

The-Trap-Of-Ace-by-Eva-Zahan
The Trap Of Ace
Chapter 1

I glanced at my wrist.

Nine-thirty.

"Ma'am, please turn off your cell phone. The plane is about to take off," said the flight attendant in her angelic voice.

"Yeah, just a minute." I threw her an apologetic look. Nodding her head, she walked away.

"Mom, I need to hang up now. The crews have already warned me for the second time."

"Alright, alright! I will let you go now. You're coming to me in some hours anyway. Don't forget to call your dad when you're about to land. We will be waiting outside!" Excitement dripped from her voice.

A sudden homesickness filled my mind. It's been two years since I met them.

"And keep that boy at an arm's length," Dad called out in the background.

Shaking my head, I let out a chuckle. "Alright guys! I will see you at the airport."

"Love you, honey!" They intuned together.

"Love you too!"

Sighing, I looked out of the window. Another plane took off the runway, flying high in the sky. It'd always fascinated me. Though I always struggled with myself not to flip during the taking offs.

A figure slumped beside me, making me turn my head. Letting out a huff, he settled against the seat.

"How's your stomach now?" I asked, seeing the perspiration on his forehead and flushed cheeks.

"Not good. I shouldn't have eaten the leftover macaroni last night. God! I swear! I won't ever touch leftovers again." He groaned.

Poor guy! Even in this crisis, he'd agreed to come with me to my home.

"I'm so sorry, Warner. You have to travel with me in this state. You should've stayed back, you know?"

He flashed me a boyish smile. "Don't be. It was my decision to tag along even after knowing my condition this morning."

"But it was me who asked you to come with me," I said, guilt crashed on me.

"Don't be silly. I can do anything for you. And this is just a slightly uncomfortable journey. And it will go away just in a day. I've already taken medicines." He grasped my hand, entwining our fingers.

I smiled, a grateful one.

"I love you," he said, looking at my eyes.

The smile threatened to fall, but I managed to put it up and squeezed his hand in return. The announcement of the flight attendant for every passenger to fasten their seat belts, saved me from another awkward situation.

We've been dating for six months now. And known each other since I joined college. We were good friends from the beginning. After my several failures at keeping up on dating a guy for more than a week, I gave up on kindling any kind of relationship with anyone. And when Warner one day asked me out at a friend's get-together, I couldn't put him down.

He was everything a girl would want in an ideal boyfriend. Handsome, intelligent, humble, honest.

And most importantly, he knew me so well. After all, we've been friends for three years now. So when he'd asked me to be his girlfriend, I'd said yes.

But even if he'd confessed his feelings for thousands of times before me, I couldn't just bring myself to reciprocate. It's not that I didn't like him, I did. He was a great guy.

Maybe it'd take some more time for me to feel that deep for him. And I was waiting for that day.

"Ma'am, would you like some coffee?" The air-hostage's voice broke my trance.

"Do you have tea?"

After a long four and a half hours later when we finally landed in California, I found my parents right

where they told me they would be. Holding a placard that said 'welcome home', Mom met me with her more than usual enthusiastic hug, where Dad had a satisfied look in his eyes now that I finally came home. Though it was just for two weeks until I would go back. From the day I decided to shift to Los Angeles for my high school, he took the world of worry for me on his shoulders. They both did. It wasn't easy for me to stay that far from them, but it'd have been more difficult for me to stay here in this city. I needed time to heal myself. So the distance was necessary. As soon as the memories of that night started to flood in, I shut off my mind, burying them at the pit of my brain. Just like I did for the last seven years.

I've moved on.

"Welcome home, little mouse!" The moment I stepped into the threshold, I was tackled into a bone-crushing hug. "Look at ya! You've grown up!"

I rolled my eyes at my brother. "You just met me two months ago."

"Yeah, but it feels like ages since I irritated you," he said, eyes warm with nostalgia.

My eyes stung. I've missed him. Even though he visited me often in Los Angeles whenever he was on his business trips.

"You better keep your stupid ass away from me, I'm warning you!" I feigned a serious look.

He chuckled, and then his gaze fell on Warner who looked blue in the face from his marathon to washrooms in every ten minutes. He seemed to be faint at any moment. He was extremely embarrassed when he had to run for the washroom before he could even shake Dad's hand.

Way to impress my parents!

I wanted their first meeting to be good. And Dad couldn't dislike him anymore for that.

'He is too good to be true', Dad had said once on the phone. I didn't know why, but he didn't seem to approve of him the moment he heard us dating.

"Hey, Warner! It's good to see you, man!" Tobias gave him a manly hug.
"You alright though? You look sick."

"Nothing serious, just have a stomach bug. And it's nice to see you too."
Suddenly his expression twisted like someone had punched him in the gut. "Uh, if you don't mind..."

"Go right and then straight up, the first door. You will find the
guestroom," said Dad with a displeased tone.

Heaving a 'thank you', he ran inside.
I sighed.

I will have to talk to Dad about this. Though Warner didn't notice his
tone now, he'd soon.

"Poor boy," mom murmured, subtly sending Dad a look of reprimand
which he proudly ignored and padded inside. Shaking her head, she looked at me. "Honey, why don't
you go to your room and freshen up. I will make something quick for you in the meanwhile."
Getting a nod from me, she followed Dad. Definitely to give him an ear.
Tobias threw an arm over my shoulder as we climbed up the stairs. "So?
You're determined to keep this one, huh?"

Like Dad, he also wasn't fond of my boyfriend. But when Dad was balant
about it, he was sneaky.

"He is a good guy, Tobias. And the best thing is, he is my best friend."

"Is it just it? You will keep him because he is a good guy and your
friend?" He raised his brow.

"Isn't it enough?"

He shrugged. "What about feelings? I don't see you look at him the way
you used to look at A..."

I put a hand before him, not letting him finish the sentence. "I like him.
And I think it's enough for me to stay in a relationship with him. And you should be happy for me, don't
you?"

Something flashed in his eyes which I couldn't decipher. Then he smiled.

"If that's what makes you
happy, Em."

My lips curled up. "Thanks for understanding."

Once he left me in my room to freshen up, I left a message to Casie and Beth of my arrival and prepared for a long warm bath. It's been so long I haven't met them, though face-timing was regular between us. They'd wanted to join me there for college, but Beth couldn't because her boyfriend was here. And Casie, well, she'd left her study for her modeling career. Good thing that her decision was right. She was a successful model now. And I couldn't be more proud of her.

At the dinner, Warner looked much better than this morning. Tonight was our family dinner, so delicious dishes made by Mom were the speciality. If I missed all these years anything beside my family, it was her cooking.

When she placed a plate of apple-pies before me, I gaped at her, my face splitting into a greedy grin.

"My favorite!"

Chuckling, she took her chair beside Dad.

When Tobias tried to pick one, I slapped his hand away. "Don't you dare touch them, they're all mine."

He frowned. "But that's not fair! I also love them!"

"Tobi, let my daughter have whatever she wants. You had them these years all by your own, now it's her turn," Dad said.

"This is partiality!" he complained, making us all laugh. Mom's eyes twinkled watching us banter like old times. Then her gaze fell on my left wrist.

"What a beautiful bracelet! When did you buy it, honey?"

I gazed down at it. An involuntary smile turned up my lips. It was a thin golden chain, decorated with glittering emeralds and sparkling tiny diamonds, shaped like roses.

"Someone gifted it to me on my graduation day," I replied. I still remember that day. Mom and Dad couldn't join because their flight got cancelled due to bad weather. No one from my family could attend. With a sunken mood when I returned to my flat that night after a wild party with my friends, I found a small box lain before my door.

It was from someone anonymous. No note or name. Though I didn't want to keep it, I just couldn't resist it. I fell in love with it the moment I saw it.

"Who?"

I shrugged. "Don't know. There wasn't any name on the gift box."

"Princess, you shouldn't accept anonymous gifts. It can be risky. And who would give you such an expensive bracelet and don't reveal their name?" Dad's forehead creased.

"It might be Matt. And I'm sure he is the one who sends you roses on your every birthday," claimed Warner.

"Who is Matt?" Mom looked at me.

I sighed. "No one, Mom. A guy from my college who once asked me out."

"No one? He literally stalked you everywhere until something happened and he disappeared in the air.

He must've taken seriously my threat to hand him over to police," Warner said, his face grim.

"Stalker!" Mom and Dad shrieked at the same time.

"All this happened, and you didn't even consider to inform us?" Dad gave me a look of displeasure and disappointment.

Warner shifted uncomfortably on his chair at my glare. He had to open his big mouth right now, didn't he?

"Calm down, Dad! He was gone before I could even take any action."

"Gone where?"

"I don't know. One day he just... disappeared." I shrugged. "Maybe got the idea of my disinterest and gave up."

"He even disappeared from college," Warner muttered, receiving another look from me.

Honestly, I didn't care where he vanished. But I didn't think it was him who gave me this bracelet.

Such a beautiful idea wouldn't come into a psycho's head.

"Still, you should've told us, princess." Dad shook his head.

"It's alright, Mr. Hutton. I was there with her," Warner chimed.

Dad eyed his lack of muscles and went back to his food. And Tobias's lips twitched at the side in

amusement. He knew about Matt, but didn't inform my parents because he knew how restless they could get about every tiny things.

Mom's eyes darted to the door. My sister was about yet to join us. But as always, she had more important things to do than her family dinner.

Just as I picked an apple-pie and brought to my lips, the sound of clicking heels on the tiled floor reached my ears.

She had a big smile on her face as she sauntered closer. "Hey everyone! Sorry, got stuck with something."

Yellow sundress, high stilettos, shoulder length straight blonde hair, blue eyes and perfect make-up.

As stunning and sophisticated as ever.

"Hey, lil sis!" Lightly kissing my cheeks, she sat next to me. "Look at you, you've grown more beautiful than I remember last time."

My lips turned up in a tight-lipped smile. "Thanks. How're you?"

"Oh, I've been good! More than just good, actually!" she chirped, her skin glowing under the light.

When her gaze landed on Warner, she recognized him immediately.

Though I wasn't in touch with her

much, other than my one or two days visit sometimes at home, Tobias kept updating her about me on a regular basis. Even though she wasn't interested.

After we were finished with our dinner, dessert was served.

"So, Em? You heard about the party tomorrow night?" asked Tess.

Mom tensed at the mention of the party. I raised my brows.

"What party?"

"They didn't tell you? The party at Valencian house." Now it was my turn to tense. Where her eyes

shone with excitement. "A party will be thrown at the celebration of Valencian Corp's coming at

Forbes business magazine. They're ruling the country's business world now. Isn't it cool?"

Tobias casted me a concerned glance. So did Mom. At Tess's question, I just nodded my head.

"Yeah, that boy has worked hard for it. After his father, he handled their whole business single

handedly," commented Dad, his eyes proud.
"Why not? After all, he is my best friend," Tess said. Flashes of that night floated in my mind, my hand curled around the glass. "And, another thing! In this party, I'm going to announce something really important before the whole world. So you all must join." As I was about to open my mouth to say no, Mom gasped. "Is that a ring in your finger, Tess?" Another smile stretched across her lips as she shyly raised her hand for everyone to show. "H-he proposed to me last night. And tomorrow, we're going to announce our official engagement date." Everyone held a stunned face. Something churned in my stomach. "When did this happen? I thought you guys weren't serious," Mom queried. "I know, we were on and off. There were some issues between us. Specially with him, you know after what happened to his family. But he finally got the balls and proposed me last night! I can't explain how happy I am!" Her eyes shone with happy tears. And then my eyes fell on the letter that was curved into her ring. "What's the 'V' stand for, Tess?" My eyes glued to it. The grip of my hand tightened around the glass. She followed my gaze. "Oh, it's for 'valencian'. Isn't it beautiful?"

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 2

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A knock landed on the door. "You ready, honey? Your Dad is waiting downstairs."

"Yeah, Mom. Just give a minute," I replied, staring at my reflection in the mirror.

"Alright, come soon."

I ran my palm over the red material clung against my skin. It felt smooth. Everything was perfect. The nude make-up, the simple side-parted long hair, the off shoulder gown with a sweetheart neckline and a semi-high slit at the side, everything was in place.

"I'm ready," I whispered at my reflection, and those big turquoise eyes of her stared back.

Grabbing my black clutch, I smoothed my hair once again and sauntered downstairs.

Warner met me at the door. His mouth fell open, his light blue eyes looking up and down my body.

"Holy shit! You're looking..." He shook his head. "I've no words." I stretched my lips into a smile. "Thanks. You don't look that bad yourself."

He did look good in his three piece suit and tie.

"Shall we?" I asked.

"Sure! God knows, no one can take their eyes off of you tonight."

Grinning, he gave me an arm, and I took it.

Once outside, we met Mom adjusting Dad's tie as he grunted something.

His face turned more grimier

spotting us together. After Mom gushed about my looks and being

proud that I went after her, we all

piled in the car. Though her subtle attempt of asking me if I was feeling good after I left the dinner in

the middle, excusing of my jet lag last night. I knew what she wanted to ensure, if I was okay, not

physically, but emotionally.

Everyone had avoided talking about the engagement as much as possible before me. They thought it

could upset me as they all had an idea of my heartbreak seven years ago.

Not all of it though. They

weren't aware of what happened that night. But they didn't know I

wasn't the fifteenth years old

Emerald anymore.

I was going to face the man who broke my heart years ago, and see him announce his engagement

with my sister before the world. But I was alright. It's been years since

then. I had a boyfriend, I'd

moved on.

After last night, I hadn't seen her. And honestly, I didn't want to. Even if I didn't care anymore, I still

felt the anger and betrayal I felt that night. After knowing everything,

how could she come and

announce her engagement to me as if nothing happened?

How could she...

I shook myself, not wanting to remember the past. I was stronger now. The past should remain in the past. And I should be happy for her. It's been years after all. And I've overcome the past. It didn't affect me now. Not at all. The car screeched to a halt, along with my heart. Mom and Dad got out, and Warner followed behind. We were here.

"Em?" Warner called out, waiting for me outside. Deep breaths came out of me, my hands fisted my gown at my knees. Heart palpitating down the chest, my mouth turned dry. A drop of sweat trickled down my nape. It was slipping. The calm facade, it was slipping from my control.

"Honey? Come on, Tessa is waiting for us inside," Mom probed.

I can do it. Nothing happened. I've moved on.

Giving her a tight nod, I gritted my teeth and scrambled out with shaky knees. I caught Warner's arm in a vice grip as my eyes fell on the huge mansion I didn't remember when I last visited.

"You alright? You look a little pale," Warner asked as we crossed the threshold. The line I shouldn't cross.

"I'm fine." My nails dug into my palms.

"Are you sure?"

I nodded, clutching him harder. He winced, but didn't ask any further. And I was grateful for that.

I let him drag me across the mass of people dressed in sophisticated and branded clothes. The vast hall was sufficient to gulp the massive crowd alone. Everything was decorated the way a party of one of the most influential families should be. Elegant yet dazzling.

As we passed the chatting and drinking crowd, we spotted Tess, standing beside some of her friends.

Seeing us, she excused herself and rushed to us, the tail of her silvery sparkling gown dragged behind her. Tobias followed behind.

If all of their friends were here, that meant...

Tugging my hand out of Warner's arm, I took a step back. My eyes glanced around. My legs urged me to run. Go back to the safety of my room where someone couldn't reach me. Someone whom I buried

at the pit of my memories.

"Oh my God! Look at my baby, you're looking so beautiful!" Mom's voice croaked as she glanced at Dad. "When did our daughter get so big, Wilson? Look at her wearing an engagement ring today." She sniffled.

I averted my eyes from her ring, and took a glass of wine from a passing waiter. My hand shook around it.

Dad rubbed Mom's back while Tess rolled her eyes. "Mom, we're just announcing our official engagement date. I'm not getting married tonight!"

"Don't worry about her, she just got a little emotional. Anyway, where is your fiance?" Dad asked, looking around.

"Oh, he is over there!" She pointed near the bar. And I froze.

Slowly and steadily, I followed everyone's gaze. Four men stood together, one of them stood with his back to us.

Is it... him?

If it was, then he was more tall and lean than I last remembered. Seven years. After seven years, I will come to him face to face. I will have to look into those stormy grey eyes...

I let out a shaky breath. I needed air, I needed out.

Just as I was about to slip away, Tess called out for him.

"Caleb?"

My steps halted. Caleb?

I glanced at the direction as that man turned around and a broad grin lightened his face. Striding

closer, he kissed on Tess's cheek and greeted Mom and Dad.

Their linked arms, gazing at each other's eyes with full of affection... I blinked, a silent gasp slipped through my lips.

That means, Caleb was the one Tess got engaged to? Achilles's cousin? Now that 'V' in her ring made sense. 'V' for Valencian. Caleb Valencian. A pressure in my chest suddenly disappeared, filling it with air. They weren't together.

"Em? Emerald? Is that you?" Caleb asked, recognition flickered in his brown eyes. "Oh my God! It is

the infamous Emerald Hutton who didn't even give a call to this poor abandoned man all these times?"

I managed a smile. "Hey, Caleb."

He engulfed me in a bear hug. And I couldn't help but return his endearment. He was like a big brother to me. But in the process of distancing myself with him, I cut ties with everyone involving the Valencians.

He pulled away and put his hands on my shoulders. "Did anyone tell you what a beautiful woman you've grown up into?"

Chuckling, I shook my head. The grip around my glass remained firm. Any moment now.

"If you've stopped flirting with my sister, can I hug her now?" Tess raised her brow at Caleb.

Grinning, he placed a kiss on her temple. "You know I only have my eyes on you, right?"

Rolling her eyes, she pushed him away and threw her arms around me.

"You're looking lovely!"

"So are you," I said. Her gaze locked with mine. Something close to regret flashed in her eyes, and then something else which I couldn't decipher.

"Emerald, I..."

"Alright! It's time for dance." Caleb interrupted. His giving Tess a look didn't go unnoticed. What's going on? "Shall we?"

Blinking, Tess cleared her throat. She smiled and placed her hand on Caleb's and together they skipped off to the dance floor. Mom and Dad got busy in conversation with some other couple.

Warner's phone rang, cutting him in the middle as he went to say something. Excusing himself, he walked away to attend the call.

Tobias noticed my wary glances around. My uneasiness. "Relax, everything will be fine."

"What? Why did you say that?" I feigned confusion.

He sighed, shaking his head. "Nothing. You need another drink?" He jutted his chin at my empty glass.

No, stay here with me. I wanted to say, but decided to go against it.

"Sure."

Nodding, he went to the bar to get us drinks.

I didn't need anyone for support. I could deal with it alone. I wasn't still that naive teenager who will

fall on his feet with just his one glance.

Suddenly the hair at the back of my neck stood up. Goosebumps pricked on my skin.

Turning around, I observed my surroundings. Nothing seemed unusual.

Then why did I feel like someone was watching me?

As the colorful lights moved around the mass of chattering people, my gaze went to the first floor and

stuck there. At the furthest corner, a figure stood there; his face in the shadow. Hands in his pockets,

he stood unmoving, his body facing mine. Even if I couldn't see his face, I could tell he was looking at

me. And for some reason, it unnerved me. Even then, I couldn't tear my eyes.

Who is he?

"Em?"

Jumping in fright, I whirled around.

"Whoa! Whoa! Relax, it's just me," Warner said, putting his hands up.

Breathing out a sigh of relief, I turned back again. And he was gone.

"You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. You just startled me," I replied, wetting my lips.

"Alright. Dance?" he asked, giving me his hand.

I looked for Tobias. And there he was, laughing with some girls with two glasses still in his hands. I

shook my head at my brother.

Giving Warner a small smile, I took his hand.

I didn't want to be alone right now.

Once at the dance floor, we started to sway under the dim lights and slow music. And then I felt it

again. That stare, the burning gaze watching me from afar, following my every move.

Warner tucked a strand behind my ear, but my ardent gaze was searching for something in the crowd.

"Em? You sure you're alright? You look a little disturbed since last night."

He frowned.

"Yeah, everything is alright. Don't worry. Just the jet lag," I lied. I didn't want to. But I couldn't tell him

why my nerves had been on haywire since I heard of this party.

"Alright. If you say so. But you know you can tell me anything and everything, I will listen, right?"

This time my smile was genuine. I nodded my head. "I know."

His lips turned up as he took one of my hands and placed a kiss on the back of it.

A throat cleared at my back. "May I have the chance to dance with this beautiful lady?" A deep hard

voice asked, distant Greek accent.

I stiffened.

Warner looked up over my head, and his eyes widened slightly.

Recognition flashed into his eyes as a

polite smile tugged on his lips. "Sure." Stepping away, he glanced at me.

"I will wait for you at the

bar." And then he disappeared from the dance floor.

No! I wanted to say. But I couldn't move or say anything.

I didn't even turn around. Didn't dare to. My heart pounded in my chest as I felt his heat behind me. A

pair of big calloused hands covered mine, placing them before me together, with his arms engulfing

me. A gasp slipped through my lips at the electricity that ran in waves into my veins.

When I didn't move, he took the control and swayed us both with his enormous frame around me in

slow moves. The heady combination of his exotic cologne tangled with smoke filled my senses.

Still the same.

My brain stopped working.

Hot breath tickled on my neck, making my knees weakened. An uncouth swarm of emotions crashed

on me. Something squeezed in my chest as a shaky breath left my lips.

Both of us stayed silent as we swayed under the music. All I could hear was the music, my deep

breathing and the pounding of my heart in my ear. My hands trembled under his.

I couldn't do this. I can't! I needed to go away!

Moving his arms away, when I tried to pull away, he grasped my hand and swirled me around, pulling

me in. My chest collided against him. Gasping, when I looked up at him...
My breath caught at my throat.

Those stormy grey eyes.

After seven years I was looking into them. And it was what I feared. They held me captive, just as they used to do years ago. Those grey pools peered into my soul, compelling me. His face was inches away from mine.

Breathless, I took in his other features. And I was lost for words. Strong chiseled jaws, prominent chin, beautiful sharp nose, firm desirable lips and a wide forehead.

Not even a strand of his jet black hair was out of place. He wore it long, the ends touched his neck.

Just like a Greek god.

Gone that charming boyish look, everything about him now screamed man. A powerful rough man.

I was breathless, my gaze couldn't move from his face. I didn't know age made people that much beautiful. No, beautiful wasn't the word. Words couldn't describe Achilles Valencian.

He was... out of the world.

Raising a hand, he brushed a single strand away from my face, and I didn't feel the shiver when

Warner had done it earlier. His gaze roamed on every inch of my face, as if memorizing them. They

seemed in some kind of trance. As if he couldn't help it, he brushed his knuckles against my cheek. A

breathy murmur left his lips which I couldn't decipher.

Subconsciously, I leaned into his touch, eyes not leaving his face. Skin eager for more, only those

strong arms around me didn't suffice. My heart longed for something as it basked under his scorching gaze.

The gaze I used to die for wishing it on me even for a second. My vision burned at the soaring emotions slamming in my chest.

My Ace...

But then his voice broke my trance, bringing me back to the present, the reality.

"Still won't talk to me, Rosebud?" His grey locking with my turquoise.

Rosebud? So he still remembered someone of that name existed in his life?

Then he also must remember the heartache he gifted her years ago...

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Chapter 3

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The name that used to give me flutters in my tummy, now was only adding fuel to something that was smoldering inside me for years.

I didn't want to be called with that name anymore. I couldn't.

"I didn't think my Rosebud could stay mad at me for that long," he drawled out when I didn't say anything, eyes searching for something on my face.

My Rosebud?

Whatever you see on my face, Achilles Valencian, but you won't find the fifteen years old sister of yours best friend there. Because she died that night because of you. And the irony was, it wasn't even your fault.

"Don't call me that!" My voice came out much like a snap. When he raised a brow, I tried to cool down my nerves. I couldn't show him my anger. And though how much right it seemed, he wasn't at any fault.

He didn't even know.

"I- I've a name. And I'd prefer to be called by that. I don't like when someone calls me with nicknames," I clarified.

The side of his lips quirked up. "I know your name. But you will always be Rosebud for me." He leaned in, his hot breath fanning my earlobe. "Though this Rosebud of mine now bloomed into a beautiful rose."

My heart stuttered.

Whispers of the past echoed in my mind.

"Really?" I'd brightened up like a Christmas tree. "That means you will marry me?"

He'd bit his lip, his eyes lit up with amusement. "I'm sorry, Rosebud! But I can't."

"Why not?" I pouted.

"Because it's not the right time. You're still so young."

"Then when will be the right time?" I'd gazed up at him with so much hope.

"When you turn into a blooming rose from a rose bud."

A shaky breath left my lips, a squeezing pain shot through my chest. My eyes stung with forbidden memories. He... remembered?

But then flashes of that night floated across. My throat tightened, causing me to ball my fists.

I gulped, it felt like acid burning inside me. I needed air!

Moving out of his arms, I pushed him away. Surprise flashed across his eyes, and then something like

concern took over his features. Not wanting to stay there any longer, I turned around and walked

away. As fast as I could without creating a scene.

"Rosebud!" He called after me, his voice closer. At my peripheral vision, I saw Tobias going to him, maybe to stop him from following me.

"Em? Where are you going?"

Ignoring Warner's question, I ran out there and didn't stop until I was at the serenity of the huge balcony.

Gripping the railing, I breathed in the cold night air. Up in the sky, hung the half curved moon, surrounded by gazillions of twinkling stars. They winked at me, as if mocking me for my pathetic feelings.

A lone tear escaped my eye as the cool breeze touched my face. And then I let some more to fall free.

Tears that I'd been succeeding to put in for years.

My hand clutched my chest as I felt the same pain it felt that night. As if someone has sliced the old wounds open.

Bitting my lip hard, I attempted to stop those tears. Seven years. Seven freaking years! And here I was, still mourning over the heartache I got as a punishment of my foolishness. Seven years, and it still pained me physically to remember the lose.

I was still afraid of meeting him. I was still a coward. That's why I tagged Warner along. I needed

support. I knew one way or another, in these two weeks i'd have to face him. I'd been trying to escape from him after that night. I'd avoided him like a plague. Even if it was impossible for some occasions to avoid him before I went to high school to another city, I hadn't looked at him. I didn't look at his face or into his eyes, because I knew, I knew if I did the mistake to look up, he would see it. He would see it all.

And he would find out how pathetic I was for believing in his words he said to a nine years old naive kid, not to break her fragile heart.

I thought, I will forget him if I went away. So I went to live in a different city. I thought, if I dated other men, I would forget him. So I dated a lot of men. If I toughen myself up, I'd be able to wipe him from my memories.

But no. Just one glance, and some mere words threw me back to where I'd stood years ago. All my attempts failed.

"Why?" I whispered, my voice quivering.

Why can't I just move on?! After all these years, why can't I just not feel anything? Why it still hurt?

Fuck you, Achilles Valencian! Fuck you for fucking up my life!

I wiped my face when I felt presence behind me. A glass of orange juice was held before me.

"Just give me a moment, Warner. I will be inside in a while."

"Sorry to dissappoint, but I'm not your boyfriend. He is enjoying his drink very much with your brother inside."

I snapped my head to him. He followed me here?

Stormy grey eyes was dark with... anger, shadowed jaws were clenched.

His charcoal suit gleamed

under the moonlight as he towered over me. Even after these years, I

could only reach his broad

shoulders with my five feet four inches.

And the way he pronounced the word 'boyfriend' with malice, didn't go unnoticed by me. I didn't like that tone at all.

"Why are you here?" I took a step back. His close proximity suffocated me.

He covered the distance I created between us, handing me the glass.

"Came to see if you're okay."

You didn't come to see me all these years.

"You don't need to be concerned of my well-being." I ran my free hand over my arm as chilling air kissed my bare skin.

A muscle of his jaw ticked. Shrugging of his jacket, he placed it over my shoulders. I tried to go away from his overwhelming presence, but he held me in place and secured it around me. His intoxicating scent filled my senses. "I will be always concerned for your well-being, Emerald. I can't stop doing it even if I want. And I won't."

"Why?" I looked up into his intense grey. His arms still around me. Why wasn't I pulling away?

"Because I care for you."

As a little sister?

A sourness rose up my throat.

"And why do you care for me?" I asked, my tone bitter.

Leaning in, he snuggled my hair against his nose, breathing me in. A shiver ran down my spine. Then he pulled away and peered into my soul, briefly glancing down at my parted lips.

"Let's keep the answer for another day. Let the time unfold the inevitable of its own." Tucking a strand behind my ear, he turned around and strode away, leaving me standing there. Cold and confused.

What did he mean by inevitable?

Whatever, I didn't care. Looking back up at the sky, I took a deep breath to calm myself down. Once feeling more controlled, I sauntered back inside.

I found him at the feet of the huge staircase, talking to a bald middle aged man. But his eyes were on me.

Averting my stare, I stopped a passer by waiter.

"Yes, Ma'am? What'd you like to have?" He gestured to the variety of drinks on his tray.

"Nothing, but I need you to do something." Shrugging off the jacket, I handed it to him. "Would you please return it to Mr. Valencian? He forgot it with me." The waiter followed my gaze and seeing the tightness of his jaws, the color of his face drained. He fumbled in his place with the tray and jacket in both of his hands. Before he could object, I thanked him and left.

The more I'd be away from him and things related to him, the more it'd be good for me.

"Em? Where were you? You okay? I was about to go to you, but Tobias said to give you some time alone. Did something happen?" Warner fired as soon as he saw me, standing beside him, my brother eyed me with concern.

I gave him a tight smile. "Nothing happened, everything is fine. Don't worry! I just needed some fresh air."

He didn't look convinced, but nodded his head anyway. That's what I liked about him, he never forced me to do anything I didn't want to.

When I asked Tobias for the car keys excusing of not feeling well, he requested me to stay until the announcement and cake cutting. I agreed to stay until the announcement, only for Mom and Dad. I didn't want them to worry. And the entire time I ignored a pair of scorching gaze on me.

I needed to get away if I wanted to keep my sanity intact.

The blaring of my phone alarm woke me from my sleep that had come to me with much difficulties last night. The soft beams of morning glow fell into the room, causing me to squint my eyes. Letting out a yawn, I sat up.

My head felt heavy. And soon my heart followed as the memories of last night flew in.

Closing my eyes, I pinched the bridge of my nose. Just a matter of few days, and then I will be gone.

A buzz of my mobile caught my attention.

Must be one of the girls.

Reaching out, I grabbed my phone and saw an unknown number.
Good morning, my Rosebud! Hope you'd a good night sleep.

A

My heart skipped a beat. A? M-means, Ace?

My hands curled around the phone.

What does he want now?

Is my behavior last night wasn't enough to clarify that I didn't want to do anything with him? Even

though if he didn't know the reason, I didn't care.

I thought to reply him with a 'back off', but then decided instead.

Deleting the message, I threw my

phone back on the bed and padded into the washroom.

"So? What're you gonna do now?" Casie raised her brow, when Beth munched on the chocolate chips

she brought with her.

They came to hang out at my place and together we'd breakfast. And now was watching TV at the hall,

sprawling on the leather couches. Mom and Dad went for shopping right after the breakfast for Tess's

upcoming engagement party. And Warner tagged along happily. Good thing that I could share

everything with the girls without fearing anyone's overhearing.

"I don't know. And it doesn't matter, you know? He is just being polite to me as a family friend, that's

all," I replied.

"And 'ow do you 'ow that?" Beth asked, her mouth filled with chips.

I shrugged. "Why else he was being so nice all of a sudden then? Before I shifted to NY, he was never

around. And even he was, he never'd said a word to me, which I was grateful for. But now, after all

these years, he is suddenly so nice to me. Calling me Rosebud like nothing happened."

Both of them listened to my blabbering with utmost attention.

"Hmm, it's confusing," Casie hummed. "Maybe you're right. But then you said he remembered what

he said at your ninth birthday?"

I nodded. "He did say those words. But I don't know if it was just a coincidence that he said those

same words. Maybe he didn't even know what he was saying?"

Did he really?

"He even said he cares for you and his behavior was strange," Beth stated, then her eyes lit up with realization. "Maybe he saw you last night and lost his heart to you? You know, love at first sight?"

I rolled my eyes.

"Shut up, Beth! Achilles Valencian isn't a man to fall in love with someone at one glance. Of all these years, did you see him with even a single girl around him?" Casie scoffed.

"Some even thinks he could be a closet gay."

Not even a single girl? I thought if he wasn't with Tess, then there must be another girl in his life.

Something burned in my chest at that thought. I ignored the feeling. It wasn't possible. He must've someone in his life.

"He isn't and that I can guarantee you," Beth retorted. "Did you forget the amount of girls he used to tag along at school?"

Casie flipped her a middle finger and slumped back on the couch. "We don't know everything. Maybe he changed his preference after he'd gone for England for two years, right after Em shifted to NY?"

I heard about him going to England to persue some degree. And in those two years, he didn't return home even for once.

"Whatever. And you said you moved on, right? You like Warner. Then why do you even care what Achilles Valencian does or not?" Beth queried.

I was out of answers. "Uh, of course I moved on! And I do like Warner very much!" I raised my chin in confidence. "And I don't care of what he does or doesn't. I was just sharing what happened last night."

Both of them gave me a look, not convinced at all. I shifted my eyes to the television.

The door bell rang breaking the awkward situation. I literally sighed in relief as both of their gaze turned to the door.

Casie went for it, and a minute later she walked in.

"Well, I think it's an considerable matter now for you to care about," she commented, with a bouquet of white roses in her hand.

"Whose is it for?" Beth raised to her feet.

Casie's eyes locked with mine. "Guess who?"

Leaping up, I grabbed the bouquet and took out the note.

A beautiful day should start with those beautiful flowers. Hope you like them.

A

My heart raced.

"Who sent them? And who is 'A'?" asked Beth, frowning.

Casie rolled her eyes. "If not by the letter, then you should understand seeing these dozens of rosebuds between those flowers."

Beth's eyes went big as realization set in. "So he sent flowers for you."

Her voice teasing. "I didn't

know people sends their family friends good morning messages and flowers without any reason. But why white roses though?"

I looked up at Casie as she said, "White roses symbols peace." Her mouth turned up into a smirk. "And

a fresh start. So you better be start caring, Emerald Hutton. Because I think Achilles Valencian wants a fresh start with you. And as far as we all know, he always gets what he wants."

And my heart stopped in my chest.

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 4

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I cleared my throat, catching everyone's attention around the table. The noise of their cutleries and spoons stopped along.

I knew what I was about to say would upset them. But it'd to be done. So taking a deep breath, I said,

"I'm leaving for NY this Friday."

Silence. The shock on Tobias's face and sadness that formed over my parents' were clear.

"But we thought as your college is finished now, you'd stay with us again from now on." Dad's forehead creased. Mom agreed with him.

"No Dad. I'm not a kid anymore. I can't just crash here just because my college is over. It's time to build my career. So I've to go back," I clarified.

"But what's wrong with California? You could easily get any job here," Mom argued. "If you want your privacy, honey, then it's alright. But if you look for a job here, at least you can stay close to us." Her voice broke.

"Why don't you help Tobias in our own company?" Dad suggested, and my brother bobbed his head eagerly.

"Yes, in that you won't have to work under anyone. You'll have a free will in your own company. You don't need to leave, Em."

"Dad, Tobias, how many times do I have to tell you that I want to do something on my own? I want to prove myself that I can stand on my feet without anyone's support. I'm extremely grateful to have you guys care for me. But- I can't work in our company. Maybe in the future, but not now."

What I said was true. I wanted to do something on my own ability. But it wasn't the main reason for me to leave right now.

"Alright, if you want to work somewhere else, it's fine by us. But you don't have to go that far from us, honey. You could look out for jobs staying here, near us," said Mom. Guilt washed over me for hurting her like that. But if I stayed here, I wouldn't be able to take care of my heart.

"I'm sorry, Mom. Staying all these years over there, my plans are revolving all around NY. And I'd reconsider my plans if I already hadn't been called for interviews next week."

I'd two interviews from two prestigious textile companies in NY. And I couldn't miss them even if I wanted.

"And these companies who called me for interviews, they've been my dream place to work at. So, I've to go this Friday. I'm sorry."

Dad sighed and placed a hand on Mom's, comforting her. "If that's what you want, princess. We won't stop you. We're happy if you're. But if by any chance you change your plans, let us know."

I nodded, relieved that he understood. "Thank you, Dad. But don't worry, I will visit time to time to see you guys."

"But what about Tess's engagement? You can't miss that," Tobias stated. "It's in next month. Nothing to worry, I will figure something out when time comes," I assured him.

But he didn't look pleased at all. Honestly, I didn't want to go away from them again. But I didn't have any choice.

A knock landed on my door, and Warner poked his head in. "You busy?" "No really. Just checking some emails," I answered. Placing the laptop on the bed from my lap, I

turned to him. "How did your dinner go with your cousin?"

He shrugged. "Good. Just as usual. You tell me, how did your talk go with your family?"

A sigh left my lips. "They weren't happy. But they also know that I'm not gonna budge from my decision."

I glanced outside the window, gazing at the starry night.

"Hey, what is it?" he asked, turning me to him.

I bit my lip, my throat tightening. "Nothing, it's just... it's difficult to go that far from my family. Even if

I stayed away for years. But still, I wish I could stay here with them." But for one person, it wasn't possible.

"Hey, look at me." He grasped my hand. "Everything will be alright. Don't be upset. It's just the

beginning of your career. Once you get a good grip, maybe in future you can shift back in this city. And

it's not that you won't visit them time to time. And they can also go and see you there. So, don't

worry, okay? Everything will turn out good."

Nodding my head, I squeezed his hand. "Thank you for being always there for me."

He smiled and pecked my lips. "Anything for you."

"Where're they?" I asked, adjusting my cap from the scorching sun. People buzzed with excitement around us as they rushed in and out of the auditorium. "They will be here in no time, don't worry. Let's just go and grab our seats," Tobias said, ushering me and Warner inside.

We were at Castelo Track. The famous place to enjoy horse racing. I didn't know we were coming to this game until my brother called this morning announcing his and Tess's plan. Apparently, Caleb, Tess's fiance didn't get that much time to spend with me and Warner, so Tess thought it'd be great to enjoy a horse race together; a way to catch up with us. I didn't want to come, but Warner was too excited for me to say no. Even though meeting my sister didn't appeal me that much, saying no would've been rude to Caleb. So I agreed.

Once we grabbed out pre-booked seats, we waited for the couple to arrive and the race to start. At least thirty or thirty five horses were lined up at the side, far from the auditorium. Their jockeys were preparing themselves and checking their horses to see if everything was alright. Their neighs were covered by the hubbub of the audience. A smile stretched at the side of my lips. Those horses were beautiful. I'd always wanted to ride one, but didn't get the chance ever.

When Warner brought popcorn and drinks for us, the announcement blared across. The race was about to start in five minutes. "Where are Tessa and Caleb? They should be here by now." He moved his brown locks away from his forehead.

"There they're!" Tobias exclaimed.

Following his gaze, I saw my sister and her fiance climbing down the stairs. In a yellow sundress and a matching hat, she looked stunning as ever. And Caleb chose to flaunt a white Tee and jeans.

And here I was. In a black tank and leather jacket, paired with worn out shorts and sneakers, I didn't

even try to doll up a little.

"Sorry, guys! Got stuck with the traffic," Caleb apologized, greeting Tobias with a side hug. And the same with Warner, but when it came to my turn, he engulfed me in a tight bear hug. "I'm glad that you came, Em. Finally I will get to spend some time with my would be sister-in-law and long lost friend."

I smiled. "It's great to see you again. And don't worry, you're not late. The race is about to start."

"I thought you wouldn't come. But I'm happy to see you here," Tess said, giving me a hug. And I didn't reciprocate.

Tobias and Caleb saw the act, but didn't comment on it.

Once we were all seated, in no time the race begun. Every one of the horses were extremely good and competitive. Their Jockeys were guiding them with brilliance. But the teeth and nail race was between two red and black horses. They both were ahead in the race than the others.

I was cheering for the red one, Jordan. Not because the black one, Cage was any less good or beautiful.

Because I just happened to love the color, red.

"Yes! Go Jordan, go! You can do it!" Tess yelled out beside me. She was also on my team, for the first time in our life. Where Tobias, Warner were encouraging a different one. And Caleb just watched all of it silently.

"Which one are you betting for?" I almost screamed over the loud cheerings.

"None! Because I know who is gonna win," he shouted back, beside Tess.

"Really? Which one?" I ducked away from Tess's elbow. She was leaping with cheerings.

"Jordan. He is a winner," he replied.

"How do you know? It can be a different one this time."

His brown eyes locked with me. "I know because my cousin never loses. And that-" he pointed towards the horse that was now slightly ahead of the Cage. Even a white one now was giving them

competition, "-is Achilles's horse. He always bets on Jordan."
My lips parted in surprise. Ace's horse? That means, he was here?
My nerve pulsed, eyes looking around. He was nowhere in the
auditorium. But the owner of the
horses, the bettors never sat at the auditorium with ordinary people.
Then my gaze lifted up.
And there he was. High in the V.I.P section, shielded by glass, he stood
even higher with his proud
chest and powerful broad shoulders with hands in pockets. Some other
suited people stood behind
him, watching the race to unfold. I couldn't see where his eyes were as
he wore sunglasses.
His name thoroughly did justice to his personality.
I shook my head and fisted my hands. Get to your senses, Em!
I didn't know he was gonna be here. Otherwise I wouldn't have come.
Now I didn't like that red horse
at all. I'd rather support the white one as it now passed the black one,
Cage.
My sister continued to dance. Now I understood why she was on
Jordan's side.
"For a moment I thought Cage would surpass Jordan. Damn, he was
good," commented Warner, while
Tobias munched on Popcorns.
That brat! He definitely knew Ace was gonna present here, but he didn't
even think of informing me.
Noticing my glare, he raised a brow. To avoid Warner's overhearing, I
pointed to his phone.
He is here. And you didn't care to inform me!
He looked up at me, frowning and then went to typing.
Tobias: Who?
Me: Don't be so saint now! I'm talking about Ace.
Tobias: Oh, but I thought you already knew. After all it's a very common
thing to attend the race of his
own place.
My eyes widened. Wait, what? Castelo Track was his? How come? I
thought his every company or
property's name started with Valencian.
Me: He owns it? And why Castelo?
Tobias: Yes. And it's his mother's last name.

Oh! I didn't know much about his family other than him and Caleb, whom his family adopted at the age of eleven when his parents passed away in a car crash. And they grew up together since then. I had only visited their home a few times. And most of the time his parents were missing.

When I looked back up, he wasn't there anymore. My eyes then glanced at the track. Cage took the place of Jordan now. Explained why my sister had gone so quiet all of a sudden.

Huh! The great Mr. Valencian couldn't handle his loss and ran away. Rolling my eyes, I stood up from my seat. The race was almost near the end but my stomach had the other plan. Excusing myself, I climbed up the stairs and headed towards the washroom.

"Look, who is here!" A group of rugged looking guys whistled as I passed them just outside the washroom area. "Fucking hell, look at those legs, man!" I gritted my teeth, glaring draggers at them. But I tried to control myself and not give them any attention.

"What's your name, babydoll? I've two bundles of cash in my pocket right now, interested?" They laughed.

That's it!

As I turned to them, an arm wrapped around my shoulders and turned me around.

"Em, don't pay attention to them. They're dangerous. So just avoid them."

"Avoid them? Did you hear what nonsense they were spitting out? Let me just go and teach them a lesson." I wiggled out of Warner's hold and tried to go back to them but he dragged me away.

They whistled and cracked jokes on us until we were out of the side, outside of the ladies' washroom area.

"Em, please. If you go and say something, it will be worse. They were four and we were just two. So, please, don't make a scene here," he talked logic in my head. "So just go inside and come back down.

And enjoy yourself, alright?"

I sighed. Maybe he was right. Nodding my head, I went inside and to take a phone call, he went away.

Men weren't allowed inside anyway.

Finishing my business, I washed my hands and brushed my waves with my fingers a little. They went wild with the wind.

Once satisfied with my hair, I grabbed my cap from the counter and exited the washroom. And when I turned...

A yelp left my mouth as a figure towered over me out of nowhere.

I gasped.

Who do you think it is? Want to know? I'll get back to you with the next chapter soon! Till then, stay

tuned with Emerald and Achilles!

And don't forget to hit a vote and write some comments!

With love,

Eva Zahan.

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 5

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"W-what're you doing here?" I couldn't even ask without stuttering.

Stormy grey eyes roamed over my features, briefly glancing at my lips.

They watched me as if they'd

waited too long...

I gave myself a inner shake. I was assuming things that weren't possible.

"Well?" Voice firm this time. How did he even enter in ladies washroom

area? Oh yes, I forgot that he

owned this whole damn thing.

"Came to see if you're okay," he said, deep Greek accent strong. Was he-mad?

"How many times do I've to tell you that you don't need to be concerned about me? It's not your job

to care for me."

"Someone has to if that so called friend of yours can't even take a stand for you like a loser he is!" he

mocked.

Friend?

So he knew what happened outside?

My eyes narrowed. "Excuse me? Don't you think you're crossing your limits here? You don't have a say in how my boyfriend is or not!"

A muscle of his jaw ticked. "I'm just stating the truth. Only a loser leaves their friend alone after she just got targeted by some drunkards!"

"He didn't leave me. He- he just went to take a phone call," I defended.

"And I'm his girlfriend, not just a friend."

His eyes flashed, nostrils flaring as he cocked his head. "Not for long."

"What do you mean?" I asked, confused.

He came closer, making me step back. And then another until my back hit the wall, his towering figure blocking my escape.

"W-what are you doing? Step away." The intense gaze of his had my heart skip a beat. His intoxicating cologne filled my lungs. He needed to create some distance between us. It was too much.

Placing his hands at the both side of my face, he leaned in; my heart thudded inside my chest. "I meant, you will NOT be his girlfriend for long." Determination latched into his eyes.

"How do you know that?" I whispered. His close proximity was doing something to me.

When he brushed my cheek with his knuckles gently, a treacherous shaky breath left my lips. And then the bruise of his knuckles caught my eye. As I was about to ask him of his injury, my breath hitched at throat when the pad of his thumb traced my bottom lip.

"You won't be, because-" leaning in, he whispered in my ear, hot breath tickled my skin, "-you already belong to someone else."

My thoughts were everywhere, I couldn't think straight. To be able to comprehend his words, I pushed him away, building some distance.

"D-don't come that near me ever again! And what do you mean by I already belong to someone else? Whom are you talking about?"

He stayed quiet. The look in his gaze sent a shiver down my spine. My throat clogged up.

No, no! It's not what I was thinking. I must've misunderstood his eyes. After all assuming wrong probabilities had ruined my entire childhood once. I wouldn't do the same mistake again.

"You will know, soon."

Again incompleting answer!

I went to open my mouth to say something but the pompous cheering and loud announcement cut me off. The race was finished, and the winner's name could be heard from the gallery outside.

I looked at him. "Looks like the title 'loser' suits you more now." My lips curved up at the winner's name while he remained monotonous. "My condolences on your loss. Poor Jordan and the Jockey, they tried hard, you know? Sometimes fate just doesn't support you everywhere."

"Em, you're done?" Warner asked, putting his phone in his pocket. When his eyes landed on Ace, confusion flashed over his face. But then he smiled. "Hello, Mr. Valencian."

And Mr. Valencian stood still as a rock. Jerk!

"Yeah, let's go!" I linked my arm with Warner's. Stormy eyes followed my moves. "Better luck next time," saying that, I turned to go, pulling Warner along.

I didn't know why I did that, but when I glanced back at him, something flipped in my tummy.

An almost non-visible smirk tugged at the side of his mouth. It whispered a secret I couldn't unfold.

"What was he doing there?" Warner asked once we were outside.

I shrugged. "Nothing. You tell me, how do you know him. Even at that party, it seemed like you knew him even before anyone introduced you two."

He laughed as if it was the silliest question someone has ever asked him.

"What doesn't know Achilles Valencian?"

I rolled my eyes.

"Is there any problem between you guys?"

"Why do you ask?"

His shoulder lifted. "I don't know, but... whenever you're with him or hear about him, you always get

tense."

I tried my best not to get tensed right now. "Nothing. It's just... we never got along," I lied. And my

tone told him not to query more. So he didn't.

When we passed the place where those drunk guys were, I didn't spot them anymore. But I did spot

some drops of blood scattered on the ground. Frowning when I looked up, I found some guards

dragging those guys away down the stairs to the exit. One of them were holding his bloody nose. He

was the one who asked me if I was interested mentioning his money.

Then the bruise on Achilles's knuckles flashed in my mind. A silent gasp left my lips. Did he... did he do

that to them?

But why?

When we got back down to our folks, I was still lost in my thoughts. But my sister's gloomy face

caught my attention. Of course! The horse she was cheering on lost. But Tobias, on the other side was

grinning ear to ear as he poked Tess.

"See, I told you Jordan will lose. Now you owe me a thousand dollars!"

"But you weren't supporting Cage either! So how come I lose the bet?"

Tess glared.

He shrugged. "Doesn't matter. The bet was about Jordan's winning or losing. And he lost. So the

money is mine!"

Huffing, Tess slumped beside Caleb as he shook his head in amusement.

"It's all Ace's fault! Why

didn't he tell me that this time he was betting on Cage instead of Jordan?

It's not fair!"

My eyes widened. He betted on Cage? Not Jordan? But I thought...

My eyes met Caleb. He flashed me a sheepish grin. "Even I didn't know.

But what I said turned out

true, right?"

That he never loses.

Now I understood the meaning of his smirk back there. And here I was thinking that he lost, calling

him a loser on his face. God! He must've laughed at me in his head for my lack of knowledge.

I glanced at the VIP section. He was in his previous place, the dark sunglasses were back. People were surrounding him, must be congratulating, but his form was angled to us telling me his gaze's direction.

My eyes set on his as I pulled Warner closer, hugging his arm. The tightness of his sharp shadowed jaws made my doubt clear. He was indeed looking at me.

But about my sudden act, and his reaction... I shut down my brain before some realization sets in my mind I couldn't handle.

"The race is over now. So why don't we go and eat somewhere? I'm hungry," I said, not wanting to stay there anymore.

Nodding, Caleb stood up and pulled a grumbling Tess along with him.

"Em is right, even I'm famished.

Let's go honey, let's get you some cold drink so that you can cool down a little."

When we exited through the gate, this time I didn't dare to look back.

Though I did feel the burning gaze lingering on me all the way until we were finally out of the exit.

After a whole day of roaming around the city, the day was finally over.

Though I did enjoy with Tobias,

Caleb and Warner, the awkwardness of my sister's presence always hindered my pleasantry.

Because whenever I see her face, I can't help but remember that night...

I closed my eyes, shutting the door of those memories.

"You okay?" Warner asked. We just stopped outside my house after a long walk. I decided to take a

walk instead of Tobias's lift thinking it maybe would help me clear my mind off today. But it didn't. The

heady scent of his still lingered at the back of my mind, that deep yet husky voice still murmured in my ear.

My free hand balled in a fist.

"I'm fine, just a little tired."

Smiling, he cupped my face. "I can understand, you'd a long day today."

Brown orbs shone with

adoration and love as they flickered to my lips. "You know, I'm happy that I came here with you. I'd

miss this amazing day with you if I hadn't."
I stopped breathing when his lips met mine. Closing my eyes I waited for something, anything. But I felt nothing. Just a mingling of flesh, that's all. A burn felt behind my closed eyelids.
Even a kiss from a guy whom I called my boyfriend couldn't spark even a little of the sensation I feel with just his eyes on me.
Something built up in my chest. Frustration, guilt, and an overwhelming emotion I didn't want to give a name to.
As his tongue parted my lips, I pulled away. Hurt flashed across his eyes. "I- I'm so sorry, Warner. I'm really tired right now. Can we go inside?" Even if he was hurt, he covered it with a smile. And I couldn't feel more terrible. "It's alright, Em. I understand. Let's go in and freshen up." With that, he turned around as I just watched him walk away in silence.

Soft breeze touched my skin as I watched the dark clouds cover the light of the full moon. The stars weren't awake tonight. The bare night offered nothing but the sounds of crickets.
They used to soothe my mind other times, but not tonight. Even they couldn't tame the storm raging in my chest.
A stab of guilt again hit me as I remembered Warner's face this evening when I rejected him, again.
This wasn't the first time I turned him down on being intimate with him. Not only him, in those past years whoever I'd dated, I'd not gone anywhere past the kiss. I just couldn't.
And no guy would want to do anything with a girl who couldn't even let them kiss her properly let alone getting physical. But Warner wasn't one of them. He respected my wishes and kept his distance.
The most he touched me intimately was kiss me. Other than that, I couldn't give him anything. And he never complained even though I felt his desire to take our relationship on a next level.

But tonight, I couldn't even give him a kiss.
A tear slipped down my cheek.
I swear, I tried. I tried my best to get out of my barrier, but I failed. The more I tried the more I felt disgusted with myself. The more I felt my insides dying. Even if I'd closed a chapter of my life in my mind, those strings never left me.
The feeling of doing something wrong never left me alone. And I did wrong to myself by forcing myself to feel something for those men I dated. But I couldn't make my heart beat for someone else like it did for him.
So I stopped trying.
When Warner had proposed me, he knew of my condition. Though he didn't know what happened in my past. But he knew of my broken heart. I told him I might never be able to love him back, but he said he wanted to give it a try. I didn't want to hurt him in the process, but his persistence gave me hope. That maybe, I could feel love again.
But I didn't.
Though he wanted a relationship between us, I agreed for my own selfishness. And I hurt the man who was always there for me when no one was in the process.
And all of this because of my stupid heart. It just doesn't know to react to anyone other than him.
I gritted my teeth at the clench of my heart. Another tear fell free.
I wish, I knew how to stop...
I wiped my eyes sensing a movement behind me on the rooftop. Her saldalwood perfume reached me even before she sat beside me.
We stayed silent for some moments before she finally spoke. "You're still mad at me for that night, aren't you?" Her gaze remained high in the sky, as the clouds slowly freed the moon.
"I can't be mad at anyone when I was the foolish one," I said, eyes not moving from the sky.
I saw her looking at me from the corner of my eyes. "You weren't foolish, Em. You were just a young girl in love with someone at a wrong place and time."

I let out a dry laugh, my nails dug in my palms. "Funny, you were the one who made me realize of my foolishness."

I still remember that day when I confronted her about it, and how she laughed it off on my face making me remember how naive I was to even think a boy like Ace would want me instead of someone like her.

A soft sigh left her. "I'm sorry, Em. I know I'd behaved with you like a bitch that night, instead of like a sister. But, trust me, I never wished anything bad for you."

After a moment of silence, she spoke softly.

"Because of misunderstandings and childishness, we've lost a lot of years, Em. I- I missed my sister in these past time. Even if you visited sometimes, you were so distant that I couldn't reach you. And

honestly, I never found that much courage." The tremble of her voice made me turn to her. Blue eyes

glistened under the moon. "I want the relationship we'd before, Em. I

want my sister back. Especially

when the most important day of my life is coming. Can't we just forget the past and start over? A new

beginning?"

"Why did you do it?" I knew it wasn't the right time to ask her this when she was talking of a fresh

start. But I'd to know. It might be a teenage girl's breaking heart over a crush for her, but it was much

much more than that for me.

Looking away, she heaved another sigh. "I know you hate me for that.

But trust me, Em, I never

wanted anything bad for you. I'd always wished your well-being."

"Can you answer my one question?" I'd to know why she did it. Why she broke my heart after

knowing everything.

She seemed hesitant, but then nodded her head.

"Did you love him?"

Happy Thanksgiving, guys! I hope you all had a good feast with your family and friends! I know I'm a

bit late to wish that, but I thought why not give you a treat? So here it is!

I hope you guys enjoyed it!

With love,
Eva Zahan.
The Trap Of Ace
Chapter 6

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The amber rays colored the horizon, manifesting a crown of crimson and pink above the setting sun.

Lines of birds flew alongside across the sky in the direction of their shelter; melodic twittering of them

felt like an announcement of the darkness to befall.

I took in a deep breath, filling my lungs with the cool evening air.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Dad said, sitting on the car hood beside me.

I nodded, a smile curved onto my lips. "Yes, very. Thank you for bringing me here, Dad. It's been so

long I'd last visited. I really missed our sunrises and sunsets."

We used to come to this meadow at least once a week. Well, at least me, Dad and Tobias. Mom and

Tess was too lazy to join every time. It was like a tradition for us. The tradition my grandfather started

with Dad. But after my shifting to NY, I couldn't join Dad and Tobias anymore.

"Me too, princess. Without you, our visits here didn't have the same meaning." His tone filled with

nostalgia.

"Yeah, that idiot had all the fun for himself," I joked, mentioning my brother. He couldn't join us due

to an important meeting this evening. "But I'm happy that you came here with me this time. It's my

turn today to have all the fun." I grinned.

Chuckling, he shook his head. "Nah, our time here became pretty boring as even Achilles stopped

joining us after you left for your high school."

My smile slipped at the mention of his name.

He used to accompany us regularly to watch the sunrises and sunsets.

But after his father's death, his

visits became less, until it stopped totally. I still remember my extra enthusiasm for the ride here even

at four in the morning to see him. Meeting him was more important for me than watching anything

else.

I heard Dad heaving a sigh. "Sometimes we've to let go of the past to live our present, Emerald.

Because until you live your present, you won't be able to accept your future."

I knew what he was trying to say. Though my family hadn't said anything, but I knew everyone'd

sensed my distance with Ace even after so many years. But I couldn't explain anything to them even if

I wanted. They didn't know the whole truth, so they couldn't understand.

"But what if it's too difficult to let go of the past?"

His blue gaze locked with mine. "Nothing is impossible, sweetheart.

Sometimes we indulge ourselves

so deep in our pain that we can't see anything past that. All you've to do is, open your heart a little

more, be a little more greater, and let go of the grudges. Don't let the past hold you from your

happiness of present."

I put my head on his shoulder, saying nothing. Could I do it? Could I be that brave to let go of

everything and move on? I haven't been able to in years.

The buzz of my phone cut my thoughts.

"Who is it?"

I put my phone back. "Casie. She and Beth wants us to have dinner together at our regular."

Nodding his head, his gaze turned back to the chromatic horizon.

After spending some more time talking and refreshing memories, we headed back to home. Once

dropping him off, I turned the car around and drove to Nova'd Diner, where the girls were waiting for

me.

But all the way, the only thing that consumed my mind was, Dad's words.

I knew he was right. I

couldn't let go of the past because I held grudges. Grudges against my sister, grudges against Ace,

grudges against myself.

I could understand the reason I blamed Tess and myself, for being so naive. But Ace, he didn't deserve

my hatred. He'd never promised to take care of my heart that I'd blamed him to break it. But the

heart couldn't see anything else than its ache. And it knew, it'd to hurt others if it wanted to prevent another ache.

After talking to Tess last night, I decided to give us another chance. Maybe it was time to let go. Even if it was just a tiny step, but it was something. I couldn't just hold over something that happened years ago.

And maybe, it wasn't all I thought it was. Last night's conversation flashed in my mind.

"Did you love him?"

Her eyes didn't flicker as she answered, "No."

"Then why did you do it? Why did you do it even after knowing that you'd be hurting me by doing that?" I asked, my voice was desperate.

A look of sorrow had covered her features. "I didn't want to hurt you, Em. I'd never hurt my little sister like that, no matter how much we were different from each other."

"Then why?"

She'd casted me a look of apology. "I'm sorry, Em. I can't tell you why. But you will know, soon."

She didn't explain anything after that, just told me to think over her request and left, leaving me alone and confused.

What was she hiding? I didn't know.

"So you decided to forgive her?" asked Casie, raising a brow.

I shrugged, twirling the fork into my spaghetti.

"I'm happy that you're solving your problems with your sister, Em. Life is too short to hold grudges forever. I agree with your Dad." Beth smiled.

Casie scoffed. "These things only sounds good in your stupid books. They're not that brilliant in real life. Once a bitch, always a bitch."

"Casie!" I sent her a look of reprimand, causing her to roll her eyes and taking a sip from her smoothie.

"I wouldn't forgive my sister if she'd done something like that to me. Thank God, I don't have one!"

she remarked.

Beth scowled at her. "Don't listen to her, Em! You do whatever your heart says." She wiggled in her seat. "Uh, now that you forgave Tess, will you consider to do the same to Achi..."

"I don't want to talk about him right now, Beth. Let me just enjoy my dinner right now with you guys, will you?" There was nothing to forgive Ace in the first place, but trying to get my relationship good with him meant sacrificing my heart again. And I knew better. Just some days more, and then I will be gone. Far away from him.

"Well, I see your wish didn't get granted at all," Casie commented, looking at her right.

"What're you talking about?" My eyes widened when I followed her gaze to the furthest corner of the diner.

Followed a gasp from Beth. "What's he doing here?"

Three suited men and a woman in her twenty something sat around the table. She sat right beside him, too close to just be a business associate. With fiery red hair, porcelain skin and soft features, she was gorgeous.

At something one of those men said, she laughed delicately placing a hand on his shoulder. And he too reciprocated with a soft smile he only displayed on rare occasions. A pang felt in my chest, my eyes set on her hand on his shoulder. Turning around, I gulped the lump down my throat.

"Oohoo, I thought he didn't have any barbie in his life." Casie whistled.

"Casie!" Beth hissed, throwing me a concerned glance.

Casie straightened. "I'm sorry, Em. I didn't mean to... we can leave if you want."

I waved my hand in dismiss. "No need. I don't care if he is here or not, or whom he brought here.

We're here to enjoy our dinner, and we will just do that." I casted another glance back at them. She was now whispering something in his ear; the grip on my fork tightened. "You sure?" Beth whispered.

I nodded, putting a spoonful of spaghetti in my mouth, not wanting to give them any attention. But it was difficult when her high-pitched laughter burned my ears. Beth and Casie sent daggers at them with their hostile looks. "Look at him! Getting so comfortable with that leech, and here I thought his sending you messages and flowers meant something."

"Will you shut up, Cass?" Beth glared and then looked at me. "She could be just a friend. And after what he did and said at the race track, it proves that he likes you. I don't think he is that shallow that he'd try to pursue one and roam around with another."

"I don't think so, look at them. They look too cosy to be just friends," remarked Casie.

Another pang made me grit my teeth. "I don't care if they're friends or not. Why should I anyway? It's not that I'm his girlfriend or something. And whatever he did yesterday, it didn't mean anything. So let's just forget about it."

My fork kept playing with the food, I seemed to lose my appetite. Even if I didn't want to, my eyes went back to them.

Her arm was now linked with him and his hand patting hers. And my treacherous eyes stung, heart squeezed with something.

Thunder cracked outside, announcing the upcoming downfall. I didn't look away when his eyes met mine. Surprise flashed into them, and then something else that I couldn't decipher. Seeing his lack of attention, she followed his gaze. Her eyes widened slightly as she untangled herself from him once she noticed the direction of my stare. But he remained as comfortable as he was. As if he didn't care.

And why would he? It's not that he really did care for you or he'd any soft corner for you anyway.

Everything he said and did was just a pretence.

All of a sudden, I felt suffocated.

Turning away, I stood up abruptly, grabbing my purse. Casie and Beth went to follow me but I stopped them.

"You guys finish your dinner. I'm done." When they went to protest, I shook my head. "Don't. I will see you guys later. Bye."

A storm was building in my chest, wanting to release. My fingers clutched my purse in a vice grip. My jaws right, holding the emotions that was threatening to surface. I needed to go away. I needed air.

Just as I stepped out of the exit, a shoulder bumped into mine.

"Em? What a pleasant... are you alright?" Caleb held my shoulder, his face morphed into concern. The flash of lightening fell onto us.

Without giving him an answer, I moved away and walked into the open air.

"Wait, where're you going? It's raining!" he called out behind me, but I didn't pay him any heed.

Drops of rain slapped against my face along the gust of cold wind.

Goosebumps rose across my arms

as the water drops pricked my skin. But it didn't stop me, this storm was nothing before my inner one.

The rage that boiled inside me, it didn't make any sense. But it did bother me. It did bother me to see

him with that girl even if I didn't have any right over him.

It hurt. It hurt like a bitch! And that's what frustrated me. I didn't want to feel, but I couldn't help it.

My car wasn't parked where I left it. The valet must've parked it in the parking lot. So ignoring the rain

and howling wind, I strode towards the parking lot.

What it'd take for me to get over him? What'd it take for my heart to heal the wound that I'd given myself?

The tear that slipped from my eye, the pouring rain washed it away. I hope it could take away the ache also.

All of a sudden, a flash of blinding light fell onto my eyes, causing me to cover them with my hands. A

shout of my name came with a screech of tires as a pair of strong arms moved me away from the way.

The driver yelled out some curses driving away when my gaze remained in no particular direction with my heart pounding in my chest.

"What the hell is wrong with you! Where was your attention? You could've just died, God damn it!"

He shaking me by my shoulders got me out of my shock. Stormy grey eyes blazed with fire under the cold raindrops.

He was done with his lady love that he came after me?

"So what?" I snapped, pushing him away. "It's not that you'd care if I died! Go enjoy your dinner with your girlfriend!"

His jaw clenched, grabbing my arm. "She's not my girlfriend. And don't you dare talking about..."

"I don't care! Leave me alone! And DO NOT touch me again, I'm warning you!" I jerked my hand from his grasp and turned to my car.

A gasp left my lips as my chest collided against his, his one arm tight around my waist and another on my nape. "I WON'T leave you alone, get that into your beautiful head. And about touching you-" he leaned in, his nose brushing mine, "-no one can stop me from touching you. Not even you, Rosebud.

Because, you're mine to touch."

His forehead pressed against mine, noses touching, stormy grey clashing with my turquoise, strong arms clutched me to them in a possessive grip.

My breath hitched at my throat, heart racing. Even under the heavy cold rainfall, my blood streamed hot in my veins. My breathing came out ragged as he pulled me closer against him, one hand cupping my cheek.

Raindrops rolled down his head to the thick lashes of his eyes as they gazed at my lips with unmistakable dark desire. My own lips parted at the heat of his body against mine. My insides burned for something.

"Mine. Just mine," he rasped, placing his hot mouth at the corner of my lips. My eyelids threatened to shut, drunk in his intoxicating warmth.

My heart whispered his name.

Lingering his mouth on there for a moment, when his lips went to meet mine... a honk of a car jolted

me out of my trance. As soon as I got back to my senses, I pushed him away.

Surprise and something close to disappointment flashed across his hard features. His hand shot up to reach me again, but stopped him from doing so. Closing his eyes for a second, he opened them again.

This time they held calm and composure.

"Emerald, I..."

Shaking my head, I turned around and ran to my car. Fumbling with the keys with trembling hands, I

somehow managed to get in and drove away. His silent yet rigid form grew distance in the rearview as

I went far and far away until he vanished out of the sight.

Slamming on the brakes, I stopped at a corner. I gripped the wheels tight as a sob left my mouth. I let

the tears free placing my head against the seat.

The pounding of my heart still didn't die down. My hands shook on the wheel.

How could I let it happen? I could I let him so close to me? Even after everything, how I could I let myself sway? How?

You're mine to touch! Mine. Just mine. His words rang in my head.

I shook my head. No! No, no! I can't let it happen. I can't let myself get hurt again. I can't let him do

this to me, again! I won't be able to live through another heartbreak.

My phone blared in my purse.

Wiping my cheeks, I grabbed the purse and got the phone out.

Tess.

"Hey, Em! Sorry if I'm disturbing you. Dad told me you're with your friends," she said from the other side.

I've to do something.

"Em? Emerald, you listening?"

I blinked. "Yeah, tell me."

"Alright, so I called to tell you that we're having a family dinner at Caleb's place tomorrow night. It'd

be a great chance to get our families together again. His uncle is also coming. So I'd be really happy if

you join," she explained. "You will come, right?" Her voice full of hope.

Silence.

"Em? You will join us, won't you?"

"I'm sorry, Tess. I can't."

"But..."

I cut the call and dialed Warner's number. After two rings, he picked up.

"Hello?"

"Book two tickets and pack your bags."

"What? Now? But why?"

"We're leaving. Tonight."

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 7

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A pair of stormy grey eyes gazed down at me, my heart skipped at the intensity in them. I tried to move but as if I didn't have any control over my body. I couldn't do anything but to watch those grey pools coming closer.

Then I felt hot breath fanning on my neck, sending goosebumps across my skin. My insides squirmed with anticipation.

"Mine..."

Jolting awake from my sleep, I searched around for him. But there was no one. But, I felt as if someone just called me mine...

Running my palms over my face, I sat up. It was just a dream.

He wouldn't leave me alone even in my dreams, would he? Three days had passed since that night and my returning back to NY, and his words still haunted my sleep.

Shaking my head, I glanced at the time. Shit! It's already eight!

Scrambling out of the bed, I grabbed my clothes for the interview and ran inside the washroom. I'd

two interviews today, and the first one was at nine. If I wouldn't reach there in time, I'd lose the chance to work at one of my dream work places.

Actually both of them were important to me. If I got a job at one of them, it'd be a golden ticket for my career as a designer.

And my first destination was Summer Clothing House. One of the most famous fashion houses across the city.

"What? But how's that possible? I was informed that I'd have an interview today at nine."

The receptionist sent me a professional look of apology. "I'm sorry for the hassle, but we've found the perfect candidate for the post, so we'd to cancel the interview. Didn't you receive the email, Miss?"

I frowned. "What email?"

"We'd sent all our expected candidates an email regarding the rescission as an apology," she informed.

Oh! I'd kept my phone off since I left home that night to avoid my family's questions and a particular person's messages. And I didn't even check my email for some days now. How could I be so careless?

"Uh, maybe it missed out from my eyes." I bit my lip. "Alright, my bad luck, I guess."

"We're again sorry, Miss. Have a good day!"

Nodding, I sent her a tight smile and got out of there. Time to go to my next destination. I just hoped everything will turn out good this time.

Checking myself one last time in the rearview, I let out a breath, wiping my clammy palms on my skirt.

Come on, Em! You've got this!

Chanting the mantra in my head, I got out of the car and looked up at the huge forty something floor building. A big Coopers Fabrics was hung at the top.

I blew out a breath. I really didn't want this chance to get out of my hands. These two were my dream workplace, and now one is gone, left the latter. I'd try my best to impress them to take the ball in my court.

Ignoring the nervous wreck in my tummy, I padded inside. Shoulders squared and chin high in confidence.

But as soon as the crowd in the waiting area came into my view, my confidence melted into a puddle.

All of them were sophisticatedly dressed, with CVs in their hands. Definitely for the interview.

Of course, this was one of the most renowned textile companies in the country. What did I expect?

The receptionist guided me to wait with the others as there was still quite time for my turn to come.

And getting among these sharp and talented looking people, my nervousness just rose into a new height.

So choosing a vacant seat, I settled at the furthest corner of the waiting area and waited for my turn to come.

My phone blared in my purse, getting some eyes on me in irritation. Getting out the phone, I put it on silent. It was Warner.

"Hello," I whispered.

"Em, thank God you finally switched on your phone. Your parents were killing me asking about you.

They're really mad that you left all of a sudden and then kept your phone off."

I glanced down at my nails, the sense of guilt was picking up on me. I hadn't given them that much of an explanation of my sudden leave, and then blocked any way they could connect to me. Just to avoid one person, I'd to hurt so many loved ones.

Since I switched on my phone this morning, I didn't even check the calls or messages. I'm sure my notification box has been flooded.

"Yeah, I'm sorry that you'd to handle my family's bombering. I will talk to you later about it, I'm now at Coopers Fabrics for the interview. Do you've anything else to say?"

"It's nothing, Em. It's just that even I'm worried for your sudden change of heart. Anyway, I called you to give a good news. I will meet you tonight at your place." His voice dripped with excitement.

"What good news? And sure, I'm free tonight." I ignored his first statement.

"That's a surprise for later tonight. Now I gotta go. All the best for your interview!"

I smiled. "Thanks. See you later."

Sighing, I put the phone down. What good news he was talking about?

"Emerald Hutton?" A lady in her mid-thirties with a high tight bun and suit, looked around for the beholder of the name.

"It's me!" Raising my hand, I got up.

"You're next. Mr. Cooper is waiting for you inside," she said. Tone professional with no hint of smile.

Nodding my head, I grabbed my purse, CV, and followed behind her.

Once we stopped before a pair of white doors, she knocked and waited.

"Come in!" barked a voice from inside. I cringed. God knew who was going to take my interview. I

already had a feeling of doom.

Tilting her chin, she gestured to me to go on and left. Taking deep breaths, I entered. Restless

butterflies stormed in my stomach.

A small round man in his late fifties sat opposite of the huge desk. With a big scowl, he continued to

sign in some papers, muttering something incoherent under his breath.

A loud noise echoed in the

room as he slightly leaned at his right and then sat straight.

Eyes wide, I stopped at my track.

"Would you stand there forever? Sit!" he grumbled, without looking at me. He didn't seem to notice

that he just farted before someone.

Trying not to crinkle my nose at the foul odor in the air, I took the chair opposite of his and placed the

file of my CV on the desk.

"Hello, Mr. Cooper! I'm Emerald Hutton." I kept my tone as professional as I could holding my breath

on.

"So? I'm not here to play introducing ourselves with you. Give me your CV already, will you?"

Brushing the arched moustache on his upper lip, he reached out for my file and I handed it to him.

With narrowed eyes, he scrutinized my CV. Though I'd topped in most of my exams and my other

qualifications were also good, I was still at the edge of his judgement.

Because the way he was looking

at those papers, I got a feeling he was a judge in some time of his life.

"You're fluent in Spanish and Italian? Or you just added it out of excitement?" His tone was already

calling me a fraud.

But I remained calm. "No, Mr. Cooper. I've especially taken courses on Italian and my second language was Spanish at high school. If you want, I could converse with you in one of them."

"No need." He waved his hand, grunting. "It's not that I'd understand anything anyway. You could blabber to make a fool of me."

I gritted my teeth, but still kept my composure. This grumbling potato was now getting on my nerves.

Who takes interviews like that? I wonder who even made him the CEO of this company.

"You eat well?" For the first time he looked up.

My brows creased. How did that relate to anything with the job. "Uh, I do when I'm hungry. Why?"

He snorted. "Girls of your generation are fond of keeping themselves empty stomached to stay lanky.

And if your stomach is empty, so will be your head. How would you create designs if you're empty in the head?"

I didn't miss how he mentioned fit as lanky.

Do I still want to work in his company? Sadly, yes.

"No, Mr. Cooper. I prefer to be healthy than be... lanky," I replied.

He cast a look, observing me. I fidgeted on my seat. Then all of a sudden, he closed my file and slid it

to me. "Get out now. And tell Lucinda to send the next headache."

I raised my brow. Did he just reject me? Then I understood that it was his way to say: you may leave

now. And I assumed Lucinda was that woman who sent me in, and headache was the next candidate.

Pressing my lips tight, I flashed him an even tighter smile and stood up.

The nervousness now turned

into fear as I informed Lucinda and then walked away. She told me I'd receive an email of the position

of me in this interview: rejected or selected. Until then, I will have to wait.

As I got out of the elevator, my shoulder bumped into someone.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" Looking up, I found a man near Mr. Cooper's age standing there. But he was far

from small and round, the opposite in fact. Tall and fit. Some grey hairs were peaking out of the dark strands.

When he glanced at me, something flashed across his dark hollow eyes. Tilting his head, he gave me a look over. I didn't know why, but he looked familiar. And from just looking at his eyes, I got a sense of uneasiness.

"It's alright, my dear. People often stumble into their way when they don't see where they're going. Or... crossing whom's path." The edge of his voice evolved some secrets. Then the ominous look suddenly vanished and replaced a bright smile that didn't reach his eyes. "I hope your interview had gone well, dear."

I looked down at my CV. But still, they were in a file, how did he know that I came here for an interview?

"Uh, it was good. But, how do you know that I came here for an interview?"

He'd that look again. "I know a lot of things, young lady." His eyes flickered over my shoulder. "If you will now excuse me, I'm in a hurry right now. I will see you later." Nodding, he passed me and went into the elevator.

"But..." I turned around, but the doors already closed and he was gone. I frowned. Who was he? He talked as if... he knew me somehow. But how?

Whatever, I didn't want to see him around again. That man radiated some kind of negative energy. Heaving a sigh, I looked up at the sky once outside. First interview got cancelled and this one was terrible. Though he didn't give me an answer, his expression didn't seem to be impressed. But still, I'd my fingers crossed. I didn't want this chance to slip away from my hand. It wasn't even noon. And I was already feeling tired.

My phone beeped again. And this time it was my best friend. "I've found out. She isn't his girlfriend or anything like that. They're just friends! And if it still bothers

you then, you should know that she's happily married," Casie finished in one breath.

"Casie, what are you talking about..." Then it hit me. That girl with him at the diner. That red head. All

of a sudden, irritation irked my skin.

Wait... what did she say? They're just... friends? Not anything else?

Why did I feel so light all of a sudden? I shook my head.

"Em, you there?"

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

"Oh thank God! I thought you died out of relief." She teased.

I straightened up. "It's nothing like that! I don't care if she's his girlfriend or just a friend. And you called me to inform this?"

I could imagine her rolling her blue eyes.

"Yeah, right! That's why you vanished all of a sudden after that night.

Don't lie to me, bitch! I know

how much you care. So as a best friend, I just did my duty by applying balm on your burn."

Now it was my turn to roll my eyes. "Shut up! I'm not lying. And right now when I'm in fear that if I got

rejected or selected for the job, I don't want to talk about that man."

Now that caught her attention and then I gave her a brief of everything that happened since this

morning and all she did was laugh at my misery, wishing me luck with Mr. Fart Cooper.

"So? What good news are you going to give me?" I asked Warner, taking a bite on the pizza he'd brought for us for dinner.

"You tell me first. How did your interview go?" He chewed on his piece. My shoulders lifted up. "Peachy. The first one got cancelled and the second one was horrible."

"Why? What happened? Your CV is excellent, everyone would want to give you a chance," he stated.

"Thanks. But Mr. Cooper wasn't everyone." Shaking my head, I explained everything. Except that creepy man I bumped into.

He laughed so hard that he started to choke on his food.

"That's not funny! I'm concerned over my whole career here!" Giving him a glass of water, I glared at

him.

"Sorry! It's just, I still can't believe he farted before you." He chuckled, wiping his tears that he got from laughing his ass off. Seeing my serious expression, he sobered up and smiled. "Don't worry, Em.

They will definitely get back to you soon. And trust me, the job will be yours. I know it."

"I hope so. Anyway, will you tell me your good news now?"

Setting the glass aside, he sat straight. Though his eyes sparkled with exhilaration, he seemed hesitant.

"Uh, you remember I applied for a job last month?"

I nodded.

"Well, I got accepted to work directly under the general manager there."

"What? That's amazing, Warner! Congratulations!" Leaping up from my place, I gave him a tight hug.

"Thank you! But there is another thing..."

Pulling away, I studied him. "What's it?"

"Umm..." he scratched his head. "This company is in Seattle. So, uh, I've to go there and join from next week."

"Of course you should go! Why are you so hesitant about it?" I queried. He huffed. "That means I've to go that far away from you, Em. And I can't do that."

I grabbed his hand. "I know how you're feeling. I will miss you too, but just because you will have to shift to another city, you can't miss this opportunity. It's always been your dream to work at that company. And now that finally you got the chance, you should definitely take it."

"But Em, I can't leave you here alone..."

"I'm not a kid, Warner. I can take care of myself. And we will talk everyday, so don't you worry. Just pack your bags already!" I punched on his shoulder making him laugh and engulf me into another hug.

My phone buzzed on the couch making me pull away. My heart skipped. Was it an email from them?

Warner eyed me. He thought the same. Giving me an encouraging nod, he pushed me to check it.

With both excitement and nervousness I picked up my phone expecting an email of good news. As I

saw the screen, my heart stopped in my chest. And then started racing for a mile. It wasn't anything I expected it was.

I gave you time. And now your time is over.

You can't escape from me anymore.

A

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 8

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"Come onnn, Em! You can't sit here with that gloomy face. Don't worry about the job, just enjoy, girl!

Everything will be fine," Molly, one of my college friends, slurred, leaning against the bar counter.

"Here take this drink, you'll feel good."

I shook my head. "I'm not in a mood. So I'd just pass."

She pouted. But as I didn't drink the shot she offered to me, shrugging, she gulped it herself.

Kate and John, my other friends and circle's popular couple, shook their heads at her and went back

to their cuddling.

We were at a local pub with our college friends. After they got to know about Warner's getting the job,

they wanted to celebrate it. So here we were, enjoying the night. Except me. Too many thoughts were

playing in my head to get wasted with alcohol.

"Here, at least drink this orange juice. It's really good, I tell you." Warner handed me a glass, sipping

on his own.

"Thanks!" My eyes went around the dancing crowd and the moving lights. Even the booming music

didn't make my mood better.

"Hey!" He turned me to him. "Don't worry, alright? I'm sure you'll get it."

I smiled and then he got busy with the others, laughing and joking. And I just concentrated on my

juice in silence.

You can't escape from me anymore.

What did he mean by that? Whatever he said that night, at the parking lot, and then that message,

what do I think out of it? Why all of a sudden he was behaving like he... like he'd some right over me

or something. All these years, he didn't even ask about me to anyone. And now...

A sigh left my lips. He confused me. I confused myself, or should I say my feelings did. Even knowing he could give me another heartache, why did I still feel so connected to him?

"Em? You're here with us, right? You seem lost," Kate asked.

"My love, you know why she isn't in a good mood tonight. We're pestering her from the moment she arrived. Leave her alone," John said, kissing her temple, and then pulled her for a kiss. The others gagged at their PDA, laughing.

Something soared in my chest and subconsciously, my hand touched the corner of my lips. The place

where his scorching mouth was just nights ago.

Warner's pocking me pulled me out of my reverie. Looking at his eyes, guilt washed over me like a

cold bouquet of ice. My hand balled into a fist.

How could I think of someone's kiss when I was sitting right beside my boyfriend? Shame befell on me.

But I couldn't control my feelings even if I wanted to.

The beeping of my phone distracted my sense of shame. My eyes widened when I checked it.

An email from Coopers Fabrics!

I squealed as soon as I read it, making Warner and others watch me with confusion. Grinning ear to

ear, I leaped up from my seat. "I did it! I got the job!"

Whistles and cheers resonated around the group as they congratulated me one by one. Warner

seemed as happy as I was and engulfed me in a bear hug.

Finally, after so many days something good happened in my life.

"Now that our dear Emerald got the job, it's time to double celebrate!"

John yelled out. "And you

Miss-" he pointed at me, "-no more gloomy face, enjoy with us now!"

Kate and Molly bobbed their heads as they passed me glasses of shots.

And this time, I didn't hold

myself back. And why not? It was a matter of celebration.

After hours of drinking and spending time with everyone, I was swaying on my feet. I couldn't even

walk properly without stumbling on my way. Once everyone called it a night, John and Kate offered to drop me and Warner. As the couple drank less and got cozy more. "Careful, Em!" Warner cautioned when I got out of the car with wobbly legs.

"Bye, guys! We'll see you soon!" shouted Kate, even if we were just outside the car. I cringed at her high pitched voice.

Waving at them, I hobbled towards my house. My eyes were about to shut down.

"You sure you don't want me to drop you to your home?" I heard John ask Warner.

"Nah, my place is just two blocks away. Thanks, man! You guys can go now. It's late," Warner replied.

Again saying goodbyes, they drove off. The sound of car engine reverberated across the empty street.

Only one or two dogs barking at distance could be heard other than our footsteps.

"Hey, hey! Careful there!" He held my shoulders before I could fall on my face before my main door.

"I'm fine, Warner." I giggled without any reason. "You don't worry about me. You go home, I will just fly into my room from here in no time."

"I don't think so. You can barely walk straight, Em. Let me help you to your room," he offered.

"I can walk just fine. And I'm already at my home. So I will be fine. You go." I insisted, fumbling the keys out of my purse.

"But... you sure?" He seemed hesitant.

I bobbed my head without looking at him. Sighing, he gripped my chin and pressed his lips against mine.

I stood there still, not returning the affection. Something told me to pull away, but I didn't.

Suddenly at the corner of my eyes, I caught a movement. Pulling away, I squinted my eyes to see clearly. There, at the furthest corner of the street, opposite of ours, stood a shadow under the damaged street light. Its body was angled to us.

Goosebumps crawled up onto my skin as I felt its gaze on me. Though I couldn't make out anything out of it as it was in the darkness, but I could feel it. Its stare. "What happened? What are you looking at?" Just as Warner turned around, it vanished totally into the shadow. "Is something wrong there?" "I think I just saw someone there." "But there is no one, Em. Who would be there at this late night?" Warner frowned. "But if you're not feeling good, I can stay the night if you want." My head snapped back to him, blinking. "Uh, no, it's fine. It could be my imagination. I think, I drank too much tonight. You go home, I will be fine." Though it could really be just my imagination, but after that, I wasn't feeling that high right now. My head seemed to get cleared up. "Alright, if you insist." Yawning, he gave me a hug. "I will go now. See you later. And call me if you need anything." As he walked away, my eyes flickered to that spot where I saw that shadow, but there was no one. It must be my imagination. Shaking my head, I opened my door and closed it behind me.

"Em, you should sleep well, especially if it's the night before your first day at job," Mom chastised over the phone for me not sleeping enough last night properly. Well, after returning home at midnight, I only had two hours of sleep until I woke up with another dream of a particular person. And then the hangover came along. Even though after two pain killers, I got some relief, I couldn't fall asleep after that. Excitement and nervousness had kept me wide awake. It was six in the morning, and here I was, pacing around the hall out of anticipation. "Anyway, when will your office start again?" "At nine." Three hours more to go. And I already could feel my hands and feet turning cold. "There is still so much time. You could still take a nap for an hour, you know, honey? I don't want you

to look like a zombie on your first day." When I'd informed her about the job, she was over the moon.

She was way more excited for my job than I was. And I was happy about that. At least she wasn't

upset with me for leaving all of a sudden anymore.

"It's alright, Mom. I'm fine. I won't fall asleep even if I want. So I will just make some breakfast for me now and then get ready."

"Oh, okay then. Don't forget to call me after your office, I want to know how did it go, alright? And eat something healthy," she said.

I smiled. "Alright, mother. I will. Now can I go? I've not even taken a shower."

"Okay, okay. Go. Your father is waiting for me outside for jogging anyway. I will talk to you later. Love you!"

"Love you, too!"

The doorbell rang, halting my movement around the kitchen. I glanced at the clock.

Seven-thirty. Who could be here so early in the morning?

A grey head peaked through the peephole.

"Carole? What are you doing here today? I thought you'd be at your daughter's place on vacation," I

asked as the aged woman stood at my door with a box in her hand.

Carole was the caretaker my parents hired for me when I shifted to this city. Since then she'd come

and look after my needs every morning and evening. Even though I could handle everything myself,

this lady wouldn't budge from her duty to take care of me.

"Good morning, Ms. Hutton. It seems you're not happy to see me here," she said, raising her brow.

Shaking my head, I laughed, giving her a hug. "Of course, I'm happy. I was just surprised to see you

here as you still had two days off in your hands."

She walked inside, padding directly into the kitchen. Her primary responsibility, feeding me well. Well,

because obviously, I sucked at cooking. It was never my forte.

"I was supposed to. Even Mindy was upset that I left so soon. But you see, dear, the cold weather

didn't suit me well. So I cut it short and came back last night."
Mindy was her daughter, who lived in Canada. And once a year, Carole goes to visit her because her daughter can't make it here because of her job.

"You should've taken the day off today and rest, you know?"

"So that you could eat these dry sandwiches for another day?" She glanced at the leftover bread I was

gonna make my breakfast with spread on the counter.

Flashing her a sheepish grin, I hopped on a chair and eyed the box she brought.

"What's in that?"

"Oh, I almost forgot. I brought you some cookies I got from Canada.

They're delicious, you will love

them." She smiled with affection in her eyes. Though she was a caretaker of me, she has become

more of a family for me over those years. She loved me just as a grandma would to their grandkids.

"You didn't have to, Carole. But thank you!" Unpacking the box, I picked up a cookie and munched on

it. And the moan that left my mouth, had her smile in acknowledgement. These were amazing!

"You eat them while I make you something for breakfast," saying that she went to do her magic in the kitchen while I devoured the cookies. Who needed breakfast if you had these pieces of heaven?

Blowing out a breath, I checked myself in the rearview one last time before getting out of the car. The huge building stood tall over me. It felt like a deja Vu. But I just hoped today wouldn't turn out like last time.

Forcing my legs, I raised my chin high and walked ahead. But as soon as I crossed the entrance, my steps halted.

People were like on a marathon around the lobby, coming in and out with boxes, racing around with loads of folders. No one left another even a single glance as they ran like headless chicken. Even the receptionist was having difficulties attending so many phone calls at a time.

A frown set on my forehead. What was happening here?
"Hi! Actually it's my first day here, so can you tell me where Lucinda is..."
The receptionist cut me off with her hand, and picked up another call.
Her looks were disheveled
compared to the other day. She looked miserable.
"Excuse me? Can please tell me..."
She again ignored me for the third time of my asking, and then my eyes
fell on the packed box on her
left. Was she- leaving?
Some other stuff were also carrying those same boxes with crestfallen
faces. What was happening?
"Oh, Ms. Hutton! You're already here, I see. Good that I found you now,
otherwise I don't think I'd
have any time later to discuss anything with you. Now, follow me."
She didn't even let me speak as she turned around and stormed away,
leaving me no chance but to
follow her.
"You see, there is a lot of work today. So I won't take much time of yours.
Sadly, Mr. Cooper is not
here right now, otherwise he'd inform you all newcomers himself," she
informed, not stopping her
steps a bit.
It was good that he wasn't here. I preferred my environment pure and
breathable.
"Uh, what is going on here? And what information Mr. Cooper was
supposed to tell us?" I queried, but
that woman ignored me, walking inside a spacious cabin.
"Here!"
"What's it?" I eyed the white envelope she handed me. Something
churned in my stomach. Oh no!
Was I already fired for some reason?
"Your transfer letter," she replied, no emotions on her face. "You've
been transferred to another city
in one of this company's branches."
"What?" I gaped. "What do you mean by transfer letter? I- I don't
understand. What's happening?"
She sighed. "We apologise for the sudden decision, Ms. Hutton. But
Coopers Fabrics had been sold to
a multinational company last night. A lot of employees have lost their
jobs, some even got appointed.

You're lucky that the new owner didn't terminate the newcomers and decided to give them a chance."

My mouth was on the floor, eyes wide. Someone bought it overnight? But how was it possible? And about my transfer, I didn't have any idea of which corner of the country they've shifted me.

"Is there no other way to change the decision? I mean, I can't just leave everything and move to a whole new city all of a sudden." My voice desperate.

"Sadly, no. We're doing what we'd been ordered to do. We're just doing our job, Ms. Hutton," she said, glancing at her watch. "Now, I've something else to attend to. If you will excuse me. All the best for your future."

"But, I..." And she was already gone.

I just stood there, flabbergasted. What the hell just happened?

I glanced down at the letter. Only God knew.

With shaky hands, I pulled the paper out and unfolded it. My heart stopped beating in my chest.

God! It's not happening! It can't be.

Now the crestfallen expression was slapped on my face as I walked out of the ominous building and pulled my phone out, dialled the number. After some rings, he picked up.

"Hello?"

"I'm coming back."

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 9

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"So, that means you will stay here now that you've been transferred in this city?" Mom eyed me,

stirring the soup on the stove. Her voice radiated felicity.

Peeling another pea, I shrugged. "I don't know know. I'm thinking to apply for another transfer.

Maybe they will consider it?"

Staying here wasn't an option for me, but leaving this job, well, I couldn't take this risk. I'd dreamed to

work at companies like this, and now that I finally got the chance, I couldn't just throw it away. The

one thing that didn't make any sense was, Coopers Fabrics was one of the most successful textile companies, then what happened all of a sudden that they had to sell it overnight?

"I didn't know you hate this city that much," she said, her tone fragile. I sighed. "I don't hate it here, Mom. It's just, I told you, all my plans are made around NY. And I can't just ignore them just like that."

"Do you think I'm a fool?" Her brows rose. "Do you think I don't know why you're so keen to stay away from California?"

I opened my mouth and then closed it.

She shook her head. "Just because one person, you can't punish your whole family, Em. You've to accept it sooner or later, you can't keep running forever."

Closing my eyes, I rubbed my neck. I didn't deny anything she enunciated. Because we both knew the truth.

"Anyway, what's the name of your new employeer? I want to thank him personally for transferring you here. I already like this person." Sensing my unease, she changed the topic.

I rolled my eyes. "I don't know. And honestly, I don't have any wish to."

For that person I was here

again, back to the city where the devil of my dreams resided.

Mumbling something incoherent under her breath, she took the peas from me and added them into the boiling soup.

"Smelling good, what's for lunch today?" Tess strolled into the kitchen.

Throwing her purse on the

table, she took a seat beside me. "Glad that you're back! I was really disapiointed when I heard of your departure, you know? I couldn't even spend much time with you."

I casted her an apologetic smile. "Something important came up. So i'd to go. And sorry about the dinner, I hope it went well?"

"Do you really think we'd have a family dinner without you?" At her question, my brows creased in

confusion. "I cancelled the dinner as soon as I heard that you left for New York. I want both my and

Caleb's family to come together at this event. And without you, my family remains incomplete."

I stared at her. Though I didn't want to, but her words touched something inside me. Where was that harsh and spoiled Tess I knew seven years ago? As if I was getting to know my sister in a whole new way.

"You could reschedule it again now that she's here," Mom suggested.

"No, Mom. Caleb's uncle isn't in the town right now. You know what uncle Arthur means to Caleb and Achilles. After Achilles's father's death, he is the one who took care of them. So with his absence, arranging a family dinner isn't a good idea."

"Arthur Valencian? He lived in England, right?" He was the only relative Achilles and Caleb had left after their family crisis. But due to a conflict between Achilles's father and him, he didn't live in USA.

That's all I knew about him. I didn't know he returned to his homeland. Tess bobbed her head. "Yes, but he returned after some years of his brother's death. To look after his nephews. He is an amazing person."

But what about his mom? Where was she when they needed someone to take care of them?

"Anyway, I've to do some shopping today. You know, preparing for the engagement party? And I need my sister to help me with it. So go get ready, we're leaving in ten minutes."

Before I could object, Mom chimed in. "Excellent idea! She needs some shopping to get her mind off things. Take her along, she needs it."

"But..."

"Em, won't you help your sister with her engagement shopping? I need you there," said Tess, blinking her blue eyes.

Shaking my head, I got up and went upstairs to get ready. And her squeal followed behind. Maybe

Mom was right, going out could help my mind off the transfer. And this way, my relationship with

Tess could progress more. At least I'd to try.

Gliding down the stairs, I found Tess closing the door, holding a huge teddy with an adorable bow around its neck. A involuntary grin stretched on my face. It was so beautiful and big that she was having difficulties holding it. "Who brought it? Is it yours?" I asked, admiring the teddy. "Well, my fiance is too boring to send gifts like this! It's for you," she joked, rolling her eyes. I frowned. "For me? But who'd sent it for me?" She shrugged. "There's a note in there, check it out." Though I was confused, but the excitement surpassed the confusion and curiosity as I grabbed the teddy from her first. I took my time petting it, feeling its softness against my palms, and then I took out the note. Tess watched me with amusement. I've always loved those. My room used to be filled with huge teddies. I couldn't even sleep without some beside me. I was so definitely going to keep it on my bed. But when I opened the note, I was doubting it. Welcome home, Rosebud.

A
Three words, and my excitement drained into the drain, annoyance took place instead. How did he know that I was back? Then my eyes landed on my sister, who was patiently awaiting to know who sent this enormous gift. Either her or my stupid of a brother. "So?" She queried. "There's no name on it." I swiftly put the note in my pocket. An A wasn't a name. "If you want, you can have it." "Why? You don't like it?" I shrugged. My arms had a firm grip around it. And when she came forward to take it from me, my treacherous body stepped back, holding the teddy tight against my chest. Her brows quirked, lips twitched at the side as she put her hands on her hips. "Well, seems like your heart had a sudden change of mind."

"I'll be back in a minute." My ears turned hot. Not knowing the reason behind my own reaction, vexed, I turned around and ran upstairs to put it in my room. But I was sane enough not to place it on my bed.

"What do you think about this one?" asked Tess, twirling around in front of the mirror in the eleventh dress she'd tried this afternoon. And only two of them turned out lucky and got selected and bought.

Apparently, she was shopping for every function of her wedding except her wedding gown. That's for another day.

We even missed our lunch due to her infinite dress hunting.

"It's beautiful! I think you should take this one for your rehearsal," I replied from the couch, stretching my legs before me. My legs was killing me from standing on my feet for hours.

Only if I knew. I just hoped she'd get satisfied with her shopping soon, or else I'd just leave her here and go home.

"You're right! It fits in all right places," she gushed. Thank God! Once she got out of the changing room, she instructed the sales girl to add the dress to her list and dragged me along to another store.

And when I caught the direction of her gaze, my eyes widened. Victoria Secrets. Though it wasn't a big thing, I was always shy of buying my underwear. Most of the time I order them online.

"Uh, Tess, why don't you just go in and see what you want for yourself? I'd just find some shoes for me."

She gave a look. "I know you're just using excuses to not go in there. Jeez, Em! It's not that you're going to buy underwear and lingerie with a man out there. It's just me. So drop your embarrassment and come with me."

I groaned as she dragged me into that store. God! I was now seriously repenting of coming with her.

"So Em? You didn't tell me why did you get transferred on the second day of your job?" she asked, running her hand on a silk lingerie. When a man in the same row glanced at me, I turned more crimson with a small piece in my hands.

"The company got sold all of a sudden. And the new employer wished to transfer some newcomers to another city, and here I am." Irritation filled my insides again. Curse whoever that person was!

"Oh? That's really unusual, but I don't complain. At least you came back to us." She smiled. "So what's this company's new name now?"

"OC Textiles," I replied, remembering the name on the letter.

She stopped whatever she was doing, her gaze snapping to me. Eyes wide, something flashed across her face.

"Uh, you see if you like anything, I'll be back in a minute."

"But where are you going?"

She didn't wait to answer and rushed out of the store. What's wrong with her all of a sudden?

As I was searching for matching bras with the panties I took for myself, avoiding the sales clerks, someone called out my name behind me.

"Emerald? Is that you?"

Turning around, I froze in my place. The red head with Ace at the restaurant that night. I still remembered how comfortable they were with each other, even though Casie confirmed that they were just friends. Matching her hair, she looked stunning in her body hugging dress and heels, her blue eyes twinkling.

Wait, how did she know my name?

Before I could pronounce my thoughts out loud, she pulled me in a tight hug.

"Damn! I finally got to meet you." Pulling away, she shook her head.

"I've heard so much about you

that it became my prime wish to know you personally. And I think my wish got just accepted. Thank

God! He won't just let me see you."

I frowned. "Uh, nice to meet you too?"

"Oh, so rude of me! I'm Leyla, Leyla Collins. Ace's friend." She shook my hand.

"T-that's great. But may I ask, how do you know me? I mean, I haven't met you before, at least not personally." My gaze fell on her ring finger. And indeed there was a diamond ring that screamed married.

"Yeah, we haven't. But I know everything about you. Achilles and Caleb talk so much about you that I almost feel like I've known you for years!" She snorted, rolling her eyes. My heart skipped. He- he talks about me to her?

"Leyla? Hi!" Tess had a surprised look on. "What're you doing here?"

"Hey!" She kissed her cheeks. "Well, why do people come here?"

Tess rolled her eyes, smiling. "Well, I see that you already met Emerald? Em, she is..."

"Oh, she knows. I just introduced myself to her," Leyla said, cutting Tess off. Then she looked at me

from head to toe. "I must admit, she's way more beautiful than A..."

A nudge at her ribs halted her in the mid sentence. She looked at Tess with confusion, and then some realization set in as they talked with their eyes.

"Uh, I meant you're more beautiful in person than I heard about you from all of them." Casting a look

at Tess, she cleared her throat. "I gotta go now. I'm getting late for an appointment. It was so nice meeting you, Em! I will see you soon."

"Likewise," I said, politely.

Once she was out of sight, then Tess did relax a little. When I asked her why did Leyla look so out of

place before her exit, she just shrugged and told me she'd an urgent appointment to catch on. Maybe she was getting late.

"Where did you go, anyway?"

She averted her eyes. "To make a phone call. Now if your interrogation is over, can we continue our shopping? I've still a lot of things to buy."

Letting out another groan, I strolled behind her as we left the shop and went to look for some jewelry.

Though their odd interaction still bothered me. What was Leyla going to say before Tess stopped her?

The Trap Of Ace

Chapter 10

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I'd to crane my neck to look up at the huge skyscraper standing proud before me. Moulded with sleek glass, it reflected the whole city against it. And a huge OC Textiles was hung at the top of the building.

My new office.

I wasn't hoping for anything to turn out good, because from the past experiences, I knew my wish wouldn't get sanctioned anyway. But that didn't tame down the nervous flutters in my tummy. I

wasn't even sure if I'd have to work here or they'd consider my request and transfer me elsewhere.

Let's see what happens.

Having my fingers crossed, I blew out a breath and walked inside. And I was left in awe.

From the dark marble floor and classy contemporary interior, to the polished dark wood ceiling, everything was stunning and spotless. I didn't know an office could be this beautiful.

When I approached the receptionist, she was up to her feet with a bright smile plastered onto her face, even before I could reach her. As if she was just waiting for my arrival.

"Welcome to OC Textiles, Ma'am! How may I help you?" Greeting me with a polite nod, she asked.

"Hi! I'm Emerald Hutton. Today's is my joining here, so could you please tell me where should go first?"

Her nod was eager. "Yes, yes, of course! Can I see your joining letter first, please?"

"Yeah, sure! Here." I handed her the letter.

She didn't even read it properly, just swiped her eyes over it and gave it back to me. "Alright, kindly

please follow me, Miss. Let me show you to the boss's office."

Nodding, I did what she said. But before we could even cross the lobby, we halted at our tracks.

A frown set on my forehead as I stared at the man walking towards us with a happy face. When he gestured at the receptionist, she flashed me another smile and walked away.

"Caleb? What're you doing here?" I glanced around. "Are you here for any meetings or something?"

He chuckled. "First of all, welcome to the office. And as for your question, no, I'm not here for any meetings or anything else. This is my office."

I opened my mouth, processing his words. And then it hit me. "Your office? That means, you're my boss now?"

He shrugged. "In a way, yes. I'm the CEO of this company. But you don't have to worry about that.

Think it as your own."

"Wait a minute, I'm not catching up here. What's going on? I mean, you weren't even shocked to see me here." With narrowed eyes, I tilted my head.

"Because he already knew of your arrival," a voice stated behind me, a deep voice with hint of Greek accent I wanted to hate.

Not losing my composure, I turned around. And there he was. Towering over me in his three piece charcoal suit, he looked as heart-stopping as ever. I didn't even dare to show the effect on my face as the memories of that night hit me.

Stay cool, Em. Focus on the current situation.

But how could I when those stormy grey eyes stared at me like I was the only person around him in the entire office he could see?

"Hello, Emerald," he said, a formal smile on his lips.

Emerald? No Rosebud now?

Ignoring him, I turned to Caleb. Seeing my questioning stare, he nodded, confirming his cousin's statement. Of course, he'd know. Who will work in his company, if the CEO wouldn't know, then who'd?

Then something hit me, my eyes widening. "You're the CEO of this company, that means- you

transferred me here on purpose, didn't you? And how did you even know that I was one of the newcomers?" Everything turned more vogue for me. What was happening here?

He shifted on his legs, glancing behind me. "Uh, the decision of transferring some staffs was totally for official reasons. You were about to be transferred to another city. But when your papers caught my attention, I thought why not bring you back to the city? As we've one branch over here. And you'll also be comfortable staying close to your family." His reasons didn't convince me. And the burning stare at the back of my head didn't let me concentrate either.

"Such a coincidence, isn't it?" Was he telling the truth? But why would he lie to me?

He coughed. "Yeah, it is. But I'm happy that you're here. Tess was missing you."

"I hope you got your answers, Ms. Hutton?"

I turned around. The side of his lips twitched, grey eyes twinkling with something. Ms. Hutton? Was he playing with me right now? Because I could see it in his gaze. They were weaving some web, but what? I couldn't figure it out.

Suddenly he took a step closer and tucked a strand behind my ear. "Did you like the office, Rosebud?"

his rough voice whispered, eyes roaming on my face.

My breath caught at my throat.

First Emerald, then Ms. Hutton, and now back to Rosebud. What was he doing?

I slapped his hand away and stepped back, before I lose my sanity. "It doesn't matter if I liked it or not.

It's not that I'm working here anyway."

I ran away from my home to NY just to stay away from him. I hurt my family and friends just to be away from him. And now my fate has brought me here, in the company his cousin owned. I couldn't let this happen. Though it wasn't his company, but it was one of his family member's. So avoiding him

wouldn't be an easy thing for me if I stayed. And considering his weird behavior towards me recently,
I didn't believe he'd keep his distance.
He tilted his head, giving me a challenging look. "And who told you so?"
I raised my chin, even that didn't help with his over six feet height. Damn man! "I did. I won't work in
this company. I'm going back to New York."
At the mention of NY, he tensed. But only for a second. The next moment he was in utmost ease as he
shoved his hands in his pockets. "I'm sorry to inform you, Ms. Hutton. But you can't."
"What do you mean? You can't force me to work here!"
"Did you read the rules and conditions before you applied and accepted the job?"
I frowned. "Yes?"
A tiny smirk tugged at the edge of his mouth. Something dropped at the pit of my stomach. "Then you
must've read about the three months contract. In which, you agreed to the condition that you can't
leave this job at least for ninety days while accepting this job. So that means, Emerald Hutton-" he
closed the gap again, staring at my eyes, "-you can't leave this company and this city at least for three
months even if you want."
I gaped at him. Speechless. How could I forget about the clause? Because at that moment, it wasn't a
big deal for me. I wouldn't have left the job even if it was for some years instead of just some months.
But now...
"I don't care about any contracts. I'm resigning and no one can stop me. And how do you know about
this contract anyway?"
"I know a lot of things. And you will have to care, Ms. Hutton, if you don't want a big red mark on
your career."
"I- I..." I didn't know what to say. He'd point. Breaching this contract could be a big thumbs down for
my career.
The look of triumph in his eyes vexed me.
And then I remembered his words.

You can't escape from me anymore.

No. I can't let that happen. I- but what can I do?

Then I turned to Caleb and before I could ask for any help, he put his hands up. "I'm sorry, Em. But I can't help you in this. The contract states that, just like the employee can't resign before the estimated time, the employee even can't fire them until its for something major issue."

But it is a major issue for me! I wanted to scream.

"Please, is there nothing you can do? You could transfer me somewhere else," I requested.

He shook his head. "I'm sorry, Em. And why transfer though?"

"Uh, nothing. It's just..."

"Are you scared of something, Ms. Hutton?" He stood before me. "Is there anything that you think you can't handle?" He cocked his head.

My jaws clenched. What was he trying to do? Was he challenging me?

"I'm not scared of anything or anyone!"

"You sure about that? Because it seems like you're desperate to escape the city. What are you afraid of?" He fired back.

Something squeezed in my chest. His questions pricked me. Did he really not know of why I wanted to escape this city so desperately?

"I- I'm not escaping anything. I'm not a coward you're sounding like I'm!" My eyes burned as I defended myself.

"Yes? But you're behaving like one," as soon as he said that, regret flashed over his features. "Emerald, I didn't mean..."

"You know what, Achilles Valencian? Go to hell!" Sending him a glare of wrath, I turned around and stormed out of there.

Watching down the whole city from the balcony helped me cool down my nerves. When I found this balcony empty, I decided to take some breaths in the fresh air. And thought of all the things that just happened to me.

Though Ace's words stung, he was telling the truth. I was running from someone, him. I was a coward. I just didn't have the courage to be around him more than I could handle. More than my heart could handle. But now that a challenge was thrown into my path by him and my fate, was I ready to accept it? My phone beeped. I'm sorry. I glared at my phone as if I was glaring at him instead. Sorry my foot! He did it on purpose. To hurt me. Because he knew it was a sore subject for me. Though he never mentioned it, but I knew, somehow in deep down he knew of my feelings for him. That was years ago! Yes, years ago. I reminded myself. And I didn't know what changed, and why he was after me, but whatever he wanted, he won't get it. Achilles Valencian wouldn't get what he wanted this time. Be it if he wanted to hurt me or something else. Gripping the phone tight into my fist, I typed. Whatever you're trying to do, you won't succeed in it. I won't let it happen. Just three months, and I will be free of this contract soon. You can't make me stay here forever. Yes, I decided to face it. It was high time to face my fears. I didn't even have any choice. Maybe, just maybe I could finally move on from the past hurt facing the my fears? Who knew? And in these three months, I could stay with my family. Plus there was Tess's wedding arriving. So in a way, there was a lot of positive sides if I stayed back and worked here. It was just a matter of three months, anyway. I could do it. Spending some time more sitting on the couch, I got back inside and found Caleb's assistant, Liza. After she gave me a whole office tour and explained my job here, we stopped at the management department. With dozens of cubicles where dozens of people were working tirelessly on their given tasks. "So, Liza? Where will I work from?" I turned to the tall blonde.

"Your cabin is at the forty-eighth floor."

My eyes narrowed. "Cabin? Shouldn't I get a cubicle like the others? I mean, I'm just a new employee, assisting head designers."

"You're right. But the boss had made a cabin especially for you so that you don't have any kind of discomforts. And trust me, you will love it." She smiled.

Caleb? But, wouldn't that be partiality? Then I shrugged. A personal cabin didn't sound so bad.

I wonder, if Tess knew of my job in Caleb's company.

When Liza took me to my cabin, she was right. I fell in love with it at the first sight. It was decorated in

a combination of white and blue colors. Everything in the cabin was either blue or white. The couch,

the shelf, even the beautiful paintings on the walls. It also had a floor to ceiling window from where I

could watch the whole California.

I breathed in awe as I took in the beautiful view of the busy city from the window. It was like a

customized personal office. As if someone decorated every single thing with utmost care and

affection.

I must thank Caleb for this. Getting my own personal cabin kinda

reduced the bitterness of the

argument I'd with his frustrating cousin.

Once Liza left me on my own, I put my head into the work. All of it was a little difficult at first, but

then it all turned manageable with time. But it needed hard work. Piles of files were stacked on my

desk. I didn't even realize when the sun set in the jam of the work. And as a newbie at this, I was

lacking with speed.

A knock on the door made me look up. My brother strolled in with a small box in his hand.

"What're you doing here?" I asked.

"Came to see how my little sister is doing at the first day of her office.

Why? Is that a problem?"

I rolled my eyes and jutted my chin to the box. "What's in it?"

"Cupcakes. I thought you'd like some after a day full of work," he said, opening the box. The

mouthwatering sweet aroma of them had me salivating. Only then I realized how hungry I was.

"Thanks!" Grabbing one, I took a bite.

"So? How was your day? Did you like the office?" he asked, putting almost half of one in his mouth.

"Other than the shock that I was brought here on purpose and who was the owner, everything else

was pretty good. The people over here are very nice and humble."

He nodded in understanding. "I heard what happened. But I don't have any complain against their

decision. We can have you closer to us after all."

I shook my head. I knew none of my family members would see any problem in it. For them, whatever

Caleb did, was right. I can't even stay upset with him for it, he didn't know my reasons. If I were in

their place, maybe I would do the same.

"Hey, I know what you're thinking. But don't worry. I'm sure he won't do anything that will make you

uncomfortable. I can talk to him if you want?" he offered, concern latched onto his face.

"No need. It's not that I'll have to face him everyday. Not that I care, but it's good that Caleb is the

owner of this company and not him. So there is nothing much to worry. I won't see him often."

"Who told you Caleb is the owner of this company?" He raised his brow.

I frowned. "What do you mean? He's the CEO, right?"

He nodded. "Yes, as a CEO, he manages everything. But he's not the owner. Achilles owns this

company. He bought it."