

Chapter 149

AEKERIA

The slave master swallowed audibly, his face pale. He turned to Aekiera, his eyes downcast. "I apologize for everything I did wrong, human."

Lord Vladya's voice remained calm, his face blank. "That is not her name, Tyke." Lord Vladya's voice remained calm, his face blank.

"I a-apologize for everything, A-Aekeira."

Aekeira was tongue-tied. "Uhm..."

Lord Vladya finally released her hand, leaving it tingling from his touch. He turned and strode away, his cloak swirling behind him. "Follow me."

Aekeira trailed behind him, leaving the bewildered, prying eyes behind. Silence enveloped them as they made their way through the Blackstone's courtyard, where slaves toiled, and into the heart of the fortress, where only Urekai roamed.

She thought back on High Lord Herod's message this morning, thankful Em was somewhere safe for her full heat. Though surprised the grand king was helping her through it. Still, knowing whose arms Em was in, eased some of her worries... even if it opened the doors to newer, scarier, ones.

They passed through manicured gardens and ornate fountains, surrounded by the sweet scent of blooming jasmine and the gentle chirping of birds.

In a meadow overlooking a lake, Lord Vladya came to a halt and Aekeira collided into his broad back.

"I was not aware you'd stopped, I..." she trailed off, breath caught in her throat. Aekeira allowed herself to lean against him, burying her nose in the folds of his dark robes, breathing him in.

For a moment, the world ceased to exist. The uncertainties of tomorrow, the worries of the future, vanished.

But she knew she couldn't linger. With a deep, shaky breath, she began to pull away...

Only to have her hands caught in his, holding her in place.

"For a moment...just for one moment." The wind carried his husky voice, brushing against her skin like a caress. "Stay like this, for one moment."

Aekeira's heart quickened its pace once more, racing so much that if she didn't know better, she'd suspect a sudden illness. But she did.

This enigmatic force of a man. This hard, cold, stubborn male with stone walls built all around him to keep the world out, was going to be her undoing.

Her hands slipped from his, rising of their own accord to encircle his waist. She pressed her cheek against the expanse of his back, the smell of him filling her senses, grounding her. "Are you well, My Lord?"

Silence answered, more eloquent than any words could have been. His body was a taut coil, vibrating with tension. Something was going on with him, and Aekeira felt helpless. She glanced around, but his ever-present guard had already granted them privacy.

"My Lord..." Her teeth worried her lower lip. She couldn't address his impending madness, not only might it shatter this fragile connection between them, but the very thought of it filled her with dread. Unbearable, terrifying dread.

"Tell me how I can ease your burden, and I will do it." Why was she voicing it out!? It was supposed to be in her secret thoughts.

But when it came to this grand lord, it seemed her every instinct rebelled against reasoning and common sense.

A bitter laugh escaped him. "First you offer your blood, then your body, and now this boundless compassion. I hurt you, Aekeira. I inflict pain, cause you harm. You find no pleasure in pain, that much I know." His head fixed on the quiet lake ahead. "Why do you not run? Why do you stay, when you should flee from me as far as your legs can carry you?"

"I cannot help myself." She nuzzled closer, eyes fluttering shut as she surrendered to the truth. "I have tried...to run, and yet...I cannot, my lord. I worry for you. I wish for you to be alright."

She braced herself for his usual rebuke, as silence reigned. The air was alive with the smell of water lilies, their ivory petals decorating the lake like stars fallen from the heavens.

"That day in court, you unclothed to protect Emeriel. To conceal her true identity."

Aekeira nodded against him. "My feelings for Lord Zaiper are not...as you believe. I do not lust for him."

"No, you lust for me," he stated. "The first night I took you, your body grew wet for me, not to the discussion of him."

Aekeira gave another nod against the rough fabric of his robe, heat flooding her cheeks.

He drew a sharp breath, a subtle tremor running through his body. "You dance with fire, little princess. You walk a dangerous path for a soulless male, one who hates your kind. One who barely feels anything anymore."

Aekeira knew this, knew it with a painful clarity that her foolish heart refused to acknowledge. Her only answer was to tighten her arms around him.

"I apologize, Aekeira," he said, his tone flat and emotionless. "For that night in the woods. For all the nights before."

His words offered no comfort. Only a deeper unease. This male felt too little to truly regret his actions, yet he apologized...as if fulfilling a duty. Tying up loose ends.

Tears pricked at Aekeira's eyes, but she blinked them back fiercely. "Tell me again," she choked out. "When you truly feel it."

"I may wake a different male tomorrow, Aekeira. For now, it's as if the rage, the anger, the hate...they slumber." A sigh escaped him, heavy with resignation. "But these days, I cannot predict who I will be at the dawn of a new day. Today, I want you here, your arms around me as we watch the sundown and the moon rise. Tomorrow, I may be consumed by the darkness, the need to hurt you. To lay you down and mount you within an inch of your life until you beg for mercy. And that is not the darkest of my desires, Aekeira. If you knew the depths of them, you would flee in terror."

Aekeira's breath hitched.

He turned to face her. "I want to whip you and make it hurt," he stated bluntly. "I wish to lay you out naked and design your pretty little skin with the marks of my whip. I want to tie you up and wreck you with my phallus all day long, until you are all raw, bruised, and unable to walk for days. Bedridden from being stuffed full of my big, Urekai cock. Your skin red from the design of my whips."

He paused, his stare piercing into her very soul. "Those are barely my instincts on a bad day. Do not take my hands, Aekeira. Run for the hills. Run, and never look back."