

Turning 82

Chapter 82

Nahan gently closed and opened his hand, his figure shifting to resemble one of the unconscious individuals. Yuder couldn't see his own appearance, but he looked down at his body, which seemed to be wearing unfamiliar clothes, and realized that the illusion ability had been properly applied.

They pocketed the personal items of the unconscious ones and entered the cave with their water containers. The outside was so dense that it seemed impossible to see an inch ahead, but unexpectedly, it was not so dark inside.

Following an obviously artificially carved path, they were taken aback as someone suddenly stuck out his face from within. It was a man they hadn't met before.

"Huh? Who are you guys? Did you already return from fetching water?"

Yuder didn't respond immediately. Neither did Nahan. Seeing this, the man's face twisted into an annoyed expression.

"Ah, I see. You didn't even get water and just came back smoking your pipes? You're caught now. Today, I can finally show the Warden how useless you guys are! Hand over your water container! Show it to me!"

The man rolled up his sleeves and confidently approached them. Yuder subtly used his power to fill the empty water containers that he and Nahan were holding in a flash.

If Nahan had stumbled due to the suddenly heavy water container, they would have been immediately exposed. However, Nahan merely glanced at Yuder once, standing firm without any significant movement.

"I've disliked you since you were selected just because you could use some insignificant ability. What do you think is so great about you guys? You're no different from the guys locked up in there! All of you are nothing but liars...!"

The man, who was coming towards them all fired up, fell silent instantly when he saw the water container filled to the brim.

"...Huh?"

"Can we go now?"

In the brief moment the man was stupefied, Yuder quickly responded in a low, indifferent voice.

"Uh... uh huh. How did you manage to get water in such a short time..."

"Let's go."

Leaving the shocked man behind, Yuder emptied the water from the container again. Similar incidents occurred with several others, but no one was able to discern their disguises.

Through the disgusted gazes of the others, Yuder was able to glean some information about this place.

Inside this cave, several Awakeners were imprisoned. The person they called the Warden was said to be 'selecting' these Awakeners. The individuals Yuder and Nahan were disguised as were Awakeners specially employed to protect the Warden who was doing dangerous things.

'Just based on the revealed information, it's clear this isn't an ordinary place.'

Although he didn't show it, Yuder was internally astonished. He already knew in his previous life that there were nobles who used the Awakeners like slaves.

However, that was considered akin to buying skilled slaves from other countries, hence it was treated as private affairs of the high-ups that couldn't be infringed upon.

In this era, where only about two years had passed since the Awakeners had revealed themselves to the world, he had never heard of a family capturing Awakeners on such a large scale.

'Selection, huh? What are they planning to do with the selected Awakeners? In my previous life, the Apeto family was consistently loyal to the emperor and never caused any major incidents related to the Awakeners...'

Could the Apeto family really have been involved in something like this? Yuder furrowed his brows, recalling Nahan's words, 'In the East, it's common for Awakeners to be falsely accused and disappear after being arrested'.

If those who had been caught experienced a similar ordeal, it meant that at least two noble families in the eastern region were engaging in such activities, targeting the Awakeners.

'I wonder if Kishiar was aware of this.'

Had he known, given his nature, he would have certainly mentioned it before sending Yuder. Yuder, who had lived several years longer than Kishiar, hadn't known about such occurrences in his previous life, indicating there was a high chance that Kishiar too hadn't known. This led to a certain speculation.

'Even though they had kidnapped the Awakeners, either their intended purposes hadn't been achieved, or perhaps they were achieved sooner than expected, and they felt no need to maintain these places any longer, quickly closing them down.'

In his previous life, the missions Yuder had been directly assigned were nearly always the most dangerous, involving handling monstrous threats or the assassination and capture of rebels.

After becoming the Cavalry Commander, the Emperor told Yuder not to take interest in anything other than what he was specifically ordered to, and strictly prohibited him from taking independent action without permission.

Even if not for that command, Yuder hadn't had the leeway to divert his attention elsewhere, busy as he was with managing the Cavalry, the most dangerous group on the continent.

It was only when several years had passed since his rise to the position of Commander and he started doubting whether there might be some hidden motive behind the events happening all around the world, that he was able to shift his focus outward.

In the blind spots he hadn't had a chance to look into in his previous life, what were they trying to achieve by doing such things?

"...A fork in the path."

Nahan spoke quietly to Yuder, who was deep in thought while walking. True to his word, there was a fork in the path before them. According to the information given by those they had encountered before, the left path led to a prison, while the right led to the space where the Warden and others stayed.

"To the left."

Yuder promptly decided the direction, feeling around the cave floor and picking up a few pebbles to put in his pocket.

The path leading to the prison was steep and exceptionally winding. They hadn't placed many magic stones to provide light, so it was extremely dark. They had to feel their way along the wall to move forward.

"Who goes there?"

After walking for a while, they came across three Awakeners sitting in the middle of the path. Recognizing them as the underlings of the Warden they had encountered earlier, Yuder felt dismayed.

'They must know the owners of these disguises... they'll discover us soon.'

If they were discovered, they could knock them out, but dealing with Awakeners was tricky. If they didn't succeed in one hit, a ruckus could arise.

As Yuder was contemplating throwing a stone from his pocket, the seated Awakeners spoke with bored expressions.

"Number 2, Number 4. It's not time for shift change yet, why are you here early? And what's with that water container?"

"You said you were going out for a smoke. Don't tell me that red-haired old man started a fight again?"

'These guys... don't they call each other by name? Lucky.'

Yuder, releasing his grip on the tightly held water container, calmly opened his mouth.

"Well, something like that."

"I knew it. That crazy old man. Does he think we're here because we like it? I'd have killed him before he got me in here."

"The conditions are terrible. Why on a day like today, after fighting to the death, without proper treatment, we're trapped in this sunless underground?"

"Exactly, my wounded arm still hurts."

As if they had been waiting to speak, the three of them started to argue at the same time. Then, from the dark corridor, there were a few small sounds like a suppressed groan of a beast. The Awakeners continued talking, not paying any attention, but Yuder felt the sound was very unsettling.

"What's that noise, Number 3?"

"I'm Number 1. Number 3 is with the Warden."

Yuder had randomly picked a number to draw the others' attention to his question, but unfortunately, he called for someone who wasn't present. Yuder quickly changed his approach.

"Sorry, I have a condition where I can't see well in the dark. What's that noise, Number 1?"

"It's the whimpering of the young man from the noble family we caught earlier. But did you have such a condition?"

'Ah, so I'm Number 2.' Yuder nodded his head, trying to remember the nickname of his character.

"Yes, I mentioned it before. Try to remember. So, has he been like this since then?"

"Yeah. It's so annoying. Doesn't that boy know when to give up? He should save his energy, since he's going to die anyway. Among those trapped here, he's probably the worst."

"If it weren't for the Warden's orders, I would have shut him up."

Kiolle da Diarca seemed to attract no sympathy even for a stranger he had just met.

'Impressive if nothing else.'

Thanks to the continuous, grim, and desperate whimpering of Kiolle, the atmosphere among the Awakeners became more relaxed.

The three Awakeners seemed to have stopped doubting Yuder and Nahan. Yuder, while casually agreeing with their trivial chat, pointed towards the inside as if he found something.

"Wait, is that guy...?"

"Huh? ...Eek!"

"What...Ugh!"

Although his voice lacked any surprise, fortunately, the Awakeners fell for it. As they turned their heads in surprise, three stones flew and hit the back of their heads.

Looking down at the three Awakeners who fell without making a sound, Yuder signaled to Nahan who had been quietly standing.

"Number 4. Search their pockets quickly."

"I'm Number 4?"

"I'm Number 2, so you must be Number 4."

Even though Nahan looked as if he might say something, he didn't utter a word. He kneeled down and rummaged through the pockets of the Awakeners, finding a bundle of keys. Yuder took them and moved forward decisively.

Not long after, several small rooms with solid iron doors appeared. They were designed with iron bars at the top to allow looking inside.