

Turning 54

Chapter 54

The man lifted his staff, embedded with a transparent magic stone, and moved slowly. With each soft sound of the staff's end meeting the ground, the color drained from Kanna's face.

Having ascertained this, Yuder reached for the hood hanging on Kanna's uniform and pulled it over her head. The moment the large hood concealed her face, Kanna gasped and swallowed.

"Don't say a word."

Yuder murmured softly, just loud enough for her to hear, then stepped forward towards the approaching man. This position naturally allowed him to shield Kanna behind him.

"What's going on here?"

"Who are you?"

Despite not knowing Yuder's affiliation or status, the man talked down to him. This meant he was looking at him in a belittling manner.

"I am Yuder Aile, affiliated with the Cavalry. And you are?"

"The Cavalry?"

The man tilted his head as if hearing the name for the first time, then let out a sound of realization a moment later.

"Ah, right. That group collected by His Grace, Duke Peletta..."

He left the rest unsaid, but the underlying tone was clearly negative. Yuder coldly looked at his face while subtly glancing down at his gloved hand.

'He dares to ignore my question twice. In the past, I would have immediately forced him to his knees...'

Not that he couldn't do it now. His hand itched to act, but the sound of shaky breaths from the hooded figure behind him held him back.

"There's no need for pleasantries. The woman behind you is from my household. She committed a crime recently and ran away. We couldn't find her until now. Step aside, so I can take her."

Kanna's trembling breaths abruptly stopped. Yuder briefly glanced back at her before returning his gaze to the man. Seeing Yuder's nonchalant demeanor, the man commanded with a ruthless attitude once more.

"Didn't you hear me? I said to step aside."

"Heh, don't you hear the Count's words? Step aside!"

The servant standing next to the man also raised his voice. Nevertheless, Yuder remained stationary, not budging an inch.

"Are you deaf?"

"There's no need for you to deal with these lowly beings yourself, Master. I will go..."

"Can you prove it?"

Finally, Yuder spoke.

"What?"

"How can you assure that the person behind me is the one you've been looking for?"

The moment Yuder's deep, gloomy voice echoed through the air, everyone who had been watching felt a chilling intensity that made them shiver uncontrollably.

The man who introduced himself as Yuder Aile felt incongruous, like a single incorrectly placed piece in a perfect puzzle.

Two pitiless eyes under jet-black hair. The dark shadow cast beneath them was terrifying, as if merely meeting his gaze could steal away one's soul. His ghostly pale face was equally unnerving.

Yet, this ominous and intense emotion made it impossible for anyone to look away from Yuder. No one had paid him any attention until now, but once recognized, everything about him appeared different.

Despite being right in front of them, he seemed like a shadow with no presence - appearing inconsequential yet, upon closer inspection, swallowing something terrifying like the darkness. Someone unconsciously swallowed their saliva.

Who on earth was this person? Many who hadn't heard Yuder's self-introduction simultaneously wondered.

"Sir...You cover her with a hat to hide her, and now you want to argue?"

The servant who had been confidently trying to drag Kanna from behind Yuder stuttered, barely managing a response. He didn't even realize he had unconsciously used honorific language.

"You came out of nowhere and tried to take her without even confirming whether she's the person you're looking for. I didn't know that a nobleman of the palace, like yourself, could just take anyone within the imperial palace without even revealing their name."

Yuder didn't show the slightest sign of fear or confusion. His chilly words caused a murmur to spread among the crowd.

"A nobleman from the palace?"

"A nobleman was trying to take someone? Who is it?"

Realizing that the attention of the crowd was focused on his master, the servant's face turned pale.

"Ma... Master."

Contempt and anger dwelled in the eyes of the Count, who resembled Kanna. If there had been no witnesses, he would have simply ignored the situation and done as he pleased. Unfortunately, this was in front of the Black Pigeon, one of the busiest places in District 2.

Once the attention had been drawn, he had to act considering his status and dignity.

"It seems there's a misunderstanding. My servant must have misspoken, but he didn't mean it. I am Hank Gallon, a Second Class Official of the palace."

He was still condescending, but his tone had changed to a somewhat polite one, seemingly mindful of the onlookers. Yuder searched his memory for the name Gallon.

'Gallon... Gallon. Right. He was a Count, that much is certain.'

To perform all sorts of secret missions close to the emperor, one had to be well aware of the political landscape both inside and outside the empire.

Remembering all the influential families in the empire was part of the necessary preparations for this. Yuder ransacked his memory before speaking.

"So, you are Count Gallon."

"I apologize for the sudden request, but that woman you saw earlier is undoubtedly a member of my household that I lost. If you allow me to confirm her face, it will quickly become clear whether my claim is correct."

The only information about Count Gallon that remained in Yuder's memory was that his family had lived quietly in the capital for a long time. Even if they had never been at the center of politics, they had neither taken the initiative to cause trouble. They seemed to have conducted themselves wisely.

Moreover, the palace was a place where only nobles with at least five generations of confirmed lineage could enter, as they directly handled imperial affairs. The power they could wield was limited, but it was good for elevating their honor.

'He didn't refer to her as a blood relative, but specifically as a member of his household. This means their relationship isn't something that can be openly discussed.'

Considering Kanna's reaction, it was clear that she had been acting strange since arriving here, perhaps fearing she would encounter this person. Yuder made up his mind and shook his head with a brazen expression.

"I'm afraid that won't be possible."

"Excuse me?"

"My companion comes from humble origins, and has just recently received a last name and recognition from His Majesty. Why are you so sure that she belongs to your family, Count? Our Cavalry verifies the identity of all its members, so it's hard to believe there's a criminal among us. What is this crime you speak of in the first place?"

"...There's no need for you to know."

"Then naturally, I cannot hand over my companion. To doubt my companion is to doubt our Commander, Duke Peletta. ...Did you come to us with some ulterior motive, Count?"

The people around them murmured as he let his words flow without hesitation. His argument seemed logical and hinted at various meanings.

Was the person implying that the Count had an ulterior motive, that this was a family issue, or was there a hidden intention against Duke Peletta? Or was this just some lustful scheme targeted at a woman who had caught his eye? Tension crept into the hand of the Count, clutching his cane, as curious eyes watched.

"How dare you question my master's intentions!"

"You stand back."

Count Gallon waved his servant away. But his seemingly gentle façade had long since hardened with anger.

"I tried to be respectful, but the way you speak is utterly vulgar. Does your audacity stem from the foolish belief that you're backed by someone of great power?"

"Then why not answer my question? How could my companion behind me possibly be a criminal who has slipped through your fingers?"

"I've already told you. If you remove the hat and reveal the face, all will be clear."

"Answer me first. How will I know the truth if you only speak after you've seen?"

The firm response from Yuder, hinting that he couldn't trust the Count, drove Count Gallon to the brink of fury.

If it were up to him, he would have immediately summoned the palace knights to accomplish his goal. However, he had no choice but to hesitate as more and more eyes turned towards them.

"What did you say? A Count of the palace is eyeing a woman? Targeting someone who works here? How bold, under the watchful eye of the Sun Palace."

"No, they're from the Cavalry. You know, the place that Duke Peletta established a few months ago that caused quite a stir."

"But why is someone from there in a confrontation with the Count?"

"I think he mentioned something about a family issue, but I don't know the details."

Every noble values their reputation and safety above all else. Even if the emperor's health wasn't the best, everything that happened within the palace would reach his ears. The four major ducal families were even more cautious.

The House of Count Gallon had managed to stay unscathed and cleverly navigate through the politics without allying with anyone. It wasn't their intention to stir up unnecessary controversy and expose their weaknesses.

They couldn't afford to reveal their family's secrets to everyone over the pursuit of a young runaway girl.

In the end, Count Gallon decided to take a step back.

"You said you're from the Cavalry, didn't you? Today is not the day, but I will pay a visit there soon. Once I speak with Duke Peletta, the truth will be crystal clear."

Even at the veiled threat, Yuder's expression remained calm. His indifferent and arrogant demeanor, as if such words were no concern to him, made the Count grind his teeth in frustration.

"I'll remember your name."