

Turning 91

Chapter 91

Devran, who should have been dead to atone for all his sins, couldn't be allowed to live. The same was true for the people of the Apeto family who had joined hands with him and orchestrated all these events. If it were revealed that Zakail had joined hands with them to seize the Lordship, he could never be forgiven.

Even though he hadn't yet inherited the Lordship, with the success of everything right before his eyes, he didn't anticipate such a turn of events. Although his mind was reeling, only the thought of escaping by any means necessary propelled Zakail to act unabashedly.

"How dare you plot in front of me, the Lord of Hartan? Escape? Report? This is absurd. I will contact His Grace, the Duke of Peletta, your immediate master, right away. I will ask him to grant me permission to execute the person who killed my father and sister and is now roaming around with a calm face...!"

"Did I kill the Lord and the others?"

The one who responded to Zakail's words was Devran. He couldn't help but let out a genuine laugh, as if the suggestion was absurd. However, the laughter that burst from his face, covered in bruises and wounds, looked monstrous, causing Zakail to involuntarily recoil in fear.

"So... so, didn't you! By starting a great fire!"

"Why would I?"

Devran asked back with a twisted smile. His eyes were full of hatred, but his voice was eerily calm, making Zakail shiver even more.

"What?"

"Why would I do that, huh? No matter how much I think about it, there's no reason, right? I left my hometown, joined the Cavalry, received a holy order from the emperor himself, and made a lot of money. I was on the path to success. Why would I risk all that? Doesn't that seem absurd to you, too?"

"How should I know? People like you get a little power and start getting ideas above their station, and perhaps in your arrogance, you started the fire! Because of you, I didn't even hear my father's and sister's last words!"

"So, you're blaming me with lies until the very end."

"So, are you saying that I, who wasn't in Hartan at that time, started the fire?"

"Ha, that's a good point. Let's discuss that, shall we?"

Looking into Devran's piercing eyes, Zakail managed to keep his unease at bay.

'What's this? Does he have some kind of proof? No. These guys don't know anything yet. I left no solid evidence that I was in league with the Apeto family. Even if they heard something when they were caught, words alone can't serve as evidence.'

As Zakail rolled his eyes, Devran opened his mouth.

"The guys who captured me grumbled that taking over a small place like Hartan wouldn't mean much and that they'd done too much for what they got. They even said that without me as a payoff, the deal wouldn't have been worthwhile. That means someone joined hands with them, took Hartan, and handed me over as compensation. Who else could be the culprit if not you, Zakail Hartan, considering the Lord and the heir, Zupiel, have passed?"

"..."

"Or could it be Zachlis, who has already received his knighthood and started a new life? None of them had any reason to do so. But you, Zakail Hartan, you had a reason! Can you swear before God that you didn't commit all these atrocities just to become the Lord of Hartan?"

Devran's resonant voice was so loud that even the guards standing far away could easily hear their conversation. Zakail gritted his teeth as he heard the murmuring voices from afar.

"After the fire, you didn't listen to a word I said. You immediately framed me as the culprit, locked me in prison, then buried me alive in front of the Rock of Death, didn't you?" Devran accused.

"No!"

Zakail yelled, his body convulsing as if in a seizure. But no matter how much he struggled, the black shadow clone that firmly held him didn't so much as flinch.

"I heard that you had committed suicide in prison, so I simply ordered you to be buried quietly!"

"Whom did you tell this to?"

The one who retorted to Zakail was a handsome man with auburn hair and striking features. The man in a well-fitted black uniform looked down at Zakail with eyes sparkling with amusement as he asked again.

"To whom did you give this order, Zakail? If we can find this person, the truth will be revealed. Right, Devran?"

"Right. I couldn't know who took me that day as I was hooded, unable to see."

'You, you brats.'

Zakail suddenly realized that he had fallen into a trap. Of course, he never gave such an order. The ones who had taken Devran from the prison, buried him, and then dug him up again, were the people from the Apeto family who had disguised themselves as hunters and hidden after negotiating everything in advance with Zakail.

Zakail had personally opened the door leading to the prison so that they could fulfill their purpose quietly under the cover of the pre-dawn darkness without anyone noticing.

To divert the attention of his older brother Zachlis, who came rushing upon hearing the news of their father and sister's death, and the village people, he spent all day preparing for the funeral in the back hill, purposely dragging out the time.

As he expected, no one cared about the missing Devran. They all believed that Devran had killed his family and set fire to the castle.

Who could suspect that Zakail, who was faithfully playing the naive youngest son who knew nothing, was lying? Zachlis, busy with knightly duties, was shell-shocked upon hearing the news of his lover's death and was spaced out throughout the funeral.

Although he had said that he would deal with inheritance matters when he returned to the Knights Order, Zakail didn't doubt that his brother would not desire to inherit the title of lord of the village.

Aside from the fact that the promising future of a knight was brighter than the petty lordship of a small village, he calculated that his overly sentimental brother wouldn't want to return to the village where his lover died.

If that happened, Zakail would have become the lord as planned, gaining the protection of Apeto instead of the Diarca family, who hadn't done anything for him, and would have grown stronger. He had big dreams of starting as the insignificant youngest son of a small village lord and ultimately becoming the winner in the east.

Zakail bit his lower lip hard enough to bleed as he thought about that dream. He couldn't afford to be tripped up here because of those commoners.

'Let's not interfere. Getting angry won't benefit me. Bowing my head to those commoners is humiliating, but I need to reassure them and survive.'

"I really can't remember who I gave such an order to, as there wasn't enough context."

"You're only saying that now...!"

"Father and older brother are gone. Do you think there would be any danger if it were you? Yes, perhaps. Who knows if those men who claimed to have captured you had deceived me and taken you instead. Right?"

"What?"

Zakail managed to force a smile to match Devran's brazenness.

"Listen, I'm not sure who planted this ludicrous idea in your head, but it wasn't me who captured you. Think about it. I'm a victim too. All I did was order a proper burial upon hearing news of your death, and here we are. Shouldn't vengeance be first sought from those who captured you? Right?"

"..."

"Free me now. If you do, I will forgive all the insolence you have shown me and, as the current representative of the lord of Hartan, I will happily assist you. I'll contact the capital to help find the real culprit. Persisting in hounding me in this manner won't do you any good."

Devran, and everyone else present, were taken aback by Zakail, who was trying to persuade people with sheer audacity despite having no evidence. His audacity was truly formidable.

'He probably won't admit anything without evidence. I suppose I should just do what I need to do before he can further manipulate the situation.'

"Devran. We need to send a letter, let's return to the castle for now."

"Can't we just kill him?"

Despite facing his mortal enemy, Devran, who was unable to lift a finger, muttered with a scowl. At Devran's grumbling, Zakail visibly shrank back, holding his breath.

"Did Yuder say it was okay?"

"No."

"Then don't."

After saying this, Gakane approached Devran and whispered just loudly enough for him to hear.

"When Yuder finishes his work and comes back, that guy's done for. You don't need to soil your hands. Our leader will take care of it. So, bear with it for a little longer. For the sake of your family."

"...All right."

At the mention of his family, Devran, whose face had softened, subdued his fiery temper and exhaled. They took Zakail, who they had apprehended, and returned to Hartan Castle.

The villagers, seeing Zakail caught by the shadow clone and lifted up, wore expressions as though they were about to faint, but were even more surprised when they saw Devran and his family who had returned alive.

"What on earth happened? I thought he was dead?"

"Considering Lord Zakail has been captured, it seems..."

"Goodness, what in the world is happening!"

And their confusion peaked when they entered the castle and came face-to-face with a terrified-looking elderly attendant.

"Lo, Lord Zakail! Not long ago, Lord Za, Za, Zachlis had returned and was waiting...but...what on earth...."

"Zachlis is here?"

On behalf of Zakail, who was gagged by the shadow clone, Devran shouted out loud.

"That's good. Where is he now?"

"In, in, in the parlor..."

"Let's go."

They all rushed to the parlor. The same parlor where, this morning, Yuder and his colleagues had devoured a plethora of food, much to Zakail's annoyance, now had a man dressed in silver armor anxiously pacing.

The man, who had a similar appearance to Zakail but seemed much kinder, was startled by the sudden influx of people. However, upon noticing Devran and Dermilla behind him, his eyes widened in shock.