

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 91 - 92 [1,393 words]

Chapter 91: Chapter 92

ELODIE'S POV~

The content they'd worked so hard on, all the technical analyses, the detailed breakdowns, the stuff that would've been considered proprietary at any other company, Nolan had dismissed it like it was a high school book report. Even decided to call it worthless.

"Superficial. You barely scratched the surface."

So for the next two or three days, I and Johnny worked together, tearing apart our original submission and rebuilding it based on Nolan's feedback.

More depth. More critical analysis. More of everything.

By Monday, my ankle had mostly healed. Still a little tender if I put too much weight on it, but functional. I wasn't confident enough to drive yet, I didn't trust my reaction time if I had to slam on the brakes but I could walk without limping.

Good enough to go back to the office.

When I got there, Johnny was waiting at my desk with coffee and news.

"Dante's serious about the collaboration."

I stopped mid-step. "What?"

"He sent someone over last week. Initial contact, preliminary discussions." Johnny handed me the coffee. "I didn't tell you because I didn't want to distract you while we were drowning in Nolan's revisions."

Right. Because nothing said "focus" like finding out your estranged husband's company wanted to work with yours.

"Someone from his team is coming by this afternoon," Johnny continued. "If it goes well, we can finalize a preliminary plan."

Great.

Just great.

The technical director Dante sent over wasn't from the Wilson Group, it was from his personal tech company. A guy named Director Quinn. Mid-forties, with a sharp suit, and a confident handshake.

"Hello, Miss Miller," he said when Johnny introduced us.

"Hello."

I said professionally and polite. He had no idea I was married to his boss.

And I wasn't about to enlighten him.

The afternoon went smoothly. Too smoothly, actually. Director Quinn knew his stuff, asked good questions, seemed genuinely interested in what Cole could bring to the table.

By lunchtime, Johnny suggested we all go grab food and continue the conversation in a more relaxed setting.

"There's a good place nearby," he said. "My treat."

Director Quinn agreed, and we all piled into cars.

I rode with Johnny. Director Quinn and his team took their own vehicle.

The restaurant was one of those upscale places that catered to business lunches, with private rooms, and expensive menu, the kind of atmosphere that made deals happen.

We pulled into the parking lot and I was halfway out of the car when I saw them.

Well... Dante's car. That sleek black thing he drove everywhere.

And getting out of it was Dante... and Sienna.

Of course.

Of. course.

I froze.

Johnny noticed immediately. "Oh, you've got to be kidding me."

But Director Quinn had already spotted them. His face lit up and he called out, "President Wilson!"

Dante and Sienna turned around.

For a second, nobody moved.

Dante's expression flickered with surprise, maybe? Or just annoyance at the coincidence.

Sienna's face did something more complicated. Confusion, I think. Then recognition. Then that smooth, blank mask she always wore when I was around.

Director Quinn was already walking toward them, oblivious to the tension.

"What a coincidence! We were just discussing the collaboration with Cole."

Dante recovered quickly. Smiled and shook Director Quinn's hand. "Good. I'm glad it's going well."

Johnny and I exchanged a look.

We couldn't just stand here. We still had business to discuss. And Dante had already seen us.

So we followed.

I kept my face neutral. Professional. Like running into my husband and his, whatever Sienna was, at a business lunch was perfectly normal.

Director Quinn seemed to know Sienna too. His face brightened when he saw her. "Miss Brown."

"Hello," Sienna replied.

Her tone was cool and distant. But not rude.

Director Quinn didn't seem bothered. It made sense, Sienna was with Dante, and Dante was his boss. In his mind, she was probably going to be his boss too eventually. Better to stay respectful and keep his distance.

He turned back to Dante, gesturing toward Johnny and me. "I had a meeting with Cole this morning. We're discussing a potential partnership. Just finished up, so I'm joining President Gray and his team for lunch."

Dante nodded and shook Director Quinn's hand. "Good. Thank you for your work on this."

"Not a problem at all, President Wilson."

Then Dante's eyes shifted to Johnny and me.

He acknowledged Johnny with a nod. "President Gray."

But when his gaze landed on me, he said nothing.

Just looked right through me.

Like I wasn't even there.

My jaw tightened, but I kept my face neutral.

Johnny stepped in smoothly. "Since we've all run into each other, why don't we have lunch together? Continue the discussion?"

For a second, I thought Dante might agree. Thought he might actually be professional enough to sit through one meal.

But then he shook his head.

"No, this is a private arrangement. Not really appropriate." He smiled, politely, although the smile looked distant. "But next time, I'll definitely take you up on that offer, President Gray."

Private arrangement. Right.

A date. With Sienna.

And he didn't want it interrupted.

Didn't want 'me' there ruining his romantic lunch.

Johnny's smile didn't falter, but I could see the tension in his shoulders. "Of course. You're too kind, President Wilson."

Sienna had been quiet this whole time, watching the exchange with that carefully blank expression.

She probably wanted to network with Johnny, of course he was a valuable connection, after all. But compared to that, she clearly wanted Dante's attention more.

And Dante had just made it clear he was prioritizing their "private time."

She looked pleased. Satisfied.

Like she'd won something.

Dante turned without another word, and Sienna followed him toward the restaurant entrance.

Leaving us standing there in the parking lot.

Director Quinn watched them go, then turned back to us with an apologetic smile. "Well. Shall we head in?"

"Yeah," Johnny said. "Let's go."

We started walking toward the entrance. Director Quinn fell into step beside Johnny, already talking about the collaboration again.

And I walked a few steps behind, trying to keep my face together.

Trying not to think about how Dante had just blown off a business lunch to protect his date with Sienna.

Trying not to care.

Once we were inside and settled at our table, Johnny leaned over and asked Director Quinn casually, "So you know Miss Brown as well?"

"Oh, yes. I've met her a few times." Director Quinn smiled. "President Wilson is very attentive to her. He's brought her to the office several times."

The words hit me like a slap.

Brought her to the office.

Several times.

I'd been married to Dante for years. Years! And I'd never once been to any of his companies. Personally.

Not the Wilson Group. Not his personal tech firm. Nowhere.

Because he didn't allow it.

"The office isn't a place for family," he'd said once, early in our marriage, when I'd suggested visiting. "It's not appropriate."

And I'd believed him. I thought he was just being professional. Keeping work and personal life separate.

But apparently that rule only applied to me.

Because Sienna got to visit. Got to see his world. Got to be part of his professional life in ways I never had.

Director Quinn was still talking, oblivious to the knife he'd just twisted in my chest.

"President Wilson seems quite serious about her. It's nice to see."

"Mm," Johnny said noncommittally.

He glanced at me, concern flickering across his face.

I looked down at my menu. Pretended to study it even though the words were blurring together.

He brought her to the office. Several times.

He never let me.

My throat felt tight.

I swallowed hard and forced myself to breathe normally.

This was fine. I was fine.

Just another reminder of where I stood. Another confirmation that I'd never mattered to him the way she did.

The waiter came over and started taking orders.

I picked something at random. Didn't even know what I'd said.

Johnny was watching me. I could feel it.

But I didn't look at him. Didn't acknowledge the concern in his eyes.

Just sat there, menu closed, hands folded in my lap.

Professionally. Composed.

Completely fine.

Even though inside, I was breaking all over again.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 92 - 93[1,482 words]

Chapter 92: Chapter 93

ELODIE'S POV~

While Director Quinn was distracted talking to one of his team members, Johnny leaned closer to me.

"You hear about the Brown family?" His voice was low. Quiet enough that only I could hear.

I glanced at him. "What about them?"

"After that charity gala and then last week's tech expo, they've been making moves. Building connections all over the capital." He paused. "I heard they've secured several major projects in the last few days alone."

My stomach tightened.

"Once those projects are done," Johnny continued, "the Brown family will be completely established here. Solid footing in the capital."

It was the kind of success most business families spent years working toward. Decades, even.

But with Dante's backing, they'd done it in days.

Of course they had.

"Mm," I said.

That was all I could manage.

Johnny didn't push. Just gave me a look that said he understood, then turned his attention back to the conversation.

After lunch, we spent several more hours hammering out details. By the time we left, Cole and Dante's company had a preliminary agreement in place.

Progress. That's what this was. Professional progress.

I repeated that to myself the whole drive back.

—

Two days later, Johnny and I went to Wilson Tech to finalize the contract.

Dante's tech company. The one I'd never been allowed to visit when we were actually trying to make our marriage work.

And now here I was. Walking through the lobby. Taking the elevator up. All because of business.

The irony wasn't lost on me.

Director Quinn met us in the lobby, along with another executive by name, Mr. Kim. He was an older guy, in a sharp grey suit.

"Apologies for running late," Mr. Kim said as we headed toward the conference room. "I was just in a meeting upstairs with President Wilson."

Dante was here.

In this building.

Probably just a few floors above us.

My pulse kicked up, but I kept my face neutrally.

"No problem at all," Johnny said smoothly.

We settled into the conference room that had a sleek glass table, and leather chairs, floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the city. The kind of space designed to impress.

And ... It worked.

Mr. Kim pulled out his laptop and started going through the contract line by line. All the technical specifications. Timeline. Payment structures.

I tried to focus. Tried to pay attention.

But my mind kept drifting upward. To whatever floor Dante was on. Wondering if he knew we were here.

Wondering if he cared.

A knock on the door pulled me back.

Someone entered. I didn't look up immediately, just assumed it was just another Wilson Tech employee bringing documents or coffee or whatever.

But then Director Quinn and Mr. Kim both stood abruptly.

"Miss Brown."

I froze and then looked up.

Sienna. Of course, it was Sienna.

She was dressed impeccably with her tailored blouse, and fitted skirt, heels that clicked against the floor as she walked in.

Everything about her screamed I belong here.'

Johnny's jaw tightened beside me, but he didn't say anything.

Sienna glanced at me briefly and then dismissively. Then turned her attention to Director Quinn and Mr. Kim with a warm smile.

"I just came to take a look around. Don't let me interrupt."

"Of course, of course," Director Quinn said immediately. "Please, have a seat."

Mr. Kim was already gesturing to his secretary. "Get Miss Brown some tea."

Their attitude was so different from how they'd greeted us. More warm. More deferential.

Like she was already the lady of the house.

The future Mrs. Wilson.

My throat felt tight.

Sienna settled into one of the empty chairs, crossing her legs elegantly. "President Gray," she said, acknowledging Johnny with a polite nod.

"Miss Brown," Johnny replied. His tone was courteous but cold.

She didn't greet me.

Didn't even look at me again.

Sienna accepted the tea from Mr. Kim's secretary with a gracious smile, then settled into the chair they'd practically scrambled to pull out for her.

She took a sip and set the cup down delicately.

Then her eyes landed on the contract spread across the table.

"May I take a look?" she asked.

Not can I, but may I. Like she was being polite about something she already had every right to do.

Mr. Kim beamed. "Of course, Miss Brown."

I felt Johnny tense beside me. I saw him glance at me from the corner of his eye.

Mr. Kim must have noticed our reaction because he chuckled, like he was letting us in on something. "Miss Brown is President Wilson's girlfriend. When President Wilson signs contracts, he never hides anything from her."

The words hit like a punch.

Girlfriend.

He'd said it so casually. So matter-of-fact.

Like it was common knowledge. Like everyone at Wilson Tech already knew. Already accepted it.

Mr. Kim kept talking, his smile still in place. "So there's no need to worry about confidentiality. She's one of us."

Johnny recovered faster than I did. Smiled back, smooth and professional. "With your assurance, Mr. Kim, we have no concerns."

I kept my head down and stared at the contract in front of me like the words would suddenly make sense if I just focused hard enough.

But all I could think about was the study.

The study in Dante's villa. Our villa, technically, though it had never felt like mine.

He'd made it clear from day one, the study was off-limits. Company secrets, he'd said. Confidential information. The housekeeper had informed me of the rule the first day I moved in.

"Mrs. Wilson, the study is Mr. Wilson's private workspace. He's asked that you not enter."

And I hadn't. Not once in all these years.

Never stepped foot inside. Never saw what he was working on. Never got a glimpse into that part of his life.

Because he didn't trust me with it.

Didn't want me there.

But Sienna? Sienna could waltz into Wilson Tech whenever she wanted. Could look through confidential contracts. Could sit in on meetings.

Everyone here knew her. Welcomed her. Treated her like she already belonged.

Like she was already Mrs. Wilson.

My hands clenched under the table.

Sienna picked up the contract, flipping through it slowly. Taking her time. Making sure we all saw that she had access to things I'd never been allowed near.

Then she set it down and looked directly at me.

I kept my head lowered. Didn't meet her eyes. I... Couldn't.

Because if I looked at her right now, if I saw that satisfied smile I knew was on her face... then I might actually break.

Sienna picked up her teacup again. Took another sip and settled back in her chair like she was supervising.

Like she was the boss and we were here for her approval.

Mr. Kim and Director Quinn were revising something in the contract, heads bent together, discussing terms.

And then Johnny spoke.

"Miss Brown," he said, his voice casual. "Aren't you planning to work at Wilson Tech?"

I looked up despite myself.

Sienna set her teacup down and met Johnny's gaze directly.

"Dante asked me if I wanted a position here," she said smoothly and confidently. "But I prefer to rely on my own abilities. I don't want to use connections or backdoor opportunities, so I declined."

The implication was clear.

'I could work here if I wanted. Dante offered. But I'm too principled to take the easy route.'

Unlike some people.

She didn't say that last part. She didn't even have to.

It hung in the air anyway.

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

Johnny's smile didn't falter. "That's admirable, Miss Brown. It's good to see someone committed to earning their place."

Sienna inclined her head, graciously. "Thank you, President Gray."

But her eyes flicked to me for just a second.

And in that second, I saw it.

Triumph.

She'd won. She knew it. And she wanted to make sure I knew it too.

Dante had offered her a job. Had brought her into his professional world. Had given her access to everything he'd kept from me.

And she'd turned it down.

Not because she didn't want it. But because she could afford to. Because she already had everything she needed, all of his attention, his trust, his affection.

She didn't need a job title to prove she mattered to him.

Unlike me, who'd never mattered at all.

The meeting continued.

Voices discussing clauses and payment terms and implementation timelines.

But I wasn't really listening anymore.

Just sitting there. Taking notes I wouldn't remember. Nodding at appropriate moments.

While Sienna sat across from me, sipping her tea, looking like she owned the place.

Looking like she'd already won.

And maybe she had.

Maybe she'd won a long time ago.

I just hadn't wanted to admit it.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 93 - 94 [1,387 words]

Chapter 93: Chapter 94

ELODIE'S POV~

Before Johnny could say anything, Mr. Kim jumped in with a smile that was just a bit too eager.

"Miss Brown, you're being far too modest. Everyone here knows you're top-tier talent in the AI field." He gestured broadly, like he was stating an obvious fact. "Your relationship with President Wilson aside, no one would consider it using connections. Honestly, if you joined Wilson Tech, our projects would run so much smoother. Why don't you reconsider?"

Sienna's smile was small and demure. "I'll think about it."

Translation: I can join whenever I want. The door's always open.

Another reminder. Another way Dante treated her differently than he'd ever treated me.

I could list them all if I wanted to. Could enumerate every single way he'd shown her consideration, trust, respect, all the things he'd withheld from me.

But what would be the point?

I picked up my water glass. Took a sip just to give myself something to do.

That's when I saw him.

Through the glass door of the conference room.

Dante.

I froze, my glass halfway to my lips.

He was looking into the room. His eyes swept across the table, across Johnny, across Mr. Kim and Director Quinn.

Across me.

But his gaze didn't linger. Didn't pause. Just moved on like I was part of the furniture.

I set my glass down carefully and turned my attention back to the contract.

From the corner of my eye, I saw Sienna smile. Saw her give a small, subtle wave toward the door.

Greeting him.

"I should get going," Sienna said, standing gracefully.

That's when Mr. Kim and the others noticed Dante outside. They started to rise, ready to greet their boss properly but Dante waved them off.

He stepped inside. "No need to get up. Keep working."

They settled back down, but the energy in the room had shifted. Everyone sat a little straighter. Smiled a little wider.

It was almost noon. Obviously, Dante had come to pick Sienna up for lunch.

Like a boyfriend would.

Like a partner would.

He turned to Johnny. "I apologize for not hosting you personally. There's a lot to handle today."

Johnny smiled, professionally. "Mr. Wilson, no need to apologize. I completely understand. You're a busy man."

Dante's smile was just brief but polite.

Then his eyes flicked to me.

Just for a second.

I met his gaze. Didn't look away. Didn't give him the satisfaction of seeing me flinch.

He said nothing.

Just turned and left with Sienna following close behind and the door clicked shut.

Silence filled the conference room for a beat.

Johnny's gentle hand landed on my shoulder and squeezed softly.

I shook my head before he could say anything.

I was fine. I was. fine.

When we'd headed to Wilson Tech this morning, I'd mentally prepared myself for the possibility of seeing Dante. That much, I'd expected.

What I hadn't expected was Sienna being here too.

A few days ago, when Mr. Kim mentioned that Sienna had visited Wilson Tech before, I'd assumed it was occasional. A handful of times, maybe. Special occasions.

But this?

This was different.

Sienna walked into Dante's company like she owned the place. Like it was her second home. She knew everyone. Everyone knew her.

She could come and go as she pleased.

And they all welcomed her. Smiled at her. Made space for her.

Treated her like the future Mrs. Wilson.

While I... the actual current Mrs. Wilson had never been allowed through these doors until today.

Until business made it necessary.

Mr. Kim was talking again, going over another clause in the contract.

I forced myself to focus. To nod. To take notes.

But my hand was shaking slightly as I wrote.

The contract negotiations dragged on.

Every clause had to be examined. Every technical specification was being discussed. Every potential point of dispute identified and resolved before it could become a problem later.

This was important work, yes, but exhausting.

By the time we finally finished going through everything, it was past five.

Johnny signed his name with a flourish, then slid the document across to Mr. Kim.

"I'll take this upstairs for President Wilson's signature," Mr. Kim said, standing.

Johnny paused. "Mr. Wilson is still here?"

"Yes. He's handling another project. Very busy today."

Mr. Kim left the room, with the contract in hand.

Johnny glanced at me.

I knew what he was thinking. Same thing I was thinking.

Was Dante really that busy? Or was he just avoiding coming down here because I was in the building?

Probably the latter.

Mr. Kim and Johnny had worked together before, they knew each other from industry events, conferences, that sort of thing. Now that the contract was signed, the atmosphere in the room relaxed. Now less formal.

Mr. Kim leaned back in his chair, cleared his throat lightly, and lowered his voice.

"Miss Brown is still here too, you know. Been with President Wilson all day, from what I heard." He smiled. Knowing. "Their relationship is... quite solid."

I was sitting right next to Johnny.

Of course I heard.

Of course Mr. Kim knew I'd hear.

Maybe that was the point.

I kept my face neutral. Took a sip of water that had long gone room temperature.

A while later, Mr. Kim returned with the signed contract.

Dante's signature was at the bottom.

Johnny had somewhere to be that evening, to deal with some personal thing he'd mentioned earlier, so when Mr. Kim invited us to dinner, he politely declined.

"Another time," Johnny said with an easy smile.

Mr. Kim and the other managers didn't push. Just walked us to the elevator, while still making small talk.

The elevator doors opened. And there they were.

Dante and Sienna, standing inside together.

Johnny stopped short. "Well. What a coincidence."

Dante's expression didn't change. "Quite a coincidence."

The elevator was small. There were four of us plus Mr. Kim and Director Quinn. It would be cramped. Uncomfortable.

Johnny made the call. "There are more of us. Why don't you two go ahead? We'll catch the next one."

"Alright," Dante said. "See you next time."

"See you."

The doors slid shut.

And we stood there in the hallway, waiting.

Nobody said anything.

What was there to say?

A minute later, the elevator returned. Empty this time.

We got in and the doors closed.

My phone rang and I saw that it was Liora.

I glanced at the screen, then at the others in the elevator. "Excuse me."

I answered. "Hello?"

"Mom! Are you done with work yet? When are you coming home?"

Her voice was bright and it made my chest ache.

Since my injury, Liora has called every day. Checking on me. Making sure I was okay. And last night, when I'd told her my ankle was healed, she'd asked when I'd be coming home.

I'd been too busy to give her a definite answer. But now...

"I just finished," I said. "I'll be home soon."

"Really? Okay! I'll see you soon then!"

She sounded so happy.

I hung up just as the elevator reached the ground floor.

The doors opened and we all stepped out.

Mr. Kim was looking at me with curiosity. "Miss Miller, you have children?"

I nodded. "Yes."

"Really?" He looked genuinely surprised. "I couldn't tell. You look so young."

He'd probably assumed Johnny and I were together. We worked well together, spent a lot of time in each other's company. Johnny was attentive, protective, even.

Easy to assume we were a couple.

And I looked young for someone who already had a kid.

I didn't bother explaining. Didn't see the point.

"Just one daughter," I said simply.

"Well, she's lucky to have you," Mr. Kim said pleasantly.

I smiled. Politely, although my smile was empty and gladly he didn't notice.

Was Liora lucky?

Liora, who called Sienna for advice before calling me? Who spent more time at Dante's house than at mine? Who was slowly drifting away no matter how hard I tried to hold on?

Was she lucky to have a mother who was falling apart? Who couldn't keep her marriage together? Who was watching her family disintegrate in slow motion?

I didn't feel like she was lucky.

But I just smiled and said, "Thank you."

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 94 - 95 [1,390 words]

Chapter 94: Chapter 95

ELODIE'S POV~

But Mr. Kim looked extremely curious. "Does your husband work in tech as well?"

I hesitated.

What was I supposed to say?

Oh yes, actually you know him. He's your boss. The man who just left with his girlfriend?

"Sort of," I said instead.

Mr. Kim had talked to me earlier about some technical issues, he knew I was competent in the field. He probably assumed my husband was in the same industry. I could see the question forming on his face, ready to ask for a name.

But something in my expression must have warned him off.

I didn't want to talk about it. Didn't want to explain. Didn't want to stand here in the lobby of my husband's company and pretend my marriage wasn't a complete disaster.

Mr. Kim smiled politely and changed the subject.

I could feel Johnny beside me, practically vibrating with the effort of keeping quiet.

I knew what he wanted to say. The husband you're asking about? That's your boss. Dante Wilson. The guy who just took the elevator down with Sienna.'

He would have said that.

But he didn't.

And I was grateful.

Because once Mr. Kim and the others knew who I really was, knew I was Dante's wife, the one being replaced by Sienna, everything would get complicated.

They'd feel awkward. Wouldn't know how to interact with me. And it wouldn't be surprising if someone, trying to curry favor with Sienna, started making things difficult for me.

Better to just stay quiet and stay anonymous.

At least for now. By the way, Dante would be extremely infuriated once he got to know my identity had been revealed to people. He wanted our marriage hidden. Then so be it.

Johnny and I left Wilson Tech and went our separate ways in the parking lot.

I drove to the villa, to see Liora like I'd promised.

She was waiting for me when I arrived. The second I walked through the door, she came running.

"Mom!"

"Hey, sweetheart." I ruffled her hair, smiling despite everything.

She looked down at my feet immediately. "You're really okay now? Your ankle?"

"I'm fine. All healed."

"Can I see?"

"There's nothing to see—"

"Please? I want to make sure."

I sighed but kicked off my shoe anyway, pointing to the ankle I'd twisted.

Liora crouched down, inspecting it carefully. "There's no bruise or anything..."

"It's not swollen anymore. That's why you can't see anything."

"Oh." She stood back up, satisfied but still concerned. "You still shouldn't stand too long. I already had someone prepare dinner. Let's eat, okay?"

My chest felt warm. "Okay."

She took my hand, her small fingers curling around mine and led me toward the dining room.

There were two place settings at the table. Just two.

Dante's usual seat was empty.

I stared at it for a second too long.

And Liora was quick to notice. "Dad said he's busy tonight. Won't be home for dinner. So it's just us."

Busy? Yeah, right...

I'd seen him in that elevator with Sienna barely an hour ago. Seen the way they'd left together.

He wasn't busy.

He was having dinner with her.

But I didn't say that. Didn't correct Liora's innocent assumption that her father was working late.

What would be the point?

"Just us is good," I said instead, squeezing her hand.

Liora smiled. A very big bright and genuine smile. "Yeah. I like it when it's just us."

We sat down. Sabina had prepared all of Liora's favorites and a few of mine, I noticed. Sweet and sour pork. Stir-fried vegetables. Soup that smelled like ginger and something else I couldn't quite place.

Liora started chattering about school. About her friends. About some project she was working on.

And I listened. Really listened.

Let her voice wash over me. Let myself pretend, just for this one meal, that everything was normal.

That I was just a mom having dinner with her daughter.

Dinner was nice.

Really nice, actually.

Liora continued to talk nonstop about school, about her friends, about some more science project she was excited about. And I just listened, asking questions when she paused, laughing when she told me about something funny that happened in class.

Maybe it was because I'd been giving her more space lately. Less hovering around her. Less desperate attempts to force closeness.

Whatever the reason, she seemed... lighter with me. More open... now.

Less impatient. More affectionate.

Like my little girl again.

After dinner, she grabbed my hand. "Mom, can you help me with my bath? And wash my hair?"

"Of course."

"And blow-dry it after?"

"Sure, baby."

Her smile was so bright it hurt to look at.

Bath time turned into playtime. Liora splashed around, told me more stories, let me wash her hair without complaint. And when I wrapped her in a towel afterward, she leaned against me like she used to when she was smaller.

"Mom?" she asked as I was blow-drying her hair.

"Yeah?"

"Can you take me to school tomorrow?"

I paused and looked at her reflection in the mirror.

She was watching me. Her eyes were hopeful that I wouldn't decline her request.

"Of course I can."

"Really?"

"Really."

Her grin was worth everything.

It had been ten days since the hot spring resort. Ten days since I'd had any real quality time with her. And now here she was, asking me to stay. Wanting me around.

I wasn't going to waste it.

"I'm staying here tonight," I told her as I finished with her hair. "Is that okay?"

"Yes!" She threw her arms around me. "Can you sleep in my room?"

My throat felt tight. "If you want me to."

"I do!"

So that's what I did.

I took a shower in Liora's bathroom, borrowed one of the spare nightgowns I kept in her closet, and climbed into bed beside her.

She curled up against me immediately. My little girl was small and warm and smelling like the lavender shampoo I'd just used on her hair.

"You're comfy, Mom," she mumbled, already half-asleep.

I kissed the top of her head. "Go to sleep, sweetheart."

And... She was out within minutes.

But I stayed awake longer.

Staring at the ceiling. Listening to her breathe.

Trying not to think about the fact that I hadn't gone back to the master bedroom. That I was sleeping in my daughter's room instead of the room I technically still shared with Dante.

Because what was the point?

He wasn't there anyway.

The last time Liora had slept with me like this, she'd been sick. Feverish and miserable, wanting her mom.

But tonight she wasn't sick. She just... wanted me.

And I was greedy enough to take it. To hold onto this moment as tightly as I could.

Even if I knew it wouldn't last.

I finally fell asleep sometime after eleven.

Dante still hadn't come home.

The next morning, I found out Dante hadn't come home at all.

Sabina mentioned it casually while making breakfast. "Mr. Wilson called early this morning. Said he stayed at the office working late on a project."

Right.

A project.

That's what we were calling it now.

I didn't respond. I just nodded and finished my coffee.

I took Liora to school like I'd promised. She chattered the whole way, pointing out things through the window, telling me about her day ahead.

And I listened. Smiled. Responded at the right moments.

But part of me was somewhere else.

Part of me was thinking about how Liora had texted Sienna last night. How careful she'd been to hide it.

How she only really needed me when Dante wasn't around. When she was bored. When Sienna wasn't available.

I was a backup. A substitute.

Not the first choice.

Maybe not even the second.

And I hated how much that hurt.

Hated how desperate I was for these scraps of attention from my own daughter.

But what choice did I have?

After I dropped her off, I sat in the parking lot for a moment and watched her disappear into the school building, her backpack bouncing against her shoulders.

Then I drove to work. At least, at Cole, my presence was valued. At least it was somewhere I think I was being seen and welcomed entirely.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 95 - 96 [1,237 words]

Chapter 95: Chapter 96

ELODIE'S POV~

After that day, Liora stopped calling.

Not completely though. It just... turned less. Now that she knew my ankle was healed, the daily check-ins disappeared.

She didn't ask why I hadn't come home last night. Didn't seem to notice or care.

And Dante? He never asked about my movements at all. Never had.

So I just... went back to my apartment. Back to my routine.

Work. Sleep. And just... Repeat.

By Friday, Cole had signed two new projects, both big ones that brought in substantial revenue. Johnny was thrilled, and to celebrate, he organized a company-wide team-building event.

The team voted on the location and hot springs won.

When the message came through, I stared at my phone for a long moment, and then let out a bitter and quiet laugh.

Johnny looked up from his desk. "What's wrong? You don't want to go?"

"It's not that."

It was just... the last time I'd been to a hot spring, Dante and Liora had left me there. Abandoned me at the resort while they went off together.

Half a month ago.

It felt like yesterday and a lifetime ago all at once.

"You sure?" Johnny pressed. "We can pick somewhere else if—"

"No. It's fine." I closed my laptop. "It's my first company event since coming back. I should go."

And I meant it.

This time would be different. This time I'd be with people who actually wanted me around.

The resort was nothing like the Wilson family's private estate. This was a public, huge hotel, with multiple pools, and full entertainment facilities. It was busy and loud and completely different.

I changed into the provided bathrobe and headed to the hot spring area.

The women's section was empty when I arrived. Most of the other female employees were still getting ready, I guessed.

I slipped into the pool. Let the hot water soak into my muscles and tried to relax.

I'd been there maybe a minute when I noticed her.

I mean a little girl. Maybe six or seven, around Liora's age. She was crouching by the edge of the pool, reaching out to touch the water with her curious fingers.

The pool was deep here. At least 1.2 meters. And this kid was small. Definitely shorter than that.

Where were her parents?

I sat up straighter, watching her.

"Hey," I called out. "Be careful—"

She leaned too far.

I saw it happen. Saw her lose her balance and saw her eyes go wide.

Then... splash.

She went under the water. I didn't even think. I just moved and lunged across the pool, and grabbed her, and pulled her up and out of the water.

She clung to me immediately, her small arms wrapping around my neck in a death grip. Coughing. Crying. Her whole body was shaking.

"It's okay," I said, holding her tight. "You're okay. I've got you."

She coughed harder, more water coming up. Her face was red from the heat or the crying or both.

I patted her back gently, trying to help her breathe. "Shh. It's okay. You're safe."

Her crying didn't even stop, but the coughing eased.

I looked around and saw that there was no one else in the pool area.

Where the hell were this kid's parents?

"Hey," I said softly. "What's your name?"

She hiccupped and didn't answer.

"Can you tell me your mom's name? Or your dad's?"

Nothing. Just more crying.

Great.

I climbed out of the pool, still holding her and grabbed a towel and wrapped it around her shaking shoulders.

"Come on. Let's find someone who can help, okay?"

I headed toward the staff area, the little girl still clinging to me like a koala.

I walked out of the staff area, still holding the little girl, when I saw Alpha Harry Becker. He was standing maybe twenty feet away, looking around like he was searching for something.

Before I could process that, the girl in my arms started reaching toward him. Crying harder now.

"Uncle! Uncle!"

Harry's head snapped in our direction. He crossed the distance in seconds, and I found myself handing over the soaking wet child.

"Daisy," he said, taking her from me. His hands were gentle but his face was tight with concern. He looked her over quickly, checking for injuries, probably, then his eyes landed on me. "What happened?"

Of all the people at this resort, of course this kid belonged to Harry Becker.

"She fell into the pool," I explained. "I saw her go under and pulled her out."

His jaw tightened. "Thank you."

"Don't mention it." Then, I gestured toward Daisy, who was still shivering. "Just get her into dry clothes before she catches cold."

He nodded and then looked at me for another second like he wanted to say something else.

But Daisy was crying again, clinging to him, clearly scared and overwhelmed.

"Right," he said and gave me a brief nod. "Thank you."

Then he was gone, heading toward the elevators with Daisy in his arms.

I stood there for a moment, dripping and alone.

Then I went back to the hot springs.

After soaking for another half hour, I changed into regular clothes and headed to the buffet.

I was almost done eating when I saw them again.

Harry. And Daisy, now dressed in dry clothes, her hair still damp but neatly combed.

He was scanning the room, looking for somewhere to sit, probably.

His eyes landed on my table.

Great. Ugh!

He walked over. "Mind if we sit here?"

I did mind, actually. I didn't particularly want to spend more time around Harry Becker than absolutely necessary.

But he'd already asked. And his niece was right there, looking small and tired.

"Go ahead," I said.

He pulled out a chair for Daisy. "Sit here and don't move, okay? I'm going to get you some food."

Daisy looked at me nervously, then back at Harry and then nodded. "Okay..."

Harry turned to me. "Can you watch her? Just for a minute?"

I really didn't want to.

But what was I supposed to say? No, I can't keep an eye on a six-year-old for five minutes while you get her dinner?

"Sure," I said.

He left.

And then it was just me and Daisy.

She sat across from me, her hands folded in her lap, looking everywhere except at me.

She was shy or scared. Maybe both.

I didn't want to startle her by talking too much, but the silence felt heavy either way.

And I had no idea what to give her from my plate. I didn't know if she had allergies or dietary restrictions or if she was one of those kids who only ate chicken nuggets.

"Your uncle will be back soon," I said gently.

She looked up at me with those dark eyes, still a little red from crying.

She nodded and silence fell again.

I tried again. "Does your nose still hurt? From the water earlier?"

She shook her head.

"That's good."

More silence ensued.

God, this was awkward.

She kept staring at me, though. Not saying anything. Just... watching.

"What?" I asked, keeping my voice soft.

She bit her lip. Then, very quietly, "You saved me."

My chest tightened.

"Yeah. I guess I did."

"Thank you."

Her voice was so small. So sincere.

"You're welcome, sweetheart."

She smiled. Just a little, tentatively.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 96 - 97[955 words]

Chapter 96: Chapter 97

ELODIE'S POV~

The nanny's sandals smacked the wet tiles as she hurried over, her words tumbling out. "Miss Elodie, thank you so much for yesterday."

I gave her the quick smile I'd used a million times at Pack events, a smile I used whenever I didn't want to talk much. "You're welcome."

I figured Daisy would still be scared of the water after the scare, but nope. She held the nanny's hand tight with one fist, the other squeezing her pink floatie, and after dipping a toe, she just slipped right in. Harry must've talked her through it or something.

She paddled over to me, kicking little splashes on the water. "Auntie..."

I turned. "What's up?"

She didn't say anything, just swam happy circles around me, grinning with that missing tooth gap.

The nanny chuckled. "She really likes you."

I smiled but didn't answer.

The speaker buzzed: activities were starting soon. I waved to Daisy and headed out. "Bye, kid."

She reached out. "Auntie, pick me up."

I sighed and lifted her out. Water dripped everywhere. I wrapped her in my extra robe and it swallowed her and I carried her to the elevator. We would say goodbye on our floor.

The elevator dinged and the door opened.

There stood Harry, as though he was awaiting us.

Daisy's face lit up. "Uncle!"

He stepped forward, reaching for her. But she wouldn't let go of me. She had one arm to him, and the other clamped on my robe.

Harry grabbed her anyway. As he lifted, her grip pulled my robe open.

Cold air hit me first.

My blue lace was underneath my robe. The set I'd worn because... whatever, old habit. My chest, waist, the stretch marks from birthing Liora, were all out there for a second.

My face burned. I yanked the robe shut, tying it fast.

Harry's eyes went wide, then he spun around quickly. "Sorry... Elodie, shit."

The nanny fussed with the fabric, mumbling sorrys.

I kept my voice even. "I gotta go."

Inside, my heart was pounding. I reached hurriedly into the elevators and watched the doors closed on his red face and Daisy's little wave. The little sweetheart was oblivious to what she had done. I couldn't help but wave back sheepishly.

Harry turned around, his expression tight. "Sorry about that."

Daisy was looking up at Elodie with wide, worried eyes. She must have sensed something was wrong, thought maybe she'd upset her.

"Auntie, I'm sorry..." Her voice came out small. Trembling slightly.

Elodie softened immediately. The kid hadn't meant any harm. Had just gotten excited and grabbed it without thinking.

"It's okay," she said gently. "I know you didn't mean to."

She managed a small smile and then waved at Daisy.

Then stepped into the elevator.

The doors slid closed.

Harry looked down at his niece. "Daisy. You can't just grab people's clothes like that, okay?"

Daisy nodded seriously. "Okay, Uncle."

She looked genuinely remorseful. Like she'd committed some terrible crime instead of just being an overenthusiastic six-year-old.

Harry sighed and reached down and ruffled her hair.

Kids.

Around four in the afternoon, the group activities were wrapped up.

Elodie had to leave early. She needed to head over to Nonna's dinner. She couldn't exactly skip it, even if she wanted to.

Johnny walked her to the parking lot.

"Drive safe," he said, his hands in his pockets.

"I know." She directed a smile at him before pulling her eyes away.

She was fishing her keys out of her bag when a car pulled up nearby. The car pulled up slowly and unhurried but she didn't pay attention at first, just simply thought it was another guest leaving the resort.

But then the rear window rolled down and a small face appeared.

Much to her surprise, it was Daisy.

"Goodbye, Auntie!"

She was waving enthusiastically, with that shy smile replaced by genuine excitement.

Elodie couldn't help but smile back. "Goodbye, Daisy."

Then she noticed Harry in the front seat.

Their eyes met through the window.

Elodie paused and then decided to just give him a polite nod.

He nodded back at her, but his gaze lingered and shifted past her and then landed on Johnny and stopped there.

Well... just for a second. It was brief and assessing.

Then he looked away, and the car pulled off.

Johnny watched it go, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "Huh."

"What?" Elodie frowned, looking up at him.

"I don't know." He tilted his head. "Felt like Harry was sizing me up just now."

Elodie frown deepened. "Sizing you up for what?"

"I'm not sure." Johnny shrugged, but his expression stayed curious. "Maybe because we're standing close? Maybe he thinks we're..." He wagged his eyebrows. "You know. Together."

Elodie rolled her eyes.

"And maybe," Johnny continued, warming to the theory, "he's keeping an eye on things for his good friend Dante. Making sure you're not stepping out on the marriage or whatever."

The words landed wrong.

Elodie's faint smile faded, immediately.

"That's definitely not it," she said quietly.

Johnny caught the shift in her tone. "I was just—"

"Dante doesn't care what I do." She said as she unlocked her car. "Or who I do it with. He hasn't cared in a long time."

The words came out flatter than she intended. More honest. But it was the truth, Dante didn't care. And she doesn't care anymore about what Dante cared about or not. It was no longer business. She couldn't wait for the divorce to proceed successfully and she would cut every single tie between them.

Johnny was quiet for a moment and didn't speak, his eyes trained entirely on Elodie, who raised a brow at him.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 97 - 98 [1,277 words]

Chapter 97: Chapter 98

ELODIE'S POV~

Harry and Sienna were close. Everyone knew that.

And it was obvious that compared to me, people like Harry and Levi would much rather see Dante with Sienna. Someone who fits. Someone who made sense.

If anything, they probably hoped I would have something ambiguous going on with another man. Give Dante an excuse. Give him an easy out.

Why would they care about protecting his marriage when they wanted it to end?

I got in my car and drove away.

—

By the time I reached the old Wilson estate, it was fully dark outside.

The house was quiet. Just servants moving around, preparing for dinner. And Nonna.

She came out herself when she heard I'd arrived. Her face lit up with that warm, genuine smile she always had for me.

Then she looked past me. Toward the empty driveway, searching.

"Where's Liora?"

Her smile faltered. Just slightly.

She didn't ask about Dante. That wasn't unusual, he rarely came home with me anymore. But Liora? Liora usually came with me whenever I visited.

The thing was, I didn't know where Liora was.

After my ankle healed, after that one dinner at the villa, I'd barely heard from her. Didn't know what she'd been doing over the weekend. Didn't know who she'd been with.

Didn't ask.

Couldn't bring myself to.

"They should be here soon," I said. Smiled like I meant it.

Nonna seemed satisfied with that answer. Assumed I knew their plans. Assumed everything was fine.

We sat in the living room and talked. She asked about work, about how I was feeling, about whether I was eating enough.

Normal grandmother things.

I answered on autopilot. Smiled when I was supposed to. Laughed when she made jokes. Perfectly pretending. Always pretending.

By 7:30, there was still no sign of Dante or Liora.

Nonna's brow furrowed. "What time is it now? Why aren't they here yet?"

She paused. Something flickered across her face, a memory, probably. Thinking about the hot spring resort. About how Dante had been absent then too.

Her expression darkened.

"Elodie," she said, turning to me. "Could you call him? Remind him at all?"

I didn't want to.

The last thing I wanted was to call Dante. To hear his voice. To be reminded of everything that was broken between us.

But Nonna was watching me and waiting.

So I picked up my phone and dialed his number.

He answered quickly. Like he'd been expecting it.

"We'll be there in twenty minutes."

No hello. No greeting. Just straight to the point.

I opened my mouth to respond but froze when I heard—

"Goodbye, Auntie Sienna!"

Liora's voice, so bright and cheerful and was coming through the phone clear as day.

My heart stopped.

They were with Sienna.

Of course they were.

I should've known. Should've expected it.

But hearing it, actually hearing my daughter say those words...

"Goodbye, Liora."

Sienna's voice came through the phone now. So soft and warm and gentle. The voice of someone who'd become part of my daughter's life without my permission.

Then, quieter, now to Dante, I think. "I'll head upstairs first."

Dante's response was simple. "Mm."

A casual, intimate sound. The kind of acknowledgment you gave someone you were comfortable with. Someone you cared about.

The line went silent for a beat as though Dante wanted to make sure I listened to every conversation that was going on in the background to remind me of my place in their lives. Hah!

Then Dante's voice came again. This time to me, it was cold and flat.

"Is there anything else?"

I stared at the wall across from me.

Is there anything else? I expected my eyes to start brewing with fresh tears at Dante's flat tone but the new me now had no emotions and didn't give two fucks if he still loved me or not. I felt extremely numb right now.

He sounded like I was a nuisance. Like this phone call was an inconvenience he needed to get through as quickly as possible.

Like I didn't matter at all.

"No," I said. My voice came out steadier than I felt. Empty if you ask. "Just that Nonna is waiting."

"We'll be there."

A click sound resounded and then he hung up.

I lowered the phone slowly and set it on my lap.

"Well?" Nonna asked. "Are they coming? Dante is really something else. That child gives me a lot of headaches!" Nonna was beginning to fume.

"Twenty minutes. They'd be here in twenty minutes." I said, trying to force a smile that felt shaky on my lips. "Don't be angry, Nonna. There's a lot of traffic, that's why they're stuck. They'll be here soon."

She relaxed. "Good. Good."

I smiled.

But inside, I was crumbling.

Nonna's face had softened a bit after I told her they were coming, but she was still annoyed. I could see it in the set of her jaw.

"Well," she declared, "let's eat first. We won't wait for them. He can have the leftovers!"

My eyes then shifted to the butler, who was standing quietly by the doorway, clearing his throat. "Miss Liora is still in the car, Madam..."

Nonna paused and her expression flickered.

Then she snorted. "Fine. Fine! For my great-granddaughter's sake, I'll let him off this time."

I smiled at her but didn't say anything.

What was there to say?

Twenty minutes later, the front door opened.

Nonna didn't even look at Dante when he walked in. Just turned her attention to Liora, her whole face lighting up.

"Liora! You're here!"

Liora ran toward her, her small feet pattering against the marble floor. "Great-grandma!"

Nonna scooped her up, and hugged her tight, and rubbed her head affectionately. The kind of unconditional love that grandmothers gave so easily.

Then she set Liora down and nudged her toward me. "Go say hello to your mother."

Liora came over. "Mom."

"Hey, sweetheart."

I pulled her into a hug.

And caught it immediately.

That scent. The familiar, expensive and familiar and floral scent.

Unmistakably Sienna's perfume.

It clung to Liora's clothes. Her hair. Like she'd been wrapped in it all day.

My chest tightened.

I didn't say anything. Just held her for a moment longer than necessary, then gently let her go.

"Did you have a good weekend?"

Liora nodded enthusiastically. "Yeah! It was really fun."

Fun. With Sienna, probably.

I didn't ask for details. Didn't want to hear them.

Dante had settled into the chair next to Nonna. He was holding out a small, elegant and clearly expensive box.

"A gift," he said. "To apologize, Nonna.."

Nonna took it, and opened it. Inside was tea. Snow tea, specifically, the rare kind she loved. It was hard to find and ridiculously expensive.

Her way of knowing he was sorry about missing the hot spring trip.

She examined it for a moment, then snorted. "At least you remembered to bring something for your grandmother."

She set the box aside.

Then her eyes narrowed.

"But what about Elodie?" She looked at Dante. "Did you prepare an apology gift for her?"

The room went still.

Dante smiled. That usual polite, empty smile he used for situations like this.

Then he glanced at me.

Just a look. Giving me a brief and meaningless look that was filled with no warmth, no guilt, no anything.

Just that silly acknowledgment that I existed in the same room as him.

He didn't answer Nonna's question.

Didn't offer an apology. Didn't pretend he had a gift hidden somewhere.

Just looked at me like I was furniture.

And then looked away.

Nonna's expression tightened.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 98 - 99[1,313 words]

Chapter 98: Chapter 99

ELODIE'S POV~

Nonna wanted Dante to pay attention to me. To show some care. Even just a little.

But I didn't need that anymore. I didn't even want it.

I kept my eyes away from Dante, and let a small smile settle on my face. "Nonna, the food will get cold. Let's eat."

She looked at me and sighed.

"You," she said, shaking her head. "Always covering for him."

She thought I was protecting Dante again. Thought I was deflecting because I didn't want to hear her scold him on my behalf.

That's what I'd always done before. Every time he ignored me, every time Nonna called him out, I'd smooth things over. Defend him. Make excuses.

My old habits.

But that wasn't why I'd changed the subject this time.

I just didn't care anymore.

What was the point? Nonna could pressure him all she wanted. Could guilt him into gestures that meant nothing.

It wouldn't change how he felt.

It wouldn't make him love me.

I smiled at her but didn't explain.

Dante's expression stayed flat. Unchanged. My words hadn't registered with him at all or if they had, he didn't show it.

It didn't matter.

None of it mattered.

Nonna stood, taking Liora's hand. "Liora, you haven't had a meal with great-grandma in so long. Sit with me tonight, okay?"

Liora nodded. "Okay, great-grandma!"

"Such a good girl."

Nonna shot Dante a pointed look as she said it. The meaning was obvious.

'Your daughter knows how to behave. Why can't you?'

I followed them into the dining room without looking at Dante.

Nonna settled Liora into the chair next to her, across from where I'd be sitting. A clear setup. She wanted me and Dante side by side.

I sat down.

And then I heard the chair beside me scrape against the floor.

It was Dante.

He pulled it out and sat down. Close enough that I could smell his cologne, that familiar scent that used to make me feel safe.

Now it just made me tired.

Nonna looked pleased, like she had accomplished something.

The servants began setting out dishes. The steam rising. The Porcelain clinking.

"Dante," Nonna said, her voice sweet but firm. "Serve Elodie some food."

Here we go.

"No need, Nonna." I reached for the serving spoon. "I can help myself—"

Before I could finish, Dante's chopsticks moved.

He placed a piece of stir-fried pork on my plate. And it was my favorite.

I stared at it.

"...Thank you."

He didn't respond.

He didn't look at me.

Just went back to his own food like nothing had happened.

This was how it always went when Nonna was watching. She'd ask him to take care of me, and he would. Mechanically. Dutifully.

Throughout the meal, whenever my plate got empty, he'd refill it. Always with things I liked. Always without being asked twice.

To anyone watching, it looked attentive. Considerate.

Like a good husband.

But I knew better.

This wasn't care. This was performance.

He was doing it for Nonna. Because she expected it. Because refusing would cause problems he didn't want to deal with.

Not because he actually wanted to take care of me.

Not because he saw me.

I ate in silence. Accepted the food he placed on my plate. Said thank you when it seemed appropriate.

And played my part.

Just like he was playing his.

Liora was chattering happily with Nonna. Something about school. About a project she was working on.

I listened with half an ear. And smiled when she looked at me.

This wasn't special.

Any of it.

Dante serving me food, knowing what I liked... it was just muscle memory. Years of meals with Nonna watching. Years of going through the motions.

He didn't need to try to remember my preferences. They were just there. Stored somewhere in that brilliant mind of his, alongside business strategies and stock projections.

Not because he cared.

Just because he'd been doing it for so long.

After dinner, Dante stayed in the living room with Nonna. Talking about Business, probably. Or pack politics.

I sat nearby, quietly. Barely speaking.

I didn't look at him, didn't participate unless directly asked a question.

Nonna noticed and I could feel her eyes moving between us, noticing the distance, the silence.

She sighed.

She was frustrated.

She'd been trying for years to make this marriage work. To push us together. To create a connection where there was none.

It never worked. It will never work.

But she kept trying anyway.

Around nine, Nonna started looking tired. She waved her hand at her. "Go upstairs. Rest. This old woman needs her sleep."

We said goodnight to each other.

I took Liora upstairs. Bathed her and washed her hair. Sat her down in front of the vanity to blow it dry.

She was quiet while I worked, watching me in the mirror.

Usually I'd fill the silence and ask about school. Tell her stories. Find things to talk about.

Tonight I didn't.

Couldn't find the energy to.

Liora noticed. Her small brow furrowed slightly. "Mom?"

"Hm?"

"Are you okay?"

I blinked and forced a smile. "Of course, sweetheart. Why?"

She shook her head and said. "Nothing."

But she kept watching me in the mirror. Like she was trying to figure something out.

I finished drying her hair and set down the brush.

She rolled onto the bed, burrowing into the blankets, then looked up at me. "Mom? Will you sleep with me tonight?"

My heart squeezed.

"Do you want me to?"

She shrugged. "I don't mind either way." A pause. Then, quieter, "But... you haven't spent much time with Dad lately. Don't you want to sleep in your room? With him?"

The question hit like a punch.

So innocent. So reasonable. A smart girl.

She had no idea what was happening.

"I'll go back in a bit," I said. Smiled like it was nothing. "Let me tuck you in first."

I couldn't stay here. If Nonna found out I'd slept in Liora's room without a good reason, that I'd avoided the master bedroom, there'd be questions. So many concerns.

More pressure. Ugh! I didn't want that.

The divorce wasn't finalized yet. On paper, I was still Dante's wife. Still supposed to share his bed.

I kissed Liora's forehead. "Goodnight, baby."

"Night, Mom."

I left her room and walked down the hall.

Stopped in front of the master bedroom door.

Took a deep breath.

And went inside.

The lights were on.

Dante was at the desk, his laptop was open, his fingers were moving across the keyboard. Working.

He glanced up when I entered. Briefly.

Then went back to his screen.

I didn't say anything. I just walked past him to the closet.

Found something to sleep in and headed to the bathroom.

The shower was hot. I stayed under the water longer than necessary. Let it beat against my shoulders. Tried to wash away the exhaustion that had settled into my bones.

It didn't work.

When I came out, Dante was still at his desk. Still typing.

I changed into my nightgown. Did my skincare at the vanity. Went through the motions.

It was still early. Not even ten yet.

I climbed onto the bed and propped myself against the headboard.

Picked up the book I'd been reading.

Opened it to where I'd left off.

The words blurred in front of me.

Across the room, Dante kept working. The keys of the keyboard were clicking.

We didn't speak.

Didn't acknowledge each other at all.

Just two people in the same room, existing in parallel. Occupying the same space without ever actually touching.

I turned a page I hadn't read.

Stared at the words without seeing them.

The silence pressed down on me. The silence was heavy and suffocating. But I didn't break it.

I wouldn't.

Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate

ELODIE'S POV~

Around midnight, sleep finally started pulling at me. I set my book down on the nightstand. Reached over and clicked off the lamp.

The room went dark except for the glow of Dante's laptop screen across the room.

I lay down, facing away from him. Facing toward the edge of the bed.

Part of me thought I wouldn't be able to sleep. It had been so long since I'd shared a bed with him. Months, maybe. The last few times I'd stayed at the villa, I'd slept in Liora's room or in the guest bedroom.

But then I thought, maybe it wouldn't matter. Maybe once he finished working, he'd leave anyway. Go to Sienna.

He wasn't obligated to stay here.

With that thought, my eyes grew heavier.

The rhythmic clicking of his keyboard became white noise.

And somewhere in that sound, I drifted off.

I slept deeply. Better than I had in weeks, actually.

The blankets were warm. And soft. Comfortable in a way I hadn't felt in a long time.

Somewhere in the haze of half-sleep, I became aware of warmth behind me. No, I mean around me.

A breath against my ear. Arms wrapped around my waist.

Something solid and warm pressed against my back.

And I was holding something, or someone, my hand resting against what felt like a chest.

My body went rigid.

Consciousness slammed into me immediately like cold water.

My eyes flew open.

I was on my side, facing the middle of the bed instead of the edge.

And Dante was wrapped around me.

Both of his arms were holding me close. His legs tangled with mine under the covers.

There was no space between us. None at all.

I could feel everything. The heat radiating off his body. The slow, steady rhythm of his breathing. The weight of his arms that were secure around my waist.

Like lovers.

Like we actually meant something to each other.

My heart was pounding so hard I was sure he could feel it.

How did this happen?

I'd fallen asleep deliberately on the edge of the bed. I'd made sure there was distance between us. A gap.

So how—

Unless he'd pulled me in.

Unless, in his sleep, he'd reached for someone to hold. Someone warm. Someone familiar.

Someone he thought was Sienna.

The realization hit like a blade between my ribs.

He was used to sleeping like this now. Used to having her in his arms. Night after night.

And in his unconscious state, he'd mistaken me for her.

My hand was still pressed against his chest. I could feel his heartbeat under my palm. So slow and peaceful.

He had no idea.

No idea he was holding his wife. Me.

My fingers curled slowly into a fist against his shirt.

I looked at him for a long moment.

At his peaceful face. At the way his arms were still loosely wrapped around me.

At the man I'd married who didn't even know he was holding his wife.

The bitterness rose up my throat like bile.

I swallowed it down and took a deep breath.

Then slowly, carefully, started pulling away.

We were so tangled together. Every small movement risked waking him.

I managed to slip his hand off my waist. Started sliding my legs out from under his. And then that's when his eyes opened.

I froze.

Our gazes met.

For one horrible, endless second, we just stared at each other.

I watched realization dawn on his face. Watched him register where he was. Who he was holding.

Not Sienna.

Me.

His expression flickered. Something I couldn't quite read.

Then he released his legs from around mine.

I didn't wait.

Didn't give him a chance to say anything.

I pulled back, and turned away, and moved to the edge of the bed, and found my slippers with my feet and stood up.

I walked to the bathroom without looking at him once and closed the door and then leaned against it.

And breathed.

When I came out, the room was empty.

He was gone. Of course he was gone.

I stepped into the hallway and saw him at the far end, still in his sleepwear, his phone pressed to his ear.

Talking to someone.

Sienna, probably. Calling to explain why he hadn't come home last night. Why he'd slept in the same bed as his wife.

I looked away and went downstairs.

Nonna was already awake, sitting at the breakfast table.

She smiled when she saw me. "Good morning, dear."

"Good morning, Nonna."

A few minutes later, Liora came bouncing down the stairs. So bright and energetic despite the early hour.

Nonna's face lit up. "Since everyone's awake, let's eat!"

Liora nodded eagerly. "Okay!"

The servants started bringing out food. Noodles. Soup. The usual weekend breakfast spread.

Then Dante appeared.

He walked in calmly, like nothing had happened, and sat down next to me.

Right next to me.

My body went stiff.

I shifted slightly in my seat. To put a few more inches between us.

It wasn't enough.

The memory of his arms around me was still too fresh. Two raw and I hated it.

I picked up my chopsticks and started eating my noodles.

Tried to act normal.

Then Liora spoke.

"Daddy?" She was looking at Dante, eyes curious. "Do you like sleeping with Mommy?"

I nearly choked on my soup.

Shit, I started to cough and my face turned red.

Dante didn't answer.

Liora tilted her head. "Because when I woke up and went to find Mommy, I saw Daddy hugging her really tight."

No.

No no no.

Nonna's eyes lit up. Delighted. "Oh? Is that so?"

She looked between me and Dante with that hopeful expression she always got when she thought we were finally getting closer.

"That's wonderful," she said, smiling warmly.

I wanted to disappear.

Because I knew the truth.

Dante hadn't been hugging me because he wanted to. Hadn't been holding me because he cared.

He'd thought I was someone else.

And now Liora had seen it. Now Nonna was drawing conclusions that weren't real.

Building hope on something that meant nothing.

I stared at my bowl. I couldn't bring myself to look at anyone.

Dante still hadn't said a word.

The silence stretched forth.

Then my phone rang.

Thank goodness.

I grabbed it and looked at the screen.

It was Grandma Miller.

My grandmother.

"Grandma," I answered, standing from the table. "Hello?"

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Alpha's Regret: Losing His True Mate - Chapter 100 - 101[1,625 words]

Chapter 100: Chapter 101

ELODIE'S POV~

Grandma Miller's voice was warm on the other end of the line. "Your uncle is back. Brought some gifts for you. Do you have time to come over for a meal?"

I glanced at Nonna, who was watching me with curious eyes.

"I'm with Liora at the old house right now," I said.

Nonna had mentioned earlier that she wanted us to stay at the manor. She wanted us to pick fruits in the garden. And spend time together.

Grandma Miller persisted to see us while trying to give other reasons. Nonna who was busy trying to pick up some fruits right over the table, pretended not to be invested in the discussion going over the phone call between grandma and I. Her face was blank.

But when she heard why Grandma Miller was calling, her expression softened. After the call ended, Nonna looked at me.

"Then take Liora and go," Nonna said warmly. Then she turned to Dante. "And you, it's been a long time since you visited Grandma Miller. Since you have free time today, why don't you go with Elodie?"

I didn't look at him.

I didn't need to.

"I have something to do later."

There it was.

No hesitation. No apology. Just that flat refusal I was used to.

I kept my face still. No surprise. No disappointment written on my features.

Why would I be surprised?

This was the pattern. The routine of Alpha Dante Wilson.

Dante never had time for anything involving me. Never had time for my family, my obligations, my life.

But for Sienna? He always found time.

Always. Every single time.

Nonna's face darkened. "What could possibly be so important that you haven't—"

"Nonna."

I interrupted before she could continue.

My voice was calm when I called her.

"It's fine. Since Dante has things to do, Liora and I will go alone."

Nonna looked at me. Something pained flickered in her eyes.

She thought I was being considerate again. Thought I was protecting Dante from pressure, the way I always had.

That wasn't it. It was no longer that.

I just didn't really care anymore.

What was the point of forcing him to come? So he could sit there in silence, counting the minutes until he could leave? So I could watch him check his phone for messages from Sienna?

No.

I was done.

"Elodie..." Nonna started.

I smiled gently, giving her my empty smile. Really, Nonna. It's fine."

She sighed and then let it go.

After breakfast, I spent some time chatting with Nonna. Keeping things light and normal, anything that would make her not bring up the issues between Dante and I.

Then it was time to leave.

Nonna had prepared gifts. Lots of them. Boxes and bags piled by the front door.

"For Grandma Miller," she said. "And for Helen. And for your uncle."

"Nonna, this is too much—"

"Take them." Her voice was firm as she placed a soft hand on my shoulder. "It's been too long since I've seen them. The least I can do is send gifts."

I couldn't refuse. I threw her a smile small and nodded.

Dante hadn't left yet. He stood with Nonna by the door as Liora and I prepared to go.

Liora ran over to him, and wrapped her small arms around his leg. "Daddy, are you coming home tonight?"

He rubbed her head gently. "I will."

Such a simple gesture. Such easy affection. For her.

Never for me.

There was no communication between us. No goodbye said. No single acknowledgment between us.

Just silence.

After Liora got in the car, I waved to Nonna and smiled.

Then got in and drove away.

In the rearview mirror, I could see them. Dante and Nonna, standing together, watching the car disappear down the driveway.

She looked concerned.

He looked like nothing at all.

The drive to Grandma Miller's house wasn't long.

When we pulled into the small courtyard, she was already outside, waiting for us.

Aunt Helen was with her, who'd practically raised me after Mom left.

They both came forward as I parked.

Grandma Miller's face brightened when she saw Liora scramble out of the car. "There's my great-granddaughter!"

Liora ran into her arms. "Great-grandma!"

I stayed back to pop the trunk.

Grandma Miller's expression shifted when she saw what was inside. All the gift boxes. Bags. They were enough to fill half the living room.

"Why did you bring so many things?" she asked, frowning.

"Nonna asked me to bring them for you."

The mention of Nonna made something flicker across Grandma Miller's face.

Since my marriage to Dante, the relationship between the two grandmothers had... cooled.

They used to be close. Best friends, almost.

But Grandma Miller had watched me suffer in this marriage. Had watched Dante neglect me year after year. Had seen the light slowly drain from my eyes.

And she blamed the Wilsons.

All of them.

She snorted and then said nothing.

Aunt Helen stepped in, smoothing things over. "Well, let's get these inside. Liora, sweetheart, come help carry the small ones, okay?"

Liora nodded eagerly. "Okay!"

We began to haul everything into the house.

I noticed the villa across from Grandma Miller's was being renovated.

Workers were moving around and tools were loudly clanging. The whole place was surrounded by scaffolding.

"Is someone moving in?" I asked, grateful for the change in subject.

Grandma Miller followed my gaze. "Seems like it. It started last week. From what the workers say, the owner's in a rush." She shook her head. "They've almost finished in just a few days. Won't be long before someone's living there."

This neighborhood was old. Everyone had been here for decades. Here was filled with familiar faces. Familiar routines.

A new neighbor was unusual.

Aunt Helen came out carrying some of the gift bags. "I hope whoever it is will be easy to get along with."

The unspoken worry hung in the air. If they were difficult people, life here could get complicated.

Inside, Aunt Helen set a bowl of bird's nest soup in front of me. The steam was curling up. It looked rich and golden.

"Your mom mentioned you've been looking tired lately," she said gently. "I had someone save some top-quality bird's nest for me. I'll send some back with you to take home."

I wrapped my hands around the warm bowl, grateful. "Thank you, Aunt."

The taste was familiar and comforting.

Like being taken care of. Like being loved.

Uncle Jason didn't get home until dinner.

Seeing him walk through the door brought a wave of guilt I'd been trying to push down for days now.

The last time, when Johnny had stood up for me, when Sienna had been blocked from joining Cole because of it, Dante had retaliated. He made sure Uncle Jason lost a project he'd been counting on.

It was my fault. All of it.

"Uncle," I said quietly when we had a moment alone. "I'm sorry. About what happened before."

He waved a hand casually and dismissively.

"It's in the past. I told you already, even without the Brown family, Miller Corporation couldn't have handled that project. Our situation isn't what it used to be." He shrugged. "Don't blame yourself."

He said it like it didn't matter.

But I knew better.

This was something Grandma Wilson could never find out. If she knew Dante had helped Sienna target my family, he had used his power to hurt us, she'd be furious.

Uncle Jason saw Grandma Miller approaching. He nudged me subtly.

‘Stop talking about it.’

I understood and immediately changed the subject.

"Next month is your birthday, Grandma," I said. "Your seventieth. We should do something special. Really for you."

Uncle Jason nodded. "Absolutely. It's a milestone."

Grandma Miller made a face. "Don't bother with all that fuss. Just a meal together would be fine."

Aunt Helen shook her head. "Seventy is important. We should celebrate properly."

"She's right," I added.

Grandma Miller looked between us. It was clearly she was being outnumbered right now.

Finally, she sighed. "Fine. If it makes you all happy."

I smiled. Genuinely this time.

This was something I could do. Something good.

I would plan a celebration. Make her happy.

Something that had nothing to do with Dante or Sienna or the mess my life had become.

After dinner, I drove Liora back to the villa.

She'd been happy all day, playing with Grandma Miller, eating sweets with Aunt Helen, being spoiled by everyone.

But as we pulled up to the house, her mood shifted.

She scrambled out of the car, ready to run inside.

I stayed in my seat.

"Liora."

She stopped and turned back.

"Take a shower and go to bed early, okay?" I kept my voice light. Normal. "Mommy has some things to do. I won't be coming upstairs tonight."

Her face fell.

"Huh?" She frowned, walking back toward the car. "You have things to do again?"

The disappointment in her voice was a blade between my ribs.

But I kept my expression calm.

"Mm. Just focus on your studies. Call me if you need anything."

She pouted. Clearly unhappy.

But then she sighed. "Okay..."

She was used to this.

Dante was always busy with work, always gone. And now I was doing the same thing.

She probably thought it was just our jobs. Never suspected anything else.

Never knew how broken everything really was.

The butler appeared at the front door, ready to greet us.

Liora looked up at him. "Is Daddy home?"

His face brightened. "Yes, Miss. He just got back."

I didn't react. I didn't feel anything.

"Okay." Liora turned to me. "Bye, Mom."