

Chapter 129

AEKERIA

The figure remained motionless, as if frozen in time. Nothing happened.

"Forget him. He's not bothering us, is he?" the leader snarled, turning his attention back to Aekeira. "Now, my fair one, where were we?"

"Leave me alone!" Aekeira's breath hitched, shaking with rage and fear. She had been so sure it was the grand lord, yet the figure's inaction filled her with doubt.

Had she been mistaken?

But her body only turned traitor for one male. And right now, it was pulsing with familiar warmth. It must be him.

Hands groped at her, lifting her garment higher, as a calloused hand clamped onto her jaw. "Hope you remain this feisty by the time we are done with you."

"Friends," a voice laced with unease broke in. "I am not at ease with this. That is definitely an Urekai. The robes are a dead giveaway."

The others faltered, bravado waning as their eyes shifted toward the shadowed figure.

"So what? They do not care what we do in our free time, and tonight, we're off-duty. Let it go, you idiot." The leader smiled, smacking the nervous man on the back of his head.

Their hesitation vanished, their focus returning to their prey. Aekeira fought with renewed desperation, trying to keep her garment down even as they cruelly forced it up, their foul breath hot on her skin.

But she was no match for their strength. She closed her eyes. A hand reached for her undergarments and—

A blood-curdling scream pierced the night.

Aekeira's eyes flew open, just in time to witness one of her assailants being violently torn away from her. His hands were ripped off and discarded like puppet dolls.

The figure stood a few paces away, bathed in the eerie moonlight.

Another attacker was seized and flung into the trees, his agonizing screams reverberating through the forest. One by one, the men were killed, each in a more gruesome way than the last. Their cries of terror mingled with the nauseating sounds of flesh tearing and bones snapping.

Aekeira watched, paralyzed with fear. Finally the figure stepped into the light, revealing the savage features of Lord Vladya.

His eyes, more beastly yellow than human gray, locked onto hers as he seized another man. Without breaking eye contact, his fangs elongated, piercing the victim's neck with a sickening crunch.

Blood flowed freely as he drank, the man's struggles weakening with each passing moment until he hung motionless. The body was discarded with casual indifference.

The remaining attackers scattered like frightened rabbits, their screams mingling with the sounds of their frantic footsteps.

Lord Vladya smirked at her, then turned and gave chase.

The air filled with the sounds of breaking bones, tearing flesh, and bodies hitting the ground.

A whimper escaped Aekeira. It was the first time she had ever seen him fight. Not that this could be called a fight—more a massacre.

He did it effortlessly. Unfeelingly. Did not hold back, nor blink twice.

I could easily drain you dry, he had told her once. Only now did she grasp how easily he could make that happen. The savage look in his eyes...his beast so close to the surface.

You have noticed, have you not? Sometimes his behavior seemed... off. Crazy. Cruel. Lady Marilyn's voice whispered in her memory, reminding her of that day they'd talked on the river shore.

Panic surged through Aekeira. Without a second thought, she turned and fled, her legs pumping as she plunged deeper into the woods. She ran until her lungs burned and her legs ached, the darkness swallowing her whole.

Eventually, she collapsed against a tree, gasping for air. The silence of the woods was deafening, broken only by the frantic beating of her heart.

A twig snapped nearby and Aekeira froze, her eyes darting into the shadows.

Run, Aekeira, her instincts screamed.

She bolted once more. But this time, she did not get far. A strong hand grabbed her from behind, and she shrieked as she was slammed against a tree.

"There you are," Lord Vladya's voice rasped, his breath hot against her skin. His grip tightened on her waist, possessively. "I enjoyed the chase, sweet little Aekeira."

He lifted her hand—the same one Hansel had held—and inhaled sharply. "Why do you stink of the human?" His voice was guttural. More beast than male.

Aekeira frantically wiped her hand on her dress. "My Lord, I—"

"Why in Hades are you in my thoughts all the damn time? All I want is to bury myself deep inside you. To stick my dick into you and fuck you raw till you cannot walk for weeks. I wish for you to feel nothing but me, Aekeira."

She whined, her head swimming with lust. It wasn't just the usual arousal he ignited in her; this was something more. A powerful compulsion urging her to submit.

"What are you... doing?" It was becoming harder to breathe. To resist.

Then, it hit her. Pheromones.

It was why her neck bared itself without a conscious thought. Why her knees shook with the effort to remain upright instead of collapsing in submission.

But why was she affected? She was human, not Syren. This was not supposed to happen.

"All over my damn thoughts," he growled, his body flush against hers, his erection hard and thick. The familiar scent of him wrapped around her, both comforting and terrifying.

"I saw that human all over you. Do you want him?" Lord Vladya's breath was hot on her neck, and he breathed deeply, as if trying to draw her very essence into him. "Tell me, Aekeira, do you wish to undress for him?"

"No! Never, I swear it!" She rubbed herself against his nose like a feline creature, a moan slipping from her. "You are all I want." By the heavens, why did she confess such words? "You're all I ever want to take my clothes off for."

A deep growl vibrated from his throat as his hands undressed her with urgent haste. Leaving her naked and vulnerable under the stark moonlight. Pulling back slightly, he surveyed her with a gaze that was both feral and eager.

Aekeira gave in. Sinking to her knees, she bowed forward. Her legs parted, hands moving behind her to hold her cheeks, spreading them apart as she bared herself completely in total surrender to him. Utterly exposed.

Lord Vladya's growl deepened, as he crowded her. His smell enveloped her, his strong body pressed against hers. She was so aroused she could feel the wetness between her thighs, dripping down her legs.

"Want you, want you, want you," he repeated, voice rough and disjointed. Was this the wild side of him taking over?

Her throat tightened, a lump of fear and desire choking her. I do not want him to go feral. "I offer myself to you. Right here, right now. I belong to you."

In a single, forceful movement, he thrust deep inside her, filling her completely.