

Turning 99

Chapter 99

"Return? In this state?"

Kiolle retorted in a voice thick with disbelief.

"How could I explain what happened here because of you? I have to speak of Paviel, who died..."

"That's for you to worry about. If word reaches my ear that there has been any suspicious movement from Diarca House in the vicinity of this place, then you'll find yourself sealed in a coffin, forever asleep."

Looking at Yuder who murmured ominously, a curse of eternal sleep and eventual death, anger flared in Kiolle's eyes once again. Yet, the fear of the overwhelming force he faced remained alive within him.

"..."

After glancing at the faces of Yuder and the people around him, Kiolle slowly stepped backward. Moments later, he turned and sprinted away without a backwards glance.

"He acted so arrogant, but he couldn't move at Yuder's words."

Jimmy sneered with a satisfied look on his face, watching Kiolle disappear. However, Gakane whispered something to Yuder with a somewhat uncomfortable expression.

"Is it okay to let him go just like that? If he talks nonsense about us after he returns, we might be challenged by Diarca House."

"No need to worry about it. He made an oath to keep his mouth shut in exchange for his life."

"An oath? You managed that in such a short time? Well... I trust you've handled it, Yuder."

Nodding in acceptance, Gakane's gaze then fell upon Yuder's arm.

"It seems like you're still bleeding. Are you feeling dizzy? Let's get moving."

"Yeah, let's go. If a person loses too much blood, they could faint."

Yuder gave one last glance towards the cave entrance before heading down the mountain with his comrades. During the descent, he explained briefly about what had transpired in the cave. For a while, the three companions remained silent, apparently shocked.

Jimmy couldn't comprehend Nahan's strange actions, Gakane deeply regretted not being at Yuder's side, and Devran was chilled by the words hinting that deeper darkness might be hidden behind the heinous acts committed by the Apeto family, targeting the Awakeners.

However, they all agreed on one thing: they needed to report everything to Kishiar as soon as possible.

"You are Yuder Aile, the assistant to the Commander of the cavalry, aren't you? I've heard about you from the others."

Upon his return to Hartan, Yuder immediately met with Zakail's brother, Zachlis. His physical condition wasn't the best, but it was tolerable considering the countless severe injuries he'd experienced in his previous life.

Compared to then, when he could only receive treatment after reporting to the Emperor despite his serious injuries, he was relatively at ease. Currently, he sat comfortably, receiving treatment for a sword wound while having a conversation with Zachlis.

Furthermore, Zachlis, unlike Zakail, was a man he could easily converse with.

"I'll get straight to the point. I love Dermilla, and I want her brother Devran to fare well as he is her family. I will do whatever it takes to achieve that."

"Does that mean, unlike the late lord, you won't support Diarca House?"

When Yuder asked directly, without any sugarcoating, Zachlis' eyes widened slightly before he nodded with a resolute look filling his good-natured face.

"Yes."

This word was, in effect, Zachlis declaring that he could support the Cavalry and behind them, Duke Peletta Kishiar, and even further, the Emperor. If things were as they originally were, a single knight making such a statement wouldn't have been particularly interesting. But now, things were different.

Zachlis Hartan was in a position to become the Lord of Hartan if he so wished. Even though Hartan was a small fief, it was undeniably one of the traditional and long-standing noble families of the East.

Planting someone on his side at the center of the Eastern power base that supported the Diarca family wouldn't be a bad story for Kishiar or the Emperor.

Moreover, if Zachlis were to become their ally, they could proceed with addressing the matter of Zakail and Apeto's collusion, and the issues caused by the Apeto family in the East, much more swiftly and easily.

Having finished his calculations, Yuder nodded and met Zachlis' gaze directly.

"I understand. I will certainly convey your thoughts to our Commander. After we leave, the Commander will contact you directly. Until then, it would be best if you maintain a position no different from your previous Lord on the surface."

In Yuder's words, implying that Zachlis should maintain a friendly demeanor towards the Diarca Duchy until contacted by Kishiar, Zachlis responded with a faint smile.

"Understood. Let's keep Zakail from coming out until then. If I find the two Awakeners who escaped as you mentioned, I will contact you."

Yuder had asked Zachlis to search for the two mercenary Awakeners who had been beaten by Devran and had fled, and to monitor the vicinity of the cave where they had been hiding. Since everyone there had either died or fled, it was certain that the Apeto family would notice something amiss and start an investigation. They needed to find the escaped mercenaries before they did.

"Um... I've finished treating the wound on your left hand, but do you have any other injuries?"

Noticing that their conversation was about to wrap up, the physician cautiously interjected. Yuder looked at his bandaged left forearm and shook his head.

"I'm fine."

"Your right hand seems to be uncomfortable, too..."

Was it that noticeable? Yuder tried to ignore his right arm, which was still throbbing intermittently, and shook his head.

"I'm not uncomfortable. I'm fine. Why don't you go?"

"Ah, okay..."

"I'm going to get up now. I hope you rest well tonight and have a safe journey back."

As the physician stood, Zachlis also rose. Yuder had already informed him that he would leave quietly early in the morning, so there was no need for formalities.

After they had left, Yuder was alone in the bedroom. Since he had sent everyone else out on the pretext of talking with Zachlis, this was his only chance to check how far the spots on his right arm had spread.

Yuder quickly removed his gloves and the top of his uniform and unbuttoned the undershirt he had worn underneath.

"This is..."

He had expected it, but the sight revealed under his clothes was absolutely grim. From the tips of his right fingers, over the elbow, all the way to the shoulder, his entire arm was completely stained with a dark purple hue. His forehead involuntarily wrinkled at the ominous color, resembling that of venom.

"It doesn't look good..."

However, there was one thing that differed from his expectations. The palm of his hand had turned a deep purple, almost black, while the area near his shoulder was a very pale violet. He wasn't sure why there was a color difference, but he made a mental note of it, since any piece of information might be useful.

As he clenched and then released his fist, his arm spasmed again. Without thinking, Yuder gritted his teeth and exhaled. That was when it happened.

"Hey, Yuder. Are you done talking with Sir Zachlis? Listen to me for a moment. My sister, Dermilla, said she won't be going to the capital tomorrow..."

"Yuder! I finished writing the report to send to the commander before we leave, could you check if there's anything missing...?"

"..."

The moment Devran and Gakane, who had burst open the door and poked their faces in, saw his body and fell into silence, Yuder felt a rare sense of awkwardness.

'I should have locked the door before undressing.'

In his hurry to check the spots, he had completely forgotten. How was he going to explain the unusual purple spot, where it came from, how it appeared, and to what extent? It felt more difficult than facing someone who killed indiscriminately.

"Guys, why haven't you said a word since we left until now? Did something happen while I was asleep?"

The group that left Hartan at dawn the next day kept riding without uttering a word until sunrise. Unlike the original plan, the other Awakeners they rescued from the cave of the Apeto family, as

well as Devran's family, remained in the village. Devran was the only addition to the group, so their speed was remarkably fast.

The reason was simple. It was because of the condition of Yuder's right arm, which was revealed last night.

Yuder tried his best to explain the reason for the spot to Gakane and Devran, but it was no use. After all, Yuder himself knew nothing more than speculation that the spot was caused by the energy from the red stone.

In the end, he roughly concluded that it had been like this since before he arrived here and that he had been trying to improve the condition with the methods that Commander Kishiar knew, as the treatment method was not yet clear.

Gakane and Devran were silent for a while. Devran seemed to look at Yuder, who had come to save him despite such a terrible condition of his arm, as if seeing him anew. Gakane, who quickly guessed what "before he came here" meant, wore a complex expression. Yuder discreetly made a gesture to Gakane, avoiding Devran, and slightly shook his head. It meant not to mention it directly, no matter what he guessed. Fortunately, Gakane understood him immediately. After that, they decided to minimize the group, as they were doing now.

'After all, since Sir Zachlis is in Hartan now, there's no need to worry about the families and others staying here for a while. But you... no way.'

'Yes, Yuder. I'll send the report as it is, so take a rest for now.'

Because he was feeling slightly feverish again, Jimmy, who had gone to sleep early by himself, wasn't too surprised when they said that only four of them would go to the capital first, contrary to the plan. However, it was odd that everyone continued to ride without saying a word even after sunrise.

"There was nothing, Jimmy."

Gakane forced a smile, but Jimmy wasn't easily placated.

"But... the way you keep leading on Yuder's horse, surely something must have happened, right? It's strange that everyone is so quiet, excluding me. It makes me feel left out."

Ironically, Yuder, who had injured both arms, found it uncomfortable to hold the reins as tightly as he used to. Yuder himself didn't mind, but it was due to the objections of the others against him riding alone.

'It's still better than riding together.'

In fact, Gakane had suggested not just weaving the reins together, but actually sharing a ride. However, the horses were already too weak to accommodate two large men.

"Jimmy. You should be more concerned about your health. How's your fever?"

In the end, Yuder spoke up. Jimmy's slight fever had not subsided even after sleep, and had instead worsened. Whether it was because he thought that the tense mission was finally over, or because of some other factor, the boy's cheeks and forehead were still notably red.

Before they set off, Yuder had felt Jimmy's forehead and had the feeling that the boy would soon truly manifest his second gender.