

# HELLBOUND HEART

Chapter 12 This Instant



Elle felt as though a huge thorn that she never knew was there had been lodged deep within her chest was finally pulled out the moment Sebastian agreed to marry her. The feeling was incredibly... strange. Almost liberating, in fact. She felt as though her heart that was leaden was now as light as a buoy.

"Thank –"

"Don't." The curt reply came as he cut her off, giving his head a small shake. Then he stepped closer and leaned towards her before his indifferent voice ran through her. "There is nothing for you to be thankful for, princess. One day, you will realize that I deserve none of your thanks."

Her breathing shallowed at those words. Just by looking at those grey eyes as cold and hard as a bullet, she felt that what he told her were not just empty words. She could feel that he truly meant it. He was confident that what he was saying would turn out as a reality one day.

But no matter what he believes, whether he will end up right in the end or not, to Elle, he was still the man who had saved her from her impending doom. And no matter what happens, however the result turned out, she would not regret her choice tonight. She believed that as long as she expects nothing at all from this man... as long as she does not fall for him, she would be perfectly fine. Right, all she had to do was firmly shut her heart close from him...

"I understand, Prince Sebastian." She replied simply, her stormy blue eyes gleamed as she bravely held his gaze.

"Good." He said and nodded before walking past her.

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When the marriage talks were finally over, Sebastian was ordered by his father and uncle to escort Elle back to her room.

The engagement was finalized, and the wedding will be held after a week in Viscarria. Sebastian's uncle, Alexander, had also suggested that it would be better for Elle to travel back with them once they were to leave for their country so she could start familiarizing herself with the place there. It was a great suggestion as Elle herself was literally dying to leave this place and go someplace else. She had been caged in this place for far too long that she could not wait to fly out in the open again.

Once they reached her room, Elle faced Sebastian. She knew that Sebastian's uncle had prompted him to escort her for the two of them to talk and get to know each other. But none of them spoke until now. It was such a surprise though that the silence between them was not as uncomfortable and unbearable as she had thought it would be.

Elle was about to speak and bid him goodnight when he quietly leaned against the wall and whip a cigarette out from his pocket. She watched as the flame of a lighter casted reddish gold tones over his gorgeous face.

Quickly, she looked away before her gaze could fall to his lips. He was so gorgeous to the point of being extremely distracting! She scolded herself and made a mental reminder that she needed to practice absolute tolerance against this man now. It really was for her own sake.

She instead fixed her gaze to the gleaming ambers of his cigarette.

"Do you smoke, princess?" he asked. His deep voice came out lazy and... just sounded so pleasurably dark in her ears. It was as though someone had poured warm soothing wax over her.

She shook her head and met his gaze. "You can call me by name, Prince Sebastian."

He watched her with that hooded look, as a puff of smoke smoothly escaped his parted lips. "As you wish... Izabelle." Her name seemed to roll off too easily from his lips that it caused her to blink a couple of times and her calm smile faltered a tiny bit.

Trying to instantly regain her composure, Elle spoke hesitantly. "Uhm... about our agreement..." she paused when he stared at her. It was not easy for her to bring up this topic again but since he was not leaving yet, she thought that he must have wanted to talk about it. That was the only reason she could think on why he was still hanging around her.

"You have something else to add?" his expression was unreadable as he said those words.

Elle quickly shook her head, not expecting him to perceive her words that way.

"You referring to the divorce papers? I'll have it prepared before the wedding." He said flatly and before Elle could even react, they heard sounds of footsteps heading towards them.

Her brows knotted. The quality of the footsteps was enough for Elle to tell that something serious had happened. Her heartbeat raced when she saw the butler and her maid rushing in as though someone was on their tails.

"What happened?" Elle questioned as the duo panted before her.

"Princess, you need to go! His Majesty had ordered you to leave the palace this instant!"

"Wh-what? Why?" Elle had not expected these orders.

Her maid looked at her with wide eyes. She could see the panic reflected in it.

"Mr. Haze is on his way! He's coming for you, princess!"

## Chapter 13 Proper Fiancé



The world skittered to a halt. Elle's body was paralyzed again. This always happens when she hears this name. When it comes to that man, her fear always gets the better of her.

"Princess!" the maid grabbed onto her shoulders and had to shake her firmly for her to come back to her senses.

Elle whipped her head to look at Sebastian, clenching her fists to stop her fingers from shaking. She cannot show him this cowering side of her anymore. Unlike her who was almost being rendered useless by her panic and fear, Sebastian was calm and unbothered as he leaned there, his position not moving from before. She opened her mouth to speak but shut it close again even before a word managed to get past her lips.

She was about to beg him to take her away. She wanted to tell him they should leave this place together or at least have him just escort her out of the palace to a safer place that Brandon cannot reach. But she then remembered she could not ask anything from this man. She must not beg anything from him. Not even for his help when she's in a dire situation. That was what she had vowed for him to agree to their contract marriage. Her face paled as her

whole frame shook from the terror of just thinking about Brandon Haze coming after her. She needed to leave. NOW!

"I... I need to go, Prince Sebastian. See you tomorrow." Elle gave her farewell greeting and her voice trembled a little. Upon giving him a small nod of acknowledgement, Elle gripped her maid's hand tightly and they made haste to leave.

Sebastian did not move. He just watched unblinkingly as Elle's figure retreated until she disappeared from his sight.

"Sebby," Alexander's voice suddenly echoed from the entrance. The man was as relaxed and calm as Sebastian. It was as though nothing big enough could happen which would be able to shake him out of his composure. That was how composed he was.

"King Markus had informed him about the situation so that they could finally cancel tomorrow's wedding. But it seemed that the news didn't sit well with that Brandon guy. Now he's coming over. I have a feeling that this guy would not give the princess up even after we tell him that something had already happened between the two of you." Alexander said casually. "Anyway, you should go with your fiancée and keep her safe. And I am guessing that guy will not stop even after finding out she's not here anymore. Based on the king's description, that disgusting guy is definitely obsessed with the princess. There's a big chance he might hunt her. So, you go after her. We'll handle the rest here."

A quiet breath escaped Sebastian's lips as he lifted his gaze and meet Alexander's eyes. There was a flash in Sebastian's eyes when he locked his gaze with his uncle's. A few minutes of silence passed as both men stared at each other, each waiting for the other to speak first.

"Tell me, Alexander..." Sebastian finally spoke. "What exactly is your connection with Princess Izabelle? You seem to care about her so much as a

stranger. Don't try to tell me otherwise. I knew something was off the moment the palace sent me to attend a wedding of a princess I know nothing about. And the fact that you too, are attending, and now doing all these just for her, only further confirms my suspicions."

Alexander did not look surprised at all. In fact, he looked like he was actually expecting this confrontation. A slow smile curled up at the corners of his lips.

"Well, that's a good question, Sebby. You are right. Izabelle is not a stranger to me, most especially to my wife. We are complete strangers to her now though." Alexander did not try to avoid the question and answered Sebastian's queries seriously. "But don't get me wrong. This is no setup or anything of the sort. We were initially here purely as honored guests to attend the wedding. Also, I am here only to identify and make sure that the man Izabelle is going to marry is a good man as per my wife's request. Nothing more, nothing less. However, this situation ended up this way because of the circumstances of matters that were happening over here with the groom being quite problematic, as you can see. And also, your actions that pushed things along the way, of course. There is no one puppeteering anyone here if that's what you are suspecting me of right now, Sebastian."

The silence between the two men became a little heavy for a moment. Alexander was beyond serious as he explained everything, and Sebastian was certain of that. Alexander rarely speaks this seriously. So when he looked and spoke like this, he knew what that meant.

"You came here to make sure the man Izabelle is going to marry is a good man and yet you had a hand in helping her get married to someone like me?" Sebastian commented ironically, as a wry smile tugged at one corner of his lips.

Alexander looked skyward and sighed. "There's no better choice, Sebby. Apart from the fact that she herself personally chose you over that asshole, I'm with her on this too, you're still the better choice."

Sebastian gave his head a slow shake. "Really... I don't understand why you'd say I am any better for her when you know what kind of man I am, Alexander."

"I know. But... if it's you, we could at least be there to support her and look out for her well-being. And something already happened between the two of you. So, you..." he grabbed Sebastian's shoulder and squeezed gently, however, his gray eyes seemed to burn with something intense. "You need to take responsibility for your own actions, Sebastian. Be a proper fiancé and go after your woman."

#### Chapter 14 Normal



Inside the king's study.

"Your Majesty, Mr. Haze's men are already searching through the entire palace." The servant reported. "He's on his way here too."

"How pathetic. He's free to search your palace even without the actual owner's permission? You are the king, but this Brandon guy acts like he owns this place." Alexander commented as he watched the ruckus down below. He was swirling his red wine in a tulip glass as he looked through the window overlooking the massive garden.

King Markus was on the couch, his head bowed down low. His shoulders were slumped and the entire aura around him seemed defeated, as though he had no authority as the ruler.

"Mr. Haze had been free to come and go within the palace for quite some time now. I was... forced to give him such authority." The king spoke through gritted teeth with forced restraint. At the same time, he looked visibly tense and was obviously scared of Brandon Haze. "I couldn't refuse him because he is this country's only hope. The country... needs him." King Markus' voice was strained and shaky as he spoke the last sentence. It was barely audible, but Alexander heard him, nonetheless.

Alexander released a soft snort as he rolled his eyes. "This country does not need him, Mr. Eves. You're the one who needed him."

King Markus lifted his head with a start. His face flushed as he looked at Alexander with a darkened gaze. But the instant their gazes met, the king felt that ridiculously intimidating feeling wash over him again. This Alexander was obviously not the king. But since the moment these two arrived, Markus felt like this man was actually the real king and King Rudy was just some kind of powerless mascot. It was ridiculous but his instincts were telling him otherwise! He could feel who the powerful people were but... how could this be explained? He shook his head, telling himself that he was just too stressed out and panicking right now. He firmly believed though that something was definitely strange with this Alexander guy! But then, he had felt the same overwhelming and powerful aura from Prince Sebastian. Only King Rudy felt normal...

A loud crash pulled King Markus out of his internal contemplation. His gaze flew to the door and there stood Brandon Haze. His face was twisted and dark as he stormed into the King's study as though he owned the place. There was not an ounce of respect in the way he behaved before the king.

"What is the meaning of this, Markus?! Where is the little girl! Where is she?!!" he bellowed.



"The little girl..." Alexander's lazy voice echoed, causing Brandon to snap his head over to Alexander's direction and threw him a death glare. But Alexander returned him the same gaze and all of a sudden, the air inside the room became charged. "As far as I know, there is no 'little girl' in this palace. A beautiful adult lady was here though. I think you are lost, Mister."

"You... you shut up! Speak once more and you're dead." Haze gritted his teeth before facing Markus once again. "Where is she!!! Bring the princess out now!"

"Ohh... so you're looking for Princess Izabelle, are you?" Alexander butted in again, shaking his head. "How could you refer to the adult princess as a 'little girl'? I think you are sick, Mister." He insulted the man, not caring if Haze got angrier.

Bang!

The gunshot echoed in the room. Markus stood up in shock as he looked at the gun that was in Haze's hand, pointed right at Alexander.

Slowly, Markus shifted his gaze to Alexander, a little scared that the man might be dead. But he was still there, standing as he was earlier, smiling as though there was no gun pointed at him. It seemed he had dodged the bullet.

Markus knew Haze was fond of guns and he was a sharpshooter. He had seen him shoot others many times before this way and none had survived it so far. But this Alexander...

"Oh... I must say that shot's pretty impressive." Alexander drawled lazily as he casually eyed the gun in Haze's hand when another gunshot echoed again in the room.

And again, Alexander dodged it. He stood there, still smiling mockingly. His eyes were taunting Haze, wordlessly saying that he was a bad shot.

Haze's face turned pale, and his eyes blazed with utter fury. But before he could pull the trigger another time, Alexander was suddenly standing before him. Haze had not noticed that Alexander had been moving closer and closer the two times he had fired his gun at him.

The cold barrel was now pressed against Haze's throat.

"What's wrong? Aren't you about to pull the trigger just now?" Alexander smirked.

"W-w-who the fuck are you?!" Haze stammered out weakly, his face now as white as sheet. His body was paralyzed as he realized how freaking strong this unknown man was. His hands on his was like a vice. "Don't you know who I am?"

Alexander tilted his head. "Hmm... your face doesn't ring a bell. So, I guess you aren't important enough for me to know?"

"Y-you're going to regret –" Haze spluttered out, enraged at how this man had looked down on him.

"Brandon! Mr. Reign. Please drop the gun." Markus butted in. Visibly anxious at what was going on.

"Okay," Alexander nonchalantly nodded, "but first, I'll have to tell this man here that Princess Izabelle has been taken away by her beloved. I guess I shall inform this man too on who dared took the beautiful princess away. She's taken away by my nephew, crown prince Sebastian of Viscarria, and they're going to get married soon." He moved and softly whispered to Haze. "If you value your life, give up the princess and don't do anything stupid. Now scram."

Alexander pushed Brandon away hard the man stumbled and nearly fell on his behind. When he whirled around as if to attack, a gunshot had him frozen. Alexander had shot on the ground right beside his feet.

"Leave." His low voice rumbled out and another bang echoed.

"You will pay for this!!!" Haze yelled as he ran towards the door.

"How pathetic." Alexander sighed before he leisurely sat on the couch and faced King Markus. "Alright, now let's get down to your political dilemma and get it settled, King Markus." He spoke as though all that hullabaloo did not just happen. And the king could only slowly sat down, utterly speechless.

## Chapter 15 Piece Of Paper



Elle had finally arrived at a certain hotel near an airport.

She was being extra careful and had chosen an average hotel instead of going for a high class one, as she knew that most of the luxury hotels all over Dalenn were owned or closely connected to Brandon Haze. Elle also knew there was a high possibility that Haze might have already mobilized all his men to be searching through the airport to spot her. So, she did not dare go straight there even though she badly wanted to leave the country as soon as possible.

An hour ago, Elle had stopped their car midway during their escape and took a cab by herself. Her maid and bodyguard had protested but Elle had told them that she did not trust any cars that were from the palace. She was quite confident that they would have been bugged and a tracker might have also been planted somewhere in the car. That was how insane Brandon Haze was!

So here she was right now, checking herself into an average hotel, pretending to be another tourist that had come to visit the country. She had made sure that no one recognized her. Thankfully, it was easy enough to disguise herself and blend in as their country do have tourists coming in all year round to visit.

Locking the door and fastening to latch to her room, Elle finally took in a deep breath. Her legs gave out and she slid weakly down to the floor. She had been so tensed and scared ever since her maid had come running to her with the news that Haze was coming to get her. All her previous attempts in the past to leave the country had been foiled again and again that she had not realized that she had developed a certain anxiety whenever she attempted it again.

Wherever she goes, she felt as though a sinister eye was following and tracking her every move. Trailing after her and watching her back, just waiting for the right time to pounce on her. She had lost count on how many times she had looked behind her before she entered this room.

Another couple of deep exhales escaped Elle's lips as she looked around the room. It was dim and tidy and quiet. "I am safe now, right?" she asked no one before her gaze fell to the telephone on the side table.

A certain event in the palace flashed in her mind, causing her to immediately fumble in her pocket. She opened a small, folded paper and saw a phone number written on it. Just as she was running out of the palace, Sebastian's uncle, Alexander, had stuffed this piece of paper into her hands. He had told her that this number should be the one she must call if she ever needed help.

As she stared at the number, the doorbell suddenly rang.

Elle almost jumped out of her skin in fright. Her fingers trembled and the piece of paper fluttered to the floor.

When it rang the second time, she pushed herself up from the carpeted floor and forced herself to stand. Convincing herself that it most probably is just the hotel staff.

Hesitantly, Elle peeked out the peephole.

She stumbled back, nearly tumbling over her feet onto the floor. Her throat constricted and dried up. Her breathing was raspy, her skin turned clammy and cold. She could recognize those men in black anywhere, even in her dreams. They were Brandon Haze's goons! How? How could they have found her already? She had not even checked-in to this hotel for an hour!

Elle had left her bag and phone in the car before taking a cab because she did not even trust her own belongings. She did not even trust her servants. She had always thought that the reason all her plans for escape had failed was because they knew all her secrets. She had strongly believed that Haze must have planted a mole and was spying on everything that went on in her phone. Thus, the reason she left them all behind. She only took all the cash she had in her purse with her. There should be no way they could have tracked her! At least not this quickly!

Fear started to consume her entire being. She could feel herself almost hyperventilating. No! She must not! She needed to stay as calm as possible and find a way out for herself quickly. Clenching her fists, she dug her nails into her palms until there were deep and red crescents marking her fair hands. That helped to stabilize her volatile emotions somewhat.

Her eyes desperately combed the room for a weapon. But she did not find anything that could be effective enough for her to use to fight against them.

When the doorbell rang for the third time, Elle's pulse leapt into her throat, as her whole frame shook with fear. She rushed towards the curtain, wishing there was a window where she could probably escape out of.

There was no window that she could open. It was only a wall of glass she knew she could not possibly break.

Her lungs constricted when she heard loud noises at the door. Hope was being ripped out of her and no matter how she tried to hold onto it, the more seconds ticked by, the more she felt like giving up. There was no use. She was done for. She thought she had finally escaped this nightmare when her engagement with Sebastian was finalized. It appeared that she was wrong. That monster was not going to let go of her unscathed.

Just when all hope started to fade, the piece of paper on the floor caught her eyes like a beam of bright light in the murky and thick darkness. It was as though this was her last hope of salvation and she clung to it. Her body moved so fast even before her mind could think and rushed to grab it. When she realized it, her fingers were trembling as she dialed the number.

But before the telephone could even ring, she heard the click of the doorknob to her room being turned.

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## Chapter 16 Accidentally



Elle had put the telephone lying on top of the table, leaving it there to continue ringing.

Standing by the door, Elle clutched a porcelain vase tightly in her hands, ready to strike anyone who managed to enter. The moment she heard the sounds of the doorknob being twisted a while ago, she had immediately

grabbed the only vase in the room, about the size of a one-liter wine bottle, threw out the fake flowers in it and rushed towards the door.

It seemed that her survival instincts had prompted her to move instead of just standing there frozen to the spot and behave as a helpless damsel that was paralyzed by her fear.

She stared hard at the doorknob. She had initially thought that she was not going to make it, but for some reason, the door did not fling open as she was expecting. It was almost as though the person behind the door had hesitated. Which was suspicious. Did someone interrupt them?

She gave her own head a shake, reminding herself to not let her guard down and to expect the worst and always be prepared. Her heartbeat was pounding so loud in her ears that she could hardly hear anything else that was happening behind the door.

A few breaths later, the doorknob moved again. Elle held her breath as her pupils constricted due to nervousness. Her grip on the porcelain vase tightened as she lifted it up, ready to slam it down hard onto that someone's head who dared burst in unwelcomed into her room.

She needed to give her all so she could at least wound or even better, perhaps make the person fall and keel over. If she could achieve that, she would then grab the person's gun. She knew Brandon Haze's goons have guns on them wherever they go. If she managed to swipe a weapon from them, she would at least have a fighting chance in escaping. So, she must not mess this up. This was most probably her very last chance!

Someone pushed the door open.

A crash of glass against something solid broke through the few seconds of tense silence that followed the door swinging open. The shattered glass fell to the floor, breaking into more pieces.

Elle's eyes stretched wide as she looked at the man she had just attacked. Blood started flowing down his forehead to the right side of his gorgeous face.

"S-seb..." her voice was barely a whisper. The absurdity of seeing him here had her unable to even complete his name.

Sebastian looked at her. His one hand holding onto the doorknob and the other was at his ear, holding a phone.

He lowered his hand slowly, ended the call before slipping the phone smoothly into his pocket. Though his expression was unreadable, Elle was terrified. Not because she was scared that he would retaliate by hurting her back, but because she knew she had accidentally done another terrible and unforgivable thing to this man. Oh goodness... what had she done?!

"I'm... oh god... I'm so sorry..." she moved closer to him, her hands trembling as she hesitantly reached out to him. There should not be this much blood flowing from his head! "Hospital! You need to get to hospital right now –" her panicky voice issued from trembling lips.

He caught her wrist before she could touch him. "There is no need." His voice flat and curt, but Elle frantically shook her head. No matter what he would say, she knew his wound was dangerous. He could even suffer a brain hemorrhage from this! She had given all the strength she could muster when she hit him! Not to mention the amount of blood flowing from him!

"You're in danger! Please let's –"

"Go take off your clothes and jewelries. Everything. Now." He cut her off and shot out that command.

Elle blinked. "W-what?!!" Oh, no! Had she hit him too hard in the head? Why was he asking her to undress in such a situation?

"You are being tracked. There must be a bug somewhere on you."



"Okay but... you really need to be treated first, Prince Sebastian!" Elle insisted. She knew it was in her best interest to listen to him, but his situation was still more important right now. His life could be in danger! "There's too much blood flowing from you... I can't let you bleed to death!" guilt was wrecking a havoc in her heart.

He was silent for a moment but thankfully, he sighed and finally relented. "I'll get it treated. Go and change your clothes now."

Before Elle could even react, the door was shut closed before her. She could only grit her teeth and started stripping hastily as she rushed towards the closet. Sebastian was right, there must have been a tracker on her. That was the only reasonable explanation on why they were able to track her to this hotel so fast. Once she got rid of her clothes, she took off her luxurious jewelries and threw them to the floor.

Grabbing a white bathrobe from the closet, Elle wore it, and tied it securely around her before hastily headed for the door. It was not the most proper of clothes, but she knew that right now, it was better for her to have a wardrobe malfunction than to be tracked due to a bug in her clothes!

She was worried about Sebastian. She was afraid that the man might have fainted outside or perhaps blacked-out by now since it was a miracle he did not even stumble when she hit him.

But the moment she stepped out of the door, her lips parted from the sight that greeted her. Men in black were scattered on the floor, some seemed to be unconscious while others were unable to stand, making agonized sounds. Blood was even dotted the beige-colored marble floor. And Sebastian...

He was standing there. The red-haired man she had seen a couple of times in the palace with him was already almost done taping down a bandage on Sebastian's forehead.

She could not help but swallow as she counted the number of those men in black that littered the ground. How could they have beaten these men up on their own? There were only the two of them against ten men who were no doubt professionals, but it still seemed that they had done this in no time all. Is this prince and his sidekick some kind of top-notch fighter?

"I'll leave this mess to you, Lucas." Sebastian's voice pulled her attention away from the men on the floor.

"Yes, sir." The man named Lucas gave a short nod.

"Let's go." Sebastian gestured at her and Elle immediately moved towards him. He eyed her outfit and then glanced at the red-haired guy again.

To Elle's surprise, Lucas gave her his coat. "Please put this on, Miss Eves." Lucas said respectfully.

## Chapter 17 Bad Grass



## Chapter 17

This bonus chapter is dedicated to @edi\_o, @Monic\_Ceja, @Sacogun, and @MonsterUnderTheBed. Thank you so much for the supergifts!

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Elle did not hesitate to take the coat and when she turned back to look enquiringly at Sebastian, the man was already leaving. She had no choice but to quickly nod her thanks to Lucas and rushed after Sebastian while hastily wearing Lucas' coat over her bathrobe.

She finally caught up to him when he stood before the elevator. She could not help but glance up at his enchanting face. Though it seemed as though Lucas had successfully stopped the bleeding, the man did not bother to even wipe off the blood that had tracked down and dried on the side of his face. The blood was all over his neck. If he had not been wearing an all-black outfit, she was certain that the blood soaking his clothes would have been quite gruesome to look at.

The elevator dinged and its doors finally slid open. So Elle poked her head in, only to see a large man inside, wearing the same all black three piece suit that the beaten up men were wearing.

Her heart leapt up to her throat. Elle thought Sebastian would not enter, but he nonchalantly walked inside, turned around and look at her. His gaze was unreadable, but Elle did not feel him sending her any signal whether she should enter or not.

"Get in, Izabelle." His voice nearly jolted her. She had not expected him to say out name her right before her enemy. And in front of one that looked like wrestler at that!

Despite her jumbled-up thoughts, Elle entered. She stood right in front of Sebastian.

The air inside the elevator was charged, almost suffocating as it moved down.

As the seconds ticked by, the atmosphere inside the elevator became more dangerous. Elle thought that this must be what bloodlust felt like. It was nauseating. She felt as though a bomb was about to be detonated anytime soon inside this elevator. And all she could do was to just stand still and pray for the elevator's door to finally open.

Loud sounds of something solid slammed against the elevator's walls in the next few seconds. Startled, Elle scooted forward and pressed herself against

the elevator's door. When she turned back to look, thinking to maybe help Sebastian against the huge guy, she was once again rendered paralyzed.

Sebastian's hand was gripping a fistful of the huge man's hair and was slamming his head against the now bloodied wall.

He suddenly stopped, finally glancing up at her. He straightened and let go of the man's hair.

The huge man's body slumped to the floor and the elevator's door slid open behind her.

Sebastian stepped over the man nonchalantly, as though stepping over a mound of dirt and walked past her. Elle swallowed, looking down at the now unconscious and bloodied man on the floor before slowly turning around and obediently following Sebastian out the elevator.

The prince was looking at her. His grey eyes expressionless. His hair was messy, and blood stains were visible all over his face and neck. Nevertheless, he still looked so perfect. But it was no longer the perfect princely image that she always saw in the TV and magazines. Right now, he looked more like that favorite handsome-as-hell villain in a certain movie.

He offered her his hand quietly. She could tell that he knew he had frightened her and now he seemed to be giving her a choice if she still wanted to go along with him or not.

Elle stared at his hand. She had not realized that he was wearing black gloves until now. She wondered why he was wearing them. Was it because he was expecting this bloody encounter and had to take precautions?

She stretched out her hand and placed it in his. She imagined his gloved hands filled with blood and she could not deny the shivers that ran through her. But even if her imagination was the truth, she would still choose this tainted hand over that monster's.

When they reached the garage, Sebastian let go of her hand and walked around a black car.

"Take off your shoes and leave it there." He ordered as he opened the car door.

Elle creased her brows, but she immediately obeyed, not even asking any questions anymore. And as soon as she entered the car and buckled on her own seatbelt, Sebastian zoomed off.

Soon, the car was speeding up in the highway. Elle was waiting for him to take a turn as she thought he was going to go to the hospital first. She noticed his wound did not seem to be bleeding anymore which was pretty impressive. But she still wanted him to go to the hospital to check it out just to be on the safe side. But he obviously was not planning to go to any hospital with the way they were moving.

"Where are we going?" she finally asked.

"To the airport."

Elle pressed her lips together tightly for a moment. "I think we need to go the hospital first."

He glanced at her and Elle did not know why her heart skittered to a stop. Anxiety immediately gripped her heart as the thought that he must be thinking she was already starting to nag at him came to her.

"Don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to nag you." She reasoned out. "I just... don't want to get widowed before I could even get married. You still... need to marry me." She tried that excuse on him.

A smirk graced his face and that faint dimple showed up again for a fleeting moment, causing her heart to pick up speed.

"You don't have to worry about that." he replied, his voice gentle but sounded a little darker than usual. "Bad grass never dies, Izabelle."

## Chapter 18 First Step



The next time Elle opened her eyes, she realized that it was all quiet and there were no longer that slight movements she felt earlier on the flight. The private jet had already landed.

She had slept all throughout the journey because it was already dawn when their plane took off from Dalenn. The fatigue that had piled up and non-stop stress had really beaten her down and literally knocked her out into a deep a slumber. And due to that, she now was waking up alone in the plane.

There were no one else in the plane anymore. Sebastian and even the pilots were gone. When she glanced at the clock, her jaw dropped. She checked the timing just when their flight took off and remembered that their arrival in Viscarria should be at nine in the morning. It was now already eleven!

Rushing out of the plane, Elle was welcomed by a lady at the door, dressed in a gray suit. She was tall and had long, straight and neatly tied up hair. One look and Elle thought that she must be a female bodyguard.

"Hello, Princess Eves. I am Ava." She greeted Elle with a wide polite smile. "I am assigned to escort you to the Reigns castle and attend to everything that you need."

Elle smiled back. She was about to ask about Sebastian's whereabouts, but she held her tongue and just nodded at her. She needed to keep to her end of the bargain regarding all the things she had promised in the contract.

"Give me a moment to prepare myself." Elle informed her before smiling back. But as soon as she turned, her smile turned a little bitter. 'Of course, he'd leave. What were you even expecting? That he's going to wait for you to wake up? Don't you dare be delusional, Elle. Don't forget about the deal. Never expect anything from Sebastian Reign.' She told herself firmly.

"Uhm... Miss Eves," Ava followed behind her so Elle looked at her from over her shoulder. "Prince Sebastian had brought you clothes to change into before he left."

Elle halted and Ava went to pick the paper bags marked with luxurious brands and placed them on top of the bed.

"If you need any assistance, please don't hesitate to call out, Miss Eves. I'll just be outside the door." Ava said and with Elle's nod, she quietly left her.

After staring at the row of bags lining up on the bed, Elle then slowly looked at each of them. Everything was complete and just perfectly chosen. From the right sized underwear to the perfect outfit and even matching shoes, bag and accessories! Elle stared at the understated yet elegant outfit sporting a mix of both conservative and modern style. A neutral-colored shawl paired with a white knee length coat, nude high heeled leather stilettos, a pair of tiny pink sapphire earrings and... even makeup. Everything a woman ever needed to dress up was there.

Elle immediately thought that this must have definitely been prepared by a royal stylist. She imagined Sebastian making a call to bring whatever she needed, and the stylist had gotten their job done perfectly even without being told the details. And for some reason, Elle suddenly remembered when Lucas had given her his coat last night. She had noticed when Sebastian glanced at the man before it happened. She wondered if Sebastian was the one who had gestured for him to give her his coat. But Sebastian was wearing a coat too. Should he not...

She took a deep breath and shook her head. Telling herself that she must stop overthinking everything, Elle focused on getting herself ready. She was used at dressing herself up even when there were important occasions as long the dress was not something that required too much attention. And since she also did her own make-up as she had already mastered doing it herself, she did not call for Ava until she was done fully getting ready.

"You look lovely, Miss." Ava praised her. Elle somehow felt quite at ease with this woman so far. There seemed to be no pretense in her eyes and smile.

"Thank you, Ava. Am I going to be escorted straight to the Reigns castle?" Elle asked. She was curious if there was already a formal meeting so she could prepare herself.

"Actually, Prince Sebastian said you can take your rest today. He didn't say anything about your schedule. So I guess once I escort you to the castle, you can have your rest."

"Oh, I see..." Elle nodded, hiding how relieved she was that she did not need to meet Sebastian's family right off the bat. In fact, she was not really afraid or nervous. But she thought that she needed to speak with Sebastian first. They needed to get some facts right before they meet up with the family. She was certain Sebastian's family would ask her questions, so she needed to speak with him first on what she was and was not allowed to reveal about their relationship.

But if she went straight to the Reigns residence now, there would be a high chance that she would immediately meet them as soon as she gets there. And once that happens, questions could not be avoided.

"Is Sebastian already there?" Elle asked.



"I am not sure, Miss, as I wasn't informed about Prince Sebastian's schedule for the day. But if you ask my opinion, I don't think the prince is there. Prince Sebastian rarely goes to the Reigns Castle."

Elle creased her brows. He rarely goes there but he's sending her there...?

"I can make a call to the castle right now and ask just to be sure." Ava said as she led her out of the plane's door.

As soon as Elle stepped out, a fresh cold breeze welcomed her. She stopped and inhaled it as she looked around and then up to the clear blue sky.

A faint smile curved on her lips. It was hard to believe she was now in Viscarria. A place she has never been to before. A place that was away from Dalenn. Far, far away from that monster's reach.

She could not quite explain her feelings at the moment. As she reached the last step of the stairs, she stared at the ground. This would be her very first step into this land.

Her heartbeat suddenly picked up its pace and she couldn't shake the feeling that the moment she sets foot on this land, her life would never be the same again.

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## Chapter 19 Wings



This bonus chapter is dedicated to @MonsterUnderTheBed, @VanillaChocolate and @Sacogun! Thank you so much for the supergifts!

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Looking out of the window at the passing scenery as the car brought her towards her destination, Elle watched how fascinating the view of this city was. Quesa, Viscarria's capital was a complex blend of the ancient and modern world. It exhibits wide range of architecture, from ancient to modern. But the way it was incorporated was tastefully done and melded well together.

,m Elle had been aware that Viscarria was a prosperous kingdom but also known as one of the mysterious places on Earth. Now that she was here, she could not shake the feeling that the rumors she had heard all this while were true. This place was indeed very beautiful and yet it was not even numbered among the top hundred most famous cities in the world. That alone was suspicious to her because she could easily consider this city to belong to the top three most beautiful cities in the world.

It also looked really peaceful. It was not too crowded, and the air was just fresh. Back in Dalenn, every time she looked outside the car window, she would always see something that would break her heart. Here, all she could see was a perfect peaceful paradise. There were literally no signs of poverty. At all.

She could not help but wonder what kind of life she would have right now if Dalenn was not a struggling kingdom. If Dalenn was as prosperous and peaceful as this place, would she be here right now? Would her father even need to go to that monster for help?

A small smile tugged at the corner of her lips. She reminded herself that she still knew nothing about this country. It might be perfect as she looked on from the outside, but perhaps there were ugly things hidden on the inside? She was aware of many places in the world that were hiding their real situation. Many appeared to be standing strong and prosperous if you were only to skim it on the surface. But the reality is just otherwise. This place must be hiding their flaws and dark secrets too, like every other place in the world.

The car pulled off to the roadside, causing Elle to shift her gaze to the front seat. Ava had just ended a phone call and turned back to look at her.

"Miss, there is a change of plan." Ava said. "His Highness said that you will not go to the Reigns residence today. I will be bringing you to check in to stay in a hotel for today."

Elle did not speak and just stared back at Ava, her face carefully neutral as she processed what her bodyguard just told her. After giving her a single nod of acknowledgement, she eventually looked away again.

"Alright," was all Elle said in a soft voice as she fixed her gaze outside.

The car then made a U-turn and headed to a different direction. Ava kept glancing at Elle through the rearview mirror as though checking to see if her mistress was alright.

"Miss, would you like to go sight-seeing later tonight once you are more rested?" Ava asked politely. But Elle heard the tinge of concern in her voice. She understood why Ava was being cautious and trying to probe if she were angry or upset.

However, Elle still did not trust Ava. Well, she trusted her for her physical safety, of course. But she would not think that Ava would be loyal to her. In Elle's mind, Ava would most probably be reporting her every move to Sebastian, not leaving out even the minutest of details be it the things she does or say, just like all her previous maids and bodyguards. Elle could already imagine that someone might even report to Sebastian that she was sulking if she did not show she was not bothered with this arrangement. And she would never want that. She must never allow that to happen.

Returning her attention to Ava, Elle responded. "I've slept quite long on the plane, so I'm actually quite rested already. Why don't we go sight-seeing now?"

I'd like to see more of this city." She made sure to keep her tone light and easygoing.

Ava's eyes gleamed. "Of course, miss. I will be your tour guide!"

"But first, I'd like to go freshen up and get changed into some more comfortable clothes."

"Alright, Miss! Leave that to me." Ava looked so fired up and as she quickly informed the driver to drop them at a certain place.

...

Later in the day...

Elle was lying back on top their car, watching the sunset as she allowed her mind to wander. She had spent hours just strolling around along some of the busiest streets of Quesa just dressed in jeans and sneakers, with a wide brimmed straw hat and a pair of sunglasses to shade her head and eyes. Though simple, she still looked stunning and did not stop many pairs of eyes to follow her as they appreciated her slender and shapely figure.

It was unexpectedly an amazing experience. It must be because it had been so long since she had been allowed to wander on any street without her security guards swarming all over her and without all the watchful eyes following her every single move. But what surprised her the most during her unexpected tour was the fact that she had yet to find the flaw she was expecting to see. She had asked Ava to bring to her to outskirts and busy streets. She even went and walked to an underground subway even when Ava was discouraging her to go. But all she saw was flawlessness. Everywhere, the streets and surroundings were incredibly clean and tidy and... she was just speechless.

As she stared at the beautiful sunset, Elle could not help but wonder about how this country's monarch ruled this land to be this enviably peaceful and

beautiful. She could not forget the contentment and happiness she had clearly seen in the eyes of the people that she saw walking along the streets. Back in Dalenn, all she could see was the resentment and hatred in the people's eyes whenever they, the royals, pass on the streets.

"This country is just fascinating." Elle commented and Ava smiled proudly as she nodded.

"It is all thanks to our capable rulers. They had ruled the country well and maintained the peace."

"King Rudy is such a great ruler..." Elle smiled, never taking her eyes off the colorful sky. She did not hear a response from Ava, so she stood on top of the car and spread her arms wide. The breeze blew her red hair behind her. And with the sunset, it had turned her hair into a brilliant fiery orange.

Elle felt like her wings were starting to grow behind her again. At long last.

## Chapter 20 Attractions



The next morning, Elle had woken up in a great mood. She had fallen asleep quite early last night because she got tired from all her excited wanderings and explorations.

Now it was only seven in the morning, and she was already all dressed and prepared. Yesterday, Ava had informed her that Sebastian was going to come fetch her early in the morning. So she made sure that she would already be ready when he arrives.

Though Ava did not mention anything more, Elle deduced that they most probably be heading for the Reigns residence. Therefore, she made sure to be dressed as presentable as she could be. She had already met the king and Sebastian's uncle and gladly, they seemed to be really nice, most especially Alexander. But she still did not know how the rest of his family would treat her once she meets them. She was not expecting everyone to like her, so she spent her remaining free time mentally preparing herself and relaxing at the same time. There was no point getting all nervous for no reason.

After a couple of hours of patiently waiting, the knock she was waiting for finally echoed.

Elle stilled the moment she realized it was Ava who stood in front of her door instead of Sebastian.

Her expression was apologetic as she looked at Elle. One look and Elle already knew she was going to apologize again and then inform her of some not so good news. She deduced that Ava might even say that Sebastian was not coming anymore.

"Miss..." Ava paused, hesitating.

"What is it? Is Prince Sebastian not coming?" Elle asked, her voice still light and calm.

Ava's eyes widened before she nodded curtly.

An odd smile curved on Elle's lips momentarily. "I see... did he say anything else?"

"His assistant said, he'll probably come to fetch you tomorrow." Ava said in an apologetic tone.

"Probably..." Elle repeated. Her voice soft but neutral. "So, I am to stay here and continue waiting for him? We're not going to the Reigns residence without him, am I right?"

Ava nodded slowly. "I apologize Miss –"

"Oh, there is no need to, Ava." Elle cut her off, giving her an understanding smile. "This is not your fault. And I understand Prince Sebastian is a busy man. Something must have cropped up at the last minute."

"I'm so glad you are so understanding, Miss. Do you want to explore again today? Please don't hesitate to tell me if you want to go somewhere again."

"Hmm... I guess we should go out again. I know Quesa is large. This time, I'd like to visit some more famous landmarks, shall we?" Elle suggested to Ava with a bright smile.

A wide smile plastered on Ava's relieved face and Elle excused herself to change her clothes into more appropriate clothing for another full day of excursion.

That day, Elle made sure to familiarize herself with the city and enjoy herself at the same time. Somehow, with how busy and occupied she was in her tour and sightseeing, she had not thought of Sebastian the entire day. And they returned to her hotel when the night was still relatively young.

But the next day, Sebastian did not appear. Again.

Elle had chosen to go out with Ava again since there were still a lot of places that they did not finish exploring the last two days. Quesa was really big and full of beautiful spots worthy of being top notch tourist attractions. The most amazing part was that there were no swarm of tourists everywhere that would block the view and bring unnecessary noise along. The entire time, Elle had felt as though she owned the places as there were barely any people around in those places that were supposed to be packed.

But she credited it to Ava. She thought that Ava must have known the right time to visit the places where there were less visitors. Though that was a bit questionable, Elle did not poke her nose about it anymore and just felt thankful that she had enjoyed the attractions by herself.

By evening, when it was time for dinner, her reliable companion and bodyguard had brought her to the most luxurious restaurant in the city called, Alistair. Ava had dutifully informed her that this place was the royal's favorite restaurant.

Elle was pretty amazed by the food that had been presented before her. She could not even say anything about it but just sang pure praises for it. She was still happily praising the food even while they were already leaving the building. She even praised Ava, telling her that it was a perfect choice on her part in arranging for their dinner.

But her smile froze and slowly faded at what she saw the moment she and Ava stepped out of the entrance.

A man was escorting a beautiful woman in a shimmering evening gown out of a luxury car. It was... Sebastian.

Time seemed to slow as she watched the woman wrap her hand around Sebastian's arm. And then they marched forward together. They walked with such grace, a perfect picture of a couple walking down a red carpet.