

## Turning 80

### Chapter 80

The Warden's expression changed at the mention of dogs of Apeto. The numerous worries that had been lurking over his downcast face seemed to dissipate into the cold air.

"...Did you hear what we said?"

"Yes, I heard!"

"I see. Do you happen to know where the other knights who came here for training are now?"

"Why are you asking about those bastards?"

"Well..."

Touching his ear and stalling, the Warden signaled the others around him with a nod and gave a chilly smile.

"I'm curious how long it would take for them to notice if the idiot youngest of the Diarca family disappeared from here."

"What?"

"Just take care of it and don't worry about it! After all, there's only two of them!"

"Yes!"

Excluding the Warden and his closest subordinate, eight men all stepped forward at once. Yuder soon understood why most of them did not hold weapons.

Out of the three who had drawn their weapons, the others began to showcase threatening auras. Their hands and feet began to grotesquely transform as elemental powers like fire and water began to manifest.

"...So five of the Awakeners have joined."

In the momentary standoff, Nahan, who had grabbed Yuder's shoulder, moved him aside and murmured in a low voice.

"I think I might have an idea where my missing brothers have gone."

"Ki, Kiolle sir! There are too many enemies! Are you really going to confront them like this? It would be better if we first retreated.....!"

From behind Kiolle, a panicked knight panted out. His hand, holding the sword, trembled, suggesting that he was barely experienced in real combat.

"You're talking nonsense, Paviel. Members of the Diarca never retreat in front of vermin like these. Let alone, there are some among them who possess powers that I absolutely can't forgive. And you're telling me to retreat? Obviously, they all have to die!"

"But...!"

"Paviel. If you're thinking of turning your back on me now, even if you survive, Diarca will never forgive you. Are you scared of those vermin, spewing fire and strutting around with the power gifted by the Red Stone?"

At the mention of "vermin spewing fire", Kiolle gnashed his teeth.

'...Hmm. That's probably... because of me.'

Yuder felt an odd sensation as he belatedly realized that the source of Kiolle's intense anger, which had clouded his judgment, might have been due to their past interactions. The young knight appeared to still be in a state of confusion.

"..."

A mixture of terror and resentment flickered across the knight named Paviel's face.

"No..."

"That's right. That's how it should be. I knew you were here to monitor me under my father's orders. He probably promised you a promotion. But, in the end, that promise ends if I object. Understand?"

"Yes..."

"This is the only time your noble background, being from the Han family, will be useful."

Kiolle's icy words echoed as his gaze turned towards the enemy, who was charging at him with arms transformed into swords.

"In the end, they are too scared of the consequences to kill us! They're all talk! Go!"

‘Well, they might be able to kill you.’ Yuder felt a twinge of regret that he couldn't voice his thoughts as he watched them clash.

Though the group consisted of five Awakeners, and three quite skilled swordsmen, Kiolle and his fellow knight fought admirably.

Watching Kiolle hold his own against the Awakeners, Yuder thought that the experiences he had endured, though they had knocked him unconscious, might not have been entirely useless.

Judging by their previous exchanges, it seemed that the arrogant knight from the Diarca family had been here for training by sheer coincidence. Mentions of other knights suggested that they might be in the vicinity as well. The longer the battle dragged on, the more disadvantageous it would be for Apeto's side.

"Damn it. They just had to show up for training right now... this is getting annoying. Damn Diarca, causing trouble in his entire life."

They've heard the place where the knights in training are staying is far from here. Nobody, not even the Warden, would have thought they'd run into them here. That's why there weren't any orders for them to move from above.

As Kiolle and his subordinates fought, the Warden of the Apeto family and his subordinates, standing not too far away, expressed their anger loudly.

"What on earth did that man do in the capital to come here all of a sudden?"

"From what I know, he's been causing continuous trouble and disorder within the Imperial Knights. It's said that the Duke himself sent him here for training to calm the resentment built up in his heart."

"Resentment, my foot. Does that guy look like someone who'd have something built up in his heart? It's more like he's building resentment in the hearts of others! He's an ignorant youngster who doesn't know how high the sky is, thanks to his well-connected father!"

Yuder agreed with what he heard, empathizing greatly with the angry voice of the Warden.

"We cannot let him live once he hears the name 'Apeto'. Kill him here to prevent any future problems. Push harder! What are you doing against just two opponents!"

At the sharp cry of the Warden, the movements of the fighters paused momentarily, then resumed with even more intensity.

Though their abilities were suitable for combat, they lacked experience. Fighting without disturbing several comrades in a forest filled with obstacles required tact, something they seemed to lack.

'... Did they gather those who just awakened? They are incredibly clumsy.'

Kiolle and his fellow knight remained surprisingly composed against them. However, as the enemies started to charge desperately after the Warden's order, they were quickly overwhelmed.

"U-uh, Sir Kiolle! We should retreat and scatter them!"

"... Retreating now will do no good! What on earth did you learn in the Imperial Knight!"

Even in this critical moment, Kiolle was stubborn. His judgment wasn't bad, but ultimately two people couldn't face eight.

'If they had turned and run from the start, picking off the scattered enemies, they might have had a chance.'

Kiolle's excessive hatred for the Awakeners ended up ruining everything. Yuder watched as wounds gradually accumulated on Kiolle and his fellow knight, contemplating what to do next.

He definitely needed to capture one from the Apeto side for information, but he hesitated on what to do about Kiolle's side.

If he left them to die, there was a high risk that the Diarca Ducal House, who would likely learn about the knight group's presence in the nearby village, would stir up trouble. However, revealing himself to save them could lead to repercussions from Kiolle himself later on.

'I thought he was a man who would die quickly in my previous life because he didn't stand out... But at least back then, he wouldn't have died here.'

In a way, the entire vacation time of the Cavalry caused by Yuder had twisted the situation up to this point.

"Tch!"

"What the hell are you doing, Paviel!"

Then, another great uproar arose around Kiolle, who was in the midst of fighting. Yuder, whose eyes had been lost in thought, looked up and felt a surprising emotion upon seeing the subordinate knight step forward, drop his weapon, and raise both hands.

"It can't be helped. Kiolle, you are a Diarca, I don't want to die here because of your stupidity! I'm surrendering, so spare me!"

The subordinate knight, more severely wounded than Kiolle, was covered in countless wounds on his right arm and both legs. Deciding it was too hard to hold his sword any longer, it appeared he had chosen to betray Kiolle and attempt surrender.

"...You dishonor our knighthood!"

"The one who doesn't know shame is you, Kiolle! Why should I die because of you! Because of you, a bastard, who relies solely on the power of your family!"

"What... did you say?"

Kiolle raised his sword to strike down the knight in a fit of fury. But the Warden's hand was quicker. As soon as he raised his hand, one of the henchmen, dressed like a hunter and holding a sword, blocked Kiolle's attack. The clash of metal against metal echoed as Kiolle dropped his sword.

The surroundings fell silent as the battle calmed down for a moment.

"Ha... This is something. I didn't anticipate this."

The Warden looked at the knight who had surrendered and gave a grim smile.

"So there is a knight like you who knows what's practical in the honorable Imperial Knights. I wouldn't have wanted to die for such a person either. I understand."

" ... "

"You said spare me... I can spare you. But I can't show sympathy without any compensation. Why should I spare you when I could kill both of you?"

"Anything... I'll do anything. I'll keep the secrets."

"Paviel, you..."

Kiollé's eyes twitched in disbelief. However, the subordinate knight didn't look back at him, just kept his head bowed.

The Warden seemed greatly amused by this and burst into hearty laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha... This is truly a sight to behold. Noble knights who vowed to serve God and pledge loyalty betraying each other... Especially when one is a thorn in the side like Diarca."

"..."

Yuder saw the Warden move his snake-like thin eyes and give a subtle signal to his subordinates who were lined up around him. He then continued nonchalantly.

"Does anyone know that you knights came here?"

"Eight other knights who came here with us know. But they won't come looking for us."

"Why?"

At the Warden's question, the subordinate knight clenched his lips with an enraged expression.