

Turning 83

Chapter 83

"Devran Hartude. Is Devran Hartude here?"

"..."

Even after the voice echoed, the prison remained eerily quiet. Even Kiolle's groans had subsided, intensifying the grim atmosphere.

"Devran Hartude. I am a Cavalry member here to rescue you. The Commander has ordered me to bring you. If you're here, answer."

Having said that, Yuder quietly counted in his mind. He planned to open all the doors at once if there was no response after counting to a hundred.

Fortunately, around the count of ten, someone from inside a cell drew a ragged breath and spoke.

"Are, really, Cavalry?"

Suspicion and trembling could be felt from the exhausted voice. Yuder moved toward the cell where the voice originated, fumbling with a bunch of keys.

"Devran. Is that really you?"

Before inserting the key, he asked for final confirmation. A dark shadow within the cell sluggishly stirred. With a voice that sounded strangled, as if at the brink of death, the figure managed to speak.

"... Yes. I am, Dev, ran."

Yuder glanced back at Nahan and gave a subtle nod. The man, understanding the signal to disable the illusion ability, immediately moved his hand to dispel the power.

Yuder began to unlock the door with the keys he held. Fortunately, on the third attempt, the lock clicked open with a metallic sound.

The cell was narrow and filthy. Amidst the stench of blood and waste, a single person was sitting. Yuder halted when he saw the man's hands and feet bound by iron chains that looped through two rings on the upper part of the wall, constricting his neck.

Yuder was well aware of this method of binding. The victim's hands and feet were stretched painfully until the chain around the neck loosened just enough, only to strangle the victim if they relaxed even slightly.

It was one of the methods used on the most dangerous criminals. Yuder, having experienced it in his past life, knew all too well the malicious agony it inflicted.

A criminal bound this way couldn't even sleep properly. If they relaxed their strained limbs due to fatigue, they would be strangled to death.

The reason why most people trapped in this prison could barely make a noise was that they were all bound in the same way. Yuder grimaced at the scene more brutal than he expected and drew the practice sword attached to his waist.

"It's, impossible. This chain isn't, ordinary..."

Devran tried to articulate that ordinary strength wouldn't be able to break the chain, but Yuder's sword touched the chain and cut it faster than he could finish.

With a clanging sound, his arms lost their strength and fell to the ground. The chain around his neck lost its purpose. Devran managed to gasp, his suppressed cough exploding out.

"Cough, cough!"

Yuder conjured up some light to illuminate the cell further. He wanted to get a clearer look at Devran's face.

"Devran. Can you see my face?"

"I, I can. Yuder, of the, Shin...."

Devran indicated that he had managed to recognize Yuder, despite his ragged, labored breaths. His condition was grim, marred by blood and filth, yet no signs of permanent damage or broken bones were visible. Whoever had handled Devran had not intended to kill him; this much had become clear.

"Yes, your mind seems to be intact, that's good. Now tell me, what happened to you?"

"..."

At those words, Devran wore a deeply pained expression. His hand, full of wounds, but once likely robust, clutched at the hem of Yuder's garment. Between his disheveled hair, an anger smoldered in his uniquely brown eyes.

"...I was, tricked. It was, a trap, from the start....."

Tricked? By whom?

Yuder knelt on one knee, directly meeting Devran's gaze.

"By whom?"

"They tried, to sell off, Dermilla, while I was away. So, I...!"

"Hold on. It's hard to understand you. Try to answer concisely."

Yuder gently patted Devran's shoulder, who was unable to hide his agitation even as he was coughing. Underneath his calm voice, Devran shot a resentful glance at him but quickly quieted down when Yuder created a small ball of water in mid-air.

"Drink this first."

"...Thank you."

After swallowing the ball of water that Yuder had placed in his mouth, Devran took a moment to catch his breath. His eyes became markedly calmer. Only then did Yuder recognize that Devran was ready for a proper conversation and calmly asked,

"Start from when you went on leave. What happened?"

"...Alright. After getting leave, I went straight to my hometown."

Devran's story could be summed up as follows: He had not informed his family beforehand about his leave, so upon his arrival, he noticed a strange atmosphere among the surprised villagers. The reason became clear once he reached his home.

'Devran, my boy! The Lord has ordered your sister, Dermilla, to marry a man from the neighboring village!'

His father, whose one leg had been impaired due to an accident from his youth, clung to Devran, shedding tears.

'The man she's supposed to marry is a widowed blacksmith known for his rough temper, who's killed two people! When Dermilla resisted, he locked her up in the castle. They say they'll keep her until the wedding day and then send her off. What are we to do?'

Devran felt his world darken. What he had feared had finally come to pass.

His father didn't know, but his younger sister had fallen in love with Zachlis, the Lord's eldest son, a long time ago. However, Zachlis, knowing his father would never approve of his marriage to a commoner, had enlisted in a Knight Order far away to avoid his father's watchful eyes.

Upon settling there, he had promised to come back for Dermilla, a promise she had shared with Devran. He remembered the anger he felt when he heard this.

That's why Devran was overjoyed when he was accepted into the Cavalry, even if it meant his awakened powers were known and he had to endure the scorn from his village. He had no trust in nobles; he only wanted to get his family out as soon as the opportunity arose.

In that process, he considered the worst-case scenario to be Zachlis pressuring the Lord to prevent him from leaving. But he had not anticipated things would turn sour this quickly.

What would have happened if he hadn't taken his leave? He felt suffocated.

"Sir Zachlis? Is he not in the village at present?"

"Why him? He, of course, must still be with the knight order..."

There was no mistaking it: somehow, the relationship between the Lord's eldest son and the commoner girl had been discovered. Despite not knowing why, seeing the Lord maliciously trying to send Dermilla to the neighboring village made it clear.

Could it be that the Lord just wanted to get rid of Dermilla? It might be early, but what if he went to him and asked if they could leave for the capital together with their family?

The request that he had already intended to make had merely been expedited, and it was not like the Lord wanted to have a dispute with him, and made a foe of the Cavalry.

Devran had faith in the presence of the Cavalry behind him and the name of the Duke of Peletta, Kishiar La Orr.

"I went to the castle of the Lord. Though the Lord himself wouldn't meet me because he was unwell, his eldest daughter, Zupiel, who came to inherit the title, thought it would be better to listen to me. Thanks to her, I was able to return home safely with Dermilla. I decided to take my father and Dermilla to the capital when my vacation ended. But that night... the Lord called for me again."

He had a bad feeling about it. Devran told his father and sister not to leave the house and headed alone for the Lord's castle. However, what he faced upon entering the castle was a fierce fire, as if to swallow the entire castle.

"It was obvious at a glance that it wasn't an ordinary fire. There was an Awakener who could wield fire there that day."

Devran not only had the ability to summon fire, but also to control an existing one to some extent. However, no matter how hard he tried, the fire spread uncontrollably, almost as if it had a will of its own.

He was captured by the villagers who, misunderstanding him as the culprit, rushed at him in anger. He was thrown into prison, confused and worried about his father and sister.

"The next day, Zakail, the Lord's youngest son, returned and declared me guilty. And then, I..."

After being beaten to near-death in prison, Devran was buried alive near the Rock of Death, where prisoners were buried, with a sack over his face, at a time when he couldn't tell if it was day or night. When he woke up, he was here.

'Are you awake? Let's have a chat now.'

A strange man greeted the conscious Devran. He introduced himself as one who followed the 'High One.'

'I was doing some tedious work before you showed up.'

Through the man and his subordinates, Devran learned a lot. They were expanding the power of the Duke of Apeto secretly in the East, where the support of the Diarca ducal family was strong.

They had been attending to the request of a 'Contractor' who had agreed to support them and joined hands, when Devran suddenly appeared.

'You're kind of special among all the Awakeners. It's a stroke of luck, being able to capture the confidant of the cunning Duke Peletta.'

The man wanted to extract information about the Cavalry and Duke Peletta from Devran. But Devran never opened his mouth.

The Cavalry was the place that had saved his life, and the Emperor and Commander Kishiar were the ones who had acknowledged him for the first time. He had lived in contempt as a commoner, but he vowed never to betray.

