THORNS 57

Chapter 57: Treasure Goblin

"Well well well. What do we have here? A survivor?"

Kurt was hiding outside the goblin camp behind a tree and double-checking for any dangers that might be lurking when he spotted a strange-looking creature.

It had green skin just like all the other goblins he's come across, but this one was thinner, smaller and wore a strange skull mask that had hair coming down its head. The most important thing that struck out to him, however, was that this creature was carrying a sack on its back that was almost as huge as its body.

'Is that a sword sticking out the sack?'

The creature was looking through the corpses as if searching for something in particular. It picked up a stone dagger and lifted it up in the air to scrutinise it. After coming to a decision, the creature threw it away as if it were worthless and continued its search.

'It's alone, and it doesn't look dangerous. I'm also curious about what's inside the sack that it's carrying. Time to go in.'

Kurt picked up a stick that was lying nearby and casually made his way to the broken-off front gate.

"Hello there!"

"Gege?!" It quickly turned its skull mask to look at Kurt.

"Wait, so you are a goblin! I was kinda on the fence about it but your stupid 'gege' gave it away."

"Geeeeee! Gege gege gege!"

"Oh no you don’t!"

The goblin tried running away, but it was too slow. Kurt spun and threw the stick at its leg, causing it to tangle and trip.

CRASH!

"What the hell..."

When the goblin fell, the sack fell with it, causing it to drop all its contents.

"Swords, jewelry, coins, clothes and a bunch of other miscellaneous crap... Holy jackpot..."

"Graa... Gege!" The goblin slowly got up and realised what happened. It scurried to pick up all that it dropped, but once again Kurt was there to stop it.

"I said no you don’t you dickhead!"

THUD! STAB! STAB!

"Graaugh!"

He jumped on the goblin’s back and stabbed both its hands into the ground with two stone daggers he picked up.

"And just to make doubly sure..."

STAB! STAB!

"G-Graaugh gege!"

He stabbed both of its feet into the ground as well.

"There we go. Now you can watch what I'm about to do next. But first, let's pack these goodies up neatly."

"Grageegeh! Grageegeh!" The goblin struggled to lodge itself free as it watched Kurt take all its loot. But no matter how hard it tried, its efforts were futile.

"Wow, you're really carrying all sorts of things, aren't you? I think I'll call you Treasure Goblin. You know, I honestly wasn't expecting to find anything when I decided to come back here, but I'm glad I did. Seriously, where did you find all of these things? Wait a minute..." He slowly turned his head to the goblin.

"Did you take all these... from the women who were brought here?"

"Gege."

"You freakin' scum!"

THWACK!

He punted the goblin in the face so hard its mask fell off, and its nose was cracked and bent in an unnatural way.

"What the hell is wrong with your goddamn species?! Who wired your brains to be like this, hah?!"

THWACK!

"You destroy quiet villages!"

THWACK!

"You kill hardworking men!"

THWACK!

"Kidnap then rape women!"

THWACK!

"And still, you have the audacity to steal from what I'm guessing are their dead bodies?! I don't even want to think about what you do to their children, you sick..."

THWACK!

"Sick!"

THWACK CRACK!

"Bastards! Haaaa... *Huff*... *Puff*... Great, now you're dead... Now I don't even feel like burning these corpses up. Oops, spoilers ha ha. That's why I wanted to keep you alive. I was gonna gather all your buddies here and let you watch them burn, before letting you get cooked alive of course."

Kurt picked up the sack of goods and threw it over his shoulder.

"But that was all just for theatrics anyway. Way to ruin the mood. See ya."

He turned away from the scene, hopefully for the last time, and left the goblin camp.

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’Argh! Lift your spirits, Kurt! You can’t let Diana see you all down in the dumps... I seriously pray that there’s at least one righteous soul out there doing the Lord’s work by killing all these green shits.’

Rustle

"Hmm? Rosie, you’re back." Diana’s serious face turned softer when she saw him.

"Yeah and look what I got." He dropped the sack on the sand and laid it out in the open. "There was this one little goblin left, I call him the Treasure Goblin. Just as his name suggests, he was carrying this huge sack of treasure."

"Hate to break it to you, but they are actually called Treasure Goblins. There is usually only one of them in a camp, and they are always alone since they do not like to share what they have found with the rest of the tribe."

"Oh..."

"Hehe. No need to get so sad. It’s very rare for one to show itself let alone having its treasure stolen. I say you did a fine job~"

The rest of the women also gathered around the sack, curious to see what he brought back.

"... That’s my ring!"

"... And that’s my necklace!"

"... That’s the bracelet my husband made for me!"

"... S-Sword!" The quiet woman quickly latched onto it.

’The sword belongs to her?’ Kurt looked at her with surprise. ’I never would’ve guessed.’

"Mrs. Cooper, is there anything you recognise to be yours?" Diana asked her.

"...No. It’s not like I had anything on me of value when they kidnapped me..."

"Okay, if that’s the case, then Rosie, you may keep the rest of these things."

"Really?"

"Yes. Firstly, you found it and secondly, it’s not like their owners would be here to collect them. Is that okay with everyone?"

They all nodded as they were beaming for joy on having their precious items back.

"Alrighty then," Kurt closed the sack and hid it in a bush. "All that’s left now is to wait for that boat, take it and then we’re home free. While we wait, I want to know..."

The women all held their breath as they watched Kurt become serious.

"What I want to know is...."

"...."

"Who’s hungry~?" He smiled at them.

"Rosie..." Diana held and shook her head as she sighed at his little prank.

"M-Me!" The quiet woman spoke up. "M-Me! I! Hungry!"

"Hmm? You're not scared of me anymore?"

"N-No. Kurt.. nice.. person. Also.. not.. ugly.. like.. monsters. Very.. handsome. Pretty.. smile." She blushed as she spoke slowly and in broken sentences.

When she finished speaking, she ran behind Mrs. Cooper again and kept sneaking glances at him.

"Oh my, hehe."

"Rosie..." Diana came into his line of sight and stared at him with a threatening glare.

"W-Would you look at that! I think the fishes are calling me to go capture them, haha!"

"Are you sure it's not to sleep with them?"

"A-Ana~ Would you like to come help me? I'd feel much better with you by my side."

"... Yes." He walked next to him and held his arm while glaring at the blushing woman.

"Ladies. Can I ask you to keep the fire going? We'll need it for when we come back. And there's no need to worry about any dangers since I already scoured the area before coming back."

"Yes we will. And thank you for all your hard work, Kurt." Mrs. Coopers elegantly bowed at him.

"C'mon Diana." Kurt pulled her along and walked to the ocean. "And stop glaring at her like that. What if she gets scared all over again."

"...I was just making sure she understood her position."

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- Nighttime -

"Is that the boat?" Kurt asked Diana as they hid behind the trees in the jungle.

"Looks like it, yes."

Out in the distance they spotted a large object that was headed their way.

"You know, for some reason I pictured an actual rowboat. Not a ship." Kurt whispered as the now identified ship sailed closer to shore.

"Me too. I thought they'd try to be stealthy about this whole dirty operation they had going, but I guess not."

Kurt then dug into his sack of goods and pulled out two steel daggers and a common steel sword which he strapped around his waist.

"You know how to use a sword?" Diana asked. "And here I thought daggers were your main choice of weaponry."

"I know how to use any kind of weapon, it's just that daggers let me go up and personal with my target." He smiled as if reminiscing.

"As expected of my Rosie hehe~ But there's no need for that." Diana said as she readied her sword. "I'll just teleport on deck when they're close enough and take them all out in one fell swoop."

"No no no no. Then how am I supposed to have fun if you do that? Let's wait for them to come in close and then take them out. Besides, we need to see how many more women they're bringing in."

"... Fine. I'll wait." She eased up on her stance. "Rosie?"

"Yes?"

"What kind of date are we going to go on?"

"O-One thing at a time Diana! Oh! They're anchoring the ship and coming out with rowboats."

As they looked closer at the ship, they indeed saw a boat coming out.

"Only one boat though?" Kurt asked.

"Maybe they're bringing only one woman. I can make out two people on board."

"Mmm. If that's the case, then maybe you should teleport on deck while I take out this goon."

"Alright, now let me just—"

"Wait!" Kurt stopped her again.

"Why're you stopping me now?"

"Look! At the people that just got off the boat. Isn't that..."

""Emelie and Dominik?""

Chapter 58: Injured Face

"What should we do?"

Kurt asked Diana as they watched Emelie and Dominik unboard the rowboat.

"What kind of a silly question is that? We stop hiding and go to them."

"But what if, you know, it’s not them?"

"Rosie, what are you talking about? It’s clearly them."

"I’m just saying." Kurt looked at them intensely as they were talking to each other. "I may not have watched a lot of anime, but I have seen the classic big four. And the world now, as I see it, is filled with magic. What if it’s just the cult disguised as Emelie and Dominik?"

"Anime? Big four? Rosie, I love you but you’re getting way in your head with this. Look, Emelie even started floating." Diana pointed at her. "Even if it was a disguise, nobody can replicate the magic she does. They’re real."

"Hmm. Alright, that’s fair. Also maybe checking this island was part of Emelie’s plan all along." He mumbled the last part to himself.

"What’d you say?" Diana moved closer to him.

"Nothing, it’s nothing. I’ll go out first to greet them while you get the women."

"Sounds like a plan." She nodded and teleported away.

’Alright. Here goes nothing. Please let me be wrong about that whole anime theory.’

Kurt got out from his hiding place and went to them with his hands up.

"Hey, Dominik! Emeli–"

Suddenly, he found himself stuck in place and unable to move a single limb. That's when he noticed that Emellie was holding her hand out the same way that she did when they fought Diana together.

'Dammit Emelie! Can you not see it's me?! Wait... my theory! Was I right!? Shit! C'mon body, move. Move!'

Kurt channeled mana through his body again in hopes that his skill would somehow come in clutch.

'T-This feels way worse than when Arlo froze me!'

"Good job, Emelie! I'll finish him off!" Dominik screamed from a distance and came flying in with a fire kick. But as he got closer to Kurt, his face changed from dead serious to disbelief, then happiness, and finally horror all in the span of a second.

"Kurt? Holy shit it's Kurt! OH SHIT IT'S KURT!" The fire on his leg was put out, but unfortunately his momentum wasn't.

WHACK!

'Wait, did Dominik just say Kurt?' Emelie let go of her hold on him and flew towards them.

"Kurt! Are you alright?! I'm so sorry!" Dominik panicked as he dug Kurt's head out the sand.

"Aww... my head... *cough!* *cough!*"

"Is that your footprint on his face? Damn Dominik. You really went in swinging for the fences."

"Your commentary's not helping Emelie! And why are you looking at me in pity?! It's not that bad! Shit, I think I've got some ointment in my robes..."

"Here, let me do it. I know healing magic." She took Kurt from him and put his head on her lap.

"You know healing magic? T-That great... But still, here." He gave her a small jar of healing salve. "Put this on his face. Maybe it'll heal faster."

"If it makes you feel better." She took it and applied it around the print of Dominik's boot.

"Auugh... D-Dom?"

"Kurt! I'm so sorry man! I didn't know it was you until it was too late"

"I say he's partly at fault too. Maybe this'll teach you to stop wearing all black, hmm Mr. Pirate?"

"B-But I'm a ninja... not a pirate."

"And now he's talking nonsense." Emelie sighed.

"D-Dom. Diana's... in the jungle... getting the victims. Help her..."

"That's right! I don't see Principal Valentine anywhere! She's in the jungle you said? Alright, I'll go get them!" Dominik got up and ran away.

"W-Wait! I didn't show you which direction she's in- aaand he's gone..."

"Hold still. I'm nearly done applying this salve."

"..... I should probably do this myself. Don't want Diana throwing a fit when she sees me like this. I appreciate the help though." Kurt got up and applied the salve to the rest of the spots of where it hurts.

"So you made up with her? Cleared the misunderstanding?"

"Yes. In super succession. We're going now hehe~"

"That's actually really impressive. Never in all my cycles have I seen her with a lover despite all the offers she received. You really are special." She smiled.

"Thanks for the compliment. So, why're you here?"

"After you teleported away with the principal, Dominik and I had a discussion about what to do next. Luckily for me, he was really cooperative about helping out. Said that since you put your trust in me, he will do the same. Also, something about having a good feeling about me and being my number one fan."

"That definitely sounds like him alright."

"Yeah. I just told him that you told me that you received an anonymous tip from someone about strange men smuggling women onto a ship. We infiltrated the ship and took out the cultists on board. Dominik then tied them up with ropes that he mysteriously pulled out from his robe and said that he'll be taking them to the station."

"I didn't ask 'how' you got here. I'm asking, 'why are you here'?

".... I'm sure you could already guess." Emelie clutched her arm and looked down at the sand when she answered him.

"But why now? Why only come to this island now? I don't know how long the cult has been bringing women here for but if you've known about it all this time then..."

The question struck Emelie harder than she thought. Yes, she knew about all the horrors that were taking place on this island, however....

"I... I can't save them all." She said softly.

"What? You can’t save them all? What does that even mean?"

"It means exactly that. Kurt there are too many evils in this world, and I’m only one person. Even at this very moment there is something bad happening out there, but I chose to be here because having these women in our corner would help us speed up the process of taking Tobias down. As for the reason why I’m only saving them now, it’s because I’ve decided..."

"Decided what?"

"I’ve decided that I want to keep some semblance of a normal life. During my early regression days, I tried two things. One, I tried speeding through the process of saving everyone. I completely disregarded my own wellbeing and personal life which eventually led to me becoming... insane. This method of fixing things did save a lot of people but didn’t stop the end of the world."

"Yes, I could see that happening. Carrying the world on your shoulders must not have been easy. But what about the opposite? Couldn’t you have sought help from your peers and friends?" Kurt tried to counter.

"And that’s my second point. I did do all those things you said. I told them everything and even received support from all the kingdom’s leaders. But as you must know, humans are greedy creatures.

During the leadup to the second invasion war, the very leaders we all looked up to grew complacent and saw each other as political enemies rather than allies. These kingdoms couldn’t even sit in a room together without flaunting about whose fucking dick is bigger. And so another war broke out.

The method that should’ve saved many people, killed them instead. In the end the cult won and the world ended.

Throughout all my trial and error, I decided that for my peace of mind I would not only walk this road alone, but I would also heavily weigh the scales of who’s worth saving..."

"... I just have one question." Kurt spoke after a moment of silence. "Please, answer me honestly. If I wasn't here in this 100th cycle of yours and of what you consider who's worth saving, would these women be on the right side of your 'scale'?"

"They..... They wouldn't."

"Emelie..."

"Please understand where I'm coming from, Kurt. I've already saved all these women countless times before. At some point I just became desensitised to everything and focused my priority on more important matters, and it worked because I got things done faster.

I'm here because I thought saving these women would've helped you on your mission of stopping Tobias. I'm making it my mission to help you above everything else because–"

"Because I'm different." He finished that sentence for her.

"Yes..."

"God, you're making me sound like some last hope type of main character."

"To me it certainly feels that way..."

"Haaa... Emelie." Kurt rubbed his head as if he were troubled but then quickly looked back to her with resolve. "While I can't empathise with what you've been through, I can, however, sympathise. I won't, or rather can't, judge you for your actions since, from what you told me, you've only ever been doing your best."

"T-Thank you for understanding and not being mad." Emelie let out a sigh of relief she didn't know she was holding.

"I wasn't mad. Just confused."

"Still. I’m glad to know we’re still a team. Here, let me heal the rest of your face." She brought her hand to his face.

"Wait wait wait! You don’t need to do that! I’m all better now! Seriously!"

"Stop making a scene and let me see!" She grabbed his chin to look closer at his wounds. "What the... it really is gone. It healed that fast on its own? Or is this the work of Dominik’s salve?"

"I told you it’s fine! Now let me go before–"

SHWOOSH

"What’s going on here?"

"D-Diana?!"