

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 71 - 72 [1,423 words]

Chapter 71: Chapter 72

Elodie's POV

The faint smile I'd been forcing disappeared the second I saw Liora's name on my screen.

I stared at it for two, maybe three seconds, my thumb hovering over the answer button.

Finally, I pressed it. "Hello."

"Mommy!" Her voice was sweet, that little sing-song tone she used when she wanted something. "When are you coming home?"

I didn't answer right away. Couldn't.

Because the truth was, I didn't know if I could go back there tonight. Didn't know if I had the strength to walk into that house and pretend everything was fine.

"What's wrong, baby?" I asked instead.

"I'm so bored! Daddy's not here, and Aunt Sienna is busy, and the house is so quiet. Can you please come home and keep me company?"

Each word was a knife.

Daddy's not here. Aunt Sienna is busy.

So I was the backup. The third option. The person she called when everyone else wasn't available.

I closed my eyes, my hand tightening around the phone.

She missed the days when I'd sit with her and listen to her talk about her cartoons and toys. When I'd been her whole world.

Before Sienna.

Before everything fell apart.

“Mommy has some things to take care of tonight,” I said, keeping my voice as steady as I could.
“Maybe another time, okay?”

The silence on the other end felt heavy.

I was her mother. I should drop everything and go to her. That’s what mothers did, right?

But I also had limits. Boundaries. And tonight, after everything with Logan and Sophia and that damn jewelry store, I just... couldn’t.

I needed space. Needed time to fall apart in private before I could put the pieces back together again.

“Oh...” Liora’s voice was small now. Disappointed. “Okay.”

The guilt hit me immediately, sharp and suffocating.

“I’m sorry, sweetheart,” I said, and I meant it. “If you need anything, anything at all, you can call me again, okay?”

“Okay...”

She didn’t sound convinced.

“Bye my sweet, little baby.”

“Okay... take care, mommy.”

She hung up before I could say anything else.

I stood there in the parking lot, phone still pressed to my ear even though the line was dead, and I felt something inside me crack.

Dante’s POV

When I walked through the door, Liora was sprawled on the couch looking miserable like someone had told her Christmas was canceled.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, setting my briefcase down.

She didn’t even look up, just buried her face deeper into one of those oversized throw pillows. “I called Mommy. Asked her to come home and spend time with me. But she said she was too busy.”

Her voice was muffled, but I caught the disappointment in it.

“Mm,” I said, walking over to the adjacent sofa and sitting down.

I pulled out my phone to check some emails that had come in during the drive. A new contract Albert needed me to review, some updates on the European Pack negotiations.

Liora shifted slightly, peeking at me from behind the pillow.

I kept my eyes on my screen. She'd be fine. She was just being dramatic, kids her age always were.

Elodie was probably off doing... whatever it was she did these days. Working at that company, making a point about her independence or something.

She'd get over it eventually. Come back. They always did.

I could've gone to my study to handle this work, probably should have, honestly. Better lighting, bigger desk, no distractions.

But something made me stay.

Maybe it was the way Liora kept glancing at me. Or maybe I just didn't feel like moving.

Either way, I settled into the couch and kept working.

After a few minutes, I noticed Liora's mood starting to lift. She sat up a little straighter, grabbed her tablet from the coffee table, and pulled up one of those puzzle games she was obsessed with.

The sound effects started almost immediately, little chimes and bleeps that were mildly annoying but tolerable.

She was fine now. See? Didn't need Elodie after all.

I glanced at her from the corner of my eye. She was completely absorbed in the game, her earlier sadness apparently forgotten.

Good.

Everything was fine.

I went back to my email, responding to Albert about the contract terms, and let the comfortable silence settle over the room.

When Logan and the others returned home, his sister Lauren was waiting in the living room, flipping through a fashion magazine with a glass of wine in her hand.

She looked up when they entered. "What took you so long?"

Logan set his briefcase down with a sigh. "I ran into Elodie."

Lauren's perfectly manicured eyebrows rose. "Oh? You saw her?"

She set her magazine aside, but her expression wasn't one of concern for her stepdaughter. Instead, there was a calculating gleam in her eyes, the look of someone who'd just been presented with useful information.

"Did you talk to her about Sienna joining Cole?" she asked, leaning forward slightly.

Logan shook his head. "We discussed it briefly, but she wouldn't listen."

Lauren picked up her coffee cup and took a delicate sip, her lips pursing in distaste. "That girl really is something. I understand she's upset that Sienna has captured Dante's attention, but honestly, we've all met the man. He's not the type to be tied down to someone like her."

She said the word "her" like it tasted bitter.

"Elodie has nothing to offer except a pretty face," Lauren continued, her tone dripping with condescension. "No real education, no particular talents, no substance whatsoever. Even if Sienna wasn't in the picture, Dante would have divorced her eventually. It was inevitable."

Logan nodded slowly, his expression thoughtful but agreeable.

Lauren set her cup down with a sharp clink. "This whole situation with Cole Corporation, Elodie blocking Sienna from that position, it's nothing more than petty jealousy. She's acting like a spurned woman throwing a tantrum because she can't keep her husband interested."

She laughed, the sound cold and mocking. "It's pathetic, really. She actually thinks she's accomplished something by keeping Sienna out. As if that changes anything. Dante will still choose Sienna in the end. Anyone with eyes can see that."

Logan remained silent, but his lack of disagreement spoke volumes.

"And the worst part," Lauren continued, clearly enjoying herself now, "is that Elodie doesn't even realize how foolish she looks. She's probably sitting somewhere right now, pleased with herself for this tiny, meaningless victory. While Dante gives Sienna everything she could ever want."

She picked up her phone and scrolled through something, then smiled. "Speaking of which, did you hear? Dante gave our family that multi-billion dollar project. As compensation for what Sienna went through with the Cole situation."

Logan's expression brightened slightly. "Yes, Sophia mentioned it."

"See?" Lauren spread her hands as if presenting evidence. "That's the difference between my daughter and his wife. Sienna gets billion-dollar projects as apology gifts. What does Elodie get? Nothing. Not even his time."

She leaned back against the plush sofa cushions, looking supremely satisfied.

"When you compare them, Sienna with her PhD, her accomplishments, her grace and intelligence, to Elodie, who has... what? A bachelor's degree and the ability to make coffee?" Lauren shook her head pityingly. "There's simply no comparison. It's almost cruel that Elodie even tries to compete."

Logan sighed heavily. "I know. But she won't listen to reason."

"She's stubborn," Lauren said dismissively. "Just like her mother was."

The mention of Logan's first wife, Elodie's mother, hung in the air for a moment.

Logan shifted uncomfortably. Any mention of that woman always made the atmosphere tense.

"Anyway," Lauren said, smoothly changing the subject, "what about CUAP? Did you find out anything about that programming language during your conversation with her?"

Logan shook his head. "No. But we can ask Sienna about it when she gets back. She'll know how to handle it."

Lauren smiled, her expression radiating confidence in her daughter. "Of course she will. Sienna always knows what to do."

She picked up her wine glass and took another sip, already dismissing Elodie from her thoughts entirely.

"That girl," Lauren murmured, almost to herself, "will learn eventually that beauty fades and temper tantrums accomplish nothing. And by the time she figures it out, Dante and Sienna will be married, and she'll be nothing but a footnote in their love story."

She laughed softly at her own words, clearly pleased with the image.

Logan said nothing, but he didn't disagree.

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Chapter 72: Chapter 73

Logan was practically salivating over the possibilities.

For years, the Brown family had poured money into the AI sector, massive investments, aggressive acquisitions, partnerships with tech firms across multiple Pack territories. But despite all that capital, they lacked one crucial thing: strong core technology.

Their development had stagnated. Plateaued. While other companies soared, the Browns were stuck treading water.

Meanwhile, Cole Corporation with CUAP as their foundation was raking in over a hundred million annually. And from what Logan understood, they barely had to lift a finger. The technology was just that good.

The envy ate at him constantly.

If they could just get their hands on CUAP's core technology, if they could integrate it into their existing projects, the Brown family company would skyrocket. A market value of several billion wouldn't just be possible, it would be inevitable.

He and Lauren had been deep in discussion about exactly this when the front door opened.

"Dad, Aunt Lauren."

Sienna walked in, looking effortlessly elegant as always. Her designer bag hung perfectly from her shoulder, her hair fell in perfect waves, and she carried herself with the confidence of someone who knew she was exceptional.

Lauren's face lit up immediately. "Sienna! You're back!"

The affection and pride in her voice was unmistakable. This was her niece, the one who mattered, the one worth celebrating.

Sienna set her bag down and settled gracefully onto the sofa. "What are you two talking about?"

"Still discussing CUAP," Logan said, leaning forward eagerly. "Since you can't get into Cole Corporation now, what's your next move? Has Dante mentioned anything?"

Sienna took a delicate sip of the water that had been waiting for her on the coffee table. "He said he'd help me contact Professor Nolan."

Logan's eyebrows shot up. "Nolan? The Nolan?"

Professor Nolan was legendary in the domestic AI field, one of the top experts, deeply connected with government projects, notoriously selective about who he worked with. His schedule was a closely guarded secret, and only a privileged few ever got the chance to meet him face-to-face.

Johnny Gray was one of Nolan's handful of direct disciples. And CUAP, the technology Logan was so desperate to access was rumored to have been developed by Nolan himself.

If the route through Johnny was closed off, then going straight to Nolan was the next logical step.

"That's excellent," Logan said, smiling broadly. But then a flicker of concern crossed his face. "Although... Johnny is Nolan's student. If he's said anything negative about you to his mentor, could that cause problems?"

Lauren waved a dismissive hand. "It won't be an issue, brother. You don't know Professor Nolan like I do. He values talent above everything else, reputation, connections, personal feelings, none of that matters to him. Only skill."

She looked at Sienna with undisguised pride. "And Sienna is a genius. Once she gets the chance to meet Nolan and demonstrate her expertise in AI, he'll recognize her brilliance immediately. He might even take her on as one of his direct disciples."

Logan nodded enthusiastically. "That's true. You're absolutely right."

He turned back to Sienna. "Has Dante mentioned when you might meet Professor Nolan?"

Sienna set her glass down, her expression calm and unbothered. "Next week. At the national tech exhibition. Apparently, Nolan will be attending."

Both Logan and Lauren perked up immediately.

They knew about the tech exhibition, of course, it was one of the most prestigious events in the industry. Government officials, top researchers, CEOs of major tech corporations, all gathered in one place.

But the Brown family company didn't have nearly enough status in the field to secure an invitation. They'd tried for years and been rejected every time.

However, with Dante's support...

Logan and Lauren both looked at Sienna expectantly.

She met their gazes evenly. "Dante gave me two tickets. But only two."

There was a beat of silence as Logan and Lauren processed this.

Two tickets. Which meant only one of them could accompany Sienna.

But neither seemed bothered by the limitation.

"It doesn't matter who goes with you," Logan said quickly. "As long as you're there, that's what counts."

"Exactly," Lauren agreed, her smile widening. "You're the one who needs to make an impression on Professor Nolan. Whoever accompanies you is irrelevant."

She reached over and patted Sienna's hand. "This is your opportunity, darling. Once Nolan sees what you're capable of, everything will fall into place. Cole Corporation, CUAP, all of it."

Sienna nodded serenely, as if her success was already a foregone conclusion.

Logan leaned back in his chair, his mind already racing ahead. "Once you're connected with Nolan, once you have access to that level of expertise and those resources... the possibilities are endless."

“And Dante is giving you this opportunity,” Lauren added, her voice warm with approval. “That man truly understands your value. Unlike some people.”

The unspoken reference to Elodie hung in the air.

“He does,” Sienna agreed softly. “He’s been very supportive.”

Lauren’s smile turned almost predatory. “As he should be. You’re brilliant, accomplished, beautiful, everything a man like him needs in a partner. It’s only natural that he’d choose you.”

Logan nodded along. “And once you’re officially together, once you’re the Luna of the Bellini Pack, the opportunities for our family will multiply exponentially.”

“The project he already gave us is just the beginning,” Lauren said, her eyes gleaming. “Imagine what else will come once Sienna is truly established in that world.”

They talked for another hour, strategizing, planning, envisioning the glorious future that awaited them once Sienna secured her place.

Not once did any of them express concern for Elodie.

Elodie’s POV

Dante was always busy. Always traveling, always in meetings, always somewhere that wasn’t here.

For the next couple of days, he was away on another business trip, and Liora was home alone with just Sabina and the staff.

I knew she was bored. Lonely. So when my phone rang and her name popped up on the screen, I wasn’t surprised.

“Mommy, when are you coming home?”

Her voice was small, hopeful.

The past two days at Cole had been hectic, back-to-back meetings, deadlines, code reviews. I’d barely had time to think about anything else. The pain from that encounter at the jewelry store had dulled into something more manageable. Buried, but not gone.

“Is Daddy there?” I asked, even though I already knew the answer.

“No, he’s still on his trip.”

Something in my chest loosened.

If Dante wasn't there, I could go. I could spend time with my daughter without feeling like I was suffocating. Without smelling Sienna's perfume or seeing evidence of her existence everywhere I looked.

"Okay," I said. "I'll come over after work."

"Really?!" Her excitement was instant, pure. "Thank you, Mommy! I love you!"

"Love you too, baby."

When I got to the estate that evening, Liora was waiting by the door. The second she saw me, she launched herself into my arms.

"You came! You really came!"

I held her tight, breathing in the scent of her shampoo, and for a moment, everything felt okay.

She dragged me inside, talking a mile a minute about school, some drama with her friends, a project she was working on, a new game she'd discovered and was completely obsessed with.

"You have to play it with me, Mommy! Please?"

How could I say no to that face?

After she finished her homework, I checked it twice, like I always did. We settled onto the couch with her tablet. She showed me how the game worked, walking me through the tutorial with the kind of patience only a six-year-old who's passionate about something can have.

We played for over an hour. Team matches where we had to work together, laughing when we failed spectacularly and celebrating when we actually won.

Liora was glowing. Happy in a way I hadn't seen in weeks.

"This is so fun!" she squealed, bouncing on the couch. "We should play every night!"

Every night.

Like this could be normal. Like I could just come here whenever she wanted and everything would be fine.

But I didn't say that. I just smiled and ran my fingers through her hair. "We'll see, baby."

That night, she didn't want to sleep alone.

"Can you stay with me, Mommy? Please?"

I looked toward the master bedroom down the hall, the room I'd shared with Dante for seven years, the room that probably still smelled like Sienna now and I felt my stomach turn.

“Of course I’ll stay with you,” I said.

Liora’s face lit up, and she grabbed my hand, pulling me upstairs to her room.

We lay in her bed together, her small body curled against mine, and she talked until she couldn’t keep her eyes open anymore.

“I missed you, Mommy,” she mumbled sleepily.

“I missed you too, sweetheart.”

“Promise you’ll come back more?”

My throat tightened. “I promise.”

She fell asleep a few minutes later, her breathing evening out, her little hand still clutching my shirt.

I stayed awake for a long time, just watching her.

This was what mattered. Not Dante, not Sienna, not any of it.

Just her.

The next day, Thursday, I decided to make dinner.

Liora had been asking for my cooking, and honestly, it felt good to be in the kitchen again. To do something with my hands that wasn’t typing code or answering emails.

I made her favorites: stir-fried vegetables, honey-glazed chicken, and rice the way she liked it. The smells filled the kitchen, warm and familiar.

I’d just turned off the range hood and was reaching for the serving dishes when I heard Liora’s voice from the living room.

“Daddy! You’re back!”

I froze.

The dish in my hands felt suddenly heavy.

Dante was home.

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Chapter 73: Chapter 74

Elodie's POV

Then I heard his voice, that deep Alpha timbre that used to make my pulse quicken, but makes my chest tighten so much now.

“Have you eaten yet?”

“Not yet, but Mommy's almost done cooking!” Liora's voice carried from the living room, bright with excitement.

“Really? Is that so?”

I stood in the kitchen, gripping the edge of the counter so hard my knuckles went white.

The mate bond, so thin and frayed as it was, pulsed weakly in my chest. Even after everything, my wolf still recognized him. Still wanted to go to him.

I shoved that instinct down and forced myself to walk out with the serving platter. I would never do that again. I was never going anywhere near Dante.

When I entered the dining room, Dante was coming in from the foyer with Liora practically bouncing beside him. He'd loosened his tie, and even exhausted from travel, he carried himself with that effortless authority that came with being Alpha of one of the most powerful Packs in the country.

“Mommy! Look, Daddy came home early!” Liora beamed.

I let my gaze flick toward him for barely a second before looking away. “I can see that.”

My voice came out flat, and cold I felt my wolf whimper at the coldness. Good. Slowly, we were detaching. The earlier the better.

I pulled off my apron and handed it to Sabina, who took it with a concerned glance. We all took our usual seats. Dante at the head like the Alpha he was, Liora to his right, and me across from them.

The perfect Pack family.

Except we weren't. Not anymore.

Liora dug into her food enthusiastically, then tilted her head at Dante. "I thought you weren't supposed to be back until tomorrow? You told me Friday."

"Finished the negotiations early." He cut into his steak with precise movements. "No point staying in Milan when everything was settled."

"Oh! That's good then."

The Bellini Pack didn't enforce the old-fashioned dining rules some traditional Packs still held onto. Liora was free to talk, to ask questions, and Dante, despite being a man who commanded board rooms and Pack meetings with just his presence always made time to answer her.

He was a good father.

He just wasn't a good husband.

My wolf curled up inside me, wounded and confused. She didn't understand why our mate barely looked at us anymore. Why the bond felt like it was dying inch by inch.

"Mommy, how come you're not saying anything?" Liora looked at me with those big curious eyes.

I managed a gentle smile. "I'm just happy listening to you talk, sweetheart. Tell Daddy about that project you're working on at school."

"Oh! Right!"

She launched into an animated story, and I went back to pushing food around my plate.

From the corner of my eye, I saw Sabina watching me. She'd been with the Bellini Pack for decades, she'd served Nonna before Dante was even born. She knew Pack dynamics better than anyone.

She could see what was happening. Could see the bond deteriorating, could see me fading.

But Dante? He seemed completely oblivious. Or maybe he just didn't care.

He responded to Liora, ate his dinner, exuded that calm Alpha energy that made everyone around him feel secure.

Everyone except me.

His phone buzzed on the table, the custom ringtone he'd set for Pack family.

He glanced at it, then swiped to answer, putting it on speaker without interrupting his meal. "Nonna."

"Another business trip? You're going to work yourself into an early grave, boy." Nonna's voice came through, warm but chiding in that way only she could manage.

“Just got back actually.” There was a hint of amusement in his tone, she was one of the few people who could talk to him like that. “Miss me already?”

“Don’t be cheeky. I haven’t seen my granddaughter or Elodie in almost a month. The weather’s turning cold, and these old bones need warmth. Tomorrow, we’re all going to the hot springs estate. The whole family.”

My stomach dropped.

The Bellini Pack’s hot springs resort. A full day. With Dante. Pretending everything was fine.

“Understood,” Dante said simply, like it was already decided.

After Nonna hung up, Liora was practically jumping in her seat. “Hot springs! We get to go to the hot springs again! This is the best!”

Dante set his phone down and finally looked at me, really looked at me for the first time all evening. “I’ll have someone pick you up from work tomorrow evening.”

I kept my eyes on my plate. “I’ll just drive myself. It’s on the way from the office anyway.”

“No, Mommy, come with us!” Liora grabbed my arm. “Please? The resort is so far, and it’s really boring sitting in the car by myself all that time.”

I hesitated.

The last thing I wanted was to be trapped in a car with Dante for over an hour. The silence would be suffocating. Or worse, he’d spend the entire drive on the phone with work, treating me like I wasn’t even there.

But Liora was looking at me with those pleading eyes, and I felt my resolve crumble.

“...Alright,” I said quietly. “I’ll come with you.”

“Yay!” She hugged my arm happily.

I forced a small smile for her sake, even though my chest felt tight.

After dinner, my phone rang, it was Johnny’s custom ringtone.

“I need to take this,” I said, already standing.

Dante and Liora had settled into the living room, him with his tablet reviewing something, her curled up beside him with a book. I walked outside onto the terrace where I could have some privacy.

“Hey,” I answered. “What’s up?”

“Sorry to bother you so late,” Johnny said, “but I’m looking at the framework for the new app and I’m running into some issues with the integration. Can you walk me through your logic on the backend architecture?”

“Of course.”

We talked for over half an hour, going through code line by line, discussing potential solutions to the bottleneck he’d identified. It was technical, focused, and for those thirty minutes, I could forget about everything else.

When I finally hung up and came back inside, Liora looked up from where she was still sitting with Dante.

“Mommy, you’ve been getting so many phone calls lately,” she said, her tone curious. “And you talk for really long every night. You didn’t used to do that...”

I felt Dante’s eyes on me.

Even Sabina, who was clearing the last of the dishes, paused slightly.

Because Liora was right. I used to barely use my phone. Used to be available at all times for Dante, for Liora, for whatever the household needed.

Now I was taking long calls every evening, disappearing to deal with work they knew nothing about.

“It’s just work stuff,” I said, keeping my tone neutral. “Nothing important. I’m going to head upstairs and finish some things.”

“Oh... okay.” Liora looked a little disappointed, like she’d wanted me to stay.

But I couldn’t. Couldn’t sit in that living room with Dante pretending everything was normal while my wolf whimpered pathetically inside me.

I went upstairs to Liora’s room, the guest space I’d been using and opened my laptop.

Johnny had sent over the files he needed me to review, and I dove into them immediately, grateful for the distraction.

This was easier. Code made sense. It followed logic. It didn’t lie to you or choose someone else or make you feel like you were slowly disappearing.

I was deep into debugging a particularly tricky algorithm when I heard small footsteps.

Liora appeared in the doorway, fresh from her bath, her hair still damp.

“What are you working on, mommy?” she asked, padding over to look at my screen.

“Just some programming for work.” I tilted the laptop so she could see. “Remember when I showed you how if-then statements work?”

“Oh yeah!” Her eyes lit up. “The computer decides what to do based on the rules you give it.”

“Exactly.”

Over the years, even while I’d been playing the perfect Luna and devoted wife, I hadn’t completely abandoned my skills. Whenever I had spare time, late at night after everyone was asleep, or early mornings before anyone woke up, I’d work on programs. Design systems. Keep my mind sharp.

And sometimes, when Liora got curious, I’d teach her little things. Basic concepts. The building blocks of logic and code.

She climbed onto the bed next to me now, watching as I worked through the problem.

“That looks really complicated,” she said after a moment.

“It is. But that’s what makes it interesting.”

“Is this for your new job? The one you go to during the day?”

I paused, my fingers stalling on the keyboard.

She’d noticed. Of course she had.

“Yes,” I said carefully. “It’s for Cole Corporation.”

“Oh.” She was quiet for a moment. “Do you like it there?”

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 74 - 75 [1,597 words]

Chapter 74: Chapter 75

Elodie’s POV

The truth was, I didn’t mind being alone.

Actually, I preferred it.

Here, in this empty resort with just the rain and the hot springs and my thoughts, I could breathe. Could exist without having to perform. Without having to pretend I was okay.

So I stayed. Through Saturday. Into Sunday.

I read. I soaked in the springs. I ordered room service and ate in silence.

And I didn't check my phone obsessively. Didn't wait for messages that wouldn't come.

By Sunday afternoon, I figured it was time to head back. Face reality. Go back to my empty apartment and prepare for another week of work.

That's when my phone rang.

And it was Nonna.

"Elodie, dear, I spoke with Dante this morning. Told him to drive up to the resort tonight and bring you home properly. Has he called you yet?"

My throat tightened.

No. He hadn't called. Hadn't texted. Hadn't acknowledged my existence since Thursday.

And Liora? She'd vanished yesterday morning without a word and hadn't reached out since.

But I wasn't going to tell Nonna that. Wasn't going to worry her or create more family drama.

"Yes," I lied. "He did."

"Oh good." Relief flooded her voice. "I was worried he'd forgotten with how busy he's been. I'm glad he's coming to get you."

After checking on her health, she said her cold was better, then we hung up.

I stared at my phone for a long moment.

Nonna said Dante would come pick me up. That he'd promised her.

But it was already past dinner time, and I hadn't heard a word from him.

I waited anyway. Ate dinner at the resort restaurant alone, surrounded by couples and families, feeling like a ghost nobody could see.

By nine PM, I gave up.

The resort was over an hour and a half from my apartment. If I waited any longer, I'd be getting home after midnight.

And Dante clearly wasn't coming.

“Can you arrange a car to take me back to the city?” I asked the front desk.

“Of course, Luna. Right away.”

Twenty minutes later, I was in the backseat of a town car, watching the mountains disappear behind us as we descended toward the city.

I was exhausted. The kind of bone-deep tired that comes from emotional devastation rather than physical exertion.

I let my eyes close, my head resting against the window.

My phone rang, jarring me awake.

I fumbled for it, my heart doing that stupid hopeful thing where it thought maybe it would be Liora. I wasn't hoping for Dante to reach out. Not anymore.

It was Cara.

“Hey,” I answered, my voice rough with sleep.

“That bitch!” Cara's voice was pure fury.

I sat up straighter. “What? Are you okay?”

“Oh, I'm fine. Sorry, I'm just raging about someone. Not you, obviously.”

“What happened?”

“You know that charity gala I had to go to tonight? The one for the children's hospital?” She didn't wait for me to respond. “Well, guess who I ran into? Your waste-of-space father and Sienna.”

My stomach dropped.

“Listen to this,” Cara continued, her voice getting more heated. “So there's this whole scene right in the middle of the gala. Some girl, young, early twenties maybe, from a prominent Pack family, she walks right up to Sienna and starts calling her a homewrecker. Says Sienna stole her fiancé.”

My breath caught.

“This girl is pissed,” Cara went on. “She throws a full glass of red wine right in Sienna's face. It's dripping down her dress, total chaos. Security's trying to intervene, but this girl won't back down. She's from the Morrison Pack, you know, old money, serious connections, so nobody can just throw her out.”

I pressed my hand to my chest, trying to calm my racing heart.

“The whole room is watching,” Cara said. “Your father’s trying to smooth things over, Sienna’s crying, though honestly, I think she was hamming it up and this girl just keeps going, calling her every name in the book.”

“Cara—”

“But wait, it gets worse.” Her voice dropped, and I could hear the anger simmering beneath it. “I’m standing there watching this whole mess unfold, thinking karma’s finally catching up to her, when guess who walks in?”

No.

“Your husband,” Cara spat. “Dante fucking Bellini. Shows up like some kind of knight in shining armor.”

The car suddenly felt too small. Too hot. I couldn’t breathe.

I went completely still.

“And here’s the thing,” Cara said, her voice tight with barely controlled rage. “This wasn’t some private event. This was a massive charity gala, A-list guests, Pack leaders from across the country, the whole thing was being *live-streamed*.”

My hands started shaking.

“Sienna and your father aren’t exactly celebrity level, but when the Alpha of the Bellini Pack shows up to defend her and walks out with her in his arms? Yeah, that got captured on camera and broadcast to thousands of people in real-time.”

Oh shit!

My phone buzzed. Cara had sent me something.

“I’m sending you the video,” she said. “I’m sorry. I just... you need to see it. Before someone else shows you or you hear about it from some gossip channel.”

“Okay,” I whispered.

“Call me after. I mean it, Elodie. Don’t go through this alone.”

“I will.”

I hung up and stared at my phone.

The video file sat there, waiting.

I didn’t want to open it. Didn’t want to see.

But I had to know.

I tapped it with trembling fingers.

The video started mid-event. There was music playing in the background, people mingling, the camera sweeping across the elegant ballroom. The quality was good, professional live-stream setup.

Then the camera swung toward a commotion.

A young woman, in her early twenties, beautiful, wearing an expensive gown was walking purposefully toward someone. Which was Sienna.

Even on the small screen, even from a distance, I recognized her immediately. That perfect posture. That designer dress.

The girl reached her, and even though the audio was muffled by the music and crowd noise, I could see her mouth moving. Angry. Accusatory.

Then she threw her drink.

Red wine splashed across Sienna's face and chest, staining her white dress crimson.

The crowd around them gasped and pulled back. The camera zoomed in.

Sienna's face was a picture of shock and hurt, the perfect victim.

Logan rushed over, trying to intervene. The girl was still yelling, gesturing wildly.

Then a man appeared, probably the girl's fiancé based on how he grabbed her arm. They started arguing. His family arrived moments later, older Pack members, clearly wealthy and influential based on how they carried themselves.

And they tore into the Browns.

I couldn't hear most of what was being said, but their body language was clear. They were furious. Insulting. Logan kept trying to smooth things over, his posture apologetic, but the girl's family wasn't having it.

They kept going, and I could see Logan's expression darkening. Lauren looked murderous. Even Sophia seemed rattled.

The Brown family was being publicly humiliated.

And then everything changed.

The camera panned suddenly, someone important must have entered because the crowd shifted, parting automatically.

Now it was Dante.

My husband walked into frame, and even through a screen, even from far away, his presence was undeniable. Alpha energy radiating off him in waves. People stepped back without even realizing they were doing it.

He walked straight to Sienna.

Didn't acknowledge anyone else. Didn't look at the girl or her family or Logan.

Just went directly to Sienna, who looked up at him with those big, tearful eyes.

And my husband... so called mate took off his jacket and draped it around her shoulders.

The gesture was gentle. Protective. Intimate.

My vision blurred.

He turned to face the girl's family then, and even though I couldn't hear what he said, I saw their expressions change instantly. From angry and aggressive to shocked and... afraid.

Dante said something, just a few words based on the movement of his lips and then he turned back to Sienna.

And he picked her up.

Actually lifted her into his arms like she was something precious and fragile.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, burying her face against his shoulder.

And he carried her out.

The camera followed them, of course it did, this was the Alpha of the Bellini Pack making a dramatic exit and I watched my husband walk out of that ballroom with another woman in his arms while thousands of people watched.

The girl's family tried to follow him, clearly attempting to apologize or explain, but Dante's security blocked them.

By the end of the video, those same people who'd been so arrogant and aggressive were practically groveling. Trying to make nice with Logan and the Browns, probably terrified of what Dante might do in retaliation.

But Logan and the others just ignored them and followed Dante out.

The video ended.

I sat there in the back of the car, staring at the black screen.

He'd promised Nonna he would come get me tonight.

Instead, he'd gone to a gala where Sienna was.

And when she needed him, he'd dropped everything, including his promise to his grandmother, including any consideration for his wife and he'd gone to her.

He'd given her his jacket.

He'd carried her out in his arms.

In front of everyone.

On a live stream.

The symbolism wasn't lost on me. Wasn't lost on anyone who'd watched.

The Alpha protecting his chosen one.

And I felt something inside me finally shatter completely.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 75 - 76 [1,382 words]

Chapter 75: Chapter 76

Elodie's POV

I shouldn't have done it.

Shouldn't have opened my laptop when I got back to my apartment. Shouldn't have searched for the gala. Shouldn't have looked at the comments.

But I couldn't help myself.

Like pressing on a bruise to see if it still hurts.

The video had already gone viral. The gala had been a big event, A-list celebrities, influential Pack leaders, the kind of star-studded lineup that guaranteed attention.

And now, because of what happened with Sienna, it was trending everywhere.

I scrolled through the comments, my stomach twisting with each one.

“Wait, that gorgeous man who carried her out is THE Dante Bellini? The Alpha of the Bellini Pack?”

“How did I not know he looked like THAT? I knew he was some billionaire prodigy who built multiple companies before he turned thirty, but nobody mentioned he’s basically a Greek god!”

“He keeps such a low profile. That’s why we’ve only heard about him but never seen him. Mystery man energy is so attractive.”

My hands were shaking as I kept scrolling.

“Okay so let me get this straight, that girl caught her fiancé flirting with Mr. Bellini’s girlfriend?”

“I know the girl’s fiancé. He’s decent-looking, comes from old money, but compared to Dante Bellini? Please. We’re talking about completely different leagues here. The Alpha of one of the most powerful Packs in the country vs some random heir? Not even close.”

Someone had identified Sienna. Of course they had.

“OMG I KNOW HER! She’s that genius AI researcher! She’s only 25 and already has a PhD from one of the top universities in the world. Plus she does rally racing, extreme sports, and I heard she’s some kind of coding prodigy too. This woman is literally the main character from a novel!”

Each word was a knife.

“Did you see the way Dante looked at her during that racing event last month? His eyes were filled with so much pride and admiration. That’s true love right there.”

“I SAW THAT! The way he watched her... God, I want someone to look at me like that. They’re absolutely perfect for each other!”

“Right? Look at her resume and then look at him. Literal power couple. I’m obsessed.”

My vision blurred with tears, but I kept reading. Kept torturing myself.

“Wait, so people think this genius goddess would actually flirt with some random girl’s fiancé when she has DANTE BELLINI? Be serious. She’s not an idiot.”

“Exactly! In the video, you can see the fiancé approaching HER. She was probably just being polite. That girl overreacted by throwing wine. Way too dramatic.”

“For real though, sometimes being too perfect is a curse. Poor Sienna’s beauty and charm literally caused this whole scene. Not her fault everyone falls for her!”

I slammed my laptop shut.

My whole body was trembling.

Nonna had told Dante to pick me up. Had specifically asked him to drive to the resort and bring me home.

But by ten PM, my phone hadn't made a single sound.

No call. No text. Nothing.

Maybe he'd been on his way. Maybe for a brief moment, he'd actually remembered I existed and started driving toward the mountains.

But then Sienna had needed rescuing from that scene at the gala, and just like that, I'd been erased from his mind completely.

Forgotten. Again and again. Always just like before.

I didn't let myself think about it. What good would that do?

When I finally made it back to my apartment around eleven, I showered and fell into bed.

And surprisingly, maybe because I was too exhausted to feel anything anymore, I slept.

Deep, heavy sleep. The kind where you don't dream because your mind has just shut down completely.

The next morning, I woke up and went through the motions.

Shower. Coffee. Getting dressed for work.

Everything felt mechanical, like I was watching myself from outside my body. Going through the routine of being alive without actually living.

I drove to Cole Corporation and buried myself in code. Let the logic and structure of programming fill my head so there wasn't room for anything else.

At lunch, I grabbed a salad from the cafeteria and sat in a corner of the break room, picking at the lettuce without really tasting it.

My phone rang.

Liora's name flashed on the screen, and my heart did this painful squeeze in my chest.

This was the first time she'd called since Saturday morning. Since she'd snuck out of the resort to go be with them.

Two full days of silence.

I answered, trying to keep my voice normal. "Hi, baby."

“Mommy...” Her voice was soft, tentative.

“Mm.” I swallowed hard. “Have you eaten lunch yet?”

“Yeah! I just finished!”

She sounded cheerful. Happy.

Of course she did.

She’d spent the weekend having fun while I’d been left behind.

There was this awful silence, and I could hear her breathing on the other end, like she was working up the courage to say something.

“Mommy, are you... are you upset with me?”

The question hit me right in the chest.

Upset? I was devastated. Broken. Feeling like my own daughter was choosing to leave me behind just like everyone else.

But I couldn’t tell her that.

“No, sweetheart,” I said quietly. “I’m not upset.”

LIORA~

That Saturday morning at the hot spring resort, Liora had woken up early, bored and restless.

Her mom was still sleeping, and the resort was quiet. She’d wandered out to the main area, tablet in hand, when her phone rang.

Aunt Sienna.

“Hey, sweetie!” Sienna’s voice was warm and cheerful. “Guess what? Your daddy and I are going out today, there’s this amazing amusement park about an hour from where you are. Want to come with us?”

Liora’s face had lit up immediately. “Really? Yes! I want to come!”

“Perfect! I’ll send a car to pick you up. Can you be ready in like twenty minutes?”

“Yeah!”

She’d hung up and rushed back to the room, moving as quietly as possible while she threw some things into her bag.

Her mom was still asleep, curled up on her side, looking tired even in sleep.

For a second, Liora hesitated. Should she wake her? Tell her she was leaving?

But then her phone buzzed with a text from the driver saying he was waiting outside.

And Aunt Sienna had said it was just her and Daddy going. If Liora asked her mom to come, would that ruin it? Would Daddy get upset?

Things had been weird between her parents lately. She wasn't stupid, she could see that they barely talked anymore, that her mom seemed sad all the time.

So maybe it was better not to say anything.

She'd slipped out of the room quietly, closing the door with barely a sound, and hurried downstairs.

The driver was waiting exactly where Sienna said he'd be, and within minutes, they were heading down the mountain.

The weekend had been incredible.

They'd gone to the amusement park, and Daddy had won her a giant stuffed bear that was almost as big as she was. They'd ridden every roller coaster, eaten way too much cotton candy, and Aunt Sienna had been so much fun, laughing and joking and not acting like a boring grown-up at all.

Then they'd gone to this fancy Italian restaurant for dinner, and Aunt Sienna had let her order whatever she wanted, including the chocolate lava cake that cost almost as much as an entrée.

By the time they finished dinner, it was late, almost ten PM and the drive back to the city was over an hour.

Monday morning, sitting in the cafeteria after lunch, Liora suddenly thought about her mom.

She'd been gone all weekend and hadn't called even once.

Guilt twisted in her stomach.

What if her mom had woken up Saturday morning and been worried? What if she'd been upset that Liora left without saying anything?

She pulled out her phone and stared at it for a moment.

Part of her didn't want to call. Didn't want to deal with her mom being sad or asking questions about where she'd been.

But she felt bad. Really bad.

So she hit the call button and called Elodie.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 76 - 77[1,062 words]

Chapter 76: Chapter 77

Liora~

When her mom asked if she'd eaten lunch, Liora felt the tension drain out of her shoulders.

She didn't sound angry at all. Not about Liora sneaking away Saturday morning, not about the whole weekend spent with Daddy and Aunt Sienna.

Relief washed over her.

See? She knew her mom would never actually be mad at her!

Her mom loved her too much to stay upset about something like that.

But then Liora thought about something else, something she'd noticed over the past few days.

Her mom hadn't been calling her every single day like she used to. Hadn't been texting constantly asking where she was, what she was doing, if she needed anything.

Before, it used to be multiple calls a day. Morning check-ins, afternoon texts, evening calls before bed.

Sometimes it felt like... a lot.

Like her mom was always worried, always hovering, always needing to know everything.

But lately? Her mom had been quieter. Less clingy.

And honestly? Liora kind of liked it.

It felt more grown-up. More independent.

Like her mom was finally trusting her to be okay on her own, instead of treating her like a baby who needed constant supervision.

Yeah, this was definitely better.

Her mom was changing, and Liora thought it was a good thing.

A really good thing.

ELODIE'S POV~

I didn't ask where they'd been.

Didn't want to picture it, the three of them together, laughing, being the family I could never seem to make us.

After Liora and I talked about school for a few minutes, safe territory, nothing that would hurt, I told her I loved her and hung up.

Then I sat there at my desk, staring at nothing, trying to convince myself I was okay.

Johnny stopped by later. "Tech exhibition's tomorrow. You ready?" He said.

I looked up. "Yeah. Should we meet here and go together?"

"Sounds good. Eight-thirty work for you?"

"Perfect."

Finally. Something that mattered. Something that was mine.

The next morning, I left early to beat traffic.

I was maybe twenty minutes into the drive when the car started making this awful grinding noise.

My wolf stirred uneasily, sensing something wrong before I even fully processed it.

Then the engine just died.

I managed to get partly onto the shoulder, but I was still blocking half a lane, and within seconds I heard tires screaming behind me.

The impact jolted me forward hard against my seatbelt.

Then another crash. And another.

My heart was pounding, my wolf instincts screaming danger, and I forced myself to breathe, to think, to move.

I got out on shaking legs.

Three cars behind me, all crumpled together. Drivers already climbing out, faces red with rage.

“Are you kidding me?!”

“What the hell were you thinking?!”

“You just stopped in the middle of the goddamn road!”

“I’m sorry,” I called out, my voice barely carrying. “I’m so sorry, the car just died, I didn’t—”

But they weren’t listening. Just kept yelling while I fumbled for my phone with trembling hands.

I called roadside assistance.

“Your estimated wait time is forty to fifty minutes—”

No. No, no, no.

The exhibition started in less than an hour.

My chest felt tight, like I couldn’t get enough air. This couldn’t be happening. Not today. Not when I finally had something good, something important, something that was mine.

I quickly dialed Johnny. “My car broke down. There was an accident. I’m okay but I’m stuck, you guys need to go without me.”

“What? Elodie, we can wait—”

“No.” My voice cracked slightly. “Don’t. This is going to take forever. Just go. I’ll get there when I can.”

“Let me send someone to pick you up—”

“It’ll take too long with this traffic. Just go. Please.”

“Okay. But text me the second you’re on your way.”

I hung up and just stood there on the side of the road, watching cars inch past, listening to angry drivers still shouting at me.

Everything I touched fell apart.

Everything.

By the time I dealt with the police report, the tow truck, all of it, the exhibition would be over. I'd miss Professor Nolan. Miss everything.

"Car trouble?"

I looked up sharply.

Harrison. Harrison, standing there with a coffee cup, having apparently crossed from the other side of the street.

Of course. Because my humiliation needed witnesses from Dante's inner circle.

"What are you doing here?" The exhaustion in my voice was impossible to hide.

"Getting coffee." He nodded toward a café behind him. "Saw the accident. You alright?"

"Car's dead. I'm fine."

He looked at my car, at the traffic, at the other drivers still glaring at me. "Where were you headed?"

"Tech exhibition at the convention center." I couldn't keep the defeat out of my voice. "Or I was. I work for Cole Corporation now."

Something flickered across his face, surprise, maybe. "The tech exhibition? I'm headed there too. Wilson Group is presenting."

Perfect. Of course Dante's company would be there. Of course I couldn't have this one thing without his world bleeding into it.

"Great," I said flatly.

My phone buzzed in my hand just as I finished speaking with Harrison, my entire mouth tasted bitter just by merely responding to his words. I had no interest in speaking to any of them.

Johnny: Elodie, did you get help yet? We're almost there but I can turn around*

I quickly typed back.

Me: Yes, someone's handling it. Go ahead, I'm getting a ride. Will be there soon

Three dots appeared immediately.

Johnny: You sure? I don't want you stuck out there

Me: I'm sure. Don't wait for me

Johnny: Who's giving you the ride? Want me to send Marcus back to get you instead?

I hesitated, my thumb hovering over the screen. I really didn't want to bother him right now. Telling him that one of Dante's friends had made an appearance right beside me would make Johnny agitated and he would be concerned and would try driving over and I didn't want that. I could handle this.

Me: Got it covered. Just save me a seat. I'll explain later*

Johnny: Okay but text me when you're 10 minutes out. And if anything changes*

Me: I will. Promise

Johnny: Alright. Be safe

I pocketed my phone just as Harrison finished his call and walked back over.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 77 - 78 [1,630 words]

Chapter 77: Chapter 78

ELODIE'S POV~

I hung up the phone and just... stood there for a second. Staring at the screen. The driver couldn't make it. Of course he couldn't. Nothing was working today. Nothing had been working for weeks, actually, but who was counting?

"I'll have someone handle this for you."

Harry's voice cut through the fog in my head. I looked up, startled. He was already pulling out his own phone, fingers moving across the screen with that casual efficiency that came so naturally to wolves in his position.

"Where are you going? I'll take you."

I blinked. Once. Twice.

"I—" My mouth opened but nothing came out at first. "You don't have to—"

"It's fine."

It wasn't a question.

Five minutes later I was sitting in the backseat of his car and I wanted to crawl out of my own skin.

We sat with distance between us. Enough space that I could've fit another person there, maybe two. The leather seat was cool against my legs, cold almost, even through my dress. I pressed my palms flat against my thighs, tried to focus on that. The texture. The temperature. Anything but the awkwardness sitting in my throat like something I couldn't swallow.

"Thank you," I said. My voice sounded small and I hated that.

"It's nothing." He said.

I frowned and looked out the window. Watched the city blur past, all the glass and steel and people who probably had their shit together. People whose husbands actually wanted them. People who didn't spend their nights wondering if the bond was supposed to hurt this much or if it was just—

Stop.

I bit the inside of my cheek. Hard enough to taste blood.

Harry wasn't... well we weren't close. We'd never been close. Most times before this he'd barely looked at me. Like I was part of the furniture in whatever room we happened to be in. And that time at the racetrack, goodness, that had been—

Uncomfortable. Tense. He'd looked at me like he was trying to figure something out and I didn't want to be figured out. Didn't want anyone seeing too much.

Though last time we'd run into each other he'd actually greeted me. Said hello like a normal person. That had been... strange. Unexpected.

Still... This was worse. This small space.

Harry started making calls. His voice low, and clipped, and all business. Something about a contract. Something about the Packs in Eastern Europe. I stopped listening.

I was grateful, actually. That he was busy. That he wasn't trying to make conversation because I didn't... no I couldn't...

My phone buzzed in my lap.

I looked down. A message from Cara.

'Where are you? Everything okay?'

My fingers hovered over the keyboard. What was I supposed to say?

I simply typed, 'I'm fine. On my way.'

I sent it before I could overthink it. Locked my phone. Pressed it against my thigh and stared out the window again.

Forty minutes felt like four hours.

The silence between Harry's calls was suffocating. I could hear everything. The hum of the engine. The whisper of air conditioning. My own breathing, which I was trying to keep even and quiet and normal even though my chest felt tight. Like something was wrapped around my ribs and squeezing.

Finally... thanks goodness... The car stopped.

I looked up. We were at the exhibition. The building all lit up against the darkening sky, people in expensive clothes filtering through the entrance. The tech world and the Pack world colliding like they always did in this city.

I needed to get out. Needed air. Needed to not be in this small space anymore with my thoughts eating me alive.

"Thank you," I said again as I fumbled for the door handle. My hands were shaking. Just slightly. Just enough that I hoped he didn't notice.

Harry nodded. Didn't smile. Didn't really look at me.

I gave a brief nod back, too quick, too stiff and turned to leave.

Elodie had barely made it ten steps when another car pulled up.

It was a black and expensive car. The kind of car that made people turn their heads.

Sienna was still standing there with her parents, about to head inside, when she noticed. Squinted at the car and At the license plate.

Wait.

No, that couldn't be...

But it was.

She walked over with her heels clicking, and knocked on the window. It rolled down, slowly.

"Harry?" She bent down, peering inside. "It's really you."

Harry looked... tired. Or maybe just done with the day. Hard to tell with him.

"What brings you here?" Sienna asked.

He got out and Straightened his jacket. "Was dropping a friend off."

Sienna's eyebrows went up just a fraction, but she didn't ask. Didn't push.

Her father and aunt, Logan and Lauren had noticed now too. They approached, and when they realized who it was, their whole demeanor shifted into something Respectful. The way wolves got around other powerful wolves.

"Harry," Logan said with a nod.

"Uncle. Aunt," Harry replied, politely but distant.

They exchanged pleasantries. The weather. The exhibition. Something about the Bellini Pack expanding, about how Logan had heard things, wanted to know if the rumors were true.

Harry's phone suddenly buzzed.

Once and then Twice.

He glanced at it, with his Jaw tightened just barely.

"Excuse me," he said, already lifting the phone to his ear.

Sienna caught her aunt's eye. Lauren gave a small shrug. They'd been dismissed. Politely,

"We should head in," Sienna said. "Exhibition's starting soon."

Logan nodded, already turning toward the entrance.

But Sienna lingered. Just for a second.

Harry was on the phone now, voice low. Talking about Business. Always business. He wasn't even looking their way anymore.

Sienna's gaze drifted toward the exhibition entrance.

"Sienna?" her aunt called.

"Coming," she said.

ELODIE'S POV~

I saw Johnny at the entrance and my chest loosened just a little.

He smiled when he spotted me, waved me over. I walked faster, my heels clicking on the marble, and tried to arrange my face into something that looked normal.

"Hey," I said. Breathed it out more than said it.

Johnny leaned in. Close enough that I caught the scent of his cologne.

"The professor's here," he whispered.

My heart stopped.

Just. Stopped.

"What?"

"Professor Liam," Johnny said, pulling back to look at me. His eyebrow went up. "He's attending the exhibition. Didn't you—"

"No, I—" My hands were shaking. I clasped them together. Tight. "I didn't know."

Of course I didn't know. Why would I know? I'd been so focused on just getting here, on not falling apart, on preparing myself to see Dante and pretend I was fine that I hadn't even—

The professor.

Oh God.

Johnny's expression shifted. Less teasing now. "It's a good thing you found someone to help you then," he said. Softer. "If the professor knew you were late, he'd probably..."

He didn't finish. Didn't have to.

I knew.

I knew exactly what the professor would do. What he'd say. That look he'd give me, the one that said 'I expected better from you. I trained you better than this.'

Being late wasn't just being late. Not to him. It was disrespect. Carelessness. Proof that you weren't serious about the work, about the field, about anything that actually mattered.

And he already thought that about me.

Already looked at me like I was a disappointment. A waste of potential.

Ever since—

My throat tightened.

Ever since I graduated and got married. Ever since the Liora. Ever since my life became this thing I didn't recognize anymore.

He'd been furious. I'd never seen Professor Liam angry before that. He was always so controlled, so measured. But when I told him, when I showed up to his office with the ring on my finger and tried to explain that—

"You're throwing it away," he had said. His Voice flat and Cold. "Everything we worked for. Everything you could've been."

And I'd stood there, stomach barely showing, my bond humming under my skin, and tried to tell him it wasn't like that. That I could still work, still contribute, still—

But he'd just looked at me.

And I'd seen it. The exact moment I stopped being his protégé and became just another woman who chose a man over her career.

Just another failure.

I shivered.

Couldn't help it. The memory was too bitter to recall.

"Hey," Johnny said, touching my elbow a little. "You okay?"

"Yeah," I lied. "Yeah, I'm—"

Fine. I was going to say fine.

But the word stuck in my throat.

Johnny gave me this look. This sad, knowing look that made me want to scream or cry or both.

"It's good you weren't late," he said instead. Gently. Like he was trying to throw me a lifeline. "Really. He would've... yeah."

I nodded. Swallowed hard.

"Right. Good. That's—" My voice cracked. Just slightly. I cleared my throat. "That's good."

A pause.

People were streaming past us. People in their Expensive suits. Designer dresses. Wolves from Packs all over Europe, the northern territories, even some from overseas. All here to network, to see and be seen, to make deals that would shift power in ways humans would never understand.

And I was just. Standing here. Trying not to break.

"Have you seen him yet?" I asked. My voice sounded strange. Hollow. "The professor, I mean."

"Not yet. He's inside somewhere. Probably near the algorithm displays, you know how he is."

Yeah. I knew.

I used to know everything about how the professor thought. Used to be able to predict which projects would excite him, which theories he'd want to explore. We'd worked together for three years and I'd been good. Really good.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 78 - 79[1,041 words]

Chapter 78: Chapter 79

SIENNA'S POV~

The exhibition hall was packed.

I smoothed down my dress, the red one that made me look good under these lights and scanned the room. Tech displays were everywhere. People in expensive suits all pretending to care about algorithms and robotics when really they just wanted to make connections.

Same as me, I guess.

Aunt Lauren was saying something to Dad about one of the displays but I wasn't really listening. I was looking for—

Wait. A. Fucking. Second.

I blinked.

Elodie? Was that Elodie?

She was standing near the center of the hall, talking to some tall guy. Laughing. Actually laughing.

What the hell was she doing here?

"Is that..." Aunt Lauren had spotted her too.

"Yeah." My voice came out flat.

This didn't make sense. These exhibition spots were exclusive. You didn't just walk in off the street. You had to be someone. Had to matter.

And Elodie didn't. Not anymore.

She'd quit everything when she got pregnant. Dropped out of her programs, stopped working, just... gave up. And then she lost everything, every single thing. What was the point then?

Now she was doing what? Temping somewhere? I didn't keep track. Didn't care enough to.

So why was she here?

The guy she was talking to turned slightly and I got a better look at his face.

Oh.

"That's Johnny," I said.

Dad looked up. "Johnny?"

"Johnny Cole."

Dad's eyebrows went up. Even he knew that name.

Everyone knew Johnny. He was one of those people you wanted to know. Major player at Cole Industries, not just some guy in a suit, he was actually brilliant. Built half their tech himself. I'd heard his name dropped at parties, at Pack meetings. People from the European Packs wanted meetings with him. The Bellini Pack had tried to partner with Cole twice last year.

He was connected. Powerful. The kind of person who could open doors.

And he was with Elodie.

Talking to her like... like she belonged there.

I watched him introduce her to someone. Watched her smile and shake hands and play the part.

My jaw tightened.

"I didn't know she was working at Cole," Aunt Lauren said carefully.

Neither did I.

"Must be recent," I said. "Some entry-level thing probably."

But even as I said it, something felt off.

These spots weren't for entry-level employees. These were for executives. For people who mattered to the company.

Why would Johnny bring her?

"Should we say hello?" Aunt Lauren asked. "To Johnny, I mean. Your father's been wanting an introduction and—"

"I don't think so. At least not yet." I said softly, trying hard not to harden my tone.

Dad's eyes slowly followed her and my eyes twitched in annoyance.

"You look surprised dad." I said casually, folding my arms to my chest, trying hard not to clench them into a fist.

"Yeah... I am." He said and softly cleared his throat. "I actually knew that Elodie had joined Cole and left Wilson's group but I've never expected her to walk in with Johnny Zhang himself. I mean I expected her to come alone as a regular employee. But look at that. Johnny looks like he values her extremely."

My brows raised, taking every single movement of them, right across the room into consideration. Probably... dad was right.

Before I could even voice my thoughts, I heard someone call out, "Miss Brown, Mr Brown. Oh! What a pleasure to see you both are here."

We all turned to the voice and immediately put on our automatic, fake smiles and shook hands with the man.

"Mr Andy, what a pleasure to meet you." Dad said and I forced a smile to my face and hummed in agreement.

And then he began to speak and I couldn't help but join in the discussion despite how much I wanted to have my eyes pinned on Elodie and everything she was going to do today, in here. But the discussion was taking its curve to another end. About last night.

You see... We only had two tickets.

Then Mr. Andy sent one over this morning. Because of last night. Because everyone saw.

Dante's hand was on my waist at the gala. The cameras were taking evidence and Everyone was staring.

God, the way people looked at us.

At me. Finally,

"Miss Brown"

He began to say, turning fully to face me and I already know what he wants. Same thing they all want.

"Mr. Andy."

"Is Alpha Dante—"

"He'll be here."

I Don't even let him finish. I know. I always know.

Mrs. Chen appears out of nowhere. Her perfume makes my eyes water. "Sienna! After last night everyone's just... oh moon goddess, you must tell me everything—"

I smiled. Said something. I don't even know what.

More people came Drifting over and Circling us.

It's working. Whatever happened last night, whatever people think we were, it was indeed working.

They were looking at me.

Someone was talking about Pack alliances. Someone else about tech investments. Dad's laughing at something. Aunt Lauren's doing that thing where she touches people's arms when she talks.

And I'm just standing here and people keep coming over, trying to strike some conversation with me so we could get acquainted just because of Dante.

This was good.

This is what I wanted.

Right?

The crowd kept getting bigger. I could feel it. Feel eyes on us from across the hall.

But I turned toward Elodie's direction and my jaw tightened.

She's over there with that guy. Johnny. They're talking but she's looking over here. At the crowd around us.

At me.

Her face does this thing. Like she's in pain but trying to hide it. Then she looks away fast.

People kept pushing closer. Wanting to talk. To know me. Mr. Andy was introducing someone else, some investor from the European Packs. Mrs. Chen wouldn't stop touching my arm.

I glanced at Dad. He was smiling. Actually smiling. That proud look I'd only seen so many times in my life.

Aunt Lauren too. She caught my eye and there was this gleam there. This satisfaction.

We were the center of attention and they were eating it up.

So was I.

Wasn't I?

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 79 - 80 [1,456 words]

Chapter 79: Chapter 80

ELODIE'S POV~

Over here, at the far end of the hall, I was trying to focus on what Mr. Tyler was saying. Something about drone technology. The new models. How the stabilization systems had improved.

I wasn't really listening.

"Over there," Mr. Tyler said suddenly. He nodded toward the other side of the hall. "The Brown family. I'm sure everyone knows by now, right?"

I didn't want to look but I looked anyway.

Sienna. Logan and Aunt Lauren and That crowd around them that just kept growing.

"Miss Brown and Alpha Dante are close," Mr. Tyler continued. His voice had this edge to it. Disdain, maybe. "Now everyone's flocking over. Trying to get on their good side."

Alpha Dante.

My chest hurt. That same ache that wouldn't go away. That constant pressure right behind my ribs.

Johnny shifted beside me. I could feel him glance at me but I didn't look back.

"Mr. Tyler," Johnny said carefully. "Do you have some issue with the Brown family?"

Please stop talking about them. Please.

Mr. Tyler shook his head. "Not an issue, exactly. But... you know about last night, right? The charity gala? You heard about it, right?"

I didn't want to know. Didn't want to hear this. Not after I had seen the clip that Cara had showed me that left me devastated.

"That girl Xyla," he continued. "The one who had the argument with Miss Brown, she's the daughter of an old friend of mine. Known her since she was a child."

My hands were shaking. I clasped them together. Focused on the exhibit in front of me like it was the most interesting thing I'd ever seen.

The exhibit was a robotic arm. It was Industrial and boring. And yet I couldn't stop looking away.

"Xyla can be unpredictable," Mr. Tyler was saying. "But she's not unreasonable. Her fiancé, Lane, he was close to another girl a couple years back. They were about to break up. Then that girl got involved with Alpha Dante and suddenly..."

He trailed off.

But I understood. I understood perfectly.

Sienna had gotten close to someone's boyfriend. Then she'd moved on. To Dante. And the boyfriend went crawling back to his fiancée because Sienna didn't want him anymore.

Because she'd found someone better.

Someone like Dante.

The ache in my chest spread. Down to my stomach. Up to my throat.

"After Alpha Dante showed up at the gala last night," Mr. Tyler continued, "it's all over the internet. Photos and silly speculation. The netizens have been tearing into Xyla. She was so upset she couldn't stop crying."

I felt sick. Why? Because I knew what it means to break down, to cry, to pray for the ground to open up and swallow you. I know that ache. The ache that spreads through your bones, freezes you and wants to eat you alive and yet you don't know how to stop it. Because you feel like you're already dying.

Poor girl.

Xyla didn't deserve that. She was just... she was just another person hurt by Sienna's games. By Dante's... By whatever they were.

"My friend and Xyla were supposed to come today," Mr. Tyler said. "But after everything... They decided to stay home. They didn't want to face people. Didn't want to be the target."

Because Dante had sided with Sienna.

Publicly and At that gala.

I'd seen the photos. Couldn't help it. They were everywhere this morning that Cara had to send them to me. Dante's hand was on Sienna's waist. Both of them looked perfect. Powerful Together.

"Those old foxes found out about Miss Brown's connection to Alpha Dante," Mr. Tyler was saying. "Now they're all rushing to form alliances with the Brown family. Pathetic, really."

I looked back without meaning to.

The crowd around Sienna had doubled. Maybe tripled. People were pushing in. Smiling. Talking. All wanting a piece of whatever power she represented now.

Power she only had because of Dante.

Because he chose her.

Not me. Never me.

My throat was tight. Too tight.

"Elodie?" Johnny softly called.

"I'm fine," I said automatically.

I wasn't fine. Nothing was fine.

"The exhibition is really impressive this year," I added. Forced my voice to sound normal. Interested. "The advancements in AI integration—" I said instead, trying to deviate the attention on me so Mr. Tyler doesn't grow suspicious.

Mr. Tyler nodded. Started talking about the exhibits again. Something about machine learning and Neural networks.

The champagne continued to feel wrong in my hand.

I should've—

I don't know. I should've stayed home.

Johnny's elbow brushed mine, and I knew what was coming before he even opened his mouth. That shift in his posture, the way he angled himself just slightly to the left meant...

"Elodie."

God. Even his voice sounded like a warning.

I didn't want to look. I really, really didn't want to.

"He's here."

My chest did this stupid thing. This horrible, traitorous thing where it sort of... clenched. Like my wolf was trying to claw her way up through my ribcage, and I had to bite down on the inside of my cheek to keep me from screaming.

Dante. Of course he was here. Of course.

The Bellini Pack's tech empire stretched across half of Europe, and Dante had always been good with technology. Too good. The kind of good that meant he could probably track my phone if he wanted to, could probably access the guest list for this exhibition before I'd even—

Stop it.

Stop thinking about what he could do.

He was standing near the back exhibition hall, and the crowd around him moved like water, like they were pulled by some invisible current. Alpha energy does that. Makes people orbit without realizing they're doing it.

And next to him was Sienna.

She laughed at something someone said, her hand resting on his forearm. Casually and yet Possessive.

I looked away.

Too fast that Johnny noticed.

"Does he know you're here?" His voice was careful. Too careful. As though he didn't want to break me by raising his voice.

I shook my head, watching the bubbles rise in my champagne instead of watching... them.
"Probably not."

We didn't talk anymore. Not really. Not about anything that mattered.

When we did, when circumstances forced us into the same room, usually because of Liora, it was always about her. About pickup times and allergies and whether she'd eaten her vegetables. Surface things. Safe things.

Things that didn't require me to look at him too long or breathe in the scent of pine and winter that still made my wolf whine like a kicked dog.

So no. He wouldn't know I was here. Wouldn't know and wouldn't care, probably, and that thought felt like swallowing glass.

Johnny made this noise in his throat. Disapproving. "You're not going to go over there?"

I could hear what he wasn't saying. You're still his mate. Technically. Legally. The bond hasn't been severed yet, and if you walked up there right now and made him acknowledge you in front of all these people, in front of her...

"No need," I said.

My voice came out steadier than I expected. I almost felt proud of it.

Johnny's expression said he thought I was being a coward.

Maybe I was.

But I'd learned, moon goddess, I'd learned, that pushing Dante only made things worse. If I cornered him here, in public, surrounded by half the pack alphas in Europe... he'd push back. He'd bring up that night. The "deception." The thing I didn't do but could never prove I didn't do, because how do you prove a negative? How do you prove you didn't trick someone into—

My throat closed.

Simon was calling me from across the room, gesturing toward a cluster of investors who looked confused about something. Technical specs, probably. They always got confused about the encryption protocols.

I started to turn away, grateful for the excuse, for something to do with my hands that wasn't shattering this champagne flute against the marble floor.

But my eyes... Traitor. My eyes dragged back one more time.

Dante was laughing now. His Head tilted back slightly, the line of his throat exposed in a way that used to make me want to press my lips there, right over his pulse. Sienna was saying something, animated, and his hand, his hand was on the small of her back.

That's where he used to touch me. Before.

I forced myself to look away. To focus on Simon and the investors and the clean, clinical world of security systems and firewalls. Things that made sense. Things with clear problems and clearer solutions. Dante and Sienna were none of my concern.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 80 - 81[1,726 words]

Chapter 80: Chapter 81

ELODIE'S POV~

Elodie was mid-sentence, saying something about encryption layers, her finger tracing the screen of the tablet, when she paused.

Just for a second. Half a second, maybe.

Simon noticed. "You okay?"

"Yeah, I just—" Elodie shook her head, refocusing on the screen. "Sorry. The biometric integration works in three phases..."

But something had shifted. Some instinct, some awareness.

Across the hall, Levi's elbow connected with Dante's ribs.

"Ow—what?"

"Over there." Levi nodded toward the far corner, where a small group huddled around exhibition displays. "Your wife's here too."

Dante's head turned. Followed the direction Levi indicated.

There. There stood... Elodie. A Tablet in hand, explaining something with those animated gestures she did when she got absorbed in tech. Two investors from the European delegations leaned in, listening. Simon stood beside her, arms crossed, looking pleased.

"Mmh," Dante said.

Nothing else. Just that.

Levi waited, but when no other response came, he looked between Dante and Elodie again. "Who are those people she's with? Is she—" He squinted. "Is she explaining the core technology? Damn. Your wife's impressive."

Dante didn't answer.

His eyes stayed fixed on that corner. On the way Elodie tilted the tablet, pointing to something on screen. The way her mouth moved, forming words he couldn't hear from this distance. The older wolf from the German packs nodded, and asked something. Elodie's hands moved again, shaping invisible concepts in the air.

She looked... competent. So Professional.

Completely in her element.

Then she looked up.

Her gaze swept the room, casually, just checking the space and then landed on him.

That moment seemed even stretched.

Elodie's expression didn't change. Didn't even flicker. Just that same calm, neutral look she might give anyone. Might give Any stranger. A look she could give to any face in a crowd.

Recognition was sure in her eyes. She wasn't even surprised. She knew he was there.

But nothing else. Nothing underneath her gaze.

Dante's mouth did something. A twitch. Maybe a smile, maybe not. Even he wasn't sure what his face was doing.

Was he smiling at her?

Elodie's brow furrowed. Just slightly. Like she was trying to figure out what that expression meant, if it meant anything at all.

Then she looked away. Focusing her gaze back to the tablet. Back to Simon. Back to the investors who were actually interested in what she had to say. Just like that.

"What's so funny?" Levi was staring at Dante now.

"Nothing." Dante's voice came out lighter than it should have.

Levi's eyes narrowed, but he didn't push. Instead, he looked back across the room, watching as Elodie gestured toward another display, the investors following her lead.

Something shifted in Levi's expression. Understanding, maybe. Or maybe calculation.

"She's good at this," he said quietly. More to himself than to Dante. "Keeping distance. Not making it obvious."

Across the hall, Elodie laughed at something Simon said. A Polite and professional laughter.

"She knows you don't want the marriage public," Levi continued, still watching her. "So she's being... what's the word? Considerate. Yeah. Considerate about it."

Dante said nothing.

"Whether it's at events like this or that banquet last month, she never approaches you. Never tries to—" Levi shrugged. "It's smart. Respectful, even."

The word 'respectful' just hung there.

Elodie had moved to another exhibit now, with different investors, and different explanations. Her hand came up, tucking hair behind her ear. The gesture was so familiar it hurt to look at.

But her face... her face was calm, focused and fine.

Completely fine.

"Dante?"

Sienna's voice cut through whatever thought was forming in their heads.

She appeared at his other side. Her hand found his arm, fingers wrapping around his elbow like they belonged there.

"What are you two talking about?" Her eyes moved between them, curiously.

"Nothing," Levi said smoothly, his smile already in place. His Professional mask sliding on just like they always did, like a second skin. "Finished with your discussions?"

Before Sienna could answer, someone approached with Professor Liam in tow.

"This is Professor Liam, the algorithm genius I mentioned." The man gestured between them.
"Miss Brown."

Sienna's smile was polite. Practiced. The kind she'd perfected at a hundred different networking events.

Professor Liam looked... ordinary. Unremarkable, really. The kind of face that blended into crowds. Wire-rimmed glasses, slightly rumpled shirt despite the formal setting. He offered his hand.

"Hello, Miss Brown."

"Hello." Sienna's handshake was immediate as she shook him firmly.

She didn't recognize him.

Why would she? He'd been at that banquet weeks ago, the one where she'd tracked down Johnny, where things had gotten... tense. But Professor Liam had been deep in conversation with someone else that night, oblivious to the small drama unfolding across the room. Just like another face among dozens.

And Sienna hadn't come to that banquet to meet tech people anyway.

Professor Liam, for his part, didn't bring up that night. Didn't mention seeing her there, didn't reference anything that might make this awkward. Just smiled, and adjusted his glasses, and waited.

The Brown family's tech division needed talent. Desperately. And Professor Liam's background, his algorithms, encryption, the kind of specialized knowledge that couldn't be bought, made him valuable.

Very, very valuable.

Logan stepped forward, his hand extended. "Professor. Good to finally meet you properly."

"Likewise."

The pleasantries began to flow.

Within minutes, Sienna and Professor Liam had drifted into conversation. Things about Technical stuff, data structures, algorithmic efficiency, the exhibits surrounding them providing endless fodder for discussion. Professor Liam's whole demeanor changed when he talked about his work. Turned awkward and More alive.

Sienna nodded at the appropriate moments, asked the right questions, played the role she'd been groomed for since childhood.

But Logan and Lauren, standing slightly to the side, understood maybe one word in five. Their eyes glazed over when Professor Liam started explaining neural network architectures.

Their purpose here wasn't the tech anyway.

It was the connections. The visibility. The chance to be seen with the right people.

And, if they were being honest, it was to watch.

Logan's gaze kept drifting across the exhibition hall. Toward where Dante stood with Levi. Toward where Elodie had been earlier, though she'd moved now, and shifted to a different cluster of investors.

"Do you think he's noticed her?" Lauren murmured, low enough that only Logan could hear.

"Oh, he's noticed."

"But he hasn't—"

"No." Logan's mouth curved. Not quite a smile. "He hasn't done anything. Hasn't approached her. Hasn't even looked at her twice."

It was fascinating, really.

There were rumors, of course. There were always rumors about the Bellini Pack's alpha and his... wife. That word always came with a pause, like people weren't quite sure it applied.

The stories varied depending on who was telling them. Some said Elodie had trapped him. Used underhanded tactics, maybe even manipulation of the mate bond itself, to force a marriage he'd never wanted. That she'd gotten pregnant deliberately, and left him no choice but to marry her.

Others said Dante had married her in a moment of weakness and regretted it ever since.

Either way, the conclusion was the same: Dante felt nothing for her. Only Disdain, maybe. Or obligation if they were to say.

He barely went home. Everyone knew that. He kept her tucked away, never brought her to pack events, never acknowledged her publicly.

And now, watching him stand there with Sienna's hand on his arm, watching him not even glance in Elodie's direction...

Yeah. The rumors seemed pretty accurate.

"He looks right through her," Lauren said in a whisper. "Like she's not even there."

"Maybe to him, she isn't."

Across the hall, Elodie was laughing at something Simon said. The sound didn't carry, but her expression was clear enough. It was just light and Unbothered.

If she cared that her husband was standing fifty feet away with another woman attached to his side, she didn't show it.

The exhibition was winding down. Staff members began moving through the crowd, quietly notifying key personnel about the conference hall. The summary meeting. The networking opportunity everyone had actually come for.

Johnny appeared at Elodie's side, and said something to her. She nodded, and collected her tablet.

They walked toward the conference hall entrance together.

Johnny was first, Elodie half a step behind. They were at a professional distance, but there was an ease between them.

Logan noticed. Of course he noticed.

"Does Johnny really value her that much?" He directed the question at Sienna, though his eyes stayed on Elodie's retreating figure.

Sienna glanced up from her conversation with Professor Liam. "Hm?"

"Johnny. And Elodie." Logan gestured vaguely. "He brought her to the exhibition, sure, but letting her into the conference hall? That's... that's not nothing."

The conference hall was for primary representatives only. Limited seating. Only the key players from each company.

And Johnny had chosen Elodie.

Lauren frowned. "It's surprising, isn't it? I mean, she's already married. Has a child. And while she's pretty, Johnny could have—" She stopped herself, reconsidered her words. "He could find someone less... complicated."

Someone who wasn't about to be divorced, she meant. Someone who didn't come with the baggage of a failed bond to one of the most powerful alphas in Europe.

Why invest so much attention in Elodie specifically?

Sienna didn't answer. Her jaw was tight, eyes tracking Elodie's path to the conference hall.

The doors closed behind Johnny and Elodie.

"Well," Logan said, breaking the silence. "We should head in too."

Their company wasn't presenting anything. They weren't showcasing exhibits. Which meant they'd normally be relegated to the back rows, if they got seats at all.

But Dante had extended an invitation.

Specifically to Sienna, To sit in the front.

Logan's smile widened. "Did you hear Mr. Nolan's giving a speech later? From the front row, you'd have a much better chance of catching his attention. Maybe even exchanging a few words after."

Mr. Nolan. Head of the European pack coalition's tech initiative. Connections to him were worth their weight in gold.

And Dante had given Sienna a direct path.

While his wife sat... where? Somewhere in the middle with Johnny?

The optics weren't lost on anyone.

Sienna smoothed her dress, checked her reflection in a nearby glass panel. "I suppose we shouldn't waste the opportunity."

"No," Logan agreed. "We shouldn't."