

SPELLBOUND

Chapter 5: Journey

"No one's allowed to hurt you, not even me. You have nothing to be scared about," he added gently and before Evie realized it, as though he had cast a bewitching spell on her, she obeyed.

He shifted and made room for her and then she found herself half lying on him with her back to his chest and his arm wrapped around her, holding her, keeping her tucked against him as the carriage lurched forward. It seemed her fatigue and dizziness had given her away because of how little resistance she had against his irresistible offer of comfort. The back of her head settled on his solid and hard chest, which suddenly felt like a cushion, as she relaxed comfortably.

This was the first time she had experienced anything like this. She had never let any man hold her this way before. She found it overwhelming because, even in her lightheaded state, her body reacted in a strange way as he held her. And the most surprising thing was she didn't hate it. She had thought she would despise any physical closeness with a vampire so this was surprising.

However, she brushed it off. She thought that she was feeling this way because of the strange situation she was in. She was perhaps just really exhausted.

"You are... warm..." she muttered in a sleepy voice, her eyes already closed. "I thought... vampires are cold."

"I am the only exception," he answered and she forced her heavy eyelids to open.

An amused smile curved on his lips as he watched her forcing herself to open her eyes, struggling to fight her dizziness. "What do you –"

"Hush..." His finger almost landed on her lips. "Sleep. One day, I might tell you," he whispered and Evie could no longer fight the call of the god of sleep and finally succumbed to its irresistible invitation.

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Twisting, she glanced up and a gorgeous face greeted her good morning. Her eyes circled at the sight of the man and almost immediately, she pushed herself away from him so hard that her back hit the wall on the other side of the carriage.

Deep lines formed on the man's smooth forehead, but, "Good morning, Evielyn," he greeted still. He seemed displeased by her reaction. Despite his expression, Evie

couldn't help but just stare at him. His legs were still parted, one resting on top of the seat and the other hanging down to the floor. Evie knew that he was in that position because he had cradled her in her sleep. And more importantly, he was... oh god... Gavriel, her vampire husband, in daylight was a sight to behold - not that he wasn't already - but unlike his angel of the darkness appearance last night, he now looked approachable and almost harmless. It was as if the daylight had turned him into the angel of light or something. Evie could even stare at him longer now without flinching.

She shut her eyes and then blinked quickly, as if she was trying to wake herself up from having a hallucination, but when she looked at him again, her shoulders dropped, disappointed that she wasn't hallucinating at all. Evie couldn't help but feel this uneasy feeling in the pit of her stomach. This was not supposed to happen. She was not supposed to be admiring any vampire's beauty. She was supposed to despise them all.

"Good morning, Your... I mean... G-gavriel," Evie struggled to respond calmly.

"We'll stay in this inn until you're ready to continue the journey," he said as he opened the carriage door and then he jumped down and stretched out his hand towards her.

Hesitantly, Evie put her hand on his and he gently helped her down. Since the moment he had held her hand at the altar, this man, she noticed, always held onto her with an almost exaggerated gentleness - something she never, ever expected from her vampire husband.

"Make sure to take your time and rest properly," he said, causing Evie to look up at the inn in front of them before she looked around.

"Have we already crossed the border?" she asked. She was glad that the rain had stopped and the weather was looking fine again.

"Yes. This inn is the last place where you can take a comfortable rest. It'll be a long stretch of traveling after this. It will take longer for us to cross the Dark Valley and reach the next village than the journey so far, so make sure to have a proper rest. We should be able to stay here for at least three hours, longer if needed," he said as he led her inside the inn.

The innkeepers welcomed them. They were both gray-haired and wrinkly with old age but what Evie noticed, with mild surprise, was that they were humans. They smiled at her but then, they also smiled at her husband! They were polite towards Gavriel and it seemed to her that they knew he was a vampire prince. It was completely unexpected. Evie had never seen any human not cower in fear in the presence of a vampire, let alone greet them politely. Shaking her head at the unbelievable scene that just played out before her, she walked in almost a tranced state towards her room.

Evie had eaten her meal inside her private room alone. Her husband didn't come back to check on her - or maybe he did but she just missed it because she might have already been fast asleep on the bed.

Before the wedding day, Evie had actually travelled for many days to reach Rennox Castle where their wedding had taken place.

The house of Ylvia was in the Southern Empire and the human emperors couldn't allow the vampires to set foot down South so they brought Evie to the Eastern empire, to a citadel closest to the northern border. It had been a long journey. Although she rested for a couple of days before the vampires arrived, Evie's fatigue from the last uncomfortable journeys had still not fully recovered. And now, she was going on a new journey again. A journey that she would never, ever forget.

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After napping for about two hours, Evie woke up and readied herself for the long journey ahead. She had a small chat with the old innkeeper when the old lady had brought her meal in and she had told her that they needed to cross the Dark Valley before the day ended because that place was very dangerous. She said that the Dark Valley was a peculiar dark forest through and through. Evie had also heard before from one of their soldiers that the Dark Valley was the place where the vampires loved to ambush the human soldiers in every war. It was said to be the first and hardest hurdle for humans to cross every time they invaded the vampire's land. The innkeeper also told her that at night, the place would be filled with the notorious beasts coming from the Middle Land.

Evie didn't want to encounter any beasts. Vampires were already killing her with fear so she didn't want to see one of those creatures too! She already had enough 'excitement' in the last twenty-four hours to last her a lifetime without adding that to the list! If that did happen, she didn't know if she would reach the vampire's imperial palace without fainting from fright! Worse yet, she might not even reach the vampire's land alive if those beasts attacked them! The vampires that were present at their wedding were all gone. The only ones left in their party was herself, the vampire prince and the vampire coachman. Why on Earth did everyone else leave them? Wasn't her husband a prince?

Human princesses and princes, even she, a noble's daughter, had knights or guards that were appointed to stay by their side whenever they travelled anywhere. Even though she didn't like it sometimes, she knew it was a safety precaution. But with this vampire prince - they all just abandoned him! Was it because they thought he didn't need protection?

Evie couldn't come up with a reasonable conclusion. But then, she thought that the vampires might have a different system or maybe the prince she had married was probably so powerless that his emperor didn't even bother to give him any guards. Evie had heard about powerless princes like that, especially ones who were born from

concubines and maids. This thought worried Evie even more. They really needed to cross the border before daylight faded to avoid those dangerous beasts!

"Are you sure you don't want to stay longer? We can continue the journey this afternoon or even at night," a deep, pleasing voice echoed inside the room and when Evie looked over her shoulder, she saw the alluringly gorgeous creature, her vampire husband, looking at her as he leaned against the door frame. She didn't notice his arrival or his presence at all.

"I-it's fine. I prefer travelling during the day," she said, averting her gaze from him. "I'm ready."

Her firm answer made his right eyebrow twitch slightly as he watched her but eventually, he let out a quiet sigh before he finally relented.

As they both left the inn, Evie looked back and saw the old human couple step out as well to send them off. Evie waved at the human couple before she entered the carriage, wondering if they would be the last humans she would see on this journey. But then she remembered that the vampires agreed to give her human servants because the vampires had many human slaves in their land. That thought somehow made her feel less apprehensive.

But her ease and the little energy she gathered from her rest abruptly evaporated. The road through the Dark valley was brutal. It was obvious that this road wasn't used often. In fact, it must've been a long while since the last carriage passed through it. The vehicle jolted and swayed until Evie began to feel nauseous. All the uncomfortable traveling she had endured in the last few days until that dawn was nothing compared to this.

Although the vampire prince wasn't as miserable as Evie, he, too, had acquired a little rumpled appearance. The deep lines on his forehead seemed to have been permanently carved on his gorgeous forehead since the carriage started to bounce on and on. It was obvious he badly wanted to leave the carriage and walk or leap or run instead.

But he couldn't, knowing that his wife would surely fall on the floor and bump her head on every wall of the carriage like a pinball, without him there. Since the carriage had entered the Dark Valley, Gavriel had caught her from nearly falling on the carriage's floor twice before he decided to sit next to her and hold her waist.

"Shall we take a break?" he asked her after an hour, but Evie shook her head.

"No, let's keep going." She remained willful despite the look on her face.

But after another hour, the vampire prince asked again.

When Evie still shook her head and told him to keep going, a slight smirk curved on Gavriel's face.

"I didn't know human females could be this stubborn. You're clearly having a hard time yet you're not even complaining," he said with a hint of amusement and wonder in his tone.

But Evie couldn't even form a response. The two hours of the nonstop brutal ride had already exhausted her and her nausea had not subsided since it started. She had never experienced anything like this. Back in the South, as well as when she travelled to Rennox Castle, there were times when the road was bad because of bad weather but they always took a break or made camp and postponed the journey to the next day. But Evie knew she couldn't do that this time. They needed to make haste or the beasts might catch them.

However, after half an hour, Gavriel spoke again. And this time, he didn't ask anymore.

"Let's stop for a while," he declared and surprisingly, Evie was very quick to nod. It seemed she had finally reached her limit. The carriage stopped and he quickly helped her out. But as soon as she stepped on the ground and looked around, goosebumps crawled under her skin and she instinctively stepped back.