THORNS 73

Chapter 73: Before The Fight

[LADIES AND GENTLEMEEEN! GATHER YOUR FRIENDS, GATHER YOUR FAMILY, HELL, GATHER THE PERSON STANDING NEXT TO YOU AND COME TO EVERGREEN PARK WHERE YOU WILL HAVE A FRONT ROW AT WITNESSING THE MIGHT OF OUR FUTURE LEADERS; KIANA AND MAXWELL, JR. DOROTHYYYY!!!]

"What the hell do those two idiots think they're doing?!"

Emelie and Kurt were on their way to meet the Dorothy twins when they all of a sudden came across a lively announcer riding a horse and screaming along the street about their fight, which was about to happen at Evergreen Park.

"Hold on now, Emy. Don't shoot the messenger. Poor guy's just doing his job." Kurt held her back from storming off and attacking the announcer.

"Do you really want this to become a big deal–!"

[IN EXACTLY TEN MINUTES, THE DOROTHY TWINS WILL TAKE ON THE CRIMINAL WHO HAD ASSAULTED OUR PRINCE! AND THAT'S NOT ALL, THIS CRIMINAL HAS DECIDED TO TEAM UP WITH NONE OTHER THAN "THE BEST" THE ONE AND ONLYYYYY... EMELIE HEEEERRST!!!]

"... Emelie Herst is teaming up with a criminal?"

"... Why would she?"

"... I heard from my son at Future Academy that Princess Kiana and Emelie don't particularly like each other..."

"... Who cares about the why! I just wanna see Emelie whoop some ass!"

"You know Emy," Kurt nudged her lightly, "You still haven't told me what made you so famous towards all these people. There are people that faint when they hear your name and others that go absolutely crazy."

"There are people that faint? The fuck?"

"Well, I'm only exaggerating but it sure feels that way. Even the weapons store owner knew about you. Plus, if there's a fan club that's dedicated to you, I bet Dominik and Darwin are part of it."

"I don't care about some 'fan club' as long as people respect my privacy. As for why I'm so famous... it probably has something to do with the entrance exams." Emelie sighed and speed walked past the announcer without doing anything to him.

"Entrance exam? You mean for Future Academy?" Kurt caught up to her and asked.

"The very one. I don't know if you know this, but during the exam, all first years are sent into a monster infested forest and are told to survive for one week. While all this is happening, we are each scored by a point system based on how many and what type of monsters we clear out."

"Hmm?" Kurt suddenly has a thought. "I remember Diana telling me something about this while we were stuck on that island. Guess she was talking about this exam, huh. So, you became famous during this exam?"

"Yes. Basically... I... I solo'd it." She frowned.

"Why the long look though?"

"Because that's when..." Emelie bit her lip as she tried to get out her next words. "That's the starting point of my regressions... Every time I fail and die, I'm brought right back to right when we're about to enter that forest and start the exam.

It's a blessing and a curse really. On one hand," She looked down and squeezed her right fist. "I realise that once again I couldn't change a single thing."

"On the other hand," She looked at and squeezed her left fist. "I can use whatever I've learned during that cycle to not only become stronger, but also, take advantage of the exams given to me and do some much needed stress relieving."

She then unballed her fists and relaxed her shoulders as she calmed down a bit from thinking about the past. "Basically, I went into the forest, cleaned out the most monsters and took out some students who tried to get in my way. Including the Dorothy twins.

Because of whom they are, they were expected to easily come out on top. Even the king was watching which only invited even more of the press and journalists. Imagine to their surprise when an unknown student comes in and cleans house. Worst of all I came out unscathed."

"Daaamn. Quite the little disrupter you were to the chain of power." Kurt admired.

"That's not all. After the exams, everybody at Future Academy wanted to see if my strength was real or not. This led to me beating them all down. From the 1st year students all the way to the 7th year students."

"If that's what happened then I understand how you got your notoriety. But why didn't you refuse those fights? I didn't take you for the type who would involve herself in petty squabbles. Especially given your accumulated experience and knowledge."

"I gave up caring about those things long ago. Besides, they make for pretty good benchmarks. My strength resets with each regression so I use them to see how much quicker and stronger I've gotten during a new cycle."

They both took a right when finally, the entrance gate to Evergreen Park came into view.

"Whoa. I can already see people lining up just to get inside. Just how far did the news spread, I wonder?" Kurt squinted as he held his hand on his forehead to look ahead.

"Is that Amy I see?" Emelie jogged forward when she saw someone she recognised.

"Emy, hi!" Amy got out from behind a booth that read ’1 Silver entrance fee’. "You finally made it! That means the fight is about to begin soon, yeah?"

"Are you seriously monetising this clown show?!" She pinched Amy’s ear.

"Ow ow ow! It wasn’t my idea!"

"Then whose was it?!"

"President Amber! It was her idea! She’s right over there managing the betting booth!" Amy pointed beyond the gate where Amber was stationed at.

When the two of them saw each other, Amber waved at Emelie as if none of what was happening was a big deal.

"This is so ridiculous." She let go of Amy’s ear.

"Hi Amy." Kurt greeted.

"K-Kurt! It’s been so long! Nice to see you again. Y-You’re looking extra cool today~" She fiddled with her pink braids and tried to make herself look pretty.

"What are you doing?" Emelie looked at her with a straight face. "Do you still have feelings for him–"

"WAAAAH EMY! WHAT ARE YOU SAYING!" She jumped and held her hands to cover Emelie’s mouth. "I-Ignore what she just said, Kurt. Ahaha..."

"I didn’t even hear what she said." Kurt acted clueless.

"That’s great! She’s always been soft spoken, so people often misinterpreted what she says, isn’t that right Emy?" Amy glared at her.

"Right..." Emelie freed herself. "C’mon Kurt. Let’s get this over with."

"W-Wait Emy! How’d you even get involved in this? What’s the real story behind this fight?"

"Sorry. That’s not my place to tell. As for how I’m involved. Let’s just say I was at the wrong place at the right time."

"She basically got dragged into my affairs." Kurt summerised.

"Wait, but Kurt, how’d you get involved with the Dorothy twins?"

"Ergh, it’s none of your business Amy. Kurt! We need to get this over with so hurry up!" Emelie yelled as she turned back to him.

"Alright alright! It was nice seeing you again Amy. Oh and I love the hotel you recommended. Thanks again for that." Kurt smiled at her one last time before leaving.

"N-No problem! I’m glad you like it!.... Hehehe" She giggled and blushed as she watched his back.

"That’s weird." A deep voice resounded next to her.

"Whoa! Aren’t you from Emy’s class? Errrmmm..."

"Gary. My name’s Gary. Here’s two silver coins for the entrance. My friend Austin should be arriving soon."

"Oh right, Gary! You’re a representative, that right! By the way, what did you mean by ’weird’."

"I mean those two. Emelie and that man. Kurt, was it?"

"Yes... Is there something weird between them?"

"I don’t know about Kurt. Emelie, however, can’t seem to stop talking about him during classes. I’ve even seen them walking around the street a couple times. Now they’re teaming up to take on the Dorothy twins? Yep, definitely weird. I wonder if they’re... dating?" Gary asked innocently.

"W-What? ... Da..ting?"

"Hey Gevin! There you are! Why’d you run ahead without me!"

"Haha. Sorry about that Austin. Just got a little excited, that’s all."

"Hmph! ’Excited’ my ass. I bet you wanted to kill– Oh! Hi Amy, haha!"

"... Hi? I don’t think we’ve ever been properly introduced for you to know my name"

"Oh, that’s b-because Emelie talks about you all the time, haha..."

"Emy talks about me... to you?"

"N-No! That’s not what I meant to say. What I’m trying to say is–"

"Is that everyone in our class knows you’re the only one Emelie talks to. Except, of course, when she talks about Kurt."

"Kurt?" Austin looked at him strangely. "Why’re you bringing him up–"

"Let’s get moving, Austin." Gary dragged him by the arm before he could speak. "I want to get a good view on this fight."

"H-Hey! Stop dragging me, Grimball! I can walk by myself."

"... Emy and Kurt are... dating? Is that why she’s always telling me to give up on him?" Amy looked into the crowd with a pained expression as she thought about what Gary said.

Chapter 74: Opponents Switched

"Well well well. Looks like you two didn’t chicken out after all." Kiana watched Emelie and Kurt appear from the crowd and walk to the opposite side of their makeshift arena.

"Was the audience really necessary? Because this seems a little excessive, don’t you think?" Emelie pointed at the crowd where a particularly rapid group of people were getting a little too into their cheering.

"DEATH TO THE CRIMINAL!"

"I LOVE YOU EMELIE!"

"OH MY GOSH! THE PRINCE LOOKS SO HANDSOME WHEN HE’S GETTING READY TO FIGHT!"

"STEP ON ME PRINCESS KIANA!"

"Do I seriously have no fans?" Kurt sighed when he took off his glasses.

"... Whoa. Isn’t he also kind of handsome? Should I have bet on him instead." A few loud jeers changed to quiet cheers.

"... Now that I’m getting a proper look at him, those pecks are kinda..."

"THE HELL YOU THINK THIS IS, A BEAUTY CONTEST?! WE'RE HERE TO SEE HIM GET HIS ASS BEAT!"

"... I bet he can beat my ass~"

"You were saying, Kurt?" Emelie asked him in a sarcastically dry tone.

"Never mind. Let's just focus on the fight. So, who's taking on whom?"

"I'll go for Kiana since we're both long-range combatants. You go for Junior. Although he does have a couple of long-range techniques, he mostly specialises in close range–"

"EMELIE!" Junior called as he pointed at her. "Finally, after one year, I get to have my revenge for what you did to me at the entrance exams! I'll show you just how much I've changed during all this time!"

"What!?" Kiana turned sharply at him. "Junior, didn't we agree to–"

"Sorry sis. But after seeing Emelie standing opposite me like this, I realise this is one of the few chances I'll get to fight her seriously. She'd normally always reject my requests... but not this time." He smiled excitedly with his teeth showing.

"Junior! It's supposed to be your duty to punish the criminal–"

"THAT'S FINE WITH YOU RIGHT!?" He ignored what his sister was trying to say and focused all his attention on Emelie.

"Honestly, I'd rather not fight a battle maniac like you–"

"IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT YOUR OPINION IS! I'M COMING FOR WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT! GET READY, EMELIEEE! HYA!"

BOOM!

A golden light surrounded Junior’s entire body as he shot forward straight towards her.

"I swear this muscle-brain never listens. Sorry Kurt, looks like you’re handling the princess." Emelie told him as she flew in the air to dodge Junior’s oncoming attack. However,

"YOU’RE NOT GETTING AWAY THAT EASILY!" He changed his momentum from forward to straight up as he super jumped at her and summoned a sword of ice.

"... Fine. Let’s make this quick then." Emelie summoned her own ice sword and charged at him.

"SINCE WHEN DID YOU KNOW ICE MAGIC!?"

"WHY DON’T YOU BEAT ME TO FIND OUT!"

"HAHAHA! JUST WHAT I’D EXPECT OF YOU EMELIE! HAAAAAA!"

CLANG!

SHATTER

Their swords broke into ice shards as they collided with one another.

"I hope you haven’t forgotten, but the sky is my domain!" She wrapped him in a telekinetic barrier and flung him to the ground.

"Oh shit–!"

BOOM!

[AND JUST LIKE THAT, EMELIE HERST HAS WON THE FIRST EXCHANGE AGAINST THE PRIIIINCCEE!!!]

"""YEEEAAAAHHH!!!"""

The crowd erupted at the exciting sight they were witnessing.

".....Ha. Hahaha. Yes... this is just what I've wanted." Junior wiped the blood from his lip and stood up like it was nothing. "But that doesn't mean I'm through! Take this!" He jumped right back at her but even faster this time.

This earned the amazement of the crowd who thought they'd be seeing a repeat of what happened last year.

"How is he doing that!? He's so fast."

"He's blitzing through the sky! Will Emelie be able to keep up?!"

"I knew you had it in you, my prince!"

Meanwhile, on the ground below, Kurt had already taken out his knives and was waiting for Kiana to make the first move. Instead, she was visibly shaking and muttering something to herself that no one could hear.

"...lie... elie... melie... Emelie Emelie Emelie Emelie EMELIE EMELIE EMELIE!!! IT'S ALWAYS EMELIE! WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT HER!?" Spiky ice bars shot out of the ground and surrounded herself as Kiana stomped her foot down.

'Holy shit! What's wrong with Princess Bubblegum-Head?'

Kurt slowly tip-toed forward and approached her cautiously.

’Well, whatever’s going on in her head, I want none of it. I just need to land one good blow to freak her out. Show her I’m a threat. Hopefully that will end the match. On my side at least.’

As he got closer to her, he felt the ground below him start to subtly shake.

"Hm? Oh shit–!" He jumped out the way and narrowly dodged a spike of ice that would’ve torn right through him.

"Are you trying to kill me!? Wasn’t this supposed to be a friendly spar to see who’s receiving a punishment?!"

"Hmm. I’m surprised you evaded that. Maybe you do have some skill..."

"Alright, fine. Ignore my question then. See if I give a shit." Kurt fully ran at her and got ready to strike.

"Hmph. What an idiot." Kiana concentrated her magic on the place where Kurt would step on. Once he reached that spot, she’d summon more spikes to stab through.

"Hup!" Kurt quick-stepped away just in time.

"Hup! Hup! Hup!" With each spike coming out the ground, Kurt would easily dodge them.

Grrr! "How are you doing that!?"

"Haha! Why don’t you beat me to find out, Princess Bubblegum-Head~" Kurt twirled his knife as he taunted her with the same thing Emelie just said.

[WHHOOOOAAA!!! ARE YOU WITNESSING THIS LADIE AND GENTLEMEEEEN! THE CRIMINAL KNOWN AS KURT HAS EASILY DODGED THE PRINCESS’S ONSLAUGHT!]

"""YEAAAAHHHH!!!"""

"Feels like as long as they get a good show, these people would cheer for anybody. Isn’t that right, Princess Bubblegum-Head?"

"Stop calling me that!" She screamed as she shot multiple ice spikes at him.

"Oh crap–!" Kurt raised his arms up to defend himself from the incoming attack.

The impact caused him to tumble backwards. Although none of his vitals got stabbed from the blast, his forearms weren’t so lucky as a few spikes pierced into his skin.

"...Aahh." Kurt seethed in pain. "Note to self: Don’t call her by that specific name unless you want to be riddled with pointy ice magic"

He pulled out the spikes and gave his arm a few good shakes to check on his condition.

’Alright. Still good to go.’

"You’re still standing, hey?" Kiana smirked and crossed her arms.

"... You’re a real annoying opponent to fight against, princess."

"And you’re just annoying."

[OHHHH, AS EXPECTED LADIES AND GENTLEMEEEN!! THE PRINCESS HAS TURNED THE TIDES AND SHOWED US EXACTLY WHY SHE’S PART OF THE TEN REPRESENTATIVES!!!]

"Woooooo! Princess Kianaaa!"

"We love you!"

"Waste that criminal!"

Observing the fight near the front of the cheering crowd were Austin and Gary, who were not focused on the spectacle happening above them, but rather on one particular man.

"So that's Kurt Rossana? The one who's been gathering the attention of all the main heroines." Austin glared at Kurt as he got ready to face off against Kiana again.

"Main heroines? What are you talking about, Austin?" Gary asked.

"N-Nothing! I meant to say Principal Valentine and Emelie."

"Wait. You like the principal and Emelie? Pfffthahaha! Is that why you want Kurt out of the picture? Because he's been involved with them and you feel threatened by him?"

"Yeah, so what? They're supposed to be mine anyway."

"'Supposed to be yours'? That's some serious erhm... ambition you have going for you. Is there anyone else you consider a main heroine?"

"I told you to forget about that!" Austin raised his fist to hit him on the head.

"Sorry! I'm sorry, ok?! Haha! I was just curious."

"Well, if you must know, I'm planning on making a harem which includes a bunch of baddies such as Emelie, Principal Valentine, Princess Kiana, Secretary Mia, Amy, The Saintess and many, many more. Heheheh~"

"Whoa Austin... That's... insane. How do you plan on making all that happen?" Gary looked at him with stars in his eyes.

"By triggering all the romance flags of course."

"The what flags?"

"Although I may have to give up on the Saintess since..."

"Since..." Gary leaned in closer to hear what he was going to say.

"Fuck! Why are you always getting in my personal space!" Austin pushed his face away.

"I can’t help it. You always make such a cute face when you’re thinking so hard." Gary smiled at him with a faint red glow in his eyes.

Tsk! "I told you I’m not gay! Stop doing that!"

"Hehehe~ Neither am I..." He whispered so that Austin couldn’t hear him.

BOOM!

A body landed near where they both stood. Once the dust settled, the person who lay unconscious was revealed to be,

[WHOOOOOOA!!! AND JUST LIKE THAT THE PRINCE IS DOWN FOR THE COUNT!! EMELIE HERST HAS TAKEN VICTORY FOR HER SIDE FOR THE TEEEEAAAM!!]

"Emelieeee! I knew you could do it!"

"This is just like last year, huh?"

"Nooooo! My money!"

"JUNIOR!" Kiana tried to run and check up on her brother, but Kurt quickly jumped in to block her way.

"Nah ah uhh princess." He smirked at her. "No getting distracted now~ I'm still here, remember?"

"Why you..."