

Turning 88

Chapter 88

Kiolle stared at Yuder with the face of someone that had barely survived falling straight into hell. Of course, his gaze soon diminished like a small flame extinguishing in front of a chill breeze before Yuder's direct stare.

"Admission, apology, and a declaration to do anything. All three are the best things you've said so far. Not a bad persuasion."

At Yuder's words, Kiolle managed to express a bit of hope. But Yuder soon replied with a cold look on his face.

"But why should I believe you?"

"What?"

"Anyone can say words. How can I trust the sincerity of your words? If you deny ever saying such things once we leave here, that would be the end of it."

"Damn it. Then what, what do you want me to do? Take a knight's oath here?"

"An oath is too weak."

"Then what do you want me to do?"

Kiolle had no clue what Yuder was asking of him. Watching Kiolle's puzzled face, Yuder's lips curled into a slight smile.

"Alright. I'll find a way to definitely trust your persuasion. Wait here a little."

"What? Wait a minute. You have to free me first!"

Kiolle, surprised, desperately grabbed at Yuder's hem, but to no avail. Yuder easily freed his hand, stood up from his place, and brushed off his hem.

"It'll only be a moment. You won't die in that time, so don't worry and keep your mouth shut."

"What? No. You said you'd help me! Wait! Hey! Where are you going!"

Despite his defeated situation, Kiolle was indeed Kiolle. Yuder, who was about to turn away, stopped and bent over towards him.

Despite calling out first, Kiolle sealed his lips when Yuder approached, his face slightly scared.

'Scared, indeed.'

Yuder grabbed the gag hanging around Kiolle's neck and lifted it back up.

"Gah-!!"

Kiolle widened his eyes, thrashing about, shaking his head. He had experienced all kinds of humiliations and thought he had found a way to survive, but felt like he was rolling back into hell again. His desperate demeanor was understandable.

'But one should know when to trust a person's word.'

"If you said you would do anything, then first learn to quietly wait."

"Grrgghh! Urgghh!"

"I'm going."

Yuder left the cell where Kiolle was trapped. Then he waited for Nahan and the young boy to come out, before closing and locking the door again. The muffled sounds of Kiolle could be heard from inside, but no one paid any attention.

"He will never keep his promise."

Nahan stated coldly, a blank expression on his face.

"I know."

"But how are you going to make him keep it?"

"I told you, I'm going to find a way."

Yuder replied lightly, striding forward. It wasn't long before the sight of three incapacitated Awakeners revealed themselves. They had been knocked unconscious by only throwing stones without a single injury when they arrived, but their current condition was a total mess. It was clear who had done it.

'Devran and the others seem to have been quite tormented.'

Yuder used the power of wind to lift them and distributed them into any open cell, then resumed his stride. His destination was the crossroads he had seen earlier.

He had headed towards the prison before, but this time, he had to go in the opposite direction. The final goal of the day should be there.

"Aha."

Only then did Nahan, who had been following Yuder, nodded his head as if he had guessed something.

"Indeed. There must be a way."

Not long after, the road gradually widened, and small voices began to echo from the inside. Judging by the calmness in the voices, they seemed to have not yet noticed what was happening outside.

'It means Devran and the prisoners have taken care of the ones they ran into.'

Yuder continued towards those who couldn't even imagine the silently approaching shadow of misfortune.

"...They're late."

"Hmm?"

"What is it? Are you already awake, Jimmy?"

After returning to the castle as Yuder had instructed, Gakane, who had been looking out the window, sitting next to Jimmy who lay in bed, turned his head in surprise.

Feeling somewhat sorry that his murmured words, not intended for the ears of a sleeping boy, had elicited a response, he asked, "Did you wake up because of me?"

"No, I had a good sleep... I woke up quickly. But what do you mean it's late?"

The boy's cheeks, which had been slightly feverish before bed, were now back to their usual clear complexion.

Gakane didn't notice the peculiar scent that those on the verge of a second gender manifestation exuded, but just to be sure, he lightly touched and then pulled his hand away from Jimmy's forehead. There was no fever.

"Well... no. I just think Yuder is later than I expected."

"Yuder?"

Jimmy, who had just woken up, sat up, rubbing his sleep-filled eyes. A steadily sinking sun was visible through the large window next to the bed. The crimson sunset was beautiful, but it was difficult to think so when he looked at the burnt black buildings beneath it.

Jimmy, turning his worried gaze towards Gakane who was looking out the window, said, "True... I thought he'd be back before sunset. But if something had happened to Yuder, he would've sent a signal as promised. Don't worry too much, Gakane."

Looking at Jimmy, who offered his consolation in a somewhat calm and dignified manner, Gakane managed a wry smile.

"That's true. Anyway, it's good you're awake. I was actually about to go out and check around."

"Outside... Ah. To check on that man Zakail?"

"Yeah. Earlier when you were sleeping, I went out on the pretext of getting water and got a feel for the situation. It seemed Zakail wasn't in the castle."

"He wasn't? Where could he have gone?"

"I don't know that. He might be back by now, so I want to go check again."

"Wow. I want to come too."

Jimmy's eyes sparkled as he tried to get out of bed. Gakane put out his hand, pressing down on the boy's round head to make him sit back down, shaking his head.

"You can't."

"Why!"

"People here think you're lying down because your body isn't in good shape after the long journey. The best way to scout around without arousing suspicion is for me to go out, pretending to fetch necessary items like water or towels while looking after you."

Unable to find a rebuttal to Gakane's reasonable response, Jimmy pouted his lips, looking disappointed.

"...Then hurry back. I'll be here."

"Right. But it's also important to keep an eye on the outside, so you need to keep watch until I return. If by any chance you see Yuder send up flames or any other signal, run straight to me."

"I understand."

Gakane rose from his seat, looking at Jimmy, who promptly nodded with a determined expression. Jimmy was more calm and smart in judging the situation than his peers, so he could be relied on to handle things properly. Now Gakane had his own work to do.

Not long after Gakane stepped outside the room, maids appeared across the hallway, murmuring and chatting among themselves.

They had an air of discomfort around the unwelcome guests in the castle, but Gakane did not let their attitude affect him. He greeted them warmly and approached them first.

"Hello. Could I possibly get a towel?"

"A towel? Why do you ask?"

An older maid asked, eyeing him suspiciously.

"One of our little companions isn't feeling well. He has a fever, and we need a wet towel."

"The little one... are you talking about the little brown-haired child that was with you?"

"Yes. Poor thing, he seems to have overdone it moving such a great distance so quickly. There's not much we can do; he's still a child."

While the Easterners seemed to dislike the Awakeners, they felt sympathetic toward Jimmy, who was still a child.

The maid, old enough to have children of Jimmy's age, exchanged sympathetic glances. The previously tense atmosphere softened instantly. Everything was going according to Gakane's plan.

"I'll bring one, so wait here for a moment."

"Thank you. You're really kind."

After all, how many could resist a handsome young man with a strikingly beautiful face speaking softly with a smile?

Gakane was well aware that his looks played in his favor when it came to people's favor, and he utilized this to the fullest to lower the maids' guard.

By the time the maid returned with the towel, he had naturally obtained most of the information he could get from them.

"Jimmy. I'm back. Any issues?"

"No. Did Zakail return?"

Jimmy, who was watching outside the window, swiftly turned around. Gakane nodded, placing the newly acquired towel on the table.

"Yes. He left and returned within an hour."

"So, he just met someone from the village?"

"No, that's not it. Zakail has been going out alone from the castle and returning from time to time since a year ago. But the people he met were suspicious. He's often been seen meeting unfamiliar hunters that people have never seen around here. The former lord was quite worried about it."

"Hunters, you say...."

"I don't know their identities. But I got another interesting piece of information."

"What's that?"

"Devran's younger sister had a deep relationship with Zakail's elder brother. Not long ago, Zakail told the late lord about this. The lord got angry, confined Devran's sister in the castle, and then Devran, who was on leave, seems to have come here."

Jimmy couldn't hide his surprised look as Gakane casually spilled out all the deep information he hadn't been able to gather while roaming around the village.