

## Chapter 79

MIXED POV.

"Please, my lord!" Aekeira cried out, drawing his attention. Her hands clasped together in a desperate plea. "Show mercy to my brother!"

"Mercy? Why? Are you going to offer yourself again, as you did in court?" Zaiper's voice was a mocking purr.

"Yes," Aekeira's answer came fast. Unwavering. "Yes, please, I'm willing to."

Zaiper barked out a laugh, the sound devoid of warmth. "Such devotion, such dedication. Sadly, you are not the one I wish to bury myself inside tonight."

He turned his attention back to Emeriel, his hand raised and flexed. Claws, glinting, ready to shred his clothes.

"All hail His Majesty the Third! The third sovereign ruler of Urai and the sole leader of the western wings. All hail Grand Lord Vladya!" The booming announcement shattered the charged atmosphere.

Zaiper froze, his grip loosening. "Vladya's returned?"

The door swung open, and Grand Lord Vladya entered. His measured stride carried an air of cool detachment, yet hinting at a barely restrained power.

"Vladya, to what do I owe this unexpected visit?" Zaiper's voice was laced with a veneer of politeness that barely concealed his displeasure. He stepped away from Emeriel.

"The question is, what were you doing, Lord Zaiper?" Vladya countered, his measured strides bringing him closer to the heart of the lavish chamber.

"Punishment," Zaiper said smoothly. "The boy trespassed into Greyrock uninvited."

"And what prompted this trespass?" Vladya's tone was sharp, challenging. "Let me guess. You had his sister detained. But what might I ask was her crime?"

Zaiper faltered. A plausible excuse eluded him. Anger simmered beneath the surface, a muscle twitching in his jaw. "She's a human, Vladya. We don't require justification for disciplining their kind."

"Perhaps with any other slave, but not them." Vladya's voice was firm, unwavering. "Ottai and I embarked on a specific mission to acquire them, and if they are to face punishment, there should at least be a valid cause. Do you not agree?"

"Since when do you concern yourself with such trivial matters?" Zaiper spat, his patience wearing thin. He closed the distance between them. "Since when do you advocate for humans?"

"I do not," Vladya said coolly. "But these two serve an important purpose—to fulfill the beast's sexual desires. Have you forgotten what happens when his desires go unmet? Do you want our people slaughtered?"

Zaiper seethed, but he held his tongue.

Vladya turned to face Aekeira and Emeriel. "Come with me, both of you." His voice, though commanding, held gentleness. They scrambled to their feet, and moved toward him.

"Do you truly believe you can just waltz in here and take them?" Zaiper's voice dripped with venom. "You overestimate yourself, Vladya."

Vladya paused, his gaze piercing. "What is the real issue here, Zaiper? If I didn't know any better, I'd say this is not about the girl at all, but the boy. You lured him here by abducting his sister, but why? Why all this elaborate theater?" His voice lowered, every word a weighted accusation. "If I were less informed, I might suspect you simply want the boy dead."

"That is preposterous!" Lord Zaiper blustered, his hand forming a fist.

"I am not accusing you of anything," Vladya continued calmly. "I am merely speculating what conclusions I might draw if I didn't know better. If I have misunderstood, then you would have no reason to object to me taking them, do you?"

A tense silence filled the room, each man holding the other's gaze. Emeriel and Aekeira stood side by side, their shoulders brushing, fingers interlaced behind their backs, forming a united front.

"The beast requires its sustenance, Zaiper. Right now. He is already irritable. You and I both know what follows—an escape from its confines," Lord Vladya's voice remained steady, his composure unruffled. "One of them will proceed directly from here to the forbidden chambers to fulfill their duties. The sooner you release them, the sooner we can prevent disaster."

"Very well." Zaiper's concession was a grudging growl. "Take the boy. The girl stays. That's my final offer." His gaze, cold and calculating, dared Vladya to refuse.

Vladya stiffened, his eyes flickering between the siblings. Emeriel's face was etched with dread, while Aekeira's eyes brimmed with terror.

A choice had to be made. He had come to rescue Emeriel. And he had succeeded in securing the boy. Vladya typically avoided confrontations like this. Zaiper was exceedingly skittish, believing everyone to be challenging his claim to the grand throne. Vladya had no desire for the throne and no intention of directly challenging Zaiper's rule. He cared little for whatever Zaiper did. Thus, he should accept the offer and depart.

However, the same gnawing unease that had gripped him two days ago when Zaiper spoke of Aekeira, resurfaced with renewed ferocity. It was a primal instinct, protective and vengeful.

No, he did not want Zaiper to have her just yet.

"What is your decision, Lord of Blackstone? You may depart with the boy, but..." Zaiper moved closer to Aekeira, positioning himself behind her, roughly cupped her breast. "But the girl stays. Or you can take the girl while the boy remains. Either way works for me."

"No. I will depart with the boy," Vladya asserted firmly.

"And the girl?"

"I will take her as well. As I said, I am not finished with her. You can have your turn later," Vladya proclaimed, his words dripping with arrogance.

Aekeira's eyes flashed with a mixture of anger and hurt, tears filled her them as she locked gazes with Vladya who met her stare for a fleeting moment.

Unfazed, his expression remained stoic, his face devoid of emotion, as he shifted his attention to Zaiper. "She is still my whore. You can have my leftovers later."

"I've heard that before," Zaiper hissed, a cruel smile twisting his lips. "But my patience is not infinite. I look forward to sharing. The girl desires me, after all. Remember how eager she was to disrobe for me in court?"

Vladya's eyes darkened, but he offered no response. He turned on his heel and strode towards the exit. "Follow me, slaves," he commanded.