

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 201[1,629 words]

Chapter 201: Chapter 201

David was still a little scared of Dante. He always had been. There was something about his uncle, the way he carried himself, the cold look in his eyes, the authority that seemed to radiate off him without effort, that made David nervous.

So when he walked into the living room, he made sure to greet everyone properly.

"Grandpa. Grandma. Uncle."

His voice was small but polite.

Dante gave him a brief nod. Nothing more.

Liora was sitting on the floor near the coffee table, completely absorbed in a puzzle. Pieces were scattered everywhere, and she was frowning in concentration, trying to fit two pieces together that clearly didn't match.

Amber nudged David gently. "Go play with Liora."

David nodded and walked over, plopping down on the floor beside his cousin.

"Liora, cousin," he said.

Liora looked up and smiled. "Oh, you're here?"

"Yeah." David reached for a puzzle piece and started helping. "I went to the movies with Mom today."

Liora hummed absently, still focused on the puzzle.

Then David added, almost like an afterthought, "I saw your mom there."

Liora's head snapped up so fast she nearly knocked over the puzzle box.

"You saw my mom? Where?"

"At the cinema," David said, confused by her sudden intensity.

Liora's face scrunched up immediately. "No way. My mom is super busy. She doesn't have time to go to the movies. You probably saw someone else."

David frowned. He didn't like being told he was wrong when he knew he wasn't.

"I didn't see wrong," he said firmly. "That person was definitely your mom."

"You're lying!" Liora shot back, her voice rising.

She had called her mom last night. And this morning. Both times, Elodie hadn't picked up. If she was too busy to answer the phone, there was no way she had time to go watch a movie.

David's face turned red. "I'm not lying!"

"Yes, you are!" Liora insisted, her hands balling into fists.

David, now frustrated and hurt that she didn't believe him, blurted out, "And your mom wasn't alone! She was with another kid. About your height. Super cute!"

That did it.

Liora's face went hot. Her chest felt tight. Before she even realized what she was doing, she grabbed a puzzle piece and stood up, throwing it at David as hard as she could.

"No way! Stop lying!"

David yelped, startled. He didn't understand why she was so angry. He was just telling the truth!

So he grabbed a puzzle piece and threw it right back at her.

"I'm not lying!"

"Yes, you are!"

"No, I'm not!"

"Enough!"

The sharp voice cut through the chaos.

Both kids froze.

The noise had drawn everyone's attention. Stella came rushing over first, her expression a mix of concern and frustration.

David's eyes were already watering. "I just said—"

But before he could finish, Liora let out a frustrated huff, tears streaming down her cheeks now. She didn't want to hear it. Didn't want to listen to him anymore.

She turned and bolted toward the living room.

"Daddy!"

Dante, who had been in the middle of a conversation with one of the Pack elders, looked up immediately.

Liora ran straight to him, her face red and blotchy, tears spilling over.

Without hesitation, Dante bent down and scooped her up into his arms, holding her securely against his chest.

He excused himself from the conversation with a polite nod and carried Liora out of the crowded living room, away from the noise and the stares.

When they reached the quiet hallway, he finally stopped and looked down at her.

"What's going on?"

Liora opened her mouth to tell him. She wanted to explain what David had said, wanted to ask if it was true, wanted to know why her mom would go to the movies with some other kid and not her.

But the words wouldn't come.

Because suddenly, all she could think about was the image David had painted... her mom, smiling and laughing with another child. A child who was cuter than her. A child who got to spend time with her when Liora didn't.

And it hurt.

It hurt so much.

The emotions crashed over her all at once, and before she could stop herself, she burst into tears.

Dante's expression shifted. His jaw tightened.

"Liora," he said quietly, his voice firm but gentle. "Talk to me. What happened?"

But Liora just buried her face in his shoulder and cried.

By the time Stella and Dante made it over to where the kids had been fighting, David had already spilled the whole story.

Stella looked at Amber, her tone sharp but controlled. "Did you not see what happened?"

Amber glanced up from her phone, barely looking fazed. "I wasn't paying attention. So I don't know if what he said is true or not."

Stella let out a quiet breath through her nose, clearly unimpressed. She thought for a moment, then softened her tone, mostly for David's sake.

"I believe David isn't lying," she said carefully. "It's possible he really did see your sister-in-law. But it's also possible he saw someone who just looks like her."

She paused, then added, "After all, if Elodie had time to go watch a movie, wouldn't she have come home instead?"

That seemed to make sense to everyone.

They'd all assumed Elodie was swamped with work. That's why she hadn't been around. That's why she never answered her phone. So the idea of her casually going to the cinema? It didn't add up.

Still, David's words had planted a seed of doubt.

David, who'd been on the verge of tears just moments ago, perked up immediately when Stella sided with him. His chest puffed out a little. See? He wasn't lying.

Meanwhile, Liora had stopped crying.

She sat curled up in Dante's arms, sniffing quietly as she processed what Stella had said.

Right. Maybe David had just seen someone who looked like her mom. That made more sense, didn't it?

Her mood lifted, just a little.

But then another thought crept in.

She remembered the way her mom had talked about Tommy once. How she'd said he was so cute. How the two of them had seemed really comfortable with each other, like they'd known each other forever.

Liora's chest tightened again.

She wiped at her face with the back of her hand, then reached toward Dante's pocket.

"Dad," she said quietly, her voice still shaky. "Phone."

Dante had already pieced together what was going on. He could see the worry written all over her little face. Without a word, he pulled out his phone and handed it to her, brushing away the last of her tears with his thumb.

Liora didn't waste any time. She pulled up her mom's contact and hit call.

Elodie was at the arcade.

After the movie, Harry had suggested they stop by since Daisy was still full of energy and clearly not ready to go home yet. So now Elodie was standing in front of a claw machine, watching Daisy try and fail to grab a stuffed bear for the third time in a row.

Her phone buzzed in her pocket.

She pulled it out and glanced at the screen.

It was Dante.

Her finger hovered over the screen for half a second.

Then she hung up.

She wasn't in the mood. Not today.

She slipped the phone back into her pocket and turned her attention back to Daisy, who was now pouting at the claw machine like it had personally insulted her.

"One more try?" Elodie asked with a small smile.

Daisy nodded eagerly.

Back at the Wilson estate, Liora stared at the phone in her hands.

The call had gone to voicemail.

Her eyes were still red and puffy. She let out a long, shaky sigh.

"Mom didn't pick up."

Dante, standing beside her, kept his expression neutral. "She's probably busy. Let's not bother her right now."

He crouched down so he was eye-level with her. "How about I take you out to eat tonight? Anywhere you want."

The mention of her mom being busy made Liora feel a little better. If Dad thought Mom was busy, then maybe David really had made a mistake.

She nodded slowly. "Okay."

Then her face brightened just a bit. "Can we invite Aunt Sienna too?"

Dante smiled. It wasn't warm, but it was there. "Of course."

That seemed to settle her.

Liora climbed down from his lap, her feet hitting the floor with a soft thud. She was about to head back to her puzzle when something gnawed at her again.

That uneasy feeling wouldn't go away.

She picked up the phone again.

This time, she didn't call her mom.

She scrolled through the contacts until she found her instructor's number and hit dial.

The instructor picked up after a few rings, clearly surprised.

"Liora? Is everything okay?"

"Hi, Miss Chen," Liora said politely, her voice still a little wobbly. "I wanted to ask you something."

"Of course, sweetheart. What is it?"

Liora hesitated, then said, "Can you give me Tommy's number? I want to talk to him."

There was a pause on the other end.

The instructor was caught off guard. As far as she knew, Liora and Tommy weren't particularly close. Liora had never been mean to him, but they didn't really hang out either.

Still, the little girl sounded upset. And the instructor had a soft spot for her students.

"Let me check with his mom first, okay?"

"Okay."

A few minutes later, the instructor called back with Tommy's contact information.

Liora's heart was pounding as she opened the video call app and typed in his number.

She hit the button.

The screen flickered.

Then it started ringing.

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Tommy answered almost immediately, her face lighting up the screen.

"Liora! You're looking for me?" Her voice was bright, surprised, maybe even a little hopeful. "Do you want to play with me?"

Liora had never really been nice to Tommy. Not mean, exactly, but not warm either. Still, Tommy had always liked her anyway. She thought Liora was brave and confident and just... cool. The kind of kid other kids wanted to be around.

"Mm," Liora said quietly, her lips pressed into a thin line. "Where are you?"

"At home!" Tommy said cheerfully, already turning the camera around to show her surroundings. "My grandparents came over, and we're making cookies with Mom. You want some?"

The camera panned across the kitchen. Liora could see the table covered in flour, cookie cutters scattered everywhere, and a tray piled high with freshly baked cookies cooling on the counter.

Tommy was definitely at home.

Liora felt something loosen in her chest.

"You didn't go watch a movie with my mom, right?" she asked, her voice small but steady.

Tommy blinked, clearly confused. "No. I haven't seen Aunt Elodie in a long time."

That was it.

The knot in Liora's stomach finally unraveled. She let out a breath she didn't know she'd been holding.

"Okay," she said, her tone lighter now. "You go ahead and make your cookies."

She was about to hang up when something made her pause. She hesitated, feeling awkward, then mumbled, "Goodbye."

Tommy, caught off guard by the sudden end to the call, fumbled for a response. "Oh, um... goodbye?"

The screen went black.

Liora set the phone down and sat there for a moment, staring at nothing in particular.

Then she stood up and walked back toward the living room.

Dante had already returned to the main hall by the time Liora came back.

Felix glanced at him from across the room. "Everything alright?"

Dante gave a short nod. "Mm."

Felix didn't push.

Not long after, a few guests who had just arrived were shown into the sitting area. They greeted Felix and Dante with polite smiles and took their seats across from them.

This was the first time they'd met Liora.

One of the guests, an older man with graying hair and a sharp suit, couldn't help but comment.

"I can't believe it," he said, shaking his head with a chuckle. "Alpha Wilson's child is already this big. Does that mean you've been married for quite some time now?"

There had been rumors, of course. Everyone in the Pack had heard whispers about Dante having a daughter. But seeing Liora in person, seeing her sit there so calmly, so polished, it made the rumors feel real.

Dante, who had been sipping his tea, set the cup down with a quiet clink.

"Yes," he said simply.

The guests exchanged glances.

They laughed awkwardly, trying to cover the tension that had just settled over the room.

The truth was, they'd brought their daughter along today. She was sitting off to the side now, poised and pretty, with perfect posture and a practiced smile. They'd been hoping, really hoping, that maybe, just maybe, Dante might take an interest.

If things went well, it could've been a good match. A strong alliance between families.

But they hadn't expected him to already be married.

And even worse?

He hadn't looked at their daughter once.

Not once.

She'd been sitting there for over half an hour, and Dante's eyes had never so much as drifted in her direction.

It was like she didn't exist.

The guests began to wonder, even if Dante hadn't been married, would their daughter have stood a chance?

Probably not.

Meanwhile, across town, Elodie was still at the arcade.

Harry and Daisy had left about twenty minutes ago. Daisy had been yawning nonstop, and Harry insisted on getting her home before she passed out completely.

Elodie had smiled, waved them off, and told them to get home safe.

Now she was alone.

She'd spent most of the earlier part of the day working on a research paper, something she'd been chipping away at for weeks. It was almost done. Just a few more tweaks to the latest section, and then she could send it over to Professor Nolan for review. Once he gave the green light, she'd submit it officially.

But right now? She wasn't thinking about any of that.

She was standing in front of a VR racing game, headset strapped on, completely immersed.

The world around her faded. All she could hear was the roar of the engine, the screech of tires, the adrenaline rushing through her veins as she took a sharp turn and overtook another racer.

She didn't notice the woman walking past.

Didn't see the way the woman slowed down, eyes narrowing as she recognized her.

Sophia.

She stood there for a moment, arms crossed, watching Elodie play. Alone. No husband. No daughter. Just... by herself.

Sophia's lip curled into a sneer.

Pathetic.

She shook her head, let out a quiet scoff, and kept walking.

Elodie never even knew she'd been there.

Half an hour later, Sophia pulled up to the Brown family's villa.

The place was massive, sleek, modern, dripping with wealth. She parked her car, grabbed her bag, and practically skipped up the steps. The moment she walked through the front door, she froze.

Her mom was there.

"Mom?" Sophia blinked, genuinely surprised. "Weren't you supposed to go shopping with someone? Why are you here at Aunt's house?"

Tracy looked up from where she'd been sitting on the couch, scrolling through her phone. She seemed confused by the question.

"I just came back from shopping," she said simply, like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

The truth was, Tracy had been spending more and more time here lately. Sure, the Green family villa was nice, spacious, well-kept but it was nothing compared to the house Dante had bought for Sienna. Ever since the Brown family moved in, Tracy couldn't stay away. The luxury, the prestige, the sheer grandeur of it all, it was intoxicating.

Sophia was the same way. She loved coming here. Loved being surrounded by all this wealth, even if none of it was technically hers.

She plopped down on the armchair across from her mother, a sly grin spreading across her face.

"Mom, Aunt," she said, her tone dripping with mischief. "Guess who I saw at the arcade?"

Sienna was sitting by the large floor-to-ceiling windows, a book open in her lap. She didn't even look up. She had a pretty good idea who Sophia was talking about, but honestly? She didn't care enough to respond.

Tracy, on the other hand, perked up immediately.

"Did you see Elodie Miller?" she asked, leaning forward.

"Yes!" Sophia grinned wider, cracking open a sunflower seed between her teeth. "You know how her husband won't let her back to the Bellini estate, right? Well, guess what? I saw her all alone at the arcade, playing games by herself. She looked so... pathetic."

Tracy let out a sharp laugh, shaking her head. "Well, of course she's all alone now. That's what happens when you don't know your place."

They'd already heard about the whole situation. Everyone had. It wasn't exactly a secret.

Still, hearing Sophia bring it up again made Tracy smile like she'd just heard the best gossip of the week.

Sienna, meanwhile, didn't react at all. She just kept reading, her expression smooth and unbothered.

It was like Elodie didn't even exist to her anymore.

Sophia was about to keep going, clearly enjoying herself, when Sienna finally spoke, her voice calm, almost gentle.

"Sophia," she said softly, still not looking up from her book. "I'm studying. Don't disturb me."

Sophia blinked. "Oh..."

She glanced at Sienna, taking in how focused she looked, how serious. Then she let out a long sigh.

"Didn't the tutor come this morning? It's already past five in the afternoon, and you're still studying. I'm tired just watching you. Aren't you exhausted?"

Tracy chimed in, shaking her head fondly. "She must be tired. But your cousin has big ambitions, Sophia. I've always told you to learn from her, but you never listen."

She paused, then smiled warmly at Sienna. "But still, Sienna, hard work is important, but you need to take breaks too. How about coming over and eating something first?"

Sienna finally looked up, just for a second. Her expression was calm.

"No need," she said simply. "Dante invited me to dinner. I'll just read a little longer and then head out."

Tracy's smile widened. "Oh, of course."

Sophia rolled her eyes but didn't say anything else.

Sienna went back to her book.

Meanwhile, across town, Elodie had finally made it back to the Miller family home.

She'd spent the last three hours hunched over her laptop, reworking her research paper for what felt like the hundredth time. Every sentence had been scrutinized. Every argument double-checked. Every citation verified.

Finally, finally, she was satisfied.

She hit send, emailing the final draft to Professor Nolan, then leaned back in her chair and stretched. Her shoulders ached. Her neck was stiff. But it was done.

She stood up, rolled her neck a few times, and left her room.

As she made her way downstairs, she noticed something strange.

Her grandmother was standing by the front door.

Just... standing there. In the cold. Like she was waiting for someone.

Elodie frowned and quickly walked over.

"Grandma, you—"

Before she could finish, the sound of a car engine rumbled from outside.

Elodie stopped.

Her grandmother's face lit up.

The car pulled into the driveway.

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Before Elodie could even finish her sentence, a car rolled into the driveway.

The engine hummed softly, then cut off. A second later, the back door flew open.

"Mom! Great-grandma!"

Liora came tumbling out of the car, her little legs moving as fast as they could carry her. Her face was lit up with pure excitement.

Old Lady Miller's entire expression softened. Her eyes crinkled at the corners as she smiled wide and bent down, arms open.

"Ah, there's my girl!"

Liora had actually started running toward Elodie first. But the moment she saw her great-grandmother crouching down with her arms stretched out, she veered off course and threw herself into the old woman's embrace instead.

Old Lady Miller hugged her tight, rocking her a little. "Have you eaten yet? Are you hungry?"

Liora shook her head, her voice muffled against her great-grandmother's shoulder. "I just ate with Dad. I'm not hungry."

She pulled back after a moment, then turned toward Elodie. Her arms shot up immediately, fingers wiggling.

"Mom, hug!"

Elodie's chest tightened, just a little.

She bent down and reached for her daughter, ready to scoop her up. But as Liora leaned in, Elodie caught it.

A faint scent that was floral and expensive. Definitely not something a five-year-old would be wearing.

Elodie's expression didn't change. She didn't flinch. Didn't pull back. She just lifted Liora into her arms like nothing was wrong.

But she knew.

She knew exactly whose perfume that was.

Dante hadn't come himself this time.

After Liora hopped out of the car, she left the door wide open. The driver, a middle-aged man in a dark suit, got out, shut the door for her, and gave Elodie and Old Lady Miller a polite nod.

Then he got back in the car and drove off.

Liora didn't stay long.

She had school the next morning, so after a quick visit with her great-grandmother, Elodie gave her a bath and tucked her into bed.

Liora was out like a light within minutes, her little hand curled under her cheek, breathing slow and even.

Elodie stood there for a moment, just watching her.

Then she pulled out her phone and typed out a message.

[Please have the driver pick Liora up tomorrow afternoon. Also, don't send her here without letting me know next time.]

She hit send.

The message showed as delivered. Then read.

But no reply came.

Not that night, anyway.

The next day, after dropping Liora off at school, Elodie headed straight to the office.

It was only then, hours later, that Dante finally responded.

[Okay.]

That was it. One word.

Elodie stared at the message for a second, then locked her phone and got back to work.

Two days later, the weekend rolled around.

Monday morning, Elodie's phone buzzed with a new email.

It was from Professor Nolan.

[No problem. You can submit it now.]

Elodie let out a breath she didn't realize she'd been holding. A small smile tugged at her lips.

It was done. Finally.

She and Johnny hadn't seen Nolan in a while, weeks, maybe longer. So after the official submission went through, they decided to invite him out for dinner that evening.

To their surprise, Nolan actually said yes.

That evening, Elodie, Johnny, and Professor Nolan pulled up to the restaurant around six-thirty.

The place was upscale but not overly fancy. Warm lighting, quiet atmosphere, the kind of spot where you could actually have a conversation without shouting over background music.

They got out of the car and headed inside, chatting as they walked toward the entrance.

None of them noticed the sleek black car parked a few spaces down.

But Harry noticed them.

He was still sitting in the driver's seat, eyes following the group as they disappeared through the restaurant doors. His grip tightened slightly on the steering wheel.

Then he let out a slow breath and pushed the door open.

He stepped out into the cool evening air, walked around to the backseat, and carefully lifted Daisy into his arms. She was half-asleep, her head resting heavily against his shoulder.

He stood there for a moment, adjusting his hold on her, then made his way toward the entrance.

Levi was already waiting outside when Harry arrived.

He spotted Harry immediately and walked over with a casual grin. "You're here?"

Harry nodded. "Mm."

A few minutes passed. Daisy stirred in his arms, blinking groggily as she woke up.

Then more cars pulled into the lot.

It was Dante's sleek and expensive car. Unmistakable. The doors opened.

Dante stepped out first, calm and composed as always. Then Sienna, looking polished and perfect in a soft cream-colored dress. Then Liora, who immediately ran over to Levi with a bright smile.

And then Sophia.

Harry's gaze dropped slightly when he saw her.

But Sophia? She lit up like someone had just turned on a spotlight.

She practically bounced over to him, her smile wide and eager.

"Harry!" she said sweetly, her voice dripping with warmth.

Harry looked at her.

His expression was flat. Indifferent.

He didn't say a word.

Sophia stood there, smiling awkwardly, waiting for Harry to say something back.

He didn't.

The silence stretched just long enough to sting.

Then Liora came trotting over, her eyes immediately going to Daisy, who was still slumped against Harry's shoulder looking half-asleep.

"Daisy, are you feeling okay?" Liora asked, her little brows furrowing with concern.

Daisy blinked slowly and mumbled, "I'm fine..."

Harry's expression softened the moment he looked down at Liora. A small, genuine smile tugged at his lips.

"She's alright," he said gently. "She just woke up."

That seemed to satisfy Liora. The second Daisy perked up enough to notice her, she wiggled out of Harry's arms and grabbed Liora's hand.

"Come on, let's sit over there!"

The two girls scurried off to the corner of the room, plopping down on the sofa and immediately diving into some animated conversation about who-knows-what.

Harry watched them for a moment, his expression unreadable.

Then Sienna walked in.

She moved with that same calm, graceful confidence she always had. She sat down beside Dante without a word, accepted the glass of water he handed her with a quiet "thank you," then pulled a book out of her bag.

She glanced around the room briefly, then said in that soft, polite voice of hers, "I'm going to read for a bit. Don't mind me. Just go ahead and talk."

Levi, who was sitting across from her, let out a short laugh.

"You're bringing a book to dinner?" he said, shaking his head in disbelief. "Isn't that a little... extreme?"

Sophia, now seated beside Harry, too close for his liking, chimed in immediately.

"My cousin's been like this lately," she said, her tone dripping with admiration. "Super hardworking."

Harry said nothing.

He knew Sienna was trying to become Professor Nolan's student. Everyone knew. She'd been working herself to the bone for weeks now, studying day and night, meeting with tutors, attending lectures.

What she didn't know, what none of them knew, was that Nolan was in this very restaurant right now.

Just a few rooms down.

Harry had seen him earlier when he'd pulled into the parking lot. Seen him walk in with Elodie and Johnny, laughing about something, completely at ease.

He could've mentioned it. Could've told Sienna. Could've given her the opportunity to "accidentally" run into him.

But he didn't.

Instead, he sat there quietly, his mind turning over something else entirely.

Something that had been nagging at him since the moment he'd seen Elodie downstairs.

She'd been standing next to Nolan. Not Johnny. Nolan.

Johnny had been on Nolan's other side, sure. But Elodie had been the one closest to him. The one he'd been talking to. The one he'd been listening to.

Harry had assumed, like everyone else, that Elodie was only there because of Johnny. That Johnny had invited her along as a colleague, maybe even as... something more.

But if that were true, wouldn't she have been standing next to Johnny?

Elodie wasn't the type to schmooze. Wasn't the type to work a room or butter people up. She was polite, professional, but she didn't go out of her way to make connections.

And yet, when Harry had seen her earlier, she'd looked completely comfortable with Nolan. Like they were old friends. Like they'd known each other for years.

Harry's mind started piecing things together.

Cole Technologies had only launched two major projects in the past few months. Both of them had been wildly successful. Both of them had come out of nowhere.

Elodie had left the Wilson companies and joined Cole around three or four months ago.

Leo had said, just the other day, that Elodie's abilities surpassed his own. That she was on another level entirely.

And then there was the thing with Sienna.

When Sienna had wanted to join Cole, Johnny had turned her down. Flat-out refused her. And Sienna wasn't just anyone, she was talented, well-connected, driven. She would've been an asset to any company.

But Johnny had chosen Elodie instead.

At the time, both Harry and Levi had assumed it was because Johnny had feelings for her. That maybe there was something going on between them.

But now...

Harry's gaze shifted.

He looked at Sienna, who was flipping through her book with that same focused expression she always wore. Every few minutes, she'd lean over and ask Dante a quiet question, and he'd answer without hesitation, his tone patient and indulgent.

It hit Harry all at once.

A realization so sudden, so sharp, it felt like the floor had just dropped out from under him.

He stood up.

The chair scraped loudly against the floor.

Everyone stopped.

Dante looked up. Levi froze mid-sentence. Even Sienna glanced over, her brows lifting slightly in surprise.

"Harry?" Dante's voice was calm, but there was a question in it. "Did something happen?"

Harry blinked.

He looked at Dante. Then at Sienna. Then back at Dante.

For a second, he didn't say anything.

Then he slowly shook his head.

"Nothing," he said quietly.

And he sat back down.

But his mind was racing.

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Sophia opened her mouth again, clearly trying to get Harry's attention.

"Harry, I—"

But Harry didn't even glance her way. He turned his head toward Daisy, who was still sitting near him, and spoke gently.

"Daisy, are you thirsty? Want some water?"

Daisy nodded immediately. "Yes, please."

Harry reached for the glass on the table, poured her some water, and handed it to her. She took a few sips, then hopped off the couch and scurried back over to Liora.

The two of them had been chattering nonstop about the little toys Liora had brought along earlier.

As soon as Daisy sat back down, she reached into her pocket and pulled out a small figurine, some cartoon character with big eyes and a goofy smile.

"I got this during the New Year holiday when I went to the movies," Daisy said excitedly, holding it out to Liora. "It's for you."

Liora's eyes went wide. She took it carefully, turning it over in her hands like it was made of glass.

"You went to the movies during the New Year holiday?" she asked, her voice tinged with envy.

"Yeah!" Daisy grinned. "My uncle and aunt took me. And after the movie, we went to the arcade. My aunt is really good at games. We didn't get to play for long though, 'cause my uncle had to leave."

Liora pouted a little. "My uncle took me to see a movie that morning too. But he was in a hurry to meet his friends, so we just went home right after. I didn't even know they had figurines like this."

She looked down at the little toy in her hands, clearly disappointed she'd missed out.

Then, as if trying to defend her own pride, she added quietly, "My mom is really good at games too."

Daisy perked up immediately. "Then next time, we should ask my aunt and your mom to come with us! We can all play together!"

Liora's face brightened at the idea. "Yeah!"

But before either of them could say anything else, Liora noticed something.

Her dad was looking at them.

She blinked and turned toward him. "Dad, what's wrong?"

Dante's expression didn't change. He gave her a faint smile, barely there, but enough.

"Nothing," he said smoothly. "Keep talking."

"Oh... okay."

Liora turned back to Daisy, but she seemed a little quieter now.

After the waiter came by to take their orders, Levi leaned back in his chair and glanced over at Harry.

"By the way," he said casually, "how's the collaboration going between your company and Cole? Everything smooth?"

Harry didn't look up from his phone. "Yeah. Quite smooth."

Levi raised an eyebrow, clearly intrigued. "Oh? No problems? No... mishaps?"

Sienna, who had been quietly reading her book up until now, paused. Her eyes didn't leave the page, but her fingers stilled on the corner.

Harry knew exactly what Levi was really asking.

He was asking if Elodie had screwed up. If she'd made mistakes. If she'd proven to be the liability everyone assumed she was.

Harry could feel Dante's gaze shift toward them too. Not obvious. Not direct. But there.

He was listening.

Harry lowered his eyes and answered simply.

"No."

Levi blinked, clearly surprised. "Really?"

"Mm."

Sienna's lips pressed together. She turned the page of her book a little too quickly, the sound sharp in the quiet room.

Dante took a slow sip of his tea, his expression giving nothing away.

Levi seemed to realize the conversation had hit a dead end. He let out a short laugh and waved it off.

"Well, that's good then," he said lightly, already moving on. "Anyway, speaking of work, did you guys hear about the new Pack regulations coming out of Europe? Apparently—"

And just like that, the topic shifted.

But Harry wasn't really listening anymore.

His mind was somewhere else entirely.

Later That Day. About two hours later, after finishing their meal, the group finally started packing up to leave.

Dante stood first, helping Sienna gather her things while Liora clung to his hand. Levi was still mid-conversation with Sophia, who was laughing a little too loudly at something he'd said. Harry picked up Daisy, who was yawning and rubbing her eyes, clearly ready to crash the moment they got home.

They made their way downstairs, said their goodbyes in the parking lot, and went their separate ways.

What none of them noticed was that just as they were leaving, another group was descending the stairs on the opposite side of the restaurant.

Elodie, Johnny, and Professor Nolan.

They walked out through the side exit, still talking animatedly about something work-related. Nolan was gesturing with his hands, explaining some concept, while Elodie listened intently, nodding every now and then.

They got into their cars and drove off into the night.

Back home, Elodie didn't even bother turning on all the lights.

She went straight to her desk, pulled out the stack of materials Professor Nolan had given her earlier, and spread them out in front of her.

The papers were dense. Filled with diagrams, formulas, research notes. They covered the latest developments in AI research across various Packs, concepts that were still in the experimental stage. Ideas that hadn't been tested yet. Theories that might never see the light of day.

But they were fascinating.

Elodie dove in headfirst.

She lost track of time completely. One page turned into five. Five turned into twenty. Her pen moved across her notebook in quick, messy strokes as she jotted down thoughts, questions, ideas.

She didn't notice when the darkness outside her window started to fade.

Didn't notice when the sky shifted from black to deep blue to pale orange.

It wasn't until the sun had fully risen, high and bright, that a soft knock sounded at her door.

"Elodie, it's time for breakfast."

It was her aunt, Helen. Her voice was gentle, careful not to startle her.

Elodie blinked, pulling herself out of the haze. She glanced at the window, surprised to see daylight streaming in.

"Okay," she called back, her voice a little hoarse. "I'll come down in a bit."

She stood up slowly, her body stiff from sitting in the same position for hours. She brushed her teeth, took a quick shower to wake herself up, then grabbed her phone.

She dialed Johnny's number.

He picked up on the second ring, his voice groggy and rough.

"I knew you hadn't slept yet," he groaned.

Elodie smiled faintly. "I'm about to go downstairs for breakfast. Want to chat after?"

There was a pause. Then Johnny sat up straighter, suddenly more awake.

"Yes," he said, his tone shifting to something more enthusiastic. "We have to chat."

Ideas were fleeting. You had to grab them while they were fresh.

"Alright. Talk soon."

She hung up and headed downstairs.

After breakfast, Elodie was just about to video call Johnny when her phone rang again.

It was Paul, her lawyer.

"I just got a call from Mr. Bellini's lawyer," Paul said. "The property certificates for the three villas he transferred to you have been finalized. I'll be picking them up later. When are you free to collect them? Or I can bring them to you if that's easier."

Elodie had almost forgotten about that.

Her mind had been so consumed with work that the whole villa situation had completely slipped her mind.

"Then please, Mr. Blake," she said politely, "make the trip for me."

"Of course."

She hung up and immediately called Johnny.

They worked straight through until noon, their brains buzzing with ideas, theories, solutions. By the time they finally took a break, Elodie's head was spinning.

Elodie had last visited Nonna the previous Sunday.

She and Old Lady Miller had originally planned to go again that afternoon, but Elodie had been up all night. She was exhausted. So she suggested they push the visit to the evening instead.

When she mentioned it over lunch, Old Lady Miller took one look at her tired face and nodded.

"Alright. We'll go after dinner then."

Elodie took a nap after that and didn't wake up until almost six in the evening.

After a quick dinner, she and Old Lady Miller drove to the hospital.

When they arrived, Dante wasn't there.

Elodie wasn't surprised. She hadn't expected him to be.

She and Old Lady Miller spent nearly two hours with Nonna, chatting, laughing, keeping her company. Nonna looked better than she had in days. Color was back in her cheeks. Her eyes were bright.

Just as they were getting ready to leave, the door opened.

Dante walked in.

He paused briefly when he saw them, but his expression didn't change. Like he'd known they'd be there all along.

"Thank you both for coming," he said politely, his tone formal. Detached.

Neither Elodie nor Old Lady Miller responded.

Dante walked them to the elevator and pressed the button for them.

As the doors slid open, he asked, almost as an afterthought, "Did you receive the property certificates?"

"Not yet," Elodie said simply.

She and Old Lady Miller stepped into the elevator. Before Dante could follow, Elodie held up a hand.

"No need to see us out," she said quietly. "You should go back."

Dante stopped.

For a second, he looked like he wanted to say something. But he didn't.

He just nodded once and stepped back.

The elevator doors closed between them.

As for why she hadn't received the property certificates yet, he didn't ask.

And she didn't explain.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 205[2,266 words]

Chapter 205: Chapter 205

Those were minor details. What really mattered was Cole's technology. That was what had real value.

Logan understood exactly what Sophia meant. Sure, Elodie had done well during her speech. But when it came to the technical stuff? Both he and Sophia figured Johnny had fed her all the answers beforehand.

There was no way Elodie actually knew that much on her own.

Tracy chimed in. "But she really is relying on Johnny, isn't she?"

No matter how you looked at it, Elodie had been front and center today. And whether they liked it or not, that helped the Miller family. In Tracy's eyes, that showed Elodie had at least some ability.

But Sophia wasn't concerned with any of that. What bothered her was something else entirely.

She'd noticed Harry in the audience during the press conference. Watching Elodie. His gaze had been locked on her, focused, and intent.

He'd never looked at Sophia that way. She couldn't help but think if she'd been the one on stage, Harry's eyes would've been on her instead.

By the time Elodie and Johnny left the hotel, it was nearly ten at night. After a full day of nonstop work, Elodie's head was pounding.

She got in her car and drove on autopilot, only realizing when she pulled into the garage that she'd gone to her own apartment instead of back to the Miller house.

It was too late to turn around now. She wasn't going back tonight.

She got out, pulled out her phone, and scrolled through her messages. The Miller family had called. So had Liora.

There was also a text from Liora, sent around 8 p.m., asking when she'd be home.

Elodie glanced at it, then put her phone away. She went upstairs, took a quick shower, and collapsed into bed.

The next morning, she'd barely opened her eyes when her phone rang.

It was Liora.

Elodie didn't want to answer. But the second her phone went quiet, the landline at the Miller house started ringing.

She sighed and picked up. "Grandma."

"Elodie, you didn't come home last night?"

"Yeah. I was too busy. Didn't make it back."

Hearing that she'd been working, Old Madam Miller softened. She didn't push. Just handed the phone to Liora.

"Mom!" Liora's voice was bright, and cheerful.

"Hey."

Liora sounded surprised that Elodie didn't come back to the Miller house every night. When she'd called last night and gotten no answer, and then woke up this morning and didn't see her, she'd felt a little let down.

"Mom, when are you coming back?"

"Tonight, probably."

"Oh..." Liora's voice dipped.

Elodie remembered something. "Call your dad and have him send a driver to take you to school, okay? I'm too busy today."

"Okay." Then, after a pause, "By the way, Mom, where are you living now? Can I come see you after school?"

"No," Elodie said quickly. "I'll still be at work when school gets out. Just stay at your great-grandma's. If you get bored, call your dad and have him take you out to eat."

"Okay."

"I have to get to work now. I'm hanging up."

"Bye, Mom."

Elodie ended the call.

After breakfast, she went straight to the office.

Even though she'd been swamped yesterday, today was no different. But she left earlier than usual in the afternoon so she could have dinner with Grandma.

When she got to the Miller house, she noticed right away that Grandma seemed off. Upset about something.

Elodie glanced around the living room. There was no sign of Liora.

She guessed Liora had gone out to eat with Dante again.

Elodie wasn't particularly bothered. But Grandma clearly was. She thought Liora was getting way too attached to Dante.

"Elodie," Grandma said seriously, "once you finish up your current work, you need to spend more time with Liora. Otherwise..."

Elodie nodded vaguely. "I know. I will. Let's eat first."

Grandma didn't say anything else.

After dinner, Elodie chatted with her for a bit, then went upstairs to rest.

Around nine, she came back downstairs. That's when the security booth called.

There was a visitor.

Elodie glanced at the monitor and saw Dante's car.

She frowned. Before she could process it, her phone rang. And it was from Liora.

Grandma hadn't gone to bed yet. She came out of her room, saw what was happening, and immediately told security to let the car through.

Elodie answered the phone, talked to Liora briefly, then hung up.

A moment later, Dante's car pulled up outside.

Liora bolted out, grinning. "Mom! I'm back!"

Elodie smiled faintly. Grandma looked pleased.

The car door was still open. Dante was still inside. Then he stepped out, holding Liora's forgotten backpack in one hand and a cake box in the other.

He walked toward them.

Elodie didn't say anything.

Liora suddenly remembered she'd left her stuff and turned around, beaming. "Thanks, Dad!"

"Mm." Dante glanced at Elodie, then at Old Madam Miller. "Old Madam."

Grandma gave him the coldest nod imaginable.

Elodie had no choice but to take the cake box from him.

Liora was about to say how good the cake was, but Elodie cut her off.

"Liora, say goodbye to your dad."

Liora blinked, confused. "Dad's leaving?"

Dante smiled slightly. "Yeah."

Liora had no choice. "Bye, Dad."

"Bye." Dante gave Old Madam Miller a brief nod, then turned and walked back to his car.

Elodie took the cake and Liora's hand and headed inside without a second glance. Without bothering to give him a polite wave. No seeing him off.

Dante's car pulled away moments later.

The second they were inside, Liora started bouncing on her toes. "Mom! Great-grandma! This is a little cake Dad and I got for you! It's strawberry, the kind you like, Mom! You have to try it, okay?"

Liora smelled faintly of perfume. Floral perfume.

Sienna's, probably. Elodie's nose almost wrinkled in disgust.

Elodie set the cake down on the counter. "I just ate dinner, sweetheart. I'm not hungry. We'll save it for later."

Old Madam Miller nodded in agreement.

Liora's face fell a little. "Oh... okay."

After putting the cake in the fridge, Liora ran upstairs to take a shower. She'd just finished when her phone rang.

Dante was calling.

She picked up. "Dad?"

"I just heard your grandfather's coming back tomorrow afternoon," Dante said. "After school, I'll have someone pick you up so you can come home for dinner. Let your mom know."

Dante's father, Felix Wilson, worked in government. High up. He was always busy, barely home more than a handful of days each year. The day Nonna had fallen, Felix had rushed back at dawn only to leave again before sunrise.

Now that Nonna was still in the hospital recovering, Felix had taken a few days off in advance so he could come back and spend New Year's with her.

Liora nodded even though he couldn't see her. "Okay. Got it."

As she hung up, something clicked.

Her dad had said "pick you up." Not "pick *you all* up."

Just her. Not Elodie.

She turned to her mom, confused. "Mom, aren't you coming to dinner with us?"

In the past, whenever Grandpa Felix came home whether Dante was there or not, Nonna always invited both Elodie and Liora to the old house for a family meal.

It happened often enough that even though Liora was young, she'd just assumed: when Grandpa comes back, we all go to the old house.

Elodie opened her mouth to answer, but Dante cut in through the speaker.

"Your mom has something to do tomorrow."

"Oh... okay," Liora said quietly.

Liora had put the phone on speaker, so Elodie had heard the whole thing.

She hadn't known Felix was coming back. Not until just now.

But it made sense. She and Dante were in the middle of divorcing. Given the circumstances, there was no reason for her to visit the Wilson family anymore. No reason to meet Dante's relatives or play the role of dutiful daughter-in-law.

Clearly, Dante felt the same way. He hadn't even waited for her to respond, he just made up an excuse on her behalf so she wouldn't have to come.

He didn't say anything else. Just ended the call.

A cold glint flashed through his eyes. It wasn't angry, exactly. It was territorial. He reached out and grabbed my waist, his grip firm but not painful, and pulled me gently to his side. It was a movement that said **mine** without him having to speak.

He turned to lead me up the stairs, but the pilot stepped forward. He was a young guy, maybe thirty, with a nervous smile. He bent down to pick up a small, plush cashmere blanket that had been folded on the floor near the entrance.

"Here, Miss," the pilot said, holding it out to me. "It gets cold in the cabin. You should cover your legs."

I looked at the blanket, then at him. It was a nice gesture. "Thank you," I said, my voice shaking a little. I reached out to take it.

Konstantin moved faster than a snake. He stepped between me and the pilot, blocking my hand. The air temperature seemed to drop ten degrees. He looked at the pilot, then at the blanket, and a low, rumbling growl started in his chest.

"Three feet minimum," Konstantin barked at the pilot. His voice was sharp, like a whip crack. "Don't overstep."

The pilot blinked, his face turning pale. He dropped the blanket instantly. "S-sorry, Pakhan. I just—"

"Get in the cockpit," Konstantin snapped. He didn't wait for an apology. He ignored the pilot completely and turned back to me. He guided me inside the plane, his hand on the small of my back, steering me like I was a valuable piece of cargo.

He made sure I was seated in the massive leather chair. He checked the belt, pulling it tight across my lap himself. Then he took the seat right beside me. Not across the aisle. *Beside* me. His thigh was touching mine. The heat radiating off him was suffocating.

I rolled my eyes, trying to hide the fact that my hands were trembling. I unbuckled the belt immediately and moved to the seat across the aisle, putting an empty seat between us. I buckled it again, glaring at him.

Konstantin watched me. He didn't look mad. A slight curl of his lips played at the corner of his mouth, like he was watching a kitten try to roar.

Then the engines started.

The roar was deafening. The vibration rattled my teeth. My stomach dropped instantly, that sickening feeling of weightlessness, like falling down an elevator shaft. I gasped, my hands flying to the armrests. I gripped the leather so hard my knuckles turned white. I felt like I couldn't breathe. The walls were closing in.

Konstantin's deep voice cut through the noise of the engines. He didn't shout, but I heard him perfectly.

"You haven't flown before."

It wasn't a question. It was a statement of fact. I didn't answer. I couldn't. I was too busy trying to keep my heart from exploding out of my chest. The plane began to taxi, bumping over the tarmac. Every bump felt like a crash.

I clamped my eyes shut. *Please don't let me die. Please don't let the baby die.*

Slowly, I felt a heavy warmth cover my hand on the armrest. His hand. He had reached across the gap and covered my hand completely. His palm was rough, his fingers long and strong.

My breath caught in my throat. I tried to pull away, but my muscles wouldn't work.

"Breathe, Alessia," he said. His voice was right next to my ear, low and steady.

I forced air into my lungs. It came out shaky. "I'm fine," I lied, my voice thin and reedy.

"You're terrified," he countered. He wasn't mocking me. He sounded... certain.

I opened my mouth to snap at him, to tell him to go to hell, but the plane lifted. The nose went up, and we were in the air. The G-force pressed me back into the seat. I gasped, a small, broken sound of panic.

His thumb moved. He rubbed it gently over my knuckles, back and forth. A slow, rhythmic motion. It was grounding. It cut through the panic just enough for me to think.

"I got you," he said.

The words hit me harder than the takeoff.

I got you.

My ears rang. The roar of the engines faded into the background. Those words. They were oddly familiar. A memory flashed in my brain—darkness, music, the smell of expensive cologne. The stranger. The one night stand. In the pitch black of the club, he had whispered that against my skin when I stumbled. *I got you.*

I felt my breathing slow down, against my will. A strange, warm feeling spread through my chest. It wasn't fear. It was safety. And that terrified me more than the crash. I stiffened, my back going rigid against the seat.

My eyes snapped open. I looked down at our hands. His large, tattooed hand covering mine. Then I looked up at his face.

He was watching me. Those grey eyes were intense, focused entirely on my reaction. I hated to admit it, even to myself, but his eyes were so damn beautiful. Like storm clouds before a thunderstrike.

My lips moved before I could stop them. The question tumbled out, a whisper lost in the hum of the jet.

"What... did you just say?"

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 206 [1,650 words]

Chapter 206: Chapter 206

Elodie's POV~

It seemed like he'd only asked to make small talk.

The moment the elevator doors slid shut, Grandma turned to me with a curious look on her face.

"What property certificates?" She asked.

I kept my eyes on the descending floor numbers, my voice flat. "We're getting divorced. He gave me a portion of the properties as part of the settlement."

Grandma didn't even hesitate. "If he gave them to you, then keep them."

"I know."

I didn't want to talk about it anymore. Didn't want to think about Dante or his lawyers or the cold, transactional way he'd handed over pieces of his life like they were nothing.

When we got home, Paul was already waiting outside. He handed me the documents, we exchanged a few polite words, and then he left. Smart man. He knew better than to stick around.

I took the property certificates upstairs to my room. I didn't even look at them. Just opened a drawer, tossed them inside, and shut it.

Out of sight. Out of mind.

I went straight to the bathroom after that. The hot water felt good against my skin, washing away the exhaustion that had been sitting on me all day. I didn't even bother drying my hair properly. Just climbed into bed and let the darkness pull me under.

The Next Day.

I woke up early the next morning, laced up my running shoes, and went for a quick jog around the block. The air was cool and crisp, it was a type of air that cleared your head and made you feel like you could breathe again.

After a shower and breakfast, I grabbed my keys and headed out for work.

The city was still waking up. Traffic was light. The sky was a soft, pale blue.

As I approached the building where Cole Technologies was located, I slowed down to make the turn into the underground parking lot.

That's when I saw Harry.

He was sitting in his car just outside the building, the window rolled down, like he'd been waiting.

I frowned.

Why was he here so early?

I ran through my mental schedule. There wasn't any meeting between Cole and his company today. Nothing on the books. Nothing Johnny had mentioned.

Before I could figure it out, Harry noticed my car. He got out and started walking toward me.

I slowed to a stop and rolled down my window.

"Mr. Becker."

He stopped just beside my car, hands in his pockets. "Morning."

I nodded. "Morning."

Then, because I couldn't just sit here staring at him, I asked, "Is there something you need here?"

Harry didn't answer right away.

He just looked at me with that steady, unreadable expression of his. The kind that made you feel like he was already three steps ahead of whatever conversation you thought you were having.

"Last Saturday evening," he said carefully, "at the restaurant entrance. I saw you, Mr. Gray, and Professor Nolan."

I blinked.

Okay. So?

I waited for him to get to the point.

"You're also Professor Nolan's student, aren't you?"

My entire body went still.

For a second, I forgot how to breathe.

"You—"

But I didn't get to finish.

Because Harry was already nodding, like my reaction had told him everything he needed to know.

"So the two major projects Cole launched," he continued, his tone calm but pointed, "they were developed by you and your team, weren't they?"

My jaw tightened. My hands gripped the steering wheel a little harder.

"What exactly are you—"

"One last question," Harry said, cutting me off gently but firmly. "The CUAP programming language that Cole uses, tell me did you create it?"

My heart slammed against my ribs.

How the hell did he figure that out?

I stared at him, my mind racing. I wanted to deny it. I wanted to brush it off. Wanted to say he was being ridiculous and drive away before this conversation went any further.

But I couldn't.

Because the truth was written all over my face.

Harry didn't need me to say a word. He'd already seen the answer.

I pressed my lips together, my chest tight.

"Why are you asking me this?"

My voice came out quieter than I wanted. More controlled. But there was an edge to it now.

Harry didn't look away.

"Because I want to know the truth."

I let out a slow breath, my mind spinning.

The truth.

The truth was that I had created CUAP. When I was seventeen. When everyone thought I was just some quiet kid who spent too much time on her laptop.

The truth was that those two projects everyone praised Johnny for? They were mine. My ideas. My late nights. My blood, sweat, and frustration poured into lines of code that most people would never even understand.

The truth was that I'd been invisible for so long, people had forgotten I was even capable of being seen.

And now Harry, of all people, was standing here asking me to admit it.

I looked at him for a long moment.

Then I leaned back in my seat and let out a quiet, bitter laugh.

"You really want to know?"

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

I held his gaze.

I didn't say anything.

But Harry had already made up his mind. I could see it in his eyes, the way they shifted, like all the pieces had finally clicked into place.

Even though he'd clearly figured it out before asking, the confirmation still seemed to hit him hard. He just stood there, staring at me like he was seeing me for the first time.

Like he'd never really known me at all.

I pressed my lips together, my patience thinning.

"So you came here early just to tell me this?"

Harry blinked, pulling himself out of whatever thoughts he'd been drowning in.

"I was just... really shocked," he admitted. "I wanted an answer."

He rubbed the back of his neck, looking almost sheepish. Like he hadn't planned any of this. Like seeing me had just made all those questions spill out before he could stop them.

I didn't know what to say to that.

Before I could even try, Harry looked at me again, his expression suddenly serious.

"Don't worry," he said quietly. "I won't tell anyone."

I paused.

There was something in his eyes when he said that. Something sincere. Something honest.

I didn't respond. Didn't know if I should believe him or not.

Harry took a step back, putting some distance between us.

"You should go," he said, nodding toward the building. "I won't keep you."

And just like that, he turned and walked away.

I sat there for a moment, watching him leave, my mind still spinning.

Then I shook my head, let out a slow breath, and drove into the underground parking lot.

After that, life became a blur.

Johnny and I threw ourselves into the materials Professor Nolan had given us. We worked early mornings, late nights, weekends, it didn't matter. We barely slept. Barely ate. We were obsessed.

More than ten days passed like that.

Then one morning, I had to go to the airport to pick up a business partner.

I got there early, parked, and waited near the arrivals gate. The place was packed with families reuniting, businesspeople rushing past with their briefcases, tourists dragging oversized suitcases.

I checked my phone. Mr. Taylor's flight had landed ten minutes ago.

Finally, after about twenty minutes of waiting, I saw him.

He was walking through the gate with his assistant, scanning the crowd. I was just about to step forward and wave when I saw someone else.

Right behind Mr. Taylor was Logan. My father. Or would I say, my father.

My entire body went rigid.

He hadn't noticed me yet. He was too busy talking to someone on his phone, his expression focused and unbothered.

Then I heard a male young voice, that was way too cheerful.

"Mom! Sis! Dad and I are here!"

A teenage boy, maybe seventeen or eighteen, was waving excitedly toward the other side of the exit.

I stopped dead in my tracks.

I knew exactly who he was.

Landon Brown. Sienna's younger brother.

I turned my head, slowly, reluctantly and saw them.

Janice and Sienna. Both of them were smiling as Landon jogged over to them, his arms open for a hug.

My chest tightened.

"Miss Miller?"

I snapped back to reality.

Mr. Taylor was standing right in front of me, smiling warmly, hand extended.

I forced myself to relax. Unclenched my fists. Pulled my gaze away from them.

"Mr. Taylor," I said, shaking his hand with a smile I didn't feel. "Welcome."

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Logan and Janice finally notice me.

Logan's expression shifted, just slightly. A small frown creased his forehead.

Janice's smile faded, her face going carefully neutral.

Sienna, on the other hand, didn't react at all. She just looked at me like I was a stranger. Like I was nothing.

Landon, oblivious to the tension, followed their gazes.

When his eyes landed on me, his jaw practically dropped.

"Whoa," he said, loud enough for half the airport to hear. "She's beautiful!"

Sienna's eyes narrowed. She shot him a sharp look.

Logan cleared his throat and put a hand on Landon's shoulder, steering him away.

"Let's get in the car," he said firmly.

Landon blinked, still staring at me, then huffed and followed.

But as they walked away, I heard him complaining.

"Where's my future brother-in-law anyway? Why didn't he come pick us up? If he can't even do that, does he really think he deserves to marry my beautiful, amazing sister? Hmph. I'll be the first to say no."

My stomach twisted.

Future brother-in-law.

He was talking about Dante.

Of course he was.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 207 [1,479 words]

Chapter 207: Chapter 207

Sienna smiled and reached over to lightly pat Landon's head, the way an older sister would when her little brother said something cute.

"Dante has an important meeting he couldn't get out of," she said gently. "But he knows you're coming to the capital, so he canceled another event and booked a private room just for you. How's that? Satisfied?"

Landon huffed, tilting his head like he was considering it.

"Well... I guess that'll do."

Then he puffed out his chest a little, looking ridiculously proud.

"My sister is so beautiful and outstanding," he declared, loud enough for people nearby to hear. "He should do **whatever it takes** to marry her!"

Sienna's cheeks flushed just slightly, but she was smiling. So were Janice and Logan. Even Sophia looked amused.

It was the kind of moment that looked perfect from the outside. Warm. Happy. Like a family that had everything figured out.

Meanwhile, Elodie had just finished wrapping up her conversation with Mr. Taylor.

She kept her tone polite, professional, her smile carefully in place. But inside, she just wanted to get out of there.

They headed toward the cars.

As Elodie reached for the door handle, she heard voices nearby.

"Wow, what a stunning family. Are they celebrities or something?"

"I don't know, but they look so happy together. I'm so jealous."

Elodie's jaw tightened.

She climbed into the car and shut the door, cutting off the noise.

She and Mr. Taylor talked for almost an hour during the drive. By the time they finally pulled up in front of the restaurant, it was nearly noon.

Elodie stepped out of the car, Mr. Taylor following close behind.

That's when she saw Logan. Janice. Sienna. Landon.

They'd just arrived too.

Logan's eyes landed on her immediately. His expression shifted, just slightly, into a frown.

Of course. He hadn't expected her to be here.

Sienna, on the other hand, didn't even flinch. She just smiled calmly and gave Logan a small, reassuring look. Like she was saying, Don't worry. I've got this.

Before Dante had officially filed for divorce, he'd hosted her family once. And back then, Sienna had been careful. Extremely careful. She didn't want to do anything that might upset him or make things awkward.

Now that the divorce was almost finalized?

She was even more careful.

Logan seemed to understand. He relaxed a little, nodding subtly.

He didn't want anything to ruin their happy day. Not today.

Elodie didn't look at them.

She turned her attention back to Mr. Taylor, keeping her expression neutral.

Then she heard another car pull up behind her.

Johnny climbed out, adjusting his jacket, and immediately spotted Logan and his family. His eyes lingered on Landon for a moment, taking in the kid's excited energy, the way he was chattering nonstop to Sienna.

But Logan and the others had already turned around and were heading inside. They didn't even notice Johnny standing there.

Johnny let out a quiet breath and walked over to Elodie and Mr. Taylor.

"Mr. Taylor," he said warmly, extending a hand. "Good to see you again."

Mr. Taylor grinned and shook his hand. "Likewise, Mr. Gray. Shall we head up?"

They were just about to walk inside when another black, sleek and expensive car pulled up.

Elodie didn't need to look to know who it was.

Dante stepped out of the car, calm and composed as always, his tailored suit fitting him perfectly. He looked like he'd just walked off the cover of a business magazine.

Mr. Taylor's face lit up the moment he saw him.

"Mr. Wilson!"

Dante's eyes flicked briefly to Elodie and Johnny. His expression didn't change. Not even a little.

He walked over with that same easy confidence, a faint smile on his lips as he shook Mr. Taylor's hand.

"Mr. Taylor. When did you arrive in the capital?"

"Just now, just now," Mr. Taylor said, still grinning. "Last time we met, you mentioned getting together when you had time. How about this evening? Are you free?"

Dante shook his head politely. "I have a full schedule today. Maybe in a couple of days?"

"Of course, of course. A couple of days works perfectly."

As Dante and Mr. Taylor continued chatting like old friends, Johnny stood off to the side, arms crossed, his jaw tight.

He leaned slightly toward Elodie and muttered under his breath, "We got a whole two weeks of peace. And now we run into them again."

Elodie didn't respond.

She just kept her eyes forward, her expression blank, her hands clasped loosely in front of her.

But now that she thought about it, it really had been half a month since she'd last seen Dante. Even when she'd gone to the hospital last weekend to visit Nonna, he hadn't been there.

Over the past ten days, Liora had called her a few times. Especially in the last two or three days.

Maybe it was because of the winter break. Maybe Dante and Sienna were too busy to keep her entertained. Whatever the reason, Liora had been calling more often, clearly bored and looking for something or someone to fill the time.

Elodie hadn't answered any of the calls.

Still, Dante had kept his word. She wasn't sure what he'd told Liora, but even though Elodie never picked up, Liora hadn't shown up at the Miller house unannounced.

It saved her some trouble.

At this point, Dante and Mr. Taylor had wrapped up their conversation.

The group stepped into the elevator together.

Mr. Taylor, chatty as ever, glanced between Elodie, Johnny, and Dante. He seemed to notice the lack of warmth, the stiff silence, the way none of them were really looking at each other.

His smile faltered slightly, turning a bit awkward.

Elodie could feel Dante's gaze on her.

She kept her eyes forward, jaw tight, refusing to acknowledge it.

But then he spoke.

"When will you be free next?"

Elodie's eyes flicked up, meeting his.

His expression was calm. Unbothered. Like this was just a casual question.

She looked away immediately, her voice flat and cold.

"I'm never free."

She didn't need to guess what this was about. She could tell with her eyes closed.

It was about Liora.

It had only been a little over half a month since she'd last seen her daughter. There were still more than ten days left before the month was up.

She'd been busy. Too busy to take Liora out. Too busy to play pretend happy family.

Dante's faint smile didn't waver. He didn't seem fazed by her tone at all.

"The New Year is coming soon," he said simply.

Elodie froze.

Oh.

That's what he meant.

If she didn't make time to see Liora soon, then the New Year would come and go, and she'd have missed her window entirely.

She'd been so buried in work that she'd completely forgotten.

Still, she wasn't about to let him guilt her into anything.

"I don't mind not taking her for a month," she said coolly.

After all, she'd spent plenty of time with Liora last month. What difference did one month make?

Dante raised an eyebrow at that.

But he didn't say anything else.

Mr. Taylor, who had been listening to this exchange with growing confusion, looked between them like he was trying to solve a puzzle.

He had no idea what they were talking about, but the tension was impossible to miss.

Before he could ask, the elevator chimed.

Ding.

The doors slid open.

Dante nodded politely at Mr. Taylor. "Enjoy your meal."

Then he stepped out without another word.

The doors closed behind him.

Mr. Taylor turned to Elodie, his expression curious and just a little bit suspicious.

"Miss Miller," he said slowly, "are you and Mr. Bellini... not a couple?"

Elodie's face remained perfectly neutral. "No."

Mr. Taylor didn't look convinced. He studied her for a moment, clearly thinking she was just upset and denying it out of pride.

He opened his mouth, probably to say something about how well-suited they seemed, when his phone buzzed in his pocket.

He pulled it out, glanced at the screen, and his attention shifted immediately.

The topic was dropped.

After lunch, Elodie, Johnny, and Mr. Taylor headed back downstairs.

They were walking through the parking lot, discussing the next steps for the partnership, when Elodie saw them.

Dante And the Brown family. Logan. Janice. Sienna. Landon.

They were standing near a sleek black car, clearly wrapping up their own meal. Landon was laughing loudly about something, his voice carrying across the lot. Sienna stood close to Dante, her hand resting lightly on his arm as she smiled up at him.

Elodie stopped walking.

Johnny noticed immediately. He followed her gaze and let out a quiet sigh.

"Of course," he muttered under his breath.

Mr. Taylor, oblivious, kept talking.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 208 [1,341 words]

Chapter 208: Chapter 208

As they passed by, they overheard Landon's loud and confident voice, completely unaware of how ridiculous he sounded.

"Treat my sister well!" he was saying to Dante, wagging his finger like he had any authority. "If you dare bully her, I won't let you off, hmph!"

This was Landon's first time meeting Dante in person.

Earlier, when he'd first walked into the private room and saw Dante sitting there, so calm, composed, radiating that quiet, unshakable power, Landon had been terrified. He'd barely been able to string two words together.

Dante had that effect on people. There was just something about him. The way he carried himself. The way he looked at you. It was clear he wasn't someone you messed with.

But Dante had been kind to him. Patient, even. He'd smiled when Landon fumbled over his words, asked him questions about school, made him feel like he mattered.

By the end of the meal, Landon's fear had melted away completely.

Now, full of food and confidence, he felt bold enough to make threats.

Not that he meant them, of course.

Landon was actually thrilled with Dante as a future brother-in-law. From every angle, Dante was perfect. Successful. Powerful. Respectful. And the way he treated Sienna? Like she was the most important person in the world.

Landon couldn't have asked for better.

So even though his words sounded like a warning, everyone standing there knew what he really meant.

Dante smiled one of those rare, genuine smiles of his and nodded. "Got it."

Sienna laughed softly, her eyes warm as she looked at her little brother.

It was a sweet moment. Wholesome, even.

Johnny, standing a few feet away, let out a cold sneer.

Elodie's expression didn't change at all.

Mr. Taylor, however, was starting to piece things together. He glanced at Elodie, then back at Dante and Sienna.

"So," he said slowly, "you and Mr. Wislon really aren't a couple?"

So the beautiful woman standing beside Dante... that was his girlfriend?

Elodie's voice was flat. "No."

At that moment, Dante and Sienna noticed them.

Their eyes met across the parking lot.

Dante's expression didn't shift. Sienna's smile stayed perfectly in place.

Johnny, on the other hand, had had enough.

"Mr. Taylor," he said sharply, already moving toward the car. "Please get in."

Mr. Taylor blinked, clearly picking up on the tension now. He didn't ask any more questions. Just gave Dante a polite nod and climbed into the car.

Elodie and Johnny followed without another word.

Their car pulled out of the parking lot and disappeared into the afternoon traffic.

Two Days Later.

The partnership with Mr. Taylor went smoothly.

The contract was signed. Hands were shaken. Mr. Taylor had other business to attend to, so he left shortly after.

Elodie and Johnny returned to the meeting room, both exhausted. They grabbed some hot drinks from the break area and collapsed into their chairs.

A few minutes later, the secretary walked in holding a thick stack of envelopes.

She set them down on the table with a soft thud.

"Here are the invitations for the year-end parties we've received over the past few days," she said.

Elodie glanced at the pile.

There had to be at least twenty or thirty of them.

She reached over and started flipping through. Invitations from Rex Hardin. Harry Becker. The Wilson Corporation. Wilson Tech.

Then she paused.

An invitation from the Brown family.

She pulled it out, her brows furrowing slightly.

Johnny's name was on it.

And so was hers.

Johnny leaned back in his chair, holding up the Brown family's invitation with a smirk.

"Well, well," he said, clearly amused. "Looks like our company is quite charming."

Elodie didn't say anything, but she knew what he meant.

It wasn't about charm. It was about leverage.

The Brown family wanted access to Cole's latest projects. They wanted CUAP. They wanted to get close to the people behind the technology that had been making waves across the Pack territories.

So they swallowed their pride and put Elodie's name on the invitation.

What they didn't know, what none of them knew, was that the impressive technology they were all drooling over hadn't come from Johnny at all.

It had come from her.

Johnny's smirk widened as he tossed the invitation back onto the table.

"This is going to be fun," he said.

Elodie just stared at the invitation, her expression unreadable.

Fun wasn't the word she would've used.

Actually, it wasn't just the Brown family.

Hardin Group, Bellini Tech, and Bellini Corporation had all included Elodie's name on their invitations too.

The only one who'd done things differently was Harry.

He'd sent two separate invitations. One for Johnny. One for Elodie.

Johnny let out a low whistle and smirked. "Harry's not bad."

Elodie and Harry's last real conversation had been that morning in the parking lot...when he'd cornered her and asked if she was Professor Nolan's student.

Now, hearing Johnny's comment, Elodie didn't say anything.

Johnny leaned back in his chair, flipping through the stack of invitations with a casual air.

"Let's pass on the ones from Hardin Group, Wilson Tech, Wilson Corporation, and the Brown family," he said. "We'll just go to the ones from Becker Group and the other companies we've actually had decent partnerships with."

As for the others? Sending a polite gift would be more than enough.

And as for Bellini Corporation, Bellini Tech, and the Brown family? It would be best to avoid any dealings with them altogether.

"Okay," Elodie said simply.

Besides handling the core operations of the company, she and Johnny had been pouring most of their energy into the materials Professor Nolan had given them. So aside from the necessary socializing, they didn't want to waste time dealing with people who didn't matter.

Cole was also preparing for its own year-end party.

But they were swamped. The invitations wouldn't be going out for another few days.

As the end of the year approached, business at Bellini Tech also needed to be wrapped up before the New Year.

The next day, Elodie and a few others, including Sophia, headed over to Bellini Tech to finalize some deals.

When Elodie arrived, she happened to run into Sienna in the lobby.

Neither of them acknowledged the other. No glances. No nods sent in either of their directions. They were just like two people existing in the same space, pretending the other didn't.

Elodie went straight to work.

After a while, she felt someone was staring at her.

She looked up and saw Landon.

He was standing a few feet away, hands in his pockets, eyes fixed on her with open curiosity.

Elodie immediately looked away and went back to her notes.

Landon had been in the capital for three or four days now.

He'd spent the first two days sightseeing...checking out the landmarks, eating at fancy restaurants, taking a million photos to post online.

But by the third day, he was bored out of his mind.

So when he found out his sister was working at his future brother-in-law's company, he got curious. Figured it'd be interesting to see what the place looked like.

He didn't expect to run into her the second he walked through the door.

The beautiful woman from the airport.

Landon's eyes widened slightly.

He'd thought about her a few times since that day. Wondered who she was. Why his family had gotten so tense when they saw her.

And now here she was. At Wilson Tech. Looking just as stunning as before, but also... distant. Focused. Like she didn't want to be bothered.

Landon tilted his head, studying her.

She was dressed simply, nothing too flashy, but she carried herself with this confidence that made her stand out anyway.

He wanted to say something. Maybe introduce himself. Ask her name.

But something about the way she very deliberately didn't look at him made him hesitate.

So he just stood there, watching her work, wondering what her deal was.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 209[1,308 words]

Chapter 209: Chapter 209

Landon assumed she was an employee at Wilson Tech.

When Elodie glanced at him briefly and then looked away, he got curious. He turned to the guy who'd been showing him around.

"What are they working on right now?" he asked.

The guy shrugged. "Different departments handle different things. I'm not entirely sure, but it's probably related to the maintenance of the language systems."

"Oh..."

Landon really wanted to walk over and take a closer look. Maybe ask a few questions. But Elodie and the others looked busy, focused, with their heads down, completely absorbed in their work.

He didn't want to be that guy who interrupted.

So instead, he asked, "Where's my sister?"

The guy's face lit up immediately. "Director Brown is in a meeting right now. Would you like to go in and see?"

Landon nodded, and they headed toward the conference room.

Inside, Sienna was at the head of the table, speaking confidently as she walked the team through some kind of technical breakdown. Charts were displayed on the screen behind her. People were taking notes. Nodding. Asking questions.

Everyone's attention was locked on her.

Landon watched for a moment, then leaned toward the guy beside him.

"Everyone seems to respect my sister a lot," he said, his tone was proud.

The guy smiled. "Of course. Director Brown is very capable. Our team really likes her."

What the guy didn't say, but was definitely thinking, was that because of Sienna's relationship with Dante, their entire department had been getting better perks. Higher bonuses. Better resources. It was a win-win.

But he kept that part to himself.

Landon, oblivious to this, just grinned wider, clearly pleased.

Still, he didn't want to disturb her.

"Take me to see other places," he said.

"Sure thing."

As they left the conference room, they nearly walked straight into someone.

And it was Harry.

The guy showing Landon around immediately straightened up. "Mr. Becker."

Harry gave a short nod, his gaze briefly landing on Landon.

The kid looked young. Clean-cut. Student vibes. Definitely not someone who worked here.

Harry put it together quickly.

The guy gestured toward Landon. "This is Director Brown's younger brother, Landon."

Landon had never met Harry in person, but he'd heard the name plenty of times. When the guy called him "Mr. Becker," Landon's eyes widened slightly.

"You must be Harry Becker?" he asked, a little too eager.

Harry nodded. "Hello."

Landon smiled. "Hello."

He opened his mouth to say something else, maybe try to make small talk, build a connection but Harry had already spotted someone across the room.

It was Elodie. She was standing near one of the workstations, reviewing something on a tablet with Sophia.

Harry didn't hesitate.

"I'll be over there for a moment," he said, already walking away.

He didn't wait for a response from Landon or the guy showing him around. Just turned and headed straight toward her.

Landon stood there, blinking in confusion.

Hadn't people said that his future brother-in-law's two friends had a good relationship with his sister?

So why did Harry seem so... cold toward him?

Harry didn't care what Landon thought.

He walked over to where Elodie was standing and stopped just beside her.

"Miss Miller."

Elodie turned around.

When she saw him, she paused for just a second. Then she nodded politely.

"Mr. Becker."

It was the end of the year. Both of them had been swamped with work.

They hadn't seen each other in nearly half a month.

Not since that morning in the parking lot, when Harry had asked her point-blank if she was Professor Nolan's student.

Harry had been meaning to bring it up again quietly, and carefully. But now wasn't the time.

Instead, he looked at her and asked, "Will you be attending my company's year-end party this weekend, Miss Miller?"

Elodie didn't hesitate. "Yes."

Harry had gone out of his way to help her uncle before. And ever since then, his attitude toward her had been... different. Better. More respectful.

No matter what, he'd helped her when he didn't have to.

And their recent collaboration had gone smoothly. He'd personally sent her an invitation, separate from Johnny's, which was a small but meaningful gesture.

There was no reason for her not to attend. Professionally or personally.

After hearing her answer, Harry smiled, one of those small, genuine ones that softened his whole face.

"Thank you for your favor."

Elodie gave a polite nod. "You're too kind."

She didn't seem interested in continuing the conversation, and Harry could tell. He wasn't the type to push.

"You're busy," he said easily. "Don't mind me."

Elodie didn't say anything else. Just turned back to the others and picked up right where she'd left off, discussing the maintenance schedule and system updates.

But Harry didn't leave.

He stayed right there, standing a few feet away, listening to their conversation. Every now and then, he'd chime in with a comment or a suggestion—small things, but useful.

Harry and Levi both had shares in Bellini Tech, though neither of them were involved in the day-to-day operations. Still, they made it a point to show up for the company's year-end meeting. That's why Harry was here today.

After a while, Sienna finished her meeting.

She stepped out of the conference room and immediately spotted Landon standing near the entrance, looking around like a kid in a candy store.

She smiled and walked over. "Have you toured the company yet?"

Landon nodded. "Yep."

Just then, Levi strolled in through the main doors.

He greeted Sienna with a warm grin, then his eyes landed on Landon. His grin widened.

"This must be your little brother, huh?" Levi said, looking him up and down. "Not bad, not bad. He's definitely got those good Brown family genes."

Sienna laughed, about to introduce Levi properly, but Landon beat her to it.

"You're Levi Davis, right?"

Levi raised an eyebrow, clearly amused. "Yep. You've got good eyes, kid. Gussed it right on the first try."

Sienna looked pleased, but Landon scratched the back of his head sheepishly.

"Actually," he admitted, "it's because I already met Harry Becker earlier."

Sienna blinked, surprised. "Harry's already here?"

"Yeah, he's over there." Landon pointed across the room.

Sienna and Levi both turned to look.

Sure enough, Harry was standing near one of the workstations, talking to Elodie. His posture was relaxed. His tone warm. He even smiled at something she said briefly

Sienna watched for a moment, then looked away, completely unbothered.

She understood why Harry had softened his attitude toward Elodie. It was business. Pure and simple business attitude. Cole Technologies was a valuable partner, and Harry wasn't the type to let personal feelings get in the way of a good deal.

Levi seemed to be thinking the same thing. He didn't comment, just shrugged it off.

But Landon?

This was the third time he'd seen Elodie now.

And every time, she stood out. Not because she tried to. She just... did.

He tilted his head, curious.

"So that young lady is Harry's girlfriend, huh?"

Levi nearly choked.

He coughed, eyes wide, like Landon had just said the most ridiculous thing in the world.

"What girlfriend?" Levi sputtered, still coughing. "They don't have that kind of relationship. Stop making things up, kid."

Landon blinked, confused. "Really? But he seemed really nice to her."

Levi waved him off. "That's just business. Harry's a professional. Doesn't mean anything."

Sienna nodded in agreement, her expression calm. "Landon, don't read too much into it."

Landon frowned, unconvinced.

He glanced back over at Harry and Elodie.

Harry had just said something that made Elodie's lips twitch, like she was trying not to smile. It was barely there, but Landon saw it.

And the way Harry looked at her?

It didn't feel like "just business."

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 210 [1,647 words]

Chapter 210: Chapter 210

Harry had noticed Sienna and Levi watching him from across the room.

The meeting was about to start. He needed to go.

He turned to Elodie and gave her a quick nod. "I should head out."

She nodded back, already refocusing on her work.

Harry took a step toward the door, then stopped.

He turned back around.

"You won't be attending Bellini Tech's party in a few days, will you?"

Elodie looked up at him, her expression still calm.

"No."

Something in Harry's chest tightened.

He didn't say anything else. Just nodded and walked away.

As Harry headed back toward Levi, Dante walked in.

He moved through the space with that authority he always had, his expression unreadable, every inch the Alpha. His eyes swept across the room and then they landed on Elodie.

She was standing near one of the workstations, reviewing something on a screen with another employee, with a calm composure.

However, Dante only glanced at her briefly before shifting his gaze away.

Like she was nothing more than part of the scenery.

He turned to Levi and Harry. "It's about time. Let's head upstairs for the meeting."

Harry didn't move right away.

He stood there for a second, watching Dante's face. Watching the complete lack of emotion. The total indifference on his face. Like Elodie wasn't even worth a second thought.

Harry lowered his gaze, his jaw tight.

He didn't say anything. Just turned and started walking toward the elevator.

But before they could leave, Dante turned to Landon, who was still standing nearby looking a little lost.

"Have you been to my office yet?"

Landon shook his head. "No, not yet."

"I've had someone prepare some snacks for you upstairs," Dante said, his tone casual but not unkind. "If you get bored, you can come up and sit for a while. Help yourself."

Landon's face lit up. "Really? Thanks!"

In just two or three days, Dante and Landon had already gotten comfortable with each other. Dante had this way of making people feel at ease when he wanted to. It was one of the things that made him such a good Alpha.

Although Sienna and Landon weren't top executives at Wilson Tech, their connection to Dante was more than enough. They were invited to ride with him to the restaurant, with no questions asked.

Sienna slid into the backseat of Dante's car with ease, smoothing her skirt as she settled in. Landon climbed in after her, still chattering excitedly about something he'd seen in Dante's office earlier.

Dante didn't say much. Just nodded occasionally, his expression calm as the driver pulled out of the parking lot.

Levi and Harry followed in another car.

As they drove past the Wilson Tech building, Harry found himself glancing up at the glass facade. His mind drifted back to the image of Elodie standing by that workstation alone.

He stared out the window for a moment longer, then turned to Levi.

"When can their divorce papers be processed?"

Levi didn't think much of it. He just assumed Harry was concerned about Dante and Sienna's relationship, wanting things to move forward smoothly so they could finally make it official.

"It could've been done a few days ago," Levi said, leaning back in his seat. "But there's a problem with the stock transfer on one of Dante's companies. Legal needs to sort that out first before they can finalize the divorce papers." He shrugged. "Should be soon though."

Harry nodded slowly, his gaze still fixed on the passing buildings.

"Okay. I understand."

Levi didn't press. He just pulled out his phone and started scrolling.

But Harry's mind was elsewhere.

Still thinking about her.

Elodie had lunch in the company cafeteria with the other Wilson Tech employees.

It was nothing fancy... just the usual midday rush. She sat with a few people from the tech team, nodding politely as they talked about system updates and upcoming projects.

She didn't say much. She just listened. Smiled when it was appropriate.

No one seemed to notice she wasn't really there.

After eating, she took a short break in one of the quiet corners of the building. Just fifteen minutes. Enough to close her eyes and breathe.

Then she went back to work.

By three in the afternoon, she'd wrapped up everything she needed to do at Wilson Tech. She packed up her things, said a quick goodbye to the team, and headed back to Cole.

On the day of the Becker family's party, after finishing their work, Elodie and Johnny drove together to the venue.

The event was being held at one of the upscale hotels in the city.

When Harry heard that Elodie and Johnny had arrived, he immediately excused himself and headed toward the entrance to greet them.

But the moment he saw her, he stopped in his tracks.

Elodie was wearing a stunning blue-purple gown that shimmered softly under the lights. It was off-the-shoulder, elegant, cinched perfectly at the waist before flowing down in gentle waves.

Her skin looked smooth, and flawless. The color of the gown brought out the elegance she always carried but rarely showed.

She looked graceful. Refreshing. Breathtaking even.

Harry just stood there for a second, completely still, thinking that she looked even more beautiful tonight than any other time he'd seen her.

Two seconds passed before he blinked, and pulled himself together, and subtly concealed whatever emotion had flickered across his face.

He walked forward with a small smile.

"Mr. Gray. Miss Miller."

Elodie and Johnny both nodded.

"Mr. Becker."

They exchanged a few pleasantries. Harry asked how their drive was. Johnny made some joke about traffic. Elodie smiled faintly but didn't say much.

And then, right on cue, Dante and Sienna arrived.

Sienna stepped out of the car first, and heads turned immediately.

She was wearing a white, figure-hugging gown that looked like it cost more than most people's monthly salary. The fabric clung to her in all the right places, screaming money. Her earrings sparkled. The necklace around her throat gleamed under the lights, they were diamonds, probably.

She looked stunning.

She knew it too.

People noticed her the second she walked in. Whispers followed and eyes lingered on her.

Sienna smiled graciously, nodding at a few familiar faces as she made her way toward the entrance.

And then her gaze landed on Elodie.

She paused. Just for a second.

Because honestly? Compared to the other times she'd seen her, Elodie looked even more striking tonight.

The gown. The way she carried herself. The effortless beauty that didn't need diamonds or designer labels to stand out.

For just a moment, something flickered in Sienna's chest.

It was not jealousy nor insecurity. Just... an awareness.

But she didn't let it linger.

Because at the end of the day, what did it matter if Elodie was beautiful?

Beauty wasn't enough. It never had been.

Sienna believed she had more than that. She had intelligence. Ambition. Drive. She had Dante's attention. His respect. His future.

What did Elodie have?

A job. A few polite acquaintances. A marriage that was already over.

Sienna calmly shifted her gaze away and looked at Dante standing beside her.

He was composed as always.

Sienna noticed the way Dante glanced at Elodie indifferently like she was just another guest before calmly shifting his gaze elsewhere.

She couldn't help the small smile that tugged at the corner of her lips. Perfect.

When Dante and Sienna arrived, Harry's gaze naturally drifted toward Elodie.

He watched her carefully, waiting for some kind of reaction. A flicker of emotion. A tightening of her jaw. Anything.

But Elodie's expression didn't change at all.

She didn't flinch. Didn't look away. Didn't even blink.

She just stood there, calm and composed, like Dante's presence didn't affect her in the slightest.

Harry felt something settle in his chest.

Good.

He smiled lightly and turned to Elodie and Johnny. "I'll go over there for a moment."

They both nodded.

Harry walked over to Dante and Sienna, greeting them with the usual pleasantries. They exchanged a few words. Then Rex arrived.

The moment Rex spotted Sienna, his entire demeanor shifted. He walked toward her almost instinctively, his eyes brightening just a little.

Sienna noticed and smiled politely. "Mr. Hardin."

"Miss Brown."

Rex had been swamped with work lately and hadn't seen Sienna in weeks. Now that she was standing in front of him, looking elegant and radiant in that white gown, he couldn't help but let his gaze linger a little longer than it should have.

A trace of admiration flickered in his eyes before he pulled himself together and greeted Harry and Dante.

After a few moments, Rex turned his attention elsewhere.

Cole Technologies was an important partner for Hardin Group now. He couldn't afford to ignore them.

He excused himself and walked over to where Johnny and Elodie were standing.

"Mr. Gray," Rex said warmly, extending his hand.

Johnny shook it with a polite smile. "Mr. Hardin. Good to see you."

They exchanged a few pleasantries about business talks. Then Rex turned to Elodie.

"Miss Miller," he said, his tone was casual but it was polite.

Elodie smiled faintly but didn't say anything. She just nodded.

Rex paused, waiting for her to respond verbally.

She didn't.

An awkward beat passed.

Rex shifted slightly, his smile faltering just a bit.

The truth was, he'd only found out tonight that Hardin Group hadn't received an invitation to Cole's year-end party. He'd checked. Double-checked. Asked his assistant to confirm.

Nothing.

Which meant one thing.

Cole wasn't planning to attend Hardin Group's event tomorrow either.

Rex's jaw tightened slightly, though he kept his expression neutral.

It was clear that Elodie and Johnny had no intention of engaging with him beyond basic politeness.

He wasn't stupid. He could read the room.

They were keeping their distance deliberately.