THORNS 81

Chapter 81: Pillow Talk

’Ugh my head...’

The first thing that returned to Kurt was his sense of smell. The scent in the air was cold of something sweet and familiar.

His eyelids felt like they had been stitched shut. When he finally opened his eye, the world was a blur of muted greys and deep shadows.

’Egh, my eyepatch is gone and... This isn’t my room.’ His mind slowly began to wake up from its drowsiness as it registered his surroundings.

The ceiling above him was layered with pristine black beams instead of the flat wooden texture of the hotel that he came to know, and the mattress beneath him was unnervingly soft, sinking around his weight as if to pull him in deeper.

He tried to shift his head but the still fading throb at the base of his skull warned him to stay still for just a while longer. From somewhere to his right, the steady, frantic drumming of rain lashed out against the windowpane.

’Sounds intense. What a downpour... I wonder how long I was out for? Last thing I remember was getting stabbed and... fainting? I’ve been through much worse and I fainted because of a stab wound? No. There was something about that dagger that instantly sent my body into shock. Was magic involved? Was I poisoned perhaps?’

That’s when he felt it.

A heavy, grounding pressure was draped across his chest and waist. It wasn’t the weight of a blanket, granted, there was a blanket covering him. It was the distinct warmth of another person that felt far too intimate.

He looked down as much as his stiff neck would allow. A shock of platinum hair against his shoulder, and a pair of arms were wrapped tightly around his torso. The grip was possessive and desperate.

’Diana? So it was your scent that I recognised. Wait, this feeling. Are we naked?’

Diana was curled into his side, arms locking around his chest and legs gripping firmly onto his. Her face was hidden against his somewhat damp collarbone, and her breathing was slow and hitching. It was the unmistakable rhythm of someone who had fallen asleep while weeping.

Kurt remained frozen as his heart hammered against his rib cage.

’S-She’s so adorable~ No Kurt! Snap out of it...’ Unbeknownst to him, as if it had a mind of its own, his arm and hand started moving downward until it reached its destination

Squish~

’Really, Kurt!? At a time like this!?.... But it’s so soft~ Hehehe~’ His body started trembling at the sound of him giggling as he played with her plump naked peaches.

"Mmm... Hm? Rosie?"

Kurt quickly switched from his guilty pleasure face, to smiling at her with the peak of his confidence as if all is well and that he did nothing wrong. "Oh. Uhm... Hey beautiful–!"

Before he could finish his sentence, Diana was already all over him. With a choked gasp that sounded like a sob caught in her throat, she pulled him into a loving embrace.

Her arms locked around his shoulders and her fingers dug into the skin of his back as if she were trying to anchor his soul into his body. She tucked her face into the hollow of his neck, her skin burning hot against his own as she tightly pressed her chests together.

He could also feel both their hearts racing against one another. His was from the excitement of her touch, whereas hers was from the anxiety turned into relief.

"You're back." She whispered in a raspy voice.

Kurt, sensing that this was no time to be getting excited, wrapped his own arms around her and soothingly rubbed her back as if to tell her that everything's going to be alright.

After her initial rush of adrenaline subsided, Diana settled back on the bed and used his arm as a pillow. Though, she remained partially draped over him just like before.

"How are you feeling?" She asked as her eyes searched his face for any sign of discomfort. "Does your body ache anywhere? Is your mana stable? Tell me the truth."

"I did have a slight headache when I woke up, but that's gone now. Other than that I feel great."

"Good. I'm glad that Christy was right."

"Who's Christy?"

"The Saintess. I had her take a look at you and she told me that there was no poison in your body when she healed you. Which is strange because when I saw you in the park... *sniff* you looked like death..."

"Hey, don't cry." He wiped away her tears and held her cheek. "I'm fine as you can see."

"You don't understand, Rosie. Every scar on your body had been reopened. Blood kept pouring out of your eye and mouth and you were just lying there utterly limp like a lifeless doll. My heart felt like it was being ripped out from my chest, and now you're telling me that you're 'fine'.

Even if the Saintess gave you the clear and said that there's nothing wrong with you, you still wouldn't wake up no matter what I tried. Every second felt like an eternity. What if you just kept sleeping forever..."

"I-I'm sorry, Ana. I didn't mean to scare you."

"I know I'm just... I'm just glad that you're awake, hehe *sniff*" She held and kissed the back of his hand."

"By the way, Ana. Where am I? And why am I naked?"

"You're at my mansion. More specifically, in my room. You're naked because I cleaned you up personally. I would've had my maids do it but I'm not letting them see my man's naked body. Is there a problem?"

"No no. No problem. I was just wondering that's all. I actually like sleeping in the nude."

"Perfect. So do I. That's why I'm naked too." She smiled mischievously. "So, are you going to tell me how you ended up fighting the Dorothy twins? I got the gist of what happened at event from some students of mine, but I'd rather hear it from the horse's mouth."

"It's not that deep or complicated." Kurt began to explain. "Remember when the king said that he'll leave my punishment to the prince? Well, turns out the prince really didn't care about me knocking him out. We even came to an understanding. But his sister had other ideas.

She's the one who came up with the duel. If they win then I have to grovel before them and lick their feet."

"Ew."

"Ahaha, I know. But if we win, then we get to spank hem publicly. I say 'we' because Emelie was dragged into this whole scuffle... Actually, when I told the princess that she and her brother were getting spanked, I did see Emelie's ears perk up. So she probably was looking forward to that the most, and didn't really fight against herself being dragged in."

"Mmhm. Kiana was always looking for a way to one up Emelie. She most definitely saw this as an opportunity to take her frustrations out on the princess."

"As you might've guessed from your awesome boyfriend and powerful student, we obviously won but things took a turn for the worse when the cult unexpectedly showed up. The same person that saved Tobias and uses some sort of shadowy magic, popped up from my shadow then stabbed me. You mentioned that it was poison? I guess that was the main culprit which caused me to faint..."

"Was it your skill, Adaption, that kept you alive?"

"Yeah, that's what I'm thinking too. I seriously wonder what the limit is on that skill."

"Well, I'm not too keen on finding out. I don't want to go through that feeling of nearly losing you again." Diana pouted.

"Aww~ Come here." Kurt pulled her into his chest, to which she hugged him tightly and started squeezing her plump peaches again.

"By the way. How's Emelie doing?"

She looked up at him and pinched his nipples when she heard him say Emelie's name. "Really? You're talking about another woman while I'm in your arms?"

"H-Hey, stop doing that. You're gonna make me develop a weird kink."

"Really? Then perhaps I should do it more, hehe~ Emelie's... not okay. Physically she is but I think she has a lot on her mind."

"That doesn't sound good. I should check up on her as soon as I can."

"..."

"What’s wrong, Ana?"

"Nothing, it’s just that, I feel like every time I take my eyes off you, you’re always in danger somehow..."

"Oh, come on. It’s not that–"

"Maybe I should just lock you away so that no one else can hurt you." She said as if she were in a trance.

".... Huh? Diana?"

"Yes." She looked up at him innocently.

"W-What do you mean by that?"

"What do I mean by what?"

"What you just said."

"What did I say?"

"That you were gonna–"

Growl~

Kurt’s stomach suddenly growled. The sound was so loud that it interrupted what he was going to ask her, which lightened the mood around them.

"Are you hungry?" She asked him as she booped his nose

"Yeah. I haven’t eaten all day. What’s the time?"

"Hmm?" She turned to her side and picked up an object that was lying on top of the bed drawer. "It’s a little past midnight." She tapped the object twice and showed it to Kurt.

"Wait, is that my phone?"

"Phone? Is that what you call it? It’s quite the fancy watch you have. A little too big for my tastes though."

’Looks like she couldn’t get past the lock screen.’ Kurt thought with a smirk.

"Why’re you looking at me like that?"

"It’s nothing. Thanks for keeping my stuff safe."

"... No problem. Come." She stood from the bed and threw on a red silky gown. "The chefs and servants are all asleep but I’m sure that there’s something easy for you to eat in the kitchen."

"Wait, what do I wear?"

"Hmmm... Oh!" She ran to her closet and took out a red apron. "Here~"

"Really? Naked apron style?"

"I bet you’d look really sexy wearing that. I’ve always dreamed of my boyfriend wearing this for me, hehe~"

".... Sure. Whatever you say, Ana." Kurt reluctantly wore the apron and posed in front of her. "Well?"

Diana held her hands to cover her crimson flushed face. "I-It’s too powerful~ C-Critical damage~ F-Follow me to the kitchen before I pounce on you!" She quickly turned around and marched out the room.

As soon as Kurt took a step forward, however, his foot knocked on something.

"A novel? Let’s see, ’Burning Desire. How I tamed my Boyfriend’. What the heck..."

"Rosie, what’s taking you–" She immediately stopped when she saw what Kurt was holding in his hands. "K-KYAAAAAA! W-What are you doing!?" She ran up to him and,

SLAP!

"Uugyaah!" Kurt fell on the bed as Diana smacked the shit out of him and ran away after picking up her novel.

"Oh, Dirty Diana, hehehe~"

Chapter 82: Wendy’s Dilemma

Knock Knock

"Ms. Valentine, are you up? It’s time for your morning bath. Breakfast will also be ready in a few minutes." Wendy stood patiently behind the door to Diana’s room and waited for an answer.

"..."

Knock Knock

"Ms. Valentine? Are you still asleep?"

Wendy waited for another thirty seconds for an answer, but none came. She then took out a golden key that hung around her neck, and with a soft click, the door let out a soft screech and swung open to reveal a room plunged into near-total darkness. The heavy red velvet curtains had been drawn tight, sealing out every scrap of daylight.

As Wendy stepped inside, she was immediately hit with a thick, heavy atmosphere. The air was stagnant and uncomfortably warm. It carried an odd stench that was mixed together with spilled wine, stale sweat, and a musky, primal scent that made her nose instinctively wrinkle in distaste.

The floor, usually a pristine expanse of polished wood, was a minefield of chaos:

A silky red gown lay shredded near the front door; the intricate Persian-style rug featuring a vibrant crimson field and a bold ivory medallion was creased at its edges and nearly flipped over; and to top it all off, an apron lay mixed in with everything else.

'My goodness. What in the world happened here? *Gasp* Was there a break in!? But, who would dare provoke my lady? And how did they sneak past the security outside?'

Wendy quickly crossed the room and pulled back the velvet curtains to check for any damage. Thankfully, there were no signs of broken glass nor were any of the windows slightly ajar. She then fully pulled the curtains aside and opened the windows to let the fresh air in.

The sudden influx of gray light coming from the overcast clouds, cut through the darkness and revealed the wreckage of the room. As Wendy turned towards the bed, she felt her breath hitch.

"Ms. Valentine and... who?"

The king-sized bed was a battlefield of tangled red silk sheets and pillows scattered all across the bed and floor. There, stripped of every ounce of her mature dignity, lay Diana. She was completely naked, save for a small piece of blanket covering her lower half.

It appeared as though she was resting on top of someone else with both their heads buried deep within the gap of two-euro pillows. She also noticed that the unidentified person's hands were gripping onto her behind as if to keep her in place.

Wendy stood frozen when the harsh rays of morning light revealed the raw, scandalous intimacy of this scene. The silence of the room, punctuated by the soft drumming of drizzle pitter-pattering outside and the sleepers' breath's, felt suffocatingly loud.

'What should I do? Should I wake her up or...' Wendy bit her nail as she contemplated on whether to leave or not.

'I... I shouldn't let her sleep in. I'm sorry Ms. Valentine, but even if it's the weekend, I know how cranky you get when you oversleep.' She took in a deep breath and held her nose close as she stepped closer to them.

"Ms. Valentine." Wendy poked Diana's bare back and gently shook her shoulder. "Ms. Valentine, please wake up before I pass out from lack of oxygen."

"Zzzzz... Hmmm... not dirty... zzzz..." Diana's voice could barely be heard as she muffled some random jumbo.

"Ms. Valentine. You better wake up before I throw away your favourite muffin. Or worse, I'll eat myself and give the rest away to the servants and maids."

"Noooo... don't do thaaat... zzz..."

"I see you're still not getting up. I'm leaving now Ms. Valentine. Say goodbye to your muffins." Wendy quickly walked to the door and caught her breath before she herself passed out.

"Waaaiiit..." Diana slowly dragged herself up and sat while straddling the unknown person as she looked towards Wendy with droopy eyes and a strand of her hair stuck in her mouth.

"There. I'm up."

"Ms. Valentine, who is that beneath you?" Wendy pointed with a shaky finger.

"Rosie."

"And that is..."

"My... my other half." Diana blushed as she looked down at Kurt's headless body.

His head was still trapped between the pillows.

"Y-You're other half?.... So, so it's true then? My assumptions were right? Madam Valentine was skeptical when I told her about the news, but now! Oh my goodness, but now she'll be so happy!"

"I see you haven't disbanded that silly club of yours..."

"I should call her over immediately." Wendy whispered to herself and turned around.

"Wait, Wendy! My bath! My muffins!"

"Right, yes! Silly me, haha. Guess I got too excited." Wendy made a U-turn and headed for the bathroom door just past Diana's bed.

A few minutes later, she returned only to find Diana's head once again lodged in between the pillows.

"Haaa, Ms. Valentine..."

"I know. I'm still up. I was just admiring his sleeping face." She popped her head back up and got out of bed in her birthday suit.

"By the way, is he just going to keep sleeping there or...?"

"No. He’s coming with me. Rosie, wake up." She shook him.

"Mmmm... it’s still early, Ms. Alarm... zzzz..."

"Wake up before I start biting your nipples."

"Huh!? N-No! I’m up!" Kurt sat up like a certain deadman and covered his nipples with both his hands.

"Oh my~" Wendy blushed when she saw Kurt’s toned body, which was covered in teeth marks, and handsome face that was riddled with red lipstick and love bites.

"Ahem! Diana, who is this?"

"Save the introductions for breakfast. Now let’s hurry before the water gets cold." She took his hand and pulled him off the bed.

"W-Wait! The blanket’s gonna fall!"

"I-It’s ok!" Wendy turned around and covered her eyes. "I’ll clean the room while you two are... well... cleaning up."

"Thank you, Wendy. Also, if you check the corner of the room, you’ll see a pile of bloodied clothes. Have those cleaned up by the time we’re done. Much appreciated." Diana dragged Kurt into the bathroom and closed the door behind them.

"... Pick me up and carry me to the bath, Rosie~"

"... Yes, You Highness. Whoa, this bathroom is huge."

"Ms. Valentine... After so many years, hehe. I have a feeling that things will become much livelier around here soon." Wendy chuckled as started cleaning up.

....

"So, what are your plans for today?" Diana asked Kurt as she relaxed with him in the bath.

"Well for starters, I obviously need to check in with Emelie. Don’t want to keep her waiting and worried about me."

"Hmm. You should do that, yes."

"Oh. Not gonna throw a jealous fit?"

"Don’t tease me now. You know what will happen if you do~" She looked over her shoulder and pitched his cheek. "It’s just, last time I saw her, she wasn’t looking so great. Emelie has an important tournament starting next Friday and I want her focused and ready."

"Yeah... I also want to find out about who that cultist was. This is only our second encounter, but I already know that they’re going to be a pain to deal with."

"How will you find them? The cult lives in absolute secrecy. It’s a miracle that you even crossed paths with them in the first place. And us landing on that island was by complete accident."

"I have a ’source’ who might know."

"Who?"

"I obviously can’t tell you. These types of relationships are based on trust. I can’t have them finding out I blabbed about their identity to anyone."

"I understand. Just double checking, are you sure you’re alright? You can stay here until you’re better."

"Yes, for the tenth time. I'm 100% ok. With the Saintess healing me plus my skill negating the poison, I'm feeling extra chipper. I even learnt how to control my mana a bit properly during my fight against the princess. I promise you, nothing will bring me down again."

"That's a big promise to keep. Are you sure you can uphold it? Because if not..."

"I will certainly do my best, now that I know how the cult likes to play their games." Kurt tried to reassure her before she started having doubts.

"Alright. I believe in you."

"What about you? What are your plans for today?"

"Just some finalisation of a few things. It's raining so I can't do any outdoor work, but that's fine by me. That just means I get to go home earlier than usual."

"Working on a Saturday? Oof, must suck."

"Well, I am the principal of the most prestigious academy in all of Eldoria. It comes with the job."

"Nice humble brag."

"Hehe~"

After they finished bathing, Kurt changed into his now clean clothes and equipped all his weaponry with his tags. Diana watched him change from the bed without missing a beat.

"You're not changing?" He asked her with a raise of his eyebrow.

"I am, but I like looking pretty. My maids are waiting for you to leave the room before they can come in and help me. You can wait for me in the kitchen or foyer once you're done."

"I’m definitely not skipping breakfast this time... I don’t see my eyepatch anywhere."

"That bloody thing? I threw it away. It didn’t hold any sentimental value, did it?"

"Nope. Just a cheap thing I bought at the dollar store."

"Dollar store? Anyway, there’s a replacement in the drawer by the mirror over there." Diana pointed across the room.

"You keep replacement eyepatches?"

"Only for you~" Smiled widely at him.

"Right. Hmm. Thanks." Kurt opened the drawer and found at least ten eyepatches just laying inside. He took one without questioning her and casually slid his phone in his pocket. "See you downstairs."

"Mmhm."

When Kurt opened the door, he saw three maids waiting outside.

"Good morning." He greeted them.

"... G-G-Good morngwing– u-uwaaaah!" The first maid tried greeting but stumbled over her words and ran inside.

"Yo! Morning, bossman!" The second maid patted him on the arm and went inside.

"...."

".... ?"

"....."

"Uhm are you just gonna keep staring at me or..."

The third maid kept staring blankly at Kurt for about 10 seconds before,

Tsk!

She clicked her tongue in irritation, went inside the room and closed the door.

"Heh, aren’t they quite the characters..."