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"The increasing number of requests for our Cavalry to participate in events is a good thing. But it seems a bit excessive. Aside from the simple participation requests, there are quite a few requests for maintaining public order, all from important events where foreign diplomats are involved. Moreover, it hasn't even been a year since the formation of the Cavalry, and they want the whole team to attend the largest party of the year, held at the Imperial Palace. What should I make of this intention?"

"It appears that someone is planning to put us in a position where we cannot refuse," came Yuder's response, to which Kishiar lightly nodded in agreement.

"They broke the rule of keeping all related matters confidential until I give a response. Not only among our members, but the information has already spread throughout the capital."

The autumn harvest festival held in the capital was one of the most significant events in the continent. The Pope himself led the worship and prayer events from an outdoor altar at the main temple of the Sun God. There was a grand parade featuring the Imperial Knights of the palace, specially selected Elite Imperial Troops, renowned Knights, and mages from various provinces. Not to mention countless other major and minor events and competitions held throughout the city for several days.

There was no greater honor than to officially participate in an event that attracted numerous foreign diplomats and tourists.

There was no better opportunity than this to announce the newly formed Cavalry to the whole continent.

It was likely that whoever suddenly proposed this also knew this, hence why they had boldly set the stage.

"Still, you can refuse, can't you?"

"I could."

A laugh-tinged answer returned.

"If you, as the Commander, choose to refuse, that would be the end of it."

"What do you think? Would it be best for me not to be suspicious and reject this overly beneficial offer?"

The fork that was lightly cutting the fifth piece of cake stopped. Yuder, staring into Kishiar's red eyes full of expectation, realized that this question was the primary reason he had been called.

"...How would I know? I doubt my opinion would be of much help in your grand decision."

He tried to deflect once, but Kishiar chuckled and shook his head like a boa constrictor.

"Why not? Your unique perspective has always been helpful to me. Giving your opinion on such matters is part of an assistant's job, so I would appreciate it if you could speak freely."

'Well, if it comes to that...'

Yuder opened his mouth as he speared a cherry that resembled Kishiar's eyes with his fork.

"Actually, haven't you already made your decision?"

"Hmm?"

"The reason why they set this stage and called us is clear. They want to smear the name of the Cavalry across the entire continent. Even if you refuse, they could still make a mess at the event, but I guess they wouldn't be satisfied with just that."

At Yuder's words, Kishiar gave a satisfied smile, resting his chin elegantly on the hand placed on the armrest.

"So?"

"I don't know who they are, but you can probably guess."

Yuder continued, recalling that Kishiar had said the night before that he had a rough idea of who might be behind this.

"If you know who the enemy is, you can predict what they'll do. Why retreat needlessly when they're practically handing us a golden opportunity? Isn't it better to bite the bait and use it to our advantage?"

"Is that so? So you're suggesting we do just that?"

"If our Commander isn't afraid of challenges, that's what I suggest."

As soon as he finished speaking, a piece of cherry and a chunk of whipped cream cake disappeared into Yuder's stomach in no time.

"Hahaha. Not afraid of challenges, eh?"

Kishiar broke into a bright smile, tilting his head.

"You, with your unassuming face, are surprisingly good at saying things that put people in a good mood."

"It's just my honest opinion."

"Only you could manage to compliment someone while simultaneously throwing them against the wall."

Despite his words, Kishiar seemed to be in high spirits.

"In fact, I already accepted those propositions as you suggested. I've sent my reply."

Just as Yuder had thought, Kishiar had already made up his mind.

"Considering that the Ministry of Internal Affairs was desperately avoiding my contacts till now and suddenly came forward on their own, could anything be better? Someone might have thrown this bait, hoping that our Cavalry would become the laughingstock of the continent, but I won't fall for it, nor will I run away. Even though we're a new formation and my members are still inexperienced in many ways, that doesn't mean we're bound to fail. Don't you think so?"

At his confident, slow voice, a light shiver ran down Yuder's back. Yuder answered with sincerity, looking into Kishiar's glowing red eyes.

"Yes."

"I'm truly glad that my assistant and I share the same opinion. It'll be a hectic period for a while, but let's succeed in a way that will show them. It might even be entertaining to watch."

Hearing this, Yuder finished the last piece of cake and put his fork down. The sweet aftertaste lingered in his mouth.

"But who is behind all this? Can you tell me now?"

"Why don't you try guessing with your clever mind?"

"Commander."

At Yuder's low calling, Kishiar squinted his eyes in a smile, then opened his mouth.

"A few days ago, the courtiers of the Crown Prince suddenly burst into the palace. I also heard that a courtier with a red belt was seen there yesterday. It seems like the Crown Prince is very interested in this event."

His answer seemed to come out of nowhere, but it was more than enough for Yuder to deduce the meaning.

'Crown Prince Katchian La Orr.'

Yuder recalled the face of the young Crown Prince he had briefly met during his recent visit to the Imperial Palace. He already knew who was behind the boy who hid his cold gaze with a painted smile.

'Did Duke Diarca get involved?'

He wondered if it might be due to the Hartan case where Kiolle was involved, but Yuder shook his head. The bound-by-oath Kiolle couldn't inform anyone in the house. Besides, if they had been meddling in the palace for a few days, it couldn't have been because of the recent incident.

"And... do you remember Count Gallon who visited here a few days ago?"

While Yuder was engrossed in his thoughts, Kishiar threw in another piece of information.

Count Gallon. Trying to remember where he had heard that name before, Yuder finally recalled who it was after some time.

'Ah, the man who had come demanding Kanna's release.'

After giving him a good scolding and kicking him out, he had completely forgotten about him.

"Yes, I remember."

Seeing Yuder's obvious grimace, Kishiar laughed heartily.

"Well, there's no need to try to remember him again. Thanks to the rumors about him, a lot of people have become interested in the Cavalry unit. There might be people looking for the members related to that incident during the festival, but just pretend not to know. The courier from the palace earlier was subtly trying to confirm the truth of the rumor."

"Ah... Yes. I understand."

Yuder responded apprehensively, realizing a beat too late that Kishiar's words were another hint.

'So, they just want to see the Cavalry's power for themselves because of that rumor...'

Then it made sense why Kishiar was so relaxed. No one yet knew how much power the Cavalry held. It was the perfect time to turn the trap they underestimated into an opportunity.

While Yuder was thinking, Kishiar continued smoothly.

"So, from today, we'll reduce overall training by half and separate people for participation in each event. You, Nathan, and the Deputy Commanders of each Division will need to work hard. But you have one more thing you need to do."

"Are you talking about the investigation of the Red Stone?"

"There's that, but there's one more thing."

Kishiar nonchalantly announced he was adding another task.

"Did you forget? The request you made before your leave. You asked for the authority related to the members' training."

"Oh..."

When Yuder nodded, Kishiar handed over a piece of paper with a seal on it, as if he had been waiting for him.

"I've already approved it. Your individual training with Gakane and Kanna was quite impressive. Now that Devran Hartude has returned, isn't it time to expand that capability to all members?"

Looking at those confident, red eyes, Yuder found himself speechless.

'Well, I had planned to do it anyway...'

He had done this in his previous life, so doing it twice wouldn't make a difference. Yuder accepted the approval letter and nodded slightly.

"Understood."

"Now then..."

Just then, there was a knock at the door.

"Commander. It's Ever Beck. I've come to deliver urgent news."

Kishiar, who had momentarily turned his gaze to Yuder, commanded, "Come in." As Ever opened the door and entered, her cheeks were flushed, as if she had run here. Seeing Yuder sitting across from the Commander surprised her, but she quickly regained her composure, approached, and bowed.

"What's going on?"

"Just now, Jimmy Ocker's second gender manifestation has begun. As we prepared, I've isolated him and came to report."

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The manifestation of Jimmy's second gender had been a long time coming. There had been signs for days, so it wasn't surprising. Kishiar seemed to share the sentiment, nodding his head as he opened his mouth to speak.

"Were there any members affected prior to the isolation? Any other anomalies?"

"Fortunately, the manifestation began while we were discussing training, so other members were not affected. Given the energy I felt alongside the fever from the manifestation, it seems that Jimmy will likely develop into an Alpha like myself. Until the manifestation is complete, I plan to have the Alpha members of the Shin Division take turns caring for him in an isolated room."

This was the first time that a member of the Shin Division had manifested a second gender. Despite what must have been a significant surprise, Ever's response was impressively calm.

"We gave him a herbal juice with a fever-reducing effect and applied a wet towel, but do you think this response is sufficient?"

Upon hearing her question, Kishiar, who had been lost in thought, nodded in approval.

"That should be sufficient for now. You handled the sudden situation very well."

The corners of Ever's eyes turned slightly red with pleasure.

"Thank you. It's all thanks to your prior instructions. I merely carried them out."

"The one who suggested making those arrangements is here, so you should thank Yuder."

"Yuder, you mean?"

Yuder was taken aback as the conversation suddenly turned towards him. In Ever's eyes, there was a look of surprise as she turned to look at him.

"...I merely made a suggestion. The fact that it was clearly defined as a rule and law is all thanks to the Commander. There's no need for that."

"Haha, it's nice to see you both passing around credit."

'I don't like it.' Yuder swallowed the words he couldn't bring himself to say aloud.

"Excuse me, Commander. I also have another matter to discuss..."

Upon finishing her report, Ever trailed off, seemingly aware of Yuder's presence. She evidently wanted to speak with Kishiar one-on-one. Noticing her hesitation, Yuder quickly rose from his seat to bid his leave.

"I'll take my leave then."

"Do that."

Kishiar waved with a smile. Unaware of Ever's slightly trembling eyes as she noticed the heap of empty dishes on the table, Yuder left the residence.

As he moved towards the lower ground of the building, avoiding the gaze of the other Cavalry members, his mind was filled only with thoughts related to the news of Jimmy's manifestation.

'It was a good decision to set up regulations regarding second gender manifestation in advance.'

In his previous life, there had been quite a few incidents among Cavalry members who suddenly manifested their second gender. Just the thought of not having such troubles this time was refreshing.

'Come to think of it, wasn't there not much time left when I manifested in the past?'

He couldn't remember the exact timing, but he was glad it wasn't precisely the same as before, since he couldn't be sure if the timing of manifestation would be the same this time.

'Wasn't there a time in the past when awakeners facing a second gender manifestation influenced those with potential around them, leading to a chain of manifestations?'

Those about to, or just after, manifesting a second gender often emitted a unique energy that could be felt with the senses, even if it wasn't visible.

In the case of Jimmy, he had only experienced slight fevers, but it never hurt to be cautious in case of an unknown occurrence. Yuder contemplated spreading the word in advance in case his power erupted suddenly.

'With the rules in place and those around me on guard, I'll be prepared even if my powers erupt abruptly like before. Jimmy's precedent would mean there will be less surprise.'

This time, absolutely, he would prevent any situation where he was alone with Alpha before his powers erupted. Clenching his fist lightly, Yuder made a firm resolution.

As Kishiar had mentioned, the Red Stone was stored in a spacious room set up beneath the Cavalry building. When he knocked on the entrance that appeared to be nothing more than an ordinary warehouse, a small hole just wide enough for a pair of eyes to peek through opened in no time.

"Ah, it's you!"

Despite his lack of self-introduction, the person inside recognized Yuder immediately and opened the door for her.

"I've been looking forward to seeing you again... Uh, yes, my name. You remember it, right?"

"Of course. You're Alik Pelgin."

Upon Yuder's succinct answer, Alik Pelgin, the apprentice of the old mage, smiled brightly.

"That's right. I'm relieved. I thought you might have forgotten me, as our first encounter was so brief... Just like the first time we met...."

Seeing his eyes cloud over as if recalling something, it seemed the incident of Yuder forgetting the name of Kiolle da Diarca at their first meeting was deeply imprinted in his mind. Yuder turned his gaze towards the expansive space behind the mage, rather than responding.

Other than massive pillars placed here and there to support the building, the place was completely empty.

However, a transparent box was visible on a table far away, and a hefty aura was barely leaking out from that direction, making his fingertips tingle slightly. It seemed that the Red Stone was stored there.

"Is the stone currently in that box?"

"Ah, yes. As expected, you spotted it right away. Follow me. I'll show you."

Yuder started walking behind Alik. As the distance shortened, he could feel the energy emitted by the Red Stone intensifying through his skin.

Yet, strangely, Yuder noticed that the energy didn't seem as provocative and heavy as before.

'What is this?'

"Do you see those magic stones on the ceiling?"

Alik opened his mouth as if noticing Yuder's puzzled expression.

"The energy emanating from the Red Stone was so strong that as soon as my master and I arrived here, we had to first create a barrier. We spent dozens of precious stones to build a seven-layer barrier, which was just barely enough to weaken it to this level. My master still seems to think further reinforcement is needed. How do you feel? Is the air breathable?"

Only then did Yuder notice the magic stones stuck all around the high ceiling. Upon closer inspection, he could make out complicated magic circles drawn faintly.

"...Yes. It's much better."

"Miss Kanna also said the same. I'm glad it seems to be effective."

Alik grinned, looking rather proud, but Yuder didn't return the smile.

"By the way... Where did Master Yulman go?"

"Master had briefly gone up to our quarters. He'll be back soon. Ah, wait a moment. Please, stop there."

Alik interrupted, abruptly blocking Yuder's path.

"We've set up a camp here. From here, it just looks like an empty space, but if we do this... Ha ha."

As Alik complicatedly twirled and waved his hand, the once empty space started to blur and the scenery changed. The distant Red Stone remained in view, but suddenly before Yuder appeared two sleeping bags that hadn't been there before, a table, three chairs, and a small magic stone stove burning brightly.

"Master couldn't be bothered to go back to the quarters, so he left these here."

"Shouldn't we inform the Commander and move proper furniture here?"

Alik scratched his head at Yuder's serious question.

"No, no, it's alright. This is more than enough for us. Master dislikes complicated things, and he's accustomed to living this way while conducting research... Ha ha..."

A subtle hint of struggle was noticeable on Alik's laughing face, as if he was a disciple catering to a demanding master.

"Actually, even though we've set up camp here, I can't proceed further without Master. When Master arrives, would you like to observe more closely with us? Or..."

"Stay here. I'll go take a look alone."

What was important wasn't to observe the stone, but to understand how much the mages had deciphered from the stone and what kind of investigation they were going to conduct.

Leaving Alik behind, Yuder began to stride towards the Red Stone. Thanks to the magic stones set up, he could approach much closer than before.

The Red Stone, delicately placed on a cushion inside a transparent box, hadn't changed since he last saw it. However, it seemed like the old mage had attempted to set up something as several magic stones were scattered around the box.

'It seems there hasn't been much progress yet.'

"Oh, our guest has arrived."

Yuder, who had been observing the stone, turned his head at the voice behind him. The elder magician of the Pearl Tower, Thais Yulman, greeted him with a smiling face.

"Sir Yuder. It's been a while."

"It has indeed, Yulman. Just call me Yuder."

In previous meetings, Kishiar had been present, and so formal titles were used. But now, as they would be seeing each other more frequently, there was no need for such formality. The old mage readily accepted Yuder's suggestion.

"Right."

The old mage, sporting a splendid white beard, was wearing an ordinary grey robe unlike what you'd expect from an elder of the Pearl Tower, but his eyes twinkled with youthful vigor. He was a stark contrast to his disciple, who seemed half weary.

"Did you come to see the stone?"

"No, I wanted to hear about the progress of the investigation."

"Ah, I see."

Thais Yulman nodded, looking back at the Red Stone and wrinkling the bridge of his nose slightly.

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"Well, as you can see, it's still nothing impressive," the old master remarked, "We've set up a defensive formation, barely enough to inspect the situation. It seems we'll need at least another day to establish a proper one. If only my apprentice had created the formation a bit quicker, we could've progressed further by now. Tsk."

"Master, do you wish to kill me? There are only a few people across the continent who can finish a defensive formation faster than I!" Alik cried out in a gloomy tone from afar. But neither Thais nor Yuder paid much attention to his words.

"I see. I heard you've had some conversation with Kanna."

"Oh, that young woman with astounding abilities."

A delighted smile spread across Thais's face.

"She was very enthusiastic and friendly. Thanks to the stories shared by Kanna, I was able to contemplate on how to approach the Red Stone."

Of course, nothing was definitively decided yet, Thais added. Yet, to Yuder, his words sounded like great news.

"Is that so?"

"Indeed. Care to listen?"

Yuder followed Thais back to the spot with chairs and a table, where Alik had already prepared a pot of tea.

"Have some. It's tea made from flowers I personally harvested and dried."

"You've plucked it from the garden behind the Pearl Tower, haven't you? As they're grown by the mages for research, they may at least have the best effect in boosting energy, if nothing else."

The flower, floating on the hot water, seemed almost alive. He didn't know about the effects, but the extraordinarily fresh and cool scent washed away the lingering sweetness of the cake he had at Kishiar's quarters.

"How is it? Isn't the fragrance pleasant?"

"Yes, it's delightful."

Hearing Yuder's response, Thais twirled his swollen fingers around the invisible tea cup and continued.

"Pouring hot water over dried flowers to experience such vivacity and intense aroma again, it's truly a marvel."

"..."

"Each time I see this, I'm reminded of the immense potential and power dormant within a tiny, withered flower. That's why I adore this tea. The effects of this tea, which I first researched 54 years ago....."

He had promised to discuss how to approach the Red Stone, but the old mage began a new tale.

"My research on the origin of magic, which started there....."

Alik, too, was at a loss when the idle talk, starting from the tea, eventually led to the historical research of Thais Yulman. Despite the irritating situation, Yuder didn't rush him. Seeing Yuder listening to his words patiently, without any change in expression, a faint smile flashed across Thais Yulman's face, only to disappear shortly.

"Oh dear, I apologize. I got carried away with a different topic instead of getting to the main point. Weren't you bored?"

"Not at all."

Sitting quietly in front of someone who only talked about his interests was not a difficult task for Yuder, who had been dragged to various meetings in his previous life that didn't suit his personality.

'And besides, Thais Yulman does not seem to be sharing these stories for no reason.'

"Truthfully, I had a specific reason for telling these stories."

'Just as I thought.'

Yuder felt a sense of vindication, taking another sip from his cup of tea.

"You guys were the ones who retrieved the Red Stone, and I'm sure you're already aware, but contrary to its exterior, the stone is brimming with dormant power, isn't it? I thought maybe we could apply the method used in making this flower tea to access that power."

Access the stone in the same way as making tea? Yuder looked at his companion's face for a moment before responding.

"Do you plan on pouring some water on it?"

"Ha ha ha. Close, but not quite water."

At Yuder's words, Thais chuckled as though amused, stroking his beard as he continued the conversation.

"When I asked Kanna, she mentioned... if an Awakener's power like you guys touches the stone, it triggers an explosion, right?"

Upon hearing this, Yuder quickly realized what the old mage was thinking.

"Do you plan on forcibly triggering all the remaining power within the Red Stone to erupt and discharge?"

"That's right."

"That's dangerous."

The response didn't need a second thought.

"The power of the stone is of a different dimension than any other power we've encountered so far. A mere touch can have lethal consequences. And what do you plan to do with the released power?"

Yuder himself had suffered damage from accidentally touching the power of the Red Stone, so there was no need to elaborate on its lethal danger.

"Didn't I just mention that the area I've been consistently studying for a long time has to do with the origin and essence of magic?"

"The power of magic and the Red Stone are completely different."

"But what if they're not so different?"

Thais responded leisurely, flashing a smile.

"Look here, Yuder. Our magic-created barrier is firmly blocking the power of the Red Stone, right? That means, although the two powers might differ, they can influence each other. If we can block it, theoretically, it should be possible to confine the discharged power."

Yuder furrowed his brow, momentarily at a loss for words. It was true that the seven-layer barrier he and his disciple had cast was currently blocking the energy emitted by the Red Stone. However, naturally emitted energy and exploding energy couldn't possibly be the same.

"Even if that's true... If multiple layers only manage to block this much, it's impossible to stop the exploding power. Let alone confining it, I can't even imagine it."

"I think it would be possible to confine the discharged power within a certain space if we significantly reinforce the barrier we have now. After that, we would need to transfer it using a medium."

"Transfer it?"

"Yes. Like a magic tool. Yuder, have you heard about magic tools?"

As Yuder nodded, Thais continued, as if he had expected as much.

"The principle of making a magic tool is to preserve the form of magic power at the moment of its manifestation using a medium. How well it can be confined depends on the quality of the medium and the skill of the mage making the tool, but the principle itself is simple. That's what I want to try."

If making magic tools was as simple as Thais suggested, the mages who knew how to create them wouldn't be treated as such rarities. However, Thais was talking about it as if it was an easy task.

"You make it sound so simple."

"In a sense, it might be easier than creating a magic tool, since we're trying to contain just the pure energy filling a space, not preserving a specific form of magic energy."

His explanation was complicated, but frankly, it was a rather intriguing proposition. If, as Thais had suggested, they could separate the energy from the Red Stone, they could possess the Stone and its energy separately.

The Stone, devoid of energy, would no longer be dangerous, and they could have Kanna examine it. If they had the mages investigate the energy stored in a medium, it couldn't be better.

When he thought that far, Yuder suddenly remembered something and froze with a stiff expression.

'...Wait. How was it in my previous life?'

In his previous life, the Red Stone that headed to the Pearl Tower had lost its power afterward and returned as the 'World Sphere'. Yuder had long been puzzled about where the power that the World Sphere originally had went, but due to the collapse of the Pearl Tower and the loss of all relevant personnel and information, he couldn't find the answer until his death.

The one who examined the Red Stone headed for the Pearl Tower in his previous life was likely Thais Yulman, just like now. In that case, he must have thought of the same solution back then.

'And... it must have been successful. Otherwise, the World Sphere that returned couldn't have been such an empty shell. If he had succeeded in separating the Red Stone and the energy inside it, where did the separated energy go? Who used it, and for what purpose? Keilusa La Orr died before the World Sphere returned... How about Kishiar? Did he retire before the World Sphere returned? Did Emperor Katchian know about it?'

'Or perhaps, the Pearl Tower side may have hidden the separated energy, or it might have been lost...' Trying to recall faint memories, he got a headache.

Yuder felt a chill down his spine and gritted his teeth. Seeing him suddenly stop talking and become cold, Thais Yulman tilted his head as if he found it strange.

"Does my idea seem that reckless to you? Your expression doesn't look good."

"...No."

Right. What did it matter what happened in the past? The Red Stone and Thais Yulman were both here now, so all they had to do was find new answers.

'Anyway, one thing I can be sure of. I don't have to worry about Thais Yulman's hypothesis failing.'

Regaining his composure, Yuder spoke.

"Your words certainly seem reasonable, Yulman. But even if we can separate and contain the power... Do we have a medium that can contain such immense power?"

Seeing that his sudden change in mood was due to the matter of the medium, Thais didn't question it further.

"We'll have to test that from now on. I'll tell you a few things that are known as the strongest mediums. It would be great if you could tell the Duke about this. He should be able to help with that, shouldn't he?"

"Understood. What are they?"

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"A piece of the ancient dragon's heart, the dust of an ancient fairy, top-grade Eucalractus."

Yuder didn't know much about the components of magic tools or the like, but he did know that the three ingredients Thais mentioned were all incredibly rare and valuable. Given the rarity of these items, it was reasonable that Thais couldn't procure them on his own and had to request help from Kishiar.

"Are those the only three items?"

"For now, yes."

"Understood. I'll pass this onto the Commander. Also, you might need magic stones for setting up the defensive formation. I'll mention that as well."

At Yuder's words, Thais's pupil, Alik, wore an expression of gratitude.

"Oh, thank you for considering that too. The truth is, we were running low on magic stones."

"If you find anything lacking, please let either me or Kanna know. Ah, was there any contact from the Pearl Tower?"

"We're fine. They still think we're in the Imperial Palace. Even if they find out we're here, given the Master's character, it won't be a major issue..."

"Ahem, Alik. You're unusually talkative today."

At his Master's pointed words, Alik stiffened his shoulders.

'So, that means the other mages from the Pearl Tower are not as interested in the study of the Red Stones as Thais Yulman.'

It was fortunate. Emperor Keilusa had given them only a month to investigate the Red Stones, and several days had already passed. There was no time to delay. Any potential distractions had to be completely ruled out.

'Still... I must ensure their safety.'

Yuder decided he needed to caution them about the dangers of the stone through Kanna as well, to prevent any accidents from mages mishandling the Red Stone. With this thought, he exited the underground.

Of the seven walls existing in the capital, the 1st and 2nd walls were the territory of the Imperial Palace. As such, the area accessible to ordinary people truly started from the 3rd wall. However, even prestigious noble families often resided beyond the 4th wall. Entering within the 3rd wall was not an easy task.

Of course, the main house of the Apeto Dukedom, one of the most traditional and prestigious families maintained from the beginning of the empire, was naturally located within the 3rd wall.

Among all the beautiful buildings erected within the 3rd wall, it was the most sacred and graceful. However, that day, it was filled with a precarious atmosphere, as if one was treading on thin ice.

The reason was simple. Lenore Shand Apeto, the second son known for his exceptionally cold nature, was in a very foul mood.

"There's no one at the stronghold, not even any trace of any left behind object or sign... Did they think that I would grant them more time because of such a shoddy report?"

"Of course not, sir."

The servant knelt before Lenore, shivering in fear. He didn't need to look up to feel the icy anger pouring down from above.

Unlike the first son, Aishes, who, bearing the title of heir, didn't need to concern himself with trivial matters, the second son, Lenore, handled many practical affairs. If he wanted to increase his chances, even by a small margin, of surpassing Aishes in the Duke of Apeto's eyes, his only way was to produce good results in his tasks without making mistakes.

Hence, Lenore had been most focused on supporting 'research' related to the Awakeners these days. Since the First Prince didn't express much interest in this field, Lenore saw it as an excellent opportunity to yield results.

For research, the consistent supply of Awakeners to be used as subjects was of utmost importance, and the Eastern base, which had done this job most competently until now, had suddenly lost contact a few days ago. Lenore sent nearby subordinates to investigate, but the only reports that returned conveyed meaningless information: the base was already emptied out, with no clue as to where its inhabitants had gone.

There were only two pieces of information that could be obtained for him. One, the oath of the Eastern base's Warden kept at the headquarters had been stained in red, indicating he had failed to keep the 'secret' and had likely died. And the other, an unfathomable rumor that a gigantic column of fire had suddenly risen and disappeared around the time the contact with the Eastern base was cut off.

'Fire. The last report from the Eastern base said they had captured an Awakener from the Cavalry. His ability was fire, if I remember correctly.'

There were many things Lenore had wished to investigate upon bringing the Cavalry's Awakener here, but everything had gone into disarray with the disappearance of the base itself. Considering that Duke Peletta, the Cavalry Commander, had been silent up till now, it seemed doubtful whether the Eastern base had really captured a member of the Cavalry.

The fact that secrets about the ongoing research at Apeto had been leaked was nothing short of an emergency. There must have been a colossal incident there, and yet it was unbelievable that nothing remained at the scene.

Even more disturbing was the fact that, according to the reports, some time had passed since the site was thoroughly cleaned up, but no suspicious movements had been felt around Apeto family.

'If only someone who caused this mess had threatened us, it would've been easier to deal with.'

The fact that Lenore couldn't identify who leaked the secret was extremely unsettling. If Duke Apeto found out about this, not only would he immediately take back all the tasks he had entrusted to Lenore, but he would also send Lenore far away without hesitation.

"The fact that everything disappeared without a trace means that either the others there planned to kill the Warden and run away, or they were caught somewhere without even having time to escape. What about the possibility that the Diarca family noticed something and took action?"

The Diarca family was the most likely suspect for causing this incident. The East was originally their territory, and if they found an intruder, they would have certainly not let them live. It wouldn't be surprising if they figured out that Apeto was involved in the process.

'But if that was the case, they wouldn't have remained silent till now. If they had that good information, they would either show signs of starting research like us, or give us some hint.'

"The possibility is indeed... plausible."

The servant, who had no clue about Lenore's thoughts, simply stammered and wrung his hands.

"The investigators said that the youngest prince of the Diarca family happened to be training the knight squad nearby a few days ago. Then, is there not a possibility that our people came across them during their training?"

"If you're talking about Diarca's youngest, do you mean Kiolle da Diarca?"

Upon mentioning Kiolle's name, Lenore's expression scrunched up, failing to conceal his disdain.

"Of all people, that fool who thinks he became an Imperial Knight because of his superior skills is not very capable. If he were smart enough to carry out such a bold action without leaving a trace, he would have already earned at least one favor from the Diarca family."

"I apologize if my inadequacies upset your mood, sir."

Immediately, the servant prostrated himself on the ground, his forehead pressing against the floor.

"Enough. Any other peculiarities?"

"..."

"Speak up, anything will do. If you can't prove your worth here, there will be no future for you."

At the chilling threat, the servant trembled and desperately tried to recall the information he'd exchanged while in contact with the Eastern base. He was so terrified that everything he knew seemed to disappear from his mind, but with great effort, a small piece of information popped up.

"The, the people at the Eastern base said they had a few collaborators in the nearby village. Wouldn't we be able to obtain information related to the incident if we find those collaborators?"

"Collaborators."

The Apeto family's 'bases' scattered across the continent did a lot of work, but their most important task was to undermine the powers that followed other aristocratic families. One of the most effective methods was to recruit dissatisfied young nobles, with issues of succession or inheritance, as collaborators.

"I wonder how much they really know... but alright. It's better than not trying. Along with monitoring the movements of the Diarca family, find and investigate these collaborators, then report back."

"Yes, sir!"

Lenore rose from his seat and headed towards the annex behind the main mansion. The annex had a prison in the basement, and it felt strange to see priests in white robes moving around amidst the horrifying scene where groans of pain echoed.

Among the priests, one with the most luxurious holy symbol necklace around his neck turned to Lenore and greeted him immediately.

"Welcome, second young master."

"How is the research going, uncle?"

The middle-aged priest referred to as 'uncle' by Lenore was Beltrail Shand Apeto, one of the illegitimate siblings of the current Duke of Apeto. He had an uncanny resemblance to the duke, suggesting undeniable kinship. Beltrail had joined the Sun God temple at a young age and had risen to the position of one of the twelve senior priests, directly under the Pope.

Outwardly, he seemed utterly incorruptible, but the inner contents didn't align with his appearance. The priest smiled gently and patted Lenore's shoulder.

"As always. We are simply observing the will of God."

God's will. Amid the chorus of agonized groans, it was an eerily absurd phrase to hear, but no one challenged him on it.

"None of the ones you sent last time who had children survived. It seems certain that there are more complicated conditions necessary for them to reproduce than simply waiting for their mating season."

"Is that so? How is the plan to observe their changes coming along?"

At Lenore's question, Beltrail shook his head.

"It seems we need to gather more Awakeners who originally had power. Wouldn't there be differences between an Awakener Priest and an Awakener Mage? It would be best if we could find an Awakener Knight who can use aura, but that might be quite challenging."

The news was negative; they still hadn't obtained clear results. But Lenore couldn't be angry at his uncle, so he simply let out a long sigh.

'It's been over a year since we started this research, and we still haven't achieved any significant results. If Aishes knew about this, he would double over with laughter.'

Turning

Chapter 115

The First Prince Aishes had long since washed his hands of the research, arguing that it would yield no useful information. In contrast, Lenore invested heavily in this study. It was a research that he started with faith in the power of his uncle, who had been studying the Awakeners ever since they first appeared.

If through this research he could find a clue to resolve the blood-related issue that had been plaguing his family for so long, or even discover information that could serve as a weakness for the Duke of Peletta, who had been annoying everyone since his awakening, Aishes' position as the successor would be shaken in an instant.

Lenore had no doubt that he would be a far superior successor than a frail Aishes who arrogantly relied solely on being born first.

However, the research had been fruitless for over a year, and to add insult to injury, the Warden of the Eastern base, who had been supplying the Awakeners, had died. As if that wasn't enough, the entire base had disappeared without a trace. The more he thought about it, the more of a headache it was. The Warden had been a good communicator, and Lenore had taken a liking to him.

"Have you seen my father? Did... did he say anything?" Lenore asked.

Beltrail shook his head at Lenore's question.

"I saw him a little while ago, but he said there's no need to report if there's no progress."

It was a rather bad sign that the Duke, who had been interested and even provided a place when Lenore first proposed this research a year ago, said that. Lenore looked around with a forced smile.

"I see. Well, father is busy these days, so it can't be helped. I will see if I can bring more Awakeners, either Knights or Mages, for uncle."

"How did the situation with the Awakener from the Cavalry you mentioned last time turn out?" Beltrail asked, as if he suddenly remembered.

Feeling as if his sore spot had been prodded again, Lenore hid his irritation behind a forced smile and shook his head.

"Well... there seems to have been some misunderstanding. It's not like an Awakener from the Cavalry can be easily captured."

"I see. That's unfortunate."

Genuine disappointment crossed Beltrail's eyes. It was an unusual expression for someone who always maintained a gentle demeanor.

"It seems you had quite high hopes. I'm sorry for not meeting your expectations."

"Duke Peletta is one of the first Awakeners and the first confirmed second gender. I thought those handpicked by him must be special in some way. Please bring them if you ever get a chance."

Lenore knew that Kishiar La Orr was one of the early Awakeners, but he had never heard of the latter part. Watching his uncle's research over the past year, he had thought he understood the Awakeners and the second gender quite well. Unable to hide his surprise, he responded.

"Is that so? I wasn't aware that Duke Peletta had manifested a second gender."

"It was almost simultaneous with his awakening, as far as I understand. That's what the Temple of the Sun God confirmed. Well, isn't it only natural?"

Natural. Lenore instantly understood what that meant.

"I see. An Imperial family member worthy of the title of Duke... Then, what gender is the Duke of Peletta?"

"What do you think?"

Beltreil asked with a smile, clearly enjoying himself.

"I'm not sure. Didn't uncle say it's difficult to distinguish just by appearance? But I would prefer it if it were the Omega."

"Why is that?"

"Wouldn't it be nice if God granted at least the mercy of nurturing an imperial heir directly to someone who is destined not to have children? Especially considering how blessed he is."

The comment was filled with unmistakable sarcasm. And yet, hearing a remark that could get him dragged away for insulting an Imperial family member, Beltreil did nothing but smile softly, not rebuking his nephew.

"Unfortunately, he is an Alpha."

"I see. That's a shame."

Lenore replied indifferently in a voice that was not sorry at all, then turned away.

"Then, I'll take my leave now. If you need anything, please send a message through the servant at any time."

"Understood. May the Light's blessing be with you."

Emerging from the underground dungeon, Lenore began to walk toward the main mansion through the corridor. Several servants followed him politely. However, before he completely left the annex, a sound of something breaking along with a beast-like roar echoed from somewhere.

"What was that sound?"

One of the servants hurriedly ran off at the question asked by the second prince, who had stopped walking with an unpleasant expression. He returned shortly and reported the identity of the sound they had just heard.

"It's said to be that Awakener brat you ordered to be imprisoned last time. He's still not behaving, so he's still being confined, but as soon as he regains consciousness, he causes such a ruckus."

"You mean the one I had imprisoned last time... are you talking about that brat who was Revlin's escort?"

"Yes, that's right. He's reportedly screaming to see Prince Revlin again."

"It's surprising that the ignorant fool is still alive."

To be honest, Lenore had forgotten until just now that he had given such an order. However, as he heard the servant's story, the unpleasant feeling he had felt at that time came back to him.

"Prince Revlin comes every day to beg not to harm him, so we can't even flog him. We're just drugging his food to keep him quiet."

"Revlin? But why wasn't I informed?"

"I apologize! ..."

As Lenore furrowed his brow, the servants all flinched in fear and bowed deeply. For them, meeting the gaze of the second prince when he was in a bad mood meant death.

'What a bunch of idiots. They're all useless.'

Lenore looked down at the back of the servants' heads and imagined stabbing them all to death. If he did that, no one would say a word. Such things had happened plenty of times before.

But he refrained because he still remembered how Aishes had reported him to the duke when he had killed a few servants last time, and he had been reprimanded. It was not good to give more reasons in a situation where his brutality was already regarded as his weakness.

"Never mind. If Revlin had forced me not to tell, then you couldn't help it. But you must not forget that I am your master."

The servants trembled in uncertainty at Lenore's cold voice. Lenore turned his head towards the inside of the annex where the beastly screams had subsided.

"The one we've locked up... Right. Starve him for a week, not even a drop of water, and if he still doesn't quiet down, send him to the dungeon. Inform my uncle he can use him however he pleases."

"Understood."

"Also, Revlin Shand Apeto is to be prohibited from approaching this annex. He disregards the dignity of the Apeto, plays with the likes of hired hands, and blatantly ignores my orders, showing no fear. If he disobeys again, bring it directly to me."

Having said that, Lenore exited the annex without a backward glance. The servants straightened their bent backs and exchanged terror-filled glances a good while after he'd disappeared.

"...That's what he said, sir. Therefore, you must never come here. If he finds out, we will all die."

"What?"

Not long after, a small shadow that tried to sneak in through the back door of the annex was stopped by a servant's hand. The figure, his face hidden by a large hat attached to his cloak, was none other than Revlin Shand Apeto, the youngest of Duke Apeto and the younger brother of Lenore Shand Apeto.

"That's nonsense. You know, Phil. If I don't go, he will truly die."

"You really can't, sir. Don't you know the temper of Second Prince?"

After a few rounds of squabble, the white hand removed the hat from his face. He was a doll-like pretty boy that attracted attention at first glance.

Seeing the golden eyes soaked with tears and anger under the disheveled red hair, the old servant who blocked Revlin sighed. But still, he couldn't let him in. For the sake of the young prince, for his own life, this was the best choice.

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Damn."

Revlin, spitting out a curse unfitting of his pretty face, cast his gaze to the ground. The thought of what could be happening underneath this ground sent shivers down his spine.

"Okay, I won't go in. Was there any other news? If Lenore was here, he surely must have had a talk with uncle."

"Nothing in particular. Ah, but..."

The old servant, who followed Lenore to the dungeon, scratched his face as he racked his memory.

"The two of them were talking about Duke Peletta."

"Duke Peletta? Did they discuss the Cavalry?"

Revlin hastily raised his voice to ask.

"Yes, I believe I heard such a name. They tried to bring someone from there but failed, and they were saying it's a shame."

Revlin's expression sunk into thought for a moment before he nodded, handing the servant a gold coin.

Turning

Chapter 116

"Right. Thanks for telling me. Take this."

"Oh, you shouldn't have...."

"It's not just a handout. You have to hide it well so that he doesn't notice."

"That won't be as easy as you think, sir."

Even as the servant spoke those words, he didn't refuse the money. Revlin gazed upwards at a window in a room on the third floor of the annex, the light completely concealed by thick curtains, and murmured a name under his breath.

"....Nion."

His lips quivered merely at uttering the name. The boy let out a long breath, clenching his fists tightly.

"The Harvest Festival will start soon. When it does, I'll be free from my close guard. I'll be able to move without his watchful eyes... Just hold on a little longer..."

"Sir, you must leave now. The shift change is about to end and someone will come."

Turning around, the old servant gestured sternly. Revlin flipped his hat back on and quickly turned away. The area behind the annex became silent as if nobody had ever been there.

The first event of the Harvest Festival, always held in the capital, was the 'Grand Parade'.

The Grand Parade was a massive procession circling the entire capital, involving the Imperial Knights, Imperial Mages, specially selected Elite Imperial Troops, and renowned Knightly Orders from various regions, along with other famous figures from across the continent.

To be able to participate in the parade, an event that brought together the largest crowds and was eagerly anticipated, was a great honor that could be boasted of for generations.

This year, the news that the Cavalry led by the specially invited Duke Kishiar La Orr of Pelleta would participate in the parade had surprised many, and depending on their interests, some were hoping for the Cavalry's success and others for its failure.

"I can't believe... I'm here to participate in the parade."

Yuder looked at Kanna, who was mumbling next to him. She stood proudly at the front of about ten members of the Cavalry. Despite her band being slightly skewed, indicating her position as the Deputy Commander, she seemed oblivious to it, appearing half-dazed.

"I'm nervous. Despite all the practice, I feel like my hands and feet are shaking now that I'm really here. What if I fall while walking? What if I make a mistake and the Cavalry becomes a laughing stock...."

"Don't worry. Have you forgotten?"

Yuder nonchalantly spoke as he straightened her band.

"The moment we start walking, we will create a wind barrier so that even if we try to fall, we won't be able to."

"Ah, right. I... I forgot."

Kanna nodded endlessly, her mouth gaping as if she had just remembered.

Kanna wasn't the only member who was worried about falling during the parade. Therefore, Kishiar and Yuder decided to call in a member of the Sul Division with wind power, who has a particularly calm personality, to wrap the members' legs in wind throughout the parade.

In truth, Kishiar had some doubts about the effectiveness of this, but Yuder's past experiences assured him that the method had certainly worked.

'It's a win if it doesn't get worse.' Wind, for instance, may not be practically helpful, but the stability that it offers can soothe the members' hearts. It was all about keeping a calm mind.

'This was a method I used when I first became the Commander in my previous life... Well, it worked well back then.'

However, the difference was that back then, Yuder was the one who used the wind, and this time, it wasn't. All Yuder hoped for was that the member who decided to use the power of the wind would do their job properly.

"Yuder, Kanna!"

Just as he was gently patting the slightly calmed down Kanna's back, a bright voice came from behind him. A bit behind the main row where the Shin Division had gathered, standing right next to the other members, was Jimmy, his eyes sparkling with a smile.

"You're really, really cool today!"

Jimmy, who had manifested his second gender, stood up, dusting himself off, on the third day. The boy who had completed his manifestation was now a perfect Alpha. Although many were worried about his manifestation at such a young age, Jimmy rather enjoyed it.

In the few days of preparing for the Harvest Festival, Yuder, who was so busy that he couldn't even get proper sleep, felt like he was finally seeing Jimmy's face properly today.

'Somehow... it doesn't feel like it's just me. Hasn't he grown a bit in the meantime? Hasn't his uniform sleeve gotten a bit short? When we get back, I'll have to get it mended right away.'

In preparation for today's march, all members had dressed up smartly in their black uniforms. Those who had requested personal weapons all had new weapons bestowed in the name of Kishiar. The members, freed from the predicament of having to carry worn-out training weapons, had faces full of excitement and tension.

Yuder, seeing the beautiful high-quality scabbard hanging around Jimmy's waist, gave a faint smile. In fact, a very similar sword was hanging around Yuder's own waist. It had been personally bestowed upon him by Kishiar the night before.

However, unlike the other members' swords made of well-refined high-grade iron, Yuder's was a little special. That's because it was a sword made from Eucalractium, one of the materials that Thais Yulman, the Elder Mage of the Pearl Tower, had requested from Kishiar a while ago, to use as a medium to contain the power of the Red Stone.

Eucalractium, a rare mineral occasionally discovered in unexpected places, was similar to iron but became incomparably hard when refined. Its ability to accept magic power was also excellent, so it was often used as a material for magic tools rather than swords. Nevertheless, it was clear that it was one of the best materials for making swords.

"There's no need to give me such a good sword."

"As long as it doesn't look any different from what the other members got, it's fine. The average person wouldn't recognize it. Surely, you don't expect my assistant to carry a training sword even during the parade, do you?"

Yuder received the sword from Kishiar with a mix of emotions. On the inside of the scabbard, painted black to avoid drawing the enemy's attention, was an ancient language drawn beautifully in white, blessing and wishing for martial luck. As Yuder stared at it, Kishiar opened his mouth with a soft smile.

"Do you see the empty slot inside the scabbard?"

“Ah... yes.”

Just as he said, there was a strange groove at the very bottom of the white motif that could be felt when touched by a finger.

“Where's the gemstone I detached from the divine sword before?”

“It's here as well.”

Kishiar's eyes narrowed slightly at the sight of Yuder pulling out a red gemstone from the pocket of his uniform. His demeanor seemed to imply that he expected this.

“What are you going to do if you drop it while carrying it around like that?”

“I had no other way but to keep it by my side at all times. I have yet to lose it, isn't that okay?”

“It's not okay. That's why I ordered to make a slot in the scabbard so that you can fit it in. Now, attach it.”

Only then did Yuder realize what role the groove inside the scabbard was intended to play, and he was surprised. When he carefully inserted the red gemstone, it fit perfectly, as if it was made for it from the beginning.

“Now it's complete.”

Indeed, the existence of the red gemstone meant Yuder's sword was fully completed. Although the gemstone was placed where it would not be noticeable unless one paid close attention, Yuder was satisfied with it. He preferred it this way, as being too conspicuous could cause dissatisfaction among the other members.

“Thank you.”

“You've been reducing your sleep for days, running around preparing for the festival. To be honest, I wanted to give you something better, but that was the best I could do on short notice.”

“This is more than enough.”

“I thought you would say that.”

Kishiar sighed, shaking his head slightly, and smiled.

“...”

Yuder, who was absentmindedly fiddling with the sword hilt while reminiscing about what had happened last night, glanced at Kishiar, who was chatting with the Imperial Knight Commander and the Chief Imperial Mage up ahead.

Wearing white gloves embroidered with gold thread and a flawless golden hair stylishly swept back to reveal a smooth forehead, he looked as if he were born for this day.

His tall stature stood out from a distance, and he wore a dazzling white uniform brighter than ever. Just watching him gave one a dizzying sensation. Indeed, many people were sneaking glances at Kishiar and losing their wits.

He was as beautiful as he appeared, but like Yuder, he had hardly slept and had been preparing for today. While his fatigue didn't show like it did under Yuder's eyes, he must have been quite tired.

“Yuder, Kanna. You're here.”

“Gakane.”

Just then, another tall young man entered Yuder's field of vision, obscuring Kishiar. Gakane, looking neater than usual with his red hair tied back with a black silk ribbon, had a brilliant aura about him, reminiscent of a prince from an old tale.

"Wow, Gakane. You look like a real noble lord now."

As Kanna openly admired his appearance, Gakane, who was indeed from a distinguished family of nobility since birth, gave a perplexed smile and scratched his head.

"Ha-ha. Is that a compliment?"

"Of course!"

At Kanna's playful words, Gakane, smiling, turned to Yuder. His gaze drifted momentarily toward Yuder's hand, covered by a black glove, then quickly returned as if nothing happened.

Turning

Chapter 117

"Yuder, you worked hard until late last night, didn't you? How are you feeling? You look a bit tired."

"I'm fine."

"Is that a new sword you have? Quite impressive. The red string tied to the handle, did the Commander give it to you?"

In fact, Yuder had tied a red string, which Enon had given him, to the sword handle before leaving that morning. If he wanted to keep Enon's advice to always carry it, tying it there seemed the best way. It was a relief that it matched well without seeming out of place, according to Gakane's words.

"The sword, yes, I got it... The string is mine."

"I see. It suits you well. It makes you look incredibly strong."

"Thank you."

As Yuder expressed his thanks, Gakane was about to say something else, but the atmosphere suddenly buzzed with activity, and everyone's gaze turned towards Kishiar, who was returning.

"It seems the march is about to begin."

"Ah, I'll return to my post. See you later, Yuder!"

While Kanna, who had once again turned pale with tension, clenched her fists, Gakane returned to where the Shin Division and his companions gathered. Following Gakane's departing figure, Yuder unintentionally glanced in that direction and briefly exchanged a nod with Devran Hartude, who was smiling upon noticing him.

After returning to the capital and receiving treatment for several days, Devran, who had completely erased traces of his torture, had started to act very friendly towards Yuder. Although he suspected the sudden friendliness was due to Devran witnessing his violet-tinged injury and sharing the secret, Yuder was relieved that he kept it well.

"Yuder! Over here."

Finally, Kishiar, who had returned to where the Cavalry had gathered, looked around for Yuder. Leaving Kanna behind, Yuder approached him. During the short walk, a few colleagues approached him, unable to hide their excitement and tension.

"Yuder, you look terrific today. Like a truly noble person."

"You too, Steiber."

Steiber Rendley, the Sul Division Deputy Commander with a pleasant smile, patted Yuder's shoulder. The Shin Division Deputy Commander Ever Beck, who had styled her long hair unusually high, also greeted him from beside.

"Yuder. We're heading to the 6th Wall right after this, right? I keep forgetting if I remembered it correctly."

"Yes, we are. Even if you try to run away because you don't want to go, I'm confident I can find you and bring you back, so you don't need to be that nervous."

At Yuder's calm response, Ever managed a smile. After passing them, Yuder finally stood in front of Kishiar, whose eyes, red as gems, were staring at him.

"Your coat is disheveled."

Looking down, he saw that his uniform's coat had slightly come undone as he had brushed past the troops. Yuder reached out to adjust it, but Kishiar was quicker. His fingers, covered in white gloves, gracefully adjusted Yuder's coat and even brushed off a piece of dust.

"...Thank you."

"You're welcome."

The sight of the imperial family member, Duke Peletta, personally adjusting someone's coat made people murmur in surprise. Yuder couldn't bring himself to turn his gaze towards them. Regardless, Kishiar just stood there, smiling.

"Thanks to your highness's grace, I'm likely to be misunderstood quite a bit today."

"That's not too bad."

"For me, it is."

"Whichever way, isn't it better for the Cavalry to be the talk of the town? Enjoy it."

Lowering his gaze and flashing an elegant smile, Kishiar waved towards the capital's citizens who were cheering for him from afar. Instantly, the cheers grew so loud that they could have deafened him.

"There he is! That's Duke Peletta! The brother of His Majesty the Emperor!"

"Wowwww!"

"Sounds like you're going deaf. How will you manage if this continues before we even start?"

Nathan Zuckerman, his face scrunched up amidst the roaring cheers, appeared, leading a huge white horse. It was the horse Kishiar was supposed to ride during the march.

"It's just a wave of a hand, after all."

Kishiar took the reins from Nathan's hand and smoothly mounted the horse. The cheers again surged, engulfing the entire street. Yuder, seeing Nathan Zuckerman's expression darken even more in his proper Peletta Knight attire and armor, opened his mouth.

"Sir Nathan, I heard you'll be accompanying me, following on either side of the horse. Which side do you plan on taking?"

"Either side is fine, but since the Cavalry should be most visible to the people, I'll take the left."

The right was directly visible to the crowd, while the left was a spot overshadowed by Kishiar and his horse.

After acknowledging Nathan's choice, Yuder stood to the right of the horse Kishiar was riding. Then, as they had been trained, the remaining Cavalry members started to line up behind them. The Deputy Commanders of each Division stood at the very front, and then the members lined up in pairs. Seeing the confident look of the lined-up members, the crowd erupted in admiration and curiosity.

"Are those the people in the Cavalry? They look incredibly strong."

"Their outfits are cool. This year, the Cavalry is more worth watching than the Imperial Knights."

'The continuous practice was worth it.'

Yuder smiled faintly, making sure no one else could see. Considering how desperate things were when they first practiced this parade a few days ago, the current situation was almost unbelievably improved.

As he heard the horn being blown three times in the distance, Yuder visualized the parade schedule that was about to begin today. The Imperial Troops always stood at the very front of the parade, followed by the Imperial Knights and the Imperial Mages, and then the rest of the participants.

The Cavalry, participating for the first time this year, had yet to set off since they were at the very end, but judging by the atmosphere, it didn't seem like they would be received poorly.

'Of course. We worked hard to make it that way.'

"We're about to depart. The signal came."

Kishiar, holding the signaling baton, spoke. Yuder heard the sound of a cannon firing in the distance and looked back. His 330 Cavalry comrades, stiff with excitement, came into view.

After scanning each of their faces, Yuder made sure everyone could see him as he curled up the corners of his mouth in a smile.

"Nervous?"

"..."

"No need to be. This event isn't even as challenging as a single lap around the training field."

While the parade was a grand event, it was still a festival. They were not knights who must remain stern or soldiers, so there was no benefit to them being overly serious.

'In my previous life, everyone was so tense that they made many mistakes and took a lot of criticism. There was no need to be so stiff in such a place.'

In order to maintain an image that was fitting of them, those who were chosen based on their skills alone, regardless of their social status, a leisurely smile was best. At least, that was what Yuder had decided.

"Uh, yeah. Right. We run more than ten laps around the training ground every day, so this is nothing!"

Kanna, who had been rigid, broke into a small smile as if infected by Yuder's rare grin. Subsequently, the other members also began to relax their stern expressions, one by one, and started to laugh.

"True. It's really no big deal. It's just like taking a round to celebrate the festival!"

"There wouldn't be a single person who'd be overly scared about such a trivial matter, right?"

"The one who was frozen was you. Just a moment ago, you were standing there with a face that said you wanted to go to the bathroom. I saw everything."

"Me, when did I?"

It was a miraculous scene. As Yuder looked at the Cavalry members who were openly smiling, a low voice came from above his head.

"Looks good."

Turning his head, he saw Kishiar, holding the reins, smiling like a Sun God.

"Cavalry."

"Yes!"

It was not a loud call, but the sight of all 330 members straightening their posture and responding at once to Kishiar's voice was truly spectacular.

"That's right. You are the Cavalry."

Kishiar La Orr's voice, standing under the brilliant sunlight, echoed in everyone's ears.

"Move forward with pride in that fact. I will always be in front, so there is no need to worry about losing your way. Understand?"

"Yes!"

As if waiting for that moment, the cannon fired once again.

It was a signal for the Cavalry to set off.

Listening to the cheering that was loud enough to make his ears go deaf, Yuder started to walk beside the horse Kishiar was riding. His heart was pounding, but his steps were firm.

In his previous life, Yudrain Aile, as the Commander of the Cavalry, participated in nearly ten parades. He was not nervous then, and he wasn't now, but there was one thing that was different from that time.

A serene emotion of not being worried, yet curious about what was ahead.

It was anticipation.

"The Cavalry is about to appear soon."

"Alright, understood."

Crown Prince Katchian La Orr, after hearing the whisper of the attendant's report in his ear, put down the cup in his hand. The parade, which circled the entire capital, traditionally started from the end of the seventh wall and ended in the huge square inside the fifth wall.

Therefore, foreigners or nobles who wanted to watch the parade sat in a secret balcony of an unusually high-end accommodation prepared within the fifth wall, from where they would view the spectacle. The place where the Crown Prince was seated was one such balcony.

"I see Duke Peletta has prepared quite meticulously. I thought we would see the amusing sight of them herding around the common-born who could barely walk properly because they were frozen with fear."

Sitting opposite, Duke Diarca opened his mouth as if he had been waiting, wearing a grin like an old raccoon. He too had just received a whispered report from his servant, so he knew exactly how perfectly the Cavalry was performing in the parade.

And that was not the sight Duke Diarca had expected.

Turning

Chapter 118

A cacophony of cheers began to echo from afar. It was the appearance of the Cavalry. From beyond the transparent wall of the balcony, imbued with magic, the Crown Prince and Duke Diarca watched a man boldly riding a white horse at the head of the group. It was Duke Peletta, Kishiar La Orr, the man they had just been speaking of, who waved with a leisurely smile on his face.

The Crown Prince's eyes narrowed, the sight of him recalling a myth of the Sun God, who had overturned a thousand stars rushing towards the ground and had eventually risen brilliantly.

“...He looks healthy every time I see him.”

“You're right. Who could have expected that Duke Peletta would live so healthily at that age?”

Duke Diarca sipped his transparent crimson wine, chuckling softly.

“Fate can be quite ugly.”

“Yes, indeed. Incredibly ugly. To someone, it feels as if the blessing of God is really there.”

The Crown Prince's gaze moved beyond Kishiar to the dark-uniformed processions behind him. Those who wouldn't have dared dream of such a place just a little while ago wore bright smiles that seemed to mock him. As the Crown Prince turned his head and sank deeply into the plush chair, Duke Diarca quickly sensed his discomfort and broke the silence.

“No matter how strong the blessing of God is, it's ultimately a curse. Remember, the most meaningful thing is power, right?”

“...”

“Now that power is in your hands, Your Highness. Still, do you feel threatened by Duke Peletta?”

“There's no reason to.”

Upon hearing the terse response, Duke Diarca smiled like a grandfather imparting wisdom.

“That's right. All Duke Peletta can do is just play these little games. No matter how he tries to compensate for his inferiority, it does not change who will lead this Empire in the future.”

Duke Diarca's icy gaze landed on Kishiar's head as he steadily approached. The young Duke reflected in his eyes was a truly annoying and bothersome existence.

"We need to make that fact clear this time."

Finally, Crown Prince Katchian met Duke Diarca's gaze squarely. Laughter rose over his dark, gem-like eyes, resembling the Duke's.

"Good. I'm looking forward to it."

"The preparations will start soon, so please enjoy."

As Duke Diarca's words came to an end, a sharp scream erupted from the center of the previously cheering crowd. The Crown Prince casually propped his chin, looking down at the cavalymen who could not hide their confusion amidst the panicking crowd.

"What's that!"

"Who are those guys?"

It has begun.

Yuder looked around, listening to the screams and shouts that reverberated noisily in his ears. There hadn't been any problems in front of the Cavalry during their march of the fifth wall. However, as they entered the district of luxury residences, filled with ostentatious and towering balconies, several masked assailants suddenly appeared.

Their faces concealed by cloth, they used elongated, blade-like fingernails and fists as hard as steel to take several bystanders hostage. They then swiftly blocked Kishiar and the Cavalry's path, plunging the surroundings into fear.

"What the devil are you doing! How dare you in the sacred capital where the Emperor himself resides! Surrender immediately!"

As the march came to a standstill, several Imperial Troops, previously dispersed to maintain order, converged rapidly. They brandished their swords, but it was to no avail.

One of the intruders stepped forward, creating a fierce flame. The troops lost their fighting spirit in an instant, succumbing to fear and retreating.

"Did you just see that? He spat out fire! It's an Awakener!"

"Run away!"

The street turned into complete chaos. The Cavalry members, having realized that the intruders were Awakeners, also lost their previous composure, filled with tension.

"Commander! What should we do?"

Sul Division Deputy Commander Steiber yelled toward Kishiar with a grim expression.

"If you order us to capture them, we will charge in immediately!"

Unlike the members who were focused on Kishiar, Yuder glanced towards the luxury accommodations not too far away. Balconies there were crafted with special magic and mechanisms, making it impossible to see the inside from the outside. So, he couldn't tell who was sitting there.

'But surely, they must be watching us from somewhere over there.'

Yuder speculated that Emperor Katchian, or rather, the Crown Prince, whom he knew, would surely be doing so. He, who was naturally more suspicious than others, would have wanted to see for himself what was happening here.

It was apparent to anyone that among the many opportunities generously given to the Cavalry by the Crown Prince and Duke Diarca, there would be a trap. However, the timing was much faster than anticipated.

He thought they would watch for the first day of the festival and move on, but it seemed the opponents didn't even want to give them that much leeway. The fact that they sent not ordinary beasts but Awakeners also indicated immense malice.

Though it was undoubtedly a dangerous situation, Yuder wasn't overly worried. The man who stepped forward was Kishiar La Orr. He and Yuder had anticipated such events from the start and accepted everything.

He should be able to handle this much.

"Are you the famous Commander of the Cavalry, Duke Peletta?"

One of the intruders, who had taken an old woman hostage, asked Kishiar with a heavily scratched voice.

"That's right."

The Duke's response was cool and collected, his demeanor surprisingly elegant in contrast to the sharpness of the question.

Those who heard Kishiar's voice momentarily felt embarrassed for their earlier panic. As everyone suddenly fell silent, the commotion around them gradually subsided as if by magic.

"All of this... all of this is your fault!"

Feeling the change in atmosphere, the intruders intentionally raised their voices and tightened their grip around the hostage's neck, forcing her to scream.

"Please, spare me...!"

The momentary calm exploded into chaos once more. Kishiar's gaze briefly landed on the hostage before returning to the intruder.

"I'm not sure what you mean. Are you saying that your act of threatening the innocent people of the Orr Empire is my fault?"

"Are you denying it? You lured us here with lies and then abandoned us!"

One of the intruders yelled angrily in response to Kishiar's words.

"We put everything on the line to join your Cavalry, trusting in you, and yet you didn't even bother to look at us in person! You just randomly picked to your liking and kicked out the rest without a second thought!"

Upon hearing this, the entire Cavalry stiffened. Yuder felt an unexpected surge of emotion.

'They weren't just simple Awakeners, they were the ones who had applied for the Cavalry test.'

The claim that Kishiar didn't personally see the people and randomly picked was not true. He had been using magic to alter his face at the time. Moreover, according to Yuder's knowledge, those who failed the Cavalry test were given enough money for their return trip, with some to spare.

Yet if they chose to stay in the capital, that was their decision, not because of Kishiar or the Cavalry. However, those unaware of the circumstances were moved by their desperate outcry. Yuder turned to look at Kishiar, feeling the rising tension within the Cavalry.

'It would be better to shut them up and knock them out before they say more.'

Yet Kishiar remained calm, a faint smile playing on his face.

"There are countless like us within this capital, because of that useless Cavalry you created to play Commander! We're all doomed! Now we will kill everyone and we will die too!"

The capital and central region had been tolerant towards Awakeners. This was especially true since Kishiar, a member of the imperial family, was one of the first Awakeners. To the general populace, everything about the imperial family was seen as a blessing from the Sun God. The central region, where the emperor's power was most directly exerted, was no exception.

Yet the masked stranger's cry was enough to plant a seed of doubt and fear in the hearts of the common folk.

Could they truly trust Awakeners possessing such powerful abilities to be safe? How could they guarantee they would not randomly murder people as they were doing now?

Could Kishiar, who had formed the Cavalry with such people and then did nothing for months, really be concerned about the safety of the citizens?

As the intruder growled and snarled, appealing their unfortunate situation, the crowd saw a different side of 'Awakeners.' Until now, Awakeners to them had been the elegant Duke Peletta in his fine uniform and his stalwart followers, but now these terrifying individuals, who were howling and choking an old woman in front of them, were also Awakeners.

Doubt and fear filled the streets. It echoed the inexplicable hostility they had experienced in the eastern region. Having traveled the east, Yuder was sensitive to this atmosphere.

'If they keep shouting, it will be too late.'

He didn't know why Kishiar was leaving these men unchecked, but he felt he couldn't endure it anymore. Yuder slightly raised his hand, intending to deal with them now and face any repercussions later.

Yet, as if sensing this, Kishiar glanced back for a moment. Caught off guard, Yuder tensed up, like a child caught doing something wrong.

Turning

Chapter 119

"..."

Kishiar, who had been smiling with narrowed eyes at the sight, suddenly leapt from his horse and descended onto the ground. Even though he had dismounted, his figure was far taller than any ordinary man, his very presence exerting an overwhelming force.

"Is that all?"

He asked as he turned to look at the intruders. It was a brief question, yet the thug who received his gaze felt an immense pressure, as if being physically crushed. He struggled to attribute this pressure to mere emotions, raising his voice and shouting.

"Y-Yes. All of them died because of you! Remember this...!"

The thug's zealous cry was suddenly cut off. Among the many people gathered, very few understood what had happened in that brief moment. Even the Cavalry members were in the same predicament.

However, Yuder felt a surge of incredibly small, yet potent force tearing through the air. Launched like a shot from Kishiar's fingertips, it precisely struck only the intruders in the blink of an eye before vanishing as if it were an illusion.

Moments later, the intruders fell to the ground as if struck by an unseen force, silently collapsing. The only ones left standing were the hostages held by them. But even those hostages were trembling, dumbfounded, unaware of what had happened.

In the midst of confusion and a situation that could not be understood, silence froze over the streets. Amidst this eerie quiet, Kishiar spoke.

"Countless people visit the Pearl Tower each year, wishing to become mages. However, less than one in a thousand are chosen to train as mages. If one who failed to become a mage falls onto a dark path, is that the sin of the Pearl Tower?"

Everyone's gaze turned toward Kishiar.

"..."

"I created the Cavalry to protect innocent people from such individuals. The fact that my judgment of people was correct can be sufficiently understood just by looking at the acts these men have committed. There's no need for further words."

Kishiar's fiery gaze swept over all those overwhelmed by him, and beyond them toward the luxury lodgings in the distance, before returning.

"Imperial troops."

As he raised his hand and pointed at the Imperial troops who had retreated to a corner as if fleeing, a reply came from the men who still seemed shocked.

"Y-Yes, sir!"

"Arrest them immediately and imprison them. They are criminals who took advantage of the festival to disrupt the capital where the Emperor resides. Until I interrogate them personally, no one is to approach them."

"Understood!"

"The Cavalry will begin marching again, so quickly reorganize the ranks."

"Yes, sir!"

"And....."

As the Cavalry members began to reform their ranks and the Imperial Troops hastily ran over to arrest the fainted intruders, Yuder suddenly saw the hand of one of the intruders, being dragged on the ground, begin to turn a bright red and swell as if it were about to burst.

'That is...'

Realizing that he had seen this scene before, his body moved on its own.

"Everyone, let go and step back!"

"Ahhhh!"

The moment Yuder waved his hand, a tremendous gust of wind arose, sweeping away the troops and forming a protective barrier around the intruders. Shortly after, an appalling sound rang out as grotesquely swollen bodies exploded all at once.

Screams echoed from every direction, but nothing emerged from beyond the wall of wind. Yuder then manipulated the earth, swiftly burying all the debris beneath it, before exhaling and lifting his head.

"Ah."

The gazes of the Cavalry members, wide-eyed like startled rabbits, were one thing, but the gaze of Kishiar, staring straight at him from behind, was terribly piercing.

Yet before Yuder could say a word, Kishiar strode forward, lifting one hand high to draw all eyes back to him, and spoke.

"Now, observe. Should anyone dare to threaten the safety of our Empire, remember that they will be judged as you have just witnessed."

"Whoa... Wow!"

Only then did the previously frozen spectators start to regain their senses and start cheering. Amid thunderous applause, a massive cheer, as if the whole city was about to lift off, poured down over the heads of the Cavalry.

"His Grace the Duke has swiftly vanquished the intruders!"

"Long live His Grace the Duke of Peletta! Long live the Emperor!"

"Long live the Cavalry!"

Amid the shower of petals, Yuder averted his gaze as he felt Kishiar's chilly eyes turning towards him, while he wore a smile on his face.

"I thought I told you not to use your power recklessly."

"I had no choice because it was urgent."

During their march to Victory Square, the final destination of the procession, Yuder heard Kishiar's reprimand, spoken so quietly that no one else could hear.

"Just removing the troops would have been enough."

"Don't you know that would not have been enough to completely prevent the damage?"

It was a mood Kishiar had laboriously changed, stepping forward himself. The reason he showed his overwhelming power there was likely because he knew the Crown Prince was watching. It was certainly better than ruining his hard work.

He thought it was a valid excuse, but Kishiar's gaze on his cheek turned slightly sharper. Pretending not to notice, he ignored it until a sigh was heard a moment later.

"How's your hand?"

"It's fine."

"I don't trust you, show me later."

"..."

The atmosphere wasn't one that would believe him if he said it didn't hurt at all. Yuder casually replied okay, then turned to look at Kishiar's face.

"But what about you, Commander? What power did you use earlier? Didn't you send something flying?"

"You saw that?"

"More like... I felt it."

"You're sensitive as always."

The corners of Kishiar's mouth rose slowly into a smile at his murmur, whether it was praise or not.

"I flicked the air with my fingertips."

"Excuse me?"

"Like this."

He released the reins he had been holding and flicked his forefinger against his thumb, as if playing a children's game of flicking marbles.

"Nothing happened because I did it slowly for you to see, but if I add strength and do it quickly, I can do as I did earlier. It seems simple, but it's quite difficult. However, the results are overwhelming."

Yuder suspected that Kishiar might be lying. Yet, he could not sense any deceit from his handsome visage.

'Could he exert his strength in such a manner? But... He never showcased such an attack in his previous life.'

In his past life, Kishiar hardly used his power, resorting to hand-to-hand combat only when absolutely necessary. Hence, Yuder wondered if the recent attack he'd seen was perhaps a spell, borrowing the power of a magic tool. But if it was not magic, why hadn't Kishiar utilized that power in his previous life?

Noticing the questioning look on Yuder's face, Kishiar's eyes narrowed.

"Is something bothering you? You look unconvinced."

"...If it's a simple ability to enhance one's speed, shouldn't Shin and most of the squad members be able to use it as well?"

The question was hasty, but Kishiar did not question its sincerity.

"That's precisely the tricky part. It's not merely about using force, but manipulating aura a little... hmm, the specifics are a secret. Anyway, you need to slightly mix in another power."

Aura. Kishiar casually mentioned a capability only Knights and Swordmasters at their zenith could harness, before winking and turning his head.

'Aura... Is the difference between his past life and now because of that?'

In his previous life, Kishiar, who always wore gloves and seldom used power, and the current Kishiar, who did not hesitate to employ divine powers or aura and naturally exposed his bare hands.

If the Kishiar of the past life had been unable to utilize divine power or aura by force, it was natural that he couldn't execute attacks using those powers. Having pondered to this point, Yuder suddenly recalled the bitter expression Kishiar had in his dream.

'If only I had not shattered my vessel...'

What did the 'shattered vessel' that he spoke about mean?

Yuder began to believe more strongly that the dream he had was not a simple one, but might be closer to a memory that he had forgotten or had been made to forget for some reason. The recent incident intensified this thought.

Why he kept having such dreams, he did not know. He speculated that if he discovered the reason, he might also learn why he had returned eleven years back in time.

'I'm not particularly curious about how I managed to return.'

There was only one important thing.

He was certain that he could not let the same conclusion as before happen, no matter what.

"I'm sorry. Everything that I had prepared... I failed to fulfill my role. My apologies."

After the Cavalry vanished amid cheers, Duke Diarca, who was bowing before the Crown Prince, looked completely different from before. The Crown Prince, however, was no different in this regard.

'How on earth?'

The same thought crossed both of their minds.

They had set several traps to ensure that Kishiar and the Cavalry wouldn't escape the blame easily. They believed that even if they slipped through one or two, they could never escape the last resort—the human bomb.

But Kishiar had brushed them all aside with an air of derision, disappeared amid thunderous cheers, as if treading on flowers. It was a spectacle they could scarcely believe, even as they witnessed it with their own eyes.

Turning

Chapter 120

"...Indeed, it seems I've greatly underestimated the existence of the Awakeners."

The Duke of Diarca murmured with a contorted face.

"Although similar to magic, I perceived them as being inferior to mages, and even if they were comparable to aura, I dismissed them as being far from matching Swordmasters. Those I actually saw seemed to confirm this..."

"Isn't Duke Peletta of imperial blood? It isn't strange for him to possess power beyond the norm. The power of an imperial family member's inherent blessing has always been proven throughout history."

The Crown Prince, having composed his disturbed expression, spoke slowly. Unlike the Duke of Diarca, his gaze remained steadily on the street where the cavalry had passed. One could barely believe what had happened at the spot that seemed as if someone had forcibly dug and then refilled it.

Just moments ago, a man there freely manipulated two elements - wind and earth. Although it happened in a blink of an eye, the Crown Prince was certain his eyes didn't deceive him.

The assassins who were supposed to explode and die immediately upon failure, having been poisoned and double-bound with oaths to their mission, were effortlessly blocked by the man as if he had foreseen their attack.

He had met many individuals who boasted strong powers, but it was the first time one had left such a deep impression in such a short moment.

Recalling the man's black hair and pale face, the Crown Prince narrowed his eyes. Meanwhile, the Duke of Diarca was still rambling on.

"...thus, the individuals prepared for Duke Peletta next time should be..."

"How about investigating that man instead?"

"Pardon?"

Caught off guard, Duke Diarca looked bewildered for a moment before following the Crown Prince's gaze outside.

"Whom are you referring to, Your Highness?"

"The man who demonstrated his abilities in front of Duke Peletta."

A smile as poisonous as venom spread across the thin lips of the Crown Prince.

"The Duke must not have had a proper look at the man, having stepped out briefly at the time."

"That's correct."

"He possesses quite extraordinary abilities. I have a feeling he might prove useful, even if we can't pull him to our side right now."

Finally recalling who the Crown Prince was referring to, Duke Diarca couldn't fully understand the Prince's interest, as he hadn't seen the man's display of power.

'He must find his appearance appealing.'

Thus, he inwardly concluded. Then, outwardly embodying grace and loyalty, he bowed respectfully.

"The fact that Your Highness has taken an interest arouses my curiosity as well. I'll have him investigated immediately."

...

From the onset of the Harvest Festival, an uproar erupted.

During the parade led by Duke Peletta Kishiar La Orr, they encountered intruders intending to indiscriminately harm the people. However, as soon as Kishiar himself stepped forward, the intruders fell helplessly, unable to move even a finger.

The carcasses of the dead intruders, torn apart as if by claws, made it impossible to further speculate on their origin. However, people were more enthralled by the fact that a member of the imperial family had personally defended their citizens. The tale of Duke Peletta forming the Cavalry to protect the innocent in front of the fallen intruders was being loudly acclaimed and discussed by the citizens in the capital for days on end.

The social circles where the nobles gathered were also abuzz with talk of the Cavalry. The initial attention the Cavalry received for standing up to Count Gallon and driving him out paled in comparison to the current fervor.

The spiteful rumors that Duke Peletta had created the Cavalry out of sheer boredom disappeared almost instantly. Emperor Keilusa, who rarely made public appearances and was therefore not very popular, also received more attention than ever before.

There were even conspiracy theories suggesting that the Emperor might have instigated the whole incident to counterbalance the Crown Prince and the four major ducal families.

The Cavalry members were equally motivated by the enthusiastic public attention. Their morale significantly boosted after successfully completing the parade. Even though there were several suspicious incidents targeting the Cavalry during various events around the capital, the situations never escalated. This was because all the members handled the situations well, just as they had been trained.

'Staying up all night training was worth it,' thought Yuder, looking at the earnest faces of the dispatched members and nodding in satisfaction.

The place they were assigned to that day was the site of the largest open worship of the Sun God, presided over by the Pope himself. Believers from all over the continent gathered to attend the annual worship, so in addition to the Cavalry, the Imperial Knights, the Imperial Troops, and several Imperial Mages were also dispatched to maintain security.

Kishiar, who had to attend the worship not as the Commander of the Cavalry but as an imperial family member, was not among the members. However, the fact that the square in front of the Orr Cathedral, where the worship was being held, would be safer than ever with Yuder and Kishiar in the same space was certain.

Even though there were still hours left before the start of the worship, Yuder gave his last notice to the members, looking at the people who had already gathered like clouds.

"As I told you earlier, divide into pairs and guard your designated positions. Report immediately if there's an anomaly, and remember each other's locations well."

"Got it."

Due to the extreme importance of the worship that day, only about 20 members, deemed to have the most exceptional abilities among the Cavalry members, were chosen to attend. Hence, many familiar faces were present, including Ever, Steiber, and Kanna, the Deputy Commander of each Division, as well as Gakane, Jimmy, and the Eldore siblings, who already had a fairly close relationship with Yuder.

"Do not engage in personal conversations with strangers unless you're assisting them. Don't secretly consume food other than what's provided. And don't ever respond to Imperial Mages or, especially, Imperial Knights if they pick a fight during your mission."

"Ah, Yuder. How many times have you said that since we started training? It's drilled into our heads by now."

"Right, I've got your rules memorized. Don't talk, don't sneak food, don't fight!"

Hinn Eldore wrinkled her nose and shook her head in irritation. Finn Eldore loudly agreed, but Yuder, who already had something to say to the Eldore siblings, impassively opened his mouth without a change in expression.

"I have to keep repeating because there are people who don't follow the rules. Like when you nearly started a fight with some knights the day before yesterday."

"..."

Stung by the memory, the Eldore siblings abruptly changed the subject, avoiding Yuder's gaze.

'I wonder if it would be better to send those two back today... But they do their jobs well and their teleportation abilities might be needed in case of emergencies. Can't help it.'

Yuder sighed softly, his gaze drifting to the other members of his team.

"Alright, everyone, back to your posts."

The area Yuder was assigned to secure was the space between the platform where the Pope would stand and the place where the common believers stood. The VIP seats where the nobility sat were quite a distance away, but he had a good view of the people seated there.

'Kishiar hasn't arrived yet?'

While observing the VIP seats, a mix of familiar and unfamiliar faces from his previous life, Kanna, who was assigned to guard the area with Yuder, approached him with a smile.

"This is really incredible. Right? I've attended this grand ceremony a few times, but it's the first time I've seen it this close. It's quite intriguing."

Judging by her reaction, Kanna seemed fascinated by the spectacle of the ceremony, which she was seeing for the first time. While Yuder had grown tired of such events from his past life, he considered his colleague's enthusiasm and nodded in agreement.

At that moment, a few Imperial Knights, standing not too far away, made a sound as if to attract attention, their faces twisted in distaste.

"Isn't it great that even commoners get to see the Holy Pope in the same place as nobles because they're well-connected? It's nice to see them chatting as if they're here for pleasure rather than duty, completely ignoring our words."

"Aren't we always the ones who do the work, while the black coats get the praise?"

The term "black coats" was a new derogatory phrase created by the Imperial Knights to belittle the Cavalry. The blunt sarcasm of the knights reddened Kanna's ears with rage.

"Kanna."

"Don't worry, Yuder. This is nothing compared to the things I had to endure in the Gallon household."

At Yuder's call, Kanna turned her gaze, a smile appearing on her face.

"But I will remember their faces. It wouldn't hurt to get back at them a little after everything is over, right?"

Yuder was curious about what kind of revenge Kanna was planning, but seeing her darkly burning gaze, he figured it was better not to know. He told her she could do whatever she wanted after the festival ended and turned his gaze back to the VIP seats.

Kishiar had yet to arrive, but more than half of the VIP seats were already occupied. The elegant nobles, who had been laughing and chatting, suddenly stood up and looked in one direction. Soon, Crown Prince Katchian and Duke Diarca appeared, followed by their entourage.

'The person standing behind Duke Diarca... was it his heir, Viscount Kironne? And... Kiolle of Diarca?'

Yuder, who had been scrutinizing the faces of the newcomers, narrowed his eyes at the sight of the familiar face of Kiolle among the servants following Duke Diarca. Kiolle appeared quite uncomfortable, unable to hide his unease, like a spooked animal with its fur on end.