Chapter 36

Isabella seemed lost in thought for a brief moment. Just as Alexander's arms were about to close around her, she came to her senses and raised her hand to stop him.

Frowning, she blocked him. "What are you doing, Alex?"

"Bella! I... I just couldn't hold it in anymore," Alexander stammered, staring at her flawless face, his emotions overtaking him.

He blurted, "Actually, I like you... Bella, can I—"

"Stop it! Do you even know what you're saying?" Isabella's eyes widened in shock. "I see you as a sibling! How could you say something like that?"

Her words shattered what little restraint Alexander had left.

"Bella, we're not real siblings!" he cried. "Don't you have feelings for me too?"

Isabella's expression hardened. "Enough! Alex, we're sworn siblings, and that's all we'll ever be. Do you understand? I don't want to hear this again. I will never betray Dom!"

Her response was nothing like what Alexander had expected. He had assumed that after she'd agreed to pose as his girlfriend, confessing now would surely win her over. But her reaction blindsided him, and regret began to sink in.

Yet the arrow had already flown and could not be recalled.

He clenched his fists, his voice shaking with passion. "That's not true! You must like me too! Think about it! If you really don't, then why do you always take my side over Dominic's? That's your heart talking, Bella!"

Stop lying to yourself!"

"Enough!" Isabella shot to her feet, her voice sharp. "If you ever entertain such thoughts again, then don't consider me your sworn sister from this day on!"

Alexander froze. After a long silence, he broke down, sobbing. "Bella... I'm sorry. I was too impulsive. Please don't be angry."

This time, Isabella didn't comfort him. She gave him a cold glance and walked out of the ward. In the corridor, she stood by the window and gazed at the starlit sky. She didn't know that Dominic was standing quietly beside her.

"My love... Was it my behavior that made him misunderstand? Or... did you misunderstand too?" she murmured, guilt clouding her face, her eyes rimmed with red.

Alexander's words had left her deeply ashamed.

'Did I really make him think I chose him over my husband? No... impossible. I've only ever seen him as a younger brother,' she thought.

Her face grew pale as she whispered, "My love, I've never done anything to betray you. Please don't be angry. I'll be more careful from now on."

Behind her, Dominic heard every word. A bitter smile touched his lips as sorrow welled inside him. 'If you had truly known how to keep your distance, Alexander wouldn't have thought you cared more for him. And I... wouldn't have died.'

His gaze turned cold. Her self-deceptive murmurs stirred no emotion in him now. 'Besides... how can you "be careful" anymore? I'm already dead. It's far too late.'

Isabella stayed by the window for a long time before returning to the ward. By then, she had composed herself.

"Alex, what just happened... I'll pretend it never did," she said softly. "From now on, you're not allowed to mention it again."

A flash of frustration crossed Alexander's eyes, but when he looked up, his eyes looked tearful. "I understand, Bella. It was my fault."

"It's okay," Isabella replied evenly, shaking her head. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine."

"That's good. I'm going to make a call." She took out her phone and dialed Katherine's number.

It was already past midnight, so Dominic should have been home by now. Feeling guilty, she didn't dare call him directly. Instead, she decided to contact her sister to ask about his whereabouts, planning to explain everything to him in person later.