

SPELLBOUND 71

Chapter 71 - Voice

"Perfect." He smiled proudly. "Again, Princess!"

Evie shot at him again and again and she had yet to miss any shots barring the first one. She was incredibly precise. Even Zolan was starting to enjoy being her target.

"You're an incredible archer princess, but... what if your target is moving?" Zolan told her. "If your enemy is running from you, could you do a thing to take it down?"

Evie remembered her self-taught trainings. When her father stopped instructing her, Evie decided to train by herself. Though archery was simply a hobby to her at that time, she often found herself experimenting on things whenever she was bored. She had tried to aim at many things, even moving objects.

"Try to aim at me while I'm moving Princess." He then began moving – not that fast but not that slow either. Evie aimed and the first shot was a miss. But the second one was precise, making Elias clap and Zolan smile in satisfaction.

He gradually increased his speed. Evie missed a lot but after five fails she always end up making the shot on her sixth attempt. But every time she lands a successful hit, Zolan increases his speed.

They went on this way until Evie was drenched with sweat. By then, she could not land a single hit anymore as Zolan had increased his speed to a vampire's level. But Evie refused to stop without landing a hit even though the two were the ones who were pleading for her to stop now.

"I'll land one last hit. Don't even try to slow down your pace, Zolan." She panted out, causing Zolan to be speechless. He could not believe how stubborn this human princess was. She was clearly tired now.

"Alright." he said and moved again. This time, Evie did not immediately shoot. She just followed him with her bow and arrow aimed at him. She did not release her arrow for a long while looking as though she was waiting for something. What was she waiting for? Was she waiting for him to let his guard down or slow down a little?

Zolan thought of giving in and letting her land a shot but he had seen how perceptive she was. She might feel slighted if he slowed down on purpose.

Out of the blue, her arrow came zipping at him, right towards his forehead. Zolan's eyes were wide as he caught the arrow then halted. How? He looked at the princess with surprise. It was not possible for a human to follow that speed! Wait, could it be that she anticipated his movement and trajectory and then shot ahead?

Evie finally slumped and rested her hands on her knees.

"My Lady! Are you alright?" Elias rushed to support her and led her to a bench.

"I'm fine."

"You're amazing!" Elias praised sincerely, eyes sparkling, as he handed her water to drink and a clean handkerchief to wipe herself down.

"Thank you," she said as Zolan approached them.

"You were really impressive, Your Highness," he looked awed. "How did you do that? Did you anticipate my movement?"

Evie looked at him and took a deep breath.

"Yes. There is no way I could follow your speed." She admitted with a shrug and Zolan looked even more amazed.

"I think you should rest now, My Lady. I've already asked the maids to prepare the bath for you." Elias butted in and Evie rose from the bench.

"Thank you for joining me in my training," Evie expressed her gratitude to Zolan before she left with Elias trailing behind her.

Once Elias and the Princess were gone, Zolan sat on the bench. Levy landed beside him and looked at him with a questioning gaze.

"What are you doing?" Levy asked and Zolan just shrugged.

"I'm just helping her out. At least she'll be tired enough today. She'll sleep properly if she's tired out."

"So, you're saying that was all simply a distraction?" Levy pursed his lips, clearly not believing Zolan's words.

"Hmm... not really. I just thought she should learn to use her skills properly. She's pretty amazing for a human girl. She could kill a vampire with that skills of hers."

"Yes, she's precise but she's still lacking in the strength to kill."

"She can. If her arrows were laced with poisons, it doesn't need that strong force to pierce through a vampire's body. All she need would be a precise aim to scratch the enemy's skin."

"I don't think His Highness will be happy about this though... You know how protective he is towards her." Levy reasoned.

"I know. But we don't know what the future holds. It's still better if she at least learns to fight for herself." Zolan pointed out a very crucial point.

Levy only grunted, acknowledging that fact.

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Another day passed but Gavriel had yet to come back. It had already been three nights since she last saw him.

Zolan and the other men never appeared before her again since her archery practice yesterday. Only Elias stayed by her side, but the butler remained tight lipped. He insisted that the Prince was still on his secret mission.

Evie could feel it in her bones that there was something off. She had been unable to feel at ease for the last few days. And as time ticked by, her unease and worry only got worse. Was Gavriel really okay? Why is she feeling like this? Why can't she wait for him comfortably?

It was getting more and more unbearable the longer she thought about him and his whereabouts. She had forced herself to think that she need not worry, as her husband is very strong.

But she had just awakened from a very brief dream. She had heard his voice, calling out her name. She didn't see nor hear anything else, but his voice sounded as though he needed her.

Worry gripped her heart again as she rose from her bed. It was noon and everyone was asleep.

Evie stared out of the window for a long while before she grabbed her robe and left her room. She silently and aimlessly walked along the empty large corridors. She did not know where else she could go. She knew that there were guards outside who would stop her if she tried to go to the wall. Thus, she continued wandering around, until she found herself in a place she had not planned on visiting. The library.

Chapter 72 - Normal

The library was a large, elegant place that was a bookworm's dream come true. Shelves after shelves of books, from all topics that one could think of were gracing those layers of strong mahogany wood. However, the first impression Evie got from this place that it was awfully silent. It was so still that the sounds of her gown brushing against the beautifully polished wooden floor and her quiet steps seemed to vibrate extra loud in her ears. Thus, walking through this place made her feel a little uneasy. However, as beggars cannot be choosers, she decided to go ahead and stroll through the place.

As she slowly walked, her eyes were not idle. Looking around, Evie's observant gaze fell on the large sturdy table that was placed in the middle and the first thing that came to her mind was Gavriel. His face, his eyes, his voice and his kisses. He had kissed her so hard as she sat on top of that very table.

The memory was so vivid in her mind that she started to feel hot. She wanted him to kiss her again, to be able to taste his sinfully delicious mouth. She wanted to hear his seductive voice calling out her name and stare into his hypnotic grey eyes. She wanted to see him. So. Very. Badly.

Evie squatted on the floor and hugged her knees, feeling a telltale moisture at the corners of her eyes. She could not believe how much she was missing him. It was not even that long yet and she already felt as if it has been weeks since they last saw each other.

She somehow felt that this world was not so magical anymore. Without him, this initially charming castle, this breathtaking snowy place, seemed to have lost their sparkle and glitter in her eyes. She did not know she could feel this way due to a man.

Having the thoughts that she could not survive in this vampire world without Gavriel made her hug herself even tighter. Now she realized just how much he meant to her. Just how much she needed him and wanted him.

"Where are you? You said you will never leave me without telling me first." She whispered softly knowing that there was no way that he would hear her, as she buried her face miserably on her arms.

For a long while, Evie remained in that position. When she finally lifted her face, she took a few deep breaths to compose herself. She knew there was no use acting like this. He would not magically appear before her even if she wailed and rolled about.

Standing up from her crouched position, she looked around and was about to turn and head back to her chambers when something caught her attention and caused her to halt in her steps. Her gaze fell on that one book that had reminded her of her husband.

Evie had just decided to go back because she knew that it would be bad if any other vampires caught sight of her roaming around at this hour. She did not want to cause any trouble for them. But for some reason, the sight of that book was enough to make her forget about her good intentions and she ended up staying a little while longer.

She faced the shelf and stared closely at the book. She had not had the chance to even touch this previously and now her curiosity had intensified. Why was this book always catching her attention?

Lifting her hand, Evie slowly reached out and touched the book. She did not know why, but her heartbeat was suddenly racing. Was she going to find something unexpected inside?

The anticipation made her feel incredibly thrilled and nervous. However, when she opened it, the book was empty. "Well, that was anticlimactic." Evie thought wryly.

With a deep frown, Evie flipped through and scanned the pages, but they were curiously blank. Thinking that there were some secret or hidden messages, Evie tried to move the book closer towards the candle, hoping to catch a glimpse of something. Nothing appeared. She tried many other ways she knew but after almost turning the book upside down, Evie could only give up. There was just no sign whatsoever that the blank book had something secretive hidden in it. But then, why was this book blank? Was it just some accessory? Who would put a blank book in a library?

Puzzled, Evie refused to believe that the book was nothing. She tried once again but the results were the same. She could not derive anything from all her flipping and digging.

Frustrated, Evie closed the book. She decided to return the book back to the shelf when she noticed something. What was this? Wait, blood?

Her eyes widened. Did someone touch the book with their bloody hand? Curiosity gripped her hard once again. She looked closely at the other books beside it and at the next layer, another book was seen also to be tainted with blood smears. It was not obvious at all, but due to Evie's meticulous and observant nature, she definitely would have noticed and picked up what was normally unnoticeable to others.

Evie was quick to grab the other book, opening it in haste in the hopes of seeing something interesting. But then again, the content of the book only served to dismay her even further. Granted, it was not a blank book like the earlier one, but there was nothing intriguing about the contents inside it. It was just another normal book.

She looked around again, not knowing what exactly she was looking for. But to her surprise, she found another book stained with blood, but this time at the lowest layer. She grabbed it and opened it. Still, she found nothing out of the ordinary.

Dismayed, Evie sighed. "What am I doing?" she murmured to herself.

Realizing that she was just being ridiculous, Evie decided to return all the books when her eyes caught another book stained with blood. This time the book was located in the centre of the shelf. Evie stared at it intently, not rushing to pull it off the rack. She told herself rationally that it was probably just a coincidence and would more likely than not be the same as the other books.

Probably someone injured had touched the books not realizing that they stained it with their blood. But Evie's curiosity won over and she reached out for it.

"This is the last," she muttered to herself firmly, as she pulled it out.

What followed the moment she pulled the fourth book out made her freeze in shock as she watched with widened eyes, the thick walls suddenly moving, silently and without notice. Oh, my!! A secret door?!!

Chapter 73 - Passage

Shock etched on Evie's face as she stared at the secret passage. Her mouth was literally hanging open. It was mind blowing to even think that vampires would also have the need to make secret passages. She never thought she could find something like this in a boring place like the library. It took her quite a while to calm her excitement get her bearings before she could gather up enough courage to slowly and carefully approached the dark eerie door.

"Where does this passage lead to?" she asked, whispering to herself. Her heartbeat for some reason was pounding loudly in her ears and she could tell it definitely was not because she was thrilled about going for an unexpected adventure into this secret passage which might be offering her. It was pure nervousness and a healthy dose of fear. And she did not exactly know why. Was she scared?

As Evie silently peeked inside, the pitch-black darkness that welcomed her sent shivers down her spine. She knew secret passages like this would most probably lead her on to nowhere pleasant. More often than not, they were like likened to pandora's box. Something pretty and interesting to look at, but a total disaster when opened.

Moreover, this secret passage was located in a vampire castle. Why would vampires even have things like this in their castle? What kind of hidden secrets lies ahead?

Though nervousness and fear still churned in her heart violently, her insatiable cat-like curiosity won over her once again and Evie went and grabbed a lamp that was conveniently sitting on a small table nearby. She rubbed her sweaty palms on her gown to dry them somewhat before gripping the handle of the lamp securely, making sure she did not accidentally drop it and cause a fire or worse, get discovered by other vampires.

Taking another deep and calming breath, she stepped past the door in the secret passageway. Evie suddenly gasped when the floor before her suddenly made a movement. A section of the stone floor dropped down, opening to reveal a hidden stairway that circled down into the depths. What was below that, she could not tell as it was too dark.

Staring at the dark and even eerier passage, Evie hesitated and swallowed uneasily. Her mind was torn as she was fighting to make a decision. She could tell in one glance that this was no ordinary passage. The passage door looked like it was indestructible. If one would be trapped inside, there was no way out. If she decided to go down to explore, there would be a slight chance that she might be trapped in there. And since no one knew of her clandestine trip, that might be a really unwise choice if she decides to go down. However, this kind of occurrence is so rare! There might not be other chances for her to explore a secret passageway by the vampires.

After mulling about it for quite a long while, she finally made up her mind. "Alright, alright... let's get myself back to my chambers. This place just reeks of bad news." Evie spoke out loud, trying to convince herself but her feet just would not move. Her gaze stayed fixated on the stairway and the

longer she stared at it the more she felt like something was pushing her...no, drawing on her heart to go ahead.

She was scared of the unknown. She knew the risks and the fact that something might happen to her while she was inside but why was her guts telling her to keep on going? Why was the fear not enough to deter her from going on or send her away?

Clenching her fists, Evie nodded resolutely as she firmed her resolve to go ahead. She walked back out of the secret passage and went towards the chairs near the library entrance. She then carefully removed her outer robe, folded it, and left it by the door. This could be a precautionary measure that she could take. She had the thought that this would inform anyone who would be looking for her that she was inside just in case the door closes behind her and she might end up being trapped inside.

After taking a couple of deep breaths, Evie approached the secret pathway and stairs and began to descend that dark path. Her heartbeat thumped loudly in her heart, her blood flow whooshing deafeningly ears. The darkness was heavy and thick, and the stairway seem to be endlessly circling down. Or was it because she was just slow? Just where was this stairway leading to?

Evie did not know why she kept insisting on continuing this seemingly useless undertaking. However, she could tell that there was something weird with this passage. It was unlike the secret passages that she used to explore in their castle back home. Passages were meant to lead to other parts of the castle or to a door at the back leading for escape purposes. But this one seemed to be heading deeper and deeper.

She was sure there was no escape route or door opening to the outside when the direction is going deeper into the earth. If that was the case, then what was this secret passageway created for? Could there be something that the vampires in this fortress had that needed to be kept from others? Or was there an extraordinary treasure that was hidden away from the imperial palace that they do not want the royals finding out about? She chuckled dryly at her own imagination running wild. Whatever it was, hopefully by following the path, it would finally reveal to her what was so secretive to the point it had to be hidden away so far beneath the ground in this frozen kingdom.

She could not remember and had long since lost count on how many flights of stairs she had travelled now and yet she still had not reached the bottom of this winding and infernal stairway. She kept telling herself 'one more flight and I'll turn back' but as she reached the next flight, she kept telling herself the same line over and over again. Somehow, she did not like that she was such a stubborn person. Why can't she just give up and turn back?

Lifting her lamp, Evie spun around, looking back up the way she came down. It would be another challenge to climb this endless stairway back up to the entrance in the library! And she was yet to even find a single interesting thing about this place! Did she just come here for exercise? The thought of that made her roll her eyes. That little devil at her shoulders whispered and taunted Evie and she turned around again.

She nibbled the insides of her lower lip and the next moment, she turned back forward and continued descending the never-ending stairway.

Her knees began to wobble as she braced her free hand against the wall which seemed to be made of stone. She was already feeling tired earlier. Now, she is just plain and straight up exhausted! Her

mind kept asking herself what in the heavens was she doing down here. But before she could give up, she finally caught sight of the end of this seemingly bottomless stairway.

Feeling excited from her findings and brave again at the sight of a new discovery, Evie slowed her pace. Anticipation started to grip her insides. The nervousness and fear she felt that was dissolved by her fight against herself along the way was slowly creeping back. What was waiting for her at the end of the stairway?

She gulped and wiped the sweat that was beading on her forehead. At long last, her feet landed on the ground.

Chapter 74 - Incandescent

Her lips parted at the sight that laid before her. A dungeon? What on earth?

The place was surprisingly very large that her lamp was not enough to light up the ceiling or the far end of whatever this place was.

And then, she suddenly stiffened. She had the prickling feeling that something or someone else was down here together with her. There was a living, breathing presence in this place. Something, no, someone was here.

Evie was frozen still. She could sense something dark. A shadowy coiled energy pulsating with quiet and deadly power was making her shiver violently.

She knew she should run before it was too late. But why did she suddenly pictured Gavriel's face in her mind? This quiet and dark power... why did it feel so familiar? That's right, she once felt something close to this same sensation towards Gavriel before. What she was feeling right now was far more intense, but it still strongly reminded her of Gavriel. Why was that so? This was getting so strange.

Suddenly, Evie remembered herself thinking earlier that Gavriel's men seemed to be lying about her husband's whereabouts. And she could not help but reason out that perhaps, this presence has something to do with her husband no matter how unlikely it seemed to be.

Steeling herself, Evie moved and walked ahead, very slowly. The dark energy kept getting thicker and more unbearable as she stepped forward. She fought for strength, fighting the fear that threaten to consume her by filling her mind with thoughts of Gavriel. She reminded herself that this place was still Dacia and that she would be safe here, like how he promised her.

She halted, choking back a startled squeak at the sight of a man's shadow sitting ahead of her. The inky darkness did not permit her to see him clearly with the meagre light of her lamp, but she could faintly make out a pair of incandescent eyes clearly in the darkness and they were looking straight at her.

Evie tried her very best not to scream out and crumble to the floor in fear. She gritted her teeth and stiffened her frame, forcing herself to stay upright and not show any outward panic. When she looked closely, those intense eyes were becoming more familiar to her with every second that passes. They were impossibly bright like Gavriel's but something in those bright eyes does not seem to belong to her husband.

She remembered seeing eyes like this before. Eyes such as these usually belong to deadly and heartless predators. And yet, that niggling feeling deep within her told her they felt the same as Gavriel's.

Evie did not know what to do. She was paralyzed by the indescribably fearsome presence coming from that unknown person whose scary looking eyes belong to. On the other hand, her heart was moving and aching for something. What was it? Why is it aching? She did not have the answers to it. The only way to figure out the answers was for her to step closer despite the warning bells blaring away in her mind.

She took one brave step forward and peeked at the person. However, the owner of those killer eyes remained still and unmoving. It reminded her of the dangerous stillness of a predator just before it attacked. Evie paused again, inwardly shaking her head, trying to clear away the residual terror.

Refusing to blink, Evie never took her eyes off those pair of incandescent eyes glowing in the darkness.

A little bit more and she would be able to see his face. Who was he? And what was he doing in this place? Why was his quiet power so terrifying? And most of all, why did he feel like her husband and yet feel like a different man?

Taking another step, Evie's hand shook as she lifted her lamp and the moment she saw his face, time seemed to screech into a halt. G-gavriel?!

Evie could not believe her eyes. The man was her husband. What was he doing all the way down here? What happened to him? And what is...

She could not even make a sound at the sight of something dark and ghostly that seemed to be wrapping itself around him.

How many times had she imagined during the past few days of what she would do the moment she saw him? She imagined herself jumping on him and hugging him as tight as she could and kissing his dearly beloved face all over. She even thought about scolding him for not showing up first and making her worry to death.

Yet now that she finally saw him, and was right before her, she was frozen to the spot, not knowing how to react. Her knees were trembling, and her lips felt numb to the point that she could not even utter a single word.

Fear had gripped her to her core. She never once thought she would ever feel this kind of fear towards him. Why? Was this man really her husband? But looking at his face, it was truly him in the flesh. Then why did he look like he was seeing through her? Could he not recognize her anymore?

The thought made her heart shiver. She must speak. She must call his name. Perhaps, that ghostly thing enveloping him had possessed him!

Evie forced herself to break free from the fear. But as she struggled, a sudden aggression and bloodlust punched through the ceiling.

Evie subconsciously stepped back as he finally moved and without warning, he lunged directly at her.

A life-sucking panic gripped Evie's entire being as she watched as a large dark shadow flew upwards menacingly. Then there was a blur of motion lunging through the air seeming to explode out of the darkness with such an impossible speed. She knew it was him and he was going to...

"Gavriel!!!"

Evie's scream ricocheted off the cold stone walls of the pitch black dungeon.

Chapter 75 - Unfamiliar

"Gavriel!!!" Evie screamed.

She did not know how she managed to even force out a reaction to make any sounds at that very moment. Fear had seemed to paralyze her body and mind and yet the name that came out of her lips before she even realized it, her instinctual response in calling out for help in times of danger, was still his. She remembered belatedly that it was the same response she gave too when the beast attacked her in that Little Forest back at his castle. Whenever she thought that she was in grave peril or felt as if the situation was one that she was going to die, it was Gavriel's name that her lips would call out.

Still hearing the echo of his name reverberating around her, Evie realized that she had fallen backwards and collapsed onto the ground.

She realized that nothing had touched her yet but the extreme force of what seemed to be an aura of bloodlust and deadly power had forced her to fall over on her own.

Gasping to steady her uneven breathing, Evie lifted her face, and she felt the world screeching to a halt and so did her ragged breathing. She was immobilized by the sight of him – of Gavriel just standing a foot away from her face.

Her husband towered over her, eyes blazing incandescently and his clothes... they were all blood stained. In her worry, she quickly scanned her eyes over his body, and it seemed as though almost all that blood covering his clothes did not belong to him, making her breathe out a tiny sigh of relief. However, her fear came rushing back as she remembered her own situation that was not looking that promising either. He did not carry the look of the breathtakingly gorgeous and regal prince anymore. His eyes were no longer red nor silvery. It was as if that those bright pair of moons had been swallowed up by the devil's very own blue flames of hell. At this moment, he looked and felt like the devil himself had become one with him.

As he looked down at her, those pair of devilish eyes regarded her with such an inhuman, soulless gaze that nearly shattered Evie's heart. She told herself this man was not her husband. The outer shell might look similar to him, but the part that matters – on the inside – is definitely not him! The Gavriel she knows, and loves would never look at her this way. But... he had somehow stopped when she had screamed out his name earlier. If he had not stopped in his tracks, it was highly probable that she would have been dead by now!

Evie swallowed nervously and fought to gather whatever strength and courage she had. Her lips trembled. She must call his name again in the hopes of waking him up from whatever that seemed to have possessed him.

"G-gav... riel... it's me. Your wife." she stammered as she peered deep in those flickering blue flames. Suddenly the corners of her eyes stung as she realized that she was wrong when she thought

she was seeing nothing of Gavriel at all as she looked into those incandescent eyes. Because despite of all the fearsome bloodlust and suffocating darkness that seemed to be possessing him currently, she could still see a glimpse recognition and shock deep within those unfamiliar eyes.

The fear and panic that had been bubbling over inside her began to subside, faster than she could have imagined. Even though there was no hint of change or reverting to his original self that was shown in his expression or aura at all.

Evie did not know why but she somehow suddenly felt the urge to reach out her hands and touch him, to hold him, to drive away whatever it was that was possessing him. Slowly but confidently, she reached out her hand but before her fingers could reach to brush against his face, the darkness and wildness in him rose to its full height, paralyzing Evie's body once again.

His growl rumbled out from his chest and then a single word was uttered with much difficulty. "Leave!!!" his voice sounded like death, making Evie's soul to shake in fear. He was driving her away. "Now!!!" that roar even shook the walls around them.

Something suddenly grabbed her arms, and she was suspended in the air. Eyes wide, Evie could only look at Gavriel as she was taken away from him. In that very short moment, she saw Gavriel pressing his palms against the sides of his head and then the darkness swallowed him.

Just before the secret door on the floor closed before her very eyes, Evie heard the echo of his bone-chilling roar that shook her heart violently once again.

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The moment Samuel emerged from the secret door with the princess in his arms, Zolan immediately closed the secret passage. All the five men, including the butler Elias were in the library, bodies utterly tense and faces were grimaced with apprehension. Elias looked worried to death.

When they saw Evie being carried out in Samuel's arms, alive and well, they looked as though they could not believe their eyes. They remained frozen, staring at her for a few seconds until Samuel slowly and carefully put Evie down on a nearby chair.

Elias and Zolan approached Evie as the butler frantically scanned Evie with his eyes from top to toe, especially paying attention to her neck area to check if she was bitten. To their surprise, there was no smell of blood from her at all. How was that possible? It was already a miracle she came out still alive and not a single hair out of place! How was it that nothing happened to her even when she went down there? How in the world... just what did she do?

Chapter 76 - Unintentional

Elias had bustled about serving Evie a cup of warm tea from a flask as Zolan draped a thick blanket over her shoulders to warm her up, obviously prepared for her as they found her outer gown having been discarded at the library door to indicate her presence there. After a long while and with the help of the warming tea and thick comforting blanket, Evie was breathing fine again. However, she was still dazed from the earlier encounter and attempting to get control of herself, in trying to make sense of all the things she had seen and everything that had happened. Her hands were still shaking lightly but her mind was clearer now.

When she finally lifted her face to look at the men who were surrounding her, Elias knelt before her. His face showed how worried he was over her condition. "Are you alright now, My Lady? Is there

anything that I can get for you? Are you hurting anywhere?" he fussed about her like a mother hen and Evie could tell just how much the butler had feared for her. She looked at the other men and even though they looked calm and collected, she could tell they were all worried as well. Evie gave a small gentle smile as she looked around at the men.

Finally letting out a deep sigh, Evie tried her best to collect herself, even though it felt impossible. After all, this was related to her husband – which she truly thought was injured on a secret mission out there somewhere – who now suddenly was found within the depths of a secret passageway hidden beneath the library! She was bursting with questions inside despite the shock and fright that she had just recently experienced.

"Gavriel... he's down there, in that dark and dreary dungeon. Alone." she managed to say. And her heart suddenly started to ache at the mention of the word 'dungeon'. She suddenly remembered what Elias had told her on how during his childhood, Gavriel had grown up hiding away in a dungeon as well – perhaps not unlike this one? – and the pain in her heart grew to an unbearable measure. Refusing to shed tears for now, Evie took a few more deep breaths. This was not the time to cry. She needed to be strong and find out on what was going on with her husband and his men! Why the deception and lies?

"Tell me, what's going on? Why..." her voice shook and then she paused and composed herself again. "Why is he down there? Please... answer me."

The men looked at each other. There seemed to be a message being conveyed between them that she could not seem to follow nor understand. But as Evie looked at them with pleading eyes, the men shifted their gazes to one man, and it was towards the braided blond, Zolan. The other men all looked like they were giving the final decision to Zolan.

Letting out a sigh, Zolan sat across Evie. "You really terrified us, Princess." He started out with this statement. Evie could see a trace of anger in his expression. "We wouldn't be able to face His Highness if something bad did really happen to you. You could have..." he paused and sighed again. "How did you even find out about the –"

"It was unintentional. I was browsing and just so happened I noticed traces of blood on the books and got curious." She cut him off with a matter-of-fact explanation.

"I see. So, this is all because of my recklessness, huh –"

"No. You're not to blame for any of this Zolan. I was the one who made the decision to enter through the secret door."

A short silence reigned amongst them. All the men had the same thought. They would never had expected for this small and fragile-looking human girl to be so brave. How could a defenceless woman simply enter into an uncharted and unknown territory, one so dark and dangerous, just like that? They truly wondered how brave was this princess. It seemed like she was not afraid to die at all! Which they knew was not the case because they could see how terrified she was when she was brought out by Samuel earlier.

"Gavriel..." Evie broke the silence as her gaze fell on her hands clasped lightly together on her lap. "He's not himself."

Staring at her still slightly trembling hands, Zolan made a decision. Apart from the shock that she was still alive and unharmed, Zolan was surprised that she was still asking about His Highness. She

was obviously terrified with what she had seen. And they all understood very well why because even they had gone through a similar kind of primal fear the first and the next couple of times that they had witnessed their master in that state. How much more terrifying was it for this human woman?

They had thought she would have ran away screaming all the way back to her room and locked herself up like a child who had seen something impossibly daunting. They thought she would not be able to speak at all today and needed time to sort herself out.

But here she was, already asking questions and despite her fear, the worried and pinched look on her face was all for the prince.

It was very hard for them to figure her out. It was obvious that the current condition their prince is in had scared her to her core and no one would blame her if she began to see her husband as nothing but a terrifying creature – a monster. She was terrified of him but at the same time worried for him?

"His eyes..." Evie continued. "I think there is something wrong with him." she lifted her gaze and looked at Zolan.

And at that moment, the man had finally decided to spill the truth. He told her about what happened after the war, and how that the prince was poisoned and that was why he was inside the dungeon now.

Evie's hands flew to her mouth, looking at Zolan with wide eyes. "Then... why... if he's poisoned. Why did you guys put him in the dungeon?!"

Chapter 77 - Way

"Calm down, Princess. Like I said, you don't have to worry too much because the poison really won't kill him. We have to put him inside the dungeon because the poison triggers something dangerous in him." Zolan explained. "You have seen it right? The colour of his eyes has changed. When his eyes turn that way, His Highness will lose himself. He would crave for blood. If he were in the midst of a battle, he would easily slaughter the enemies on his own no matter how many there are. Thankfully, he could somehow recognize allies from foes even if he could not recognize the individual person anymore. He'd be very useful during war when he's like that but if there is nothing for him to kill, it would be very hard on him."

Disbelief and shock coloured Evie's eyes. "What... do you mean it'd be very hard for him?" she asked.

Zolan looked like he was deciding whether or not to tell her more about this. He did not want her to get scared of her husband more than this. In the end, he chose not to speak more about it.

"When we were going through in our journey in the Crescent Land, His Highness used to just go on a rampage and kill as many beasts as possible until he was satisfied. After that, the side effect of the poison would slowly subside, and he would eventually return to his normal state. It was too late for us to bring him anywhere else in the forbidden land, so naturally our only choice was to put him in the dungeon. We are also trying to keep this a secret, so we truly did not have much of a choice. This isn't the first time we had to put him down there so I can assure you My Lady, that he'll be just fine once the poison runs its cycle and he comes out. Please be patient for another two more days and he'll be back, safe and sound to his normal self."

Evie shook her head. The thought that Gavriel had been inside that dark place all alone for the last three days and needing to spend another two more days down there caused her heart to squeeze in pain.

"Earlier when Samuel took me away, I saw him pressing his hands onto his head as if... as if he's in a lot of pain. Then I heard..." Evie swallowed, holding back her tears. "I heard him roared in pain."

Zolan and everyone looked utterly doomed. He leaned back and glanced at Samuel for a moment.

"I don't think he's alright. He's not fine at all. And you're telling me to wait here for two more days?"

"Princess... that was..." Zolan hesitated but in the end, he sighed out loud as he gave in and looked deeply in Evie's eyes. "That is what happens when His Highness tries to stop himself and fights against his killing instincts when he's in that state. This only happened once before because it was very rare for His Highness to be able to stop himself. But back then, he suffered with pain and then afterwards, his body weakened. It's not permanent but he'd become quite vulnerable for a few days. His Highness could withstand the pain of course, but the weakness is what he cannot afford especially during this time. That's why being confined in the dungeon is the best move."

"But he had already... stopped himself. He launched himself at me and I screamed out his name and he stopped." Evie said, her panic returning. She was fearful that her interference might have caused more damage to Gavriel.

The men all looked at each other quite speechless. Not expecting that all she did was scream out his name and he had actually stopped his actions. That was unbelievable. They knew that no one able to make him stop before, apart from the late empress. But even the late empress had had a hard time back then and yet, all this woman did was scream out his name?

"He's already in pain. Meaning he's weakened now." Evie stood. "He needs help. We can't let him stay there alone. I'll go... I'll go get him. I can't let him stay there all alone." She was desperate to get to Gavriel and help him whatever way she could. She cannot stand seeing him suffer alone and in such conditions any longer.

"Wait, My Lady. Please. We are still not certain if His Highness is weakened now. And even if he did, it's best for you not to go. He's still dangerous for you even if he's weakened. And he's quite starved right now so we cannot allow you to go back."

"Are you saying we'll just stay here while he suffers down there alone?!" Evie burst out in indignation when Samuel butted in.

"Don't worry, My Lady. There's a way to help him."

"What way? What is it?"

"All we need is to find a virgin human girl rig —" Reed was the one who replied. He stopped as the others glared at him, but it was too late.

"What do you mean? Why do you need to find a virgin... human... girl?" Evie's emotions flared. It was not too long ago that they had just resolved the issue with his ministers pushing the vampire noble ladies onto him. Now there is another plot involving a woman? Again? "Answer me. Please. Don't hide anything anymore." Her voice was suddenly cold, commanding, and powerful, fitting of a queen.

Wishing that he could strangle Reed to death at the moment, Zolan silently prayed for patience. Raking his hand through his hair, Zolan could only answer Evie's demands. "Back then, the empress sought for a way to quickly bring back His Highness strength because the empress feared that the enemy would attack and kill him when he was still in his vulnerable state. That time, His Highness was also set to appear in front of the public, so the empress did everything she could to ensure nothing would go wrong. The only thing that worked was a pure blood of a human girl."

Hearing that, Evie just gave a single small nod of her head. There was no change in her facial expressions and the men wondered how she would take this news.

"Alright. You don't need to go and find someone. I'll go." Evie said without any hesitation.

Chapter 78 - Choice

"No, Princess!" Three of the men shouted simultaneously. "That will not do! You can't possibly do that!" Their eyes were bulging out of their sockets, totally shaken at the sudden statement that the princess had made. Just the mere thought of what Evie just said earlier caused another round of shivers to wreck through their bodies. No! They absolutely must not let it happen.

Pressing his fingers to his already throbbing temples, Zolan stood and blocked Evie's way. "We can never let you do that. Wait here, My Lady. Levy and Luc will definitely be able to find and bring a human girl here before midnight."

Evie shook her head. "That's still half a day away, Zolan. That means it is another half a day that Gavriel need to suffer... It's alright. I can handle it –" she looked up at Zolan and smiled reassuringly.

"No. Please. His Highness will never forgive himself if he accidentally kills you in the process." Zolan needed to use whatever angle he could to stop this. "Not to mention how he'd not forgive us for allowing you to do this. We're literally dead if you go ahead." Zolan inwardly muttered to himself, hoping that the princess would just be obedient and comply.

"He will never kill me." She grinned up at him, that posture and statement showed her confidence in her husband.

"Princess! He ended up killing the human girl the empress brought to him the last time." Zolan blurted out in a solemn tone and Evie froze. "You don't know how much he had loathed himself because of that. That girl was the very first and only human he killed."

The shock made Evie unable to say a word for a long while. "Then why –"

"We don't have a choice, Princess. We cannot let him continue on in that state for long. We don't know how long it will take for him to recover this time around. But back then, he was still weak even after five days until he drunk a human's pure blood. Even five more days is too long. We don't know if Caius will suddenly return. He might even return tomorrow with more of his troops. We can't afford to waste time in this urgent situation. Moreover, we cannot reveal anything to the duke and anyone else apart from all of us here. The duke's already getting mad looking for him just like you are." Zolan then nodded to towards Samuel and Reed when Evie spoke.

"Wait." She put up her hand to stall the men. Evie did not know why but their decision just somehow does not sit quite right with her even though in her mind, she understood their point very

well. But what nagged at her was the aftereffects. What would happen to Gavriel if he found out afterwards that he had killed and spilt the blood of another innocent human again?

Evie could not explain it properly, but she definitely did not want something like that happening. It is not just because of the innocent life that would be lost but more importantly to her, it is due to Gavriel. Gavriel was never a monster – had never been one. He had always cared for her, never hurting her even once. He had been nothing but kind and caring to her ever since they first met. She just knew that he might never forgive himself when he killed an innocent person even if it was against his will or when he has no control over it. He had loathed himself in the past when that happened. How would it impact him this time if he were to realise that he had done the same thing ... again?

The thought of putting Gavriel through that just served to make Evie shiver. Her heart already ached for him and it was getting worse. She knew what was at stake currently with the situation between the two opposing sides and she also remembered her dream, which was for the time being, pushed to the back of her mind. That vision of how Dacia was going up in flames. The fear crept back and began to grip her heart. What if that actually happened because Gavriel was in his current predicament? Then would this be her fault ultimately? She should not have gone down into the dungeon!

At that same moment, Evie also remembered the dream she just had a few hours ago. She had heard him call out her name as if he needed her to be there. That particular recollection calmed her a little. There must be a reason why she had that dream. But what was it? Why did she have that dream? Could it be that it was related to something that she could do?

"You don't need to go anymore." Evie suddenly said in a commanding tone, causing the men to frown. "I'm not going to let him loath himself for killing someone innocent again." She added and confusion filled everyone's eyes.

She stood up, took a deep breath, and squared her shoulders as she smiled at them. "I'll go. I believe I'm the one he needs right now, not some random human girl. I'm his wife after all."

Everyone was mesmerized by that smile and the confidence and determination blazing in those clear amber eyes.

"Do not worry, Gavriel will never hurt me. I can assure you of that. He must have killed that girl because he was unable to stop himself from sucking her dry. I'll be able to stop him before something happens to me." Everyone blinked seeing her exhibit such resolution in the face of imminent death.

No one could even make a sound. They were like deer caught in the headlights and speechless as can be. Not just because of what she was saying but also with her certainty and faith in their prince. That she could make it work.

"I believe in him. And I know you all believe in him too." She looked at the direction of the secret door and her eyes glimmered. There were no more traces of her fear. "So please open the door and let me go see him. I will bring my husband back. Trust me,."

Chapter 79 - Vulnerable

The men looked at each other. Everyone once again left the decision to the brain of their group. Zolan was sincerely torn. The plan about sending Levy and Luc was actually risky and would

probably take a longer time. There were many humans in the capital but was there still a pure young girl out there? He was aware about the fact that virgin humans in this empire – especially young girls – were treated as rare diamonds. A highly sought-after commodity, greatly valued. Everyone wanted to have the first bite and taste of a virgin's blood. So, they were mentally prepared that it might take a long time for them to find one. And there is always that possibility that if they could not find one and the enemy returns...

Zolan looked at Evie again and he was unable to say a word to discourage her or even question her will. How could she be so sure? Moreover, when did she even become like this? They were all aware about the fact that she was yet to give herself to the prince. So how come she was acting like this now? Wait... could it be that she had finally fallen in love with the prince?

This realization made Zolan bite his lips. How could he miss this? He had kind of suspected this a few days ago. But now it was crystal clear. Her actions right now said a lot. The fact that she still wanted to help him after all that she saw also means only one thing. She cares deeply for him despite everything she knows and had seen.

This was probably the hardest decision he would ever make. If she dies in the prince's hand, they would be doomed. But... he had witnessed it himself, how the prince looked when he stared at the lifeless girl at his feet... and then the risk of the war...

"Fine." Zolan sighed heavily and walked towards the shelf himself, shocking the others and making Evie smile. "Do what you have to do, Princess." He added and the secret door opened.

"I will. Thank you." She said without any hint of doubt in her voice.

"I think I should go with you, Your Highness." Samuel spoke up.

Evie looked at him and was about to shake her head when she remembered the endless steps she had to travel to reach Gavriel. Her knees had weakened from all that walking, and it seems she was still tired from that exercise, so she refrained from rejecting the offer. In fact, she was thankful for the offer of help she would be gaining.

"He's right, Princess. Samuel must go with you." They agreed and thus Evie and Samuel entered the secret door. She had asked for another lamp and the men gave her one.

The men watched, a little tensed, until the two disappeared.

As Evie held onto Samuel, she took a few deep breaths. The vampire was incredibly slow this time compared to his impossible speed when he took her away.

The pitch darkness had slowly made Evie's heart start beating louder. She was relieved that there were no sounds of Gavriel's roar anymore.

It did not take long for them to descend to the bottom and Samuel halted at the end of the stairway. Evie looked over and nodded at him. Using hand signals, she urged him to stay hidden while she went on ahead and approached Gavriel slowly and cautiously.

The man nodded obediently. His gaze was worried but at the same time hopeful. And that made Evie feel even more determined to succeed in her attempt. Her amber eyes glimmered against the light of the lamp when she looked straight into the darkness ahead. The lamp she had left behind earlier... did he smash it?

Evie drew in a deep breath and calmed herself. She took a silent step towards the spot where she had seen him last. She had vowed in her heart that she would find a way to help him. Somehow. She must!

As she drew closer, the pace of her heartbeat quickened. But she realised that she was not fearful as before. She could still feel the same ominous presence filling the space but the effects that it had on her this time around was not the same anymore.

The moment she laid her eyes on him, slumped and slouching over on the ground with his head bowed down in a defeated position, a fierce protectiveness surged within and tightened her chest. This man had never showed any outward displays of weakness to her before. He had always been that almighty prince who was constantly regal and powerful even when he was tired or playing at being naughty.

Since the first time she saw him, she never thought she would one day see him in this state – being so vulnerable. Her urge to sprint over and throw herself onto him, to touch him and hold him in her arms and keep him enveloped in her embrace intensified that it surprised even herself.

Taking yet another deep breath, Evie continued on, very carefully. She was a little worried that any sudden movement on her part might startle the quiet and still man before her.

However, before she could reach him, a low growl echoed from deep within his chest. He then lifted his face and slightly turned it to where she was. The intense blue flames glowed in his eyes as he peeked through his dishevelled hair. Surprisingly, it was not bloodlust that Evie sensed pouring out from him right now. It was insane, uncontrollable hunger. HUNGER?!

"Gav..." Evie could not help but feel a wave of dread sweep through her, causing her heart to shake a little. But she fought the jerk reaction of turning tail and running away. She fought as hard as she could. Nothing about this man should cause this suffocating dread. This man was the same man who had cared for her since he married her.

"Gavriel... It's me. Evie." Her gentle voice echoed, coaxing and very careful. "I'm here to help you... you can recognize me, right? I –"

Evie could not even finish her words as she was suddenly yanked forward and before she knew it, Gavriel's hands were clutching her upper arms – like a drowning man grabbing onto a lifeline – his fangs bared as he was about to bury them in her very tempting neck.

Chapter 80 - Thirst

Evie could feel a sudden puff of air brush past the tender skin of her neck. Then there were a few short snuffles as a nose nuzzled against her neck as her scent was being deeply drawn in. Terror was a logical reaction Evie should feel first and foremost at this point. A normal human would scream and trash about with mind-numbing fear. No one would blame her if she had gone down this route. She had imagined doing these exact things every time she thought of the possibility when a vampire would one day try to suck her blood. She remembered it was the biggest fear every human girl had back in the human empire. And she was not an exception – until now.

However, the funny thing that is happening is, now that she is about to experience it in reality, Evie did neither of the actions she had imagined she would do. She did not trash about in the hopes to escape him nor did she scream in terror at the top of her lungs asking for help.

She would not deny that her heart had stopped for a moment due to the shock she had received. And yes, there was a little fear too. But the first thing that come tumbling out of her lips was still his name.

"Gavriel!" she called out right in his ear. She took this great opportunity since he was already sticking his face right into her neck, effectively planting his ears nearby where she just needed to turn a little to be able to directly speak into his ears. Of course, the thought of her making the first move to step closer to him when he is in this condition did give her some pause. Thus, this is one opening that she would not waste! She made sure to call his name clearly even though with a gentle tone, making sure he would hear her this time and he went rigid after hearing her voice.

Evie felt like her heart restarted again when he stopped at the very last moment. "W-wait..." her voice shook at the feel of his icy cold breath on her skin. His body was as cold as ice again like that one time.

She raised both her hands and tenderly cupped his face, at the same time pulling her face away to look at him. As soon as her gaze met his, Evie gasped at the fiery blue flames that were surging intensely within his eyes. Up close, they were enthralling and mind-numbingly mesmerizing but still giving off a terrifying feel all at the same time. The insatiable hunger reigned in them.

Evie could not help but feel her heartbeat pick up speed just within that few seconds of staring into his entrancing eyes. She did wonder if this reaction was due to only fear or was it that fatal attraction that she had towards her ever so strikingly handsome husband of hers, or perhaps a mix of both.

Keeping her eyes on his and quietly observing, his eyes told Evie that her life had just been saved by her calling his name. If she had not called out his name right at that moment... she shuddered at the thought on what was probably the end result right now. No! She shook her head. Gavriel will never do that. She has to continue to have that faith in him.

Giving her head a small shake again to focus on him, Evie swallowed hard and regained her composure. She could see him also fighting over for control over himself and she knew he somehow recognized her, though barely.

"Gavriel..." his name rolled from her tongue so delicately and lovingly as her fingers softly caressed his face. Despite the blood smears streaking all over his face and having the look of the most terrifying predator right now, he was still the most beautiful creature she had ever seen in her entire life. It was unbelievable how this man could look both terrifying yet beautiful at the same time. "You can see me, right? It's me, Evie." She added as she searched his eyes, hoping against all odds that he would recognize her as his wife.

She must try to ensure as best as possible that he would at least show some recognition that it was her before letting him bite her.

As Evie continue to carefully observe his physical conditions and how he behaved, she could not actually tell if he was in pain. She immediately remembered what Zolan had said earlier, where he could bear the pain and now, she realized rather belatedly that the pain must have been overshadowed by his extreme thirst – for blood.

He let out a long, agonized groan and her heart clenched in sympathy. His jaw muscles were working – clenching and gritting down hard on his bared fangs.

His hands flew to her wrists and he gripped them. He had indeed been weakened. He was still strong but probably his strength right now was the same as the strength of a human man and not one of a vampire. That was why in her perception, he was still strong but in the eyes of the vampires, he was considerably weak.

Yanking her hands away, Gavriel pushed her off him and he scrambled, weakly rising to his feet, and walking away from her like a drunken man. Evie was initially astonished at his actions and was frozen to the spot for a few seconds, hands still up in the air where Gavriel had pushed them off.

However, as she considered his reactions, it only made Evie more certain that he had already recognized her. He knew who she was and that was why he took the action of moving away from her. She knew it was only because he did not want to accidentally hurt her in the case of him losing his mind.

Her heart swelled with joy but also ached at the same time after perceiving this matter. But there was no way she was going to let him go away, not now when she knew. She must make him bite her and draw her blood in order to regain his strength. That way, she could finally take him out of this dark, desolate place. She can not bear having him stay in this place any longer.

Quickly, Evie got up, jumped on him, and hugged him tightly from behind, causing him to freeze up and turn into a living statue.