

SPELLBOUND 221

Chapter 221 - Not Too Much

Leon looked at Evie.

For some reason, the look in Leon's eyes made Evie smile to herself. It was obvious to her that Leon wanted her to just let Zanya join them without the need to show off her skills. And Evie knew it was not due to Leon being afraid. It was just that he was extremely reluctant, and Evie found him quite adorable at the moment. Even though his expression did not show anything at all, Evie could tell from the extra stiff set of his shoulders and how he was standing so still where he was.

"I believe this is for the best, too." Zolan suddenly spoke up. "It's best for us to know what she is capable of. That would be good for us to know when and how to aid and protect her once we're outside of the Middle Land. So go ahead Leon." All the other men agreed. After all, they all knew just how dangerous the next part of this journey they were going to embark on.

They still have the princess to protect so having a powerless fae tagging along with them would be another extra person they need to look out for. She would be as good as a human after all without her magic. It was not that they were selfish in not wanting to protect another person, or that they were thinking that she was an additional burden. It was just that they were very clear on their responsibilities where the safety and well-being of the princess was always to be their main and utmost priority. That was what their prince had entrusted to them, and they knew how much Prince Gavriel loves the princess. Therefore, if another person were to tag along and end up being the one factor to cause them to slack on their protection of the princess because they need to split their attention, then it would be better off that the fae did not follow them at all.

When Leon looked over at Evie again, she just nodded and smiled at him. Thus, the man understood the princess' stand on it and reluctantly stood up. He then gave a little bow to Zanya before swinging his arms towards the main doors in a gesture for her to precede him in walking out to commence their sparring.

They then headed out of the castle where Leon and Zanya stood, facing each other in the middle of a spacious and dark courtyard while Evie and the other vampires stood at the front of the castle's door. All of them were somewhat excited to see what Zanya was capable of doing when facing an opponent such as Leon without the use of any magic whatsoever. The question that was on all their minds were could she even run from Leon, much less respond with an attack.

Zanya started to block off her magic until it was completely sealed from her own usage. White lights began to gather around her body as she stretched her arms out before her as she slowly closed her eyes.

Her lips were moving rapidly, and it seemed as though she were chanting a whole slew of spells just under her breath. Then the lights gathered right in front of her before submerging into her chest. She moved her palms to her chest as well and the moment they were on her chest, the light disappeared completely, as if she had locked them all within her.

And just like what she had said, Zanya's hair turned ashen. Her pointed ears rounded and turned into human ears as well. And she was no longer shining like a translucent creature. She had truly become just like the princess. Only that her hair was a few shades darker than the princess'. Her eyes had dimmed as well and became a very dark green.

"That's cool. There's almost no sign that she is a fae anymore!" Luc commented, through telepathy.

"But she's still very beautiful, I must say. A very beautiful human." Followed Levy's comment.

"I guess no one would even think that she was anything other than a plain human female." Zolan said, "I cannot feel that peculiar aura resonating from her anymore. It's amazing she could really hide all her magic. There is not even the slightest hint of her being one of the fae people."

"Now the question is if her combat skills will be enough." The big man Samuel added in his thoughts as well. The man definitely understood that they cannot bring along anyone that could become a weak point for their group. As much as possible, their attention should be fully focused on the princess' safety alone. What they will witness right now will make Samuel decide whether it was better for them to take her with them or not. "Since she's basically a human, she must at least be at par with Leon to be able to stand a chance when she's going to face a vampire."

"Whew! That's too much, don't you think, leader?" Levy winced. Leon's skill even beat Reed's so how could he expect the lady to be at least of the same level with a half-blood's skills?

"It's not too much," Samuel insisted with a serious face, "we don't know what's waiting for us outside of the Middle Land. We can only prepare ourselves for the worse. And one of the worst possibilities is that we might not be able to always be there to rescue her during every battle that we encounter. More importantly is especially if the princess' life is in danger. That time, we can only focus on the princess and might even have to abandon her instead of using our efforts to rescue her."

"Samuel is right." Zolan agreed, his eyes fixed on Zanya now. "She is an important ally to us but outside of the Middle Land, if she's not capable enough, she could even be a burden to us. We must not forget that we can't be distracted from our most important job and that's to protect the princess. We can't afford to split our attention once we are out of the Middle Land. Especially when we are dealing with the danger of the Dark Fae. We know that it is no trifling matter. The princess' life is at stake here."

Chapter 222 - Passed

The others could only solemnly nod in agreement. Even Levy shut his mouth as he realized that it was not as easy and as straightforward as he had initially thought. He could only agree that if Zanya could not prove herself to be capable enough, it would be better if she just stayed put in this place as it would no doubt be safe for her and patiently wait and pray for the princess' safe and victorious return.

At that moment, the fight finally started.

Zanya was the first to attack. She was faster than what the vampires had thought she would be. But Leon easily blocked her attack with a single counter.

Zanya kicked off the ground with a puff of dirt and literally zipped over to Leon like a bullet. As she approached Leon, she extended her legs and kicked him square in the chest before immediately flipping in the air and landing on the ground in a such a graceful manner. Despite not using any magic, it appeared that Zanya's body was very light. Her movements were extremely fluid as well.

However, what she showed so far was yet to impress the vampires, much less Leon.

"Why are you not attacking?" Zanya said, her eyes intense as she glared at Leon. "If you're holding back because I'm a woman or because I have no magic, then quit it. That's the same as looking down on me."

Leon's purple eyes twitched a little and then he sighed heavily. He looked up at Evie and others then towards Zanya again.

"I'm not looking down on you." He said and then his eyes turned red.

Zanya swallowed and her instincts made her magic threaten to come bursting out in self-defence. Thankfully, she was fully in control. She realized that it was the first time any of these vampires turned their eyes red, and Zanya could not help but have a flash back on the vampires in the past.

"Get ready," Leon warned, "I'm coming at you for real."

"Bring it on." She challenged. Her eyes fixed intensely on Leon's red eyes. And before she knew it, they were clashing against one another. He was strong but she was fast. And at that moment, because of those red blazing eyes Zanya had hated in the past, she fought Leon like she was fighting an enemy.

Leon immediately felt the change in her, so he began to be truly serious. She was fighting for real this time and Leon was glad. He could tell, she had already envisioned him as her enemy.

Zanya again flew towards Leon as before. As Leon prepared himself to counter her high kick as before, Zanya then kicked out her leg. However, before her leg hit his forearm, she pulled back and spun around. Leon then realised it was a feint! But he could not pull back his arm fast enough before she flipped over his head and kicked him right in the back. Leon stumbled forward a few steps. The corner of his lips curved up a little. He had to admit that she was really fast in her movements. Zanya then proceeded to zip around Leon and used her legs to her advantage in kicking him in his stomach, the back of his knees, and the sides of his head. Though all those attacks were blocked, Zanya continued attacking with vicious swings of her sword whenever she found an opening in his attacks. Of course, Leon didn't stop attacking as well. However, as Zanya's responses were very quick, she could minimise his attacking power by kicking or pushing back whenever his blows almost landed on her body. That way, the impact on her was reduced significantly.

"Amazing," Evie exclaimed, watching the incredible match. Zanya was really very fast. It was like a match between a lion and a tiger. "I can't believe Zanya is this good!"

"Well, she has already passed in my opinion." Zolan agreed and then the men looked at Samuel. The big man was yet to decide. Well, they already know that Samuel was always the hardest to impress among the rest of them.

The fight continued, until Zanya's sword was thrown off her hands. Leon's sword was aimed right at her throat as he immobilized her, standing right behind her.

The men and Evie clapped their hands. And Leon put down his sword.

Zanya on the other hand looked quite worried. She was very confident with her skills, but she could not believe this Leon was this good. She had fought countless of men in the past, she even fought against dark faes but this man was still better than them. She could not remember vampires being so good in sword fight. She remembered the vampires in the past being just fast and strong. But this

man was obviously very intelligent too. It was as if he already knew her next move before she could even carry the move out!

Biting hard on her lips, Zanya could not help but grit her teeth. This was the first time she lost this quickly and badly in a sword fight.

Suddenly, Leon spoke from behind her, "You did very well." He said in a whisper, and Zanya froze for a moment realizing that he had just whispered very closely on her ear.

He backed away immediately and released her as Zanya turned to look at him suspiciously. He was already facing the princess and the other vampires.

"I believe she can survive outside of the Middle Land." He said to the princess and Zanya was once again surprised. She honestly thought that she had failed. Her eyes fell on Leon, never suspecting that he would speak up for her.

"I also believe she'd be fine, right Samuel?" Evie seconded as she looked behind her, towards Samuel. The big man blinked at the princess' expectant look, and he could only nod.

"Yes Princess." The man said and Evie happily approached Zanya and held her hands. "You're going to come with us, Zanya!" she then grinned at Zanya, satisfied with the outcome of the sparring match.

Chapter 223 - Wait For Me

Evie was all ready and waiting at the bridge even before daybreak. Though she knew she could continue summoning the dragons and training them as she and her men travelled along, she had still wanted to get one more chance in her dragon training before they leave this place. She then called upon the seventh dragon and as soon as it landed before her, Evie was a bit surprised by its size. This dragon was definitely the largest among the weyr of the young dragons.

In fact, it was even a little bigger than the green-eyed dragon the dark fae had summoned back in the battle at Dacria.

When she saw that it was another male, Evie pressed her lips together tightly as she approached it. She quietly caressed the dragon's snout and then she stared at its spikes. The hues at the edges of the dragon's spikes were almost the same as the colour of Evie's silken hair and despite her disappointment that this dragon was another male, Evie smiled. She was determined this time to just give her best and not stress out no matter what the outcome will be with this last dragon.

"Silver," she said and then she caressed the dragon again. She did not seek to rush through this last training, and she was much calmer than the days before. "Alright, bear with me, okay? Silver?" Evie whispered while she still stroked the dragon's snout. Then taking her time, she climbed up and rode on the dragon's back.

In the sky, Evie simply sat on Silver's back and enjoyed the flight as he flew around, circling the immediate area as how the other dragons did as well. She silently watched from her high viewpoint, the castle as the daybreak arrived. Looking down, she was awed at the sight below her and at how vast and large this castle was. She realized now on how she was much too focused on her task on trying to control the dragons that she did not even take the time to look at this magnificent view below her.

At that moment, she began to envision how this castle would look like once it is back to its former glory. She could already tell what a magnificent sight it would be for all who laid eyes on it.

Leisurely, Evie just let the dragon continue flying with her on its back, for a long while. Before she even realised it, she was already enjoying the ride. She smirked at herself as this was the first time that she felt herself enjoying this part of the training after so many attempts with the other dragons in the past days.

Calmer than ever, Evie closed her eyes, and she began to communicate with the dragon with her mind. She did not try to command it this time. Instead, she spoke to the dragon in a very friendly way. And because she had been so relaxed and had treated the flight as a ride rather than a training session, her 'tone' of voice in her mind as she 'spoke' to the dragon was calm, warm and without the strain that was present in the previous times she had 'spoken' to the other dragons.

"Do you think you could breathe out fire like what I am trying to show you in my mind, Silver?" she asked as she calmly envisioned the dragon breathing out a stream of fire towards the sky.

To her surprise, she felt the dragon 'nod' in agreement, and he responded by doing exactly as Evie pictured in her mind's eye. Evie was stunned as she never would have thought the dragon would listen. Though she had asked, she was more prepared to be rejected in the request that she had made of Silver. She then asked Silver to breathe out fire again and when the dragon acceded to her request, Evie gasped in stunned surprise, her heart racing with joy. She was beyond thrilled now! She could not dare believe that the dragon actually listened to her requests! And of all times for her to succeed, it was to be on the last try with the last dragon. And to top it off, it was a male!

With a wide smile plastered on her face, Evie looked down at her comrades below and waved at them excitedly, not able to wipe that grin off her face. Evie then spent the entire morning training with Silver.

Once Evie was satisfied, she gave the cue to Silver, and he executed a perfectly smooth landing on the bridge and Zanya and her men were all smiles as well as they congratulated Evie on her job well done. Zanya had the highest praise for the princess as she understood the best on how hard it was to actually call for a dragon the first time and getting it to respond and obey you. On top of that, the princess managed to tame a male dragon on her first try with it. To Zanya, it was truly an impossible feat to achieve such results, thus, she was overjoyed for Evie as well.

This was the brightest smile their princess had shown for a long while now. They could tell she was truly happy that Silver had not only responded but gone on to obey every single one of her commands.

It was already afternoon when everyone had packed up and were finally out of the castle. Zanya was the last to come out as she went back to the throne hall for a while, stating there was something she needed to do before leaving.

After shutting the massive gates closed, Evie stood before those very gates and stared at them for a moment. Her eyes were gleaming with strong emotions as a small smile crept across her lips after she took a deep breath.

"I'm definitely coming back to this place." She promised to herself inwardly, "Wait for me."

A long and deep sigh escaped her lips and she finally turned towards her comrades who were waiting patiently for her. Another deep breath and then she finally moved forward.

Chapter 224 - Finally Going Back

As they walked along the bridge, Evie suddenly halted. She turned around for one last look of the grand view, committing it to mind and heart, before resolutely turning to the opposite way and walked on without turning back anymore. Evie and her men – plus a new companion – finally left.

When they arrived at the foot of the hill, Evie was surprised that Onyx was still waiting there, crouching at the very same spot where they had left him so many days ago. Seeing the large ebony dragon, Evie did not know why but she suddenly had the urge to run up to him and give him a hug.

However, Evie opted to approach him with measured steps and Onyx opened its large amber eyes to look steadily at her. Then Evie reached out her hand and touched his snout. Her face softened and her eyes turned gentle even as she flashed him a slight smile.

"Why are you waiting here?" Evie asked as she continued caressing the dragon. "You didn't even move from this spot like a good boy, and yet you didn't respond to my call when I called out for you?"

Evie nearly pouted as she said those words. She had truly wanted Onyx to respond to her call. This one dragon just seemed to be so special to her. She did not know if it was because she was his master's descendant but... she just felt a close bond with Onyx that was clearly not there when she was with the other dragons – even with Crimson and Silver who both responded fully to her commands.

"I really want to know why you weren't responding to my call a few days ago... but I don't have much time right now. I need to go." Evie said slowly and clearly, as if explaining to a little boy. The dragon did not make a sound. "But worry not, Onyx. Once I return, I will definitely train with you next. I will do my best so you will have no choice but to finally respond to my call. For now, I'm not going to bother you on your guarding duty."

The reason why Evie did not try to call for Onyx again was not solely because she knew she could not. It was because Evie was not planning to call Onyx when she was outside Middle Land. She wanted to hide his existence from the Dark Fae prince. And she knew that Onyx was here to protect Crescia. And that was why she would not focus her training to be on the other dragons. There was no choice, but Onyx would need to remain by the gate and stay hidden, for now.

Everyone then climbed on the large dragon's back before it flew towards the exit. Since Zanya had already blocked off all of her magic, she could no longer fly so she too hopped on.

Onyx landed before the dark cave as per Evie's command. Everyone stood on the ground as Evie began to call on the other dragons one by one. She wanted to get the dragons to bring them back to the magical lake. Having flying mounts bringing them back to the lake would shorten their trip significantly as opposed to how they travelled on foot previously.

As the seven dragons come out of the massive and dark cave and crouched before her, the men could not help but shiver at the sight of their princess standing right before seven dragons and one massive and darkest one behind her. It was truly a magnificent sight to behold! This was something simply incredible and disbelieving! Though the men had seen their princess with the dragons over the past days when she had trained with them, but the sight of a fragile-looking lady standing amongst powerful and large dragons would always take one's breath away.

Still touching Onyx, Evie spoke to the dragon. "I'm going to call for them only while I am outside this land. However, when I return, I will call on you, so wait for me, okay?" she whispered to him, and hugged the dragon's snout. Onyx only nudged forward gently to show his understanding, pushing Evie one step back as she laughed out at his affectionate display.

Evie then touched the other dragons one by one on their snouts as she called out their given names until she stopped at the last one who was Silver. Since only two of these dragons were fully obedient to her, Evie could only choose between Crimson and Silver. However, seeing that Crimson was the only female among all these dragons, Evie had decided not to use her. Crimson must be protected at all costs or else, the dragons will really go extinct this time.

That was why her only choice now was Silver.

Evie then climbed on the dragon's back and the others followed her up as well.

As Silver entered the dark cave, Evie looked back and waved at the other dragons before everything turned dark and Silver walked through the cave and headed to the outside.

Once they were outside, Silver immediately spread out his wings and the next moment, they were flying above the misty forest.

They were finally going back!

As they travelled through the air and watched the Middle Land passing by below, they very quickly approached the magical lake, Evie's heart began to thud harder and faster. Was she nervous or was this a thrill she was feeling?

Evie swallowed. She prayed hard silently that what she was feeling was a mere thrill. Because she was finally going to set out and look for her husband.

At last, they could now see the shimmering lake ahead of them.

Silver tilted his body backwards slightly, raised the front of his wings before making a graceful landing. And Evie realized that her heartbeat had not settled down. She just had a bad feeling churning in her gut.

She ordered Silver to slowly head towards the spot where they left the other vampires. It was so silent, as though no one was around. And the silence made Evie's heart thud wildly even more. She looked at her men and she realized that she was not the only one feeling this way. She could see it in their eyes.

When Silver halted, Evie looked around and her eyes widened.

Chapter 225 - Unless

The shores of the crystal lake that was once teeming with women sitting together, chatting away and children noisily running around chasing after each other were now empty. They did not see a single shadow of their company. The women, the children... no one was there anymore. It was as silent as death.

Evie's heart was immediately filled with dread as she frantically looked all around the area again, praying that her eyes were simply tricking her. Or better yet, they were the ones tricking her. Maybe they had seen them coming and were just hiding somewhere before jumping out from their hideout to give them a surprise? Evie could only desperately hope that was the case, but her heart was

already banging out an unsettled rhythm. Something was wrong here. Where are they? Just what in blue blazes had happened here?

The vampires immediately jumped down from Silver's back and spread out to investigate the entire area, looking for any clues and if they could find anyone from their previous party still around. While the men were searching, Evie and Zanya stayed on Silver's back.

After a quick search of the entire area, the vampires then gathered again and Evie and Zanya finally climbed down from the dragon. There was fear evident in Evie's eyes as she stood before the men, staring at each of them in turn. Each time, she would land her gaze on one person, heavy and full of expectations, and all they could do was gaze back at her helplessly while giving their reports with sombre moods.

"No one is here anymore Princess..." Samuel said, causing Evie to catch her breath.

"But please don't worry Princess," Zolan added as he rubbed his chin with his thumb. "I don't think that something bad has happened to them."

"Are you... are you certain they're alright?" Evie asked. She also wondered how did he know for sure that nothing happened to them. What was it that Zolan knew that she did not?

"We couldn't find any signs of struggle, princess." Zolan said. "Even though they are only women and children left here, don't forget that they are vampires. Thus, they would certainly be able to fight when facing any dangers and when they have to. Most especially since there are all those children with them. In fact, an ample number of those women are really good in combat style fighting. But there is no sign that any fight had broken out here. So, I am guessing that there must be another reason why they are all no longer here."

"So, you're saying they willingly left on their own?" Evie questioned Zolan.

"Yes, Princess." Zolan's reply was quite confident.

"But... why? Why would they? Where would they go? Do they even have any place else to go to?" Evie could not understand. The duchess had promised her they would wait for her and the men there. And as far as she knew, they do not have anywhere else to go. Dacria, their home, was already destroyed!

At that moment, Luc and Reed also joined them. The two went in to check on the cave that was leading back to Dacria, the route they had used during their escape.

The men both shook their heads at Evie. "We couldn't find any signs that they used that route as well." Luc reported. "But we saw footsteps leading to the outside of the Middle Land. And still there is no evidence of any fight that happened even outside of this place." Both their reports seem to coincide with what Zolan had said earlier.

Evie somehow relaxed a little and let go the breath that she did not realise she had held back when Luc and Reed came to report on their findings. She had the dreaded thought that perhaps it was the orcs that had reached them while she and the men were still in Crescia. She could console herself now that at least it was not the orcs! Evie thought. But the question still stands... are they alright?

"I don't understand why they left this place. Wasn't this place supposed to be the safest for them since nothing could approach them and harm them in this area here?" Evie said. "The duchess

promised me that she'll wait. And she knew full well that it was very dangerous for them to go back to the Northern Empire."

"You are right, princess," Zolan agreed, "I don't think the duchess is stupid enough to lead everyone out of the land."

"You mean someone took them away from here and they just quietly followed?" Evie's tone was incredulous as she found that highly unlikely of the duchess.

When Zolan nodded, Evie's brows were creased hard in utter confusion. Again, she could not think of any sensible reason why would they willingly follow anyone out of this protected area. Unless the person who found them was...

Evie's heart skipped a beat before speeding up at the thought. She looked straight at Zolan but then she questioned herself again. If it really was him, the vampires would certainly follow him wherever he leads them. But then again, if it really was him, why he did he not come for her or wait for her?

Everyone was silent. Zolan was glancing at Evie when he realized that the two of them had just thought about the very same thing. However, just like the princess, there was also a huge question that is ringing in his head about that theory. Thus, he found himself in the same predicament as the princess – where he could only ponder silently in his mind and not say anything out aloud for the moment.

"What are we going to do next?" Levy broke the silence and Evie looked at Silver.

"We will ride Silver and head back to Dacia." Evie said and after the men agreed, they all climbed on Silver's back again.

When they reached Dacia, the clouds were already dark and overcast, and the rain was pouring heavily. They realized that the clouds and rain will only appear when the dragons set out from the Middle Land. There were no rain nor clouds when Silver appeared at the magical lake.

Chapter 226 - Disguise

As the dragon slowly descended, they saw the ruins of the once beautiful and snow-white place. Evie's heart clenched in agony at the sight that welcomed her. Dacia was unrecognizable – a far cry from the once stunning view she remembered it once to be in her mind. It was all but ruins now. She fought for calm and held back her tears as the dragon slowly circled and finally landed at where the castle was once standing magnificently.

The moment they landed; Evie realized that it was the very place where she last saw Gavriel. The memories came flooding back into her mind at that moment when Gavriel had hugged and kissed her before pushing her away into the dungeon.

Evie bit her lower lips so hard right then that she had to force herself to swallow the tears that were threatening to spill over at any moment. This was not the time for her to cry.

After the men had searched the inside of the dungeon and reported that there was no one there, Evie and the men gathered once again for their next plan. The vampires were not here, nor Gavriel. Now the problem was where they should start looking for Gavriel and the surviving Dacrian women and children's whereabouts.

"We should target Kirzan," Zolan said. "Kirzan is the closest dukedom from here so they must have information or even rumors that we could use as a lead on the whereabouts of the prince. I believe we could also find information about the Duchess and the other Dacrians there."

Evie nodded. Knowing that it was best if it was Zolan who would think of their best move for now. They really need a lead desperately and he was right, even if it was a rumour, that would be enough for them to get started on. Because as of now, they had nothing to work on to search for these missing people.

Since they could no longer take Silver with them, because of Zolan's plan to infiltrate the state as quietly as they could, Evie sent Silver back to the Middle Land after stroking its snout. She communicated her thanks to him and told him silently that she would call upon him again whenever the need arises.

Then that same day itself, the group left Dacia and they travelled by foot towards Kirzan. On their way there, Zolan had revealed some things to Evie about the infamous state of Kirzan. Kirzan was the third largest state in the empire. It was much bigger and more populous than Dacia. Just like the empire's capital, Kirzan was famous because of their rampant slavery on humans. The Duke of Kirzan was said to be obsessed with young humans and he had a harem of young human ladies in his castle.

Kirzan was still farther than Evie had initially thought. Because when they had finally arrived at the walls of the city, it was already night.

The group settled at the nearby forest overlooking the lively city. The city lights were bright and lively, and a stark contrast to the darkness of the forest that surrounded them.

"Luc and I will go scout things out over there," Zolan had said while they were eating dinner. "We will just go and investigate for now. If there is no threat, we will look for an inn where we could stay for the night."

"Please be careful," Evie told them while the men were preparing their disguises. Zolan smiled at her as he was putting on red tint on his lips. The man had decided to disguise himself as a female because of his blond hair and pretty man appearance was just too famous and that made him immediately recognisable by many others. Zolan was actually the most famous one among the members of Gavriel's men because of his position in the empire before he chose to follow Gavriel as one of his loyal knights.

"Don't worry, Princess. I'm an expert in disguise. You might not believe it, but Prince Gavriel was the only person so far that my disguise was not able to fool." He laughed out loud and unashamedly, and Evie smiled as well. Zanya on the other hand was gaping at Zolan because of his transformation. He had put on large dangly earrings and bright attention drawing jewellerys such as necklaces and bangles. And he was now looking very beautiful that Zanya could not quite believe her eyes that it was not a female that was before her, but a male.

He had made himself up so well that even when Zanya observed him carefully, it was hard to tell that Zolan was a male. He had tied up the upper half of his hair while leaving the lower half free and gently fluttering in the night breeze. His naturally clear complexion was now slightly reddened with the help of some rouge rubbed into his high cheekbones. And the red tint he had applied on his lips just further enhanced the whole get up. The only thing that was a little off was that one would

think this 'lady' was a really tall one. But even so, with 'her' exceptionally good looks and elegant bearing, many men would swoon and salivate over Zolan's captivating eyes and attractive smile.

"He's beautiful..." the light fae uttered before flushing red in embarrassment, realising that she had just called a male as 'beautiful'.

"He is..." Evie agreed, nodding vigorously with a big grin on her face. Zolan always had the soft look, the perfect definition of a pretty man. But now that he had disguised himself and wore things meant for women, he had become totally unrecognizable. If they did not know him, or if they did not see him transform before their very eyes, they would never think of him as a man.

The men were not as impressed as Evie and Zanya though. It was as if Zolan's appearance was already something normal to them.

"You both should rest while waiting for us. We will be back in two hours." Zolan said in a mellow and throaty voice – his lady voice – and then the duo headed towards the city.

Chapter 227 - Responsibility

Two hours went by quickly, but Zolan and Luc had yet to return. Samuel was quietly leaning against a tree trunk while staring gloomily at the gleaming city below them. But despite his silence, his aura was leaking out strongly in waves.

"Your aura is leaking out, leader." Levy muttered as he approached the man. "What's your order?"

Samuel's face finally darkened as his brows furrowed together. Zolan was the most reliable among his men in the group when it comes to planning and everything else except for combat. He never missed the time he agreed upon. And yet, minutes had already passed by, and he is not here yet. The men could not help but worry as they knew full well that Zolan hated missing deadlines, more so for the deadlines he set for himself.

In fact, the men already knew that if Zolan misses the time that he had set, it can only mean one thing. Something had happened that had prevented him from coming back on the agreed time.

Pushing himself away from the trunk of the tree he was leaning against, Samuel straightened up and called for Reed.

"Reed, Levy... the two of you must go and look for them." Samuel ordered very seriously. He had a bad feeling about this. "Also, be extra careful. We do not know what we're dealing with yet."

"We will. Don't worry, Samuel." Levy grinned and winked. Reed only nodded before the two set off as well.

It was as if Evie sensed that something was not quite right, she and Zanya both stepped out of their tent and approached Samuel. After looking at Samuel's stern and hard face, Evie could not put her finger on what it was, but she can somehow immediately tell that something was really off. Something must have happened for Samuel's face to be as dark as it was.

"Where are Levy and Reed?" Evie asked after looking around the campsite, noticing that these two were currently missing. Samuel's eyes darted over to Evie and the man could only tell her that Zolan and Luc had yet to return. And now, Levy and Reed too.

Evie instantly felt uneasy, but she fought for calmness. As their princess, she could not lose her cool so easily. "Is Levy and Reed also late now?" she asked after calming herself down and making sure her voice would not waver.

"Yes princess, they should be here by now." Samuel replied to her, after which he turned around and stared wordlessly down the path that led down to the city.

The atmosphere became more tense as no one spoke and just looked at one another. Evie turned to Elias to ask him to start packing up. When time passed and still none of the four men returned, Evie took a few steps on that same path that they took previously. Her hooded eyes were fixed on the city. The men stared at her small back that looked lonely against the brightness of the city lights as they waited patiently for her orders.

"Let's go." She then declared and reluctance immediately clouded over Samuel's eyes. He was torn. He was almost certain something had happened to their comrades while they were in that city. But how could he let the princess go there as well since he was now aware there are dangers unknown in that place?

"Princess... I don't think it's wise for you to go into the city." The big man went against Evie's orders for the first time. "I believe that something bad happened to them. They could have been caught or even badly harmed... I can't let you go there with a clear conscience, knowing there are dangers that might harm you too. There's a big possibility that the dark fae must be there waiting for you to come and then capture you, using Zolan and the others as bait."

Evie was silenced. She knew Samuel's words made sense. There was indeed a huge possibility that Thundrann was the one responsible behind the reason why Zolan and the others are not returning on time. But though she understood what Samuel had said, Evie just could not bear the thought that her men were caught and must have been harmed while she was here, just waiting and keeping herself safe. She felt so bad. How could she allow others to endure harm and danger just so she would not have to?

But she understood the dangers. Still, could she abandon those faithful men who have been all the way beside her since the beginning of her journey? She knew in her heart of hearts that she could not bring herself to do that. Without them, she would not have been able to arrive to this point now. They had never abandoned her. So how could she do that to them? If it were before, perhaps she could still accept it as she was still that slightly fearful and protected princess. However, now that she had grown into her own powers and had experienced dangers and survived them, she was not going to just sit back and take the passive role of being the damsel in distress that need to be saved. No way!

"I fully understand the dangers but nevertheless, I will still go even if you tell me not to. I will never abandon them. If they are in danger, it's my responsibility as their master to save them the same way they did their very best to save me many times before despite the dangers it posed to them." She said strongly and it was Samuel's turn to fall silent. His gaze was deep and contemplative as he stared at the princess.

"Do not worry Samuel, if the dark fae is in there, then so be it. I have my dragons to back me up." Evie then added with utter confidence and fighting spirit that Samuel could do nothing but bow his head and obey whatever she wished to do.

"Alright, get ready everyone. As mentioned, we will head out and find our comrades." Evie's firm voice rang out in the clearing they were camped in.

Chapter 228 - On The Other Side

Moments after Evie declared those words, the group then headed towards the city as well.

They quietly arrived at the wall of Kirzan. Since they were trying to infiltrate into the city, they could not just happily waltz through the main gates. Before Zolan set out he had planned the route they were to use to infiltrate into the city. Zolan had actually lived in Kirzam for quite a while, so he had insiders' knowledge on everything in the city. Thankfully, before he and Luc had left, he had mapped his route out and left a copy of it with Samuel.

However, Samuel had decided not to follow the route Zolan had left with them. His reasoning was that perhaps this route must now be the most dangerous one of all and probably, the enemy was already waiting for them there, just looking for the right time to ambush. So, they ended up entering from the opposite side.

Standing before the walls and looking up, Evie's heart was thudding wildly again. She could not explain what she was feeling. Her heart simply shivered so ferociously the closer they get to the walls.

As they stood there and looked up, Evie realized that the wall was not built as high as Dacia's walls. However, it stands to reason as Dacia was actually a fortress. It was just as tall as the walls in human realms. They could not see any guards at the top as well unlike in Dacia where there are always guards on patrol.

"I'll go in first," Samuel said. "I will signal you once I see that it is safe."

Evie nodded and then they watched as the man leapt over the walls and travelled in blur. They saw him land at the top of the wall in a crouching position. He looked back again and gestured for them to wait.

Then he was gone in a flash.

Evie, Zanya, Leon and Elias quietly waited. The time of waiting made Evie even more anxious as time passed by. They felt like time had slowed down and the wait was excruciating.

And when Samuel was still nowhere to be seen after long moments that passed, Evie gritted her teeth, and she clenched her fists. She could not take this anymore. She must know what was going on at the other side of these walls. Her men were not just your everyday average vampires. They were the elites, the best of best. It was very strange that they just disappeared so easily like this!

But before Evie could open her mouth to order Leon and Elias to bring them up on the walls, Leon suddenly leapt before them as though he had heard something across the walls. His eyes had turned vivid red and then after saying "wait here, princess," he too leapt towards the walls.

The moment Leon quietly landed on top of the wall like a cat, his eyes immediately found the source of the sounds. He caught sight of blades clashing. He saw Samuel surrounded, fighting a large number of vampires.

There were dozens of them, and Leon could tell that those vampires were part of the Duke of Kirzan's elite knights, judging from their crests embossed on their clothes.

Samuel ferociously fought the vampires with his incredible strength and skill. He had even used his massive blade swinging at them mercilessly. And it did not even take long before the vampires were all slaughtered around him.

However, even Leon who was watching from afar could not even feel any relief as he saw someone clapping leisurely at Samuel as he came walking out from the shadows.

The next instant, Leon's eyes circled and like a blur he rushed towards where Samuel was.

Below the walls, Evie saw that Leon had disappeared as well.

She whipped her head towards Elias. "What's going on? You can hear what's happening over on the other side, right?" Evie asked.

"There is a fight going on across the wall, Princess." Elias said and Evie's eyes widened. She looked up again and then she began to order Elias.

"Bring me up there, now!" Evie ordered and Elias swallowed. "Obey me, Elias. We don't have time to argue anymore." Evie's eyes suddenly glowed for a moment and before Elias knew it, he nodded.

"Please let me go first, princess." Zanya said. "I'll cover for you from up there. This is just in case someone is aiming arrows at anyone who jumps on the wall."

Evie did not bother to argue anymore and nodded. They could not waste any more time. Elias then helped Zanya climb the wall and once he put Zanya down, he immediately leapt to where Evie was again. Elias' body was now moving on its own.

He then carried Evie up and, in a flash, they landed right next to Zanya who was now covering for Evie.

As soon as Evie was on her feet, she saw Samuel and Leon. And before them was someone else. Leon and Samuel were seemingly frozen and looked like they could not move.

Seeing that the man before them was holding a sword, Evie swallowed, and she lifted her own bow and knocked an arrow, aiming it at the man for fear that he would strike Leon and Samuel. She could not let that happen!

At that moment, as Evie aimed at the man wearing an obsidian cloak covering his entire body, her heart shuddered strangely. But when she saw the man raising his sword, Evie's fear for her men made her release the arrow. And that very moment, she saw it inside her head. This... oh my god... do not tell me...

It was another *déjà vu*. And as Evie watched her arrow flew at the man in black cloak, she stopped breathing. Just like what happened in her dream, the man caught her arrow and then a gust of wind blew, throwing back the hood that was covering the man's face.

Chapter 229 - Permanently

Evie could not believe her eyes. Her heart skipped a beat, and her throat was now constricting because of the overwhelming emotions that had crashed upon her like a massive wave the moment she saw man in the dark cloak. This was just exactly as how she had pictured it in her dreams! It had happened so many times that she could even remember it whenever she closed her eyes. She could feel her body trembling and her skin prickle as she continued to stare at that black clad figure that stood before her, cloak fluttering in the wind.

"Gav..." she whispered brokenly. She could not even completely say out his name. This was not another dream, right? She was fully awake, right? She was temporarily confused as she had this recurring dream too many times that even now, she wondered if she was actually having a flash back on the dream with her eyes opened or was it really happening before her.

Paralyzed, Evie just stared at him. It was him... this time, he was real! She was finally seeing him for real! She could finally touch him for real and speak to him directly! More importantly, she was thanking God that he was alive and well. She could not help but feel her eyes burn as tears stung the back of her eyes.

In that moment, Evie was so shocked she was still unable to move or speak or think. She could only stand there and breathe shallowly, mouth slightly ajar as her eyes roved over his form, drinking in the sight as though it was water for her parched eyes. She would have never thought she would finally see him. And now of all times. He seemed to be a little different from the last time she saw him. He was clad in nothing but black now, his cloak does not even have that infamous silver crest he always wore before. His black hair was cascading down his forehead and seemed a little longer and tussled compared to previously, and it was covering parts of his beautiful eyes.

And that was right. His eyes... his eyes were the thing that had changed in him the most. There was something different in his eyes now, and it was not only because of the devil-blue colour. There seemed to be something unrecognizable that she could not quite put her finger on as she looked closely at him.

Evie tried to swallow the lump in her throat at the realization that his stare was now cold. It was extremely cold and piercing. And she suddenly felt a chill go right through to her bones. Nevertheless, though she felt a little fear, Evie wanted to run up to him and hug him and ask him what had happened. Why was it that his eyes now seemed to have turned permanently blue? If she could leap and jump like the vampires, she would have done it already without a second thought. And if she was not so shocked and overcome with the emotions she did not know were strong enough to have rendered her mute, she would have long since asked Elias to bring her down to the ground, so she could run towards him.

All her mind could think about was to get to him, fearing that he would suddenly disappear on her again. She would not be able to take it if he disappears on her again.

She tried to force herself to snap out her stupor so she could order Elias now, but she could not even take her eyes off him. Why? Was it because he was staring back at her as intently if not more, and the both of them could not bring themselves to look away from the other even for a moment?

Slowly, he moved but never releasing her form from his gaze. He was taking very unhurried steps towards her, and Evie's heart drummed loudly in her ears.

As he slowly got closer and closer, Evie could hear and somewhat make out that Elias and Zanya were speaking with her. But she could not make out what exactly they were saying to her. It was as if she was spellbound, and her senses were dulled to everything else, and she could only focus on him. She was hopelessly transfixed on him and him alone.

"G-gavriel!" she called out, not realizing that she was only calling out for him in her mind and that there were still no words coming out of her lips. Then she dropped her weapons and began to run towards him, her speed picking up as she went. She seemed to have forgotten that she was still at the top of the wall, and he was on the ground.

However, he suddenly disappeared from her view and panic immediately suffused her and she felt her breath catching as her mind buzzed loudly. "No, don't disappear on me again, please! I've missed you so much! Where are you?" she shouted out those very same words she had heard herself say in her dreams many nights before. But again, she still had not realised that those words were only shouted out on the inside of her head and no sound actually came out from her lips.

When she could not find him at that spot where he was just a moment ago, Evie panicked and called his name out again, and her knees began to weaken even as it started to shake.

She was about to fall over on her knees when all of a sudden, someone grabbed her from behind, pulling at her, causing her to be dragged backwards. Then out of nowhere, she saw Elias' back right in front of her view.

What happened next finally awakened Evie from her stupor and confused state as Elias was thrown hard to the ground.

The butler quickly stood again, coughing out blood from the very strong strike he had received earlier and stood before Evie as he blocked her. He seemed to have perceived that there was danger to the princess. However, Evie was unsure what had happened as Elias was struck and still had blood trickling out of the corners of his mouth.

Chapter 230 - Reunion

"Princess, please escape now! Something... something's wrong with this person! This man isn't our -" Before Elias could finish his statement, he suddenly went still as if he could no longer move nor speak. Evie was still waiting for Elias to complete his sentence, thinking that perhaps he was considering what to say but after a few more seconds, she noticed that something was wrong. Coming around Elias and peering at his face from the front made her realise that Elias had been frozen mid-sentence and could not move on his own volition.

"This one does not seem as powerful as the others." A voice so familiar, that deep velvety voice echoed and then in a very fluid and regal manner, the blue-eyed man in the dark cloak descended from the top of the wall, right before them. It was not in the blurry and fast way vampires usually landed; but it was as if he was floating. "Since this one seemed like such a useless guard, I guess there's no need to keep him alive anymore." He drawled out as he let a lazy smile spread across his face.

Evie's eyes widened and at last, her voice came out in a burst. "No! Don't you dare kill him!" Evie was too shocked and still in an emotional mess and confusion that she blurted out whatever that was on her mind before she even realized it.

Now that she had managed to snap out of her confusion, her mind began to work again. She now realised too that something was wrong. This Gavriel... he had fought against her men, his men. And now, he even wanted to kill Elias as if he never knew him? Evie did not know what was going on, but she could feel her mind was about to burst due to these confusing happenings. Was Gavriel possessed? But his eyes were not the same green like what had happened to her father when he was possessed.

Evie had seen her possessed father and the moment she saw him during the war in Dacia, she immediately knew he was possessed the moment she saw him. Her father's actions and the way he behaved, his characteristics, even some of his features like his eyes and some parts of his skin had

changed into a greenish colour, and there was something black on his neck that extended to the lower parts of his face. If she were to describe, it was like some jet-black veins being painted on his skin. And most of all, even her father's voice had changed as though it belonged to someone else and did not sound anything close to his original voice.

But for Gavriel, he was still very much the same except for the colour of his eyes and what he was doing right now. His calm voice and the way he looked at her despite the coldness in his eyes were still the same. Her heart keeps telling her that this person is still him... so, what was going on? His actions right now seem to tell her he was not quite himself! In fact, it was almost the exact opposite of how he usually brings himself.

Their eyes met again after Evie's outburst. And there it was... the most confusing thing. The one thing that she had been trying to understand in her dreams before. Now that he was very much closer, Evie now knew what was bothering her with the way that he looked at her.

He was looking at her as if he could not believe she was real. His gaze was so intense and piercing as if he had been longing for her or looking for her for an eternity. And now that he had found her, he was actually having a hard time believing it. It does not quite make sense to Evie. It was only a matter of days that they were separated from each other, not an eternity. Even though she does admit that she felt those days to be so long, what she was seeing in his eyes right now was just too much. This was Gavriel they were talking about. He was the epitome of calm and collected. He always knew how to control his emotions even though things were really going badly and not according to plan. So, she could not believe her already overwhelming longing for him seemed to be nothing compared to what was blazing in those blue eyes of his.

Without a word, he moved his outstretched hand, and it was as if an invisible string was holding Elias, he was being moved to the side, still being held immobile like a statue. Evie's eyes widened and her mouth opened a little in shock. Since when does Gavriel have such powers? But was this something that Gavriel already had since long ago and just did not show or used it? Or was it a new power that he had gained during the time that he was separated from her?

Then he took a step towards Evie, fixing his gaze on her again. Evie was held in thrall even when her heart was racing and beating like a drum within her chest cavity.

But this time, it was Zanya who suddenly appeared and stood before Evie, protecting her.

He stopped and Evie immediately felt an immense aura of danger, not for herself but for Zanya. Evie could see how he pinned Zanya with a gaze so furious and dangerous that Zanya was even shivering as she still stood resolutely in front of Evie.

"Move, light fae, or you'll die this instant." He growled out threateningly and both Evie and Zanya could not move in utter shock. How did he know Zanya was a light fae? Zanya now looked fully human and had no characteristics of a light fae at all on her. So how could he even tell?! Was he really possessed?

When Evie saw him lifting his hand again, Evie was quick to step forward and this time, she blocked Zanya.

"Stop! Don't you harm her!" she exclaimed loudly as she spread out her hands to block Zanya as she bravely met his icy gaze. It was strange, being in this situation. Who would have thought that this was how they were to be reunited?

