THORNS 87

Chapter 87: Mr. Shittypants

The fluorescent lights overhead hummed with an eerie buzz that seemed to vibrate against the metal table. Inside the interrogation room, the air was stale and stagnant, smelling of floor cleaner mixed with old coffee.

Kurt sat bolt upright with his hands in his pockets and leg crossed over the other. He stared across the table where an empty chair stood, waiting for the man that they would have to convince, or otherwise threaten, for his cooperation.

Emelie stood behind Kurt. She was leaning back against the wall with her arms crossed and hood covering most of her face as her sharp gaze watched the entrance of the open metal door in anticipation of when Dominik would bring in the cultist.

"Say Emy," Kurt looked over his shoulder. "Do you wanna play good cop bad cop when they get here? Or I guess in this case it'd be good prefect bad prefect."

"Good prefect? Bad prefect? What bullshit are you spouting this time?"

"I mean think about it." Kurt turned halfway around on his chair and slung his arm over the crest rail. "You'd be the perfect bad prefect. You already got the looks with that sharp glare and attitude of an impatient veteran who's sick of doing the same song and dance over and over. Very dark and brooding.

And I'd be the perfect good prefect. I'd ease him into a false sense of security, make him think that I'm really on his side. Little does he know, I'm actually a level 99 mafia boss and that he got fooled by my silver tongue."

"I suppose I could play along..." Emelie agreed despite the lack of enthusiasm in her voice. "But if it were up to me, I'd rather just bash the prick's skull in until he agrees to help us."

"And that's why you're that bad prefect." Kurt gloated with a smug expression as he turned back around.

Finally, from a distance, they heard the approaching footsteps of Dominik's steel boots as well as the soft patter of bare feet slapping against the cold tiles of the corridor.

"... W-Why am I going back for questioning?! I already told you everything I know! Which isn't much considering I'm only a low grunt!"

"... Yeah yeah. Save the talking for when you're in the interrogation room, yeesh..."

"Kurt." Emelie pushed herself off the wall and stood next to him.

"Yep. Here they come. Get ready and put your mean face on, Emy. Cause it's about to get... stinky."

Dominik arrived through the door with the cultist, who was for some reason blindfolded, in tow.

"You know the drill. Take a seat in that empty chair and slide your wrists through the table cuffs. Don't make me use force on you, and we won't have a problem. My friends here have something to ask of you, so please be kind enough to answer them politely."

"I know, I know. But why'd you blind me? This didn't happen before when I came here."

"You'll see soon enough." Dominik uncuffed the cultist's hands and guided him to the chair where he then slid his wrists into the table cuffs. "You ready, Kurt? Emelie?"

"Mmhm." Emelie nodded.

"Yeah. Take off the blindfold, Dom."

"W-Wait... That voice is."

As Dominik took off the blindfold, the fluorescent lights lit the cultist's eyes in a blinding fashion, causing him to wince momentarily. Once his eyes adapted, he saw the one-eyed madman who threatened him on the ship, causing him to have an unfortunate accident.

"Hello. We meet again, Mr. Shittypants–"

"UWAAAAH! G-GET ME OUT! GET ME OUT OF HERE! H-HE'S GOING TO KILL ME! HELP! HEEELP!"

"Looks like we won't be able to play your little game, Kurt." Emelie recoiled at his sudden outburst.

".... PLEEEAASE! I DON'T WANT TO DIE!"

"Dammit! *Tsk* I was really looking forward to it too. I had a whole script written out in my head." Kurt slouched back in his chair with disappointment.

"Wait? Was Emelie right? Was he really scared of your face back then?" Dominik held a hand over his mouth as tears started to form.

"... TOBIAS! MY BRETHEREN! ANYONE! SAVE ME!"

"Pffthaha! I told you Rosie~ Look what happened to poor Mr. Shittypants after he saw your mug again~" Emelie smirked at Kurt.

"This is the worst... Am I really ugly?"

"Is there something wrong with my eyes? Is Kurt really that ugly?" Dominik thought out loud.

"... OH NO! NO NO NO! IT'S HAPPENING AGAIN! I-I CAN'T– I CAN'T HOLD IT IN! I'M GONNA– I'M GONNA–!"

""""Hmm?"""" Emelie, Kurt and Dominik all looked at the cultist at the same time when suddenly they heard,

BRAAAAAP! Pfftoooooo... Toot

""""...""""

"... *Sob* S-Save me *sniff* my brethren *sob*..."

"OH FUCK NO! THAT'S FUCKING DISGUSTING!" Emelie stormed out of the room while holding her hoody over her nose.

"Oh dear Goddess above I feel like I'm gonna *hurk* *blech*" Dominik crouched in the corner of the room and started gagging at the wretched smell.

"..." And Kurt was left speechless as he stared blankly at the cultist who was ugly crying in his chair.

"... Hey shitpants." Kurt called to him.

"P-Please just take me back to my cell... Oh no... I'm getting another stomachache... I can't hold it–"

SLAM

"HEY, SHITPANTS! I"M TAKING TO YOU!" Kurt slammed and stabbed his switch knives on the table to catch to cultist's attention

"Heeeeeee! N-No–! *Braap* *Fraap*..... *sob*"

"If you don't stop shitting and crying for one second, I swear to God I'm gonna gouge your eye out and eat it right in front of you. You know what they call me? The Bloody One-Eyed Doctor. Heard of me? No?

Well, you’re sure as hell gonna know after I’m through with you. So, you better do as I say. Understand?"

"... *Sob* *pfftoo* S-Save me–"

"I SAID, DO YOU UNDERSTAND!?" Kurt pointed the knife inches from his pupil.

"I-I understand! P-Please forgive me! I’ll do anything you say! Just don’t eat my eye!"

"Good. I have one simple job for you. You see, we’re gonna go on a little trip together. Where, you ask? To the island where your sick ’brethren’ are keeping those kids they took away from their families. What I want you to do is to merely say, when asked, that we are part of your cult. The newcomers, if you so will. And that you’re just showing us around on... let’s say... Tobias’s orders. Are we clear?"

"Y-You know where we’re keeping those kids? H-How?"

"I asked you a simple yes or no question and instead you’re asking me questions of your own. Do you know what that gets you?"

"W-Wait! Please don’t–!"

"Damn, I’m feeling kinda hungry! Say goodbye to your right eye!" Kurt pulled back his hand and thrust the knife towards the cultist’s eye.

"Y-YES! WE’RE CLEAR! I UNDERSTAND!"

"Really?" Kurt stopped and slowly trailed the knife down his cheek. "Then tell me what you’re supposed to do."

"I-I have to say that you’re part of our brotherhood!"

"And if they ask for verification?"

"I-I'll say that you're newbies still learning the ropes of our operations!"

'Hmm, I feel like that isn't enough. I should probably ask Emelie if we need anything that'll serve as solid proof that we're really a part of them.'

"On whose orders?"

"T-Tobias! It's all on Tobias's orders!"

"Good. And just know that the moment you act out of line and betray us, or if I sense that you're secretly trying to communicate with your 'brothers', is the moment I'll stab my knife right up your shitty asshole and straight into your mouth so that you know what shame tastes like. Got it?"

"Y-Yessir! I-I won't betray you! I value my life above all else!"

"Yeah, I can see that. You're about to betray your stupid brotherhood just to save your own skin. You make me sick. Hey Dom! Quit gagging in the corner and take Mr. Shittypants away from here. We got ourselves a way in."

"W-Why me? Why is it always me..." Dominik took a deep breath and dragged the cultist out of the room and back to his cell, but not before taking him to the men's showers.

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"Hey Emy. I'm back." Kurt tapped her shoulder from behind as she was sitting in the lobby and watching the rain.

"Finally. And? Did you convince him to agree to our plan?"

"Yeah. Golden ticket secured. Which reminds me, when we arrive at the island, how are we going to definitively prove that we are part of their club? We didn't really go over that part of the plan."

"Don't worry. I already thought about that... All we need are the captured cultist's personal tags. I know somebody who can forge identities through... not so legal means." She whispered.

"Nice. Secret connections... Wait. Can this contact also hack into a personal tag's banking info, and take money out of it?" Kurt whispered back.

"Yes. Why?"

"... Dammiiiiit... If only I still had Arlo's tag; I could've been even richer. Just you wait, Tobias. When I find you, I'll make you pay tenfold."

Chapter 88: Emelie's Contact

"Alright you two. Here are the cloaks that we confiscated from the captured zealots." Dominik handed both Kurt and Emelie one plastic bag each with their disguises inside.

"Thanks. By the way Dom," Kurt threw his arm around Dominik's shoulder and dragged him away from any prying ears. "There's another thing that we'll need in order for this operation to work without running into any complications."

"Oh yeah? What's that?"

"The cultists' personal tags."

"What?" Dominik's eyes widened. "Kurt, I can't just take those. They're high priority evidence. What do you even need those tags for anyway?"

"... Forgery."

"What the fu–!"

"Shhhh!" Kurt covered his mouth and looked around if anyone was watching them. Once the coast was clear, he slowly took his hand away while gesturing to Dominik to keep his voice down.

"Sorry for yelling. But Kurt, respectfully, what the fuck are you thinking?!" Dominik hissed, trying his best to keep his voice down while emphasising the severity of what Kurt just said. "Forgery!? Are you kidding me?! You know we have a whole team dedicated to tracking those bastards down! Don't tell me this was your idea?!"

"It–"

"It wasn't. It was mine." A strange, secret circle of whispers was formed as Emelie huddled in close to join the two of them.

"It was your idea?! Wha–"

"Dominik," Emelie interrupted him. "Please try to whisper a bit quieter. Your hissing is getting an octave too loud. You're gonna draw suspicion."

"If you ask me, I say we already look super suspicious being bunched up like this in the corner of the prefect station." Kurt took a quick peek around just to make doubly sure they aren't being watched. When his and the front deskman's eyes connected, the man sitting behind the desk simply smiled and waved before going back to whatever paperwork he was busy with.

"Heh, I bet Dominik does even dumber things than this while at work. So we're probably getting overlooked just by the fact that ginger head is here with us." Emelie smirked when she looked at him.

"Yeah. The guy up front didn't look the least bit concerned." Kurt confirmed as he huddled his head back in the circle.

"W-What the hell guys? I'll have you know that I take my work very seriously... But enough about that. Emelie, why are you bringing up forgery? Those guys are a bunch of criminals involved in scamming, identity theft and money stealing. This isn't something I can overlook."

"Not my contact. This person I know doesn't do any of those things since it's not their main objective. It's just that their certain set of skills allows them to do some tinkering and hacking that most would consider illegal."

"And that makes it better, how? The chief would never approve of this. Although he didn't let it show, I could tell that he was already pushing it by agreeing to this plan and handing out those disguises."

"Please just trust me on trust, Dominik. This person isn't like that at all. I would never do something that could put your reputation, or job, in danger. Besides, you'll have those tags back by the end of the day. They're just going to make temporary copies of the original and tweak them to fit our mana signatures."

Dominik looked at the plastic bags he gave them, then back up to Emelie. Although he hasn't known her for long, he has been following her accomplishments and read enough newspaper stories on interviews with her to become a major fan of hers.

This feeling only grew after they met, which turned their only connection they had with each other from someone who was far out of his reach, to someone he can confidently call a true friend. And now, that very friend is asking him to trust her with something that could very well be illegal.

Thoughts of doubt swirled through his mind. But as he saw both Kurt and Emelie look at him with unwavering determination, he got a strong, familiar sensation in his gut that he normally gets when around these two which told him...

"... Alright. I'll trust you, Emelie."

"Thank you. Dominik." She smiled with relief.

"I'll quickly get those tags for you. I'll also stay here at the station and make sure no one comes looking for those tags in the evidence room while you two do what needs to be done." Dominik broke from the circle they formed and left to get the cultists' personal tags.

"Emy. Is this contact truly trustworthy?" Kurt asked as stood up straight and leaned against the wall. "From the way Dominik was acting and how he described them, it sounds like these forgers are the scum to society."

"Didn’t you literally just ask me a few minutes ago whether they could hack money out of a tags banking account?"

"... R-Right. But that was more of an impulse question. I wouldn’t have actually gone through with it."

"Oh yeah? Then why’d you keep your precious friend Arlo’s personal tag, hmm Kurt?"

"A-As a keepsake! Look, let’s just forget that I asked that, okay?"

"Mmhmm, riiigghhht. Anyways, to answer your question; Yes. My contact is trustworthy and does not involve themselves in anything illegal."

"Cool."

’However, forgers, huh? I should be on the lookout for them. Keep my ears open in case I hear anything. Without a doubt, Dominik was not a fan. After those kids are safe and everything has calmed down, perhaps I should begin my own little investigation? Hmm. We’ll see.’

Not long after he left, Dominik returned back with a small black pouch that contained the cultists’ tags and handed them to Emelie.

"One two three... alright, it’s all here. I’m also going to need your two tags." She pointed the open pouch to Dominik and Kurt. "And before you ask, the reason I need them is for your face scan that pops up on the display. Imagine we show our information to them only for a different face than our own to show."

"I see. But won’t they find it weird that THE Emelie Herst is joining the brotherhood?" Kurt asked as he put his personal tag in the pouch.

"Are you kidding me?! I'd be overjoyed if she were to join whatever bullshit club I made up." Dominik geeked out at Kurt's question as he put his own tag in the pouch.

"Whatever you say." Emelie rolled her eyes and closed the pouch. "I'll be back later to return the original and give you your tags, Dominik. Thank you once again for trusting me."

"No problem. See you later."

"You coming with me?" She asked Kurt.

"Nah. The rain is letting up. I want to use this chance to check in on the orphanage. See if everything is well."

"Alright. Then let's all meet tomorrow morning by the docks at seven. Kurt, I won't be back at the hotel today, so don't wait up for me and head straight for the docks."

"Got'cha. See you tomorrow, Emy."

After they watched Emelie leave, Kurt turned to Dominik and asked him one last thing before leaving as well.

"Say Dom. Is there something special about the cultists' personal tags? Last time I checked, it looked just like any other. Even the popup was the same."

"Oh, I guess you didn't know this. The zealots have their own secret page of identification hidden within the popup display. It basically contains the information about their ranking and role inside of the brotherhood."

'Huh. Interesting. I didn't see anything on Arlo's. Then again, I'm no regressor. Nor am I part of any government agency, such as the prefects, who's been investigating the cult for years.'

"Dominik!" The front deskman called. "I need you to come take a look at something!"

"Oops. Gotta get to work. See you tomorrow, Kurt."

"Don’t let me keep you. Later, Dom."

After they shook hands, Kurt left the station and headed for the orphanage.

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- 1 Hour later -

"Good morning, dorm mother."

"Emelie? Oh my, good morning. Or should I say, good afternoon. It just hit past twelve. What are you doing here?"

"Just visiting." Emelie looked around the dorm’s common room and behind the counter which led to the kitchen. "I don’t see Austin anywhere. Is he skipping out on his duties again?"

"Oh no no. He apparently received a message from the school to go meet the principal. I think I heard something about him receiving more punishments for skipping out on work the other day."

"Hmph. Serves him right... And Gary? Is he here?"

"The quiet boy? He went with Austin. I think they are friends? I can’t quite tell since I always see Austin shouting at him and calling him silly names. But they’re always together so maybe they are?"

’Gary... You’re lucky you weren’t here.’ Emelie thought as she clenched her fist.

"Noted. Nice to see you’re well. See you later."

"Good luck with your training, Emelie. I’m rooting for you~"

"Haha. Thanks." Emelie waved goodbye to the dorm mother, went up the stairs towards the girls’ dorm and eventually stopped in front of her room door which was closed.

"Suuuu... Haaaaa. Alright Emy. You can do this." She took a deep breath and readied herself as she raised her knuckles at the wooden door.

Knock Knock Knock

"Amy? Are you inside?"