THORNS 105

Chapter 105: Bored Women Breaks Hearts

On the other side of the fortress, far from the dungeon of Kurt and Violet's fight, Dominik and Emelie were being led down a sterile, stone-walled corridor by Thomas. The prisoner shuffled between them as his eyes darted around in terror.

"We're nearly there, my new brothers and sister." Thomas' voice echoed through the silence. "Still, I must say, I am pleased to know that we have such devoted new blood joining our brotherhood. Imagine my surprise when you told me that the first stop you wanted to visit was the main reason this fortress was built. Most newcomers immediately ask to visit our place of worship. The love they hold in their hearts for Goddess Bula always seems to take president over all else."

"Of course, Brother Thomas." Dominik walked up next to him. "Our mission to snuff out any blasphemers and heretics will always be our first priority. Those false priests at the church dare claim that the Goddess has a direct descendant while ignoring our existence? The nerve! We are her children. And we will show them exactly what happens when they deny us by making an example of those children. This is our way of showing how much we love Her. Isn't that right, Sister?"

"... You speak no lies, Brother." Emelie responded, keeping her head and hood low.

"Truly. I cannot express how lucky we are to have such focused devotees." Thomas wiped a tear sliding down his face. "And worry not. When the time comes for us to execute our in killing those blasted children, you two will have a front seat. Perhaps, you may even partake in the event. I will definitely put in a good word for you. That is, if Tobias decides to get his act together..."

"W-Where is B-Bishop Tobias!?" Mr. Shittypants ran up to Thomas and grabbed the sleeve of his cloak.

"Finally, you speak. I was beginning to worry, Brother...?"

"Mr. Sh– No! D-Duncan! I am Brother Duncan! Please, you must tell me where Bishop Tobias is! I must know!" Mr. Shittypants began frantically pulling and pushing Thomas.

"H-Hold on, Brother Duncan. Please, calm down. You going to tear my robes–"

"BISHOP TOBIAS! W-WHERE IS BISHOP TOB–"

"Whoa there, Brother Duncan!" Dominik pulled him off Thomas and covered his mouth. "Didn't you tell me that you took your meds this morning? I can't believe you lied to me, haha. I'm so sorry about him, Brother Thomas."

"It's ok. I am not hurt. Brother Duncan, however, does not seem well. You said he has not taken his medication? Then you should take him to the medical room. It's three doors back from the way we came."

"I'll take him." Emelie grabbed his arm and whispered to him, "You better shut the fuck up before I shut it for you."

Sensing the killing intent from Emelie, Mr. Shittypants nodded meekly and walked behind her.

"Please excuse me, Brother Thomas, I'll be leaving for now. I will catch up later though. Once our friend here has calmed down." Emelie gave a slight bow before leaving them.

"What a poor soul. May the Goddess watch over him during his struggle." Thomas brought his hand together and prayed.

"Amen." Dominik followed suit.

"Anyways, come. We are very close to our destination."

"Lead the way."

After reaching the end of the hallway and going up some stairs, they entered an elevated room that looked to be like a comfortable living room with couches all facing a closed shutter.

'What the hell is this place?' Dominik looked around in bewilderment.

Thomas stepped up to a console and near the shutter and pressed a sequence of heavy iron buttons. With a low, mechanical rumble, the massive metal shutters began to slide open. Behind them was a wall of thick, tempered glass that looked down into a cavernous hall below.

"Behold, my brother." Thomas gestured with his hand for Dominik to look through.

And so, he did.

Below them was a gargantuan playroom, lit by soft, artificial golden light. It was beautiful, filled with toys and soft rugs. But the sheer scale of it was haunting. Hundreds of children, ranging from toddlers to young teens, were scattered across the floor. They were playing silently, their movements eerie and synchronized. To Dominik, it looked like a sea of stolen lives kept in a gilded cage beneath the hills.

"What the fuck..." He muttered under his breath. He knew that this is what they came here for, but seeing it now in person, everything just became a whole lot more real.

"Take a good look at those pathetic little faces." Thomas walked up behind Dominik and smiled. "Because it’s the last thing you’ll ever see, Prefect Dominik."

"... Huh? I never told you my– Oh shit–!"

SHATTER!

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The hallway outside the Violet’s chamber remained eerily calm, the stone walls muffling the chaotic violence that was taking place. Two cultists, walking past the empty hallway, paused as a particularly

loud crash shook the heavily reinforced wooden door. It was followed by a sharp, high-pitched scream that ended in a wet, choking sound.

The younger cultist reached for his sword hilt, eyes wide. "Should we...?"

The elder man just chuckled dryly. He adjusted his hood and kept walking. "Forget it. That's Sister Violet's quarters. She probably got her hands on a new plaything. You know how she is. She likes her toys to scream before she breaks them. If you value your skin, you'll stay as far away from that door as possible unless you want to be the next one on the slab."

"R-Right. It's all by the Will of the Goddess." The younger man shivered, nodding quickly.

"The will of a bored woman with a whip," the elder corrected. They then moved on, footsteps fading into the distance as they left the screams behind.

Inside the room, the air was thick with the scent of iron as blood splatters lay all around. The sex dungeon was a ruin. The black silk curtains had been shredded to ribbons, the heavy wooden cupboard was a pile of splinters, and the floor was slick with more than just spilled wine.

"Haaa... *Huff* *Puff* ergh..." Kurt leaned against a cracked stone pillar, his chest heaving.

His cloak was gone, his shirt was torn open to the waist, and a jagged, purple welt ran from his shoulder to his hip where the whip had caught him. He wiped a mixture of sweat and grime from his forehead, fixing his one eye on the center of the room.

Violet was hovering three feet off the ground, her head lolling at an impossible angle as her neck knitted itself back together for the third time in ten minutes. Purple swirls of magic pulsed around her midsection once again.

With a sickening, wet splat, another heart burst through the magical vortex her body created and tumbled to the floor. It landed with a heavy splash next to two others that were completely still, glistening in violet slime.

"Three," Kurt panted. "That’s three times I’ve put you down, you freak. Three times I’ve felt your neck snap or your lungs collapse. How many of those things do you have inside you?"

Violet’s head snapped upright. She inhaled deeply, her chest expanding as if she were tasting the very air he breathed. She landed softly on her toes, the purple whip coiling around her arm like a loyal serpent.

"Oh, Kurt," she purred. "Most men can barely handle me once. But you... you’ve taken my life three times over. It’s almost romantic, isn’t it? Such a vigorous, violent courtship."

She stepped over one of her own discarded hearts, crushing it under the heel of her boot without a second thought. A dark, oily substance leaked out, but she didn’t seem to care.

"I have enough hearts to keep us playing until the sun rots out of the sky," she whispered, her tongue flicking over her split lip. "And with every death, I learn a little more about how you move. I can feel your pulse slowing, little boy. The poison is gone, but the exhaustion is a much slower killer."

Kurt didn’t answer. He reached down and gripped a jagged piece of the broken cupboard the size of a shortsword. He didn’t have his primary blades; they were lost in the wreckage, but he had his spite, and he had a mission to complete. Those kids weren’t going to save themselves.

"I’ve got all night," Kurt lied, his muscles screaming in protest as he shifted into a low combat stance. "I’ll carve every single one of those hearts out of you until there’s nothing left but a pile of meat."

"Hehehe~ I do hope you’re still as good with your hands as you are with your tongue."

She cracked the whip. The sound was like a thunderclap in the small room. The purple energy lashed out, not as a single cord, but splitting into three separate ethereal tendrils.

Kurt dived to the right, rolling over the shattered remains of the bed frame. The whip disintegrated the pillar he had been leaning on just a second before, sending a shower of stone dust into the air. He surged forward through the debris, staying low to the ground.

"Ahahahaha!" A genuine sound of manic delight escaped her throat as she laughed.

She then spun in a graceful circle, her cloak flaring out like wings. As Kurt lunged upward with the wooden shard, she didn't dodge. She caught his wrist with a hand that felt like cold iron, leaning in so close he could see the shimmering violet veins beneath her skin.

"Round four, Kurt," she breathed against his ear, her grip crushing his bones. "Try to make this one last. I'd hate for you to disappoint mommy so soon."

With a surge of her magical strength, she hurled him backward, and the dance of death began again.

Chapter 106: Dance With Death

Landing flat on his feet, Kurt stood amidst the wreckage of the black-silk-draped dungeon. His breath hitched in his chest as he stalked Violet who circled him like a sleek, purple-scaled predator.

"Oh~ Finally feeling fatigued? But we haven't even gotten to the main event," she whispered, the purple whip in her hand slithering across the floorboards like a living thing. "Do try not to pass out from exhaustion. I have yet to get a proper taste of you~"

Kurt didn't waste his time on words. He took one last deep breath, focused his mind, and lunged.

"Hahaha! Here he comes!"

The fight exploded into a blur of motion. Kurt moved with the fluid; brutal efficiency of a man trained in a dozen different styles of combat. He closed the distance with a lightning-fast jab-cross combination, his fists whistling through the air.

Violet didn't block the attack; she dodged, or rather, she danced. She moved with an uncanny, jerky grace, displaying strength and agility that far exceeded what her slender frame suggested.

When Kurt stepped into a low sweep, she leaped into the air, spinning like a ballerina and lashing out with the whip. The weapon came down with a streak of purple amethyst light. Kurt dove beneath it, feeling the hair on the back of his neck rise.

’Something’s off. I’m too tired... That whip. Every time she hits me with it, my energy feels like it’s being drained from me.’

"I see you’re eyeing my dear weapon, Kurt." Violet cooed as the whip slid around her thigh. "Have you finally figured it out?"

"... Dammit, haha. What a naughty cheater we have here."

He knew now that the whip was more than just a physical threat; when Violet wielded it, the weapon acted as a conduit for her dark magic. Every snap that landed on him felt like it was tugging at his very soul, trying to drain the mana from his veins.

’But it didn’t sap me when I used it to choke her. Hmm. The magic probably requires her specific touch to activate its parasitic nature.’

"That’s enough ogling, boy!" Violet jumped into the air, preparing to slash her whip down.

Ceasing the split opportunity moment, Kurt surged upward, catching her in mid-air with a powerful muay-thai knee to the ribs. He felt the bone shatter, but Violet only laughed, her eyes wide and manic.

"Gaah! Hahaha! Good, but not good enough!" She grabbed his head, pulling him into a savage headbutt of her own that sent stars dancing across his vision.

She fought with a terrifying, reckless abandon. She didn’t care about being hit, stabbed, or broken. They both knew what would happen if she were to die.

As they both landed on the ground, she swung the whip in a vertical arc, slamming it into the floor beside Kurt. The floorboards disintegrated into splinters. Kurt narrowly dodged and countered with a spinning back-fist that caught her square in the jaw, twisting her head around, but she simply snapped it back into place with a wet pop and lunged again.

"Hahaha! What big hands you have, Kurt~!" Violet interlocked their fingers as they held each other in place.

"Hahaha! You too, granny! What big eyes you have!" Kurt quipped back.

"All the better to see you with, my dear!"

They both raised their right and left leg respectively, and with a hard thwack, kicked each other in the stomach.

They broke apart, both panting, standing ten feet away from each other. Violet wiped a streak of blood from her cheek and blew him a mocking, theatrical kiss. As her lips parted, a thick, cloying purple mist erupted from her mouth. It drifted and expanded with unnatural speed, filling the room in seconds. Kurt coughed, trying to cover his nose, but the mist was everywhere. It was more than a smoke screen. It was a sensory assault.

"Can’t see me, can you?" her voice echoed from the fog, appearing to come from every direction at once. "Do you feel it, Kurt? The heat? The way your heart wants to jump out of your chest?"

True to what she said, Kurt’s heart began to spike. His pulse hammered a frantic rhythm in his ears. His vision blurred, not just from the fog, but from a sudden, overwhelming surge of heat and desire that threatened to drown his combat focus.

’D-Dammit!’ He stumbled, nearly falling on one knee. ’An aphrodisiac!? Did that shit just come out her mouth?’

His muscles felt heavy, his mind clouded by images of Violet’s laughing face. As his guard was dropped, a sudden lash of the whip caught him across the shoulder, tearing through his skin.

WUH-PSSSH!

"AARGH!" Kurt held his shoulder, feeling the mana drain from his body. He then crouched down into a turtle position, making sure to cover his head as he took on a barrage of onslaught.

WUH-PSSSH!

WUH-PSSSH!

WUH-PSSSH!

"Hahaha! Why are you just lying here~? Come to mommy, little boy," she taunted, her voice a sultry purr inches from his ear.

"You know what? Screw this. I'm done." Suddenly, a searing heat ignited in Kurt's core. It wasn't the heat of the mist; it was a biological defense mechanism. His skill flaring to its limits: Adaptation.

His unique magical ability, triggered by the extreme biological stress of the toxin, surged to life. His lungs filtered the purple gas with sudden, violent efficiency. His heart rate leveled out, and the fog in his mind burned away as his nervous system reconfigured itself to neutralize the aphrodisiac. His eyes snapped open, the haze gone, replaced by a cold, murderous clarity.

"I see you've given up." Violet's reverberated voice sighed. "It's no surprise, really. Your mana must be completely drained by now. Oh well, it was fun while it lasted. Now, it's time for the main course to begin~"

She then lunged from the mist, her whip cocked back and ready to successfully capture him. As expected, Kurt didn't dodge. But to her shock he instead reached out with lightning speed and caught the glowing purple cord in his bare hand.

"What the?! How are you still moving?!"

The mana-drain tried to take hold, but Kurt's grip was absolute. He planted his feet and with every ounce of his physical and magical strength–

"Would you let go alre–Aaaaa!" He yanked Violet forward, her feet leaving the ground as she was hauled toward him.

Kurt coiled his right arm, his mana surging for the first time in the fight. He then pulled back his entire arm and channeled his magic into a Mana-Coated fist, the air around his knuckles shimmering with a sapphire, translucent light.

And once she was close enough, he swung his fist with his entire weight. "You hungry!? Eat on this, bitch!"

"Aaaaa–!"

BOOM!

The blow landed with the sound of a cannon blast. Violet's face buckled under the impact. She was sent tumbling backward, crashing through the remains of the stone pillars and sliding across the floor.

She scrambled up, her face a mask of genuine panic for the first time. "Mana coating?" she hissed, spitting out a mouthful of blood and broken teeth. "You... you've been holding back? Why? Why only now?"

Kurt walked near the corner of the room, his silhouette dark against the flickering torches. He reached down on the ground and picked up his signature weapons: his brass-knuckle switchblades. The steel blades shinging as they slid out, locked into place over his knuckles.

"It's a last resort," Kurt said, his voice a low, dangerous rumble. "I've killed you over and over, yet you always get up. I'm reaching my limit, so I've decided that this is it. I'm done playing with you. This ends now."

He dropped into a tight, professional boxing stance, the mana shimmering around his blades like a halo of death.

Then, he vanished.

"Grrr! Why you!" To Violet's eyes, he became a blur of blue light. He was too fast, his movements fueled by the desperate surge of his strength enhancing power and mana coating light.

He appeared on her left, his brass knuckles slamming into her kidney, followed instantly by a hook that carved a deep red line across her throat.

Violet tried to swing her whip, but Kurt was already gone. He appeared behind her and struck with devastating speed.

THWACK!

Left.

THWACK

Right.

THWACK!

Jab.

THWACK!

Uppercut.

Each blow carried the weight of a sledgehammer and the edge of a razor.

He was blitzing through the room, using the walls and the debris to launch himself at impossible angles. Violet screamed, spinning in circles, lashing out at shadows, but Kurt was always a step ahead. He was a storm of iron and mana.

He caught her in the center of the room, delivering a flurry of sixteen consecutive blows to her torso and face. The sound was like a drumbeat of breaking bone.

For the fourth time, Kurt moved for the kill. He drove both blades into her chest, twisting them with a brutal, wrenching motion, and then delivered a spinning roundhouse kick that sent her shattered body into the far wall with enough force to crack the masonry.

Violet slumped to the floor, her body twisted and broken beyond recognition. Kurt stood over her, his chest heaving, sweat dripping from his chin. He waited, staring at her limp form, praying that the sheer level of physical trauma he had just inflicted would be enough to break the cycle of her hearts.

And for a moment, there was silence.

"Finally..." Just as Kurt turned around, he heard that dreadfully familiar hum.

When he turned around, he saw the magic swirls returning even more violent than before. Kurt's heart sank.

'No... Not again.'

"Hehehe~ Ahahaha! Kuuurt~!"

Violet's body began to rise, the bones snapping back into place with a sound like a forest fire. She stood up, her hair covering her face. A low, bubbling giggle began to rise in her throat, turning into a full-blown maniacal laugh. She looked like a nightmare given flesh, ready for round five.

BOOM!

The locked front door exploded inward.

"ENOUGH!"