante with that radiant smile, as he looked at her like she'd hung the moon.

The auction moved on.

I tried to focus. Tried to keep my eyes on the catalog, on the items I actually came here for.

But then another piece came up.

An antique vase. One of Ming Dynasty, or something close to it. It was beautiful, it was the kind of thing collectors went crazy for.

And Sienna raised her paddle.

The starting bid was \$700,000.

Most people were bidding in increments, \$70,000 here, \$150,000 there.

But when Sienna's paddle went up, her voice rang out clear and confident.

"One and a half million."

Half the room went silent.

The other half started whispering again.

But not everyone was intimidated.

A voice cut through the murmurs, smoothly, almost like it was amused. "Two million."

I turned to see who it was.

A young man. He looked striking with hair, sharp jawline, a kind of face that belonged on a magazine cover. He looked relaxed, almost entertained.

Cara leaned in. "That's Rex Hardin."

I nodded, filing the name away.

Sienna hesitated, glancing at Dante like she was asking permission.

I watched her face carefully. She wanted that vase. Really wanted it.

And then I remembered.

Mrs. Brown, Sienna's grandmother, collected antiques.

Of course. Sienna wasn't bidding for herself. She was bidding for her grandmother.

Dante nodded.

Sienna raised her paddle again. "Five million."

Rex laughed, actually laughed and countered without missing a beat. "Eight million."

Sienna's confidence faltered. She leaned in close to Dante, whispering something I couldn't hear. Probably telling him to let it go. That it wasn't worth it.

But Dante shook his head.

And Sienna raised her paddle again.

"Ten million."

Rex's grin widened. "Twenty million."

The room went dead silent.

Even Cara gasped beside me.

Sienna's brow furrowed, and she turned to Dante again, her voice barely audible. "How about... we forget it?"

Twenty million was insane. Even for someone like Dante.

But Dante just smiled at her. Soft. Reassuring.

"It's fine," he said, loud enough for those nearby to hear. "Didn't you say your grandmother likes it? Just bid for it."

Something warm and sweet flickered across Sienna's face. She looked at him like he'd just promised her the world.

And she raised her paddle.

"Twenty-five million."

Rex didn't hesitate. "Thirty million."

Then he turned slightly, his voice projecting across the room with easy charm. "President Bellini, our elderly family members love this kind of thing. Could you do me a favor and give me some face here?"

Dante glanced over at him, although his expression remained polite.

"Sorry, Hardin," he said smoothly. "But my family also has elderly members who appreciate these things."

My family.

Those words hit me like a slap.

He was talking about Mrs. Brown. Sienna's grandmother.

But he'd called her his family.

Like the Brown family was already his own. Like Sienna was already his wife. Like they were already bound together in every way that mattered.

I felt something twist painfully in my chest.

Because he'd never said that about my family.

Not once.

Not when my grandmother had invited him to dinner. Not when my uncle had tried to include him in family events. Not when I'd begged him, begged him, to just show up and pretend to care.

He'd never called the Miller family his family.

But he'd call the Browns his without hesitation.

Cara's hand found mine under the table again, squeezing hard.

I didn't look at her. I couldn't.

Because I was too busy watching Sienna raise her paddle one more time, her voice steady and sure.

"Fifty million."

The room erupted.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 126 - 127[1,315 words]

Chapter 126: Chapter 127

Elodie's POV~

This time, Rex didn't counter.

The auctioneer's gavel came down with a sharp crack. "Sold! To the lady in blue for fifty million dollars."

The room erupted in applause and whispers, everyone turning to look at Sienna like she was royalty.

And maybe, in this world, she was.

I watched as she turned to Dante, her face glowing with gratitude and something softer, something that looked a lot like love.

He smiled at her. That rare, private smile.

And I felt nothing. Or at least, I told myself I felt nothing.

Cara leaned over, her voice tight. "Damn. Fifty million."

She looked like she was in physical pain. Like watching someone else spend that kind of money on a whim had actually hurt her.

I understood the feeling.

But it wasn't the money that bothered me.

Not really.

"Are you okay?" Cara asked quietly, her eyes searching my face.

I knew what she was asking. Can you handle this? Watching your husband throw millions at another woman, your half-sister, no less?

But that wasn't what was eating at me.

"Dante has money," I said evenly. "He can spend it however he likes. It doesn't bother me."

Cara looked skeptical, but I pressed on.

"What bothers me is that if there's something I want to bid on, and Dante and Sienna want it too?" I shook my head. "With my financial situation, I can't compete."

Cara's expression shifted. Understanding dawned. "Oh. Oh."

"Exactly."

"But she's already bought two things," Cara said hopefully. "She probably won't bid anymore, right?"

I wanted to believe that.

But Dante had endless resources. He could spend another few hundred million tonight without even blinking.

And if Sienna wanted something, he'd make sure she got it.

I was still turning that thought over in my mind when the next item was brought out.

The embroidered art piece.

One of the two things I'd come here for.

My heart picked up speed.

The auctioneer's voice rang out. "Starting bid: seven hundred thousand dollars."

Someone immediately jumped in. "Nine hundred thousand."

I raised my paddle. "One million."

My voice was steady, but my pulse was racing.

At first, Sienna didn't seem to notice.

But the second I spoke, I saw her shoulders stiffen.

She turned. And our eyes met.

For a long, tense moment, neither of us moved.

Then she turned back around, her expression blank, and raised her paddle.

"Two million."

My stomach dropped.

She'd recognized my voice. And that meant Dante had too.

But he didn't look back. Didn't acknowledge me. Didn't even glance in my direction.

Like I wasn't even there.

Cara hissed beside me. "Damn it! She's doing this on purpose!"

Rex entered the fray. "Two and a half million."

I clenched my jaw and raised my paddle. "Two point eight million."

Sienna didn't even turn around this time.

She just raised her paddle, her voice cutting through the room.

"Five million."

A collective gasp rippled through the crowd.

She'd jumped the bid by more than two million.

My heart sank.

I didn't have that kind of money to throw around. My budget for tonight was maybe eight million and that was stretching it. The Miller family business had been struggling lately. We didn't have endless reserves.

But Sienna? Sienna had Dante.

And Dante had everything.

Rex raised his paddle. "Seven million."

I stared at the embroidery on the stage, the beautiful stitching, the vibrant colors, the craftsmanship that had taken someone months, maybe years, to complete.

It was perfect for my grandmother.

But could I really go higher?

Should I?

Cara grabbed my arm. "Elodie, don't—"

I raised my paddle.

"Eight million."

My voice was calm. But inside, I was screaming.

Because I'd just blown my entire budget on one item. And I had no idea if it would even be enough.

I could feel eyes turning toward me. They were curious. Assessing me.

Rex Hardin looked back, his gaze landing on me with a flicker of surprise and maybe interest.

He raised an eyebrow and smiled.

I smiled back and gave him a polite nod.

Please don't make this harder than it already is.

But before I could even exhale, Sienna's paddle went up again.

"Ten million."

My hands clenched into fists under the table, my nails digging into my palms.

Rex jumped back in. "Twelve million."

I raised my paddle quickly, my heart pounding. "Fifteen million."

Sienna didn't hesitate. Didn't even blink.

"Twenty million."

Those numbers hit me like a punch to the gut.

My mind went blank for a second, the noise of the room fading into a distant hum.

Twenty million.

I'd budgeted eight million for tonight. Maybe I could stretch to ten if I was desperate.

But twenty?

I could afford it. Technically.

If I sold the villa Dante had just put in my name, I'd have that and more. Easily twenty or thirty million.

But that felt... wrong.

Not because I didn't want to spend the money. But because I knew... I knew that this piece of embroidery wasn't worth twenty million. Not even close.

And if I sold the villa, I could use that money for something that actually mattered. Something that could help my family's business. Something with real impact.

I couldn't just throw it away on a bidding war I was never going to win.

My hand stayed down.

Cara leaned in, her voice urgent. "Why don't you call Dante?"

I'd thought about it.

God, I'd thought about it.

But would Dante really ask Sienna to back down just for me?

No.

Of course not.

Still, some stupid, desperate part of me pulled out my phone and dialed his number anyway.

I watched the front row.

Watched as Dante pulled his phone out of his pocket.

Watched as he glanced at the screen.

And watched as Sienna leaned over, her eyes flicking to the number. "A stranger?"

Dante smiled faintly.

And ended the call.

Just like that.

No hesitation. No second thought.

My screen went black.

My chest felt hollow.

Cara hissed beside me, her voice shaking with anger. "He didn't even pick up! That bastard—"

I didn't respond. I just slipped my phone back into my bag, my hands were steady even though everything inside me felt like it was crumbling.

The bidding had already climbed to thirty million.

Rex rubbed his forehead, looking frustrated, and turned to Dante. "President Wilson, do me a favor here?"

Dante gave him that same polite, detached smile. "Next time, I'll definitely help."

Rex looked like he wanted to argue, but he just shook his head and raised his paddle.

"Thirty-five million."

Sienna didn't even flinch.

"Forty million."

Rex went silent.

The room went silent.

Cara whispered beside me, her voice tight. "This is the first time I've ever seen Rex Hardin get outbid."

The Hardin family was one of the top-tier families in the Pack. On par with the Bellinis.

But Rex looked hesitant now. Like he was weighing whether it was worth it.

Meanwhile, Dante didn't even blink.

He just sat there, calm and unbothered, while Sienna spent his money like water.

No one else bid.

The auctioneer's gavel came down.

"Sold! To the lady in blue for forty million dollars."

Applause filled the room.

Dante turned to Rex, his tone easy. "I owe you one, Hardin."

Rex sighed, shaking his head. "You're too polite, President Bellini."

I sat there, staring at the stage, at the embroidered art piece being carefully wrapped and carried away.

My grandmother's gift.

It was gone.

Cara grabbed my hand. "We still have the emerald jewelry. Maybe Sienna won't bid on that."

I wanted to believe her.

But deep down, I knew better.

If I wanted it, Sienna would want it too.

And Dante would make sure she got it.

No matter what it cost.

No matter who it hurt.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 127 - 128 [1,355 words]

Chapter 127: Chapter 128

Elodie's Pov~

The starting price for the emerald jewelry was one and a half million.

Someone immediately jumped in. "Two million."

I raised my paddle, my voice still steady despite how my entire core was beginning to tremble. "Two point three million."

"Two point five million."

"Three million."

I waited, my heart pounding, watching the front row.

Sienna's paddle stayed down.

Cara grabbed my arm, her grip tight with hope. "She's not bidding. She's not—"

I was about to raise my paddle again when Sienna's hand went up.

"Five million."

The room gasped.

My stomach dropped.

Sienna lowered her paddle calmly, like she'd just ordered a coffee.

I clenched my fist under the table, my nails biting into my palm, and forced myself to think.

You can do this. You can go higher.

I raised my paddle. "Six million."

Someone else countered. "Six point five million."

I didn't hesitate. "Seven million."

My voice was calm, but inside, I was screaming. Again and again.

Seven million was more than I'd planned to spend. More than I should spend.

But this was my grandmother's seventieth birthday. A milestone. Something rare and precious.

If I spent eight million—

Sienna raised her paddle.

"Twelve million."

All the air left my lungs.

Twelve million. For a set of emerald jewelry that was beautiful, yes, but not worth anywhere near that amount.

I stared at the stage, my chest tight, my hands trembling.

I couldn't. I couldn't.

Slowly, I lowered my paddle.

The room was silent.

No one else bid.

Everyone had seen what Dante was willing to spend tonight. No one wanted to go up against that kind of wealth.

The auctioneer's gavel came down.

"Sold! To the lady in blue for twelve million dollars."

I sat there, staring at nothing, feeling hollow.

Cara's hand found mine again, squeezing hard. "Elodie..."

I didn't respond.

What was there to say?

I'd come here to buy my grandmother a gift. Something meaningful. Something that would show her how much I loved her.

And I was leaving empty-handed.

Because my husband had made sure of it.

The rest of the auction dragged on.

There were other items, beautiful things, rare things but I didn't want any of them.

And because the auction house had a strict rule that no one could leave before the event ended, I was stuck there, sitting in the middle-back section, watching Dante casually spend over three hundred and sixty million dollars like it was nothing.

Cara leaned over, her voice tight with disbelief. "Does he even have a limit? Even if he's rich, this is insane. For *her*, he's really not holding back at all."

I didn't answer.

I didn't have an answer.

But the answer came soon enough anyway: Dante didn't bid again.

He'd gotten everything Sienna wanted.

Mission accomplished.

When the auction finally ended, I stood and walked out without looking back.

I didn't glance at Dante. Didn't acknowledge him.

I just left.

Cara followed close behind, but I could tell she was still watching the front row.

"Rex is talking to them," she whispered. "He's smiling. They're all smiling."

Of course they are.

As we stepped out into the lobby, an older woman approached us, someone Cara knew from her social circles.

After some polite pleasantries, the woman's gaze shifted to me, her smile curious and appraising.

"Cara, this young lady looks unfamiliar. May I ask which family she's from?"

Cara glanced at me, then introduced me. "This is Elodie Miller. She's Mr. Jason Miller's niece."

The woman's smile faltered just slightly. "Ah. Mr. Miller's niece. How lovely."

She knew the Miller family, clearly. Knew that my mother had struggled with her mental health for years. Knew that the family business had been declining.

Her eyes swept over me again, appraising.

I was beautiful, sure. Well-mannered. Probably educated enough.

But my family was struggling.

And in this world, that mattered more than anything else.

Despite Jason's tireless efforts to keep the company afloat, the odds of Miller Corporation bouncing back were slim at best.

And with those two glaring issues, my mother's mental health and my family's financial instability, it didn't matter how beautiful I was or how much this woman might have liked me at first glance.

I would never be welcomed into families like hers.

Such a pity, her expression seemed to say.

She didn't speak the words aloud, but Cara and I both heard them loud and clear.

The woman still had more to discuss with Cara, so we stayed put for a few more minutes.

That's when I saw Dante, Sienna, and Rex stepping out of the auction hall together.

Rex reached out to shake Dante's hand. "I've got something to take care of. Let's catch up next time."

Dante nodded. "Next time."

Rex left with his friends, and immediately, more people swarmed Dante, eager to talk, to network, to be seen.

And in the middle of all that attention, Dante's eyes found mine. We locked gazes. For a split second, neither of us moved.

Then I looked away first.

He did the same a moment later, turning back to the people vying for his attention like nothing had happened.

Sienna, standing beside him, noticed the brief exchange. I saw the smile curve slowly across her lips. The smile looked smug and satisfied and victorious. Like she had achieved her aim.

I turned back to Cara, keeping my expression carefully blank.

After another ten minutes of polite small talk, Cara was visibly parched. She grabbed my arm and nodded toward the drinks table. "Let's get something to drink before we leave."

I followed her across the lobby to a quieter corner where the refreshments were set up.

There weren't many people over there, which was a relief. I was about to comment on it when I heard voices nearby. Male voices.

"Rex, what's going on? Are you interested in Dante's girlfriend?"

I froze.

So did Cara.

We turned slightly, careful not to make ourselves obvious.

Rex and one of his friends were standing just on the other side of a tall display of champagne flutes, their backs to us.

They hadn't noticed us.

"I wouldn't say interested," Rex said thoughtfully. "But... she is quite interesting."

Cara's eyebrows shot up. She mouthed, Sienna?

I shook my head slightly. Wait.

"During the auction, I saw you eyeing the gentle beauty sitting with Jessica," Rex's friend continued, his tone teasing. "She's probably still in the hall. Why don't you go say hello?"

My breath caught.

He's talking about me.

Cara's eyes went wide, and before I could stop her, she looked ready to march over there and play matchmaker on the spot.

But then Rex shook his head.

"No need."

Cara stopped mid-step.

His friend laughed. "Huh? What happened? Suddenly lost interest?"

Rex sighed. "Yeah. She's beautiful, I'll give her that. But... she looks so gentle. So quiet. No real fire, you know? I don't find it interesting anymore."

I felt the words land like stones in my chest.

They just said I was gentle. Quiet. With no personality.*

Cara's face flushed red with anger, but I stayed perfectly still, my expression frozen.

Rex's friend laughed louder. "Damn, man, and you say you're not interested in Sienna!"

Rex didn't respond immediately.

His friend pressed on. "Come on. You talked to her for what, five minutes? And suddenly the other girl doesn't measure up? That's textbook interest, my guy."

Rex chuckled softly. "It's not like that. It's just... Sienna's got this cold, untouchable vibe. Makes you want to break through it, you know? That kind of woman is way more intriguing."

"I get it," his friend said, grinning. "And honestly? A lot of guys in the circle have noticed her. Some are practically obsessed. But she's already with Dante, so..." He trailed off with a low whistle. "I gotta hand it to him. Dante's got impeccable taste in women."

Cara's smile vanished.

Her entire face went dark, her jaw clenched so tight I thought she might crack a tooth.

I felt my own hands curl into fists at my sides.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 128 - 129 [1,217 words]

Chapter 128: Chapter 129

Elodie's Pov~

Cara looked ready to march over there and give both of them a piece of her mind. Her whole body was tense, entirely coiled like a spring.

But I reached out and grabbed her arm, stopping her.

She turned to me, her eyes blazing. "Elodie—"

I shook my head calmly. "It's okay."

"It's not okay—"

"Cara." I kept my voice calm, even though something bitter was crawling up my throat. "It doesn't matter."

Maybe I didn't have much of a personality. Maybe I was too gentle, too quiet, too boring.

But I knew who I was.

And whether or not Rex Hardin or anyone else, found me interesting didn't change that.

I didn't need their approval.

I didn't want it.

A moment later, Rex and his friend finished their drinks, set their glasses down, and walked away, completely oblivious to the fact that we'd heard every word.

Cara was still fuming. "I used to think Rex had taste. That he was different. Interesting, even. But no, he's just like the rest of them. Completely charmed by Sienna."

I opened my mouth to respond, maybe to tell her it didn't matter, that I was fine but before I could, a man approached us.

He had this sleazy, greasy smile and eyes that lingered too long in all the wrong places.

He knew Cara, apparently, because he grinned at her before turning his attention to me. "Cara, is this your friend?"

Cara's expression went ice-cold immediately. "What kind of person are you to even look at my friend? Get lost."

His smile faltered. "Cara, you—"

She shot him a look so sharp it could've drawn blood.

The man wisely backed off, muttering under his breath as he slunk away.

Cara downed half her glass in one gulp, her jaw tight with anger. "That's the fifth... no, sixth guy tonight who's tried to hit on you. And why is it always the trash? Why do all the decent ones only have eyes for Sienna?"

I didn't answer right away. I just reached over and patted her back gently, trying to calm her down.

I was about to say something, maybe that Sienna was impressive in her own way, that it wasn't surprising people were drawn to her, when Cara's entire body went rigid.

I followed her gaze. And there she was.

Sienna. Out of all people, standing not far away, holding two glasses of water, her eyes fixed on us.

I didn't know how long she'd been there.

But judging by the slow, satisfied and venomous smile on her lips, she'd heard everything.

Rex's conversation. His friend's comments. All of it. Our eyes met and her smile deepened.

She didn't say a word. Just gave me a cold, disdainful once-over, like I was something she'd found on the bottom of her shoe.

Then she turned and walked away.

"Damn it!"

Cara's hands clenched into fists, her whole body shaking with rage. "She's the daughter of a mistress, and she's a mistress herself! What the hell does she have to be so smug about? And 'the one everyone loves', I think she's just a pile of shit"

"Cara," I said quietly, pouring her another glass of water. "What do you mean, 'the one everyone loves'?"

She blinked, then sighed, running a hand through her hair. "It's what they're calling her now. Sienna. 'The one everyone loves.' All those second-generation heirs in the circle, the ones with more money than sense, they're all obsessed with her."

Cara's voice dripped with disgust. "They act like she's some kind of goddess. Like she's the most fascinating woman to ever exist."

She paused, then muttered, "And the worst part? Even guys like Dante and Rex—"

She stopped abruptly, her eyes widening as she realized what she was about to say.

"Wait, no, I mean... Elodie, I didn't mean to—"

I shook my head. "I'm fine."

"Are you sure? Because—"

"I'm fine, Cara."

Since childhood, I'd been surrounded by people who turned their backs on me. My father, Logan, who'd always favored Sienna.

My aunt Lauren, who'd made it clear I was never good enough.

Old Mrs. Brown, who'd looked at me like I was a mistake her son had made.

And then, in the last few years, Dante, now falling head over heels for Sienna.

And Liora, my own daughter, wanting her to be her mother.

Through all of it, I'd never spoken to anyone about how I truly felt.

I'd never cried. Not once.

If I couldn't bear it, any one of those things should have broken me. Should have shattered me into pieces so small I'd never be able to put myself back together. But I'd survived.

I'd gotten through it all.

So compared to everything I'd already endured, what did Rex Hardin and his friend matter?

What did their careless words mean in the grand scheme of my life?

After hearing them talk, my heart had remained calm. Unaffected. Or at least, that's what I told myself.

Cara didn't say anything for a moment. Then she reached out and pulled me into a tight hug. "Elodie..."

I smiled against her shoulder. "It's getting late. Let's go home."

She pulled back, her eyes searching mine. "What about your grandmother's birthday present?"

"We'll find something another day," I said. "I don't believe we won't find something perfect."

She nodded, her expression fierce. "Damn right we will."

We held hands and walked toward the exit together.

As we stepped outside into the cool night air, I saw Dante and Sienna. They were walking toward the parking lot, side by side, close enough that their arms were almost touching.

Dante's eyes flicked toward me. Just briefly.

I looked away first, pretending I hadn't noticed, and climbed into the car.

Cara shot them both a glare before sliding into the passenger seat. "Assholes," she muttered under her breath.

I started the engine and pulled out of the parking lot, my hands steady on the wheel.

In the rearview mirror, I saw Sienna glance at Dante, then gave a soft and sweet and victorious smile. I looked away and kept driving.

After dropping Cara off at her place, I was about to head back to my apartment when my phone rang.

I stared at it, only to see it was Liora.

I connected the call to Bluetooth, keeping my eyes on the road. "Hi, sweetheart."

"Mommy, when are you coming home?"

Her voice was small. A little lonely.

I swallowed the tightness in my throat. "I'm not coming home tonight, baby. But I'll come see you tomorrow after I finish some things, okay?"

"Oh... okay."

I could hear it in her tone. She was bored. Restless.

She'd been spending so much time with Sienna lately that she probably didn't know what to do with herself now that Sienna was busy.

And she'd thought of me.

Not because she missed me. Not because she wanted to spend time with me.

But because she had no one else.

I tightened my grip on the steering wheel. "Goodnight, Lio."

"Mm. Goodnight, Mommy."

The line went dead.

I drove in silence for a while, the city lights blurring past my windows.

And for the first time all night, I felt the cracks starting to show.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 129 -s[1,360 words]

Chapter 129: Chapter 130 Chapters

Elodie's Pov~

The next two days were a blur of work.

Meetings, deadlines, code reviews, everything piled up at once, and I barely had time to breathe, let alone go shopping for my grandmother's birthday gift.

I kept telling myself I'd find time. Tomorrow. After this project wraps up. After this meeting ends.

But tomorrow never came.

On the third day, Johnny decided to reward the team for all our hard work. He booked a private room at a nice restaurant downtown and treated everyone to lunch.

By the time we were halfway through the meal, I excused myself to use the restroom.

When I came back out, walking down the hallway toward our private room, I stopped dead in my tracks.

Not far ahead, a group of people were filing out of another private room.

Seven or eight of them.

And right in the center, unmistakable even from a distance, was Sienna.

My father, Logan, was there. Aunt Lauren. A beautiful woman I didn't recognize but who was clearly close to Logan, probably his current wife. And an elderly woman, being carefully supported by Sienna.

Mrs. Brown. My grandmother. Or rather, the woman who used to be my grandmother.

They stepped into the elevator, chatting among themselves, completely oblivious to my presence.

The doors slid shut.

And they were gone.

"Who were they?"

I jumped slightly. Johnny had appeared beside me, his eyes still fixed on the spot where the elevator had been.

He'd seen them too. Sienna. Logan. Lauren. All of them.

"The Brown family," I said quietly.

Johnny's expression shifted. He looked at me carefully, then back toward the elevator. "That elderly woman... is she your...?"

"She was," I said, cutting him off. "But she's not anymore."

Johnny didn't say anything for a moment. Then he reached out and gave me a gentle, reassuring hug. "You okay?"

I nodded. "Yeah. Let's go back."

He didn't push.

We walked back to the private room together, and I slipped back into my seat, picking up my chopsticks like nothing had happened.

But my mind was spinning.

I'd changed my surname years ago. Cut ties with the Brown family completely.

They weren't related to me anymore. They didn't matter.

Or at least, that's what I kept telling myself.

But seeing them all together like that, heading to the capital, clearly settling in, made something twist uncomfortably in my chest.

I'd suspected this might happen.

When Sienna's uncle, the Green family, had tried to buy property near my family's villa, I'd figured they were planning to move to the Bellini Pack's territory.

And if the Greens were moving, it made sense that the Browns would follow.

But suspecting it and seeing it were two very different things.

That afternoon, I left work earlier than usual.

Cara and I met up for dinner, then decided to go shopping, which was another attempt to find something, anything, for my grandmother's birthday.

But after more than an hour of wandering through stores, trying on jewelry, looking at art pieces, I still came up empty.

Nothing felt right.

Cara disappeared into a dressing room to try on a dress, and I stood outside, scrolling absently through my phone.

Then it rang. And again it was Liora.

I answered. "Hey, sweetheart."

"Mommy, when are you coming back?"

There was something off in her voice. A little flat. A little bored.

"What's wrong?" I asked, keeping my tone light.

"Dad's on a business trip, and I'm so bored."

Of course he is.

I leaned against the wall, watching other shoppers pass by. Normally, even when Dante was away, Liora would be with Sienna. They were practically inseparable these days.

But it was the weekend. And instead of being with her, Liora was calling me.

Which meant Sienna didn't have time for her.

With Logan and the rest of the Brown family already in the capital, and Dante away on business, Sienna probably didn't have time to babysit my daughter.

"You can entertain yourself for now," I said, keeping my voice gentle. "I'll come back tomorrow."

"Really?" Liora's voice brightened immediately. "So we're agreed? You'll be back tomorrow morning?"

"Yes. I promise."

"Okay! See you tomorrow, Mommy!"

She hung up, already sounding happier.

I slipped my phone back into my pocket and rejoined Cara, who was still admiring herself in the mirror.

That evening, I still hadn't found a gift.

My grandmother's birthday was in just a few days, and I was running out of time. I considered just picking something decent and calling it good enough, but every time I looked at an item, it felt wrong.

They were too generic. Too impersonal. Not good enough.

So I left empty-handed. Again.

The next morning, I drove back to Dante's villa.

Liora was already awake and eating breakfast when I arrived. I kissed the top of her head, told her I'd be right back, and headed upstairs to grab something I'd left in the bedroom.

But the moment I stepped inside, I stopped.

There, sitting neatly on my vanity, were two exquisite jewelry boxes.

Just like the property deed before, they were placed deliberately on my side. Which meant they were meant for me.

I walked over slowly, my heart beating a little faster than it should have been.

The first box was small, and round.

I opened it. And froze.

Inside was the emerald jewelry set.

The one I'd tried to bid on at the auction. The one Sienna had outbid me for.

The one I'd walked away from.

My hands trembled slightly as I set it down and reached for the second box, which was a heavy, rectangular case.

I already knew what it was before I opened it. It was an embroidered artwork.

I carefully lifted the scroll out and unrolled it on the round table in the center of the room.

The colors were vivid, and luminous. The stitching was breathtaking.

It was perfect. Both of them were.

I stood there, staring at the two items I'd wanted so desperately just days ago, now sitting in front of me like they'd always been mine.

And I didn't know what to feel.

If I wasn't mistaken, these were gifts Dante had bought at the auction. For my grandmother's birthday.

One was meant to be given in Nonna's name.

The other... was meant to be given in the name of both of us. As husband and wife.

My throat tightened.

Why? Why had he done this?

He'd ignored me at the auction. Hadn't answered my call. Had sat there with Sienna, letting her outbid me, letting her humiliate me in front of everyone.

And now he'd bought these for me anyway?

I didn't understand him. I didn't understand any of this.

"Mom! I'm done eating! We can go now!"

Liora's voice echoed up the stairs.

I quickly rolled the scroll back up, placed it carefully in the box, and closed both lids.

When Liora burst into the room a second later, she peered at the boxes curiously. "Oh! Those are the ones Dad brought back a few days ago. He said they were for you."

I gave a quiet "Mm," then gently guided her toward the door. "Come on. Let's go."

Liora wanted to go to the shooting range, so I took her.

Then she wanted to ride the roller coaster, so we did that too.

We spent most of the day together, and by late afternoon, I was exhausted.

But Liora was still bouncing with energy, tugging on my sleeve. "Can we go to the arcade next? Please?"

In the past, I would've said yes immediately.

I would've put my own needs aside, rearranged my schedule, and stayed with her for however long she wanted.

But not today.

Today, I looked at her and said calmly, "I have other things I need to do, sweetheart. If you want to keep playing, the bodyguard can stay with you."

Liora's face fell. "But I want you to stay."

"I know. But I can't today."

She pouted, clearly not used to hearing me say no.

But I didn't budge.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 130 - 131 [1,412 words]

Chapter 130: Chapter 131

Elodie's pov~

Liora didn't want the bodyguard.

She pouted, her bottom lip trembling just slightly, and latched onto my arm. "Mom..."

That voice. That look... In the past, it would've worked. Every single time. I would've melted, rearranged my plans, stayed as long as she wanted.

But not today.

I gently unwound her fingers from my sleeve and took a step back. "I really do have something important to take care of, sweetheart. We'll spend more time together next time, okay?"

Her eyes widened. She wasn't used to hearing me say no.

I kept my expression calm, my brow slightly furrowed to show I meant it.

She studied my face for a moment, probably trying to figure out if she could push harder. But when she saw I wasn't budging, her shoulders slumped.

"Alright then..." she mumbled, her voice small and disappointed.

I crouched down and kissed her forehead. "Be good. The bodyguard will take care of you."

She nodded reluctantly, and I stood, giving the bodyguard a few quick instructions before heading to my car.

I didn't look back.

If I did, I'd see her sad face, and I might change my mind.

But I needed this. Just this one thing for myself.

I slid into the driver's seat, pulled up the navigation, and punched in the address of an antique market I'd never been to, one that was farther out, away from the usual tourist traps.

If I was going to find something meaningful, it would be there.

The market was tucked into a narrow street lined with old buildings, the kind of place you'd miss if you weren't looking for it. Inside, it was a labyrinth of stalls and tiny shops, each one was crammed with relics from another time.

I wandered slowly, running my fingers over jade carvings, porcelain vases, old scrolls tied with faded ribbons.

And then I saw a set of traditional scholar's tools. They were... Four pieces, displayed on a bed of dark silk: brush, ink stick, paper, inkstone.

But these weren't ordinary. The paper had a texture like woven silk, it looked precious. The brushes were carved from ancient wood, their handles inlaid with jade. The inkstone was polished to a mirror shine, deep black with veins of gold running through it.

I picked up one of the brushes, feeling its weight in my hand, feeling the smoothness of the carved handle.

And I could already see in my mind's eyes, about my grandmother's face lighting up. Her hands trembling slightly as she touched each piece. The way her eyes would soften, the way she'd smile, really smile, the kind that reached all the way to her heart.

This is it.

I didn't even hesitate.

"I'll take it," I told the shopkeeper.

He named the price, just over ten million.

I didn't blink. I handed over my card.

It was less than what Dante had spent on the embroidered scroll and the emerald jewelry. Far less.

But I knew my grandmother.

And I knew she'd treasure this more than anything else.

As the shopkeeper carefully wrapped each piece and placed them in a lacquered wooden box, I felt something shift inside me.

It was pride. A certainty that I'd done something right.

This was my gift. One I'd chosen. One that came from me, not from obligation or performance or someone else's money.

Just me.

I was walking back to my car, the box tucked under my arm, when my phone rang.

"Hey Cara" I answered, unlocking the car with my free hand.

"Elodie, I'm so sorry. I have to go out of town tomorrow for work. I won't be able to help you shop for your grandmother's gift."

I smiled, sliding the box onto the passenger seat. "It's okay. I already found it."

"Wait, seriously?" Her voice shot up. "Already? What did you get?"

I glanced at the box, and its polished surface caught the light. "A set of traditional scholar's tools. They're beautiful. She's going to love them."

"Oh my God, Elodie, that's perfect!" Cara sounded genuinely thrilled. "I'm so happy for you."

"Thanks. Me too."

There was a pause, and then her tone shifted. Turning more careful.

"By the way... about the Brown family."

My smile faded.

"You mentioned seeing them the other day," she continued. "So I asked around. They're definitely planning to move to the capital. I heard they've been looking at houses."

I gripped the steering wheel, staring out at the crowded street.

"I see," I said quietly. "Thanks for letting me know."

"Are you okay?"

I took a breath. Let it out slowly. "Yeah. I'm okay."

"As for Sienna's side of the family," Cara continued, "I heard they've already picked out a place. They'll be moving in soon. And apparently, they're already sending out invitations for a housewarming party."

My grip tightened on the steering wheel.

Of course they are.

"Got it," I said, keeping my voice level. "Thanks for the heads-up."

"Anytime. Call me later?"

"Yeah. Drive safe."

I hung up and pulled back onto the road, heading toward the city.

Next week was my grandmother's birthday.

On Sunday, I took Liora back to the Miller family house and sat down with Uncle Jason and his wife to go over the details of the party, all the guests list, catering, seating arrangements. All the little things that needed to be perfect.

Dante wasn't coming back that weekend. He was still away on business, so I stayed at the villa.

He'd be back on Tuesday, apparently.

Which meant I had a few more days before I'd have to see him again.

Before I left the villa that morning, I'd gone back upstairs to the bedroom and looked at those two boxes sitting on my vanity.

The emerald jewelry and the embroidered scroll.

Dante had placed them there, clearly expecting me to give them to my grandmother at her birthday party.

Maybe one from Nonna. One from the two of us, as a couple.

As if we're still a couple. I'd stared at those boxes for a long moment, feeling something bitter curl in my chest.

Then I'd picked them up and brought them with me.

I didn't know yet what I'd do with them. But I wasn't leaving them there.

After dropping Liora off at school Monday morning, I went straight to the office.

Cole Technologies was juggling three or four new projects at once, and with the start of the new week, Johnny and I were buried.

Dante must've come back on schedule, because Liora didn't call me once over the next few days.

Which meant she was with him. Or with Sienna.

Either way, she didn't need me.

On Wednesday evening, Johnny and I had a dinner meeting with a potential client.

We were walking toward the private dining room when I saw Dante. Sienna. Logan. And Mrs. Brown.

They were standing near the entrance to another private room, chatting casually, looking like the perfect family.

My stomach twisted.

Mrs. Brown and Sienna's mother, Janice, had both come to the capital now. And Dante, ever the dutiful prospective son-in-law, was clearly making an effort to show his respect.

He'd only gotten back from his business trip yesterday, and here he was, taking time out of his schedule to have dinner with them.

He's always so attentive when it comes to Sienna.

The last time I'd seen the Brown family, they hadn't noticed me.

But this time, both Mrs. Brown and Logan looked up. And they saw me.

They all froze for a split second, like they were debating whether to acknowledge me.

Maybe because Dante was there, none of them said anything.

Sienna and Dante, positioned slightly differently, but didn't see me at all.

I pulled my gaze away, my expression blank, and turned toward my own private room.

None of them followed.

Over an hour later, after we'd finished our meal and said goodbye to the client, Johnny and I were walking through the parking lot when I saw them again.

The Brown family and Sienna.

They were standing by their cars, preparing to leave.

But Dante wasn't with them.

He must've left early.

Johnny and I hadn't even reacted yet when our client, Mr. Felton, a friendly man in his fifties, spotted them and immediately walked over, his face lighting up.

"Miss Brown! Mr. Brown!" he called out warmly.

I stopped in my tracks.