

Turning 97

Chapter 97

"Ugh... What... what is this...."

At the same time Nahan's body violently collided with the wall, Kiolle managed to somewhat pull herself out of the illusion and regain consciousness. Groaning softly, she shook his head.

"Why does my arm hurt so... No, why... why am I covered in dirt...? What is this!"

"That's not the problem. If you've regained your senses, run quickly!"

The boy, Nahan's companion, started running toward him. Yuder grabbed Kiolle, who had thankfully recovered enough to maintain a good speed, and they both sprinted.

Without looking back, they fled from the cave. Outside, the day was faintly fading as the sun began to dip behind the mountains.

"We... we finally made it out... But what the hell just happened? What was that..."

"Be quiet."

Fighting a dizzying wave of vertigo, Yuder moved forward. This was where they had tied up and hidden two mercenary Awakeners before entering the cave.

For better or worse, the only things left were the loosened gags and ropes. No one remained.

'Hopefully, they were discovered by Devran's group, took a beating, and ran....'

"What... what's this rope for?"

Kiolle exclaimed at the sight of the gags and pieces of rope. Yuder didn't respond, just kept walking. His arm throbbed incessantly. The pain from the knife wound paled in comparison to the throbbing sensation welling up from his puncture wound.

Yet he could endure that much pain. Currently, Yuder's mind was filled with questions about Nahan's unexpectedly powerful abilities and his true identity.

'Perhaps Nahan is more important than even Apeto Family. Why didn't such a conspicuous person appear in my past life? Did he continually hide himself with his illusionary abilities? Or perhaps....'

"That one hurt a bit."

At that moment, an unbelievable voice came from ahead. Yuder turned his head, following Kiolle's wide-eyed gaze.

Incredibly, Nahan and the small boy who were undoubtedly left behind in the cave, as well as the still dazed mercenary Awakeners, all stood there.

'Did I mistakenly think that what I left behind was an illusion?'

For a moment, that doubt sprouted in his mind, but Yuder soon realized it was not the case. Blood was seeping from a cut on Nahan's forehead, proving that the collision was real. But how could they have gotten here faster than Yuder and Kiolle?

"It seems my power even surprises a great warrior like you."

Nahan smirked at Yuder's expression.

"It's simple. I can use my power more deeply than usual on a few targets I choose for a certain amount of time. The duration is short, but the effect is certain."

"..."

"The more you doubt and get confused, the deeper you fall into the illusion. A beautiful illusion that surpasses even the senses in reality. Just like now, when you think we've teleported, but we actually just walked past you."

A cold smile crossed Nahan's face. After a moment of silence, Yuder asked,

"Why are you bothering to explain all this?"

"Because it helps to amplify the doubt. I have no choice but to do my best to incapacitate someone who managed to break even a powerful illusion that most people couldn't endure. It's quite beneficial."

If what he had said was true, Yuder, who had been made a fool of his sense of time and space, was clearly heavily eroded by the power of that profound illusion.

What would happen when he was completely consumed by that ability? The face of Kishiar he had seen in the illusion moments ago flashed across his mind.

"..."

Yuder sighed, feeling both of his hands, as if they had been sliced and speckled by a blade, throb simultaneously.

'No, let's not think too deeply. He must have said that hoping for this kind of reaction.'

Showing signs of being disturbed was the worst thing one could do when facing an Awakener who could directly influence one's mind.

Yuder breathed deeply and slightly rolled up his uniform sleeve. A very small red dot was visible on the inside of his left wrist, still bleeding. It was the seal he had imprinted when he made a pact with Kiolle earlier. After confirming its existence, he felt calm again.

'The fact that this remains means Kiolle is not dead, which means the guy next to me is not an illusion.'

There was no way the illusion would have chased him this far if Kiolle was already dead, using more of its illusionary ability on Yuder. Yuder turned his head towards Kiolle, who stood frozen, unable to utter a word.

His foolish expression somehow felt like the most certain evidence that he wasn't an illusion, and Yuder found his mind somewhat more at ease.

'I never thought I'd feel this way looking at his face.'

"Kiolle da Diarca."

"Why?"

Kiolle responded with a pale, scared face.

"Stay close behind me. The moment you separate, those bastards will kill you."

"Why would they want to kill me? Are they the ones who hold a grudge against Diarca?"

"No, it's just that they really want to kill you because you're such a piece of trash."

"What...?"

Kiolle gaped, his facial expression cycling through myriad feelings of astonishment, as he looked back and forth between Yuder and Nahan.

"Still, you're trying to protect me, right? Then I..."

"Of course I think you're trash too. I'm not protecting you because I like it, so just shut up and stay quiet."

Worried about any possible misunderstanding, Yuder made sure to speak clearly. Kiolle retreated slowly with a somewhat shocked expression. Thankfully, after writing the vow, he seemed to obey orders a bit quicker.

'Whether Nahan really used the deep illusion ability or not, I can't afford to waste more time here.'

If it wasn't for the spreading speck on his right hand, Yuder would have been able to hold out until Nahan's 'time limit' is over and capture them all here.

But that wasn't possible now. The pain spreading up his arm was certainly abnormal, indicating that the spot was moving upward. If this continued and it somehow interfered with his ability, it was clear what Nahan, who was quick to notice, would do.

"You're not giving up till the end, brother? How do you plan to escape my ability? Especially when you have no one to help you."

Nahan tilted his head leisurely, as if watching the rebellion of a cornered prey.

"No matter how powerful an ability you have, if your sense of reality is breaking down, hitting me will become more and more difficult. An attack that can't hit is just a waste of power."

He muttered, gently patting the head of the boy standing next to him.

"Just admit it now. Your head is getting increasingly dizzy and your body heavy, isn't it exhausting just to bear it? You've been looking quite strained since a while ago."

As soon as Yuder heard his words, as if some magical incantation was spoken, his limbs grew heavier and his head began to spin again. He wondered if Nahan had noticed something amiss with his arm, but that didn't seem likely. Nonetheless, it was clear his condition was gradually deviating from normal.

Yuder squinted as he felt an intensifying pain that felt like his entire shoulder was pulling downwards, stretching beyond his right elbow.

"Well... there's no need, really, to confirm it."

"What do you mean by that?"

"This is what I mean."

Nahan's expression subtly changed, as if he had sensed something. In response, Yuder clenched his fist instead of answering, drawing on all his strength.

Suddenly, a massive pillar of fire erupted in front of Yuder. He felt the scream of Kiolle from behind him, accompanied by a deafening explosion.

"Aargh!"

At the same time, Yuder's right arm stiffened due to the most intense pain he'd ever experienced. The pain was so intense that it made him feel as if his vision was briefly whitening.

Regardless of whether Kiolle was sprawled out and screaming, the flames summoned by Yuder surely incinerated the surroundings, spreading higher, ever higher. The vast and overpowering flames, which obscured the figures of Nahan and others in the distance, looked like a protective wall for Yuder.

And when that fire eventually penetrated even the clouds and stretched high into the sky, Yuder felt his previously disoriented consciousness clear up, along with a sensation as if the opaque wall shielding him was breaking down, and the surrounding air became sharp.

It was a sight similar to when he first met Nahan and he had dispelled the illusion cast over the vast area.

'So my hunch was correct after all.'

Nahan had continued to skillfully speak as if he had been using profound abilities solely on Yuder, but this wouldn't explain why Kiolle also continued to be under the same influence. However, Yuder remembered the fact that Nahan's ability initially affected a specific range.

'There were many Awakeners before who could use more advanced abilities than their original ones under certain conditions. But it's difficult to think that these conditions are exactly as Nahan himself described.'

If Nahan's advanced ability was not affecting a certain target as he claimed, but instead adjusting the range more freely than usual, everything would be explained.

And for any ability that influences a specified range, the best way to break it is to shatter everything with an overwhelming power from within.

That was something Yuder did best.

'He must have felt the area of the illusion ability that had been covering us breaking, and he should realize there's no chance of winning since from that distance others could clearly see...'

Then the only choice left was to run. Yuder believed that even in such a situation, he wouldn't be so obstinate as to insist on killing Kiolle.

Just then, the ground shook violently and Kiolle screamed even louder.