THORNS 75

Chapter 75: Kurt VS The Villainess

"Get out of my way..." Kiana gripped her staff tightly as she stared down at Kurt.

"Now now Kiana." Emelie floated down and landed next to him. "What are you doing telling the enemy to make way for you? You know that that's not how we things in a 2v2, it's pathetic. Your brother picked his fight and lost."

Tsk "Emelie... It's you... It's always because of you that Junior never pays attention to me–!"

"Easy princess, haha. Your opponent isn't me. It's Kurt, remember~" She jumped and flew backwards towards the unconscious prince.

"You're not gonna help me deal with her?" Kurt asked Emelie.

"No. Besides, fighting with Junior has exhausted too much of my mana. If I really wanted to I could but I'd prefer to watch you in action. Oh, but don't worry. If it means anything to, I will be cheering for you from back here."

"Greeeaaat. How supportive of you." Kurt fixed his attention back on Kiana.

"Are you two finally done chit-chatting? Cause I've just about lost all my patience."

"You were actually waiting for us? As expected of royalty. Very magnanimous of you."

"Only because I don't want you complaining to me that I beat you when you were caught off guard. But I suspect that you will be crying about the result of this fight either way, like the criminal you are."

"You really have to stop calling me that. You don't want to disappoint daddy with your wrongful accusations now do you? I even stopped calling you Princess Bubblegum-Head."

Grrr! "Just die already!"

Clang!

Kurt deflected the oncoming spike of ice with his knives and gave his hands a little shake.

"It’s always the same two moves with you. You better switch things up or everybody here will witness their poor little princess getting spanked~"

[LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! IT WOULD SEEM THAT THIS FIGHT WILL BECOME A 1V1. KURT VERSUS PRINCESS KIANAAAA! AND WITH THAT, A NEW BETTING EVENT!

THE TAGS THAT YOU RECEIVED FROM THE BETTING BOOTH HAS BE UPDATED, COURTESY OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL PRESIDENT OF FUTURE ACADEMY, AMBER STRONGWIIIIILLL! SO PLEASE, IF YOU FEEL SO INCLINED, MAKE YOUR BETS AND CHOOSE YOUR SIIIIDE!!!]

"It’s definitely the princess!"

"Hello, have we been watching the same fight! Didn’t you see how easily that one eye has been handling himself!"

"That parry was pretty sick! My coins are on him!"

"What a disgrace you all are! Supporting a random person over our princess!"

While the crowd was arguing, cheering and betting, Emelie felt a little tap on shoulder.

"Hi Emelie."

"Hm? Oh, Gary... and Austin..." Her eyes sharpened when she saw him in particular. "What are you two doing here?"

"Austin said he wanted to come by and cheer you on, isn't that right?"

"Fucking Gary– Ehm! Errr! Y-Yes! H-Hi Emelie! Good job on beating Junior. Y-You were awesome, hahaha..." Austin blushed once he was put on the spot.

"W-Who do you think is gonna win between the villainess– I MEAN! Between Princess Kiana and erm... Kurt, was it?"

"Hm." Emelie, looking totally disinterested in Austin, picked up Junior using her telekinetic magic and walked away from them.

"Pfffthaha! Smooth one, Austin." Gary wiped the tears from his eyes. "Was this one of those 'flags' you mentioned? Has she fallen for you yet?"

"S-Shut up..."

CLANG!

SHATTER!

'Looks like the enhancing magic plus adaption skill is kicking in. Dodging and breaking her ice feels like a walk in the park now. It's about time I end this.'

When Kiana shot another ice spike at him, Kurt skillfully raised his hands and, by enhancing his arms, redirected the ice using its momentum to throw it back at her.

"Oh no–!" She quickly summoned an ice wall to defend herself.

CLASH!

"That’s not all!" Kurt yelled as he came running and finally closed the distance. "Now break!"

SHATTER!

He punched through the ice wall causing it to break down and reveal a vulnerable Kiana.

"Hi princess." Kurt smiled, "And goodbye!" He switched the blades into its brass knuckle form and swinged right at her face.

However, instead of looking fearful, she smiled.

’What? What’s with that look? Was she waiting for me?’

Despite his doubts, he still went in for the punch... which connected to her face with a thunderous,

CRACK! Her head moved slightly backwards at the impact.

’Crack? Cheeks don’t crack.’ Kurt tried moving his hand away from her, but to his dismay, he couldn’t.

"...he...hehehe." Kiana slowly turned her head towards him. And when he saw her, it all made sense as to why he heard and felt what he did.

"So, you can even do that, huh? Not bad, Princess."

Her entire face was covered in a protective layer of ice which gripped on his hand like a vice.

"I finally got you." She whispered as her cool breath hit his face.

She then grabbed his wrist and began to spread her ice across his arm and all over his body.

"Oh hell no." Kurt tried to knee her in her stomach but instead,

Crack!

His leg got trapped inside the voice of her abdomen.

"Die, you persistent roach. When I'm finished with you, that bitch Emelie will be next and soon, when she's out of the picture, Junior will finally forget about her and be all mine."

'Shit! It's spreading too fast!' Panic started to surface from Kurt as his whole arm and leg were now completely encapsulated in ice.

"Are you just going to keep watching while your partner gets completely frozen to death, huh Emelie!?" Kiana screamed at her.

And true to what Kiana said, Emelie just kept watching with her arms crossed and a smirk on her face.

"... Is she really going to do nothing?"

"C'mon Emelie, move! My money's on the line here!"

"Heh! I told you that no one can beat our princess!"

"Damn, looks like I just lost part of this bet. But we all know that Emelie's going to beat the princess after this."

"Yeah. She's just standing there and recovering her mana while the princess is using up all hers."

The ice had now covered Kurt’s whole body and was approaching his neck.

"Hehehe. Sorry Kurt, it seems that Emelie still cares about no one but herself. Oh well. Sucks to be you, I guess. Farewe– Hm?" Kiana noticed that the ice had stopped moving.

Or rather than stop moving, it struggled to reach any further and was being pushed back.

"It’s about time Kurt." Emelie snickered.

"Sorry about that. I was honestly quite worried my skill wouldn’t activate in time. However, luckily for me, my body recognised this ice from before and decided to make some... adjustments, in case I find myself in a situation like this.

And what do you know?" Kurt smirked and,

SHATTER!

He freed both of his legs and arms.

"W-What is happening!? Why aren’t you freezing!?" Kiana tried casting her magic onto him again, but the ice would just keep breaking off even without the assistance from Kurt himself.

"Why is your skin so pale!? This isn’t supposed to happen!"

"Let’s just say I’ve... Haaaaa." Kurt let out an ice-cold breath of his own. "Adapted to the situation."

"Argh. How corny." Emelie shook her head.

"Nnrraagh!" Kurt punched her again and this time it went straight through her icy protective layer and landed square on her cheek, sending her tumbling back against the ground.

[WHHOOOOAAA!!! LADIES AND GENTLEMEEEN!! A BIIIG COUNTER FROM KURT HAS SENT THE PRINCESS FLYING BACK! WILL SHE GET UP FROM THIS OR NOT!? LET'S FIND OUT!]

"How could he hit a lady like that!?"

"Are you kidding me! She was going to kill him first!"

"But still! She's the princess!"

"And this is a battle! Suck it up or piss off if you're gonna whine!"

"Damn, Princess Kiana really took the full brunt of that attack, huh Austin?"

"How dare that fucker hit my waifu like that... I swear I'll make him pay!"

"Waifu? Oh, Austin. You and your silly little terms..."

Emelie flew next to Kurt and tapped him on the back. "So, you got one good shot on her. You think it's over?" She asked him.

"Hmm. I don't know. Something didn't feel right. Huh? Look!"

[AND SHE STANDS BACK UP AGAIN! AS EXPECTED OF A DOROTHYYYY!]

"Let's gooo!"

"I knew you could do it, Princess!"

"Dammit! Hey Kurt, finish the job properly so I can go home rich!"

"Hehehe. I didn't want to have to use this technique against you since I was saving it for Emelie. But you've really pissed me off..." The air around Kiana had started to change and her once deep blue hair was now turning snow white.

'What the! She learnt this technique already! But it's still a couple years too early!' Emelie stared at Kiana wide-eyed as the grass below them all turned to ice.

"What's wrong, Emy? You're looking freaked out."

"Shit, this isn't good Kurt! I can't give the full details right now but long story short is that Kiana is currently turning in berserk mode. She's unable to control her magic in that state and will potentially, no, definitely hurt innocent people without realising!"

"That's not good. How do we stop her?"

"Simple. You're gonna have to knock her unconscious."

"Me!? What about you?!"

"I'm gonna stay back and protect anybody that gets caught in the crossfire. Unless you want to switch roles with me?"

Kurt looked at all the people around and back to Kiana. He then took a deep breath and let it out slowly when he came to his decision.

"No. That's too many people for me. I'll handle the princess; you take care of them. Besides, I've gotten used to her ice."

"Heh. Smart man." Emelie flew back and spread out her arms to create a telekinetic barrier around the makeshift arena.

"Alright Princess Kiana." Kurt put away his knives and drew Silent Night from its sheath. "Get ready for the next battle."

Chapter 76: Absolute Zero

"... Hey look. Something's happening with the princess."

"... Her hair. It changed."

"... Is it just me or has it gotten a bit chilly."

"Hey Austin, this isn't looking good. Should we bail? We got what we came for, you now know what Kurt looks like."

"Why should we bail? Emelie's here. She'll do something about this." Austin told Gary while keeping his gaze focused on the arena.

"What could she possibly do–! Oh. That."

Suddenly, an invisible barrier had surrounded all the people that were in the park except for the space in which Kurt and Kiana are about to fight.

"... Hey! The cold stopped!"

"... Look up at the sky! It's Emelie! She's protecting us!"

"""Yeeeaaah!!!"""

"Hahaha, they really do love her." Kurt smiled when he looked at the crowd who were losing their minds from the fact that she was protecting them.

"Eyes on me, criminal." Kiana raised her staff and shot another ferocious ice spike at his head. Due to the sudden power of the blast, however, she recoiled slightly and winced in pain.

Kurt did not even look nor panic when he quickly swung his blade up and sliced the spike in half, causing it to split cleanly in two and crash behind him.

"This power... Heh, I'm really starting to dig magic." He flexed his hand around the hilt of the sword and turned to face the princess. "Alright, you've got my attention, not that you lost it. So how are we going to do this?"

"W-Why you..." Kiana started to shiver.

But not from fear of the sudden display in power that Kurt brought out. Every drop in the surrounding temperature demanded a toll from her own mana veins. Slowly but surely, she was losing the feeling of control in her magic.

"Talk less," She whispered just enough for him to hear her. "Fight more."

"How direct of you. I like it." Kurt grinned.

He forward once, causing the icy ground beneath him to crack, and ran full burst at her.

Kurt's speed was unnatural even for him. He let out a kinetic explosion that closed the thirty feet between them in a fraction of a second. He appeared on her right, which was his blind side considering it's the place where his eyepatch rests. Kiana tried at first to block it with her staff but then she saw the subtle raise of his lips.

'Shit, It's a trap!' She tried switching directions to cover her left side in time but,

"It’s too late!" He yelled as his blade arched in a vicious, horizontal sweep aimed at her collarbone.

Kiana, thanks to her quick wittedness and overpowered state, snapped her fingers causing a compressed permafrost wall to erupt from the ground with a thunderous crack.

Kurt slammed the blunt side of his blade into the wall, causing a shockwave to ripple through the air. He used the momentum of the blocked strike to pivot, launching himself backward in a flawless backflip.

"Not bad, Princess. But defensive magic only delays the inevitable. You can stay behind that wall forever."

"Shut up! I don’t intend to!" She screamed, her voice dropping an octave as she let out a strange, resonant resonance.

She dropped her staff and slammed both her palms into the icy ground. The magic was visceral, tearing out of her in a blinding flash of azure light.

"What’s she doing now?" Kurt gripped his sword tightly and prepared himself for what’s coming next.

A wave of absolute zero rolled outward in a perfectly concentric sphere.

"OH SHIT!" Kurt jumped and blitzed behind a tree.

Wherever the wave hit, the world died. The remaining grass became completely covered in a thick layer of ice, the stones cracked and the moisture in the air flash-froze into microscopic daggers.

"Fuck!" Emelie groaned as she fought off the freeze with her own magic while doubly intensifying the barrier that protected the people.

"What the hell are you doing, Kurt! Hurry this up already! I only have so much mana before I run out." She tried calling out to him but the wave of absolute zero blocked out any sound it came across.

"Screw it. Hey you!" She called the announcer who was nearby. "Tell the people that the show's over and to go home!"

"But Ms. Herst, what about the bet! People want to see the result of this outcome. They paid good money to watch you!"

"Bet?! Are you fucking kidding me?! You're going to die if you stay here! Despite what you might think, I can't stay here protecting you all forever! I'm not invincible! And I'm already exhausted from fighting Junior! So please, tell the people to leave!"

The announcer saw the desperate and resolute gaze in Emelie. He looked once at the battlefield and realised that they were only alive right now thanks to her.

"I-I'm sorry. You're right." He nodded and lifted his microphone to make the call.

[LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! DUE TO UNPRECEDENTED CIRCUMSTANCES, THINGS HAVE TAKEN A TURN FOR THE WORST AND WE HAVE BEEN TOLD TO IMMEDIATELY EVACUATE THE PARK!]

"Aw What!?"

"But we're just fine! I want to see the result of the match!"

"Yeah! Emelie will protect us! Besides, I've spent a lot of coins on this!"

The crowd was starting to get rowdy and not in a good way.

[THIS IS A DIRECT REQUEST FROM EMELIE HERST HERSELF! KINDLY LEAVE. THE. PARK! I'M SURE YOU HAVE ALL WITNESSED THE SPECTACLE THAT SHE GAVE US WHEN SHE FOUGHT THE PRINCE, BUT THAT FIGHT HAD TIRED HER OUT!

AND RIGHT NOW, SHE IS BUSY BRAINING HERSELF OF MANA WHILE TRYING TO SHIELD US FROM DISASTER! LET US NOT BURDEN HER ANY MORE THAN WE ALREADY HAVE AND CORDIALLY MAKE OUR WAY TO THE EXIT–]

[EVERYBODY, THIS IS AMBER STRONGWILL! THE SHOW IS OVER! KINDLY MAKE YOUR WAY TO THE FRONT GATE OF THE PARK WHERE YOU WILL ALL BE REFUNDED BASED ON THE AMOUNT YOU'VE SPENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH YOUR BETTING TAGS!]

Amber took the microphone away from the announcer and made her own call to show them just how serious the situation is.

"... Aw darn it! I really wanted that money!"

"... Well at least we're getting our money back."

"... Oh well. It was fun while it lasted."

Although many were dissatisfied with the end results, they finally started moving away towards the exit.

"Thank you, Amber." Emelie smiled in relief.

"Anything for my cute junior." She winked. "Hopefully once they're all out, you can ease up on the barrier and steady yourself."

Back inside the ice-covered arena, the spherical ice wave of absolute zero had finally died down and stopped causing chaos. The aftermath of this, however, was that the entire arena, other than outside the barrier that which Emelie created, was shrouded in fog and mist.

Kurt peeked out from the now cracked and frozen tree to check on the princess, but.

'I can't see shit.'

He looked down at his arms and hands and saw that his skin was now completely pale due to his skill. Even his veins were practically visible at this point yet, strangely enough, he doesn’t feel the least bit of coldness.

"Kurt." Emelie landed beside him. "Whoa. You look like a vampire."

"Emy? Why are you here? What about the people? And my God, do you look awful."

"Yeah, well, I’m tired...The people are safely evacuated. I’m still covering this arena with a barrier, but the strain is not as bad. The student council president of our academy also safely took Junior away."

"Good. I could use a little help with this fog."

"Leave it to me." She waved her hand to the side and effortlessly cleared the obscurations.

"E-Eme... Emelie..." Kiana was crouched down on the ground and holding her arms together tightly to hug herself.

"What’s happening to her?" Kurt asked.

"She used a technique that she wasn’t ready for and is slowly killing herself..."

"Killing herself? Dammit, what do we do? I just got off the king’s naughty list."

"Argh, this is why I wanted to deal with her myself *tsk!* Don’t worry. I’ll do the same thing to her as I did to the principal. I’ll disrupt her magic while simultaneously healing her mana veins."

"That’s right. I nearly forgot that you can heal."

"It’s not my specialty but I can heal minor cuts and bruises. C’mon. It’ll be easier once she’s knocked out. Can I leave that to you?"

"Sure." Kurt sheathed his sword and followed behind her. "So how can we tell once it's game over for her because based on what you said, things could've gone south really fast with her using that technique without even mastering it."

"Normally, once she's nearing her limit, an ice crown starts to form on her head."

"A crown? Like that?" He pointed at Kiana with his scabbard.

"Hm?" Emelie squinted closely and saw that the base of the crown was already starting to take shape. "Oh no! We need to hurry!" She jumped and flew towards her.

"Hey! What about me!? Dammit, she probably doesn't even have enough mana to carry me seeing as how drained she looked."

"Pity ain't it. Cause you're going to die here."

"Wha–" Kurt tried to move but his whole body stood in place. When he looked down, he saw the same hooded figure that appeared from Tobias' shadow, pop out of his.

"Goodbye. Kurt Rossana."

STAB!

A black dagger had been stabbed into his stomach.

Thud!

Kurt fell to his knees as blood leaked out of his mouth.

"And now," The figure held Kurt’s head with both of their hands in a way that would twist it. "And now my dear friend will finally be worry free..."

"GET AWAY FROM HIM!" Emelie flew back and shot the figure away with a telekinetic blast, but there was no impact. Just black smoke as they disappeared.

"Kurt! Oh shit oh shit oh shit oh shit! D-Don’t die on me! *sob!* Do...hear me! D... nt... urt!... alive!"

Emelie’s voice was slowly fading away as Kurt began to close his eye.

"N-No! *sob!* Ku...Kurt! Wak... with me....."

The blood loss eventually took hold of him, causing him to black out.