

# SPELLBOUND

## *Chapter 15: Fiancée*

As the music continued playing in the background, Evie distracted herself by looking around. A princess named Vera had approached her a while ago and just like the emperor, the woman was unexpectedly friendly to her. Though she hurriedly left right after greeting Gavriel in an obviously hasty manner.

Elias, who was standing behind Evie, told her that Vera was the only vampire princess of the empire. Evie found it surprising because back home, there were at least ten princesses in their empire. The difference was too huge! But maybe, there were more princes?

"How about the princes? How many are there?" Evie asked Elias. Even though Gavriel was sitting next to her, she preferred asking Elias. Apart from the fact that Elias was so easy to speak with, almost giving off the same vibe she got from both Fray and Gina, Evie also thought that this way, she could avoid getting close to Gavriel – especially avoiding those bewitching eyes of his.

"There's only two, my lady." The butler said. "The Crown Prince and His Highness Gavriel."

Evie's eyes widened. Really? Only two?! It seemed it was true that the vampires' ability to reproduce offspring was indeed very low compared to humans. Now she somewhat has an understanding on why the vampires ended up agreeing with the truce.

Having her mind preoccupied with her own thoughts, she didn't see how Gavriel threw a threatening gaze towards the poor butler. Evie was blissfully unaware that the butler behind her had took a few steps away from her upon receiving the cold glare until she turned back to ask more questions.

"Wife, how about we go and dance?" Gavriel's voice was so compelling that before she knew it, she found herself turning to stare at him.

Evie's brain screamed at her to avert her gaze and thankfully she managed to look away before she lost herself in that seemingly hypnotic eyes. Dance? With him? No! She was trying so hard to keep her distance from him so why would she agree to dance with him? She only agreed to come to this ball because he didn't give her the chance to refuse. And she thought that this would be a great opportunity to understand this place and even meet the emperor so that when the time comes, she might be able to use the information she gathered over this trip to help the humans – once her father comes to rescue her and bring her back to where she belong.

"I... I'm sorry but I..." she bit her lips as her shoulders tensed up. "I'm still –"

"It's fine if you're not ready yet." His pleasing voice yanked her eyes back to him and then, he smiled at her. It was a slow and gorgeous smile, Evie had to remind herself to breathe. My god! Was this man doing this on purpose? He's definitely seducing her, right?!

Quickly dropping her gaze before she loses control and end up gaping at him, Evie pressed her lips tight as she focused her attention to the couples on the dance floor. She did the right thing. She must do her best to refuse and maintain a distance from him. She must not dig her own grave by agreeing with everything he asks.

Gavriel fell silent after that and they both just sat there silently when a beautiful and voluptuous woman in a low-cut black gown approached them. The woman had long, and luxurious looking dark brown hair and her eyes were the colour of the forest. Evie could say, she was probably the most beautiful woman at the ball, even prettier than the blond-haired princess.

"Good evening, Your Highness." She greeted and for the first time that night, someone greeted Gavriel with a genuine smile and not one that was forced and tensed up. Unlike the others, even the emperor and the princess, this woman stared directly into Gavriel's eyes. She behaved as if she knew him and were more than close acquaintances. Moreover, unlike the others who had greeted her warmly first before her husband, the woman had yet to spare her a glance. "I was surprised that you actually attended a ball, Your Highness. And since it's very rare for you to attend this kind of occasion, will you dance with me?" she offered her hand in front of Gavriel, causing Evie's eyes to momentarily widen.

Evie suddenly felt something inexplicable inside her and she failed to stop herself from staring at Gavriel with questions in her eyes. She regretted her impulse because as soon as she looked, Gavriel was also looking at her and just like her, he seemed to be asking as well. Though their questions were completely different, him probably asking for her permission and her asking him who the woman was.

She bit the inside of her lip. For some reason, her brain was lagging and while she was momentarily dumbfounded, Gavriel looked at the woman and spoke. "This is my wife," Gavriel introduced and finally, the woman turned to face her.

"Evielyn," Evie managed to say.

The woman blinked and then smiled at her. "Nice to meet you, Lady Evielyn. I'm Thea. I am His Highness' fiancée."

Evie struggled to keep her serene expression. Fiancée? So that's why they were so casual with each other. Before Evie could even respond, Thea spoke again. "I believe it

won't be a problem with you if I dance with His Highness, right?" she asked, and Evie didn't know why she had the sudden urge to clench her fists tight.

"Of course not, Lady Thea." She said without throwing a glance at Gavriel. She didn't see how the man's face went a few shades darker at her approval.

Thea smiled and the next moment, Evie watched Gavriel's back as he followed Thea out to the dance floor. The couples that were dancing even cleared a wide space for them in the middle of the vast ballroom.

Evie felt a sharp pinch in her hands and realised she was clenching her fists tight. She not only averted her gaze from them but also turned around from looking at the sight. Something was wrong with her. Why did she suddenly feel so awful? She did the right thing. She rejected his offer to dance with her, so naturally she didn't have the right to keep him next to her when a fair woman wanted to dance with him. She was very well educated when dealing with these kinds of situations. Even in the human empire, any lady can ask a prince or an emperor to dance if they're brave and noble enough. It was something that was normal, and she assumed it would be the same in this land...was it not? If that woman was the prince's fiancée, she must be a noble lady. She had the right to ask Gavriel for a dance so why was she feeling this way? This wasn't right.

Evie gave her head a little shake and then took a silent deep breath. She scolded herself inside her head and somehow, she managed to feel a little better. But the moment her eyes caught them on the dance floor, swaying so gracefully, staring into each other's eyes, and looking so perfect as if they were a couple made in heaven, something strange and awful bloomed inside Evie's heart.

Despite her struggles, she couldn't seem to contain this undesirable feeling eating her. She tried to push it away, knowing that it was ridiculous for her to suddenly feel something like this but why is it so hard for her to control these overwhelming responses? Why?

"Good evening, My Lady." A suave voice yanked her attention from the turmoil inside her. When she lifted her face, a tall and lean man was standing before her. He had intense sapphire blue eyes that seem to be able to pierce one's soul. His hair as blond and beautiful as the princess and the emperor. "I think I must introduce myself first." His smile was pleasing and lovely. "I'm Caius, Gavriel's brother."

Evie almost choked in surprise but somehow, she managed to keep her reactions to herself and outwardly remain graceful. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Crown Prince Caius. My name is —"

"Evielyn." He took the word out of her mouth with a smile before offering her his hand. "May I have this dance, My Lady?"

Evie didn't know what possessed her but before she could stop herself, she found herself accepting the crown prince's hand. She did that right after throwing a glance at Gavriel who couldn't seem to tear his eyes off the woman's face.

"Are you nervous?" The prince's deep voice nearly made her flinch. She finally realized his hand was already on her waist and that they were already dancing.

"Uhm... a little, Your Highness." She said as she looked up at him, momentarily putting her predicament in the background.

"Don't worry. I've got you," he assured her. As Evie looked at him, she couldn't help but admire his good looks. He wasn't as otherworldly as Gavriel but he still had the appearance that could break many female hearts. But wait... wasn't he Gavriel's brother? Now that she looked closely at him, Evie realized that Gavriel had nothing in common with this man. Evie then realised that the emperor and the princess had the same sapphire blue eyes and same blond hair as this crown prince. Why is it that only Gavriel looked completely different from the three of them – these three whom he calls family?

#### *Chapter 16: Human*

"I hope Gavriel is treating you well, Lady Evielyn. I'm afraid he wouldn't know how to be gentle to such a lady as yourself." The crown prince said in a low voice. Evie almost frowned but thankfully she managed to keep her face cool and collected. She was thinking perhaps the man wasn't saying these words to mock Gavriel as he seemed genuinely concerned about her. But why would he be worried in the first place?

"His Highness Gavriel is treating me well. He's in fact..." Evie remembered how gentle Gavriel had been to her ever since she met him at the altar on that night of their wedding. "He's very gentle to me, Your Highness."

"I see... that's a relief then. Nonetheless, I believe I must warn you, my lady. My brother might look harmless but he's a dangerous man. I want you to keep that in mind and never try to provoke him."

Evie could no longer keep her face straight. She didn't understand why this Prince was telling her something like this. Isn't this the first time they are meeting each other, much less speak to either party? She would've slightly understood if he was trying to destroy Gavriel's image in her eyes but that did not seem to be his aim. What exactly was he aiming for by bringing these matters up? Was he trying to scare her?

"I... I appreciate your concern, Your Highness but please don't worry... I am very aware that vampires are dangerous for a mere human like myself. I wouldn't dare provoke him or anyone in this land." Evie tried to respond as calm as she could.

The Prince's sapphire eyes seemed to have deepened in colour as he moved slightly closer. "It seemed you still know nothing about your husband Lady Evielyn. I know he vowed never to harm you but there are times when my brother loses control of himself. If in any case, you feel something off about him..." he paused and he looked as though he was scanning his surroundings before he continued. "Stay away from him and don't ever dream of provoking him."

"W-why are you telling me these?"

"Because I don't want a war suddenly breaking out if something happens to you." He calmly responded. Evie tried to look for any sign of lies in his striking blue eyes, but all his face was only showing that he truly was concerned for her well-being. "My brother had been away for many years. He had just returned from a long... journey." Evie sensed as though he had just omitted something from his earlier sentence. "We thought he's long dead, but he came back alive. Many things... changed in him since then. So, I am trying to warn you beforehand because I know my brother will not tell you about this."

"You mean... about his journey and the changes in him?"

"Yes. He never talks about anything related to his journey. So as the crown prince and his older brother, I believe it's better for me to let you know about this. I believe this is important. For your sake, My Lady."

Evie blinked and all she could do was nod. "I understand. I will keep that in mind, Your Highness."

He gave her a kind smile and Evie could only smile back to him. Curiosity had flooded her mind. She wanted to know more about Gavriel.

She turned her head to look for her husband and to her shocked surprise, those beautiful but piercing eye were trained on her. Evie subconsciously swallowed because for a moment, she thought he was angry. However, when the woman touched Gavriel's face to look at her, the awful feeling in her stomach that had momentarily disappeared returned – and this time, with a vengeance.

"I never thought you're a possessive woman, Lady Evielyn." Prince Caius yanked her attention away from Gavriel. W-what? Her? Possessive?

Evie was speechless. She felt like her brain was having a hard time functioning. "I... I..."

"I hope Gavriel had explained to you on the matter about Lady Thea." The crown prince ventured a guess and when Evie's expression sold her out that Gavriel had never mentioned anything, Caius sighed. "You already know that vampires are no longer monogamous, right?" he asked, and Evie nodded. She had heard about this before. At

one point, a long time ago, vampires were one-woman creatures. However, since the war against the dragons started, the emperor at that time had changed the law, allowing the vampires to take more than one wife, for the sake of increasing their population. "Of course, it is not a forced thing. Most vampires still have one wife even to these days but Gavriel's case is different so he must not sever his engagement to Lady Thea."

"G-Gavriel's case?"

Evie was about to ask again when the music ended – having them bow and curtsy to each other as was the custom. As they faced each other again, the crown prince smiled at her as Evie immediately whipped her head towards where Gavriel was standing.

When she saw his back as he held Thea's arm heading towards the balcony, Evie found herself being overwhelmed with intense new emotions. She didn't even realize that she was back in her seat until the crown prince spoke to her again.

"It was nice talking to you, Lady Evielyn. If you have more questions, we can have a further discussion at the balcony, since it looks as if my brother is still occupied." The prince flashed her a friendly smile, but Evie could no longer fake her expression as her face fell.

She bowed in apology. "Pardon me, Your Highness but I would like to retire for the night now. As you said, I'm only a human so I need my rest. It was a pleasure talking to you." Evie did not know what was coming over her. Her chest felt tight and seemed to be hurting without actually feeling the pain. Weirdly enough, her eyes felt hot and were stinging something fierce. She moved unconsciously, not noticing how her feet hurried her along in her quest in needing to find a place where she could be alone and try to figure out this mess that is in her head.

Without giving the crown prince a chance to reply, she curtsied low and walked away in haste. The crown prince watched the beautiful human girl in red as three of Gavriel's men immediately followed after her. As soon as the lady in red was gone, the prince's sapphire blue eyes sharpened intensely before his gaze fell to the balcony where Gavriel had gone out from just a moment ago.

*Chapter 17: What's wrong?*

"Let's end our engagement, Thea." Gavriel's tone was hard and firm. The atmosphere in the balcony abruptly turned incredibly chilly. Gavriel was berating himself for actually forgetting about this. He should've dealt with Thea first before bringing his wife in the palace. But the matter of his prior engagement to Thea absolutely slipped his mind. It would be fair to even say it probably didn't weigh much in his mind in the first place. He should've spoken to Thea as soon as he arrived in the capital while his wife was still asleep!

"No." Thea didn't even hesitate. Her gaze on Gavriel was serious and unrelenting. Looking as though she would never give in no matter what Gavriel say or do to her.

Gavriel looked surprised at Thea's answer. It never crossed his mind that she would refuse. To the vampires, engagements were as serious as vows. Even if it was an engagement made by politics, it was something that wasn't easily severed. The engagement could only be legally severed if both parties are in mutual agreement to break it. If one of them refuse, no one could break the engagement. This was why Gavriel had hated his forced engagement to Thea. He knew that the emperor had arranged this engagement so he would be tied to something, since Thea's father was the emperor's loyal general.

Gavriel didn't hate Thea because it wasn't her fault and since they were young, Thea had never clung onto him like some desperate female. Before he left the empire, the two of them rarely see or even talk to each other. They had never even tried to form any romantic connections with each other before and that was why Gavriel even forget that he had a fiancée sometimes. He knew that the same was true with Thea. Even when they first met, they never enjoyed each other's company. And Thea had never tried approaching him before. She only started approaching him and talking to him when he returned just more than a month ago. So why was she refusing the annulment of their engagement now?

"I don't mind, Gavriel."

Her answer made Gavriel's eyes narrow. "I mind. You know I will never have more than one wife."

"I know."

"Then why are you refusing? Did your father threaten you?"

Thea played with her dark brown locks as she answered. "No. My decision has nothing to do with father or anyone else. This is my own decision."

Gavriel's jaws tightened. "Then what exactly do you want to happen for still refusing like this?"

There have been many cases of vampire engagements where one party refuses to end the engagement. But because of the vampire's law allowing polygamy, the man can always marry someone else even if he was still engaged to another girl. Thus, most of the females who refused to sever the engagement gave up in the end while some just let it until they got married to someone else.

"She's a human, Your Highness. If she's a vampire, I'd give you up right here, right now. But she's a human."

"What exactly are you trying to say? So what if she's human?" Gavriel didn't know why but he was ticked off. He wasn't usually like this. He had dealt with so many sensitive and political issues before and nothing could make him lose his cool. So why was he suddenly pissed that Thea was pointing out that his wife was just a human?

"Your Highness, I'm certain you know what I'm trying to –"

"Just say it, Thea."

Thea was surprised. Was he testing her? She knew just how intelligent this man was. This prince wasn't someone who needs explanations about obvious things such as this. And why does he sound irked and angry? Was he so pissed and angry his emotions were getting the better of him? Thea silently gnashed her teeth. She knew what kind of man this prince was. In fact, she had never seen him so emotional and worked up like this before. He was always calm and collected even in battles and even in front of the emperor so why was he acting like some short-tempered and dumb now? There was just no way he didn't understand what she had meant! But fine, if he wanted her to spell it out for him, then she'd be happy to say it.

"She's a human so she can only be your wife for the next few decades, Gavriel. When she –"

"Enough." He cut her off and Thea was once again surprised at the intensity of his voice.

"I can wait for you so there's no need to end our engagement. A few decades isn't that long –"

"I said, enough." His voice wasn't loud but the harshness and coldness in them skyrocketed. Even his calm demeanor was gone. Thea's lips parted in shock because of the darkness he had emitted just to make her shut her mouth. Why? Why was this man acting like this now? Her relationship with Gavriel was no different with that human girl. That human was married off to him because of mere politics too. So why was he reacting like he hated the fact that she pointed out blunt facts?

Thea felt her blood boiling, unaware that her eyes were turning red. "No matter what you say, I will never let our engagement end. I told you, I don't mind waiting for you. And besides, it didn't seem like your wife mind it at all, Your Highness."

As though something had snapped inside him, Gavriel froze for a moment. His reaction didn't escape Thea's eyes and she smirked inwardly. "I could tell she's fine with it. From what I observed she might not even care if you take another wife. Now I can't help but wonder... does she even like you at all, Your Highness? She must be seeing you as nothing but a monster like all humans th –"

"Thea."



With just that one word, Thea clamped her mouth tight. The chill that enveloped her body forced her to subconsciously flinch back. No one ever uttered her name that way before. That voice was filled with dangerous warnings that sounded so much like death that came knocking early on her door, terrified her more than the emperor's or her father's raging voice. W-when did this man change so much? When did he become this scary?

He stepped closer to her and leaned over. His killing aura was barely kept veiled and eyes dangerously cold, as if something sucked up all the light in his pair of beautiful moon-kissed eyes. "Listen, and listen very carefully," he whispered. "Evie's going to be my one and on-"

Before Gavriel could even finish his sentence, Samuel emerged from the door. As soon as Gavriel met Samuel's eyes and received the report that his wife had left the ballroom, he leaped from the veranda and his three men followed behind him, not even throwing a glance at the woman he had left behind.

While he was in the air, he spotted his beautiful rose under the moonlight rushing down the staircase as if she was trying to run all the way across the vast garden, right up to the palace's gate.

He landed right in front of her, causing Evie to gasp. "Wife," he said as he approached her. "You want to go home now? Come, I'll carry you –"

"No!" Evie's exclamation was sharp against the silence of the night and Gavriel's low baritone. Her voice even cracked as she stretched out her hands to stop him from touching her.

"What's wrong? Are you alright? Did something happen?" he asked worriedly, but Evie gritted her teeth and pushed his outreached hands away.

"Nothing's wrong! Nothing happened! You just go back to your fiancée now. Elias can bring me home!" she yelled at him as she kept pushing his reaching hands and was actively avoiding his touch like the plague.

Gavriel caught her wrists and made her look at him. He was no fool as he heard and observed how her voice trembled and sounded strained as she said the word 'your fiancée' and considering how frantic and distressed her movements were. His eyes smoldering and filled with wonder as he looked at her. "Wife, are you jealous?" he tilted his head slightly as he asked and Evie turned to a frozen statue. Oh my! W-what was she doing?! What was she doing?! This can't be... she can't be acting like this! No! No! This can't be happening!

## *Chapter 18: Grave mistake*

The silence that followed Gavriel's question was deafening as Evie was utterly tongue-tied. Her lips trembling a little as she could only look at him with wide eyes. No matter how much she tried, she could not deny the shocking and foreign emotions that had flooded her insides since she saw him dancing with Thea. The question had struck her damned hard.

"No! J-jealous?! W-why would I be jealous?!" She stammered as she took a step back, shaking her head forcefully as if to also convince herself of that statement, as she dropped her eyes to the ground, avoiding Gavriel's eyes.

Gavriel watched her carefully and something gleamed in his eyes. His thin lips slightly twitching as if he was suppressing a smile. In the end, he caught his lower lip between his perfect white teeth and silently looked elsewhere to get his bearing.

When he returned his gaze to her, his expression was serious but gentle. He took a step closer, but Evie stepped back, causing him to sigh.

"Look at me, wife." His voice was compelling and warm. Yet Evie turned away, showing him her blatant defiance. "If you're not jealous, then why are you reacting like this?"

Evie's grip on her skirt tightened and she felt her body about to tremble. "I said, I'm not! I just want to leave this place, now!" she yelled at him, unaware that she was looking as though she was about to cry.

Gavriel stilled and became silent. His gaze never leaving her face. After another moment of observing her distraught face, his low and husky voice filled the silence. "Okay, I understood. I'll take you home, now."

He offered her his hand and Evie's gaze settled on it. Why does he always do this? Why did he always offer her his hand like this? She had just yelled at him and yet he's still...

Evie knew that every time she accepts this large, warm and strong hand, she was letting him come a step closer to her. And if she was honest to herself – a step closer towards her heart too. Since their eyes first met that night of their wedding, Evie had been running on adrenaline and emotions that had been centred on this man before her. She couldn't believe that it's only been a few days and she was already this overwhelmed. Evie was starting to feel scared and worried because she was not a fool not to understand the reasons behind her very own actions and emotions. At this rate, if she let him come any closer than this, she was terrified of the consequences. It would be unimaginable!

Tightening her grip on her skirt even harder, Evie steeled herself. Her gaze still not landing on his person even once.

Evie waited for him to retract his hand and when he didn't, she began to feel a little anxious. Was her refusal still not enough? As she was struggling to think about her next move, Gavriel spoke.

"I'm afraid your request came a little too late now, wife. Everyone already left just a while ago."

His words made Evie whipped around just to see that the men behind her were gone. Her lips parted in disbelief and then, she found herself turning to stare at him. He was rubbing the back of his neck as he looked at her with an apologetic gaze, causing Evie to fall even more speechless.

Evie didn't know that while she was refusing to look into Gavriel's eyes, the man had been ordering his men to disappear and leave before him despite their strong refusal. Gavriel had somehow foreseen that his wife would try to distance herself from him again and he was glad he had seen that coming.

"Now let's go. Before the emperor sends someone to call us back inside." He reached for her hand and without giving her a moment to protest, he lifted Evie, princess-like, and leapt from the ground.

All Evie could do was wrap her arms around his neck and as her forehead brushed against his jaw, she felt like he had smiled. He pulled her head back to look at his face. "Did you... just smile?" she asked, her expression still serious.

Gavriel craned his head a little. "Am I not allowed to smile too? Wife?"

Evie blinked. "T-that's not what I meant..." she stammered in surprise. "And what do you mean by 'too'?"

"Well, I figured I am not allowed to accept anyone's offer to dance with me because it will make my wife angry."

His words made Evie looked like a blow had struck her, hard. While she was tongue-tied, Gavriel continued.

"If smiling will make you angry as well, then I shall not –"

"D-don't be ridiculous. Why would you smiling make me angry?" she blurted and then the sly prince turned his smile on. That smile that was enough to turn any woman's brain to mush and make her voluntarily crawl into his bed.

When Evie saw that smile, she didn't know why but she felt like she had just made one of the greatest mistakes in her life.

"If my smile won't make you angry, then I think I should smile more –"

"No!"

"No?"

"I... I mean... don't smile when there's no reason. Else... you'll look like a fool."

He chuckled and Evie felt like she just brainlessly committed another grave mistake. She must get away from this dangerous man. She couldn't believe that even his laughter could gravely affect her.

*Chapter 19: Non-related*

"Of course." His eyes gleamed with pure amusement as he landed on the roof top of a certain castle. Evie waited for him to leap again and when he didn't move, she lifted her face to look at him. She regretted immediately because his eyes held hers in an intense but still somehow sad gaze now. "You're not angry with me, anymore?" he asked.

When Evie couldn't find her voice, he looked at her while patiently awaiting her response. And then he sat on top of the watchtower's edge, with her in his lap.

"Still angry?" he whispered again after a long while of silence, causing Evie to swallow. She managed to pull her eyes off him and when she looked down, wonder filled her eyes. She felt like she had been transported to a different world. She had never once thought or imagined that a night could be this alive and vivacious.

'So, this is how the world looks like when everyone doesn't sleep and rest at night.' She thought to herself. Because this vampire's capital had so many bigger castles compared to any human cities she had ever seen, the lights from the castles and the big houses and the streets spread throughout the land as far as she could see.

The view was so different and breath-taking, but it still wasn't enough to distract her from the man holding her.

"W-why did we stop?" she asked instead.

"Because it's not good if we reached home while you're still angry with me."

Evie blinked at him again as she creased her brows. "Was that... vampires' belief?"

"Well..." Gavriel tilted his head slightly. "Yes. It's our castle's long tradition that a husband shouldn't bring an angry wife home, and vice versa. They said that's a bad luck that could ruin the household."

"What? Vampires believe in bad luck?!!" Evie's eyes were wide in disbelief.

"No. I am trying to soothe your anger."

Evie could no longer keep her expression in check, and she buried her face in her palms to hide her expression. What should she do? Was she really doomed now? Oh please, Evie... hold your ground!

"I... I am not angry with you anymore." She uttered in a small voice.

"Really?" his voice sounded worried, but she nodded frantically. All she wanted now was for them to go back so she could escape from his clutches. If they were to stay here any longer than this...

"Yes. So, let's go home now, Gavriel. Please." Her voice was so weak it was barely a whisper.

Gavriel silently stared at her as she continued hiding her face in her hands. He lifted his hand and was about to touch her hair that was being blown about by the breeze, but he stopped. He retracted his hand and finally, he stood.

Without a word he leapt, and it didn't take long for them to reach Gavriel's castle. As soon as Gavriel put Evie down, Evie curtsied to her husband and wished him goodnight before immediately running towards the grand staircase without turning back.

As soon as Evie's back disappeared from his view, Gavriel ran his fingers through his raven black hair. "Elias." He called out as his silver-grey eyes sharpened.

"Yes, Your Highness." Elias appeared before him.

"I need you to investigate Lady Thea's motive on refusing to break our engagement. I need results as soon as possible."

Though Elias looked surprised, he didn't dare ask further questions. "Yes, Your highness."

Once Elias was gone, another man appeared before Gavriel. It was Zolan. The most intelligent of his men. "What is it?"

"The emperor has started his move, Your Highness."

Gavriel smiled. But it was a smile way far from the kind of smile he had showed to Evie. His smile that moment was sinister and screaming with dark and wicked amusement. "Gather everyone in the hall." He ordered and Zolan gave a curt nod.

...

As soon as Evie rushed in, she closed the doors to their chambers. She then rested her arms against the wall and leaned her forehead there, feeling totally drained emotionally. Her mind and heart were in chaos; the kind of chaos she didn't know how to deal with.

She wasn't prepared for something like this. God knows how she had worked so hard for many days to learn everything that was related to vampires, their customs, habits and whatever she could get her hands on, all just to help her survive in the vampire's land. She had even trained herself on how to deal with her fears and how to react if it overtakes her. A general even made her memorize the exact words she should say if and when any vampires threaten or blackmail her to divulge information about the dragon keeper, her father. It was these kinds of extreme matters which had been the main content of her brain for days before her wedding.

Never in a million years would she have even imagined that there would come a time that she had to deal with something completely different and non-related. She never thought she would end up having to deal with herself first, more specifically the matters of her own heart, that had already started rebelling against herself. What should she do?

#### *Chapter 20: Rumour*

Evie didn't realize that she had been keeping that position for quite long while until a knock pulled her attention back to the present.

Fray and Gina emerged from the door with wide smiles as they greeted her.

"Good evening, Milady. We came to help you get changed," said Fray and Evie tried her best to maintain as normal a smile at them both.

The maids then hovered around her while Evie silently let them do their job. Her mind was still wandering, but her brows occasionally pulled together, as though a certain thought kept popping in her head to disturb the flow of her mind.

"Milady, would you want to go somewhere after your rest?" Gina asked politely and Evie almost frowned because she knew it was already past midnight. Thankfully, she managed to stop herself in time as she quickly realized that she was in a different world now. The opposite to the world she came from – a world where people moved around during the bright daylight and enjoy their rest when it was dark. Was she going to live like the vampires now? Was she going to stay awake during the night and sleep during the day?

As Evie looked to the pitch-black darkness outside her window, her thoughts flew back to the bright and sunny Southern Empire, her home. She was in a place that was far, far away from that familiar and comforting scene now and that realization that slammed into her heart made her feel an overpowering sense of homesickness within her.

"If it would please you, milady, it is be our pleasure to bring you to the garden." Gina's voice was careful and gentle. Evie could tell that the maids must have felt the roller-coaster of her emotions because she was too caught up in her reminiscing that she forgot to hide it.

Clearing her throat, Evie centred and composed herself. She knew she couldn't sleep even if she forced herself because she had slept for so long. But she also could not bring herself to agree with them. Why would she go out at night? She was not a vampire.

Suddenly, words from her advisors back home echoed in her head and as though something enlightened her, Evie shook her head at her maids. "It's okay, I'm fine. I am not used to moving about in the darkness so I doubt I can enjoy the view of the garden much when it's dark. I will try to sleep tonight so I can visit the garden in the morning."

One of her advisors told her that she must continue living the way she usually does. If she sleeps when the vampires were active, she could avoid them. Evie thought this was the best way she could avoid her husband. And since he wanted them to sleep in the same bed, this would solve her dilemma on how she could avoid him.

"We understand, milady. We will also go to bed soon, so we'll be awake in the morning."

"Yes." Evie nodded as they again changed her clothes into a sleeping gown.

"How's the ball, Milady? I hope you enjoyed it." Gina asked innocently and Evie was then again reminded of all the emotional roller coaster that overshadowed the luxurious event. She gave her head a little shake to force the emotions that bubbled inside her again.

"The palace is really very grand, and the emperor seemed kind. The crown prince is also surprisingly quite friendly." Evie commented and she was surprised at the momentary shock on Fray and Gina's face.

"We are happy to know that they treated you well, milady."

Evie was suspicious at their reaction. For some reason, Evie thought that her maids reacted the same way how the vampires inside the grand hall reacted when she and Gavriel arrived in the palace. Now that she thought about it, the question she'd been wandering about when she was dancing with the crown prince came to her mind.

"I noticed..." she started hesitantly. "Gav... my husband seemed to be on bad terms with the emperor and his brother and sister. It might just be my imagination though..." she let her statement trail off.

Carefully watching her maids' expressions, Evie saw them glanced at each other. Her curiosity then got the better of her and she sat up straight and faced them, giving them the most piercing and probing look she could summon.

"Uhm..." Fray nudged Gina when they realized Evie pinning them with her very obviously questioning gaze. After a long stretch of awkward silence, Fray was the one

who relented and spoke up. "Your observation is not misplaced, milady. Everyone knows that His Highness Gavriel is not on good terms with his royal family."

"Why? Is it because Gavriel has a different mother?" Evie asked. She recalled her observations on how Gavriel's appearance and colouring was so very different from the rest of the royal family. No matter how one changed angles or views, Gavriel does not resemble the emperor or his siblings at all.

There was another round of silence. Evie could tell that the maids were having a bloody battle against themselves whether they should speak or not.

When Evie realized their struggle, she waved her hand, signalling them to stop but she didn't hide her disappointment. "It's okay, I understand. I shall go to bed now." She said in a sullen voice and guilt flashed in the maids' eyes.

As Evie sat at the edge of the bed, Gina suddenly approached Evie and she dropped to her knees as she looked up at Evie. "We will tell you what we know but this needs to be kept a secret between us, okay? Milady?" The maid whispered as she glanced at the door.

Fray was already standing by the door as if guarding it. Evie blinked. She realized that the information they're going to tell her must be something confidential. She knew the risk. These two maids might be punished severely if it was found out that they gave the secret away, but her curiosity was so strong she couldn't refuse to hear it.

"Of course, Gina. This will only be between the three of us." Evie replied sincerely and Gina nodded. Her gaze became incredibly serious as she continued whispering to Evie.

"It is said that all vampire royal family in the past since the beginning of time has that distinct feature of having raven black hair and their eyes are the colour of the cold grey moon." Said Gina and Evie immediately frowned. The emperor, the crown prince and the princess all had a sapphire blue eyes and blond hair. Now that Evie thought about it, she had yet to see a vampire with raven black hair and moon-like grey eyes except Gavriel. Even within the crowd of vampires who were at the imperial palace, she never saw anyone with black hair except her husband.

With a shocked expression, Evie looked at Gina in confusion. The maid continued after seeing her reaction. "There's a rumour that the current emperor is not the real vampire royalty and that includes the crown prince and the princess as well. Rumour has it too, that the real and only royal bloodline still alive right now is our very own prince Gavriel, milady. Your husband."