Fine Foe

Gabil gradually felt enraged as he grew Hippocout grass in the cave every day.

“Aiyi, speaking of Souka, rumor has it that she’s improved greatly as of late. Wouldn’t she one day become stronger than me if this continues?”

“That’s true, Souka-sama was already a capable warrior worthy of being the captain of Abil-sama’s elite bodyguards, and has since become a force to be reckoned with, next to Gabil-sama. With her training under Souei-sama, her current level of ability makes her barely recognizable compared to her past self.”

“Indeed. Her performance against the megalodon during the Charybdis crisis was fantastic. This and that may all be thanks to Souei-sama’s training.”

Gabil agreed with the words of his subordinates. They had no problem at all acknowledging the power of Souka, who is from the same clan as them, and thus simply expressed their opinion to each other.

“That’s gotta be the case. But it can’t be helped that we haven’t been put in more important roles. We are still outsiders and were once hostile towards Rimuru-sama. We should be grateful for being accepted as companions. Moreover, I’ve started to gain more interest in the cultivation of this Hippocout grass—”

“That’s true.”

“Indeed, indeed.”

Gabil basked in the support from his subordinates, then exclaimed what had been irking him: “—However! Souka not only received the important task of espionage, she is also gaining strength at the same time! This may not be good. If this is to continue, I may lose my dignity as her senior, further deepening my shame before her! Don’t you guys think that in order to be one’s senior, one has to be stronger as well?”

“Ga-Gabil-sama…”

“Perhaps you are thinking too much…”

“No, no. The monsters in this cave are unable to pose any threat at this point. If we continue to live like this, we may lose our sense of crisis awareness. My spear-work may also get dull over time. At least thanks to Rimuru-sama’s grace in dispatching Hakurou-dono as our instructor, our basic training and troop formation exercises are on point… But this is not nearly enough! Isn’t there anything else significant enough that the likes of us could be of use?! Especially in this town where you can’t shine if you are a master of none…”

Regardless, Hakurou’s weapon of choice is the sword, thus I have no way to improve my spear-work, other than working hard on my own, Gabil thought to himself.

“Indeed. Setting us aside, the monsters in the cave are hardly any threat to Gabil-sama…”

“Hn-hmm… Souka-sama receives Souei-sama’s abus—no, guidance and has been steadily improving. Nansou, Hokusou, Touka and Saika have been thriving as well. Presumably, what’s necessary is an opponent of similar strength, at least that’s what I think will work.”

“…Indeed, yes. My ability is undoubtedly a bit higher than yours. But, an opponent, hmm…”

These whispers and complaints swirled around Gabil’s party.

Meanwhile, someone was giving them a cold look. That would be Vesta. From his point of view, them bragging about the monsters in the cave being laughable, was proof enough that they were plenty strong.

And since they’ve already become this strong, what’s the point in pursuing more strength?

Plus, before that…

That nonsense can wait, could you guys start separating the Hippocout from the weeds instead…

Vesta thought to himself and sighed internally.

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Gabil’s party reignited their discussion during break time.

A man approached them while they discussed.

“Hu-Hu-Hu, I’ve heard of your complaints!”

It was Gobta. Vesta half-telling, half-complaining told Gobta about Gabil and their concerns during a meal.

“Oh-oh, Gobta-dono. I see you are able to get inside without even using the magic circle. It would seem your ability has grown quite a bit.”

“Of course! When spending time with that old man it’s inevitable, no matter how bad it is,” Gobta said with pride.

“So, what seems to be the issue?” Gabil asked. Gobta cut to the chase with his question: “I heard you were looking for a rival. Allow me to be Gabil-san’s opponent.”

“What!?” Gabil was shocked by this response, yet upon second thought, it didn’t seem to be such a bad proposal. Based on pure strength, Gabil was no doubt stronger, yet Gabil had always been defeated by Gobta so far. This could be attributed to Gobta’s wit and adept combat coordination, which Gabil himself lacked. Gabil was well aware of his shortcomings. He also received the advice that “having technique is far from being strong. At the point between life and death, the inability to react can be lethal” from Hakurou. Recalling this, Gabil thought to himself that he could leverage Gobta’s bizarre fighting style to help him improve his reaction speed.

“I understand now, that sounds like a great proposal, however, Gobta-dono’s job—”

“Just call me Gobta. I’m in this to learn how to wield a spear, and since I went through quite a lot of trouble to get this weapon from Rimuru-sama, I want to practice and master it as well.”

Gobta showed off his kodachi. Despite being a kodachi, it was a magical weapon that would transform into an ice spear upon being covered in water. Gobta was unable to master the way of using a spear himself, hence why he was looking for a training partner.

“Very well, Gobta-dono. No, Gobta, from today onward, I shall teach you the art of the spear, and in return—”

“I’ll be Gabil-san’s opponent and teach you the ways to fight dirty.”

“Hmm! I look forward to training with you, Gobta.”

“The feeling is mutual!”

With a firm handshake, a new friendship was born. One that would develop into a secret, competitive relationship.

All the while Vesta shot an ice-cold look towards the two from a distance.

— Gabil-dono is such a simple man. And what in the world is “the ways of fighting dirty” — his eyes were burning with a desire to argue…

But Vesta who had since learnt to read the air remained silent on the matter. Among the three, there is no doubt that Vesta is the one who had matured the most.