



BEGUILED
The Gate Deadlock Series
Book 2
By Urania Sarri

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To my husband and sons for being my inspiration

“Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, “Beyond Good and Evil”

Preface

When the rain got me, I was still running along an unfamiliar street that seemed endless on both directions. Within seconds, the drizzle became a cold downpour that soaked me to the bone, plastering the thin shirt and jeans onto my body. My hair was sticking on my face, pricking my eyes like dozens of needles, but I didn't stop. Lost in a haze of despair, I could not comprehend the faint voice in my head that warned me to go back. I kept running away. Where I was heading, I could not tell anymore. Everything around me seemed strange and obscure; no houses, no shelter, only the perennial olive trees and the murky veil of rain. For the last two years in my life, every day, every minute, every second had been spinning around one single pivot; that rescue mission had been the only pivot of my new life. It had defined my actions, my thoughts, and my whole existence. I had gone a long way, overcoming any personal limit and fear, transcending time, only because I was fixed on a purpose. I had left my old life behind.

I had a life once.

Now, my mission was my life. A mission that had taken me far away from my family, my friends, my studies and my future. But I did not care anymore. I had chosen my destiny. It had always been about him. Christopher. He had turned his back on me and the pivot support had suddenly vanished. I had nothing to lean on. My whole life was collapsing. I was collapsing. There was no angel coming to my rescue this time. A sharp pain in my chest blocked my breath, forcing me to stop. But I welcomed the pain, didn't want it to ease out. Strangely enough, it seemed to be the right thing to feel. This is how some people have died, right? Perhaps this could be the end...

“Hey, you're standing in the middle of the street!” a voice in my head shouted. “And that yellow light approaching is about to crash into you in minutes. Can't you hear it? You have to move to the side. Don't just stand there. It's a car! It's definitely a car and the veil of haze certainly does not help. MOVE!”

Then why wasn't I moving? Could I be waiting for the car to put an end to this excruciating obstacle race I had started?

I closed my eyes and held my breath as the roaring sound of the car approached.

Chapter 1

Angels

Angels don't always look gorgeous. Sometimes, they have rough hands and smoked-yellow moustaches. Their faces may be wrinkled, carved with paths that reveal the burden of each year of hard living. Even more, they may hit the brake at the very last moment if they mean to spare your life. But they do cover you with their worn-out coat to protect you from the hailstorm and they don't ask a lot of questions. They take you in their old, rattling truck and drive you to the nearest village to find someone who can speak your language.

He asked for my name.

"Emma." I mumbled. "My name's Emma."

"Tourist?" he asked.

"Yes, tourist." I lied.

Angels could tell when you needed help. They even bought you a drink and waited until you found the strength to speak again.

"What's happened to you?" a stout, young woman with long, curly black hair asked me, having been assigned with the interpreter's role by my angel. I guessed she must have been the café owner's daughter, judging by the resemblance they shared. He'd been the first to storm out of the café to my assistance when my angel pulled over and called frantically for help. The poor man had been so alarmed by my shivering.

"Was anyone after you?" About a dozen saucer eyes around me were waiting for answers as she tried to wipe my hair with a towel. She smelled of fresh lemon. A faint but still invigorating scent, released every time she brought her hands close to my face.

"Yes." I nodded, still shivering. I thought it wasn't a good time to tell her I could speak Greek.

"Who was it?"

I sat up on the uncomfortable, plastic chair, searching vainly for a lie. "I'm not sure." She put the towel on the table, looking worried. "Shall I call the police?"

"The police?" That brought me to my senses. The police were the last thing I needed.

"No. I'm fine now. I was just scared of...the storm." I tried to sound embarrassed. If I had started lying, I must have been my self again. She turned to translate my silly explanation to our audience, and next minute, I realized I had disappointed her customers who'd been expecting something more exciting to disturb the tranquillity of their simple life. Just normal, ordinary life. Deadlock-free.

"Where are you staying? I can call a taxi to take you home."

Home. Home is where your heart is. Once again, my dad's voice repeated in my head, like a broken CD. Where was my heart now? Did I have a heart anymore? It must have been shattered. Its pieces felt scattered all over my chest.

"Yes. I need a taxi. I must go to Korinth," I said.

"Korinth? It's three hours drive at the least."

"I have money." I had been wearing my bag across my chest ever since I'd left the Squad Headquarters. Just a few hours ago, I was still in the future, a time-traveller to Christopher's world, determined to set him free and get him back.

For a fleeting moment, I thought of what those villagers' reaction would be if I tried to tell them what was lying ahead. To warn them. Tell them we were all being

watched; and those of us who stood as a threat to the future world, like me, were in mortal danger. Those villagers would not call a taxi for me then, but the fastest means to the closest mental health institution. Who could blame them?

“Okay. I’ll take care of it. Just drink your ouzo. It’ll make you feel better,” the chubby, young woman said and turned to our curious audience, who reminded me of the chorus of old men in ancient Greek plays, to translate our short conversation. Obviously, my situation was of no interest to them anymore. They smiled in front of the naïve tourist who had gotten scared of the thunderstorm and started running. They probably had other problems to deal with now that the hail was ripping against the blossomed trees, destroying the crop of this year. Maybe their lives weren’t really as simple as I’d thought.

“Your taxi is coming,” the young woman shouted behind the counter.

Curled in the backseat of the taxi, I watched the headlights of the cars passing by. We were already on the highway and despite the fact that it was still early in the afternoon, the gloomy shroud of the menacing storm covered everything, stalking my escape.

Angels can tell when you need them. They sometimes call you when you least expect them to; when you think they have forgotten about you the same as you have forgotten about them.

I jerked to the persistent buzz of the pouch hanging from my belt. “Hey? Did I catch you in a bad time?” Alex’s voice sounded worried through my cell phone. Alex. A rainbow in the storm of my torment.

“Alex! Thank God!”

“What’s going on, Emma? Where are you? You don’t sound good.”

“It’s over, Alex. It’s all over. You were right. I shouldn’t have gone there. Now, it’s too late.” My voice broke. Tears were streaming down my face and I realized I was sobbing.

“Emma, can you hear me? Concentrate. Where are you?”

“In a taxi...somewhere...near Pylos.”

“Where are you going?”

It was so hard to collect my thoughts. “I’m going to ...Korinth. Yes, I’m going to Korinth.”

“Okay. I’ll get there as soon as I can. Just go home and wait for me. I’ll take you away from them. Do you hear me?”

“Yes. Hurry, please.”

“I’ll see you soon. Just call me when you get there, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Hang on, Emma. Listen to me.” he said in a calm, steady voice for which he’d never guess how grateful I was at that moment. “Try to relax. Everything will be all right.”

I wiped the blurred glass with my sleeve and looked outside. The dark clouds that carried the torrential hailstorm were now moving to the north, hiding the mountain-tops behind the haze.

Are angels likely to play tricks on you? To try and fool you? Is it possible that they might let you take a glimpse of paradise just to make you realize what you’ve lost afterwards, when they have deserted you? Do they let you believe they’ve always been there, eternal guardians of your soul, until one day you wake up to find you are

on your own, wondering if they've ever really existed or they've been just a figment of your imagination?

I had a guardian angel once. In his eyes I found the bluest skies. It was the hint of the oncoming storm that I missed. His face tortuously gorgeous, altogether perfect. His heart a bleeding wound because of his haunting past, searching for healing. When he first revealed to me that he came from the future, I was certain he was a compulsive liar. Yet, when he unveiled his assignment in my world, he scared me to death because the charming tutor I thought I had spent the night with, was transformed into an ex-assassin, a Crusader of the Future World, entrusted with the mission of protecting my life. Because on that same night, I discovered I was going to be murdered for the same reason my father had been murdered thirteen years ago. The deplorable twist of the story had totally been my fault. After all, Christopher would still be one of the Crusaders if he hadn't traded his freedom for my life. I wouldn't have suffered the ordeal of the car crash the night I was told he'd left me, a near-death experience, months in a wheel-chair and, worst of all, the loss of our baby. Although I found out about my pregnancy after the car crash, when it was too late, the loss was still an open sore for me. But he didn't know anything of this. I would always wonder if there was a chance we could still be together had I gone along with the League's orders. If Christopher hadn't chosen to offer himself to his worst nightmare, Denzel, commander of the Squad, the Special Forces of The League. He had been Christopher's boss in the past, after he had him arrested years ago in their time, when Christopher was just an abused teenager. He'd recruited him to the Squad and trained him until Christopher became the most efficient Squad agent: a ruthless killer, a soldier of The Future, condemned to defend the secrets of The League. They had ordered my father's murder when he refused to cooperate and conceal their secrets. And Christopher had taken part in what happened, although not directly. The League had ordered my death too when they found out I was following on my dad's steps to excavate the area where the Gateway that connected our worlds lay. That was when Christopher came to my time to save me. And he did it out of love.

Unfortunately, it was just for a while. Because when I challenged the League, I turned them against Christopher too. That was how he had decided to put an end to the threat by surrendering to Denzel and going back to a life he'd tried so hard to redeem his soul from. I knew it was worse than death for him, but I knew he did it for me.

I'd do everything to get him back, to disentangle him from the Squad's claws. That was no secret to Denzel. So, here I was, a double agent, ostensibly on a new mission assigned by the same people who had ordered my death. I was supposed to locate the Gateway for them, which had for some strange reason, moved. For an even stranger reason I couldn't fathom, Denzel was convinced I was the only one who could carry this mission through. Such was his despair to find the Gate that he had accepted my one and only condition: to let Christopher come with me. To my astonishment, Denzel had no clue of the clandestine save-Christopher-mission the Crusaders had organized to get their comrade back. Which was going pretty well and according to plan apart from a slight detail which changed everything. No sooner had I gotten back to my world with Christopher when I discovered he was different. A changed man, a cruel assassin once again, a loyal Squad member who made it clear I meant nothing to him anymore. In his eyes, my mission to save him was nothing but a huge blunder. And my life was hanging in the balance.

That was why I had no other choice but run away from him in the rain; because I was pretty sure I couldn't endure another second near him without risking my sanity.

When I got out of the taxi I took a moment to stare at the beach house in front of me. The house Christopher had bought that summer for us. I was determined to clear my thoughts of anything related to him. Since he was gone, the place felt desolate, forlorn and abandoned. The oversized arched windows looked harrowing dark in contrast to the white of its walls but the flowers in the garden were still in life, breaking the gloom that pervaded the place. My nostrils filled with smells of the sea, its whining breaking the silence of the night reminding me it was still there to comfort me.

I found the key behind the gardenia pot where I always left it in case he came back. Every time I tried to reach it I prayed for it not to be there. But just like today, it was always there. I unlocked the heavy wooden door and took a few seconds before I entered. This would be my first time in our house without the hope that Christopher would return. Never before had that place seemed emptier to me. I closed the door behind me and almost ran up the stairs. My movements were mechanical, fast. I took off the clothes that had already dried on me and showered. It was unbearable and, at the same time, wistful for me to stay here. I should not let my mind play the same tricks again, recalling his face, imagining him sitting in the living room, on the porch, or lying in bed next to me.

After the shower that did little to alleviate the ache inside my chest, I curled on the sofa in my bathrobe with a glass of wine. I turned on the TV hoping it would distract me. Alex wouldn't answer his cell phone, but I kept calling him several times and left a couple of messages. What could have happened to him?

Things would have been much different if I hadn't crushed Alex's hopes last Christmas in London, when I told him outright that I only saw him as a friend. We had a terrible fight, which ended with his departure for Greece. I had no one to blame but myself. If I hadn't taken advantage of Alex's feelings for me for as long as Suzan, my Crusader friend, needed him as a cover up while she prepared me for my time-travel and my encounter with Denzel, maybe things would have turned out differently. Alex had forgiven me for what I did. But it didn't mean I forgave myself.

It was already dark outside when I began to wonder how long it would take for him to get here. More than four hours had passed since he'd called, but I told myself I shouldn't panic. He should be here in any minute. Then he would take me away from here and we'd try to find Tom or Susan. They would know what to do. As long as I didn't have to look into those empty, deep-blue eyes again. I would manage to go on somehow, to find a way to survive. I had done this before. I should know.

2. Under Duress

The ear-splitting sound of thunder jerked me awake. All of a sudden, an alarming ice-cold tingle stirred every nerve under my skin. Someone was in the room.

Despite my instincts warning me, my body refused to cooperate as panic took over.

The house was dark. Trying to figure out where the intruder was, I quietly reached for the bottle of wine on the coffee table, the only way to protect myself. But I couldn't find it.

My ears throbbed at the frantic pounding of my heart.

In a sudden flash of lightning, I saw him sitting in the red armchair, right across the sofa. A familiar, still figure in his usual black Squad suit; broad shoulders upright against the back of the chair, hands resting on the armrests.

"That was a very foolish thing to do," Christopher said calmly, a second before panic punched my chest.

My relief lasted only for a split of a second. I remembered he was the one I'd been running away from, unable to deal with the change in him. Why on earth did he have to follow me here? Why did he keep on torturing me with his adorable face and his irresistible voice?

"Why are you here?" I whispered sitting up. "Why don't you leave me alone?" I continued, my voice faltering. "Haven't you tortured me enough?"

"It's too late for that I'm afraid. It was you who brought me back, remember? You started this, Emma, and no one can stop it now." His voice sounded milder than a few hours ago, when he had drawn the line between us. Still, underneath his composed façade, I had the feeling there was something he was trying to hide.

"I'm perfectly sure I can stop it now. I won't be bothering you anymore; you've made it clear that you want nothing to do with me." I tried to sound stern, hoping he missed the edge of despair in my voice.

"As I said, it's too late. They've got your boyfriend."

"Who?"

He pressed two fingers against his forehead, right between his eyebrows, in a gesture that revealed his exhaustion.

"The guy you've been meeting in that hotel in London."

I blinked. "What hotel? Oh, my God! Are you talking about Alex?"

He raised one eyebrow. "Is that his name?"

Moving on its own, my hand reached up to clasp my throat. "What... Who's got him?" I squealed.

"You know who's got him." a rigid voice said. "I told you many lives would be at risk until you completed your mission."

"What are they going to do to him?" The thought brought a heavy feeling to my stomach, making me sick.

"I can't say." He shrugged. "Maybe nothing."

"But you don't really believe this, do you?"

"I don't know what to say to you, Emma. Your guess is as good as mine. They still keep me in the dark, you see. It didn't help that you ran away."

"I'm sorry I caused you trouble." I hoped he didn't miss my sarcasm. His problems with the League didn't matter to me anymore. I only cared about the news he came to deliver. They've got Alex. The Squad kidnapped my only friend here. I should have seen it coming. I shouldn't have involved him in this. Tex has Alex. Because of me. Because I ran away. Horror overwhelmed me at the thought of Alex in Tex's hands. I had to get him back. Whatever it took. I needed to save Alex.

“You mustn’t let them hurt him. You owe me that.” Tears started to wet my face. Christopher looked into my eyes for the first time since we came back from the League’s time. Despite the darkness around us, interrupted by the continuous flashes of lightning, I was suddenly very aware of his scrutinising stare.

“I’m really sorry, Emma. He must be really important to you,” he said.

“Alex is my friend, you fool. My only friend who knows.”

He didn’t take his eyes away from my face. “Come on now. You can do better than this. At least be honest. Do you often spend hours in a hotel room with your male friends?”

What was that about? Was he really jealous of Alex? I opened my mouth to protest, but he cut me off.

“I’m sorry. I have no right to ask you this. Besides, I’m glad you’ve moved on. The question is: what are you going to do now?”

I wished I could see his face clearly, to read his eyes. Was he really glad about the possibility of Alex and me being together?

“What do you think I should do?” I asked him trying to clear my mind from the blur of panic.

“It’s up to you. I know what I would do if someone I cared about was captured by the Squad.” he shrugged.

“Well, obviously I can’t walk away under the circumstances. I can’t leave him to the Squad.” I stood on my feet and started walking back and forth nervously.

“So, what are you saying?” he asked.

I inhaled deeply. “Tell them I’ll do it. I’ll have to find an excuse about why I ran away, though.”

“I’m sure they already know why you ran away.”

“Mateo?” I knew Denzel had sent his snitch along to check on us.

He shook his head before he put his hand in his pocket to take out his cell phone.

“Wait!” I stopped him. “Tell them I won’t cooperate until Alex is safe. They will have to let him go.”

Christopher didn’t say anything. He stood up and walked to the kitchen, amazing me with how he found his way in the dark, as if the house was brightly lit.

I remembered there used to be a lighter and candles in the drawer next to the TV set. I felt my way in the room and lit the vanilla scented candles. Their dim light gave the room a cosy atmosphere, reminding me of the summer when Christopher would inexorably use all his charm to distract me with his seducing talent and evade revealing to me the real reason he had come to my world. But I couldn’t be swamped with memories; I shouldn’t break now, even though the situation was evolving into what I’d been trying to avoid.

I poured some wine into my glass and gazed at the storm through the glass door, trying to find a way to distract myself or, at least, hold back the tears that threatened to break out again. Outside, the rain kept falling and every now and then flashes of lightning, followed by claps of thunder, illuminated the rough, black sea in front of the house.

Christopher came back. His face looked terribly pale in the candlelight, an impressive contrast to his dark clothes. He looked thinner and more tired than ever. Still, he was so excruciatingly attractive.

“Well?” I asked, trying to speak around the lump in my throat.

“They’ll call back. But I wouldn’t expect them to call soon. It’s part of the game. They will try to test your limits.”

“Do you think they’re going to let him go?”

He shook his head. "Not likely. They'll let you talk to him. They'll probably hold him as an assurance, so that you do what they've asked." He thought about it for a moment. "I wonder," he muttered.

"What?"

"How did they find out he was coming to you? They must have caught him on his way here. Did anybody else know he was coming?"

"No."

"That's strange. They could be tracing your cell phone of course but still, they moved too fast." he said with a bewildered expression on his face.

"Do you think Mateo gave me away?"

"Mateo didn't know about him. I'm sure about that. He was as surprised as I was." Surprised, I thought. About finding out that I had a new boyfriend probably. I thought of all those things he was ignorant of. Everything that had happened during the last two years we'd been apart.

I had imagined myself telling him about it as soon as I found him, but now I knew it would remain an imaginary conversation.

"Can't you see what's going to happen? Not even a glimpse?" I asked.

"Not any more. I'm not allowed to."

Christopher must have taken the bottle of wine while I was asleep because it was now on the coffee table next to him. Wondering how long he'd been watching me sleeping, I poured some wine in my glass and took a few sips. Christopher cast me a disapproving look.

"Since when did you start drinking?" he asked.

I wanted to laugh. Drinking? I had been through so much and he was concerned about my drinking habits?

"Give me a break, Christopher! Besides, you've lost the right to tell me what to do anymore, don't you think?"

His pursed lips and his clenched jaw revealed his anger, but he didn't argue.

"It's only four o'clock. I suggest we both try to sleep. They're not calling for the next couple of hours. Why don't you go upstairs? I'll take the sofa."

"Fine," I said.

I took my glass in one hand and a candle in the other so I could find my way to the stairs. I saw Christopher take the bottle of wine to the kitchen and I smiled thinking that somehow his gesture revealed he still cared.

But the hope vanished in the following seconds after I said, "Suit yourself. It's your house anyway."

He stopped and turned to me. "No, it's not. I don't belong here. Never did, never will. You've got to keep this in mind," he reminded me and turned towards the kitchen again.

I closed the bedroom door behind me and held my breath. I could have never imagined that Christopher's presence would be as painful as his absence. Maybe even more painful. How many times I had wished with all my heart for him to come back to this house. How naïve had I been to think I could revive the past, that nothing had changed and we'd be able to go on with our lives from where we'd stopped? Why hadn't I seen this coming? Why had I ignored the signs? The more I thought about it, the more convinced I was that Plato, the wise Commander of the Crusaders and Christopher's mentor, knew about Christopher's change of heart and he'd tried to warn me. Besides, every time I recalled Christopher's words, it seemed like it had been ages since Plato had warned me that hearts changed and nothing lasted forever.

He was right. Forever was an unacceptable word for us. Back then, I'd thought he was only trying to comfort me; I'd missed the warning in his words. I'd intentionally ignored all the signs. I was the star in my one-man act, keeping my head in the clouds, creating my own reality, my own illusions. Now, it was time to pay the price.

My mind was a mess. The changes in my life had once again been so sudden and dramatic that I failed to fully comprehend them. The bottom line was I had to change the route of my life if I intended to retain my sanity. And of course, I had to do everything in my power to save Alex. I involved him into this mess, and I was responsible of getting him out.

I found it impossible to sleep, suffering from the torture and despair inflicted by the unexpected obstacles I had brought upon myself. I could not tell which was more painful: the love of my life was a stranger, who didn't love me anymore, even worse, had never really loved me, or that Alex, my good friend was in mortal danger because of me? Tossing and turning in my bed, I couldn't help thinking that, however hard it was for me to accept, deep down I knew Christopher's return, even under these circumstances, devalued Alex's troubles. I pitied myself more for the thought. Why did I have to be obsessed with a person that had made it clear I left him cold? Alex cared so deeply; he'd risked his life for me, for God's sake! Christopher was the "there" and "then" whereas Alex was the "here" and "now." I had no excuse. I should stick to reality. But then, had the last two years of my life been a total waste? How could I leave everything behind me? I was impossible to accept that I had to give up on my love for the man I considered to be my other half.

How could he have done it? How had he deleted me from his life? Could it just be an act, part of his protect-Emma-mission he had undertaken when he first met me? If it was an act, it was too realistic. No, that has to be wishful thinking. Hopes of a broken heart, I thought, realizing I had soaked the pillow under my cheek. But my tears stopped with the last thought. The wound in my heart became too large to leave space for any kind of externalization of my pain.

Alex. Stick to this thought, I repeated to myself. He could not be punished for what I'd done. Neither could anybody I cared about. I shouldn't allow that. I would rack my brain to think of a way to blackmail Denzel, but I was aware of the fact that he'd always be one step ahead. It was more than certain.

The knock on the door made my heart pump fast. I got up and looked at my face in the mirror. Awful image. Red eyes and dark circles underneath. I quickly fixed my hair in a sloppy bun but there was no time to change the bathrobe I was still in.

"Emma? Can I come in?" That voice. The voice I adored.

"Come in," I said, biting my lip. Christopher looked tired too. It was obvious that he hadn't slept either. He was holding his cell phone.

"They've just called. In about two minutes they'll call back. You'll be able to talk to your boyfriend."

"Stop calling him my boyfriend."

"Right. I meant your...friend," he mocked.

"Did you get anything out of them? Did they say where they're keeping him?"

"No. I'm sorry. It's obvious that they still don't trust me."

"Why don't they? You're one of them now, aren't you?" I was deliberately trying to hurt him, but he didn't seem to take the hint.

"You're absolutely right. I am one of them. Maybe I've always been one of them."

And just like that, he'd turned the bow toward me. The arrow hit its target, aiming straight at my heart.

“Hmmm.” He looked around. “It looks exactly the same. I’m surprised you haven’t changed anything,” he remarked.

What was I supposed to say? That I’d been waiting for him to come back and that I didn’t want anything changed because it all reminded me of him? I preferred to let him think exactly the opposite.

“I’ve only been here a couple of times. I never thought about changing anything. I’ll probably sell the place.” I’d never thought about selling our house, of course, but now it occurred to me that I should put an ad about it as soon as this doomed-to-fail mission would be over.

“That will be a very wise thing to do.” His face remained annoyingly unreadable.

“Won’t you come inside?” I challenged him.

“Sure. Why not?”

Christopher walked into the room with stealthy, cat-like movements. He lay on the huge bed, his palms supporting the back of his head; a sight for sore eyes to every woman. In another world, I would have thrown myself at him and covered him with kisses.

With a leisurely air, he fixed the pillows behind his head and gazed at me.

In an act of senseless bravery, I sat on the other edge of the bed. “How... How does it feel?” I asked.

“What do you mean?”

“How does it feel to be here? To be back.” Back with me, I wanted to say.

He smiled, but the smile did not reach his eyes. “What do you want to hear? That I’ve missed this place, this house, this...bed?”

“Have you?”

“You know the answer to that, don’t you? Trained assassins do not become attached to places or people. We cannot afford to be.” He closed his eyes. “But I have to admit, I’ve always liked this bed. Especially after having spent the last three hours lying on the sofa.”

So that was his only emotion about being here. The comfortable bed. So uninspired, so unromantic.

Then he looked at me through his half-open eyes. “But you know this, don’t you? I’m sure you and your boyfriend make the most of this bed when you meet here.”

“What are you trying to prove?”

“To prove? It’s just pure biology. Don’t tell me I still shock you! As far as I remember, you’ve overcome that stage.”

I felt my cheeks burn. I had an intense urge to slap him.

“There’s no need to be so cynical,” I said instead. Suddenly, thinking of Alex made me want to laugh. What would he say if he heard Christopher talk this way, considering my silly fixation on keeping myself pure “until the prince came back” as he used to tease me?

His mobile vibrated next to him and he took his time to answer it, ignoring the twitch I couldn’t hide.

“Yes?” he said. Then he passed me the phone without saying anything, his eyes more blank than ever.

“Alex?” My voice trembled.

“Emma?” I could barely hear him. His voice sounded too low, too distant, too exhausted.

“Where are you? Have they hurt you? Tell them not to touch you!” I croaked out, my voice tight with anger and panic.

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Urania Sarri lives in Korinthia, Greece with her husband and sons. She holds a BA in English Language and Literature and an Msc in Teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). She is now finishing her studies for a PhD in Linguistics. She specializes in teaching English to children and young adults and she totally adores her job. While doing so, she takes any opportunity to convey to her students the passion of reading. She is fascinated by paranormal stories and appreciates good romance whenever she gets her hands on it!

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