



## From Enemy's Daughter to Expectant Bride (The Billionaires of Black Castle Book 1)

*By Olivia Gates*

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Revenge and love collide in this Billionaires of Black Castle novel by USA TODAY bestselling author Olivia Gates

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Eliana Ferreira has never met a man like Rafael—powerful, irresistible, unstoppable. She knows something dark drives the self-made billionaire, yet she can't deny him anything...until she discovers his terrible purpose. She is expecting his baby and is days away from becoming his bride, but will his revenge tear them apart forever?

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### **Editorial Review**

#### About the Author

USA TODAY Bestselling author Olivia Gates has published over thirty books in contemporary, action/adventure and paranormal romance. And whether in today's world or the others she creates, she writes larger than life heroes and heroines worthy of them, the only ones who'll bring those sheikhs, princes, billionaires or gods to their knees. She loves to hear from readers at [oliviagates@gmail.com](mailto:oliviagates@gmail.com) or on [facebook.com/oliviagatesauthor](https://facebook.com/oliviagatesauthor), Twitter @Oliviagates. For her latest news visit [oliviagates.com](http://oliviagates.com)

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Rafael Moreno Salazar stood in the shadows, looking down from the mezzanine of his newly acquired mansion in Rio de Janeiro.

The grand ball was in full swing. All the major names in the marketing world were enjoying his exclusive hors d'oeuvres and free-flowing Moët et Chandon and waltzing to the elegant music of his live orchestra. And he hadn't yet made an appearance.

He was leaving his guests to...stew, letting their curiosity about him and his intentions reach a fever pitch.

He'd been doing that since his announcement. That Rafael Salazar—the enigma who'd revolutionized financial technologies—was shopping for a marketing partner in the Western hemisphere. Although the announcement's impact was already huge, he'd kept stoking interest by deepening his mystery. Then he'd added a pinch of spice. A handful of dirt, really.

As he always did with potential clients and associates, he'd let info leak that his background was in organized crime. As it was. Just not in the way people imagined. He and his brothers had had their own shadow operation in their beginnings.

Heads of state had been fascinated by his avant-garde methods from the start, but they hadn't courted him aggressively except when they'd found out those methods had been forged in the crucible of crime and tested through the ingeniousness of corruption.

But he hadn't been sure the marketing tycoons he was baiting would be as open to dealing with someone who dabbled in the world's grayest zones and was one of those zones' most ambiguous figures.

But instead of being repelled, it seemed everyone thought any illegal skills and liaisons he commanded would make him an even more lucrative partner. And if he was as formidable as it was rumored, he'd also be invulnerable. They could all do with a partner bullets bounced off.

And there they were, the hopeful candidates, pretending to be enjoying his lavish party and trying to be gracious to one another. But he could feel them seething with frustration, wondering whom he'd favor if and when he finally deigned to grace his own ball.

"Will you finally make an appearance tonight, Numbers?"

He slanted a calm glance at the man who'd appeared silently at his side. "I just might this time, Cobra."

The Englishman he'd called Cobra for the past twenty years curled a ruthless lip as he examined the scene. Rafael had told him the same thing on three previous occasions.

To the world, he was Richard Graves—the name he'd picked when they'd manufactured their new identities. At forty-two, Richard looked like a Hollywood movie star, and at first glance, he could pass for Rafael's older brother. They had almost the same build and coloring, only Richard's jet-black hair was threaded with discreet silver. On closer inspection, however, their bone structure revealed their different ethnicities, with Rafael being of Portuguese Brazilian stock.

But there was one other major difference between them, and it wasn't on the surface. It was in their specialties.

Though Rafael had been trained to be deadly, his main power lay in his mind. He'd rarely relied on his prowess in violence but was the go-to guy to liquidate targets financially. Richard was code-named Cobra for the best reasons. He was the total package of lethality. His liquidations had always been the literal kind. He now hid the deadliness that made him the ultimate assassin behind a facade of refinement. Until you examined him. Or he examined you. Rafael didn't know any mere mortals who could withstand his scrutiny.

But Richard's days of eradicating scum were behind him. Or so he said. But whether this was true or not, he now eliminated threats in the worlds of business and politics with an equally ruthless precision. With Richard as his partner and protector, Rafael felt confident that the past would never catch up with him...and that the future could hold no worries.

Richard pulled back, leveled probing eyes on him. "Aren't you playing this with too much deliberation? You waited years to concoct this plan—I thought you'd be a bit more eager to finally put it into action."

Rafael jerked one shoulder. "I'm in no hurry."

"Really? Could have fooled me." Richard huffed. "Seriously, all you've done for two months is set up such events, then stand in the wings watching. Don't you think you've done enough reconnaissance?"

"After twenty-four years, you think two months is too long for me to savor the anticipation of my revenge?"

"Put that way, no." Richard made a sound of self-deprecation. "Seems I'm the one who can't contain my impatience. You've always been the most methodical, *patient* person I know. That is, along with your dear, relentless Phantom. But you still have one up on him. On anyone. You see the intricacies of probability as simple equations when they're a maze to the rest of us."

Rafael didn't contradict him. He'd long known that the fluke of his mathematical ability did make him see the world in a different way.

But no matter what he'd just claimed, Richard was as clear-sighted as he was in his own way when it came to his concerns. However, when it came to Rafael's, Richard had zero tolerance. He'd killed for him, would no doubt do so again if need be. He'd die for him. The feeling was absolutely mutual.

It never stopped amazing him that he'd not only been blessed with such a "brother" but with seven. Even though they were down to six these days.

Shaking away the disturbing memory of how they'd lost Cypher, seemingly forever, he sighed. "Maybe I'm

discovering revenge is a dish best served cold."

At Richard's unconvinced grunt, Rafael chuckled, then sipped his champagne, swirling the sweet taste of vicious expectation.

His revenge *would* be cold. As bitterly cold as the prison he'd grown up in. As agonizingly slow as time had sheared past there. As grimly inexorable as the hatred he'd nursed all those years for those who'd had a hand in his enslavement.

Twelve interminable years of enduring his enslavers' dehumanizing as they'd molded him into the mercenary the Organization would later lease to the highest bidders. Their patrons ranged from top names in politics and commerce to those in organized crime, espionage and war mongering.

He'd been one of a few hundred boys, picked from all over the world. Some kidnapped from their families, others bought or bartered, many more plucked from orphanages, the streets or chaos-torn zones. They'd all been way above average, physically and mentally. Some were gifted. Like him and his brothers.

The Organization's "recruiters" chose their potential operatives using unerring criteria, and they went to great lengths to "acquire" them. They delivered them to that prison in the depths of the Balkans, where they were kept segregated from the world in that sinister fortress his brothers had named Black Castle.

The Organization acquired children as young as possible, the easier to shape them. The ones they acquired a bit older, like him, or younger but strong enough to resist, like his brothers, they broke first, before they put them in training.

*Training* was a euphemism for the hell, both physical and psychological, that they put them through to forge them into lethal weapons. Once they graduated to fieldwork, they were sent out in teams according to the skill set each mission required. They performed under the airtight surveillance of their "handlers." Death rewarded any attempt to escape.

Yet he'd survived escaping and, before that, the years of oppression and abuse. Not that it had been because of his own strength. He'd had none left after that first period of isolation and torture. If he hadn't met his brothers, he wouldn't have lasted much longer. Then, four years later, Richard had taken him under his wing, too. Richard and his brothers had saved his sanity, and his life.

Phantom, now Numair Al Aswad, had fulfilled the promise he'd made that day in the dining hall when he and the boys had recognized him as a kindred spirit. From that point on, they'd made life worth living, their brotherhood replacing the family he'd lost. After proving himself worthy of their total trust, they'd included him in the blood pact they'd sworn. That they'd one day escape and become powerful enough to bring the entire Organization down.

To that end, Phantom had maneuvered the Organization into constantly teaming them up together until they became their prized strike force. This inseparable unit had been vital to their very long-term plans.

Phantom had also made them believe they'd eradicated their individuality, had turned them into inhuman weapons to be pointed wherever they pleased.

Once they'd become trusted and depended on, they'd been granted more autonomy, until that laxness had allowed them to execute their escape.

When they'd finally broken out, they'd gone deep underground, using their combined covert expertise to forge new identities....

"Reminiscing?"

Richard, his onetime handler, always read him with uncanny accuracy. It was how he'd found Rafael and the others after they'd escaped—by tracing him.

His brothers' handlers had thankfully had no insight into their true nature. But since Richard had been assigned to him when he'd been twelve, an unbreakable bond had developed between them. Richard, ice-cold and implicitly trusted by the Organization, had hidden it perfectly. But there'd been no hiding anything from his brothers. Especially from Phantom and Cypher. Those two saw *everything*. And seeing his growing rapport with Richard had made them more apprehensive by the day. Their trepidation had proved well-founded when Richard had found them.

They'd distrusted Richard as totally as Rafael trusted him, considered him one of their enslavers. Their decision had been unanimous. Richard had to die.

Rafael hadn't known whom to fear for more. Richard was the most lethal operative the Organization had ever had and certainly capable of wiping them all out. There'd been only one way he could avert that catastrophic situation.

He'd declared he'd stake his life on both sides, so if there was any killing, they had to kill him, too. Thankfully, they'd trusted him and his judgment implicitly, and it had been enough to make them all back down.

Yet even after he'd proved their escape plans wouldn't have worked without Richard's covert help, they'd still suspected Richard's motives. It had taken proof that Richard had been a hostage of the Organization himself for them to believe that he wanted to bring them down, too.

It had still taken his brothers ages to warm up to Richard. Never in Numair's case. Rafael remained the link between them, since he didn't relish tearing Richard and Numair's fangs out of each other's flesh.

Those two had never had a truce, not even while they'd collated their unique skills to guide their brotherhood into building their joint enterprise. The one thing they'd ever agreed on was the name of their business—the name they'd given their prison, where they and their brotherhood had been forged. And so Black Castle Enterprises had been born.

Their business now spanned the world, with each becoming a billionaire in his own right. Each was also on a personal quest. Some searching for the family they'd been taken from, others for the heritage they'd been stripped of, some for a new purpose in life. But beyond planning the Organization's downfall to save other children from their same fate, they had one more quest in common. Investigating how they'd ended up in the hands of the Organization.

Rafael had recently found out exactly how.

"Ferreira is down there?"

Richard's question brought him out of his musings. "Of course."

"So when will you put the man out of his misery?"

Rafael glanced fondly at his friend. "I wouldn't put it past you to mean that literally."

Richard gave him his patented predatory smile. "Oh, no. I think your plan is a much worse fate. I couldn't have thought of a more diabolical one."

"High praise from the man who puts 007 to shame."

Not one for false modesty, Richard only said, "You know I'm a fan of subtle and protracted torture."

Indeed. And his impending torment of Ferreira would have an abundance of both elements. Disgracing him and oh-so-gradually stripping him of his wealth would only be the beginning.

"Your plot is far more effective than putting a bullet in his brain. I just wish you'd get on with it."

"So you no longer disapprove of my direct approach?"

Richard shrugged. "A remote one remains better. It would be the perfect setup if he didn't realize where the blows were coming from. But that's logic talking. And there's more than logic involved here. You need the satisfaction of looking that git in the eyes as you stick the knife in and turn it."

Richard had originally advised against getting close to Ferreira, with the inherent drawbacks and dangers that entailed. It now warmed Rafael that his friend not only understood his need, he empathized. He wanted this for him. This gratification. This closure.

And he would come close. He'd make Ferreira taste everything he'd ever hungered for...before snatching it away. Rafael would have a front-row seat to his betrayal and desperation.

Putting his glass down, he sighed. "But you're right. It's time I got that satisfaction. I won't single Ferreira out tonight, though. I'll dangle myself, pretend to take pitches, let the mystery around me build a bit more, before."

Something sizzled at the back of his neck. As if a soft hand stroked him there, or a hot breath blew over his skin.

Frowning, he turned to investigate the source of the disturbance. It couldn't be someone's gaze. He wasn't in anyone's line of sight.

As expected, no one was looking his way. But those sensations only increased, enveloped his body and.

Everything seemed to fade as his senses converged on the beacon of disruption. A woman.

Framed in the ballroom's doorway, she stood as if at a loss for what to do. She was swathed in an ethereal off-the-shoulder cream evening gown, gleaming hair swept away from a face that seemed almost unreal before cascading to a tiny waist that.

"Before what?"

He blinked Richard's question away, resuming his focus on her. Though he'd never suffered anything like this before, he knew what it was. A bolt of attraction. More than that. Recognition...of the woman who translated his every fantasy into glorious reality.

He had to be imagining this. But all his senses told him he wasn't. This felt real.

One way to find out. Get closer....

"What are you staring at, Numbers?"

This time Richard's intrusion annoyed him. He realized his reaction was exaggerated, but he didn't want to talk, couldn't risk shattering this moment.

As if afraid he'd startle her out of her indecision, which afforded him the leisure to examine her, he whispered, "Her."

Richard stepped forward. "Who? That woman at the door?"

Surprised, he turned to him. "You see her?" Richard scowled. "You asleep on your feet again?" He hadn't slept in over twenty-four hours, but that had nothing to do with his reaction to her. "I'm wide-awake.

Though she does belong in a dream. She looks like she's just stepped out of a fairy tale."

Richard's incredulity surpassed his. "You're serious?"

"I am. I..."

His thoughts stalled. She'd started walking into the ballroom, but her uncertain steps, her darting eyes and the way she fiddled with the long chain of her purse revealed her discomfort. Everything about her unconscious grace and reluctant demeanor made something rev behind his sternum. It intensified with her every step until he had to rub the heel of his hand against it.

"How could this be real?"

"It isn't."

Richard's response startled him. He hadn't realized he'd spoken out loud. "How can you say that?"

"I can because she's just another pretty blonde."

He looked at his friend as if he'd grown a third eye. "She's *not* blonde. Are you even talking about the same woman?"

Richard seemed about to argue, then changed his mind. "Whatever. Just go initiate your incursion."

"It won't be an incursion. I will approach her with utmost finesse."

Richard frowned. "I'm talking about Ferreira."



"Forget Ferreira. I'll..."

Rafael stopped as he realized something. He *couldn't* approach her. He'd been scrupulous about keeping any photos of himself out of the media. But if anyone knew what he looked like, they were down there at the ball. He didn't want to risk anyone recognizing him, not now that he'd decided against making an appearance. This evening had suddenly become all about establishing contact with this magical being.

He turned to Richard. "Cobra, bring her to me."

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