

SPELLBOUND 171

Chapter 171 - Ruins

Gavriel was enveloped with a combination of something bluish and dark as ink as he stood there. Suffocating and spine chilling bloodlust and danger could be felt coming from him. Even his own men could not help but instinctively halt and brace themselves. The aura that the prince was emitting was something that caused everyone to feel the threat of danger to their very lives. Though they know that their prince would not hurt them indiscriminately, the gut reaction they were having to his aura was just something out of their control. His projected bloodlust was just that menacing and frightening. And for Gavriel's own men who are battle worn to even feel that way, it truly was something beyond the ordinary.

They had seen the prince going into this state before but there was something a little off this time. Something is just rubbing them the wrong way and it was frustrating, but they just could not quite figure out what was that something they were looking for.

The prince was bloodied but he was in a far better condition than the dark fae who had been reduced to a sorry state and currently kneeling on the ground. He was bleeding quite profusely and was battered up by Prince Gavriel so ferociously that he had lost whatever elegance he had left in him. One glance at the dark fae and the men could already tell how merciless their prince had been when he was on the attacking front. They could not quite imagine the heights of savagery achieved by His Highness this time. It was truly unprecedented.

However, the fight between Gavriel and the dark fae did not seem to have ended just yet. Not even close. Because the dark fae was now emitting something from his body which they could already tell was deadly. His serpentine green eyes were fixed on Gavriel as his dark magic lingered around him, as if it were functioning as a shield that was protecting him.

At that moment, debris began to fall. Large and huge chunks of debris were falling all around them, breaking the stalemate. They looked up and saw the dark dragon starting to burn and destroy the castle while the other dragon was trying to stop it. However, it seemed as though the amber-eyed dragon was not doing much in stopping the dark dragon.

Seeing this, Gavriel gritted his teeth and his incandescent eyes turned towards his men.

"LEAVE! HELP THE DRAGON INSTEAD! IT'S TRYING TO DESTROY THE CASTLE TO CUT OFF ALL POSSIBLE ESCAPE!" his orders resounded through their telepathy link and the men immediately moved as their prince had ordered. They knew that rather than trying to stay and help, following his orders would help him focus better on his own battles and free his mind from worrying on the other things which they could take care of. Thus, they would do it perfectly and not fail their prince!

They knew in their hearts they could not help in their fight anyway. But against the dragon, they could try something to stop it from continuing in its rampage!

They immediately headed to the walls and retrieved the surviving arrows the dragon had not managed to burn.

The vampires were quick to move and in no time, they were aiming at the dark dragon which was wreaking havoc above them.

Samuel aimed the large arrow at its eyes while the others aimed at its other crucial spot. And then they simultaneously let go as soon as the amber-eyed dragon fell back due to the dark dragon's incredible attack strength.

The arrows that were fired managed to pierce through it! But due to the dragon's quick evading, it managed to dodge Samuel's arrow, narrowly missing its eye. However, the arrow still managed to pierce through its head instead. Though not as critical a point as the eye, as the head had harder scales for protection – that would have to do for now.

"F*ck! Jump!" Samuel yelled as the dragon had now turned and was shooting flames at them. The vampires spread out. But the dark dragon seemed hellbent in destroying the castle. Could it be that it knew there was a secret passage inside? Zolan wondered. No... it was not the dragon that knew, but it was the dark the fae. He might have deduced that there was a secret passage when Prince Gavriel and the rest of them suddenly appeared inside the castle, bypassing the castle gates. And that was why the dark fae had commanded the dragon to reduce the entire castle into ashes!

"Don't stop shooting! Aim at its eyes. The Princess's dragon is coming again! Prepare to shoot. Shoot the moment the princess' dragon distracts it!" Zolan ordered his comrades. Not even realizing that he had already been freed completely from whatever control of the princess that was holding his body captive.

The men did as Zolan had instructed and the moment the amber eyed dragon crashed itself against the dark dragon, they released the arrows and this time, Samuel ended up hitting pay dirt. Both dragons came crashing to the ground again.

However, what they saw next had everyone's breath catching in their throats. They saw Prince Gavriel and the dark fae fighting ferociously and they had already moved inside the castle's ruins. They could see that the dark fae was trying to head towards the library.

"Damn! He really knew!!!" Zolan cursed and they all headed first ahead of the two ferocious creatures fighting each other to death.

Gavriel was trying to block the dark fae but the dark fae truly was very strong. He was really a tough opponent. He could very well be one of the toughest and cunning opponent Gavriel has ever encountered yet. He was tricking the prince with his dark magic every now and again.

The vampires all arrived at the library first. Its ceiling was already scrapped and though the fire had yet to reach it, the library was now ruined. Books were strewn about, and the tables and chairs were in pieces.

To their relief, Leon was already almost done tending to the princess' wounds, so the scent of her blood was no longer that intense anymore. They could hardly catch any whiff of her scent on the air.

Zolan immediately opened the secret passage as Leon quickly finished wrapping up Evie's wounds.

It was at that moment when something came crashing through the walls.

Everyone was shocked, seeing that it was Gavriel who was thrown hard towards them. The prince immediately rose as they saw the dark fae heading towards them. The dark fae was now unrecognizable. The guardian's body had turned into a greenish dark hue as the dark fae's black magic thickened like a dark and poisonous miasma. Everyone could sense that the dark fae had

shown his true power now and it was beyond anything anyone could have ever imagined! Who could defeat this creature now?!

Chapter 172 - Flames

Gavriel stood up where he fell, as if turning himself into the wall that would be protecting and shielding Evie and his men from any attacks of the dark fae itself.

"All of you... enter the dungeons! Leave this creature to me!" Gavriel said without turning back to look at them. His gaze was firmly fixed on the slowly approaching dark fae.

"No! You're coming with us!" It was Evie who screamed out with a broken voice. "We're not going to leave you!!! Gavriel!!!" Evie who was held back by Leon, had her arms outstretched, trying to rush forward and grab Gavriel.

Gavriel was silent for a moment but when he turned to look at her, everyone held their breaths. Gavriel's eyes were now looking even more strangely different. It was incandescent but there was just something different and inexplicable about it. Evie had seen him looking like that when she saw him back in the dungeon. However, as she observed, it somehow seemed similar, yet something was terribly off.

"You will go without me. I will stay here and block this passage until all of you escape. Zolan, you know what you need to do. There is no need for me to remind you. Bring my wife as far away from here! Accompany her all the way to the forbidden land!" he commanded his men, and Evie's tears fell like rain.

She struggled within the hold of Leon's arm to go to him, but Leon silently held her back.

"No... we can't leave you! Gavriel! Please! Come with us!" Evie continued to shout out, desperation tinged her voice. She was straining against Leon's iron grip on her.

Gavriel looked at her. Seeing the tears in her eyes shattered his heart but he there was no other choice. He could feel that this battle here was now or never. He must stay here to stop this dark fae in order for his wife to escape safely. Gavriel had received a message from one of the Dacrian soldiers who was sent to the forbidden land that the guardian was only possessed by the Dark Fae the moment they stepped out of the forbidden land. The soldier had said that the guardian was fine during the entire time when they were still in the grounds of the forbidden land.

That news made Gavriel thought that there was a possibility that the dark fae must not be able to enter the land. And that must be what was behind Caius' and his army's delay in their attack. The dark fae was unable to enter the forbidden so he could only wait for the moment Caius and the guardian walked out of the land. This was the only sensible explanation that he could come up with, and since that night he had brought Evie in the forbidden land, Gavriel had a feeling that the safest place for Evie now was there. She must get into that area, where this dark fae's malicious intents could not reach her!

And this dark fae seemed to know what Gavriel was trying to do. He seemed to realise that Gavriel would be sending her there through this passage and thus, this dark fae was now hellbent on capturing her.

He had unleashed all of his power now just to stop her from leaving.

Now the only way for this escape route to succeed was for Gavriel to stand his ground and become the impregnable wall blocking this passage. That was at least only until his wife reaches the forbidden land! He was the only who could do this!

He had felt that this dark fae at his full strength was something beyond anything he had ever known or came across. But he would never allow him to touch his wife. Never!

Gritting his teeth, Gavriel moved and faster than a blink of an eye, he was holding Evie and kissing her. Evie herself was shocked and could not respond in time. However, when she registered what Gavriel was doing to her, her eyes widened.

The next thing she knew she was being pulled inside the secret door.

"GARVIEL!!!" she screamed as she reached out for him. But all she saw was him, smiling tenderly at her as the door closed.

"NOOOOO!!!" Her agonizing scream ricocheted inside the cave. But Gavriel's men did not waste any more time. Their hearts were being crushed as well in leaving their prince and lord behind. However, it seemed to have helped somewhat that their princess was screaming out their frustration and fear on their behalf as well.

They could not believe they were leaving their prince behind. They would rather die fighting honourably beside him than leaving him in the lurch like this. But they had no choice. They had to fulfil the duty he had given them and that was to bring the princess to a safe place.

It was the most painful thing they could do but they would swallow this hurt, for the sake of their princess and probably the heir that was growing inside of her.

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Back in the library, the dark fae laughed hysterically.

"What made you think you can stop me? I can still reach them you know?" he scoffed. But Gavriel smirked in return. He let the dark fae feel victorious for a moment longer.

"Why don't you try it then?" Gavriel replied in confidence as he lifted his sword.

Then suddenly, Gavriel's body blazed in blue flames that were as hot as the surface of the sun itself. His eyes burned with what seemed to be the devil's own blue flame, causing the dark fae's eyes to slightly widen.

"Oh... so I was right... I am not the only one hiding in someone's body, I see. Now this is very interesting. But too bad, I truly don't have much time left . I can't let that woman escape from my grasp –"

Before the dark fae could finish his words, Gavriel attacked him and this time, it was the dark fae who was thrown away like a ragdoll.

"Damned vampire!!! It seems my only choice now is to kill you!!!" the dark fae screamed and his darkness flared out as he rushed forward to attack Gavriel.

Chapter 173 - Always

"Gavriel!!!" Evie screamed as her eyes flew open. She looked around wildly, eyes full of confusion.

The first thing she saw was Elias crouching down at her side with worry plastered all over his face. "Princess! Are you okay?" the vampire asked as he helped her to sit up.

Evie did not respond. Her eyes wandered around the area in confusion. They were currently in a forest, a beautiful forest filled with otherworldly things, strange ice-blue colored trees and colorful stones and glass-like flowers. The scenery was so beautiful, and everything looked as though it belonged in a dream.

"Elias..." Evie managed a hoarse voice, "Am I dreaming? Am I still asleep?"

The vampire's eyes became sullen, and it took him a while to give an answer. "You're not dreaming, Princess. We're now in the forbidden land." He said and Evie began to feel her heart ache. Her eyes could not help but tear up. But she held back those tears from falling from her eyes.

Everything that had happened before she passed out came rushing back to her and she could not help but feel like breaking down.

"Where is Gavriel?" she asked Elias in a broken voice, "he's here now, right?"

Elias looked down and could not bring himself to look at her or speak, causing Evie's lips to tremble. "A-answer me... where is he?" Evie's voice trembled at the end and sounded like she was choking on her tears.

"We don't know, Princess." The one who spoke was Zolan. His face was quite passive as Evie looked at him. But one look into his dark eyes made Evie tremble.

"W-what do you mean you don't know?" she asked nonetheless, clenching her fists tight.

"Go prepare the princess' food and everything she needs," Zolan told Elias and when the butler nodded and left, Zolan slowly knelt on one knee before Evie. He took a few seconds before looking up at Evie from his kneeling position.

He stared at Evie intently and she knew he was hesitant on telling her whatever he was going to say.

"Speak," Evie demanded, knowing fully well that what she will be hearing might break her.

"We waited for him the entire night and the entire morning too. But he did not come, princess." Zolan said in an incredibly careful manner. His voice was as neutral as he could make it, but his expression became so emotional for a moment. However, after a few moments, his expression hardened as he looked at Evie with so much worry. "There are..." he paused as if struggling whether or not to keep on talking.

"Go on..." the princess demanded and Zolan was surprised that the princess was yet to shed tears. He knew this news would break her heart all over again. So he and the others had already debated for quite a while on whether to tell her about this or not. In the end, Zolan had decided to tell her the truth. He knew now that the princess was not just a normal human, she was not as fragile as they had initially thought she was. And most importantly, he felt that hiding the truth from her would not help in the least.

Thus, he could only spill everything out. "There are soldiers who managed to escape alive. They had reported that the entire city was burned to the ground and even the castle was reduced to ashes. None of them saw Prince Gavriel... but they saw the amber-eyed dragon die." Zolan's voice was becoming smaller as he continued especially when he spoke about the prince. "I'm sorry to be the

bearer of bad news, princess. Though we are still holding out hope that Prince Gavriel is out there somewhere... we need to be prepared to accept that he... might never return to us. That he might be forever lost to us..."

While they waited for Gavriel last night, the men were losing hope when the prince was taking too long to arrive. They all believed their prince would definitely be able to escape and find them. But he never did come to find them. And they could only think of one sensible reason why. Their prince must have lost the battle against the dark fae, and he might already be...

They refuse to believe it but that was the only reason they could come up with for now. That conclusion was made with the knowledge that their prince would always come to them and pursue his wife no matter what, if he survived.

"Princess..." Zolan struggled to keep his voice even. "The prince might be –"

"No." Evie suddenly cut him off and Zolan was stunned at the intensity that was blazing in her eyes.

He watched her rise and stand. She squared her shoulders back as she clenched both her fists. After breathing in and out for a few moments, she looked straight ahead. The men were all awed at the look she was sporting on her face.

"He's not dead." She continued and her voice was firm and filled with confidence. "My husband is not dead. Your Lord and prince is NOT dead!"

Zolan's jaws clenched. Seeing the princess' confidence flare up so brightly when he fully expected her to crumble and go into an emotional breakdown was such an incredible surprise. It was not just Zolan who felt that way, but the rest of the men too. Elias included. However, he was a little afraid that this show of bravado was only her way of being in utter denial due to her not being able to accept the truth.

"I... I receive a report saying that the dragon guardian is still alive. He had gone back with Caius and the imperial army to the capital." Zolan added on. He hated saying all these, but it was better to lay all his cards on the table than having her cling on helplessly onto a false hope.

"I saw him in my dream..." Evie said suddenly, then she turned and looked down at Zolan. "And he's alive..." she added, her face so strangely serene. "This is my family's secret which we are not allowed to expose to anyone else. But due to the circumstances, I'll let you in on the secret, Zolan... our dreams will always come true." Evie's eyes sparkled with confidence. "Always."

Chapter 174 - More Than Enough

Zolan was rendered speechless, not only because of the shocking thing that the princess had revealed about their dream but also from the way she spoke and brought herself. Was it even possible for a person to grow so much overnight? But then again, thinking back, Zolan realised that the princess had been maturing and changing over the course of time when she had been with the prince.

Looking up at her at that moment, Zolan suddenly felt his entire being wanting to bow down to her. He did not know if she had unconsciously done something to him again for him to feel that way, but all he knew was that, right then, she had made him believe in her. He trusted her when she said with such conviction that their Lord was not dead.

"He's alive..." he heard her murmur in now a soft yet faithful voice. "Somewhere... wherever he is right now... we will see him soon..." she turned her back to him again and looked up at the clear blue sky. Evie was very convinced in her beliefs now. For a moment, she had panicked and gotten flustered. But when she sorted out her thoughts, she had come to this conclusion. The latest vision she had seen in her dream had shown him and that was more than enough for her.

Evie just smiled and looked back at Zolan and the rest of the men. "My husband... your prince is very much alive and would be making his appearance soon."

"D-don't tell me you are planning to go look for him..." Zolan immediately panicked. He was quite relieved now with how the princess was managing herself and most importantly because of the new hope she had lit up in all of their hearts. But the thought of her traipsing around these foreign lands in the hopes of looking for His Highness had brought his anxiety rushing back in an instant.

"Do not worry. I am not so stupid to waste the opportunity my husband had created for me by rushing out of this place to look for him. Even I know better than to be running around this place blindly, not knowing a single thing about how things work here." Evie replied calmly and Zolan sighed in relief.

However, Zolan was not looking at her face as her back was facing him, but Evie's lips began to tremble a little. But she bit down on it ruthlessly and struggled inwardly to stay calm and composed. When she had gathered herself once again, she continued. "I don't want him to be disappointed in me... I won't waste his sacrifice just because I am dying to see him and worried to death for him."

Then she looked down at Zolan again. "Gather everyone close, I have something very important to tell you all."

Elias had arrived with food in his hand and approached the princess. She obediently followed the butler and silently, she sat down on the round reddish stone where Elias had pointed to her to sit.

Zolan stared at her for a while before he finally moved as she commanded.

Once Zolan was off carrying out her orders, Evie silently ate her food. She could hardly taste anything, but she mechanically continued putting food into her mouth, chewing carefully and then swallowing it. Though everything tasted like dry cardboard to her right now, she knew she had to eat. She had to keep up her strength and health for Gavriel's sake. It would do no good for them to finally meet up but then having him find her in flailing health and weak to her bones. That would only serve to cause more heartache to Gavriel. Thus, she knew where her priorities were.

She headed to where Gavriel's men were gathered the moment she finished. There were a few other male vampires with them, and the duchess was with them too.

As she approached the group, Evie looked around again and saw the children and women scattered around. She knew that this was the same safe place Gavriel had brought her to visit that night. She could tell that that lake was just behind those bushes not far from here.

Evie figured that Zolan had brought everyone here because the beasts could not infiltrate into this area. She silently agreed on his decision as it was such a relief that none of them would have to worry about the beasts attacking anyone while in this spot.

Upon standing before everyone, Evie did not waste any moment and she immediately began. Even though every single one of them had just experienced the greatest loss and pain of losing their home

and their loved ones, she did not have the luxury to console anyone right now. She could not afford to... because if she did... she felt that she too, might crumble... and she knew it was not the right time for any of that.

"I am going to go on a journey." She declared immediately. Surprising everyone, most especially Gavriel's men.

"J-journey? To where?" the duchess asked.

"To the heart of this land."

The duchess gasped and the men were speechless. They knew how dangerous the outside of this forest was and the princess had just announced that she was going to go on a journey to the heart of this land? That was literally the same as going on a journey towards the deepest part of hell! What was actually going on in the princess' mind? These were the thoughts of the men, including the duchess who had never witnessed all the things the princess had done.

Only Gavriel's men were the ones that knew she was not planning something ridiculous, most especially Zolan as he had already deduced the reason behind her desire to go on this journey.

"P-princess –"

"I don't want to delay any longer." Evie cut the duchess off before she could even say anything further. "I have to leave as soon as possible."

"We will definitely come with you wherever you are planning to go, Princess." Zolan said and all of Gavriel's men stepped forward without any hesitation nor questions or doubts. They knew that Prince Gavriel would want them to protect her with all that they have. It was a given.

Chapter 175 - Journey

Evie turned and looked at the men. She felt touched at their willingness to follow along with her plans without questions. However, she could not possibly take all these able-bodied men with her. They are Gavriel's most trusted men, warriors most elite and the best of the bunch. There are people here who will be needing their protection as well. Evie thought of all these as her eyes looked around, noticing the older women and young children. They would need more protection than she did.

"I am very thankful... but I would not be taking all of you with me. Some of you will need to stay back here to protect everyone." Evie said. The men immediately looked quite disapproving.

It was then that the duchess butted in. "May I know the reason why you are going to the heart of the land, Princess?" the other vampires who heard her question all nodded their heads in assent. Evie looked at her and though she knew the duchess was only concerned, she could not tell her the details of her reasoning.

"I'm sorry but I can't say it yet." She replied apologetically, but the duchess did not seem to have taken offence to Evie's rejection.

"I see... I know there must be a good reason behind this. You are not a naïve woman. Nor are you one who is impulsive and jumps into things without weighing out the pros and cons. I always knew you'd become one hell of a woman someday... and I guess that someday would be today." The

duchess smiled as she said this. "You are very brave, Your Highness." The duchess praised Evie as she reached out her hands to gently fold them over Evie's own. "And so... so strong."

Evie nearly wavered at the duchess kind words and the genuine care that was shining forth from her eyes. But she held herself strong and kept calm.

"Thank you..." was all she could say, and the duchess smiled at her, as if she knew everything that was happening within her.

"I know you'd become even stronger." The duchess gazed deep into her amber eyes. "That is why you should take all of Gavriel's men along with you. Now that His Highness isn't here, their new master now in his absence would be you. So, don't worry and just bring them along."

What she said had surprised Evie. She did not expect the duchess to say that. "B-but..."

"Don't worry about us, Princess Evielyn. Most of us are women here but we are not helpless. We can protect ourselves and fight if it were necessary. Moreover, we are going to stay right here in this spot and wait for your return. Since the beasts can't enter into this place, we'll be safe here. It is you who need these men as your own guards the most." She explained and everyone agreed.

The women standing further away from her all had confident looks on their faces and Evie realized that she had forgotten for a moment that these women were not frail and fragile flowers, but vampires. And not just vampires. They were mothers and sisters and daughters. They all had many precious others to protect too. The will to protect was the greatest motivation and strength for them to fight. These women were warriors in their own right.

She looked at Gavriel's men and they all nodded encouragingly at her. All of them were in full agreement of the duchess' statements.

Evie could only smile helplessly before giving in. She too, knew that she truly needed these men's protection as they had already once nearly reached her destination before. She knew she had strange abilities now, but she still knew they were nothing when being put up to real combat. And she did not even know if her abilities would be able to do anything against the beasts. Remembering the beasts Gavriel had killed in the Dark Valley, Evie knew that she might never even survive a few seconds if she were to go there without the protection of these men.

And thus, the decision was made and all of Gavriel's men including Elias would go along with her.

Everyone immediately prepared for the journey. With Elias being the busiest of them all, as there were many things that he wanted to prepare to pack and bring along with them.

Until at last, it was time for them to head off.

Evie was standing by the lake and staring off into the clear waters by herself. She remembered Gavriel telling her this place would look even more beautiful in daylight. And he was absolutely right. The lake was just breathtakingly picturesque. So breath-taking that Evie's heart began to ache.

She wished she was seeing this spectacular view together with him.

Just as she was about to fall to her knees and cry, a small voice called out to her. She turned back to look, and it was the boy named Elijah. She had met him in Dacia's town that one night and he had given her a flower.

He was giving her flowers again this time as well.

"I wish I could come along to protect you too, Princess." He said and the ache in Evie's heart dulled a little as she smiled at his earnestness. "But it's okay. Once I grow up, I will become strong too, like Samuel and that time, I will protect you. For now, I will protect my mother and everyone in here while we wait for your return." The boy said in confidence and Evie's smile widened as she patted his head.

"That's right. One day, you'll be one of the strongest." Evie told him as Elias came to inform her that it was time for them to leave. She embraced the little boy and then whispered to him. "Thank you so much for the flower."

The boy grinned innocently, and Evie felt a surge of emotions welling from within her that seemed to strengthen her.

Lifting her head up, Evie squared her shoulders and followed after Elias to join the now more than prepared men.

One last time, Evie and the men looked back at the vampires they were leaving behind before they finally stepped out of the protected forest and took the first step of their journey towards the heart of the forbidden land.

Chapter 176 - Treacherous

Leon immediately squatted before Evie at Zolan's signal. "Please get onto my back, Princess." He said and Evie did as she was told without any hesitation. She was not going to pretend to be strong and end up slowing everyone down, or worse, endangering everyone's life. She knew when she can push herself and when to pull back.

Once she was tucked securely on Leon's back, Zolan stood by her side and asked. "Are you ready, Your Highness?"

"I'm ready," Evie replied Zolan and nodded at him with determination.

Zolan was relieved at the sight of her firm expression and clear eyes. It was amazing that she was this composed and even fearless. Even elite vampires – like them for example – felt fear, especially during that first time they had embarked on a journey into this land. They knew that the dangers here were real and not to be taken lightly.

He remembered that apart from Prince Gavriel, every single one of them were quite tensed up and a little anxious. It was normal for everyone to feel that way upon entering a very dangerous zone. But this princess does not seem to feel the fear at all. Perhaps, she was at least somewhat nervous, but she was certainly a lot calmer compared to them when they first stepped foot into this land. Well, what could he expect? This woman had extinguished a dragon's fire and even commanded it. This should not come as a surprise to him anymore.

"Princess... I know we are just your subjects now and that we are here to protect you, but if it possible please do tell us about your plans and what you are trying to accomplish in this journey." Zolan said and Evie looked at him with an unreadable expression plastered on her face.

She understood very well what Zolan was trying to say to her, and after thinking through, she had decided that she was not going to hide anything from them. These men were her husband's most loyal men. They would even sacrifice themselves for her and even though it had not been long since she had met them, Evie already had this unwavering trust on every single one of them. It was such a

strange feeling. But she was so glad. It is so very reassuring in having these men around, whom she could trust with her very life.

"How long would it take for us to reach the heart of the land?" Evie asked.

"We will try to follow the route we used when we were here previously, so it should only take us a few days."

Evie was surprised. She actually thought they would be able to reach their destination tonight!

"Is... is it because of me? I think I'll be fine if we travelled at your pace." She argued, looking so sure.

"Er... it's not actually because of you, princess. We are going to proceed slowly because of the beasts that are roaming in the area. There are strange creatures here that appears out of nowhere. We have to slow down our pace so we would be able to avoid them if and when they suddenly appear. It is just too risky taking the chance of fighting against these beasts." Zolan explained. "We will also try to avoid the spots occupied by some certain types of ferocious beasts, so that would also take us on a detour. Back then, we have chosen to fight against them, but that route is too dangerous. We have lost so many comrades back then. That's why we'll try to avoid those spots. We will try to get you to your destination as soon as possible but also in one piece and without a scratch. And the best way is to avoid fighting to death with the beasts."

"I understand," Evie could only say. She must have been underestimating on how easy this journey would be. Of course, the path would always be treacherous. Especially one that is of such importance like this one. She sighed deeply to herself.

"But do not worry, Princess. We will try our best to reach there as fast as we could." Zolan smiled and Evie nodded at him. "Alright... you can think about what I said. I mean about your plans, Princess. You can tell us once you're ready."

The moment Evie agreed with a nod, the men finally made their move.

Though Zolan said they would proceed slowly, their pace was still much faster than what Evie had expected. And she was quite pleased at it.

She wanted to peek out of the protective enclosure Leon had her in and look about, but Leon was quick to tell her that she should not as their pace was still very fast. The winds might hurt her eyes if she did so. They did not stop running for hours.

Though Evie knew it was still daylight, she could tell that the further they got towards the heart of the land, the darker it seemed to become. Then suddenly, they halted.

The next thing Evie heard were sounds of familiar growls she had heard before. When Leon put her down and pulled out his sword, Evie saw the wolf-like huge beasts she and Gavriel had encountered in the dark valley. The men had encircled her and only Leon stood by her side, protecting her.

Evie grabbed her weapons too, but none of the beasts came any nearer to her. She watched the rest of the men fight these wolf-like beasts. She of course felt a little fear, but it seemed she was getting more and more immune to these things now. She no longer trembled like before.

In no time, every single one of the wolf-like beasts were all dead. The snowy ground was painted with dark blood. Back then, Evie could not even make herself look at the creatures.

But at that moment, she took a step closer to one of them and realized that these creatures actually looked somewhat magical despite their ferociousness. And she suddenly wondered why this land was filled with ferocious beasts such as these.

"Let's go, princess." She heard Leon's voice call out to her and with one last glance at the dead creatures, Evie turned and hopped onto Leon's back again.

Chapter 177 - Fish

"We will stay here for tonight Your Highness," Zolan said when they finally stopped moving, "the savage beasts usually roam around at night, and they tend to be more ferocious and are quite harder to deal with."

"Savage beasts?" Evie asked as she sat on a round and smooth glowing stone. It was already dark but due to the glowing stones that were scattered everywhere, Evie could see the men even without the light from any fire source.

"They are the beasts between the darkwolves and dragons. They are much stronger and more troublesome than the darkwolves but they are of course inferior to the mighty dragons." Zolan explained. "There are many other kinds of savage beasts roaming about here too. And many of them are deadly. It would be best that we do not encounter any of them in the course of our journey. Though that would be a long shot, let's just hope for the best and prepare for the worst."

"You also need to rest, Your Highness. And you'll need to eat soon too..." Elias butted in as he was already starting a fire while Reed and Zolan were setting up a tent.

"Where are the others?" Evie looked around. She was very distracted by the beauty of the glowing stones all around them.

"They're all on guard around the perimeters we have already set up." Zolan said and Evie's eyes circled. She had thought that this place was similar to the lake they had stayed at last night. Since it had looked so tranquil and calm, she had assumed the men had found another place just like that one.

Zolan seemed to immediately understand from her expression what she was thinking, so he immediately began to explain. "The beasts tend to avoid waters with those strange silvery lights and that's why I chose this spot as it is near a stream that seemed to flow towards that lake. However, it's not completely safe like that spot near that magical Lake. Though rare, there are beasts that sometimes come here. Still, it is already late, and this is the safest spot we could find to set up camp right now."

Evie eyed the stream and Zolan was right. She had not noticed because of the glowing stones. The stream was really exactly like the water of that Lake.

"Princess, come over near the fire. The air might be slightly cold for you, so this fire would warm you up nicely." Elias said and Evie moved towards the crackling fire.

At that moment, Luc appeared. "Do you think the princess will like this type of fish?" he whispered to Elias as he handed over three palm-sized fish he had caught in the normal river not quite far from their spot.

"Leave it to me... I will make sure she'll like it." Elias said with a grin and Luc sighed in relief.

"Alright, I'm leaving it to you."

After Luc left, Elias prepared the fish and a while later, he approached Evie by the fire. Evie watched the skilled vampire set up everything to cook the fish.

When Elias was done and he sat to just turn the fish by the fire, Evie spoke. "Can I do that?" she asked. She had been itching since a while ago to ask what she could do to help them. But she was hesitating as she was also afraid that she would just mess up since she had never done anything like these in her life.

"I'll just need to turn it around until it is cooked, right?" she smiled at Elias and Elias could not refuse her expectant gaze.

He stepped aside and Evie immediately took over the task. She seemed pleased.

At that moment, Samuel appeared to speak with Zolan when he saw the princess doing Elias' task while Elias just sat quietly next to her.

"This butler..." the big man groaned, and he was about to approach Elias to scold him when Zolan spoke.

"Let her be, Samuel. She just wants to have something to do." He said, "It's a simple task anyway. And it would help her to focus on something else even for a while. I think the princess needs a task to help clear her mind too."

Samuel calmed down, realizing that Zolan was right.

By the time the fish was cooked, Elias gave them all to Evie.

"I think, this one is enough for me... you guys can go ahead and have these two." She said and the butler blinked. He then smiled.

"Don't worry about us, princess. We are still full." Elias replied. Evie pressed her lips tight. She could not believe she actually forgot that these men were not really into human food like her. She was so used to Gavriel eating with her and eating everything she eats that she had forgotten the vampires do not necessarily need to eat anything as long as they had their fill of blood.

Remembering Gavriel made Evie suddenly lose her appetite and she did not feel like eating anymore. But she still took a bite of her food and munched on it quietly.

She did not realise that the men were all looking at her and were feeling worried.

"Elias... didn't you say you'll make sure she'll like it? I think the princess don't like the fish!" Luc complained to the butler through telepathy as he glared at the poor butler.

"But I really think she liked it. I once made something similar to this for her before. Though I lacked some spices this time, I am sure the taste is not that much different from the one I cooked in the castle." Elias argued.

"Maybe it is burnt? Just look at her face, does she look as though she likes it? She looks like she's about to cry to me!"

"It must be due to the fish then."

"Wha- and you put the blame on the fish this time?!"

"Enough you two," Zolan butted in. "I think... the princess might just need someone to accompany her in her meal. Humans don't like eating alone, I have heard."

"Yeah, that must be it!" Elias agreed. "All these while when Her Highness dines with Prince Gavriel, she tends to eat a lot and has a really good appetite. But when she eats on her own, I noticed that she eats so little!"

"Oh... then... you go eat with her." Luc told Elias.

"But I don't like fish. How about you go?" Elias complained as he scrunched his face at the mention of fish.

"I just had my fill. How about you go, Zolan? I don't think fish can kill a vampire anyway." Luc quickly foisted off the responsibility to Zolan.

Zolan's gaze locked onto the fish as though lasers were beaming out of his eyes and his face darkened.

"Alright, I'll go..." it was Leon who spoke. He knew how vampires despise fish. They can bear eating vegetables and they truly enjoy feasting on meat – but not fishes. No, siree! Though eating fish would definitely not kill them, it might as well be able to! It was the one source of meat vampires could just never bring themselves to eat.

The men all looked at Leon and their eyes sparkled as though Leon had just become their saviour right at that moment. That was right! Leon! How could they have forgotten that there was a half-human in their midst who could actually eat a freaking fish?! He might even enjoy it!

Chapter 178 - Beast

Evie had ended up spending the night in the tent that the men had set up for her while the vampires, except Elias took turns at carrying out guard duty in the area.

As soon as daylight came, the group continued on their journey. Somehow, they had fortunately not encountered any beasts which Zolan had mentioned that was quite rare.

"Now this is strange. The beasts tend to increase in number the closer we get to the heart of the land. Normally, by this time, we should've encountered at least one savage beast by now." Zolan mused to himself while they were taking a break. It was also to give the princess time to eat and tends to her needs. However, Samuel who was nearby overheard Zolan's comment too.

"You're right. It's too quiet, don't you think?" Samuel said as he approached Zolan. His normally serious face was currently frowning as he looked on towards the dark and vicious looking mountains that were ahead of them.

"It is indeed too quiet." Zolan nodded. "And I can't say if this strange occurrence is a good thing or not. We have only travelled once through this land previously with the prince. And that time, we had encountered quite a few beasts on our journey. However, that in itself is not a good enough gauge to understand how things work here in the forbidden land. There are just too many factors that could be influencing how things run here."

"Perhaps, this might be the calm before the storm?" Levy butted in. "It's just too good to be true, in my opinion. We're now quite close to the heart of the land, right? And yet, none of those savage beasts are even in sight? We did not even see a shadow of them. That is just really weird, and it's

making me suspect that there is just something afoot." Samuel was truly cracking his mind on what was the reasoning behind this peculiar happening.

Zolan was rubbing his chin with his fingers as he thought hard. "Yes... if none of those beasts appear, we would be reaching the dragon's territory by tomorrow afternoon latest. That is truly a big reduction in the estimation of the timing we had calculated."

"Has the princess talked to you about her plans yet? And also the reason of her coming all the way out here?" Samuel asked again, curiosity was evident in his serious face.

"She had said that she will be talking to all of us tonight." Zolan informed Samuel.

"That's great then. I really want to know the real reason behind this journey. It seems as though it's really important and one of utmost priority."

"Well," Zolan shrugged, "isn't it pretty obvious? The princess has something to do with this land and definitely some connections to the dragons. She's here to find something... and I believe... to find out who she really is."

The men looked at Zolan with surprised gazes. Now that they thought about it, the intention was indeed obvious. She must have embarked on this journey to find the answers to her burning questions!

"Still, I want to know what had pushed her to come here. I have my theories, but it is still much better if the princess could tell us everything she is planning to do." Zolan concluded as they saw the princess and Elias now coming towards them.

"Thank you for waiting," she said. Then without waiting for anyone to respond, she approached Leon and nodded at him. "I'm ready."

The group then immediately went off again. Still, there were no beasts in sight until sunset came. The men were getting a little anxious. They had been on high alert the whole time during their journey but not spotting even a single beast made them somewhat worried. They were expecting to at least encounter one. Actually, they were more than certain that they had to at least fight off a couple of those vicious savage beasts by bow. Thus, not meeting a single one is really throwing them off. Were they really not going to encounter any beast at all?!

Just as they were about to reach their next planned camping spot for the night, Samuel suddenly halted and shouted out. "Protect the princess!!" he yelled and the men were instant in their reactions. All of them immediately circled Evie, forming a protective barrier around her.

The next moment, the earth shook slightly as a huge and ferocious beast appeared before them.

Leon had earlier on covered Evie's face with her hood, but she was able to judge by the quake alone that it was definitely something huge. Much, much bigger than those darkwolves.

A spine-chilling sound echoed and the next thing she knew, the fight had already started.

"F*ck! This savage beast is unlike all the ones we have encountered before, right Zolan?!" she heard Luc's voice shouting out from her left.

"That's right. This one is on a whole other level, so be careful!" Zolan shouted back a reply and the moments that followed later on sounded so intense and dangerous. Unlike yesterday, Leon had to grab her, and they had already changed locations quite a few times already.

Evie could tell that the vampires were having a hard time too, unlike their earlier fight against the darkwolves. She could not help but worry incessantly about the men's well-being.

The next moment that she and Leon landed on the ground again, Evie grabbed onto her hood to remove it. But Leon's reflexes that were faster had stopped her hand from doing so.

"I think... it's better if you don't look Princess..." Leon said. Though his voice was hesitant, his grip was firm on her wrist.

Evie creased her brows. For Leon to actually say that to her despite knowing that she does not fear a dragon now, made Evie feel uneasy. However, no matter what the reason was, she had to get used to it now. They might encounter more of them from here on as they get closer to their destination. Who knows, she might end up being able to help?

"No, don't worry about me. I might be able to do something." Evie said bravely as she gripped her weapon and pulled her hood back.

Chapter 179 - Alive And Kicking

Evie bravely gripped her weapon and pulled her hood back. The moment her eyes landed on the figure of the savage beast her body froze up.

This beast was unlike anything she had imagined. It was a far cry from what was the worst possible thing she could have come up with in her imagination!

"F*ck! What kind of savage orc is this?! This one's not normal!!" she heard Levy's yell and Evie could hear the word orc reverberating in her mind. Orc? This was an orc?! How did an orc find its way across their path?

Evie felt nauseous. Now she understood why Leon had been trying to cover her eyes and gave her that warning when she wanted to look. However, she did not regret her decision. This beast they called an orc was not just huge and powerful. It was absolutely disgusting. Its greenish body looked like it was rotting away. There were green and black liquids – or were they flesh? – that were dripping down its large pustule covered body.

Its head was like the head of a bull and its face looked as though it was rotting off too. She saw Samuel slashed at its neck, but his blade barely cut through anything. It was though it only managed to nick its thick skin.

"Shit! Its skin is tough! We must find its vulnerable spot to kill him!" Samuel yelled and all of them except Leon attacked the beast.

Reed and Zolan was sent flying away. Zolan slammed against a tree trunk while Reed fell hard on the ground. Then Luc was slashed by the beasts' sharp and powerful horn.

Evie screamed as she saw blood spraying out of Luc as he fell to the ground.

Then she felt herself being grabbed again. As she looked behind Leon, she saw the beast coming after them as the others ran after it to attack it and tried to stop it. Was the beast targeting her?

She saw Samuel appear behind it and he stabbed at the orc's nape with his sword. The beast roared and his large and strong arm slammed into his back, making Samuel not able to pull the sword from it before he too thudded to the ground.

But the man rose again and the others too. She could only watch them attack the orc over and over again. No... she could not just watch her men continue like this... she must help them!

Suddenly, Leon stopped. And he put her down. He did not say anything but, she saw that Zolan and Elias were already beside her.

Then Leon leapt away and met the approaching beast. Leon's purple eyes quickly bled into a vivid red and his sword slashed at the beast's face. Its dark green blood, splashed disgustingly in an arc over the pristine white snow.

At that moment, the others joined him in a synchronized attack. But no matter how much the vampires slashed at the beast, it could still fight. It did not die.

"I think the only way is to behead it!" Zolan yelled out.

"But how? Its bone is as hard and tough as stone!" Levy yelled back. But they tried that method, nonetheless. Taking turns to slash its head every time there was a chance. They did not know what else to do for now.

While Zolan was trying his best to figure out any possible vulnerable spot, Evie suddenly stepped aside from behind him.

Zolan's eyes widened as he looked at her as she was already pulling her bow and was aiming at the orc-like beast so seriously.

And before Zolan could say anything, Evie let go of her shot. He whipped his head back towards the savage orc and saw her arrow pierce through its eyes. The princess' aim flew true!

Another ferocious growl echoed. Zolan could only swallow. But the princess was already aiming again.

And in just a matter of seconds, she released another arrow. Zolan thought that she was going to miss this time, as the beast was wailing and was about to cover its eyes. But to his surprise, the arrow pierced deep into its other eye.

The beast roared again, and the vampires took this opportunity to kill it. The beast grabbed at the arrows and pulled it out of its eyes as it ran straight towards her.

Zolan grabbed Evie but the beast suddenly leapt high up into the air, a greenish fluid coming from its eye where the arrow was once buried.

Evie's eyes widened, seeing that it was about to reach them. At that moment, she also saw its eyes close, and it had the same colour as that dark fae.

"F*ck!" she heard Zolan curse out loud and her heart stopped at the sight of it about to reach out its hand at them.

However, right before that fleshy appendage reached them, its head rolled off to the side and greenish fluid spurted out like a fountain. Leon and Samuel landed on the ground at the same moment the beast's head fell. Their blades painted with the disgusting green fluid.

Zolan landed too along with her, and the world seemed to fall into utter silence.

After seeing that the beast was no longer moving, Evie finally released the breath she did not know she was holding in. Is it already over?

She looked around at the men and she took another deep breath seeing that all of them were standing.

Elias suddenly ran towards her and gently used a damp cloth to wipe at her face. It was then that she realized she was splashed with the beast's disgusting blood.

"Are you alright, princess?" he asked, and Evie nodded.

"H-how about everyone else?" she asked, scanning over her men.

They flashed her small smiles and grinned at her while giving her thumbs up. "We're fine princess! Still alive and kicking." Levy joked.

"That was an awesome aim! As expected of you, princess!" Reed added, looking so proud as he looked at Evie with twinkling eyes.

Before Evie could respond, Zolan spoke.

"Alright, we must leave this area now. It's already dark out." He said and everyone became serious again as they quickly made to move towards the safe spot where they had planned to set up camp for the night.

Chapter 180 - Water

The night sky was not as clear as the night before from where the group had settled down. There were smoke-like wisps of mist creeping right at the trees' crowns, covering the thick forest like greyish white blanket.

Without the glowing stones, Evie was certain she would not be able to see anything at all because of the inky-black darkness.

While Elias was preparing her meal and Reed started setting up her tent, Evie approached Zolan who was busy checking on Luc's wound. He seemed to be the worst wounded among the rest of the men. Evie remembered that vampires usually had accelerated healing, so minor wounds such as the men had sustained should be healing up soon or even almost fully healed already. So, she was wondering why Zolan was worrying over Luc's injuries. Was there something wrong with Luc?

"It's alright, princess." Zolan said, "his wound is just taking a little longer than normal to heal. It seems that the orc's horn was laced with some sort of poison. But he's alright, the wound is already healing. I'm guessing the poison is something that is not too potent. Luc just needs a little more time to rest to and he should be as good as new."

Luc looked up at Evie and grinned energetically. "I'm very fine princess, no worries. This is actually nothing at all compared to my wounds when we went against a dragon back then."

"How about you go soak in the waters of the river?" Evie suggested as she looked at the glistening stream. "I believe my husband already told you about the healing powers of the waters flowing here, right?" Evie queried them.

Both the vampires creased their brows. "Yes, His Highness did tell us and that's why we always rush our wounded comrades towards that magical lake before leaving this land. But only that magical lake, though..."

"You mean this water can't be used to heal?" Evie asked, surprised.

"Unfortunately, you're right princess. We thought it could heal as the water is exactly the same as the one in that lake. But strangely, it doesn't work the same as the lake water." Zolan shrugged his shoulders.

Zolan's explanation made Evie stare at the glimmering water with intrigue and wonder flashing in her eyes.

"Nonetheless, you still need to go and wash the wound with the running water, Luc." She heard Zolan said, "You need to wash out all of the poison for the wound to heal properly and as fast as possible."

The wounded vampire immediately rose and took his upper clothes off. Then he sat in the water. Since the stream was quite shallow, the water only reached his waist despite him already sitting down. He had to lean down for the water to be able to reach the large wound on his upper abdomen.

Curious, Evie followed Zolan and she stood next to him while they looked at Luc.

Luc was suddenly flustered. He was not expecting the princess to follow along to the stream as well. He was not usually a shy man, but he wondered if it was okay for him to strip and be half-naked before the princess. That could not be a proper thing to do before a princess, right? And to top it off, she was his prince's beloved wife...

When he suddenly realized that the princess was staring intently at his torso, he nearly turned around in a panic. He barely managed to keep himself still, even though he knew full well that she was only staring at his wound.

"Er... princess... you can go back and take a rest in your tent for a while waiting for your supper. Leave this man to me," Zolan said. Somehow, he too, found that it was not quite right for the princess to be looking at a scene such as this. Though there was basically nothing wrong with it, however, if their prince was here... Zolan was more than a hundred percent certain that the prince would probably cover her eyes or distract her just so she would not be looking at another man's half-naked body.

"You're really not feeling anything? Do you feel any better upon soaking in the waters?" Evie asked Luc, as if she did not hear Zolan's statement earlier.

Luc simply shook his head. Too embarrassed to reply to the princess' questions.

Evie squatted on the ground and stared at the glimmering water. "That's strange," she murmured, "why would this water not work when it's literally the same water? They both come from the same source. Is it because that lake was the only special place here and that's why the beasts couldn't go in it as well? Meaning, it wasn't the water that was magical but that particular spot itself?"

Suddenly, she reached out and swirled her fingers in the water as she absentmindedly continued wondering.

The two vampires' eyes widened in shock when the silvery glimmers in the water slowly changed into a golden amber hue.

They could not utter a word for a long while, until Luc sprang from the water in surprise. "It's gone!!!" he exclaimed, holding out his arms and looking down at this upper torso.

Zolan and Evie looked at him and both of them were surprised as well, seeing that Luc's wound was really gone as he had said.

"T-this is incredible! The pain is gone too, completely..." Luc stammered, "and I feel quite revitalized!"

Evie blinked as the two vampires looked at her with their eyes filled with nothing but wonder and amazement.

"I think the water does heal after all?" Evie mumbled in a question more to herself than to Zolan or Luc.

"I don't think so, Princess... It could be what you just did with the water earlier was the thing that truly healed him!" Zolan was very certain. "There is no doubt about it!"

Evie blinked and she then pulled her hand out of the water, and it quickly went back to its normal state again. She stared at her hands. Why did that happen? Her curiosity about herself was growing. She wanted to know why all these things were happening. Why she was able to do these things? There were so many questions that keep piling up but no one to give her the answers to it. This made her all the more determined to reach that place that promised to grant her all the answers to her questions.