

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 141 - 142 [1,400 words]

Chapter 141: Chapter 142

Elodie's Pov~

I nodded, said nothing more, and got into the car. But Harry didn't move.

As I drove past him, I lowered the window, gave him a brief nod in acknowledgment, and then pressed down on the accelerator.

I watched him fade in the rearview mirror, still standing there, before he finally turned and got into his own car.

I returned to the Miller family house.

Grandma Miller and Uncle Jason were still awake, sitting in the living room with the lights dimmed. Xavier and Hugo had already gone upstairs to rest.

When they saw me walk in, they both turned to look at me, like they'd been waiting.

"You're... Back?" Grandma Miller asked.

"Mm, Grandma."

She extended her hand toward me, and I set my bag down on the side table before walking over to sit beside her.

Grandma Miller took my hand, her grip warm and firm. "Elodie," she said quietly, "are you planning to let go of Dante?"

My attitude toward him tonight had been different. Colder. More distant than usual.

It was hard not to notice.

"Mm," I replied. "We're preparing for a divorce."

Grandma Miller let out a soft laugh, her eyes crinkling at the corners. "Good. Good, good. Divorce is fine."

But then her expression shifted, her brow furrowing with concern. "Liora's become very attached to him, though. He's been good to her these past two years. He probably won't give you custody..."

I didn't want custody of Liora.

But I didn't say that out loud. Instead, I kept my voice steady. "I understand. I'll discuss it with him properly. It's getting late, let's all rest now."

The others went upstairs, but I couldn't relax just yet.

Because on the way back, Professor Nolan and Johnny had discussed a lot. When I got to my room, I found a message from Johnny with a task list attached and a note:

'The teacher wants this done. Must be finished before 6 AM tomorrow.'

I set my bag down, took a long sip of water, and replied: 'Got it.'

I didn't remove my makeup. Didn't take a shower. I just turned on my computer and started working.

It wasn't until around 4 AM that I finally finished everything and sent the completed tasks over.

Johnny, who was clearly still buried in work himself, replied immediately: 'Teacher wants us at his place before 9 AM.'

'Alright,' I typed back.

We didn't chat any longer. After shutting down my computer, I dragged myself into the bathroom to remove my makeup and take a quick shower.

By the time I finished, it was already past 5 AM.

I set an alarm for 8, turned off the light, and collapsed into bed.

The next morning, when the alarm went off, I felt like I'd been hit by a truck. My body was heavy, my eyes burning, but I didn't dare slack off. I forced myself up, stumbled into the bathroom, and got ready.

When I came downstairs, I knew I didn't look great. Grandma Miller noticed immediately.

"Why didn't you sleep a little longer?" she asked, concern flickering across her face.

"I have to go to the teacher's place," I said.

Grandma Miller knew how strict Professor Nolan was with his students.

She just sighed and said, "I don't feel comfortable with you driving like this. Let the driver take you."

"Alright."

When we arrived at Professor Nolan's villa, the three of us, Johnny, the professor, and I, went straight to the study to get to work.

We didn't stop until lunchtime.

At that moment, my phone buzzed.

It was a message from Cara, asking if I wanted to go skiing with her in the afternoon.

I sent a voice message back. "I've got things to do today, so I can't make it. You go ahead and have fun."

Cara: 'Okay.'

In the afternoon, when I stepped out of the study to refill my water, Cara sent another message.

This time, it was a string of photos.

I opened the first one and saw it was Dante. Sienna. Liora. Harry. And a little girl I recognized as Daisy.

All five of them, together.

My thumb hovered over the screen for a second before I swiped away from the rest of the photos. I didn't need to see more.

Cara sent another message: I was having such a good time skiing with my friends, but then I ran into THEM. Total buzzkill!

I took a slow breath and sent a voice message back, keeping the tone light. "Don't let them ruin your day. Just enjoy yourselves."

Cara: We might not leave until evening. Want to join us?

Me: No, I've got some things to take care of.

Cara: Alright.

I put my phone away, picked up my water, and walked back into the study.

We worked all day.

By evening, Johnny stretched his arms over his head and groaned. "Teacher, how about we go out to eat? Our treat!"

Professor Nolan didn't even look up from his screen. "I'm heading out soon."

Johnny and I both blinked. "Huh?"

"I have dinner plans with Dante tonight."

Johnny's eyes flicked toward me.

I calmly sipped my water, my expression giving nothing away.

Professor Nolan grabbed his car keys and stood. "Remember to lock the door when you leave."

Before stepping out, he added, "I shouldn't be gone too long."

Johnny and I both nodded. "Got it, Teacher."

The door closed behind him, and the room fell silent.

Meanwhile, on the other side.

Liora, Dante, Sienna, and the others had been skiing for half the day and were in high spirits.

As they exited the ski resort, Liora bounced alongside Dante, her cheeks flushed from the cold and exertion. "Dad, I want seafood for dinner!"

Dante glanced down at her, his expression softening just slightly. "Dad and Auntie Sienna have plans tonight, so we won't be able to eat with you. The driver's already waiting in the parking lot. When you get home, just tell the chef what you want."

Liora's face, which had been lit up with excitement, immediately fell. "What? Why can't I come with you?"

Dante reached down and gently pinched her cheek, offering a small smile. "It's something very important."

"But—"

Liora pouted, her eyes already shifting toward Sienna. She let go of Dante's hand and rushed over to hug Sienna's waist, her voice turning whiny and sweet. "Auntie Sienna..."

When Sienna heard Dante describe their dinner as "very important," warmth bloomed in her chest. She bent down, wrapping her arms around Liora and smiling warmly. "It's something important for Auntie Sienna too, sweetheart. I've been waiting for this chance for a long time, and I don't want anything to go wrong. Can you understand?"

Liora hesitated, her bottom lip still jutting out in a pout. But eventually, she nodded, though her tone was reluctant. "I understand... but you have to make it up to me next week and take me somewhere really good to eat!"

Sienna laughed softly, brushing a strand of Liora's hair behind her ear. "I definitely will."

She glanced up at Dante, her smile lingering, and he met her gaze with something unreadable but warm.

Harry, who had been standing off to the side, remained silent, his hands tucked into his coat pockets.

Daisy, however, came over and gently took Liora's hand. "If we get the chance next week, maybe we can all eat together too."

Liora had spent time with Daisy a few times now, and they'd become fast friends.

She nodded, her mood lifting slightly. "Okay!"

After watching Liora and Harry leave, Dante and Sienna got into the car and headed toward the restaurant.

The drive was quiet, but not uncomfortable. Sienna sat with her hands folded neatly in her lap, stealing glances at Dante every so often. He looked calm, focused, his profile sharp against the dim glow of the city lights outside.

She wanted to ask what exactly this dinner was about, but she didn't want to seem overeager. So she stayed quiet, letting the anticipation build.

When they arrived at the restaurant, they were led to a private room that looked elegant, and understated, the kind of place reserved for important conversations.

A few minutes later, there was a knock at the door.

Professor Nolan stepped inside.

Sienna's breath caught.

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Chapter 142: Chapter 143

Elodie's POV~

"Professor Nolan."

Upon seeing Nolan walk through the door, both Dante and Sienna stood up to greet him.

When Nolan's gaze landed on Sienna, there was no surprise on his face. No recognition beyond the bare minimum.

Sienna stepped forward, her smile polite and carefully practiced. "Hello, Professor Nolan. My name is Sienna Brown. We met briefly at the technology exhibition—"

"I know," Nolan replied, his tone neutral as he extended his hand to shake hers.

Once Nolan sat down, Sienna took the seat directly beside him, angling herself slightly toward him as she spoke. "I've admired your work for years. I've been hoping for an opportunity like this, to meet you face to face and discuss the AI field with you."

Nolan simply responded with a brief "Mm."

At that moment, Dante's phone buzzed. He glanced at the screen, then stood, his expression apologetic. "I need to take this. Please, go ahead without me."

Sienna nodded with her smile unwavering.

After Dante left the room, Sienna picked up the menu and handed it to Nolan with a gracious tilt of her head. "Professor Nolan, why don't we order first and chat while we eat?"

Nolan pushed the menu aside without even glancing at it. "Not yet."

Sienna blinked, caught off guard. Before she could respond, Nolan spoke again, his voice direct.

"Do you want to be my student?"

Sienna hadn't expected him to cut straight to the point like that.

But she recovered quickly. Nolan was known for being blunt, and despite his towering reputation as one of the top figures in the AI field, Sienna wasn't the type to be easily intimidated. She met his gaze calmly, and confidently.

"Yes," she said. "I'm very passionate about AI, and I believe studying under you would push me to achieve even greater progress."

She had prepared for this. She'd known this moment might come.

Reaching into her bag, she pulled out her laptop and set it on the table between them. "Let me show you the product I developed for my PhD dissertation."

Nolan leaned forward slightly, his expression impassive as he scrolled through the presentation with the mouse.

He moved through several sets of data, charts, technical breakdowns. His eyes scanned the screen with practiced efficiency.

After a few moments, he spoke, his voice low and measured. "As a graduation project, it's significantly better than what most doctoral students produce."

Sienna's smile deepened. Her confidence swelled. She was about to elaborate when Nolan let go of the mouse, his gaze shifting away from the screen and landing squarely on her.

"Is this what you completed this year?"

"Yes," Sienna answered.

"Nothing else?"

Sienna hesitated.

She wasn't sure if he was asking because he was satisfied and wanted to see more highlights, or if he wasn't satisfied but was giving her a chance to prove herself further.

But she knew her record spoke for itself. She had consistently ranked at the top of her class, received numerous awards, and her doctoral advisor was a highly respected figure in A Country's aerospace program, someone who had participated in multiple space missions. The praise she'd received from her advisor carried serious weight.

So she had every reason to be confident.

With that thought steadying her, she straightened slightly and said, "I also conducted a technical analysis of the exhibits from the last technology exhibition. Would you like to hear it?"

"Go ahead."

Sienna launched into her explanation, focusing on one of the autonomous vehicles that had been showcased. She broke down its core systems, the perception, planning, control, articulating the strengths and weaknesses of each component with precision.

She spoke for over ten minutes, her voice steady and assured, her hands gesturing occasionally to emphasize key points.

During that time, Dante returned briefly, only to step out again to take another call.

Sienna barely noticed. She was too focused, too locked in.

Just as she was about to transition into her next point, Nolan suddenly looked up.

"That's enough."

Sienna stopped mid-sentence.

Nolan rose from his seat, his expression unreadable as he spoke. "You've got a decent grasp of the fundamentals, I'll give you that. But what you've shown me isn't enough for what I require from my students."

Sienna's breath caught. She forced herself to stay composed, but her fingers tightened around the edge of the table.

This couldn't be it.

Nolan was already heading for the door when Sienna found her voice. "Wait... Professor, please. What can I do differently? Where am I falling short?"

He stopped, glancing back over his shoulder. "Engage more deeply with current research. Don't just read about innovation, participate in it."

Before Sienna could respond, Dante re-entered the room.

Nolan nodded toward him. "We'll talk later this week. I have other matters to attend to."

"Of course," Dante replied.

And just like that, Nolan was gone.

Dante turned to Sienna, reading the disappointment written all over her face. "Not the outcome you were hoping for?"

She shook her head slowly. "He turned me down."

"Walk me through what happened."

Sienna recounted the conversation—every question, every critique, every piece of feedback Nolan had given.

When she finished, Dante said thoughtfully, "His feedback sounds fair. You're talented, Sienna. This isn't about your intelligence."

She frowned. "Then what is it about?"

"Commitment. He wants to see that you're fully invested, not just interested."

Sienna's jaw tightened as the realization settled in. She had been distracted lately, spending weekends racing, attending events, playing the role everyone expected of her. Maybe Nolan had sensed that her priorities were scattered.

Dante's voice softened. "Try again when you're ready. This isn't the end."

Sienna managed a small smile. "I will."

But inside, frustration simmered. She'd been so certain this would work.

Back at the villa, Nolan walked in to find Elodie and Johnny setting up for dinner, hot pot ingredients spread across the counter, steam already rising from the pot.

Johnny looked up, clearly surprised. "That was quick. Thought you'd be gone longer."

Nolan shrugged off his jacket. "Didn't take long."

Johnny shot Elodie a knowing look, then turned back to Nolan with a grin. "So I'm guessing we're not about to meet a new addition to the team?"

Nolan didn't answer, just took the bowl Elodie handed him and sat down.

Johnny laughed. "Called it."

Elodie smirked. "You're so smug. Go grab the rest of the ingredients."

As Johnny disappeared into the kitchen, he called back, "So, Teacher, honestly, where would you rank her skillset?"

"Competent. Better than most graduates. But nowhere near what I need."

"Figured."

Johnny returned with a platter of thinly sliced beef. "The thing is, she's got credentials, sure. But credentials don't mean much when you're used to working with people who actually push boundaries."

Nolan nodded. "Exactly."

Elodie stayed quiet, focused on arranging the vegetables, but there was a faint flicker of amusement in her eyes.

Johnny leaned back in his chair, grinning. "Besides, she's what, twenty-five? And she's still lightyears away from what *you* were doing at twenty-two."

Elodie shot him a look. "Don't start."

"I'm just saying."

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Chapter 143: Chapter 144

Elodie's POV~

Perhaps because he could see we were genuinely exhausted, Professor Nolan let us leave around nine that night.

After an entire day of mental strain, I went straight home, soaked in a hot bath until my fingers pruned, and collapsed into bed.

The next day, there was a glitch at Wilson Tech that needed addressing.

Johnny and I headed over that afternoon to sort it out.

When we arrived at Wilson Tech, we spent some time going over the technical issues with their team. I was mid-sentence, explaining a potential workaround, when the conference room door opened and two men walked in, escorted by a staff member.

I glanced up briefly.

Both of them looked vaguely familiar, but I couldn't place them immediately. One of them, tall, with sharp features, an expensive watch, raised an eyebrow when he saw me.

"Wait, she actually works here? Small world."

The other guy, broader build and more casual in his demeanor, just shrugged like he couldn't care less.

A staff member nearby overheard and quickly corrected them. "Oh, you mean Miss Miller? No, she's not with Wilson Tech. She's from Cole Technologies, just here helping us troubleshoot a system issue today."

I felt their eyes on me, lingering a beat too long.

I turned slightly, meeting their gazes head-on for just a second before calmly looking away and refocusing on the screen in front of me.

The taller one chuckled. "Wow. Ice cold."

I didn't react. Didn't need to.

The other guy opened his mouth like he was about to say something else, but then the door opened again.

Sienna walked in.

The shift in the room was immediate.

"Miss Brown."

The taller man's entire demeanor changed. The bored indifference he'd shown when talking about me vanished, replaced by something sharper. More attentive.

Sienna paused when she saw them, her expression polite but distant. "Mr. Hardin. Mr. Jolly."

The one called Hardin Rex, stepped forward eagerly. "Miss Brown, do you work here at Wilson Tech?"

"No," Sienna replied smoothly. "I specialize in algorithms. I've been coming here recently to learn from the team and improve my skills."

Rex nodded, clearly impressed. "That's admirable. Always refining your craft."

I kept my eyes on my laptop, but I could hear the shift in his tone, it was warmer, more engaged. Like she was worth his time in a way I wasn't.

I didn't care.

Johnny, sitting beside me, glanced over and muttered under his breath, "You good?"

"Fine," I said quietly.

And I was.

Because I'd recognized them now. These were the two men from the auction, the ones who'd been talking about me like I was some kind of curiosity. Some amusing little footnote in their social circle.

I could feel Hardin's attention still hovering near Sienna, his body language open and interested.

I'd heard things about him. About both of them, actually. Rex Hardin especially, he was from one of the prominent families in the Bellini Pack, though he spent most of his time abroad. He'd only recently come back.

And apparently, since meeting Sienna, he'd been hearing all about her from their mutual circles.

The prodigy who graduated university at eighteen. The PhD candidate at a top-tier global institution. The woman who excelled at racing, esports, even extreme sports like rock climbing and skydiving.

It was an impressive resume.

I could see why he was interested.

Too bad for him, though.

She was with Dante.

I could sense him keeping his distance from Sienna, careful not to overstep. "You're incredibly dedicated, Miss Brown. That's rare to see."

Sienna's voice was smooth, or pretending to be smooth and modest. "You're too kind, Mr. Hardin. I'm here because I know how much I still have to learn."

I didn't look up, but I could practically feel the admiration radiating off him.

Hardin and his companion, Jolly, I think, were here on business. Their company, HJ Tech, had some kind of partnership with Wilson Tech. We were all working on different pieces of the same puzzle, apparently. Cole and Wilson Tech were collaborating on system technology, while HJ Tech handled materials.

Footsteps approached our table. I heard Manager Jack's voice, friendly and professional. "Mr. Gray, are these two—"

Johnny glanced up, his expression shifting into something politely neutral. "Oh, Mr. Hardin, Mr. Jolly. And Miss Brown."

My fingers stilled on the keyboard for just a second.

I didn't raise my head. Just kept my focus locked on the screen in front of me, continuing my conversation with the staff member beside me about the system parameters.

Manager Jack sounded pleasantly surprised. "You all know each other?"

"We've crossed paths," Johnny said casually.

They were all from the same elite circles in the Bellini Pack. It would've been stranger if they didn't know each other. But Johnny's tone made it clear they weren't exactly close.

Hardin and his team exchanged pleasantries with Johnny before heading off with Manager Jack to discuss whatever business had brought them here.

Sienna stayed behind.

I felt her gaze on me, and it was brief, although assessing but I didn't acknowledge it. Just kept typing.

After a moment, she turned her attention back to Johnny. "Mr. Gray, did you just arrive?"

Her voice was light, and friendly. Like we were all just colleagues having a casual chat.

Johnny didn't look up from his notes. "About half an hour ago." He paused, then added dryly, "You seem to have been here much longer, Miss Brown."

"I got here this morning," Sienna replied easily. "But after working all day, I needed a break. I went upstairs to grab some water and rest for a bit."

Upstairs.

To Dante's office, she meant.

I kept my expression blank, my hands were steady on the keyboard, but something tightened in my chest.

Johnny's tone cooled noticeably. "I see. So Mr. Wilson is here today as well?"

"No, actually. He's at the main company."

There was a beat of silence.

So even when Dante wasn't here, Sienna could just waltz into his office whenever she wanted? Make herself comfortable? Help herself to his space like it was hers?

Did that mean he had no boundaries with her? No secrets?

I swallowed the bitterness rising in my throat and forced myself to focus on the line of code in front of me.

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Chapter 144: Chapter 145

Johnny only responded with a flat "oh" and didn't say anything further. He stepped closer to Elodie, tapping his pen against a section of his notebook. "Hey, take a look at this part. Does the logic hold up?"

Elodie leaned in, scanning the notes for a moment before nodding. "Yeah, that tracks. Let me cross-reference it with the current build."

She turned back to her laptop, her fingers already moving across the keys.

Seeing this, Sienna spoke up, although her tone was casual but it was persistent. "Which section are you working on? I'd love to take a look if you don't mind sharing."

Johnny's response was immediate and cold. "Miss Brown, I'm in the middle of something right now. Not really the best time."

Sienna opened her mouth to reply, but Elodie had already walked over to Johnny, rattling off a string of data points without looking up from her screen.

The moment Elodie stepped closer, Sienna's expression shifted. Her eyes went cold, her jaw tightening just slightly.

Elodie hadn't planned on acknowledging her at all. But when she glanced up and saw Sienna staring at her, practically glaring, she met her gaze head-on for a brief, icy second before turning back to Johnny and continuing their discussion.

Sienna had her own work to handle, so she turned on her heel and walked back into the meeting room.

Rex and the others were deep in conversation about contract details when she entered. Rex looked up, noticing the subtle tension in her posture. "Everything okay out there?"

Rex and Yves hadn't been close enough to hear what Sienna and Johnny had actually discussed.

From their vantage point, it had looked like a normal, even pleasant conversation.

Then Elodie had suddenly appeared, pulled Johnny aside, and shot Sienna a look that could've cut glass.

Like she thought Sienna was trying to flirt with him or something.

Sienna didn't look up from her laptop, her tone carefully neutral. "It's nothing. I was just asking Mr. Gray for some professional input."

That seemed to satisfy them. Rex nodded, remembering that both Johnny and Sienna worked in the same field.

Johnny was one of Professor Nolan's students. His skill set was beyond question.

Sienna was hardworking, always seeking to improve. It made perfect sense that she'd want his advice on technical matters.

But Elodie, with her narrow perspective, had clearly misread the situation. She'd assumed Sienna was making a move on Johnny and rushed over to intervene, throwing her a warning glare in the process.

Rex leaned back in his chair, his curiosity piqued. "Do you know that woman?"

When Sienna realized he was referring to Elodie, her fingers froze on the keyboard for just a second.

Elodie was undeniably beautiful.

For a split second, Sienna wondered if Rex was interested in her.

But then she remembered the conversation she'd overheard at the auction—the way Rex and Yves had dismissed Elodie entirely. And the way Rex had been so eager to talk to *her* instead.

She relaxed slightly.

"Not really," she replied coolly. "Why do you ask?"

Rex glanced back toward where Elodie and Johnny were still working, heads bent close together as they discussed something on the screen. "She seems pretty involved in whatever they're working on. Looks like she knows her stuff."

Sienna's tone remained indifferent, almost dismissive. "I'm not sure about that. From what I've heard, she only has a bachelor's degree."

"Only a bachelor's?"

"Yeah."

Rex let out a low hum, like that explained everything.

No wonder.

Elodie's education didn't measure up to Sienna's, and she didn't have that same effortless charm either. It made sense that she'd be insecure about someone like Sienna getting too close to Johnny.

Rex could understand feeling protective. But the hostile attitude Elodie had displayed constantly assuming other women were trying to steal her boyfriend, felt unnecessarily petty.

The more he thought about it, the more his indifference toward Elodie shifted into something colder. Subtle disdain.

Johnny, now momentarily free from the immediate task at hand, glanced through the glass window separating them from the meeting room where Rex and Sienna sat.

After watching for a moment, he leaned closer to Elodie and muttered under his breath, "Does Rex have a thing for Sienna?"

Elodie, absorbed in troubleshooting a data inconsistency, paused for half a second as she registered the question. Then she realized who Rex was.

She shrugged, her tone unbothered. "Probably."

She genuinely didn't care about this particular drama. After answering, she nudged Johnny's arm and urged him to get back to work instead of gossiping.

The sooner they finished, the sooner they could leave.

Johnny pursed his lips, shaking his head. "That guy's got weird taste."

After making his comment, he dropped the subject and refocused on the screen.

Rex, noticing Johnny's glance through the window, assumed Johnny had been looking at Sienna.

He also assumed that Elodie had gotten annoyed because Johnny kept staring at Sienna, which is why she'd quickly pulled him back to work.

It confirmed his suspicions about her jealousy.

Meanwhile, Sienna hit a snag in her own work and paused, frowning at her screen.

She wanted to ask Johnny for help, but when she glanced over, she saw that both Johnny and several Wilson Tech staff members were gathered around Elodie, listening intently as she explained something.

The way they were all paying attention, nodding, taking notes, asking follow-up questions, made it clear that Elodie knew what she was talking about.

Sienna's jaw tightened slightly.

She turned her gaze back to her laptop and kept working alone.

Elodie and Johnny stayed busy until around five in the afternoon, finally wrapping up the bulk of their work.

The contract with Wilson Tech had also been finalized.

Manager Kim invited Elodie, Johnny, and the others into the conference room to relax and grab some water.

When he noticed that Rex and his team had also finished their work, he smiled warmly. "It's getting late. Why don't we all grab dinner together?"

Rex felt a flicker of interest and immediately looked toward Sienna.

Sienna, seemingly oblivious to his gaze, spoke up without hesitation. "I appreciate the offer, but Dante will be picking me up from Wilson Group soon. We already have plans, so I'll have to pass. Enjoy your meal, though."

The moment Sienna declined, Rex's enthusiasm evaporated entirely.

He shrugged, his tone casual. "I've got other things to handle anyway. Maybe next time."

Sienna's refusal didn't surprise him, but it didn't stop the disappointment from creeping in either.

Johnny, watching this exchange unfold, became more and more convinced that Rex was interested in Sienna.

And it was painfully obvious that Rex only didn't want to go because Sienna wasn't attending.

Manager Kim looked a bit awkward now that both Rex and Sienna had bowed out. He turned to Johnny, hopeful. "Mr. Gray, what about you?"

Johnny raised his teacup and clinked it lightly against Elodie's, grinning. "We're free, right, Elodie?"

Elodie, catching onto the fact that he was subtly needling Rex, nodded. "Yeah, we're free."

Sienna noticed the easy familiarity between Johnny and Elodie, the way he smiled at her, the way she responded without hesitation.

Her brows furrowed slightly.

Johnny was really good to Elodie.

Too good, maybe.

It bothered her more than she wanted to admit.

Because if Johnny who was Professor Nolan's star student, someone with real influence in the field, was this invested in Elodie, it meant Elodie had something Sienna couldn't easily dismiss.

And that was a problem.

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Chapter 145: Chapter 146

Although Rex and his team didn't have time for dinner, the work was done, so they all headed downstairs together, preparing to leave Wilson Tech.

At that moment, Sienna's phone rang.

After a brief conversation, she hung up and said smoothly, "Dante's almost here. I'll head down with you all."

When they reached the lobby, Dante was already waiting outside.

The moment he saw them, he stepped out of the car, his presence commanding as always. He greeted Rex and Johnny with polite nods, his tone was professional and measured and all.

His gaze briefly flicked to Elodie, but he didn't say a word to her. Not even a greeting.

Sienna, meanwhile, walked over to stand beside him the moment he exited the car.

The two of them, standing together like that, looked like a legitimate couple. Polished and coordinated like they belonged together.

Rex was chatting easily with Dante, clearly trying to make a good impression.

Johnny, watching the scene unfold, curled his lips into something resembling a smile but his tone was ice-cold. "Mr. Wilson, we've already made dinner plans, so we'll be heading out now."

Dante nodded, his expression neutral. "Mr. Gray, take care."

Johnny and Elodie left first.

After dinner with Manager Kim and the others, Elodie drove herself home.

As soon as she pulled into the driveway, her phone rang and she glanced at it only to see it was Harry.

She paused for a second before answering. "Mr. Becker."

"The contract's been signed," Harry said without preamble. "You can call your uncle to confirm it. Call me back once you've done that."

Before she could respond, he hung up.

Elodie blinked at her phone, surprised.

She hadn't expected Harry to move that quickly.

Still, she didn't fully trust him. At least not yet.

So she dialed her uncle immediately. "Uncle Jason, did the company sign a project with the Becker family?"

"Yeah!" Jason sounded genuinely happy, his voice lighter than it had been in weeks. "There's real progress on our end. By the way, how did you hear about this?"

"I heard it from someone else," Elodie deflected casually, then chatted a bit more with her uncle before hanging up.

She immediately called Harry back.

He answered almost instantly.

"I'm free on Saturday and Sunday," Elodie said.

Harry replied smoothly, "Good. Should I arrange the time, or would you prefer to?"

"You arrange it."

"Alright."

After hanging up, Elodie headed into the bathroom for a quick shower. Seeing that it was still early, she settled onto her bed with her laptop and started browsing the latest news about AI developments around the world.

The next morning, she had a simple breakfast and was about to head out when Harry's call came in again.

"Last night, I talked to Daisy," he said. "She mentioned she wanted to go skiing. Are you okay with that, Miss Miller?"

Elodie smiled faintly. "Sure."

Harry asked, "Do you need me to arrange any ski equipment for you?"

"No, I can handle it myself."

"Alright. See you Saturday, then."

"Mm."

After hanging up, Elodie left for work.

At five that evening, Liora called.

Her voice was small, almost shy. "Mom, can you come over? I want to eat some of the food you make."

Elodie's chest tightened, but she kept her voice calm "Of course, sweetheart. I'll be there soon."

She drove over that evening. Dante wasn't home, he'd gone on a business trip.

Elodie stayed at the house that night, cooking Liora's favorite dishes and watching her eat with a quiet contentment she hadn't felt in weeks.

The next morning, before taking Liora to school, Elodie remembered the skiing trip with Harry and Daisy on Saturday.

She decided to grab her ski equipment, which she'd left behind at the house, so she wouldn't need to go out and buy new gear in a couple of days.

As she packed it into her car, Liora watched from the doorway, her expression unreadable.

Seeing her with the ski gear, Liora's eyes lit up. "Mom, are you going skiing?"

"Mm, in a few days," Elodie replied, adjusting the strap on the bag.

Liora's face brightened instantly. "I want to go too!" Even though she'd only spent half a day at the ski resort with Sienna and the others recently, she clearly hadn't had enough fun yet.

Elodie paused, studying her daughter's hopeful expression. "When do you want to go?"

Liora hesitated, her enthusiasm dimming slightly as she thought it over.

Elodie knew what she was really thinking. Liora wanted to go skiing when Sienna and Dante weren't around, but since she didn't know their schedules, she couldn't say for sure when that would be.

Elodie pulled her gaze away and said gently, "It's fine. Just let me know when you want to go, and if I'm free, I'll take you."

Liora's bright smile returned. "Okay!"

After a busy week, Elodie finished work earlier than usual on Friday evening. When she got home and was about to start making dinner, Liora's call came through.

Elodie paused, then answered.

"Mom, I'm free on Saturday! Let's go skiing!"

Elodie had promised to take her when Liora asked, but she hadn't planned on going tomorrow. She already had other commitments, which was the outing with Harry and Daisy. It was somewhat of a social obligation, and honestly, she didn't want the added complication of bringing Liora along.

"Mom's busy tomorrow," she said carefully. "Can we go another time?"

Liora's voice immediately turned whiny, pleading. "No, I want to go on Saturday! Mom, please go with me?"

"Saturday won't work, sweetheart. How about next week? If you still want to go then, I'll take you."

Liora didn't accept that, she continued to whine and try to soften her up. "Mom..."

Elodie remained firm, her tone although calm but was unmoved. "If you still want to go next week, just let me know. And make sure you eat well tonight, don't be picky."

She ended the call before Liora could argue further.

Liora didn't call back, likely sulking somewhere in the house, but Elodie didn't let it bother her. She set her phone down and headed into the kitchen to start cooking.

The Next Day:

When Elodie woke up, Harry called again, asking if she needed a ride.

She declined politely, preferring to drive herself.

After a light breakfast, Elodie packed her gear and drove to the ski resort. By the time she arrived, Harry and Daisy were already waiting near the entrance.

Harry glanced over when he spotted her, but before he could say anything, Daisy had already pulled free from his hand and was running excitedly toward Elodie.

"Auntie!"

Elodie caught her just in time, crouching down slightly as Daisy threw her arms around her. She smiled warmly, and gently patting Daisy's cheek. "Daisy seems to have grown a little, and there's more meat on your face. You look even prettier."

Daisy beamed, nodding enthusiastically. "Yes! I've been eating lots of meat!"

Elodie chuckled softly, about to respond, when Daisy suddenly pulled something out of her pocket, a small crystal keychain shaped like a snowflake.

"Auntie, this is for you," Daisy said earnestly, holding it out with both hands like it was something precious.

Elodie's chest tightened unexpectedly.

She took the keychain carefully, turning it over in her palm.

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Chapter 146: Chapter 147

The keychain was a small pink cat-shaped bag with a white kitten nestled inside, that made it appear so delicate and yet unique. It looked almost identical to the one Liora had attached to her backpack zipper a while ago, just in a different color.

To Elodie, she felt that Harry often spent time with Daisy, and Dante too for that matter, so it wasn't surprising that they might have similar tastes in these little trinkets.

Elodie paused for a moment, her thumb brushing over the smooth surface of the crystal, but she didn't ask any questions. She smiled warmly at Daisy. "It's beautiful. I really like it. Thank you, Daisy."

Daisy's entire face lit up, and she tugged eagerly on Elodie's hand, practically bouncing with excitement. "Auntie, let's go skiing!"

"Okay."

Seeing them walk ahead, Harry fell into step beside Elodie and asked, "Have you had breakfast? We brought some extras if you haven't eaten yet."

Elodie glanced over at him. "I've already eaten. But thank you."

"Good."

After getting dressed and putting on their goggles, they headed out onto the slopes.

Daisy wasn't very skilled yet, wobbling slightly as she tried to find her balance, but Elodie had been skiing for years. She stayed close, guiding Daisy patiently, her voice was very calm and encouraging.

On weekends, the ski resort was packed, and Harry stayed nearby, keeping a protective eye on them in case someone accidentally bumped into them from behind or lost control on the slopes.

Unfortunately, the crowd was dense. After skiing for just over an hour, two girls came barreling down the slope, clearly moving too fast for their skill level.

One of them clipped Daisy, but the little girl managed to stay upright. Elodie, however, wasn't as lucky. She lost her balance and went tumbling forward, straight into Harry's chest.

He reacted instantly, his arms wrapping securely around her waist and pulling her firmly against him to steady her.

Suddenly pressed up against his broad chest, Elodie froze, her breath catching. She felt the solid warmth of him through the layers of fabric, the way his grip was strong but careful, and for a second, she didn't know what to do.

She tried to pull away, but the moment she shifted her weight, a sharp pain shot through her ankle.

Harry didn't let go. His voice was calm but it was edged with concern. "Did you twist your ankle?"

"I think... yes," she admitted, wincing.

Harry immediately called a staff member over and asked them to keep an eye on Daisy. Then, without warning, he bent down and scooped Elodie up into his arms.

She thought he'd let the staff help her to the medical station, but when he suddenly lifted her like she weighed nothing, she was caught completely off guard. Her hands instinctively went to his shoulders, resisting. "Put me down, I can—"

"The doctor's already waiting," Harry said without budging, adjusting his hold on her. "Let's get your ankle checked first."

Elodie hesitated, then stopped struggling.

There was no point arguing when he clearly wasn't going to listen.

Once inside the medical station, Harry gently set her down on the examination table. The waiting doctor checked her ankle carefully, pressing along the bone and asking her to flex her foot.

After a quick assessment, the doctor said, "Just a mild dislocation. Nothing serious." With a swift motion, he adjusted it back into place.

Elodie winced but didn't make a sound.

Harry asked, "Do you want to keep skiing?"

Elodie tested her weight on the ankle, then nodded. "I'm fine. We can continue."

She'd come all this way. She didn't want to ruin the day for Daisy or for Harry, for that matter.

The doctor confirmed her leg wasn't actually injured, so Harry didn't refuse her.

Meanwhile, across the resort...

"Sophia? What are you staring at?"

Sophia squinted toward the medical station entrance, her brow furrowed. "I think I saw someone I know."

The side profile of the man she'd just seen really looked like Harry Becker.

But he'd been with a child and a woman, so... it probably wasn't him.

Still, curiosity nagged at her.

When she tried to take a couple of steps forward to get a better look, the person had already put on a hat and sunglasses and walked away, disappearing into the crowd.

Sophia frowned, uncertain.

But she couldn't shake the feeling that it had been him.

And if it was...

Who was that woman?

Elodie's POV~

For the next hour or so, Daisy and I bumped into people twice more on the slopes, but fortunately, neither of us got hurt.

When Harry reached out to steady me, his hand that was already warm, went firmly around my wrist, I gently pulled away. "I'm fine. Thank you."

Harry nodded and then finally let go.

At noon, we left the ski resort and headed to a nearby restaurant for lunch.

Harry handed me the menu, gesturing for me to order whatever I wanted.

I was scanning the options when Daisy suddenly perked up, looking at me with those wide, curious eyes. "Auntie, what's your name?"

I smiled at her. "Elodie. My name is Elodie Miller."

Daisy nodded seriously, testing it out. "Aunt Elodie."

I reached over and gently patted her cheek, warmth spreading through my chest.

Probably because skiing had worn her out, Daisy started nodding off halfway through her meal, her little head drooping forward.

Harry carefully picked her up, cradling her against his chest as he wiped the oil from the corner of her mouth with a napkin.

I'd nearly finished eating too, so I set down my chopsticks and said, "Should we wrap it up for today?"

"Sure." But Harry didn't stand immediately. Instead, he looked at me, his expression thoughtful. "Can I invite you again sometime?"

I paused, then nodded. "Sure."

He'd helped me, helped my uncle, really. And Daisy clearly enjoyed spending time with me. It was only fair to return the favor a few more times.

"Thank you," he said quietly.

"You're welcome."

Since Daisy was asleep and there wasn't much left to say, I didn't linger. I stood, grabbed my coat, and headed for the door.

I felt Harry's gaze on me as I walked to my car, but I didn't look back.

By the time I got home, I'd barely settled in when my phone rang.

"Elodie, where are you? I'm exhausted. Come pick me up and let's grab dinner." Cara's loud voice came through the moment I picked up.

I didn't mention that I'd already eaten. "Where are you?"

"Floral Garden," Cara said, slightly out of breath. "You know, that fancy ancient-style housing development from a few years ago? I came here with my aunt to look at houses this morning, and I'm wiped out."

"Alright. I'll be there soon."

After hanging up, I plugged the address into my GPS and started driving.

About ten minutes later, Cara called again.

"You won't believe who I just ran into here!"

I felt my stomach tighten.

The only person recently who could make Cara this worked up was probably—

"Dante and Sienna's family! He brought the whole Brown family here to look at houses!"

I stared ahead at the road, my face blank, and murmured, "Mm."

Normally, when Dante and Sienna went out together, they brought Liora along.

Today, Dante must have left Liora at home because he was taking the Brown family to look at properties.

Of course. The Green family had already moved into the Bellini Pack territory. It made sense that the Brown family would want to settle here too. And naturally, Dante would be the one helping them find a place.

I tightened my grip on the steering wheel.

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Chapter 147: Chapter 148

Elodie's POV~

When I arrived at Floral Garden, I parked the car, texted Cara that I was here, and sent her my location.

She replied she'd be out soon.

I asked where she was because I wanted to use the restroom at the sales office.

She sent me a pin.

As I was about to get out of the car, I saw Old Madam Brown, my father Logan, and my stepmother Janice walking toward the parking lot.

They all had smiles on their faces, clearly in a good mood.

I stayed still for a moment, watching them.

Logan and the others entered from the other side of the parking lot and didn't see me.

I exhaled slowly and got out of the car.

A few minutes later, when I reached the sales office, I bumped into Dante and Sienna.

They were surrounded by seven or eight salespeople from the office, all hovering around them like they were royalty.

When Dante saw me, his eyes flicked over briefly, but he didn't say anything.

Sienna, her arm looped through his, gave me a cold, dismissive glance.

I calmly averted my gaze and kept walking.

Once inside the sales office, I found Cara waiting near the entrance.

The moment she saw me, she leaned in close and muttered through gritted teeth, "The houses here start at three million. I just heard from the staff that the villa Dante bought for the Brown family is the highest-class one they have. Over six million."

I nodded. "Mm."

Cara studied my expression, then added carefully, "And... I also heard that Dante brought the Brown family here to look at houses because Sienna's mother liked the style."

I stopped walking for just a second.

No wonder Janice had looked so happy earlier.

I swallowed the tightness building in my throat and said evenly, "I'm going to the restroom."

"Oh, okay..."

Once I was inside the restroom, I clenched my fists at my sides, my nails digging into my palms.

I'd long lost any reaction to Dante's kindness toward Sienna.

But hearing that he was fawning over Janice, the one who had destroyed my mom's happiness, buying her a villa, making sure she was happy, catering to her every whim... I couldn't... I just couldn't—

Just then, I heard voices outside the restroom. Two women, probably sales staff, talking casually as they walked past.

"Dante Wilson has great taste. His girlfriend is so pretty."

"Right? And her mom is so elegant and classy. The best part is, her husband and mother-in-law clearly adore her. Everything's done according to her wishes. When I compare that to my situation, my husband, my mother-in-law, it just makes me so frustrated!"

"I know! And Dante treats his girlfriend so well. Even though they're not married yet, he already bought a six-million-dollar villa for her family. As a woman, his girlfriend is truly the winner in life."

I stood there, frozen, staring at my reflection in the mirror.

My face was calm. Composed as well.

But inside, something was cracking.

When I finally left the restroom, it was already ten minutes later.

I ate with Cara, though I barely tasted the food. My mind was somewhere else entirely.

Suddenly, I felt the urge to go to the nursing home. To see my mother, Sally. To sit with someone who understood what it felt like to be discarded by people who were supposed to care.

But then I remembered the director's words, how she wasn't allowed to meet with familiar people. How seeing me might set Sally back.

So I drove to the entrance of the nursing home and sat there in the parking lot, staring at the building.

But I didn't go in. I couldn't.

After a long while, I turned the car around and drove back home instead.

When Elodie got home, she locked herself in her room and threw herself into her work.

She didn't know how much time had passed when her phone started ringing.

It was Dante.

Elodie glanced at the screen, jotted down some data in her notebook, and let the call go to voicemail.

The ringing stopped.

A few minutes later, it started again.

She still didn't answer.

After a while, her phone buzzed with a text: Nonna wants us back at the estate for dinner tonight.

Elodie read it, then set her phone face-down on the desk and went back to her work.

Over at Dante's place, he stared at his phone for a moment, waiting for the three little dots that never came.

"Dad, you're back!"

Liora's voice echoed from the top of the stairs. A second later, she came bounding down and launched herself into his arms.

Dante caught her easily, his hand steadying her as he gave a faint "Mm."

Seeing him still holding his phone like he was about to send another message, Liora tilted her head. "Dad, what are you doing?"

"Your mom isn't answering," Dante said simply.

At the mention of Elodie, Liora's expression soured. She turned her face away with a huff.

Dante let out a quiet breath, almost amused despite himself. He reached over and gently pinched her cheek. "Why are you upset with your mom? What did you do to make her mad?"

Liora's eyes widened indignantly. "I didn't do anything! She's the one who made me mad!"

Dante raised an eyebrow, leaning back slightly with his hand propped under his chin, genuinely curious now. "Oh?"

Liora crossed her arms, still fuming. "Mom said she'd take me skiing, but when I called her today, she told me she was too busy and we'd have to go some other time!"

Dante's lips twitched, fighting back a smile. He ruffled her hair with one large hand and stood. "Come on."

Liora blinked. "Where are we going?"

"Your grandmother wants us back for dinner."

"Oh..." Liora mumbled, scrambling to keep up as he headed for the door.

Elodie ordered takeout, and by seven that evening, she'd finished eating and was back at her desk when her phone rang again.

This time, it was Nonna.

She could ignore Dante's calls. But Nonna had always been kind to her family, especially to Grandma Miller. She couldn't ignore her.

"Hello, Nonna," Elodie answered, keeping her tone warm.

"Elodie, dear," Nonna's voice was gentle but concerned. "Dante mentioned you're busy with work. When do you think you'll be finished?"

Elodie didn't want to go back to the estate. Since Dante had already covered for her, she decided to lean into it. "I'm swamped these next few days, Nonna. I'm sorry, but I don't think I'll have time to visit."

Nonna didn't seem bothered. "That's alright, sweetheart. I just worry about you working yourself too hard."

"I won't, Nonna. I promise I'll take care of myself."

"Good girl." Nonna paused, then added, "Dante's coming back tomorrow. I'll have him bring you some of Cook's dishes, make sure you eat properly, alright?"

Elodie's chest tightened, but she kept her voice steady. "Okay. Thank you, Nonna."

After they hung up, Nonna set her phone down and glanced across the sitting room at her grandson, who was seated on the sofa with a newspaper in hand, looking far too relaxed.

"Next time," Nonna said pointedly, "if Elodie still doesn't come back with you, don't bother coming back either."

Dante glanced up, one eyebrow lifting. "Should I leave now, then?"

Nonna shot him a look. "Don't test me."

Dante smirked faintly but said nothing, returning his attention to the newspaper.

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Chapter 148: Chapter 149

Elodie's Pov~

After the call, I went back to my work.

By nine, after hours of pushing through data and code, I finally felt like I could breathe again. more clearer now.

That's when Johnny called.

"Feel like getting out of your head for a while?"

Half an hour later, I pulled up outside the bar.

Johnny was already waiting near the entrance, his hands stuffed in his pockets. When he saw me, he grinned. "You look like you could use a drink."

I hesitated for half a second, then nodded. "Yeah. I could."

He studied my face for a moment, then asked carefully, "Rough day?"

"Better now," I said, and I meant it.

Johnny didn't push. He just led me inside and ordered me something blue and sweet that had low alcohol in it that was easy to sip.

I held the glass in my hand, letting the coolness seep into my palm as I listened to Johnny joke around with his friends. The music pulsed around us, lights flashing in rhythm, and for once, I let myself just be in the noise instead of running from it.

What I didn't realize was that someone was watching us from the bar upstairs.

"So that's her with Johnny," Yves said, leaning back against the counter with a drink in hand.

The man next to him followed his gaze and paused when he saw me.

Yves noticed and smirked. "Interested?"

His friend didn't answer right away. Instead, he asked, "You know her?"

"Yeah," Yves replied casually. "That's the girl I mentioned the other day. Rex thought she was interesting for about five minutes before he got distracted by someone shinier."

His friend looked at me thoughtfully. The bar wasn't wild tonight, but I clearly didn't belong here. I had this quiet, grounded presence that stood out against the chaos, like I'd wandered in from somewhere calmer and hadn't quite adjusted yet.

Johnny turned to me, his grin widening. "Wanna dance?"

I didn't really know how to dance, but something in me wanted to try. To let go, just for a little while. "Sure."

On the floor, Johnny took the lead, guiding me through the rhythm. It took me a minute to find my footing, but once I did, I let myself relax into it, swaying lightly with the beat.

I'd had just enough to drink to feel warm and loose, my cheeks probably flushed, my guard finally down. For the first time in what felt like forever, I wasn't thinking about Dante or Sienna or any of it.

I was just here.

Upstairs, Yves let out a low whistle. "She doesn't have that commanding presence Miss Brown has, but damn, she's got this natural charm. The one you don't see coming."

His friend still didn't reply.

That's when I felt my phone buzz in my pocket.

I didn't stop dancing right away, just pulled it out to glance at the screen.

The moment I saw the name, I froze.

Johnny noticed immediately and leaned over. His eyes went wide. "Is that—"

"Professor Nolan," I finished, my voice barely audible over the music.

We bolted off the dance floor.

As we hurried toward the exit, I glanced up and caught sight of Yves sitting at the bar upstairs with another man, who looked tall, and unfamiliar, watching us with an unreadable expression.

I didn't know Yves well enough to care, so I quickly looked away and stepped outside with Johnny to take the call.

When I answered, my voice came out hesitant, almost nervous. "Hello, Professor..."

"Pick me up tomorrow afternoon."

I blinked. "Wait—what?"

But he'd already hung up.

Johnny immediately leaned in. "What did he say?"

"He wants me to pick him up tomorrow afternoon."

"Did he say anything else? Like whether I should come too?"

I shook my head.

Johnny checked his phone, clearly hoping for a message that wasn't there. He pouted dramatically. "He plays favorites."

I laughed despite myself. The bar had been loud and chaotic, but it had worked, finally I felt lighter. I reached out and tapped his shoulder. "Feeling better now?"

"Nope. I'll feel better when you cover the tab."

"Deal."

Of course, I was joking.

There was no way Johnny would actually let me pay. And honestly, he looked a little paranoid about Professor Nolan finding out he'd taken me to a bar. After quickly settling the bill, he practically rushed me out of there.

The next afternoon, I drove to Professor Nolan's villa to pick him up.

After he got into the car, I glanced over at him cautiously. "Professor, where are we going?"

He didn't look up from his phone. "You'll find out."

I gripped the steering wheel a little tighter and pulled out onto the road.

Half an hour later, we pulled up to a restaurant I'd never been to before, that looked upscale, and discreet, the type of place where people went when they didn't want to be noticed.

Professor Nolan led the way to a private room at the back.

When we stepped inside, two men were already seated, and the moment I saw them, I felt the shift in the air. They had that kind of presence, the type that didn't need introduction.

They stood when we entered.

"Nolan. Good to see you."

Professor Nolan gave a slight nod, gesturing toward me without ceremony. "This is Elodie, one of my students."

I recognized them immediately. Jordan Hall, he was military. High-ranking. A man whose decisions shaped entire operations. And Reed Hardin was politics. Influence that stretched across the Pack and beyond.

But when they turned to me, their expressions softened in a way I hadn't expected.

Jordan extended his hand first. "Finally. We've been trying to meet you for a while now."

I shook his hand, keeping my voice steady. "I wasn't aware of that."

Reed chuckled, shaking my hand next. "Nolan keeps his cards close. We've been pestering him for months."

I glanced at Professor Nolan, who looked entirely unbothered as he took his seat.

Jordan gestured for me to sit. "We've been digging into the system you built, remarkable work, by the way. Our team's been dissecting it for weeks, and honestly, we had questions only you could answer. Figured it was time to stop being polite and just invite ourselves to dinner."

I couldn't help but smile a little at that. "I'm happy to help."

"Good," Reed said, pouring himself some tea. "Because we're not letting you leave until we pick your brain."

The conversation shifted quickly into more of systems architecture, energy optimization, potential military applications I hadn't even considered. They asked sharp questions, and I answered as best I could, feeling the rhythm of it settle into something almost comfortable.

Professor Nolan sat quietly the entire time, eating slowly, occasionally sipping his tea. He didn't contribute much. Just watched.

After over an hour, Jordan refilled my teacup without asking, his movements seemed to be easy as he did so.

He set the teapot down, studying me with a look that felt almost paternal. "How old are you, Elodie?"

"Twenty-five."

"God, you're young," he said, shaking his head like he couldn't quite believe it.

Reed leaned back in his chair, grinning. "So what's the situation? Boyfriend? Husband? Someone we need to worry about stealing you away from all this brilliant work?"

I hesitated.

Then I said simply, "I'm married."

The room went quiet for just a beat.

Jordan's expression flickered with surprise, maybe, or curiosity. Reed raised an eyebrow but didn't push.

But I could see it. The way they processed that. The way they noticed the flatness in my tone, the lack of warmth when I said it.

They knew.

They knew it wasn't a happy answer.

And I could practically see the gears turning in their heads.

'Hmm. Married. But not happily. Interesting.'

I had to suppress a laugh. These two were already matchmaking in their minds, weren't they? Wondering if their sons stood a chance once the divorce went through.

Most families wouldn't touch someone with a failed marriage. But I wasn't most people.

I had value. Potential. A future they wanted access to.

And that made me different.

Jordan smiled warmly. "Well, whoever he is, he's a lucky man."

I didn't correct him.

Reed opened his mouth, clearly about to say something else, when Professor Nolan finally looked up from his tea.

He didn't say a word.

Just gave them both a look that was so cold, and sharp. That seemed to say... 'Don't.'

Jordan and Reed immediately redirected, shifting the conversation back to technical specs like nothing had happened.

I bit the inside of my cheek to keep from smiling.

Professor Nolan didn't need to speak.

He'd made his point perfectly clear.

And somehow, that quiet protection meant more than anything else that had been said all night.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 149 - 150 [1,214 words]

Chapter 149: Chapter 150

Elodie's Pov~

After dinner, as soon as I got home, my phone rang. I picked it up when I saw it was Johnny calling.

"So? How'd it go? What did Professor Nolan want?"

I filled him in on the dinner, then about Jordan Hall, Reed Hardin, and the whole thing.

There was a pause on the other end. Then Johnny let out a low whistle. "Wait, those two? Damn. That's serious."

"Yeah, it was... intense."

"I bet." He hesitated, then added, "Oh, fun fact, that Rex guy we ran into? He's Reed Hardin's son."

I blinked. "Really?"

"Yep. His dad's brilliant, so I have no idea why the kid's so dense. Anyway, just thought you should know."

I hadn't expected that, but honestly, it didn't matter much to me.

On Tuesday, the initial test for Wilson Tech's self-driving car was scheduled. Johnny and I arrived early in the morning.

By the time we got there, Rex and Yves were already present, standing off to the side near the equipment.

When they saw us, they glanced over briefly, then looked away.

Johnny didn't seem bothered. He just grabbed my arm and pulled me toward the workstation. "Come on, let's get started."

I set my bag down and began reviewing the preliminary data. Everything looked ready, but no one had started the test yet.

Johnny frowned. "Why are we just standing around? What are we waiting for?"

Manager Kim cleared his throat. "Mr. Wilson will be personally overseeing the test today. Once he arrives, we'll begin."

Johnny's expression soured. "...Oh. Great."

Then he seemed to remember something and asked, "By the way, where's Miss Brown? I thought she was supposed to be here learning from the team."

Manager Kim smiled knowingly. "Oh, Miss Brown wanted hands-on experience, so Mr. Wilson decided the best way for her to improve was to lead her own team on a project. He had one of the shelved company initiatives pulled out of storage. She's been running meetings upstairs for the past few days. Actually, she's Director Brown now."

I kept my eyes on the data sheet in front of me, my pen moving steadily across the page.

I didn't react.

Johnny, however, turned to look at me, his expression tight with concern.

I could feel his gaze on me, waiting for something, something like anger, sadness, something.

But I didn't give him anything.

He sighed and reached over, ruffling my hair like I was a kid.

I swatted his hand away. "Knock it off."

He didn't say anything, but I could tell from the way his shoulders relaxed slightly that he was relieved I wasn't falling apart.

At that moment, Dante arrived.

He wasn't alone. Harry and Levi were with him.

They both looked surprised to see us. When Harry's eyes landed on me, there was a flicker of something I couldn't quite read, shock, maybe. Or curiosity.

I didn't acknowledge it. Just glanced at them briefly before turning my attention back to my notes.

Dante, meanwhile, addressed the room with his usual calm authority. "Thank you all for your patience."

Manager Kim stepped forward eagerly. "Mr. Wilson, are we ready to begin?"

"Not yet. We're waiting for one more person." Dante checked his watch. "I'll head upstairs and check in. Give me a few minutes."

And just like that, he left.

I didn't need to guess who he was talking about.

Sienna, of course.

We were waiting for her to finish her meeting.

Johnny clearly realized the same thing because I heard him mutter something under his breath that sounded an awful lot like a curse.

A few minutes later, Dante and Sienna came downstairs together.

Sophia was with them.

She wasn't surprised to see me, Sienna must've told her I'd be here.

When Sophia's eyes landed on me, standing off to the side like just another member of the team, I saw it. That gleam of smug satisfaction. That little smirk that said, Look at you. His wife. Waiting for her like everyone else.

I didn't care why Sophia was dressed in a professional suit or what she was doing at Wilson Tech.

I simply looked away.

Because giving her a reaction, giving any of them a reaction, would've meant they mattered.

And they didn't.

Not anymore.

Sienna offered a polite smile, keeping her voice warm and apologetic. "I'm so sorry for keeping everyone waiting."

Her apology seemed genuine enough, but it was clearly directed only at Rex, Yves, and Johnny.

She didn't even glance in Elodie's direction.

The message was clear: the apology didn't include her.

Rex, who hadn't been paying much attention to Elodie anyway, waved it off easily. "A few minutes is nothing. Don't worry about it."

Johnny stood abruptly, his tone sharp and cold. "Well, since we're all here now, let's not waste any more time. Shall we?"

Dante, who had been standing off to the side, stepped forward with his usual calm demeanor. "The delay was on us. Mr. Gray, after you."

Johnny let out a quiet scoff, reaching over and tugging Elodie by the arm as they left the meeting room.

Seeing Johnny hold Elodie's hand so casually, so familiarly, Dante's eyes flickered toward them for just a moment.

Then he looked away, his expression unchanging, like it didn't matter at all.

Harry, however, couldn't help but watch the two of them a beat longer than necessary.

Among the group, Dante and Sienna were clearly the center of attention.

At the test site, one of the staff members approached respectfully. "Mr. Wilson, Director Brown, everything's ready to go whenever you are."

The staff addressed Sienna like she was already the lady of the house.

Dante gave a slight nod. "Let's begin."

"Yes, sir."

They could watch the driving performance on the monitor in real time.

After the test driver successfully completed a full circuit, one of the staff members turned to Dante and Sienna. "Would you like to experience it yourselves?"

Dante agreed without hesitation.

He and Sienna got into the same vehicle.

On the monitor, Elodie could see them talking, their expressions on their faces. At one point, Sienna laughed at something Dante said, her hand brushing his arm.

Elodie continued watching the screen, her face completely calm, her expression giving nothing away.

Johnny, on the other hand, looked like he wanted to throw something.

Levi, clearly eager to try the car himself, was about to say something to Harry when Sophia approached, her tone bright and expectant. "Mr. Becker, should we—"

Harry cut her off smoothly. "You go ahead. I'm not really interested."

Sophia blinked, clearly caught off guard.

Meanwhile, Manager Kim turned to Johnny and Elodie. "Mr. Gray, Miss Miller, would you like to take it for a spin?"

They were more familiar with the car's systems than most of Wilson Tech's own staff. Normally, they might've jumped at the chance.

But after everything that had just happened?

Johnny snorted. "Hard pass."

Elodie leaned in slightly, her voice low as she murmured something about the engine's performance. "You sure you don't want to try? The torque response is actually impressive."

Johnny shot her a look. "How do you even know that? We haven't tested it yet."

Elodie's lips quirked just slightly.

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Chapter 150: Chapter 151

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.