

Turning 101

Chapter 101

As Yuder lowered his arm, Kishiar, who had risen from his place, approached and deftly unbuttoned Yuder's uniform and even the inner shirt without hesitation.

Feeling a touch that was unusually practiced for a prince who rarely dressed himself, Yuder felt slightly strange.

It wasn't that he had never undressed in front of someone or been undressed, but he realized that this was the first time someone else had undressed him in this manner.

What's more, the person doing it was Kishiar La Orr. Despite spending countless nights with him in his previous life, it was an unfamiliar experience he had never encountered.

"Done."

With the last button undone, Kishiar stepped back nonchalantly, and a faint fragrance wafted from him. It was a subtle scent, different from the perfume he had given off when Yuder had come here to decide whether to go to the Shin or Sul Division.

Yuder was momentarily mesmerized by the scent, then shook his head and opened his mouth.

"You are... adept at dressing and undressing."

"Well, yes. I think everyone would agree that I'm probably the prince who can unbutton and button up the fastest in the thousand-year history of the Orr Empire."

"Did you practice?"

"Practice, should I say..."

Kishiar, about to answer, faded his words for a moment and slightly lifted one corner of his mouth, only to lower it again soon.

"Well, that's not the most important issue right now. Now, show me how much you've burned."

Yuder slowly took off his shirt and gloves, looking at his right arm from which a dull pain was emerging. Kishiar's sharp gaze went towards the violet spot spreading across the bandaged left forearm and shoulder.

"... It's hard to even call it spot at this point."

As he watched the color of the spot darken almost to black, Kishiar murmured softly. His voice was heavier than usual.

"Is it still hurting? Answer truthfully, regardless of whether it's bearable or not."

As if he had guessed what Yuder would answer by his expression, Kishiar quickly added to his question. Yuder closed his mouth hesitantly, then opened it again. It felt as if his thoughts had been read because he was about to answer exactly as Kishiar had predicted if he hadn't added that comment.

"It hurts."

"To what extent?"

Kishiar asked back, like a doctor questioning a patient.

"As you can see, it's not severe enough to interfere with conversation... but occasionally, it hurts as if I've been struck by lightning."

"Occasionally, you say? Does that mean it's periodic or..."

"It's intermittent. I'm not sure what triggers the sudden increase in pain."

"Intermittent, huh."

As Kishiar muttered to himself, lost in thought, he tapped his fingers against his knee. At that moment, his faithful adjutant appeared, carrying several items, and the conversation between the two was temporarily put on hold.

'That's... a Purification Stone and a holy seal used in the temple? And there's more.'

What Nathan had brought were various tools used by the priests of the Temple of the Sun God. Most of them were used for purification, but there were also items used for healing or enhancing divine power. As he carefully piled the items on the table to prevent them from collapsing, Kishiar picked up one of the Purification Stones as if he had been waiting.

The Purification Stone was known to be particularly good at cleansing impurities. It was created by imbuing a transparent magic stone, known for its cleansing properties, with a hint of divine power. Most of them had a white hue, with the cloudiness, resembling milk diluted in water, indicating an inferior quality product. The clearer and more transparent the white light it emitted, the more superior the stone was considered to be.

And, of course, the Purification Stone in Kishiar's hand was a superior product, shining like a top-grade gemstone.

'Even if they didn't know, a Purification Stone of that quality would have the same value as a chunk of gold of the same weight.'

It was impressive that Nathan had managed to acquire enough to fill the table in such a short amount of time, but it was equally astonishing that Kishiar had paid the price for them.

Yuder was genuinely surprised by the fact that Kishiar had prepared so much for his treatment.

"As soon as I received the letter, I ordered everything that could help with cleansing and healing from the temple. It seemed difficult to solve with my power alone," Kishiar quietly explained, noticing Yuder's gaze fixed on the Purification Stone.

"It seems... quite expensive."

"Compared to the burden of using my strength directly, it's cheap."

"Wouldn't it have been easier to kidnap a priest?"

"One must be cautious when increasing the number of those who know a secret."

In Kishiar's words, Yuder realized that he did not see the disclosure of his secret to Gakane and Devran positively.

"...I had no choice."

"I know. I trust that Gakane Bolunwald and Devran Hartude aren't ones to speak easily."

However, not everyone would be like that. Kishiar's red eyes silently conveyed such meaning.

"I don't intend to continue this way. There is a need to hear the opinion of your expert. However, it may take some time to find someone who is tight-lipped and experienced, so until then, let's try to minimize the need for treatment."

The pressure was even greater than before, given that he had bought enough Purification Stones to buy a mansion and still have leftovers. The atmosphere around Kishiar softened when Yuder obediently nodded.

"Now, let's begin. Could you extend your arm?"

As Yuder reached out his hand, Kishiar placed a Purification Stone on the back of it. At the same moment, a white light burst from Kishiar's hand and began to absorb into Yuder's skin through the Purification Stone.

'Ugh....'

Yuder felt a tingling sensation, as if his shoulder was being pricked with needles. As he clenched his teeth and took slow, deep breaths, he saw the previously translucent magic stone gradually darken to a gray hue. Not much time passed before Kishiar removed the Purification Stone, which had become an ordinary stone, and placed it aside.

"Luckily, there seems to be an effect."

As Kishiar said, there was a change. The range of Yuder's shoulder that had turned purple had reduced compared to before the Purification Stone touched it. However, the problem was that the reduction was only about the size of a finger joint.

"However, the effect seems less than anticipated. We might run out of the prepared Purification Stones at this rate."

As Nathan, standing behind them, quietly responded, Kishiar nodded and picked up a symbol of the Sun God from among the piled objects.

The divine symbol, adorned with twelve radial stripes of gold and silver of varying lengths encircling a red ruby, exuded a sanctity that was entirely different from the ordinary wooden ones commoners would carry around. It was a luxurious item that seemed fitting for a pope to carry.

"Surely, he wouldn't give me such a flashy item," thought Yuder. Perhaps noticing Yuder's apprehensive glance at the divine symbol, Kishiar chuckled softly.

"Don't worry. It's my job to handle this."

"That's a relief..."

"This divine symbol was created with blessings bestowed directly by the 45th Pope, known for his particularly strong divine power. It's a good medium to amplify divine power."

Kishiar wound the gold chain connected to the holy symbol around his hand and lifted another Purification Stone. The second stone that touched the back of Yuder's hand transformed into something resembling a black pebble within minutes.

However, it was apparent that the effect was slightly stronger than before. The purplish hue that had been hovering around the shoulder line had noticeably receded below the shoulder.

After confirming the effectiveness, Kishiar began the repetitive process in earnest. Each time he infused the purification stone with divine power and touched it to the back of Yuder's hand, the purple specks gradually disappeared downwards, revealing the original white skin beneath.

But the pain that felt like a knife stabbing and twisting continued, and soon Yuder's forehead and back were drenched with cold sweat. Flecks of sweat could also be seen on Kishiar's forehead as he continually exerted his divine power.

"If you keep gritting your teeth like that, you'll hurt them. Better to talk about something."

"...What should I talk about?"

Kishiar picked up a new purification stone and spoke again as Yuder responded a little late.

"There must be stories that couldn't all be written in the report."

"..."

"For example, stories about an Awakener named Nahan who had illusion abilities."

Kishiar continued as he infused the purification stone with divine power.

"Or the political situation in the East as seen from your perspective, or stories about the Apeto and Diarca families. Anything will do."

"If I start now, it will sound too disjointed... Wouldn't it be better for such a report... to be received separately later?"

Due to the pain that surged like sparks from time to time, Yuder's responses had unwittingly slowed. Despite showing an astonishing lack of distress or discomfort on his face, pain was still pain. Kishiar managed to muster a quiet smile at his assistant who seemed too accustomed to enduring pain.

"Why waste time like that? I'll filter it out myself, just go ahead now."

With that, Yuder couldn't argue. Despite the ongoing pain and tension that made his head increasingly numb, he rummaged through his mind and finally started to speak about the topics he had intended to bring up.

The suspicion that Nahan was more than a mere bandit, the powerful illusion ability he had which could kill people without any visible attack, the need to investigate the strange research taking place in the Apeto estate, and even the conversations he had had with Zachlis Hartan – as these sporadic words flowed out unchecked, Kishiar used up a dozen more Purification Stones.

Chapter 102

"So, in my opinion, allying ourselves with Zachlis Hartan and establishing a link in the east could turn out to be... a beneficial choice in the long term."

"That sounds sensible. My elder brother would approve."

Kishiar, who had chimed in with Yuder's words, scrutinized the purple speckles that had trickled down to his elbow before he lifted his eyes. Hidden beneath his long eyelashes, his crimson irises clearly locked onto Yuder's face.

"But, what about this man named Nahan? What did he look like? The report only mentioned a large scar on his left face."

Yuder slightly furrowed his brows, unable to grasp Kishiar's intention for such a sudden question. Kishiar subtly gestured towards Nathan Zuckerman, who was behind him.

"Did he appear to be of southern origin like Nathan?"

Yuder's gaze turned towards Nathan Zuckerman, who was sitting expressionlessly. His skin hue was unique, casting a distinct red shade, and the brilliant blue eyes under his ashy hair contrasted with his complexion, creating a striking impression.

The red skin tone he possessed was one of the most commonly thought features of the southerners. But, in Yuder's memory, Nahan had an ordinary skin color, except for his scar.

'His hair color was somewhat similar to Nathan Zuckerman's eyes...'

Yuder recalled Nahan's hair, dark enough to appear almost black, contrasted with his cold, gray eyes.

However, there were countless people with deep blue hair or gray eyes. They did not have features as immediately noticeable as those of the southerners.

He had not dismissed the possibility that even that appearance could have been conjured by illusion, but Yuder, sensitive enough to sense the faintest energy released during power usage, doubted it.

"I'm... not sure."

"Do you know that Nahan means 'revenge' in the southern language?"

"Pardon?"

That was news to him, despite his rebirth. Caught off guard, Yuder blurted out a question, and Nathan, who had been standing behind Kishiar, slowly opened his mouth as if he had been waiting.

"Sanan re Uzan. Nathan re Gamu. Ruhan re Nahan. Moda Suyrin Anzan neum re Ur."

It was a language with a unique accent. Yuder recognized that Nathan spoke in the southern language, but he didn't comprehend its meaning. He only registered the words 'Nathan' and 'Nahan' tucked in the middle.

"What did you just say?"

"Birth and death, blessing and curse. Mercy and revenge. Everything is as the day and night of the desert. I recited an old southern adage."

With that, Nathan added another sentence.

"It's one of the most famous proverbs where the word 'revenge' is used."

Indeed, isolated from the rest of the continent by a vast desert, the area had unique proverbs.

"What does it mean?"

At Yuder's question, Nathan opened his mouth as if he had been waiting.

"The desert's day is parched and scorching, devoid of a drop of water. However, the night is so cold that everything you have freezes. Since even the day and night bound in the same day are so, it's natural for everything else to be contradictory. It means, strive for what you want, either way."

Before Yuder could fully contemplate the meaning of those words, another wave of agony surged along his arm, and he gritted his teeth, bracing against the pain.

"Then, may I ask, what does the word 'Nathan' within you signify?"

"Blessing. It's a name I bestowed."

The answer unexpectedly came from Kishiar. As he set down the Purification Stones, now devoid of light having used all its purifying power, his expression remained stoically calm. However, Yuder was greatly surprised by his words.

"Are you... saying this, Commander?"

"It's the name bestowed upon me when I was freed from slavery in my youth and brought into the palace. His Highness chose that word after hearing a certain maxim."

Yuder had never heard this from them in his previous life. He knew that Nathan Zuckerman, the adjutant who had long served Kishiar and hailed from the southern country, but he was shocked to learn that it all started from his time as a slave during his youth.

'It wasn't just about emancipation, Kishiar bestowed a Knight's title upon him, made him an adjutant, and kept him by his side until he became a swordmaster... This is no ordinary bond.'

And the fact that such information was hidden from the public suggested that Kishiar highly valued his adjutant and greatly appreciated his abilities.

Even though Kishiar, his lord, who had given such great favor to him, could not have been ignorant of who had killed him, Yuder wondered why Nathan Zuckerman in his past life did not seek revenge against him, but quietly disappeared from the Peletta territory.

A question he had deliberately avoided pondering in his previous life suddenly resurfaced. Regardless of Yuder's thoughts, Nathan continued speaking.

"That's why I think his name is probably not his real one."

"That... makes sense."

"Actually, after receiving the first report where you wrote his name, I initiated an investigation under His Highness' order. There seemed to be an individual, assumed to be the same person as 'Nahan,' who had been gathering Awakeners in a similar manner throughout the empire since a year ago."

Upon hearing the unexpected news, Yuder even forgot his pain and lifted his head. Nathan, as if understanding Yuder's surprise, slightly nodded.

"We had a fairly easy time finding him thanks to a considerable amount of records left by those who found him suspicious and reported him. Whenever a certain number of people gathered, he would lead them abroad and then return alone to repeat the same thing in another area. As you surmised, there's a high chance he belongs to a certain group."

"So... he might return to the empire again."

"Most likely, yes."

When Nathan agreed with Yuder's words, Kishiar immediately followed up.

"We'll have to report him to His Majesty as someone to watch out for. We'll need to send a missive to the administrators in each region. Further investigation will also be necessary."

While it was still unclear what the future held, if they continued tracking Nahan's information, there was a high likelihood they would see him again. Yuder decided that if he met Nahan again, he would definitely capture him alive and bring him here.

"But Yuder,"

Kishiar called Yuder as he brought a new Purification Stone.

"Yes."

"I heard that you injured your own arm to break free because of Nahan's powerful illusion ability, but the report did not mention what kind of illusion power you experienced exactly."

As soon as he finished speaking, a sharp pain, as if stabbed by a knife, surged up. Seeing Yuder's fingers twitch, Kishiar spoke softly.

"What kind of power was it? What have you seen that you'd felt compelled to injure yourself?"

"..."

Yuder looked at his arm, trembling with pain independent of his will, with a gaze soaked in consternation. What kind of illusion had he seen? As if he could ever tell.

Perhaps it would've been better for him to leave and reveal the violet spots on his arm in front of everyone. After all, the thing Yuder truly wanted to hide wasn't the spots, but Kishiar that he had seen in the illusion.

What face would the man before him make if he confessed that he had seen him? Regardless of how he would interpret it, the atmosphere would definitely become awkward, and on top of that, the Kishiar in the illusion was not the Kishiar of the present, but the Kishiar he had killed in his past life. That was the real issue.

He could never tell. Bearing the pain radiating from his aching arm, Yuder opened his mouth.

"...Must I really tell you?"

Kishiar, who had slightly widened his eyes at his question, offered a subtle smile, apparently pondering over something.

"Oh. Perhaps you've seen something embarrassing? Someone naked, perhaps..."

"What are you thinking? No, that's not it."

His resolute response was naturally met with a chuckle.

"Ha-ha. Truthfully, you don't need to explain in detail. As long as we know the type, we can find a way to handle it the next time we encounter it, and inform the entire Cavalry. That's all."

While he had no intention of revealing what he had seen, keeping it a complete secret was proving difficult. After a moment's thought, Yuder decided to provide a simplified version of the information.

"It seems to show the target an illusion that triggers their fear."

"Fear? How does it know what they're afraid of?"

"I suspect it pulls from the target's memories to construct the illusion. Considering those who have succumbed to insanity from the illusions, I thought it was better to get out of it early, even if it meant hurting myself."

At Yuder's calm explanation, Kishiar slightly tilted his head.

"I'm glad it worked, but I'd prefer if you didn't resort to such methods next time you two meet."

If they were to face a similar situation again, Yuder wouldn't hesitate to harm his arm once more. However, he chose to remain silent in front of Kishiar for now. Meanwhile, Kishiar had already consumed more than half of the Purification Stones, piling them on one side of the table.

Considering the Purification Stones had lost their power and become useless, it was as if a large sum of money was being spent in a very short time. But Kishiar showed no sign of regret.

"Now... finally, it's reached inside the elbow."

Kishiar gazed satisfactorily at the progress he'd made. The spot had been reduced to half its size due to his generous use of the Purification Stones, so his sense of accomplishment was justified.

"Take a break and wipe off your sweat."

At Kishiar's light gesture, Nathan Zuckerman immediately approached the table and handed him a handkerchief he'd pulled out. After watching Kishiar wipe the sweat from his forehead and neck, Nathan also offered a handkerchief to Yuder, who was gazing blankly.

"I'm fine, actually..."

"Wipe yourself off. You're soaked far more than me."

Chapter 103

"So, the Duke says so."

Yuder fell silent for a moment, examining the intricate embroidery on the handkerchief in his hand. It was clear at a glance that the handkerchief was made with care from a fine fabric. It seemed too extravagant to be used to wipe the sweat of someone who wasn't even its owner, only to be discarded afterwards.

"Then it might be better to give me a towel instead. As you said, it's a bit... insufficient to wipe with just this piece."

Perhaps agreeing with his reasoning, Kishiar ordered Nathan to bring a towel. However, what appeared next was a piece of fabric similar to the handkerchief he had seen just a moment ago, only larger, still beautiful and seemingly very expensive.

"Why, don't you like this towel either?"

"No...that's not it."

Ultimately, Yuder gave up on finding a less luxurious item in this room and wiped his body with it. Although the coloring had diminished, the aftereffects of the intense pain he felt each time the Purification Stones touched him persisted, drenching his entire body in sweat.

He felt the lesson was that he must never repeat his previous actions if he didn't want to go through this hardship again.

'He must not have wanted me to heal with the Purification Stones...'

If it had been an ordinary person, rather than Yuder, experiencing this pain, they would have already fainted, screaming. To be honest, Yuder's strength was not in abundant supply either.

"You should take better care of your body. Just because you have strength doesn't mean you should use it recklessly."

At that moment, as if reading his thoughts, Kishiar clicked his tongue and Yuder turned his head in surprise.

"Are you pretending not to have the ability to read minds?"

"It's written all over your face."

Even though he knew it was a metaphor, he almost instinctively touched his own face. Watching Yuder with an amused look, Kishiar continued.

"You're surprisingly easy to read."

"I've often heard the opposite."

Exhaling a sigh and retorting, Yuder heard Kishiar mumble a 'Oh well.' and smile.

"Those who find you hard to read haven't really looked into your eyes. Looking at expressions isn't the only way to read someone's intent."

Upon hearing this, all the responses Yuder was about to utter vanished from his mind.

A feeling of unease slowly crept up from his stomach. Ever since he looked at Kishiar's face again, he had been feeling this way, but now it was especially strange. Yuder averted his gaze, avoiding the piercing red eyes on his face.

'There's no difference from the usual nonsense he speaks.'

Why couldn't he think of a retort? As he traced back the origin of his feelings, he thought perhaps his brain, still affected by the illusion, had not fully returned to normal.

'Yes, I'm tired... That must be it.'

His arm had not yet fully recovered, let alone his mental state.

It was just that. He decided to think of it that way.

"Are you very tired? You suddenly look pale."

His concealed emotions seemed to have betrayed him through his expression. Kishiar suddenly ceased his laughter and asked.

"No, I'm fine."

"No, you're not. Your lips are even turning blue. The discoloration has spread to the inside of your elbows, so put your clothes back on. Nathan, get more stones for the stove."

"Yes, understood."

As Nathan Zuckerman left to fetch more magic stones that would fuel the fireplace, Yuder quickly donned the shirt he had set aside.

Through the rolled-up sleeves, his still nearly black discolored back of his hand was revealed. As Yuder's gaze drifted to it, Kishiar also looked at the same spot.

"How's the pain? The discoloration has reduced, so it should be getting better."

"I'm... not quite sure yet."

He'd hoped that the pain would disappear once the discoloration had returned to its initial state, but even now that it was reduced by more than half, the intermittent pain persisted.

Yuder clenched and unclenched his trembling hand. A tingling sensation raced from his fingertips up to his elbow, delivering a discomfoting pain. He could feel sweat breaking out on his forehead again. He never enjoyed the feeling of his body not obeying him.

"Don't worry too much. Even if we can't heal it completely now, we will definitely find a way."

It seemed Kishiar offered consolation, thinking Yuder's serious expression was due to the pain and the discoloration.

Kishiar, who had scolded him for his reckless act, looked genuinely concerned when Yuder seemed genuinely discouraged. Yet, feeling more uncomfortable sitting here, Yuder diverted the conversation, claiming it wasn't for the reason Kishiar assumed.

"Speaking of which... How is the research related to the Red Stone going?"

"Ah. That's what you're asking about."

After Yuder had left for the mission to save Devran, Kishiar had immediately set up a lab in the basement of the building, where the mages could research the Red Stone. Since yesterday, Kanna Wand was sent there to build familiarity with the mages and assist in their research.

"So, if you visit them tomorrow, they will all be glad to see you."

"I understand."

The fact that the Red Stone research had started was good news. Yuder quickly forgot about the queasy feeling he'd just had.

'I need to check on the progress of the research, enhance and refine the training of the entire Cavalry. I also promised to visit Enon... I need to do that as soon as possible.'

Back in this world, there were many things he needed to attend to, far more important than Kishiar La Orr's idle chatter. The man in front of him was someone Yuder had to guard against, not someone to get entangled with as in his previous life.

"Your Highness. Is this enough to add?"

At that moment, Nathan, who had returned with a hefty pouch in his hand, pulled out a handful of magic stones and asked.

"A little more than that."

"Understood."

When Nathan threw the magic stones into the furnace, multi-colored flames sprung up and radiated a bright light through the decorative holes. It wasn't long before the large space began to warm up.

"Are you going to start the treatment again?"

"I was going to... but you seem to be struggling. I'm thinking of calling it a day and continuing tomorrow. I called you for treatment, not to make you collapse. How about a cup of restorative tea before you go?"

Kishiar answered Yuder's question. However, Yuder immediately shook his head without hesitation. They had already exchanged almost all the reports and conversations they needed to have for the day. He had too much to do to waste more time.

"No. I prefer to get it over with quickly. Let's finish it all today."

"Are you sure?..."

Kishiar's crimson eyes scanned Yuder's face, still wet with cold sweat, his flushed cheeks, and the inside of his unbuttoned shirt.

"Are you sure you're okay? It seems like you've reached your physical limit. Being stubborn isn't a good thing. If you pass out, the speed at which the Purification Stones absorb power will decrease."

"I'll be fine. I won't pass out."

Despite knowing that Kishiar's eye was accurate, Yuder responded firmly.

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure it's not that you feel pressured by my invitation to have tea?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

His heart skipped a beat, but Yuder feigned calm and replied as if he didn't understand what was being said. Thankfully, Kishiar didn't pursue the matter further, although he did tilt his head with a look of dissatisfaction.

"Something I said clearly didn't sit well with you... I can't guess what it might be, so I suppose it can't be helped. Very well. If you insist so strongly."

The hand wrapped in the divine seal picked up a handful of Purification Stones.

"It seems that as the discoloration darkens, more divine power is required to remove them, so from now on, I'll increase the quantity and add holy water. Remember your promise not to pass out."

Kishiar opened a bottle of holy water that he had never used before and poured it without hesitation over the Purification Stones in his hand. Astonishingly, the holy water didn't drip down his hand but was absorbed directly by the stones. The Purification Stones, having absorbed a whole bottle of holy water, held much stronger divine power and emitted a transparent white light.

As soon as Kishiar's hand touched the back of his own, Yuder closed his eyes and gently bit his lower lip.

Soon, a pain so intense that it threatened to blacken his vision hit his entire body.

'Now, it's time to hear why you knocked down five of your colleagues to the point of them becoming like wounded soldiers. Is there anything else you want to say, Yuder, apart from what I've heard?'

Yuder looked up at Kishiar standing before him. Seeing his face, utterly unreadable under the well-maintained smile, a sudden surge of anger welled up in him.

'I did nothing wrong. They got hurt because they lost to me in a duel, agreed upon mutually. Even if they are in the state of wounded soldiers, that's for them to deal with, and I don't think it's a matter worthy of summoning me, sir.'

'Right. That duel. No one said how it happened in the first place. Why did it start?'

'What could I do when they said they couldn't accept me ascending to the Commander's position? Didn't you say the best way to gain someone's respect is to show strength?'

So he did exactly that. Yuder felt no guilt.

Chapter 104

He had heard the jeers of his colleagues as he returned to his quarters after finishing training for the day. They seemed intent on making sure he heard their complaints.

Such characters had always been numerous, even when he was merely a deputy commander. But ever since Kishiar La Orr had nominated him, Yuder, to succeed as the Commander, each day was filled with insults that struck him like blows to the back of the head.

To be honest, Yuder himself didn't understand why Kishiar, who had been doing so well as the Commander, would suddenly decide to step down, or why he would pass the position onto him, of all people. But, objectively, he could only surmise it was because there was no one else in the unit stronger than him at that time.

The unit's mood was more menacing than ever due to an accident during a recent monster extermination mission, which had resulted in the death of some members. Yuder had intended to brush off most of the insults he had heard, but those rascals had crossed a line.

‘That bastard sure has it easy. Everything was settled after he offered his ass to the Commander!’

‘He was the one who was supposed to be in the monster extermination team, but the Commander stole him away, saying he had to train his successor. So, poor Gakane had to go instead...’

‘That bastard who only plays with the Commander doesn't even know who died. I'm so jealous. It's hell for the rest of us every day.’

Beyond the curse-laden rumors, they laughed with cold mirth. Yuder stopped in his tracks and turned around. Upon making eye contact, they flinched in surprise but quickly attempted to hide their fear and stepped forward.

‘What are you looking at? Got something to say?’

‘Seems like the ones with something to say are you lot.’

Yuder's voice was low, anger simmering beneath the surface.

‘Do you want to be the Commander?’

‘What?’

‘Do you want to be the Commander?’ He repeated.

‘What nonsense is this? What if I do? Are you going to hand over your position?’

‘That could be arranged. Provided you can defeat me.’

Upon hearing that he would readily relinquish his position if any of them could defeat him, they eagerly lunged at him.

After thoroughly beating the dimwits, Yuder gathered them up like a bundle of dried fish and dumped them in the middle of the dining hall, visible for all unit members to see. That's how the situation ended up as it was.

He never desired the position of Commander. He didn't enjoy engaging in foolhardy antics under the pretense of bonding with his colleagues. He never wanted any of it, but the cold insults always seemed to follow him.

'...'

It was Kishiar La Orr who had nominated Yuder Aile as the next Commander.

Yet, why did all the disputes aim only at Yuder? Of course, he was younger and of lower status, but that didn't stop him from getting angry, despite the reasons being glaringly obvious.

Yuder recalled the harsh words his beaten and fallen comrades had spat out like curses. He disliked all of what they had said, but particularly detestable was the rumor that Yuder had offered his body to the Commander.

Had the claim been completely false, he would have easily dismissed it. However, no matter how it happened, the fact that he had engaged in a sexual relationship with the Commander was true.

Even though it was due to an incident, the fact that the rumors were not baseless and he couldn't outright deny them stung his pride even more.

'Your anger still hadn't subsided.'

'Would it have subsided for you? It's because of this incident in the first place...'

'Right, it's all my fault. I get it.'

Kishiar's response was soft, as though he had read the resentment hidden behind Yuder's words. Yuder, who had deliberately been provocative, momentarily closed his mouth at that gentle reply.

That's how it always was with Kishiar. He was a man capable of repelling pointed swords aimed at him with the ease of a feather.

'But, Yuder. I said that showing appropriate strength could be one way of gaining respect. I never insisted that it should be the only way to deal with others. Am I right?'

'...That...'

Yuder looked at Kishiar, then avoided his gaze and bowed his head.

'...Yes.'

Ever since Kishiar had named Yuder as his successor, he was frequently absent. Whenever he returned, he called for Yuder and taught him many things, but apart from the practical matters, the rest was mostly airy talk.

Still, occasionally some of his words proved helpful in setting future policies. One of them was that a person with strong power should not use it recklessly.

Frankly, it wasn't a statement that entirely resonated with him. Yet, seeing Kishiar himself demonstrating such behavior, those following him couldn't help but be influenced.

To Yuder, who had only been interested in training, Kishiar was like his first mentor who instilled in him a sense of responsibility and the mindset needed for a leader.

If only their relationship was simply one of respectful admiration. Then he could ignore whatever nonsense those around him were saying.

'I definitely made a mistake.'

At Yuder's insincere apology, Kishiar let out a chuckle.

'Even so, you followed the duel protocol as you said, so it's not as big of a problem as before. Personal emotions are hurt, but that's that.'

'Well, that's good.'

'At least you're considering how to rectify your actions in the future, which is fortunate. Consider how I felt, hearing this news right after returning from Peletta. Can you imagine how surprised I was?'

'...'

Ever since Kishiar declared that he would pass his position to Yuder, he was often away. Mostly, he visited his fief, Peletta. But his frequent absences left Yuder, who had to manage affairs in his absence, with a sour taste.

What were those left behind to do when he disappeared without reason? The one who should've thought about the consequences before acting wasn't Yuder, but Kishiar.

Yuder felt a desire to voice a complaint, but swallowed his words. Maybe because he had dealt with the incident caused by Yuder right after returning from Peletta, Kishiar, seated at his desk, looked paler than usual.

Despite the shadows under his eyes and the color draining from his lips, his beauty still rivaled the manifestation of the Sun God. However, all Yuder could see was the deep fatigue etched on his face.

Ever since the previous Emperor had passed away and the new Emperor ascended the throne, Kishiar's excursions had been becoming more frequent. Rumors circulated quietly that the reason he was relinquishing his position was due to conflicts with the current Emperor, with whom he shared no blood ties.

However, the concern that weighed heavier on the minds of the Cavalry members was the potential disbandment of the Cavalry following Kishiar's resignation. The new Emperor originated from a family not particularly friendly towards Awakeners, so such worries held considerable credibility.

Among all these swirling rumors, the absolute trust Kishiar La Orr once received from the members gradually began to fade. Fear and unease were instead directed in full force toward Yuder, the common-born successor designated by Kishiar.

Everyone wished for Kishiar to do something. After all, he had a responsibility to the Cavalry as their commander.

Yet, Kishiar had done nothing so far. Apart from when teaching Yuder, he never disclosed his intentions or plans, even to him.

Yuder wanted to know why Kishiar was resigning, why he chose him as a successor. These were, in truth, the things Yuder most wanted to understand.

Yet, sometimes, what seemed the closest was often the farthest.

‘Wouldn't it be better if someone else took the Commander's position, not me?’ Yuder blurted out impulsively as he looked at Kishiar, who appeared fatigued. Although it was a spur of the moment, it was a sentence he'd repeated more than ten times already.

‘No.’

And as always, Kishiar's response was succinct and firm.

‘Aren't you tired of this repeating itself? There are plenty of people in the Cavalry who, even if not as powerful as me, have a higher status and are competent. Choose one of them as your successor. I just want to focus on my training.’

At Yuder's words, Kishiar gave a slight, sardonic smile.

‘Do you think I'm handing over the position of Commander to you simply because you're powerful?’

‘Isn't that the case?’

‘Of course not.’

Yuder furrowed his brows deeper.

What on earth was he saying then? Yuder, well aware of his own strength, was equally able to critically assess the rest. He, Yuder Aile, was unsociable and hardly fit in with others, his demeanor always cool and detached, uninterested in anything he disliked.

Born a commoner without friends, it was laughable to think he could succeed the perfect Kishiar La Orr as Commander.

‘So what is it, then?’

‘Your keen eyesight.’

Yuder was momentarily speechless at the answer that flowed calmly. It was only when Kishiar began to chuckle, as if finding Yuder's expression amusing, that he managed to open his mouth.

‘I don't understand what you mean. I'd appreciate it if you could explain it in a way a commoner like me could understand.’

‘How many times have I told you that you're no longer a commoner? Lord Aile. Belittling yourself is not good. If you've forgotten...’

‘No.’

Of course, he remembered. And it was true that Yuder's current title was that of a lord. However, the world refused to accept someone of common origin, regardless of their received title.

And what was important wasn't that right now.

‘What does ‘keen eyesight’ mean?’

‘Hmm. Seems like we're not communicating well. We used to connect better. Has your charm decreased a little while my deputy commander wasn't watching?’

‘...Commander.’

As Yuder's voice turned ominous, Kishiar tilted his head and laughed heartily.

‘Understood. I apologize. I’ll answer, so ease the grip of your hand. The flame has been ignited, yes. The notion of keen eyesight... it’s just that, quite literally. You, Yuder, calmly assess the situation regardless of what it may be. Whether it involves an enemy, an ally, or even yourself.’

‘Anyone with reason can do as much.’

‘I apologize, but I can’t.’

At the unexpected confession, Yuder hesitated, and Kishiar raised his hand, beckoning him closer. Yuder glanced at the luxurious white glove that enveloped his hand, then slowly moved towards him.

Even when he felt he had approached close enough, the man continued to gesture him nearer. Frowning at the continuous beckoning, Yuder navigated around a large desk to stand directly in front of Kishiar. This time, a suddenly outstretched hand grabbed his arm and pulled him in.

Within moments, Yuder found himself seated on Kishiar’s lap, embraced in his arms.

‘...What are you doing? It’s broad daylight.’

‘See, this causes me to make completely subjective decisions.’

A sweet voice lingered near his ear.

‘But you’re capable. We need someone like you as the next Commander of Cavalry, someone who can grasp their surroundings under any circumstance. Isn’t that the epitome of keen eyesight?’

‘I’m fairly certain that resorting to this to make your point... is not a good decision.’

‘Isn’t it, though?’

Despite the reproach in his words, Kishiar grinned nonchalantly. Yuder endured as Kishiar gently caressed his cheek, knowing it was the only area that had been injured during his duel with the others.

‘That must have hurt quite a bit.’

‘It wasn't too bad. I've applied some holy water with healing properties, so it should heal soon.’

Because of the smooth leather glove, Kishiar's touch always felt cold. There was only one occasion when it wasn't so.

A time when they were together in a room during an invisible night.

‘You seem a little... thinner than before.’

‘I'm not sure about that.’

‘Moderate your training a bit. At this rate, we'll need to adjust your uniform before the Commander's inauguration ceremony.’

While he spoke, the hand that had been lightly caressing his rib area through his clothing slipped down to encircle his waist. The breath that had been grazing the top of Yuder's hair while he inhaled and exhaled steadily began to slow and thin.

Listening to the slow and deep breathing that sounded as if he was scenting, Yuder let out a quiet sigh, careful not to be heard.

There were times when Kishiar returned after stepping away, calling Yuder close to behave as if he was sniffing an animal. Therefore, when he had just called him closer, Yuder had prepared himself for another such event, and he was glad his intuition hadn't been mistaken.

Why would he behave this way when he surely knew that Yuder didn't emit any special energy or scent like other second gender manifesters?

Despite his curiosity, knowing that he wouldn't receive an answer, he decided not to say anything. Even so, sitting on his lap still felt a bit awkward.

In their interactions, Kishiar was typically the one to initiate conversation. Hence, moments like this, filled with silence when Kishiar closed his mouth, always made Yuder feel peculiar. Even

though he had touched his partner's bare body, the current situation seemed to make him feel more restless than those moments.

'...Yuder. The tactical game I taught you before. Do you remember?'

Then, at last, Kishiar, who had been only breathing slowly and quietly, opened his mouth. Yuder instinctively stiffened his shoulder and replied.

'Yes.'

'The rules associated with the special piece?'

'I remember.'

Not long ago, Yuder had learned a two-player tactical game from Kishiar. In that game, there was something called a 'special piece', not a regular piece that existed from the beginning, but a sort of secret weapon that the player secretly designated from among the regular pieces before the start of the game.

Although the special piece could exert power beyond its original movement limit, due to the nature of the game where two players took turns, once it was used, it was always eliminated by the opponent.

Therefore, most often it was used only at the crucial moment when the victory had been nearly secured after being well hidden. Since losing the special piece meant having to return some of the opponent's pieces they had taken, many did not even designate it in the first place.

As Yuder was recalling these rules, Kishiar continued his words.

'The worst thing you can do when using the special piece is to get caught by the enemy before using it. You suffer a great loss.'

'...'

'So, if I feel like my special piece is about to be exposed, I take the initiative and put it out as a bait in front of the enemy.'

'Does such an obvious strategy really work?'

To his skeptical question, a response mixed with laughter returned.

'Surprisingly, it does. Even though they think that the piece right in front of them might be the special piece, they continue to doubt because of the potential penalty that might come back if it isn't. It works especially well on those who believe that the more openly revealed, the less valuable it is. To save something, sometimes such a ruthless method of putting it at the forefront is necessary.'

He had thought that Kishiar had brought up the tactical game to say something important, but it turned out it was just about the game.

Anyway, since Kishiar often talked about such nonsense, Yuder was not greatly disappointed and responded casually.

'If it works, it's a good tactic. I don't particularly think it's a cruel method.....'

'But from the point of view of the special piece, wouldn't it be considered cruel? It's supposed to be a piece that's treated precious and takes up the most important part of the board, after all.'

Yuder doubted for a moment whether Kishiar might be drunk. Was he really saying that the hard stone-made piece used in the game was pitiable?

'Firstly, it's not like we asked for the consent of the piece when choosing the special piece. How to use it is up to the person playing the game.'

'That's true.'

'Knowing that, why are you asking? Did you suddenly develop a fondness for the stone-made pieces?'

Kishiar was silent for a while. Just when Yuder half-forgot their pointless conversation and started to think about the impending headaches he had to deal with, Kishiar gently nudged his back with a soft touch, prompting him to stand.

'Alright. We can go back now.'

Kishiar's face, as Yuder stood and turned, looked as calm as always. However, Yuder thought, for some reason, his red eyes staring at him seemed oddly subdued.

The first thing he saw when he opened his eyes was not the small barracks where Yuder always fell asleep and woke up, but the high ceiling painted with a beautiful golden sun symbol.

Yuder blinked, staring at a ceiling he had grown tired of seeing in his past life, before slowly rising to a sitting position.

'Here... this is the guest room in the command post quarters. Why am I here?'

His head felt empty and lethargic, a momentary confusion setting in. However, when he lowered his gaze to the blanket he held with both hands, his memory suddenly cleared.

'Ah, that's right. After receiving treatment from Kishiar, I said I would return to my room...'

Yuder hadn't fainted until the discoloration on his arm was reduced to its original size, just as he had told Kishiar. The horrifying ordeal was endured in silence, a feat so impressive that even Nathan Zuckerman, who was simply observing, couldn't hide his admiration for Yuder's perseverance.

The problem occurred after the treatment was finished. He intended to get up and leave as soon as he put his clothes back on, but the moment he tried to stand, his strength drained from him.

And so, he found himself here.

"..."

He must have collapsed immediately upon trying to stand. Given the difficulty of moving a passed-out person to the regular member's quarters, they must have left him here. While he could guess the rough sequence of events, it only deepened his self-loathing.

Even when he had been tortured, flesh stripped raw from bone, he hadn't fainted. But to collapse from merely having a spot on his arm healed with divine power was shameful. He didn't want to guess what Kishiar and Nathan were thinking.

Straining his ears, he found the outside to be incredibly quiet. Judging from the dark landscape visible beyond the curtains, it seemed to be night, making it likely that Kishiar was sleeping in his own room.

'It's probably for the best...'

Figuring it would be better to carefully return to his original quarters while Kishiar was asleep, Yuder rose from his bed and stepped onto the floor. His vision blurred for a moment, but he was able to keep from passing out again by leaning on the wall.

Suddenly, he remembered the dream he'd had. It wasn't exactly a perfect dream, but more like a brief reenactment of a moment he'd shared with Kishiar in his past life. Since it was such a long time ago, some memories were so blurry he wasn't sure if they were real, but Yuder thought they probably were.

'I can't remember the specifics... but I did learn strategy games from Kishiar.'

Also, during the days when he was a candidate to succeed the Commander, it was true that his colleagues would constantly pick fights with him.

'Back then... I was indeed too young. It was so hard for me to ignore such comments.'

While he was outwardly twenty, internally he was an experienced veteran, he was confident he could handle the same issues without getting angry. However, it wasn't the case back then.

Even though it was a dream, it was rare to objectively observe oneself from such a distance. After all, it was those moments that had shaped him into who he was today. Yuder felt anew how impressive it was for Kishiar to patiently teach the young Yuder Aile with a smiling face.

Kishiar had complimented Yuder's keen eyesight, but from Yuder's perspective, it was Kishiar who truly had the keen eyesight.

'But I'm not sure why I dreamt of that period now. I wonder why?'

Chapter 106

Why was it that now, of all times, an event deeply submerged in his unconscious mind had surfaced? Yuder pondered for several minutes over this question to which he could find no answer. Recognizing that returning to his lodging was his priority, he moved his feet.

Several steps ahead, a uniform cloak was neatly draped over a table, and gloves were placed nearby. Slipping them on and clenching his fist, he felt a very faint tingling in his right hand that soon dissipated.

It had been a while since the pain, almost washed away, had nearly disappeared. Had his body recovered while he was unconscious?

'Seeing how well I've recovered, money indeed does wonders.'

It was natural for him to recover quickly. After all, a priest with a divine power as strong as Kishiar's was rare, let alone one who also amplified it with the highest-grade Purification Stones that absorbed holy water.

'But I don't want to go through such chaos again... I really need to restrain myself from blindly using force to solve everything.'

The ways in which an Awakener could use their power were limitless. In his previous life, Yuder had enjoyed overwhelming enemies with tremendous power, like a vast sea, as he wished. He hadn't needed to research ways to achieve more effect with less power, but now things were different.

Most would be discouraged, but Yuder thought it turned out quite well. There was nothing more pleasurable to him than honing and developing his skills. He had often thought that, had he not become a Commander in his previous life, he would have spent his entire life cooped up in a training room.

While contemplating this, Yuder crossed the hallway and went into the study room. Suddenly, he saw a flickering light ahead and stopped in surprise.

'Kishiar?'

By the fireplace, the flickering light revealed the side profile of a man sitting at a desk, penning something. No matter how Yuder looked at it, it was Kishiar, whom he had presumed to be asleep.

His gaze was momentarily stolen by the shadow of the man's face illuminated by the small lantern.

Was it because of the thick shadows, or the expressionless face he usually hid well? The sight of him sitting in darkness, his hand clutching a quill pen, moving sharply, felt both strange and familiar.

Even in his previous life, Yuder had occasionally seen him working late into the night, illuminated by a single lantern.

At that time, they often spent the night together, so seeing him at work was inevitable, but he did not expect to see that scene again now. Perhaps it was because he had just dreamed about the past. His feelings were complex.

"...You're awake already?"

At that moment, Kishiar, sensing Yuder's gaze, lifted his head. Yuder had thought he hadn't given any sign, but Kishiar's keen senses were indeed exceptional. A playful smile crossed his face, and his previously somber look disappeared, replaced by an aura of vitality.

"Do you know how surprised I was when you fainted right after waking up, despite saying you wouldn't?"

"I apologize."

"Well, as you said, you didn't faint until the treatment was over. So, we're half-right each. No need to apologize."

"Why didn't you wake me up immediately then?"

"How can I forcibly wake up someone who fainted from exhaustion? It's late anyway, so just get a good night's sleep here. Oh, how's your arm?"

Despite the softness in his voice, he seemed to have no intention of accepting any rejection. Yuder glanced back and forth between the door he could leave through and Kishiar at the desk, then let out another sigh.

"...It's all better."

His feeling of numbness still lingered somewhat, but a little more rest would naturally take care of it. At Yuder's response, Kishiar responded with a satisfied smile.

"Well done."

"But... What are you doing up at this hour, Commander?"

He was practically wide awake already. Even if he were to go back to bed, he did not feel like sleeping. As he sat down on a chair near the desk and asked, Kishiar looked at the paper he had been busy writing on.

"I'm writing letters."

As he spoke, he tapped on three sheets of paper laid out side by side.

"One is for His Majesty the Emperor. Another is for the Pelleta Knights, and the last is for the acting Lord of Hartan."

The content of the letters to the Emperor and the acting lord, Zachlis Hartan, would be predictable. Most likely, they contained a report of the recent incident and a request for cooperation in the investigation. Then, could the letter to the Pelleta Knights also be in support of that?

"Is it because of this incident?"

"Yes."

Kishiar nodded, confirming that Yuder's guess wasn't wrong.

'Surely... it makes sense that he's staying up late to handle urgent matters.'

Writing letters wasn't his only task; quite a few documents and bundles of paper were piled next to Kishiar. Seeing him dip the tip of the pen into the ink again, Yuder impulsively opened his mouth.

"Is there anything I can help you with?"

"Of course, there is. Going to bed."

"..."

When Yuder remained silent, Kishiar, who had stopped writing for a moment, laughed out loud.

"You can even make such an expression."

"This is my usual expression."

"No, it's not. Look here."

Kishiar lifted his hands and pulled at the corners of his eyes. The combination of the sharply raised eyelids and the red eyes sparkling and looking around from underneath was somewhat comical.

"When did I ever do that?"

"Now."

Yuder, who was about to refute that he had never done that, shut his mouth when he saw Kishiar's eyes gleaming as if expecting such a reaction.

'Even though I'm back to being twenty, my mental age isn't... what am I even doing with Kishiar?'

This was too childish a conversation for two grown men to be having.

"If you say so, Commander. Then, that must be the case."

"You always pull yourself together and step back at crucial moments. Is it because of your keen eyesight?"

Kishiar looked slightly disappointed, but Yuder was taken aback by his mention of 'keen eyesight'.

"...Yes?"

"Why are you so surprised? It's a fact that you have keen eyesight. You can discern everything from the subtle changes in the energy of the Awakeners to the power held by inanimate objects like the Red Stone and Divine Sword."

"Ah... yes."

So that's what he meant. Recognizing that it was similar yet different from what he had heard in his dream, he managed to quell his surprise.

"And if you really can't sleep, come over here and take some of these."

Kishiar, who had previously told him to go and sleep, now pushed a stack of letters towards Yuder, who was sitting blankly.

"This is.....?"

"The letters are intended for the Cavalry. Originally, I had Nathan sort them, but strictly speaking, he's not part of the Cavalry. Henceforth, this will be your job as my assistant. After reading them, categorize them by importance. Put the most important ones on top, and relatively less important ones beneath."

Despite his detailed explanation, Yuder was already familiar with such bundles of letters. After all, he had seen plenty of them in his previous life.

"Am I allowed to determine their importance at my discretion?"

"You'll get the sense once you read them. Either way, I'll reread all of them, so don't worry."

Having said that, Kishiar picked up his pen again, freshly dipped in ink, and resumed writing his letter. Yuder pulled the bundle of letters closer and opened one on his lap. Although it was dark, the light streaming from the magic stone stove made reading the words not too difficult.

'This is... an invitation to a party. The next one is also a party invitation. The next one... a request for deployment of Cavalry members?'

Most were party invitations sent by nobles living in the capital to Kishiar, who was both an imperial family member and a duke.

The next most common were requests to borrow the power of the Cavalry members, but the ones that had plausible reasons written on them were few and far between.

Most contained ludicrous requests such as wanting to borrow an Awakener to escort high-ranking nobles or to perform tricks at parties. It seemed that the nobles living in the capital still did not fully understand what the Cavalry and the Awakeners were.

'Unbelievable.'

Yuder promptly moved these letters to the bottom. Once he had shifted most of them, only two remained.

'One is a letter asking for help in exterminating monsters that suddenly appeared in the west... and the other one...'

Yuder looked down at the remaining letter, sealed with red wax stamped with a crest. It was the emblem used in official letters sent from the palace. Inside the envelope, a concise letter was found.

The letter that began with 'To the illustrious descendant of the Sun that knows no darkness, Duke Pelleta, Commander of the Cavalry, Lord Kishiar La Orr' was a request for his participation as an imperial family member in an official event and party at the palace, in commemoration of the upcoming harvest season.

Only then did Yuder recall that in his previous life, not long after the Cavalry was established, an event commemorating the harvest season was held.

'Right, that was it. We made a ridiculous parade behind the Imperial Knights and the military band as the formal introduction of the Cavalry... we became a spectacle for the nobles at the event.'

Still, the Cavalry members were quite encouraged by the fact that they stood with dignity among the nobles for the first time. That day was also the first time the Cavalry showed their faces on the official stage in front of the entire continent.

While reminiscing about those times, Yuder happened to spot a small note added at the bottom of the letter, which made him widen his eyes slightly.

'...Additionally, as a result of our meeting, we have decided to include an additional schedule following the Cavalry parade on the 26th. We will soon inform you of the confirmed details related to the changed schedule...'

"...An additional schedule?"

Chapter 107

Without realizing it, Yuder voiced his question in a small murmur, which caused Kishiar, who had sharp ears, to lift his head.

"Is something amiss?"

Hesitating for a moment, Yuder rose from his seat and handed the letter to Kishiar.

"I believe you should read this immediately."

Kishiar, having quickly read the letter from Yuder, stopped at the final section. Interest welled up in his red eyes.

"An additional schedule, huh? Who suggested and approved this? I thought everyone was trying to avoid cramming more in."

"Isn't it ultimately up to the Emperor to decide on such schedules?"

Although he was currently the Crown Prince, the Emperor Katchian, whom Yuder had served in his previous life, was the type who insisted on personally verifying everything. If put positively, he was cautious; negatively, overly suspicious.

As he grew older, he began to doubt everything more and more, and in the end, he didn't even dare to deal closely with his overly powerful subordinates. Yuder was also on his list of guarded targets.

The current Emperor Keilusa looked entirely different from Emperor Katchian, but Yuder was quite surprised to find out that their basic way of handling affairs wasn't the same.

"There are countless events taking place during the harvest season. His Majesty cannot handle all of them. The majority are handled within the palace."

As Kishiar folded the letter and placed it in a conspicuous position, he raised the corner of his lips.

"I have a hunch about whose influence this is, but I'll have to confirm it. Looks like I've got one more letter to write today."

He has a hunch? Who could Kishiar be thinking of? Yuder was extremely curious, but since he would find out once the results came in, he simply nodded and stepped back.

"Yuder! You're back!"

The next day, at breakfast, Kanna, who Yuder encountered in the dining hall, was overjoyed to see him.

"Did you hear? I've been assigned to work with those... mages, under the Commander's orders."

"I heard. I was actually thinking of going there later."

Kanna, who had been whispering to keep the other members from hearing, brightened at Yuder's response.

"Really? Archmage Yulman and Mage Alik were both eager to see you again. They'll be thrilled if you visit today."

Given that she was now on a first-name basis with them, it seemed she had built quite a rapport in a short time.

Yuder listened to her talk about how excited the mages were when they heard about Kanna's abilities, how they were eager to test her, and how the three of them were planning their research together, while he quickly shoveled soup and bread into his mouth. Seeing him practically gulp down his food without chewing, Kanna, who had been chatting away happily, shot him a puzzled look.

"Yuder, why are you eating so fast? You didn't starve while you were on your mission, did you?"

"No... I'm just hungry since I got back."

In truth, he planned to eat as quickly as possible so he could meet Enon in the town during the morning, but he couldn't tell her that outright.

'Besides, it's true that I'm hungry.'

The pain in his arm had prevented him from eating properly yesterday. Given that he had also fainted in that condition, it was almost as if he had gone a whole day without food.

Even though he hadn't felt particularly hungry when he woke up that morning, the moment he descended to the dining hall and inhaled the aroma of the food, an insatiable hunger crashed over him.

"Yuder! You're here early!"

The joyous voice of Gakane echoed from behind Yuder, just as Yuder was tearing into his eighth piece of bread, dipping it in his soup, while listening to Kanna's story.

"I knocked on your door earlier, but there was no answer. I thought you might have fainted or something in there."

"Fainted? Why would you think that, Yuder's not ill?"

Before Yuder could respond, Kanna waved a hand in greeting, starting a conversation with Gakane. A brief flicker of surprise flashed across Gakane's eyes, but he quickly found a plausible explanation.

"After returning from yesterday's mission, unlike me, Devran, and Jimmy, Yuder spent some private reporting time with the Commander. If it were me, I would have been too exhausted today and just slept all day in my room. But Yuder, you're really something. Ha ha."

"I see. Why wasn't Devran able to come back? I heard he went to the infirmary without breakfast this morning. Did he get hurt? Everyone keeps talking about it."

Upon hearing Devran's name, Kanna asked, belatedly recalling a point of curiosity.

"Yes. He ran into some trouble with a noble from his hometown, and was detained. He got slightly injured in the process. But everything has been sorted out, so he'll recover soon after treatment."

"That's really a relief. It seems the Commander did the right thing sending the rescue team early."

It was fortunate they had agreed on what to say in case their comrades asked about the incident the day before. A shared understanding passed between the gazes of Yuder and Gakane.

'Yuder. How's your arm?'

While Kanna was passionately cursing the noble for what they had put Devran through, Gakane covertly tapped his own arm with his fingers to convey his question.

Yuder gave a slight nod in affirmation. His right arm was back to normal after yesterday's hellish treatment, and though his left arm was still bandaged, it was concealed beneath the sleeve of his uniform, unlikely to be discovered. A wave of relief and bright joy passed over Gakane's face.

'That's a relief.'

"What are you mumbling about, Gakane? Aren't you listening to what I'm saying?"

"Ah, it's nothing."

"You were whispering something to Yuder, weren't you? Or weren't you?"

Just as Kanna, with a suspicious look in her eyes, was about to further interrogate Gakane, the dining hall door suddenly burst open, and a familiar face amongst the members rushed in, flushed and excited.

"Did you all hear? Something incredibly exciting just happened!"

"What is it?"

As one of the members eating his meal asked with curiosity, the newly arrived member grinned and raised his voice so everyone could hear.

"A messenger from the Imperial Palace came. Guess what? The entire Cavalry has been invited to attend a party at the palace during this harvest festival!"

"A party?"

"At the Imperial Palace?"

"Really? If all the members gather, it's over 300 people. Are we all going? Will the Commander allow it?"

The unbelievable news stirred everyone in the dining hall. Surprised looks etched onto the faces of Gakane and Kanna.

"Is it really true? A party... The only parties I know are those we used to have at Gallon House, where the servants would gather in the kitchen with leftover food."

Next to Kanna, who was muttering in astonishment, Gakane turned to Yuder with a serious expression.

"Yuder. Have you heard anything? You're the Commander's assistant."

"...No."

In truth, he had already learned of the fact while organizing a letter that had arrived for Kishiar the previous day, but Yuder decided to keep his mouth shut for now.

"I see. Since the messenger only just arrived, you would have heard it for the first time too. If it's true, wouldn't the Commander gather everyone and tell them himself?"

Listening to Kanna's words, Yuder glanced at the surrounding members. Most wore astonished expressions, but amidst those were hints of excitement, expectation, and nervousness.

'Sending a messenger to announce this publicly, making sure everyone knows about it... it means that Kishiar is being compelled not to refuse the invitation.'

Kishiar, as the Commander, had the power to decide whether or not the Cavalry would participate in any event. Unless directly ordered by the Emperor, there was no exaggeration in saying that Kishiar, a member of the imperial family and a duke, wouldn't feel pressured to attend any event. But what would happen if he refused to accept an event that all the members were eagerly anticipating?

'Even if he says he refuses, there would be a significant disappointment, considering they had all hoped for it.'

The true power of leading a group comes from the trust and support of its members. Being a genuine leader isn't simply about maintaining the title. The most needed strength for Kishiar, who was establishing a new group called the Cavalry, was exactly that.

'Whoever it was, they've played a pretty clever hand.'

As Yuder pondered this, the rumor spread endlessly throughout the Cavalry. Yuder left the barracks, passing the excited members engaged in lively conversation, quickly changing into civilian clothes.

The atmosphere of a city excited for a grand festival was palpable as he made his way to a rundown pharmacy tucked away in a poor alley where Enon lived. The excitement wasn't limited to the members of the Cavalry.

"I'm not open for business today. Go away."

However, Enon's shop was naturally an exception to this atmosphere. After scanning the interior of the shop, still covered in a layer of dust and clutter, Yuder opened his mouth toward a boot sticking out from behind the counter.

"It's me."

"And who is me?"

"The one who commissioned you."

"..."

At that, the boot that had been swinging listlessly froze. After a moment, Enon rose from his spot with a loud thud, and met Yuder's apologetic smile with an angry glare.

"I got caught up with something and got delayed. Sorry."

"Sorry? You just said sorry? You're even worse than a dog-gnawed bone. Do you even know how many days I've been waiting? Why am I picking up your scraps? Get out!"

He had attempted to create a light-hearted atmosphere with a smile, but it seemed to have had the opposite effect. Yuder quickly dropped his smile and reached into his pocket to pull something out.

"Here."

"What is it? I don't need it, so leave..."

Enon, about to shout something angrily, stopped mid-sentence as he saw what Yuder held out. It was a bright yellow lemon he had bought from the market before entering the slum.

Chapter 108

Enon had glared at the innocent fruit for quite some time before finally extending his hand over the counter. Yuder gently placed a lemon on his palm.

"...Who told you? That I'm crazy about these?"

Enon asked in a significantly softened tone, far from the seemingly lethal resentment he had just expressed. Yuder, recalling his past life where Enon would often munch on raw lemons, opened his mouth. He had found Enon's love for lemons incomprehensible back then.

"I can't tell you now."

"Again with that? Damn it."

Cursing, Enon bit into the lemon, peel and all. The act looked as if it would set his mouth on fire, but he swallowed it down without a flinch.

"It tastes good. Damn it."

Having devoured the lemon in an instant, Enon finally subdued his anger and met Yuder's gaze directly.

"I've waited for you and even tolerated your tardiness. You should know what an honor this is. Come with me."

The inside of the shop where Enon led him was still cluttered with old odds and ends, but there were a few tables and small chairs that could accommodate customers.

Yuder looked at an old red cloth hung on one wall, so worn that its pattern was unrecognizable, several rusted swords carelessly leaned near the entrance, and a bed with one side heavily sagged. They were all just like what he had seen in his previous life, stirring a mix of emotions.

"What are you doing standing there like an idiot? Sit here."

Enon gestured to Yuder with his gruff face as he sat at the table. Yuder cleared the pile of old books occupying the chair and sat down in front of him.

"You said you needed information about those who carried the name La Orr among the past dukes."

"Including Kishiar La Orr."

Yuder added, causing Enon to frown.

"Ah, right. Anyway, as you should know if you have any common sense, it wasn't easy to investigate. To find a duke carrying the name La Orr, I had to go through the royal family tree, and what you wanted was even more detailed information."

However, what Enon pulled out from his pocket was a fairly thick bundle of papers.

"But thanks to your late arrival giving me extra time, I was able to gather roughly this much. It would be hard to find such detailed information anywhere else on this continent."

"Thank you..."

"Before that."

Enon slapped away Yuder's hand, which had been reaching to accept the papers along with his thanks.

"If you want to receive something, you have to give something. Why are you trying to take as if it's a given?"

"Isn't it enough that I know the name 'Guardian of Luma'?"

At Yuder's question, Enon flared up in anger.

"Of course, it's not enough! Who the hell are you? What are you doing and where? How did you come to know about me? Start talking. If not, I'm going to burn this right here."

As if to show that he wasn't joking, he firmly gripped the bundle of papers and brought a match close to it from among the clutter on the table. Though a rough item prone to sudden explosions, it was more than capable of setting a fire quickly without the aid of expensive magic stones.

Yuder sighed softly, looking at Enon's stern expression. He had long concluded that, based on experiences from his previous life, Enon was a person he could trust no matter what. He had planned to reveal his identity soon anyway, so saying it now wouldn't matter. However, explaining how he knew Enon's name was a slightly different matter.

'...Will you believe me?'

Who could possibly believe him if he told them that after he died once, he woke up and found himself 11 years in the past? However, Yuder thought that the person in front of him, Enon, might be the one who could most easily believe such an implausible story in this world.

The reason was simple. If Enon, a being difficult for most to comprehend, being the Guardian of a great mage that existed a millennium ago, then there was a high probability he would believe Yuder's seemingly absurd tale.

'In the past, I was curious and suspicious about Enon's identity... I didn't expect the tables to turn this way.'

Would he truly believe Yuder? Could he understand why this happened?

Yuder looked into Enon's bright, lemon-yellow eyes as he forced a bitter smile.

"Alright. I'll tell you. My name is Yuder Aile. I come from commoners. I'm currently a member of the Cavalry, and I awakened my powers two years ago."

"Yuder Aile... I don't recall."

Enon repeated Yuder's name, a thoughtful expression on his face, as if wondering whether he had met him somewhere and had simply forgotten. However, no matter how much he pondered, there was no way he could find the answer on his own.

"You're part of the Cavalry, the new one that's been formed?"

"Yes."

"The one with Kishiar La Orr as the Commander?"

"That's correct."

As Yuder succinctly replied, a forced smile spread across Enon's face.

"This... You're not completely mad, are you? Are you trying to investigate the background of the Commander of your own group? Isn't that tantamount to treason?"

"Of course not. My intention is actually the exact opposite."

Unfazed by Enon's attitude, Yuder calmly retorted.

"The opposite?"

"My goal is to protect Kishiar La Orr at all costs, to keep him from dying. But to do that, I felt I needed to know a bit about the secrets of these illustrious individuals who are shrouded in mystery."

Enon's eyes flickered. His expression was as if he wanted to say 'don't lie to me.' However, he couldn't find any traces of deceit in Yuder's face or voice.

"You're not lying."

"I told you so."

"You crazy man."

Enon cursed again. Despite Yuder giving him a proper answer, he was still subjected to Enon's abuse, which made him feel slightly wronged.

"Why would you do such a thing? Why would you want to protect someone who's an imperial family member, a duke, and even a Commander? What can you do just because you have some information? Are you going to thwart an assassination or something?"

"No. Not at all..."

"Then why on earth?"

Enon's golden gaze was filled with curiosity. Yuder felt this was his chance to say something.

"If I were to tell you that I came from the future, would you believe me?"

"That's not a funny joke."

Enon's first response was to dismiss it as a joke. As it was an anticipated reaction, Yuder calmly retorted.

"But it's true."

"Huh. Time-related magic was the only thing that Luma couldn't succeed in. Did you become a great mage of the century or something? There's a limit to joking."

"Don't you think you're the one who can best determine whether I'm joking or not?"

"That's why I'm saying it's nonsense, you bastard. That's a realm no one has ever succeeded in, you understand? Do you have any proof that you've traveled back in time? You don't, do you."

"Just because nobody has succeeded doesn't mean it'll never happen. Ordinary people might not believe you're Luma's guardian, so why is this any different?"

"That's a separate issue."

"Then where do you suppose I learned of your true identity?"

Piercing through Enon's dismissive deflection with his soft retort, Yuder was able to make him change his expression for the first time.

"...What?"

"All I know about you, you've revealed to me yourself. You're the Guardian of the Archmage Luma, you said you've lived for a very long time, you've gathered information here and there, and you liked lemons. I know more beyond that. That's my proof. Still won't believe me?"

Yuder saw Enon blink rapidly, his eyes wide and astounded. His expression flickered with confusion, surprise, skepticism, and disbelief, then became sharply serious. It was a look Yuder had never seen on him before, despite having observed Enon for a long time.

Yuder felt a weighty pressure, as though he was slowly sinking into cold, deep waters. However, he managed to maintain composure, showing no change in his outward expression.

"...What's your purpose, then? Why did you seek me out?"

"Like I said, to protect Kishiar La Orr."

"You came back in time for that? Such a grand action for just that reason? Are you telling me to believe that?"

Enon seemed to quickly pick up on the fact that Yuder wasn't telling the whole story. It seemed he had to reveal more to satisfy Enon. After a brief hesitation, Yuder decided to share the larger goal he had in mind, which would gradually unfold with time.

"...And I want to prevent the same events from happening again, before I came back here."

"Hmm. Okay. Now it's starting to make sense. The same events... Are they personal?"

"No personal issues. That's all for now."

After stating that, Yuder added one more sentence.

"The reason I came to you is because I thought you were the only person who could help me with this matter without tricking me."

"Tricking?"

Enon's expression changed dramatically in an instant.

"I can't leave this to an information broker who could potentially trick me. There are limits to the information I can find myself."

"...So you really just wanted this information?"

"That's what I said."

From Yuder's perspective, he was entirely sincere, but Enon looked incredulous.

"Each word you say sounds like a complete lie, yet why can't I shake off the feeling that you're not lying? Is something wrong with me?"

Enon, heaving a deep sigh, shifted his gaze to the bundle of papers in his hand. Alternating between looking at Yuder and the papers, he slowly put down the match he had been holding in his other hand. The cold, tense atmosphere then eased back to normal.

It was brief, but Yuder remembered the intense pressure he had felt from Enon. It was a power unlike anything he had ever felt before; somewhat similar to magic yet not, and also different from the energy emanated by Awakeners. It was a strange energy.

Perhaps it was a power inherent to his being a 'Guardian'.

"I didn't ask you to believe me right away. You can take your time to watch and judge."

"Why should I watch you? Didn't I clearly say that I would only help you this one time?"

Chapter 109

"Why should I watch you? Didn't I clearly say that I would only help you this one time?"

Despite his words, Enon was not as cruel or indifferent as he pretended to be. Yuder, who had received his help on several occasions, knew this fact better than anyone.

‘The ones I am trying to save are not only Kishiar La Orr. You are also included. And so are the many others who have been lost due to ignorance in the past.’

Swallowing the words he couldn't say to Enon, Yuder reached out his hand.

"Are you not giving it to me?"

"You... You're not really planning a rebellion, are you?"

Despite his numerous assurances to the contrary, Enon repeated the same question before handing over the paper, clearly still uneasy.

"No."

"..."

Even after hearing the firm answer, Enon hesitated a bit before slowly handing the paper to Yuder. As Yuder unfolded and began to read the document, Enon couldn't hide his suspicious gaze and opened his mouth.

"By the way, you must read and leave it here. It's absolutely forbidden to take it outside."

"Understood."

Since highly classified information was often read and disposed of quickly on the spot, Yuder wasn't surprised and simply nodded.

Enon's eyes grew perplexed as he watched Yuder, a mere soldier from commoner background, reading the document filled with difficult terms and seeming comfortable handling confidential information.

It was far too early for such a look. What exactly was this familiar sight?

Regardless of Enon's thoughts, Yuder remained focused on the document in his hands. The paper contained detailed information about the imperial family, a topic he had never been curious about in his previous life.

'Most of it is information I already roughly knew...'

There were a total of ten people who had become dukes with the imperial family's surname 'La Orr,' including the current Duke Peletta, Kishiar La Orr.

Considering the empire's thousand-year history, it seemed a small number. However, on the flip side, it was astonishing that these ten had largely been forgotten, with their names barely recorded in history.

There was hardly any official information about them. Only the years of their birth and death, and the names of the territories they had ruled as dukes, were known.

Rumor had it that the dukes who bore the surname La Orr all had significant defects that made it difficult for them to live normally as princes. They received the nominal title of duke, thereby

permanently losing their rights to the throne, but in return, their lives and safety were guaranteed until death.

Yuder was about to skip over the sections containing information he already knew when a particular part caught his eye. It was the section transcribing the birth and death years engraved on the tombstones of the previous dukes who had held the surname La Or before Kishiar.

'Come to think of it... they all died quite early.'

According to the records, all nine of them died before they turned 30. It was too soon. Even peasants, struggling to live day by day, mostly lived past 50. This made it even more surprising.

'I wonder if the major defects... included physical aspects as well as mental.'

"They share quite a few common traits. They all died young, never married, had no children, and severely restricted their external activities. Considering they even died within their own territories, it's almost like they were imprisoned."

Enon opened his mouth with a grim face as if he realized where Yuder's gaze had stopped.

"You know, apart from Kishiar La Orr, whom you said you'd protect, there isn't anyone else who showed their faces in the Capital's high society. Very few remaining portraits, and there were six who were isolated in remote areas and raised from the time they were born. But do you know what's more interesting?"

"What is it?"

"Out of ten, six were born in the last 300 years."

Hearing that, he looked down at the paper once again, and indeed, it was as Enon said. Yuder realized that including Kishiar, a total of six people were born within the past 300 years and his eyes widened.

"It's really strange considering that the duke with the surname of La Orr first appeared 200 years after the empire was established. Even I found out while researching this time."

"So is it... a problem related to the imperial bloodline?"

As Yuder opened his mouth, thinking about a certain hypothesis that crossed his mind, Enon nodded.

"It's plausible to think so."

The imperial family of the Orr Empire has long been revered, being referred to as having inherited the blood of the Sun God. Although the geopolitical situation of the continent has changed a lot now, with countries that were once vassal states gaining independence or increasing their power, and the Orr Empire no longer occupying the absolute position it once did, people living on the continent still held a degree of reverence for the imperial family.

Having superior abilities and overwhelming appearance befitting the inherited blood backed up such reverence, but what if there was a problem with the so-called perfect bloodline?

Just imagining it felt like blasphemy, denying the god. However, Yuder had long realized that the imperial family was ultimately just human, like him.

"They are humans, after all."

And many people who face insurmountable problems tend to avoid them and just hide them well enough to not attract attention, like the mere title of Duke given to the ten royals including Kishiar...

"The remaining records are extremely scarce, so it's not clear exactly what the problem was with the Dukes bearing the surname of La Orr. But it's likely not physical. There hasn't been a case where someone was deprived of their succession rights because they had a minor physical disability, right? Like Tilar who had difficulty with his legs since birth, or Crown Prince Zekeim who returned half-paralyzed after a war."

"Indeed..."

Yuder agreed with Enon's assumption, nodding. Among the past emperors, there were those who had physical disabilities from birth, or those who had acquired physical problems. However, he had never heard anyone questioning their abilities as royals.

'So is it mental? But Kishiar seems perfectly fine.'

There must have been some common defect between the nine previous Dukes and Kishiar to have maintained the title of Duke of 'La Orr'... yet he had no clue what it could be.

Yuder flipped through the bundle of papers, lost in thought. The next page contained rumors and remaining records related to the nine deceased Dukes. Most of it was nonsense, near groundless rumors, but Yuder focused on a certain common point that appeared among them.

Before death, they had rapidly weakened over several months, and their appearance was like a corpse drained of all blood by a monster.

Those who had witnessed the Dukes before their death were all reportedly shocked at their appearances, as they had become as shriveled and dark as a corpse, their former visage nowhere to be seen.

The most detailed story among similar ones was the information about the ninth Duke, Laflamme La Orr, who died 33 years ago.

He is said to be getting weaker day by day. Now he can't even walk by himself and is suffering, but no more painkillers seem to have any effect. Following his wishes, I've decided to dismiss everyone working in the castle, except those brought from the palace. I wish only for his comfort until the day he departs, but sadly, given past cases, it is highly likely that this will not be the case...

"Whose account is this?"

"That? A letter sent by the Duke's adjutant to his brother."

Although I was very curious as to how a letter sent by someone as close to the Duke as his adjutant to his kin ended up as a reference, it didn't seem like Enon was going to give me any answers.

'If this is information left by the Duke's adjutant, then the 'previous cases' mentioned are likely referring to former Dukes who were in the same condition.'

So, does this mean that while the information was strictly classified externally, within the imperial family everyone knew these facts?

Yuder recalled the image of Kishiar from his past life just before his death. He hadn't drastically withered like a corpse or become too weak to walk on his own in the months leading up to his death as described in these accounts. However...

'The fact is, Kishiar looked more and more tired and thin as time went on, unlike how he is now.'

Kishiar had been in such a state even before stepping down from his position as Commander of the Cavalry. While this might not necessarily point to commonalities with the Dukes mentioned in this information, Yuder was somehow continuously bothered by it.

"The part about Kishiar La Orr you were looking for is in the last chapter."

As Yuder was carelessly flipping through the pages filled with various rumors, Enon pointed out where the section he was looking for was. Hearing this, he brought the last chapter forward, and saw information written rather succinctly compared to other chapters.

"Is this it?"

"I left out common knowledge since he's still alive. Only things not widely known are left, and that's about it."

Enon was correct, but there was one problem. Since Yuder had been fairly close to Kishiar in his past life, he already knew most of the information provided.

'The rumor that he became the new owner of the divine sword. That's true... And the fact that he can use divine power. That's true as well. The rumor that he learned magic from the senior court mages in his childhood... I'm not sure about that. He might have been misunderstood because he carries around a lot of magic tools...'

In his past life, Yuder had seen Kishiar freely changing his appearance and wandering outside his quarters using a special magic tool. These days, he doesn't use it much, but if someone who didn't know it was due to a magic tool saw this, it could have been misunderstood.

'It is said that the private soldiers he raises in the Peletta territory are actually a powerful force, and at the Emperor's command, they can rush to the capital and execute any rebels... Is this just a baseless rumor?'

Chapter 110

The remaining members of the Peletta Knights in Yuder's mind were few in number. They were efficient guides, but their skills, with the exception of Nathan Zuckerman, were quite ordinary.

'Yet, they did cook well in the field...'

He had almost reached the last sentence among the scant information on Kishiar.

Originally, the position of the Crown Prince was set to be Kishiar La Orr's. However, about 20 years ago, due to the strong influence of the then Empress, Inella La Orr, at the imperial family meeting, Keilusa La Orr was appointed as the Crown Prince. It is said that the late Emperor and Empress Inella had a major dispute over this issue for several years, and their relationship was not good.

Was the position of Crown Prince originally intended for Kishiar?

No matter how many times he read it, the sentence remained unchanged. Yuder, holding the paper where the related section was written, extended it towards Enon and opened his mouth.

"Enon. Is there any basis for this section?"

"Indeed, many of those who attended the meeting at the time are still alive, so the information is quite reliable."

Enon responded dryly to the section that Yuder pointed out, but it was still unbelievable.

'Kishiar was almost the Crown Prince?'

Although the Orr Empire does not determine the Crown Prince by age and traditionally chooses after the princes have grown to some extent, it was indescribably strange to think that Kishiar might have been sitting on the Emperor's throne by now.

'...I can't imagine it.'

However, if such a thing had really happened, it might not have been bad.

Kishiar La Orr was the most perfect leader Yuder had ever seen. People said that the ability to manage a Knight Order or Cavalry and the ability to take responsibility for an entire country were different, but was it really so?

He could confidently say that Kishiar's abilities were much superior to the Katchian Emperor he had seen in his previous life. While it was hard to imagine him as an Emperor, who pays attention to his subordinates and steps up personally, wouldn't it be nice to have such an emperor in the world?

If the emperor he had served in his previous life was like Kishiar, Yuder would have been much happier than when he had been injured while handling unnecessary, dangerous assassination or destruction missions.

'If that were the case...'

Yuder suddenly realized he was stretching his assumptions to an absurd level and stopped his thoughts.

Once one becomes a Duke, regardless of what happens, Kishiar could never ascend to the Emperor's throne. That's why the current Emperor, Keilusa La Orr, didn't raise any heirs.

Moreover, in the end, the one who killed Kishiar in his past life was Yuder himself.

'Isn't it amusing that I'm having such thoughts?'

In this life too, Kishiar has already become a Duke. Rather than regretting the parts that couldn't be changed, he had to prioritize things that could be changed. Yuder decided to stop his overstretching imagination. He was losing his appetite.

"Judging by your expression, it seems this information is not satisfying?"

Then, Enon spoke at the perfect timing. Yuder lowered his head and opened his mouth.

"I think I got some leads on what to investigate next, so it's okay. For now, this is more than enough."

"Right now? What are you talking about? You said this would be the end."

"Well... could it really be?"

Yuder gave a faint smile toward Enon.

"Enon. Now that you know me, given your nature, you'll inevitably continue to be curious about what I might do. Instead of investigating behind my back, which won't yield any profit anyway, wouldn't it be better to openly observe what I'm doing?"

"W-what are you talking about?"

Enon stammered, raising his voice in surprise. Was he planning to investigate Yuder the moment he left?

"Why would I pay attention to you? I don't plan to believe in such nonsense like you coming back from the future, and I'm even less interested. I helped you once as a repayment for knowing my identity and that's the end of it! The end!"

"If you say so."

Even though Enon's expression clearly contradicted his words, Yuder let out a laugh, set the stack of papers down, and rose from his seat.

"I appreciate your help."

There was still plenty of time. Soon enough, it would become clear whether Yuder was right or Enon. As he imagined the frown on Enon's face that would follow him out, Yuder chuckled silently.

"Enon. If something happens or if you want to find me, contact me at the Cavalry's residence within the Imperial Knights' grounds."

"I won't, okay?"

"Just in case you need it, I'll leave this here."

Yuder placed a uniform button, which he had brought with him, on the counter. It was a spare Cavalry stone button with his name on it, capable of replacing a Cavalry member's identification.

"Are you listening? I told you I won't. Take it back! Hey! You rascal!"

Ignoring Enon's yelling, Yuder opened the door, and the bright sunlight made him squint.

"Hey!"

But before Yuder could step outside, Enon rushed forward and grabbed his sleeve. Yuder intended to tell him that it was okay to throw the button away if he was trying to give it back, but the expression in Enon's eyes was subtly different from before.

"...You really are a wretched kid. Here, take this. If I let you go and you collapse and die somewhere, it feels like my luck for this year would be completely ruined."

Enon forced something into Yuder's right hand. It didn't feel like the button. When Yuder opened his hand, he saw a slightly worn red string.

"What is this?"

"Figure it out yourself."

Despite his words, Enon explained with a grimace.

"It's something like a charm. Just tie it to something you always carry around."

"Why are you giving me this?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake!"

Enon shouted at Yuder's question, messing up his own hair.

"I don't know what you were doing before coming here today, but you're a lot more unstable than when you came before. It seems you've calmed yourself with divine power, but if you keep doing that, not even God can save your life. Anyway, it's better than dying, so take it!"

Bang. The moment his words ended, the door of the pharmacy closed with a loud noise as if it would break. Yuder coughed lightly as the old dust falling from above hit his head.

'It just looks like a normal string..... what effect could it possibly have.'

The returned Cavalry members were still abuzz with tales of the Harvest Festival. No one had noticed when Yuder stepped out for a moment and then returned. Only a small piece of paper with a message instructing him to come to the Commander's quarters was left on the table of his lodging, prompting Yuder to head straight to the top floor.

"Did you call for me?"

"You're early. I happened to have a cake that came in as a gift. Care to join me?"

Kishiar, who was enjoying his tea and snacks, greeted Yuder with a leisurely wave of his hand. His face was surprisingly neat, as if the late work from the previous night was but a fantasy. Nathan Zuckerman was nowhere to be seen.

Upon seeing Kishiar's face, Yuder recalled the conversation he had with Enon. After a small sigh, he put on an expression as if nothing had happened and took a seat across Kishiar. As if Kishiar had been waiting for him, he pushed a plate of cake toward Yuder.

There were many different kinds of cakes, all of which looked incredibly sweet just by looking at them.

"May I partake in the gift?"

"Don't refuse. They're all sent for the Harvest, and we don't even know who sent them."

In the Orr Empire, it was traditional to exchange food gifts before and after the Harvest Festival. Among commoners, this mostly meant sharing freshly harvested grains and fruits to celebrate the bountiful harvest, but the nobility was different. They used the tradition to flaunt their wealth, competing over who could present the most luxurious and precious food.

Yuder himself, in his previous life, used to receive high-end sweets and rare ingredients from faceless nobles during this time. He was unable to use them all and had to constantly send them down to the Cavalry's dining hall.

Almost none were sent with pure intentions. Most were sent with a hidden agenda, hoping that their families would be looked upon favorably later. It was quite uncomfortable to eat, and the ones sent to Kishiar were probably no different.

"...Then I won't refuse."

"Just use any fork."

Yuder casually picked up one of the new forks neatly placed next to each plate and started to eat the cake. As expected, it was so sweet that it felt like his tongue would melt.

According to tradition, dignified nobles were supposed to use only one fork per plate of food, which is why there were so many forks. However, Yuder didn't care about such formalities.

Even Kishiar himself said to use any fork, so why should he care?

"Do you like cake? You eat quite well."

"I don't particularly like or dislike it. ...You didn't call me here to ask this, did you?"

"Can't I have a little friendly chat with my assistant?"

After saying that, Kishiar went straight to the point.

"You've heard, haven't you? About the matter that has been causing a stir in the Cavalry since this morning."

"If you mean the news of the messenger from the palace, then yes, I've heard."

"That's right. It's an extension of the story you saw in the letter last night. Things have gotten a bit complicated."

The topic Kishiar brought up didn't stray from the subject Yuder had anticipated before coming. As Yuder silently stuffed a third piece of cake into his mouth, he listened to Kishiar's words.