THORNS 65

Chapter 65: Meeting The King

"So, this is the one who’s been causing a stir lately, Kurt Rossana."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

’Oh brother. Here we go...’

Kurt was currently kneeling, albeit forcefully, inside of the king’s throne room while being cuffed down and having two spears pointed to his neck and body separately.

Natural sunlight streamed through the tall arched windows on the left side of the room. These light beams create distinct, sweeping "god rays" that cut across the room, illuminating the dust in the air and casting long, dramatic shadows.

Massive classical columns line the walls, featuring intricate and heavy gold detailing at their bases and capitals. Between these columns hang tall, white and gold tapestries. These were decorated with complex golden crests as well as a beautiful womanly figure that is holding her hands together with her eyes closed and has a sun-shaped halo etching behind her head.

The ceiling featured a deep, white and gold grid pattern made of square and rectangular panels, each centered with a decorative golden rosette. Hanging from the center are two massive, multi-tiered chandeliers that match the room’s formal style.

The floor was made of large, white polished marble tiles laid out in a large-scale geometric pattern that reflects the ambient light. Its subtle grey veining is accentuated by a rich golden brass which creates the look of it being sterile and yet incredibly expensive.

A long, expensive red carpet was laid on this finely finished floor, which begins from the entrance doors of the room and trails all the way down and up the stairs, where it spreads all across the elevated space where the thrones stood proudly.

Positioned at the far end of the hall, and acting as the undisputed focal point, were two ornate, gilded thrones. These two thrones sit atop a short flight of tiered stairs which elevates both the queen and monarch above anyone else in the room.

Finally, sitting on his golden throne was none other than the king of Eldoria, Maxwell Dorothy. Dressed in white robes and a golden cloak, his presence in the room almost left divine. Light shone against his golden crown that drew in the eyes of all who laid eyes upon him.

What caught Kurt's attention, however, was his tired and lifeless golden eyes, that were hidden behind his wavy dark blue hair, as they stared at him like he was looking at nothing more than a bug.

'Argh. What's gotten King Bubblegum's panties in a twist? He looks like he doesn't want to be here as much as I do.'

"Kurt Rossana." He spoke after one tired blink. "You assaulted my son, the first prince and future king of Eldoria. Maxwell, Jr. Tell me, what gave you the courage to do such an act? Do you not fear for your life?"

"I have no excuse other than I didn't know that he was the prince. If it means anything to you, then I apologise"

"You... apologise?" There was almost a hint of surprise in his tone. Almost, that is.

"Yes. There's not much else I can say."

"Hmm. You said you didn't know who my son was when you assaulted him. That excuse sounds so idiotic that I'm having doubts on whether or not you're lying to me."

"It's not a lie. I'm not from around here, you see, therefore I couldn't have known. To me, it was just some random kid trying to get in my way of capturing the real criminal–"

"Now now Rossana." King Maxwell raised his palm at Kurt to command silence. "Let's not get ahead of ourselves. We're currently talking about my son."

"Respectfully, Your Majesty, I've already apologised about hitting your son. If you want I could also apologise to him personally but please understand that none of this would've happened if he hadn't tackled me to the ground and stopped me from catching a member of the cult."

"Hmm..."

"You insolent!" The king's royal advisor stepped forward from behind the throne. "How dare you accuse an upstanding member of the church to be a part of those zealots! And you did not just hit the first prince; you knocked him out cold! He could have died, my king!"

"Again, I. Didn't. Know."

"How could you have not known!? The news of his inauguration has spread worldwide! Where are you from!?"

"... I'm from Riverton."

"Riverton?! That cheap heap of islands?! So you're telling me that some low-class filth from Riverton such as yourself has come all the way from the other side of the world in order to assault the future king of Eldoria?! He must be an assassin, my king!"

'Wow. Spot on with the profession.'

"....."

"Well?! Say something!"

The two guards ever so slightly pressed the tip of their spears at him when he wasn't answering.

Tsk "No, that's not what I came here to do. Sounds like you're just making shit up. Since you cannot seem to comprehend what I'm saying let me say it again but this time so that your monkey can understand.

Me chase bad man. Me gets tackled by Prince. Me see bad guy is getting away. Me not know who Prince and hit him. Me chase bad man again. But bad man gone. Me gets arrested. Me say sorry. Capisci?"

"How dare you treat me like a–"

"I put down your weapon and stand back." The king spoke clearly.

"But my king–"

"Do not make me repeat myself."

"..... Y-Yes, I understand...." The royal advisor sheathed his sword and stood back behind the king.

"Rossana. Do not treat my loyal subjects like an idiot lest you wish for your head to roll off your shoulders."

".... Understood."

"Now, in regard to what your punishment will be, I will let my son decide. However, in order to make an example out of you, you will publicly receive ten enhanced lashes. Be grateful it isn't more, or maybe it will be, depending on the punishment of your next offenses."

'D-Dammit. That does not sound pleasant.'

The king waved his hand at his royal advisor as if to give him a signal. The advisor then nodded his head and called,

"Bishop Tobias, you may enter!"

’You have got to be kidding me...’

Tobias as well as another priest entered the room and stood next to Kurt.

"Greetings, Your Majesty." They both bowed respectfully while sneaking a glance at Kurt.

"Hm. Bishop Tobias, I trust all is well?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. Especially now that you have captured this... heathen."

’Smug prick. Enjoy your last moments of freedom while you can. You’re done for.’

"And who’s this that you brought with you? I believe I only asked for your presence."

’Wait isn’t he the guy who–’

"Excuse me, Bubble– I mean Your–"

"Be quiet. I am not speaking to you. Do not speak out of turn again, Rossana. This is your first and only warning."

’But this is the guy that killed Peter!’

"Y-Your Majesty, my name is–"

"I was not speaking to you. Do none of you know the courtesy of ’speak only when being spoken to’? From now on if anybody speaks out of line, you’re going straight to the royal dungeon where you’d be tortured and executed immediately."

"""..."""

"That’s much better. Now, Tobias, you were saying?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. This is my loyal friend and also a priest of the church who was there on the day we all met this criminal. His name is–"

"I see. That’s enough, Tobias. I care not for his name nor who he is. Only that he is but a priest of the church and will not be of any help in this ruling. Guards take him away as his presence here is unnecessary."

"B-But Majesty!" The priest stepped one foot forward. "I’m–"

"Guards, I’ve changed my mind. I have already given a clear warning, but it would seem I’m being taken lightly. Take him to the royal dungeon for torture and execution."

The royal guards changed their destination from the front doors of sweet freedom to the side doors where hell awaits those who enter it.

"W-What! Your Majesty, I apologise for speaking out of turn! Please forgive me! N-No, take your hands off me! I said unhand me! Please, Your Majesty! Tobias, this isn’t what was supposed to happen! You said if I come here, I’d be–

SHUT!

"""..."""

’Damn. That’s one less piece of shit taken off my list of people to kill. So this king is cold even to people believed to be members of the church, huh? I like it.’ The corner of Kurt’s mouth rose slightly when he looked at King Maxwell not being fazed by the cries and pleas of the cultist being taken away.

"Tobias, there isn’t a problem, is there?"

"N-No, Your Majesty..."

"Good then let’s get to the offense number two. The attempted murder of a priest."

"...."

"Hmm?" The king noticed that Kurt’s mouth hung slightly open at what he just said. "No need to look at me like that, Rossana. I know the irony in my words. The difference between us, though, is that I’m king while you’re a criminal that’s beneath me and awaiting his punishment."

Chapter 66: Caught With Your Pants Down

"Honestly out of all your offenses this one seems to be the tamest." The king tapped his finger on his armrest. "Attempted murder of a priest. With the contentious being on the word ’attempted’. Well Rossana? What say you to this charge against you?"

"Obviously, that it’s false. I wasn’t attempting to murder anyone. The better word would be apprehend."

"If that’s so then explain the blood you were covered in."

Sigh "Your Majesty, have you not received a report from the prefects that pertains to this situation?"

"I have."

"Then why are we doing this song and dance? The person I was chasing is, or rather was, a member of the cult. I say ’was’ because the person you just sentenced to death was the person I was chasing. And the reason I was covered in blood was because that cultist killed the real priest right next to me. His name was Peter."

"Hm. What you’re saying does match up with the report I received from Chief Hudson. It also said that you captured another member of the cult. A ’male prostitute’ was it? Apparently, when they

interrogated him, they learnt that he was still an initiate of the cult and that it was his job to look for ’specific’ children and report back to the higher-ups."

’I’m glad that male prostitute proved to be useful in the end.’ Kurt thought as relief washed his face.

Tobias, on the other hand, was beginning to get nervous. He knew that the cult member he dispatched in that rural area was missing but he could not find him anywhere. Not even a hint of blood was left in that destroyed house. It was as if he’d just vanished.

’So he was inside the prefect’s holding cell and being interrogated this whole time? Dammit! Also, that one prefect lied to me about Kurt being the one in a cell!’

"Tobias," the king snapped him out his thoughts, "Was that man I sentenced to death truly a member of the cult? And do not lie to me." His eyes glowed behind his hair as if probing him for any hint of falsehood.

"... Y-Your Majesty... if the actions of what Kurt is doing, which is tracking down members of the cult, are true, then I can only assume that he is..."

"Oh," Maxwell’s eyebrows raised slightly. Finally showing some hint of emotion. "So you admit that there are members of the cult hiding and disguising themselves as priests?"

"N-No Your Majesty–!"

"But you just said that he is." He leaned forward on his throne.

"I-I said I ’assume’! There is no way I could have known! We have absolutely no proof that he is a member of those zealots! All we’ve established is that this criminal is supposedly hunting them down for some reason!"

"For some reason? Rossana, care to explain what those reasons are?"

"Of course, Your Majesty. A few days ago, I've come to learn that the cult is using the church's prophecy; [a child of golden hair and crystal blue eyes will be born as a direct descendent of the Goddess Bula in the year 780] as an excuse to kidnap children that has those same features.

The reason they're kidnapping those children is because they are disgusted by the church's insinuation that the Goddess would have a direct descendant, since they are all "children" of hers. They said that they're planning to put on a 'show' which is to kill more and more of those kids at the end of each month until the year is over.

I'm hunting these cultists because I want to find those children and bring them home safely."

"Hmm, I see. That's very noble of you. But do tell, how did you come to learn of all this?"

"Through pure coincidence." Kurt said nonchalantly. "I stumbled on a shady deal between two robbers and the cultist. A fight broke out and I came out on top."

"Pure coincidence you say." Maxwell probed Kurt for any hint of a lie and found nothing. "Who and where is this cultist?"

"His name is Arlo. Another priest from the church and, well, he's dead."

'So he is the bastard that killed Arlo! No wonder Arlo and those display tags never showed up! Because he's dead!'

"Tobias, why do you look so nervous? Is it because yet another member of the cult has been identified to be a priest?"

"T-There's... We have no priest called Arlo, Your Majesty! He has no evidence to back up what he's saying. This cur is spewing defamatory nonsense in order to make the church look bad!"

"Is that true, Rossana?"

"Look inside my blazer to my right. There’s a personal tag belonging to Arlo in there."

"Guards." Maxwell waved his hand.

...

"It’s true." Maxwell confirmed after the royal guardsman searched Kurt and brought the tag to him.

"Tobias. You lied to me. Guards."

"Y-Your Majesty–!" Two additional guards appeared and bent him to the knee while holding their spears at him.

"Why hi there. We finally meet at eye level." Kurt smirked at him.

"You blasphemous wretch!"

"Tobias." Maxwell called and asked, "So far we have identified three members of the cult. Two of which are members of the church. I sincerely hope I’m wrong, but tell me, are you a member of the cult?"

"No, Your Majesty! I would never associate myself with those blasphemous heathens! Believe me!"

"I would like to; however, you’re making it very difficult with the way you’re acting. Rossana, what do you say? Is he also a member of the cult?"

"I-I told you, I’m not–!"

"Yes. A hundred percent he is."

"Surely you have proof to make such bold statements!?" Tobias screamed at him. "No, you don't, because you're ly–"

"I do have proof. Heck, I'll do you one better. I have victims of his crimes being transported to Eldoria from the docks."

"That's right Toby~ I found your little goblin rape island and saved those women."

"W-What? What the hell are you talking about?! I don't have a–"

"Rossana, explain."

"Yes, but, Your Majesty. This actually ties into my third offense which is that I've kidnapped Diana Valentine. Is it okay if I speak about it?"

"You may." Maxwell nodded.

"Well then, the first thing I would like to say is I did not kidnap her. Due to a... mishap that caused her to teleport all over Eldoria, we ended up on that foul goblin island where we found women getting... assaulted by them.

We quickly killed those goblins and saved whatever women we could. Only five out of twenty made it out alive.

When we asked them the reason they were brought there, they told us it was because when they were asked by Tobias to hand over their children to him, under the excuse that they would be trained to serve under the prophesied child, they refused.

And so the following night, the cultists would break into their homes, kidnap their children and send them to that desolate island."

"Hmm, and you say that they're on their way from the docks? Who's escorting them?"

"A prefect by the name of Dominik and a member of the ten representatives, Emelie Herst."

"Those are some big names you just mentioned. If I remember correctly, Dominik is a potential candidate for becoming a royal guard. Isn't that right captain?" Maxwell looked to his right where the captain of the royal guards stood.

"That is correct, Your Majesty." he answered with a courteous nod.

"And Emelie Herst. My daughter, Kiana, cannot stop talking about her, hehe. She calls her, her rival. I've also been informed that she might even be stronger than what Diana Valentine was back in her academy days...

Captain, take a few guards with you and bring them here. I want those women properly taken care of for when I ask them questions later."

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

"Actually, before you go, you should know that Dominik is also bringing in more cultists that we caught from the ship we... borrowed to get back. I'm sure that with enough torture, you'd get them to spill the beans of who Tobias really is." Kurt added.

"I see. Captain, bring them here as well."

The captain of the royal guardsmen saluted the king and took two men with him as he left the castle.

"Rossana, I take it that Diana Valentine is back safe? And that this was all a misunderstanding?"

"That is correct, yes."

"Very well. I'll confirm this once my son and daughter come back from their club activities.

Guards, take him to a cell where he will wait for further news on his punishment. If all of what he spoke of today is true, then I will redact the public enhanced lashing and reward him instead. However, my son will still decide on what to do with you."

""Yes, Your Majesty!"" They brought him up by the shoulders and began to take him away.

"And as for you, Bishop Tobias... hm?" Maxwell noticed that he started shaking.

"...he...heh he...hehehehe! Ahahahahaha!....Freeze." Tobias reached for the spear that was pointed at him and stabbed his hand through it.

’Oh shit! This magic is–!’

At that moment, all but Tobias were frozen still. Unable to move neither limb nor a muscle.