THORNS 205

Chapter 205 - Make Up

- Sometime later -

Orange skies of the late evening cast long shadows across the perimeter of the Rossana-Valentine estate.

At the front entrance gates, as a guard stood perfectly erect and attentive, his eyes caught an unmistakable silhouette walking steadily from down the road. The guard nudged at his fellow guardsman with his elbow.

"Hey, Look. Down the lane."

The second guardsman squinted through the orange glare, "T-That's–!"

Both men slammed their heels together as the figure became clear. Their postures went completely rigid and their expressions morphed into a state of nervous seriousness.

Step. Step... Step.

""Duke Reuben Valentine!"" The guardsmen executed a flawless salute.

"Hm. Let me through."

""Right away, sir!""

The guards practically threw the gates wide open without a shred of hesitation. They then stood perfectly still as the man casually strode past them, only daring to let out a long sigh of relief once his footsteps had faded far down the smooth stone pathway.

As Reuben walked down the long, immaculately manicured lane leading to the mansion every servant, gardener, and maid he passed instantly stopped whatever chore they were doing. They dropped their heads, pressing their hands tightly against their sides as they greeted him with a deeply instinctual respect.

He maintained his steady pace until his boots slowed to a halt directly behind a young servant who was currently kneeling beside the sideway gardens.

"Laaa♪ la ♪ lalaaa ♪ laaa ♪ la ♪ lalaaa~♫" The boy was entirely oblivious to the heavy atmosphere, softly singing a tune to himself as his shears neatly trimmed the hedges.

The boy happily spun around to grab another bucket of fertilizer, only to instantly freeze. His eyes dilated in horror as he realised someone was towering directly over him.

"GAAAAAH! Merciful Goddess! L-Lord Valentine! Forgive me! I did not see you– I mean, a wonderful evening to you, sir!"

"Hm," he grunted softly.

His gaze then drifted away from the servant to scan the vibrant floral arrangement stretching across the entire wall. "There are a lot more roses compared to when I was last here."

"Y-Yes, sir! It was by Ms. Valentine’s explicit request. She... well, she told the staff that ever since she met Master Rossana, the rose has become her new favorite flower. She wanted them planted nearly everywhere."

"Is that so?"

"Y-Yes, sir."

Slowly, Reuben reached his right hand down toward a particularly thick cluster of blooming crimson flowers. "May I take a few?"

"Wait! Lord Valentine! Those roses have thorns! If you'll just give me a moment, I can–"

Prick.

Before the boy could finish his warning, Reuben's fingers had already closed firmly around a thorny green stem, causing a small droplet of blood welled up from the side of his index finger

"Oh, no! I am so sorry, my lord! I should have intercepted you–"

"Do not worry yourself over it."

Without a single trace of irritation, Reuben reached into the side inner coat pocket and pulled out a small box of plasters. He smoothly peeled one open and neatly wrapped it around his punctured finger.

"Um... Lord Valentine... if you don't mind me asking... why are you carrying around a personal box of plasters?"

Reuben calmly slipped the box back into his pocket and answered, "Habit."

The confused servant wisely chose not to press the matter any further. Standing up quickly, the boy retrieved his shears and meticulously cut four perfectly bloomed crimson roses from the bush, wrapping the ones with the smallest prickles in a neatly covered canvas bundle.

"Thank you." Reuben accepted the bundle with a solemn nod of his head.

He then turned back to the main pathway, continuing his casual stride toward the front doors of the estate.

As he neared the entrance of the mansion, he caught the sound of quick footsteps rushing out from the side maids' quarters.

A small girl dressed in a maid uniform came scurrying around the corner, her tiny arms desperately balancing a basket filled to the brim with freshly washed linens. The basket was so large it obscured her peripheral vision until–

Trip.

Her tiny black boots tangled with one another.

Thud!

"Ow!" She dropped the basket and skidded across the stone, scraping her knees in the process.

She sat up to look down at her legs. Her white stockings were slightly torn at the left knee, and a small smudge of blood began to slowly pour through the fabric.

She blew on the tiny wound, her lower lip trembling as she whimpered to herself. "Oh, no, no, no... Yuna is going to scold me this time for ruining another pair of tights..."

A shadow suddenly fell over her tiny form, blocking out the orange glare of the evening sun.

Reuben stood in front of and looked down at the little maid. "Are you alright?"

Phheeww "H-Huh?! Y-Yes! I am perfectly functional, sir! I am so sorry for blocking the entrance–"

She tried standing up and straightening her leg when a sharp sting shot through her knee, causing her to wince and stumble back.

Before she could lose her balance, Reuben cleanly dropped into a crouch, catching her.

"Wait. Don’t force your weight upon it."

Hope stood still as the man reached for a white handkerchief. With a gentle, meticulous touch, Reuben wiped the stray dirt and the small bead of blood away from her scraped knee.

He then reached back into his pocket and pulled out that same plaster box. His fingers shifted through the standard white strips until they bypassed a few specific coloured strips from the bottom.

The little maid’s eyes widened.

Reuben peeled open a pink plaster printed with a cartoon image of a smiling white bunny.

With absolute, unironic seriousness, he carefully pressed the bunny plaster directly over the girl’s scraped knee. He lightly rubbed his thumb over the edges to secure the adhesive and softly recited a low mantra:

"Pain, pain... go away."

A nearly invisible glimmer of healing magic subtly pulsed from Reuben’s thumb, sinking through the adhesive. Almost instantly, the throbbing sting beneath the bunny plaster completely.

"Wow! It doesn’t hurt at all anymore! Thank you so much, mister!"

"Hm."

"Oh, right! I still haven’t introduced myself! My name is Hope! I’m a cool maid of this household, hehehe~"

"I am Reuben Valentine."

Hope’s jaw dropped.

"Ah! You... you're that super cool man from the big screen! The one who stood there so proudly and said–"

She quickly spun around on her heel, puffed out her tiny chest, and deepened her small voice into a hilariously terrible, raspy impression of the duke:

"Do whatever you want."

She spun back around and let out a series of adorable little giggles as she covered her mouth with both hands.

"Is Julianne currently within the mansion?"

"Yes!" Hope nodded enthusiastically, turning around to quickly scoop the fallen linens back into her woven basket.

"Madam Valentine is in the guest room! Master Rossana and Ms. Valentine are also here, but Head Maid Wendy told everyone not to disturb them because they are extremely busy with work. But they've been busy since this afternoon! What's taking them so long?"

Reuben's stoic expression didn't falter for a single second. "That is fine. I am only here to see Julianne."

"Okay! Follow me, Lord Valentine! I'll show you where she is!" Hope squealed happily, balancing the basket on her hip as she threw the front doors open and led the way inside.

As they walked through the opulent, long corridors, the scene repeated itself.

Dozens of maids and servants nearly all stopped what they were doing upon spotting the duke, bowing respectfully as he passed.

Finally, Hope came to a halt in front of a pair of beautifully carved double doors near the end of the guest hallway. She turned to Reuben, pointing a tiny finger at the handle.

"She’s right inside this room, sir!"

"Thank you, Hope. I will be fine from here on."

"You’re welcome. Have a wonderful evening, Lord Reuben." Hope cheered softly, offering another quick bow before waddling down the hall with her laundry basket.

Reuben watched her exit the corridor, his gaze remaining fixed on her retreating form until she turned the corner.

He then turned back to the doors. Taking a single, slow breath, he raised his hand and delivered three firm knocks against the wood.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

From deep within the quiet room, the soft, melodious voice of his wife drifted through the seal.

"It’s open, Wendy. You can bring the evening tea inside."

Reuben slowly turned the handle, pushing the door open as he stepped over the threshold. He quietly closed and locked it behind his back so that no one could disturb them.

The guest suite was spacious, illuminated only by the warm amber light of the bedside lamp.

Sitting comfortably while reading a book near the center of the king-sized bed was Julianne. She was wearing a loosely fitted silk nightgown that draped elegantly over her shoulders, and a pair of delicate reading glasses perched on the bridge of her nose.

Without lifting her eyes from the pages, she spoke calmly. "Wendy, I was actually thinking I’d rather have chamomile flavor–"

"Julianne."

Julianne violently flinched at the single word.

The book slipped from her fingers, clattering against the silk sheets as her entire body went rigid. Her head snapped up and eyes widened behind her glasses as she stared at the man standing by the door.

"R... Reuben?" her voice trembled as she quickly stood up from the bed, pulling the silk fabric of her gown together to properly cover her collarbone.

"W-What... What are you doing here?"

Reuben didn't take a step forward. He remained still by the door, slowly raising his right hand to present the wrapped bundle roses.

"Julianne," Reuben spoke softly, his deep voice carrying a raw sincerity that she hadn't heard from him in years. "I am here... to apologise to you."

Julianne's shoulders began to tremble as her eyes welled up with sudden, hot tears behind her lenses, but she remained silent, listening.

"Julie, I have... severely hurt both you and our daughter. For a long time, I convinced myself that my actions were necessary. I told myself that I was simply future-proofing our lineage... ensuring that the Valentine name and our family would survive and thrive within the capital long after you and I are no longer of this world.

"I admit... I was afraid. Diana, although still 27, is nearing 30. For the longest time, she's been chasing away every suitor or anyone who tries to romantically get involved with her.

"I feared she would end her days alone. When I witnessed Emelie Herst's immense potential, and when I saw Everett's desperate pursuit of her... I allowed my strategic mind to take over. I decided to force things into my own hands.

"... I made a mistake."

A hot tear finally spilled down Julianne’s cheek, and a choked sob escaped her lips as she tightly gripped the fabric of her gown.

"I was indeed shocked to learn that she had found a lover," Reuben continued.

"But by that point... my pride had already locked me into dozens of binding, complex arrangements with House Herst. Instead of listening to any of you... I chose to stubbornly stick to my decision.

"It was a choice that did nothing but bring pain to the two people I was supposed to protect."

Julianne wept quietly at the honest vulnerability from her husband, completely dismantling the wall of bitter anger she had carried all day.

"But today... down in that ring... I watched the lengths that Rossana would go to secure her happiness," Reuben murmured as a faint, rare, and genuinely warm smile lightly traced the edge of his lips.

"And I watched our daughter... stand ready to unleash a war against her own father just to stay with him. By the end of it... I finally understood that my ambitions were useless against the two of them."

He paused, looking at her softly. "I assume... you were watching the broadcast?"

Julianne nodded through her tears, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand as her chest heaved.

"I will offer my formal apologies to Diana and Rossana tomorrow morning," Reuben said clearly as he stepped right in front of, offering the crimson roses to her once more.

"But I needed to see you first. Julie... will you forgive this foolish old soul?"

"Yes! Of course I forgive you, you stubborn old fool, hahaha!" Julianne choked out as her voice broke into a beautiful, tearful laugh.

She threw her reading glasses onto the nightstand, entirely abandoning her defensive posture. "Don’t you dare... don’t you dare ever put me through a day like this again, Reuben! I hate feeling this way!"

"I won’t."

Julianne lunged forward and threw her arms around his neck. She buried her face on his shoulder, letting out a torrent of long-overdue, deeply relieved tears as she held him with all the strength in her body.

Reuben slowly wrapped his arms around her waist, lifting her slightly as he held her close against his chest.

....

After a long, quiet minute, Julianne slowly pulled her head back.

"And... I suppose I should apologize for how I spoke to you earlier this afternoon. It was unseemly of me."

"It is fine. I deserved every word of it."

"You damn well did," Julianne whispered devilishly as a burning wave of lingering frustration and intense passion flared deep within her crimson eyes.

Before Reuben could reply, she reached up, grabbed his hair, and violently crashed her lips directly onto his in a fiercely commanding kiss.

While their lips were still locked, Julianne’s slender fingers reached down, smoothly unfastening the silk tie of her nightgown. She let the fabric slide effortlessly off her shoulders, allowing it to pool loosely around her ankles as she pushed him back toward the bed.

"Tonight... I am going to take out every single ounce of my remaining frustration on your body." she whispered breathlessly against his neck.

Reuben smirked with a vengeance. He effortlessly unbuttoned and tossed his coat onto the wooden floor.

"You can certainly try, Julie. But if my memory serves me correctly... you have never once managed to win a single one of our bed battles."

Julianne let out a melodic little giggle, her fingers digging into his chest as she violently pulled him down onto the silk sheets beneath her.

In the heat of the passion, a lace bra flew through the dim air, landing perfectly over the bedside lamp. The ambient light softened into a deep, violet shade as the doors remained firmly shut for the rest of night.

Chapter 206 - Quick Morning Session [R18]

Tweet. Tweet. Tweet.

’... Ah, yes. El Clásico. Can’t wake up first thing in the morning without having the birds yell at me.’

Kurt’s eye fluttered open as his consciousness slowly returned to him. The very first thing his senses processed was a strange, slight disorientation.

Staring upward, he realised that the ceiling of the bedroom felt somehow significantly further away than it usually did. Furthermore, the surface beneath his bare back was completely flat. Unlike the softness of a mattress.

That’s because he wasn’t in bed. He was lying straight on the floor, equipped with nothing but a pillow beneath his head and a heavy, tangled down blanket draped loosely over his lower torso.

"Hehehe~"

’Hmm?’

Turning his head across the pillow, he noticed that Diana was lying on her side right beside him. She was resting her hand comfortably on her cheek as her hair spilled wildly over her bare shoulders. She was watching his sleepy face with a deeply affectionate smile.

"Hey, Ana? Did we seriously fall asleep on the hard floor last night?"

"Well, to be fair, sleeping on the bed would have been uncomfortable anyway."

"Why’s that?"

"Because..." Diana’s cheeks flushed with a faint pink hue as she glanced briefly over her shoulder toward the disheveled bed a few feet away. "Because the bed is too wet~"

’Damn.’

Ahem "Haha. I guess we went too crazy yesterday, huh?"

"We did," she whispered softly.

Shuffling her body closer, Diana closed the distance between them until there was no space remaining between them. As she pressed her warm body against his side, Kurt instinctively secured his hand around her waist and leaned in. Their lips met in a tender kiss that filled the quiet of the room.

’Hm–?!’

Suddenly, mid-kiss, Kurt’s breath caught slightly in his throat.

Beneath the fabric of the blanket, Diana’s soft hand smoothly slid down across his abdomen until her fingers confidently brushed past his hip and wrapped around his limp member. Without breaking the rhythm of her mouth, her palm began to slowly fondle and stroke him from underneath the covers.

Kurt reluctantly broke the kiss, pulling his head back slightly. "Hey... hold on a sec. Isn’t today Day 2 of the tournament? Don’t you need to be running things over at the academy?"

Diana’s gaze of desire remained locked onto his. She didn’t slow her hand down for a single moment; instead, her thumb lightly grazed the tip, causing his member to instantly twitch and surge into a rock-hard state beneath her palm.

"The tournament matches don’t begin until three in the afternoon" she murmured in a sultry tone. "While it’s true that I do need to be there a bit earlier for any sort of briefing... I really just want to spend a little longer like this with you. Can I, Rosie~?"

"Mmmmm... Damn it, Ana... it’s really hard to say no to you when you’re being this adorable. Not to mention, you’re fondling a weapon that’s already fully loaded."

Diana’s lips curled into a devilish smirk as her fingers tightened their grip and gave a firm, upward stroke. "Well, Rosie~? Can I~?"

"Okay."

His hand slid down from her waist, slipping beneath the edge of the blanket to find the junction of her thighs. "But we’re only going one round, alright?"

"Mhm~ One round~" she gasped softly.

Right when Kurt’s fingers brushed against her inner thigh, his hand instantly came into contact with a slick abundance of heat. She was already soaking wet. Her natural moisture coated his knuckles the second he touched her.

"Jesus, Ana... how long have you been like this?"

"Since I woke up... and just stayed here staring at your face," she whispered, her breathing rapidly turning shallow as her thighs parted wider under his touch.

"... Hahaha. I better not keep you waiting then."

He smoothly climbed over her and pinned her down. He reached up to fling the blanket off their bodies to give them room to move when–

"No... leave the blanket over us," Diana interrupted quickly.

She quickly caught the fabric and pulled it all the way up to cover over their heads, sealing them both inside a dimly lit cocoon.

"Leave it like this. I want to feel every bit of heat. I want to sweat, I want to feel your skin slide against mine, I want everything, Rosie~"

Kurt didn’t argue. He neatly tucked the blanket back around their perimeters, trapping the rising warmth of their bodies inside.

Beneath the covers, the atmosphere instantly became suffocatingly hot with the scent of their mutual arousal. Diana stretched her arms up, inviting him into her embrace. "Come here. I’m all yours."

After spreading her legs wide enough for him to comfortably fit, he guided his stiff cock straight to the burning entrance of her pussy. Thanks to the continuous slickness already coating her skin, the moment he entered her, his entire length slid all the way inside with ease.

"Ahaaah... Rosie, come down on me~"

Kurt sunk down into her eager embrace. Finally feeling all of him, Diana wrapped her arms tightly around his back, pressing her soft breasts hard against the muscles of his chest.

It was time. Kurt pulled his body back, anchoring his hands firmly against the floor beside her head, and delivered a powerful, deep thrust straight back into her core.

Slap~!

"Ahn~!"

The moisture of their wet skin-on-skin connection created a sound that echoed loudly beneath the enclosed blanket.

"Mmmph... Rosie..." Diana’s fingers dug into the muscles of his shoulders as his movements began to quicken.

Slap~! Slap! Plap~!

"Ahh..! Hnngh~! H-Ahhh~!"

With every thrust of his hips, the wet friction between them grew increasingly louder. Diana’s control over herself had completely broken down; her voice rose in a series of loud, uninhibited moans that echoed against the fabric above them.

She arched her back off the floor with every impact shot through her spine, consuming his cock as he locked into a merciless, rapid pace.

Slap~! Plap! Slap~! Plap~!

Kurt looked down and stared straight at her glazed-over intoxicated face. Her lips were parted and her breath came in short gasps. Unable to resist, he leaned down and crashed his mouth back onto hers, burying his tongue deep inside her mouth.

"Mmmmm..."

Diana tangled her hands fiercely into his dark hair, pulling his face down with desperate strength as their tongues mixed with saliva.

Even with their mouths locked in a deep kiss, Kurt didn't slow his pace down for a single second. He continued to move wildly beneath the covers, driving his relentless thrusts in a sensual rhythm.

Plap~! Plap! Plap~! Plap~!

The intense insulation of the down blanket, combined with the extreme physical exertion, quickly took its toll. Their bodies began to sweat profusely, causing their torsos to slide against one another with a primal intensity.

"Mnn~! ...Ngh~! *Muah~* Haah~! ...Mnn~! Mmhn~!"

Diana's ecstatic moans were muffled against his mouth, her head thrashing against the pillow as the overwhelming friction of his cock continuously hit all the right places.

The stagnant heat inside the cocoon was rapidly making both of their heads feel light and dizzy, but the intoxicating mixture of sweat, lust, and pleasure kept them driving forward without a single thought of stopping.

Suddenly, as Kurt delivered an exceptionally deep thrust, Diana's entire body violently stiffened beneath him. Her toes curled tightly and her eyes widened in glazed-over ecstasy as an uncontrollable wave of pleasure ruptured through her core.

"MMMMMNNN~!!!"

Splat—PSSSSST~!

A violent spray of her own womanly fluids erupted out from her pussy, soaking the floor and the sheets beneath them. Yet, Kurt didn't stop. He kept driving straight through the gushing release of her squirting, maintaining his rapid pace as he pounded through the wetness.

Squelch~! Squelch~! Squelch~! Squelch~!

"MMN~! NGH~! NYYGHH~! MMFGHH~!"

PSSST—*Squelch*—PSSST~!

Diana, though her mind was rapidly fading into a state of lightheaded delirium from the intense orgasm, could feel a distinct, tight swelling occurring deep within his cock with every subsequent thrust.

The muscles of his lower back were locking up, and his breathing turned into a series of ragged growls.

'He's close~ He's Cumming~'

With a desperate surge of energy, Diana wrapped her legs all the way around his waist, locking her ankles together behind his back and trapping him inside her so he couldn't pull away.

Realising he was locked in, Kurt abandoned all remaining restraint and went all out, delivering five final thrusts that bottomed out against her walls.

PLAP~! PLAP~! PLAP~! PLAP~!

"Ahaaaah! R-ROSIE~!"

On the finishing drive, Kurt's body went completely rigid. Unable to pull out due to her locked embrace, an explosive torrent of thick, burning cum shot directly inside the absolute deepest depths of her womb.

Diana’s core instantly began to violently spasm and contract around him, clamping down on his cock as they both twitched in world-shattering ecstasy beneath the covers.

Silence slowly returned to the room, save for the sound of their ragged breathing.

Once the closing tremors of his release had finished pulsing inside her, Kurt gently parted his lips from hers. With thick beads of sweat dripping from their faces, both of them lay entirely still beneath the blanket as their lungs expanded and contracted.

Kurt let out a long groan and slowly slid his cock out from her tight, dripping pussy. He rolled over to the side and collapsed heavily onto his back against the floor, staring blankly up at the fabric above.

Diana didn’t let him stay apart for long, however.

Still trembling from the residual aftershocks, she weakly crawled across the floor and dragged her body directly on top of his chest. She collapsed her weight entirely onto him, resting her cheek right over his heartbeat before lifting her head slightly to press another affectionate kiss against his lips.

"Haaa... *Mmch* Huff* I.. I didn’t get to say this, but... *Huff* Good morning, Rosie~"

"Hahaha... *Huff* Morning Ana~"