THORNS 223

Chapter 223 - The Mascot’s Betrayal

Step.

A single white polished boot set itself firmly on the edge of the shattered arena, ready to step into the clearing dust.

"I must say, I’m surprised that you saw right through Senior Lily’s illusion magic," a confident voice called out across the rubble. "You didn’t even flinch when her fake golems attacked you."

Ayako turned her attention toward her next opponent, wiping a small smear of blood from her lower lip. Her voice remained cool as she spoke. "When one is well versed in the art of mana to the point of well near mastering it such as I, no attack, whether illusion or not, will phase me, Your Highness... Prince Maxwell Dorothy Junior."

"Oh yeah? Well, my mana is a bit special. To the point where "One such as yourself" might even call it... divine."

""""YEEEEAAAHHHHH!!!!""""

["AND ENTERING THE ARENA NEXT FOR ELDORIA!" Commentator Ken bellowed into his microphone, ["IS NONE OTHER THAN PRINCE MAXWELL DOROTHY JUNIOR!!!!"]

["Woohoo! Personally, I am very interested in what the prince will bring to the table today!"] Christy leaned forward as her eyes sparkled with genuine intrigue.

Feeling the massive wave of support washing down from the spectators, Junior’s excitement bubbled over. He raised his fist straight up toward the front VIP seats. "I dedicate this fight to my new master, Kurt Rossana!"

Every projection in the arena pivoted and zoomed in to where Junior was looking.

Instead of showing the fearless lover of the most beautiful woman the crowd expected to see, the holographic screen displayed the Golden Phoenix mascot of Myria, sitting perfectly upright in the Eldorian section, right next to Diana Valentine.

The plush, cartoonish bird head, complete with giant round eyes and a wide yellow beak, sat completely motionless. Just staring ahead like it's nobody's business.

"...H-Huh? Master?"

Up in the commentary booth, Ken nearly dropped his microphone as his jaw hit the desk. ["W-WHAT IS THIS?! MYRIA'S OFFICIAL MASCOT IS SITTING IN THE ELDORIAN VIP SECTION RIGHT NEXT TO THE PRINCIPAL OF FUTURE ACADEMY?! THE ENEMY TERRITORY?!"]

The Myrian fans pointed and shook their fists at the giant golden bird.

"GET BACK OVER HERE, YOU TRAITOROUS FEATHERED PIECE OF SHIT!"

"WHO PAID YOU OFF, HUH?!"

Christy was practically doubled over in her seat, clutching her stomach as she died of laughter.

The Eldorian crowd, despite being confused, immediately seized the opportunity to taunt their rivals.

"EVEN YOUR OWN MASCOT KNOWS WHICH SIDE IS GOING TO WIN!"

"DAMN! I THINK I MIGHT HAVE CHICKEN SOUP TONIGHT! AHAHAHA!!!"

Dominik joined in on the mocking laughter, clapping his hands together. "Paahahaha! Look at those idiots! They lost their own bird!"

Suddenly, he squinted at the seat next to Diana. He turned his head slowly. "Wait... where's Kurt?"

"That is Kurt." Mia hissed under her breath,

"It is?" Dominik looked back and forth between Mia’s dead-serious expression and the giant, cute, perfectly still mascot head. A second later, he burst out laughing even harder.

At the Eldorian representative benches, Amber and Kiana were standing and screaming at the top of their lungs.

"JUNIOR, WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR??!!!"

"WAKE UP YOU BLONDE IDIOT!" Amber yelled. "STOP STARING AT THE BIRD AND FIGHT! YOU’RE LETTING HER RECOVER HER STAMINA!"

"R-Right. Right!"

His eyes and hair flaring into a radiant gold as pure divine mana surged around his body. Right as he planted his boots on the stone, preparing to charge, he caught sight of the expression on Ayako’s face.

She was staring at the giant cartoon bird with wide, heartbroken eyes. The giant, ridiculous plush head returned her gaze with its blank, adorable stare.

"W-Why is our cute mascot... over there?"

A single tear slid down Ayako’s bruised cheek, and she slowly lowered her head, her posture slumping slightly.

Seeing the opening, Junior burst forward, his golden aura leaving a blazing trail across the shattered stone floor.

Ayako muttered softly to herself, "... I believe I’ve done enough. It’s about time I end this–"

BOOM!!!!

Junior landed a square fist directly into Ayako’s midsection. The sheer force of the impact created a shockwave that blew the surrounding dust into a high ring.

Ayako was sent flying backward, her body skidding across the arena floor before crashing heavily into a mound of rubble.

CRASH!!!

Junior pulled his fist back, looked at his glowing hand and then back toward the crash site in surprise. "W-Whoa... nice! I actually hit her!"

"DONT GET DISTRACTED, YOU FOOL!" Kiana screamed from the bench.

A sharp glint of steel flashed in the corner of Junior’s peripheral vision. His survival instincts screamed, and he bent his upper body into a backward dodge.

Shing—WHOOSH!

Ayako’s katana whistled through the empty air directly above his face, cutting a few stray golden hairs.

Reacting quickly, Junior summoned a sharp spear of divine ice in his palm and thrust it upward. The spear pierced straight through Ayako’s chest – only for her form to shatter into a flurry of pink sakura petals.

She rematerialized directly above him, bringing her mana coated sword down in a deadly two-handed strike. Junior raised his ice spear horizontally to block in the nick of time.

CLANG!!!

The force of the overhead blow drove Junior’s boots into the white stone, causing a web of fresh cracks to spread beneath him as the two fighters locked eyes in a fierce standoff.

While the battle raged in the background of the arena, two coliseum guards marched toward the front VIP row and stopped directly in front of the Golden Phoenix mascot.

"E-Excuse us," the lead guard said nervously. "You’re going to have to come with us... s-sir."

"He is not going anywhere." Diana didn’t even turn her head to look as she addressed them.

"Ma’am, please understand. He... He caused a disturbance in the men’s restroom."

"What did he do?" She raised an eyebrow and finally looked at them.

"Well... he beat up a few men, and then he..."

"He beat up some men? Then those men obviously started it. Go kick them out of the premises. Problem solved."

"B-But ma’am. There is a victim who–"

"Is this ’victim’ hurt in any way?"

The guard hesitated as his face flushed with embarrassment. "N-No... physically, he is not but..."

"Then tell him to meet with me at my office after today’s match concludes. If he isn’t there, then I will assume it wasn’t anything major."

"Ma’am–"

"That’s enough, you boys," an authoritative female voice interrupted from behind them.

Vicky – the bodyguard whom Kurt hired to protect the orphanage – pushed past the two guards. "You’re disturbing the high-profile spectators, as well as our employers, from enjoying the match."

She nodded respectfully toward the seat next to the bird. "Haven’t seen you since graduation. It’s been a while, Valentine."

"It has. Hello Vicky."

Vicky turned her sharp gaze to the two guards. "Move along. We already got a full confession from one of the men who woke up in the infirmary."

She then looked directly at the giant mascot head. "Boss. They attacked you first while you were using the facilities, correct?"

The giant golden mascot’s head awkwardly nodded up and down.

"We also caught the faint scent of alcohol on the man who claimed you forced him to perform an indecent act on the bald attacker’s head," Vicky continued, looking completely serious. "That was a fabricated lie to cover his own drunken embarrassment... right?"

"Pffft–! Ahem! L-Let’s go Prince Junior!" Beside them, Sadie let out a sudden, loud snort of laughter, quickly covering her mouth with her hands before cheering on again.

The mascot’s head, after a hesitant pause, slowly nodded its big cartoonish head once more at Vicky’s cover up lie.

"Then it’s settled. Dismissed, boys."

The two guards saluted quickly and hurried back down the corridor. Once they were gone, Vicky leaned down and spoke softly to the plush bird. "I'm going to need the mascot suit back now, Boss. There's a man named Suzuki who is desperately looking for it."

"... Alright," Kurt's muffled voice echoed from inside the beak.

He reached up, grabbed the edges of the giant bird head, and popped it off. Sweat was running down his neck, his face was slightly damp from the sweltering heat inside the costume, and his dark hair stuck to his forehead.

While he began unzipping the oversized plush body suit, Vicky leaned in slightly closer, keeping her voice low. "By the way... the two siblings over at the orphanage got into a big argument this morning. They're apparently not on speaking terms."

Kurt stopped as he pulled his arm out of the plush sleeve. "You talking about Tristan and Rupee?"

Vicky's eyes drifted over his sweat-glistened collarbone, when a faint flush touched her cheeks. Sensing danger, she suddenly caught the terrifying, dead-eyed glare Diana was directing straight at her.

A-Ahem "Yes. Those siblings. Just thought you should know."

'... Please just be a silly sibling squabble.'

He smoothed down his tight pink shirt with a golden printing of Jin Fu singing and nodded. "Thanks for the heads-up, Vicky. I appreciate it."

"No problem, boss."

She grabbed the plush suit and the giant bird head, gave Diana one last polite nod, and practically sprinted down the hallway to escape the suffocating aura cast onto her.

Kurt sat back down and turned to face Diana but stopped dead in his tracks.

She was leaning ridiculously close to him, her crimson eyes were wide, dark, and utterly devoid of emotion. Without a word, she leaned in even further and brushed her nose against his neck, taking in a slow inhale of his scent.

A devious smile curved her lips, though her eyes remained unreadable.

"You smell like shit," she whispered softly as a subtle blush crept up her cheeks.

Her gaze slid down and watched a stray bead of sweat roll down the side of his neck. "You need to go clean yourself up right now."

"Now? I kinda wanted to watch my so-called student's match against Izumi–"

"I conceded this match."

""""".....""""

I was unmistakable. Ayako's clear voice echoed across the coliseum, cutting through the noise of the crowd.

Every single person in the stands froze. Junior, who had been mid-stance with his golden ice sword raised, blinked in shock.

["W-WHAT?! I-IZUMI AYAKO HAS FORFEITED THE MATCH! ELDORIA SECURES A MAJOR VICTORY OVER MYRIA!!!!"]

The Eldorian stands erupted into a confused, but ecstatic celebration, while the Myrian fans groaned in agony – some, unable to speak, blink, or move at the shocking move from their strongest.

Kurt looked down at the arena, then turned back to meet Diana's unwavering gaze. She hadn't looked away from his face for a single moment.

"You were saying, Rosie?"

"I... I guess I could go clean up for a bit. But I can't be long. I still want to watch till the end. I'm pretty invested in this whole shabang."

Diana's smile widened as her hand reached out to wrap her fingers firmly around his wrist. "Don't worry. Where we're going... you'll have a wonderful view of the whole arena."

"... I am just going to clean myself up, right–?"

SHWOOSH!

Chapter 224 - Colliding Fronts [R-18]

SWHOOSH!

The world around them warped with a sudden shift of spatial magic, and the roar of the coliseum became muffled inside of Diana's principal office.

"Hmm? Why are we here?"

He walked slowly toward the massive, floor-to-ceiling glass wall that offered a breathtaking view of the entire academy grounds and the open coliseum below.

He rested a hand on his hip and noted the elegant furniture and the pristine bookshelves. "I have to say, the place has been fixed up quite nicely since I was last here. Doesn't look like an unfeeling father and a super pissed off daughter had a sword clash."

Diana walked slowly toward the double doors at the front of the office. With a soft click, she locked them both inside. "Uh huh. I have Mia to thank for that. She's the perfect secretary."

Kurt looked down through the reinforced glass, watching the tiny figure of the next Myrian step onto the arena.

"Well, you weren't lying about having a good view from here. However, aren't we a bit too high up to see the details of the fight–?"

SHWOOSH!

Suddenly, Diana teleported right behind him. She wrapped her arms around his waist and pressed her body flush against his back. Her hands slid smoothly beneath the hem of his obnoxiously pink shirt, her cool fingers tracing the hard ridges of his chest and the muscles of his abs.

A knowing smirk played on Kurt's lips as turned his head slightly back. "Didn't you just say I smell like shit? Why the sudden touchy-feely routine?"

"I lied about that... You only smell of... light sweat."

"Then why bring me all the way up here? Surely it's not for the devil's tango? We just had a pretty spicy session this morning."

In an instant, the warm, loving affection in Diana's crimson eyes vanished, replaced by terrifying lifelessness.

A sharp hum of spatial magic filled the air, and she summoned her crimson odachi blade directly in front of him.

"A-Ana?"

She brought the blade closer, her voice dropping to a dangerous, icy whisper. "How do you know Victoria?"

"Victoria?" Kurt repeated, genuinely confused for a second before it clicked. "Oh, you mean Vicky–"

SLASH—Tear!

With a flick of her wrist, Diana swung the odachi, perfectly slicing the front of Kurt's shirt right down the middle. Before he could react, she grabbed the ruined fabric and pulled it off his shoulders, tossing it aside.

Kurt spun around to face her, only to find the cold edge of her blade resting dangerously close to the side of his neck.

"Her name is Victoria. Why are you calling her by a cute little nickname?"

Feeling his heart race, Kurt's own eye darkened with no life. "That's not very nice of you, Ana. I paid good coin for that."

Diana's eyebrow twitched in irritation. She tightened her grip on the hilt.

But before she could even process the thought of moving her blade, Kurt struck. His hand moved in a blinding blur, drawing his switchblade from his belt and parrying her long sword to the side, simultaneously sweeping his leg out to trip her.

When Diana lost her footing, Kurt grabbed her by the shoulders and pushed her against the glass.

Thud!

Right as she was about to recover, he pressed his body against hers. He then trapped his knee firmly between her legs and spread them wide to kill her balance, all the while he pressed the flat of his switchblade directly against her throat.

Without breaking eye contact, he slid the blade slowly down her neckline. With a sharp flick of his wrist, he cleanly sliced her blouse open, tearing the fabric away and throwing it to the floor, leaving her upper body completely bared against the cold glass.

Flustered and outmaneuvered, Diana's breath hitched. "You... you didn't answer my question– Mmm!"

Kurt crashed his lips onto hers in a dominating kiss.

Almost immediately, the jealousy drained out of her. Diana melted against the glass, letting her odachi dissolve into red shimmers back inside her gem as she wrapped her arms around his neck.

She pressed her bare breasts flush against his chest, parting her lips to deepen the kiss with a fiery passion.

Down below, the stadium roared back to life.

["AND FOR THE NEXT ROUND!"] Commentator Ken's voice boomed over the speakers. ["THE CROWN PRINCE OF ELDORIA WILL FACE THE ARMORED MYRIAN SAMURAI... HANA!"]

A small yet threatening figure stepped onto the cracked stone. Hana wore a full set of red samurai armor, complete with a horned demon mask. Despite her intimidating appearance, she offered Junior a deep, respectful bow.

Junior grinned as he cracked his knuckles. He struck a cool, dramatic pose and pointed his finger up toward the VIP seats. "Watch this, Master Kurt–!"

He paused and squinted. The seat was empty. Neither Kurt nor the giant cartoon bird was anywhere to be seen.

"... Huh? Seriously, where'd he go?"

With her formal greeting out the way, Hana lunged forward. She swung her heavy, electric charged kanabo club with enough force to shatter any person's skull.

BOOM!!!!!!!

Junior barely dodged, diving to the side as the stone exploded where he had just been standing.

High above the arena, the principal’s office was filled with entirely different sounds.

Slap... Slap... Slap...

"Mmm~! Ah~! Rosie~!"

The sound of Diana’s heavy breathing echoed through the room, punctuated by the rhythmic, wet slapping of skin meeting skin.

Kurt had one of her smooth, thick thighs hooked over his forearm and his other hand gripping her plump behind to hold her steady against the glass window as he thrust up into her relentlessly.

Diana moaned louder as her head fell back against the glass.

"Haa~! Right there... Don’t stop... Don’t stop~! Ah~!"

She kept her arms locked tightly around his neck, her crimson eyes hazy with lust as she stared straight into his eye.

Her chest heaved against his, slick of sweat. But as Kurt pulled back for another deep thrust, she noticed his gaze flicker sideways, drifting toward the magical flashes of light exploding in the arena far below them.

Diana’s eyes narrowed. She reached up and grabbed him by the jaw, her nails digging slightly into his cheeks as she wrenched his face back to look directly at her.

"Keep... your eye... on me~ Only... me~!"

A dark smirk crossed Kurt’s face. He wrapped his free arm around her waist, pulling her even tighter against him, and abruptly picked up the pace.

PLAP~!

"AHN~!"

["AND JUST LIKE THAT, JUNIOR TAKES THE WIN!"] Ken screamed as the crowd went wild.

Down in the arena, Junior stood panting, his golden divine aura flickering out.

His hair returned back to its natural blue and his eyes fading back to their violet hue as the medical priests rushed onto the field to cart the unconscious, dented Hana away.

But there was no time to rest.

Junior's next opponent entered the ring like a bullet. He didn't bother with introductions or bows, and instead launched an unrelenting, impossibly fast barrage of strikes. Junior was instantly put on the defensive, gritting his teeth as the high-speed attacks battered his forearms.

"Not yet!"

His hair flared golden once more, his divine mana erupting in a blinding shockwave as he began his own barrage of counterattacks.

Back up in the office, overwhelming passion took over the room.

Kurt had moved them away from the window, lifting Diana effortlessly and laying her across her massive desk. The paperwork and ledgers were shoved carelessly to the floor as they continued going at it.

As he stood behind her, his hands dug onto her hips tightly. He pulled her flush against his pelvis, pointing her ass upwards at him as he thrust deeply.

"Ah... ah~! Rosie, yes... Faster... please~!"

"Haa... you're so... demanding,"

From this bent-over angle, Kurt found he had a barely unobstructed, direct line of sight over the window and down to the arena. He squinted, trying to catch the rapid blur of Junior's golden mana clashing with his opponent.

Diana let out a shuddering moan, but as she glanced back over her shoulder, she saw exactly what he was doing. His eye was darting toward the window again.

Annoyed, but deeply amused by his stubborn challenge to watch the fight, her eyes flashed crimson.

SHWOOSH!

Mid-thrust, they reappeared instantly on the luxurious black leather couch on the other side of the room. But this time, Diana had flipped their positions.

Kurt was now sitting back against the cushions, and Diana was straddling him, riding his cock in a vicious motion.

As her breasts swayed, she leaned down and grabbed him by the chin, pulling his face up to smash her lips against his in a deep, wet kiss just as Junior, far below them, landed a devastating, fight-ending uppercut.

["INCREDIBLE! HE'S CLEARED THREE!"] Ken's voice cracked with hype. ["BUT HERE COMES HIS FOURTH CHALLENGER!"]

A petite, incredibly cute-looking girl skipped onto the arena floor, twirling a parasol.

["IT’S YUMI YUMI! A GRUDGE MATCH IN THE MAKING! We all remember the fatal four-way where Jason Cambell of Riverton took the win against her! Well, before that, Prince Maxwell Junior sure gave her a run for her coin!"]

Yumi Yumi stopped a few yards away from Junior and tilted her head with a sweet smile.

"Hiii," she said in a high, cute voice. "I’m about to completely destroy you for bullying me the last time we met."

"Haaa... *Huff*... Haaa... H-Hey there..."

What followed was a massacre.

Yumi Yumi’s cute exterior hid a ruthless, powerful combatant. She pushed the tired Junior to his absolute limits, unleashing a barrage of torrential spells that tore the rest of the arena apart.

Within minutes, Junior was battered, bruised, his clothes torn, and barely standing on his last trembling legs.

In the office, Kurt heard the muffled, continuous explosions of the clash vibrating through the tempered glass behind him.

Plap~! Plap~! Plap~! Plap~!

His hands gripped Diana’s ass tightly. He was sweating profusely and his chest heaved as Diana rode him with a wild, unrestrained passion.

"Hah~! Hah~ Mmn~! Ah~! Rosie... I’m so close..." Diana gasped, her head thrown forward into his neck.

"Ana~ Haah... Me too. I’m... cumming..."

Still wanting to see Junior’s fight, Kurt suddenly stood up, lifting Diana with him.

She wrapped her legs tightly around his waist to stay anchored as he turned around, trying to look over her shoulder toward the far glass panel.

With much effort, he made it toward the end of the room where he continued pumping into her while looking through the glass.

Down in the arena, Junior let out a final, raw scream. "Take this! MY DIVINE JUDGMENT!"

He unleashed his ultimate attack.

A massive, blinding flash of golden light erupted from the floor, completely illuminating the principal’s office in a stark glow.

At that exact second, Kurt his grip tightening hard on Diana’s thighs as he reached his limit, unloading all of his load inside of her.

SQUELCH~!

"AAHHNN~!"

Diana let out a breathless cry, her nails digging into his back as she climaxed at the exact same moment as well.

When the golden light finally faded from the arena, the dust settled.

Junior was standing victorious in the center of the ruined stone, striking a triumphant, heroic pose with his fist raised to the sky.

A second later, his eyes rolled back, and he fell flat on his face, completely unconscious.

At the same time, Kurt collapsed backward onto the floor, dragging Diana down with him.

He lay flat on the carpet, staring up at the ceiling. Utterly drained of every single ounce of energy.

Diana shifted, resting her chin on his sweaty chest. She looked up at him with a deeply satisfied smirk spreading across her face, enjoying the afterglow.

She traced a lazy circle on his chest with her fingernail. "Now. About Victoria."

"Haaa. Victoria... is a guard that I hired to look after this orphanage I care for... We're just acquaintances, Ana. That's it."

As Diana looked at his exhausted face, her dark jealousy finally soothed down by his surrender. With a soft, loving smile, she leaned down and she ended their tango with the devil by kissing him deeply.