

## Turning 78

### Chapter 78

"Why...?"

"Surely you don't expect a guard to be unaware of that."

There was a hint of hesitation and a great deal of doubt in the eyes of the young guard who had met his gaze squarely. However, Yuder did not clarify the intent of his question.

"Incredible. He is the kind of person who couldn't help but tell everything."

After the young guard had given all the answers and hastily left, Nahan, who had been watching him from a step behind all this time, approached Yuder.

"Did you recognize that man as the guard we met last night and targeted him?"

"No."

However, as a result, the intimidation had been even more effective, which was fortunate. Following Yuder, who walked decisively towards the house where Devran had lived, Nahan continued the conversation.

"I never imagined he would take the threat of revealing his name to Zakail so seriously. Why, though? Even if you told Zakail, he would likely not care, as long as things were going as he wished."

"Just because the one at the top doesn't care doesn't mean those below feel the same way."

As an example, he referred to the remarkably stern and intimidating old guard captain.

"...I see."

Nahan's eyes shone oddly, quickly grasping the meaning behind the words.

"So lower-ranking individuals dislike even being mentioned, for fear it could offend those above them. Hmm. How did you know such a subtle detail? Were you perhaps a member of the imperial army?"

"Do I have to answer that as well?"

Yuder quietly retorted, implying that the one losing out wasn't him but Nahan. At this, Nahan gave a low chuckle.

"I'm a bit too curious, you see. Especially when I meet a competent brother like you."

"I would've thought I told you there were no brothers like you."

"Your coldness is almost at the level of a glacier's breath. Surely, you could share that much."

"If you want to know, you should start sharing."

Seemingly annoyed by Nahan's excessive curiosity and reluctance to share his own information first, Nahan quickly shut his mouth. Silence followed until they reached Devran's house.

'Here we are.'

Everything was charred black. The ruins were devastating even from afar, but the horror was more palpable up close. Yuder slowly circled around the ruins, filled with the burnt debris, and inspected it.

The neighboring houses and streets they had seen on the way here were all marked by the same charred traces, but none were as severe as Devran's house. At least the others hadn't collapsed like this.

As Yuder returned to his original position and looked down at the chaotic debris, Nahan stood next to him. Yuder glanced at him and then opened his mouth.

"You must have come this far as well, right?"

"I did."

Nahan casually agreed.

"However, I didn't discover anything beyond the conjecture that the fire here was more purposefully destructive than elsewhere."

This was in line with what Yuder had thought. He was certain that the fire which had consumed Devran's house had been deliberately set.

While the other parts of the village had been only superficially scorched, the fire that had burnt this house down seemed intent on completely annihilating everything. If not, the house wouldn't have been destroyed to such an extent that its very form was unrecognizable.

"The villagers seem to consider it ominous to even approach this place. The bodies inside must've burnt up, so it seems they plan to bury it as is."

"Well...."

Yuder stared towards the ruinous debris piled high, muttering about the secrets it could potentially hide within.

"Even if the outside has been burned, could the inside be the same?"

"Hmm? Do you mean there might still be a body inside? But it would be difficult to clear these ruins on our own."

Yuder gave a nonchalant wave of his hand, without turning to look at the puzzled Nahan. Then, a tremendous wind rose silently around the ruins of Devran's house, starting to lift the debris as one. The ground trembled minutely as if experiencing a mild earthquake, submitting to the immense power before it.

A moment later, they could clearly see the bare floor of Devran's house, revealed beneath the rubble floating mid-air.

"The inside... surprisingly, it's rather intact."

Nahan glanced back and forth between the debris and the floor, murmuring quietly.

"We might be able to find traces of a body inside."

They looked at each other, then stepped fearlessly into the interior. The old stone floor, hardly burned by the fire, was clean.

However, if two people had indeed died here, there were no signs of their bodies. No bones, no blood, nothing else was visible.

"Most of the debris seems to be furniture, dishes, and cloth from the house. Other than that... is this a shovel?"

As Nahan wandered among the floating debris, he nudged a small shovel with a burnt handle. Yuder approached what seemed to be the area where a door and a wall once stood, stepping over the charred debris.

From the original shape of the floating debris above, it appeared that a bed might have been here.

Then, Yuder noticed something small gleaming amidst the charred wood and cloth. What he grasped in his outstretched hand was a small, round piece of metal.

Although it was difficult to recognize its original form due to the fire, it was certainly a piece of jewelry adorned with a gem.

"What's that? A brooch?"

"It seems so."

Yuder examined the object, rolling it in his fingers. It appeared to be an ordinary brooch, but when he put pressure on the end, the inside jingled and twisted ever so slightly. A spark of interest appeared in Yuder's eyes at this realization.

'A double brooch?'

Even an ordinary brooch would be a luxury for a commoner, but this one was a double brooch, designed with a hidden compartment.

Yuder remembered seeing such double brooches in his previous life, often used by nobles to store miniature portraits of loved ones. They were always popular for their romantic appeal, though he himself could never quite understand it.

He tried to open the brooch by applying pressure with his fingers, but due to the distortion from the fire, it didn't open easily. After several attempts, Yuder finally managed to pry it open. Inside, a small portrait revealed itself, fortunately undamaged by the fire.

'This is.....'

Upon seeing the image, Yuder unintentionally furrowed his brow, Nahan peering into the brooch alongside him had a similar reaction.

"A knight donned in a cloak with the insignia of the Hartan family and a cross emblem. There's only one person who fits that description."

"..."

Zakail Hartan had said that he had a brother who was a member of the Silver Cross Knight Order.

And Devran Hartude had a father and a younger sister.

Yuder remembered Devran expressing concern to his fellow members that the lord might not grant his request to move their residence due to his sister.

Devran and his family had disappeared, but Zakail Hartan's brother had not died. The visage of the man in the fine brooch discovered in the ruins of Devran's house. What did all this signify?

Yuder closed the brooch and tucked it into his chest pocket.

"Get out. I'm going to restore it to its original state."

"Have we found everything we came to find?"

Quick-witted, Nahan answered and slipped out of the ruins. Yuder followed him out of the burned house, slowly released his power, and returned the remaining debris to their original places.

A large amount of black dust rose with the sound of crumbling, but none of the ashes flew to Yuder, who was enveloped by the wind.

"Where are we heading next? To the back mountain as well?"

"...Yes."

Before they had arrived, they had heard from a young guard that the bodies of executed convicts were buried casually around a large rock in Mount Clayman, extending behind the Hartan territory.

Even if he committed suicide, Devran was a convict, so his body must have been buried there.

Of course, if he truly died.

No bodies of people who were said to have been burned to death in the house were found, so could Devran's body really be fully discovered? He felt like he could bet it wouldn't.

And his thought was confirmed when they reached Mount Clayman after about an hour's walk.

'Just as I thought. Nothing.'

They quickly found the large rock used to bury the bodies of the convicts. As the young guard had said, the rock had a bizarre appearance, looking like a monstrous creature standing on two legs and roaring, making it easy to identify. The guard mentioned that the townspeople called it 'The Rock of Death'.

However, there were no signs around the Rock of Death that suggested something had recently been buried. Just in case, Yuder lightly manipulated the wind and earth to turn the area upside down, but all he found were a few skeletal fragments that seemed to have been buried a very long time ago.

"Over here. Can you come this way?"

Then, Nahan, who had disappeared a short distance away, called Yuder.

"There's a pit here."

The pit that Nahan found was closer to the woods than to the area around the rock. It was narrow and deep enough to bury a person, but there was nothing inside it.

"Was it like this from the beginning?"

"No. When I found it, the fallen leaves were... covering it like this."

Nahan moved his feet to roughly cover the pit with the piles of leaves that had been pushed to the side. It was clear that it had been covered up hastily.

Yuder pushed the leaves aside again and knelt down in front of the revealed pit. When he leaned over to look inside, a foul, damp smell wafted out.

Although the scent was mixed with the strong smell of decaying leaves that had been piled up for a long time, the foul smell was extremely familiar to Yuder.

Yuder reached out and randomly scooped up a handful of dirt from inside the pit. Inside his black gloves, he could see a liquid that had not completely dried out seeping out from between the crumbled soil.

'Blood.'

There was no doubt about it. It was blood.