

## Turning 98

### Chapter 98

'It's a shame that I couldn't capture him and discern his identity, but it won't be the last chance.'

Nahan. As Yuder whispered this name, he recalled the man who exuded such a dangerously overwhelming aura. It was rare to remember a stranger one had met only once, but that man was vividly etched in his mind.

'But... considering that I am trembling all the way up to my shoulders... I'm worried about how Kishiar will react.'

He wasn't sure if it was his imagination, but it seemed as if he could hear his name being called from a distance. Yuder gradually extinguished the column of fire that had blazed hot enough to scorch his entire body.

The forest, surprisingly pristine for a place where a massive fire had raged for quite a while, revealed itself. Kiolle, who had been crouching with his head down, slowly lifted his head and looked perplexed at the deserted scenery.

"Where did they go, those guys...?"

Unlike Kiolle who was simply scanning the area, Yuder looked down at the few strange traces left on the ground. Seeing the ground seemingly forced open then covered again, he had an idea of the method Nahan and the boy might have used to escape.

'A kid who can make friends, huh? I guess his friends aren't human.'

Among the countless monsters that suddenly appeared on the continent, some had been accepted as unique native creatures, living almost harmlessly and hidden for a long time. The Rumvet, a monster that could always be found by digging deeply into any mountain, was one of them.

The Rumvet, shaped like a giant worm, was harmless to humans as it only burrowed and lived underground. Yuder, through his long experience of monster extermination missions, knew several habits of the Rumvet.

One of them was that it would block the entrance from the inside after burrowing into a tunnel, secreting a fluid that hardened the soil. Seeing the moist ground around him emitting a faint stinging smell, he was certain that a Rumvet had indeed burrowed out of the ground and returned not long ago.

The ability to summon and control a monster hidden deep underground as if it were a friend was definitely a power worth risking danger to rescue for someone like Nahan.

The earth's intense shaking after the creation of the fire pillar must have been due to that.

'A monster-controlling Awakener... While it wasn't unheard of in my previous life, I've heard it's quite difficult to control a large monster like a Rumvet.'

If he had the power to summon and control a giant monster so silently, why didn't he escape immediately while he was imprisoned? Was there a problem with using his ability?

Remembering the silent boy, Yuder decided to also keep the boy's face in mind along with Nahan.

"Yuder, Yuder!..." At that moment, the urgent voices calling out Yuder's name were indeed real this time. They were the voices of Gakane, Jimmy, and Devran.

He had anticipated someone would rush over upon seeing the fire pillar, but he was a little surprised that they hadn't left this place yet.

'Did something else happen?'

But the first thing he felt upon hearing his comrades' voices was a strange and clear sense of relief.

"Yuder!"

Gakane was the first to appear. His face turned pale as soon as he saw Yuder standing with his left hand cut by a knife and bleeding. Gakane, who had run at full speed, carefully lifted Yuder's hand.

"My goodness, was it you who conjured that column of fire earlier? But what in the world... who inflicted such a wound on you?"

"I did."

"What?"

"Both the fire and the wound, I caused them myself."

"Yuder!"

As Yuder calmly responded, Gakane, doubting his own ears, stood in silence. Meanwhile, Jimmy, the second to emerge from the thicket, ran towards them with a worried look on his face but abruptly stopped upon noticing Kiolle, who was awkwardly standing in the rear.

"Uh...? That man... isn't he the knight from the Imperial Palace Knights? Why is he here? And in such a state..."

Hearing the cautious words of the boy, Gakane turned and finally noticed Kiolle, wearing an astonished expression.

"You are..."

"Uh, hem! Hem!"

Unable to discuss the events due to the vow he'd taken, Kiolle glanced at Yuder, coughing as if to prompt an explanation. The sight of him moments ago, terrified and prostrate on the ground, screaming, had long since vanished.

Even though he was covered in dirt, far from his usual noble appearance, Yuder chose not to comment.

"I rescued him from the ones who had taken Devran."

"What? So, did you get hurt trying to save this man?"

"...Somehow, yes."

"What? Yuder, you just said that you inflicted the wound on yourself. So, you hurt yourself to protect him? Why on earth?"

"What? Gakane, what do you mean?"

"Yuder said it himself."

"Does that mean..."

Before Yuder could even respond, both Gakane and Jimmy, who'd quickly exchanged a conversation, fixed their fierce gaze on Kiolle. Yuder opened his mouth, watching as Kiolle visibly stiffened in surprise.

"That's not it..."

"What's going on, Gakane, Jimmy? Don't leave me behind. I still find it hard to run."

Fortunately, Devran appeared at that moment, attracting everyone's attention.

"I saw a huge fire and thought something incredibly serious must have happened here, but it seems relatively peaceful. What happened?"

Meeting Devran for the first time in a few hours, Yuder noticed that his friend appeared much better, having changed into clean clothes and tended to his wounds.

"Yuder, where's that scarred guy who was with you? And who is this new person? What happened to those people in the cave you said you'd deal with?"

"It's a bit of a long story."

Thinking of Nahan, Yuder felt his relaxing nerves sharpen once again. He sighed softly, turning his head towards the direction of the cave. Considering the events that had transpired, he needed to return as soon as possible.

"Things got a bit complicated."

"...Complicated? You didn't let them escape, did you?"

Devran, who bore a grudge against the people of the Apeto family, asked with a grim expression.

"No. They're all dead."

"Dead? Did you kill them?"

"No."

"Then who..."

As Devran paused mid-sentence, both Gakane and Jimmy also wore strange expressions.

Looking at Yuder's unusually cold gaze, they inferred that the man who had vanished from here was likely the cause of the complication. Although they didn't know the specifics, it was clear that something significant had happened.

Gakane, sensing the sudden change in atmosphere, donned a smile and looked around before speaking.

"Alright, now that we've found Yuder, let's head down for some healing first. We can chat about the details on the way."

"But before that."

"Hmm?"

Gakane turned his head towards Yuder, who had raised his hand to interrupt.

"Why are you still here? I thought I clearly told you to evacuate and not return to the village."

"Ah... that's the thing. Zakail's brother came back and the situation changed. Do you remember? That guy who was said to be in a relationship with Devran's sister..."

"...He came back?"

"Yes. It seems Zakail tried to delay his return, but it actually sped up the man's arrival... Anyway, Zakail is locked up well. Considering we have injured, including Devran, it seemed better to rest and heal before leaving the village immediately..."

'So that's what happened.' Yuder, hearing Gakane's brief explanation, quickly inferred the unfolding situation. He nodded in response to the story that wasn't too far from his own assumptions.

"Got it. And, Devran."

"Hmm?"

"Did you see the two people who were tied up there while escaping?"

Devran nodded nonchalantly upon spotting the dropped gag and cord Yuder pointed to.

"Those guys? I saw them. When I came out, they were visible so I showed them some action and drove them out. Why do you ask?"

"No. It's fine. As long as they escaped alive, it's good."

It was fortunate amidst the misfortune that there were still people who could testify about what the Apeto family did here. They just needed to be found and apprehended.

Yuder finally let go of the tension in his trembling arm. As he turned his head, Kiolle, who had been nervously waiting behind him, stepped back with a start.

"Kiolle."

"W-What. You, earlier, you were in a state of emergency so I didn't point it out, but if you keep casually calling my name..."

Even while failing to hide his fear, he attempted to reassert his authority in front of the others, which almost appeared pitiful. Yuder ignored his words and continued.

"You use informal language with me too."

"I do! Our statuses are different, and I'm older, so where do you get the nerve...!"

Just then, a tingling sensation pulsed from the mark of contract inscribed on Yuder's wrist. It seemed Kiolle felt the same as he abruptly closed his mouth and clenched his teeth.

"...Do as you please!"

In the end, he spat out those words with a face full of humiliation before sharply turning his head away. Of course, it wasn't Yuder's business to know.

"I intend to. Anyway, those who wanted to kill you are gone now, and it seems you won't forget our agreement. So for now, you should just head back as you are."