THORNS 79

Chapter 79: Desperate Plea

The air around Emelie was thick with the metallic tang of blood and the dewy cold scent of mist and fog. Kurt's head laid across her lap as she tried healing the area in which he got stabbed, and although the wound on his stomach had already closed, the bleeding did not.

Blood kept pouring out of his mouth as his head lolled to the side, but more horrifically, it began to leak out from beneath his eyepatch.

"W-What's happening to him!? Shit, Kurt! What's going on with you?! Why aren't you healing!?"

Emelie's hands were trembling as she slowly and steadily removed his eyepatch to try and heal him straight from the source. When she finally took it off, the sight revealed to her sent a cold shiver down her spine. A gruesomely old 'X' shape scar was covering the entire space around his right eye. And even though his eyelid was closed, it looked oddly hollow from her perspective.

"F-Focus Emelie..." She whispered to herself. "This is nothing compared to what you've been through."

She then used her thumb and index finger to open up his eyelid. Once she did, the unusual hollowness of his eye all made sense. Because there was no eye.

'Who could've done this to you... No. That doesn't matter right now. Ask questions later.'

"Don't worry, Kurt. I'll get you all fixed up and it'll be like none of this happened." She stuck her finger ever so slightly into his eye socket and began to heal him from the inside.

"Yes! I did it, Kurt!" This method seemed to have worked since the bleeding stopped. However, "Now you just need to wake– Huh?"

Kurt's whole body had begun to ooze out blood.

"....Nononononononono!" Emelie ripped off his shirt and saw that every single scar riddled across his body looked like it had been reopened.

"F-Fuck, Kurt! Why is this happening! You were fine just a second ago!" She pressed both of her palms onto him and began healing. But no matter what she did, nothing was working.

"Wake up you fucker! Stop it! Just stop it! *Sob* Stop bleeding already! This stupid fucking poison! Kurt! *Sniff* P-Please stop bleeding! *Sob* I'm sorry I was too late! *Sob* P-Please wake up!"

"Emelie?" A familiar voice called from behind her

Gasp "P-Principaaal *sob* He's *sniff* he's not h-healing! I-I don't have the *sob* antidote!"

"Who's not healing?! What happened?! I've never seen you like this!"

"He's... He's–" Emelie tried turning Kurt towards Diana, but she quickly ran around to her front instead.

Thud!

"R-Ro.. sie?" She reached out and pulled him on her own lap.

"P-Principal! You need to take him to the Saintess! He's been poisoned by the cult and they're the only one who can cure him!"

"Hey, Rosie..." Diana didn't scream. The sound was trapped in her throat like a jagged thing that tasted like salt and grief. Instead, she leaned over him, her hair falling like a veil to shield him from the coldness in the air.

"Prin..ci..pal?"

"Hey, Rosie. You can’t sleep here... Is your mana all out of whack again? No? Then why aren’t you getting up? Haha, don’t tell me this little blood is what’s keeping you down? No? Then tell me, why aren’t you waking up? Hey, stand up. We still haven’t gone on our date yet."

Her thoughts weren’t a linear narrative; they were in a frantic loop of denial. She found herself mesmerising the shape of his eyelashes and the way his jawline remains set even in unconsciousness, terrified that these are the last images she will ever have of him.

"Principal, you should take him to–"

A single tear hit his right cheek, trailing through a smear of blood. She shook him a little. A silent plea for him to be the same possessive and loving person he was the last time she saw him. But, with his lack of reaction and the weight of him feeling heavier than he ever was, is the moment her composure finally shatters.

Drip... Drip

"Ro..sieee *sob* No... No! Not like this! There’s still so much we haven’t done yet! *sob* Please, don’t die–!"

"PRINCIPAL VALNETINE!"

SLAP!

Diana’s head cocked to the side as Emelie slapped some sense into her.

"He’s not dead! But he will die if you keep stalling and spewing all that shit! Despite how he looks, he’s still breathing! Now please hurry up and take him to the church! That’s where the Saintess is meeting with the king."

".... Y-You’re right." Diana looked at Kurt and saw that his chest was slightly moving. "I’m sorry for losing my composure like that, Emelie. Makes me wonder who the real adult is."

"It’s fine. I lost my composure too. Just. Please get going. My mana’s spent so I couldn’t take him away even if I wanted to... We both know Kurt’s a tough cookie, but you can never be too careful."

Diana nodded and lifted Kurt up from under his arms. "Stay here with Kiana. I’ll be back to get you both after I get the help of the Saintess."

"Okay..." Emelie slowly got up and made her way to the princess.

"Thank you, Emelie..." Diana closed her eyes to envision the church and teleported away.

Shortly after, Emelie sat next to the unconscious Kiana and put her head in her knees as she thought back on what happened.

’That magic. Why is he acting up so early? He would always try to distance himself from the cult. Even when I joined them in the past he’d never go along with what they’re doing unless it was orders from the upper echelons. Gary, what spurred you to do this? And what the hell are you planning?’

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"And? What are the results, Saintess?"

"The results are... they’re perfectly normal. Not a trace of malice nor any suspicious markings. Just your regular ’ol priests hehe." The Saintess let down her hands of purifying light magic which were scanning the priests that the king ordered to line up.

"... T-Thank you for proving our innocence."

"... We’re not worthy to be in your presence. I was so afraid."

"... Thank the Goddess Bula. For she has blessed us with your ever-loving light."

"Ahaha! You’re all exaggerating. Old Maxy here wouldn’t hurt innocent priests. That’s why he called me! So that I can double check and give you all the clear." The Saintess raised her nose up in pride and thumped her flat chest.

"Oh, praise be Saintess Christy!"

"I feel so enlightened by your grace!"

"Your holy magic has only strengthened my beliefs!"

"As it should! Ooohohoho~!"

King Maxwell watched with a bored expression on how all the priests practically groveled on the ground and were singing the Saintess praises.

"Haaaa. You may all leave and continue your services." He turned around and waved a hand at his royal guards, gesturing to them to follow him.

"Now hold on, Maxy! Aren’t you going to apologise to these poor priests who took their time out to see you?"

"No."

"Oof. Uptight as usual. Tsk tsk, Maxy."

SHWOOSH

"Saintess! Is Saintess Christy here?!" Diana appeared at the front door of the church with Kurt in her arms.

"Oh, what's this? Someone looking for me?" Christy jumped out from the church's playground where they were all standing and peeked around the corner to look towards the church.

"Why, if it isn't the queen of the single lady's society–"

"Christy! Please come over here quickly! I need your help!"

"Hmm? What's wrong?" She curiously ran to Diana and stopped when she saw what the problem was. "Oh my..."

"Hurry, Christy! I need you to heal him or else he won't last much longer."

"Heal? Now Diana, you do know that there's a hefty price you have to pay when it comes to using the powers of a Saintess's abilities. Just now, even Maxy had to–"

"Please," She choked out. Diana looked down at Kurt and did not raise her head again, afraid that if she were to break eye contact with him, the last of his pulse would vanish without her knowing.

"You have the light... And is the closest thing that represents Goddess Bula. If there is any mercy in those powers of yours, then please heal him. Take whatever price you want from me, just don't let him go cold."

Christy felt an unfamiliar jolt run through her. Never has she seen Diana begged for someone's help like this. Especially considering the fact it was for a man.

'Hehehe. How interesting~'

"Priests!" She snapped her fingers. "Take this man inside the church and lay him up front. It is time to work a miracle!"

"""Yes, Saintess Christy!!!""" They all shouted and carefully picked up Kurt to carry him inside.

"T-Thank you, Christy..." Diana beamed at her with relief.

"Don’t thank me just yet. Also, I expect to hear the full story of what happened to him and of who he is. You really surprised me there."

"There’s actually two more I need to bring back. Hang on. I’ll be back in a second."

"Huh–!?"

SHWOOSH

"T-Two more men?" Christy stood at the door with her mouth wide open from shock.

Chapter 80: Strained Relationship

BANG!

"Christy!" An old woman wearing slightly black and white robes with a golden sun chain, slam opened the church’s front doors and stormed inside. "Why is it that whenever I take my eyes off you for one second you always seem to disappear!?"

"Hello, granny! Circumstances called for my immediate attention. I ’o so deeply apologise for vanishing away from your watchful gaze."

"Do not give me that sass! What ’circumstances’?! Does it have something to do with that man you’re healing? Because if it does, then you could’ve ordered the priests to take him to the hospital!"

"Him? Oh no no no, granny." The light faded away from Christy's hands as she took them away from Kurt's body and sat facing cross legged towards the old lady. "Maxy required my assistance which is why I'm here at this lovely church. Isn't that right, my lovely devotees?"

The priests who were sitting at the pews, and admiring Christy, all nodded their heads enthusiastically.

"Is that so? Because I don't see any king around. Also, how many times do I have to tell you that you should not refer to his majesty in such a formal fashion! He is the king of Eldoria for goodness sake! Show your respects!"

"Boo. Maxy doesn't seem to mind." Christy pouted as she put her hands behind her head and looked away.

"Where are you manners!? Get up from that floor right this instant–!"

SHWOOSH

"Christy! I've brought the other two!" Diana appeared at the front door again. She ran inside the church with Kiana in her arms and Emelie walking slowly behind her.

She set the princess down beside Kurt and quickly went to check up on him.

"The bleeding stopped? Is he alright now? Emelie told me he was poisoned by the cult so I imagined that the procedure would've taken a bit longer." Diana held onto his now warm hand and asked the Saintess.

"Yep, he is just dandy. Although, I don't know what you're talking about when you say that he was poisoned. All he really needed was a little healing. So much so that you could've just rubbed some dirt on it and he would've been fine."

"Wait? So you didn't cure the poison out of him?"

"More like there was no poison to begin with." Christy shrugged.

"Emelie? Is what the Saintess saying true?"

"Here. This was the dagger used to stab him." She handed the blood covered dagger to Christy.

"Oh wow! Aren't you Emelie Herst!? I loved what you did at the entrance exams two years ago! Very awe inspiring! And the way you beat the entirety of Future Academy last year was quite the spectacle to read about!"

"Hm." Emelie, not feeling any desire to strike up a conversation, just let out a simple hum while holding out the dagger for the Saintess to take.

"Aww. Feeling a bit tired? Want me to give you a little boost in energy?"

"No thanks. Just take this and confirm to the principal whether there's poison on here. Because this is definitely Kurt's blood."

"You! How dare you refuse Saintess Christy's kind offer! Do you know how many people would die for a chance to–"

"Shut up, old hag. Your screeching voice is giving me a headache." Emelie's eyebrows furrowed in irritation as she glared at the old woman.

"Ahahahaha! No one has ever spoken to you like that, have they, granny! Ahahahaha"

Flushed in the face from frustration and embarrassment, the old woman was about to lecture Emelie when she suddenly turned around and walked toward the exit.

"Wha–! Where are you going, young lady?! Where are your manners?! Do you want me to report this unethical behavior to your parents?!"

"Do whatever you want. Now that I know Kurt's safe, I'm going to sleep. Principal Valentine, I'll swing by later to see how he's doing." Emelie looked back once more at Kurt then turned her attention to the Saintess.

"Hm? Want a little boost after all?" Christy offered as she made creepy gestures with her hands.

Emelie's blank expression suddenly turned into a little smile. After which, she opened the door and left the church.

"Boo. What a bummer."

"That young lady has not an inch of the respect and elegance that her parents and siblings have."

"Oh give her a break, granny. She was clearly drained. Now let's take a look at what we got here." Christy held the dagger in her two palms and coated it with her holy light. "Eew! This thing reeks of malice! And that's definitely poison alright, which is funny considering that my magic didn't detect nor dispel any poison."

"Hmph! Maybe she was lying about that man being stabbed with it. How else would there be nothing to purify inside his body."

"No. Emelie's not lying." Diana defended her. "I was there. And although I didn't witness him being stabbed, the aftereffects of the poison were most certainly present. I also might have an idea as to how he is alright..."

"Oh, care to tell, Diana~" Christy skipped and kneeled next to her.

"Honestly, I'd rather take him somewhere safe right now. If he wants to, he can explain it to you once he wakes up."

"Hmm? Oh! Ahh. Does this have something to do with his skill? If that's the case, I understand the secrecy. I won't ask you any more questions then."

"Thank you, Christy. About the price I must pay..."

"You don’t have to worry about that. There was nothing serious about him that required the assistance of holy magic. Just a small healing spell to close his scars and stop the bleeding." She winked at Diana.

"I see." She looked down and touched his cheek. His skin had returned back to its natural complexion and he was now resting easily. "Can I leave Princess Kiana in your capable hands? I soothed and stopped her mana veins from going out of control for now, but it would be better if she had someone like you to treat her."

"Of course!" Christy jumped up and knelt beside Kiana, "I’ll even put it on Maxy’s tab hehehe. In return, I expect you to spill all the beans as to why you’re going through such lengths for him."

"Hehe, sure." She held Kurt in her chest and said her farewells. "Christy, Madam Gloria, until next time."

"Bye bye, Diana!"

"May Goddess Bula watch over you both." The old lady, now known as Gloria, gave her a respectful bow and said her farewells.

SHWOOSH

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Although there was still light outside, the street lamps flicked on when the clock tower in the distance struck 6:00pm. The skies were gray and small drizzles of rain hit Emelie’s head as she walked back to the hotel from the church.

’Great. Nothing seems to be going the way I had hoped for today...’

The rain was light, a subtle, cold mist crept along the streets which only served as fuel to remind her of what happened. Rain drops clung to everything it touched, but Emelie’s exhaustion was heavier than anything that would drag and slow her down.

Each step was a conscious effort to fight against fatigue that was more than just physical. Thankfully, her body knew the ins and outs of Eldoria, as it was moving on autopilot to take her through any shortcuts and alleyways, all to get to her destination quicker.

After walking for a while, the rain really began to pour when a familiar street came into view as she turned the corner. And to her left was Sophie’s Diner, where she and Kurt were supposed to have dinner.

’... Haaaaa. Guess I’m skipping dinner tonight. What a pain...’ After staring at the diner for a good second, Emelie walked the final stretch of street where finally the City View Hotel came into view.

She was about to open the door when a soft voice whispered to her right, "What are you doing here?"

"Hmm? Amy?" Emelie slowly turned her head and saw her best friend completely soaked to the brim as she was standing out in the open rain.

"Why’re you standing out here? Do you want to catch a cold?"

"I asked you a question first, Emy. What are you doing here?"

"... I’m staying here for the week."

"But you told me you were going to your family’s estate."

"... Sorry. I lied."

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The two of them just stared at each other as the rain kept pouring on them. They were waiting to see who would speak first, when finally,

"... A-Are you staying here because Kurt stays here?" Amy hesitantly asked her.

"... Yes."

"But why? Why would you lie to me about this? You're always telling me to forget about him and move on. Meanwhile you're out here sneaking behind my back and staying in the same building as him."

"Heh, we're basically neighbours too."

"Why're you laughing? Is this a joke to you?"

"N-No, sorry. I'm just... really tired. Look, I can't tell you why but let's just say we're both helping one another out."

"Helping?..... Emy, did you know that Kurt and the principal are dating."

"... Where did you learn of that?"

"So you did know... W-Why didn't you tell me?"

"... I just found out myself not too long ago, but since then I've been too busy with other things. Didn't really get the chance to."

"Too busy going out with Kurt behind everyone's back?"

"... What?"

"Gary told me everything."

’Gary, again?’ "Amy, I think you’re misunderstanding something. Kurt and I aren’t–" Emelie reached out to Amy but she swatted her hand away.

"Misunderstanding?! You lied to me so easily, and with a straight face no less! What makes you think I’d believe what you’re telling me now?!"

"A-Amy?"

"I came here to hear it from Kurt himself! I wanted to hear from him that he and my best friend aren’t in some... some... f-f-fucked up relationship! But instead, I find out that you’re staying here with him?! After you told me so many times to forget about him, you’re staying here with him?!"

"I’m telling you, you’re misunderstanding. Can I explain myself now?"

"Why?! So you can tell me more lies!?"

".... I’m too tired for this shit." Emelie, sensing that Amy’s emotions are too high and that she won’t listen to her, decided to turn away and enter the hotel.

"Where are you going?! Why’re you walking away from me?!"

"It’s raining. Let’s talk once you’ve calmed down." Emelie held her hands to the door handles and opened the door.

"Don’t walk away from me, Emy! Emy! Emelie–!"

Shut