

Turning 75

Chapter 75

"Understood. But I fear I can't wait for long. I am simply famished."

"Attendant! Guide our guests to the reception room and arrange some food for them. Quick!"

Zakail barked nervously. Barely poking his head out from the door, the elderly attendant scrambled to respond, "Yes, sir!" Zakail watched the rabble depart, then swiftly washed his face and changed his clothes.

He thought the world would be his once the funeral was over, but what on earth was happening on the very first day? An icy premonition slithered down Zakail's spine. He shivered and lowered his head.

'No. If I think I'm unlucky, that's exactly what will happen. I must stay positive.'

Hadn't they said they were the Cavalry members sent by the Duke of Peletta? Then, their purpose of visit was clear. Hadn't they also mentioned that such people would be coming soon?

Everything was already in place. It was just that their arrival was slightly, very slightly, earlier than expected.

Taking a deep breath, Zakail stepped into the reception room. While he had been preparing himself, the uninvited guests were comfortably seated in the high-quality chairs that hadn't been burned, nonchalantly clearing the dishes.

"Yuder, you should try this. It's my first time eating it, but it's pretty good."

"That's right. It's a special dish from the east called Koakat. They say it's delicious when added to stew."

The speed at which they were eating was astonishing. No matter how hastily the cook served the dishes, they disappeared in the blink of an eye. The sight was dizzying. Zakail managed to cough loudly, drawing the attention of the unwelcome guests.

"It appears... the food suits your taste. That's a relief."

"Yes, thanks to you."

Yuder, who had been waiting for Zakail, replied leisurely. His demeanor was as if he were the host, which caused Zakail's eyes to twitch involuntarily.

"Now that you have had your fill... we should discuss the matters at hand."

"Ah, I wanted to, but there's a new dish out. Let's finish this first."

Yuder gestured towards the cook, who had brought out a new dish at the perfect moment.

The cook, who was unsure of what to do in the presence of Zakail, carefully set the new dish on the table. Immediately, Jimmy and Gakane lunged at it with their forks. Nahan also coolly managed to snatch a large piece of meat from the dish and quickly devoured it.

Seeing them disregard etiquette and eagerly devour the food as he had requested, Yuder felt a great sense of satisfaction.

The more pride these people had in their noble status, the more they struggled with this behavior. They weren't accustomed to holding back their disdain when faced with something displeasing.

"This is delicious. It's superbly grilled with sauce. I think I might fall in love with eastern cuisine. Yuder, are you sure you don't want any more?"

Gakane, whose mannerisms would never have suggested his noble birth, chewed his grilled vegetables with relish and presented a piece of the meat dish to Yuder with his fork.

"Here, ah."

"Oh, dear..."

The servants' faces changed at the incredibly embarrassing act that not even commoners would perform in front of others. Their roles had clearly been reversed.

'Gakane. He's rather good at this.'

He knew his nobles well, and it showed in this instance too. Yuder internally admired Gakane's newfound talent and resolved to match his pace.

Gakane flashed a happy smile as he accepted the meat that was offered to him. The strikingly handsome man, radiant as a rose, warmed the surrounding air with his genuine smile.

"Is it good?"

"Mmm."

"Yuder! Try mine too! You must taste this!"

Yuder accepted a bite of the dish that Jimmy offered. He was actually quite full, but he couldn't refuse if it meant causing more discomfort to the humans before him.

The newly prepared dishes presented by the chef were quickly devoured.

"Now... may we clear the table and discuss?"

Zakail, who had been sitting at a distance as if reluctant to join, finally spoke with a sour face. Yuder, seeing the distaste evident on Zakail's face as he struggled to speak, nodded.

"Of course."

While the table was being cleared, Yuder briefly explained his name and his reasons for being there to Zakail. Upon hearing that Yuder had come in search of Devran Hartude, Zakail bit his lip and nodded.

"Devran Hartude... yes. Someone by that name came by not long ago. I remember him."

"That will expedite matters. Where is Devran now?"

"He's dead."

"Excuse me?"

The one who questioned was not Yuder. Gakane, wearing a fierce expression, glared at Zakail.

"What are you talking about? Devran is dead?"

"Precisely. Do you know that he was trying to burn down our peaceful Hartan?"

"I heard about it on my way here. But Devran isn't like that. Why would he want to burn down his precious hometown, where his family lives?"

"I don't know either. I was running errands for my father in another village at the time. So all I know is what I heard after I returned to the village after the fire."

After saying this, Zakail cast his eyes downward. He appeared to be carefully choosing his words.

"He killed his family himself, ran to this castle, and caused a big fire. My sick father couldn't escape in time, and my sister and brother-in-law who tried to save him also suffered. My older brother is a knight and couldn't come immediately, but after the funeral yesterday, he had to leave urgently. He said he'll be back in a few days."

He stopped speaking and displayed a mournful face. To anyone watching, he was a noble young man distraught from losing his family.

"As the youngest son who never properly learned about the family affairs, what can I do alone? The best I could do was gather the townspeople and finish the funeral. I planned to discuss the matter with my brother when he returns and send a report to the capital... I never imagined you would come looking for us this soon."

"I understand the situation. But you haven't explained why Devran is dead."

At Yuder's calm response, Zakail furrowed his brows.

"You still haven't guessed? He took his own life yesterday. It seems he gave up after being sentenced to death and died right away in jail. Although he was a condemned prisoner, since he was under Duke Peletta's command, we were planning to report first and then carry out the execution..... This turn of events has given me a headache."

There were no loopholes in Zakail's explanation. Everything seemed to make sense.

'Except, of course, for the gaping hole of why Devran would kill his family and start a fire....'

Yuder's gaze bored into Zakail's weary face, as if trying to read the hidden intentions behind his words.

"Understood. So, after your elder brother returns and takes his place as the lord, reports and follow-up procedures will officially start, is that right?"

"No, not exactly."

At Yuder's question, Zakail shook his head.

"It's true we plan to discuss and proceed with the reporting and follow-up after my brother's return, but as for the lordship... I will likely be the one to take that position."

Zakail paused for a moment after saying that.

"My brother already has a place in the Silver Cross Knights. Despite his young age, he has outstanding skills and has already ascended to the position of deputy commander. It's said that in a few years, he'll become the commander and receive the title of viscount. Given this position, becoming the lord of such a small territory would rather be a shackle to him."

"Your brother seems remarkable."

"Indeed. Since he was young, his dream has been to leave this small, boring place and become an outstanding knight. So, the one left behind will be me, someone very... different from him."

For the first time, Zakail relaxed his furrowed brow and smiled. Yuder read jealousy and admiration in his eyes.

'Jealousy....'

Zakail Hartan, the youngest son of the former lord. According to eastern customs, he was in a position of a youngest child who had nothing to inherit but the nobility status. However, due to the fire incident a few days ago, he had suddenly come into the position of the lord.

The only person who had benefited from the entire series of incidents was Zakail Hartan.

Was this all a coincidence?

'No.'

Yuder was confident based on his experiences. It couldn't be. The man before his eyes was hiding something, and undoubtedly, within that, there was the clue to Devran's whereabouts.

'But he won't easily spill the beans. I need to observe and wait a bit longer.'

After organizing his thoughts, Yuder slightly bowed his head towards Zakail.

"I understand your situation. However, as we're here on the order of Duke Peletta, it's difficult for us to return immediately. We'd like to continue our investigation and report back to the Duke. Would that be acceptable?"

Yuder intentionally used the title of 'Duke' rather than 'Captain'. Whether it had the desired effect or not, a troubled expression briefly crossed Zakail's face.

Regardless of how low the emperor and his brother, Duke Peletta's, prestige was in the east, their noble status was recognized by everyone. A minor noble like Zakail would inevitably feel small in

front of a noble of higher rank. It was one of the lessons about the psychology of nobles that Yuder had learned in his previous life.

"...Do as you wish. I'll instruct the townspeople to cooperate."

"I appreciate your understanding. Then we'll stay here for a while."