

# The Trap Of Ace

## Chapter 61

A sigh left me with the continuous feathery kisses gliding down my neck and shoulder, when the gentle yet possessive touch of a pair of calloused hands over my curves pulled me out of the sleep.

His hot breath fanned across the skin of my neck. A raspy deep groan reverberated through his chest when his palms slid over mine.

"So perfect..." husky voice murmured into my ear.

A gasp slipped my lips as he softly bit on the skin of my throat. My eyes fluttered open to the shadowed room. The curtains blocked the sunlight out, only some rays of light peeked through the gaps.

And then I found a pair of beautiful stormy grey eyes peering into mine. With some strands of his ruffled bed hair falling over his forehead, a day's old stubble across his sharp jaw and that familiar intense look of his whenever he looked at me left me breathless; as always.

"Good morning, my beautiful Rose." Gently grabbing my chin, he placed a soft kiss on my lips.

My heart fluttered with his simple yet sweet gesture.

I smiled. "Morning."

"How did you sleep, baby?"

"Good." All thanks to him. His touch and presence set my mind at peace. Even though his words from last night nagged me.

"When will you tell me?" I asked, ready for the answers I was looking for so desperately.

His eyes met mine. "I will. But not now. Tomorrow. You'll get to know everything tomorrow."

"Why tomorrow?"

"I need some time, Rosebud. I need to prepare myself to live my past once again, the past I had buried at the darkest corner of my memories."

He asked for a day. And I'd have given him more than just a day if he had wanted. Once I made a mistake by pushing him too far, I had hurt him unintentionally. I didn't want to do it again. And one day wasn't much to wait for.

I wrapped my arms around his neck. "Where are we going?"

He let out a chuckle. "Aren't you a really impatient one?"

Last night, he had said he wanted to take me somewhere. Somewhere we could spend some alone

time away from here. Especially after these stressful days. And in his words, it was a temporary

replacement of the plan he made for our vacation which couldn't be possible because of our, well...

fight. Due to his constant meetings with the Russians, he couldn't go for a long vacation at the

moment. But he promised me to take to one soon.

I knew he needed this day out as much as I did. When I needed a change of air, he needed this time to

prepare himself to reveal his every secret before me.

I pouted. "I hate it when you do that."

"Well, it's called surprise, baby." His smile slowly slipped. A look of concern took over his features as

he cupped my cheek. "You okay?"

Letting out a sigh, I nodded. "I'm better now."

I was feeling much better now. Last night was one of the worst nights of my life. I was shook. But I

was fine now. And the love of my life's being here made it easier.

"You sure? We can postpone it if you want to stay in today." The pad of his thumb brushed over my

cheek.

I shook my head. "No. I'm fine. Don't worry. I'm actually looking forward to this, uh, what to call it? A

date?" One of my brows raised.

The breathtaking smile appeared back on his heavenly features. "Call it whatever you like. All that

matters is you being with me."

"So it's our second date then?"

"Nope," he said, making me frown. "First. Our first date as an official couple. Not just as friends."

Rolling my eyes, I bit my lip. Heat crept up my cheeks remembering how I literally forced him to go on a date with me 'just as friends'. I had no choice though. And I hoped this date would turn out good. Not that last one wasn't good. It was amazing, the most beautiful day of my life. But the end was equally disastrous. So I wished everything to turn out good this time.

His grey eyes looked down at me with adoration and love. Tracing my cheeks, he leaned in and kissed on both of them.

"These adorable freckles. Do you know I hate it when you hide them with powder?"

I giggled. "It's makeup. And yes, I very much know that."

"Then why do you do that?"

"Because I don't like them much."

His brows furrowed. "But they're beautiful."

I bit my lip at his confused face. He looked so adorable.

He snuggled into my neck, letting out a groan. "You don't know how beautiful you look with them, my rose. You're so fucking beautiful." His voice came out husky, sending a shiver down my spine.

His hand returned to my chest, cupping me firm into his big calloused hand.

And then I realized how my legs were wrapped around his hips. Our bodies were pressed together, my soft one against his hard frame. When his hand marked their territory over my chest, his lips left more hickeys in my neck sending my senses to haywire, his huge junior was rigid and hard against my thigh.

I felt a painful tug at my core.

"My Rose..." he groaned.

My breath came out ragged. I needed more.

And just as I pulled him closer, tightening my legs around him, my stomach decided to interrupt.

He pulled away slightly, a frown formed between his brows. "You're hungry?" Then he shook his head.

"Of course, you're. You didn't have your dinner last night."

At the mention of last night, I felt his shoulders tensing. But he composed himself soon.

"Let's freshen up and then i'll make something for you." Moving himself away from me, he placed a kiss on my stomach. "Let's go."

Smiling, I put my hand in his awaiting one and let him carry me to the bathroom. I didn't ask him about his sudden tense mood. In fact, I was grateful that he didn't start any conversation about last night. I didn't have the strength to remember the incident again and again.

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Pulling my hair up, I set it into a messy bun and stared at my reflection in the mirror.

My eyes were still puffy from my crying last night and the bags underneath my eyes were noticeable.

He had left to make breakfast when I decided to spend more time in the bathroom, taking a shower.

And now that he wasn't with me, memories of that hotel floated back into my mind. My hands tightened on the sink.

I tried not to think, but I failed.

I still couldn't believe Warner could do something to me like that. Yes, he was drunk and hurt. But

that didn't justify his actions. He was... violent, he was a monster last night. I didn't know he had this

side in him. Now I didn't know which Warner was real. The one I called my friend, or the one I came face to face with last night.

A vile rose up my throat recalling his actions. Closing my eyes, I took some deep breath to calm myself down.

I didn't even care to know where he was right now or how he was doing after Ace had beaten him to unconsciousness. I didn't even want to think of him anymore.

Blinking away the moisture in my eyes, I walked out of the bathroom and then out of the room.

As soon as I entered the kitchen, the mouthwatering smell of bacon and pancakes hit my nostrils. My stomach growled.

His grey orbs looked up at me, and then glided down my body.

I was wearing one of his t-shirts that reached my mid-thighs. Nothing else.

The darkening of his eyes and tightness of his sharp jaw didn't go missed by me as I sauntered closer.

"I bet you didn't wear any panties, did you?" His voice came out deep. My cheeks flushed. Shrugging, I sat on the counter. His eyes followed the movement of the t-shirt as it rose higher up my thighs.

"It's big enough to cover my lady parts. So... yep. I didn't wear anything else."

He groaned, resting a hand on my knee. "You're doing this on purpose, aren't you? Such a tease you are!" Leaning in, he snuggled his head into the crook of my neck, taking a sharp inhale. "If you wanted something from me, you could just ask, baby."

I rolled my eyes and pushed at his chest, causing him to frown. "The only thing I want is right now is food. I'm hungry."

"Yes, breakfast is almost done," grumbling, he stepped away and put some batter on the pan.

Giggling, I leaned in and kissed his cheek. "Thank you for making me such delicious breakfast everyday.

I love you. You're the best boyfriend in the world, you know that?" Though we hadn't yet discussed our relationship, nor did he ask me to be his girlfriend, I just started to think of him as my boyfriend. Well, he already called me his and he was mine, so I didn't think we needed to give it a name officially.

My kiss seemed to brighten his mood as he pecked on my nose. "I'm glad. Even though I don't like the boyfriend tag and I'd like to change it soon, it's okay for now. And I love you more."

My heart raced inside my chest. Butterflies erupted into my stomach at his words. Change the title

soon? Did he mean what I thought he meant?

Heat touched my cheeks as I looked down at my lap, twirling my bracelet.

Chuckling, he kissed my head and pressed his forehead against mine. I looked up at him through my eyelashes.

Stormy grey eyes peered into my soul with his intense gaze. "Soon."  
My heart drummed down my ribcage as I stared at him. Warmth surged through me, a happiness bloomed inside my chest. Just at the imagination of him waiting for me at the altar did something to me. My whole body tingled at the thought. Becoming Mrs. Valencian didn't sound so bad. Lost into each other's eyes, we suddenly broke away when a burnt smell reached our nostrils. Crinkling my nose, I looked at the pan. The pancake. I let out a chuckle. When he only scowled at the almost black pancake, as if murdering it with his eyes for interrupting. "Let me make another one." I shook my head. "Did someone come when I was in the shower? I thought I heard some voices when I was changing." He nodded. "Yes. Arthur and Mr. Ivanov were here. I couldn't meet them yesterday and the Russians were eager for a quick meeting. So I told Arthur to get Mr. Ivanov up here." My posture straightened. Arthur was here? "Who's Ivanov?" "The owner of the Russian company we're going to sign a deal with. Actually there are two owners of the company. Mr. Balakin and Mr. Ivanov. Mr. Ivanov is doing all the working on this upcoming project," he explained. "What he wanted to discuss so urgently?" I asked. I heard the mentions of the Russians many times in the past two weeks, but I never met any of them yet. "Mr. Ivanov came up with a new proposal. At first they were only interested in just working with OC Textiles, but now they want to work with Valencian Corp as well. Changing the original plan of Mr. Balakin, the other partner, Mr. Ivanov now wishes to work on several projects at a time. He said he had his full trust in us. So the more projects they could work on with us, the more they can expand their name in the US market."

"So what did you say?"

He thought for a second, before going back to flipping the pancake. "At first I didn't like the idea acknowledging the amount of money Valencian Corp has to invest. But then, Arthur has a belief that it can bring us a huge Russian market if we go ahead with it. Their company has a good reputation in Russia. Even Caleb seems to like the idea. So I agreed." A shoulder of his lifted.

"How much does Valencian Corp have to invest?" I raised my brow.

He glanced at me. "Five hundred millions."

I gasped. My eyes went wide. Five hundred?

"And as it's a vast amount of money, they don't want to bear any risk before the projects complete.

So they suggested signing a contract. A contract where it says that if there would be any hindrance or loss caused by a party in between the certain period of time before the projects finish, they shall compensate the other party with the whole amount they invested in the project," he added. "So that either parties wouldn't have to be in any kind of hesitation regarding the deals."

My mouth was on the floor, still absorbing his revelation. "And you agreed to go ahead with this? Five hundred millions isn't a joke for a company. I know you're a freaking billionaire, but it can be a big issue for your company in the future if something goes wrong."

He cupped my chin. "Our, it's our company, baby. And don't worry, I know what I'm doing. Our company handled deals like this before, though not with such contracts. But it's not a big deal. They agreed to a lot of our conditions, we had to agree to this one of theirs. Normally I don't work with others' conditions, but Arthur seems to be adamant to work with them. He requested me several times to agree. So I did."

Something didn't feel right. This contract didn't sit well with me. Though this isn't something rare.

People are working with contracts like that out there. But with Arthur involved in this, seeing his

desperation for this deal, I couldn't help but worry.

He was definitely planning something.

"You said, Arthur is going to handle this project?"

He nodded.

"D- do you think you can trust him with it?" I asked carefully. "I mean, it's quite a big project for him to handle all alone."

"He's not going to be all alone, Rosebud. There are people who will be assisting him. And Caleb will also join once he comes back from his honeymoon," he replied, putting some beacons on my plate.

"Don't worry. I trust him."

That's the thing that was holding me back from telling him Arthur's truth earlier, before Arthur

threatened me with Ace's past. He had this blind trust on his uncle.

Seeing my silence, he gave me his whole attention. "What happened?

What are you thinking?"

Should I tell him? Will he trust me?

And what about Arthur's threat? But that could be just a bluff, right?

Maybe he actually didn't know

anything and just bluffing to keep my mouth shut?

Kissing my lips softly, he made me look at him. "What's bothering my Rose so much?"

Should I?

I gulped. "He..."

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"He..." I licked my lower lip which suddenly felt very dry.

He nodded, patiently waiting for me to continue.

"He isn't what you think..."

His phone blared on the counter, halting me in the mid sentence.

Frowning, he picked up the phone

and let out a sigh.

"Sorry, Rosebud. Have to take this," apologizing, he answered the call.

"Yes, Arthur?"

Even though the displeasure was lucid on his face being disturbed again, his tone maintained the

respect for his uncle. If it was someone else, he wouldn't be so lenient for the interruption.

"Hmm. Alright. Just send the details to Carter. I'll take a look later," he said, while picking up a grape and putting it in my mouth. As I chewed on it, he listened carefully to what Arthur had to say.

Then suddenly his gaze snapped up to mine.

Nodding slowly, he said, "Alright, will tell her. Yeah, see you later."

I cocked my head at the side. Was he talking about me?

"What did he say?" I asked, as he put his phone back on the counter.

"Just about some details of a meeting with the Russians. Regarding our final signing with them," he

replied. "Anyway, he gave you his greetings. He said he was sorry that he couldn't meet you today, he

was in a hurry. But he'll see you soon, he really enjoyed his last conversation with you." A brow of his

raised. "I didn't know Arthur had time to converse with someone unless it's regarding work."

Something churned in my stomach. I gulped. It was a reminder of the sword he had dangled upon my

neck from him for me, not a message. When I was thinking to tell Ace everything, he stopped me

again. Even if I didn't entirely believe that he really had anything against Ace with him, a fear lingered

there. He was connected to Ace's family and past after all. He was there after his father's death. He

handled Ace. There was definitely a possibility of him knowing something.

And he'll meet me soon? Why?

"Rosebud?" Cupping my chin, he made me look at him. "Where are you so lost?"

I shook my head. "Nothing. Just thinking about the office. It's been some days I haven't attended. And

yeah, we had a little chat at the office."

He placed a kiss on my forehead. "Good. I'm glad you're coming closer to my family. Due to your stay

in NY, you weren't connected with Caleb or Arthur. And don't worry about the office, it's your

company. You go whenever you want."

A genuine smile stretched across my lips even though the thought of Arthur's planning something was

swirling in my head. At first when he made me an equal owner of everything he had, I was livid. I didn't want it at all. But now, I didn't mind it. At all. In fact, I felt happy that he loved and trusted me enough to take such a huge step for me. It was a proof how seriously he took our relationship. Of course, I wouldn't ever take any advantage of this power he gave me. But thinking of having right on everything he owned, felt good. As if I was already his wife, his other half.

"You were saying something about Arthur? What was it?" I shrugged. "Nothing. I was wondering if he could handle everything on his own. But I guess, you're right. He has been doing this for years after all. I shouldn't worry about it."

Just one more day. As soon as I'll get to know about his past, I'll be able to know what Arthur had against Ace. Maybe then I can do something? Nodding, he picked me up from the counter making me immediately wrap my arms around his neck and legs around his waist.

"Let's have breakfast now. Then we can leave for our little vacation."  
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"Ace, can I remove it now? I want to see where you've brought me," I complained for the upteenth time since we left the penthouse for our little vacation. He had put on a blindfold over my eyes before getting into the car so that I couldn't see where he was taking me. "Relax, baby. Just some few steps more and we'll be there," he murmured into my ear. I let out a huff and let him guide me to wherever he wanted to take me. When he finally removed the blindfold from my eyes, I was left surprised. My lips parted as my gaze roamed over the beauty of the mansion that stood before me. The same mansion we had visited after shopping for Tess for her engagement, the night we met that accident. The house he had bought for his future. If it was beautiful at night, it was breathtaking in daylight. Under the sun, it stood so magnificently with its black and white combination that I couldn't tear my

eyes off it. And the little garden surrounding it was now covered with colorful flowers, mostly roses.

The grass was lush green.

I took a deep breath.

"Told you. It looked more beautiful in the daylight," he said, snuggling into my neck with his arms wrapped around me.

And I could just nod.

"So this is where we are gonna spend our day?" I glanced up at him, finally tearing my eyes off the house.

"You love it, right?" he asked, getting an immediate nod from me.

Tightening his hold on me, he gently pecked my lips. "Then not just a day, this is where we're gonna spend the rest of our lives."

My heart sped up. A warmth surged through my chest. The thing that he thought about a future with me made me feel all tingly.

"S-so, you brought this house for our future?" I blinked away the moisture in my eyes.

He nodded, stormy grey orbs set on me. "For our future."

I bit my lip. "So, that means, that bedroom will be mine that has a balcony just above the rose garden?

I'll be staying there with you?"

A husky chuckle reverberated through his chest, his eyes held amusement. "Yes, only my Rosebud's.

And that'll be our bedroom. And," his voice dropped low as he brushed his lips against mine, "you're the one who's gonna be sleeping in that bed with me, every night, my rose."

Slapping on his shoulder, I pushed him away and pouted. "You're so mean! That means you were talking about me when you mentioned about your future wife sharing that bedroom with you? You were purposely making me jealous!"

I still remembered the jealousy and hurt I felt when he talked about his future wife and having a family with her. I thought he was talking about someone else. This prick! "I didn't mean to make you feel that way, baby. You just couldn't understand my hint. All you had to

do was, just look into my eyes. And you'd get to know whom I was talking about." The intensity in his gaze made my heart flip.

I rolled my eyes.

"So, you were jealous, huh?" pulling me in, he teased.

With my lips still formed into a pout, I played with his shirt's button. "Yes.

Because you're mine. No

one else can be your wife except me."

He took a sharp inhale, staring deep into my soul. "You want to be my wife?"

A blush rose up my cheeks. Even though he had made his intentions clear this morning, he wanted to hear it from my mouth.

"Yes."

"You know that means you'll have to spend the rest of your life with me.

You'll be stuck with me

forever. Because I'm not letting you go," cupping my chin, he said.

"Great. I'm not planning to go anywhere anyway."

A vulnerability flashed across his eyes, his grip tightened on me, pulling me closer. "Promise me?

Promise me you'll never leave me."

The uncertainty and urgency in his eyes tugged at my heart. Now I understood why he was asking me

this even if he already declared that he was gonna change his 'boyfriend' status soon. He even

brought this house for us. But he was still uncertain. He still had this fear that I'd leave him.

Rising on my tip toes, I cupped his cheeks, holding his gaze. "I promise.

I'll never leave you. Never ever.

No matter what happens."

Exhaling a sigh, he pulled me into his passionate kiss. Not sweet and slow, but possessive and rough.

"I love you, my rose. I love you so fucking much."

I smiled. "I love you too. More than anything."

No matter what his fear was for, no matter what his past was. I'll never leave him. I'll always stand

there beside him. Whatever happened in the past, I wouldn't let it affect our present and future. And I

had this belief that he couldn't do anything wrong. And even if he did, he wouldn't do it on purpose.

Pulling away, the nameplate on the gate caught my eyes.

Turquoise Heaven?

He followed my gaze.

"Your beach house has the same name, right? I asked. "Why though?

Seems like you liked this name  
too much."

"Damn right, I'm in love with this name. Because turquoise is my favorite  
color."

I raised my brow. And I thought it was black? Since most of the time he  
roamed around in black or

dark suits. But why Turquoise?

Then realization hit me.

The color of my eyes.

Flutters erupted across my tummy at his words.

"My eyes?"

He kissed my forehead. "Yes. My turquoise eyed beauty whom I'm  
obsessed with. Whom I love with  
everything in me."

Not knowing how to react, I wrapped my arms around him, hiding my  
face into his chest. Emotions  
soared high into me.

"I can't live without you, you know that?"

"I know. Nor can I, baby." He pecked my forehead again. "Now, let's go  
inside. I've so much to show  
you."

Once we were inside, I was left surprised again. Not only because the  
interior was beautiful as well as  
the exterior, but also because the furniture that were set around the  
house were very familiar to me.

In fact I chose them.

Before we got together, he had given me some weird jobs to choose  
furniture from hundreds of  
catalogues he had sent me. Even confused, I did mark the ones I liked  
the most. I didn't know he was  
planning to use those for our home.

"It's not done! Why didn't you tell me then?" I glared at him once he  
showed me around the rooms.

The side of his lips twitched. "If I had, would you help me choose them?"

I didn't say anything. Not having the answer, I just rolled my eyes and  
walked away from him. To the

bedroom we were going to share.  
And to my surprise again, while the rest of the house was decorated well with the furniture I chose, the master bedroom was left untouched. Except the round bed in the middle. Even the walls needed paint. When I threw a confused glance at him who followed me in the room closely, he wrapped his arms around me from behind and rested his chin on my shoulder. "I want you to decorate our room with your own hands and presence. From the color of the walls to the furniture, I want you to set everything as you want," he said. A smile graced my lips. "Why only me though? You're also gonna stay here. Your choice also matters. What if I turn this room into a pink kingdom?" He let out a chuckle and then pressed a kiss on my neck. "I don't care if it's a kingdom of pink or purple as long as you're here with me. Do you think when my sun will be before me I'll be able to see anything else beyond that?" Letting out a shaky breath, I leaned into him. As cheesy as it was, his every word seemed to be meant to flutter my heart, and spread warmth through me. He was always that good with his words. They always managed to make me fall more deep in love with him, even if it was possible. "What now?" Pulling away, he grasped my hand in his. "My study. Come, I've something important to show you." "What's it?" I asked. He looked at me. "A little glimpse of my past."

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Once in the newly organized study, I found it much similar to his cabin in the office, and of course, decorated with my chosen furniture. Except one thing. A huge picture frame on the wall, covered with a white sheet. The same one I saw in this room during

my last visit. I still remembered that blue diamond ring in her finger that was left unconcealed. But this time the sheet hid it whole.

I had the same question again. Whose picture was that?

Still securely clutching my hand in his, he stood before the picture. A soft sigh left him.

"Ace?" My voice came out as a whisper.

Rising his hand, he tugged at the sheet, letting it fall on the floor. My eyes widened slightly.

It wasn't a picture. It was a painting. Painting of his mother, Ophelia.

As graceful and sophisticated as ever, she stood there with her head held high and confidence

sparkling in her blue eyes. The navy blue velvety gown hugged her petite body perfectly when dark

red lipstick sat on her lips, bringing her smile more into life. Then the blue diamond on her finger. It

was evidence of her high class status and taste.

Whoever drew this painting was a hell of a talented painter. They

brought this painting to life so

beautifully. One could easily mistaken this as a picture instead.

"She's looking beautiful, as always," I complemented.

He nodded. "She always wanted to get herself a painting of hers. And she finally did it on my

sixteenth birthday." With his gaze fixed on his mother's face, he spoke in

a low voice, "She was very

happy that night."

Though it sounded like he was telling a happy story, I could hear the pain behind his voice. The way he

let out a defeated sigh, my heart clenched for him. He missed her.

I placed a hand on his shoulder. Turning to me, he gave me a close lipped smile.

"She loved this canvas, and always kept it in her room. But since... since she didn't take it with her

when she left, it remained in that dark old room. So I thought why not bring it here." One of his

shoulders lifted into a shrug. "As much as I didn't want to open the memories of my past, I couldn't

leave this like that. I had to bring at least one of the things related to her over here."

I squeezed his hand. "You did the right thing. Just because of some bad memories, we can't just abandon the ones we spent in felicity. I'm glad you're starting to cherish those memories even if you don't want to think about your past."

I was happy that he was opening up to me. He had never talked to me about his mother before like that. But he was doing it now. Yes, it wasn't much, but it was a beginning. I hoped he'd let me in properly soon.

He kissed the back of my hand. "Honestly, even though I brought it here, I wasn't planning to hang it here. My first plan was to lock it in the basement. But then," his eyes met mine, "I remembered your words. The same ones you had told me at Tess's rehearsal. I thought over it. You were right, until I can't accept my past, I can't move on with my present. I can't be at peace. So I..."

"So you decided to keep it here?"

Nodding, he took my hands to his lips again.

"It's one of the best decisions you took, you know?" I said.

He smiled. "Come, there's more."

Curious, I followed him closely as he went around his desk that sat in the middle of the room and got out an album. An album full of his and Caleb's pictures, there were even Tess and Caleb's pictures along them.

"These are from our highschool and college," he said, standing beside me as I flipped the pages. Some of them were even from their childhood. Two little chubby kids were grinning at the camera with their mouths smeared with chocolate. And I didn't have any difficulties pointing out which one was my man, with the gorgeous stormy grey eyes he had.

I stared at the picture in awe. "You were so adorable back then." He looked barely three or four in the picture.

"What do you mean? I'm not adorable right now?"

I laughed at his playful accusing tone. Shaking my head, I pecked his lips.

"No, you're not adorable

now." At his raised brow, I winked at him. "You're hot."  
Amusement danced across his eyes as he let out a chuckle, circling his arms around my waist.

"When did you get this picture?" I asked, looking at a photo of him and Caleb eating cookies with both of their mouths and hands full.

A look of nostalgia crossed over his features. "When grandma used to babysit us. When we would be alone in the house, Mom used to call grandma over to look after us before leaving for work. And being the kind woman she was, she always used to make cookies for us even after Mom told her many times not to spoil us."

Although I never met that woman, the fondness in his tone made me like her immediately.

"Where is she now?"

With a somber look, he shook his head.

"Oh, I'm sorry," I whispered.

"It's alright. Here, look, here she is." He pointed at a picture of a woman smiling at the camera with her grey hair tied in a bun on the top of her head and two little kids on her lap. "After the death of Caleb's parents and mine's being busy all the time, she took care of us. She'd have loved to meet you, you know? She'd be proud of my choice."

With his gazing lovingly at me, a blush crept up my cheeks.

"I'd have loved to meet her too! She sounds like an amazing woman."

He nodded, kissing my head. "She was."

Then came an old picture of a couple. I didn't know them.

"Caleb's parents," he answered my confusion. They were a beautiful couple.

Among so many pictures, I didn't find even a single photo of his father. And only one photo of his mother was there, even not alone, it was with his grandma and Caleb's parents. I knew that he purposely avoided keeping his parents' photos in there. Especially his father's. From what I got to know, he had a strong dislike towards his dad. That's why even if he talked about his mom to me, he

never mentioned his father. His parents' subject was a sore one for him. That could be the reason why he kept his mom's picture still covered with the sheet. But I was glad that he was at least trying to cope up with his past. After sharing some of his memories with his grandma, he showed me some of the trophies he won at his college. Those shining trophies were proof of his being active in sports, he was a born winner in everything. He even told me how sports and gym helped him with his drug addiction. He spent most of his time behind them to keep his mind busy and away from drugs. In just some moments, I got to know so much about him. The more I knew him, the more close I felt to him. And I couldn't be any happier that he was opening up to me, letting me peek into his life.

As the day passed, we played some matches of chess; of course, I made him promise that he wouldn't let me win on purpose. And obviously, I lost in every damn match! So to make up my ruined mood, he made me lunch. My favorite, cheesy garlic shrimps and chocolate cupcakes. Though this time I helped him make the food in the beautiful fancy kitchen. Now who would miss ogling a half naked Greek god cooking while his delicious abs were on display?

After he made me sit on his lap and feed me my lunch, he took me out to the open meadow that was filled with roses. The same one he showed me from our bedroom's balcony during our last visit. And he was right. It was breathtaking in daylight. The beauty of the freshly bloomed roses, the green meadow, the lush grass and the gentle breeze filled with faint fragrance of flowers just blew my mind away. I could definitely spend the rest of my life over here without any complaint. And the thing that he groomed this place with rose plants for me, only made it more special to me.

Then he took me to explore the backyard. The backyard woods. It wasn't dense, nor there were any wild animals, so I thought it'd be a great place for children to play around. Of course, I didn't voice out

my fast forwarded thoughts and let him guide me through the uneven ways with my hand tightly secured in his.

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Tying the belt of the robe around my waist, I bit my lip, staring at my reflection in the mirror.

Mr. Valencian was waiting for me in the pool. The rooftop swimming pool I was quite excited to swim in. After the whole afternoon exploring the woods and roaming around the small market nearby, we decided to take a dip in the heated pool.

Though I didn't bring any swimming suit as I wasn't aware where he was taking me or we were gonna swim, I did wear matching black lacy underwears. Thank God for that! And I looked quite good in those, sexy to say. I was just wondering what his reaction would be seeing me in them.

Grinning, I padded to the rooftop where he was patiently waiting for me. With his back facing me, he stood in the water with a glass of fruit champagne we bought from the market earlier this afternoon

in his hand. Gaze set in distance, he took a slow sip on his drink. Even though he smiled and laughed with me throughout the day, I could see his stress beyond. His shoulders never relaxed even when he was teasing me or kissing me. His grip on me was firmer than ever, his need to keep touching me was stronger than ever. Even when I told him to wait for me here, he didn't look pleased.

He said he'd tell me tomorrow. And as the day passed, his stance grew more tense.

Hearing my footsteps, his stormy grey eyes turned to me, making my heart skip. His hair was wet and swiped back, water droplets rolled down his broad shoulders and strong back. My mouth watered at the sight.

Will this man ever fail to amaze me?

"Took you long enough..."

His words stopped as I untied my robe and let it fall around my feet. The cool breeze pricking my bare

skin wasn't the reason for the goosebumps that crawled across my body. It caused the heated and now darker gaze of his.

His lips parted as he let out a sigh, intense stare roaming up and down my body. My cheeks flamed hot.

Licking those firm pink lips sensually, he placed his glass of champagne on the edge of the pool and beckoned me with his head. And my feet obeyed.

The moment I was in the warm water, he pulled me flush against him. My heart thudded under my ribcage at the suddenly very awake hard organ of his against my lower abdomen.

"Fucking hell, Rosebud! Do you want to kill me?" Letting out a curse, he ran his hands at my sides while undressing me with his eyes. They were glued on my chest that was barely covered with the lacy bra.

I let out a breathy moan when he pressed his lips against my neck, hands feeling my behind. A shiver ran through me at the feel of his hot tongue on my jaw and the calloused hands cupping my flesh roughly.

"So fucking soft," he murmured into my ear, biting my earlobe. "You've no idea how much I craved to feel this velvety soft skin against me, to touch you, to taste you." The husky groan of his directly hit my lower region, causing me to close my thighs. But he opened them soon with his leg in between them.

"Ace..." I whimpered at his sucking on my neck. One of his hands played with the edge of my panties.

"I had to take countless cold showers thinking of you every night. You were so close to me but I couldn't touch you. Those nights and days were a torture for me." He groaned. Pulling me forward, he moved me against his hard on. My lips parted at the sensation. "You feel that, my rose? What you do to me? What pain you make me go through everyday fucking day with just a simple glance of yours?"

Closing my eyes, I leaned into him and felt his touch, his kisses, his warmth.

"You tortured me for years in my dreams," he murmured.

At this, my eyes snapped open as a very troublesome question popped up in my head. Moving away slightly, I looked at him.

"How could I torture you in these years?" I felt a squeeze in my heart at the thought of some other

woman touching him. "You- you didn't have anyone to..."

Cupping my chin, he stared deep into my eyes. "There was no one in my life since college. Not even a

single date. There was only you in my heart, baby. Only you."

I was both touched and surprised at his admission. But then couldn't stop myself from asking another one.

"H-how many girls were you with in college and highschool?" I knew I shouldn't be jealous of the

affairs he had in his past, but it still pricked me.

A brow of his raised. "Now where this conversation is coming from? I thought we were going to do

something hot..." His hand crawled up to my chest, but I slapped it away.

"Answer my question!" My eyes narrowed. I wanted to know how many girls he slept with where he

was the only man who touched me. I just hoped the number wasn't too high. But with his Greek god

looks, I didn't think girls were decent enough to keep distance.

He let out a sigh. "Two."

It wasn't much, but it still managed to sting. Biting my lip, I nodded and looked away.

This was ridiculous! It was in his past! Then why did I want to murder those girls who got to have him?

Pressing his forehead against mine, he held my gaze. "It was when you left for NY. Even for just some

time, i- I thought to let you go. I wanted to forget you so that you can live your life happily. So, for

that I thought other girls could help me. Even if deep down I knew I couldn't last for longer until I

finally lost it and ran back to see you." He placed a kiss in between my brows. "And it happened. I

could stretch it only for one month until I lost it. I knew no one could take the place of my Rosebud.  
Nor could I live without loving her, without seeing her."  
A tear slipped down my cheek. "Those years were hell for me as well. At least you could come and see me from afar. B-but, I had to fight with me constantly to forget you. The fight I knew I never would win. Everyone thought it was just a crush of a teenage girl." I shook my head with my vision blurred with tears. "But it was much much more than just a crush. I had lost my heart to a boy I never thought would love me back."  
"But he did. More than anything, more than himself, with every fiber in his body," he whispered, brushing his lips against mine. The crack in his voice told me his pain. I could express my agony with my tears, but he couldn't. "I'm so sorry, baby. I'm so sorry, because of my one decision you had to suffer that much. But trust me, I did it only for you. Even if it killed me." I grazed his rough stubble against my palm. "I know."  
He pulled me into his chest, wrapping his arms around me tightly. "I love you, my rose. I love you so fucking much."  
I smiled. "I love you too."  
We went silent for a moment until I spoke again.  
"Ace?"  
"Hmm?"  
"You said you were waiting for me to complete my studies. What would you do if I really had managed to move on from you and fell in love with someone else?"  
His grip tightened on me. Greek accent was deep as he replied, "Then I'd kill that bastard and make you fall in love with me again."  
I giggled, shaking my head. "What if I truly loved that man and hated you for doing that? What'd you do then?"  
"Rosebud," he warned.  
Pulling away, I looked at him. "Tell me. What'd you do?"  
He pulled me back into him. "I'd kidnap you, tie you to my bed and seduce you until you forgot him

and start loving me again."

My eyes widened. This caveman!

"What if even then I kept hating you and wouldn't love you back as you wanted? What would you do

then? What would you do if I never loved you again?"

His shoulders tensed. Jaw clenched and unclenched. His fingers tightened on my hips as he stared at me with hard yet unreadable eyes.

Then I saw the vulnerability. The uncertainty. The fear.

"I'd die," he said, letting out a shaky breath. His thumbs gently brushed over my cheeks. "I'd die if I

had lost you completely. You don't know what you mean to me. This man standing before you, only

breaths for his Rosebud. Without her, he is nothing. Without you in my arms," he leaned in, pressing

his forehead against mine again, "I'd be lost. You're my light, baby. I can't think of my life without you

even in my wildest dreams. I can't live without you."

My heart broke in my chest with every tremble in his voice. With a tear slipping my eye, I wrapped my

arms around his neck and kissed his lips softly. "Good. Because I'm not going anywhere. You're stuck

with me for the rest of your life. I won't leave you even if you want me to. Because this Rosebud of

yours also can't live without her Ace."

Cupping my cheeks, he captured my lips into a deep hungry kiss. With one hand around my waist, he

pulled me up, making me wrap my legs around his hips.

Sucking on my lower lip, he growled against my mouth. "Promise me."

I knew what promise he wanted from me. The same one he asked me to do when we arrived here. He

was asking it again. A promise of never leaving him, a promise of not to give up on him ever. A

promise to love him for the rest of our lives.

Pulling him closer, I pressed my lips against him again while moving my hips against him, trying to

show him my every emotion through my actions.

"I promise."

And this was the last straw for him. Keeping me still in my place in his arms, he got us out of the pool

and took me directly to our bedroom. To show me his love, his passion,  
his wildness, his tenderness  
and his promises.

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Opening my eyes slowly, I squinted into the dark room. My hand  
reached for him beside me on the  
bed, but his warmth was missing. There lied only coldness.  
Where was he?

The bathroom's light was off. And the balcony's door was closed.  
"Ace?" I called out. But I didn't get any reply from the silent dark room.  
Getting up, I grabbed the shirt he had left at the end of the bed earlier  
before going for the pool and  
put it on. Running my fingers through my semi damp hair, I padded out  
of the door.

He didn't give us a chance to dry ourselves off before...and I didn't  
complain. Why would I when I was  
getting what I wanted?

A blush rose up my cheeks remembering the way we were relentless.  
And he was insatiable, as always.

He didn't stop until I couldn't take it anymore. I was glad that we were  
alone in this whole house.

Otherwise my screams and loud moans would send us to jail for sure.  
And after tiring me out, he took care of me. He cleaned me up and towel  
dried my hair well so that I  
wouldn't fall sick. After he was assured that I was well taken care of, only  
then he returned back to  
me under the blanket and pulled me into his chest.

Only for me waking up to a cold bed in the middle of the night.  
Where is he?

After checking the whole second floor, I climbed down the stairs and  
padded into the hall. And there  
he was.

Before the fireplace, he was seated onto the single couch. With his  
elbows resting on his knees, his  
grey eyes were lost deep into the fire crackling around the burning  
timbers. The hot amber glow  
descended on his beautiful hard features.

But the tightness of his jaw, icy gaze and clenched fists weren't  
appealing to me at that moment.

The sudden feel of the tense air around me made me cautious.

"Ace?" My voice came out as a whisper. As if afraid to break the silence. He didn't respond, not even moved a muscle of his body. The only answer I got was eerie silence, except the crackling of the fire. And when I almost thought he didn't hear me, his deep voice echoed around the hall. Low yet powerful.

"I had always looked up at him as my role model. I always wanted to be like him. Powerful, successful and dedicated to his work. A nice and humble person," he said, pausing for a second. "Until I saw him raising his hand on my mother."

A gasp slipped through my lips.

He used to beat Ophelia? I never thought he'd stoop so low. But if he could cheat on his wife, then hurting his wife physically wasn't impossible for him.

But I didn't speak my thoughts out loud. Not wanting him to stop.

"I always ignored their conflicts and arguments thinking that it wasn't my business to interfere. I

thought every couple had their disagreements sometimes. I didn't even give any ears to Mom's

suspicion on him. Until I caught him with his secretary in his office."

A muscle of his jaw ticked while I listened to him silently. Nor did he turn to look at me yet.

"My whole opinion about him changed right at that moment. Instead of respect, I only felt disgust

about that man. And my disgust turned into hatred when he found me standing there at the door but

still kept his secretary on his lap. As if his own seventeen years old son didn't just catch him cheating on his wife."

My heart tugged for him. I couldn't even imagine how broken and shocked he was when he found out

his father's real face. And I felt bad for Ophelia. Though I didn't get to spend much time with her, she

was a great woman. She didn't deserve it.

"Did you tell her about it?" I asked, not moving from my place.

He shook his head, eyes hard as stone. "I didn't have the courage to.

Even though she had her own

doubts, she never was sure about it. He never let himself get caught. She was already drowning herself into alcohol, I couldn't give her any more reason to add up her miseries."

"If she wasn't happy with him, if he was treating her that way, then why didn't she just leave him?" I

queried, curious to know more. "Even after the doubts, why did she stick around?"

"Because of love." Those dark stormy grey orbs met mine. "She loved him, Emerald. Even after he all of a sudden threw her out of the board members when she had equally worked hard with him to raise the company to success, even after he started manhandling her, even after he disrespected her every day, she didn't want to leave. She wanted to stay with the man she once fell in love hoping that he'd magically become the same charming man she once knew. She didn't want her family to get shattered.

So she stayed back. Tolerating everything."

I gulped down the tears that threatened to spill from my eyes. She loved that man so much, but the only thing she got in return was hurt. "And she found solace in alcohol to forget her pain?"

He nodded, staring hard at the fire that flickered so high as if it just needed a bit more air to spread its destructive wings into a raging lava.

And the rage in his eyes matched the zing of the flames into the fireplace.

"Even though most of the time she used to be lost into alcohol, she sometimes used to come into my room at midnight just to kiss my forehead and whisper goodnight," he whispered, his voice cracked at the end.

Not being able to stand there anymore, I walked up to him and placed a hand on his shoulder. But he didn't look up at me. Maybe because he didn't want me to see the moisture in his eyes.

A tear slipped down my cheek. His pain was slicing through my heart. I wanted to hold him to my

chest and tell him that everything would be alright, that I was here with him. But the stiffness of his shoulders and rigid posture stopped me from doing so.

"She tolerated everything even after she was dying inside. She kept smiling at the fancy parties he took her with him for the world, so that no one could raise a finger at our family. She took his insults every fucking day without relent. But everything had a breaking point. Everything had a line." His lips curled into a sneer, his nostrils flared in rage. "And the line broke that night."

I straightened up. My heart pounded. I knew my answers were just a few moments away. I knew it was the night that became the worst night in his life. The night that still haunted him.

"After a long time I and Caleb decided to have a family dinner outside with her. That...that was the night of Thanksgiving. So we thought we could at least make her mood brighten a little. Even Tobias and Tess joined us. We were supposed to leave for your home after that to spend the rest of the night with your family." Looking up at me, he held my gaze. "I was eagerly waiting to meet you and give you the gift I bought for you. But...Mom couldn't control her urge and got drunk. So we had to cancel the plan and return home."

His voice turned deeper and rougher as he continued. His jaw clenched and unclenched. I squeezed his shoulder to provide him some comfort.

"The moment we reached home, we...heard them. Him and one of his women." Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath. "I still remember the way she stood frozen before her bedroom door, I still remember the tears that formed into her eyes. She...found him with a woman on the very bed they shared. With her very best friend."

Another gasp left me as I stood there shocked at the new revelation.

"And that night her patience broke. I never saw that side of my mother. She was shaking with anger

and hatred. Tears were rolling down her eyes from the betrayal she got from the two people she loved a lot. That night, she lost it."

The way the anger in his eyes slowly turned into fear, it unnerved me.

"Tess and Tobias left immediately. Caleb stood at the door frozen. And that man didn't have a bit of

shame to even show a bit of remorse. Instead, he was mad that she entered the room with the

children. He was accusing her that she wanted to demean him before us." He paused, gulping. "I

stood there hearing them screaming at each other, their curses and shoves. I didn't know what to do.

Nor did Caleb. I wanted to console my mother, punish my father for his deeds. But all I could do was

stand there at a corner. For a seventeen years old, the situation was very confusing and traumatic."

All of a sudden he stood up, away from my touch, closer to the fire. His shoulders raised up and down

with every heavy breath he took. His curled fists shook at his sides.

"I- I didn't know what to do until, until Mom got out a gun from her closet. The same gun he bought

for his protection," he said while I stood there frozen in my place. I didn't expect everything to turn

out like this. "She was so drunk and hurt that she didn't know what she was doing. She went to shoot

her bitch friend, screaming at her for betraying her in that way. And he loved his mistress enough to

snatch the gun from her and raise it to his wife."

My heart pounded down my chest as I waited for his next words to come.

My hands and feet turned

cold out of anxiety and nervousness. An ominous feeling rose up my chest.

"He was mad. I still remember how red his eyes were. I still remember how much hatred he held in his

eyes as he watched Mom. But even if he held the gun at her, she didn't stop screaming at them,

shoving him and grabbing that bitch! And then he lost it," he murmured.

"I saw him curling his finger

around the trigger. His words still echoes in my ears when he spit them out staring right into my

Mom's eyes. 'I have had enough of you. You're becoming a nuisance for my professional and personal life now. I wanted to remove you from the company first, but now seems like I've to remove you from my life. So that I can live in peace. And this is the perfect time to do that'."

I let out a shaky breath. Not even a word left my mouth.

"He was about to pull the trigger. And that's when I jumped in between him and Mom. I requested

him to put the gun down. But he didn't seem to care that his son was standing before the deadly

nozzle. He just pushed me aside and went for Mom in rage. But I couldn't let that happen. I had to do

something, Emerald. And I did. I...stopped him."

He slowly turned to me. Dark eyes held mine, not even a trace of emotions were on his face.

Something churned into my stomach.

"You were right. I didn't tell you everything. I hid two things from you.

One, that he didn't commit

suicide, he was murdered. And two," Greek voice dense as he stared deep into my eyes, "he was

murdered by his own son. I killed him."

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 64

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Ace's POV

"He was murdered by his own son. I killed him."

I watched her silently as she froze in her place. With her Turquoise eyes wide in shock, her lips parted.

The color of her face drained the moment she heard those words left my mouth. The truth I had been

hiding in the deepest corner of my memories. The ugliest and darkest truth of my life I never wanted

to reveal before her.

She kept quiet. Only unbearable silence echoed throughout the hall.

Other than shock and disbelief, I

couldn't read a single emotion on her beautiful face. Because there was none.

I inhaled deep. The same ominous feeling was rising up my chest again, choking me in its vicious grip.

Clenching my fists, I ignored the pain that shot through my heart. "Emerald," her name sneaked out as a whisper through my lips. "Say something."

She didn't. She just stood there, staring at me with tears glistening her eyes.

I turned around from her. Deep labored breathing came out of me. My hands shook at my sides. The pain in my heart only soared high that it physically pained.

I knew it. I knew she was going to hate me. After knowing what a monster I was, she could never love me the way she did. She could never stay with a murderer. A murderer who killed his own father.

I clutched my chest, as if trying not to fall apart or destroy something. This fear, this fear of losing her didn't let me sleep for years. Once I let her go because I didn't deserve her time and love. I let go of her not only because I was a drug addict and I didn't think I had a future, but also because I knew that my past wouldn't let me live freely so easily. It'd always follow me everywhere I go. I knew a monster like me didn't deserve a flower like her.

But I was too selfish to stay away for long. Her absence in my life was ruining me. The thought of those Turquoise eyes not looking at me with full of love and adoration, not hearing my name from her sweet angelic voice, not watching her blushing because of me and not hearing her giggles drove me insane. It still did.

That's why I didn't want to tell her. I decided to keep my past miles away from her so that it never could be a hindrance in my path of keeping her in my life.

But... but she deserved the truth. She deserved to know everything about me before I bound her to me for the rest of our life. I couldn't keep her in any more darkness. She promised to never let go...

But who could love a murderer?

"I..." I gulped, rubbing my chest to soothe the burn. "I know you must be hating me now. I- I know I don't deserve you. You deserve a normal," I took a deep breath, to even think of her being with

another man made my blood boil, "man. A normal man with a normal easy life. Not a man with a tainted past. Not a man who killed his father and was a drug addict. But...I love you, Rosebud,"

whispering, I clenched my fists, trying my best not to pull her into the cage of my arms and lock her there forever. So that she couldn't leave me.

I wouldn't survive without her.

"I'm too selfish to let you go. I can't function without you. I can't..."

A pair of petite arms wrapped around my torso from behind. I felt her pressing her cheek against my back.

"I'll not leave even if you wanted me to. I can never," she said.

As if a sudden light lightening my dark insides, the pain in my chest disappeared. Replaced a feel of desperation to hear those words again and relief.

I turned around, cupping her cheeks. "You- you won't leave me? That means, you don't hate..."

She shook her head. Her beautiful eyes watched me with the same love and adoration they did for years, not a trace of hate was there as I expected.

"Never. I can never hate you. Even if you were wrong, I couldn't hate you. I'd always love you."

I frowned in confusion. "I know I can't let you go, but aren't you disgusted with me? I..." I gritted my

teeth. "I'm a murderer. A monster, Emerald. You don't need to lie to me not to upset me. I can understand if you think you need time..."

"You're not a monster." She cut me off, voice firm. "Nor you're a murderer."

I shook my head. "Maybe you didn't hear what I said. I killed him, Emerald. His blood was in my hand."

"It wasn't your fault. You didn't kill him. It was an accident," she said softly.

Taking my hands, she made me sit on the couch and placed herself on my lap. My arms pulled her closer against me instinctively.

"I can understand your dilemma, Ace. No matter how he was, he was your father. And because of that

incident, you feel guilty for his death. But it's not your fault, baby. It wasn't your fault he died. It was an unfortunate accident. You were just trying to help your mother." I just stared at her, utterly appalled. I just told this woman my darkest past, my crime, the deed I have been blaming myself for years, and she still wasn't repulsed by me. Instead she was looking into my eyes cupping my cheeks and telling me that I wasn't at fault. I gulped the thickness of my throat, clutching her to me tightly. "You really don't hate me? You- you aren't disgusted by me?" She placed a delicate kiss on my forehead before peering into my soul. "Why would I if it wasn't your fault? I can never hate you for the crime you never did. I can never feel disgusted by a man who had enough courage to stand before a gun for his mother. And you were just seventeen then. I don't think everyone at that age has the amount of bravery you showed that night. If you hadn't done that, you would have lost your mother to that monster. But you stopped it from happening. You saved her." Letting out a breath, I pulled her into me, placing my head at the crook of her neck. She ran her soft hands through my locks as I took a lungful of her sweet scent. She didn't know what she had said. She didn't know what favor she had done to me by saying those words. The fear of her leaving me was lesser in my heart now. My muscles relaxed as the pain in my chest slowly dissipated. "You won't leave me," I whispered more to myself than to her. I needed to hear it out loud. Her hug tightened. "Never." I could feel the storm inside me calming down. She won't leave me. My Rosebud will always be with me, in my arms. I breathed her in again, desperately held her against me tightly. And she didn't complain. "Stop punishing yourself for the accident that happened years ago, baby," she murmured, rubbing my

back soothingly. "I know whatever happened was unfortunate, but stop blaming yourself for that. I

know, you didn't want to tell me about your past because you thought I'd hate you. Because you

thought you were a murderer, you were guilty. But you're not. You were just trying to snatch that gun

from him so that he couldn't hurt your mom. But he didn't let you. He was in a trance of anger and

hatred. If you hadn't stepped in between him and your mom, he most probably would've killed her."

My jaw clenched at the possibility.

"It was his insistence not to leave the gun. So how was that your fault?"

"I know what I did, I did it for Mom. But...that memory, Rosebud, that memory doesn't leave me

alone. His blood in my hands, the way his lifeless eyes stared at me after..." I clenched my fists as

recollection of that night flashed over my eyes. "The thought that maybe if I had handled things in a

different way, maybe if I could do something else other than fighting him, he would be alive, our

wrestling wouldn't cause the trigger to go off. I wouldn't have to take the burden of his death on my

shoulders for years."

"Then don't." Pulling away slightly, she grazed my jaw with her palm.

"You don't need to take the

burden, Ace. You couldn't have done anything else at that moment.

Anyone couldn't do anything at

that moment. You did what you felt right. Tell me one thing," she made me look at her Turquoise orbs,

"would you do it again, would you fight him again to save your mom if you could go back to the

time?"

"Yes," I replied, without hesitating.

A soft smile tugged on her lips. "That means you weren't wrong. You did what was right. You saved

your mother from your father. Anyone who loved their mother and has courage would do that sane

thing you did. That doesn't make you a murderer. It wasn't your fault. It was his fault that he didn't let

go of the gun. He just was too blinded by his fury. You didn't kill him, Ace. You saved your mom."

I just stared at her.

How did I get so lucky to get her in my life? I was thinking she would leave me once she got to know everything. And here she was, providing light and warmth to my darkness. She was my sun that kept the demons of my past away.

A flash of pain flashed through her eyes as she leaned in and wiped my cheek with her thumb. A tear I hadn't realized that slipped from my eye.

Placing my forehead against her, I kissed her knuckles. "I love you, my rose. I love you so fucking much."

"I love you too," she murmured back.

I brushed my lips against hers. "Thank you so much. You don't know what you've done to me by saying those words. Thank you...for not giving up on me. For not leaving me. I don't know what I would do if you left me."

"And thank you for trusting me with your past." She smiled softly.

"I wanted to tell you everything on our first date. But then, I didn't have the courage. I thought even if you would forgive me after knowing about seven years ago, you would hate me forever if you got to know about it. So I backed out and just told you what I thought would be right."

"But you were clearly wrong. If I think you weren't at fault now, I would think the same then. Maybe if you had told me that night, I'd have found your reasons behind pushing me away stronger. Maybe I'd have forgiven you easily."

"I'm sorry, Rosebud." I pulled her into my chest again. "I was scared. I can tolerate anything but losing you."

She snuggled into my chest. "Was it the reason behind your turning to drugs? Your guilt?"

I nodded, sighing. "No matter how bad of a person he was, I still couldn't forget that he was my father.

And no matter the reason was, somehow he died because of me. And I couldn't deal with that feeling, Rosebud. After that night, Mom went into depression. She was broken. She blamed herself for his death and my status. She thought if she hadn't reacted that way that night, if she hadn't pulled that gun out, nothing would've happened. She completely pulled away from us, from life. And it just pushed me more into darkness."

I still remembered the way I used to wait for her to return home every night. But she used to be missing for days, drinking and staying out of the home. And it continued until she finally stopped fighting her grief and decided to leave this place, us, her past behind and go somewhere far.

Her hand ran over my chest in a small slow circle, it soothed me. "How did Caleb take all of this?" she asked.

"At first, he was shaken just as we were. But then slowly, he got better." My lips turned up at the side into a small sad smile. "He became the eldest among us taking care of me when I used to be senseless with drugs and alcohol."

"I'd be forever grateful to him for that," she said, tone low. I knew she felt bad about that fact that she couldn't be there for me when I needed her the most. Yes, I did need her the most. But I couldn't just drag her into my mess. I couldn't taint her with my darkness. She was too pure and innocent for that.

"You know that it was only you I didn't lose hope, do you?" I looked down at her. "It was you why I tried my best to become normal again and leave drugs behind." She smiled, kissing my chest. "I'm glad I could help in some way." I sighed. "You always helped, baby. If it wasn't for you, I would've let my addiction consume me whole. You have no idea how horrible it was. There wasn't any kind of addiction I hadn't tried. I once even almost overdosed myself." She gasped, shocked at my words. I squeezed her hands. "But thank God, I'm out of that hell now. And all of it because you were constantly in my mind when I was trying

to get better in the rehab center."

Shaking her head, with teary eyes, she wrapped her arms around my neck and placed her head back into my chest, hugging me closer. "I wish I could be there for you," she whispered.

I kissed her head. "You were, baby. You were always there with me, in my heart."

After a moment of silence, she asked, "When did you go for rehab?"

I gazed into the fireplace. "Right after you left for NY."

She turned her head up to look at me, still not moving away from my chest. "But you were in the UK

at that time for your degree..." Then realization set on her face as her eyes widened. "So, you went to

the UK for Rehab and not to take any degree?"

I shook my head. "No. I went there to get better. After Arthur returned, he started to handle the

company well as mom was always absent. Then he suggested that I should go to the UK for my

treatment, he had a friend who could help me. So I did, but not to his friend, but to a renowned

organization that Jonathan's friend ran."

She sat up straight. "Dad? He knew about your condition?"

Nodding, I tucked a strand behind her ear. "He knew everything."

Her head tilted at the side. "Everything, as in..."

"Yes, Rosebud. He knew what happened. It was your father who helped me with everything. He kept

the police away from me and used his influence to make everything look that it was a suicide."

Her mouth hung open, eyes wide in shock. "Dad?"

"Yes. I didn't know what to do after that... accident. I had no one to seek help from. Mom went into

shock to do anything. So I called your father and he rushed to my place immediately. After listening to

everything I had to say, he placed a hand on my shoulder and said to leave everything on him. He will

handle everything," I said, remembering the way he had reassured me like a guardian.

A guardian I never found in my father.

"I wanted to tell everything to the police but he stopped me. He had this fear that the media would

use it against my name for their own TRP. My reputation and career would be ruined in just a day. My future was at stake. No matter how it happened, our powerful rivals were ready to jump on us at any time, they just needed a spark to turn it into a volcano. And that mistress of my father was ready to give a statement against me. So Jonathan showed it to the world as a suicide. He even shut that woman's mouth with money. He destroyed every proof that could turn against me."

A shaky breath left her as she took my words in.

Kissing her forehead, I pulled her tightly against me again. Even if she said she wouldn't leave, I needed to feel her against me to be assured that she was still here. With me.

"Please don't hate me because I didn't tell the truth to the police. I just didn't know what to do at that time, so I just did what Jonathan told me to do."

She shook her head. "You did the right thing. You don't know how grateful I'm feeling to Dad for what he did. If he hadn't done it, your rivals would definitely use it against you and your company. And without anyone there with you, you wouldn't be able to defend you at that time. Don't blame yourself for anything."

I squeezed her hip gently. "Thank you for understanding me."

She kissed my lips. "And thank you for letting me in even after how much difficult it was for you to talk about your past."

I pressed our foreheads together. "Anything for you, Rosebud. Anything for you."

After that, I carried her to our bed and pulled her into me again. I felt much lighter than I ever felt.

Especially now that I had my Rosebud into my arms forever.

Throwing a leg over my waist, she snuggled into me. And placed my hand on her thigh.

Then a question struck my mind. "How did you know that he didn't suicide? Who told you about his murder?" Because I knew neither Caleb, nor Jonathan would tell her anything about it. They even

didn't tell Tess and Tobias.

Her form stiffened. After a silence, she spoke, "Warner told me."

I tensed. At the mere name of that bastard had my blood boil. "How did he know about that? No one

except me, Caleb, mom and your father knew about it. The officer that handled the case was your

father's trustworthy person, he wouldn't spit a word out. And that woman died after a year from a car

accident for her to leak any information."

Pulling away slightly, she stared at me for a moment. A small frown formed between her brows. "No

one else knew about that incident?"

I shook my head. "Even if there was any proof left, I made sure to destroy it forever. There isn't

anything left."

She went quiet again, thinking something, biting her bottom lip.

I moved my gaze from her innocent yet provocative act. "What are you thinking, Rosebud? You didn't

answer my question. How did he know about it?"

My fists clenched. How badly I regretted not finishing that insect right at that moment. It was the only

right punishment for him for even thinking to harm my Rosebud. Now he dared to dig up into my

past!

She shrugged, hiding her face into my neck. "He didn't like you from the beginning. He might've

investigated you so that he could use it against you and make me question our relationship."

That bastard!

Closing my eyes, I took a deep breath to calm myself down.

"Are you sure no one else knows about it? What if someone got to know something just like Warner

did and will try to defame you using the media? You know, you've still a quite number of rivals that

wants you down. And if they knew you lied to the world not to put your future at risk, they could use

it to show everyone that you hid the truth to save yourself. They can even accuse you being a

murderer and blame you that you did it so that the police wouldn't catch you."

I was amused how far her mind raced. Worry was thick in her voice. "No one would do anything. They can't because no one has any proof. Even if anyone knows what happened that night, they don't have any evidence to prove it. They don't have the autopsy report or the gun that had my fingerprints too. I made sure to destroy everything, Rosebud. So don't worry. No one can do anything."

Letting out a sigh of relief, she finally relaxed against me. Kissing her head again, I closed my eyes.

But the glimpses of that night continued to flash behind my eyelids. Subconsciously, my grip tightened on her thigh.

Raising her hand, she ran her fingers through my hair, massaging my scalp softly. "Sleep now.

Everything will be alright. I'm right here with you."

Heaving an exhale, I flipped our position and placed my head into her chest. With one arm around her waist, I placed her leg over me again.

My home.

With her soft hands running through my hair, soon darkness overtook me into a peaceful sleep I never had in years.

But not before I took an oath to destroy those who wanted to take my home away from me.

Antonio was down. Now it was time to get his partner in crime out of his hole.

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 65

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Sunlight beamed against my eyelids, making me slowly flutter them open. A yawn sneaked out of me as I stretched across the bed very unladylike. The soreness around different places of my satisfied body bloomed a smile on my lips.

But it slipped as soon as I found the emptiness beside me when my hands searched for his warmth.

The sheets were cold enough for me to understand that he had gotten up a long time ago.

It was getting on my nerves not finding him with me in the bed when I woke up in the morning. I craved his body warmth around me and his sultry kisses. Then memories of last night flooded into my mind. My heart clenched with the recollection of his pain and suffering for years. For the crime he didn't do. It was saddening that he had lived half of his life thinking he was the cause of his father's death and thought that I'd hate him after learning the truth. I wished he had told me earlier about his fallacious guilt and fear. I would've cleared it out to him that I wouldn't leave him no matter what. I couldn't. Not especially when he was innocent. I let out a shaky breath remembering the torment in his beautiful grey eyes. My heart bled for him. I wanted to take all his pain as mine, only if I could. After knowing the truth, I saw everything from a new angle. My respect and gratefulness for my father went to another level higher now. Though it was still shocking to know that it was Dad who saved Ace from that tragedy and he never told a soul about it. On the other hand my opinion about his mother did also change. No matter how much my heart went out for her, even after understanding her pain and sufferings, I wouldn't be able to forgive her for leaving Ace and Caleb when they needed her the most. Especially Ace. I understood that she needed an escape from her traumatic life, but she shouldn't have left her son behind to suffer in the endless guilt and insecurities. He needed her. There was no one to give him emotional support. Maybe I was being selfish. I was only thinking about the love of my life. But I wouldn't leave my only son like that ever no matter the hell I went through. Especially in that situation. Though I'd never give words to my opinion about his mother before him. I knew no matter what she did, he didn't hold it against her. He respected and loved her. Sighing, I sat up, rubbing my face.

And then the note on the side table caught my eyes. The smile returned on my face.

It must be from him.

Yes, I was a little upset that I didn't find him in the bed with me when I woke up, but he did sleep the whole night wrapped around me like a baby. He didn't get up in the middle of the night and go to the gym to channel his frustration and fears to the punching bag last night. And I think this was a big progress.

Good morning, my beautiful rose!

I'm so sorry, my love. I couldn't stay until you woke up. Had to leave for an urgent meeting. But just for two hours. Stay here, I'll come home as soon as I'm finished. I know we came here for just one day, but a day keeping you all to myself isn't enough for me. I need more. I made you breakfast. Heat it up before eating. I'll try to cut this meeting short and fly into your arms as soon as possible.

PS: As it's an very important meeting, my phone will be switched off. If you need anything, just call Carter. He'll give your message to me. But DO NOT leave the house until I'm there.

Love you!

A

Placing a kiss on the note that smelled like his intoxicating scent, I pressed it against my chest. A sigh of bliss left me.

How did I get so lucky with love? I thought I was never going to get this man. And here I was, staying into the house he bought for our future, sleeping in his arms on our bed. God, I already missed him!

Then something clicked in my head.

Wait. Meeting?

What important meeting was it that he had to leave our vacation and drive back to the office so early?

As far as I remember, he didn't have any important meetings until the next Monday. Except...

My eyes widened.

The meeting with the Russians! He did say they were about to sign the final contract. It must be it!

Damn it!

Leaping on my feet, I put my last night's clothes on.

I had to stop him! I had to tell him about Arthur before he signed the contract. The contract that old

bastard was so eager to make Ace sign.

After hearing everything last night, I didn't find anything that he could use against Ace. First of all, Ace

didn't murder his father. It was an accident. His father got shot during the fight. It wasn't his fault.

Even if Dad and he kept it hidden for the sake of his future, it wasn't that big of a crime for Arthur to

destroy Ace. Nor there's any proof of it. He might know about it, just like Warner did, but he didn't

have anything to prove. Ace and Dad made sure not to leave any evidence of the past.

That leach! I was right. He was just throwing arrows in the dark. And he hit it right. He knew what Ace

meant to me. I'd die before letting anything happen to him. And that bastard just used it against me,

to keep my mouth shut until he gets a way out of his crimes and Ace's wrath.

I was hundred and one percent sure he didn't have anything against Ace. If he did, wouldn't he and

Antonio have used it to defame Ace already?

And the frustrating thing was, why didn't I figure this out before? Why didn't I listen to my instinct?

I was certain he was planning something big this time. And he'll pull off his plan through this contract.

I didn't know what was exactly going through his wrinkled brain, but I had this strong hunch. He'd be

using this contract to harm Ace and the company. Half a billion wasn't a joke.

But I wouldn't let this happen.

I wanted to tell Ace everything last night. But last night he was distressed enough for me not to start

any more stressful conversations with him. He needed a break.

I thought I'd tell him this morning calmly. But he was gone even before I could wake up.

Rushing down the stairs, I called his phone. But as he said, it was unreachable. So I called Carter. After two rings, he picked it up.

"Good morning, Ms. Hutton!" His cheerful voice came through the phone.

"Carter, can you please pass the phone to Ace? I need to talk to him urgently."

"Umm, I'm so sorry, Ms. Hutton. But the boss maybe has already entered the conference hall. I'm still to reach there since I had to pick some files back from the office. Do you want me to give him any message?" he asked.

I came to a halt, panting from flying down the stairs so fast. "Wait, the meeting isn't happening in the office?"

"No. It's being held in hotel Diamond Valley."

Diamond Valley? It's almost twenty minutes drive from here. Not that far. But...the meeting has already started.

"Is it with the Russians?" Even if I knew that it was, but yet hoped for the otherwise.

"Yes, Ms. Hutton. Both companies are going to sign the final contract today." He stamped on my doubt.

I groaned. "Listen to me very carefully, Carter. Stop the meeting. Go there as fast as you can and tell Ace that I said, no, I pleaded not to sign the contract. You understand me? Tell him that I need to tell him something important before he goes ahead with it. I'm coming there as soon as possible."

Grabbing my purse, I ran out of the door.

"What? But what happened, Ms. Hutton? Is there any problem? Everything is set, I don't think there's anything wrong with this contract..."

"Just do as I say! Give him my message and make sure he doesn't sign anything. At least not before I reach there. If you fail to do that, it can cost you your job, Carter. Remember it. I already left for the hotel." I cut the call before he could say anything, and rushed out of the enormous silver gate.

But my legs stopped on my way as several big hulky men in black towered over me. Their tinted sunglasses hid their eyes. I could recognize two of them were from Ace's security team.

I frowned. Where did they come from all of a sudden? They weren't here yesterday.

"Ms. Hutton. We're extremely sorry to inform you that you can't go out anywhere until the boss arrives. Please, go back inside, Miss," one of the hulks spoke in his deep voice.

"What?! Where did this come from? I'm free to go anywhere I want! I need to go somewhere urgent, so move away from my path!"

When I tried to pass them, they blocked my path again.

"We apologise, Miss. But we can't let you go. It's the boss' order. You can't leave the house."

My temper rose. "But why?"

Why the hell did he tell them to lock me in the house? I didn't remember him mentioning any of this yesterday. Everything was fine. Then what happened all of a sudden? Then I remembered his note.

DO NOT leave the house.

He did warn me not to leave. But forgot to give me the reason.

I was getting late. The meeting has already started. If I don't reach on time, he will sign the contract. I

didn't care at that moment about why he didn't want me to leave the house. I had more important things to handle right now.

The guard shook his head. "We aren't allowed to say that. But we can't let you go."

"Listen here, I'm getting late. So move away from my way. And I'm going to your boss. So I don't think he'll mind me leaving."

They didn't budge from their place.

My lips pressed tight. "Move."

"Sorry, Miss. But we can't. We're just doing our job."

I cocked my head. "What will you do if I leave? Stop me? How?" I took a step ahead. "Manhandle me?

Drag me back in the house? Because, of course, I'll fight tooth and nail with you. But you can't do

that." A smirk tugged on my lips. "If you even touch a strand of my hair, Ace is going to skin you alive," hissing, I glared at them. The subtle look they exchanged and one of them gulping slowly planted seeds of hope in my heart that I was winning this fight. I just needed to hold my ground. "Now you don't want me to run to him crying and say that how you guys manhandled me and hurt me to drag me back inside, do you? Do you know what will happen then?" The color of their faces drained and they stood still, not uttering a word. I smiled. "Good. Now excuse me." "But...Ms. Hutton. Stop!" One of them called out but I didn't stop. Ignoring them coming behind me, begging for me to stay, I stopped a taxi and got into it immediately before they could reach me.

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The moment I walked through the entrance of Diamond Valley, a voice made me turn around. "Ms. Hutton!" Carter climbed up the stairs before reaching me. Hunching forward, he placed his hands on his knees, heaving laboured breath. His sky blue shirt clung to his body soaked with sweat. With a red face, he looked up at me. Some files were tucked under his armpit. I frowned. "What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be in the conference room to deliver Ace my message?" Then realization set in, my eyes widened. "Don't tell me you've just arrived! Where the hell were you till now?" Shit! I had made the taxi driver drive faster than a sane man would to reach my destination fast, bribing him with double cash. I thought Carter was already here interrupting the meeting. But he had just freaking reached here! "I- I'm so sorry, Ms. Hutton. I got stuck in the traffic. It was so severe that I had to leave my car and rush here," he panted. Shaking my head, I turned around and ran inside. Damn it! I just hoped he didn't sign the contract yet.

With my heart thumping down my chest, anxiety rolling into my stomach, I made my way towards the elevator.

"Ms. Hutton, wait!" he called out for me, still at the entrance, huffing and puffing.

"Which floor?" I yelled over my shoulder, attracting some glances.

"Thirty eight, room number 1504, but Ms. Hutton, wait! They won't let you inside the VVIP area without..."

His words faded away as soon as the doors of the elevator closed, his rushing form towards me vanished from eye sight.

While the others in the elevator patiently stood beside me, I kept fidgeting in my place. My palms were clammy as I wiped them on my jeans.

I just hope I'm not late.

Chanting this prayer in my mind, I tried his number again but it was still unreadable. I had left some voice messages for him in the hope that he'd switch on his phone and hear my messages. But clearly, he didn't.

Groaning, I threw impatient glances to the elevator panel. Why was it running so slow?

My phone blared in my hand, making my heart leap thinking it was him. But disappointment soon filled me as Casie's name flashed across the screen.

"Casie, I can't talk to you right now. I'm a little bus..."

"Em, did you see the news?" I cringed at her loud screech. "Oh God! It's everywhere! I can't even recognize his face!"

"What are you talking about?" I rubbed my temple, getting restless. I needed to stop Ace. "Look, Casie.

I'll call you later. I'm in the middle of a..."

"It's about Antonio! Didn't you see it yet?"

She again cut me off. But the name she took grabbed my attention.

"Wait, Antonio?" I frowned. "What about him?"

"God, Em, which world are you living in? The internet is going crazy over this. Antonio's butt is in the open now. Everything his stupid ass has done, his every illegal businesses is out now. It's all over the

internet. That prick is even involved with human trafficking, can you believe that?" I could imagine her shaking her head. "He got out of the jail last time, I don't know how, but this time no one can save him. Everyone knows his deeds. He's going to rot in jail for the rest of his life!"

I gasped. "You mean, he's exposed before the world? But, how?" Last time he got out using his connection with some powerful politicians. But if the media has proof against him in their hands now, no one can save him.

"Of course, you and I both know who can be behind this."

Of course. Who else?

But why didn't he tell me anything?

"Though I hate that man, I can't help but feel pity the way he's looking with him covered in blood.

Disgusted actually," she commented.

"What are you talking about?"

She sighed. "You don't know anything, do you? I'm sending you a video. Watch it."

Moments later, my phone buzzed as she sent me a message, the same time the elevator's doors opened, letting me move out.

As soon as I opened the video, my eyes widened at the sight.

Antonio was lying on a stretcher as some people carried him inside a hospital. His face was battered with bruises and cuts, the same went with his hands. Blood soaked his shirt and the side of his head.

He looked horrible.

I read the headline.

The famous business tycoon Antonio Reymond was found beaten brutally and unconscious in an abandoned alley. Police are looking into the matter. Though people are content at his state with his illegal activities now out before the world.

I stood there shell shocked.

Exposing him with proof was understandable. He deserved Ace's wrath.

He had been trying to mess

with the Valencians for so long. But torturing him like that?

Was he responsible for this too?

Even if he told me everything about his past, his secrets, I felt like I didn't know everything about

Antonio. He was still hiding something.

But I was content that one enemy of ours was down. He couldn't harm us anymore. And now it was

Arthur's turn.

It's enough, Arthur. Let's finish your game now.

Clutching my phone in my hand tightly, I held my head high and went for room number 1504.

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 66

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Walking through the endless corridors, I walked watching out for the room numbers not to get lost.

The hotel was huge. Not just a hotel, it was a palace built in the middle age, now turned into a lavish

five star hotel. With the mixture of antique architect and modern decorations, it gave out a feel of

royalty. From the masterpiece paintings on the walls, to the gorgeous chandeliers shimmering with

golden glow. Not to forget the huge gold plated flower pots at the both sides of the corridors, aside

the red carpet down the way.

As soon as I neared my destination, I found the whole area totally separated from the others by a pair

of glass doors. VVIP Area was written in bold red letters on the glass.

Two bulky men in black stood at

the both sides of the door.

Not again!

I remembered Carter warning about some restrictions.

Mentally groaning, I approached the VVIP conference area. The guards stood straight seeing me, their

hands blocking the way in.

"Our apologies, Miss. But random people aren't allowed here," one of them said in their thick Russian

accent.

Random? Whom are they calling random?

My brows creased. "I need to go inside. It's important. And I'm not any random girl wanting access.

I'm Emerald Hutton, Achilles Valencian's girlfriend and a board member."

"We don't know you. And no matter who you are, no one is allowed to go inside who is not on the list.

And you're not in the list we were given."

What the hell? Not allowed? Were they having a CIA meeting or something?

They were definitely not Ace's men. Otherwise they'd have immediately recognized me.

"Listen to me, I need to go in there, please. I need to talk to Achilles about something very urgent.

Please, let me go," I pleaded.

That rude man shook his head. "We're afraid, we can't, Miss. We have strict orders not to let anyone until the meeting is over."

I gritted my teeth in annoyance. "And who gave you the orders?"

"Arthur Valencian."

Of course! I should've known that!

That fucking leach didn't want anyone to interrupt the signing. That's why he put guards in here.

I groaned.

What do I do now? They won't let me in at any cost. I can't even call Ace.

Damn it!

Wait!

Carter must've the access.

I looked over my shoulder. There was no sign of him. Where the hell was he?

Distancing myself a few feet from the guards, I dialed Carter's number.

He didn't pick it up.

Why isn't he picking up his phone!

As I dialed again, I saw him approaching me with hasty steps, still panting.

"Carter, where the hell were you?" I snapped. "They won't let me in, please talk to them. You've an access, right?"

"I do. But just to deliver these files," he huffed. "I'm sorry, Ms. Hutton. I had to wait for the elevator."

His words went ignored by my ears when my eyes found a shadow at the end of the corridor, around

the corner. Someone stood there with their phone against their ear, their back facing me.

I knew the person very well.

Arthur.

But what was he doing here out of the conference room?

"Then I came after you as soon as possible. But you were too fast," he finished, wiping the perspiration on his forehead.

"Please tell them to let us in," I said, not moving my eyes from that silver haired villain.

Nodding, Carter went to the guards and told them something. I still stood there, watching Arthur.

When he slightly angled his side to me, I saw his face.

A smirk was tugged on his lips, with malice in his expression, he nodded at something the other person said through the phone.

Without knowing, my feet walked closer, wanting to hear what he was talking to the other person.

Though I managed a good amount of distance to be in his sight. But enough to hear his words.

"Everything is ready?" he asked, glancing down at his watch.

Then he nodded, old eyes sparkling with malice.

"Meet me where I told you. I'm coming," saying, he turned on his heels and walked away. But not towards the elevator, but to somewhere more deep into this floor.

Who was he meeting here? Was there another of his partners who was involved in all his conspiracies along Antonio?

I had to know.

"Ms. Hutton?" Carter called out, making me turn to him. "I'm going in, but unfortunately, they won't let you through, as yours name isn't on the list."

I took a swift glance to where Arthur just disappeared before speaking, "No worries. You go in and give Ace my message. Tell him I'll meet him in a few. You go and stop him, I'll just be back."

A confusion etched into his features. But before he could ask anything, I turned around and followed

Arthur's trail, ignoring the way the guards shared a discreet look with each other and getting stiff all

of a sudden.

But I had a much more important task to do than thinking anything about it. Ace wouldn't sign if he gets my message and wait for me. I trusted that. But now I had to see if someone else was with Arthur in his plan to destroy us. Because if we kick him out of our company and life after I expose him before Ace, it wouldn't be that beneficial to us if he leaves a minion of his behind to continue to betray us.

Today was a very important day for him. He was close to finishing his plan. And at this time if he wasn't in the conference room and going to meet someone, then it must be something important.

Turning to the left, I came face to face with a long wide hallway. A man was talking to a woman, but no sign of Arthur.

Continuing down the hallway, I took another turn. And I knew he came this way because there was no other way.

But where is he...

Still talking on the phone, his silver head disappeared around the corner. And I followed. Thanks to my sneakers, it didn't announce my presence with loud clicks like heels would have done.

I stopped in my track once he halted before a staircase that led upstairs. But at the feet of it, 'No Entry, Under maintenance' was written in bold words on a white board, a caution tape stretched across the way in.

And to my surprise, he ducked in and climbed up the stairs, vanishing upstairs.

Why the hell would he meet someone in a forbidden place?

Of course! So that no one can see him.

Should I follow him there?

My legs hesitated. If upstairs was under maintenance, and then no one would be there right now. The workers wouldn't be there at this rush time.

But...I needed to know. I wouldn't let him do any more chaos behind the curtains.

With a determination surging through me, I put my phone in silent and went forward.

Once Ace gets my message, he'd call me. And I don't want to get caught while spying on Arthur.

Especially when no one would be there for my safety.

I knew this step could cost me a lot, but I would do it for my Ace. I want this backstabber out of our lives.

Once I reached the upper floor silently, I kept a good distance from him.

His distance murmurs could be heard, along the noise of his heavy footsteps.

My eyes glanced around. Compared to the rest of the hotel, this place was covered with dust. And...

extremely eerie. Not to forget the flickering of lights every once in a while.

I froze as he suddenly stopped in his tracks, shoulders rigid. My breath caught at my throat as he put the phone down slowly.

Shit! I was in the middle of the corridor. Where should I hide now?

Just as he started to turn around, I jumped and curled into a ball behind one of the huge flower pots.

My back slammed against the wall due to my harsh movement. Slapping a hand over my mouth, I covered my whimper.

Silence.

I could hear my heart pounding against my ribcage as I waited for a sound. Sound of his footsteps.

But for some moments, there were none.

Then I heard him taking some steps closer.

No! No! No!

Closing my eyes, I shrunk more against the cold wall as he approached.

Shit! I can't get caught!

As I prayed in my mind relentlessly, suddenly the blare of his phone echoed throughout the empty hallway.

His footsteps stopped.

"Hello?" Came his slimy voice.

Silence.

And then I heard him again.

"Yeah, I'm almost there. Did you bring the dogs with you?"

Dogs? Here?

"Alright, see you in a minute," saying, his footsteps retreated and slowly faded away.

I let out a sigh of relief.

Coming out from behind the flower pot, I stood up.

It was close. Thank God for that phone call.

I've to be more careful now.

But what dogs was he talking about?

Without wasting anymore seconds, I tiptoed down the single corridor that led to another wide one, a darker one.

Gulping, I tried to ignore that fear that knotted inside my stomach. I felt the pepper spray in my back

pocket that I always carried and gripped my phone tighter in my hand.

Just in case.

My heart thumped down my chest as I slowly peeked around. No sign of him. The corridor seemed

endless, with endless rooms at both sides.

Where did he go so soon?

Sweat trickled down my spine as I took slow steps ahead.

Carter should've told Ace by now.

Then why isn't he calling me yet? I just hope he didn't sign the contract.

I looked at the phone to see if there were any missed calls or messages.

But there was none. Keeping

an eye around, I called Ace. It went unreachable, again. With a silent groan, I called Carter.

But it was switched off.

What the hell? What's wrong with his phone now?

He knew I'd call him.

I tried again but no avail. It went directly to voice message.

Something churned inside my stomach. An ominous feeling rolled inside me.

Why are both of their phones off? Ace should've switched on his phone by now. And Carter? He never

keeps his phone off, nor does he let his battery die down. He handled half of Ace's job, without his

phone, his work would be basically paralyzed.

Is everything okay?

And then I heard them. Two, no, more than two male voices.

Following the sound, I came to a halt before a room with its door slightly ajar. Though the hallway's light was dimmed, the room was bright enough for me to see every faces clearly.

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Six men stood there in the middle of the room. Before Arthur, stood a man in his early fifties with short height, a thin mustache on his upper lip and a shining bald. Four more much younger men surrounded him with the same black clothes the guards wore before the VVIP entrance.

The way they stood behind and around that bald man, indicated theirs being his men.

And obviously working with Arthur.

"Pozdravlyayu, Mr. Valencian," said the man with his thick Russian accent. His mustache twitched as a smirk tugged onto his dark lips.

Arthur shook his hand with his. "Congratulations to us, Ivanov. After all, it's the result of both of ours hard work."

I frowned.

Ivanov? Why did this name sound familiar...

My lips parted in shock. Ivanov, one of the partners of the Russian company Ace was going to sign the deal with.

He was with Arthur? Oh God!

And what are they congratulating each other about?

That Russian shook his head. "Nah, I just helped you for the sake of my friendship with Antonio and the promise you gave me. All the planning was yours. And finally, that nephew of yours signed the contract. I was starting to doubt your plan, but seems like your nephew trusts his uncle blindly."

A silent gasp slipped my lips. With my hand over my mouth, I stood there shocked.

Ace signed the contract? But, how? I sent Carter to stop him. Didn't get my message?

Oh no! Shit!

This shouldn't have happened! Why did Ace sign it? He should've waited for me.

Or was I already late? Maybe he signed even before I arrived here?

A feeling of failure and disappointment ran through me.

I was right. It was a part of Arthur's master plan. But the sad part was, I couldn't stop it from

happening even if I knew it.

I wish I would've told Ace earlier...

And the fact that Ivanov was connected to Antonio didn't surprise me at all. Even when Antonio went

down, he left his friend behind to help Arthur with his plan to destroy us.

But what promise Arthur made to Ivanov that he agreed with his plan?

Whatever it was, it wasn't still too late. If I tell Ace everything about them and the deal, he would find

a way to deal with it.

Arthur let out a joyous chuckle. "Honestly, even I had a little bit of doubt that he'd agree to sign such

a risky contract. One mistake and it can cost his company half a billion.

Even though half a billion isn't

a big thing for him, but for my plan, I needed him to sign it. And he wouldn't go for it if he was the

Achilles a few months ago. To escape his haunted past and the absence of the love of his life he threw

himself deep into work. He concentrated on his business. But now that his Rosebud is in his life again,

he turned into a total fool from a shrewd businessman." He snorted. "All he can think about is fucking

that annoying bitch to give attention to his business."

My fists clenched at his use of words. Rage boiled through my veins. He was calling Ace a fool just

because he trusted him?

This bastard!

"But I think it came handy to our plan. With just a request of mine he accepted your offer to work

with you and make me the head of the contract."

"Ah, that beautiful young lady-" the Russian twirled the end of his mustache upwards "-I can not

blame your nephew to be so smitten by her. I've seen her pictures on newspapers posing beside him.

A beauty I must say." While I wanted to throw up, he cocked his head, giving Arthur a look of wonder.

"Weren't she becoming a hindrance in your way? How did you take that wild sexy cat off your back?"

Arthur's mouth twisted with disgust. Walking to the small bar across the room, he popped open a bottle and poured some drink in a glass.

"She was. That bitch was all set to expose me before Achilles, even sent her ex-boyfriend's spy cousin after me to collect evidence against me."

Taking a sip on his drink, he turned back to the Russians. A smirk tugged on his lips. "I threatened her

about destroying her precious Ace using his past if she tries to open her mouth. And like I said, fools in

love, she believed my fake threats and backed out. She got to know about my illegal businesses, even

suspiciously went to meet Sierra after she saw me with her, unfortunately. Then she went to meet

Liza in the jail. Even though I knew those girls wouldn't open their mouths, I was pretty sure that bitch

got to know more than she needed to. And I couldn't let that happen."

As much as I wanted to slap that smirk off his face, he was right. I was a fool to believe him. I thought

he really had evidence against Ace. I couldn't take any chances. But the truth was, he didn't have a

shit with him against Ace. If he did, he would've given it to Antonio way before Ace grabbed

Reymond's neck.

"So that's why you sped up your plans and took action?" asked Ivanov, raising an amused brow at him.

His men stood behind him silently, with their arms crossed over their chest.

Arthur nodded, passing a glass to Ivanov. And he took it gladly.

"Yes. Even if I kept her mouth shut with my fake threat, which I wish was real because I've been trying

to get an evidence of Achilles' accidentally killing my moron brother but got nothing in my hand, I

knew she wouldn't keep quiet for long," he said, thinning his lips in displeasure. "I knew sooner or

later, my threats wouldn't affect her and she'd spit out everything to Achilles. So I sped up my plan.

And brought you into the picture. Because Antonio was in no shape to help me in any way."

Ivanov chuckled. "Achilles Valencian isn't that foolish. He wouldn't leave any evidence behind which

can harm his reputation in the future. Obviously, you didn't find anything just like Antonio except

knowing just what happened to your beloved brother."

"Antonio was another fool. I thought he could help me ruining Achilles, but he couldn't do a shit

except framing Caleb into that drug case. Even then Achilles got him out of that mess with just a

flicker of his finger. And see where he is now. Suffering on a fucking hospital bed and then will rot in

the jail."

"Yeah, that poor friend of mine. He took Achilles too lightly, thinking of himself untouchable." Ivanov

shook his head. "Anyways, now that Achilles signed the contract, what's next?"

Arthur shrugged nonchalantly before casting Ivanov a sinister look.

"He dies."

I froze. My blood ran cold in my veins as my heart stopped beating in my chest for a moment. As the

words slowly set in my mind, parting my lips I let out a shaky breath, stumbling a step back from the

door.

T-they are planning to k-kill Ace?

No! No, no. I won't let that happen. I won't let him do any harm to my Ace. Over my dead body!

My hands shook at my sides with fear and uncontrollable rage, fear of losing my love and rage to

destroy my enemy. My heart pounded down my chest, eyes burnt with tears, but my feet were glued

to the ground even if my mind was screaming to go in and kill him or run away and tell Ace

everything.

"That I know. But how? You didn't tell me how you were gonna pull it off." Ivanov quirked a brow.

That bastard gulped the remaining drink in his glass in one go and placed it on the bar. "Simple. He gets into his car for his new home that's a little far from the city and an accident happens in the middle of the road."

The more I heard the more I felt my breathing to get heavy. I felt suffocated. Clutching the phone in a death grip in my fist, I listened.

"Ah, an accident would be a nice cover for your heartless strategy," Ivanov mused. "But I don't understand one thing, even after Achilles dies, how come you get the company? I mean, after him, as your brother's adoptive son, your other nephew, Caleb gets everything. Even before that, Achilles made his girlfriend an equal owner of everything he owned. So obviously, Emerald Hutton would be the sole owner of everything after Achilles' death."

Arthur smirked, fixing the collar of his shirt. "Caleb wouldn't be a problem. He's just a puppet under Achilles' hand. He doesn't know shit about how to run a company successfully. So of course, after Achilles' unfortunate sudden demise, the company would come to a disaster. The board members would want another Valencian to take his place. So once I prove everyone Caleb's worthlessness, the throne would automatically become mine."

Getting out his phone from his pocket, he typed something before putting it back.

"The thing that will work in my favor is the contract. And right now, it's the biggest project they're going to handle. So to avoid any chances of loss after the chairman's death, as I'm the head of the project and know everything from A-Z about the company, the board members are going to want me to take responsibility. Which I gladly will. And about Emerald Hutton," saying, he cocked his head.

"They're like love birds. If one dies, the other follows. Achilles is the Alpha here, once he's gone, it won't be much of a hassle to get rid of his bitch."

So this was running in his head all the time? And again, I was right. He wanted the company, everything Ace owned. That leach!

But he was right about one thing. Without my Ace, I wouldn't be able to live. Without him, I'd die even before he would try to do the work himself to get rid of me. My heart clenched painfully in my chest at the thought of the love of my life's not being in the same world I was breathing.

But I wouldn't let that happen. I'll fail his conspiracy.

"That's why before getting rid of him, I needed this contract in my hand. Besides, you'll also support me taking Achilles' place before the world. As you're an important client to the Valencian Corp, everyone would respect your wish," he added.

"And when would I get my share of the pie?" Ivanov raised his brow.

"Right after I take everything as mine, which is my actual birth right." The backstabber's face turned cold, hatred laced into his voice. "The right my brother took away from me just because he thought I wasn't good enough to be able to run the company beside him, just because he thought I'd tarnish the Valencians name due to my reckless illegal businesses." Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath and looked at Ivanov again. "But I'll get my right back now. And as promised, you'll get 45% of the shares of the company."

So that's what he promised to this Russian?

Ivanov flashed a slimy smile. "Now that's what I wanted to hear. Now I can't wait for your final plan to take action and watch the news of the famous business tycoon's sudden death all over the news channels."

I gritted my teeth.

This dream of yours will never come true you bastard!

I've to tell Ace. I've to stop him before he leaves the building and sits in his car. Wiping the tear that rolled down my cheek, I turned around and ran.

But as if the whole universe was against me, my feet came in contact with a small flower base that

was lying on the floor in the darkness, making an unfortunate noise across the empty hallway.

Their conversation stopped immediately. My heart stopped in my chest. Shit!

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An eerie silence fell over the ambience for a moment while I stood there frozen. Only the sound of my own heavy breath reached my ears.

Then I heard heavy footsteps of boots approaching from the other side of the room they were in.

Oh no! They're coming!

I need to hide! I wouldn't be able to run from them. They'd catch me if I ran.

Looking around frantically, I searched for a place to hide.

I couldn't use the flower pot this time. They'll find me.

Rushing to the one of the doors lined up beside theirs, I tried to open it without making a noise, but to

my utter bad luck, it was locked. I tried another, but no avail. They were locked.

No, no, no! I can't get caught! I can't! I need to inform Ace about his plan.

My heart pounded under my rib cage as I went to the opposite side of the hallway and pushed at a door. And this time, it opened.

Almost letting out a sob of relief, I rushed in and quickly closed the door behind me, as silently as I could.

And right that moment, I heard that slamming of a door, their boots hitting against the floor harshly.

They didn't make any sound with their mouth, but I could tell they were surveying the area.

Then I heard a voice, a cold thick Russian accent. "Search around."

I gulped. Sweat rolled down my spine. With trembling knees and hands, I stood against the door with my back pressed against it.

Once several footsteps split up and jiggling of door knobs, slamming the doors open and close, the

noise of them moving things reached my ear. Not trying to freak out my best, I tried Ace' phone again.

But he still didn't switch it on!

Damn it! Why isn't he switching his phone on?

"There's no one on this side," I heard one of them saying.

They must be the guards. Because neither Arthur or Ivanov's voice could be heard.

"Try this side. He or she must be still lurking around. They couldn't have escaped in just a matter of

seconds," the earlier cold voice stated. "Search every room. If it's locked from inside, then break the door."

My heart dropped.

I locked the door from inside. If I leave it open, they'd find me either way.

My knees wobbled making me leaning into the door as I heard them opening and closing the doors.

The ones are locked from outside, maybe they were left alone. Because I didn't hear them breaking

down any. But they would soon.

With shaky hands, I typed a message to Ace even after knowing that he wouldn't see it anytime soon.

'Ace, please switch on your phone. Please, I need you!'

With tears rolling down my eyes, my throat clogging up, I tried my best not to let out a sob out of fear

and anxiety.

I slapped my hand over my mouth to stop me from screaming as I heard footsteps outside my door.

"Did you check this one?" the same cold voice asked.

"No. These three rooms are left," answered another voice.

And then there was nothing. The other men continued to search around.

But no one was pushing at

my door. But I knew he was there.

My heart pounded down my chest so hard that I feared they would hear it. His footsteps came closer,

right outside the door.

My eyes closed automatically, letting the tears roll down my cheeks to my throat. Biting on my hand, I

covered my cries. Prying continuously in my mind not to let them find me, I hugged my body, falling

on the floor, curling into a ball.  
I needed to go out. I needed to go to my Ace. I needed to save him.  
More tears fell as helplessness filled my chest.  
I didn't know if I'd be alive to be able to tell him everything.  
Then landed two heavy fists on the door, making me jolt.  
With eyes wide in fear, tears blurring my vision, I watched the door in horror.  
No, no, no! God, please!  
Then came another.  
Just as I closed my eyes, shrinking away from the door expecting him to jiggle the knob and once finding out that it was locked from inside, he would break it, Arthur's voice cut in.  
"Easy there, boys. There's no one. Don't worry, maybe some curious cat passed by." Came his nonchalant voice. "Let's go now. We're getting late. You guys need to reach the spot before Achilles does. Come on!"  
With that, two pairs of footsteps walked away, followed by the others. And after a moment, I heard that man also moving away and then leaving.  
Slumping against the door, I let out a relieved sigh. Thank God!  
But then I jumped on my feet and rushed out of the door.  
I need to stop Ace before he leaves. I've to hurry up!  
I waited outside five minutes with all my inner strength. I knew I had to run to Ace right then but I had to wait for Arthur and his people to leave this floor.  
In the meantime when I called Carter again, it sent my call to voicemail. Where the hell is he?  
I didn't even have the number of Ace' guards. I wish I had saved one of theirs. There was no one I could call right now who could help me stop Ace.  
Waiting enough for them to leave this floor, I rushed down the hallway, remembering my way back to the staircase. The corridors were so long that I took almost a lifetime to pass one.  
Without stopping my legs, I called Caleb. Maybe he could help me in any way.  
After some rings, just as he picked up the phone, my phone was snatched from my hand.

Halting abruptly, I looked over my shoulder.  
My breath caught at my throat, a gasp slipped my lips.  
Standing before me was two of the guards who were with Arthur and Ivanov.  
"Going somewhere, Ms. Hutton? You seemed to be in a rush," said the same cold voice. I recognized his voice. With an ugly scar running down from his brows to his cheeks, he towered over me with his huge body. Dark eyes stared without any emotion. With fast and heavy breath coming out of my lips, I took a step back and turned around to run. But another two were already standing there blocking my way. My eyes widened as my hands curled into fists. No, no, no! This isn't happening! What should I do now? When I tried to pass them, they pushed me back. "Let me go!" I hissed. They didn't leave then, they knew I was here. They were waiting for me to come out. They set a trap for me and I got stuck in that. One of the guards before me smirked. "We'll. But to the heavens, not anywhere else." A chill ran down my spine. With my throat suddenly getting very perched, I gulped. "L-listen to me. I've nothing to do with you. I need to go right now, so let me go," I stuttered out. "Right, we've nothing to do with you," said the man with scar on his face, making me turn to him. "But our boss does. If you're eager to leave, you shouldn't have come here in the first place. There's a saying in English, 'Curiosity killed the cat'. It became true for you." Maybe a curious cat passed by. I remembered his words. Fear rushed through me. He knew. He knew I was here. But then why didn't he do anything about it? I let out a shaky breath. "P-please let me go. You won't gain anything by killing me. My Ace will kill you. Y-you don't know him," licking my lips, I said. "But if you let me go, i'll give you more money than Arthur offered you. Please, just leave me."

As if my words didn't even reach his ears, he got out his phone from his pocket. "Before you die, the boss wants to give you his greetings." I stared at the phone in his hand. Gulping again, I shook my head, turned around and pushed the guards away. But as soon as I started to run, I was pulled back harshly by my hair. I whimpered at the pain that shot through my scalp. "Fucking suka! Don't test my patience! I'll make your death more painful than I want. So just do as I say!" Shoving the phone to my ear, he hissed, "Talk!" Tears streaming down my eyes, hands trembling, I held the phone against my ear. "H-hello." "Ah, Emerald, my dear." Came his mocking voice. Even hearing his voice, rage and hatred boiled through my veins. "Didn't I tell you to stay away from my way? But you clearly didn't take my warning to your head. Now see what you've done. You followed me there and got trapped. I thought I would get rid of you slowly after I was done with your boyfriend, but see, I had to change my plans again for your stubbornness. Now I've to kill you first." "You knew I was following you," I stated, hatred laced my voice. I heard his malicious chuckle. "Of course, I knew. You think I didn't notice you? My vision didn't get that old yet, now did it? I saw you behind me but I still let you come and listen to our conversation." "Then why didn't you catch me earlier?" I spit out. The grip on my hair tightened making me gasp in pain. "Suffer. I wanted you to feel the fear of me and suffer a little before you died, Emerald dear," he replied, no hint of emotion was in his tone. "And I thought to do you a favor and let you know everything before you leave all of us forever. At least I could do that for my beloved nephew's Rosebud. I knew you couldn't escape because I already told my men to wait for you at the exit of that floor. You did notice me doing something on my phone, didn't you?" I remembered. He was messaging someone while talking to Ivanov.

He was giving instructions to his men.

"You're not getting anything out of it, Arthur! You won't be able to harm Ace. I won't let you even touch a single strand of his hair!" I screamed through the phone, trying to fight off that man.

"Goodbye, Emerald. Don't worry, I'm sending your Ace to you to heaven soon. You can live there together forever because unfortunately, you won't be able to do that in this world."

"You bastard! I will kill you!" I thrashed into his hold but in return he only smacked me across my face sending me right to the ground.

A cry left my lips as the world spun around me, blood rushing to my head.

"Yes, boss," he said pressing the phone to his ear and then nodded, glancing down at me with cold merciless eyes. "Don't worry, we'll not leave any evidence behind." With wide eyes, I stared at him in shock. Fear rattled inside me as he cut the phone call and got a gun out of his back pocket, holding it directly at me.

"No," I whispered, backing away from the gun. My stomach churned as I glanced at the cold deadly nozzle. My heart pounded down my chest.

"Goodbye, Ms. Hutton. See you in the hell," saying, he curled his finger around the trigger and pulled at it. A deafening sound boomed across the hallway.

Letting out a scream, I fell on the ground, my arms before my face.

A pain shoot through my back, the spinning in my head only increased.

But it wasn't as severe as I thought a bullet's hit would be.

I didn't feel any piercing pain on any parts of my body.

And then a thump before me, made me open my eyes.

The man with the scar was lying on his chest on the floor, right before my feet, in the pool of his own blood.

Before I could understand anything, gun fires started across the hallway, a chaos rose around as the other guards kept firing at the direction my back faced while trying to save themselves from the incoming bullets.

I screamed at the ear-piercing sounds, closing my ears. Tears rushed down my eyes, heart thumped down my chest. I shook as I curled into a ball on the floor trying to stay away from the bullets.

The air filled with smoke and the smell of gunpowder, making me cough. After some hisses and yells, crying out with agony, the firing finally stopped.

Lifting my head, I surveyed the area. Three of the guards were dead, red blood soaked the carpet,

turning it into dark crimson. One of their lifeless cold orbs stared at me. I watched the sight before me in horror. I couldn't move. For a moment, I couldn't even hear anything.

Though I could feel the fast racing of my heart beat.

Then footsteps reached me. A pair of polished shoes came into my vision.

"Jesus, Emerald! Are you alright?" A familiar deep voice, laced with Italian accent made me look up.

Duncan De Sylvano.

I met with a pair of familiar striking blue eyes. They watched me in concern and alert.

"Emerald? You okay there? Are you hurt?" he asked. "Don't worry, we've got you. You're safe now."

I- i was almost dead.

When I didn't say anything, he shook my shoulder.

"Emerald? You hear me? You alright?"

My eyes snapped up to him, finally realizing my surroundings. Five men stood behind him. The guards

Ace left for me outside of our home. They just save me...

Ace?

Panic washed over me as I remembered what Arthur's plan was.

He can't leave the building!

With my breath caught at my throat, I grabbed my phone that lied before me and jumped on my feet,

swaying a little afterwards. Duncan tried to hold me but I was in too much rush to wait.

The only thing in my head was reaching Ace.

Tears blurred my vision as I ran.

"Emerald, wait! Where are you going?"

Without answering him, I rushed to the floor the conference room was in. The guards weren't there

anymore. Even the lights were off.

I shook my head. No, God, please. Please don't let him leave yet.

Knowing there was no one, I hurried down to the ground floor of the hotel.

People threw glances at my disarranged state. But I didn't care. I needed to find him. My Ace.

But where was he?

God, please let him be safe! Please, just let him be alright.

Wiping my cheeks, I dialed his phone again. But again, it went directly to the voicemail.

Damn it! What do I do now?

I pulled at my hair not knowing what to do. My knees were still wobbly and my heart still raced from my almost facing death.

"Ms. Hutton?"

I turned around. Carter rushed to me, limping, with an equal disheveled state as me.

"Carter! Where the hell were you?! I called you so many times! Where is your phone?" I snapped, walking closer to him. "I told you to stop Ace then why the hell didn't you tell him anything? He fucking signed the contract!"

I didn't know what I was saying, I only felt desperation and fear. The only thing that ran in my mind was keeping him safe.

"Ms. Hutton, I'm sorry, I don't know why but after you left those guards grabbed me, took my phone and locked me in a room," he said, eyes wide in shock. "I tried to fight them but they were too strong.

Until a hotel staff heard me and let me out, I was too late. The meeting was already over and everyone left."

As if nothing he said reached me as all I could hear was the last two words he said.

My stomach dropped, blood drained from my face.

Everyone left?

"W-where is Ace?" I asked. "He didn't leave, did he? He..."

"He also left, Ms. Hutton. The manager told me the boss and Mr. Balakin left in his car."

I stumbled back. My blood ran cold as I gasped.

Tears blurred my vision as I shook my head. I felt everything crashing down on me. I couldn't breathe.

No, no! I won't let anything happen to him. I will keep him safe. I won't let him die.

"Ms. Hutton..."

"Give me your car keys!"

"Keys? But why..."

"I said give it to me!"

Once he hurriedly took out his keys and handed them over to me, I turned around and rushed towards the exit.

"Ms. Hutton, wait!"

"Emerald!" I heard Duncan's voice called out.

But I didn't stop. I needed to go. I didn't know what I was going to do. My mind wasn't working. The only thing I knew was I needed to reach him.

"Send me Mr. Balakin's number!" Yelling it over my shoulder, I ran to Carter's car and drove away, as fast as I could.

Ace's phone was switched off, but if Mr. Balakin was with him then he definitely had his phone with him. Hopefully on.

I didn't know if Mr. Balakin was working with Arthur too. But if he did, what was he doing with Ace in his car?

I pressed the honk when a car didn't move from my way. I needed to drive fast.

I didn't know when Ace left the hotel. I had no freaking idea how far they've gone. I didn't even know if he was going directly to home.

A frustrated sob left my mouth as I hit the steering. I couldn't prevent the signing and now I couldn't stop him from leaving the hotel.

I never felt so helpless and weak before. My heart was clenching in my chest in fear. Fear of losing him.

What if Arthur succeeds in his plan? What if I really lose...

With my eyes prickling with tears, I drove the car as fast as possible.

No! I won't let that happen.

I went down the road that led to our home.

Arthur planned to make Ace's car meet an accident while he would be going for our home. And Ace did promise that he'd go home as soon as the meeting finished. And he never broke his promises.

I had a feeling he was heading this way.

My phone blared in the car. My heart skipped thinking it might be him.

But then I saw an unknown number flashing over the screen.

Maybe it was Carter?

I picked it up.

"Carter? Why didn't you send me the number yet..."

"Emerald, it's me, Duncan. Wherever you're going, stop. I'm coming to get you. You..."

I cut him off. "Where is Carter? I told him to send me Mr. Balakin's number! I need to talk to Ace, doesn't he understand?"

A curse left my lips as a car suddenly came into my way. Moving the phone away from my ear, I turned right, barely avoiding a hit.

But it didn't make me concerned as all I could think about was Ace.

When I put the phone in my ear back, I heard him asking if I was alright through the phone.

"I'm fine, please tell Carter to send me the number. I need to call Ace, Duncan. He's in danger! Arthur is planning to kill him. Please help me. Give me Mr. Balakin's phone number!"

Passing another car, I put on more speed. The knot of fear and anxiety only became worse in my chest.

Where are you, Ace?

Just stay safe.

"Emerald, listen to me. Stop wherever you're going. Ace is going to be alright..."

"You don't understand!" I snapped, getting frustrated. "He's in danger..."

My phone buzzed, signaling a message.

Putting the phone down, I checked the message.

Maybe Carter sent me the number.

Desperately, as I opened the message, a small text awaited me from an unknown number.

You got lucky. But he didn't.

I stopped the car in the middle of the street. Something churned into my stomach. An ill feeling rose up my throat.

My mobile vibrated again.

This time with a video message.

With trembling fingers, I played the video.

This was a video shot from a distance.

Across the open field, a car was passing through the empty road.

Ragged breath came out of me. My palms turned clammy as perspiration rolled down my forehead.

My heart pounded in my chest.

I knew the car very well.

Then suddenly a huge truck sped through the field out of nowhere and went directly to the black car,

hitting it from the side. With the severity of the hit, the car flipped and rolled over the road, the

middle part of it got crushed with the blow. A fire immediately set on the backside, letting black

smoke surround the car.

My heart stopped beating. Breath caught at my throat. The mobile slipped through my hands as I

went numb.

A feeling of nothingness swept over me.

My world started to spin, vision got blurred while a deafening silence rang into my ears as darkness

slowly consumed me.

The Trap Of Ace

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Across the open field, a black car that I knew really well passed through the empty road. No other sign

of vehicle or human was there.

Then a truck sped through the field, going directly to the car.

I tensed. The rate of my heart beat peaked up. I had to stop it.

But when I tried to open my mouth to say something, yell his name, my body didn't move. A panic set

in when I attempted to open my eyes but they didn't move either.

No!

I watched as the truck neared the car with full speed. It was going to hit it!

A desperation to stop it rolled inside, making me restless. I wanted to move but as if my body got paralyzed, I couldn't move even how much I wanted to. I wanted to scream, thrash to be set from whatever that held me back. I wanted to stop that truck. But all I could do was watch as the truck went ahead and hit the car with a force that it flew across the road, flipping over, a fire immediately set on it. "Ace!" I shot my eyes open, my vision blurred with tears. "No! No, no! Ace! Please nooo!!" Jolting up, I tried to get up, but a pair of arms held me back as I thrashed into their hold. I didn't know where I was, I didn't see, I didn't hear. All I could think and see was the accident. The horrible car accident, the same car my Ace was in. "My Ace needs me! He needs me! Let me go!" I screamed, continuing fighting. "Rosebud, Rosebud, calm down! I'm here. I'm here with you baby, just calm down!" A voice reached my ears but I couldn't really concentrate on it. "Let me go! My Ace needs me! Please..." "Rosebud, look at me!" Cupping my face, he made me look at him. "No..." My voice caught at my throat as his stormy grey eyes met mine. They held concern and the same affection they always bore for me there. Then I realized where I was. I was in the arms of my Ace. "Ace..." a whisper left my lips, eyes not moving from his beautiful face. He nodded, kissing my forehead. "Yes, baby. Your Ace, I'm here with you. I'm fine, and so you're. Everything is alright now, sweetheart. Calm down. Everything is fine." "You... you're here. You're here with me. You're alright." Touching his face, shoulder and chest to console my heart that he was really there, I let out a sob and wrapped my arms around him. Taking me in the cocoon of his arms, he held me close, nuzzling his face in my neck. "I- I thought I lost you! I... I was so scared. I thought you left me. I- I saw the video, I..." Sentences

came out uncompleted from my mouth in between my sob. I couldn't talk without stuttering.

But the tightness of my chest was slowly dissipating as I had him in my arms.

He was safe. Alive. I didn't lose him.

Clutching him closer to me, I hid my head in his chest. His intoxicating scent filled my nostrils, soothing my chaotic mind. I took some more greedy inhales.

"I'd never leave you, baby. Never ever. I'm here with you. I didn't go anywhere. You know I can't leave my Rosebud alone." Tightening his arms around me, he rubbed his hand over my back gently. His deep voice murmuring at the crook of my neck was like an ice to my burning soul.

With my lips trembling, some more tears fell. I pressed my lips against his chest. "Promise me you'll never leave me again like that."

"I promise. I'll never leave you alone again, Rosebud. I'll never. I swear to you that." Determination

cut deep into his tone. The way his grip only tightened and his shoulders got stiff, I could tell

everything that happened equally bothered him as much as it did to me.

But I was too tired to think about anything else. Latching onto his words, I closed my eyes and

slumped against him, taking a deep breath. It felt like I finally could breathe after such a long time.

He was here with me...

I didn't even want to think of what happened earlier the day. I was exhausted: mentally, physically and emotionally. Now that finally my Ace was in my arms, I wanted to sleep.

"Don't leave me..." I murmured as my eyelids became heavy.

"I won't. Sleep, baby. I'll be right here when you wake up," I heard his voice murmuring before exhaustion completely engulfed me.

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He kept his promise. When I opened my eyes next time, I found myself wrapped around his strong arms while he kept me against his chest. I was on the top of his body while he lied underneath me,

completely unbothered by my weight.  
When did we get in this position?  
His gentle strokes through my hair and possessive grip over my waist had me sigh in content.  
Sensing me awake, he looked down at me. "Rosebud?"  
The husky and rough texture of his voice sounded pleasing to my ears. I thought I'd never be able to hear his voice again...  
My heart clenched painfully. Tears burned my eyes at the thought as memories of those ominous incidents flooded back to my mind.  
"Rosebud? What happened, baby?" A crease set between his brows as he moved me slightly and sat up, placing me on his lap. "Did you have a nightmare again?"  
I shook my head, sniffing. "I just..."  
"Listen to me, Rosebud," cupping my cheeks, he locked our gazes, "I'm here with you, ain't I? Nothing happened to me, baby. I'm absolutely fine and alive, without a scratch."  
"B-but how? I watched that video. The way that truck hit the car, the severity of it..." I shook my head, closing my eyes. Goosebumps crawled up my arms at the recollection of the sight.  
"I know. But I wasn't in the car, baby. I got out mid way. So unfortunately for them, they couldn't succeed in their plan."  
My eyes snapped open. "Y-you know who did it? Who was behind the conspiracy?"  
A muscle of his jaw ticked. Grey eyes flashed with wrath. "Very well. I've known it for a long time now."  
I gasped. Lips parted in shock.  
"Y-you knew? You knew Arthur was planning to kill you?" Something inside me burned with fire.  
He knew everything? Then why didn't he do anything about it? Why did he let him do all this shit?  
He shook his head, rubbing his hand over my back. As if he was aware of my suddenly dark mood.  
"I didn't know what he was exactly going to do until this morning. I found out about his whole plan after the meeting, when he went to meet Ivanov once the contract was signed," he said.

"Then why didn't you do anything about it? Why did you let all this happen?" I asked, perplexed. He shouldn't have signed the contract and got into his car if he knew Arthur was betraying him. "And what do you mean by the whole plan? How do you know that Arthur went to meet Ivanov?"

Endless questions swirled around my head, but I had no answers. "You remember we had a board meeting about someone leaking information about our company and working with Antonio?"

I nodded.

"I had a hunch that it was someone from inside, someone very close to us just as you said in the meeting. And after the drug incident, I was sure of it. I knew Liza couldn't do all that alone. To know that the CCTV camera outside of the Valencian mansion wasn't working, was possible for only the people from inside the house. Or someone who regularly visited." His hand ran up and down my leg, making me realize that I was in one of his t-shirts, not in my morning clothes.

He must've changed me.

"The staff who worked there were our old and loyal workers. I knew they wouldn't betray us, but still, I had a close observation on their activities. And they came out clean. Tess wouldn't do that to Caleb either. So there left Arthur." He met my gaze. "I didn't want to doubt him as he had a huge favor on me by handling my company in my absence years ago. But I had an idea of his running illegal businesses in the UK in his past which I thought he stopped doing after returning to the states. But then I got a call from the police."

I frowned. "Police?"

He nodded. "Yes. After the drug incident, I had Antonio investigated discreetly. And the man I hired was a police officer too, he was involved in the case. According to their report, the drugs that were found in Caleb's car were from a drug dealer whose shark client was Antonio. He got them from that

man. It was a very expensive kind of drug that only that man supplied to the states through Antonio.

It was Antonio's foolishness to use the same drugs to frame Caleb. And once looked closely into it, the drug dealer was connected to a very small company based in the UK. And guess who was the owner of that company?"

With my eyes wide, I whispered, "Arthur."

"Yes," he hissed, lips curling into a sneer. "It was him who actually delivered drugs to Antonio. He just used that man as a way to run his business while still remaining under the shadows." He gritted his teeth. "The police weren't supposed to investigate further after getting to know about Antonio's involvement. But to stop the drug supply in the states, they dug out that man's history to grab his neck. And when they found out about Arthur, they immediately informed me. But I told them not to take action against that man and Arthur right away as I didn't want them to get alert."

"But why did you do that? If they had arrested him earlier then this wouldn't have happened today.

You could get hurt!" My voice rose with each word.

His grip on me tightened, his shoulders went rigid. "So could you. If I had known he was going to go after you even after knowing what I had done to Antonio, I'd have killed him even before he could think about harming you." There was a storm brewing into his grey orbs that indicated someone's demise. Arthur's demise. "You were nowhere near my plan to catch him red handed. But still to be sure you were miles away from him while I executed my plan, I kept the guards outside. But you still left and I had no fucking idea of what danger you were in. If it wasn't for Duncan..."

Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath as if even the mare thought tortured him.

I ran my hand over his chest. "I'm sorry. I didn't know what was running into your head. I didn't know

about your plan. All I knew was, I needed to stop you from signing the contract. I knew Arthur was going to do something."

"At least you shouldn't have gone after him to that floor. Especially when you had no one there to protect you. What were you thinking?"

Duncan must've told him what happened out there.

The edge of his voice told me he wanted to snap or yell, but still suppressing his anger not to raise his voice on me. But the fire in his eyes was evident.

"I wasn't thinking," I said honestly. "I know it was stupid of me. But I wanted to know who his partner in crime was. If you had told me earlier about your plan then I wouldn't have done that. But like

always, you didn't feel the need to tell me anything."

He sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. "I didn't know you were aware of his double crossing. I

didn't want to stress you out. I'm sorry. But why didn't you tell me that you had doubts on him? When did you get to know all this?"

I shrugged. "Well, I didn't like him from the beginning. There was always something like malice in his eyes whenever he looked at me. And then I saw him with Sierra."

He cocked his head at the side. "Who?"

I rolled my eyes. Of course the great Achilles Valencian didn't bother enough to ever know his employees' name.

"One of you employees. She was Liza's close friend." Then I explained everything to him, from seeing

Sierra with Arthur in the hotel garden to him threatening me. Well, except the fact that I took

Warner's help. I didn't want to ruin his mood more than it already was.

He stiffened. Those grey eyes flashed as his nostrils flared. "He threatened you?" His voice came out

low, danger laced with each word. Then grabbing my shoulders, he asked, "Did he hurt you? Did he try to do anything..."

I shook my head. "He didn't hurt me. He just tried to scare me by using your past. And thinking he

might have something against you for real, I kept quiet. That's why I wanted to know everything so desperately so that I could know if he really knew anything. But when you finally disclosed your past to me, I got to know that even though he knew something related to that night, he didn't have any evidence. And when I decided to tell you everything in the morning, you weren't there. You already left for the meeting."

His jaw clenched. "You should've told me that earlier, Rosebud."

I placed my head on his chest. "I was scared to ruin what we had by telling you something against your uncle who was so close to you without any strong proof. Even if we were fighting then, I didn't want to create more rift between us. I thought you wouldn't believe me before your uncle."

He wrapped his arms around me, pulling me closer. "There's no one in the world I trust more than you.

You're my world, Rosebud. How did you think I wouldn't believe you?"

"I thought you and him were very close and you trusted him blindly. And when I finally decided to tell

you after Liza's confirmation, his threat stopped me. I just wanted to be sure if he really had

something against you before telling you everything. Because I feared that if I would tell you about

him, you being you wouldn't be able to control your rage and confront him about it. And that would

lead him to use your past against you if had anything with him. I know it's stupid. But I didn't want to take any chance."

"I'd have killed him for threatening you like that," he hissed, tone deep.

"That's why I didn't tell you. I wanted to sort everything out before taking any steps. If you had told

me everything, then all this wouldn't happen in the first place." I glanced up at him. "Why did you

stop the police to arrest them anyway?"

"Because I wanted to punish them myself first. I wanted to make them believe that they were winning

and then watch their own fall with their own eyes, especially when they were at the verge of

winning." Venom dripped from his voice. "Nothing hurts more when you lose the moment when you had all the confidence that you were going to win." He played with my hair as I listened to him silently. "After coming out of the jail, Antonio thought nothing would happen to him again. But he was wrong. I couldn't let him live peacefully when he tried to hurt my Rosebud. So I destroyed him to pieces this time. This time, no one in the world can save him from his doom," he said. "And today was Antonio's turn. I knew he was going to do something after the final signing. And I was just waiting for him to take the step so I could grab him by his neck and catch him red handed, ruining him with his own strategy." "You said you knew he was going to meet Ivanov. How? And when did Antonio try to hurt me?"

## The Trap Of Ace

### Chapter 70

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His pupils darkened more in rage even if it was possible. "You remembered the accident when we were returning from the house I bought for us?" My eyes widened. "H-he was behind it?" He nodded, a muscle of his jaw ticked. "It was him. Even though I was his target, he shouldn't have involved you in this." I let out a breath. So that was the reason behind his intense hatred against Antonio. That's why he was so mad at Tess's wedding when Antonio came to meet me. "When Arthur brought up the Russians offer to me, his desperation for me to sign it and his being the head of this project had me suspicious. So I had his phone tapped. To know what was brewing in his shrewd head. And I was right. I got to know about his intention behind the project while he discussed

it with Ivanov on the phone. But as cunning as he was, he never unfolded his whole plan to him. Until this morning, when everything in his path was clear for him to go ahead."

But he did tell Ivanov about killing him. Ivanov knew it except being aware of how Arthur was going to pull it.

"That means you knew he was going to kill you after the signing? I thought you told me you weren't aware of it."

"I knew, but I didn't know how he was going to do it. What his exact plan was. But I got to know about his stupid master plan when he was with Ivanov this morning. We were listening to everything he was saying from the conference room."

"We?" I raised my brow.

"Me, Duncan and Mr. Balakin."

"Duncan and Mr. Balakin?" I was shocked. So Mr. Balakin and Duncan knew everything? That explained why Duncan was there.

He gave a nod. "It was Duncan whom I asked to tap Arthur's phone.

Besides being a successful

businessman, that bastard is also an expert with computers, hacking and all, he also did something to

Arthur's phone for us to hear every conversation when his phone was with him, even when he wasn't

on a phone call. As he was a partner in my company and we always had each other's back, when I told

him about Arthur, he was more than willing to throw out that leach out of the business."

Though he showed that he didn't really like Duncan, I knew they were good friends.

"When Arthur was planning to get rid of me, Ivanov also wanted Balakin out of his way to get their

company all to himself. When I made him listen to all Arthur and Ivanov's conversation about how

later Arthur was going to move Balakin away from Ivanov's way, he agreed to help us. I knew the

contract would be beneficial for both of us, so I wanted the contract, but without Arthur's plan in it.

And Mr. Balakin wanted the same. So he agreed to sign the contract as per their plan. But not for their benefit, for our gain. And it would also let Arthur believe that he was winning. So that he would play his next move and face defeat." Then suddenly his demeanor changed, those strong shoulders of his tensed. "When I left in my car with Mr. Balakin as per their plan and Duncan stayed back to keep an eye on them until they left the hotel, I got to know that you were in that hotel." His breathing came out deep as he tightened his hold on me, his eyes watched me as if he feared I'd disappear at any moment. "Duncan sent a recording to Mr. Balakin's phone of Arthur's phone call where he was talking to you and then giving orders to his dog to...kill you." I ran my fingers in his hair to calm him down, pressing my forehead against him. "You don't know how I felt at that moment, Rosebud," staring into my eyes, he gulped. The sudden redness in his eyes and the moisture in there had my heart clench. "I felt my heart stop beating the moment I heard him giving orders to kill you. I..." I squeezed his hand. "I know. I'm sorry, even I was scared. Terrified actually. I thought I could sneak out quietly before they would even notice me, but unfortunately they did. Thank God Duncan reached there at the right time." "Where I should have been. I should've been there to protect you rather than trying to proceed my worthless plan to defeat him. I should've protected the most precious person of my life. But..." His hands balled into fists. "I clearly failed. I failed to protect you." "Don't you dare blame yourself for that! It was my fault I took that risk. You put those guards outside the house to keep me safe. But it was me who didn't listen to them. So whose fault is it? Me. So stop torturing you for the thing you didn't do, again." He shook his head, eyes pained. "I should've known that you were there. I should've listened to your

voice messages and picked up your calls. But my phone was fucking dead! I forgot to charge it last night! It's all my fucking fault!" He slammed his fist against the hardboard of the bed, cursing.

I gasped. "Ace! Stop! I said it wasn't your fault. And nothing happened to me right? I'm fine. It was my stupidity that I followed Arthur without taking anyone with me." "But anything could've happened! I could have..." His jaw ticked. "I could've lost you. If Duncan hadn't reached there in time..."

I cupped his face, kissing his forehead. "But he did. I'm alright now. You couldn't have known I

wouldn't listen to the guards and leave. So stop blaming yourself," I murmured. "Anyways, what

happened then? What happened after you heard the recording?"

Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath as if calming himself down.

"I got out of the car and went back to the hotel as soon as possible. I wanted to turn back the car

forgetting our plan, but Mr. Balakin wanted to continue it, he was eager to see the shell shocked face

when his partner would get arrested after he realized how badly their conspiracy failed," he replied, shoulders still tensed.

"But I saw the car getting trashed by the truck. Was he in the car when..."

He shook his head. "No. He and the driver also got off the car turning the autopilot mode on just some

minutes before they reached the spot Arthur's men were waiting for us. They shot the accident and

sent it to Arthur. And he must've sent it to you after somehow knowing that you got out of there alive."

Taking his shaking fists in my hands, I kissed both of his palms.

"How did I get home?"

"When I reached the hotel, you already left with Carter's car. And after following your phone's

location, we found some people moving you out of the car because you lost consciousness stopping at

the middle of the road. Then I got you home." I leaned into his gentle caressing over my cheek. "Are

you okay, Rosebud?" Concern and regret echoed in his voice. I knew how the thought that he couldn't be there to protect me was torturing him. And knowing him, he'd continue to blame himself for that no matter what I said.

I nodded. "I am."

His hard eyes fell on my cheek. "You're hurt." His jaw ticked. "Who was it?"

"One of the guards. But he's dead right now. And I'm fine now, don't worry." I assured him.

"I promise, Rosebud. Arthur will beg for death but he won't get it. He will suffer for the rest of his life.

I'll make sure of that," he swore, gaze still latched onto my cheek.

"Where is he right now?"

"In the jail."

My eyes shot up in surprise.

"After the accident, he and Ivanov went to the spot to be sure if I and Mr. Balakin, as he was with me

in the car, were dead. They wanted a confirmation before they cheered over their success. That's

when Balakin reached there with the police and got them caught on the act before providing them the phone recordings."

"Damn, I missed the look on Arthur's face. It must have been worth watching," I muttered.

That got a small chuckle from him. "So did I. I was waiting to see that look in his eyes. But I had much more important things to do than being there, bringing my Rosebud back into my arms."

Sighing, I snuggled into his chest again. "I'm glad he's finally behind the bars, and out of our lives."

"It's just the start of his punishment, baby. A much worse future is waiting for him."

After a long time, I finally felt light. As if a huge burden had lifted off my chest. I no longer felt the suffocation of Arthur's threat dangling on my neck. He was finally out of our life.

Stroking my arm, he asked, "What are you thinking?"

"I'm relieved that he's finally out of our life. I just hope he never returns," I replied.

"He won't. He's going to rot in the jail for the rest of his life."

"Good. That's what I want. Make sure he suffers"

"What my queen wants, she gets."

I smiled, looking up at him. "I love you."

He leaned in and pressed his lips against mine. "I love you more."

Pulling away, he tucked a strand of my hair behind my ear.

"Your family is waiting outside for you. Do you feel like going outside? If not, I'll just tell them to come to see you later."

I sat straight. "You mean Mom and Dad? When did they arrive?"

"The moment they heard what happened to you. Even Tess and Caleb returned from their honeymoon cutting it short," he said.

"How did they know about it?"

"Caleb told me he got your call this morning but couldn't talk to you. And then he heard what happened next, those guards didn't cut the call." His voice hardened again.

Oh! Yeah, I remembered calling him hoping he could help me in some way.

"Wait, they're already here? So soon? How many hours I was sleeping for?"

"It's past eleven in the night."

I gasped. "I slept for that long? Why didn't you wake me up?"

He kissed my forehead. "You needed sleep. Don't worry about it. If you need to rest more, I can tell them to come tomorrow morning?"

I shook my head. "No. I'm fine. Let's go outside."

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"Mom, I'm alright. Don't cry," I said for the upteenth time, but her tiny arms wouldn't leave me as she kept shedding tears on my shoulder.

"You don't tell me what to do, young lady! You almost gave us a heart attack today!" she snapped, sniffing. "You don't go and put yourself in danger and then expect me not to freak out."

I shook my head, looking at Dad for help. But he only watched me with displeasure. After I got an earful from Dad, Tobias, Tess and Casie, I was now in the clutch of my Mom. She wouldn't leave me

for a second.

"Knock some more sense into her head. Because she has suddenly got a habit of playing hero all of a sudden," said my best friend, narrowing her eyes at me.

"I knew she was going to do something. I told her not to get herself into any mess, but she didn't listen." This time it was my brother.

"And yet you didn't care to tell me what was running into her head about Arthur?" Ace glared at Tobias.

My brother shuffled in his place, scratching the back of his head. "Well, I didn't think it was that serious."

"That's the problem. You never think anything. If you had even told me then I'd have talked to her.

But you just carelessly let it go! Do you have any idea what could have happened today?" accused Tess.

"Hey! I said I didn't know it was going to be this serious. I also thought Arthur was a good man like the rest of you."

"That man! I'd strangle him with my own hands if I get my hands on him for doing that to my baby girl," Mom hissed, pulling me more into her hug.

"Yes. And I will assist you in that!" Cassie joined.

"Me too!" Caleb and Tess joined.

"Ugh! Mom! I can't breathe!" I complained.

On the other hand, my man shifted from one leg to another, eyes set on me. With a creased forehead, his hands clenched and unclenched. Irritation laced across his hard features.

Then finally his patience snapped.

"Alright, now, Mrs. Hutton. It's time to feed her something," saying, he gently pulled me from Mom's chest to his, immediately wrapping his arms around me.

Only then I felt him relaxing against me.

As if it was a torture for him not to touch me for even some seconds. He hasn't left me for a second after I gained my consciousness.

"You okay?" he asked in my ear while our family planned how they were going to punish Arthur.

Smiling, I nodded. "Now that you're with me, I am."

Pressing a lingering kiss on my forehead, he took a sharp inhale of my hair.

"Are you okay?" I looked into his stormy grey eyes. They were still dark, swirling with concealed volcano.

I knew what storm was running inside him. But for my sake, he stayed calm. But I was also aware of the fact that he wouldn't for long. I saw what he did to Antonio before he left him in an abandoned alley. I just hoped he would at least leave Arthur's life. No matter how much I hated that man, I didn't want his hands to be tainted with Arthur's blood.

He just nodded.

I sighed. "Just don't kill him, alright?"

His dark orbs just stared at me silently, without saying anything.

As I opened my mouth to say something, Mom's voice cut in.

"Alright, now, everyone. Let's go and have dinner. It's late. Then we'll leave. My baby needs more rest."

Taking my hand into her, she dragged me behind her to feed me the food she made for everyone while I was sleeping.

We were back into Ace's penthouse. And as much as he didn't like so many people in his home, he didn't seem to complain. All he did was just keep me within his touch and stare at me. Not to forget grunting if someone of our family members took me away from him for a moment.

After the dinner once everyone left, promising to visit tomorrow morning, we were left alone again.

"You want to go to the gym?" I asked as we sat on the balcony, watching the still rushing city beneath us. He told me to go to bed but I insisted on getting some fresh air. So here we were. Curling on his lap, we sat on the rocking chair under the night. A peaceful comfortable night.

He looked at me in surprise. A perfectly arched brow of his raised. "I thought you hated the idea of me going to the gym?"

I shrugged. "I don't hate it until you don't bruise your knuckles. A little bit of blowing the punching bag isn't bad."

He needed to get his frustration out. And he always used the punching bag for that. But since knowing how much I disliked it, he wasn't going for it tonight.

As much as I liked it that he wasn't practicing his unhealthy exercise anymore, but if a little bit of that could reduce his anger a little, then I was okay with it.

He shook his head. Hugging me closer, he kissed my forehead. "I'm fine, Rosebud. And I'm saving it for someone else. So don't worry, the storm inside me will get unleashed, but at the right time."

The coldness of his voice sent a shiver down my spine.

That's what I didn't want. I didn't want him to take any wrong steps out of rage.

But I'd talk to him about it later. I had my Ace finally in my arms now. I didn't want to ruin this moment talking about him.

"I want to go to Greece. Where Tess and Caleb went for their honeymoon? I loved the pictures they sent me. It has such amazing places!"

A smile curved up his lips. "When do you want to go?"

My eyes went big. "You'll take me there?"

He pecked my nose. "Whenever you want to go. I promised you a vacation, right? If you want to go to Greece, then Greece it is. Whatever my queen wants."

I giggled, squealing like a small girl getting a Christmas gift. "Tomorrow! I want to go there tomorrow!"

I had even planned the places I want us to visit when Tess sent me the pictures."

A musical chuckle vibrated through his chest as he cupped my face and watched me with unconditional love and adoration.

"Tomorrow it is then. Where do you want to go after that?"

My smile only got big. "We're going for a long vacation?"

He nodded. "The more time I get with my Rosebud all to myself, the better."

"Turkey! I want to go to Istanbul! The city of dreams!" I gushed. "I love their lifestyle and food. I can't wait to visit there!"

"And I love you," snuggling into my neck, he rasped. His rough stubble raised goosebumps across my skin.

Hot sensations rushed directly to my core.

I squirmed against him, feeling him springing to life within seconds under me.

A husky groan left his sinful lips.

Wrapping my arms around his neck, I brought his mouth to mine. "I love you more."

Gripping my ass cheeks firmly, he pulled me closer and asked for entrance. And I opened my mouth eagerly.

The moment his tongue met mine, a jolt of electricity ran through my veins. It was addicting. My core clenched in want.

A moan left my lips as he ravished my mouth as if he craved my lips like they were his salvation.

And just as his hand slipped under my dress, getting every nerve of mine burst with excitement and lust, his phone decided to interrupt.

Groaning when he cut the call and got back to me, it started to blare into the night again.

Cursing, he pulled away and received it.

"What?" he snapped.

Hearing something the other person said, he clenched his jaw. "What do you want? Come to the point!"

I frowned. "Who's it?"

He threw a glance at me but didn't answer my question.

"She's alright."

Was he talking about me?

His lips pressed tight. "Why do you want to talk to her? I said she's okay now. Isn't that enough?"

I raised my brow. Who was it?

Letting out a grumble, he passed me the phone. At my questioning gaze, he huffed.

"It's De Sylvano. He wants to talk to you."

I rolled my eyes at his antics. I didn't know why he was grumbling about it. Was he jealous that

Duncan wanted to talk to me, or he was just annoyed that he interrupted us. Well, I was in his team if it was the latter.

But I needed to thank Duncan for what he did. He was a big help today.

"Hey!" I said, pressing the phone against my ear.

"Emerald, how are you doing right now?" Came his thick Italian accent.

Cassie was always a goner for Italian men for their sexy accent.

"I'm good now. Thank you. I'm sorry you had to take so much trouble for me today."

My Greek god's eyes narrowed at that. He definitely didn't like me apologising to anyone.

"Nah! Actually it was my pleasure that I could help you. As much as I didn't expect our second,

technically third meeting like that, but still, I'm glad I got the chance to get you out of that situation.

Even though your Greek man didn't appreciate me with words. But tell him that he owes me big."

I laughed. "Oh, he knows it really well."

He tried to take the phone away from me, getting irritated second by second but I pulled away.

Chuckling, he cleared his throat. "Anyways, jokes apart, I hope Valencian told you everything?"

I sighed. "Yes, he did."

"Good. Now don't worry at all about everything. Arthur is out of your life now. So cheer up! And yes,

make that moody man of yours a little less stressed. I didn't ever see that man that much anxious and

disturbed from the years I've known him. He was terrified, you know?"

I nodded, even if he couldn't see me.

Grabbing his hand, I kissed his knuckle, making his clenching jaw relax.

"I know. Thank you so much for helping him through all this, not to forget saving my life. Thank you,

Duncan! You really did a big favor on us," I said truthfully. And this time, Ace didn't show any

displeasure.

"Nah, it was nothing. I know, if Valencian was in my place, he would have done the same for me. So you don't need to thank me. It was always a pleasure!" he said.

"Anyways, I won't hold you for long.

Your caveman must be planning to kill me right now for keeping his girl busy for that long. You take care, Emerald. I'll see you later."

"Yeah, see you later. Goodnight!"

"Night!"

Once I returned his phone, I slumped against him. "He seemed to be a nice man. Then why do you behave like you don't like him at all?"

He snorted, wrapping his arms around me. "He's always a gentleman to ladies. Especially to those he thought was decent. Otherwise he wouldn't even look at you twice."

I rolled my eyes. "Whatever you say, he helped us a lot today. We should personally thank him, you know? Maybe invite him for dinner?"

He grunted, muttering something under his breath. Something like, 'I owe my life to that bastard now.'

"Maybe. But not now. After we return from our vacation."

My mood instantly brightened remembering our vacation.

"So? What do we do now?" he asked, nuzzling his nose in my neck.

And just like that my mind darkened again, but with desire.

Pressing myself against him, I whispered into his ear. "You make love to me."

He growled, standing up along me in his arms.

"What my queen wants, she gets."

The Trap Of Ace

Epilogue

"Rosebud?" His deep voice murmured into my ear, followed by a lingering kiss on my neck. "Wake up, baby. We're here."

Groaning, I moved on his lap and made myself more comfortable against him, snuggling my face into his chest. "Let me sleep."

His husky chuckle sent a shiver down my sore body. Well, the reason behind my tiredness was him.

After our fifteen days trip to Greece and Turkey, we were supposed to meet my family at dinner directly after landing in California. So here we were, outside my parents' home. But here I could barely move without wincing.

Because this man just can't keep it in his pants.

Just because a male cabin crew flashed me his biggest smile, he literally banned that man from his private jet and took me like a ragged doll in the posh cabin of his, claiming me again and again as his.

As if I wasn't already his!

Not that I didn't beg him for more and screamed in ecstasy at his rough touches.

But now I have to endure the consequences. I really didn't want to do the funny walk before my parents.

"They're waiting for us, Rosebud. If your father didn't insist himself, I wouldn't have forced you to get up. I would've instead loved to go home and have you all to myself again," he rasped, brushing his lips against my cheek.

I slapped his chest, opening my eyes to glare at him. "Don't you dare touch me for at least a week!

You're banned to to have s.ελ until I'm walking fine again."

Horror drew on his features. "What? You're joking, right?"

"I'm not."

Then he pulled me closer, biting on my lower lip. "I don't understand why you're punishing me, my rose. I thought after I thoroughly satisfied you, you'll give me a reward."

I raised my brows, leaning away from his sinful lips.

"Who said I'm satisfied? I didn't like it at all!" Moving in discomfort again, I pouted.

"Really?" His voice came out low. "I clearly remember someone moaning and begging me to go harder?"

Heat crept up my cheeks as I hid my face at the crook of his neck, making him laugh.

"You're so mean!"

He placed a kiss on my head. "Does it hurt, baby? I'm sorry. I should've gone a little gentler back in the

cabin. You should take a painkiller."

I shook my head. "I already took one. I'll be fine in some time, don't worry. Let's go now, otherwise

Mom will start to bomber our phones again."

She has been doing it for the last two days to make sure we attend the family dinner. Even Tess and Caleb would be there.

"What are you doing?" I squeaked as he scooped me into his arms as soon as we got out of the car.

"Carrying my Rosebud so that she doesn't have to walk," answering, he walked inside with me in his arms.

"What? No, put me down! I can walk myself! My parents would be there!"

He raised a brow. "So? I'm taking care of my girl. I don't think anyone should have any problem with that."

"But- but..."

He pressed the bell. "No buts."

Then the door opened and appeared my beaming mom and smiling dad. Tess, Caleb and Tobias strolled behind.

My cheeks flamed seeing their amused looks. But Mom and Dad held concern and curiosity in their eyes.

"Hello, everyone," my Greek caveman greeted, walking past them.

"Sweetie, is everything okay? Why is Ace carrying you? Are you alright?" Mom queried.

I opened my mouth, brewing my head for an answer when he butted in.

"Jet lag, Mrs. Hutton. She was tired, so I thought to carry her inside."

"Ah, that's alright then. Come, let's go to the hall." Smiling, Dad led us inside. He had this glint in his aged eyes, giving Ace a look of appreciation.

Well, Mr. Valencian didn't even have to try to win my parents' heart.

They always loved him as their

own son. And now they welcomed him as their family with whole heart.

Once we were all seated in the warm hall, Dad took him aside to talk about business along Caleb

while Tess teased me about how I had her brother-in-law wrapped around my finger.

"I thought he was your best friend?" I quirked my brow. She slumped against the couch. "He still is. But he's also my brother-in-law now. You know, I'm trying to feel this new relationship between us. Because I don't have any freaking in-laws here except him. To think about Arthur and Ophelia, one is in the jail and the other is in Italy. And I don't even know if my future children would get to have any kin from his father's side except an uncle and..." she winked at me, "aunt."

My heart skipped at her suggestion. I glanced at him at the other side of the room, only to find his eyes already fixed on me, turning me into a deep shade of red. The intensity in those stormy grey orbs made me avert my gaze and fondle with the bracelet he gave me.

Did he hear what Tess said?

Her clearing throat caught my attention again. A smirk tugged up her red lips.

I rolled my eyes.

"So? How did your meeting go with his Mom?"

I let out a sigh. "It was good. She was nice. Just was a little uncomfortable, as Ace said she would."

We went to meet her in Italy before leaving for Turkey. Ace wasn't up to meet his Mom all of a sudden as he wanted to focus only on us for the whole trip, and also that she wouldn't be all happy to see us. Because she only allowed Ace and Caleb to meet her on her birthdays. But I wanted to meet her. I wanted to know why she was still managing so much distance from her son. I understood she had issues with this place, but she could at least let Ace meet her over there.

But I didn't get any answers from her. She wouldn't talk much other than some basic conversation.

Though she was nice and happy to meet me, the girl her son loved, she was closed off. She even got a boyfriend out there. So I thought she had moved on, but clearly, she didn't. She still got affected if she met any person related to her past. Including her own son.

I saw how Ace wanted her to talk more, or to show more affection, but she just sat afar. As if we were some strangers.

And the disappointment that I saw in Ace' eyes made me feel guilty. I shouldn't have taken him to her.

I wanted to know his mother, but I only hurt him in the process.

"That's why I didn't try to meet her or talk to her. I knew she wouldn't take it nicely. Maybe she needs more time," she said softly.

I nodded. Even though I understood her situation, I didn't like the way she kept pushing Ace away.

"Come on, kids! Dinner is ready! Hurry up!" Mom called out from the kitchen.

"Let's go. I'm starving!" Getting up, Tess gave me her hand.

Once I grappled the delicious food Mom made for dinner, I had a sudden craving to taste blueberry ice

cream. I never liked this particular flavor, but I needed one right then. So I demanded Ace to take me

to a nice ice cream parlor and get me one blueberry ice cream. And even though he said I shouldn't

eat something cold in this freezing weather, after some pouting and blinking my eye lashes at him, he finally agreed.

But only for this one time. And I didn't mind as long as I got what I wanted.

After bidding my family goodnight, we went for my desired dessert and then directly left for home. It

was already late and he had to go to bed early so that he could wake up soon the next morning. He

had somewhere important to go.

An important meeting.

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"Please be seated, Mr. Valencian. He'll be here in a minute," saying, the man in a blue uniform walked out of the door.

"You shouldn't have come here. I told you to stay home, you weren't feeling good this morning. Why

do you never listen to me?" He turned to me as soon as the man left.

"I'm fine now. And I need to meet him for one last time. I've something to give him back."

We were here to meet Arthur. After the police arrested him, Ace couldn't finish some paperworks or see Arthur behind the bars due to our vacation. But now that we were back, he had to drop by the police station to sign some papers. And of course, wish Arthur good luck for his endless misery he'd be facing for the rest of his life. And how could I miss this chance? So even if I felt slight dizziness in the morning, I got ready and sat in the car with him, much to his dismay. Even I wanted to give him my best of luck. "What's that?" He raised a brow. I shrugged. "You'll see." His frown deepened at my sweet smile. Tucking a strand behind my ear, he pecked my forehead. "You're okay now?" I nodded, leaning into him. "We'll go and see Hazel after this. You need a check up." I sat straight, my mood dampening. Hazel was a friend of Leyla's. The redhead British girl whom I saw with him being so cozy in that restaurant the night months ago. The girl he visited quite a few times in the UK. Even at the night of Tess's engagement. My doubt was right. He went to meet her. Though only because she used to be his doctor back at the time when he went for rehab. I was absolutely surprised when he told me that she worked for a rehab organization. Whenever he thought his past was crawling back into his mind he went to meet her. As she handled his case to get him better, she became a good friend of his and also kind of a psychiatrist who would help him calming him down by talking to him. "No. We're not going to go to any hospital. I'm fine." Hospital wasn't the issue for me. The issue was that Hazel was Leyla's friend. Even though I knew she and Ace were just friends and she was married, I saw her gazing at him with admiration while talking to him on video calls. Even at that night at the

restaurant, her eyes were only on him. She literally had a crush on my man even when she wore a ring of another's. When I told him about it, he just laughed it off, saying I was just jealous.

Yes, I was. I didn't want any gorgeous redhead having a crush on my man. So even though it sounded weird, I didn't want to go to a place where the doctor was her close friend.

It was that annoying for me. I didn't know, but for some days it felt like my jealousy was out of my control. Even if a random girl looked at him, I felt like hiding him with a shield so that no one could see him other than me.

"No excuses. We're going and that's final. I'm not taking any chances with your health," he spoke with finality.

When I went to argue, the door opened and Arthur strolled in, guided by three cops behind him.

I raised my brow at his state. He was limping. There were bruises and cuts on his forearms and face.

The light of the bulb in the room shone on his newly shaved head as he watched us with murderous glare. The hatred in his eyes shone as bright as his bald.

A giggle left my mouth at the thought. It just made him throw daggers at me with his black eyes.

"You two! What the hell are you doing here? Came here to mock me?" he sneered.

"No, to give you something," saying, I stood up from the chair and walked up to him.

"What?"

At his confused face, I flashed him a sweet smile and slapped him across the already battered cheek of his. Hard enough to have my hand throb with pain and him hissing out a curse.

"This." My hands were itching to do this since I got to know his truth. His furious eyes snapped to me. "You bitch!"

Snarling, as he stepped forward raising his cuffed hands at me, I flinched away. But before he could hit me, a punch landed on his cheek, on the same one I just slapped, sending him to the ground.

"Keep your filthy hands to yourself if you don't want me to fucking pluck them out of your body!"

letting out a bellow, Ace stood before me, shielding me from any harm.

With eyes blazing with fury,

shoulders rigid, he glared down at Arthur with wrath.

Spitting out blood, Arthur went to stand up again but another harsh kick of Ace's polished shoe threw

him back on his back. A grunt of pain left his mouth.

When Ace went to hit him again, losing control, I held him back, at the same time the cops took

Arthur away from Ace's reach. Tugging him up, they held him back.

"You think you won sending me behind the bars? But you're wrong! No one can keep me here for long!

I'll get out and finish what I started. I'll kill you both you piece of shits!"

struggling against the cops, he

hissed at us.

Ace tried to move to him again, but I pulled him back, running my hand on his chest.

"Ace, calm down. He's just trying to provoke you. You and I both know he's just barking out of rage.

Even he knows he can't do anything anymore," I said in a calm tone.

"How dare he try to threaten you again!"

He tried to move away from my grip, but I only stood before him. "Don't take law into your hands.

The police will take care of him."

"She's right, Mr. Valencian. We'll take care of him, we've orders. You don't need to dirt your hands

with his blood," one of the cops agreed.

Then Arthur's mocking laughter echoed around the small cabin. "What a pussycat! I knew you had

become a slave of this bitch the moment you made her an equal owner of everything. Everything that

I owned! Everything that should've been mine!"

Growling, Ace moved me away from his path and stormed towards him.

Arthur's legs stumbled back

as Ace raised his hand. But then, he stopped. A chilling smile tugged up his lips. Stepping closer to him,

he fixed his orange jumpsuit a little at his shoulders and looked directly into his eyes.

"You know, you're right. I'm a slave of my Rosebud, she owns me. So I can't be mad at you for that."

He cocked his head. "But you're wrong about one thing. The Valencian empire isn't yours. It was just a mere company in my father's hand. I'm the one who made it an empire. It was my hard work. And about your right, the luxury I provided you is worth much more than you actually would have gotten from grandfather's property."

Arthur stayed silent. But the gritting of his teeth was an evidence of how much he wanted to disagree.

Suddenly a dizziness hit me again, causing me to walk up close to Ace. But I didn't interrupt him.

Instead, I took deep breaths to keep the nauseous that was rising up my throat.

Leaning in, he whispered in Arthur's ear. But loud enough for me to hear everything.

"And you and I both know you can't get out of here. Soon you'll be sent to the solitary confinement."

A malicious smirk tugged on his lips. "And you know what can happen to you behind the closed doors, don't you? So I'd be very careful with my tongue and hands if I were you."

The color of Arthur's face drained. With wide eyes, he watched Ace in horror.

"Y-you can't do that to me! I won't let you!"

I grimaced at the feeling in my stomach. The world around me started to spin.

Stepping back from him, Ace wrapped a hand around my waist. "I can and I will. You've seen my respect for you these years, and now you'll see my enmity. You should've thought ten times before you joined hands with Antonio and decided to go against me and tried to hurt my Rosebud. You did what you wanted, now you suffer the consequences. May God send you to hell. Goodbye, Arthur."

"No! You can't do that..."

Not being able to contain it anymore, I clutched my stomach, hunched forward and threw up.

"Shit! Rosebud! Are you alright, baby?" Wrapping his arms around my shoulders, he pulled my hair back as the cops and Arthur jumped back from my puke.

"What the fuck!" Arthur screeched.

Looking up with watery vision, I found his legs covered with yellowish substances. A look of disgust twisted his features.

"Rosebud, baby, are you alright? What's wrong?" Ace's concerned voice sounded distant in my ears.

Everything around me got blurred.

The black dots across my vision and the foul stench of vomit made me throw up again, before I slumped into Ace as darkness slowly engulfed me.

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The next time I regained my senses, I found myself in a hospital bed with him tightly gripping my hand in his. The smell of bleach and white walls of the hospital room surrounded me.

"Rosebud?" Shooting up to his feet from the chair, he came up and sat beside me. "Thank God, you're awake. I was going crazy thinking why it was taking you so long to open your eyes."

"Ace..." The foul taste in my mouth made my stomach clench. "Water," I croaked.

He didn't waste a second before filling up a glass from the water jug that rested on the side table.

"Here, be careful," cautioning me, he helped me sit up and held the glass against my lips. I drank it greedily, quenching my parched throat.

Then memories of my visiting Arthur in the jail and then throwing up on him before fainting into Ace's arms flooded into my mind.

As much as I wanted to laugh remembering his face when I threw up on him, I was confused about my getting ill all of a sudden.

"How are you feeling now, Rosebud? Do you still feel dizziness or nauseous?" he asked, his tone still held alert and concern.

I shook my head, giving him the empty glass back. "I'm fine now. I don't know what happened. All of a

sudden the world around me began to spin and then I had this intense urge to puke."

He suddenly got abnormally quiet as he placed the glass back on the table. Stormy grey eyes were anxious.

There weren't any doctors or nurses around. We were alone in the room.

"What happened? What did the doctor say? Did I have food poisoning?" I frowned.

It could be, considering the amount of food I had last night.

He didn't say anything. Instead, leaning in, he kissed my forehead. "You should take some rest now.

We can talk later."

My frown deepened. "I don't need rest. I'm fine now. You can tell me what the doctor said. Is it something serious?"

Nervousness now started to rattle inside me. Was there something wrong?

"Of course not, baby. Everything is alright. It's just..." he trailed off, clearing his throat. "It's just..."

"It's just what?" I probed, getting restless.

"The doctor said you..."

"Good afternoon, Ms. Hutton! You're finally up I see!" A lady in her early thirties strolled inside the room flaunting a white coat on. Flashing a blinding smile, she stood beside my bed. "Your man here was literally threatening to close this hospital down if you we didn't bring your senses back soon.

Anyways, how are you feeling now?"

Cracking up a small smile, I nodded my head. "I'm good."

"Great! I'm doctor Hazel, by the way. A close acquaintance of Mr. Valencian." Glancing at Ace, she checked my nerves while my smile threatened to fall.

So at the end he brought me to Leyla's friend, didn't he?

After my nerves, she checked my eyes. "You're good to leave I think. I thought you'd have to stay here

for at least a day, but you seem to be alright now. Be careful though, at this early stage, you'll have to

be very careful at least for the first three months. No traveling or taking too much stress. I'll prescribe

you some meds that you'll have to continue for a week."

"Wait, I'm sorry but I'm a bit lost here. What are you talking about? Why should I be very careful for three months? What happened to me?"

She raised a brow before casting a glance at Ace, who shifted on his place uncomfortably.

"Oh, I thought Mr. Valencian already informed you," she said, before showing her white teeth at me again. "But no worries, let me give you the good news. Congratulations, Ms. Hutton! You're pregnant!"

I stilled. With my eyes wide, mouth agape, I stared at her, stunned.

"What?" A whisper left my lips.

She nodded. "Yes. You're two weeks along. Because it's a very early stage, you're facing these morning sickness and dizziness. But don't worry, it'll be gone soon." Still shocked, I looked at Ace who was sitting there very quietly beside me. Grey eyes were closely observing me.

As the doctor left the room, giving us some privacy, not a word was uttered by any of us. We just stared at each other.

'You're pregnant'. Her words were still swirling around my head.

But how was it possible? I never forgot to take the after pills.

Well, these pills were never hundred percent safe. There was always a chance. But I had no choice

other than these as this Greek man never wore a condom every time we made love. He didn't want any barrier between us while he claimed me.

And of course, with the speed we were going since we got together, it was supposed to happen. Even on our vacation, we barely left our hotel.

And now, I'm... pregnant.

I didn't know what to feel about it. I was too confused.

He cleared his throat again, watching me carefully. "What are you thinking?"

"I... I'm surprised. I didn't expect it at all." Subconsciously, I hand went to my stomach.

"Rosebud, look, I know what you must be feeling. Even I didn't expect anything like this so soon. I...I'll

understand if you don't want it. I'll support you whatever your decision will be. Don't feel pressured with anything," he said, giving my hand a light squeeze. I glanced up to his stormy grey eyes, the eyes I was so in love with. They watched me with tenderness and understanding.

My gaze went back to my flat stomach, where a life was growing. A little baby.

Our baby. We made it.

All of a sudden, an intense emotion surged through my chest. The sudden feel of love and the urge to protect this baby surprised me.

With hesitation, I ran my hand over my still flat tummy.

I looked up at him again. Though he said he'd support me if I didn't want it, it didn't go unnoticed by me how his gaze followed the movement of my hand. How his hands twitched, as if he wanted to run

his hand over my stomach. And his eyes, they held... longing.

My heart clenched for him. He longed for a family for half of his life. He always wanted a happy family which he never had.

And I'll give it to him. I'll give him everything he ever wanted, every happiness he always deserved.

Taking his hand, I placed it on my stomach.

His gaze snapped up to mine, watching me in confusion.

Smiling, I nodded, my vision burned with tears. Tears of happiness. "It's our baby. I can never give up on it. We'll keep him, or her."

"Are you- sure?" His voice came out uncertain.

"Yes!"

Letting out a shaky breath, he pulled me into him and slammed his lips against mine.

Wrapping my arms around my neck, I kissed him back, eagerly. The intensity and passion his kiss radiated, told me the love and appreciation he had for me.

Pulling away, he rested his forehead against mine, peering into my soul.

"Rosebud...you don't know

what you said. You've already given me everything I've ever wanted, you, and now, you're making my

world complete by giving me a family. A family where there will be you, I and our baby. Thank you so much, I...I can't express how grateful I'm. I love you so fucking much!" Grinning, I kissed his lips again. "I love you too!" He smiled. But it was a different one. There was a light glinting in his eyes, light of felicity and love. Leaning down, he ran his hand over my tummy lovingly before showering kisses all over my stomach. A giggle escaped my lips as I watched him spooning my belly as if he was already holding the baby in his arms. Never had anyone saw this side of Achilles Valencian. So soft and doting. Only I got the luck to watch him like this. And now our baby will experience this rare moment too. "We made it," he whispered, looking up at me with a gleaming gaze. I nodded, smiling as brightly. "I can't wait to tell everyone. Mom and Dad will be ecstatic." Agreeing, he got back to me, pulling me into his arms, pecking my temple. "I know. Let's invite them to dinner and share the news with them." "Great! I'll call them right now!" When I reached for my phone, he grabbed my hand. "Let's go home first." "Alright." I smiled. I was so confused and shocked when Hazel gave me the news. And now, I was so excited to share this with everyone that I could barely keep my hands away from my phone to call them and give them the good news. I never thought I'd be that happy when I'd be pregnant. The thought of giving birth to a baby always had me shuddering. It still did when I thought about the labour pain. But that was nine months later. Right now, the only thing I wanted to think about was our baby. Once the doctor gave us the prescription, Ace helped me freshen up and then got me ready for home. Through the whole car ride he kept my hand in his and showered kisses time to time. I never saw him that happy. And that only added more content to my heart.

Once reaching the penthouse, he opened the door for us, letting me walk in first.

Padding inside, I threw my purse on the couch and turned on the switches. Every corner of the hall lit up with bright lights, overtaking the darkness.

I think some fairy lights would look good around the window frame at night. Maybe I'd put some in our bedroom too.

"Ace, I was thinking of getting some fairy lights..."

Turning around, my words got caught at my throat at the sight before me.

Achilles Valencian was on his knees right in front of me, with the most beautiful ring in his hand.

A gasp left my mouth.

"Ace?" I whispered, eyes still lingered on the ring.

It was a simple platinum ring with a gorgeous blue round diamond sitting proudly in the middle. The tiny sparkling diamonds that surrounded it only made it more marvelous.

"I couldn't wait any longer, Rosebud. I thought to give you a beautiful surprise first before going to my knees before you. But..." Gulping, he shook his head. "I couldn't wait that long. I needed to see my ring on your finger right now. So, my beautiful rose, will you do the honor of marrying me and make me the happiest man on earth?"

I was surprised for the second time in the day. And I didn't know which one was more surprising.

Getting pregnant or having the man I loved with everything I had asking my hand for marriage.

"I know I didn't deliver some unique lines to make it more special. But Rosebud, what I feel for you

can't be explained with words, nor can be expressed with acts. Nothing will be enough to justify the

endless love I have for you," his said in his deep voice, grey eyes watching me with an intense look

that always managed to speed up the rate of my heart. "I'm obsessed with you Rosebud, I'm

possessed by you, I've been all my life and I'll be till the last breath I take. Sometimes I've to hold

myself back from losing my control and keep you all to myself so that I can have you in my arms all the time. But not to scare you away, I always suppress my urges. You'd think I'm crazy, but it's how I am. I'm crazy for you, my rose. From the day you asked me to marry you on your ninth birthday, I've been dreaming of our marriage. I've been waiting since. I've waited for so long. But I can't anymore. Without you, my life is incomplete. I'm nothing. I want to make you mine forever. I want the world to see who you belong to. So Ms. Emerald Hutton, will you marry me and become Mrs. Valencian? Will you become my other half and spend the rest of your life with this crazy obsessed man of yours?"

Tears rolled down my cheeks as I stood there. His words were like sharp arrows, arrows of love and promises, that hit right into my heart. I had always dreamt of him going onto his knees and proposing to me in my childhood, asking me to become his princess. I never thought my dream would ever come true. But here he was, on his knees, with a gorgeous ring in his hand, asking me to marry him. Not to become his princess, but his queen.

"Rosebud?" he asked, anxiousness etched into his beautiful features. "Will you? Will you marry me?"

Wiping my tears, I flashed him the broadest grin and nodded my head. "Yes! Yes, I will marry you!"

A breathtaking smile spread over his face as he let out a sigh of relief. Moisture glistened into his grey eyes making my heart tug.

Taking my left hand, he slipped the ring into my ring finger and stood up on his legs before pulling me into his chest and capturing my lips with his.

"Thank you so much, my rose. You gave me everything I ever wanted. I couldn't ask for more. Thank you so much, baby!" Murmuring against my lips, he took my mouth into a hungry kiss again, making my knees weak.

Without breaking the kiss, he lifted me up and spun us around, making me laugh against his mouth.

"What are you doing? Put me down!"

Happiness bloomed into my heart as he peppered kisses all over my face, clutching me tight to his chest. Letting out a sigh, I leaned into him once he put me down on my feet.

I watched the ring that shone on my finger.

"You liked it?" he asked, tucking a strand behind my ear.

I nodded, looking up at him through my lashes, suddenly getting all shy. Heat crept up my cheeks.

I was his fiancee now.

Even the thought of marrying him made me feel all giddy.

"It's beautiful."

Cupping my chin, he made our gazes lock. "Not more than you."

Biting my lip, I looked down, hiding my face into his chest. His chuckle sounded musical to my ears.

Wrapping his hand around my neck in a possessive grip, he made me look up at him again as he

captured my mouth again into his usual demanding kiss.

"You're mine now. In every way possible." The deep dominant yet husky voice of his sent a shiver through my entire being.

"And you're mine," I whispered, biting into his lower lip, clutching his collar into my fists.

"All yours, baby. Always and forever."

I peered into those stormy grey eyes as I felt our souls getting entangled just like our breathing at the moment. I found myself getting lost into those dark pools and I never wanted to look away.

"I love you so much, my rose." He kissed my forehead as I closed my eyes, letting out a sigh. My heart filled with content and bliss.

"I love you too. Always and forever."

The End

So this is the end, guys! I'm really going to miss writing about them! But at least I'm happy that our

#emilles/ #EmAce got their happy ending! It was an amazing journey with you all, my sweet pumpkins!

Thank you so much for all the support and love you have given to our Ace and his rosebud. You'll see

them soon in the bonus chapter and maybe in the next books of this series (if I get any new idea, lol!).  
I'll see you soon with my new book! Till then, stay safe and be happy!  
And yes, if you want to read the new version of 'The Game Of Chase' with extra scenes and information, go to Goodnovel! I've published the new version over there!  
Hope you like it!  
Love ya all!  
With love,  
Eva Zahan.

The Trap Of Ace

Bonus chapter

« Previous

Dragging myself out of the car with some struggles, I got out the box and looked up at the enormous glass building towering before me.

EMERALD ENTERPRISES was written in bold red letters at the top.

A goofy smile tugged up my lips. With the warmth that surged through my chest, emotional tears burned my eyes.

Valencian Corp's new branch, which he opened with my name. It was his gift for me on my birthday, passed just last week.

Rolling my eyes, I let out a breath through my lips.

I was getting sentimental again.

Shaking my head, I closed the car door behind me with a thud and dawdled inside.

Once in, my eyes took in the interior. As fancy and elegant as I remembered from a week ago. Though

there weren't many people working here that day. But today, the way everyone was at their best speed, it seemed like they were working here for years.

I padded closer to the reception, where a girl in her early twenties, with dark curly hair and tall height

typed away furiously on her keyboard, eyes on the computer screen.

"Uh, hi!" Letting out a puff, I said. Only some steps and here I was, panting and sweating.

She looked up at me, then her blue eyes slid to the rest of my body, halting at my huge belly that I

tried my best to cover with my jeans jacket over my white sundress.

"How may I help you?" A perfectly shaped brow of her arched.

I smiled. "Can you please check if Mr. Valencian is free at the moment? I brought lunch for him."

Now both of her brows raised to her hairline, taking another once over at me. "May I ask who you are?"

And why would I let you in the boss' office with this box? Do you have an appointment?"

I knew what she must be seeing. A red faced sweating, pregnant woman whom she didn't know was

requesting to see her boss. As a new employee, she didn't know me.

Even if I understood that, I didn't appreciate her judging looks.

"I'm Emerald Valencian. I made lunch for my husband and would like to feed him these foods if you

would kindly tell me if he's busy." My voice came out sarcastic even though I didn't want to. Her

attitude was pissing me off.

Calm down, Em! Calm down!

At my answer, she seemed taken aback. Wide wide eyes, she typed something on her computer and

then glanced up at me again; the color of her face drained.

"Uh, i- I'm so sorry, Ma'am, I didn't recognize you. I just saw your picture... uh, I apologise for my

behavior, sure, Mr. Valencian is free now. You can go and see him."

Wiping the perspiration off her forehead, she offered me her best smile.

I nodded. "Thanks. Just be a little nicer to people next time."

"Y-yes, of course, Mrs. Valencian. It won't happen again," she stuttered.

Even she was aware of the

judging looks she was throwing me. "I'm sorry again."

Flashing a small smile, I turned around and walked away.

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Knocking on the door, I waited, rubbing my tummy. The smile was ear splitting on my face.

"Come in!" His deep Greek accent grumbled from the other side of the door.

A sigh left me.

Even if he just left home this morning, I already missed him so much.

And I was the one who literally

threw him out of home to go and take care of his work, because since he got to know that he

impregnated me, for the second time, he barely left my side.

Pushing the door open, I padded inside before locking it behind.

"Yes?" he asked in a very cold voice, without looking up, too busy with signing on files. An adorable

frown was etched between his brows.

"I got lunch for you, Mr. Valencian. Thought you would be hungry," I said, making his gaze snap up to

me.

Surprise flashed across those stormy grey orbs, and it didn't take long for the softness to appear in

those hard eyes.

"Rosebud?" Standing up, he strode to me, immediately taking me into his warmth. "What are you

doing here? You didn't tell me you were coming."

I kissed his cheek. "I wanted to surprise you. See, I got you home made food."

He looked at the box in my hand and then back to my face. Pressing his lips together, he got out his

handkerchief and dabbed it on my forehead.

"Didn't I tell you to stay home and rest? You have exhausted yourself!"

I pouted. "I'm fine! Aren't you happy that I'm here? I made these foods for you with my own hands!"

Sighing, he pressed a kiss on my forehead, brushing away some strayed strands. "You know my eyes

crave to see you around me every second of the day. But you're eight months along, baby, you

shouldn't exert yourself much. But now that you're already here, let's eat, I'm starving to eat the food

my wife made for me."

The grin reappeared on my face as I nodded my head and dragged him to the couch.

"Oomph!" Slapping at his chest, I tried to move away from his hungry mouth from mine. "You're

supposed to eat lunch, not me!"

"I'm just expressing my appreciation to my wife who made my favorite dishes specially for me, with

her own hands," he rasped against my jaw, pulling me back on his lap when I tried to move away.

Seriously. In pregnancy, I should be the always horny one here, which I was, most of the time, but it never surpassed his lust for me. Where I would get tired after making love once at night, he would be all set to ravish me all night long. Even after waking up, I would find him seducing me. As much as I loved it, it leaves me sore and sleepy all day. He wouldn't let me work because I would exert myself too much that way, but he wouldn't mind to tire me out with pleasure. Nine years of marriage, and here we were, still behaving like newly mated rabbits. He would be at fault mostly. Seriously, half of the day he would spend his time thinking about sex! At his burning touches on my inner thighs, I bit back a moan and slid off his lap. "Show me your appreciation later. Let's eat now. I'm hungry. Your child needs food," I complained, roaming my hand over my huge bump. As much as I loved the little one inside, I hated that I looked like a cow now. But he didn't seem to mind at all. In fact, weirdly, he keeps saying that seeing me pregnant with his kid only turned him on. It boosted his ego, because he could show the world that I was his. I rolled my eyes in my head. What would I do with this man? At the mention of the baby, he sobered up from his lust. Placing a hand on my bump, he caressed it gently. A look of felicity shone into his eyes. "Right. Daddy is sorry for keeping Mommy busy. The food is on the way, little one," saying, he kissed my belly, then pecked my lips again before starting to serve the food on our plates. "Here, let's feed your mommy."

Roasted chicken, creamy Alfredo pasta, mashed potatoes and some veggies were scattered across our plates. I wanted to make some garlic shrimps, but recently I started to dislike the taste of shrimp. So I just opted for chicken instead. "How's it?" I asked, once he put the pasta in his mouth.

Chewing, he put some pasta into his fork and held it against my mouth. Which I gladly accepted.

"My Rosebud made them for me, how could it not be good?" Taking my hand in his, he kissed my knuckles. "These hands have magic. Just like every part of your body." My eyes widened. Blood rushed to my cheeks as he let out a chuckle. I shook my head. "Concentrate on the food, will you? And they're not that good. Just fine."

"All of them taste amazing, baby. Especially the pasta. I love it." Still keeping my left hand in his, he went for another spoonful, letting out a moan. "Thank you for this, honey."

And this brought a smile on my face.

As usual, most of the cooking was done by him in our home. I would just sit there for him to feed me.

It was just on some occasions I cooked. It was just not my thing. But still, I made him and Archer

something from time to time. Archer, my eight years old son, who was currently at his school.

Remembering his school...

"We need to go to Archer's school, you remember that, right? We have a meeting with his teacher about him joining the football team," I said, chewing on the chicken. He nodded. "Of course, how can I forget that? We'll go there after we're done with your check up."

"I've an appointment today?" I blinked. I forgot again?

Damn, I didn't know pregnancy hormones could make you forget things so easily. I wouldn't have remembered about Archer's school either if I didn't get a call from his teacher just an hour ago.

He chuckled, eyes amused. "Yes, Rosebud. You've an appointment today. And we've to leave in half an hour. I was about to pick you up from home, but since you're here, I'll just call Judy to send your reports from last month with the driver."

Judy was our house help, a middle aged kind lady whom he hired to take care of me whenever he wasn't home.

Nodding, I went back to the food.

Once we were done with the lunch, we cuddled on his couch for a while until it was time to leave for my regular check-up. So when the driver got me my medical reports, we headed to the hospital.

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"Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Valencian, please have a seat. The doctor will see you in a few. She's on an important phone call," said the nurse, ushering us to wait in the waiting room.

"She should be doing her job instead of attending her phone calls. Did she forget that she has an appointment with my wife?" Ace shot a glare at the poor nurse, making her fidget in her place.

"Uh, I- i'm extremely sorry for the inconvenience, Mr. Valencian. It's an emergency. She needs to attend the phone call," she stuttered, casting me a glance that asked for help.

I put a hand on his shoulder. "Ace, it's alright. She'll just take some minutes. We can wait."

Pressing his lips, he gave a curt nod to the nurse, dismissing her. And she didn't take a second to flee away.

I shook my head. "You didn't need to be rude."

"I don't tolerate any carelessness when it comes to you." Tone strict. Smiling, I caressed his cheek, standing closer. His arm wrapped around my waist. "No need to be so grumpy. I'm just fine."

"Yeah, anyway, you want anything? Juice?"

"Orange." I beamed. I was just craving it since we left his office.

"Alright, I'll be back with it in a minute. Stay here." Placing a kiss on my forehead, he strode away.

Sighing, I took a seat. Another pregnant woman with strawberry blonde hair and freckles on her cheeks sat beside me.

"How long?" I asked, offering her a smile.

"Five months and two weeks," she replied politely. "What about you? Seven, eight?"

My brows raised in surprise. "It's eight, how did you guess?"

A smile tugged up her lips. "I'm a midwife."

"Oh, that's great. You must not need anyone's guide in your pregnancy then!" I joked.

Laughing, she shook her head. "Sometimes it helps. Though my fiance still insists on having a doctor's guideline."

"He's right though. Even the doctors go to another doctor about their health issues," I said. "My name is Emerald, by the way, Emerald Valencian."

I offered my hand for a handshake, but the only thing she did was watch me with wide eyes.

At my raised brow, she asked, "You're... are you by any chance the famous fashion designer, Emerald Hutton, who's now married to Achilles Valencian?"

My cheeks warmed. "Yes, I'm the same Emerald Hutton."

"Oh, I'm a fan of your designs! I never miss any displays of your brand," she gushed, watching me with her eyes sparkling with awe.

Though I was proud of the name I gained in the market, I was never good at facing the fame.

I had started my own clothing outlet after Archer's birth. In between the pregnancy and marriage, I

didn't get any time to think about this particular dream of mine, until Ace gifted me the studio in our

house at our first anniversary where I now worked on my designs. And from then, I didn't stop. Even

now, through my second pregnancy, I did my work as much as I could.

"Uh, thanks. I'm glad you liked them," I said, shifting awkwardly.

She smiled softly, still watching me. I had a feeling she wanted to say something else to me, but

decided against it as she looked away.

"Oh, here you are! I'm so sorry, I'm late, honey! I was stuck in the traffic," a familiar voice spoke out

as a man approached the woman beside me.

He halted in his tracks the moment his gaze fell on me.

My lips parted in shock.

It's been years since I last saw him.

"E-emerald?" Brown eyes were wide.

"Hello, Warner." My voice came out tight.

The last time I saw him was at the police station. After that night, Ace handed him over to the police

for trying to force himself on me. And as much as that night managed to send a shiver down my spine for months after that, I pressed down on my grudge against him and thought rationally. Yes, what he did was wrong, but he was drunk at that moment. Not that it gave him any excuse to do that to me, but I decided to let things end and requested Ace to withdraw his complaint.

Even I did wrong to him, though it was nothing compared to the deed he tried to do. But for the sake of our years of friendship, I decided to let him out after fifteen days of his jail, much to Ace's dismay.

He wanted him to rot behind the bars forever.

Even though he apologized for his actions endlessly, I had told him to stay away from me and not to try to reach out in any way.

But here he was today, probably with his fiance. I just hoped Ace wouldn't see him here.

The woman beside me stood up and he rushed to her side immediately, before turning to me again.

Glancing at my bump, a soft smile etched on his face.

"How are you doing, Em... I mean, Emerald." He cleared his throat awkwardly.

I nodded. "Good."

I didn't say anything else as he fidgeted in his place. "And... Achilles?" "Great."

"This is my fiance, Sarah," he said, making that woman smile at me. The look in her eyes told me she knew more than just about my designs.

"Hi, I- uh, I wanted to introduce you myself, but I didn't know how you would react. Warner told me so much about you that I feel like I know you for years!"

My eyes cut Warner. "Then he must have told you the reason behind our distance now?"

Guilt flashed over his eyes as he looked down in shame. Sarah squeezed his hand.

"Yes, he told me everything." Her voice came out soft. "You don't know what guilt he was going through for years. He still curses that night. I can't say he deserves your forgiveness, but he's

extremely sorry, Emerald. Nothing can justify his act, but it was not him. The alcohol, the anger, the jealousy and his heartbreak made him react like that. You knew him for years, he isn't that person."

"I'm so sorry, Em!" Warner took a step forward, eyes pleading. "I know you hate me. But please, maybe for the sake of the friendship we had, forgive me? I don't want any place in your life again, I lost the right to be your friend again, but at least say that you forgave me. It'll be easier to live thinking that my best doesn't hate me anymore."

Something clenched in my heart. The burn in my eyes made me look away. Even after the hatred, I had missed his presence in my life. He was my best friend after all. Even deep down, I knew he wasn't the person I met that night.

But sometimes, if a relationship is broken, it can't be fixed. So we better stay away from each other.

"I know that wasn't you, Warner. That's why I made Ace let you out of jail. Honestly, I don't really hate you, I never did. But yes," I looked at him in the eye, "the hurt you gave me that night, I can't forget it so easily. Yes, I can forgive you for that night. It's been years after all. But don't expect me to be all nice and friends with you. We'll be the way we have been for years."

When I said I would forgive him, a light of hope had lit in his eyes. But as soon as I finished my talk, it died down.

"Em..." He let out a sigh before nodding. "Thank you. At least I'll get your forgiveness. But I will always hope that maybe someday, we could be friends again."

"Maybe." Glancing at Sarah, I flashed a small smile. "All the best for your future."

"Thanks," she nodded as a small smile tugged up Warner's lips.

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When the car screeched to a halt, I looked out of the window. School hours were over. So most of the kids were out in the playground, running and skipping around.

Some were leaving with their respective parents.

"Don't you think joining the football team will add more pressure on his shoulders? He already has his studies and swimming lessons to take care of," Ace grumbled for the third time since our son informed us that he was taking a part in the football team. I smiled. "Don't worry, he can take care of all of them." I was thankful that Warner and Sarah left for their turn for check up before Ace showed up. Otherwise I was sure Warner wouldn't be going home today, which was now in this city, he would be on the hospital bed instead. He gave a slow nod. "He's my son after all." Only his son? I raised my brow. "I didn't remember it was you who gave birth to him." A husky chuckle reverberated through his chest. Leaning in, he brushed his lips against mine. "Yeah, but I was the one who made you pregnant." Letting out a huff, I scrambled out of the car. "Yeah, but I was the one who carried him for nine months in my womb and gave birth to him. So he's my son." Rounding the car, he strode to me, wrapping a possessive arm around me. "Our son." And that broke out a grin on my face. "Let's go and meet his teacher now. He must be waiting for us." Nodding my head, I let him guide me into the school where we met Archer's teacher, with Archer present in the office. "Don't worry at all, Mr. Valencian. He's very good at whatever he does, be it studies, swimming or football. I'm sure he can manage it all without hampering his studies," assured Mr. Devaski from the other side of his desk. "We know that. But still, we don't want to place much pressure on him, you know? He's just a kid," I said, glancing at our son, who stood straight beside the desk. At my addressing him as a 'kid', an almost non visible crease formed between his brows. I bit back my smile. At just eight, he was much more mature and quiet than most of the kids of his age. To say, he was just

like his father. He liked to keep to himself, wouldn't share any of his thoughts unless it was necessary and tends to observe everything quietly. Not only did he have his father's characteristics, he got his looks too. Same dark hair, grey eyes and facial features. But when Ace had stormy grey eyes, his were slightly smoldering.

I sometimes feared that he was missing out his childhood due to his being serious most of the time.

He didn't even have many friends other than Raphael, Tess and Caleb's son and Calvin, another boy in his class. That was it.

"Rest assured, Mrs. Valencian, we'll be making sure we don't give him much load," Mr. Devaski said.

"Good, make sure to stick to your words. I don't want my son to suffer in any way," Ace warned, pinning the middle-aged man with his sharp gaze.

That poor man fidgeted on his chair, clearing his throat. "Sure, Mr. Valencian. Don't worry about that."

Ace gave a curt nod. "Anyways, how's his studies going? I hope he's on his best behavior?"

Archer sneaked a glance at his father, not saying a word.

Mr. Devaski laughed. "Oh, his studies are good. He's a genius in every subject. His behavior is also good, except..." he drawled out, casting a look at Archer.

"Except?" Ace tilted his head.

"Except the occasional glares he sends to his teachers." He let out an awkward laughter as Archer did

the same thing he was accused of. His narrowed eyes fixed on Mr. Devaski. "But it's alright. Kids can have tantrums sometimes. I can understand."

My eyes widened. "Archer? Is that true?"

He didn't say anything, just removed his gaze from his teacher. His posture was too proud to be sorry for his behavior at all.

"Young man?" At Ace' voice, he turned to his father, as obedient as ever. I got jealous of Ace sometimes that he had more control over our son than I had. But at least Archer respected and feared his father which was good.

"What am I hearing? Is it true? If it is, then may I know the reason for your behavior?"

Mr. Devaski watched Archer from behind his glasses that fell in the middle of his nose.

"They waste my time asking irrational questions," was his short answer, tone polite.

Ace nodded. "Then it's understandable," saying, he stood up, buttoning up his coat. My mouth fell

open at this. "You have anything else to say Mr. Devaski?"

That poor man closed his mouth that opened followed by mine at Ace's response, and nodded his head.

"N-no, Mr. Valencian. That was all. Hope to see you soon at our annual sports day."

Giving a curt nod, Ace wrapped an arm around me and ushered us outside; Archer followed closely behind.

Once outside, I shrugged his arm away and stomped inside the car. After they piled in, I glared at both

of them. Both of them didn't meet my eye.

"Then it's understandable? Really Ace? How come that is understandable? He can't be just rude to his teachers!" I fumed, placing a hand on my stomach.

I didn't say anything before Mr. Devaski to avoid creating a scene. But I just couldn't let it go.

"Relax, Rosebud. Don't worry, he won't be rude to them anymore," saying, he grabbed my hand. But I snatched it away, making him grimace.

"I don't mean to be rude. But they always ask stupid questions and talk like I'm a two years old kid

who doesn't know anything," Archer grunted from the back seat.

"They're your teachers. They do what's best for you. So don't say like they're stupid. They know what they're doing." My tone came out hard.

"But..."

"Archer," warned Ace, sending a sharp look through the rearview mirror.

"Apologize to your mother.

Didn't I tell you not to talk back with her? If it's your mistake, then apologize. Don't argue."

He went quiet, before mumbling, "I'm sorry."

I looked out of the window, still mad at his behavior. He even didn't go along with the other kids in his class. In his opinion, they were too annoying for his liking. When I didn't say anything, a small hand caught my wrist softly. Turning around, I found his smoldering grey eyes watching me in hope that I would forgive him. "I'm sorry, Mom. It won't happen again."

A sigh left me. How could I stay mad at him for so long when he would look at me with these eyes?

"I'm sorry too," said his father. "Are we forgiven?"

At this, a smile curved up my mouth. "Yes, but make sure not to repeat it, Archer." Then I looked at

my man. "And you too, don't encourage him with his mistakes."

"Done. Thank you, baby. Let's go now." Kissing my hand, he ruffled Archer's hair which he didn't appreciate at all, before driving off.

Sighing, I leaned back against the seat. Though I let this matter go for now, I'd have to talk to both of them about it, especially Ace. Archer's behavior worried me.

I just wanted him to be more carefree, to be playful just like the other kids at his age.

At a squeeze on my hand, I glanced at Ace. His dark eyes met mine.

"I'm starving. I hope you're ready to feed me," he said, in his deep husky voice which sent a shiver

down my spine. I very well knew which hunger he was talking about.

My eyes went to the mirror where our son was sitting quietly, watching the passing road, unaware of

his father's double meaning and with a too proud stance to say that he wasn't feeling even a little

guilty of his glaring at his teachers.

I shook my head.

I didn't know what I would do with these two stubborn Valencian men.

They got on my nerves sometimes. But then, they were the best things that ever happened to me.

And I loved them with everything I had.