

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 31

When I was outside of his cabin, the door was slightly ajar. Voices were coming out through the gap.

As I raised my hand to knock, I heard him.

"I'm glad you took care of the police regarding the drug case when I was... busy. Thank you, Arthur. I knew you'd handle them well."

"You don't need to thank me, Achilles. I myself wanted to sort everything out with them as soon as possible. Because I know how you and Caleb don't do that well with the... law." Came Arthur's voice.

"The more they stay away from us, the better."

A crease formed between my brows. Ace and Caleb had problems dealing with police and law? Why?

"But we have to do something to stop Antonio. Because the way he's adamant to dig up our past, I'm afraid if he gets his hand on something..."

"He won't!" Caleb was cut off by Ace's sharp voice. "People don't get anything out of ashes."

Everything went silent for a moment, until Ace cleared his throat and spoke again, "Don't worry about

him. I will handle him myself." His voice dripped with venom.

What do they have in their past that Antonio wants to find out so badly?

Not wanting to be caught eavesdropping, I knocked on the door and stepped inside.

All three pairs of eyes fell on me.

Caleb flashed me a warm smile when Ace's hard gaze softened up to a friction.

"Hello, Emerald. How are you?" Arthur asked with a polite smile. The smile that never reached his eyes.

What're you up to with Sierra?

I wanted to ask. But instead, I returned his fake greeting, plastering a smile as well. "I'm good, Arthur.

Thank you."

"Rosebud? What're you doing here?" Striding closer, he placed a hand on my waist. Grey eyes waited for my reply.

Couldn't this man keep his hands to himself?

With flushed cheeks, I threw glances at Caleb and Arthur. While Caleb hid a simper, Arthur wore a blank face.

"Uh, I've come to call you for the meeting. It's about to start."

His lips pressed tight. "Where is Carter? He sent you here instead of doing his job himself?"

I rolled my eyes. "He's busy. That's why he sent me. It's not a big deal."

"Of course, it is! He doesn't order you to do anything, it's the other way around!"

I frowned. "He didn't order me. He requested me. And what do you mean? How come I can order him around? As far as I know, he's my senior. So technically, he can order me to do something."

If possible, his features twisted more as he watched me, frown deeper.

Caleb coughed into his hand. "Uh, let us go to the conference room, everyone must be waiting for us.

Don't take much long." Nodding at Ace, he walked outside, dragging Arthur along.

Though the tick of Arthur's jaw didn't go missed.

What got him breaking his teeth now?

Turning to Ace, I raised my brow, placing my hands on my hips. Damn this man! Due to his towering height, I felt like a toddler looking up at a pillar.

"Well?" I urged for my answer.

"He can't order his boss' girl, now can he?"

My eyes widened at his remark. With still a furrowed forehead, he pulled me closer. "And he has to

answer for that. Now we're getting late for the meeting, let's go."

I didn't argue after that as he led me out of his cabin. No matter how many times he'd declared his claim on me openly, I still managed to get shocked and all fuzzy whenever he did that.

Instead of getting irritated, I get... well, dumbfounded.

I eyed Mr. Johnson as he fidgeted in his place beside the head of the table. Well, it should've been my

position to sit right beside the chair of Ace's. But I insisted him to swap our seats today.

On our way to the conference room, Ace had to attend an urgent phone call, and I took that situation to flee from his clutch and arranged a new chair for myself. Far away from him. At the end of the table.

Why did I do it? Well, because his close proximity didn't let me think straight. And I needed to stay tight on my decision. I didn't want to sway by his stormy grey eyes. I averted my gaze when Mr. Johnson spared me another uncertain glance. Poor man! But someone had to be the scapegoat. And I wouldn't be the one today for sure. When the door opened and walked in his majesty, his already crinkled brows creased more the moment his eyes fell on my supposed to be chair. Sharp jaw ticked as he froze Mr. Johnson with his icy glare.

Everyone stood up at the respect of the king, except me. I just sat there with my arms crossed over my chest.

Caleb bit his lip, shaking his head at me in amusement. Tobias beside me raised a quearing brow at me. While Arthur didn't seem to be pleased at the situation at all, checking his phone again and again.

"Be seated, everyone. And Mr. Johnson, I'd like you to return to your usual place," said Ace as he settled over his chair, casting me a look.

While everyone took their seats back, Mr. Johnson still stood there with his petite height, unsure of what to do. He threw me another helpless look, but again, I tore my eyes away.

"Uh, actually, Mr. Valencian, Ms. Hutton requested me to..."

"I don't like to repeat myself twice, Mr. Johnson. You very much know who seats here in every meeting. So go and sit in your own place. Everyone is waiting for the meeting to start."

At his sharp tone, Mr. Johnson scurried away from my seat and rounded up the table, standing beside

me. His expression was pained, sneaking a glance at the displeased king.

"Ms. Hutton, as you heard what Mr. Valencian said, uh, could you please go back to your chair?" His

request was humble, aged brown eyes pleading.
Everyone's gaze was set on me, waiting for my adamant ass to move.
Can't I even sit somewhere of my own choice?
Caleb threw a helpless shrug and my brother literally turned away from me. I let out a huff. Scowling
at the king, whose hawk eyes were set on me, waiting for me to go near him, I stomped over the chair
beside him and plopped down.
When I was finally in my usual place, his form relaxed. His tensed jaw eased.
And the moment his heady cologne hit my nostrils, the warm fuzzy feeling returned inside me. My
resistance again threatened to fall weak.
But I couldn't just let myself sway so easily.
He nodded to everyone. "The meeting may proceed now."
His beautiful devilish features didn't hold any remorse that he again dictated me with his orders.
Instead, he seemed at total ease now, inching his chair closer to mine. Pressing my lips together, I typed on my phone.
What's wrong with my sitting on some other chair? It's not compulsory to sit beside you always, is it?
His phone buzzed on the table, snatching his attention. With long lean fingers, he picked the phone up
and checked the message. Without giving me any glance, his hand started typing.
My phone vibrated.
A queen's place is always beside her king. Not anywhere else.
My heart skipped at the text. Butterflies erupted in my tummy as heat crept up my cheeks. But not
wanting to show him the effect of his message on me, I managed a stern face as I narrowed my eyes
at him.
This time he did look at me, his gaze roamed slowly all over my face before meeting my eye.
Not being able to hold his intent stare, I turned to the conversation of the meeting. Though my mind
ran to the opposite way.
To him.
His queen?

I bit my lip as I felt the sensation his gaze left as they roamed over me, pouring water to my concentration on the meeting.

That's why I didn't want to sit beside him. His eyes would never leave me during the whole conferences. And the curious stares I got from around the table was a whole another thing.

Irritating man!

Then I remembered that I only had some hours before his given time would be over. Though I knew what my answer was, I didn't think I could give him my answer personally alone with him. He somehow would tamper with my head and change my decision. So again grabbing my phone, I messaged him.

Yes.

My phone beeped.

Yes what? You agree that you should always be beside me?

My eyes widened.

What? No! I meant, yes, I'd go out with you.

After tapping sent, I typed another one hurriedly.

But don't think of it something else. We'll go out together, but just as friends, not as a couple.

His jaw clenched as his eyes hardened. When his gaze snapped up to me, I held it.

Another message.

We both know that we're anything but friends! We're going on an actual date, as a couple. And that's final!

I groaned in my head. God! Why was it so difficult to convince him? I wanted him to agree. That was the only way I could get all my answers. Because now I wanted to know more than what happened seven years ago. I wanted to know more about him, his past, his pains. Everything. And if I didn't go on a date with him, he wouldn't tell a thing to me. And going to a date with him right now wasn't possible for me. Not until I'd everything settled with Warner. And to be honest, going out with him as a couple, scared me. The thought of starting something with him officially had me nervous. The fear of getting hurt held me back.

I needed him to agree. Going out as friends was the only option for me right now.

So I typed.

I will only go anywhere with you if it's just a friendly date, not something else. It's your decision now.

Yes or no.

Putting down the phone, I crossed my fingers on my lap.

Please say yes, please say yes!

I needed my answers!

Grey eyes flashed as they read my message. With vice grip around the phone, he turned it off and put

it down. Not leaving me even a glance, he turned to the meeting.

My heart fell.

What? He won't say anything?

But... I thought he'd argue more. Disappointment filled me as he didn't even look back at me. With his

steely features, he joined the conversation.

He wouldn't take me out with him? Yes as friends, but what's wrong with that? Did he already give

up?

My hands itched to take back my words and surrender to his wishes, but then I decided instead. I

wouldn't move from my decision this time.

Letting out a huff, I turned my body away from him and focused on the meeting, not giving him any

attention. Just like he did for the rest of the hour.

"So you guys aren't going on a date anymore?" asked Beth, over the phone.

"Damn, Em! Why did you stamp that 'as friends' mark on this? Now you lost all your chances to get

your answers!" Cassie's discontent voice said from the other side of the conference call.

Holding the phone in between my shoulder and ear, I washed my hands in the basin and then dried

them with some tissues.

Walking out of the washroom, I grumbled, "I thought he'd say yes. At least I agreed to go out with him,

right? He should be happy!"

"After you stamped the 'friends' on his face when he wants you more than just friends? I don't think anyone would be happy in his place. And we're talking about Achilles Valencian here."

I could imagine her rolling her blue orbs.

"But he also should understand her situation, right? She needs some time before taking any serious decision about their relationship," argued Beth. Always the sensible one. I nodded my head, as if they could see me.

In the middle of their banter, when I turned to another hallway, I found Arthur outside on the balcony.

With his phone in his ear, he was engrossed into a heavy conversation. With his dark eyes flaming, nostrils flaring, he hissed something into the phone. Due to the glass door between us, his words couldn't reach me.

Who is he talking to in such manner? I've always seen him composed and calm. Not this furious and anxious.

Closing his eyes, he ran his hand through his almost grey locks. And then listening to something the other person said, he slowly nodded and a small smile tugged at the corner of his lips.

A sinister smile.

"Em? You're listening to us?" Cassie's voice called out to me, but my gaze was set on him as he turned at his left and his eyes met mine.

The sinister smile slowly faded and a deadly look took over his features. A shiver ran down my spine.

Not wanting to be there anymore, I walked away down the corridor.

Something was going on in his head. But I couldn't find out what.

But what if I'm just assuming things?

I shook my head. I couldn't decide anything until I talked to Sierra.

"Em? You there?" inquired Beth.

"Yeah!" I cleared my throat. "I'm listening."

"Where were you so lost to? Saw your devil charming again?" Cassie whistled.

A chuckle sneaked my mouth. "No. I wasn't lost to anywhere. Anyways, what were you talking about?"

"I said go and ask him directly. Maybe bat your eyes a little. I'm sure he'll agree. He can't deny his Rosebud. And in that way, you can get your answers also," she suggested.

I sighed. "It's not that easy. He was pretty mad when he read my message. He didn't even look at me after that. I don't think he'd agree."

"Maybe give him a kiss?" Her tone was teasing. Beth chuckled along. "God, no! No kissing! Keep your perverted thoughts to yourself. I'll think of a way out myself!" I said, exasperated.

When they started to argue again, I almost cut the call when my phone buzzed.

My heart did a jump when his name popped up on the screen.

I opened the message. My legs stopped at my track, but my heart started racing to miles.

Be ready tomorrow evening. I'll pick you up at seven sharp.

The sneak peek is already up on my Facebook page!

I've a surprise for you, guys! And if you want to know what that surprise would be, check out the sneak peek! If you didn't visit my page yet, go to my bio. You'll find the link. And don't forget to like my page! Pretty please? ♥

With love,

Eva Zahan.

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Ace's POV

Sweat trickled down my neck to my spine, the thriving heat in my body accelerated my speed, and the hum of zeal flowing through my veins encouraged me to force myself more. Even the cuts on my knuckles didn't stop me from going for another hit into the hard punching bag.

The more pain I got, the more I could keep myself in check. The more my head would concentrate on

my physical agony, and not my heart's desires and... fears.

His brown eyes never left me from the corner of the gym as I worked on my pain and salvation.

Until I didn't get my actual redemption. Her.
"Achilles, stop it. Your knuckles are bleeding! What's wrong with you tonight?" Caleb's voice reached my ears. But the anxiousness of his tone couldn't halt my movements. Intense working out every night to help me sleep and keep myself sane was a routine of my life, but the pain and exhaustion became a necessity for me since I had her in the same city as mine. Not being able to see her and have her into my arms even after her being so close to me, drove me crazy. But not to scare the light of my life away from me by revealing the intensity of the craving I had for her, I had to bind myself back with everything I had. Red stains smudged on the grey punching bag as I went for another fist. "You'll have to meet her tomorrow evening, you remember that, right? What explanations will you have after she asks about the cuts?" And that had me halt my hand in the mid air, going for another shot. My gaze fell onto my wounded knuckles. He was right. She already asked me once. Though those wounds were from showing those bastards their places who tried to hurt my Rosebud. My jaw tightened at the recollection of that night when some vile drunkards followed her, the night she went to rescue her friend not thinking of her own safety. Only I knew how I stopped myself from destroying them to bits for even thinking of harming her. Running my hands through my wet locks, I let out a curse. Frustration and anger raged through me. I was away for just one day from her, and she got herself into trouble. And it wasn't the first time she pulled that kind of stunt, she tended to be careless of her safety even back in NY. If I hadn't put guards after her for her security, I didn't know what nightmare she would bring me to. I wished I could keep her with me twenty four hours, so that I could just hide her into my arms and never let anyone even touch her, let alone hurting her. My fists clenched. Glimpses of that accident that day flashed into my mind. A volcano swirled inside

me to be released.

No one will touch even a strand of you. I promise you that.

"Let me bring the first aid kit, your hands need some bandaging."

"No need. I'm fine."

"But you could get infection if you don't get them treated," he argued, a frown etched between his brows.

While I was just into my workout shorts, he stood there fully dressed with a formal black shirt and grey trousers.

"They won't. I'm used to them." Last time I let someone treat my wounds was my Rosebud. Because she was the only person who could heal me. Just her mere presence was enough for my pain to fade away.

"But..."

He was cut off with a sharp look of mine.

Letting out a sigh, he ran his hands over his face, shoulders slumping in defeat. Concerning about me became his habit for years now. Be it cousin or adopted brother, it seemed he was the older one among us, not me.

Whilst I respected his concern for me, I didn't prefer anyone's meddling into my life.

Unless it's my Rosebud.

I wiped myself with my towel and took some swig from the water bottle. After a moment of watching my movements, he opened his mouth again.

"Do you... do you think this date is a good idea? I mean, once the truth of that night seven years ago comes out, a lot of the past will be at risk."

I tensed at the mention of the past. The past I buried at the furthest corner of my memories.

"I know what I'm doing. She has the right to know everything," I said, gazing out of the window, at the night that matched the color of my past.

His response was hesitant. "You can lose her forever if she finds out the truth, you know that right?"

Something snapped inside me as my whole form turned rigid. But I managed to keep my calm.

"If I don't tell her anything, I won't get her either."

"But once she knows about your..."

A knock on the door interrupted him.

"Come in!"

Poking his head in first, Carter walked inside, a file in his hand. "Hello, boss. I, uh, got some reports on project CA."

Car Accident.

Not losing my cool, I nodded at Caleb. Getting my dismissal, he let out a breath and walked out of the gym, closing the door behind him.

I turned to Carter. "Did you get your hands on that driver yet?"

Averting his gaze, he fidgeted in his place. "Umm, no boss."

My jaw clenched.

"I tried to locate him everywhere I could, but it feels like he just disappeared from the face of the earth. Antonio did good to cover his traces." He added.

I took some deep breath, trying not to lose it. The volcano roared to be released inside me. My hands itched to kill. Kill that bastard who hired that driver to harm me the day I was returning from my new house with Emerald.

Antonio Raymond.

If I was alone in that car, I'd have considered giving him back what he gifted me, but unfortunately for him, my Rosebud was with me.

My fingers dug into the bottle in my hand.

Anything could've happened to my precious rose.

He did many of his little tricks in the past, but this time, he crossed all his limits. He even framed Caleb with... drugs. And the same day I found out that the accident wasn't an actual accident, it was planned.

And that was the line he shouldn't have crossed.

And now, he was going to pay.

I still remembered the way she shook with fear and shock in my arms after that crash. The way she clutched onto me.

Antonio was going to pay for every tear that left my Rosebud's eyes. He was going to regret the day

he took birth in this world.

"Did you get the names of his recent involvements?" My question came out more like a hiss. I

wouldn't get any peace until I crush him like an insect.

He bobbed his head, handing me the file. "Here are their names and backgrounds. But boss, I don't

understand. What will you do with his one night stands? Most of them just stayed with him for money.

They don't share any more relation with him to know about his plans or deeds that you can use

against him." Confusion crossed over his features.

Flipping the pages, I ran my eyes through the lists until one name caught my attention. She was one of

those few who had more than just one night with him. They even went on some dates in the last

month.

Perfect.

I pointed at the specific name. "Call her. Tell her to meet me at my penthouse back at Valencian Corp.

And make sure no one knows about it. Not even Caleb." Giving him a look, I asked. "Am I clear?"

Perplexed, blinking twice he slowly uttered a yes and took the file from me.

"You may go now," I said as my phone buzzed beside my towel.

Nodding, he turned around and strode away.

Grabbing the phone, I read the message.

I felt the corner of my lip stretching up.

You're clear.

Sitting inside my car into the darkness, I waited at the side of the road, awaiting for her signal.

The black cars parked not far away from their main gate had me reassured once again. Though due to

the murk, I couldn't see them. But I knew, they were in there. Watching. Just as I instructed.

The screen of my phone lit up into the darkness.

Time to go.

The door opened, revealing a pair of blue eyes. Ushering me inside with her head, she slowly closed

the door behind me once I stepped in.

Following her, I climbed up the stairs silently.
My heart sped up when we stopped before a pair of doors. Twisting the handle, she opened the barrier between me and my salvation.
My Rosebud.
I took a sharp intake of breath at the view. My beautiful rose curled into a ball with her silk like chestnut locks spread across the pillow. Even in the dimmed light, I didn't miss those luscious lips formed into a slight pout.
"After lots of twists and turns on the bed, she finally fell asleep. I almost thought she wouldn't be able to sleep in anxiety and nervousness," Tess whispered, not wanting to make any noise. "She tried her best to hide the date with you tomorrow from me, you know?" She giggled.
With difficulties, I tore my gaze away from my rose and turned to her. "Thank you, Tess. For helping me tonight, like you did every time I needed you."
Just so I could see my rose tonight, she decided to stay with her family today. Even convinced her sister to share a bed tonight, so that they could relive the memories of their childhood.
A smile grazed her face. "No need to thank me. What are best friends for after all?" And then she glanced back at her sister who was sleeping peacefully. "She is still your Rosebud, you know? Years passed, but her heart still belongs to you."
She pointed with her chin to the giant bear I'd gifted Emerald the day after she returned from NY. A warmth surged through my chest as I watched how tightly her small arms were wrapped around the vast doll. And then the t-shirt she wore caught my attention. It was the same shirt she borrowed from my penthouse.
"Even through her resistance, she can't help herself from the things connected to you." Her blue orbs flickered over me. "Promise me you'll always take care of her heart, Achilles."

Putting a hand on her shoulder, I gave it a firm squeeze. "Forever." This was a promise that I did to myself years ago. I'll die before I hurt my Rosebud ever again. Sniffling softly, she nodded her head and then left us alone. "Don't take much long. I'll wait outside, watching over," saying, she closed the door behind her. Striding closer to her bed, I sat beside her. My eyes bathed into her enticing beauty. Those turquoise eyes that had stolen my heart were firmly closed now. Long eyelashes shadowed over her rosy cheeks as her eyelids fluttered occasionally. Raising my hand, I tucked some strayed strands away from her angelic face. As if in a trance, my fingers glided over her soft skin. From her cheeks to her pouty lips, and then down her slender neck. She slept soundly as I watched her. I could do it for the rest of my life without getting tired. In fact, I'd want more. Leaning down, I buried my nose into her hair and inhaled deep. As if like a touch of ice, her presence distinguished the fire of my soul. My heart finally found its serenity. My beautiful Rosebud. Now turned into a tempting rose. A groan left me. Her sweet scent, like honey and citrus, her silky porcelain skin, and her soft breaths fanning my skin were tempering with my senses. My lips touched the place where the vein of her neck pulsed. My eyes followed the curves she hid beneath that too big for her t-shirt of mine. Not being able to control myself, my hands roamed around her tiny waist, to her hips, down her legs. My little vixen didn't wear any pants under that t-shirt. The ends of that material ended just below her mid thighs, showing her long killer legs. Clenching my fist, I moved my hand away from her inviting legs before I lost total control on myself. But I couldn't help but feel her soft lips against mine. A sigh left through her lips as soon as mine met them. Pulling away, my thumb brushed over her cheek.

Mine.

If I hadn't seen her tonight, I wouldn't be able to equip myself to reveal everything before her

tomorrow. I needed her touch to keep myself sane from my fears.

Fears of losing her.

Resting my forehead against hers, I shook my head as a steely determination cut through me.

I won't lose you. I can't. Not again. Not if I wish to live.

I let out a shaky breath.

"Without you, my life is incomplete, my rose," I whispered, kissing her forehead.

I won't let anything come in between us ever again. Everything will be destroyed that will try to

become a hindrance to my way of getting you. I won't allow anything to take you away from me, not

even my past.

I need you like I need my next breath, and I'll make you mine at any cost.

Because this Achilles

Valencian, is obsessed with his Rosebud.

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Placing my hand over my chest, I took deep breaths. He wasn't even here yet, and I felt like my heart

would jump out of my ribcage at any moment. The vicious war of butterflies in my tummy didn't help

either.

Calm down, Em. It's just a date. A friendly date. It's not that it's the first time you're going out with a

guy.

Yes, but this time it's the guy I lo...

My breath hitched at my throat. Shock and surprise crashed on me. Was I just about to admit my...

feelings for him?

I shook my head. No, no! Yes, he did affect me a lot, but I didn't do the 'L' word.

Not wanting to chew over my treacherous mind, I padded into my closet and reached for the maroon

dress Cassie sent for me. A very short, and backless one she wanted me to wear on this date.

Give him some tease. Were her exact words.
Though the dress was beautiful, I didn't know where he was taking me. I did ask him so that I could wear something according to convenience, but he said to get into anything decent I wanted. He didn't care as long as I was with him.
A blush rose up my cheeks. Mr. Valencian could be cheesy sometimes. I didn't know he had it in his bones.
But of course, I wasn't going to listen to him. But as I didn't know if it's a public place or not, I opted for a jacket along it.
Then my eyes fell on the red gown he'd gifted me. It called me to wear it like, but like every other day, with difficulties, I gave it my back and walked out of the closet.
Once I was ready with light make-up and a low bun just above my neck, I inspected my look once again in the mirror. Brushing away some loose curls from my face, I tugged the ends of my dress a little lower.
A breath sneaked through my lips. I was ready.
And just at that moment, the doorbell rang. So did my heart.
I glanced at the watch. Seven pm sharp.
My mouth went dry, my hands turned clammy. God, why was I so nervous?
It's okay, Em. You can do it!
Chanting the mantra in my head, I grabbed my purse and trudged downstairs.
Once at the door, I found him tackled into Mom's bear hug. As surprising as it was, a soft smile was stretched across his face as he returned Mom's affection.
Flaunting a black tux and his usual rough look, he didn't fail to take my breath away. He never did.
"I thought you forgot the way to our house. The only times we get to meet you is only if there's some occasion or party," she said, pulling away. Affection shone into her eyes.
"Though I'm extremely happy to see you here after so many years, can I ask the reason for your sudden visit?"

Before he could answer, I butted it. "We've a business party to join, Mom. That's why he's here, to pick me up."

Along Mom, his stormy grey eyes also moved to me. And they stilled on my face, until they traveled to the rest of my body. Slow and lingering touch of those intent gaze had me breathless.

"Oh my! Look at you! My baby is looking so beautiful, isn't she, Ace?" she gushed, taking a glance

towards him. She was the only one who called him by his nickname other than me. And he didn't

mind. But it was only reserved for the two of us.

Not removing his stare from me, he gave a slow and tight nod. "Indeed, she is."

Heat crept up my neck at his words. While mom watched the interaction with her wicked eyes.

"Well, honey? You didn't mention any parties like that to me," she queried, her tone teasing. Of

course she got some hints from all the flowers everyday and gifts. And only a fool will believe my lies

with me turning all red at her question.

I cleared my throat. "Uh, it was a sudden invitation. So we have to attend."

"Oh, alright then. I won't keep you guys any longer." She put a hand on

Ace's shoulder. "I would like

to ask you for coffee, but clearly, you're on a run right now. So go, and... take care of her."

Giving her hand a firm squeeze, he nodded, sincerity engraved into his eyes. "I will."

"Where are we going?" Fastening up the seat belt, I turned to him.

Something tugged at my lower region when I found his darkened gaze on my legs. With a slow rumble

into his chest, he put his big callus hand on my knee.

"You enjoy torturing me like that, don't you?" he groaned.

A shiver ran down my skin, raising goosebumps across. Noticing it, his hand raised up, sensuously to

my thigh.

With my breath hitching at my throat, I removed his hand away. My heart thudded down my chest.

The temperature of the car ambience suddenly peaked.

"K-keep your hands to yourself, will you? And don't think that high of yourself. I didn't wear it for you." I gulped. "I wore it because I liked it."

Liar.

And the twitch of the corner of his lips was the evidence of my lie getting caught.

Biting my lip, I averted my eyes. "You didn't answer my question. Where are you taking me?"

Ignoring my warning, he took my hand in his and placed a kiss at the back of it. "It's a secret. So let my secret surprise you, shall we?"

Huffing, I tried to snatch my hand from his, but his grip was firm.

And then his knuckles caught my attention. They were littered with cuts and bruises.

I gasped, taking a hold onto his hands. "What happened to them?"

How come I didn't notice them before?

His demeanor changed. Pulling away, he gave a nonchalant shrug.

"Nothing, just got carried away with exercise."

The way he averted his gaze opposed his own statement.

"Don't lie to me! Your knuckles were bleeding and you didn't even feel anything?" I snapped, taking

back his hands into mine, examining them. They were just like I remembered the morning he came

back from the UK. Did he work himself out to exhaustion and pain?

What could make him that

ignorant of his pain that he didn't even notice?

When he didn't answer, I glared up at him.

"Well? Mind giving an answer? And why didn't you treat them?" Anger, irritation and concern nagged into my veins.

When he looked at me, my heart clenched. His eyes held pain, desperation and something intense

that I couldn't decipher. Though his eyes said a lot, I wanted him to speak to me.

"Tell me," I whispered.

"I will. After the date tonight. But not now," he said softly, placing another lingering kiss on my hand.

"Let me treat them first..."

"It's alright. They're fine now."

"But you could get an infection!" I argued, once again reaching out for his knuckles.

He shook his head. "I won't. Don't worry. I'm used to them."

Something squeezed my chest at his words. He said the same the other day. He was used to the pain.

Did he hurt him purposely?

"Rosebud, I can't go on a date with bandages, now can I?" He raised his brow, when I didn't agree with his suggestion of letting it go.

When I continued to hold his eyes, he sighed.

"Alright, check them once the date is over, alright?"

I nodded. At least he agreed to get them treated. I'd have to talk to him about it. He couldn't be so careless with him.

And then the whole ride from our house to our destination was silent, my hand was secured into his.

Only occasionally to change gears, he did leave it, only to grab it again. And no matter how much I complained, I loved the feeling of my small hand getting lost into his bigger and safer one.

When the car stopped before a huge iron gate, just a little far from the highway, I scrutinized the place. It looked... familiar. But I couldn't keep my finger on it.

Getting out of the car, he came up to me and opened the door for me. When I went to do it for myself, he'd stopped me with a discontented look.

Well, if he wanted to be a gentleman, who was I to stop him?

Taking his hand, I got out and looked up at the vast gate. Turquoise Heaven, was the name written in bold golden words above.

"Where are we, Ace?" I asked.

With his arms around my waist, he murmured into my ear, "Go in and find out yourself."

Pressing my lips together, I wiggled out of his arms and approached the gate. And with a loud croak, the wings opened itself, welcoming us in.

Then I saw the guard inside, nodding in greeting. "Good evening, Mr. Valencian. Welcome, Ms. Hutton."

He knew my name?

I turned to the Greek god behind me. He must've told him about my arrival.

Wrapping his hand around my waist again, he nodded back at the watchman, while I politely reciprocated his smile.

"Is everything ready, Jeremy?"

The guard nodded his head. "Yes, Mr. Valencian. Everything is ready just as you wanted. And the staff are gone."

Everyone was gone? Why? That means, I'll have to stay alone with him?

Now my nervousness leaped to a new height. Who knew? He could compel me with his charm and

stormy grey eyes, and trap me in somewhere with him forever?

Not that I'd really mind.

I shook my head at my ridiculous thoughts.

"Good," saying that, he led me inside.

And then a beautiful familiar two storey white duplex house greeted me.

Built with a mediaeval arc,

an enormous fountain adorned its front yard, with a lush rose garden surrounding it.

But it was daisies before...

A gasp slipped through my lips. It was the place I'd visited once or twice in my childhood with my

family for small get togethers. The family of Tobis' childhood friend owned it.

That's why this place felt so familiar. I vaguely remembered the backyard where we used to play. And

this was the place I...

My eyes snapped up to him. My heart fluttered beneath my rib cage.

"Why here?" My voice came out

breathless.

His eyes bore into mine. "I thought why not start our new beginning where all of it started? After all,

this is the place where I saw my turquoise eyed beauty for the first time."

Liked the chapter? Do tell me your thoughts in the comments!

And to get notifications of the updates on time, give me a follow and add this book to your reading

lists! Now enjoy!

With love,
Eva Zahan.
The Trap Of Ace
Chapter 34

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H-he remembered that?

Though our visits here were vague in my mind, I still remembered the day when Tobias brought him along to our family to introduce his new best friend.

How could I forget the day I got encountered with those stormy grey eyes for the first time?

The reserved yet shy boy was uncomfortable among so many unknown people until his gaze locked with mine. The soft smile that had tugged across his lips in the return of my own toothy one, had engraved into my heart since then.

He gently brushed his thumb on my cheek. "Those adorable freckles are almost non visible now."

"I still have them. It's just the make-up." Words came out of my mouth of its own, lost into his grey pools.

A tiny frown set between his brows. "The make-up that hides your beauty, you should avoid them."

"Again back to dictating me, are we Mr. Valencian? I'm not in your office right now, remember?" I teased. Though the mushy feeling inside me at his compliment didn't go missed.

"I'm not dictating you, just stating the truth." He pulled me against him.

"These powders just hide your natural beauty."

I bit back my smile. Did he just call make-up as powder?

Then I realized how he had me pinned against him. Throwing him a stern look, I pulled away and turned to the house. It was beautiful. The sound of waves crashing onto the shore, then retracting into the ocean reached my ears.

Memories of old days regenerated into my mind.

"The beach!" With my eyes widened, I cast him a glance, before running inside the house.

The velvety sound of his chuckle reached me before his footsteps followed behind me.

Adrenaline rushed through my veins. Pushing open the backdoor, I relished the salty sea breeze that touched my face as soon as I let myself free outside under the open sky. But before the ocean could enthrall me, the beautiful gazebo at the middle of the beach caught my attention. The decoration of white lilies and fairy lights, and the candles lit at both sides of the way to it had me speechless. Not to miss the red petals of roses scattered over the pathway.

My mouth was on the ground until I forced myself to shut it. Everything was just... extraordinary. Just like the movies.

And he did all of that...for me?

"You liked it?" His deep voice rasped close to my ear.

Not being able to form any words, I just nodded my head.

"Come." Securing my hand into his, he maneuvered me to the gazebo through the way full of soft rose petals.

I cleared my throat, suddenly my insides went all shy. "Your staff did a good job decorating everything."

Popping open the cape of the champagne, he poured the liquid into two glasses. Casting me a glance, he said, "They just set up the gazebo, the other credits would go to me." My eyes widened again. "That means, you did all of this all by yourself?" I looked around at the beautiful view.

Putting the bottle down, he took my jacket off. And as soon as the upper side of my dress revealed before his eyes, he stilled.

"Yes," a hiss came out of his mouth, his heated gaze roamed up and down my body, lingering on my dipped neckline.

Casie was right, he did look extremely bothered. And observing his tight jaw and darkened gaze had me doubting my decision to wear this dress now. We were all alone here...

And he didn't even see the back yet.

When he took a step forward, eyes not moving from me, my heart did a skip. But I held my footing.

I wouldn't let him see my weakness for him today.

But my determination couldn't live long. As he glided more closer, I stuttered out, "W-what are you doing?"

He didn't answer. Raising his hand up, he brushed his fingers against my neck in a feathery touch.

I shivered.

And then reaching at the back of my neck, he let my hair fall free from the bun.

"Now it's better," he whispered, standing inches away from me.

"Beautiful auburn silks like them shouldn't be tied."

He's comparing my hair to silk?

Heat crept up my cheeks as I fumbled with my bracelet. Grey eyes followed the movement. Clearing

my throat, I pulled away from him, causing his hand to fall from my hair. His thick brows crinkled at the loss of touch.

Seriously, this man had an obsession with my hair. He seemed to love touching them every now and then.

Taking the glass of champagne, I took a sip. The cool liquid gave soothe to my suddenly dry throat.

"I can't believe you did all of this all by yourself. All the lights and flowers. You could just ask your staff, they'd have done it for you. When did you do it anyway?" I went back to our previous conversation, cutting the tense ambience around us.

He took his own glass, eyes still on me. "I was here before I went to pick you up. And I wanted to do it with my own hands, after all, it was for my Rosebud."

A warm sensation spread throughout my chest. Needing some more liquid to quench my thirst, I took another gulp. This man always had a way with his words. He knew how to affect me with them.

The fruity flavor of the champagne felt good in my mouth. Then something clicked into my head.

Even for champagne, he didn't go for the alcoholic one, he opted for a clean drink instead. I'd noticed

it before. He didn't drink anymore. Not even at parties.
As far as I remembered, wine was his favorite drink of all time. On some occasions, I'd seen him drink alcohol like water. Then what changed now?
"What're you thinking, Rosebud?" tucking a strand behind my ear, he asked. One of his hands gently placed over my hip.
Then the hefty roar of the wave crashing onto the shore snatched my attention. Gentle wind blew across the beach. The full moon dangled up in the sky, cradling its luster into the water as it shimmered along the waves.
With the beautiful sight before my eyes and his heat right behind me, I held my questions back for some time longer. I didn't want to break the peace raising the queries of the past.
Getting out of my heels, I walked up to the shore feeling the cool supple sand under my bare feet.
Soon a curse of his followed from behind me. But I didn't stop. Though the corner of my mouth twitched imagining the look on his face seeing my revealed back cut. The moment the waves reached me, tingling my toes with cold water, a smile stretched across my lips.
It's been so long I'd last visited a beach, let alone a private one like this. Soon I felt his presence beside me. And to my surprise, he was also bare footed. Then I noticed how big his feet were compared to mine. Just like our hands.
Looking up at the moon, I took a deep breath. "It's beautiful, isn't it?"
"Not more than my Rosebud."
My head snapped to him. Stormy grey met my turquoise.
Did he write some cheesy lines for tonight before coming here? Because he seemed to be the total opposite of the cold businessman I saw everyday.
Averting my gaze from his intent one, with the fluttering of my tummy, I started to walk along the shore, enjoying the cool water and breeze. He followed behind.
Flashes of our playing on the beach floated across my mind. A grin spread onto my lips. And then I did what I didn't even dream of doing ever again.

Crouching down, I took some water into my hand and splashed at him.
At Achilles Valencian.

Jerking back slightly, he stood frozen for a second. After registering what just happened, a wicked gleam flickered over his eyes. When he took a hasty step towards me, with my eyes wide, letting out a squeal, I ran.

A musical laughter followed me as I sprinted away from him. Not wanting to miss the chance of this rare sight, I looked over my shoulder.

With just a feet away, he chased me. Moonlight fell onto his heavenly features as his eyes twinkled with happiness. The smile lines at the both sides of his eyes, and the beautiful grin across his lips had me breathless. And it had nothing to do with my running. Another screech left my mouth when he leaped for me. But speeding up my legs, I ran away from his clutch.

"Do you think you can escape me, Rosebud?" His light voice, mixed with mirth rang like harmony to my ears.

"Looking like you're falling behind, Mr. Valencian. Catch me if you can!" yelling over my shoulder, I ran faster. The night breeze slapped against my skin and the water splashed under my feet. I felt like I was flying. Free from everything. I felt lighter.

"Gotcha!"

And then I was suddenly tackled over, another squeal left my mouth. But before we could land on the ground, his strong arms around me pulled us straight.

"This is cheating! Your legs are bigger than mine!" I complained, wiggling into his hold. But the smile on my face was still there.

"Now that's also my fault?"

"Yes, it is!"

A throaty chuckle reverberated through his chest as he pulled me against him, resting his forehead against mine. The way he tightened his arms around me, as if he never wanted to let go. His gaze

shone with contentment and felicity as he let out a breath. "Rosebud, what do I do with you?"

"What will you do?" I peered into his eyes, relaxing into his chest. And as an answer, he cupped my cheeks and placed his lips on mine. My eyelids fluttered close, already drunk on him. With his thumb brushing just beneath my lower lip, his mouth danced with mine into a slow magical synch.

This time it wasn't an urgent, possessive and demanding kiss. This time, it was a sweet, slow yet passionate touch of affection. And it had my heart race to miles just like his punishing kisses did.

Pulling away, I gasped for breath, placing my head against his cheek. "I-it's just a friendly date, you remember that, right?"

"I didn't know you kissed your friends."

My face turned hot as I hid myself into his chest, causing him to chuckle. So not fair! He couldn't just kiss me and expect me not to kiss him back. Now who could resist this Greek god?

And just then my stomach decided to embarrass me more. A grumble had me turn into a beetroot.

Pulling away, he cupped my chin. Amusement curved into his eyes. "Why didn't you tell me you were hungry?"

I shrugged, looking away. Stupid stomach!

Biting his lip, he took my hand and dragged me with him. "Come, let me feed you something."

And I didn't complain.

When we reached the gazebo again, he turned to me. "Wait here, I'll go and get the food."

"I can help," I offered.

He shook his head. "No, you wait here. I'll be back in a minute."

Getting a nod from me, he turned around and walked back into the house.

Sighing, I took my glass and drank the rest of the champagne. Gazing at the ocean as I waited for him to come back with the food, something caught my attention.

A vibration.

My phone?

When I grabbed my purse, my suspicion turned out right. But as soon as I opened the purse, the vibration stopped.

Shaking my head, I fished the phone out. I shouldn't have kept it on vibration. God knows who called me.

And as soon as my eyes locked with the screen, I stilled.

Three missed calls.

From Warner.

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 35

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Double update! Ain't I amazing? Here's the chapter you were anticipating for so long! Enjoy now!

Warner? Why was he calling me?

The phone buzzed again. But this time, it was a message from him.

"Who's it?"

My thumb halted in the mid way from opening the message. Slowly turning around, I put my phone back into my purse. "It's Mom, she asked if we've reached the party safely."

I couldn't mention Warner's name now. No matter how sweet he was right now, jealousy didn't sit well with him. He proved it many times before. And I didn't want to ruin this night when it just started.

I'd just talk to Warner later.

Nodding, he put the trays of food on the table and gestured to me to sit.

Of course, pulling my chair for me.

Shaking my head, I smiled. "Thank you."

When he settled at the opposite chair of me, my eyes fell on his broad shoulders. Gone his jacket, now he was only in his black shirt. And it clung to his sculpted chest and arms like a second skin. Those folded sleeves up to his elbows, displaying the veiny strong hands, had me stare.

A breathless sigh left my lips. Why was he so perfect in every way? Except his stubborn self of course!

The delicious aroma of the covered food snatched my attention. My stomach growled again. And when he took the lids off of the food platters, my mouth watered. Cheesy garlic shrimp! My eyes snapped up to him. Smiling at me, he put some shrimps on my plate, then drizzling the sweet and sour sauce on it. Just the way I liked. Seeing my surprise, he said, "How could I forget to make my girl's favorite food on our first date?" I gasped, eyeing the shrimps, roasted potatoes, smoking chicken sizzlings and spaghetti. All my favorites. "You- you made all of this?" I didn't know he'd culinary skills. His gaze locked with mine. "You didn't argue about the thing that I called you my girl or it's our actual date." Oh! My cheeks turned hot. I was so stunned that he made all those dishes for me that I totally ignored his other emissions. "I- yes. It's just a friendly date. Don't forget that! And I'm not your girl." I cleared my throat, shifting in my chair. He chuckled. That beautiful sound always made me feel something inside me. It felt like he was a totally different man around me. He talked more, he laughed more. His eyes held light. "Well, our kiss proves that both of your beliefs are wrong." He put some spaghetti on my plate, and then reached for the roasted potatoes. "And yes, I cooked them myself." I tried my best not to turn into beetroot out of embarrassment. Though whatever I said, my actions told the opposite. But it wasn't my fault. I tried my best to resist him, but he always crossed my boundaries. "I didn't know you knew how to cook." I changed the subject, sticking a shrimp in my fork. He shrugged. "I only know to make the favorite dishes of my Rosebud." My fork stopped in the half way in the air to my mouth. My heart skipped as I stared at him. He only

learned to make my favorite dishes?

"W-why?" I stuttered.

"So that I could always keep my queen happy and full."

His intense gaze had me gulp. Something soared into my chest as I struggled with the tons of emotions he made me feel.

Averting my eyes, I took a bite of the cheesy shrimp. And I was amazed. It was delicious! Even better than those restaurants.

Eager, I put two more into my mouth, and then tasted the chicken. My eyes closed at the savory flavors bursting into my mouth.

Once I opened my eyes, I noticed he didn't even touch his plate yet.

With an uncertain expression, he watched me. As if waiting for something.

With my mouth full, I raised my brow.

He scratched the back of his head. "Uh, how's the food? Did you like it?"

I gaped at him. Was Achilles Valencian nervous? And he needed my approval?

Swallowing, I bit back my smile and nodded my head. "They're delicious. More than delicious actually.

You'd be an excellent chef if you weren't a businessman," I answered truthfully.

Relief washed over his features as he relaxed in his seat. Wait, was I hallucinating? Was that pink tint I was seeing on his cheeks?

Achilles Valencian was blushing! Oh shit! I should have clicked a picture of it as a memory!

Noticing my astounding saucer eyes, he cleared his throat put back on his confident expression.

This time I couldn't hide my smile. "You were blushing."

"I wasn't! Now eat your food. They're getting cold," he said, filling his own plate.

"Here, try some spaghetti. I'm sure you'll like them."

"Thanks. But you were blushing. I saw it!" I argued, teasing him. "It's okay to blush, you know? It's normal."

He cursed under his breath.

I snickered. "Don't worry, your secret is safe with me. No one will ever know that Achilles Valencian

blushed."

"Rosebud!" he warned, his grey orbs formed into a scowl. "Eat your food."

Biting my lip, I finally decided to leave him alone and concentrate on my food. As we silently began eating those delicacies, my eyes fell onto his knuckles again. None of the movements of his hands didn't seem to bother him even if they were black and blue. He didn't even wince once.

My hands itched to drag him inside and out some ointment on them. But I knew he wouldn't let me until the date was over.

"When did you buy this place from Tobias' friend's family?" The way the guard outside greeted him, staff working for him here and the way he planned everything said that he owned this house and the private beach.

He didn't have to look up at me as he already was watching me. He was watching me more than he ate his food, not letting me eat comfortably. How would I do it when his hawk like eyes were watching me?

Annoying man!

"Three years ago. They actually didn't want to sell it at first, but then I convinced them."

"How?"

His shrug was casual. "By offering them triple of the actual price of this property."

My eyes widened. "Triple? But why'd you do that? You could just buy any other property, much bigger than this."

Again the intensity was back in his grey pools. "Those didn't remind me of my Rosebud."

My heart caught at my throat as I stared at him.

He- he brought this beach house for me? First that company, then that canvas and now this.

I was out of words. I didn't know what to say or react. So dumbfounded, I looked down and went back to my plate.

Once we were finished with the dinner, he stood up and gave me his hand.

"Dance?" A slow music hummed in the background.

Hesitantly, I placed my hand on his, letting him pull me on my feet and gather closer to his warmth.

His heady cologne filled my senses as we swayed slowly along the harmony. Gazing at my eyes, he tucked a strand behind my ear.

"Did I say how beautiful you're looking tonight?" his low voice said.

With heated up cheeks, I shook my head.

"Well, you're looking enchanting tonight, Rosebud," he rasped.

I blushed some more. "Thank you. You're not looking bad either."

"That's it? Nothing more I get to hear?" He raised his brow.

I rolled my eyes. "You're looking good."

"Just good?"

I glared at his mischievous grey eyes. Though he teased me, I could feel the change of mood in him

after the dinner. His shoulders were tense, eyes were disturbed.

"What happened? You look tense," I asked.

The smile slipped off his face. He shook his head. "Not now. Later, Rosebud. Let us enjoy our dance first."

Letting out a sigh, I nodded and let him pull me closer and hug me to his chest. Without complaining, I

rested my head under his chin, closed my eyes and enjoyed our slow dance, the music and his warmth.

Just as he said.

"Check mate!" I said, lining my soldier right before his king.

With his hands adjoined before him, he just stared at the chess board in silence.

After our dance, he led me inside to play chess, just like old times. At the first match, he won, as

always. But in the second match, I won. Same went with the third one.

Not because I was better than

him on the chess board, because he let me win. His mind was somewhere else other than our match.

The more time was passing tonight, the more his stance got tense. Those grey eyes turned more

anxious as our game started to come to an end. He was stalling time, I was aware of it.

And even I was now afraid to ask questions. What was in the past that he was that agitated of the revelation?

What afraid me most was the fear in those gray pools. Tonight was the night I discovered his many faces. But I didn't ever expect that I'd see fear in his eyes.

"Ace? You again let me win. It's not fair!" I pressed my lips together. He used to do it in our childhood.

He'd always let me win and even after I was aware of the fact, I'd be jumping up and down on my seat out of excitement. And he'd just watch me there. But I wasn't the little Emerald anymore.

"No problem. We can play another match," he said, rearranging the board.

I stopped his hand. His stormy grey met my turquoise. "Three matches are enough for tonight. Don't you think it's time to fulfill your promise?"

His jaw clenched, eyes looked away from mine.

"You promised, Ace. I want to know everything." My voice came out firm, though my hand fumbled with my bracelet under the table.

Hands balled into fists, he took a deep breath; gaze set on the board.

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything," I whispered, gulping. "Everything that happened that night seven years ago. If you claim that you always had feelings for me, you always wanted me, then... what were you doing with Tess that night on the balcony?"

I let out a breath, finally asking the questions that have been nagging under my skin for so long.

Silence.

The only sound I could hear in the room was the tiks of the hanging watch on the wall, and my pounding heart under my chest.

His gaze drilled into mine as he sat there with an unreadable facade.

Though the storm in his grey eyes was transparent.

"Ace?" I probed.

"Before you know what happened that night, you should be aware of my past first." His eyes locked with mine. "Remember, Emerald. Before reaching any conclusions, know that whatever I did was for everyone's good. Especially yours."

What good was in there for me? But putting my question aside, I nodded my head, encouraging him to go ahead.

He closed his eyes, before opening them again, the muscle of his jaw ticked. "After my father passed away, my... mom went into depression. She couldn't take the loss of her husband and drowned her into alcohol and parties. I was about to turn eighteen at that moment." The pain in voice was visible, though he tried to mask it hard. "As you knew, my father was an idol for me. Even if he never spent much time with us, I... loved him a lot. And after he passed, i- I was lost. I didn't know what to do with my life then."

Something squeezed in my chest imagining how much pain he must have gone through.

"With my mother never at home, I found myself alone. Though Caleb was there, no one could take the place of parents. On the top of that, the company's burden was falling on me. For an eighteen years old, it became too much for me, Emerald." He looked away from me as if ashamed. "Not being able to take everything in, i- I took the support of drugs."

A gasp slipped through my lips as I sat there shocked.

"I became a drug addict." His voice hard as steel, eyes flashing. "There wasn't any kind of addiction I hadn't tried, to forget everything. To get a moment of peace, not knowing it was only pushing me towards the destruction."

My eyes burned, heart pained at the emotional downfall he went through. And I hadn't had even any idea of it. Guilt washed over me like a tsunami.

"Why didn't you tell me anything?" My voice croaked.

He held my gaze. Different emotions swirled into those stormy grey eyes. "I couldn't let my darkness

taint you, Rosebud. I'd never."

"You could at least tell me. I'd be there with you. Maybe I could help you out." A lone tear escaped my eye.

A soft smile tugged on his lips. "You were helping me, Rosebud. You were the only hope in my life that didn't let my darkness engulf me whole. You were the only one that had kept me sane."

My lower lip trembled. No matter what he said, I couldn't help but feel the guilt clutching me in its grip. Here I was fantasizing about him not knowing what problems he was going through.

"Then what happened? H-how did you get out of your addiction?"

"I couldn't for two years. Until..."

"Until?"

"Until I lost you." Taking a deep breath, he cleared his throat. "I knew about your feelings for me, Rosebud. I knew everything. You were my princess even before you asked me to make you one. But..."

"His features hardened. "No matter how much I wanted you, I couldn't let you wait for me and ruin your life when I didn't even know if I had a future or not, what I'd do with my life."

Something churned inside me. An ominous feeling rose up my chest.

"That's why that night, I took Tess's help. To..."

My heart pounded down my chest, breath came out harsh, eyes burning. My nails dug into my palm.

"To push you away from me."

Want more? Go to my Facebook page! The sneak peek of the next chapter is already on there! And don't forget to give my page a like! Pretty please?

With love,

Eva Zahan.

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 36

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Taking a sip on the tea, I ran my eyes on the newspaper. The noise of Mom's chopping vegetables and moving utensils in the kitchen rang across. But nothing moved my attention from the paper, not even

her curious glances.

"You know, the Blackwood's daughter ran off with her cousin's fiance?"

Her sigh resonated from the

opposite side of the counter. "I got to know from the kitty party last

night. Children these days, I don't

know what runs in their head."

I flipped another page. The business column.

"Your aunt called me this morning to inform me how she's enjoying her

vacation in Switzerland with

her third husband and soon will be sending me some pictures of their

little honeymoon." She snorted.

"As if I wanted to know anyway. I'm glad that your Dad didn't go after his

elder sister. Thank God

she's not in the country right now. At least I got some relief from her

frequent visits."

I stayed quiet. Not warning her about Dad's hearing her slandering about

his sister to me just like I did

every time.

"Em?"

"Yeah," I answered, my voice came out croaky.

"You need some more tea?"

I shook my head, not looking up at her.

"Are you okay, honey?" she asked, hesitating.

This time I did glance at her, plastering a small smile on my face. "Yeah,

why do you ask?"

Her identical eyes observed me. "You're looking... tired. Didn't get any

sleep last night?"

I knew what she was indicating. The dark circles, the puffy eyes.

Nothing goes missing from mother's eyes, does it?

A squeeze in my chest had me take a deep breath. I wish I could tell her.

"Nothing like that, Mom. I did sleep last night. Just having a headache

since the morning. It'll get

better, don't worry."

"So that's why you didn't go to the office today?" Concern etched into

her features. "Why didn't you

tell me? Did you get medicines?"

I nodded. "Yes, I did. I've also informed Caleb about it. I took a leave

today."

"Good. Take some rest. You're taking too much work stress nowadays."

Work wasn't the issue at all. They barely gave me any actual work to do for taking stress.

Smiling at her, I looked back at the newspaper. The newspaper I'd been sitting with for the last half an hour. Not reading, just staring.

The clicking of heels against the tiled floor reached my ear. My fists clenched.

"Tess?" Mom exclaimed. "What're you doing here? I thought you'd an appointment for cake tasting today. Are you done with it already?"

"I cancelled it, Mom. I'd to go to a conference with Caleb this morning. It ran three hours long."

Placing her designer bag on the counter, she sat beside me. "Hi, Em." I gritted my teeth, not reciprocating. My eyes glued to the big bold headlines.

Mom's silence indicated that she noticed the tension lurking around us.

"I made some tea for Em, you need some?"

"Sure," said Tess, staring at me.

After giving her a cup of steamy tea, Mom excused to talk to Dad regarding something and left us alone. And not wanting to sit with her alone in the kitchen, I got up from my seat. That's when her voice stopped me.

"Why aren't you answering Achilles's phone or messages? You didn't even go to the office today. He's a mess right now, Em. That guy was outside of our house the entire night, and you didn't even let him explain anything!"

My head snapped to her, I stared at her in disbelief. She was accusing me here of being the cause of his misery when she's the one who should be apologizing to me? She knew! She freaking knew everything and joined hands with him in his absurd plan to display me some ridiculous show! To hurt me. To push me away from him. She was aware of everything but yet didn't even try to tell me once in these years. And here she dared to question me?

"Are you even hearing yourself? After what he did, after you did, you're telling me to give him a chance to explain?" I shook my head in exasperation.

She pinched the bridge of her nose, letting out a sigh. "I know, Em. And I'm extremely sorry for that.

You don't know how guilty I've been feeling for hurting you like that. But, Em, you've to understand.

Whatever we did, yes, it wasn't the best way to do it, but it was for your own good. Trust me."

I snorted. "My good? What was good in there, Tess? I don't see any good in my living with a broken

heart for seven years. I don't see anything good in my suffering and hurting for the last damn seven

years!" my voice rose as I spoke. With my heart beating fast in my chest, my breathing was harsh as

hot lava ran through my veins.

"I know the pain in love. I've experienced it. And I also know that we shouldn't have done it. But at

that moment, we were young, Em. We didn't know how to handle this matter other than this. The

phase Achilles was going through..."

She closed her eyes for a moment before opening them back, as if not wanting to remember past memories.

"Maybe he told you about his condition back then, but he didn't tell you of the severity of it. He was

going through a living hell. And I, Caleb and Tobis saw it. We saw him writhing in pain in his bed when

he didn't get his dose. We heard his screams from his nightmares. No matter how much he tried to get

over it, he couldn't. And no one in their sane mind would want the girl they loved to see them in that

state."

I stopped breathing at her revelation. Imagining him in that situation shook me from my core. An urge

to reach out to him rose in me, but I suppressed it.

"After knowing how important he was becoming for you, he couldn't let you dream of him anymore.

Even we didn't think he'd be able to get out of it ever. And when I told him about your plan to confess

to him that night, he sought my help. And as his best friend and thinking of your well-being, I agreed.

Please forgive us, Em. Whatever we did, we did for you." She added, moisture sparkled in her eyes.

"This doesn't justify anything. I wasn't that young that you guys couldn't tell me. But I was young

enough for that scene you guys created to have me shattered completely," I said, composing my

features into coldness. "Anyways, I don't want to talk about it anymore. You did whatever you

thought was right. And now I'll do whatever I think is right."

With my chin high, I turned around to leave.

"Em, please. If you don't want to talk to me, then don't. I understand.

But at least let him explain.

Listen to him once. Don't just shut him off like that," she almost pleaded.

"You don't know what you

mean to him, Em. That man is nothing without his Rosebud."

My heart clenched. Gulping the thickness down my throat, I walked out of the kitchen, without saying

any words.

The warm water trickled down to every curve of my body, soaking me into its heat, relaxing the knots

of my shoulders. But it couldn't soothe me, the pain in my chest. Though it washed away the tears

that fell down my cheeks relentlessly.

It hurt. It pained so fucking much! As if someone was physically churning a dagger into my heart again

and again.

A choked sob left my mouth. Clutching the place over my heart, I slid down the glass wall of the

shower and hugged my legs against my chest.

"Why did you do it? Why?" I whispered, letting the tears free.

It felt like the wound I got that night had been scratched anew. I felt the same pain, the same agony I

endured years ago. And the irony was, the incident I've suffered for so long for wasn't even real. It

was all a sham. A joke. A cruel joke life had thrown at me. Not life, my sister and the boy I loved.

They say they did it for my own good. To save me from getting hurt. But did they really save me from

getting hurt? No, they only had thrown me into the ocean of tears I'd flown every night in silence after that night. They had thrown me to the disgust I'd felt dating so many guys who I didn't even feel any connection to. The kisses I'd shared even if it hurt my own heart. The man who was always there for me, I'd hurt him in the process. I could never return his love. And all of this happened just because he thought it'd be good for me by pushing me away, breaking my heart.

To push you away from me.

It'd felt like I'd been struck by thousands of arrows the moment he said those words. The moment I got to know how easily they broke my numerous dreams, intense emotions and years of love in just a moment. Even knowing after everything.

"Don't! Don't you dare try to explain anything. You've done enough already! Leave me alone!" I'd snapped at his face when he'd tried to stop me from leaving him there last night.

Running his hands through his hair desperately, with wide panicked eyes, he'd asked for a chance to let him explain. "Rosebud, please! Just hear me out. I had no choice. I couldn't let you ruin your life waiting for me. Trust me, I'd never wanted anyone else in my life the way I'd wanted you. You were my everything. You still are."

"And that's why you wanted me away?" eyes filled with tears, I'd asked him. "Now I'll make your wish come true for real this time. I'll go so far away from you that you'll never be able to reach!"

He'd watched me as if he'd been stabbed with something. But the pain in his eyes couldn't surpass the one I'd in my heart in that moment.

Ignoring his calls and pleadings, I'd turned away from him and ran away from there. From the man I never knew would hurt me this way.

More tears fell from my eyes, my throat tightened causing me gasp for air. My nails dug into my palms as I cried my heart out. But the burn inside me didn't go away.

I love you...

I closed my eyes, not being able to withstand the squeeze that shot through my chest. The words that he whispered to me just before I left him last night still rang into my ears.

I hate you! I hate you, Achilles Valencian! For fucking up my life in this way!

"Thank God, Em! You finally picked up your phone! That obsessed man of yours is blowing off my cell phone since last night!" She huffed through the line. "I called Tess. I know what happened." Her tone softened up.

I stayed quiet, closing my eyes.

"Though I had to literally plead her to tell me everything. Trust me, I wanted to kill that sister of yours and that idiot man when I got to know what they did to you. Fucking pricks!" she cursed some profanities. "By the way, the way he's blowing up my phone just to get even a little news of you, I'm wondering how he's not already barging into your house to meet you right now?"

With my jaw tight, I threw the huge teddy on the floor from my bed. I didn't need it anymore. "He tried to get through the gate last night. But I'd informed the guards to tell him if he even tries to do anything to get into the house following me, he won't see my face ever again."

I knew he'd definitely follow me and try to talk to me. So I'd already given the guards my message to deliver to him. And to my surprise, he didn't cross my set line. Instead he'd waited outside my house, right beneath my window. Though I didn't know he was there the whole night.

A pinch of guilt surged through me, but I composed myself soon. I didn't care. He could go to hell for all I cared!

"Oh! That explains his desperation," she mumbled. "I've never seen someone so miserable to be honest."

"Are you siding him again, Casie? I can't believe you!" I snapped, fuming. Whose friend was she here?

"Of course, not! How can I? Whatever he did was extremely wrong! He shouldn't have done it even though he only wanted your well-being."

"Cassandra!"

"Alright, alright. I'm sorry. I won't say anything now. Are you okay though? I've to tell him something when he calls me again," she asked, sighing. Though there was concern in her voice, it only oiled my anger that she was somehow still supporting him. I'd blocked him in every way possible and now he was trying to reach me through Tess and Casie.

"You know what? I'm putting the phone down. You can go and answer that prick all you want!"

barking, I cut the call and threw my phone on the bed.

That man! How dare he? He was now taking my friend on his side? That nerve! I didn't understand why no one was seeing what heartache I was going through! They were just seeing only his misery. His pain.

Covering my face with my hands, I took some deep breath, trying to calm down my boiling rage. But it wasn't helping. As if the heartache blew more wind to it.

The bell of the door had my heart skip.

Is it him again?

I didn't want any drama before Mom and Dad. But I didn't think he'd do it after what I'd said.

But not believing my instincts, I ran downstairs before anyone else could attend the door. I'd just flip

him off and send him back if he dares to show up on my...

The moment I opened the door, I was shocked. But for an entirely different reason.

The man that stood before me was someone I didn't ever think would come back to my threshold again.

Warner.

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 37

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"Warner?" I stared at him in shock and surprise. He'd called and messaged last night, but through all this going on I couldn't check his message. And now seeing him standing before me again, rose the guilt inside me again. "Hey!" Tucking a strand behind my ear, I greeted him with an awkward stance. His brown orbs roamed over my features, a frown set between his brows. "You alright? You seem... not well." Even after what I did, he was still concerned for me. That's why I didn't want to lose a friend like him. Before we started dating, he was my best friend in NY. All of a sudden, I'd a sudden urge to hug him tight and share all my problems with him. But I knew I couldn't. Gulping, I nodded my head. "I'm fine, don't worry. Come in!" I held the door wide open for him, flashing a small smile. Once we were settled in the hall, I got him some coffee and another cup of tea for me. I needed it for my growing headache. "Thanks!" Taking the mug from me, he looked around. "Where is everyone?" I took a seat at the opposite side of the couch. "Dad's in the office. And Mom had another of her kitty parties." Thank God, they weren't home. They already sensed something was going on between me and...him. And seeing Warner here all of a sudden would be extremely awkward. He nodded, his gaze not moving from me. "You sure, you're okay? Your eyes are dull today." No, I'm not. I wanted to say. Instead, I just bobbed my head again. "Yeah, I'm. Just a little headache." He didn't seem to be convinced. But not wanting to intrude, as always, he let it go and took a sip on his coffee. The corner of his lips turned upwards. "I've missed your coffee in the last two months." "And I've missed you," I said truthfully.

He held my gaze for a moment and then let out a sigh, putting the mug down on the table. "I wanted to apologise to you, Em. The way I talked to you last time... I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have spit out such words for you. I didn't know what I was thinking. I was just- hurt and confused. I..."

I shook my head. "You don't need to say anything, Warner. It's me who should be apologizing. I'm sorry. I'm sorry for breaking your trust. You didn't say anything wrong. It was me who was at fault." A tear escaped my eye. I just couldn't keep my tears in since last night. As if there was a tap left open inside my eyes.

"Hey, hey!" He slid closer, wiping the tear from my cheek. "Please don't cry, Em. Truth to be told, yes, I was extremely hurt. But it wasn't your fault. I should've known something like this was going to happen. I always knew I was never in your heart. But still, being selfish, even after your telling me sometimes that we were better friends, I didn't let you go. I got too blinded by my love that I didn't see that you weren't happy in that relationship. You didn't love me." The last line came out as a whisper through his lips. Seeing the melancholy in his eyes made me feel more terrible. Another tear rolled down my cheek, but I wiped it fast. "Warner, I- I tried my best. But I just couldn't do it. Nor could I... let myself slip for him. I swear, I tried with everything I had in me. But..." I looked down at my hands, biting my lip.

He squeezed my hand. "It's alright, Em. The way you can't force yourself to love me, you can't force yourself not to fall for the guy who was already in your heart."

I looked up at him, not denying the fact.

"I'm sorry," I whispered. "I didn't want to hurt you."

He shook his head. "Don't be. And I know. My Em can't hurt someone on purpose even if she wants to."

I didn't show the discomfort on my face when he said 'my Em'. Maybe he was just saying it just as a friend.

"I'm sorry too. Being felt betrayed and in the fear of losing you, I'd ignored your calls and messages past weeks," he said. "I just needed some time, you know? By the way, I called you last night. Even messaged you. You didn't answer." I shifted in my place. "Uh, i- I was a little busy." Nodding, he grabbed his cup again. "So, how's everything going on?" "We're still friends, right?" I ignored his question. Though a huge burden had lifted off my chest that he forgave me, I still wanted the assurance that he wasn't breaking our friendship also. "Of course, Em! No matter what happens, you'll always be my best friend," he answered, eyes sincere.

This time a genuine smile stretched across my lips as I pulled him into a bear hug. "Thank you, Warner! I'm really lucky to have you in my life!" Pulling away, he grinned. Though the gloom still lurked behind his eyes. "Nothing can break our friendship, Em. Not even some old feelings." My smile threatened to fall. Even though things weren't that tense between us anymore, it was still awkward. He cleared his throat. "Anyways, you didn't answer my question. How's everything going on with your life? How's the office?"

"Wow, you've made quite a collection here for yourself," he awed, assessing the designs I'd drawn in the office when I'd no work to do. At least I'd invested my time in something productive. "Damn, Em! You should open your own clothing line. You'll rock the market!" I shrugged. "That's the plan. But not now, I've still so much to learn." After giving him a brief description about the office, he'd decided to stay back till evening since he was free. And even if I just wanted to curl up under my blanket and cry, I agreed with his plan. At least we could catch up a little till then. So I brought him upstairs to show him my designs. The designs I wanted to show to a certain person

after the date and fixing everything with Warner. I wanted to ask for his thoughts on them. But it seemed like that certain person wasn't going to have the luck anymore. My eyes went to my phone again. The flashing screen told me some unknown number was again calling non-stop. Good thing I put it on silent. I let out a huff in my head. I blocked his one number, so he got several new ones.

"Em? You're listening?"

I blinked, turning to Warner. "Yeah! Sorry, I was just thinking about something. You said anything?"

"I said why don't you show them to Caleb or your senior designers? I'm sure they'd love to add them to their next catalogue." One of his brows raised.

I shook my head. "They're for my collection, Warner. When I start the business, I want my best pieces to be available exclusively for display then."

I threw another glance towards the phone again. My hands itched to grab it and receive the calls. But I knew better.

Something soared into my chest as Tess's words flashed across my mind. We saw him writhing in pain in his bed when he didn't get his dose. We heard his screams from his nightmares.

My hands curled into the sheet. Jaw ticked. My somehow smoldered rage awakened into flames again.

Why? Why...

Closing my eyes, I took a deep breath, calming the storm inside me that has been swirling since Tess left.

You don't know what you mean to him, Em. That man is nothing without his Rosebud.

Sitting straight, I rubbed my face in frustration. The more I wanted to not to think of him, the more my mind flooded with him.

"You alright? And please don't sell me your lies again. I can see how restless you're. What happened?"

"Nothing, Warner. I..."

A series of furious non-stop honks of car stopped me. And it was outside of our home.

I frowned. What's going on?

And then came his voice which froze me in my place.

"Emerald!"

Some more honking.

"Rosebud, please! At least come to your window!"

What the hell? He- he was outside again?

Warner threw me a perplexed look. Scrambling out of the bed, I ran to the window and peeked

outside.

And there he was. Standing beside his giant black expensive car, in a three piece suit with the tie loose

and hair ruffled, he looked up at me with those intense grey eyes.

He let out a visible sigh of content as he watched me silently for a moment. While I just glared.

Tess was right. He looked miserable. The always perfect Mr. Valencian was a mess today. But he was

Achilles Valencian after all. He even wore the messy look in a very perfect way. This look of his didn't

disappoint to have my heart skip like every other day.

"Rosebud," his low voice reached as a whisper to my ears. I tried my best to ignore his desperate eyes

roaming on me and my pounding heart. Treacherous heart!

"What are you doing here? And what's this? Don't create a scene here, Ace! Go away!" My lips

pressed tight as I glanced around in the neighborhood.

"Baby, please. Just talk to me once. I know I've hurt you and I'm

extremely sorry for that. Punish me if

you want, I'd do anything. But just don't shut me off. Please, baby."

Baby?

My heart tugged at the pain in his voice and eyes, the edge in his stance.

But then I made myself

remember everything. Even though my eyes burned, I kept a stoic face.

"The only thing I would want you to do is leave me alone. I don't want to talk about it anymore. So

please, just leave."

"Don't say that. We can talk. Baby please..." He halted in the mid way as his eyes looked at something

behind me. His pleading eyes suddenly turned hard as steel, his shoulders tensed and fists clenched.

"So this is the reason for your restlessness."

Looking over my shoulder, I found Warner standing right behind me. His unreadable gaze set on the man down on the road whose murderous glare was drilling holes into him.

"What's he doing here?" deep Greek accent hissed. With his stormy greys dark with fury, his nostrils flared. Achilles Valencian was back again.

I wanted to send Warner back inside, but instead I just held my chin high.

"That's none of your business. You won't tell me who will come and go in my own house."

When his fierce eyes snapped to Warner again, I felt him stepping back behind me.

Taking a deep breath, he set his flaming preying gaze fixed on me.

"Rosebud, if you want him to stay in one piece, tell him to leave right now. Don't test my patience. You can punish me all you want, but I WON'T tolerate this."

I gaped at him. The nerve of this man!

"Is that a threat, Mr. Valencian? If it is, then I'm not scared of you," said Warner, stepping forward again.

The muscle of Ace's strong jaw ticked.

"He won't go anywhere! He's my friend, so he can stay here as long as he wants. The one who needs to go is you! So just leave, Ace! I won't say twice! Otherwise, trust me, you won't like the outcome," pointing my index finger, I warned him. What would I do if he didn't go? I didn't know.

But I didn't know why I felt it to pronounce Warner as my friend before him.

I just hoped he wouldn't barge into my house like a bull and do something rash.

With his fists clenched at his sides, eyes icy cold, he looked at Warner again. "Don't come into my way,

Mr. Wilson. Trust me, I'm not a person to mess with."

This time Warner stayed quiet.

Taking another deep breath, he turned to me. "I'll give you another night, Rosebud. I want you in the office tomorrow. And believe me, if you don't show up-" he cast a glance at the gate, "-even your set lines wouldn't be able to stop me from reaching you." With that, he sent another warning look to Warner before getting into his car and driving away.

What do you think of this chapter? Let me know about your thoughts in the comments!

And want more? Go check out the sneak peek of the next chapter on my Facebook page! And don't forget to give my page a like. Pretty please?

With love,
Eva Zahan.

The Trap Of Ace
Chapter 38

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"What's wrong with him? I don't know how can this insane man impress you that much?" Warner asked, baffled.

Sending him a look, I walked back to my bed and plopped down on it.

"What's going on here, Em? Will you tell me now?" he queried again.

"Did you two already break up?"

"We were never together for the break up you're talking about."

"Then?" Raising his brow, he probed me to explain further.

Sighing, I told him everything. And he listened, taking a seat beside me.

But I kept some of the parts from him. Ace's past, especially his being a drug addict back then. It felt

wrong to disclose his extremely personal and sore past to Warner. So I kept that part left out. Instead

I told him after Ace's father's death, he went into depression and decided to push me away from him

taking my sister's help.

It was all I could come up with.

Taking everything in, he just watched me for a moment.

"If he wanted you away from him then why is he after you now?"

"Because now he thinks he can take me back into his life," gritting my teeth, I replied. When he was

lost into drugs, he thought it was better if I was away from him. And now that he was stable again, he

wanted me back. I wasn't a freaking toy that he could toss around like that. It was my life to decide, not his.

He took my decision away from me. The decision if I wanted to stand beside him even after knowing his secret or not.

The sharp pain shot through my chest again. How could he do this to me?

"No matter whatever his reasons were, Em. He shouldn't have done it. Breaking your heart like that...

how could he be so inconsiderate towards the girl he claimed to care for so much?" Discontent

flashed across his eyes as he shook his head.

I averted my gaze as a tear slipped down my cheek.

Wiping the tear away, he grabbed my hands. "If a person causes you that much pain, you should let them go, Em. Your tears are too precious to be shed for a person that doesn't even care if you're hurt or not."

When I didn't answer, he tucked a strayed lock behind my ear. "No matter for how long you guys have known each other or have feelings for each other, no one can love you more than I do, Em. I would never hurt you like that." His voice came out soft.

Snatching my hands from his hold, I put some distance between us.

"Warner, please. I think we already talked about this."

Even hearing him eliciting his feelings for me now made me feel at discomfort.

Hurt flashed across his eyes, but he masked it soon as he sent me a look of apology. "I'm sorry. I- uh, I couldn't just stop myself."

"It's alright. I can understand. But please, Warner, I don't want any awkwardness between our friendship with these kinds of topics." Looking down, I twirled my bracelet.

He nodded, flashing me a sad smile. "Don't worry. I'll be careful from now on."

I felt bad, guilty. But it was what it was. Just because I'd an argument with Ace, didn't mean I'd

reconsider my relationship with him. I didn't love him. And I'd hurt him enough, I couldn't do it more by pretending something that wasn't real.

"Thank you for understanding!" The corners of my mouth turned up into a tight lipped smile.

"No need to thank me." He cleared his throat. "Anyways, what are you gonna do now? You'll go to his office tomorrow just like he said? Even after what happened?"

Turning away from him, I looked ahead, letting out a sigh. I was asking myself the same question. But the dilemma was, I didn't have any answer for it.

Looking up, I scowled at the huge building before me. The name OC Textiles was hung up there, as if mocking me. I wanted to break this building along its owner's head! I spit some more curse at myself for doing this. But I'd to do it. Keeping my anger aside, I straightened up and walked inside the skyscraper.

No, I definitely didn't come here for his threat. There were two reasons behind my taking this decision.

One, I didn't want to look unprofessional and let my personal reasons come between me and my work.

I wouldn't give him that much power to hold over me. I didn't care if he was here or not.

And two, I'd try my best to get out of that contract of three months that I'd to spend here.

Yes, my reasons contradicted each other. But it was what it was. I'd come here just for work as it was

my duty. But I didn't want to work here for another month and a half here. I'd ask him to terminate the freaking contract. And he'll have to do it. I'll make him.

At the lobby, the secretary flashed me her usual too friendly smile which I didn't reciprocate. I wasn't

in the mood of smiling. And the nervous flutters in my tummy and pounding heart down my chest spoiled it more.

Getting out of the elevator, just as I approached my cabin, I halted at my track.

God! What was he doing here? Waiting for me outside my cabin? But wait, I didn't think Tobias would wait for me too.

They seemed to be in a serious discussion. Tobias had a hand on his shoulder while he stood there with his hands in his pockets, jaw ticking.

Something tugged inside my chest at his appearance. He looked... exhausted. Dark circles under his eyes, dense stubble across his jaw, hair disheveled.

And then his eyes flickered to me. Surprise and relief flashed into them as he let out a breath.

"Rosebud," rasping, he pulled out his hands from his pocket and walked towards me with his long strides. Before I could warn him to stay away, he pulled me into him and nuzzled his head into the crook of my neck. My skin tingled against his rough stubbles. "You came," he whispered into my neck, taking a sharp inhale.

My heart palpitated as I stood there for a moment, unable to say anything. His voice, arms and scent were tampering with my head. But then my lips pressed together.

"Let go of me!" I wiggled into his hold.

"Never," he said, kissing my jaw.

My eyes widened. The nerve of this man! When my gaze met with my brother, he just scratched the back of his head awkwardly, not doing anything to help me.

What?

Traitor!

"Leave me this instance, Ace! Or else..."

"Or else what?" Pulling his head away from my neck, he challenged me. His slightly red eyes stared at

me hard. "You already punished me enough. Now I can't even hug you?"

"It's nothing in comparison to the seven years that you punished me for!" I snapped.

Remorse flashed across his eyes. Slowly stepping back from me, he sighed. "Rosebud, let's talk inside my cabin. I'll explain everything to you."

"There's nothing to talk about. I know what I needed to know. You had no choice, you had to use Tess

to hurt me more, you wanted my well-being only. I know enough. I don't need to learn anything new." My eyes burned with tears, but I tried my best not to let them fall. His close proximity not only affected my brain but also my emotions. His face grimaced, as if in torture as he tried to reach out for me again. But before he could do that, I turned around and scurried away.

"Rosebud, wait!"

"Em!" Rang Tobis's voice.

Ignoring their calls, I climbed down the stairs. I didn't want to wait for the elevator right now. I needed to make some distance from them.

The worst thing was, even my brother was on his side. Did he not know anything?

Once reaching the finance department, I went to where Sierra's desk was. She was the only one I was close to in this office after Liza. And I also had to discuss with her about Arthur.

I hope her leave is over.

To my surprise, another girl was sitting in her place. No Sierra there. Once trying to know what she was doing here, that newcomer told me she joined just yesterday after the previous girl resigned.

Means Sierra.

I just stared at her, dumbfounded. Why did she resign all of a sudden? Now it is extremely important for me to meet her.

I needed to talk to Matt first.

"Ms. Hutton?"

Turning around, I found Carter grinning at me. The devil's secretary. Even he seemed relieved seeing me.

"I'm glad you're here today." He took a glance around. And that's when the devil arrived from around the corner, my brother trailing behind. Glancing at his boss, the secretary mumbled, "I hope I won't have to face another of his wrath today."

Frowning, I turned to the devil approaching me. Couldn't this man leave me alone for even a minute? I

really didn't want to create a scene before everyone. But I didn't think he cared.

Just as I was about to tell him to leave me alone for the upteenth time, a voice stopped me.

"Guys, look! Isn't that Antonio Reymond?" James, the head of finance department said, standing in the lobby of this floor. His eyes glued to the huge TV on the wall. The TV they only used to get themselves updated with the business world.

But the name he said caught my attention as all pairs of eyes around the department flickered to the television.

Among the swarm of paparazzi, some cops dragged a man out of a building, through not actually dragging, just taking him with them. The media was crazy, casting question after question at that man in blue suit. But he just avoided them. Some of his bodyguards put a security circle around him, saving him from the hungry reporters.

I couldn't see his face properly as he had his hand before his face to avoid the flashing cameras.

My brows creased. Antonio Reymond? So this was the man who was after the Valencians. He trapped Caleb with the case of drugs.

Then I read on the headline.

Infamous businessman, Antonio Reymond got arrested due to the allegation his current date charged on him for getting her pregnant and threatening her to abort the baby.

My eyes widened. Such a prick!

Gasps resounded across the lobby with a curious crowd huddled around.

The curses for him followed behind that left from OC Textiles's loyal employees.

Though he deserved what he was getting, from whatever I heard, he was a powerful man. Dangerous even. Then how come the girl so easily went against him and the police was brave enough to arrest him before the whole world?

I had to admit. Whoever the girl was, she had some guts.

My gaze fell on the devil who was standing there with an unreadable mask on his face. His steely eyes

fixed on the television.

What's with him now?

And then I saw it.

The triumph look in Carter's eyes as he sent a discreet look to his boss's way, as if...

A silent gasp slipped through my lips.

Was I thinking right?

Did- did he have any hand behind Antonio Reymond's arrest?

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 39

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Huffing, I slammed the files on the desk. I've been brainstorming since the breaking news, but I couldn't come up with anything.

So Achilles Valencian literally destroyed Antonio Reymond's image before the whole world. From the gossip I heard from others around the office, after this blow, Antonio's company's shares dropped in the market drastically within some hours. Apparently, he was doomed. I even heard police had some proof against him doing illegal businesses far in small towns.

I was sure Ace had a hand behind it. Otherwise how did police get all the proofs, strong enough to destroy a powerful businessman just in a day?

Only Achilles Valencian could do it.

After what that man did to Caleb, I should've seen it coming. But this was a big blow. How did he manage it?

My legs itched to go to his cabin and ask him directly. I wanted to know what was running into his head? What was his next plan? Because I was sure, after this, Antonio wouldn't keep quiet.

But I couldn't. And all because of him!

A groan left my mouth.

The knock on the door didn't have my heart leap. Because I knew it wasn't him! He wouldn't knock at all to come in, he'd just barge in like a caveman he was!

Tobias poked his head through the door before strolling in. I scowled.

"Can I talk to you for a minute?" Tone gentle.

"No!" My answer was sharp, arms crossed over my chest.

"Em, please. This is important," he said, eyes pleading.
I cocked my head. "Are you here to lawyer up for your friend?"
He let out a sigh. "I'm here to make my sister see the truth."
My lips pressed together. So I was right. He was here for him, not me.
And then realization hit me. He
also knew everything. What happened that night. Of course he knew!
Being his best friend and Tess's
twin, there was no way they didn't tell him anything about their plan.
How could he let them do this?
"You knew." It wasn't a question. It was a statement.
The crack of my voice was clear. A look of sorrow surrounded his
features.
"It was too late for me to do anything when I found out. I'm sorry. I
couldn't do anything to stop
them." He took a step closer. "I know whatever they did, was extremely
wrong. Even I'd stopped
talking to them for months after I got to know how cruelly they broke
your heart. But trust me, Em.
With time, I realized maybe his way to push you away was wrong, but it
only did good to you. Now
look at you, you're doing so good with your dream career. You were a
topper of your batch. If you'd
stayed back, you wouldn't be able to do it."
"What do you mean? How does his decision have any connection to my
study?" my voice rose as I
spoke. Apparently, everyone knew what happened that night, but no
one even once tried to tell me
anything in those years. Now I wondered if Mom and Dad also knew.
"Do you remember when you failed in the exams for the first time?" he
asked.
I frowned, confused about his question. Why was he asking me that
embarrassing question all of a
sudden?
Shrugging, I answered, "At ninth grade."
"And why?"
"What're you trying to say? I didn't study well!" I snapped, getting
irritated.
He slowly shook his head. "Because you were too busy after Achilles to
concentrate on your study."

You were too busy changing yourself, concerned about your weight, look and get up to impress him all the time that you didn't have interest in your study anymore. Or the thing that how much you were getting lost into him that you almost forgot who you really were. You'd become a totally different person back then, Em. And that's because all your life danced around him. You didn't see anything beyond him. Not even your own career."

I remained quiet. How could I argue when his every word screamed truth?

"And after that, your grades only decreased. From a bright student, you ended up staying at your ninth grade twice. We were all concerned about your future, Em. And Achilles noticed it all," he said, making my eyes snap to him. "You were already so lost into him, ruining your future. What do you think would have happened to a naive fifteenth year old if she was thrown into a world filled with drugs and addiction by a boy she loved? Would you be able to handle the shock and pain to see him writhe in agony when he needed drugs? Would you be able to handle him when he was drunk out of his mind at some corner of a street? Would you? Would you be able to handle all of these?"

My throat dried up as his questions swirled inside my head like a blunder. "I- I'd have been there for him. I'd have definitely given him some support." I meant what I said. I meant every word.

He again shook his head. "Maybe you would. But it would be too traumatic for a fifteen year old to witness it. You were too young. Your whole future would come to at risk." A sigh left him. "He didn't know where life was taking him, Em. And after knowing your plan to confess, he knew it was the time to separate you from him. From his life. And after getting away from him, you finally focused on yourself once you shifted to New York. You found your path back again and shone in your life. Look at

where you're now. Seeing you now, I don't have any complaints against him anymore. It was necessary for your own good."

His words stung. But deep down I knew he was right. I'd have broken seeing Ace like that. My heart was too fragile back then to watch him suffer that much. But still, my heart argued with all these facts.

It didn't want to come to a peace with the fact that how easily he pushed me away.

"I understand your point. But everything has a way to do it. He could've just rejected my proposal! He didn't have to go ahead and do that with Tess! He'd no right to hurt me like that! Do you have any idea how I felt when I saw him with my own sister?" a tear rolled down my cheek as I asked him, holding his gaze.

"It was harsh, but it was necessary."

I gaped at his words. Was he even hearing himself?

"Tell me, if he'd rejected you after your confession, would you give up?"

He raised a brow. "Would you stop going after him?"

I opened my mouth and then shut it.

Never. I'd never give up.

"Your silence is your answer, Em. You'd never give up on him if he'd chosen the easy way. He could've used any girl other than taking Tess's help to do that, but still, yes you would be hurt, but after some time you would again start fantasizing about him. But when you saw him with your own sister, it shook you. It made a big difference, Em. And your being always insecure of Tess made it even harder for you to take it."

Averting my eyes, I turned away from him.

"If it wasn't Tess, you'd never give up on him, Em," he spoke in a soft voice.

"I didn't want to give up," I whispered, my throat tightening up.

I felt his hand on my shoulder. "Neither he did."

My gaze met his soft blue ones.

He nodded. "He adored you too much to let you go. But he had to. He didn't want you to ruin your

precious future on him when all he could think of was drugs and alcohol most of the time."

A sad chuckle slipped his lips.

"Though he kept himself totally sober going against his addiction the days he used to go to see you and play chess with you. He tried his best to be better, Em. But he was in too deep."

My heart tugged at his words. I still remembered those one or two visits of him a month when he'd spend the whole day at our place and stay with me. It was after his father's death. He used to be always tired. And I was too always too excited and over the moon that I never gave any attention to that. I used to think his tiredness, his losing weight was because he was sad about his father's demise.

Even in that situation, when he couldn't even go a day without his addiction, he didn't forget the promises he used to make me, to meet me once or twice a month. And he never missed the dates.

Looking down, I pinched the bridge of my nose, closing my eyes.

"Now that you know and understand his reasons, you will forgive him?" he queried, his voice expectant.

I didn't answer.

"Em, please. Don't torture him anymore. He'd already suffered enough." I cleared my throat. "Is he in his office now?"

His eyes lit up. "Yes, I'd put my everything to keep him in his office away from you for some time so that I can talk to you alone. Why? You're gonna sort everything out with him?"

"Yes. I'm gonna sort out everything by asking him to free me from the three months contract. So that I can go back to New York," answering, I turned around and walked out of the cabin.

He called out my name following me outside my cabin, but I didn't stop for him to throw another of his requests to forgive that friend of his!

Even though I accepted the good intentions of his reasons, it didn't hurt any less. It wasn't that easy for me to forget everything.

Without knocking, I barged into his office. Halting his impatient paces around his cabin, he turned to me. The disheveled hair of his indicated to the numerous times those long lean fingers brushed into them.

"Rosebud," he uttered my name in a breathless whisper, casting my heartbeat to haywire.

Taking two steps ahead, I crossed my arms over my chest. "I need to talk to you about something."

Suddenly he straightened up, a determined look placed into his grey pools. Gone the look of despair.

Nodding his head, he walked past me and went to the door. "Sure, I'll listen to everything you've to say. But first, you'll have to listen to me," saying, he locked the door with a click.

My eyes widened. "What're you doing? You don't have to lock the door to talk!"

"I need to make sure you don't run away again, sweetheart."

Short chapter, I know. But I thought to give you all another update as soon as possible. So here it is! I

hope you liked it, my sweet pumpkins!

And there's a new sneak peek posted on my Facebook page. Go check it out! And don't forget to give my page a like! Pretty please?

With love,

Eva Zahan.

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 40

Fuming, I strode to the door and tried to open it. But his pair of strong arms snaked around my midriff and hauled me to the middle of the cabin.

A shriek left my mouth. "What the hell, Valencian! Leave me right now!"

"I will. Once you hear everything I've to say."

His calm tone made me boil. I didn't let him explain things, so he would literally keep me captive in his cabin, in his arms?

I can't believe this man!

"No! I won't hear anything! You'll do what I want, and then let me go!" I said, putting on the scariest face I could manage on my face with a stern voice. But he ignored me. Because he was too busy roaming his grey eyes across my every single feature. As if he hadn't seen me for years. Not tolerating being disregarded like that, I stepped on his feet. With my five inches heel. A hiss left his mouth, his filled with adoration orbs now watched me in shock and confusion. But I didn't see any anger in there. Nor did his arms loosened a bit around me. "Do not ignore me when I'm talking!" His one rough palm caressed my cheek with the gentlest touch. "I could never ignore my Rosebud. But I won't let you go anywhere until you hear everything and forgive me." "That would never happen!" My eyes narrowed. I wiggled into his hold, but as always, I failed to escape. My gaze flickered to those stupid bulging muscles underneath his sleeves. "It will. I'll make it happen. Now what my Rosebud wanted from me?" Leaning in, he took a desperate sniff of my hair. His heady scent was messing up with my senses. Leaning back from him, I said, "I want you to terminate the contract. I want to leave." The mention of leaving had him tensed. His arms tightened around my waist and jaw clenched. Then the old Achilles Valencian came back in full force as his features hardened as stone. I saw the storm swirling inside him through the windows of his soul. Those stormy grey eyes. "You'll never leave me, Rosebud. Never again. I won't let you." The coolness of his voice sent shivers down my spine. "Well, it was you who let me go. I didn't leave on my own wish. I was pushed away," I said, holding his gaze. Now his stony features softened up a bit. "I didn't want to, Rosebud. No sane person would push the only light away from their life. But..."

"But you'd to." I completed for him, gulping the thickness of my throat.

"Tobias told me everything."

Surprise etched into his face.

"I had no choice, Rosebud. Trust me, I kept meeting you and spending time with you even after

knowing how I would affect your life in a bad way. I was too selfish to let you go." Pain flashed across

his eyes.

"But you did," I whispered. My heart clenched. "You left me."

Shaking his head, he pressed his forehead against mine, letting out a shaky breath. "I never left you,

Rosebud. I could never."

"What do you mean?"

"Yes, I separated you from me. But I was always around. Though I couldn't touch you from up close,

my eyes always did from afar," he said, stopping my heart at my chest.

Then raising my left hand, he

kissed my wrist, gazing at my bracelet. A soft smile tugged at the edge of his lips. "This looks more

beautiful on you than I imagined."

A gasp slipped through my lips. Eyes wide, mouth agape.

So, t-the anonymous person who gifted it to me was... him?

"I-it was you?"

He nodded, kissing my forehead.

"But... how?" I was shocked. All the time I wore it on my wrist and I didn't even have any idea it was

him who left the box that day outside of my door.

"How could I not give a congratulation gift to my Rosebud on her graduation day?"

"You were there? Y-you saw my graduation?" My voice came out like a meek child.

"Yes, I was there. I was always there for my rose." He cupped my cheeks.

"I always had my eyes on

you even if I was far away from you here in California most of the time.

But I was there on your every

special day. I was there whenever I thought you needed me. And trust me, it wasn't for you. It was for

my own sanity."

"That means, that means you were there all these years?" I asked, tears rolling down my cheeks. He

didn't abandon me? He was there all the time when I thought he didn't even care to call once.

He nodded, wiping my tears. "Yes, I never left you alone. I could never leave my Rosebud alone."

A flare of fire again lit inside me. "Then you saw how much I suffered! And yet you didn't consider confronting me. Didn't once come before me. Why did you do that? Why?"

My struggle began again but he held me firm against him.

"I know you suffered. And I'm extremely sorry for that. But you've no idea how much agony I went

through staying away from you, Rosebud. Especially when..." A muscle of his jaw ticked as his nostrils

flared. "Especially when I had to see my girl dating other men. I'd to endure it all. Trust me, they were

lucky I took it as my punishment to push you away from me. Otherwise, they'd be dead right now."

Surprised, subconsciously a blush crept up my neck remembering those guys I dated back then only

for some days. I couldn't even stretch them to a week. Because all I felt towards them was, nothing.

Not even a bit of attraction.

And then again my temper rose. Jabbing a finger in his chest, I gritted out. "Do you know how guilty I

felt to date them? Even after I thought you'd nothing to do with me.

Even after I was single. Do you

know how much it hurt me to feel like playing with others? Just to get a little distraction. Just to

forget my headache for some time! And all because you were being too great by keeping me away

from you! And now that I'm finally with a guy who is great, you appeared all of a sudden declaring me

as yours? The nerve of you!"

His lips pressed. "I know you were hurt. And seeing you in pain only doubled my agony. But it was for

your own good. And I didn't just appear out of nowhere." His greek accent dense. "You were always

mine. I was waiting for you to finish your study and my being stable enough to be worthy of you.

Though I was stable for a long time before you finally graduated."

To be worthy of me?

Something tugged inside my chest at his words.

"It wasn't your life to decide what I'll do or not. How did you know I wouldn't fall for anyone else and accept you back into my life just like that?" My tone hard.

"I didn't need to know that you wouldn't fall for anyone else. Because my Rosebud loved me enough to keep me in her heart forever."

My eyes burned as waves of emotions slammed into my chest. I let out a shaky breath, not denying him.

"And I also knew how stubborn my little Rosebud was. I knew you wouldn't forgive me so easily. But I couldn't give up. After all, I'd waited seven fucking years to have you back in my arms." His thumb brushed my lower lip.

I shook my head. Some more shameless tears slipped my eyes. "No matter what you say, I can't forget what you did. You hurt me. You..." I bit my lip. "You didn't let me stay with you. You pushed me away when you needed me the most. I... hate you! I hate you Achilles Valencian for that! I hate you!"

Pushing at his chest, I tried to get away from him again.

Even if it wasn't my fault, I didn't know anything about his condition. But still, I felt guilty. For not being there for him when he needed me. It tormented my soul to even think of that.

He pulled me closer. With raw emotions flashing across those stormy grey eyes, he whispered, "And I love you, Emerald Hutton. I love you so fucking much!"

My breathing stopped as I stared at him. And then slowly my heart started racing, a tingling sensation spread across my veins. My knees wobbled at his declaration. The intense emotions searing through my chest had me let out a shaky breath.

He'd said those words again. The words that haunted my dreams. The words that ran into my head twenty-four hours. The words I hated myself for feeling flutters in my tummy even after hating him.

I love you...

I wanted to hear those words again. My ears yearned to hear them again.

My lower lip trembled. I had no words. I was speechless.

"I loved you from the day those turquoise eyes met mine, my precious rose. I loved you every time you smiled at me with those big doe eyes. I loved you whenever that little nose crinkled every time you thought you'd lose into the chess matches." He kissed my nose, followed by my eyelids. "I loved you when you were away from me. I loved even your annoying habit of eating garlic prawns using your hand. And I love you when I have you in my arms right now. The place where I want to keep you for the rest of my life."

Leaning in, he captured my trembling lips into a scorching kiss. A whimper left me as I melted against him. My heart soared high.

"I love you so much, my rose. So much that without you, I deny to even breath," murmuring against my lips, he claimed my mouth again. The way he moulded our lips around each other, the intoxicating strokes of his tongue, the warmth of his arms, I found myself letting out a sign of content.

Clutching his coat tight in my fists, I kissed him back with equal urgency. I missed those lips. I missed his arms, his voice, his everything.

Slowly pulling away, he stared deep into my eyes. With both of our breathing harsh, we couldn't move our gazes away from each other. It was like an invisible magnet pulling us towards each other.

"Are you still mad at me, Rosebud?" he asked, grey pools filled with hope. "Will you give me- give us a chance?"

Would I?

Just as I opened my mouth to give him my answer, a knock landed on the door. I tried to pull away from him but he didn't let me.

"No need. Whoever it is, will go away."

Shaking my head, I wiggled out and opened the door much to his dismay. It could be something

important.

But the actual reason behind my eagerness to open it was, I got an escape from his question in this way.

And before I could even pull the door wide, it flew open making me stagger back.

"Mr. Valencian! It's so great to see..." Her ear-splitting grin fell into a half not so happy smile when her eyes landed on me standing there.

My jaw clenched, hands fisted.

Red freaking witch!

What the hell was she doing here?

My eyes immediately formed into a glare. I could feel fumes coming out from every pores of my body.

"Uh, hello, Ms. Hutton, Mr. Valencian! I'm sorry if I interrupted anything," she said, planting an extra sweet and fake mask on her face. The once over she threw at him didn't go missed by me.

"Rosebud, you didn't answer me."

Not even acknowledging her, he took long strides towards me. But I stepped away. My twisting facial expression must've told him to keep his distance.

"Don't you dare!" My voice came out as a snap. He called her here? Why? Why her? "You've got a guest to attend! Why don't you concentrate on her instead?"

"Baby..."

I stepped back again from his approaching form.

Fisting his hands, he let let out a curse, murmuring something incoherent under his breath. His eyes were desperate... wild.

Then those flashing stormy gaze flickered to the red witch who wore a maroon dress today.

"What the fuck are you doing here? Who let you in?" he roared, making both me and that witch flinch.

His shoulders were rigid, he seemed furious.

With eyes wide open, she opened her mouth and closed like a gaping fish. Her little outfit and

excessive make-up just spoiled my mood further. Not wanting to be there anymore, I pushed my legs

to move. My heart still thudded from his words. Warmth, anger, jealousy, all were messing with my head. And I definitely didn't want to see her face any longer. What she did last time still burned me like a hot knife.

"Rosebud, wait!"

"Don't!" Giving him a warning look, I passed that witch and stormed out of his cabin. And to my dismay, the door automatically closed behind me.

"Mr. Valencian, I'm so sorry..."

Her meek words faded away along the gap of the door. My lips pressed tight as I glared at it. Her

slutty dress pricked my insides. Did she wear it for him?

My nails dug into my palms. He definitely didn't call her. The way he behaved proved it. Then why the heck she was here?

I just stood there like a psycho staring at a closed door with venom. And why the hell did I come out

like that? I shouldn't have left her alone with him.

Shaking my head at my ridiculous thoughts, I decided to leave. But still somehow lingered around the

corner. Several ominous thoughts were nagging in my head.

Though his booming voice that flew out of the closed door did soothe my burning heart a little. So

they were definitely not doing anything that I wouldn't like.

After some more barking of him, the door opened again and that witch came out with a teary face. I

hid myself from her sight.

Throwing another glance at his cabin, with her pale face she turned around and rushed down the

hallway without looking back. And I just kept glaring at her until she was out of sight.

A thud came out from his cabin, followed by another. I took a few steps towards the door, ready to

barge in again. But then I stopped myself.

If I go in there right now, he wouldn't let me leave until I answer him.

I shook my head. He must be angry and throwing a tantrum right now.

But... what if he was hurt?

I bit my lip.

And then I heard him shouting something at someone. Must be talking to someone. Seconds later, a huffing and panting Carter appeared and rushed inside the devil's den. I heaved a sigh. I think he was okay. It was just another bad day for Carter, I guess.

Poor guy.

Just as I turned around to leave, my phone buzzed.

Opening the message, I read it.

Great! He sent the information I needed. Now all I had to do was to drive there and sort things out myself.

Hey, guys! So this was chapter 40! How was it?

As most of you know that I've my book published on Goodnovel too, I already published chapter 41

there. If you want to read the next chapter right now, you can head over there and check it out! Just

search for my book and you'll find it. As a warning, most of the chapters are locked, meaning you'll

have to use coins to buy them. But as you'll sign up for the first time, I think you'll have some bonus

coins to read for free. And if you do go there to read the next chapter, please leave a review for

#emilles and ratings. I'll be grateful! And yes, the next chapter is named as 'Meeting Sierra'.

I'd be grateful if you support me there as it'll help building my author career. And don't worry, I'll

definitely post the next chapter over here tomorrow for those who can't go there.

With love,

Eva Zahan.