

Chapter 253

PRINCESS AEKERIA

She froze, her breath ceasing in her chest. Had she heard him right?

Aekeira stared ahead, unable to move. “Wh-what?”

“Let’s give it a try, the bonding ritual,” Lord Vladya said again, coolly.

The world tilted beneath her feet. He wanted to bond with her...? To truly go ahead with it, against all odds?

“Breathe, young princess,” he gave the gentle command.

Aekeira’s breath shuddered out of her. Happiness, hope, fear, and disbelief rose inside her all at once.

Slowly, she turned to face him, wide, tear-filled eyes meeting his.

Even as she moved, he didn’t let her go. Pulling back just enough to allow her movement, his strong arms still holding her protectively against his broad body.

“But the odds...” Her heart hammered wildly as she searched his face. "...the odds aren’t in ou-our favor. What if—”

“Damn them all. The odds won’t favor us tomorrow, nor in the future,” he stated in a steady tone. "I’m still going mad, you’re still an unaltered human, and I have no soul."

She lowered her eyes.

"But," he added, his voice dropping to a near whisper, “let’s do it anyway.”

Tears welled in her eyes, blurring as she stared up to his handsome face. Was this real? Was she dreaming...?

“You r-really want to?” she stammered out hoarsely.

He gave a single, firm nod, confidence radiating from him.

Suddenly, uncertainty flashed across his features. “Unless you don’t want to—”

“I do.” Her reply was quick, breathless. “I really do.”

Relief touched his stormy gray eyes. “I will understand if you don’t—”

“I love you.” The words made an escape before she could even think to hold them back.

He blinked at her.

But Aekeira wouldn’t take it back. Couldn’t.

“I’m in love with you,” she said, cheeks flushing, voice steadier. “I have been for a long, long time. I want to bond with you, to be with you. I want to love you in every way I can, for as long as we have.”

The soft breeze of the night filled the silence.

“Why?” he asked, gruffly.

Aekeira’s eyes zeroed in on the silver embroidery at his neckline.

“I would be lying if I said it did not cross my mind, however there is a question that troubles me. Why?” He sounded almost pained. “Why do you love me?”

“I—”

“I never gave you a reason to,” he continued, confusion coating his rugged features. “I was brutal to you. A monster. I forced myself repeatedly on you—” he cut off, looking away. “Why? Why would a lady like you love a male like me, Aekeira? It’s downright baffling to me.”

“Why? The truth is, I don’t know.” Aekeira finally answered, shaking her head. "I don’t have a logical reason for you.”

The cool night air swirled around them, the chirping of birds in the distance.

“In the beginning, I was sure I hated you. But somewhere along the way, those feelings started to change.” Sincerity rang in her passionate voice. “I began thinking of you, worrying about you... desiring you.”

Steeling herself, she stepped closer, closing the small gap he’d placed between them. “Everything I gave, I gave willingly. When you needed blood, when your bloodlust consumed you and your beast was too close to the surface, I wanted nothing more than to give you mine. I wanted to ease your pain. I wanted you inside me, even then.”

She took his calloused fingers into hers, guiding it to her cheek, nuzzling against it. “I never forced myself to do any of it. I never regretted anything. I wanted to give you everything—two years ago, and now.”

His hand trembled slightly against hers.

“I want us to be together, even if the heavens deem us unfit,” she whispered, tears swimming in her eyes. “Even if our kinds don’t match. Let’s try anyway. I love you with everything in me—”

He silenced her with a kiss. His lips crashing into hers, so fiercely consuming it knocked her breath away.

His hand slipped to her hips, possessive and desperate, as if afraid she might slip away. The kiss was fire and longing... need and devotion.

Aekeira melted into it, kissing him back with equal passion, pouring every ounce of her feeling into it.

She couldn’t get enough of him—this gruff, powerful, grumpy male who had somehow become hers.

When he pulled his lips from hers, he breathed heavily, his hands still firmly gripping her.

Without a word, he turned her back to face the window, his arms wrapping around her shoulders as he slumped slightly, enveloping her completely.

Together, they gazed out at the beautiful, airy night. The stars above glittering.

He knows now. He knows how I feel.

Aekeira felt lighter in her heart. It didn’t bother her that he hadn’t said the words back, she didn’t need him to. His actions, his kisses, spoke louder than any words ever could.

“I never thought I’d feel these emotions running through me again,” Vladya murmured, his cheek brushing hers, his breath warm against her skin. “I’m starting to grow accustomed to them. Weeks ago, they felt so foreign.”

“What do you feel?” she asked softly, tilting her head slightly to meet his eyes.

“Happy.” A pause. “Content.”

“I wish for your happiness never to end. I wish for you to keep feeling this way, My Lord.” Aekeira stroked the corded muscles of his arm, feeling whole inside.

“I remember the first day I felt... attraction for you. It was around the forbidden chambers, after I’d checked on Daemonikai’s beast. Never in my life did I think I would feel even the slightest desire for a human.” His fingers trailed through her hair, tone indifferent... his touch was anything but. “I was livid.”

Aekeira smiled faintly, remembering all too well.

Back then, his constant anger, the coldness in his voice, the way he spat his disgust at her kind. How far we have come.

“A lot has changed with us,” he murmured softly, as if he too were reflecting on their journey. “I never thought I’d feel this way again. For anyone, Aekeira.”

“Thank you for telling me. I wish to ask a question.” Clearing her clogged throat, Aekeira ventured, “About your soul...”

His hand in her hair stilled.

“Lord Ottai said your soul is lost, not dead. Is there really no chance to get it back without performing another dark magic ritual?”

“None.”

Her shoulders slumped as silence fell between them.

“Even if there were a way, the one person who might know is beyond reach.”

What? There might be a way? Her eyes snapped to him, sharp with sudden hope.

"I'm not saying there is, Princess," Lord Vladya replied, addressing the unspoken question in her gaze. "I've searched far and wide for centuries and found nothing. I merely speculate that if anything could be done, the one old enough, wise enough, and knowledgeable enough to hold the answer is beyond reach."

“Who is that?”

“The Oracle,” he told her in a resigned tone. “She’s in deep sleep.”

Aekeira was baffled. But when she tried to ask again, he pulled away from her, stepping back. "Come, let's go for a walk."

The crease in her brow dissolved, replaced with a smile. "As My Lord wishes."

Holding hands, they walked out of her room.