THORNS 175

Chapter 175 - Kurt Rossana [Pt2]

Diana’s breath hitched in her throat.

"For the first time in my life, my mom beat me," Kurt said flatly.

"She threw me to the ground and started hitting me, screaming that I was calling her a whore just like my dad did. I curled into a ball, crying and begging her to stop, telling her I was so, so sorry.

"Eventually, she realised what she was doing. She stopped, collapsed onto the floor, and pulled me into a desperate hug, sobbing that she was sorry, that she wasn’t like this. Once we both calmed down, she looked me dead in the eye and told me there was no other father.

"That the man she killed was my only father. Whenever I tried to bring up the DNA test after that, she’d dismiss it and tell me to never speak of it again."

Kurt’s arms around Diana’s waist felt heavier now, holding her close as he dragged up the darkest depths of his past.

"Eventually, the money dried up completely. At her absolute wit’s end, terrified of us starving, she resorted to the very thing my dad had accused her of.

"One afternoon, she brought a random stranger back to our motel room. She looked absolutely terrified. She pushed some coins into my hand and told me to go play outside for an hour.

"I was confused, but admittedly, I was terrified of irritating her or getting beaten again. So I left. When I came back an hour later, the man was gone. My mom was curled up in the corner of the bed, crying hysterically beneath a blanket.

"There was a stack of dirty cash sitting on the desk. I walked over to comfort her, and she just wrapped her arms around me, weeping that everything was going to be alright.

"But time kept passing," Kurt's voice hardened.

"And those 'visits' from random men happened more and more often. With each passing month, she became more and more numb to it. Slowly, her personality twisted. Just like my dad, just the mere sight of me put her in an irritated mood.

"But unlike my father – who'd try to put on a brave face – she started using me as a physical stress reliever. She'd beat me regularly. And honestly? I just accepted it. Why? Because the brief moments right after she finished hitting me were one of the only times she ever looked truly happy or calm anymore.

"Then... came the day I turned eight."

Kurt felt Diana trembling violently against his chest. Her hands were shaking so much she could barely hold onto his fingers.

"One of her frequent visitors stopped me at the door before I could leave the house," Kurt said as his gaze clouded over with a dangerous, icy detachment.

"He looked at me, smiled this disgusting, greasy smile, and told my mom he'd pay extra if he could 'play' with the kid, too."

Diana let out a horrified gasp as her entire body locked up in revulsion.

"I looked at my mom, fully expecting her to reject him, to kick him out, to kill him... to protect me. But she just stared blankly at the man. All she said was... 'Make it quick.'"

"Rosie..."

"I panicked. I begged her to save me, crying out for her, but she just turned her back. The man lunged forward, grabbed me and started tearing at my clothes. I fought with everything I had – I kicked, I bit, I struggled, and somehow, I managed to break out of his grip and sprint into the small kitchen.

"He chased after me. In pure survival instinct, I grabbed an empty beer bottle off the counter, smashed it against the sink, and held the jagged edge out, screaming at him to stay back.

"My mom walked into the kitchen and scolded me in a dull voice, telling me to put the glass down and stop causing trouble. The man laughed, completely unphased by me, and charged in again.

"But I was smaller. Faster. I ducked right between his legs as he lunged, and the exact moment he spun around to grab me again... I drove the shattered, jagged glass straight into his face.

"He collapsed to the floor, screaming in agony, but the adrenaline completely took over my brain. So I mounted his chest and just kept driving the glass into his face, over and over and over again, until he finally stopped moving. He was dead."

Kurt let out a long, slow breath. "I stood up, covered in his blood, and turned to look at my mom. She looked absolutely terrified of me. She started screaming, telling me to stay away from her.

"She started scrambling backward into the bedroom, throwing her hairdryer, the lamp, money, condoms, anything and everything she could reach at my head. I was confused, crying, trying to walk toward her to ask why she let him do that to me.

"When I finally got close enough, she slapped me hard to the ground. She mounted me and began beating me with terrifying ferocity, screaming that I was a monster. I couldn’t take it anymore, Ana.

"The pain, the betrayal, the madness... something in my head just snapped. I escaped her grasp, grabbed the bloody glass I dropped on the floor, and in a blind fit of rage... I killed her. The exact same way I killed the man.

"I was crying hysterically the entire time I was stabbing her... screaming at her, asking why she didn’t love me, why she would let him touch me. By the time the rage cleared, and my brain snapped back to reality... it was too late. She was cold. Dead on the floor."

Kurt let out a quiet sigh as the weight of the horrific tale finally lifted from the air.

"And then... just like she did one year prior, I took whatever valuables were on the stranger and my mom, grabbed a backpack, and ran into the night. I became a street kid. Picking brutal fights, stealing food and money, hiding out in alleyways and abandoned buildings.

"Eventually, a specific group of professional hitmen – or assassins, whatever you want to call it – picked me up off the concrete, took me in, taught me the difference between good and evil, and trained me to survive. And here I am. That's my parents. That's the scumbags they were."

Diana was trembling violently. The horrific tale of Kurt's past was a level of darkness her own loving childhood memories could barely comprehend.

Sensing her distress, Kurt called out to her gently. "Ana? Hey... look at me."

Diana slowly turned her body around within his lap, fully facing him.

Her beautiful face was completely drenched in tears, her crimson eyes narrow and swimming with an intense breaking sorrow for the little boy who had been forced to become a monster just to survive.

Kurt offered her a small, tender smile and reached up to gently brush a stray strand of hair behind her ear. "Hey, don't cry. It's alright. It's all in the past now. It's over. I'm okay."

Not saying a word, Diana slowly raised her trembling hand as her delicate fingers reached up toward his face.

Unbeknownst to Kurt, a single, solitary tear had silently escaped his eye, tracing a slow path down his cheek. With absolute tenderness, Diana's thumb reached out and gently wiped the tear away.

Kurt blinked, completely confused. He touched his own cheek and stared at his damp fingers. "Huh... look at that. I didn't even realise I was crying, haha. Sorr–"

"Rosie!" Before he could say anything else, Diana lunged forward and threw her arms fiercely around his neck, burying her face into his shoulder.

She embraced him with every single ounce of strength in her body.

She let out a loud, unrestrained sob, weeping openly around his shoulder.

Kurt sat there on the sand, listening to the sound of the ocean waves crashing softly in the background, while Diana cried loudly as she spoke his name and apologised even though she had no reason to.

As he wrapped his arms tightly around her waist, holding her close, a genuine, deeply peaceful smile slowly spread across his lips.

For the first time in his entire, brutal life, he realised something beautiful. There was someone in this world who loved him enough, who cared enough, to weep for the scars he bore.

And as he held the love of his life in his arms, he knew right there that he would gladly burn the entire world to ashes before he ever let her go for another man. Or for any other reason.

Chapter 176 - Trial Error Success

The ambient warmth of the afternoon began to bleed away.

High above the vast expanse of the ocean, a blanket of dark rain clouds slowly drifted across the horizon, swallowing the blue sky and casting a grey shadow over the white sands.

Kurt and Diana remained on the sand, completely unbothered by the approaching storm.

They were sitting face-to-face; bodies tangled together in a tight embrace that seemed to shut out the rest of the world. Diana had her face buried in the crook of Kurt’s neck, while Kurt rested his chin on the soft curve of her shoulder, his arms wrapped securely around her back.

As the wind picked up, a sudden, chilly gust swept over the beach causing Kurt to shiver slightly. "Hey. The weather’s turning. We should probably head back."

"..."

"Ana? Did you hear me?"

"Yes," she muttered. "Pick me up... while you're still holding me."

"... Really?"

Diana gave a small, slow nod with her face still stubbornly glued to his neck, refusing to let the cold air hit her cheeks.

"Alright, hold on."

Kurt closed his eye and prepared to summon the mana needed to effortlessly lift them both off the ground in a single motion.

But before he could manifest it, Diana's hand snapped up and lightly smacked his shoulder.

"No cheating."

"Huh? But trying to stand up like this while holding a full-grown wom–"

"Do you think I'm fat?"

"Wha–! No! Absolutely not!" 'A fat ass, yeah. Hehe~'

"Then do it. Lift me up. No cheating with mana."

"... Alright." 'I swear. Sometimes I seriously wonder if she's actually the older one in this relationship.'

Accepting his fate, Kurt braced himself.

Diana, sensing his resolve, shifted and wrapped her legs tightly around his waist. She locked her ankles behind his back, and clutched his neck even harder, anchoring herself completely to his chest.

Attempt one.

Kurt grunted and dug his forward-facing toes into the loose sand. He tried to push himself upward using nothing but grit and muscle memory, but barely made it an inch off the ground before–

Thud

Falling back down on his butt.

He nervously looked down at Diana. Her face was still buried in his neck, apparently completely unfazed by the failure.

"Alright, let’s try this again," he muttered

Attempt two.

This time, he leaned forward, trying to shift their center of gravity over his knees. His muscles tensed as he managed to lift them halfway up. He was almost there, he almost made it, when a sudden gust of wind threw off his balance. His foot slipped again.

Thud.

"Oof! Damn you, mother nature." he muttered as he landed squarely on his backside for the second time.

Suddenly, he felt a distinct trembling against his chest.

The faint, yet unmistakable, sound of muffled snickering echoed against his collarbone. Diana was shaking with suppressed laughter, doing everything in her power not to burst out loud at his expense.

"Oh, you think this is funny, do you? Alright. No more mister nice guy."

Attempt three.

While Diana was still tightly clutched around him, laughing silently, Kurt brought his hands down with a thunderous force.

SLAP!

"Mmnn...!" Diana flinched.

Abandoning all etiquette, he firmly slapped and squeezed tightly onto her soft, round ass, using her curves as literal leverage and support to anchor her body weight completely against his torso.

With a firm grip on her, Kurt tucked his legs back one knee at a time until he was resting securely in a kneeling position.

He took a deep breath. Then, with one massive, coordinated huff – and squeezing her plump ass tightly to ensure she didn't slide – he exploded upward, and stood completely upright on his boots.

The wind howled around them, but Kurt stood as steady as an immovable mountain.

Diana finally peeled her face away from his neck.

Her cheeks were flushed a radiant crimson. A beautiful, embarrassed smile gracing her lips as her eyes locked onto his. Kurt looked back at her as a smug, victorious smirk plastered across his face.

To punctuate his victory, he gave her ass one more firm squeeze.

Squish~

"S-Stop it, Rosie, hehehe~"

"Alright, boss. You going to take us home now?"

Diana’s smile softened. A faint trace of her professional persona returned to her eyes, though she remained wrapped around him like a koala.

"I have to go back to the office... just in case anyone needs me. Should I drop you off at our place first?"

"No." Kurt shook his head. "Take me back to the arena stands. Right where we left off."

"Okay."

She leaned in and wrapped her arms tightly around his neck one last time.

SHWOOSH

As requested, they materialised right where they left.

The moment they landed, Diana smoothly slid down from his waist. She stepped closer, cupping his jaw with one hand, and pressed a sweet lingering kiss to his lips.

"I’ll see you later tonight," she whispered against his lips, her crimson eyes soft with an affection she only ever showed him.

"Mmhm. Later."

SHWOOSH

Now with free time on his hands, Kurt looked down at the massive arena floor for Emelie.

However, all he found were dozens of academy staff and construction mages bustling about, setting up the final decorative banners for the upcoming tournament tomorrow.

But as he headed down the steps, his single eye caught movement just a few rows down.

Sitting casually on a stone bench was a young woman with dark amber hair and a mischievous grin. She had her fingers pressed firmly over her mouth, her shoulders shaking as she smugly snickered, trying – and failing – to hide her amusement.

It was the student council president, Amber Strongwill.

Kurt ran a hand over his face and slowly walked down the stone steps toward her.

The moment he got close, Amber quickly snapped her hands down to her lap, looking straight ahead at the empty sky with an incredibly exaggerated, innocent expression.

"Nope! Didn't see a single thing! Completely blind over here! Just enjoying the lovely pre-storm weather!"

"We both know that's a blatant lie."

"Okay, fine! But you have to admit, I get points for trying to give you some privacy! Technically, it's your guy's fault for popping out of nowhere and doing the dirty in a public space!"

"Yeah, yeah. Appreciated," Kurt muttered, rolling his eye.

He quickly shifted the subject before she could grill him about kissing Diana. "Where’s Emelie Herst? She and I have some business to take care of."

"Business? With Emelie? Wait... don’t tell me. Is it a secret duel?! Are you two going to fight to the death here?!"

"No."

"Oh goddess above... then it’s a secret, forbidden lovers’ date?! Kurt! How could you?! You just kissed the principal not even ten seconds ago! The scandalous drama of it all! Perhaps I should run straight to the office and inform–"

"Jesus, stop making wild, ridiculous assumptions! Are you trying to get me killed!? Haaa, it’s nothing like that. Emelie and I are strictly, 100% just friends."

Amber stared at him for a moment, analyzing his completely serious face.

Slowly, the theatrical shock faded, replaced by a soft, almost relieved expression. She leaned back against the bench, letting out a small sigh.

"Phew... okay. Good. Honestly, I’m just really glad to hear that."

"About what? That we’re friends?"

"Yeah," Amber smiled gently, her usual playful demeanor softening into something genuine.

"Emelie... She’s always so distant with everyone. Aside from one other pink haired student, she doesn’t really let anyone get close to her. She builds these massive walls around herself. It’s nice to know she’s actually making other friends."

"Right... I see. As long as you don’t misunderstand our relationship. It’s all good. So, where is she?"

"She’s probably back at the student dorms," Amber replied, waving a hand toward the main path. "She flew off from the plaza a little while ago looking pretty amused about something."

"Got it. Thank you. And hey. Thanks for the tour earlier, Amber. I owe you one."

Amber’s eyes lit up with delight. She gave him a waving, narrowed smile that carried a distinctly playful, yet calculating edge.

"Oh, owing a favor from someone of your prestige? Yeah, that is definitely going to come in handy one day, Kurt Rossana. I’ll make sure to collect!"

"That doesn’t sound ominous at all."

With a final wave, he turned the corner and headed down the arena structure, leaving the amber-haired girl smiling to herself

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The walk to the student dorms was quiet with the cool wind brushing past Kurts’s hair as the dark storm clouds overhead grew denser.

After being let in by a student, the sudden warmth of the interior washed over him. The lobby was expansive, filled with plush couches, elegant magical lamps, and dozens of students lounging around, chatting about the upcoming tournament.

Standing at the front counter was the Dorm Mother whose face brightened in immediate recognition the moment Kurt walked in.

"Oh my. Why, hello there, young man. How have you been doing?"

"I’ve been doing great, ma’am. Thanks for asking. I was wondering... is Emelie here?"

The moment the name left Kurt’s mouth, a sudden, dead silence swept across the lobby.

The dozens of students lounging on the couches all subtly – and not so subtly – stopped their conversations. Heads turned, ears perked up, and eyes locked directly onto Kurt’s back.

"Oh, yes, dear. I believe she is up in her room with her roommate, Amy."

She turned her head toward a nearby couch where a few younger female students were sitting. "You there, dear, would you mind running upstairs and calling Emelie down for this young man?"

"Y-Yes!" the young girl dashed up the stairs.

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Inside the double room, Emelie and Amy were completely in their element. Just lazing about, playing a boardgame.

Knock, knock, knock.

"I’ll get it," Amy muttered, sliding off her beanbag and walking over to swing the door open.

The young female student from the lobby was standing there, breathing heavily. She quickly whispered something to Amy, pointing frantically down the hallway, before turning and running back toward the stairs.

Amy closed the door and walked back in with a deeply puzzled expression settling onto her face. "Emy? Someone is downstairs here to see you."

Emelie groaned softly, lazily rolling her body off her own beanbag. She tumbled onto her feet with effortless grace and stretched her arms above her head. "Ugh, who is it now? I swear if it’s my brother, I’m going to throw him out the window."

As she walked down the hallway, a sudden thought hit her.

’Why does this exact scenario seem so familiar?’

Looking down from the top of the staircase, her eyes instantly locked onto the unmistakable figure standing by the reception desk.

"Oh. Hey, Kurt."

Kurt turned around and offered a casual, relaxed wave. "Hey, Emy."

The exact millisecond their greetings echoed through the room, the entire student lobby collectively snapped.

"NOT AGAIN!!!"

"HE’S BACK!! MOMMY THE MONSTER"S BACK!!"

"HE’S GOING TO TAKE OUR QUEEN AWAY AGAIN!!"

In a matter of seconds, students were throwing themselves over the backs of couches, scrambling across the polished floors, and diving behind pillars in a hilarious wave of pure chaos.