

Chapter Five: Empires Need Capable Servants

A warm, all-encompassing embrace wrapped around Emelina De la Vega's spirit as a spark lit within her breast.

Information wove itself into her mind as if these skills had been developed throughout her entire life, and long-buried experiences and memories flooded back into crystal clarity. So much pain came from the ordeal but with it came a burning pride that her life's horrific incidents could be useful for her new charge, Empress Elinor.

Emelina had been granted the *Title of Head Maid* while being a *Heroic-Grade Terrorist* within the *Assassination Unit* and obtaining the *Veiled Sub-Class*, identifying her as more of a spy as connected with her past for rival drug cartels.

She didn't know precisely what her comrades' combatant abilities were as that wasn't her place of needed information. No, her primary task was taking care of the Empress' needs and training those under her care to understand what that meant.

The Head Maid opened her dark brown eyes, taking in a shuddering breath as the strange new air fed into her lungs. Rising up, she swallowed, feeling saliva enter her stomach with mild surprise.

The events of her death were clear within her mind; the edge of a sharp blade paralyzing her from the waist down as she ran, forcing her to tumble across the ground before being forcefully stopped by a webbed foot, gasping on the floor.

An orange-skinned toad creature stood over her with two others beside it as they took turns, stabbing her in specific spots, and now with a clear mind, she came to the conclusion they were trying to understand which areas were the most vulnerable, or it had been some sick sport of torture they'd been engaged in.

It was a night she'd never forget, but neither would this be as she restrained the tears in her eyes while looking upon the Empress standing before her.

Standing before Elinor, Emelina bowed her head, hearing the emotional cries of women, children, and men as their loved ones were brought back. Unfortunately, Emelina had no family that would likely be within the crowd; she'd moved to this particular village to escape her previous life and had kept a low profile because of it.

It was precisely because of her tragic past that there was such heat in her chest; the connection she felt through the Empress' Nexus was something she had wished for so long. Someone finally understood her at any given time without her needing to express a thing.

The throng surrounding them did their best to restrain themselves as her new associates lifted themselves to present themselves to the Empress, and each person's station and position within the hierarchy unfurled within her mind.

"Raise your heads," Elinor commanded, walking to stand before Emelina.

Every servant lifted themselves to stand at attention.

The Empress shifted her glowing green irises to the crying and trembling humans as they looked upon their loved ones; some of the men and women were holding back children or spouses from rushing forward. "Greet your loved ones."

Her internal command came soon after. *"The rest of you become familiar with one another. I'll observe and issue my commands once I'm satisfied."*

It wasn't clear what the condition was for her satisfaction, but Emelina suspected it had to do with learning each of them through her administration authority over her Nexus that connected them.

Those that had connections rushed to meet each other, tears even falling from those that were Undead, but Emelina stood straight, waiting for orders that would apply to herself, and she noted the few that hadn't rushed off.

Out of the eighteen new individuals revived, only five stayed still upon the Empress' command, one being a young blonde-haired man in his late twenties holding the *Ambassador Title*.

A *Maid*, possibly in her early teens; the brown-haired girl was cute with her hazel eyes darting around, likely searching for her own loved ones.

The third was the *Head Butler*, a serious-looking man in his mid-thirties that wasn't unattractive but didn't fit her particular palate in men, but she was somewhat impressed by his cadence as he moved off to greet an elderly woman. Their relationship soon became apparent as she threw her arms around him and started kissing his lips.

Lastly, there was the *Publicist*, which made Emelina's left eye crease. The young man could be described as more cute than handsome. His wild brown, bleach streaked hair was longer than she liked on most men but fit his party-boy style.

She'd seen the reckless type of boys most commonly among drug hustlers within the cartel's employ, moving between parties in the upper-class and tourist areas of Mexico. He wore an amused smirk while rubbing his cleanly shaven skin, eyeing all the women around the room, and yet her discomfort didn't come from his gaze but her own acceptance of his sparkling chestnut irises that were more evaluating than predatory.

Emelina's focus was soon snatched back to the Ambassador.

The well-built man held a dignified posture with his hands clasped behind his back, and his blue eyes casually swept the events unfolding around them with a handsome smile. He was not a local of the village she'd been a part of, she was sure, and based upon the strength she felt from him, was likely close to her own *Grade*.

He wore closely fitted silken shorts, most likely created by the alluring feminine figure standing nearby, *Royal Executioner Iris*, and the radiant control she exuded calmed Emelina's mind; she was in the presence of the highest superior within her *Unit*.

The name of every individual in the Nexus was still weaving through her memories, infusing within her being, and the man's name soon surfaced as the Empress observed every reaction with an amiable expression.

Emelina retained a neutral appearance, but her mind was alight with activity.

Klaus Klossner ... I won't be working too closely with him ... a shame.

The man lifted an eyebrow upon catching her eye and gave her a charming smile, and she was a little taken aback as he requested a conversation with her through the Nexus.

His deep voice was like that of the radio anchors she used to listen to as a girl. "*Why, hello there, Ms. De la Vega. It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance,*" he said with a slight bow before closing the distance with her.

A pleasant smile lifted Emelina's lips as she returned to gesture. *All mine, Mr. Klossner.*

"Please, Klaus," he said with a chuckle.

Oh ... alright, Klaus, then you can address me by Emelina.

"*Hmm,*" his blue irises darted to the young teenage girl, still bobbing left and right while searching for someone she knew, and his focus returned to her. "*Well, aren't you the lovely one?*"

Am I? Emelina asked with genuine surprise while glancing down at herself.

What remained of her clothes had been cut and torn, but not to the point of becoming too indecent. Still, it seemed Iris had knitted a few wide gashes to her shirt front.

The thing that drew her notice was her skin; she was younger than when she died by its health, but there was notable damage to certain parts of her figure that showed bone and muscle. Despite that, her figure was in its prime within her early twenties.

Her heart burned with renewed fervor as her thoughts turned private for a moment. *My ... what a gift, Empress.*

Vision returning to the man, she giggled softly. *I appreciate the compliment, Klaus. Were you as handsome before your revival?*

Klaus' perfect teeth flashed as his muscular chest shook, and he licked his framed lips while twisting around his muscular arms. *"By no means! No, this is by far the best shape I managed to get myself to while alive ... no, I suspect the Empress' powers brought us back to the most suitable state we ever experienced to best serve the Empire."*

It does seem that way ... do you suppose the rest of our bodies will recover as time goes on?

"Hmm ... I can't say, but wouldn't that be something?"

... I just don't wish to be unpresentable or unsightly before the Empress.

"Erm ... I don't see that happening with the vision in front of me!"

Emelina gave him a wry smirk. *Has anyone ever told you flattery suits you?*

"More than once, actually!" He laughed, turning his focus back to the teenage maid.

"Hmm, well ... it seems you have your job cut out for you. Aye, Emelina?"

She followed his gaze, lips not faltering. *I believe she can make a fine maid if the Empress has selected her.*

"Of course," Klaus nodded with an amused twinkle in his eyes. *"Although, why would the Empress select such a young and inexperienced candidate when I see hundreds upon hundreds of other possible candidates far older within the area that would provide better service?"*

Emelina hadn't reached that conclusion yet, but it was an essential duty of hers to know exactly what the Empress wished from her maids, which sparked an interest in her breast as she returned her focus to the blonde man.

Her smile widened. *Aren't you the crafty one?*

"Oh? What have I done to deserve such praise?"

The Royal Court is wise...

"That, they are."

Emelina tilted her head a little to observe the teenage girl, becoming more and more depressed as she searched in vain for someone to connect with.

The Publicist, Lucky Blue Smith, swept-back his hair before moving to speak to a red-haired woman, giving her a bright smile while calling out to her and leaving the teen to stand on her lonesome. *"Gwen! Aye, what's up? I'm happy to be workin' with you..."*

Emelina gave Klaus a small bow to excuse herself before moving to speak to the girl under her charge, leaving him with her answer. *"I'd expect nothing less from an Ambassador; please, let me know if you require anything."*

Klaus opened his mouth, jaw shifting to the right as his tongue slid across his teeth. *"Of course, Emelina. I look forward to speaking with you again ... duty calls."*

Kneeling down in front of the girl, Emelina gave her a comforting smile, initiating contact with her through the Nexus as was her privilege. *Aileen Banks.*

Aileen jumped, giving her a quick bow, causing her shoulder-length hair to bounce wildly. *“Head Maid! You’re in my ... oh, oh, the, umm ... the Nexus. Yeah ... I—umm, I just was looking for ... for my parents.”* She whispered, eyes shifting left and right while trying to stay focused on her.

Brushing her long black hair behind her ears, Emelina asked, *“What do you last remember?”*

“Umm ... I was on a—we were on a trip, and I got separated from my parents. This nice man told me he’d help me find them, and ... I don’t remember.”

Heart feeling heavy, she asked the question that bubbled up in her mind, having known many such horrible incidents she’d become aware of through working with the cartels. *“What year do you think it is, Aileen?”*

“Umm ... it’s 2012. We came from Germany to see the jungle, but ... wait, I’m really confused,” she mumbled, eyes lifting to view the beyond enormous grand hall they stood in. *“Where are we ... I know the Empress is here, and ... I just don’t know how to find my parents.”*

“Think for a moment about the Empress ... she’s given you specific memories of hers to help us understand the current state of the Empire. Do you remember what happened to the crystal that brought us here?”

The girl’s eyes became wider as she suppressed the urge to find her parents and focused on the information weaving into her mind. *“It’s not 2012...”*

Emelina gently shook her head, and tears gathered in the child’s eyes.

“This isn’t Earth ... we can’t go back...”

She pulled Aileen in as she cried into her hair. *“No, Honey, we’re far past 2012, but you’re not alone. We’re here for you, and your fellow maids will help you through this tough time.”*

It didn’t take long for the skills woven into the girl began to help ease the stress. *“No ... I can’t cry, the Empress is here ... I need to be strong...”*

They both stiffened as the Empress’ voice entered the conversation. *“It is quite alright, Aileen. I lost my own parents not long ago ... I understand. If you need to cry, then cry, but what your supervisor has said is not wrong. You have entered a new family.”*

“T-Thank you, Empress!”

Elinor’s presence within the connection faded, but she had no doubt the Empress could be observing them without their notice.

Aileen sniffed back her tears as she pulled away, clearing her throat while putting on a brave face. *“I’ll do my best, Head Maid!”*

Emelina smiled at the girl as she rose. *“I expect nothing but the best, and you may call me by my name. The title is far less important than the proper display you present while inside the presence of those in authority.”*

“It’s still important, though. Right?”

“Yes, Aileen. Always address the Empress by her Title.”

“Yes!”

The Empress gave them several more minutes to rejoice with their families before calling for their attention again, and Tiffany delivered her message.

“Alright, alright, Dearies. Work needs to be done! So, let’s get everything settled...”

She waited as everyone fell in line, each within their respective place with the eight maids lining up behind Emelina while the families held their breath for the Witch’s statement.

“James Escobedo has been chosen as the Head Butler.”

His wife's shoulders sagged slightly, knowing what was coming after that declaration, but from the looks of her, his revival had shaved off twenty-five years off his looks, which was a plus for the woman in Emelina's eyes.

"He will have more duties than those underneath him. However..."

His wife's brown eyes lifted, fists pressed against her chest.

"Both James and Eladio De la Garza, the butler under his charge, shall have the next two hours off before beginning their duties until ... oh, time is difficult at the moment, but each day is roughly thirty-hours long ... so, we'll go with fifteen-hour increments dividing A.M. to P.M.

"Great!" the Witch clapped, causing the humans around the area to shift uncomfortably. "Not that that's been cleared up ... they'll work until 13 P.M. By the way, your loved ones no longer need sleep, so ... talk amongst yourselves and decide on which times you'd wish to spend with them with that knowledge. Inform your representative when you decided!"

Mumbles softly followed the new time metric, but it soon died down as she continued.

"Mauricio Ojuda holds the *Groundskeeper Title*, and he will thereby handle the clean-up and development of new furniture for the use of ... smaller creatures than Quen'Talrat," she giggled while motioning to the giant burning skeletal ape standing behind her.

"He will thereby be working alongside many of you humans and the Ri'bot to first create sleeping accommodations from the ruins of the supplies we've been able to salvage while cleaning up. That task will soon shift to agriculture, but more on that will come later."

Happy notes followed from the crowds upon learning there was a plan for future food.

"He will have the same leniency if you so choose..." She trailed off, beautiful face tightening with slight annoyance. "On second thought, let me make it clearer ... you may select five hours today to spend alone with your loved ones, but make sure to deliver a specified schedule to your representative. Gwen will be given further instruction on individual duties."

Lucky gave Gwen a toothy grin, and she returned a strained smile.

Tiffany cleared her throat. "Three maids will be currently assigned to the Empress for the day that will be assigned by Emelina, the Head Maid."

Emelina bowed her head to the Royal Ritualist; several of the family members of the girls she was in charge of turned their attention to her as the Witch moved on.

"One will accompany me while another follows the Royal Executioner, Iris..."

Everyone became a bit tense as Tiffany trailed off, vision moving to the Royal Assassin, and there appeared to be a conversation that passed unheard. Emelina followed every expression closely, trying to decipher what was happening, and came to a specific conclusion.

Iris doesn't want a maid, but Tiffany wants her to have one ... the Empress has joined the conversation ... ah, and it seems that settles it.

Tiffany nodded with a slight frown on her lips before pulling Emelina into a private call.

"Emelina, which of your girls has the best fashion sense that would fit the Empress' Gothic Victorian preference?"

She searched her mind as information flooded it upon the request, and a name popped up. Tiffany's features brightened upon her response, quickly relaying further orders before turning back to the tense throng.

"Right ... one maid will attend to the Royal Executioner, and a maid ... with a good fashion sense ... yes, I'm looking at you, Valerie Meyer," she giggled at the blonde woman's start. "You will aid Violet by sorting and providing inspiration in her crafting hobbies."

Expectedly, Valerie requested a chat with Emelina, and she opened the private discussion. "Head Maid, does this mean I will be permanently assigned to Violet's side?"

For the time being, yes, and you may address me by name. You have experience with fashion, correct?

"Yes."

How so?

"Hmm ... I was aboard one of the humanitarian effort buses from the U.S. that came into the town. I worked as a model, and this was a P.R. stunt to help further my public image. A great choice that was ... oh, don't get me wrong, I am one-hundred-percent dedicated to the Empress ... it just sucks how everything turned out. To be honest, I was an aspiring designer ... I was allowed to wear a few of my own designs from time to time."

Fashion ... yet you're a Songweaver with the Dancer Sub-Class?

"Well ... I mean, modeling is kind of like dancing, and I actually majored in it in college. Dancing while modeling a dress is ... was actually pretty in..."

I see ... in any case, you'll be with Violet, helping to create things for the Empress. She enjoys a dark Victorian-style, which I feel you are the best candidate in that regard. You will have two days off a week to spend with ... you have a brother?

"Yes ... he joined me on the trip. He'd never been outside of the U.S."

You'll have the time free to spend with him.

"Thank you, Emelina. I will do my best to serve the Empress and you in whatever task you give me."

Emelina cut the connection, keeping close track of the Witch's speech while performing her duties.

"Three maids will have the day to rest, switching places with three others tomorrow, and that will be decided upon by the Head Maid.

"Eloy Sandoval is the Royal Chronicler and will be aiding the Royal Court with documentation ... currently, Royal Gatekeeper, Edmon, with anything he might need to be written down. His duties will be off and on, depending on what needs to be accomplished. More information will be passed to your loved ones through Lucky.

"... Speaking of the Publicist..."

Tiffany giggled as Lucky stepped forward, performing a deep bow before turning in a circle to present himself to the crowds. "He will be working with Gwen to act as the mediator between us as the Empire continues to grow. Don't be too hard on my sweet little Gwen," she mused as he gave her another bow.

"I wouldn't dream of it, Royal Grand Ritualist! I relish the opportunity to work with such a beautiful woman."

"Tiffany," she smirked, orange eyes alight with laughter.

Emelina lifted an eyebrow at the performance the boy delivered, opening a link with Valerie. *He should have been the Royal Jester.*

"Hehe ... he really does have that vibe, doesn't he?"

I can't tell if it's all an act to let people's guard down or if he really just has no issues making a spectacle of himself.

"A mix of both?"

The truth is more often in the middle...

"Federico Fallas is our Curator that will be supporting our Treasurer, Pepe Fontanez, in cataloging the Empire's supplies. Edmon will provide further instruction that will be handed down to Lucky."

The boy lifted his hand again with a toothy grin, seemingly already knowing where both family groups were.

Perhaps not all show.

“Our Artist, Leonora Gentileschi, will be joining Violet and Valerie to fashion for us a wardrobe fit for an Empress while the Cook, Antonietta Briseno, will be given access to all our stores to create our Empress’ first meal!”

Valerie restrained herself from showing the tension in her chest, but Emelina knew the news added pressure, and she could hear her internal thoughts without effort.

“Oh, no ... what if she says my designs are trash ... she’s got the freaking Artist Title...”

No need to worry. Emelina comforted, causing the woman to bite the inside of her cheek. *You will do fine. Have confidence in yourself; I chose you because I believe in you.*

“You picked me out from the rest?”

Yes. Tiffany asked me which of the maids were the most suited to fashion, and I knew it was you.

“... Mmh ... thanks, Emelina ... that means a lot.”

It’s true.

“... Thanks! I won’t disappoint Tiffany or you!”

I know you won’t.

“To finish things off ... we have our Ambassador, which will not affect any of you since he seems to have no relatives that were brought through the gateway. With that ... we can disperse!”

Emelina turned to face her maids, and each of them kept their proper posture; however, some struggled more than others. Her mind shifted through each of them, letting her gut filter through which would provide the best outcome from the Witch’s declarations.

She opened communication with every one of the eight maids under her guidance.

Valerie, you understand your duties.

Valerie nodded, keeping her dignified posture while moving to the Throne Room, her awareness of where the powerful assassin currently resided being made available to her upon receiving the task.

Emelina’s deep brown irises went to the small twelve-year-old girl, doing her best to remain still, but her curious eyes were constantly having to refocus on the Head Maid. *Aileen, you do not require rest.*

“No, Head Maid ... erm, Emelina! I am ready to serve the Empress always!”

Good girl. You’ll be joining me then. She smiled at the remaining six maids as sour emotions mixed in their hearts. *I know each of you wishes to attend to the Empress personally, and there is only one position left.*

Feeling a little playful with the women in front of her, she said, *Esmeralda Yanez, you will join Tiffany. Adoncia Vences, you will be with Iris.*

They nodded in acknowledgment, each moving to their duty, but Iris’ voice entered her mind, causing her to turn respectfully to her superior. *“There is no need. She will not be able to keep up; I am leaving the Capital.”*

Understood. I will have her await your return.

“...”

Emelina felt a cold chill run down her spine as Iris’ deep red eyes narrowed, soon vanishing without a word, and the conversation ended at that.

She does not want a maid ... clearly ... it must be the Empress' decision that forced her hand. It's largely symbolic at this point, I suppose ... there's nothing we can really support her in.

Breathing out a soft sigh of relief as the feelings of dread that the Royal Executioner's red eyes instilled faded, and she turned to the confused Adronica. *Iris has left the Capital, likely on the Empress' orders. Standby until she returns.*

"What ... should I do?" Adronica mumbled with discontent. "Was it me ... does she not wish..."

No, it is nothing like that. I suspect the Empress is forcing her to have a maid by her side, and she is unhappy with it. Weather the storm ... today might be rough for you.

Adronica's lips became a line. "Pointless tasks to get rid of me?"

Likely...

"Wonderful ... well, I'll do my best."

She'll warm up to us in time. I'm sure of it.

"Let's hope ... I hate feeling like a burden."

Emelina nodded, understanding the feeling, and the dejected maid moved to her father, mother, and two younger siblings to explain the situation. Tiffany seemed to have been listening in on the conversation because she wore a deep frown while moving toward the left-wing with Esmeralda tailing her, trying to be a ghost.

She faced the four remaining maids, holding their breath as the prized position was still open; her eyes moved between each woman, each capable in their own rights. "*Angélica Tesoro, Aina San Roman, Luisina Aristizabal ... you will each have the day to yourselves.*"

Angélica's eyes brightened before quickly dimming with understanding, but a thankful smile soon lightened her cheeks. "*I will use it to the fullest, Emelina.*"

The two other maids gave similar responses; Aina curtsied, the only one wearing a dress, while the others bowed and returned to their families thankful arms.

She gave Theresa Pecha a warm nod as the chosen maid to accompany the Empress; she was the closest woman under her care that was near *Heroic-Grade*, making her an excellent choice to give higher responsibility.

Emelina took a step forward before twisting her feet to face the Empress, more than likely listening to their conversation. *Empress, is this acceptable?*

The Empress's smooth voice entered her mind. "*It is ... tell me about yourselves.*"

Emelina, Aileen, and Theresa moved in unison as the Empress returned to the Throne Room, hands held in front of them. A Quen'Talrat followed to their right, keeping pace with the Empress.

The Head Maid spoke first, giving the Empress her life's story. Her time growing up as a little girl in a Mexican drug cartel, and the cleaning she was forced to participate in for horrible acts the men and women committed.

A woman had been the leader of the branch she first found herself in, which was heavily focused on the sex trade. However, out of some spark of luck, she'd managed to avoid that scene with the exception of the drunken, groping hands of several enforcers within the organization.

She'd been forced to watch and participate in many things she regretted; her younger brother was the reason at first, but soon enough, she didn't know why she stayed, and her brother disappeared at some point. Many of the details were blurred from those years of her life.

At one of the worst periods, she'd been selected to be the maid of a major family in the cartel, which had led to many nightmares. Nothing was done to her, but the things she'd been

around were more than enough to make her lose her stomach, and yet, she couldn't in fear of the consequences.

The experiences had created a shell around her heart that had only been penetrated by the Empress' Nexus.

Theresa had been a dutiful mother to five, losing two children to malaria seven months ago, her eight and two-year-old. Emelina couldn't have guessed how old the youthful, black-haired woman was by her lovely appearance, and she managed to keep a calm demeanor while recounting the heart-breaking experience, but that didn't mean Emelina couldn't feel it through the Nexus.

Her eldest daughter, Rowena, had been taken by the Roxim Clan and was still missing. The rest of her family was safely within the Empire, and while her husband had lost an arm, he was alive.

Aileen took up the most time, and as she recounted the memories of her family, school, friends, and favorite activities, Emelina didn't feel compelled to stop it. It came at a bit of a shock, but she concluded that the Empress enjoyed the endless string of memories the twelve-year-old shared.

The Quen'Talrat lifted the Empress up, and they ascended the stairs to the large doors above; the maids' couldn't help but smile at the new strength filling their bodies, allowing them to elegantly jump up the large black granite steps with ease.

Aileen gasped when the Empress pointed her to the crystal that would lower the floating elevator, and they rode it to the second to last floor.

When they stopped, Emelina gazed around at the space with wonder. A vast glowing white-wood double-door was the only thing visible in the short, empty entrance. There was no other path forward, and it appeared that a master artist had carved a white gorilla with four arms and legs, two heads and tails, roaring with its hands in the air.

The Empress hummed softly, pausing to study the surface; a small smile played at the corners of her lips. "It's almost realistic ... Ke'Thra'Ma, The White God. Although it doesn't come close to displaying the power I felt within that creature. Hmph."

With that, the Quen'Talrat that had joined them moved forward; the five-meter tall ape took hold of one of the golden rings near its head, and with great effort, cracked the door that neared the fourteen-meter ceiling.

It only had to make a relatively small opening for them to walk through, and upon entering, Aileen gasped, causing Emelina to silently scold her through the Nexus; the girl quickly closed her gaping mouth and straightened her posture.

Emelina followed the Empress' gaze as they moved through the huge space. It seemed as if the entire floor was open and their vision was only blocked by the relatively small circular center for the elevator and massive pillars more than six-meters thick that rose to the arched ceilings, painting a brilliant image of a starry sky from the hundreds of thousands of sparkling gems embedded in the black granite.

Brilliant white granite, mixed with some form of gold lined the floor, likely creating images they couldn't grasp from their low vantage point, contrasting the abyss-like stone above that absorbed the light cast by the gems.

"The room of the White God," Elinor commented with amusement, noting the weapons and curious objects placed on gilded pedestals. "He somehow managed to get air, ventilation, purification ... these gems certainly are useful ... if only we understood them."

The maids didn't respond, Aileen having to be preemptively warned by Emelina.

“Hmm...” Elinor walked forward to the enormous glass walls, displaying a breathtaking view of the colossal fortress city they were in and the oversized valley below, and even Emelina’s lungs were frozen as she studied the mystical sights.

We truly are living a dream...

“Emelina...” She snapped out of her reverie as Valerie sent a communication. “*Violet has instructed me to bring up one of her dresses for the Empress, and a big metal spider thing is bringing a throne she requested ... what are they called?*”

Thélméthra.

“Yeah ... that...”

The four of them stood by the window as the Empress stared down in silence, more than likely busy communicating with the Royal Court.

Emelina glanced around but noted that not a single speck of dust lined the floor, and her mind returned to the Empress’ comment. *The gems act as a filter ... what else do they do?*

They waited for Valerie, and Emelina felt Adronica’s exasperation growing while explaining to her fifteen-year-old brother that she couldn’t explore with him. The irritation increased as she was forced to warn him not to go anywhere except the east-wing to his great annoyance, and swapped to asking her all sorts of random questions about the Empress she didn’t know, further agitating the maid.

One of her duties as Head Maid was to help those under her handle the stress that built up within them while transitioning to their new state of life.

Life is rough. Don’t you think, Adronica?

“He’s an idiot! I told him I’ve gotta make a good impression, and he just won’t shut-up ... so many people are staring, too...”

Calm, serene, the picture of poised tranquility is the sight of the maid.

“I’m trying...”

Deep breaths.

“...”

Adronica took audible breaths through the connection before it slowly cut with her calming heart.

Thatagirl.

Valerie entered sometime later, holding an exquisite 18th Century, flowing black and red ballroom dress with three-tier cuffs. Red butterfly patterns went around the outer petticoat, and sitting atop the outfit were red, thigh-high stockings, and delicate 2-inch heels.

The Thélméthra carried in an elegant black silk throne.

They carefully disrobed the Empress, dressing her in the new outfit.

Once finished, she sat on the throne, crossed her legs, and rested her head against the back of her left hand while casually staring at the valley below.

“Adronica, Theresa...”

Valerie froze in place, halfway to the elevator with the old clothes in hand.

“You both are Songweavers ... can you sing?”

Clearing her throat, Valerie slowly shook her head. “By dancing, I create music ... I don’t know exactly how it works, Empress.”

“I can sing,” Theresa calmly responded. “It can cast buffs on my allies and debuffs on those I view as enemies.”

“If they are seen as neither?” Elinor questioned.

“Just music.”

“Hmm ... you may return to Violet, Adronica. Theresa, sing me something haunting.”
Valerie bowed, leaving shortly after, and Emelina could feel the slight depression in her chest.

Cheer up, you can dance for her in time.

“Thanks, Emelina ... I’m just a little confused about these new powers. I’ll practice downstairs if Violet allows it.”

With that, Theresa took a deep breath and began to sing, and her voice painted the image of an old, mist-filled graveyard, illuminated in the gibbous moon.

“Cradle to grave, one and the same

“Traced unchangeably in black ink

“In the shadows I recess

“In dark solace, I will keep

“In between the lines of black ink

“And to my surprise, I think I might

“Just shut my eyes and stay blind to this violet side

“Deep inside, there lurks a monster; she goes by Theresa

“My impostor, preposterous thoughts

“Of murderous plots of all kinds

“In the depths, they would claim her

“This path was laid before me...”

Emelina silently waited as she sang, continuing as her emotion transformed into thought, spilling from her mouth in a soft melody as they watched the bright valley slowly descend into the darkness with the falling sun.

Antonietta came in after an hour or two, and Emelina was surprised at her new Chef-like garb, likely created by Violet upon Tiffany’s request. The woman looked truly professional, bringing Elinor a fancy looking meat dish with strange vegetation and fruit that had been cut and somehow caramelized, returning below soon after the Empress expressed her pleasure to instruct the humans and Ri’bot on specific ingredients that were edible.

The remaining time passed in relative peace as Elinor watched the valley, and the maids waited by her side. Emelina continued to study her maids, learning more about their temperaments.