

Chapter 209

PRINCESS AEKEIRA

Everything hurt.

Seeing him again hurt, like tearing open an old wound.

Seeing his incredibly handsome face, reliving the past, remembering the pain, it was excruciating.

Knowing she was still going to lose him again soon, that she would have to go through that same pain all over again... was ten times excruciating.

She was already losing him, bit by bit.

One of his hands was now a paw, and Aekeira dreaded to imagine where the shift ended beneath his robes. I can't do this again.

She had thought she could handle it. She had thought she was ready to face the past again. But now, standing before him, she realized how unprepared she was.

She wasn't ready.

Lord Vladya rose too. "Don't leave, Aekeira." He took a step towards her.

Aekeira shook her head, "Please don't."

She had to leave, because even though she wasn't ready to face this all over again, she still wanted him. Pathetic, isn't it?

She still craved to see his face.

Yearned to be in his arms again.

Listen to his voice all day.

Stay by his side and make do with the moment.

The longing she had spent years burying had awoken with a jerk...rising... about to swallow her whole.

"I have to leave!" Her voice was desperate now.

"No, Aekeira," Another step forward.

Aekeira whirled around and bolted for the entrance.

She didn't get far.

Lord Vladya was upon her in an instant, pressing her against the wall.

Someone was sobbing. It took her a moment to realize it was her.

Her emotions were spilling over. Feelings she had buried deep for years now bursting free.

"Let me go!" she screamed, blindly beating at his chest with her fists. "Let me go, please!"

"Young princess, I am so sorry." His voice was the softest she had ever heard it.

"You hurt me. That morning, in your bed... I thought we were finally getting somewhere. But you threw me away like I meant nothing!" she sobbed, her words tumbling out. "Did I mean so little to you? You avoided me for a week, then you tossed me aside!"

"Please, forgive me, darling."

"Two years! Two years felt like twenty! Every day I breathed, yet I have never felt so dead. You broke my heart!" she screamed, tears streaming down her face. "You broke me!"

He kissed her.

Aekeira struggled. Her fists pounded frantically against his chest. But his hands gently restrained hers.

She fought, and fought hard.

Not to feel that kiss.

To deny the sensations.

Not to feel him again.

But it was a lost cause.

His lips on hers, his tongue in her mouth. The kiss seeped deep into her soul. Soothing the pain. Calming the storm.

Like a serum, it relieved the scathing pain from the wounds she had carried for so long.

Her struggles ceased, and Aekeira sobbed against his lips. Crying uncontrollably, her tears mixing with the kiss.

Yet, he didn't stop.

He kissed her, and kissed her, and kissed her.

Time fell away.

The world around them disappeared.

An eternity later, he broke the kiss, and licked away her tears with such rare tenderness. "I apologize with everything in me, for hurting you this way."

The raw truth, the deep regret, in his voice, made her open her eyes.

His face was a mirror of her own pain. "I'm so sorry, my little bird,"

"You hurt me," she cried helplessly, her breath hitching as the tears continued to flow. "You hurt me."

"It was never my intention. Giving you your freedom was the only decision I could make then. Letting whatever we had between us continue... it was ill-advised for so many reasons." His tone was overflowing with remorse.

"I'm soulless, Aekeira. That alone made it impossible. I'm also on a highway to madness, another reason. And you... you are human. You are not Syren. Even if I had my soul, it's not possible for a bond to take place between us. When Daemon offered to set you free, I thought it was best."

Hearing it laid out like that, Aekeira understood.

Frankly, She had thought of all this herself over the years. She could understand why he did what he did.

Yet, understanding didn't lessen the pain.

"And now?" she whispered. "What about now?"

"Now, I regret that decision more than anything. I sent you away so you would not see me go feral, but when it came down to it, you were all I wanted by my side. As I battled against it, I found myself hoping—praying—that I would recover enough to cross into the human world and bring you back here, Aekeira, to where you truly belong."

He looked her in the eyes, "I wish I'd never let you go."

PRINCESS EMERIEL

As Emeriel stood before the grand king's residence, she took in the grandeur of the place. The sophisticated decorations, the massive double doors carved with two lions, their mouths open in fierce roars.

The last time she had stood here, she had been a slave terrified of her secrets, carrying his dinner.

That was the best part about being back in this city, the freedom from that strangling fear. There were no secrets now. No deception weighing her down. This was who she was.

"Are you ready?" Lord Ottai asked beside her.

She inclined her head and took a step forward.

"One more thing," he said, halting her. "He does not like to feed. If you try, and his claws slip out, let it go. Don't push him, or he may claw you up like the others. He's...not in his right mind."

Emeriel gave a curt nod.

Led to King Daemonikai's bedchamber, she paused at the door while the Ureikai maids departed. Then, with a deep breath, she opened it and stepped inside.

His scent hit her first.

It was overpowering. An assault on her senses after two long years without it.

She swayed on the spot, and her knees buckled. Gripping the wall, Emeriel tried to steady herself. Everywhere smelled like him.

There he was. Lying peacefully on the bed.

Magnificent. Handsome. Just as she remembered.

Too much like a dream.

Their bond was dormant now, the only thing she had clung to when she made the decision to return. Seeing him again would be easy, she had convinced herself. Without the bond, there would be no feelings.

But that was a lie.

Nothing could have prepared Emeriel for the explosion of feelings that hit her. So many at once it made her dizzy.

She was not prepared for the stab in her chest, nor was she for the butterflies that fluttered to life at the pit of her stomach. They spread their wings, soaring and fluttering, alive and free again.

Emeriel had not felt this much in years.