

Apocalypse 800

Chapter 800 - Going Back To HOPE Base

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?!" Aston barked, immediately shifting into a defensive stance the moment he saw Keith.

Still caught off guard, Keith stood frozen, blinking at Aston as his brain slowly processed the sudden confrontation.

"I said, who are you?!" Aston repeated, his tone sharper now. His eyes scanned Keith from head to toe, checking to see if the stranger was carrying anything from inside the villa. He couldn't possibly remember every face from the base, so seeing someone unfamiliar here could only mean one thing—an intruder, possibly trying to steal resources, especially since the villa was mostly unoccupied at the moment.

Keith instinctively raised both hands in a show of surrender, confusion written all over his face.

Just then, Kisha stepped in, casually draping an arm over Keith's shoulder. "Relax, Aston. He's not a thief—this is my brother," she said with a smile.

Realization dawned on Aston, and his expression instantly softened. "Ah, got it! Sorry about that," he said, slipping his dagger back into its sheath, visibly relieved.

"City Lord! You're finally back?!" Aston exclaimed with clear excitement.

Kisha and the others hadn't been gone long, but for Aston—who had been working tirelessly—it felt like an eternity. He had been so overwhelmed that he often wished he could clone himself just to keep up. Aside from managing the workshop and overseeing the construction of the new marketplace, he was also supervising the completion of a school for the children, a cemetery, the ongoing warrior recruitment, and countless other tasks.

To make matters more challenging, the Winters and their team had been away as well, leaving Aston to juggle everything on his own. So, when he saw Kisha—and right behind her, Mr. and Mrs. Winters along with the Patriarch—relief washed over him. Finally, the responsibilities he had been shouldering could be handed back to their original teams, and he wouldn't have to keep running the entire show alone.

Kisha led Aston, the Winters, and her family into the study, guiding them to take their seats so they could properly discuss all the ongoing projects.

"Aston, you've done an amazing job while we were away. I know how busy you've been—thank you," Kisha said warmly, handing him a glass of chamomile tea to soothe his throat.

She had been closely monitoring the progress of the HOPE Base and fully understood the immense effort Aston had poured into everything. A simple thank-you wasn't enough—he needed rest soon, or the burden might wear him down.

"There's no need to thank me, City Lord. I'm just doing what I can," Aston replied humbly, taking the tea with a small nod. Then, almost as an afterthought, he asked, "But are you the only ones returning? What about the others?"

He wasn't trying to press for details; it was a casual question. Still, Kisha didn't hesitate to answer.

"Duke is working on an important project back at the base," Kisha explained. "If it's successful, we'll be able to supply electricity to the entire HOPE Base. That would be a huge help. As for the rest of the Winters, they'll be back soon too—they're currently training with their brothers from the other territory. Once that's done, we'll have more reliable combatants at our disposal."

Aston's eyes lit up at the mention of electricity. The lack of it had been one of their biggest limitations, affecting productivity across the board. If power became available, many of their ongoing projects could be accelerated. With electricity, they could finally make full use of power tools like saws and drills, without constantly worrying about fuel consumption from the generators.

Right now, they had no choice but to use manual tools. For example, instead of a power saw, they used traditional hand saws—steel saws for cutting rebar and other metal materials needed to reinforce the foundation of the cemetery walls, or wood saws for the lumber used by carpenter artisan-type awakened ability users to craft furniture and tableware. These goods were then sold in the marketplace in exchange for crystal cores, helping to fuel the local economy and daily life.

After the greetings and introductions, Kisha formally introduced her family to Aston. Once the pleasantries were out of the way, they shifted their focus to the matter at hand—Aston's progress report on the projects he had been temporarily overseeing in the absence of the others.

He updated them on the construction of the school building, the recruitment of teachers, and then officially handed that responsibility back to Mrs. Winters, who was in charge of women and children's welfare at HOPE Base—making her the most suitable person for the job. The management of the marketplace construction was similarly reassigned back to Mr. Winters, and so on.

Once his report was complete, Aston led them outside to tour the project sites. Kisha wanted to see the progress for herself, and she was genuinely satisfied with what she saw. Everything was running smoothly.

The first batch of warriors had already been selected and moved into the new residential complex designated for combatants. The atmosphere among them and their families appeared harmonious and positive. Though electricity and running water were still unavailable, the residents didn't seem overly burdened. They had sufficient food and clean water, and water-type awakened ability users regularly distributed water for bathing and cleaning.

The medical center had also played an active role in promoting hygiene awareness, consistently reminding residents to prioritize cleanliness to prevent illness from spreading. Thanks to these efforts, the overall health of the base remained stable and well-managed.

Seeing the number of people inside the base, Keith and his grandparents, visiting the HOPE Base for the first time, were genuinely amazed. They followed Kisha and Aston as they moved through the area, taking in the lively and well-organized environment. Meanwhile, Mr. and Mrs. Winters, along with the Patriarch, had returned to their respective offices to resume work, determined not to fall behind on paperwork and project reviews.

Fortunately, before their departure, Kisha had granted them access to the HOPE Base's territory interface, allowing them to monitor ongoing tasks remotely. With the system in place, they had kept things running smoothly, ensuring that their staff fulfilled their responsibilities. Now, all that remained was to sign off on documents for official record-keeping.

"Sister, this base is pretty huge!" Keith exclaimed as he continued to look around in awe. When they reached the outer walls, he was particularly struck by the structure. The ten-meter-high walls weren't the tallest he had seen, but they exuded a sense of strength and security. It was clear to him why the residents of HOPE Base could live in peace—those walls, along with the soldiers stationed atop them, offered solid protection.

As they continued down the streets, they passed by several city patrols. Each patrol respectfully saluted Kisha, who returned the gesture with equal respect, a clear sign of the trust and discipline within the base's leadership and its people.

Compared to the hidden base—which was sparsely populated and mainly composed of combatants from Duke's private army—the HOPE Base was far more diverse. People from all walks of life and various age groups lived and worked there, which brought a sense of liveliness and warmth to the atmosphere. It felt vibrant rather than gloomy, filled with the hum of daily activity.