

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 41

Pressing the bell, I waited.

The elevator opened and a lanky middle aged man came out in a floral shirt. Stopping at his track, he eyed me up and down with his slightly red eyes. I faced away from him and tapped the bell again.

What's taking her so much time to open the door?

Once the creepy man unlocked his apartment next to the one I was standing before and got inside casting me one last lingering glance before closing the door, I sighed in relief.

God knows how she stayed here with this creep at the other side of the wall.

With a click, the door opened and her blonde head peeked through it. Surprise was etched into her brown eyes.

"Emerald? What're you doing here?"

"Hi, Sierra!" I smiled. "Sorry, I tried to call you but it went unreachable every time. I heard from Matt that you weren't well, so thought to give you a visit."

"Uh, thank you for your concern. I'm much better now." Her wary gaze flickered around. She still was talking to me through the small gap.

I cleared my throat. "You won't invite me in?"

She seemed hesitant, but then nodded her head and held the door wide for me.

Flashing another smile, I walked into the hall of her small apartment.

With an adjoined kitchen, there were two more doors attached to the hall. An old couch, two chairs and a small bookshelf were placed at the small area. Not anything fancy, but it was cozy.

"Would you like to have anything? Coffee?" she asked, stance awkward.

What's with the weird behavior?

I shook my head. "No, thanks. I just came to see if everything is okay.

Umm, why did you resign all of

a sudden? I mean, if you needed more time to recover completely, then you could just ask Matt. I

think he'd help you out with this." I came to the point without beating around the bush. Her meetings with Arthur, taking leave all of a sudden and then resigning. I had a hunch it could be somehow related to him.

She shrugged, wringing her knuckles. "Uh, as you know I wasn't well. I needed some time to get better completely. I couldn't just expand my leave like that. And I decided to give myself a break, to spend some time with my family, you know? So..."

"So you decided to quit the job?"

"Yeah," she answered, licking her dry lips. The swell around her eyes and dark circles under them caught my attention.

"With your stack of bills pending?" I pointed at the papers on her small table beside the door. Clearly, she hasn't been able to pay them on time.

She averted her eyes. "I-i was just about to pay the bills. I was just a bit late and they sent notices."

"You don't need to explain anything, Sierra. I just want to know why you quit the job all of a sudden if you were facing some financial problem?" I asked. "Is it- is it because of Arthur?"

Her eyes snapped to mine, they widened to a friction. So I was right. He had something to do with it.

"W-what are you talking about? Why would he be the reason behind my quitting?"

"Because I saw you with him twice, Sierra. And at both times, you were pretty shaken."

All colors drained from her already pale face. Fear flashed across her eyes.

"H-how? W-where? Listen, it's nothing as you think it is..."

"What's going on, Sierra? You're definitely hiding something." I cut her off. "Is Arthur threatening you about something? Or is there something else that you had to leave your job? Tell me, Sierra. Trust me, if there's anything like that, I can help you. I'll talk to Ace myself." Placing a hand on her shoulder, I

tried to assure her.

Shaking her head, she took a visible gulp. "You've mistaken. He didn't do anything. I left the job

because of my personal reasons which I already told you."

"Don't lie to me, Sierra. It's in your eyes. I can see it. He's done something that you had to take this step, didn't you? I saw you with him, you were crying. Please tell me the truth, I can help you." I

probed, my voice desperate.

I had been suspicious about this man from the start, from the party when he denied before everyone that he hadn't met me before. Which was a complete lie. And at our first meeting, the words he said,

no sane person would say those things to a stranger just like that. So assuming that he may have forgotten wouldn't be right either.

He's always given me a negative vibe. And now that I was close to discovering the real face behind his polite mask, I didn't want to lose it.

Taking a step back from me, she wrapped her arms around her. "You can't help me, Emerald. No one can. And don't think too much of what you saw. It was nothing. Just forget it."

"Of course, I can. If I talk to Ace, he'll definitely hear me out and believe me." I knew he'll. But...

against his own uncle? Would he go to the extent for me to distrust his uncle who had always supported him in every phase of life?

Shaking her head, she took a glance at the door. "You shouldn't have come here, Emerald. I think you should go now."

"But..."

"Please, I beg you. I can't tell you anything! Don't drag both you and me in danger by digging something that isn't related to you." Though her voice was stern, there was moisture in her eyes.

Danger? Something churned in my stomach.

"What danger?"

"Emerald, please. Just leave. I'm telling this for your own good."

I sighed. "At least tell me why did you quit?"

She stayed silent for a moment, and then said, "I had to. I didn't want to do something that's against my morals."

Taking a sip on my tea, I watched the steam vanishing into the thin air slowly.

Why did she mean by that? She didn't want to do anything that was against her morals?

Though she didn't give me a direct answer, I was sure now that Arthur was definitely not a man to trust. He was up to something. But what? I wish Sierra would've told me everything. But clearly, she was scared. How dangerous Arthur could be that if she opened her mouth, she had a fear that he'd harm her?

A shudder ran through my spine.

"Em? You're listening?" A hand waved before my face, pulling me out of my thoughts. Warner had a tiny frown between his brows as he watched me.

"Sorry. What did you say?"

"I asked if you're doing well now. I mean, when I met you yesterday, you were a mess."

After getting out of Sierra's building, I got a message from him asking if I wanted to grab some drinks together. So here we were, sitting at a small buzzing cafe, sipping on our hot beverages.

"Yeah, I'm fine now. Even went to the office today." Even after the Arthur mess, I couldn't help but remember Ace's confession at the back of my mind again and again. A blush rose up my neck as I twirled the bracelet. The bracelet he gave to me. He... loved me.

Warmth surged through my chest along the flutters in my tummy. I wanted to close my eyes and relive the moment when he said those words to me again and again. After talking to Tobias and then him, it felt like a huge burden had been lifted off of my chest. Though it still hurt thinking of everything, I felt somehow lighter now. I could see the reasons.

After all, we all were young back then.

"You went to the office again? I thought after what he did you wouldn't even see his face ever again!"

he stated in disbelief.

I heaved a sigh. "It was the original plan. But then, I was bound by a contract, remember? I had to join office again."

"You could make him terminate the contract if you wanted. But clearly, you already forgave him, didn't you? You forgot how he used your sister to break your heart!" he snapped.

My eyes narrowed at his tone. "I didn't forgive him yet. And he didn't use my sister to break my heart.

Tess volunteered. And... he had a reason to do that. Not that I support his way, but he only wanted my well-being. Even if nothing much good happened in my life after his stunt."

Irritation flared inside me again recalling everything that happened since the last seven years. Even if I

couldn't call him totally wrong for his reasons. Because bitter, yes, but he had valid reasons. He truly wanted my good. But in the process, he hurt both me and himself.

"Yet? That means you're considering to forgive him? You're so lost into him to see that he isn't the right guy for you. Don't you see how he behaves with you? He wants to control your life, Em. And you're letting him!"

"I know what I'm doing, Warner. You don't need to tell me what I should do or what I shouldn't. And

about him being controlling, yes, he's a control freak. But he doesn't cross any lines if I tell him not to.

He respects my decisions." My voice came out firm.

He proved it many times. If I needed time, he'd given me without letting his dominating self in the way. Though his patience lived short.

"So you'll let him cross the line?" His jaw ticked.

"Honestly, I don't know. And I really don't think I need to answer you everything about my personal life."

Closing his eyes, he pinched the bridge of his nose before meeting my eye again. "I'm sorry, Em. I was

just looking out for you, you know? I just don't want you to make wrong decisions in your life in a rush."

"You don't need to worry." I shook my head, leaning back into the chair.

"I'm sorry too. I got a little harsh."

He smiled. "It's alright. I pushed you too much. Anyways, forget about it. You were looking tense a while ago. Is everything alright?"

Should I tell him? I knew I could trust him. He was my best friend after all. Maybe he could give me some suggestions?

After I told him everything, my suspicion on Arthur and the matter of Sierra, he pondered for a moment, taking every information in.

"So you think he's doing something at Achilles's back?"

I nodded. "He definitely is. He threatened Sierra to do something that she wasn't comfortable with, so she left the job. I'm sure she didn't want to deal with him anymore."

"So why don't you tell this to Achilles?"

A breath sneaked through my lips. "I can't. I don't have any solid proof against him. Nor did I witness him doing anything wrong before my own eyes. And Ace and Caleb trust him blindly. They won't believe me if I inform them of my doubt."

"Then I think you should wait and see if you find anything against him.

But honestly, after hearing

what Sierra said, he seems like a dangerous man. So I'd suggest you stay away from him, Em. Don't drag yourself in any kind of danger," he cautioned.

"But I can't just sit like that without doing anything. Because I can sense it, he's up to something. And I

want to stop him before he does some real damage." Especially to Valencian Corp or Ace. But I doubted if he would harm his own nephew.

Something lit up in his eyes. "I think I can help you. My cousin here in California, he's a detective. A

genius. Though we don't get along much, I think he'd help you if I talk to him."

"That's great! Please, do that! And I'll also try to provide him with as much information about Arthur as possible. Thank you, Warner! It'll be a great help!" Grabbing his hands, I flashed him a grateful smile.

He squeezed my hands. "Anything for you."

After reaching the office, I headed directly for my cabin. I needed to call Tobias and ask him about Arthur. The more I knew about him, the better. And at this moment, only Tobias could help me without asking much.

"Emerald?"

Matt's voice halted me at my track. Turning around, I found him jogging to me.

"Hey! What's up?" I asked.

"A sudden board meeting came up. And you need to be present there. I've already informed the boss," he said, huffing.

I frowned. "Even though I attended every board meeting, I won't today. I'm busy right now. Go, tell your boss," saying, I turned to leave.

"Wait!" He stopped me again. "You can't miss the meeting, Em. As a board member, you'll have to attend."

The crease between my forehead deepened. "I joined the previous meetings just because your boss ordered me. I'm not a board member, just an ordinary employee like you, Matt. I think you're mistaken."

"What are you talking..." His eyes widened. "Oh, you don't know?"

"Know what?"

He scratched the back of his head, averting his eyes. "Uh, nothing. My mistake. I thought you were really a board member since you attended each one in the previous month."

A warning bell rang in my head.

"Don't lie to me. You're the CEO's PA now. You said you didn't know who's the actual member of the

board council and who's not, and I'll believe that? What's it? What are you not telling me, Matt?" My gaze on him was intimidating.

His eyes flickered around as if looking for an escape.

"Matt! Out with it!"

"H-he will fire me. I swear, I didn't know you weren't aware of it." His whole stance pleaded me to let him go.

"Don't worry, he won't know anything. I won't expose you," I said, probing him to spill.

He shuffled into his place, looking at his right and left.

"Matt?"

"You promise you won't tell anyone that I told you this?"

"I promise. Now tell me."

He sighed, his shoulders slumped. "You're not just an ordinary employee, Emerald. You're a member of the board."

I tilted my head in confusion. "But someone only becomes a board member when..."

He nodded his head. "When they have a share in the company. And..."

He hesitated.

"And?"

"And you own royalty of the shares in not only this company, but the whole Valencian Corp's. The boss made you the equal owner as him in the business. Means, everything Achilles Valencian owns also belongs to you now."

So? What do you think about this chapter? Was it good? Any guesses what Sierra is hiding?

Want more? The next chapter's sneak peek is already on my Facebook page! Go check it out! And

don't forget to give my page a like. Pretty please?

And two more chapters are already updated on Goodnovel. You can check it out if you want. Have a

good day!

With love,

Eva Zahan.

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Chapter 42

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YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING ME!

An equal owner of everything he owned? That's ridiculous! Why the hell would he do that?

Only Achilles insane Valencian would be able to answer that.

With eyes formed into a scowl, lips pressed into displeasure and rage running hot through my veins, I

stormed into his cabin. Well, I wasn't required to knock.

His eyes snapped up from his mobile. Standing in the middle of his cabin, his features matched my

emotions right now. He was glaring holes at his phone.

I knew what ran into his head. Of course he would be mad if I wouldn't receive his non-stop calls and

messages. My phone stopped vibrating as he cut the call.

"Where the hell were you?" Throwing the phone on his desk, he fired.

"And what the hell did you do?" I countered back, glaring at him.

The place between his thick brows crinkled. "What did I do? Shouldn't I be asking you questions right

now?" Sharp jaw ticked. "You went to meet him again!"

Now that took my attention off the previous matter.

Warner? How did he know that I was with him a while ago?

Then realization hit me.

"You!" Striding closer, I jabbed a finger into his chest. "You still have your men after me? Didn't I tell

you I don't want them to follow me around? How dare you!"

"You were holding his hand," he said, ignoring my question. His tone came out hard, pure jealousy

and rage flashed across his eyes.

"Yes, I was. And that shouldn't have anything to do with you! He's my friend. I'll hold his hand, hug

him, cuddle with him. I'll do whatever the hell I want with him. You don't have a say in this!"

"No, you can't!" Pulling me against his hard chest, he wrapped one of his strong arms around my

waist and grabbed the back of my neck with the other. His dark grey eyes held me captive. "No matter

what he is to you, no men can touch you other than me! Did you forget that you're only mine, my

little rose? That you belong to me?"

Gulping, I tried to tame my wild heart beating down my chest. Weirdly, this side of his did something

to me. His possessiveness and dominant behavior produced a fire inside me. No matter how absurd it was, my treacherous body reacted to it.

"T-that is ridiculous! I-i'm not yours." I cringed at my own voice. It sounded croaky and meek.

"Yes, you are," he whispered, inches away from my face. "Are you doing this to punish me, Rosebud?"

If you are, then I'd take anything as my punishment but not this. I can't see you with him. Not with any other men."

"What will you do if I say this is your punishment and I'll meet him again and again?" I challenged.

His lips curled into a sneer, grip tightening on me. But even a flicker of fear didn't raise in me. Because

I knew, he could do anything but hurt me. At least not physically.

"Don't make me do something that you won't like, Rosebud. Do not play with my jealousy, because a

jealous Achilles Valencian is anything but good. I don't play really fair in love and war. And here we're

talking about both."

My lips parted in surprise. What would he do if I don't listen to him?

Whatever it was, it wouldn't be definitely in Warner's favor.

"He's just my friend! You don't need to go all crazy over it! We- we're not together anymore. So just

calm your ass down!" Narrowing my eyes, I tilted my head, ignoring the fact that his shoulders relaxed

visibly. "You'd take any punishment for me to forgive you?"

He straightened up, eyeing me with suspicion. "Yes. Anything. And I

know you're not together

anymore. I'd a conversation with Casie. But that doesn't mean you'll let him fly around you. That guy

still has feelings for you. I don't want him to look at you the way only I have the right to."

I gritted my teeth. I couldn't believe this man!

And Casie? That traitor! She talks to him about me behind my back, doesn't she?

I knew she was always on his side!

I'd talk to her later. Now I needed to take care of this man first.

So not commenting on his insane demands, I came to the point. "You want my forgiveness or not?"

Grey eyes widened a bit. "Of course, baby. What should I do? Tell me and I'll do it. Do you need anything? Jewelleries? Or you need a car? You love puppies, right? Should I bring you one? Or dozens?

What do you want, baby?"

I shook my head. Men! He thought gifts could melt my mind?

Raising my chin, I kept my voice firm. "Nothing you just mentioned right now. You'll have to do just

two things. And then I'll consider whether to forgive you or not."

"Consider?" He scowled.

"Take it or leave it!"

He stayed silent for a moment and then nodded. "What are those?"

"The first one is, you need to stop your men from following me around. I don't want them to keep an eye on me like hawks everywhere I go."

"What?" His displeasure was back. "I won't do such a thing! They're there for your safety, Rosebud.

They aren't going anywhere." Tone stern.

"I'm not a child that they need to protect. I'm a big and independent girl, I can protect myself very well. And what about your declaration that you'll do anything to make me forgive you?" I raised my brow.

A muscle of his jaw ticked. "I'd do anything. But not compromise with your safety."

"You have to! It's not that there's some Mafia after me who wants to kidnap me to take revenge on my father!" My fists clenched. I'd make him agree with my decision.

"Remove the guards, or no forgiveness."

"Rosebud," he warned, trying his infamous intimidating tone on me. But alas, I wasn't any of his employees. And he knew it really well.

When I continued to hold his hard gaze with my defiant one, he let out a sigh.

"Alright."

"Alright?" Shocked, I watched him in perplexion. I wanted him to agree, but I didn't know he'd agree that soon.

"Yes. I'll pull my men off of your back. Happy now?" His facial expression was too blank to read.

"Promise me."

He nodded. "I promise not to send my men after you."

He promised. That meant he wouldn't break it. He never broke his promises to me.

A smile broke onto my face.

"Now what's the other one?"

My smile faltered, remembering his audacity. "You made me the equal owner of everything you belong to. Undo it. I don't want your money! Whom did you ask before taking this decision? Did you really think I'd be interested in your property?"

The astonishment and shock in his eyes were clear. But he masked them soon, clearing his throat.

"How did you know? And of course not, Rosebud. I'll never think of you like that."

"It doesn't matter how did I know. And if not that, then why the hell did you do that? I don't have any interest in your business. Change it!"

"I'm sorry, Rosebud. I can't agree to this condition of yours."

"Why?" I snapped. "I said I don't need them. Why'd everything that belongs to you would belong to me too? I've no right on them!"

Leaning in, he pressed his forehead against mine. "Because I belong to you, my Rosebud. Just like you belong to me. So everything that I own, automatically becomes yours. It's the truth. And I just made it official. Nothing unexpected."

My breath hitched, heart fluttered inside my chest. A blush rose up my cheeks.

"T-that doesn't make any sense. I don't need anything from you." Why did his words have such an effect on me all the time?

"I know. But I need you to accept it. Everywhere my name will be, I want yours beside mine," he said, peering down my soul. "And if something happens to me, I'll rest in peace knowing that everything that I worked hard for will be in my Rosebud's hands."

A chill ran through my veins as something squeezed my chest at the thought of losing him. "What do you mean? What will happen to you? Don't talk rubbish!" my voice rose as I spoke, hands fisting on his shirt.

A soft chuckle left him. "Of course, Rosebud. Nothing will happen to me. I'm just stating facts."

"Then it's a really absurd fact! And you'll emotionally blackmail me to get me into your court now?"

Because that's not happening!"

"I'm not blackmailing you. And what's done is done. It's not negotiable anymore."

My lips pressed tight. "What if I run away with all your money?"

Another laugh. "You can take anything you want, baby. Everything is yours. Just make sure you also

take me along. Because I can't live without you."

I could feel my cheeks and neck heating up again at his cheeky response.

Now he was flirting with me?

Unbelievable man!

I wiggled out of his arms. "Whatever you say, I'll make you take everything back from me. Or I will

give it back to you!"

He quirked a brow. "It's non reversal, Rosebud."

"We'll see!" Huffing, I turned around and walked away.

"Where are you going?"

His footsteps behind me reached my ears.

"At the meeting. With the responsibility you gave me, do I have any other choice?" I replied, without

stopping at my track.

"Right. But what about my forgiveness? You didn't still forgive me."

"I said I'd consider. And you didn't agree to my second punishment."

He groaned. "Well, they were more like conditions. But yes, agreeing to them was a punishment to me."

"As if you agreed to both of them!" I taunted. "So there won't be any forgiveness!"

"Now that's not fair, Rosebud. I agreed to one even though it was too much for me to do. And the second one wasn't negotiable." He continued to walk after me down the hallway outside of his cabin.

"It's absolutely fair. The deal was for two conditions, and you only agreed to one."

"I can still keep my men after you, you know?"

"You can't. You promised." I wasn't bothered by his threat. He was bound by his promise here.

He stayed quiet.

Huh? Accepted defeat so soon?

An involuntary smile tugged on my lips as I walked ahead of him.

But I wasn't letting the equal owner thing go so easily. I'd give it back to him today or tomorrow. At

least I got his men off my back.

A masculine groan was heard behind me.

What was that?

Turning over my shoulder, I looked at him.

His heated gaze set on my butt.

With wide eyes and flushed cheeks, I turned back my head and walked as fast as I could.

That asshole!

And the whole way to the conference room, I felt his eyes on me. On a VERY specific area.

Pervert!

After the meeting, when I strolled out from the conference room leaving Ace behind to discuss with

some of the board members, I spotted Tobias.

"Hey! You're here at this time?" It was almost lunch hour.

"Yeah, remember the project Achilles invested in my start up company? I needed something to discuss with him."

Oh, I almost forgot about that. And thanking him for helping Tobias also slipped my mind. But I

couldn't let one thing slip right now, the one that was nagging in my head since the meeting with

Warner.

"Ace is still busy with some board members. Why don't we hang at my cabin until he is free?" I

needed to dig out information about Arthur from him.

He nodded. "Sure!"

Once we were in the safety of my cabin, out of anyone's earshot, I didn't waste anymore time.

"What do you know about Arthur?"

He halted his movement in the air from settling his ass on the chair to look at me. Then finally seated, he raised a brow.

"That he's Achilles and Caleb's uncle and is a good man? Why do you ask?"

I rolled my eyes. How informative!

"I didn't ask you his identity. I asked if you know more about him. Like his background and past."

"Wait a moment. Does Achilles know that his Rosebud's interest is shifting from him to his uncle? I

know even at this age, he is quite fit. But c'mon Em! Isn't it going out of the line?" he teased.

My mouth twisted in disgust. "Shut the hell up! I need some information about him to clear up some

doubt of mine. So speak up now. Don't waste my time!"

His posture straightened. "Doubt? What's happening here, Em?"

I sighed. "I can't tell you anything right now, Tobi. Once I sort everything out, I'll let you know. So

please, help me here."

He slowly nodded his head. "Alright. I don't know what doubt you have on him. He's a trustable man.

And really close to Achilles and Caleb." Unbuttoning the button of his coat, he leaned against the chair.

"Anyways, as far as I know, he'd spent a big chunk of years of his life in UK. His relationship with

Achilles's father wasn't good. And due to some conflict, Achilles's father sent him away to UK when he

was quite young. And then only only returned after Achilles's father had a sudden demise."

Yes, I heard that his relationship with Ace's father wasn't good and he was in the UK before he came

back. But I didn't know it was Ace's dad who sent him away. And between the years, they didn't have

any contact among each other.

And why everything related to Ace and his past stopped at UK?

"What did he do back then in the UK? A job or anything?"

"He'd a small business there. That's quite big now with Achilles's help.

You can say, he's a millionaire

there now with farmhouses and some hotels," he replied.

"Ace went to the UK for two years to get his degree after I left for NY, right? Did he stay at one of Arthur's places?"

At my question, he shifted in the chair, scratching his jaw. "Umm, sometimes. It was Arthur who sent him there. Though we all thought he was going to need a lot of time to finish his... course, regarding his state. But he returned after two years and started to handle his company on his own." Pride shone into his eyes.

Why did I feel like there was something hidden behind his words? "After sending Achilles there Arthur took care of the company until he returned. And he kept everything stable. That's why Achilles and Caleb respect him that much. When no one was there for them, Arthur was there."

That's why I didn't want to think anything bad about him. But after Sierra's incident, I couldn't help it.

Maybe the kindness and honesty were just masks over his true colors? "Do you know where exactly his business is located out there?" Warner's cousin can find out more about him from the locals and people that associated with him in the past.

"Yeah, in Wales. I'll send you the exact address."

"Alright. What about his own family? Doesn't he have a wife or kids?" He shook his head. "No. He never married. Neither I heard anything about him having any child."

A question out of the topic raised into my head. "Do you know where Ace's mom is? Or the reason behind his dad's suicide?"

I'd have asked him myself all these questions about his past. But after his revelation, I couldn't think of anything else other than what he did seven years ago.

"The only thing I can tell you is she's not here. And not really in touch with anyone. Then rest you've to ask Ace himself. And about his father's committing suicide, I really don't have any idea. He never told me. The only thing I know is things were never good between his parents." He shrugged.

My heart tugged for him. It must have been really difficult for him to live in a place where he had to watch his parents fight everyday. Even I heard of them arguing some times during my visits at his place. And now he didn't have his father beside him. His mother was alive, but still far from him. I wondered what was the reason she left him and Caleb alone behind just like that?

I heaved a sigh. "Alright, thank you, Tobi. I really needed some insight."

Though it wasn't much, at least I got something about Arthur.

"I don't know what you're up to, Em. But think twice before doing something rash. Achilles is quite close to his uncle, so be careful." He stood up, buttoning his coat button.

"Anyways, before I forget, tomorrow is Tess's rehearsal. You're coming, right?"

I rubbed my neck. I decided not to attend, but then I couldn't just miss an event that meant so much

for her. Nor did I want my parents to be upset.

"I'll be there. Don't worry."

He smiled. "Tess will be relieved. She's been nagging me to convince you to come if you had decided

otherwise. I'm glad you're letting things go, Em. It's for everyone's good."

I nodded. "I know. See you tomorrow."

Placing a kiss on my forehead, he walked out of my cabin.

Letting out a sigh, I plopped on the chair he occupied just some seconds ago.

In between the Arthur mess and thoughts of Ace, I totally forgot about her marriage. And also the

thing that Warner was invited by Mom. Though it was when we were still dating each other. And she

couldn't just uninvite him just like that. And my biggest concern was, Ace would be there too.

A groan left my mouth.

They were going to come face to face again. The thing I didn't want.

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"I didn't know you were so eager to ruin your sister's rehearsal dinner. Inviting your ex and present lover at the same time? And when the lover is a fiercely possessive one," Casie tasked, glancing behind me.

My heart skipped a beat. Swirling around, I found Warner strolling in the backyard. Noticing him, Tess and Caleb walked up to him, giving him welcoming hugs. Sighing, I turned back.

"What's with the sullen face?" she asked, the side of her lips tugged up into a devilish smirk.

"Expected someone else?"

Glaring at her, I took a sip on my lemonade.

It's been an hour we'd arrived at Tess's rehearsal dinner at Valencian Mansion. A BBQ party was held in the vast backyard of the mansion before the dinner. The trees were lit with fairy lights and a small bonfire was set in the middle. While Mom, Dad and some of our uncle and aunts sat around the fire to keep themselves warm in the early winter night, Tess, Tobias, Caleb and their friends took care of the BBQ meats.

It was just more like a small get-together with close family and friends than a rehearsal dinner. Tess didn't want it to be a formal event, she wanted to have some cool time with everyone.

Though I was happy with her decision, I even had a polite conversation with her after arriving here, I couldn't help but feel bored.

Well, worried to be exact.

There was no sight of him yet. And I could understand why. Coming to the house he'd faced so many hurdles in his childhood wasn't an easy thing to do.

Tess and Caleb had their new home not far from ours ready to shift after their marriage. And after the ceremony, they'll leave this mansion to their new home for a new start.

The main reason for them to keep this dinner over here, they wanted to spend some quality time before they left this place. And I couldn't be mad at them for that.

But that didn't make his pain any less. Already two times he'd come here for me. But I didn't know if he could do it again and again.

So even if I dreaded of the outcome once Ace finds Warner here, I was more concerned of his state of mind right now. My hands itched to call him, but I just kept them in control.

I was mad at him, right? I couldn't just call him to ask if he was alright. He'd think I forgot everything and forgave him. Which I didn't.

Well, not yet...

"Can you stop getting lost into his thoughts? Just call him and get over with it." She rolled her smokey eyes which went well with her black cocktail dress and high heels.

"You're not even talking to me properly. Are you ignoring me here?"

Turning away from her, I leaned against the small drink bar situated not far from the bonfire. "I'm not lost into his thoughts. And yes, I'm ignoring you. You just realized that? Now why'd I talk to a friend who joins hands with the enemy."

"Enemy?" Her brows crinkled.

"Uh-huh. Enemy." I threw her a look. "You told Ace about me and Warner's break-up. And I had no idea about it. You should be in my gang to kick his ass with me, but here you're, passing information to him about my life?"

With wide eyes, she flashed me a sheepish grin. "Oh, so you're mad for that." She cleared her throat.

"It's not my fault. When you weren't responding to his calls or messages, he'd ruined my peace to know what was going into your mind as he thought you'd share everything with me as your best friend. So to have a good night's sleep, I had to pass him something to calm the beast, you know?"

I shook my head at her.

"And I didn't say anything wrong. He'd get to know sooner or later," she added. "Now stop being a grumbling ass and call him. And don't make any excuses. Even among so many people, your mind is

somewhere else. I can see it. It's on your face."

Was it that obvious?

"By the way, does he still send you roses every morning?" she asked out of blue.

"Yes?" Why'd she ask that? She knew really well the flowers were an everyday thing now.

"Save the day after tomorrow's bouquet for me. I'll drop by your place at eleven."

My eyes narrowed. "Why'd I give you my flowers?"

"Jeez, relax. Don't need to get all green now. You can keep all of them, I just need one bouquet."

Taking a last swig of her drink, she wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. "That day is my

current date's bitch elder sister's birthday. And I've to attend her formal family brunch with

something in my hands. Now why'd I waste my money to buy something for her when I can just take your bouquet?"

I let out a chuckle, not surprised at all. Typical Cassandra McCoy. When it came to the people she disliked, she wouldn't even throw a penny for them.

"Kids, the lambs are ready!" Mom beckoned us with her hand, serving the smoky grilled lambs on plates for everyone.

"Don't forget the flowers!" saying that, Casie skipped off to the group.

Placing the glass on the counter, I heaved a sigh. Cool air kissed my bare arms, pricking goosebumps

across my skin. While rubbing my arms to provide some warmth, my eyes fell on the bracelet on my

wrist. Those tiny emeralds and diamonds sparkled under the light.

An involuntary smile touched my lips as I ran my thumb softly on it. After acknowledging the fact that

he was one who gave it to me, it felt more closer to my heart than ever.

As if it was one of my limbs I

couldn't even imagine to lose. I didn't even put it off while taking showers.

Where is he anyway?

My eyes went to my left when I heard footsteps approaching. And to my great displeasure, it was

Arthur.

Approaching the ground, he flashed everyone with one of his fake polite smiles and shared hugs with

Tess and Caleb. Both of them seemed quite happy with his presence.

"I'm glad you could make out some time for the dinner, Arthur. I hope you didn't have to cancel too

many of your meetings?" Tess asked, grinning ear to ear.

Unfortunately, he handled most of the important deals after they got signed with Valencian Corp. Due

to Ace's trust in him, he saw if everything was going smooth for those projects to get completed on

time and without any problems. Not to forget, he managed Ace's many side businesses.

"Oh, no! Not at all. Nothing is more important than family," he said, fishing a small rectangular

velvety box out from his pants pocket. "Here, I got you something for you. I hope you like it."

Her eyes shone with excitement as she took the box from his hand and opened it. The perfectly

arched brows of her rose to her hairline. A pair of sparkling diamond earrings sat inside.

"Oh my! This is beautiful, Arthur! Thank you so much! You really didn't have to buy me such an

expensive gift though." She wrapped her arms around him once again which he returned with a pat

on her back.

Pulling away, he shook his head. "Nothing is as expensive as the smile I got to see on my future

daughter-in-law's face."

Her eyes filled with moisture as Caleb pulled her into his arms, starting a conversation with Arthur.

"Who can say this man could be dangerous for someone?" Warner's voice spoke beside me.

"This mask of his will be revealed soon." My eyes didn't move away from him. Something glowed

inside his pocket. His phone. Moments later, it went off as he ignored it.

"By the way, did you talk to your cousin?" I turned to look at him. With a formal white button down

and dark slacks, he had a glass of orange juice in his hand.

He nodded. "Yes. I even gave him the address you messaged me about Arthur's business in the UK. He

already started to look into it. I'll update you as soon as he gets back to me with anything."

"Good. Tell him to do his best. Money isn't the matter of concern here. I want his truth." So that I could disclose him before Ace and throw him out of his and my family's life.

"I'll. But... are you sure you want to do this, Em? If he somehow gets even a sniff on this..." He trailed off.

I shrugged. "I'm not scared of him. And don't worry, your cousin is a detective. And detectives know how to be discreet."

Nodding, his gaze went around. "Where is Achilles anyway? I thought he wouldn't leave another chance to convince you to forgive him."

The bitterness of his voice didn't sit well with me. I could understand his concern for me, but I didn't

like the fact that he thought I'd do anything Ace would tell me. I had a mind of my own. I knew what to do in my life without anyone's influence.

But I kept quiet. Though unintentionally, I'd hurt him. And I knew he wasn't over our past yet. And it was leading him to grow bitterness for Ace more.

I just hoped he'd move on soon. He had every right to be happy in his life with someone who'd love him truly.

"Maybe he won't join the dinner tonight. Must be busy somewhere."

"Busy with whom?" he taunted.

I threw him a sharp glance. His indication pricked my skin. "Warner, please. We already talked about it, didn't we? I don't want a scene in Tess's rehearsal dinner. So even if he comes, please be civil with him. Tonight and tomorrow are very special for my sister, don't ruin it." Sighing, he nodded. "Sorry, I got a little carried away."

"Just remember what I said." My eyes went back to Arthur.

Finally pulling his phone out, he watched the caller ID. And as soon as he did it, his whole demeanor changed. Casting a discreet glance at Tess and Caleb who were busy talking to each other, he excused himself and walked into the house.

"Alright, I will... wait, where are you going?"

Warner's voice called out, but I was already following Arthur's path inside the mansion. It must be an

important call. Maybe I could find something out?

Halting in a hallway, I moved my head to my right and then left. Endless eerie corridors welcomed me

with its silence. Distant music that rang outside was the only sound I could hear. Where did he go? He

was just here a moment ago. I saw him coming here.

Ella, a house help who worked for Tess here, emerged from around the corner of the corridor at my

right with a tray of more drinks in her hands.

"Ms. Hutton? What are you doing here alone? You needed anything?"

she asked as soon as she

noticed me.

"No, Ella. I don't need anything. Thank you. Uh, did you see anyone coming this way?" I pointed to

where she just came from.

She shook her head. "No, Miss. I didn't see anyone. Why? Is everything alright?"

Nodding, I smiled. "Yeah, don't worry. Everything is fine. You can go ahead and give everyone these drinks."

Once she was gone, I took the left corridor, making sure not to make any noises. If he didn't go from

where Ella just came, he must've taken this way. Ella would've seen him if he took right.

After walking aimlessly among the empty corridors for some moments, I finally heard something. His

voice. I stopped right before the door of the balcony. Through the gap of the door, I peeked outside.

And there he was, standing beside the railings he had his phone against his ear. The knuckles of his

hand turned white around the railing as he heard the person from the other side of the phone. The

veins of his temple stood out as he gritted his teeth.

"And you're telling me this right now?" he hissed, tone low.

He heard what the other person said with hands formed into balls.

"That bitch!" he cursed under his breath. "Did she spill anything?"

His index finger danced patiently on the railing.

"Are you sure?"

Then he nodded. "Keep an eye on her. Inform me if she tries to do anything against me." His face turned into stone cold as he straightened his collar with one hand. "And if she doesn't stay in her limits, make sure she loses her life just like she lost her job."

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 44

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My breath hitched at my throat. Heart pounded down my chest.

He was talking about Sierra?

He must be. B-but, why did he need to order someone to finish her if she does anything against him?

Did he get to know I went to see her? To get information about him?

No, no. Even if he did know of my visit, how could he know that I had any kind of suspicion on him? I

could visit her for any reason, right? She was my friend after all.

But that wasn't the matter of concern right now. Sierra was in danger.

He could harm her at any

moment. And I couldn't let this happen. I had to do something for her.

What secret of his did she know for him to act that vicious to the point where he'd want her to be

dead?

When he put the phone down and put it into his pocket, I whirled around and left as fast as I could,

without making any noise. Thank God for the thick handcrafted carpet that covered the floor.

Otherwise my heels would announce my presence even if I took a single step.

With my heart at my throat, I ran down the empty corridor and turned to a hallway that didn't lead

outside. There was a risk of him noticing me if I took that route.

Glancing over my shoulder as I took another turn, I slammed against a hard chest and the blow had

me thrown backwards. But a pair of big warm hands shot out to me and pulled me back, securing me

into their hold.

For a second I almost stopped breathing assuming I got caught, but then I looked up. Narrowed

stormy grey eyes met mine, they held concern.

"What's wrong with you? You could get hurt if I wasn't here to hold you!"

Yes, I could. But you saved me.

I took a deep breath. Relief washed over me. I subconsciously stepped closer to him, casting a glance at my back. No matter what I said, I wasn't brave enough to be alone with that man in those eerie hallways. Now that there was a whisper at the back of my mind that he knew what I was up to.

Though it didn't make any sense, he couldn't have known about my suspicion. But still, after hearing his phone conversation, a fear etched into my mind.

But that wouldn't stop me from exposing him.

"Rosebud?" Cupping my face, he made me look into his now hard eyes.

My fists were now clenched around his black shirt. "What happened? You look scared. Is everything alright?" He glimpsed behind

me. "Did anyone do or say anything to you?"

Gulping, I shook my head. "Nobody said or did anything. I'm fine, don't worry. I-i kinda got lost around here. So, I was just looking for the exit."

He didn't look convinced. "You know this house quite well, Rosebud. You can't just get lost here so easily. What are you hiding?"

"I'm not hiding anything." Now that I got his one arm around my waist and another one softly running through my hair, I felt safe. His mere presence gave me security. "I was just looking around out of boredom and got a bit lost. There are so many hallways after all.

Anyways, you came? I thought you weren't going to join tonight's dinner."

Even if he was aware of my subtle way of changing the subject, he let me.

His tight jaw and steely glances over my shoulder were the evidence.

"Ace?"

His head snapped to me. "Yeah. I- I was busy with a meeting."

What Caleb said back at their engagement party floated into my mind.

My heart clenched into my chest.

"It must be difficult, isn't it?" I whispered.

"What?" His head tilted to the side.

"Coming here," I said. "It must be difficult for you to come to his house. The house that only brings you hurtful memories."

His shoulders tensed as an unknown emotion flashed across his eyes. I placed my hand against his cheek, dense stubbles pricked my palm. "I'd tell you shouldn't have come here. But I won't. Because you've to move on, Ace. Besides those ugly memories, you also have one of the most beautiful memories of your life here. So don't let the negativity overcome the positive sides. Until you won't let go of the past, you won't be able to be happy in your present."

I didn't want him getting hurt like this. Though he didn't say anything, I could see it in his eyes. The emptiness, the pain. Something was eating him alive and he couldn't express it. And worse, there was a fear in there. Behind those grey pools. Fear of something I couldn't figure out.

"Let go of it, Ace. It's time to move on. Don't let the past hold your happiness and peace," I murmured, stroking his jaw.

Heaving a breath, he pressed his forehead against mine. "Shouldn't all of these be applied on everyone, Rosebud?"

I frowned. "Everyone who..."

Then it hit me. He was talking about me.

I averted my eyes.

He sighed. Taking my hands in his, he kissed each of my knuckles. "Come with me."

"Where?"

Not answering, he led me down the hallway. Once we were at the terrace, he turned to me.

"I bought something for you."

"What?"

Taking his phone out, he typed something and then put it back inside his pocket.

"You'll see."

Hugging my arms around me, I rubbed my arms. "We should go downstairs. Everyone must be looking

for me."

I should be angry with him, right? After our argument at his cabin, I should give him a cold shoulder.

And here I was, standing on the terrace with him alone.

Shrugging off his jacket, he secured it around me. "Here, it'll keep you warm. Though I was enjoying looking at you in that dress."

Heat crept up my cheeks as I tucked a strayed strand behind my ear. I didn't wear anything fancy. Just

a simple blue sleeveless sundress with a pair of black heels.

Cupping my chin, he made me meet his intense gaze. "Never hide your face from me, Rosebud. I love to see those cheeks turn all red."

I couldn't turn more red now. My cheeks were on flames, hurt fluttering.

Damn! Would his words ever cease to affect me that much?

A clearing of a throat snatched our attention towards the door. Carter stood there with an awkward stance at the entrance with a box in his hands.

I took a step back from Ace, pulling at the jacket closer to me.

"Uh, boss. Here's the parcel you told me to get from your car," Carter said.

After taking the box from him, Ace nodded. "You can go now."

Flashing me a smile, he walked away.

"What's in that?" I eyed the box curiously.

Standing before me, he opened it, putting the contents inside on display. Very delicious content to say.

"Chocolate cupcakes?" With wide eyes, I looked up at him, a wide grin spread across my face.

A soft smile tugged at his lips as he nodded, watching me intently. "You like them, don't you?"

"I like them? I freaking love them!" Taking the box from him, I took a sniff. Sweet aroma wafted through my nostrils making my mouth water.

"Come here." Taking my hand, he took me near the railings.

A squeal left my mouth as he gripped my waist and sat me on the wide surface of the railing. I didn't

dare to look down. I was sure I'll have a heart attack.

"What are you doing? Let me down!" I tried to get off, but he only parted my knees and stepped

between them, wrapping his arms around me.

"Don't worry, I won't let you fall." Placing the box beside me, he took out one cupcake and held it

against my lips. "Now you can eat comfortably."

When his grip tightened around me, I relaxed and took the cupcake from his hand, biting into it. A

moan slipped my mouth as soon as the soft as cotton stuff melted into my mouth. There was even

chocolate cream inside it. It was so damn delicious!

"It's so good! Where did you get them?" I put my phone beside the box and occupied my other hand

with another one. While I devoured on them like a woman hungry for years, he just watched me

silently. A serenity held those stormy grey eyes. And that did something serious damage to my heart.

"I didn't buy them from anywhere. I made them myself," saying, he wiped the corner of my lips with

his thumb and put it inside his mouth.

A shiver ran down my body.

Ignoring his act, I focused on his words. "You made them? For me?"

He chuckled. "Whom else would I spend my precious time to do these efforts for?"

I just stared at him.

Leaning in, he grabbed my hand and made himself have a bite on the half eaten cupcake. "Only for my

Rosebud." Eyes didn't move from mine.

My breath hitched at my throat when he took my thumb into his mouth and sucked the chocolate off

it. His hot tongue circling my thumb while his teeth bit into my skin gently.

"Delicious," he rasped. Letting it go, he took my index finger next in between his lips. Somehow he

was closer than before, inches away from me. One of his hands brushed the side of my thigh,

gradually rising high, inching closer to my inner one.

I tried to close my legs but his form didn't let me. Something tugged at my lower region with his heady

scent around me, his mouth around my finger and his burning touch against my skin.

"W-what are you doing?" I somehow managed to stutter out, breathing heavily. Pulling my finger from his lips, I removed his hand. But his other hand squeezed my hip on the other side.

"Touching my Rosebud." Moving my hair away from my shoulder, he put his head at the crook of my neck and inhaled sharp.

Long forgotten the cupcakes, I now squirmed into his hold as his big callused hand squeezed one of my thighs. Another heat shot through me.

"S-stop," I whispered, biting my lip.

Letting out a groan, he palmed my inner thigh and my treacherous body let him.

"I can't!" saying, he slammed his mouth against me, capturing my lips into his scorching ones.

And my eyes just went shut on their own. Not caring about my ruined hands, I clutched his collar and pulled him closer, wrapping my legs around him.

He didn't waste any time to thrust his tongue inside my mouth and nor did I hesitate to join him in the battle. He explored every corner of my mouth and I let him, shivering in ecstasy. Suddenly I felt hot

under the cool weather. Too hot to be normal. I could feel my dress riding up my mid thighs, and his hands roaming and feeling them. A desperate moan left my mouth. I needed more. I wanted more of his touch. I wanted to feel his skin against mine. So slipping my hands under his shirt, I ran my hands over his taut abs and hard sculpted chest.

Letting out a rough groan, he pulled me at the edge of the railing and I tightened my legs around him.

And then I felt it. Him. Right against me. Hard and hot.

A gasp slipped through my lips as he pushed his hips against mine, emitting a loud moan from me.

"My rose," his husky yet rough voice murmured against my neck as he sucked on the skin on the junction where my shoulder met my neck. "I need you. I need you so fucking much!"

I let out a shaky breath, my hands tugging at his hair. My lips parted when he left some more marks

on my throat. They would definitely leave hickeys. But I didn't care at that moment, I was too lost into his touches and kisses.

Until my gaze fell onto his knuckles.

Every gaze before my eyes cleared up.

I tried to push him away but he ignored me. So I used more strength.

And this time, he did pull away.

With a confusion etched into his darkened eyes, he watched me in perplexion.

"What's it?" I pointed at his swollen knuckles. There weren't any cuts like before but they were

bruised. "You hurt yourself again?"

His gaze hardened. "I didn't realize."

My jaw clenched. "You didn't realize? Are you even hearing yourself?"

You hurt yourself again and

again and you don't even realize? What's wrong with you?"

He sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Don't worry, these are nothing. It happens sometimes

when people do too many work outs."

I shook my head, my blood ran hot through my veins. And this time not because of his touch, because

of his careless behavior towards himself. "They aren't there because you work out too much. They're

there because you're careless! Because you don't even care if you're hurt! You do this on purpose,

don't you, Ace? I told you to stop this, but you didn't listen. Why do you do that? Why do you hurt

yourself like that?"

He watched me with something intense in those grey pools. "Once you're in my arms forever, they

won't happen again."

"Why?"

"Because you'll be always there to keep me sane and in check."

I didn't understand it. Why would he hurt himself to keep himself sane.

He loses himself so much into his work out that he doesn't even care if he's hurt or not. And only I can

keep himself sane?

Cupping my cheeks, his eyes now held desperation. "Give us a chance, Rosebud. Give me a chance to

be a part of your life. Give me a chance to hold you in my arms for the rest of my life. Just one chance, baby. I promise, I'll make it worth it. I know I hurt you. But I'll spend my whole life making it up to you.

I promise I'll spend myself whole just to bring a single smile on your lips. I'll never make you cry again.

Just," he gulped, "give me a chance. I love you so fucking much, my Rosebud. Without you in my arms,

I had spent the seven years in living hell. I can't do this anymore. Please forgive me. I beg you. Just

give me a chance, Rosebud. Just one chance."

A tear rolled down my cheek. With my heart thudding inside my chest, I fisted my hands into balls.

Fierce emotions slammed into my chest into hefty waves.

"Will you forgive me, Rosebud? Will you give me a chance?" he asked again, his eyes searching mine for answers.

Wow! Didn't the atmosphere turn hot all of a sudden? *Fanning my face* ;)

How was the chapter, my sweet pumpkins? I hope you liked it! Want more? I already posted the sneak peek on my Facebook page! You can find the link on my bio! And don't forget to give my page a like! Pretty please?

Will see you soon, guys! Till then, stay happy and healthy!

With love,

Eva Zahan.

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 45

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Running my palm over the smooth fabric one more time, I took a deep breath and opened the door.

With every step down the stairs the ends of my gown flared more, providing a feel of a princess

ascending down the staircase towards the prince charming of hers.

But for me, my annoying best friend stood down, not even looking at me.

She was too busy applying

her dark red lipstick holding a small mirror before her dolled up face.

The light blue mermaid gown

with her blonde curls resting over her shoulders looked stunning on her.

Hearing me approaching, her eyes looked up to me. And her jaw dropped down.

"Holy shit!" She glanced up and down my whole structure. "This is the first time I'm feeling ashamed

to be straight as a stick. Damn! Achilles is a lucky ass!"

I laughed. "Look who's talking. See yourself in the mirror first."

She shrugged. "I just did. Thanks for the not direct compliment though."

I shook my head. "Where's Beth?"

Her lips twisted in displeasure. "She's gonna meet us directly at the venue. Again got caught up with her boyfriend problem."

I sighed. "Alright, c'mon. Let's see if Tess is ready yet."

"As ready as her pimple," she said, chuckling.

I frowned. "What do you mean?"

And then I heard the chaos inside the bride's room.

Pushing at the door, I walked inside.

In a beautiful white Cinderella wedding gown, with her blonde locks wrapped into a low bun on the

back of her neck and slightly heavy make-up on her face, she looked gorgeous. As usual. But she

looked anything but pleased at this moment.

Facing upwards, she tried her best not to let the tears in her eyes fall.

One of her friends was telling

her to take deep breaths and not panic.

"Tess, stop crying! Do you want your eyes to look swollen in the pictures?"

This thing isn't even visible

now. You're looking beautiful, honey!" said Mom, calming her down.

Then my eyes fell on her right cheek. A small not too visible pimple poked its head through the layers

of make-up. Though it wasn't noticeable unless you looked closely.

Tess shook her head, tears brimming into her eyes. "I'm not! I can see it clearly! Why did it happen to

me! All I wanted was for this wedding to go smoothly. Now I'll have to see this on my wedding photos

for the rest of my life!"

Mom sighed, defeated. And then she looked at me. Her eyes lit up.

"Oh my! Look at you, you're looking so beautiful!" She pulled me into a brief hug before pulling away.

"I didn't even realize when both of my babies got so big." Casting a glance at Tess and then me, she

sniffled.

"Mom, now you don't start also. We've Tess to handle now," saying, I turned to Tess.

Her eyes glued to my gown, lips parted. "You look... wait, even though you're looking gorgeous in this dress, why didn't wear the one I got you for my wedding?"

"Thank you. You're looking more than just gorgeous today!" I smiled.

"And about this dress... I

thought it'd look more good with your bridesmaids."

She asked me to be her maid of honor last night and I couldn't deny. Due to our previous conflicts, she

couldn't ask me earlier even though she didn't let any of her friends be her maid of honor. Because

she wanted it to be me. So I agreed.

Her face dropped again. "Yeah, everyone is looking so perfect except me."

"You're looking stunning, Tess! The most beautiful bride I've ever seen.

Everyone is going to love your look."

My assurance didn't affect her at all as a drop of tear slid down her cheek.

I put a hand on her shoulder. "Tess, answer me a question. Why are you getting married today?"

"Huh?" Her brows narrowed.

"Why are you getting through all of this?" I asked again.

"For Caleb."

I nodded. "Exactly. So do you think he would care if you've a little pimple on your cheek on your

wedding day? Do you think he can see any other things other than the girl whom he loves so much

walking down the aisle for him?"

Silence.

And then she shook her head. "No. He doesn't care about these things."

"See. Then why are you being so restless? You're doing this for him, and if he doesn't have any

problem with your pimple, then shouldn't you just leave it and enjoy the most important day of your

life?"

"You're right. But... what about the photos?"

Casie rolled her eyes beside me while Mom pinched the bridge of her nose. If we didn't leave now, we'd get late.

"We can always just edit them, Tess. And this won't be visible in the camera much. And if it does, then we've a solution for this already. Now can you calm down and let those girls give you a finishing touch so that we can leave?"

Now seemed to be at much more ease than before, she flashed me a smile and finally calmed down.

"It's your turn, hon," Dad said, with Tess's arm around his as they were waiting for their turn to walk down the aisle.

After all the bridesmaids skipped off ahead, came the turn of the maid of honor. Me.

Nodding my head, I took a deep breath and stepped ahead. The pace of the slow music around the gleeful ambience didn't match my pounding heart. As if I was the one getting married, not my sister.

The flutters in my tummy went berserk as soon as I stepped into everyone's sight. But it wasn't the people's stare or cheers that made my heart thump, it was the man my eyes searched for.

Returning everyone's smile, with my chin held high, I walked down the aisle with poise. Caleb stood there with his usual bright smile as he nodded at me which I returned with my own. Tobias and other of his friends stood beside him, all in well-groomed black tuxedos. But there wasn't a certain person I was looking for.

The groom's best man.

And then I saw him.

Flaunting a creased forehead, with his eyes on his phone, he walked up to Caleb and stood beside him.

And when those grey orbs lifted up and caught mine, I stopped breathing for a moment.

As if subconsciously, he took a step ahead, the frown on his forehead disappeared, grey eyes clashed

with mine until they glided down my body. His lips parted. An emotion that flashed across his face directly hit my already fluttering heart. Heat rose up my neck to my cheeks under his scorching gaze. I was sure I turned a deep shade of red, matching the color of my gown. The gown he gifted me. I was glad I didn't wear it before. It wouldn't have held the importance it did today. My action would speak what my words couldn't say. Last night he asked me a question. And here was my answer. When I reached the altar, he gave me his hand and I took it. His gaze didn't leave my face as he pulled me closer. So many emotions swirled across his stormy grey eyes but the one that stood out, was light, happiness. Though an eagerness fought along. "Dude, we're here to attend Caleb's wedding. Not yours," one of the groomsmen joked as the crowd cackled with mirth. Blushing, I stepped away. When he didn't move from his place, continuing to watch me, I pointed towards the aisle. Tess walked through the red carpet along Dad, a beautiful bouquet in her hand and a blinding smile on her face. Seeing the bride's arrival, he finally stepped back and let Caleb settle at the middle of the altar. Both of the bride and groom's gaze didn't move from each other as they stood before the priest after Dad handed her hand to Caleb. The love and adoration shone in their eyes as they took the vows to cherish and care for each for the rest of their lives. During the whole ceremony his eyes didn't move from me. His jaw ticked, fists clenched and unclenched. An annoyance plastered on his handsome face. "Can you finish it already?" He glared holes on the priest. At the command of his deep dark voice, that poor man sped up his lines. "Man, shouldn't I be the impatient one? Your girl isn't going to run anywhere. Easy there," Caleb

murmured to him, making Tess giggle and me turn beetroot.
Casie bumped her shoulder with mine, winking at me. I ignored her.
And as soon as the priest announced the bride and groom as husband
and wife, he didn't wait a
second before striding to me.
Grabbing my hand, he dragged me away from the altar.
"Ace, what are you doing? I need to be there right now."
"Trust me, Rosebud. Nobody in the world needs you more than I do right
now."
And then I let him drag me behind him.
His tight grip around my hand told his impatience. But a figure became a
hindrance to his way.
Halting at his track, his shoulders tensed. His nostrils flared as his sharp
jaw ticked. "What the fuck
you're doing here?"
"I need to talk to Em," Warner replied, his features stoic.
His grip around my hand tightened. "You didn't answer my question.
What are you doing here? Who
let you in?"
Damn! At the end it had to happen, hadn't it? The thing I was fearing.
Last night when I didn't give Ace
any answer, I felt how his mood went to a dark path though he didn't
show it to me. And his meeting
Warner didn't seem to be a good idea at all with his darkened mood. So
messaging Casie, I had her
take Warner away with some excuse from the function. I felt guilty, but I
didn't want a scene at Tess's
rehearsal dinner.
I put a hand on his arm, Warner's gaze followed the act.
"Ace, please. Don't start anything here. He was invited to the wedding," I
said softly.
His flashing grey eyes met mine. "I don't care if he's invited or not. He's
not staying here." Turning to
Warner, he hissed, "Leave!"
"Ace!" I gasped. "He's my friend. You can't talk to him like that."
"It's okay, Em. I don't care what he says. I came here for you. I need to
discuss something important
with you." Putting on a tight smile, he pushed his hands into his pockets.
"She won't go anywhere with you." The deep greek accent sent shivers
down my spine. His enraged

eyes cut through Warner.
But Warner held his gaze. "Let her take the decision, shall we?"
God! This isn't happening! I didn't plan my day anything like this. I totally forgot that he'd be here out of excitement for my meeting with Ace.
Taking a threatening step forward, he spoke in a low voice, "Do not try to cross my path, Mr. Wilson. I'm warning you for the last time. You won't like the outcome, trust me."
Though Warner kept a nonchalant face, he did take a step back. The fleeting fear flashing across his eyes for a second didn't go missed by me.
I pulled Ace back and turned to Warner, casting him an apologetic smile. "I'm sorry, Warner. I've to go right now. But I'll meet you in a bit, alright?"
His jaw clenched but he didn't say anything. Nodding his head, he gave one last glance at Ace who was still murdering him with his glare and walked away.
I turned to him. "What was that? You were flat rude!"
Ignoring my accusation, he grabbed my waist and dragged me with him again. Once before an unoccupied room, he pushed the door open and locked us inside.
"What are you doing..." My words caught at my throat as he pinned me against the door. Leaning in, he snuggled his face at the crook of my neck.
"This dress.... Tell me what I'm thinking is true, Rosebud. Tell me you wore this for me," he groaned out, taking a sharp intake of breath.
And with that, all my irritation went out of the window. My heart beat was fast as a tingling sensation ran across my skin with his hard body pressing against mine. The intoxicating strokes of his hands on my curves sent my nerves to a haywire.
"Tell me, Rosebud. I'm being impatient here. I've waited too long. I can't anymore. Did you wear it for me?" Pulling away, he pressed his forehead against mine.
"Isn't this dress an answer to your questions already? Do I need to say anything?" I whispered, gazing into his soul.
He shook his head, a torment etched into those grey orbs. "I need to hear it from your mouth. Tell me.

Did you... did you finally forgive me? Did you decide to give us a chance?"

A smile spread across my face, my eyes burning with the hefty waves of emotions slamming into my chest.

"Yes!" I gulped down my tears. A happiness bloomed into my heart. "I forgave you..."

And again I was cut off by him. But this time with his lips. Which I appreciated a lot.

Breathless once he pulled away, I was greeted with a blinding smile on his face. Grey eyes shone with felicity and content as he cupped my face. "You truly forgave me, Rosebud?"

I nodded, lost into his smile. He was breathtaking. How did I get so lucky?

Letting out laugh, he pulled me closer and littered kisses all over my face and neck. "Thank you! Thank

you so much, baby! You don't know what you gave me today!"

A fit of giggle left my lips with his non-stop kisses as I leaned more into him. Yes, it took me some time to forgive him completely, to understand his reasons for why he pushed me away. Though it still hurt,

I couldn't stay mad at the decision he took in the worst time of his life.

And the most important thing

was, he only wanted my well-being. Even after forgiving him, I held myself back to give myself some

time to process everything. And now even my patience was over. I

couldn't stay away from him

anymore.

From the man my heart beats for.

Placing a lingering kiss on my lips, he peered into my eyes. "So now I can call you mine?"

I raised my brow. "I thought you already declared that."

A musical chuckle reverberated through his chest. "Well, I declared what's the truth. You're mine."

Brushing the pad of his thumb on my lower lips, he whispered, "Only mine."

His lips latched onto my mouth again, his hungry tongue battling against my eager one. "You don't

know how happy I'm today, Rosebud. You've freed me from my years of torment. Thank you so much,

baby. I promise, I'll make it up to you for the rest of my life."

"You better," I said, breathless from his scorching kisses.

His hands reached behind me to cup my butt. Giving my cheeks a hard squeeze, he scooped me up,

making me wrap my legs around his hips. Even though in this heavy gown it was really uncomfortable,

I didn't care. Nor did he. We were more concentrated on our kiss instead.

When his hand slipped under my gown, going up my thigh, his rough big hand palming it, I let out a

moan. God! I needed more! I needed this man!

Letting out a groan, he ran his hand against my bare skin, deepening the kiss. "I love you, my rose. I

love you so fucking much!"

A warmth surged through my chest. Even in the kiss, a serene smile stretched across my lips. And then

the words I'd been hiding in my heart for years slipped through my lips.

"I love you too!"

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He froze.

Slowly pulling away, he cupped my cheeks. "What did you say?"

I bit my lip. But the shy smile broke out on my face anyway.

"What did you say, Rosebud? Did you just," he gulped, his eyes were desperate, "did you just say that

you..."

"I love you."

He let out a shaky breath, the intense emotions swirling in his grey orbs seared my heart.

"Say it again," he rasped.

Pulling him closer, I brushed my lips against his desirable ones. "I love you, Achilles Valencian. I love

you so much that it hurts."

Heaving a sigh, he engulfed me into his chest. I placed my cheek right above his heart listening to his

fast heartbeat.

I didn't complain about his vice grip around me as we stayed like that for some moments. Though I didn't like his silence.

"Ace?" I whispered into his chest.

"Just a minute, Rosebud." He took a deep breath into my hair. "Say it again."

I smiled. "I love you."

"Again."

Laughing, I smacked his chest. "No, I already told it three times."

Slightly leaning back from me, enough to look at my face, he placed his palm on my cheek. "Please, baby. Just once more. I want to hear it again. You don't know how much I've waited to hear those

words. How many times I've dreamt of you saying those words to me."

Something bloomed into my heart. Blinking away my tears, I placed a kiss on his chest. "I love you,

Ace. I love you so freaking much! More than anything in the world."

I looked up at him. His eyes were closed as if feeling every word that left my lips.

"Happy now?"

Those stormy grey eyes met my turquoise again. A content smile stretched across his heavenly features as he pulled me in his gentlest kiss. Not the demanding punishing kisses.

But to my dissatisfaction, he pulled away, leaving me crave for more.

"Come with me?" he asked, running his hand through my locks.

"Where?"

"Somewhere where I can have you all to myself." His heated gaze ran slid down to my cleavage. "Did I tell you how beautiful you're looking in that dress? More than I'd imagined you'd look."

I blushed.

Alone with him to have him all to myself?

Tingles ran down my body as unholy thoughts flashed across my mind. The idea sounded tempting.

But we couldn't just leave the ceremony like that.

"Thank you. But we can't. The ceremony."

"I don't care. Now that I finally have you in my arms, I don't want to let go of you." He placed a sensual kiss in my neck, arms tightening around me.

A moan threatened to leave my lips.

I had to stop him before I lost my control. We couldn't do anything right now. At least not until the ceremony was over.

"You can have me all to yourself after the reception is over. Everyone must be looking for us. We need to go outside." I tugged at his hair gently.

He groaned, latching his mouth on my throat. "I don't want to. I need you, Rosebud. I need you right now. I've waited so long." The last sentence came out like a breathy whisper.

I clenched my thighs at his deep voice. No matter how much I wanted to stay here, I couldn't. As a maid of honor, I had to see if everything was going smooth for the reception.

Tonight. I could wait till tonight.

"Later, baby. But we're needed outside right now. Caleb and Tess must be looking for us." The sexual tension that was floating around us from the last months threatened to burst right now. Now that there was no barrier between us, we both wanted each other like two broken poles of magnet needed the other to be completed.

Pulling away, his eyes held mine. They held dark promises.

"Later?" A mischievous smile tugged on his lips. "I will keep that in mind."

With my cheeks burning, I looked down.

Grabbing my chin, he tucked a strand behind my ear. "Let's go outside and get done with everything as soon as possible. Because I can't wait any longer."

Neither could I.

I wanted to say, but chose to stay shut. It wasn't a wise idea to tease the beast right now.

Nodding my head, I placed one lingering kiss on his lips before opening the door and stepping outside.

He followed behind, pulling me into him again. But then due to an important phone call, he had to leave me. But only for some minutes, as he said before walking away receiving the call.

When I was finally outside, Tess and Caleb were busy chatting with some guests and clicking photos. She didn't seem to be bothered with her pimple anymore. After checking out if everything was good with the reception preparation, once I was outside again, I found Warner approaching me. Instinctively, my eyes did a glance around to see if my caveman was anywhere around. I didn't want his horns to come out seeing Warner near me again. I seriously needed a serious talk with him about it. "You're free now? Come aside for a minute. I've some information about Arthur." At the mention of him, I looked around the place. I've not seen him after the wedding. The moments he lingered around, he wasn't focused on the ceremony either. He was too busy on his phone with his tensed old features. Nodding my head, I pulled him to a scheduled place where guests weren't roaming around. "What did you find out? And sorry for earlier. Ace, uh, he could be a little possessive when it comes to me." He snorted. "A little? Can't you see, Em? That man is obsessed with you. He thinks of you as his property that belongs to him. And trust me, men like him like to chase. You were like a challenge to him, so he came after you suddenly after all these years. And now that you finally gave in, just wait until he shows you his true color." My fists clenched. Gritting my teeth I kept myself from saying something that might hurt him. His hatred towards Ace was getting on my nerves now. "Warner, can we just talk about what's important right now? We've an issue in our hands. And that's Arthur. So let's just stick with it for now. And I already told you to not make any assumptions about me and Ace's relationship. So I'd appreciate it if you respect my wish here." I could see he wanted to disagree. But the stern look of mine had him shut up. Slumping his shoulders, he let out a sigh.

"Alright. Let's talk about Arthur now."

I nodded. "Thank you! So? What did your cousin find out about him?"

"Tobias told about the small business he had in Wales, right?"

I bobbed my head.

"Well, he used to run small cheap hotels for people to spend nights there. And after researching some more, we got the information that he did some illegal businesses under the cover of those hotels. He was even suspected by cops out there many times, but due to lack of evidence, they couldn't take any action against him."

My brows furrowed. "Illegal businesses? What kind of illegal businesses he ran?"

"Not hundred percent sure, but from what pieces of information my cousin got, it seemed like he managed a brothel at nights behind the service of hotels. Sources says that he even forced helpless girls into prostitution for money."

I gasped. A brothel? Well, I didn't know he would be that low of a creature. Did Ace know about this? I was sure he didn't. He'd never allow such a man to stay around him if he had even a hint of it.

"How come he never got caught?"

His lips thinned. "He's a shrewd man, Em. He made sure not to leave a single evidence behind him for anyone to use that against him. He was doing that until Achilles's father passed away and he left UK to come to California."

Why did he return after so many years leaving all his businesses behind like this? Because I didn't believe he was that kind of man who'd leave everything behind just so he could look after his nephews.

He must have some other agenda. But what?

Then it hit me. Of course! His brother's property. That passed down to Ace. And he won Ace's trust to get a hold on the power and money that Ace had. With his help, he expanded his business more within the whole UK now.

"Can't your cousin get even a single proof? I mean, there must be something."

He shook his head. "He stopped his illegal businesses a long time ago after he started handling Valencian Corp in Achilles's absence. Now he only runs legal businesses across the UK. And with the power Ace had given him, I can't say if he still runs something in the shadow while wiping along every evidence he has against him. Though I told my cousin to look more into it. He'll get back to me as soon as he finds anything out."

I sighed. He was right. He was quite a powerful man all thanks to Ace's trust in him. I wished I could tell all these to him. But without any proof, will he believe me? But he could also hire someone to look through Arthur's past just like I did right?, He'd find out the truth himself.

A determination etched into me. I'll talk to him as soon as possible. But just not now. We've come into a relationship just now. I didn't want any tension in it right now. Maybe with a day or two, when Warner's cousin would find something solid against him? Then I could easily reveal everything before Ace without fearing to ruin anything.

"Alright. Tell him to do it fast. Before Arthur gets even a hint of our quest, we've to get a hold onto something strong against him." I looked into his eyes. "And thank you, Warner! I couldn't do this without you."

He put a hand on my shoulder. "No need to thank me. What are friends for after all? And I can do anything for you, you know that, right?"

Nodding my head, I smiled.

"You just be careful around him, Em. He's a very dangerous man. Don't get yourself into any trouble."

I squeezed his hand. "Don't worry. I'll be fine."

"You didn't tell me he gave you this dress. Nor did you tell me that you guys are together now," Casie

grumbled, holding her cocktail in her hand. "I thought you confided me in with everything."

I chuckled.

The reception was about to begin. After helping Tess with retouching her makeup, Casie pulled me aside to throw questions about the faint hickey on my throat. Of course, nothing went past her eyes.

And then I told her everything.

"Don't be overdramatic now. We just sorted things up."

She eyed my gown again, a slow smile stretched across her lips.

"Remember you asked him to make you his princess one day?"

Warmth crept up cheeks as I remembered the day on my ninth birthday.

"Well, you're looking like one today in this gown. And now that you've finally become his princess,

how are you feeling right now?" She held an imaginary mike before me.

I looked down, running my hands on the beautiful gown he chose for me.

"Well, I don't want to be his princess anymore."

Her brow raised in confusion.

A smile graced my lips. "I want to be his queen now."

Chuckling, she rolled her eyes. "Now you're getting greedy here, aren't you?"

At my narrowed eyes, she burst into laughter and soon I joined in.

A throat clearing interrupted us.

Turning around, I came face to face with a tall man in his late twenties and a beautiful blonde in his

arms. What caught my attention was his pale blue eyes that weirdly lingered on my face for too long for my liking.

"Hi, Emerald. Remember me? I'm Jane from Tess's high school," the blonde said, flashing her pearly white teeth.

Yeah, I remembered her. She used to hang out with Tess sometimes.

I smiled. "Hi, Jane. How are you doing?"

That man still didn't move his gaze from me. And his features were too blank to read anything.

"I'm doing great! It's been so long since I last saw you. And look at you, you've turned into such a beautiful woman."

Before I could open my mouth to thank her for the compliment, that man interrupted. Oddly enough, I felt like I saw him before. But couldn't place a finger on it. "Indeed. Now I understood why my friend is so smitten by you," his northern accent said. "Friend?" I frowned. He nodded. "Achilles Valencian. I'm a really close friend of his." How come I didn't see him ever if he was that good friend of Ace? Then he held his hand out for me to shake. "Hello, my name is Antonio, Antonio Reymond. And I feel very blessed to finally meet you, Ms. Hutton."

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Chapter 47

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Happy Valentine's day, my pumpkins! So this update is as my love for you all! Hope you enjoy it!

Happy reading!

My smile slipped, eyes widened to friction.

Antonio Reymond? So that's why he seemed to be so familiar. I'd seen him on the TV that day, but couldn't see his face properly because he had his hand covering his face from the cameras.

But wasn't he in jail? What the hell was he doing here now? And after all he did to Caleb. The nerve of this man!

My jaw clenched. "What are you doing here? As far as I know you're not invited to this wedding."

Did Ace know of his presence here?

If he did, he wouldn't be still parading out here like this.

He placed his hand on his heart. "Oops! I wasn't expecting that coming. You hurt me, Ms. Hutton. I

didn't know you behaved that way with your guests."

"I do, with uninvited guests."

A humourless chuckle left him. "Feisty, huh?"

"What's happening here?" The blonde asked, confusion laced her face.

"Antonio, do you know them?"

I thought you told me you just wanted to spend more time with me and that's why you became my plus one here."

"Oh, he knows us really well. Unfortunately, he used you to get in here. Because he knew he wasn't invited," I said, holding his gaze.

"Hey, dude! Get your ass out of here before Achilles sees you. I'm sure as a reputable businessman, you wouldn't want to be thrown out of the gate like a stray dog." Casie flashed him a sweet smile.

His jaw ticked at her spitting insult at him. But then he reciprocated Casie's smile with equal venom.

"Oh, I've no bad intentions here. I just wanted to give my best wishes to the bride and groom. That's all."

"Mr. Reymond." My voice snapped his attention back to me. "I'd advise you leave the venue right now before Ace or Caleb notices you. I really don't want a scene here. And I don't understand. After what you've been doing to them all these years, how did you think you could just get up and come here to give them your best wishes?"

He raised his brow. "Oh, so the little Rosebud of Achilles' knows everything then?"

How did he know that Ace called me Rosebud? Only close family members and friends knew that.

My patience was running slim now.

"Of course. Everyone should know about the enemy outside. And enemies don't come to each other's happiness. So just leave." I pointed towards the gate.

A smirk tugged at the corner of his lips. "You can make the outsider enemy leave you alone. But what about the enemy inside?" His head tilted at the side. "How would you tackle them, Ms. Hutton?"

My eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

He shook his head, giving me a once over. "My work is done here." And then he turned to the blonde.

"I'll see you later, sweetheart."

Casie shared a look with me.

"Goodbye, Ms. Hutton." His eyes flickered over my shoulder. "Hope to meet you soon."

And then he turned around and walked away.

"Wait!" I called out to him, but he didn't stop. Two more men joined him before they disappeared into the crowd.

Glancing back where his eyes were seconds ago, I saw Ace striding towards me. Hands clenched into fists, nostrils flaring, eyes dark with fury.

He must've seen him.

Pulling me into his arms, he cupped my chin. "You alright, Rosebud? Did he do anything? Did he say something to you?"

Yes, about some enemy inside the house. Whom was he indicating about?

I shook my head. "He didn't. In fact, I sent him away. Don't worry." His jaw clenched, flashing grey orbs glared at the exit where Antonio just left through. "How dare he come here! That fucking piece of shit! And he dared to come close to you!"

The last sentence came out as a hiss. Moving away when he tried to storm to the exit, definitely following Antonio, I grabbed his arm.

"Ace, no! Stop! Where are you going? It's alright, he left already. There's no point in following him now!"

"No!" Snatching his arm, he walked away again. "He shouldn't have made that mistake today! How dare he come here and talk to you!"

I frowned. Why was he mad that Antonio talked to me? And he was the one who got him arrested, then how did Antonia come out?

Running to him, I wrapped my arms around him again. "Ace, stop! Please! Don't do anything rash!"

"Rosebud, leave me." His beautiful features were now clouded with anger.

I shook my head. "I won't. No matter what you say." At his scowl, I grazed his cheek with my palms.

"It's Tess and Caleb's wedding, baby. Don't ruin it by doing anything drastic."

I ignored the looks some of the passing guests were giving. They must've heard his roaring.

"Please? For me?"

Holding my gaze for some long moments, he gave me a tight nod. Though I knew he wasn't letting it go so easily, a smile spread across my lips. At least the wedding would go smoothly now.

I placed a kiss on his cheek. "Thank you!"

Casie sent me a look of awe but I ignored her and focused on calming the fuming man before me.

I peeked from behind the pillar.

At the far end of the hall, he stood there with just a plain glass of water.

The tight grip around it and

the hardness of his jaw was the evidence of his still smoldering rage inside him.

The reception ran in a full swing. People were chattering, dancing, drinking, the bride and groom were

clicking pictures with their friends after the cake cutting. Among the gleeful ambience, his mood remained dark.

And for our first night together as a couple, I definitely didn't want that.

I bit my lip as I saw the waiter approaching him. Handing him the note I sent, the poor man scurried

away from the sharp glare of his.

I shook my head.

Staring down at the note, he then took a glance around. And then he opened the note with his long

lean fingers.

The hard features softened up as a smile slowly played on his lips.

I knew what he was smiling at.

If you're done scowling at the corner, care to give this girl some company?

Your Rosebud.

When he looked up from the note, I let myself out from my hiding and his eyes immediately found

me.

Giving him a wink, I turned around and sauntered away from the crowd, to the empty hallway

decorated with crafted mirrors and beautiful paintings that hung on its walls.

I knew he was coming. My heart thumped like crazy under my chest.

Flutterings in my tummy had me

inhale deep.

I teased the beast. And now I'll have to be ready for him.

Then I heard his footsteps echoing across the unoccupied corridor.

With every step sounded closer, my heart felt like it would explode any moment.

A gasp slipped through my lips as my back was pulled into a hard frame.

His strong arms around me as

he put his head at the crook of my neck.

"You'd become the death of me someday, you know that?" his husky voice rasped into my neck.

Taking a sharp inhale, he brushed his lips on my bare shoulders. A shiver ran down my whole body.

Closing my eyes, I leaned back into his touch. It felt so right, being into his arms. No guilt or barrier

was stopping me today. It felt home.

"What did I do?" I asked, feigning innocent.

"Calling me alone here like that when you know I can't do anything to you even if how much I want to.

And you're saying you didn't do anything?" He hand brushed underneath my chest.

"What? I just wanted a hug." I pouted. "I didn't know your thoughts were still running south."

"Well, my mind always runs south when you're around," he whispered into my ear.

Heat crept up cheeks as I bit my lip.

Suddenly I felt a cold material gliding up my neck. Glancing down, I

found a simple pendant with a

diamond cut emerald sat in the middle, tiny rubies adorned around it.

I gasped.

It was the same pendant I saw at that jewelry shop when we went to buy gifts for Tess.

I looked at him over my shoulder as he secured the gorgeous pendant around my neck. The emerald

rested right above my cleavage.

"When did you get it?" My tone low.

He grazed his lips over my jaw. "The moment your eyes watched it with adoration, it became yours."

My eyes burned with the love that bloomed in my heart for this man.

Not because he got me this

pendant, but because the way he never missed even a single detail about me. He always had his eyes on me.

Taking a step aside, I looked at myself in the mirror that hung on the wall. It looked beautiful on me.

And the intensity in his eyes told me he appreciated it too.

His fingers grazed the emerald along the dip of my cleavage.

"Never take it off. Not even when you've nothing on you." The edge of his voice told me his desire.

The way his hand brushed at the side of my breast indicated to his impatience.

Turning half of my body to him in his arms, I pulled his head down and captured his lips, showing him

my appreciation. Groaning, he gripped my neck and rewarded me with his hot punishing kiss.

Sweeping his tongue into my mouth, he then sucked on my lower lip. My knees wobbled at the

sensations he provided me with his hands and mouth.

Just when I was about to deepen the kiss, the sound of footsteps reached my ears. Pulling away from

him abruptly, I ran my hands on my dress and hair to look as presentable as possible.

His frown told me his displeasure.

Giggling, I pulled his grumbling form with him outside just as an old pair entered the corridor.

I blushed.

Thank God, they didn't catch us in the act.

"What the hell were they doing there?" His lips pressed tight.

"Maybe they also wanted some alone time?" Snickering, I dragged him where the bride and groom

were.

When the bride and groom requested us to join them on the dance floor, we agreed. Well, I did. He

was too busy scowling and complaining he had enough of this wedding.

He wanted to leave this place with me.

As we started to sway along the music, well the dance Achilles Valencian preferred, I put my head

against his chest. Where others moved with the beat, he had his arms around me, moving us slowly.

And at that moment, I didn't care if everyone was watching. Even answering to Mom and Dad later didn't come into my mind. All I knew was his warmth. Then my gaze went to Casie. She was dancing with a blond. But her eyes were set on somewhere else. I followed her gaze. A man in his late twenties with dark brown hair and a tall well built frame stood near the staircase. His narrowed eyes observed the ambience around him as he sipped on his drink. An older man talked to him but he didn't pay any attention. My eyes went back to Casie, but hers didn't move from that man. A smile twitched at the corner of my lips. "What are you smiling at?" I looked up at his stormy grey eyes. One of his brows was raised. "Who's that man? I've never seen him before here." I jutted my chin to Casie's sudden interest. He followed my eyes. A muscle of his jaw ticked as the place between his forehead creased. "Why do you want to know?" I rolled my eyes. "Relax! I'm just curious. Don't need to get all green now. My best friend seems not to be able to tear her gaze from him, so I thought to ask." Casting a very disinterested glance at Casie, he turned to me again. His jaw softened up a bit. "A friend of mine. He's also been my partner in some of my businesses for years now." I nodded. "Anything else?" Annoyance dripped from his voice. I shook my head. Unbelievable man! Reaching up, I kissed his nose. "No. Now can we get out of this place? Even the Dance is over now. I'm getting bored here." Now his good mood peeked through his dark clouds. Grey eyes flashed with fire. "Where do you want to go?" His deep voice came out husky. Something tugged in my lower region. Leaning closer, I whispered in his ear, "Take me to your home."

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In the shadow of his car, his hot calloused hand trailed up under my gown to my thigh. His flaming touch left a scorch behind on my skin, followed by my ragged breath and racing heart.

Wiggling on his lap, I pushed his hand away, glancing over the driver who was silently weaving the car through the road.

"Your driver can see us!" I whispered.

A grumble reverberated through his chest but his mouth didn't hesitate to fall on my cleavage. Due to our passionate make out and his pervert hand's trying to pull down on my gown from my chest as much as he can, my neckline was much lower than it'd be appropriate before the public eyes.

But Achilles Valencian seemed to be enjoying the sight very much.

When he tried to lower my neckline more for his lustful gaze, I slapped his hand away again.

"Behave!"

Cursing under breath, he leaned in and did something before his dark smoldering grey eyes met mine.

"Now he can't see us. What excuse do you have now to stop me, my rose?"

Turning back, I found the window that separated the front from the passenger seat closed.

His hand crept up my legs to my thighs again, his hot breath fanning my neck. "So fucking soft. My mouth is craving to taste every inch of your skin."

A shiver ran down my entire body that was burning from his touch along the heat that crept up my cheeks. Biting my lip to stop a moan that threatened to spill, I closed my legs halting his movement.

"S-stop," I stuttered out.

Even if every pore of my body screamed for more of his touch, I was suddenly very shy. No one had ever touched me so intimately.

Groaning, he pulled me closer and adjusted my body in a way so that I was now straddling him.

"I can't stop tonight, my rose. I've waited for this moment for so long," rasping out, he gripped my

neck and slammed his mouth on mine. A moan slipped from my lips as his hot tongue massaged my eager one, exploring every inch of my mouth.

I gasped as he cupped my bottom under my gown and pushed my hip against his. I shuddered at the feel of his hardness right under me. A delicious painful tug in my lower region had me quiver for more.

And then I found myself moving my hips against his. Letting out an animalistic groan, he pushed me on the expensive wide leather seat and captured my lips once again. With my legs around his hips, I pulled him closer.

"Ace," his name came out as a whimper with him sucking on my neck, shoulder and everywhere his greedy mouth could reach.

"Fuck! I need you, baby! I need you so fucking much!" he cursed against my lips.

And just as his hand trailed to my back and pulled on the chain of my gown, a knock landed on the window.

"Mr. Valencian, we're here!"

And only then I noticed the car had stopped moving.

Seeing his scowling face and still eager touches, I let out a giggle. Leaning in, I pecked his lips. "Let's go inside, Mr. Valencian. You can carry on later."

"Oh, trust me. I'll do more than just carrying on."

I clenched my thighs at his dark promise as he got out of the car and helped me out as well. He didn't even let me bid the driver a goodnight. Scooping me into his arms, he carried me inside.

The moment we were secure inside the closed door of his penthouse, our bodies clashed into each other as two thirsty souls trying to quench their thirst they had for years. My hands were in his hair when his were everywhere he could reach. And my arching my body more into him indicated my eagerness.

But then I pulled away entirely, breathing hard. Flaunting a deep frown when he tried to reach me again, I took another step back.

Biting my lip, I shook my head. "I'm roaming around like this the entire day. I need a shower."

"No need to shower. You're smelling delicious!"

I slapped his hand away as he tried to touch me again, causing a muscle of his jaw tick.

"Rosebud," he warned. "I'm in no mood for games. I need you, now."

My eyes flickered down to his junior. I licked my lips at the marvelous view of his want for me.

"I'm not playing games. I just need a shower." Winking at him, I walked into his bedroom, ignoring the groan of his.

A blush rose up my cheeks at the memory of my first time coming here.

And the second time. This was

the room when we kissed for the first time.

And this room will be the witness of our becoming one too.

My heart pounded in my chest as I heard his heavy footsteps behind me.

Another tug in my lower

region. My insides were quivering for him. So biting my lip, I trudged

before the washroom door and

reached my hand to the zipper of my gown that was already half undone.

I pulled the chain down. Glancing over my shoulder, my wanting eyes

met his dark stormy grey as I let

my dress fall on the floor, leaving my half naked body for his sight.

A curse left his lips, his hands fisted into balls.

With goosebumps erupting across my skin with his scorching gaze on me,

I turned my body to him and

slowly undone my bra too. And soon it followed my dress on the floor

around my feet.

He took a deep breath, his lips parted. Those grey pools of his didn't

leave my bare chest for a second.

And then went my panties too.

Licking my lips, I turned around and walked into the washroom, leaving

the door ajar. And he knew of

my invitation for him to join.

A smile tugged on my lips as the hot water trickled down my body. I

didn't know where I got so much

boldness, but I just felt it. Only for him. Every shyness flew out the

window when he watched me with

so much want into his eyes.

I didn't even get the time to flinch from the washroom door slamming shut as I was pinned against the wall with his hard and very naked frame. His mouth on mine and hands everywhere.

"You shouldn't have teased me, sweetheart. You know what's the punishment for teasing the beast?"

he whispered, biting my lower lip.

"No..." a moan slipped my lips, my eyes went shut as his hands made their way to my chest.

"It's a very sweet and torturous punishment, my rose," his dark husky voice rasped into my ear, taking my earlobe in between the heat of his lips. "This beast will take his beauty again and again until she gets unconscious from the intense pleasures he will be giving her tonight as her punishment."

"Ace..." I whimpered at his words.

And then there was no going back.

I clung to him like my life depended on him as he made his territory on my chest, leaving the marks of his hands and mouth across my skin. Moans and groans echoed throughout the washroom along the relentless pouring water on the tiled floor as he weaved his way to the places of my body where no one ever reached before.

Our mouths didn't detach from each other when he carried me to his bed not caring about our bodies dripping wet.

Placing a kiss on my forehead, he peered into my soul. "You ready?" With my body still recovering from the heights he had taken me again and again just moments ago in the shower, I nodded my head.

"You're sure, baby? I know it's your first time. We can wait some time more if you want," he asked,

hovering above me. His fingers stroked my cheek gently.

Warmth surged through my chest at his gesture. Even when he was at the verge of losing control, he was thinking of me. I could feel his tense shoulders, ragged breath and hard and rigid...

Another blush rose up my cheeks.

Snaking my arms around his neck, I pulled him closer and captured his lips in a hungry kiss. "I want you, Ace."

Groaning, he reciprocated my kiss with ferocity. And just then I felt him against me. A delicious shudder ran down my spine.

"I love you," he whispered against my lips.

"I love you too!"

And then the rest of the night the only thing I felt was immense pleasure and undying lust. The rhythm of our bodies and labored breathing were all I knew. Our moans and groans echoing throughout the room were all I could hear.

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Turning around, I reached out for a warm body beside me but all I found was emptiness. Just the crinkled sheet and his lingering scent. Frowning, I opened my eyes and looked around.

There was no sign of him in the dimmed room. Even the bathroom's door was ajar just as we left it last night.

Where was he?

I glanced at the table clock on the side table beside the bed. Three in the morning. Where could he go this early?

And then a gust of cool air touched my face. The glass door of the balcony was open.

Clutching the blanket around me as I went to get up, a hiss left my lips at the pain that shot up in my lower region. Thus memories of last night flooded back in my mind, heating up my cheeks.

There was even a delicious soreness across my entire body.

Achilles Valencian was true to his words. He did punish me sweetly by taking me again and again until

I couldn't move any limbs the entire night. He was insatiable. And... perfect.

I bit my lip as another blush rose up my neck.

This time I took it slow and got up, securing the blanket around me. Padding into the balcony, I found him standing near the railings. Shirtless, he had only his jeans hung low around his hips. His gaze lost into the dazzling light of the city down in the streets.

I walked to him and wrapped my arms around him from behind, kissing his ripped back muscles.

"Rosebud?" Turning around with narrowed eyes, he pulled me into his warmth and hugged me closer.

"What are you doing here? You should be asleep."

"Shouldn't I ask you the same?" Rubbing my hand against his chest, I felt his smooth skin yet hard muscles.

Taking both of my hands, he kissed each of my knuckles. The blanket pooled around to my waist due to lack of grip. And his grey eyes didn't take a second to take a look. And they stayed there long enough to have my cheeks aflame.

I wrapped my arms around him, placing my head on his chest.

"Are you shying away from me, Rosebud?" he teased. But I didn't miss the huskiness and dark edge in his voice. "If it makes you feel better, I've seen everything already.

Touched you," his grip tightened around me, tone dropping to a whisper, "devoured you. You don't need to shy away from me, my rose."

He again changed the nickname. In these last two and a half months, I've realized that he'd three

names for me. When he was all affectionate, he'd call me Rosebud.

When he had perverted thoughts

in his head, he'd call me his rose. And when he was all serious and angry, he'd call me with my full

name, Emerald. And I loved each one of them. The way he pronounced them, it made them all

different from others taking my name. There weren't any warm fuzzy feelings with others.

Snuggling more into his chest at his bold words not to show him my bashfulness, I changed the topic.

"You didn't answer my question. What're you doing here instead of sleeping?" I looked up at him.

"Couldn't sleep?"

Sighing, he brushed his lips across my forehead. "I did sleep, Rosebud. With you in my arms now, I never had such a good sleep in my entire life. It's just... Carter called me a while ago regarding some important work. And I didn't get any sleep after that."

Looking down into my eyes, he pecked my nose.

"I usually only sleep for three hours at night. But I slept more than that tonight. So don't worry."

I grazed his days old dense stubble. "You were lost in deep thought. Something is bothering you, I can see it. What's it, Ace?"

He shook his head. "Nothing. Just work. Don't worry about it."

"Is it Antonio?"

His shoulders tensed at the mention of his name, sharp jaw ticked. I knew my assumption was right at the sight of his grey orbs that turned into slits now.

"It's him, isn't it?" I queried. "I know you're bothered at the thing that he's out of police custody now.

I've been wanting to ask you this. Why did you get him arrested? And how did you manage it?"

Due to our conflicts, I held myself back from asking him about Antonio. And after meeting him at the wedding today, after what he said to me, I couldn't get his words out of my head.

You can make the outsider enemy leave you alone. But what about the enemy inside? How would you tackle them, Ms. Hutton?

Enemy inside. What did he mean by that? Who was he talking about?

"How did you know I was behind his arrest?" One of his brows raised. I rolled my eyes. "It was all on your face Mr. Valencian. Anyone with eyes would have known it if they had looked closely. Your eyes were full of smug."

"Smug?" His forehead furrowed. "He did what he deserved. Even though it was nothing compared to the things I've planned for him." The malice in his voice was clear.

"How did you do it anyways? Was the girl also your set up?"

Leaning in, he buried his nose into my hair. "She was in the picture even before I made any plan. She

was already dating him and unluckily for him, she aborted his child last month after she found out due to avoid any unwanted motherhood. Though he didn't even know about that pregnancy to force her into anything in the first place, he had done it in the past to some of his partners. And I just took advantage of his past and that girl's greed for money."

A disappointment set in me thinking of that child that was killed even before he could be born in this world. And after aborting her child, she even used it to frame someone for money. Even if the person was a filth.

"I heard the police had evidence of his illegal businesses and I know this was also your doing. But then, how did he get out so easily?" He could be more dangerous for us now. That man was already after him and Caleb, and now that Ace literally drowned his name in the market, he would definitely take revenge.

"Though I ruined his business, he still has some connections with powerful people in politics. He used them to get out," he spit out the words, lips curling into a sneer. "The good thing is he can enjoy the destruction of his company before his own eyes now. And it's just the beginning. He has a lot more coming at his way. The only thing that didn't sit well with me was his coming at the wedding and talking to you."

The tightness of his grip around me and rage into his eyes had me concerned.

"Why are you so mad that he talked to me? He didn't do anything except just some talking."

He didn't give any answer to my question, just stared at me with his jaw set firm.

"Ace? What is it?"

"Nothing. He is dangerous, Rosebud. I don't want him anywhere around you," he said, cupping my cheeks. "I swear I'll rip him into shreds if he even touches a strand of your hair."

The uncontrolled fury in his grey orbs and a hidden fear lurking around had me feel unsettled. But I wasn't afraid of Antonio. I'd kick his sorry ass if he even tries to do something.

Though his concern was legit. Antonio tried to frame Caleb with drugs to defame Ace. He could try to harm some of his loved ones again to shower his revenge on. And I could be that leech's target easily now that we were together.

I kissed his chest, smiling at him. "Nothing will happen to me as long as you're here with me. So don't worry about that. Now think a way to send him back behind the bars. And this time, forever. So that he can't try anything funny again."

A smile stretched across his lips. Nodding his head, he pressed his lips against mine. "My queen's wish is my command."

Giggling, I kissed him back. His hands traveled across my curves, sneaking up to my chest.

A winch of mine had him frown in concern.

"Are you alright, Rosebud?"

"Yes. Just a little sore everywhere. You took too much liking to this particular area last night."

No matter what he was doing, his hands didn't budge from my gloves last night for a second. Not that

I complained, but I was now suffering for his adventurous hands. Though it was a delicious soreness.

"I'm so sorry, baby. Did I hurt you?" he asked, narrowing his eyes. His fingers brushed at the sides of my breasts softly.

I shook my head. "No. I'm fine. Just a little sore. They'll get better tomorrow I think."

"I'm sorry. I just," he bit his lip, still eyeing the fingerprints he left on my sensitive skin, "couldn't keep my hands away from them. They're too marvelous and perfect for me to stay away."

Blushing, I slapped his hands away. It seemed he got an obsession with my chest just like he had for my hair.

"Can we go and sleep now. I'm tired." I pouted.

"As my queen commands," saying, he captured my lips again into a scorching kiss and scooped me into his arms. Naked.

"The blanket," I whispered, already battling with my growing desire. I had to resist my urges if I wanted to walk tomorrow. But my hands were already feeling his hard body ignoring my brain.

"Forget about it. I love you like this," he groaned.

I clenched my thighs at his adding additional marks on my neck where I was sure numerous already sat proudly from last night.

"We should sleep," he murmured into my ear, placing me softly on the bed, hovering over me.

"We should," I moaned at his flaming touch at my sides.

Placing a last kiss on my forehead when he tried to pull away, I wrapped my legs around him, pulling him back.

At his confused face, I pulled him into a kiss, my hips already begging for attention. His rigid not at all junior was very much awake against me telling me his want as well. But he was holding back not to hurt me anymore.

And at that point, I didn't care. I wanted him again. Another round wouldn't be that bad, right?

"You're sore..."

"Just be gentle."

Soft touches over my hips, warm lips on my jaw and his hot breath fanning my skin woke me up from my beautiful slumber. My eyes fluttered open to the morning light and then fell on the breathtaking pair of grey orbs I was so much in love with.

"Good morning, my beautiful rose." The huskiness of his morning voice sent a shiver down my body.

Even in the morning with his ruffled bed hair, he looked as perfect as ever if not more beautiful.

As cliché as it sounded, this was the sight I wanted to wake up to for the rest of my life. The sight I had craved all my life in deep down.

A smile touched my lips. My heart was content, just as much as my body was. Though there was still a little pain down there, it wasn't bad. The pain killer he made me gulp earlier in the morning after our another session, seemed to work good.

"Morning."

With a heart stopping grin on his face, he brushed his lips against mine.

"How did my Rosebud sleep?"

"Tired slumber is always the best."

A husky chuckle reverberated through his chest as one of his palms massaged my inner thigh. "How's the pain?"

My cheeks turned hot. "Better."

Mischievousness twinkled in his grey pools. "Was I gentle enough?"

Rolling my eyes, I hid my face at the crook of his neck. Another chuckle left him at my bashfulness.

"Don't hide yourself from me. I love when you turn all red because of me." Pulling away, he grazed his fingers across my cheek. His intense gaze roamed around my every feature as a breath left his lips.

"I'm still wondering if you're real. If you're really here into my arms on my bed with me."

My heart tugged at his words. I snaked my arms around his neck. "It's real. We're real. And I'm not going anywhere. Never again."

Placing his forehead on mine, he peered into my soul. "You don't know how long I've been waiting for this moment. I didn't know if I'd ever be lucky enough to have you in my arms like this. But you fulfilled that dream of mine. And I can't thank you enough for giving me this chance, baby. Thank you so much for forgiving me. I promise, I'll make it up to you for the rest of our lives."

Something fluttered into my chest. Rest of our lives?

A happiness bloomed inside me. He wanted a future with me just as much as I wanted.

"I love you," I whispered, my eyes burning with emotions slamming into my chest.

He kissed me deep. "I love you more."

I wanted to argue, but the grumble of my tummy decided to interfere, turning me into beetroot.

Pulling away, he laughed. "Come on, let's get you freshened up. Then I'll cook something for my Rosebud."

I didn't complain when he scooped me into his arms again and took me to the washroom. Though my hands tried their best to cover my feminine parts much to his amusement.

"Pancakes?" he asked, once done with the egg scrambles.

I nodded, chewing on the slice of apple he had cut me to eat until he made some breakfast for me. I

offered to help but he denied and said I shouldn't move much due to our wild activities last night.

Though I wanted to say that I was fine, I enjoyed the pampering.

So I let him have his way.

Dangling my feet down the kitchen counter, I ate my apple and watched him move around the kitchen

with utmost ease. The way his back muscles flexed along his movement had my mouth water. Not to forget those delicious abs.

Achilles Valencian cooking in his kitchen shirtless? And for me?

I didn't know I was that lucky.

In between mixing the batter, his eyes kept flickering to my exposed legs beside him. After he gave

me a warm shower, unbelievable, but he didn't try anything naughty other than feeling my chest, he

made me wear one of his t-shirts. And I was more than grateful for that.

It was much more

comfortable than my gown would be right now.

And due to its length to my thighs, I didn't wear any pants underneath except my panties. And seeing

his lingering gazes, I could tell he was enjoying the view very much.

"Eyes on the batter, mister. I want my pancakes to be perfect," I teased.

He raised a brow. "And what should I tell you? Eyes on the apple?"

He noticed me staring at his abs?

I blushed for the upteenth time since last night.

Placing his hands on my hips, he stood between my legs and kissed my lips softly. "Did I tell you I love

seeing you in my clothes?"

"Yes. Twice already."

"Because that's the truth. It's a symbol that you belong to me." His fingers grazed my inner thigh.

Rolling my eyes, I pushed him away but he only snuggled his face into my neck.

"I love my smell on you."

I shook my head. What would I do with this caveman of mine?

Wrapping my arms around him, I kissed his shoulder just as the doorbell rang.

"Who's it at this time?" I asked, pulling away.

His brows furrowed. "I don't know. Let me check. You stay here."

Nodding my head, I jumped down the counter as he went to attend the door. Placing the plate of

apple aside, I started to pour the batter on the heated pan, humming one of my favorite songs.

Moments later, I heard footsteps coming closer and then I heard his voice. My humming stopped immediately.

"Well, well. I didn't know I'd find you here today."

Turning around, my eyes met with his empty dark ones. A fake smile plastered across his face.

And I reciprocated the gesture with one of mine. "Good morning, Arthur."

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With a tight smile, he nodded at me. The fleeting grimace on his face while he took a look at my clothes didn't go missed.

"I heard there were some problems going on between you two. But I'm glad to see you together today," he said, though his eyes didn't match his words.

Ace came back with a shirt on and took the charge of the pancakes from me again. Placing a kiss on my forehead, he said, "I've got some clothes for you in the room. Go, change. And then come out for breakfast."

When did he do that?

But it was good since I didn't want to roam only into a shirt before Arthur.

Nodding my head, I walked away from the kitchen as I heard their voices.

"What brings you here so early in the morning, Arthur?" Ace asked.

"It was important. I thought to call you but then thought discussing face to face would be better. It's about the deal with the Russians."

And the rest of the conversation was cut off as soon as I closed the bedroom door behind me.

"Achilles, as you implied a lot of conditions for the contract, there'll be a lot of paperworks. And we're not sure if the Russians will agree to them. They're quite a big fish in the market nowadays, you

know?" Arthur's gaze set on Ace as he took a bite on his pancakes. "If you want them to work with us, we should consider giving some loose on our conditions, don't you think?"

When Ace offered him to have breakfast with us while having the discussion, he agreed. Much to my dismay.

Placing some more scrambled eggs on my plate, his left hand went back to my knee as he shrugged. "I

don't mind some paperworks. And no, I won't change my rules for anyone. And don't forget that they're also interested in working with us. Yes, they're big, but nothing compared to the Valencians.

So if they want to do business with Valencian Corp, they'll have to do it our way."

They were talking about a Russian company who wanted to expand their business more in the US.

And so their first choice was to go for the Valencian Corp. And as they could bring huge money to the company, Arthur didn't want to let them go. Not to forget the project they were interested in working with us, it'd take about half a billion of investment. So a little mistake and big loss.

And the worst thing was, Arthur was going to handle it.

I didn't have a bit of faith in this man.

His jaw ticked but being wise, he decided to keep quiet before Ace. And my Mr. Valencian was too busy to feed me more fruits to notice his uncle's discreet rebel. Suddenly Antonio's words rang into my head. Why didn't I think of it before? Enemy from inside. And who could it be other than him? He was doing illegal businesses behind Ace's back. He threatened Sierra with her life to hide a secret of his. There could be a vast possibility of him being the enemy from inside. But... could he be foolish enough to go against Ace's back and join hands with Antonio? I didn't know. And the only person who could answer my question was Liza. Someone had forced her to put those drugs into Caleb's car. Maybe it was him? He threatened Liza just like he did to Sierra? I've to find out. And for that, I need to see Liza. "Alright, if that's what you want. I'll talk to them once more about our conversation. Let's see what their opinion on it," said Arthur, wiping the corners of his mouth with his napkin. Ace nodded, smiling a little. "Great. And please make sure you're present at the meeting with the Arabs today. I can't attend since i've a private meeting with De Sylvano." That had my attention. Meeting with the Arabs? Means that red witch will be at the office again? When I asked Matt about her visit at the office that day, he said she had come to complete some paperworks about the project. And as we were working together now, the Arabs will be coming for meetings and conferences frequently now. I pressed my lips. I had another problem to solve today. "I can't eat more. I'm full!" I complained as he added some more pancakes on my plate. "You need to eat more, Rosebud. You've lost weight in the last months. Here, open your mouth" He put the fork before my lips. "And after last night, you definitely need some energy," he murmured the last line into my ear.

My eyes widened as heat crept up my cheeks.

Arthur's clearing his throat snatched our eyes to him. "Alright, then. I'll meet you at the office. See you later."

Getting up, he threw me a last glance before turning around and walking out of the room.

"Please wait here. She'll be here in a minute."

I nodded as the lady cop walked out of the small cabin they had made me sit. It was a small room with just a table with two wooden chairs in the middle.

After Ace left for the office for some important meeting with some Vincenzo which he couldn't miss, as he said, I took the chance to come here. Even though he had strictly told me to stay there and have some rest, he didn't even let me go to the office with him. He said he'd be back in an hour, and I'd to finish my work in the meantime.

After five minutes, the door opened and the familiar figure with a tall frame and blonde hair walked in. The orange jumpsuit was loose on her thin body. Surprise washed over her face that's dull and pale now. Gone the usual brightness of her eyes.

Standing up, I smiled at her. "Hello, Liza. How are you doing?"

"Em? What are you doing here?" Her brown eyes were confused.

"Let's take a seat first." I jutted my chin towards the chairs.

Once we were seated opposite of each other, she leaned in.

"I know it's not your responsibility to find out if my family is well, especially after what I did. But do you know if they're fine? My brother? Is he okay?"

My heart went for her state. Even though I was pretty mad at her when she betrayed us like that, now thinking of how she was threatened by a dangerous man, I could understand her situation back then.

I had a hunch that it was Arthur who threatened her.

I put a hand on hers, squeezing it slightly.

"Don't worry. Your family is fine. Ace had some guards watching over them since you got arrested."

A gasp slipped from her lips. "B-boss did that?"

Smiling, I nodded.

Her eyes shone with unshed tears. "Even after everything I did, I know I don't deserve it. But it must be your doing, Em. I- I don't know how to thank you. I'll be forever grateful for that. I thought you didn't understand my gesture that day. I was so worried thinking about my family's safety. After they got to know what happened, they're so disappointed in me that they didn't even come to see me."

"I didn't do anything. It was Ace who did all the arrangements." She shook her head, sniffing. "I know the boss. He can turn into someone's nightmare if someone crosses his path. He doesn't see why they did it or how valid their reason was. But he did it for me even after I tried to defame his family. And I know it's because of you." A soft smile tugged on her lips.

"Boss can do anything for his Rosebud."

I tried my best not to blush and concentrate on the current situation.

"I understood why you did it, Liza. I know you. You're an honest and kind girl. Seeing you doing what you did was extremely disappointing and shocking. But we couldn't just leave your family in danger for your deed. After all, you had worked in that company for years with loyalty."

She looked down, biting her lip. "I don't deserve your kindness, Em. But... t-thank you! Thank you so much."

"We can't change what you did. But you can help me with something if you want." I kept my face neutral.

"Help? How can I help you with anything while staying in here?"

"You can. You can tell me who was the person who threatened you to frame Caleb."

Her eyes widened as her shoulders tensed. Leaning in, I grabbed both of her hands in mine.

"Look, Liza. I know you're scared that if you tell us their name, your family will come into danger. But trust me, they're safe. We've people there for their safety. You don't need to be worried about that anymore. So you can tell me the person's name so that I can find out who they're and expose them."

She snatched her hands from mine, shaking her head. "I've told the police thousands of times that I can't spill the name no matter how much they torture me. And I'll tell you the same, Em. I'm sorry. I can't tell you anything. Even though my family is safe now. But you don't know him. He's dangerous.

Those guards can't keep an eye on my family the whole time." He's dangerous.

The same thing that Sierra said.

"You know Sierra resigned?"

Her brows furrowed. "Resigned? Why?"

They were quite close. So maybe hearing about her, she would say something?

I nodded. "Even after her financial crisis, she had to leave her job. And guess what, a certain someone threatened her with something also. And when she denied to do that, she had to leave the office."

She froze in her place. Her Adam's apple moved as she gulped. "Y-you know?"

"I've a guess. I even tried to talk to her. But she said the same thing you told me. That he's dangerous.

And guess what I've heard him talking on the phone?" I titled my head.

"That if she crosses her limits, she'll have to lose her life just like her job."

Horror etched into her features as she stared at me with wide eyes.

"Look, Liza. I know you're scared for your family. But if you just tell me the name so that I can confirm

my doubt, I'll be able to stop him. If you continue fearing him, I don't know how many people will

suffer because of him just like you and Sierra." I prayed in my head for her to understand my points.

She could be a great help to expose Arthur if she agreed. "Sierra is in danger and there's no one who can protect her. He's needed to be stopped. Please, Liza. Just give me the name."

A tear rolled down her eyes as she shook her head. "I can't. I'm sorry. Sierra must be strong enough not to succumb to his threats. She's my friend and I want to help her. But I can't. I can't put my family at risk."

"He won't know if you say anything. Nobody will tell him!"

She held my gaze. "If he even gets a sniff of you knowing his secret. He'll come after me first, Em. And then... he'll go after you."

A shiver ran down my spine. But I didn't let the fear that threatened to crawl under my skin and hold my ground.

"He won't. I'm Emerald Hutton. He can't threaten me with something just like that. You don't worry about me. And you're here in jail. He can't harm you either. Your family is also safe. Then why can't you just tell me the name?"

I sighed when she kept quiet.

I had to get something out of her.

"Alright. Don't say the name. Just answer my one question." I took a desk breath. "Is it Arthur? Did he threaten you to do it?"

Her hands balled into fists, her whole body tensed at the name. With tears shining in her eyes when

she averted her gaze from me, I got my answer.

So the enemy of the house was Arthur indeed.

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