THORNS 95

Chapter 95: A Promise Is A Promise

"Amy, we're leaving. Pack up whatever essentials you need." Emelie ordered as she barged into the room.

"Leaving?" Amy stopped her magic and looked up from the study desk. "What do you mean? Where are we leaving to? What about the food? Did you get them? I'm still kind of hungry–"

"Not now, Amy. Something urgent came up, so hurry up. Pack up about a week's worth of things. We're going to the hotel I'm staying at."

For about five seconds, Amy just stood there wide-eyed as she processed the news. Once she snapped out of her momentary daze, she let out an ear-piercing squeal and transformed into a human tornado.

"Really?! Well, why didn't you say so!".

She dove under her bed, triumphantly yanking out a bright yellow suitcase, and hoisted it onto the mattress. Not bothering to unzip it carefully; she ripped the case open as if she were a kid tearing into a birthday present and turned towards the room with the eyes of a predator.

Then, the blur began.

Amy skidded across the hardwood floor in her socks, crashing into her open closet. She didn't look nor did she sort. She just grabbed handfuls of fabric. A sequined New Year's Eve dress? In. Five pairs of mismatched socks and a swimsuit she hadn't worn since late last summer? In. The only thing that made remotely sense was the heavy winter wool parker that just so happened to come into her view.

"We might need snacks! *Gasp* But there are no snacks! I know! My secret stash!" she yelled from across the room, hurling a half-eaten bag of marshmallows and a single, slightly bruised apple perfectly into the suitcase.

Next, she vaulted over the bed, completely ignoring gravity, and raided her desk. A pair of sunglasses, a stapler, and her favorite fuzzy throw pillow went flying through the air, landing in the chaotic pile of belongings. She then darted into the bathroom, reappearing three seconds later with a toothbrush, four bottles of hotel shampoo she bought from a discount store, and no toothpaste.

The suitcase was overflowing with a monstrous mountain of unrelated items.

"A-Amy. Don't you think you're taking it a bit too far– WHOA!" Emelie dodged to the side as the pink entity ran by her.

Without missing a beat, Amy threw her entire body weight onto the pile, squishing the marshmallows and wrestling the zipper. The poor zipper groaned in protest as she dragged it violently around the perimeter.

The entire process took less than forty-five seconds.

With a final triumphant snap of the zipper, she yanked the extendable handle up. Amy sprang to her feet, chest heaving, a stray sock clinging to her shoulder, and her hair a wild, electrified mess. She skidded to a halt mere inches from Emelie, slapping on the biggest, most adrenaline-fueled grin imaginable.

"Okay!" she beamed, vibrating with pure excitement. "I'm ready. Let's go!"

"Right..." Emelie looked skeptically at the suitcase. "Why are you even so excited?"

"N-No reason! I just... I'm just happy that I'm leaving this boring room is all! Haha.. ahaha..."

"... You're not thinking about Kurt, are you?"

"WHAAAT!? Me!? Think about Kurt!? That stupid..ly handsome– That stupid face!? No way!"

"Mmhm... You don't sound very convincing."

"Really! I’m already over him! Please believe me..." Amy’s eyes grew soft with tears as she gave Emelie the puppy look.

"... Whatever. So long as you know that he’s already taken, and that you won’t cause him any problems, then it’s fine."

"Yippee! What’re we waiting for?" She grabbed Emelie’s hand and dragged her out the door. "Let’s hurry before it starts raining again!"

"Even if it does, I can cover us easily."

"Shush! No excuses! Ooooou, I wonder what the rooms are gonna look like! Is there an extra bed? Do we have to share? What kind of room service do they offer? I can’t wait to see!"

"Hahaha! Ok! Ok! Slow down already! The hotel isn’t going anywhere." Emelie laughed as her previous sour mood lightened up and she let herself be dragged along by Amy.

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"Thanks again for the lunch, Maggie. It was great."

"No problem, Mr. Kurt. I’m glad you liked it. The kids were also delighted that you came by. Seeing them so happy is always such a joy to witness."

"No need to be formal. We’re basically friends at this point. Call me Kurt."

"Alright, Kurt." Maggie turned around and called out, "Rupee! Tristan! Kurt is leaving now! Aren't you going to say goodbye to him?"

Soon enough, little footsteps could be heard running as two little figures appeared from behind the door.

"Uncle Kurt is leaving already?! But why can't he stay here, Mrs. Maggie?" Rupee held onto Kurt's leg as she asked.

"Rupee... Uncle Kurt is a very busy man. Please understand that he has work to do." Maggie tried to explain but Kurt simply raised his hand to her and crouched down to Rupee's level.

"Rupee, I'm actually going on a small adventure just like you did. And while I'm away, there's something very important that I must get."

"Something important? What's that?" She asked innocently.

"The letter from your mom and dad, of course! I know it's still a bit early, but I bet that there's another letter waiting for you."

"Really?! Yaaay! Thank you, Uncle Kurt!" Rupee jumped in Kurt's chest and hugged him. After which she let go of him and stood up straight with her hands on her hips. "You must hurry and come back quickly, alright?"

"Your wish is my command, little lady." Kurt bowed as if he were in the presence of royalty.

"Hehehe~"

"Uhm.. Uncle Kurt. There's something I want to ask you." Tristan pulled on his pants to get his attention.

"Hmm? What is it?"

"C-Can... Can you train me on how to use that?" He pointed towards Kurt’s black sword on his hip.

"You want to learn how to wield a sword?"

"Y-Yes... N-Not "want". I.. I must learn how. For Rupee’s sake..." The little boy’s voice trailed off.

"For Rupee’s sake, you say?"

"Y-Yes... For Rupee’s sake..."

"Hmmmmm. Okay. I’ll teach you whenever I get the time."

"T-Thank you, Uncle Kurt!"

"But you have to promise me that Rupee’s safety will be your main priority. Only then will I teach you."

"I-I promise! I really promise! I super promise!"

"Good. Then next time I come back, we begin training."

"Y-Yes sir!"

Next, Kurt approached the two guards, Vicky and Bob, who were standing near the front gate like stone pillars. As he drew nearer, they straightened their shades and ties and wore the solemn look of duty.

Vicky stepped forward, nodding with a sense of shared burden. "Don’t you worry, Boss," she said as her voice dropped to a respectful tone.

"We’ll keep the perimeter tight and the orphanage safe. No one, especially any suspicious priests, will get near those kids. You have our word."

Bob tapped the baton at his hip, offering a reassuring, if slightly grim, smile. "Rest easy, Boss. We'll be their shadows until you get back."

Kurt stopped a few feet short of them. His brow furrowed in genuine confusion. "That's... incredibly noble of you," he started, "and hearing your guy's enthusiasm puts my worry to ease. Truly. But I'm actually here because I realised that I forgot to ask you guys something."

"Boss?" Vicky took off her sunglasses.

"It's just... I never signed a work order. I haven't seen a background check, and I certainly haven't seen a bill. Yet, here you are, guarding the orphanage gates. Where exactly is the paperwork for this operation?"

Vicky and Bob exchanged a quick, sheepish glance.

"Ehem! The contract isn't with you, Boss," Vicky explained, clearing her throat. "It's with Dominik. He came to the agency directly, said he was looking for two capable guards and that we should report here immediately."

"Yeah, that prefect has the contract, Boss." Bob added. "Said he was going on a boat trip to save his best friend but couldn't leave the orphanage unprotected due to the zealots targeting it. The contract also stipulated to refer to a man known as Kurt Rosanna as our boss, and that if he so wishes, he could cancel the contract at any time."

"Ahh. I get it now. Listen, I'll talk to Dominik about cancelling that contract–"

"What?!" Vicky cut him off. "Boss, if you are angry with us or unsatisfied with our work, please let us know so that we can improve or correct any mistakes!"

"Yeah, Boss! Please don't fire us!" Both Bob and Vicky were about to get on their hands and knees when Kurt stopped them.

"Wait! Don’t get me wrong, I’m not firing you!"

""You’re not?""

"No. I just want your company to redraw the contract so that it’s fully in my name. And send it to City View Hotel. Hiring you guys was initially my idea. So I can’t, in good conscience, have Dominik pay for it. That’s all I wanted to tell you."

"Thank Goddess Bula above... I was honestly worried there for a second." Vicky breathed a sigh of relief. "No worries, Boss. I’ll let the company know about it A.S.A.P."

"Great. Then I’ll be leaving now. See you guys. And thank you for your hard work."

The guards stood a little taller, this time with the professional ease of knowing that their jobs were secure.

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"It’s still only 3:00pm. What to do now?" Kurt wondered as he walked the streets. "Emelie is busy with the tags, Dominik is at work and Diana is also at work... Holy shit. I just realised... I’m jobless..."

meow

"What the?! Kitty? Perfect timing! Isn’t this the part where you lead me to the answers of my problems?"

"meow?* The cat tilted his head.

"... Wait? You got nothing?"

meow

"Darn it. Is it time for me to look for a job?" Kurt slumped his shoulders.

"Kurt Rossana!" A voice called to him from behind.

"Hm?"

"W-Wait! Junior, we just recovered from our injuries. Surely this isn't the time for–"

"Nonsense! We lost our duel fairly; therefore, we must face our punishment fairly."

"But Junior–"

"Hello Princess Kiana. Prince Maxwell." Kurt greeted. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"No! Junior, don't say it–!"

"Spank us, Kurt Rossana!"

Chapter 96: The Responsible And Unreasonable Prince

The afternoon bustle of the street had suddenly come to a stop, as if it had been bumped into a physical wall.

A blacksmith's hammer froze just millimeters away from hitting the iron hot ore. The flower seller's bouquet of lilies slipped from her hand, scattering across the wet stones. And a couple of passing guards all stopped in unison, armour clinking, when the words "Spank us!" echoed their way.

Then, as if everybody's minds were collectively in-sync, they all turned to the source of the commotion.

At the center of the cobblestone street stood the royal twins and an utterly bewildered one-eyed man. Maxwell Jr. had his chest puffed out and face flushed with a brand of defiant logic that only a muscle-brained one-track-mind simpleton could wear.

Right beside him stood Kiana, who had been mid-lunge about to clap a hand over her brother's mouth, but her fingers only brushed his cheek as the final syllable echoed off the stone walls. She froze in a half-crouch as her face turned into a shade of crimson so deep it rivaled the silk sheets of Diana's bed.

"P-Prince Maxwell. What are you doing shouting such... things... in the middle of the street." Kurt sheepishly asked as he noticed everyone staring at him judgmentally.

Kiana slowly pulled her hand back, tucking her head into her shoulders as if she could physically disappear into the weavings of her own cloak. She was going through a total systemic collapse. She wouldn't look at Kurt, nor would she look at the crowd. She simply stared at a specific crack in the pavement as her eyes shimmered with the desperate wish for the earth to crack open and swallow her whole.

"What do you mean?" Junior raised an eyebrow and turned his butt at Kurt. "You and Emelie won the fight! Therefore, according to our punishment, you get to spank us! So go on! Do your worst–!"

"Junior, shut up!" Kiana hissed, her voice a strangled squeak. She grabbed his sleeve and tried to fly away, but her brother held his weight down, staying firmly in place.

"Why?" Junior shouted back and turned to face Kurt with a taunting swagger. "A deal's a deal! You won the duel, didn't you? You're the big hero! So go on! Spank us! Or are you going to back out now that there are witnesses?"

"Why are you so gung-ho about this!? Excuse the pun, but you were so chill back when we first met!"

"Why?! Because I lost, that's why! Even after all my training! The blood sweat and tears I put into strengthening myself! And yet still I lost to Emelie Herst! But that's not even the worst! The worst is that I couldn't..." Junior looked painfully at his sister who was still trying to fly away with him. "I couldn't protect my sister..."

"Junior..." After seeing the painful expression of her brother, Kiana floated back down and pulled him into a hug. "Please Junior. Don’t blame yourself. You did your absolute best, and I wouldn’t blame you for it."

Kurt noticed that the crowd of people stopped looking at him and that they all had smiles on their faces as they watched this heartwarming sight.

"... What a beautifully wholesome they’re relationship is."

"... I kind of miss my own sister. Perhaps I should pop in and say hello."

"... Yeah. Seeing the kind heart of the Princess and witnessing the prince not running away from his responsibilities, puts my heart at ease knowing I can trust the future to them."

’This is my best chance to use my assassin skills to slip away unnoticed.’ Kurt slowly backed up to a nearby alleyway.

"Wait, Kurt Rosanna! Where do you think you’re going!?" Junior screamed at him so as to not let him get away.

’This mother–! Grrrr’

"Prince Maxwell, I was uhm... only joking. I admit that it’s something I said on the spur of the moment. We really don’t have to do this. So let’s forget that any of that happened and–"

"NO!"

"Junior, just let it go! He said he was joking!" Kiana pulled on him again but still he wouldn’t move.

"Joking?! It wasn’t a joke when the stakes were on the table!" Junior turned to the gawking crowd while gesturing wildly at Kurt. "He was perfectly happy to take the bet! If he’d lost, he would’ve had to lick our feet and be our personal servant for a whole year! But he won, so now he–"

"What’s going on here?" Emelie and Amy squeezed through the crowd while eating crêpes.

"Emelie! Just in time! Here!" Junior pointed his butt her way. "Spank away!"

"... Huh?"

Kiana finally found her strength, but only enough to cover her own face with both hands. Her muffled groans of agony could be heard even over the murmurs of the crowd.

"I want to die," she whimpered into her palms. "I actually want to be dead right now."

A much bigger crowd began to form now that Emelie, who is also technically part of this whole bet, entered the picture. To them, this didn’t sound like a quirky sibling bet; it sounded like a deranged, high-stakes psychological war. The mental image of the local idol licking the twins’ feet or delivering a public spanking was currently being seared into the town’s collective memory.

"Alright, let’s get this over with. Kurt, I’ll take Junior while you take Kiana."

"... My goodness! It’s actually happening!"

"... The royal twins are about to receive a royal spanking! In public!"

"... S-Should I look away!? B-But the scandal!"

"... Where’s my recording tag!? This is about to make the headlines!"

"Emy, are you serious!?" Kurt suddenly appeared in front of her. "Can’t we just let it go? The Princess looks like she’s about to faint at any moment! Also, why do I have to spank her!? Can’t we switch places?"

"You’re giving me mixed signals here, Kurt. One moment you’re telling me to let it go, and the next you’re telling me to switch places with you. Pick one."

"Let it go!"

"No."

"Aw c’mon!"

"I still have a lot... of pent-up frustrations. And it would seem that the Goddess has blessed me with an opportunity to release them all in one go. Besides, Junior has been annoying me non-stop in the years that I’ve known him. Spanking him without any repercussions from the King is something I could only dream about." Emelie smiled maniacally as she rolled up her sleeves and slowly walked to Junior.

"H-Hello Kurt..."

"Oh Amy. Hey. It’s good to see you’re okay after that little incident in the park."

"Y-Yes! You too... uhm..." Amy blushed as she felt stuck between a rock and a hard place.

SPANK!

’Just act normal, Amy! Be! Cool! He doesn’t even know you like him! So just act natural–’

"Hm? It looks like you got a little something right here. Cream from the crêpe." Kurt pointed towards his upper lip area.

SPANK!

"O-Oh! Haha! How embarrassing..." She wiped her hands on the area he was gesturing to. "Is it gone?"

"Nope. Aim a little lower. That’s your nose."

SPANK!

"O-Ok..." She wiped her nose again, but still she missed it.

"Is it gone now?"

SPANK!

"No. Here let me get it."

SPANK!

"W-Wait–"

But it was too late.

Kurt swiftly, and gently, wiped the cream off her. His finger accidently brushed her lip in the process, causing her brain to short circuit.

"Y-You... t-touch... l-lip..."

"Hmm~ This cream is pretty good." Kurt licked his finger. "You should show me where you got it next time."

SPANK!

"D-D-DATE!? FINGER?! LIPS!? MAGICAL MOMENT!?" Amy covered her mouth as she blushed furiously and spouted random words.

"Kurt! What are you standing around for!" Emelie yelled. "The Princess is still waiting for her turn!"

SPANK!

"OW! Can’t you be a little gentler! My booty can only handle so much!"

"Didn’t we just agree to ten slaps!? Then stop whining like a little bitch and take it like a man! Here comes number eight! AHAHAHA!"

SPANK!

"OW! CRAP!"

"J-Junior... *sob*" The crowd and Kiana watched with bated breath as Emelie spanked the bare ass of the prince.

SPANK!

"Dammit! I shouldn’t have suggested that stupid condition! Do I really have to dish out a royal spanking to her?" Kurt looked away with a heavy heart.

SPANK!

"Haaa. That felt good." Emelie walked away from the prince, who’d long since lost the natural colour of his ass cheeks.

"Kurt Rosanna! *Sob* Be a man and spank my sister!" Junior pulled up his pants with tearful eyes and walked towards his sister. "She knew what she was getting into when we made that deal. Now stop being a bitch and so that we can wash away this shame! Do it! Just do it!"

"Fine! You want me to spank her in public?! Then I'll spank her in public!"

"Junior, please! I don't want to–"

"Shhh! My precious sister. It'll be over soon. Go on and show him why we Dorothy's are the leaders of this country."

Kiana then covered her face with her hands out of sheer dread. Junior caressed the hand over her face and looked towards Kurt.

"Ten slaps and that's it. You will not be punished by our father seeing that this is what we brought on ourselves. Now show me your convictions."

The crowd turned their collective, burning gaze at Kurt and Kiana. The girl was trembling, her hands still over her face, but the social contract of the "deal" had been sealed by her brother's big mouth. The pressure of a hundred judging eyes. Some disgusted, some strangely expectant.

Kurt stepped forward, his heart hammering against his ribs. He didn't want this. He looked at Kiana, who finally dropped her hands. Her face wasn't just red; it was radiating heat, her eyes wide and unfocused. She turned around slowly and held onto a streetlamp for support.

"I'm ready." Kiana tensed her shoulders and closed her eyes.

"Now hold on a minute." Emelie interrupted her. "Kiana, what are you doing?"

"... What do you mean?"

"I mean, your skirt."

"W-What about my–"

"Drop ’em."

"... Huh?"