

Chapter 174 That Man Has Crossed the Line

Isabel did her best to control her breathing and heartbeat to keep the man from noticing that she was pretending to be asleep. She waited quietly for the man's next actions.

Mwah ...

A faint sound broke the silence as a gentle kiss pressed her lips.

Her heartbeat nearly missed a beat.

How dare this man sneak a kiss while I'm "asleep"!

Isabel thought of these days when they shared the same bed. Now she realized just how comfortable he'd gotten with these secret kisses. How many times had he done this when I was unaware?

What's happening to me? I was never this careless. It was because the environment in which she grew up in her previous life caused her to be vigilant at all times, whether it was day or night. Even in the deepest of sleep, the slightest disturbance would wake her.

Could it be because I've unconsciously dropped my guard and grown less careful around this man?

The thought made her head throb.

She didn't know if it was a good thing or bad to feel so defenseless around him.

Lost in a haze of confusion, she barely noticed as his cool lips brushed her forehead, landing in a light kiss.

However, it didn't stop there. Slowly, he let his lips trail down her forehead, nose, chin, the curve of her neck, and across her collarbone ...

If he went any further, she would have to drop the pretense.

Thankfully, he seemed to have some restraint. Instead, he shifted his attention to her hand, lifting it gently. He kissed her palm, then turned it over, pressing a kiss onto the back of her hand.

Not a single hand was left untouched.

Isabel felt her temples throb in frustration. She almost couldn't stand the urge to sit up and snap, "Hey, I'm asleep, not dead! Are you done? Or are you planning to savor every inch?"

Finally, he withdrew, seemingly satisfied.

Isabel sat up, staring at the closed door with an exasperated expression. She glanced down, inspecting her hand before touching her forehead, her nose, and her lips.

There were no visible traces of his kisses, yet she couldn't shake the feeling that each place he'd kissed now bore an invisible mark, an imprint that was uniquely his alone.

The more Isabel dwelled on it, the stronger that indescribable shame pulsed through her.

After a while, she shook her head, brushing off the thoughts.

No more distractions. Time to focus.

She took her phone from the bedside table and quickly typed out a message to Beowulf.

"Have you ever heard of the Nelsons?"

Beowulf's response came almost instantly.

"The Nelsons? From Daytonia?"

"Yeah."

"I don't recall that there's a Nelsons among the elite family circle. Maybe they're from a smaller one."

Isabel typed back, "It can't be a small family. Twenty years ago, they had close ties with the Bennetts."

Beowulf's curiosity spiked. Why is Isabel looking into this Nelsons?

"Did they offend you?" he asked, trying to piece together her motives.

"It might have something to do with my background," she replied. Isabel trusted Beowulf implicitly. She wasn't going to let past betrayals cloud her view. Her current brothers deserved better than that.

"Got it! I'll start digging. Expect my update soon."

After their chats ended, Isabel lay back down, reaching beneath her shirt to retrieve the emerald guardian angel pendant. She held it in her hand, sifting through fragments of memories that had resurfaced.

"Ivana? Could this be Ivana Shade, Xander's mother?" She murmured, speaking her thoughts aloud.

Meanwhile, in another part of the city, Xander received a call from his mother, Ivana.

"I heard you gave the emerald guardian angel pendant to Isabel?" Her tone was icy.

"I didn't give it to her. She likes it, so I'm letting her borrow it for a while," he replied calmly.

Ivana's expression darkened, and her voice held a distinct edge of disapproval.

"Xan, you shouldn't have done that! That pendant was Leslie's! She gave it to you, remember? And didn't she say she wanted you to marry her when you grew up?" Ivana's voice grew more heated with each word.

In Ivana's heart, Leslie was the one meant to be her true daughter-in-law. Even though Leslie was just a child back then, Ivana had always seen that girl as her biological daughter. She'd dreamed of the day she could watch Leslie walk down the aisle with her son.

Leslie was the reason she accepted Rachel as her goddaughter.

After so many years, she vaguely remembered that the Nelsons perished in a terrible fire years ago. That fire had left no trace, and Ivana had mourned for days, deeply heartbroken.

Then Rachel came into her life. That girl was so fond of her, always clinging to her while calling her name just like little Leslie once had. It brought her a glimmer of comfort.

"But she's gone." Xander stared out the window, his brows knit into a troubled line.

"That doesn't mean you should give her things to Isabel!" Ivana was fuming.

"I've told you, I didn't give that to her." Xander sighed, rubbing his temples. "We were just kids back then. You can't take it seriously."

"Xan, you ... "

"Mom, I'll handle this. And please, don't let Rachel keep feeding you stories." Xander cut her off, his voice firm.

Ivana glanced at Rachel, who was sitting on the opposite side. Her face was still streaked with tears. Her small face was now swollen, and her cheeks puffed up like a pufferfish.

Rage flared again in Ivana's chest.

"Don't even mention Rachel. Just look at what Isabel did to her! Is there nothing they could have talked out? Does it have to get violent? She has such wild and rough behavior. She's absolutely unfit for our family! I don't care how it's done; today, you're going to have Isabel come over and apologize to her. Rachel deserves to slap her back. She's my goddaughter. I can't let outsiders hit her for no reason!"

Rachel clenched her fists, and she vowed that she'd avenge today's hatred. Not only that, she'd make sure Isabel paid a hundred times over until her face was unrecognizable.

Xander's eyes darkened, his voice turning icy. "In this case, Rachel is at fault. I don't know what twisted version of the story she told you, but even if Isabel and I had nothing between us, I still wouldn't take Rachel's side on this."

Ivana frowned. Xander's firm tone made her pause, and she looked over at Rachel with doubt creeping into her eyes.

If Xander was this adamant, then perhaps things hadn't happened exactly as Rachel claimed. At least, not entirely.

"Rachel, tell me the truth. What had happened?"

Rachel Lawson had known she couldn't keep up the facade forever. Her lip quivered as she dropped her gaze, tears spilling freely.

She finally spoke through sniffles and sobs, "I ... I didn't mean to make trouble. I only saw Isabel holding something of Xan's and thought ... thought maybe she stole it, so I told her to hand it over. I-I never thought she'd refuse so boldly. I never imagined that Xan would give something so important to Isabel ... "

Ivana couldn't bear to see Rachel cry and sighed, but then a thought struck her. Her eyes widened, and she quickly turned back to Xander. "Xan, think about it. Isabel has refused everything, but then she asks specifically for the emerald guardian angel pendant. Do you think she might be connected to the Nelsons?"