

Turning 92

Chapter 92

"My goodness! Dermilla!"

"Zachlis!"

As though no one else existed, the man who arrived breathlessly embraced Devran's sister, weeping loudly. Even Devran, who was about to shout at him, couldn't stop their momentum.

"Dermilla! Dermilla! Is it really you?"

"Yes, it's me."

"I can't believe it, by the gods. After hearing that you were dead, I, I couldn't... Oh, thank the gods!"

After a long bout of sobbing in each other's arms, Zachlis Hartan finally calmed down enough to engage in conversation.

"I, I'm sorry everyone. The shock of this... miracle... So, what exactly has happened? Who are you all?"

"Do you not remember me, Sir Zachlis?"

At Devran's sarcastic query, Zachlis quickly shook his head.

"No, not you. I remember you, Devran. What in the world happened? Why is Zakail in this state?"

Devran, who was still holding his sister's hand and whose eyes were red from crying, gave Zachlis an indescribable look. Gakane thought it would be better if he took over.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Sir Zachlis Hartan."

"Yes, I am Zachlis Hartan."

"I am Gakane Bolunwald, a Cavalry under Duke Peletta, assigned to investigate Devran Hartude's disappearance. If I may ask, I heard you were to return a few days later due to some business with your order. It appears you've returned earlier than expected?"

"Well, that's...actually, I received a letter during a funeral yesterday about an urgent matter, but I ran into a colleague in a village this morning who told me there was no such issue. He suggested that there might have been a mistake in delivering the command. So, I immediately returned to the village."

At those words, both Gakane and Devran's gazes simultaneously turned towards Zakail. Zakail had been avoiding their gazes and showing a hardened face since seeing his brother.

"Oh, what to do. You wanted to chase Sir Zachlis away for a long time and kill us all in the meantime, but it didn't go as planned, did it?"

"..."

"What do you mean?"

Zachlis frowned, glancing back and forth between Devran and his brother.

"What did Zakail do? Is it related to the news that Devran killed his family and committed suicide?"

Zachlis was not as clueless as expected for a knight. Gakane glanced at Devran and slowly began to speak.

"Please listen carefully to what I am about to tell you."

Although there didn't seem to be much affection among the family members, it would still be a shock to Zachlis, being Zakail's brother.

Ignoring Zakail who was struggling against the shadow spirit restraining him, Gakane calmly began to explain.

"We believe that Zakail is involved in all of these incidents. The reasons are..."

As Gakane narrated, Devran, his younger sister, and the Awakeners each contributed, filling in the gaps in the story.

At first, Zachlis wore an expression of disbelief, utterly shocked. But as the story came to an end, he looked at everyone with a cool and collected gaze.

"...and so we have joined forces and returned here. That is all."

"I see. Understood."

A long sigh slipped through Zachlis' lips. He slowly took in the sight of his lover's tear-stained face, the wounded Devran, and Gakane and Jimmy in their black uniforms. His gaze finally settled on Zakail, who looked worn out, as if he had given up on everything, and stared back with a dreadful glare.

"Could we release Zakail for a moment? It seems we need to hear his side of the story."

"More of this...!"

Gakane raised his hand to quiet the increasingly agitated Devran and nodded in understanding.

"Alright. But, understand this—we won't entirely free him because he might try to escape. We will only release his mouth."

"That's fine."

To Gakane's eyes, Zachlis already seemed to believe their story was true. As the shadow clone that was covering Zakail's mouth slowly lowered its hand, Zachlis moved closer to him.

"Brother, you don't actually believe their words, do you?"

"Zakail."

Zakail looked at his elder brother who had just called his name and forced a pale smile onto his face. But the smile was oddly twisted, as if he was struggling to control his facial muscles, making him look even more strange.

"It's all lies. You know I can't do anything. How could I betray Father and Sister? They're targeting me and making up stories!"

"...."

"If I were to join hands, who would I do it with? This is absurd. As you know, I'm not interested in the lord's position. I'll give it all to you. Then it'll be fine, right? You trust me, don't you?"

"Zakail."

Zachlis called his brother's name again. For the first time, Zakail realized his elder brother, whose eyes he always thought were filled with pointless dreams and annoyance, could look so cold.

"Enough with the lies."

A chill ran down Zakail's spine.

"Don't tell me you thought your strange behavior over the past year had gone unnoticed by our family."

"...What?"

"You've always had the most greed among us brothers, but never put in the effort. Even when Father worked hard to pave a path for you to become a scholar, you threw away the opportunity and started mingling with suspicious figures a year ago. How should we have interpreted that?"

Zakail was so surprised he unintentionally opened his mouth.

"...Wha, what are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about the fact that Father hastened the inheritance of the lordship to our sister because of you. If we had left you to your devices, you would certainly have dragged other powers into our territory, putting us all in danger."

Zachlis sighed and looked down at his younger brother.

"But it seems it was too late. I had no idea you would involve my lover to satisfy your greed. Quite impressive, really. You precisely knew what kind of action would make me lose my senses and you acted on it."

"No, brother. That's not it. Listen to me! Are you really going to cast out your own brother based on these baseless stories and being blinded by a commoner lover?"

"Zakail. Her name is Dermilla. No... Now, having taken on Devran's last name, she is Dermilla Hartude."

"What does that matter now!"

"It's far more important than my brother who tried to kill my lover and sent me a fake letter to drive me away."

Zachlis pulled out a letter from his chest.

"If this letter wasn't truly sent from the Knights, we need to find the culprit, don't we? It seems quite interesting if we bring those guys who claimed to have captured and tortured Devran."

"...I didn't send it."

"Do you think they will say the same? If you had no interest in the lordship, you must first explain why as soon as I returned to this castle, many servants spoke exactly the opposite of you. They were convinced that you, Zakail, would inherit the lordship."

Only then did Zakail's face contort violently.

"...That's... just the stupid commoners babbling!"

"Oh? Then I suppose it's fine if I take the lordship."

"What? But, you are in the Knights..."

"If I can be by Dermilla's side, I don't care where I am. It might be better to inherit the lordship, marry her, and send you away."

"Ha...haha. That's a lie, right...?"

Zakail managed a weak smile as he studied his brother's face. But there was no sign of jest in Zachlis's cold gaze.

'No, it's not true. He's lying to shake me up. My brother, how could he leave the Knights and accept a small town's lordship. That can't be. It's not true.'

But if Zachlis truly said he would become the lord of Hartan, there was no power anywhere that could overturn that. Zakail knew this too well, and despite his self-comforting words, he couldn't dispel his anxiety.

The long-standing tradition from the east was stronger than law. Even the people of Apeto couldn't overturn it. Who could dare oppose an eldest son, even one year older, inheriting his father's estate?

Zakail saw his wide dreams, which he thought were spread out before him, collapse in an instant. All his plans started from becoming the lord of Hartan. What if he couldn't secure the lordship of Hartan?

Would anyone give a new opportunity to him, who would simply be the incompetent youngest son of a noble family?

"No, it's not true. It's not true!"

Zakail shook his head and writhed.

"It's not what you really meant, right? Right? Brother, you said you're fine as long as you have her. She came back alive, so why are you doing this to me! Don't I deserve any pity...! Uh...!"

Gakane had stopped Zakail's mouth around that point, so his yell was quickly stifled into a groan. Zachlis, who was watching his brother reveal his greedy gaze and struggle in desperation, sighed and turned his back.

"Thank you."

"Do you wish to not speak further?"

"Well, as you can see, there's nothing more to hear. The circumstances of everything are so clear."

There was no trace of sympathy for his brother in Zachlis's eyes. He brushed back his hair with a slightly tired face.