

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 131 - 132 [1,239 words]

Chapter 131: Chapter 132

Elodie's pov~

"Oh, it's Mr. Felton."

Logan's voice was smooth. He shook Mr. Felton's hand with that easy charm he'd perfected over the years. "Mr. Felton, are you discussing business with Mr. Gray?"

"Yes, yes," Mr. Felton said enthusiastically. "Mr. Gray's company has several projects I'm quite interested in. We've been chatting about potential collaborations."

Logan's eyes flicked briefly toward Johnny and me, still standing a few paces away.

He didn't acknowledge us. He didn't even nod.

He just turned back to Mr. Felton like we weren't there.

Mr. Felton, oblivious to the tension, glanced back at us with a slightly puzzled expression. I could see him wondering why Johnny hadn't come over to join the conversation, after all, networking was half the game in business.

But Johnny stayed rooted beside me, his jaw tight, his hands clenched into fists.

I didn't move either.

While Logan and Sienna continued their polite small talk with Mr. Felton, Mrs. Brown, my grandmother, stepped away from the group.

And she walked toward us.

Janice, Sienna's mother, followed close behind.

Johnny glanced at me, his eyes questioning. Do you want to leave?

I shook my head slightly.

I wasn't running.

Mrs. Brown stopped a few feet away, her expression soft, almost gentle. "Elodie. It's been a long time."

I didn't respond.

She sighed, her smile faltering just slightly. "Elodie, you..."

Before she could finish, Janice stepped forward, her voice cool. Or pretending to be cool.

"Elodie, no matter how much misunderstanding or resentment you have toward me, it's between you, me, and your mother. It has nothing to do with Logan or your grandmother. I hope you don't push away the people who care about you just because of misunderstandings."

I stared at her. I really stared at Janice Green.

The woman my father had left my mother for.

The woman he'd described as his "ideal lover." The perfect woman. The one who made him finally understand what "true love" was.

He'd told me once, years ago, that Janice was cold on the surface but good at heart. That she was a proud woman, yes, but a kind one. That I shouldn't follow my mother's example and act out, but instead recognize excellence when I saw it.

And Janice had never been cruel to me. Not overtly.

She'd never made my life difficult. Never played the wicked stepmother.

She'd just been... distant. Aloof. Untouchable.

And somehow, that had made it worse.

Because when someone like Janice, someone who acted so composed, so elegant, so above it all, spoke to you with that calm, rational tone, it didn't feel like manipulation.

It felt like wisdom.

Like maybe you were the problem.

She stood there now, still as stunning and poised as I remembered. Her hair perfectly styled. Her posture impeccable. Her expression firm like she wasn't trying hard to hurt me. Like she was trying to guide me.

And that made her words cut even deeper.

"The issues between your mother, Logan, and me," she continued, "should not affect your relationship with your father or your grandmother. They love you. You know that."

I felt something twist painfully in my chest.

Because part of me, some small, childish part, had wanted to believe that once.

I'd been eight or nine when my parents divorced. Too young to understand the complexities of adult relationships. Too young to see my father for what he really was.

I'd loved them both.

But my heart had leaned toward my mother.

Because she was the one who'd been left behind. The one who'd been hurt.

And I'd felt sorry for her. I'd wanted to protect her.

But I'd also wanted my father's love. Wanted to believe that he still cared about me. That I mattered to him.

And people like Janice, people who spoke so calmly, so reasonably, it made it easy to believe that maybe I was the one in the wrong.

That maybe if I just tried harder, if I just let go of my anger, everything would be okay.

But I wasn't that little girl anymore.

So when Logan and my mother divorced and fought for custody, even though my mother, my sweet, fragile mother, had already suffered a mental breakdown, I chose to stay with her.

Despite Logan's pleas. Despite Mrs. Brown's tears.

I chose her. But that didn't mean I stopped loving them.

I kept Logan and Mrs. Brown in my heart. I just never showed it. Because showing it would've hurt my mother, and she'd already been hurt enough.

Over a year after the divorce, Mrs. Brown visited the capital.

She arranged to meet me in secret.

I hadn't seen her in over a year, and I missed her. So I went. I didn't tell my uncle. I didn't tell anyone. I just went.

But when I arrived, I realized she hadn't come alone.

She'd brought Sienna.

Mrs. Brown smiled at me, warmly and gently just like she always did and said we were sisters. That we should get along.

I didn't want to.

I didn't want anything to do with Sienna.

But when I hesitated, when I pulled back, Mrs. Brown's expression shifted. Just slightly. Enough for me to see the disappointment in her eyes.

She said I was too much like my mother. So difficult and unforgiving.

And I felt my heart crack. Because I didn't want to be difficult. I didn't want to be the problem.

So I tried.

That day still burned into my memory.

After feeling upset and confused, I excused myself to the restroom. When I came back, I saw Mrs. Brown holding two ice creams, one for me, one for Sienna.

But one of them had been scratched. A waiter had passed by with a dirty tray, and some of the topping had been scraped off. There was an oil stain on the wrapper.

Sienna immediately grabbed the intact one.

Mrs. Brown just patted her head and smiled.

She didn't replace the dirty one.

She didn't ask the waiter for a new one.

She just handed it to me when I came back, like it was perfectly fine.

At the time, the Brown family had more money than they knew what to do with. Buying a thousand ice creams wouldn't have made a dent in their accounts.

But she didn't replace it.

And in that moment, I understood.

Her feelings for me had already changed.

I would never forget the look in Sienna's eyes as I stood there holding that dirty ice cream. Smug. Satisfied. Malicious.

Like she'd won something.

Similar things happened with Logan. Those small moments. Little slights. Things that seemed insignificant on their own but added up over time.

And now, standing here in this parking lot, looking at Mrs. Brown's kind, facade of a gentle expression and Janice's calm, reasonable face, I felt that old bitterness rise up in my throat.

But I didn't let it consume me.

I smiled just slightly.

"You say you truly care about me," I said, trying hard to keep my voice soft and steady so it doesn't waver. "And I really want to believe that."

Mrs. Brown's eyes brightened, hopeful.

I continued.

"But your kind of care, the kind where you help Sienna interfere in my marriage, where you support her relationship with my husband, where you stand by and watch her take everything from me, is that what you call concern?"

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Chapter 132: Chapter 133

Elodie's pov~

"I looked at Mrs. Brown and at Janice, standing there with that calm, composed expression that made her seem so reasonable, so right and I smiled. Just slightly.

"You say you're genuinely concerned about me," I said, keeping my voice casual. "And I really want to believe that."

Mrs. Brown's eyes brightened, hopeful. As though her wish of me being pulled to their side was working.

"But your concern," I continued, "is just helping Sienna interfere with my marriage?"

Neither of them looked the least bit awkward.

They'd probably anticipated I'd say this. Probably rehearsed their responses.

Mrs. Brown sighed, her expression patient. "Elodie, you know the situation between you and Dante. Why do you have to force someone who doesn't love you to stay with you? Divorce is the only way for you to start fresh. I'm only—"

"You want to say you're doing this for my own good, right?" I cut her off, looking between her and Janice. "How many times have you repeated that line? It's getting old."

Mrs. Brown blinked, caught off guard.

"You're not even trying to come up with new words anymore," I said. "How could I possibly believe you? Maybe next time, try a fresh approach?"

Before either of them could respond, I pressed on.

"But it probably won't make a difference. After all, no matter how much you say, it's all empty. What really matters is what you've done, right?"

Both Mrs. Brown and Janice paused, their expressions shifting just slightly.

Mrs. Brown opened her mouth, probably to launch into another speech about what was best for me, but I was already turning away.

Mr. Felton had finished his conversation with Logan and was walking back over, looking a bit confused by the tension hanging in the air.

"Mr. Felton," I said, my voice light and professional. "Are you ready? Shall we go?"

He glanced between us, clearly sensing something was off, but he didn't comment. "Of course. Let's go."

Once we'd walked a safe distance away, Mr. Felton finally asked, his voice cautious, "Is there some kind of misunderstanding between you and the Brown family?"

Johnny and I exchanged a glance.

"No," I said simply.

Because it wasn't a misunderstanding.

It was the truth.

Mr. Felton seemed to take my answer at face value, nodding thoughtfully. "No misunderstanding is good. With the way Dante values Miss Brown, the Brown family is going to rise quickly. The Bellini family and Dante aren't people you want to offend. So even if you don't want to get close to the Browns, it's best not to make enemies of them."

I almost laughed. How ironic.

I was being warned to get along with the mistress because my husband paid too much attention to her.

Only me. Only in my life would this be the advice I received.

Johnny, however, couldn't keep quiet. "Our company doesn't fear Dante Bellini."

Mr. Felton looked surprised.

Johnny continued, his voice firm as he looked deep into the eyes of Mr. Felton. "Cole Technologies has government backing. We've had it for years. And with the projects we're working on now? We're about to scale up significantly. Within the year, we'll be untouchable."

It wasn't a boast. It was fact.

And it was the foundation I had built. The security I had earned for myself.

Mr. Felton nodded slowly, clearly impressed. "Well then. I suppose you have nothing to worry about."

I smiled faintly. "No. We don't."

My grandmother's birthday was on Saturday.

Whether Dante attended or not didn't matter to me anymore.

But Liora would definitely be there.

And to make sure she didn't sneak off to find Sienna and disappear on me, I decided to call her Thursday morning.

It was the first time I'd initiated contact with her since we'd returned from our trip.

She was having breakfast when I called.

I could hear the clatter of dishes in the background, the low hum of conversations in the background.

And then her voice that sounded too bright and surprised resounded through the phone. "Mom!"

"Mm," I said, hearing the faint sounds of chewing on the other end. "Are you having breakfast?"

"Mm! Have you eaten, Mom?"

"I have," I said, then got straight to the point. "I'm calling to remind you that Saturday is your grandmother's birthday. I need you to stay with her that day. No running off, okay?"

There was a pause.

"Ah..."

I could hear the disappointment in that single sound.

Liora had clearly been planning something else for the weekend. Probably time with Sienna. She'd missed out last weekend, and she'd obviously been hoping to make up for it.

But she couldn't completely ignore what I was asking either.

I tightened my grip on the phone, keeping my voice steady. "Is your dad home?"

"Dad? Yeah, he's here." I heard her shift, probably looking across the table at him. "Do you want to talk to him?"

"Yes. Please give him the phone. I need to discuss something with him."

"Okay." There was a rustling sound, then Liora's voice, a little farther away. "Dad, Mom wants to talk to you."

A pause.

Then Dante's voice came through calmly. "What's up?"

He didn't even bother to greet me. Neither was his tone warm. It was merely like he was speaking to a stranger but I was used to it now.

I kept my tone equally professional. "My grandmother's birthday is the day after tomorrow. I need you to talk to Liora and make sure she comes back to the Miller family house with me that day. I don't want her running off."

"Got it. Anything else?"

"I'll pick her up Friday night to bring her back to my family's place."

"Okay."

That was it.

I felt a small knot of tension loosen in my chest. At least I knew he'd make sure Liora stayed put.

After a brief silence, I added, "Thank you."

"Mm."

He made that one sound and didn't bother to make any further talks.

I didn't ask him if he'd be attending the party.

I hadn't asked when I'd given him the invitation weeks ago, and I wasn't asking now.

Besides, he'd already made his position clear. He'd bought those gifts at the auction, the embroidered scroll, the emerald jewelry and left them on my vanity for me to give to my grandmother.

He was sending them in his name, sure. But he was asking me to deliver them.

Which meant he wasn't planning to show up.

He was delegating. Letting me represent him.

So there was no point in asking.

No point in hoping.

I didn't say another word. Just ended the call.

Dante, for his part, didn't seem to notice that this year was different.

That in all the years past, I'd always asked, always asked, whether he'd come with me. Whether he'd make time. Whether he'd stand beside me, even just for an afternoon.

And every year, he'd said no.

But I'd still asked. This year, I didn't.

And he didn't even notice.

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After Elodie hung up, Dante handed the phone back to Liora without a word.

He took a sip of his coffee, then spoke, his tone calm and matter-of-fact. "Your mom will come pick you up tomorrow night to take you to your grandmother's house. On Saturday, you need to listen to her and not run off."

Liora's face fell immediately. "But—"

Dante didn't respond. He just looked at her. Not harshly tho. Not unkindly either. It was just the kind of look that said This isn't a negotiation.

Liora recognized it immediately. She'd seen that look before.

Her shoulders slumped, and she let out a dramatic sigh. "Okay..."

"Good girl," Dante said, his voice softening just slightly.

But Liora wasn't done. She might have lost this battle, but she wasn't giving up the war.

She leaned forward, her eyes wide and hopeful, deploying the expression that usually worked on him. "Then on Sunday, I want to go play with Aunt Sienna. And you have to come too. You and Aunt Sienna. Together."

Dante paused, his coffee cup halfway to his lips.

For a moment, he didn't respond.

Then he set the cup down and looked at his daughter, his sweet, manipulative, far-too-clever daughter and chuckled softly.

"Alright," he said.

Liora's face lit up like she'd just won the lottery. "Really?"

"Really."

She grinned, bouncing slightly in her seat, already mentally planning the day. "Can we go to the amusement park? And get ice cream? And—"

"We'll see," Dante said, cutting her off gently. "Finish your breakfast first."

"Okay!" Liora practically glowed as she dug back into her food, her earlier disappointment completely forgotten.

Dante watched her for a moment, his expression unreadable.

Then he picked up his phone and glanced at the screen.

Elodie's name was still there, at the top of his recent calls.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 133 - 134 [1,419 words]

Chapter 133: Chapter 134

Elodie's POV~

On Friday night, after work, I drove back to Dante's villa to pick up Liora.

I was surprised to find him home. It was rare for him to be there this early, usually, he should have still being at the office or out somewhere with Sienna.

He was on the phone when I walked in. His eyes flicked toward me briefly, acknowledging my presence, then he turned away and continued his conversation.

The housekeeper approached me, her expression warm. "Madam, I've prepared dinner for you and Miss Liora before you leave."

I shook my head. "No need. We'll eat at the Miller house. But thank you."

She hesitated, glancing toward Dante like she needed his permission to accept my refusal.

Dante, still on his call, pulled the phone away from his mouth just long enough to say, "Listen to Madam."

Then he went right back to his conversation.

I nodded to the housekeeper and turned to Liora. "Let's go, sweetheart."

"Okay!" Liora grabbed her bag and waved enthusiastically at Dante. "Bye, Dad! See you tomorrow!"

Dante waved back, his expression softening just slightly. "Bye, sweetheart."

I didn't say anything to him. Didn't acknowledge him at all.

I just took Liora's hand and left.

Dante didn't seem to notice. He just stood there, the phone still pressed to his ear, watching us walk out the door.

My grandmother's birthday party was going to be a grand affair.

When we arrived at the Miller house, the place was already buzzing with activity. Caterers were setting up tables, florists were arranging centerpieces, and my uncle Jason was directing traffic like a seasoned general.

After dinner, I helped with the preparations, folding napkins, arranging place cards, making sure everything was perfect.

By the time I finished, it was past eleven.

I collapsed into bed exhausted, but my mind was still racing.

Tomorrow had to go well. It had to.

The next morning, I woke up early.

Before breakfast, the family gathered around my grandmother to offer our birthday congratulations and present our gifts.

My uncle went first, handing over a beautifully wrapped box. Then his wife. Then my cousins, Xavier and Hugo, who'd clearly put thought into their presents.

When it was my turn, I stepped forward with the lacquered wooden box containing the scholar's tools I'd found at the antique market.

My grandmother's eyes lit up the moment she opened it. Her hands trembled slightly as she lifted one of the brushes, running her fingers over the carved jade handle.

"Elodie," she whispered, her voice thick with emotion. "This is exquisite."

I smiled. "I'm glad you like it, Grandmother."

She reached out and squeezed my hand, her eyes shining. "I love it. Thank you."

Then it was Liora's turn.

I glanced at her, expecting her to step forward with whatever small gift she'd prepared.

But she just stood there, frozen.

Then she tugged on my sleeve.

I bent down, putting my ear closer. "What's wrong?"

She looked embarrassed, her voice dropping to a whisper. "Mom... I didn't prepare a gift."

I felt something cold settle in my chest.

She hadn't prepared a gift.

For her great-grandmother's seventieth birthday.

She looked up at me, her expression shifting from embarrassment to mild accusation. "Why didn't you remind me?"

I straightened, keeping my voice even. "I prepared gifts from your father and from Nonna. But you're still a child, so it's okay if you didn't bring one. Just make sure you remember next time."

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

Because I hadn't reminded her on purpose.

Not because I wanted to embarrass her. But because I wanted to see if she'd remember on her own.

If she cared enough to remember.

And she hadn't.

It wasn't that she didn't have time. She could've drawn a picture. Made a card. Asked me to stop somewhere yesterday so she could pick out something small.

But she hadn't thought of it at all.

Yet when it came to Sienna's birthday, Liora had counted down the days. Had planned her gift weeks in advance. Had been excited about it.

So I knew it wasn't that she didn't understand the concept of giving gifts.

It was that she didn't care enough about this grandmother to bother.

And that hurt more than I wanted to admit.

Liora didn't notice the coldness in my expression. The moment I told her it was okay, relief washed over her face, and she relaxed.

After Jason presented his gift to my grandmother, I stepped forward with mine.

The first one I handed over was the embroidered scroll. "This was prepared by Nonna for you, with Dante's help."

My grandmother carefully unwrapped it, her fingers gentle on the silk. She studied it for a long moment, her eyes tracing the beautiful stitching, and a soft smile spread across her face. "She's thoughtful."

I reached for the second box. "And this is from Dante."

The emerald jewelry set gleamed under the morning light as she opened it. The stones were flawless, vibrant green against the velvet lining.

My grandmother looked at it briefly, her expression polite but was still distant. Then she closed the box with a soft click and set it aside.

"Very beautiful," she said, her tone carefully neutral. "Thank him on my behalf."

She didn't ask if Dante was coming to the party. Didn't ask why he wasn't here. Didn't even pretend to care.

She couldn't be bothered.

And honestly? I didn't blame her.

In the past, I would've jumped to his defense. Would've made excuses for him, tried to smooth things over, tried to make everyone believe that he was a good man, a good husband, that he was just... busy.

But not today.

Today, I said nothing.

Instead, I reached into my bag and pulled out the lacquered wooden box containing the scholar's tools I'd chosen myself.

"And this," I said quietly, "is from me."

My grandmother opened it slowly, and the moment she saw what was inside, her entire face transformed.

Her eyes went wide. Her hands trembled as she lifted one of the brushes, turning it over carefully, reverently, like it was made of glass.

"Elodie..." Her voice cracked. "This is... this is extraordinary."

I smiled. "I thought you'd like it."

She set the brush down gently and pulled me into a tight hug, her small frame surprisingly strong. "I don't just like it, sweetheart. I love it. Thank you."

I hugged her back, my throat tight.

Of all the gifts she'd received today, this was the one she cherished most.

Not the expensive embroidery. Not the flawless emeralds.

But the one I'd chosen. The one I'd searched for. The one that came from me *.

And that felt like a victory.

After the gift exchange, we gathered for breakfast.

The table was full with uncle Jason, his wife, Xavier, Hugo, Liora, my grandmother, and me. The conversation flowed easily, our laughter punctuating the clatter of dishes and the clink of teacups.

My grandmother smiled brightly, her happiness entirely genuine.

But every now and then, I caught a flicker of sadness in her eyes. A shadow that passed over her face when she thought no one was looking.

Uncle Jason saw it too. I could tell by the way his jaw tightened, the way his gaze lingered on her just a little too long.

Because today was a family reunion.

But it was missing someone. My mother.

I turned my face away, blinking rapidly, willing the tears not to fall.

No one mentioned her. We all silently agreed not to. Because bringing her up would shatter the fragile joy we'd managed to build this morning.

So we smiled. We laughed and we pretended.

By nine o'clock, the next wave of guests began arriving, friends of the family, business associates, people who mattered.

The birthday banquet would officially begin tonight at the hotel we'd reserved, but people were already stopping by to pay their respects.

I moved through the house, greeting guests, making small talk, playing the part of the dutiful granddaughter.

That's when I noticed Liora. She was sitting on the couch, staring off into space, her expression distant.

Hugo noticed too. He walked over and gently patted her cheek, his voice kind. "Liora, what's wrong? You seem a little distracted."

Liora blinked, pulled out of whatever thought she'd been lost in, and looked up at him.

Then she glanced toward the door.

And I knew.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 134 - 135 [1,496 words]

Chapter 134: Chapter 135

Elodie's Pov~

I heard it in the way Liora's voice went soft, that particular lilt she used when she was thinking about someone she adored.

She was thinking about Sienna.

Liora had done exactly what Dante told her to do. Stayed put at the Miller's estate like a good little girl, didn't wander off. But her body might've been here, tucked into these walls, while her mind? Her mind was somewhere else entirely. With someone else.

I'd seen her checking her phone all day. Her thumb scrolling. Waiting. She'd sent message after message to "Auntie Sienna," but Sienna, busy as always, important as always, had barely replied.

By late afternoon, we'd all made our way to the hotel. The staff moved quietly, efficiently, setting up for Nonna's birthday banquet. Everything was pristine. Everything was perfect. By six, the guests started trickling in.

I watched from the side as Uncle Jason greeted them at the entrance, accepting gifts with that easy charm he wore like a second skin, directing people to their seats. But I noticed something off in the way some of them shifted on their feet. The tight smiles. The hurried words.

"Apologies, Jason. I have another engagement tonight. I'll just pay my respects and be on my way."

Jason nodded graciously. Professionally. I didn't say anything either. People were busy. It happened.

Except it kept happening.

Half an hour later, I realized it wasn't just one or two people. It was a pattern now. Business partners, people who'd worked with the Miller Family for years, were dropping off gifts and disappearing before the appetizers even hit the table. Some didn't bother showing up at all. They sent assistants. Secretaries. People with rehearsed apologies and expensive wine they didn't even hand over themselves.

We'd reserved over twenty tables.

At this rate, more than half of them were going to sit empty tonight.

I stood there, with my fingers laced together in front of me, watching the room that should've been filling up stay painfully, embarrassingly sparse. This was supposed to be a celebration. My grandmother's night. She'd been looking forward to this for weeks, talking about who was coming, what she'd wear, asking me to help her pick out a dress because Dante certainly wouldn't.

And now?

Now it was turning into something else entirely. Something hollow.

I kept my face smooth. Neutral. I'd gotten good at that.

But Uncle Jason, he wasn't hiding it as well. I could see the disappointment creeping into the lines around his mouth, the way his shoulders stiffened every time someone else made an excuse and headed for the door. He was too polite to say anything, but I knew it was eating at him.

Finally, he caught one of the guests he actually trusted, Mr. Lane, someone he'd done business with for years and I watched him lean in slightly, with his voice low.

"A lot of our guests have mentioned they can't stay for dinner. They've all said they're attending another event." He paused, and I could hear the careful restraint in his tone. "If you don't mind me asking... which one?"

Mr. Lane looked uncomfortable. Like he'd been hoping to slip out without this exact conversation.

"The Green family," he said finally.

I went still.

"Your sister-in-law's grandmother's family," he continued, almost apologetic now. "They're not originally from the Bellini Pack territory, but they just acquired an estate here. Tonight's the housewarming for their new residence."

Those words landed like stones.

I didn't move. Didn't blink. But inside, something cold and sharp twisted through my chest.

Uncle Jason's expression darkened. I saw his jaw tighten, the smallest flex of muscle beneath skin.

We'd thought the whole mess with the property dispute was over. Settled and done.

Apparently, we were wrong.

Because the Green family, Sienna's family, had decided to throw a housewarming party. Tonight. The exact same night as Nonna's birthday.

And I was supposed to believe that was a coincidence?

Nonna's dear friend, Sienna's grandmother, had known her for *decades*. They'd celebrated birthdays together, holidays, milestones. There was no way, no possible way, the Greens had just "forgotten" what today was.

No. This was intentional.

I felt heat rise in my throat, but I swallowed it down and pushed it back into that familiar place where I kept everything else I wasn't allowed to feel.

Uncle Jason looked at me and I looked back.

Neither of us said it out loud, but we didn't have to.

Some people didn't want to cross Dante. Others were scrambling to get closer to the Brown and Green families.

It made sense, in a cold way. The Miller family had been struggling for years now. We'd lost influence, lost allies, lost ground. Meanwhile, the Browns and the Greens? They had Dante's backing. They had power. They had everything we didn't.

The choice was obvious.

Mr. Lane offered Jason an apologetic nod before he slipped out the door, and I watched him go with my hands folded neatly at my sides, expression unreadable.

At first, Grandma and aunt Helen, hadn't paid much attention to the trickle of departures. A few guests leaving early wasn't unusual. But as the minutes passed and more people arrived only to drop off their gifts and vanish, the banquet hall began to feel cavernous. Empty. The meal was about to be served, and we had rows upon rows of vacant seats staring back at us.

That's when they noticed.

My Nonna and Aunt Helen approached, both frowning, confusion flickering across their faces.

"Why have so many people left?" Grandma Miller's voice was firm, but there was an edge to it. "What's going on?"

Uncle Jason and I stood there, frozen for a heartbeat. Neither of us wanted to be the one to say it. But silence wasn't an option anymore.

Uncle Jason exhaled slowly, his shoulders dropping just a fraction.

"The Green and Brown families have both relocated to the Bellini Pack territory," he said carefully. "The Green family scheduled their housewarming for today. They sent invitations to most of our guests, so..."

He didn't finish.

He didn't have to.

The picture was painfully clear now. The Green family had deliberately chosen today. My grandmother's birthday. A day they knew mattered. A day they'd celebrated with her for years.

This wasn't a scheduling conflict.

This was a message.

Jason and I exchanged a glance, worry pooling between us. I could see it in the tight set of his jaw, the way his fingers curled into fists at his sides. We were both bracing ourselves, waiting to see how grandma would take this.

The Green family had repaid her kindness with cruelty. They'd humiliated her in front of everyone who mattered. And as long as my mother, Sally, was still recovering in that rehabilitation center, still dealing with the aftermath of what they had caused, we would never forget what they'd done.

But now? Now they'd escalated.

Nonna stood perfectly still for a moment, her hand gripping the edge of the table so tightly her knuckles went white.

Then her sharp and unwavering eyes locked onto Jason and me.

"Is Wilson backing them?" she asked, her voice cutting through the air.

Wilson. Dante's family name. The name that carried weight in every corner of this Pack and beyond.

She didn't say Dante. She said Wilson. And somehow, that made it worse.

Because it wasn't just him. It was everything he represented. Everything he'd chosen over us.

I felt my throat tighten, but I kept my voice steady.

"Yes."

The word came out quieter than I intended, and I hated how small it sounded.

Nonna's gaze didn't waver, but I saw something flicker behind her eyes. Hurt, maybe. Or anger. Or both.

My vision blurred at the edges, and I felt the sting before I could stop it. My own eyes burned, and I lowered my head quickly before anyone could see.

"I'm sorry, Nonna," I whispered.

Her hand reached out, warm and gentle, cupping my cheek. She tilted my face up so I had no choice but to look at her.

"It's not your fault," she said softly, her thumb brushing just beneath my eye. "You all underestimated their vile and shameless nature. That's all."

"Nonna..." My voice cracked, just barely.

"Don't worry." She straightened, her hand falling away as she turned to survey the half-empty banquet hall. The rows of chairs no one would sit in. The tables set for guests who weren't coming.

Her expression shifted into an calm, unshaken one.

"It's just a birthday," she said unbothered. "What does it matter how we celebrate it? As long as you're all well, that's all I ask. Everything else is trivial. No need to care too much."

She looked back at me, then at Jason, then at Aunt Helen.

"Remember," she continued, her tone firm now, almost commanding. "I've always told you, don't punish yourself because of someone else's shamelessness. Understand?"

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Chapter 135: Chapter 136

Her words seemed to carry the weight of the old grudge with Sally. Elodie and Jason both nodded in understanding. "We get it, Grandma."

Elodie had also given invitations to Johnny and Cara, who had just arrived. They were both aware of the tensions between the Miller family, the Green family, and the Brown family.

Upon hearing what happened, Cara's face twisted in disgust. "Are you **kidding** me right now? Those people are absolute scum! I swear I've never seen anyone stoop this low!"

Johnny rested a hand on Elodie's shoulder, his grip reassuring, trying to ground her before the frustration consumed her completely.

A moment later, his phone buzzed against his palm. He glanced down at the screen, read the message, and then looked back up with a faint smile tugging at his lips. "Hold on. I'm gonna bring someone by."

Elodie frowned, caught off guard. "What? Who?"

Johnny's smile widened just a fraction, something almost mischievous flickering in his expression. "You'll see soon enough."

Meanwhile, at the Green family's banquet hall.

The Green matriarch and Miles Green were both grinning like they'd just won the lottery as they watched the endless stream of guests pouring through the doors.

It was exactly as Elodie had suspected—the Green family absolutely remembered Grandma Miller's birthday. After years of shared celebrations, cake and champagne and all the empty pleasantries that came with it, there was no way in hell they'd forgotten.

The decision to schedule their housewarming on this exact day had been deliberate. It had been calculated and it was cruel.

They were still pissed, even now, thinking back to when they'd tried to snag that property right across from the Miller family home. They'd had the whole thing mapped out, close enough to keep tabs, close enough to rub it in their faces. But then Elodie had stepped in, pulled Dante into it, and the whole plan had gone up in flames.

At the time, they'd been furious.

But Dante had thrown money at them to smooth it over, and honestly? It had worked out better than they could've hoped. They'd walked away with more cash, a nicer estate, and now they had something even sweeter.

And it was payback.

They'd scheduled their housewarming on the same night as Grandma Miller's birthday, and they'd stolen every damn guest she had.

Sophia Green leaned toward her mother, her voice low and dripping with smug satisfaction. "I bet their banquet hall's practically empty right now." She let out a short, sharp laugh. "God, can you imagine? All that time and money they spent putting it together, and for what? No one even stayed. It's pathetic. Once word gets out about this, everyone's gonna know the Millers are washed up. Who's gonna want to partner with them after tonight?"

Tracy patted her daughter's hand lightly, a pleased smile curling at her lips. "Exactly, darling."

Sure, the Green family had invited a bunch of big names from across the Bellini Pack territory, half of whom they'd never even met before tonight. Strangers in expensive suits with rehearsed smiles.

But it didn't matter.

What mattered was that they'd beaten the Millers at their own game and walked away with all the spoils. What mattered was proving they had the upper hand now.

Tonight's housewarming wasn't really about the house at all. It was about power. About making connections. About letting everyone know exactly who was worth aligning with.

And sitting pretty at the center of it all was Sienna.

The diamond bracelet Dante had bought her at the auction was wrapped around her wrist like a crown, glittering under the chandeliers with every subtle movement she made. It looked extremely expensive and it was Impossible to ignore.

Everyone knew Dante had dropped millions that night on four separate items, and the fact that he'd lavished so much attention on Sienna hadn't gone unnoticed. Half the room was already angling to get close to her, eager to win favor with the woman who so clearly held the Alpha's affection.

Guests circled her like moths to a flame, their voices honey-sweet and dripping with flattery.

"That bracelet is gorgeous on you. Dante clearly knows quality when he sees it."

"You look radiant tonight, Miss Brown. Absolutely stunning."

"He's got excellent taste, though I suppose that goes without saying."

It wasn't hard to see why they were all tripping over themselves. Sienna was beautiful, effortlessly so, and she wore everything like it had been made specifically for her. The bracelet caught the light with every tilt of her wrist.

She smiled graciously, angling her hand just enough to let the diamonds catch even more light.

Dressed in formal attire tonight, the diamond bracelet made Sienna look even more elegant and refined, like she'd been born wearing it.

"Thank you," Sienna responded with a gracious smile, the kind that seemed effortless and perfectly practiced.

To curry favor with the Brown family, many guests had done their homework. It didn't take long before someone took the plunge and brought up Sienna's grandmother's well-known passion for antiques.

"I've heard that your grandmother, Old Madam Brown, is quite the collector. That stunning antique vase from the auction, was that a gift from Mr. Wilson for her?"

The word gift hung in the air. It was clear what they were really saying: that Dante had already considered the Brown family as good as his own.

Sienna's smile widened just a fraction. "Yes, it was."

And it was true. The vase had absolutely delighted Old Madam Brown. Every time she thought about it, her face lit up like she'd won the lottery. After all, it had been an antique worth several million, a staggering amount, even for someone used to luxury.

It was impossible not to recognize Dante's sincerity and his extravagant devotion to Sienna. The gestures he made weren't just grand, they were statements. And everyone in the room had taken note.

When Old Madam Green overheard this, a flicker of envy crossed her face, quickly masked by a polite smile. As a senior member of Sienna's maternal family, Old Madam Brown had received an antique vase worth millions, while she herself had received... nothing comparable.

But then Sienna casually mentioned that Dante had purchased two other items that night, each worth well over several million, even more expensive than the vase itself.

Old Madam Green's spirits lifted immediately. Surely at least one of those had to be meant for the Green family. It only made sense, didn't it?

At that moment, Harry and Levi arrived.

The second they stepped through the doors, the Green and Brown family members practically tripped over themselves rushing to greet them, their faces stretched into wide, welcoming smiles.

After all, these two men held serious weight in the Bellini Pack territory. Maintaining strong relationships with them wasn't just smart, it was essential.

Sophia had met Harry before, and the moment her eyes landed on him again, her cheeks flushed beneath her carefully applied makeup. Her breath hitched just slightly, her fingers smoothing over the fabric of her dress in a nervous, almost unconscious gesture.

Tracy noticed immediately, and a knowing smile tugged at her lips.

The Becker family, much like the Wilson family, was one of the top-tier powerhouses in the Pack. Harry Becker himself was exceptional, intelligent, influential, devastatingly handsome. And Sophia's admiration for him? It was written all over her face.

Naturally, the Green family was absolutely thrilled at the idea of their daughter catching Harry's attention.

With Sienna and Dante forming what looked like an unshakable pair, if Sophia could also win Harry's heart, the Green family would be unstoppable. They'd have connections to two of the most powerful families in the territory. They'd be untouchable.

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Chapter 136: Chapter 137

With that tantalizing thought swirling in their minds, the Green family greeted Harry and Levi with even more enthusiasm, their voices more warm and eager, their hands extended in welcome.

However, Sienna couldn't help but frown at their overly obsequious attitude. She and Harry were friends, like equals. The Green family, her own relatives, shouldn't be fawning over them like this. It felt... cheap. Embarrassing, even.

But Sienna wasn't about to call them out in front of everyone. After all, the Brown family had been a powerhouse for decades, their name carrying weight that stretched back generations. The Green family, on the other hand, had only clawed their way to prominence in the past ten years or so.

In terms of legacy, the Greens still didn't hold a candle to the Browns. So while Harry and Levi clearly didn't think much of the Green family's desperate enthusiasm, they chose to overlook it, focusing instead on their relationship with Sienna.

After exchanging pleasantries and handing over their gifts to the Green family, Harry turned to Sienna, his tone casual. "Where's Dante? Hasn't he shown up yet?"

Sienna shook her head lightly. "There were some complications with a deal overseas. He's been pulling all-nighters trying to sort it out these past few days." She paused, her expression sympathetic. "Unfortunately, it's not completely resolved yet, so he's running late. He'll be here soon, though."

Harry and Levi nodded, understanding flickering across their faces, but neither pressed the issue further.

Sienna, familiar with both of them, personally guided them to their seats, her hand gesturing gracefully toward the front of the room where the best tables were reserved.

By now, it was getting late, and the banquet was ready to begin.

But the main guest of the evening, Dante, had not yet arrived, and Miles Green was visibly uncertain about whether they should proceed or wait for him.

He turned to Sienna and Janice, his voice low and hesitant. "What do you think? Should we wait?"

Sienna didn't even hesitate. "We can start the meal."

The guests who had made the effort to come tonight deserved to be treated with respect, and it wouldn't be polite to keep them waiting indefinitely. Sure, they'd probably have no issue with it, but still, it wasn't appropriate.

"But..." Miles shifted uncomfortably. "Isn't it a little inappropriate to start without Dante?"

Sienna's smile was calm, and confident. "It's fine. He won't mind."

Her words were spoken as if she had every right to make decisions on Dante's behalf. As if she knew him so well, so intimately, that she could predict exactly how he'd feel about it.

And that alone spoke volumes.

The other guests, watching this exchange closely, couldn't help but take note. If Sienna was this certain that Dante wouldn't mind them starting without him, it only deepened their understanding of just how important she was to him.

It made them even more eager to build strong ties with the Brown family.

On the other side of the venue, although many guests had already left, Grandma Miller still kept to the usual formalities.

After confirming that all the remaining guests had arrived, she took the stage to give a speech, her voice was so steady and gracious as she thanked everyone for attending. She also offered a brief apology for any disruptions earlier that may have affected the mood of the evening.

Her words were composed, dignified, and they were met with warm applause from the audience.

After finishing her speech, Grandma Miller glanced at the time and gestured for Jason to direct the hotel staff to begin serving the meal.

But then, Johnny, standing nearby, spoke up. "Uncle Jason, could we hold off for just a bit longer? Someone else is still on their way. They'll be here soon, within ten minutes, I'd say."

Given Johnny's close relationship with Elodie, Jason was well aware of the bond between them and agreed without hesitation.

"Is it the person you mentioned earlier?" Jason asked, his tone curious but welcoming. "We still have seats available at the main table. I wonder if they'd mind joining us there?"

Johnny's smile widened just slightly, something knowing flickering in his eyes. "I think they'd be honored."

Elodie, standing off to the side, frowned slightly, her gaze flicking between Johnny and Jason. She had no idea who Johnny was bringing, but the way he was acting, like he had something up his sleeve, made her uneasy.

Or maybe... hopeful?

She wasn't sure.

Cara leaned in close, her voice a low whisper. "Do you know who he's talking about?"

Elodie shook her head slowly. "No idea."

But something in Johnny's expression told her it was someone important.

Someone who might just change the entire tone of the night.

Elodie's POV~

Just as the dishes were being brought out to the other tables, Johnny checked his phone. He quickly motioned for me to come aside. "The person's here. Come with me to greet them downstairs."

I nodded, already turning toward the door, when a familiar voice cut through the air.

"There's no need. I'm already upstairs."

I froze mid-step, my breath catching in my throat as I turned back slowly.

"...Teacher?"

It was Professor Nolan.

The room went silent.

I could feel the shock ripple through the space like a stone dropped into still water. People were staring, some with their mouths slightly open, others blinking rapidly like they weren't sure if what they were seeing was real.

Because it was Professor Nolan. The tech magnate. The man whose face appeared in news broadcasts and industry panels across the entire Pack territory. Everyone knew who he was.

Not only was he brilliant, one of the most capable minds in the field but his background was rumored to be incredibly influential. The kind of influence that opened doors most people didn't even know existed.

For someone like him to attend Grandma Miller's birthday banquet? It was nothing short of extraordinary.

Grandma Miller and Uncle Jason looked just as stunned as everyone else, but they recovered quickly, rising from their seats to greet him.

Professor Nolan, who was typically reserved and distant in public settings, had always shown genuine respect toward elders he deemed worthy. He'd met Grandma Miller before, and now, he stepped forward smoothly, gesturing for her to sit back down.

"Please, don't stand up," he said gently, his tone softer than I'd heard it in weeks. "I've been remiss in not visiting you for so long."

Grandma Miller smiled, her expression warm but slightly flustered. "Professor Nolan, it's such an honor to have you here tonight. You're making me feel embarrassed."

"Please don't say that," he replied, his voice sincere. "It's my oversight not to have come sooner."

He motioned toward Johnny, who immediately handed him a wrapped gift. Professor Nolan presented it to Grandma Miller personally, his movements were respectful.

"I didn't have much time to prepare, so please excuse me if it's not up to your expectations."

Grandma Miller waved him off, her smile widening. "Professor Nolan, you're far too kind. Your presence here is the greatest gift I could receive."

After a few more exchanges of polite conversation, Professor Nolan's gaze shifted toward me and Johnny, who were still standing awkwardly behind him like two students caught passing notes in class.

He didn't say a word. He didn't have to.

We both sat down immediately, understanding the silent command.

Grandma Miller turned her attention back to him, her expression fond. "In the past, Elodie was well taken care of by you. I've always been grateful for that."

Professor Nolan inclined his head slightly. "It was nothing, really. She's done well recently, made some real progress in her research. I'm glad to see her not wasting her talents."

The words landed quietly, but I felt them settle deep in my chest.

Both Professor Nolan and Grandma Miller had long since accepted that I'd given up my academic path for Dante. They hadn't pushed me to reconsider. They hadn't lectured me or tried to change my mind.

They'd both believed that young people needed to experience setbacks, that following your own path, even if it led to mistakes, was the only way you could truly understand regret.

What mattered was whether you could recover from your disappointments. Whether you could pick yourself back up and keep moving forward.

Unlike some people who got so consumed by failure that they lost their way completely.

Fortunately, I hadn't fallen into that trap.

Not yet, anyway.

Hearing Professor Nolan's words, I watched Grandma Miller's expression soften, the tension in her shoulders easing visibly.

"I'm so glad to hear that," she said, her voice thick with relief. "Thank you for looking out for her."

With that reassurance, the worry that had been weighing on her all night finally seemed to lift. She could relax now. She could breathe.

I sat there, hands folded in my lap, trying to keep my face neutral even though my thoughts were racing.

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Chapter 137: Chapter 138

Elodie sat beside Professor Nolan, but he was still engaged in conversation with Grandma Miller, so he hadn't turned his attention to her yet.

She shifted slightly in her seat and leaned toward Johnny, her voice low. "Thanks."

She could feel the difference in Grandma Miller's demeanor since Professor Nolan's arrival. Her grandmother was visibly lighter, the tension that had been weighing on her shoulders all night finally easing. She was happy.

Johnny shrugged, his expression casual. "No need to thank me. Teacher gave me his response after seeing your project proposal a while back, so I mentioned tonight's banquet to him. He decided to come because of that. If anyone should be thanked, it's you."

Before Elodie could respond, someone near the entrance called out, surprise lacing their voice. "Dante Wilson?"

Elodie hesitated, her breath catching as she turned toward the door.

And there he was.

Dante walked into the room with that usual, confident steps of his, his presence commanding attention the moment he crossed the threshold. The quiet hum of conversation died down as eyes followed him.

He made his way directly toward Grandma Miller, his expression unreadable, but polite.

"Happy Birthday," he said, presenting her with a gift box, holding it carefully with both hands. "I wasn't sure whether you'd like the previous gift, so I brought another one. I hope this one suits you better."

Grandma Miller looked up at him, surprise flickering across her face before it was quickly smoothed over. The coldness in her expression didn't change much.

While the Green family had been shameless in their actions tonight, it was painfully clear that without Dante's backing, they wouldn't have been so bold. They wouldn't have dared. But with so many eyes on them now, Grandma Miller accepted the gift with a distant, courteous smile.

"Thank you. You're very thoughtful," she said evenly, then turned to a nearby server. "Please add another chair and set another place."

Dante didn't seem bothered by her cool reception. His gaze swept the room briefly before landing on Professor Nolan.

"Professor Nolan," he said, his tone calm and respectful.

Professor Nolan gave a brief nod in return. "Mr. Wilson."

The exchange was polite. Professional. But there was something unspoken beneath it, a quiet acknowledgment of who held more weight in this room.

Seeing Elodie glance at him, Professor Nolan looked back at her, then instructed a waiter to set a chair between him and Elodie.

Dante sat down. Right beside her.

Close enough that she could feel the faint warmth radiating from him, close enough to catch the subtle scent of his cologne that was familiar, aching so.

She kept her eyes forward, hands folded neatly in her lap.

The moment Professor Nolan had appeared, word had spread quickly among the remaining guests at the Miller family banquet. The news of his arrival traveled like wildfire through whispered conversations and hurried text messages.

In less than two minutes, the news reached the Green family's banquet hall.

The guests at the Green table were stunned.

"The Miller family has connections like that?"

"I didn't know. Wait... is that Johnny in the photo? And the woman beside him... is that actually Elodie?"

"I hadn't heard anything about this from the Greens. But if the woman next to Johnny is really Elodie, then it all makes sense now."

"How so?"

"Don't you remember? She attended the tech expo with Johnny recently. The two of them have a pretty solid relationship, and from what I've heard, things might be getting serious. The Gray family is also a strong force in the Pack, and from what I understand, Professor Nolan holds very high expectations for Johnny."

"So the Miller family's influence just increased significantly if they're now connected to Johnny's circle. Looks like we shouldn't underestimate them anymore."

The Brown family and other guests who had eagerly flocked to the Green family's event had not expected Professor Nolan to attend the Miller banquet. And now, with the Green family's guests quietly re-evaluating their relationship with the Miller family, the atmosphere began to shift.

Things were starting to feel... awkward.

Some of the guests exchanged uncomfortable glances, suddenly second-guessing their decision to leave Grandma Miller's banquet early.

Tracy Green's smile faltered slightly as she overheard the whispered conversations around her.

Sophia Green, who didn't follow national news much, looked genuinely confused when she noticed the reactions rippling through the room. She turned to Sienna, her brow furrowed. "Who is Professor Nolan? Why is everyone acting like it's such a big deal that he showed up?"

Sienna's expression remained carefully neutral, but there was a flicker of something sharp in her eyes. "He's a world-renowned figure in AI. A national-level talent. He could literally speak on behalf of the entire Pack if he wanted to. He's also..." She paused, her voice cooling slightly. "He's my ideal mentor."

Sophia's eyes widened. "He's that impressive?"

She processed that for a moment, then her face twisted with realization. "So, the reason Uncle was so upset with Elodie earlier was because she missed the opportunity to meet someone like him?"

"Exactly," Sienna said, her tone clipped and icy.

Sophia let out a scoff, her lip curling in disdain. "She's really shameless, then!"

Her tone grew even more displeased as she leaned in slightly. "But wait, someone that powerful is at that old woman's birthday banquet? Does that mean they're close?"

"No," Sienna replied coldly, her voice firm. "They only know each other casually."

In her mind, Elodie had only met Professor Nolan through Johnny. It was almost certainly Johnny's influence that had led to Nolan attending tonight. That was all. Nothing more.

Sophia's expression softened, her shoulders relaxing. "Oh, I see. So it's not really about her, then."

"Not at all," Sienna murmured, though something about the way she said it felt tight, like she was trying to convince herself as much as Sophia.

At a nearby table, Harry and Levi were seated just behind Sienna. Harry had been quietly eating, his focus elsewhere, when he overheard someone mention Professor Nolan attending the Miller family's birthday banquet.

He paused mid-bite, his fork hovering in the air. "The Miller family's birthday banquet?"

Levi glanced over, nodding. "Yeah. Today is also Elodie's grandmother's birthday. The banquet at their place and the one here are happening on the same night, so the guest lists overlapped a lot." He shrugged casually. "Because of the connection between Dante and Sienna, most of the overlapping guests ended up here."

He'd had no idea about this arrangement beforehand, only learning about it when he overheard the conversation buzzing through the banquet hall.

Harry's jaw tightened slightly as he processed that. "So the Miller family's banquet is practically empty now?"

Levi grinned, clearly enjoying the drama. "Yep. I heard about three-quarters of their seats are empty."

A wicked gleam entered Levi's eyes, and he leaned back in his chair, his tone dripping with schadenfreude. "It's so pitiful, really. They watch all these guests walk out the door, and there's nothing they can do to stop them."

He spoke with unmistakable glee, like he was savoring every bit of the Millers' humiliation.

Harry's expression darkened. His hand clenched slightly around his glass before he suddenly stood up, his chair scraping against the floor.

Levi froze, blinking up at him in confusion. "What's wrong?"

"I need to make a call," Harry said curtly, cutting him off.

Without waiting for a response, he turned and walked away, his stride quick and purposeful.

Levi sat there, still confused, watching him disappear toward the hallway.

As Harry hurried off, Sienna and Sophia both turned their heads to look at him, curiosity flickering across their faces.

Sienna frowned slightly. "Where's Harry going?"

Sophia shrugged, unbothered. "He said he's got an urgent call to make."

Sienna didn't ask any more questions, but her gaze lingered on the empty doorway for a moment longer before she turned back to the table.

The seat beside her remained empty now, and the atmosphere around them shifted, just slightly, but noticeably.

Something had changed.

And Sienna couldn't quite shake the feeling that the night wasn't going to go the way she'd planned.

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Chapter 138: Chapter 139

It was left for Dante to sit.

Old Madam Brown glanced at the time, her brow furrowing slightly as she turned to Sienna. "Sienna, is Dante here yet? Why don't you call him and give him a reminder?"

Sienna had been thinking the same thing.

She pulled out her phone, scrolling to Dante's contact and pressing call.

But the call didn't go through.

There were many guests attending the Green family's housewarming banquet tonight. The Green family needed to make their rounds, moving from table to table to toast each group, greet the guests, and build rapport to strengthen their connections.

This process naturally involved Sienna.

After all, the guests had come to the banquet primarily because of her. Because of her connection to Dante. And with Sienna present, the guests would certainly give the Greens more face, more respect.

As the Green family approached each table, guests stood up politely to greet them, smiles plastered on their faces.

After exchanging pleasantries at one table, someone asked casually, "Miss Brown, has Alpha Wilson arrived yet?"

Sienna smiled smoothly, her tone calm and assured. "He's on his way. He'll be here soon."

Just as she finished speaking, someone at a nearby table spoke up, their voice cutting through the polite hum of conversation. "My friend just told me that Alpha Wilson also went to the Miller family."

The table went quiet.

"Alpha Wilson went to the Miller family? Are you serious?"

"There's a photo. How could it be fake? Here, take a look."

Phones were already pulled out, screens glowing as the image was passed around.

"That... is definitely Alpha Wilson."

Everyone turned to look at Sienna.

The shift in the room was palpable. Eyes that had been warm and respectful moments ago now held a flicker of doubt, curiosity, maybe even amusement.

They weren't particularly close to the Green family. Most of them had come to the banquet because they wanted to curry favor with Dante, and because the Miller family's business had been in decline for years, unlikely to recover, or so everyone thought.

But now? Now not only had Professor Nolan shown up at the Miller family's banquet, but even Dante had gone to celebrate Grandma Miller's birthday.

So what exactly were they doing here?

Hearing that Dante had gone to the Miller family, Sienna didn't panic.

She couldn't afford to.

She knew that Nonna and Grandma Miller had a good relationship. With Grandma Miller's seventieth birthday, it was only natural for Dante to go in Nonna's place, especially since Nonna couldn't attend in person due to her health.

She had anticipated this.

But now that Dante had actually gone to the Miller family, even though it was under Nonna's orders, she still wasn't very happy about it.

And worse, everyone around her had assumed something was wrong between her and Dante after hearing that he'd gone to the Miller banquet instead of coming here first.

She could feel the judgment, the whispers starting to build beneath the surface.

Her jaw tightened, but she kept her expression cool and composed.

"Nonna and Grandma Miller are old friends," she said, her voice cold. "Dante just went over to sit with her for a bit, following the elder's command. He'll be here shortly."

There had indeed been rumors over the years that the Miller family and the Wilson family had a good relationship.

But for the longest time, everyone had seen no interaction between the two families, and they'd assumed it was just gossip. Old news. Something that didn't matter anymore.

Now, hearing Sienna's words, it seemed there might actually be some truth to it?

Murmurs rippled through the tables as guests exchanged glances, recalibrating their assumptions.

Sienna smiled politely, but inside, her thoughts were churning.

At that moment, someone walked in from outside.

The man was holding a gift box and made his way directly toward Sienna and the Green family. He stopped in front of Sienna, his posture professional and respectful as he spoke.

"Hello, Miss Brown. Alpha Wilson had an urgent matter come up, and he might be running very late. He was concerned he'd miss the banquet entirely, so he asked me to bring this gift to you in advance..."

Sienna reached out to take it, her expression smooth and composed. "I understand. Thank you."

The man gave a polite nod and excused himself, disappearing back into the crowd.

Sienna held the box carefully, her fingers tracing the edge of the ribbon as she processed what had just happened.

Since Grandma Miller was a friend of Nonna, and since Grandma Miller was celebrating her birthday, it was entirely reasonable for Dante to go there first, then come here later. That made sense. It was the respectful thing to do.

And seeing that Dante had anticipated their doubts about his relationship with her, he had thoughtfully sent someone with a gift in advance. It showed his consideration. His care for her.

Given Dante's status, his thoughtfulness toward Sienna was undeniable.

The guests around her seemed to come to the same conclusion. They smiled apologetically, nodding to themselves as if reassured. The tension that had been building moments ago began to ease.

Though the Green family was privately unhappy that Dante had gone to the Miller family first, they didn't show it. They couldn't afford to.

Once the awkward atmosphere had passed, Miles raised his glass high, his voice warm and welcoming as he thanked the guests for coming.

With Miles leading the way, the atmosphere quickly became lively again. Laughter returned. Conversations resumed.

Sienna felt warmth bloom in her chest when she thought about how considerate Dante had been. Any lingering unhappiness she'd felt melted away, replaced by a quiet satisfaction.

He'd thought of her. Even when he wasn't here, he'd made sure she was taken care of.

That had to mean something.

Noticing that Harry still hadn't returned, Sienna walked over to where Levi was seated and asked, her tone casual but curious, "Why hasn't Harry come back yet?"

Levi glanced up, then pulled out his phone. "Let me give him a call."

After a brief conversation, Levi hung up and shrugged. "Harry said he had an urgent matter to attend to and left early. He asked me to apologize to you on his behalf."

Sienna's brow furrowed slightly, concern flickering across her face. "Since he had something urgent, I understand. Did Harry say what the matter was?"

"He didn't mention it." Levi paused, then suddenly grinned like he'd just thought of something. "Could it have something to do with the person Harry likes?"

When Sienna heard this, her smile faltered, just for a second and her tone became a little more distant. "Harry hasn't mentioned anything about that recently. I can't really guess."

"True." Levi stroked his chin, still smiling. "I guess we'll know next time we ask him."

Sienna lowered her gaze, murmuring softly, "Mm."

But something about the way she said it felt tight. Like she didn't really want to know.

Meanwhile, at the main table of the Miller family banquet, Dante sat down and glanced over at Elodie.

Elodie had been surprised when he first appeared, she couldn't help it. But she'd quickly composed herself, her expression smoothing out into something neutral and unreadable.

When he looked over at her now, she remained expressionless and asked coldly, "What is it?"

Dante shifted his gaze away, his voice low and quiet. "Nothing."

After that, the two of them didn't speak again.

The silence between them was heavy, thick with everything they weren't saying.

Elodie's two cousins, who had never seen Dante in person before, were now stealing glances at him with open curiosity.

As someone who had held power for years, even though Dante wasn't deliberately putting on any airs, his every movement still exuded the demeanor of someone accustomed to being in command. The way he sat. The way he held his glass. The way his gaze swept the room, calm, assessing, controlled.

When one of her cousins accidentally caught his eye, they instinctively looked away, suddenly very interested in the napkin in their lap.

They didn't dare look at him again.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 139 - 140 [1,228 words]

Chapter 139: Chapter 140

Elodie's POV~

Dante took no notice of my cousins, nor did he have any intention of engaging in pleasantries. He calmly shifted his gaze elsewhere, his expression unreadable.

Dante was the man I loved.

I had fallen headlong into this, and after so many years, I still couldn't break free.

All these years, despite how Dante had treated me, if Jason had no grievances with him, that would have been impossible.

But even if he had grievances, what could he do?

The Miller family couldn't do anything to Dante.

Now that Dante had arrived, Jason, as the host, could only raise his glass and stand up, his voice polite but strained as he said,

"I didn't expect Alpha Wilson to come. If there's anything lacking in our hospitality, I hope you'll forgive us."

Upon hearing this, Dante also picked up his glass, stood up, and clinked it with Jason's, his tone smooth and professional. "You're too polite, Mr. Miller."

Mr. Miller. Not "uncle." Not even "Jason."

As soon as Dante spoke, I felt the shift in the room. Everyone took note of it.

It was clear that he didn't want to acknowledge the Miller family.

I had already known this, of course.

Now, I didn't care anymore. I didn't need him to acknowledge my family.

I knew he was here because of Nonna's wishes. Not because he wanted to be.

I turned to him, my voice cold and direct. "We appreciate Nonna's goodwill. If you have something to do, you can leave."

His staying here would only ruin the atmosphere. He had to know that.

Dante's gaze flicked to me briefly, his expression unreadable. "No hurry."

I furrowed my brows, not knowing what he meant by that.

But Dante didn't continue speaking to me. Instead, he looked toward Professor Nolan and spoke to him, his tone shifting into something more engaged, more genuine.

"Recently, our company developed a new feature that can make our products completely invisible and prevent any radar detection. I'm not sure if you'd be interested in learning more about it, Professor Nolan?"

"Any radar?"

Professor Nolan paused, his fork hovering mid-air as he looked over with a serious expression. "What do you mean?"

Dante didn't seem worried about revealing too much about the technology. He leaned forward slightly, his voice steady and confident as he continued discussing the details with Professor Nolan.

I hadn't expected Dante to discuss such matters with my teacher.

From their conversation, it was immediately clear that Dante was highly knowledgeable about AI technology. He wasn't just throwing around buzzwords—he actually **understood** it. Deeply.

Since Professor Nolan was interested, it wasn't surprising that Johnny and I would be curious as well.

At first, I was just listening casually, my attention half on the conversation and half on the untouched food in front of me.

But as the conversation went on, I forgot about eating entirely.

I leaned in slightly, my focus sharpening as Dante explained the mechanics behind the invisibility feature, the way it interacted with different radar frequencies, the potential applications.

Johnny was listening just as intently beside me, his eyes bright with interest.

At the beginning, Uncle Jason had opened his mouth like he wanted to remind us to eat while listening, but seeing how seriously we were all paying attention, afraid we might miss something, he decided not to say anything more.

For the most part, only a few of us at the table were familiar with Dante.

And even though we weren't particularly happy about his arrival, none of us showed it.

In such a situation, Dante should have felt awkward, out of place. But instead, he managed to turn it into his own turf.

Of course, tonight's main focus was Grandma Miller.

Dante wouldn't overshadow her. He was careful about that, at least.

After a few minutes, he said, "If you'd like to continue learning more, Professor Nolan, perhaps we can schedule another time to discuss this in detail?"

Professor Nolan nodded thoughtfully. "That works."

Dante nodded in return, then turned to me and asked, "Are you heading back tonight?"

I was still processing what he and Professor Nolan had just discussed, my mind turning over the technical details, and the implications. When I heard him suddenly speak to me, I paused for a moment before responding.

"I'm not going back."

Dante nodded, his expression unreadable. "Got it." Then he stood up and added, "I'll come back later to pick up Liora."

It was clear he was about to leave.

I kept my voice cold, and detached. "Got it."

Dante didn't say anything further. He walked over to Grandma Miller, his posture respectful as he spoke. "Grandma, I still have some matters to attend to. I'll leave first."

Grandma Miller didn't stand up. Her tone was icy, and dismissive. "Take care. No need to see you off."

Dante wasn't angry about Grandma Miller's indifference. He didn't even flinch. He glanced at Uncle Jason, gave a slight nod as a casual greeting, and then turned to leave the banquet hall.

I watched him walk away, his silhouette disappearing through the doorway, and I hated how much I still noticed the way he moved.

As he walked out of the hotel entrance, Harry, who had just gotten out of his car, paused.

Dante quickly got into his car and left.

Harry watched from where he stood but didn't move.

After the banquet, Professor Nolan and Johnny left together.

Liora had eaten too many snacks earlier in the day. After the dinner started, she only picked at a few bites of the food before losing her appetite entirely. She'd gone upstairs to play video games after that.

When most of the guests had left, I went upstairs to find her.

Liora took off her headphones when she saw me return. "Mom, are you done with your work?"

"Mm." I recalled what she had said before leaving and added, "Your dad said he would pick you up tonight. You should call him and ask when he'll be here."

Liora's face lit up immediately, her eyes bright with excitement as she thought about playing with her auntie Sienna tomorrow. I knew it. "Okay!"

She quickly dialed the number, and it was answered almost immediately.

I stood there, watching her talk to him, her voice animated and happy in a way it never was when she talked to me anymore.

After a while, Liora hung up the phone and said to me, "Dad said he'll be here in fifteen minutes."

"Okay, I know." I kept my voice calm. "Pack your things. We'll go downstairs to wait for your dad."

Liora opened her mouth like she was about to ask me to help with packing, the way she usually did. But then she stopped herself, her gaze flickering over my face.

She must have noticed I wasn't in the best mood.

She didn't ask.

When the time was right, I took Liora downstairs.

In the elevator, Liora shook my hand gently and said, "Mom."

I looked down at her. "Hmm?"

"You've been saying less recently."

I blinked, caught off guard.

Liora continued, her voice soft and hesitant. "You don't call me every day like you used to. And you don't always ask where I'm going anymore."

My chest tightened.

She was right.

I had been pulling back.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 140 - 141[1,105 words]

Chapter 140: Chapter 141

Liora had noticed that her mom didn't call her every day like before and wasn't always asking about where she was going.

She actually liked this change in her mom.

But recently, she'd also noticed that aside from those things, her mom seemed quieter than before whenever they met.

Her mom had become more silent.

Liora was someone Elodie had raised with her own hands. Elodie knew that she wasn't a careless person, not really.

The fact that Liora had only now realized her mom was speaking less meant she had simply gotten used to ignoring it. Used to tuning her out.

Elodie looked away, her voice soft. "Mom's just tired."

"Oh..." Liora replied quietly, her tone uncertain.

Elodie noticed that Liora seemed truly tired, so she didn't ask any further.

The night wind today was particularly cold.

As they walked out of the hotel lobby, the biting cold wind hit them, making their faces sting with the sudden chill.

Liora clearly felt the cold and didn't want to walk any further. She grabbed onto Elodie's hand and buried her small face into her stomach. "It's so cold, Mommy, hold me."

Liora was almost six years old now, and she had grown rather heavy.

Elodie felt the strain in her arms, the ache already settling into her shoulders, but she still bent down and picked her up.

Liora wrapped her little arms around Elodie's neck and buried her face there to shield herself from the cold.

Elodie's clothes were soft and warm. Liora snuggled up, enjoying the warmth as she rubbed her face against her neck, her breath tickling Elodie's skin.

Dante had a strong sense of time.

When Elodie arrived at the parking lot holding Liora, Dante's car happened to pull in at the exact moment.

Seeing them, the car stopped right next to Elodie.

Upon seeing that Dante had arrived, Liora didn't get out of her mother's arms. Instead, she lowered the car window and leaned toward it, her voice now high but sweet.

She called out coquettishly to Dante inside the car, "Daddy, pick me up and take me inside."

Dante didn't say anything. He got out of the car smoothly and came over to pick up Liora.

Liora happily swung her little legs in Dante's arms, giggling as she settled against his chest.

As Dante leaned in close to take Liora from her, Elodie caught a familiar scent. She recognized quickly that it was Sienna's perfume.

Unmistakable hers.

Before, when he had sat next to her at the banquet, he didn't have that scent.

This meant that he had likely gone to the Green family after leaving here. To her.

Elodie's chest tightened, but her face remained perfectly composed.

Dante looked at her, his expression neutral. "It's cold tonight. Let's head back."

Elodie stepped back, her voice even. "Got it."

Liora happily called out over Dante's shoulder, "Goodbye, Mommy."

"Mm." Elodie responded quietly.

Dante, holding Liora securely in his arms, turned and got into the car. Elodie didn't wait for them to drive off. She turned and walked to where her own car was parked, her heels clicking sharply against the pavement.

She didn't look back.

She didn't let herself.

Behind her, Dante paused for a moment, watching her retreating figure through the rearview mirror. The way her shoulders stayed straight. The way she didn't hesitate.

He watched until she disappeared from view.

Then he finally looked away and turned to the driver. "Drive."

His car quickly merged into the flow of traffic, taillights disappearing into the night.

And Elodie stood alone in the cold, her breath misting in the air, her arms still aching from where Liora had been.

She waited until the sound of his car faded completely before she let herself exhale.

When Elodie was almost to her car, she heard footsteps behind her, then a voice cutting through the cold air. "Elodie."

She didn't turn at first, assuming it was just someone passing by. But when she heard her name again, clearer this time, she glanced back over her shoulder and saw it was Harry.

She blinked, surprised. She figured it was just coincidence, they hadn't booked the entire hotel, after all. Maybe he had business here. Maybe he was meeting someone.

She gave him a brief nod of acknowledgment and turned back to her car, fumbling for her keys.

But when she looked up again, he was still standing there. Just... watching her.

Her brows knitted together. "Did you need something?"

Harry hesitated, like he was choosing his words carefully.

Finally, he said, "Daisy's been asking about you. She wanted me to give you something, made me promise I'd set up a time for you two to meet. Would you be free sometime this week?"

Oh... Daisy.

Elodie's expression softened despite herself. That little girl had been through hell, and she'd latched onto Elodie like a lifeline after the hot spring incident. She'd said Elodie reminded her of her mother, her late mother.

Elodie genuinely cared about Daisy. If it were any other situation, she'd agree without a second thought.

But meeting through *Harry*? That complicated things.

Before she could answer, Harry added, almost casually, "There's also a business matter I wanted to discuss. I think I could be useful to your uncle's company."

Elodie went still.

Harry didn't push. He just said, "No pressure. Think about it. If you're interested, reach out whenever. I'll make the time."

Elodie studied him for a long moment.

She didn't trust easily anymore. And Harry was close with Sienna and Dante, she'd seen it herself. What if this was just another setup? What if he helped Uncle Jason now, only to pull the rug out later when it benefited them?

Harry seemed to read her silence. "I keep business separate from personal drama," he said quietly. "Whatever happens between you and them, it won't touch what I do with your uncle. You have my word."

Elodie met his eyes. "You're sure about that?"

"Completely."

She exhaled slowly. Uncle Jason's company was struggling. Badly. If Harry was being genuine...

"Fine," she said. "I'll think about it."

"That's all I'm asking." Harry shifted his weight, glancing toward the hotel entrance. "It's freezing out here. You should get inside before you catch something."

Elodie froze.

It's cold tonight. Let's head back.

Dante had said almost the exact same thing not even ten minutes ago.

But the way Harry said it felt... different. Like he actually cared if she was uncomfortable. Like it wasn't just something polite to say.

She forced herself to nod. "I'm fine. But thanks."