

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 41 - 42 [1,147 words]

Chapter 41: Chapter 42

ELODIE'S POV~

I didn't plan on fighting for Liora's custody. I'd already made my peace with that. She was Dante's daughter as much as she was mine, and if he wanted to raise her under his pack's roof, I wouldn't stop him. Still... when she turned to me with those soft amber eyes that mirrored his and asked me to peel her shrimp, I couldn't say no.

"Alright," I said quietly, setting my chopsticks aside.

The table was filled with laughter and clinking glasses, but everything sounded distant to me like I was hearing it through a wall. I tried to focus on peeling the shrimp, to pretend I didn't feel Dante's presence sitting right beside me, cold and distant as ever. I could feel him without even looking, his scent, that sharp cedar and faint smoke I used to crave. Now it only made my chest ache.

The elderly lady, his grandmother, stopped talking mid-sentence. Her gaze dropped to my hands, and the warmth in her eyes faltered. "Elodie," she said softly, her tone both confused and disapproving, "where's your ring?"

The room went still. Even Amber stopped talking. I froze, my fingers tight around the shrimp, my mind blank for a moment before I forced a faint smile.

"I must've left it at home," I murmured, trying to sound casual. "I was in a hurry, Nonna."

My lie hung in the air. I didn't meet anyone's eyes, especially not Dante's.

In truth, I'd taken the ring off the night I packed the divorce papers. It had felt like cutting off a piece of myself. That thin band had been the last thing tying me to a man who no longer looked at me the same. I'd slipped it into the envelope beside the divorce agreement, knowing it was over even if the world hadn't caught up yet. In the past I always wore the ring like my life depended on it, everywhere I went. Even to sleep. Even Amber had once mocked me because of it but now? No more.

His grandmother didn't press further, but her sigh was heavy enough to fill the silence. "Ah... I see," she said, smiling faintly as if she believed me. But I saw the way her eyes softened, sad, disappointed, like she could already sense the truth.

No one else said anything. They just went back to eating, pretending everything was fine. But I could feel Dante's gaze on me, sharp, and unreadable. It lasted only a second before he turned away, but it left me breathless all the same.

Dinner dragged on in forced politeness. Amber chatted with Stella about some gala at the Bellini Pack, laughing too loudly. Nonna kept shooting hopeful glances at Dante and me, like she still thought we could be saved, as if a miracle could rebuild what was already dead.

When the plates were cleared, we all moved to the living room. The air smelled faintly of coffee and cinnamon from the desserts laid out on the glass table. His grandmother insisted Dante and I sit together on the couch. I hesitated, but I didn't have the strength to argue.

So I sat. Beside him. The space between us felt like a wall.

It was the first time in months we'd been this close. My pulse betrayed me, skipping just from being near him. His scent wrapped around me. Once, that smell used to make me melt. Now, it just reminded me of how far gone we were.

He didn't say a word. Didn't even look at me. He sat there, scrolling through his phone like I wasn't even in the room. I tried to focus on my fruit pudding, small bites, and tried so hard to not care. I hardened my heart. But my throat was tight.

Nonna sat across from us at the long marble table, her silver hair perfectly pinned, her eyes gleaming with pride as she looked between Dante and me. "You two make such a perfect match," she said softly, voice trembling with emotion, like she still believed in something that no longer existed.

Her words fell heavy. I managed a small smile, the kind that doesn't quite reach the eyes. Dante didn't bother to fake one. He just leaned back in his chair, wine glass in hand, silent as ever. Nonna never noticed the tension. She saw what she wanted to see, a picture-perfect couple. Handsome, composed Alpha and his quiet Luna. The illusion she'd built around us was beautiful... until you looked closer.

Because beneath that illusion, there was nothing left.

We looked perfect, yes. But that was all we were, an image.

Amber caught my eye from across the table, her mouth curling into a half-smirk. She didn't say anything, but I could read the judgment in her gaze, the same silent mockery she'd held for years. I swallowed the lump in my throat and focused on my glass of water, tracing the rim with my fingertip.

Nonna's voice broke through again, soft and affectionate. "You'll stay the night, yes? It's been so long since we've had everyone here together."

Dante nodded politely. "Of course, Nonna."

And that was that. Decision made.

By eight, he had disappeared into the study with Nonna to discuss "business." I didn't bother asking what kind, it wasn't my place anymore, even if I was still technically his mate. Instead, I

helped Liora upstairs. She clung to my hand, small and warm, her little feet padding softly against the marble floor.

The mansion was quiet at night, too quiet. The kind of quiet that made your thoughts louder.

Once in the bathroom, I helped her into the tub, pouring in her favorite lavender bubble soap. She played with the foam, humming to herself while I sat on the edge of the bathtub, watching her. She had his eyes, Dante's eyes and sometimes that alone was enough to break me.

"Mommy," she said after a moment, looking up at me with water droplets clinging to her lashes, "are you... busy tomorrow morning?"

Her voice was so careful, like she was afraid of the answer.

I smiled faintly, tucking a strand of hair behind my ear. "No, I'm not busy. Why do you ask, my love?"

Her lips fell, and she looked down at the water, poking at the bubbles. "Nothing."

It was such a small word, but it stung. Children don't say "nothing" unless something hurts.

I wanted to ask, but I didn't. I was too tired. Too worn out to peel back one more layer of disappointment.

When she was done, I wrapped her in a soft towel and carried her to her room. The scent of lavender clung to her skin, warm and familiar. She sat on the edge of the bed while I gently brushed her hair, watching me through the mirror.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 42 - 43 [1,323 words]

Chapter 42: Chapter 43

Elodie's POV~

As soon as Liora's hair was dry, she announced she wanted to sleep.

I didn't believe her for a second. She was still clutching her phone like it was a secret she couldn't part with. I leaned against the doorframe, watching her try to look innocent. "You can look at it for a little while," I said gently. "But then you go to bed after that, okay?"

"I know, Mom."

Her voice had that tired patience children use when they want you to leave. I smiled faintly and brushed a strand of hair from her cheek. "Alright then. I'll check on you later."

She nodded, eyes already glued to the screen. I hesitated a second longer, then turned away.

The moment I closed her door, I heard it, the soft click of the lock.

My chest tightened. Liora never locked me out unless she wanted to talk to Sienna. And I knew that's exactly what she was doing now. She'd probably call her, whispering things I wasn't meant to hear, things about her father that still hung like a ghost in this house.

I stood in the hallway for a moment, staring at the door, then sighed and made my way back to the master suite. The lights in the hallway were dim, and everything felt too quiet.

Dante still wasn't home.

The house, though large and beautiful, felt cold, soulless. I could almost hear the echo of my own footsteps following me, mocking how alone I'd become in a place that was supposed to be ours.

I showered, took my time with it, let the water burn against my skin until I felt something... anything. Then I slipped into one of Nonna's old silk robes, found a book on my nightstand, and tried to read.

But I couldn't focus. My mind kept drifting. The clock ticked louder than it should've. Eleven-thirty. Still no Dante.

My heart told me not to care, but my wolf wouldn't listen. She still pricked up at the faintest sound of an engine outside, still hoped to hear his boots on the marble, his low voice saying my name.

He wasn't always like this.

There was a time, years ago, before everything changed, when he'd look at me and there'd be fire in his eyes. Wouldn't get his hands off me, placed several kisses and kept repeating that I was his world. Before he became Alpha of the Bellini Pack. Before Sienna.

I should've known the moment she came into our lives that nothing would be the same.

She had a way of drawing people in, of making you feel like you were standing in the shadows no matter how brightly you tried to shine. Dante used to look at me like that like I was his world. Then one day, his gaze shifted, and it was like watching the sun turn away.

By the third year of our marriage, things had softened between us. Not love, maybe, but comfort. Peace. Then Sienna appeared.

And I lost him without a fight.

I sighed and closed my book, the silence pressing in from all sides. My chest ached with the weight of things left unsaid. I stood and left the room, padding quietly down the stairs.

That's when I heard it.

A voice, soft, teasing, and familiar.

"Everyone's asleep," Amber said lightly. "Or is it because Elodie's here that you don't want to go back to your room?"

My heart froze. Amber... And Dante.

I stopped at the edge of the hallway, the faint light from the chandeliers catching on the polished floor. They stood together near the study, Amber with that knowing smirk, Dante with his hands shoved into his pockets, looking irritated but calm.

Dante was standing out on the terrace, cigarette glowing faintly between his fingers, smoke curling up into the night. The wind carried the faint scent of his cologne, cedar, spice, and something darkly masculine that used to make my heart ache in a softer way. Now it just hurt.

From where I stood by the doorway, the moonlight painted his frame in silver and shadow. He looked carved from stillness, detached, unreadable. I couldn't see his face clearly, but I didn't need to. I knew that posture, the quiet kind of indifference that came from years of holding himself above emotion.

Amber's voice broke through the silence, smooth and teasing. "You know, I understand you, Dante. I've met Sienna a few times. She's only twenty-five, already earned her doctorate from one of the top universities in the Pack in Europe. She's smart, capable, beautiful and that wild, untameable spirit of hers... that's something most women just don't have."

Her tone was laced with admiration, though it stung like poison in my ears.

"She's radiant," Amber continued, glancing up at her brother. "She has everything it takes to attract you. But her background isn't exactly... prestigious. Have you thought this through?"

Dante didn't even flinch. His voice came out low, calm, final. "I know what kind of woman I want."

Amber frowned. "But—"

He turned his head slightly, and even in the dim light I saw that sharp flicker of warning in his eyes. The kind of look that silenced people. I'd seen it before, directed at his rivals, his subordinates, even pack members who dared challenge his authority. But never at family.

Amber hesitated, her tone softening. "You're so protective of her. You won't even let me say a word against her. Fine, I'll stop talking." She gave a dry laugh. "Don't say I didn't warn you."

I stood there frozen, my heart sinking deeper with every word. My hands were clenched so tightly that my nails bit into my palms. The night air was cold and sharp, burning my cheeks. I should've turned away the moment I heard Sienna's name but I couldn't. I stayed. Like a fool desperate to hear something that might fix the ache.

But there was no fixing this.

Amber's words had only confirmed what I'd already known, what I'd refused to admit out loud: he didn't just admire Sienna... he wanted her. Protected her. Defended her. The way he once did me.

I bit my lip and finally took a step back. I couldn't breathe.

Just as I turned to leave, Amber's voice cut through the silence again, casual, as though she'd just remembered something trivial. "Oh, by the way, I heard Elodie submitted her resignation from the company?"

My heart stuttered.

Dante's reply was quiet, indifferent. "The day before yesterday. Albert said she made a mistake with a client. He was angry, so I told him to follow company procedures. Terminate her."

For a moment, I couldn't move.

Amber gave a short, incredulous laugh. "So that's what happened. When she told me earlier, she made it sound like she resigned on her own. I was wondering how someone like her could walk away from you so easily."

Her laugh was cruel, echoing faintly in the night air. "So she was actually fired. Figures."

Dante didn't say a word. Didn't defend me. Didn't even deny it.

It was like I'd been erased, like I was just another name on his payroll. Nothing more.

I pressed a hand to my mouth to keep from making a sound, then slowly backed away before either of them could see me. My legs felt weak, trembling beneath me as I climbed the stairs, my vision blurring.

When I reached the second floor, I almost collided with York, Dante's youngest brother.

"Whoa, Luna... sorry," he said quickly, steadying me with a hand on my shoulder. His expression softened when he saw my face. "Are you okay?"

York had always been kind to me. Naïve, maybe, but kind. One of the few people in this mansion who still looked at me like I mattered.

I forced a small smile, swallowing the lump in my throat. "I'm fine."

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 43 - 44 [1,036 words]

Chapter 43: Chapter 44

Elodie's POV

York had always thought I was the perfect Luna, gentle, quiet, and endlessly patient with his brother. I could see it in his eyes every time he looked at me, that faint glimmer of admiration he never said out loud. To him, I was the woman who kept Dante steady, the one who never argued, never made a scene, never showed the cracks forming underneath the surface. If only he knew how tired I was of being the calm one.

He stood awkwardly by the hallway door, scratching the back of his neck. "Elodie," he said softly, his tone careful, like he was approaching a wounded animal. "You're... you've always been good to him. My brother's just... stubborn. He'll realize what you mean to him someday."

I forced a small smile, even though my chest ached. "Maybe," I whispered, though even I didn't believe it.

He nodded, still looking uncomfortable. "Don't stay up too late, okay? It's past midnight. Try to get some rest."

"Good night, York," I murmured, and he gave me a small, helpless look before heading down the stairs. His footsteps faded, and the silence in the house came crawling back in like fog.

I turned off the main light and switched on the bedside lamp. The warm glow painted soft shadows on the walls, familiar yet empty. When I sank into the bed, I didn't even bother to pull the blanket up. I just lay there, staring at the ceiling, feeling the quiet thud of my own heartbeat.

The door opened a few minutes later.

I didn't need to look to know it was him.

I opened my eyes, meeting his for a split second as he walked in. His expression was unreadable, sharp in the dim light.

Once, I would have jumped up immediately. Helped him take off his suit jacket. Found his pajamas. Maybe even filled the tub for him. That used to be our quiet ritual, the way I showed him I cared when words weren't enough.

But I didn't move this time. I stayed exactly where I was, pretending to be half-asleep, though the ache in my chest was wide awake.

I saw the flicker of surprise cross his face when he noticed. He wasn't used to this, me not trying, me not reaching for him. For a brief second, something unreadable passed through his eyes, but it was gone as quickly as it came.

He must've decided it wasn't worth asking about. Dante never liked things he couldn't control, and my silence, I think, was beginning to bother him.

He loosened his tie and said in that cold, effortless tone of his, “Liora’s school enrollment is done. You’ll take her tomorrow morning.”

I swallowed the lump in my throat and nodded. “Alright.”

That was all. Two words. He didn’t look at me again. Didn’t notice how my hands trembled slightly as I adjusted the sheets. He just turned to the closet, unbuttoning his shirt as though I wasn’t even there.

I wanted to ask him about the divorce. It had been two weeks since the last conversation where he said we’d “handle it soon.” I’d been waiting ever since, quietly, trying not to sound desperate. But watching him now, so calm, so unbothered, I realized there was nothing left to ask. He’d already decided.

I wasn’t his Luna anymore. Not in his heart. Maybe not even in name for much longer.

I turned away, pressing my face into the pillow so he wouldn’t see the tears collecting in my eyes. The scent of his cologne still lingered there.

His phone buzzed just then. He paused, checking the screen. The faint light from the display caught the edge of his jaw, highlighting the faintest smirk that ghosted across his lips before he answered.

I froze. My breath hitched.

I noticed how different Dante’s “hello” sounded compared to when he spoke to me on the phone. Gentle. So Careful. A softness that wasn’t meant for me, and it stabbed something raw inside my chest.

I knew immediately who was on the other end. Sienna. Of course, I don’t need to be told. Even from here, I could feel the change in him, the way his shoulders tensed and relaxed differently, the way his fingers gripped the closet door as if holding onto something he didn’t want to let go of.

Whatever Sienna had said made him release the door with a sharp exhale. “I’ll come right now,” he said. Then he was gone, moving faster than I could blink, leaving the room without even a glance my way.

I didn’t call out. I didn’t want to. There was a hollow ache in my chest, a strange emptiness where warmth had once lived. A moment later, the quiet was broken by the low rumble of a car engine pulling away. He had left. The mansion felt bigger, colder, more alien than ever.

I switched off the bedside lamp, letting the darkness wrap around me. Sleep didn’t come immediately, but it came eventually, the exhaustion of watching him drift farther from me than ever before finally dragging my eyelids down.

Morning arrived too soon. The soft light filtering through the curtains didn’t make the ache in my chest any lighter. I had to take Liora to school, which meant waking up at six.

Liora's door was locked, and I hesitated, hand hovering. Finally, I knocked softly, trying to summon patience I didn't feel. A long silence passed before she shuffled to the door, rubbing her eyes, her small frame framed in the doorway like she was bracing herself for a storm.

Her lips pressed into a thin line. "Mom... why are you knocking so loudly? It's giving me a headache," she said, voice sharp, tired, resentful.

I swallowed the lump in my throat and forced my voice calm, even though everything inside me wanted to yell.

"Liora, I mean... it's time for us to leave. You know here is very far from your school. Come on, get up," I said, each word measured, soft, almost like I was speaking to someone else entirely.

Her nose wrinkled, a small snort escaping, but she didn't say anything.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 44 - 45 [1,296 words]

Chapter 44: Chapter 45

ELODIE'S POV~

Liora was always a little wayward, headstrong like her father but she knew when not to push. Especially when it came to school.

That morning, she lay sprawled on her bed, the sheets tangled around her legs, her small face half-hidden in her pillow. "I know," she muttered sullenly, voice heavy with sleep and irritation.

I stood by the door, waiting for her to move, to show even the smallest sign of effort. She didn't. She just stared at me, her brows drawn in that stubborn little frown she got from Dante.

"Mom," she mumbled after a while, "help me squeeze the toothpaste."

There was no warmth in her voice, no soft edge like there used to be. Just that distant, careless tone that sliced through me in a way I couldn't show.

I nodded quietly. "Hmm," I said, my voice calm, because I couldn't let her see how easily she could break me.

When I left for the bathroom to prepare her brush, I heard her phone buzz. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw her pick it up, her lips twitching with a faint smile as she typed quickly. I didn't need to ask who she was texting. I already knew. Sienna.

Her "Aunt Sienna." The one she adored.

By the time I came back with her toothbrush, she had already set her phone down and was pretending to scroll through something else. I handed the brush to her wordlessly, then warmed a towel with hot water and wrung it out for her. I used to hum while doing this. Now the silence between us felt heavier than the air itself.

She brushed lazily, half-hearted, eyes drifting toward her phone every few seconds. When she finished, I asked softly, "What would you like to wear today?"

She pointed to the wardrobe without looking at me. "I'll change myself, Mom. You can go."

My throat tightened, but I nodded anyway. "Alright."

I turned and left the room quietly. The sound of her door closing behind me echoed down the hall.

Minutes later, when I came back to check on her, she was dressed. I stopped in the doorway. The outfit she had on wasn't one of the ones I picked for her. It was a camouflage jacket, oversized, sharp-edged, with black combat boots and a messy ponytail. I'd never seen her look so much like someone else before.

Sienna's influence. I didn't even need to ask.

Liora caught my reflection in the mirror and turned slightly. "Mom, you don't have to stand there. I'm fine."

Her tone wasn't rude, just distant. Detached. Like I was a stranger.

I forced a small smile. "You look... nice," I said quietly.

She didn't answer. She picked up her phone again.

I watched as her face shifted, frowning now, the spark dimming from her eyes. She typed something quickly, biting her lip. I didn't have to guess. She was texting Sienna again.

Maybe Sienna hadn't replied. Maybe she was busy. But I could feel the worry ripple through Liora's small body from across the room.

When I finally spoke, I tried to keep my voice steady. "Liora, are you packed? We need to go downstairs for breakfast."

She turned, her patience cracking. "I know, Mom! Can you stop talking so much? It's really annoying."

The words hit me harder than they should have. But I swallowed it all. The ache, the guilt, the sting of being replaced.

I didn't answer. I just stepped back and let her walk past me.

Her bag hung loosely from her shoulder, her camouflage jacket brushing against my arm as she brushed past. She smelled faintly of Sienna's perfume, vanilla and smoke. Not mine.

I followed her downstairs silently, watching her skip the last two steps like she used to when she was little. Only this time, she didn't turn to look if I'd seen.

And in that quiet, cold morning light, I realized I'd lost something I couldn't get back.

Not to death, not to distance. But to someone else's shadow.

Still, I said nothing. I just walked behind her like a ghost in my own home.

When we went downstairs, the house felt too quiet for how large it was. The kind of silence that seeps into your bones and makes every sound echo. Amber hadn't woken up yet, and Nonna was already in the living room, dressed neatly as always, with a cup of herbal tea steaming between her wrinkled hands. She smiled when she saw us.

"Elodie, Liora, you guys are up so early?"

I tried to smile back, to sound normal. "Morning, Nonna."

Liora, however, barely lifted her head. "Morning," she mumbled, her tone sharp and dull at once.

Nonna's gaze softened, but she noticed immediately. "What's wrong, tesoro? Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed?"

Liora didn't respond. She just picked at the hem of her sleeve, eyes downcast, as if speaking to her grandmother would take too much energy.

The housekeeper tried to save the moment, her laugh gentle. "It's nothing serious, Signora. Miss Liora was still asleep when Luna Elodie went to wake her. She's probably just a little cranky."

Nonna chuckled softly, her silver hair catching the morning light. But then her gaze shifted, almost naturally, toward the staircase. "And Dante? Hasn't he gotten up yet?"

The question burned through me. I swallowed before replying, keeping my tone as calm as I could. "He... went out last night."

Nonna's smile faltered. She didn't ask anything else, but I saw the understanding flash through her old eyes, the disappointment she tried to hide behind another sip of tea. She didn't scold him, not in front of Liora. She just looked away.

We ate breakfast in near silence. Liora pushed her plate around, pretending to chew. I couldn't taste anything. My thoughts were miles away, probably wherever Dante was.

After breakfast, Liora realized she'd forgotten her sketchpad and dashed upstairs to grab it. I stayed seated at the long table, folding her napkin just to keep my hands busy. That's when I noticed it, her phone lighting up beside her untouched plate.

My eyes landed on the glowing screen before I could look away.

'Kiss Kiss Aunt Sienna'

My stomach sank. The contact name hit harder than I expected, childish, yes, but too intimate, too full of affection. Something inside me froze.

I didn't mean to touch it. Spirits, I swear I didn't. But I reached for it anyway, my fingers trembling slightly.

The message preview glowed faintly.

"Sweetheart, don't let your mom ruin your morning again, okay? Be good for Aunt Sienna. I'll pick you up later if your dad is still busy."

For a long moment, I couldn't move. Couldn't breathe.

The phone felt heavier than it should.

My throat tightened as I stared at those words, the ache creeping up slow and cold, like frost beneath the skin. I set the phone down, gently, as if afraid it would shatter. But inside, I was already breaking.

So this was why she'd been moody, dismissive, angry with me over breakfast. Because she'd already spoken to Sienna. Because the woman who used to be Dante's friend and now something more, my replacement had become someone my daughter adored. Someone she called "Aunt." Someone she trusted more than me.

It was almost funny, in the cruelest way possible.

I looked up at the stairs, hearing Liora's footsteps above.

I wanted to tell myself not to cry, not here, not where Nonna or the housekeeper might see. But my chest hurt, my breath catching on something sharp. Because at that moment, I realized I wasn't just losing Dante bit by bit... I was losing her too.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 45 - 46 [1,143 words]

Chapter 45: Chapter 46

ELODIE'S POV~

I quickly flipped through their chat history, my fingers trembling just enough to make the screen blur. Every morning, Liora messaged Sienna first. “Good morning, Auntie”, the messages stretched endlessly down the screen, filled with little hearts, pictures, voice notes, laughter. They’d talked every day... for months. About everything. About her school, her favorite songs, even secrets she never told me.

My throat tightened.

The sound of the elevator dinged softly behind me. I quickly set her phone back on the table, pretending I hadn’t seen anything, pretending that my heart wasn’t burning in my chest.

By the time Liora came down, her steps were light again. She picked up her phone without a thought, and when she unlocked it, her face lit up instantly. I didn’t have to ask why.

Sienna had replied.

Something about that made my chest feel hollow, the way her eyes softened, the way her smile bloomed as if the whole world had just forgiven her. I turned away before she could see the look on my face.

I knew what happiness looked like on my daughter, but I hated that it wasn’t me giving it to her anymore.

We got into the car in silence. I drove, keeping my eyes fixed on the road, while she sat in the backseat with her head bowed, typing away. I could hear the faint sound of her laughter, so small, private, like she didn’t want me to hear but couldn’t help it. It was the kind of laughter she used to save for me.

The city faded past the window, but I wasn’t really seeing it. My chest hurt in that dull, slow way that sneaks up on you, like a grief you can’t name.

Half an hour passed before the car finally went quiet. She must’ve finished texting. I could feel her eyes on me from the backseat.

“Mom,” she started softly. “Are you free this afternoon?”

I kept my voice even, careful. “What’s up?”

She hesitated, twirling a strand of her hair. “What do you think?”

A small, tired smile tugged at my lips. “I’ve got a lot to handle at the office, Liora. There’s a pack summit tonight with the two Alphas. Why?”

She shrugged, forcing a bright smile. “Nothing... nothing at all.”

That was when I realized, she'd been asking just to be sure I wouldn't come pick her up. She wanted to go see Sienna after school.

My own daughter was lying to me, and I let her. Because what else could I do? Drag her away from the only person who seemed to make her laugh these days?

We reached the academy gates. I parked and walked her inside, pretending nothing was wrong. Pretending I wasn't breaking.

The hallways buzzed with morning chatter, students running past with their backpacks, the scent of young wolves thick in the air.

We were almost at her classroom when a small voice called out, "Sister El!"

We both turned at once.

A little girl, no more than six, ran toward us with tiny braids bouncing on her shoulders. Before I could react, she threw herself into my arms, giggling. I caught her instinctively, bending low so she wouldn't fall.

"Hey there," I said softly, recognizing her at once. "Tommy?"

She nodded eagerly. "You saved me! Remember? From that mean Rogue some months back!"

Her cheeks were rosy, her smile pure and guileless. I couldn't help it, I smiled back. "Of course I remember, sweetheart. You're okay now, yeah?"

"Mm-hmm!"

And then—

"Mom!" Liora's voice sliced through. Before I could turn, she stepped forward and shoved Tommy away.

"Liora!" I gasped.

The little girl stumbled back, her eyes wide with confusion. My heart stopped.

Tommy's lip quivered as she looked up at me, then back at Liora, unsure what she'd done wrong.

I dropped to my knees beside her, steadying her little shoulders. "Sweetheart, it's okay, she didn't mean to. Are you okay?"

Tommy's little face crumpled when Liora shoved her. She stumbled back, wide-eyed, confusion written all over her soft features. "Why did you push me?" she whispered, her voice breaking.

I froze for a heartbeat, too stunned to process what had just happened. I hadn't even realized the girl had run into my arms until it was too late, until I felt Liora's jealousy slice through the air like a physical thing.

Liora's expression darkened as her eyes flicked between me and Tommy, who was still clinging to the hem of my blazer. I saw something ugly twist behind my daughter's eyes, pain, insecurity, something deeper than childish spite.

Tommy's bottom lip trembled. She looked so small, so fragile in that moment that my heart ached for her.

"So delicate," Liora muttered under her breath, her voice shaking, "so pink and soft... ugly and disgusting."

The words hit like a slap.

Tommy's tears fell before I could even react. She backed into me and hid her face against my stomach, sobbing uncontrollably. I instinctively crouched down, wrapping an arm around her tiny shoulders, trying to calm her.

"Hey, hey," I whispered, my throat tight, "no, sweetheart, you're not disgusting at all. You're beautiful. You're brave, okay? Don't listen to that."

Tommy hiccupped through her tears, her small hands clutching my sleeve. She nodded weakly, but her sobs didn't stop.

And that's when I looked up and saw Liora watching me.

Her eyes glistened, fury and heartbreak mixing in a way that nearly shattered me. For a second, she didn't even look like my little girl anymore. Her face was red, her jaw clenched, and there was a quiet kind of devastation in her gaze, one that no child her age should ever have to feel.

"You're holding her," she said, her voice barely above a whisper, trembling, "you're calling her cute... you—"

"Liora," I started softly, "sweetheart—"

But she cut me off, her voice cracking like glass.

"I don't like you anymore!" Her tears spilled fast now, her small fists trembling by her sides. "I don't want you to be my mom!"

The hallway went dead silent.

Even the hum of distant chatter from the other students vanished. All I could hear was my own heavy and deafening heartbeat and the sound of her ragged breathing.

My lips parted, but no words came out. For a moment, I couldn't even move.

"Liora," I finally said, my voice breaking in the middle of her name. "You don't mean that."

She turned to run, but I caught her wrist, gently, terrified I might break her if I wasn't soft enough.

Her small hand trembled in mine.

“Let me go!” she shouted, twisting, her voice full of panic and hurt. “You love her more than me! You do! You always do!”

The sting of her words burned deeper than anything I’d felt in years.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 46 - 47[1,151 words]

Chapter 46: Chapter 47

Elodie’s POV~

I hugged her and kissed her, whispering, “Okay, don’t be angry...”

But the second my lips brushed against Liora’s soft cheek, I felt her trembling. The kind of trembling that comes not from fear, but from hurt that’s been building up too long, like a storm begging to break.

Her tiny hands fisted against my blouse, her face scrunching up, and then suddenly she started crying. Not the quiet kind, but the heart-shattering sobs that made my chest tighten and my throat ache.

“Then... you can’t hug her anymore,” she hiccupped between sobs, her words wobbling with pain. “And you can’t say she’s cute either!”

That was when I understood.

She wasn’t just throwing a tantrum. She was jealous.

The realization hit me harder than I expected. It wasn’t about Tommy or anyone else. It was about me. I’d been so busy juggling meetings at the Bellini Pack’s HQ, so busy trying to balance being Dante’s Luna, that I hadn’t realized my daughter, my beautiful, fiery little Liora was fighting for a space in my heart she already owned.

I crouched down to her level, brushing away her tears with trembling fingers. “Liora...” I tried to smile, but my voice cracked halfway through. “Sweetheart, is that why you’re upset?”

Her bottom lip quivered, and she refused to meet my eyes. She just nodded, her shoulders shaking as she whispered, “You used to only hug me, Mama. You used to only say I was cute.”

My heart broke.

The noise of the Pack's gathering faded away, the laughter, the chatter, the distant sound of music, all of it blurred until it was just us. Just me, holding my daughter's heart in my hands and realizing I had crushed it without meaning to.

Tommy, standing a few feet away, clutched the hem of her dress nervously. She was just a child, innocent, wide-eyed, unaware she had wandered into a fragile space between a mother and her daughter.

I reached for Liora again, but she pulled back slightly, her eyes swimming in tears. That rejection so small, yet so piercing made something inside me collapse.

"Liora," I whispered again, softer this time, "you don't have to be scared. No one could ever take your place. No one."

"But you called her cute," she said again, quieter now. "You never call me cute anymore."

I wanted to tell her she was beyond cute, that she was brave, strong, stubborn, and my only sweetheart. But the words wouldn't come out. They tangled in my throat, caught between guilt and exhaustion, between the Alpha's mate I had to be... and the mother I was failing to be.

I pulled her into my arms anyway, ignoring her weak attempt to resist. I kissed her hair, breathing in her scent, the sweet mix of honey and wild grass. "I'm sorry," I murmured, my voice breaking against her shoulder. "Mommy's so sorry."

Her little fingers clutched at my shirt again, and she sobbed harder, but this time she didn't pull away. She just cried against me, letting out all the anger and fear she couldn't understand.

Behind us, Tommy shuffled awkwardly, looking down at her shoes. I glanced at her, giving her a soft nod, and she hesitantly came closer.

"Tommy," I said gently, still holding Liora, "this is my daughter. She didn't mean to be mean, okay? She's just... she's still learning."

Tommy nodded, her voice small. "It's okay."

Liora sniffled, peeking up from my chest. Her lashes were wet, her cheeks red and blotchy. "I'm sorry," she whispered, voice trembling.

Tommy smiled shyly. "It's okay."

With everything finally settled, I exhaled shakily, trying to keep my smile steady as I took both girls toward the classroom. My palms were slightly damp, maybe from nerves, maybe from the weight of everything pressing down lately but I forced a small laugh when Tommy tripped over her shoelaces again.

The homeroom teacher arrived, taking Tommy's hand gently. "Come on, sweetheart, let's get you seated."

Then it was just me and Liora.

I crouched down to her level, brushing a loose curl behind her ear. “Alright, baby,” I murmured softly, “it’s all good now. Let’s go in, okay?”

Liora didn’t move. Her little hand clutched my wrist tighter. There was a flicker in her eyes, something stubborn, something uncertain. She’d always been fearless, too proud to back down even when she should. But right then, she just looked... fragile.

“Mom...” she whispered, her voice trembling like she was holding back tears.

My chest tightened instantly. “What’s wrong?” I asked, tucking her into my arms, inhaling the scent of her hair. That scent grounded me, even when everything else in my life felt like it was slipping through my fingers.

“I want—” she started, then stopped.

I waited.

But then I saw the change in her eyes, the quick flicker, I realized she wasn’t about to tell me.

Liora swallowed hard. “Never mind,” she mumbled, forcing a smile that didn’t reach her eyes.

I could feel the sting behind my own. “Are you sure?” I whispered, brushing her cheek with my thumb.

She nodded, too fast. “Yeah.”

And that was it. Just like that, she let go. The same way I’d had to learn to let go of so many pieces of myself in this life, quietly, without complaint.

“Alright,” I said, my voice trembling just enough for her not to notice. “Go on in, baby. Don’t keep your teacher waiting.”

“Mm.”

She took a step away, then turned back, her little fingers tightening around the strap of her backpack. “Mom?”

“Yeah?”

“Remember to call me at noon,” she said softly.

That smile. That fragile, hopeful smile. moon goddess, it broke me.

“I’ll call,” I promised, forcing the corners of my lips to lift.

Only when she walked into the classroom, introducing herself in front of everyone with that spark I loved so much, did I let myself exhale. I stood there, hand pressed against my chest, watching her wave before she turned away.

I didn't move for a long time.

By the time I got to Bellini Holdings, the shift in air was immediate, colder, like the walls themselves whispered reminders that I didn't belong here anymore. I caught a glimpse of myself in the glass doors... so pale, tired, a ghost of the woman I used to be before Dante's world swallowed mine whole.

He wasn't in his office. Of course he wasn't. He was probably in some meeting, charming investors, or maybe upstairs with Sienna. I brushed a stray hair behind my ear, pretending it didn't sting.

"Ms. Elodie," Albert's voice called from across the lobby. He walked toward me, expression neutral but guarded, like he already knew something I didn't. Behind him stood a girl, young, polished, her posture a little too perfect. "This is Sherry. She'll be taking over your position soon."

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 47 - 48 [1,246 words]

Chapter 47: Chapter 48

Elodie's POV~

Sherry was beautiful, effortlessly so. The kind of girl whose perfume lingered in the air long after she passed, whose smile looked trained, practiced, but disarming all the same. She was wearing head-to-toe designer, a cream silk blouse tucked neatly into a pencil skirt, her heels clicking confidently across the marble floors of Bellini Holdings.

When she approached my desk, her hand was already outstretched, her tone bright and friendly. "Hi, you must be Elodie! I'm Sherry. It's such an honor to work with you, please guide me well in the next few days."

Her voice was bright, practiced, too eager. I stood, returning her handshake, polite but detached. "You're too polite," I murmured, forcing a smile. "Welcome to the team."

She nodded quickly, her eyes sweeping over me like she was trying to figure me out. It wasn't rude, but it was observant, too observant. "I just graduated from T University with my master's degree," she said proudly, straightening her skirt. "What about you, Elodie? Where did you study?"

Something in me stilled. I could've told her. I could've said the name of the prestigious university but I didn't. They decided to employ someone with little or no work experience to become my replacement. So I only smiled faintly and said, "Welcome aboard."

Her brows flickered in confusion, and she laughed awkwardly, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. "Oh well, I guess experience is the best education, huh?"

I didn't answer that. Instead, I turned toward my screen, aligning the files that didn't need aligning. "Sherry, we have a meeting in five minutes. Let's go through the agenda."

"Ah!" she gasped lightly, "Right, the meeting! Look at me, already forgetting the important things." Her laughter was soft and charming. The kind that filled a room easily. I remembered when I used to laugh like that. Before everything became a careful silence.

We walked together to the conference room. She leaned toward me suddenly, her voice low and teasing. "Tell me something, Elodie... is it true what everyone says about Alpha Dante? That he's unbelievably handsome?"

My chest tightened before I could stop it. My expression didn't change. "He is," I said simply.

Her eyes widened, the corners of her lips curling into a grin. "I knew it. Ugh, you're so lucky to see him every day. I'd probably faint if he even looked at me."

Lucky.

If only she knew that being near him was not a privilege, it was a slow undoing. That every day I stood in front of him, pretending to be nothing more than his employee, while my heart remembered the way he used to whisper my name like it was a vow.

But I didn't say any of that. I just nodded and pushed open the glass doors to the meeting room.

By noon, Sherry suggested we eat together at the cafeteria. I wanted to refuse, my appetite had been gone for months but I didn't want to seem distant. So I went.

She talked through most of lunch, her voice full of energy and plans. About her goals, her professors, her dreams of one day earning the Alpha's recognition. I listened quietly, my fork moving food around my plate but never quite lifting it.

Then my phone buzzed. It was an alarm reminder that daily reminded me to call Liora. It's become a daily habit for me.

"Excuse me," I murmured, already reaching for it.

Sherry grinned mischievously. "Ooh, who's calling? Your boyfriend?"

I gave her a small, tired smile. "My daughter."

Her eyes widened. "Your daughter? Wait... you're married?"

“Yes,” I said softly. The word came out like a confession instead of a fact.

“Oh wow!” she laughed. “You don’t look old enough to have a kid. That’s so cool, though!”

But I wasn’t listening anymore. I’d already swiped the call option.

On the other side, Liora was video calling with Sienna, her small face glowing under the soft screen light. Dante sat beside Sienna, his expression unreadable, his dark suit pressed and perfect, every movement of his controlled like he always was.

When Liora saw them together, her little lips curved downward in a pout. “You’re both mean! You went to eat without me again.”

Sienna laughed softly, her voice warm, patient. “That’s because you were at school, sweetheart. After class, Auntie will pick you up, and we’ll have dinner together later, alright?”

Liora tilted her head, thinking, then gave a tiny nod. “Hmm... that’s better.”

Dante glanced toward her, his gaze softening for just a second. He reached across the table, setting down his knife and fork before picking up a small plate of roasted salmon, cutting a piece, and offering it to Sienna. “Tell me what you want for dinner, Liora. I’ll have the kitchen prepare it.”

Liora’s pout vanished, replaced with a beam of excitement as she began to list every food she could think of, pasta, risotto, sweet buns, and that honey dessert she loved. Dante just listened quietly, his tone distant but gentle, the way a man spoke when his mind was somewhere else but he still wanted to appear present.

Sienna smiled through it, her hand resting against her cheek. “You look so pretty today, Liora. That little blue dress suits you perfectly.”

“Really?” the girl asked, twirling slightly so her dress flared on the camera.

“Of course,” Sienna said, eyes glimmering with a kind of warmth that could fool anyone watching.

For a few moments, everything looked peaceful, almost perfect. The three of them sitting there, sunlight spilling through the wide glass windows of the private restaurant. The waiter who came to serve their wine hesitated, stealing a glance their way. In his eyes, they looked like a family, an Alpha, his mate, and their bright-eyed daughter. He even smiled softly before leaving them alone.

At that moment, Liora stared down at the glowing tablet screen, her small fingers hesitating over the “answer” button.

Elodie’s name blinked again. Another video call.

It was the same call her mother had promised that morning before the Alpha meeting, she had said she'd call during lunch, said she missed her little girl's face, said she'd make it up to her. But now, Liora didn't feel like answering. Not anymore.

She was sitting on the padded rug of the children's lounge, legs folded, her tiny face tilted toward the floating screen in front of her where Sienna's warm smile filled the frame.

"Sweetheart, are you sure you don't want to answer your mommy's call?" the teacher, Miss Lorna, asked gently from across the room.

Liora glanced up briefly, then shook her head. "I'm talking to Auntie Sienna right now," she said, her tone careful, almost too calm for a child her age. "I'll call Mommy later."

But She wasn't sure she wanted to.

Because this morning, before class, she'd seen Elodie holding another girl close against her chest. And Liora had just stood there, frozen in the doorway of the office, her small hands clutching her school bag so tightly her knuckles turned white.

And something inside her, something fragile cracked.

During class, when the teacher said, "Every mother's heart has a space only her child can fill, no one else can replace it," Liora had wanted to believe it. She'd even smiled, a small, hopeful kind of smile. Maybe Mommy still loved her like before. Maybe she was still her special girl.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 48 - 49[1,330 words]

Chapter 48: Chapter 49

Elodie's POV~

I noticed Liora hadn't picked up my call. It'd been ringing for too long, long enough for that familiar knot of worry to start tightening in my chest. She never ignored me. Not my baby girl.

I tried to tell myself she was probably just busy, maybe playing with the other pups in the children's lounge, but something about the silence made my stomach turn.

I called her teacher.

"Oh, Luna Elodie!" Her voice was bright, almost amused. "Liora's fine, don't worry. She's on a video call with her dad right now. And I think there's an aunt with him too? Hold on, let me tell her you—"

"No." The word came out sharper than I meant it to. I softened my voice. "Don't interrupt them. Let her enjoy her time."

"Oh, alright. She looks really happy, by the way."

Happy.

I thanked her and hung up before she could hear the way my breath caught.

An aunt. That could only mean Sienna.

Which meant Dante was with her. Right now. Probably sitting across from her at some nice restaurant, the kind with soft lighting and wine that cost more than most people's rent. The kind of place we used to go to.

I sat there at my desk, staring at nothing. The office felt too quiet. Too empty.

I could picture it so clearly it hurt, Dante leaning back in his chair, that rare smile on his face, the one he used to give me. And Sienna next to him, perfect as always, laughing at something he said.

God, I hated that I cared. I hated that it still twisted something deep in my chest.

I sent Liora a message anyway. Asked about her day, if she'd eaten, reminded her to be nice to the other pups and take her nap when the time came. Little things that made me feel like I still mattered, like I was still her mom even when everything else was falling apart.

Ten minutes crawled by before my phone buzzed.

A voice note.

"I know, Mommy. I'll take a good nap."

I played it again. And again. Her little voice filled the room, and every time I heard it, something in me cracked a little more.

The rest of the day blurred. Sherry was great, energetic, chatty, easy to work with but I wasn't really there. I laughed when she laughed, nodded at the right moments, but inside I was somewhere else. Somewhere I didn't want to be, picturing Dante with someone who wasn't me.

By six, Sherry offered to take me to dinner. "To thank you for today," she said, grinning.

I shook my head. "You don't need to thank me. It's literally my job."

She was about to argue when my phone rang.

It was Stella.

My heart stopped. Dante's mother never called me. Not unless something was wrong or she needed something. She'd perfected the art of making me feel like I didn't exist while still being technically polite. Seeing her name on my screen felt like the ground shifting under my feet.

I answered carefully. "Mom?"

"York's been sneaking out to race again." Her voice was clipped, businesslike. "I'm sending you the location. Go get him before he gets himself killed."

"Wait—"

She hung up.

I stared at my phone. A second later, the location pinged through. Outskirts of the Bellini Pack territory. The kind of place young wolves went when they wanted to do stupid, dangerous things.

My chest tightened. York idolized his brother. Copied everything Dante did. And the one person who could actually stop him wasn't here. He was off having dinner with Sienna.

I didn't even know why I'd said yes.

Maybe because some pathetic part of me still wanted to be useful. Still wanted to prove I belonged in this family, even when they only remembered I existed when they needed something.

The race track was massive, sprawling under harsh floodlights that made everything look washed out and unreal. Even this late, the place was packed with bodies pressed against barriers, voices rising and falling in waves of excitement. Engines screamed in the distance, that sharp, metallic sound that made my teeth ache. The smell of gasoline and burnt rubber hung thick in the air.

It was loud. Chaotic. Overwhelming.

And I was supposed to find one reckless wolf in the middle of all this.

I pulled out my phone and called York again. It rang. And rang. And went to voicemail.

Of course.

I tried again. Same thing.

My chest tightened, that familiar knot of anxiety wrapping around my ribs. What if something had happened to him? What if he'd gotten hurt, or worse—

No. I couldn't think like that.

I shoved my phone back in my pocket and started pushing through the crowd, searching faces that blurred together in the chaos. Excuse me, sorry, just trying to get through...no one cared. They were too busy screaming, laughing, placing bets, worshipping speed and danger like it was something holy.

Twenty minutes.

It took me twenty agonizing minutes of weaving through strangers, of being shoved and ignored, before I finally spotted him near the front barriers.

York.

Relief hit me so hard I almost stumbled. He had binoculars pressed to his face, completely absorbed, his whole body leaning forward like he might launch himself over the railing.

“York!” I called out, but my voice disappeared into the noise.

I made my way over, squeezing past people who cursed at me for blocking their view. When I finally reached him, I touched his shoulder.

He spun around, eyes wide with surprise.

“Elodie?” He blinked at me like I’d materialized out of thin air. “What are you doing here?”

I tried to keep my voice steady, tried to sound like I had it together. “Your grandmother asked me to find you. You weren’t answering your phone—”

“Oh, come on.” He groaned, dragging a hand down his face. “I’m fine! I told Amber I’d be back later. Look—” He gestured around us. “I’m not doing anything dangerous. I’m just watching.”

“York—”

“Today’s special,” he cut me off, his eyes lighting up with something close to reverence. “CC’s racing. The CC. The number one female racer in North America. She’s been racing in the European Packs for years, and this is her first race back home. I couldn’t miss this. I can’t miss this.”

I stared at him. He looked so... alive. Excited. Like this mattered more than anything.

And I felt nothing.

Just this hollow, aching emptiness where something warm used to be.

“I promise,” he continued, already turning back toward the track. “After I watch her race, I’ll come straight home. No detours, no trouble. Scout’s honor. So you can head back now, okay? I’ve got this.”

“But—”

The crowd erupted.

“CC! CC! CC!”

The chanting was deafening, shaking the ground beneath my feet. It crashed over me in waves, drowning out everything else. York's attention snapped away from me completely, his binoculars back up, his whole face transformed with fanatic excitement.

"She's coming out!" he shouted, though I barely heard him over the roar of the crowd.

He grabbed my arm suddenly, shaking it. "Sister-in-law, you have to see this! When I first learned about racing, I wasn't even interested but that was before I discovered her! She's incredible. Beautiful. Powerful. Once you see her, you'll understand why everyone's obsessed. There's no way you won't fall in love with her too!"

I wanted to tell him I didn't care. That I was tired and empty and I just wanted to go home and crawl into bed and pretend none of this existed.

But he wasn't listening anymore.

None of them ever listened.

At that moment, CC made her entrance.

The crowd went absolutely feral. York was screaming along with them, jumping up and down, completely lost in the worship of someone he'd never even met.

I stood there, forgotten.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 49 - 50 [1,659 words]

Chapter 49: Chapter 50

Elodie's POV~

"Here, take these!"

York shoved the binoculars into my hands before I could protest, his face lit up like a kid on Christmas morning. "You have to see her, Elodie! Number 38! The red racing suit! She's insane, gorgeous and wild and just... perfect!"

I didn't want to look. I didn't care about racing, didn't care about whoever this woman was that had York acting like he'd found religion. But he was staring at me with so much excitement, so much hope that I'd understand, that I couldn't say no.

I lifted the binoculars to my eyes.

The world zoomed in a blur of colors and movement until I found number 38. Red racing suit, sleek and bold against the track lights.

My breath caught.

Sienna.

CC was Sienna.

Of course it was.

I'd heard rumors that she was good at extreme sports, that she could do basically anything and make it look effortless. But racing? Being this good? Good enough to have an entire crowd chanting her name like she was some kind of goddess?

She stood by her car, pulling off her helmet, and even from this distance I could see why they loved her. The racing suit hugged every curve of her body, tall, confident, the kind of beautiful that didn't need trying. She moved like she owned the world. Wild and elegant and so completely untouchable.

I hated how much I could see it. How much sense it made.

My hands trembled as I adjusted the lens, and that's when I saw Dante.

He was across the track in the VIP section, and he wasn't alone. Liora sat beside him, my baby girl, the one who'd been on a video call with him earlier. And next to them were some of his closest friends from the Pack, the ones he actually made time for.

They'd all come here. For her.

Dante's eyes were fixed on Sienna, and even through the binoculars I could see the way he was looking at her. That intensity. That focus. The same way he used to look at me, back when I still mattered.

My chest felt like it was caving in.

"The race is starting!" York yanked the binoculars back, nearly taking my fingers with them.

I stood there, frozen, my eyes still locked on Dante across the track. He leaned forward slightly, his whole body attuned to Sienna's every move. Liora was clapping beside him, bouncing in her seat.

The engines roared to life.

Cars shot forward in a blur of color and sound, and the crowd went absolutely wild. York was screaming, jumping up and down, but I couldn't hear him anymore. Everything sounded distant, muffled, like I was underwater.

“Look, look!” York thrust the binoculars back at me. “Watch this turn coming up, she’s going to do something crazy, I can feel it!”

I took them because I didn’t know what else to do.

I found Sienna’s car, watched as she approached a sharp curve at a speed that seemed impossible. She was going to crash. She had to—

But she didn’t.

She took the turn at the last possible second, cutting inside with perfect precision, overtaking two cars in one smooth, dangerous move.

The crowd exploded.

Even I felt my breath catch. It was reckless and brilliant and terrifying all at once.

I shifted the binoculars back to Dante.

He was on his feet now. Actually standing. His expression... his expression was filled with Amazement. Admiration. Pride, maybe. Things I hadn’t seen directed at anyone in so long I’d almost forgotten what they looked like.

Liora and his friends were jumping around him, celebrating like Sienna had already won.

And me?

I was standing here in the cheap section, forgotten, watching my husband fall in love with someone else in real time.

“Isn’t she amazing?!” York grabbed my arm, shaking it. “Tell me you see it now! Tell me you understand!”

I understood. I understood perfectly.

The race continued, but I couldn’t look away from Dante. Even when York took the binoculars back, even when the crowd screamed and engines roared, my eyes stayed fixed on that VIP section across the track.

When the race hit a brief pause, Sienna was in first place. Obviously.

“Can I see them again?” The words came out of my mouth before I’d thought them through.

“Yes!” York practically threw them at me. “You’re hooked, aren’t you?! I knew it! No one can resist her, doesn’t matter if you’re a guy or a girl, she just has this... this thing. You can’t help but fall for her!”

I smiled. I actually smiled, even though I felt like I was shattering into a thousand pieces inside.

I lifted the binoculars back to my eyes, but I wasn't looking at Sienna.

I was looking at my husband.

My phone felt heavy in my pocket. I could call him right now. Right this second. Watch through these binoculars as his phone lit up with my name.

Would he even look at it?

Or would he just decline the call without a second thought, too absorbed in her to bother with me?

I already knew the answer.

He'd ignore it. Or worse he'd glance at the screen, see my name, and deliberately send it to voicemail because acknowledging me would mean tearing his attention away from Sienna, and why would he ever do that?

I lowered the binoculars slowly.

What was the point?

Calling him wouldn't change anything. It wouldn't make him see me. Wouldn't make him remember that I existed, that we were bonded, that we had a daughter together who needed both her parents.

It wouldn't make him love me again.

If he ever had.

The noise of the crowd swelled around me, but I felt so far away from all of it. Like I was watching my own life from outside my body, seeing how pathetic it all was.

I didn't want to call anymore.

There was no point.

There had never been any point.

One last time.

That's what I told myself as my thumb hovered over Dante's name in my contacts. Just one more time, and then I'd stop. I'd stop hoping. Stop reaching out into the void expecting something different.

I pressed call.

My heart hammered against my ribs as I lifted the binoculars with my other hand, zooming in on that VIP section. On him.

The phone rang once.

Dante glanced down at his phone. I watched him do it—watched the exact moment he saw my name on his screen.

It rang twice.

He stared at it for a second. Just one second. And then his thumb moved.

Declined.

The call ended abruptly, that harsh beep in my ear like a slap. He didn't hesitate. Didn't even look conflicted about it. He just... dismissed me. Then he slipped his phone back into his pocket and turned his attention right back to Sienna, like I'd never existed at all.

Like I was nothing.

I sucked in a breath that hurt going down. My hands were steady as I lowered the binoculars, and I realized distantly that I wasn't even surprised. Of course he'd decline. Why would this time be any different?

I smiled. I don't know why I smiled, but I did, this small, broken thing that probably looked more like a grimace.

"Here." I handed the binoculars back to York, my voice calm. "I'm good."

He barely noticed, already turning back to watch the final stretch of the race.

I didn't watch the rest. Didn't look at the track, didn't look at Dante, didn't let myself feel anything except this weird, hollow numbness that had settled into my bones.

When the race ended, Sienna won. Obviously.

The crowd lost their minds. York was practically vibrating with excitement, shouting and jumping with his friends, talking about rushing down to get her autograph.

"I heard CC doesn't do autographs," one of his friends was saying, breathless with adrenaline. "Like, ever. She's not just some racer, she's got a PhD from one of the top universities in the European Packs. Racing's just a hobby for her. She doesn't need fans or validation or any of that. She just... does what she wants."

"Yeah, and apparently she always leaves right after," another friend added. "There's this private exit for racers only, super exclusive. You need connections to even get close. We're not getting anywhere near her."

York groaned dramatically, but he was still grinning. "Man, just once I'd love to meet her. Just once."

They kept talking, voices overlapping, but I wasn't really listening anymore.

My phone buzzed. Stella. Asking where we were, telling me to bring York home now before Nonna started worrying.

“York.” I touched his shoulder. “We need to go.”

“But—”

“Your grandmother’s waiting.”

He deflated a little but nodded. His friends wanted him to stay, to hang out and grab food, but I shut that down fast. Stella would have my head if I came back without him.

“I need to use the restroom first,” I said quietly.

York waved me off, already back to talking with his friends about Sienna’s final turn.

The restroom was tucked away down a hallway that was blessedly quieter than the main area. The noise faded to a dull roar as I pushed through the door, and for a second I just stood there, staring at myself in the mirror.

I looked tired. Hollow. Like I’d been scraped out from the inside and left with just the shell.

I washed my hands slowly, letting the cold water run over my skin. Breathe in. Breathe out. You’re fine. You’re always fine.

When I finally stepped back out into the hallway, I wasn’t paying attention. My mind was somewhere else, somewhere far away from here, from this night, from everything.

I rounded the corner and walked straight into someone.

“Oh—sorry, I—”

I looked up.

And froze.

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Chapter 50: Chapter 51

Elodie’s POV

“Sorry.”

“My bad.”

We both stepped back at the same time, the words tumbling out in that awkward way they do when you're not really paying attention.

I looked up.

My stomach dropped.

Harrison.

One of Dante's closest friends. Part of that inner circle I'd never been allowed into, no matter how many years I'd known them.

He recognized me instantly. Of course he did.

And I watched his expression shift from mild surprise to something cold. Dismissive. Like I was something unpleasant he'd accidentally stepped in.

I felt it like a physical thing, that look. It settled over me like ice water.

I'd known Harrison for years. Known all of them, Harrison, Levi, and others. They'd grown up with Dante, inseparable since childhood. School together, playing together, building the Bellini Pack's business empire together as adults.

And in all that time, through all those years, Dante had never once let me in.

Even after we got married, after I became Luna, I was still just... there. Existing on the periphery of his life while he kept his real world, his friends, his interests, the things that actually mattered to him locked away from me.

But Sienna?

Sienna got an invitation within weeks.

Dante introduced her to Harrison and the others like she was something precious. Brought her to their gatherings, their private dinners, included her in their inside jokes. And they'd welcomed her. Accepted her as one of them in a way they never had with me.

I'd heard from Amber that they even invited Sienna to things now when Dante wasn't around. That's how close they'd become.

And me? The longer Sienna was in the picture, the colder they got. Like her presence somehow made my existence even more offensive to them.

Harrison's ice-blue eyes were flat as he looked at me. No warmth. No basic courtesy. Nothing.

I'd tried, in the beginning. Tried to build some kind of relationship with them, to be friendly, to fit in. But they never gave me a chance. Never even pretended to care.

So I'd stopped trying. Stopped forcing myself into spaces where I clearly wasn't wanted.

I still greeted them when I had to. Basic politeness, because I had some dignity left.

Most of the time they ignored me. Sometimes they looked at me like I was dirt.

I wasn't going to say anything now. Wasn't going to give him the satisfaction.

I moved to step around him.

"Elodie."

His voice stopped me cold. Not because it was warm...it wasn't. It was sharp. Suspicious.

I turned back slowly. "What?"

"Didn't know you were into racing." His tone made it clear he didn't believe it. Made it clear what he was really asking.

He was trying to ask if I had followed him here?

My jaw tightened. "What are you trying to say, Harrison?"

He didn't even have the decency to look ashamed. "Just surprised, that's all. Didn't think this was your scene. Seems a little... convenient."

The implication hung in the air between us.

He thought I was stalking Dante. Thought I'd shown up here to spy on him, to ruin his night, to be the pathetic, clingy wife who couldn't take a hint.

Something hot and bitter rose in my throat.

"Someone like me?" I repeated, my voice dangerously quiet. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Harrison's expression didn't change. "Come on, Elodie. We both know you don't care about racing. You don't care about any of this. So why are you really here?"

Each word felt like a slap.

I wanted to scream at him. Wanted to tell him that I was here because Stella had ordered me to come find York, because apparently I was still useful when they needed someone to clean up their messes. Wanted to tell him that I hadn't known Dante would be here, that I hadn't wanted to see him with her, that watching my husband decline my call without a second thought had already gutted me enough for one night.

But what was the point?

“Harrison.” My voice came out colder than I expected. Sharper. “Are we really that close? Do you actually know me at all? Because if you think you’ve got me all figured out, why don’t you tell me exactly what kind of person you think I am?”

I watched something flicker across his face. Surprise, maybe. Like he hadn’t expected me to bite back.

I’d always been quiet around them. Kept my head down, smiled politely, tried not to make waves. The perfect, passive Luna who knew her place.

That’s probably what he thought I was, some meek little thing playing at being innocent while scheming behind everyone’s backs.

I knew what they all thought about me. Knew the story they’d all convinced themselves was true, that I’d done something terrible to trap Dante into this bond. That I’d manipulated everything just to get his attention, and then had the audacity to act like I didn’t know what I’d done.

They’d never asked me. Never gave me a chance to explain.

They just decided who I was and hated me for it.

Harrison didn’t answer. He just stared at me with those cold eyes, like I wasn’t even worth the effort of a response.

Of course he wouldn’t answer. Why would he? He’d already made up his mind about me years ago.

But something felt different tonight. Maybe it was watching Dante decline my call. Maybe it was seeing him look at Sienna like she hung the moon. Maybe it was just that I’d finally hit the bottom and realized there was nothing left to lose.

I wasn’t going to smile and take it anymore.

I held Harrison’s gaze, and I saw the moment he noticed something had changed. The way his eyes narrowed slightly, studying me like I was someone he didn’t quite recognize.

Good.

Let him be confused. Let him wonder.

I was tired of pretending to be smaller than I was just so they’d feel comfortable around me.

“That’s what I thought,” I said quietly when he still didn’t speak. “You don’t actually know me at all. You just know the version of me you all decided on.”

I didn’t wait for a response. Didn’t give him the chance to say something else that would cut me open.

I turned and walked away, and this time my legs didn't shake.

By the time I got York back to his place near the academy, it was past eleven. The drive had been quiet. York had fallen asleep in the passenger seat almost immediately, probably exhausted from all that screaming and jumping.

I'd been grateful for the silence. It gave me time to shove everything back down, to lock it all away where it couldn't touch me.

When we pulled up outside the house Stella had rented for him, York stirred awake, blinking groggily.

"We're here," I said softly.

He yawned, stretching. Then his stomach growled. Loudly.

I almost smiled despite everything.

"Sister-in-law," he said, rubbing his eyes. "There's this amazing late-night food spot just down the street. Best dumplings you'll ever have. Let me buy you something? As a thank you for coming all the way out here to get me."

My first instinct was to say no. To tell him I was tired, that I just wanted to go home.

But home meant that empty house.