

Turning 131

Chapter 131

The moment Kishiar granted permission, the Elder Priest of Beltrail departed, stirring a cool breeze. As the people who watched his retreat felt the tense atmosphere dissolve, they relaxed and exchanged subtly interested glances.

A public clash had occurred between Duke Peletta and the House of Duke Apeto. The sense that neither side would back down gave rise to a premonition of an imminent and tremendous tumult.

"Yuder. Let's leave the others to the imperial army now, and head back."

"Understood."

Lusan observed the black-haired Cavalry member who had remained quietly by Kishiar's side.

'Right, I should thank him.'

He had been too flustered before to express his gratitude. He knew he might never see him again if he missed this chance, so now was the time to thank him.

"Excuse me, could you wait for a moment?"

Lusan rushed over, mustered his courage, and grabbed the sleeve of his benefactor's cloak.

"..."

The black-haired man turned his head with an expressionless face. Lusan flinched involuntarily, but soon realized that the man's look was more of curiosity than annoyance, and he relaxed.

'Does he not remember me? It was such a chaotic situation, so it's understandable.'

"I, uh, I wanted to thank you for your help earlier....."

As the man turned his emotionless face, Lusan noticed a thin wound on his neck and his words faltered.

"You've... got... a wound on your neck. It seems like you should get it treated..."

"I'm fine..."

"Let me do it."

Before he even finished speaking, a radiant light enveloped the man's body. There was no need to pour so much divine power just to treat a small wound, but Lusan deliberately used more force than usual. His intention was to express his gratitude by using his greatest strength, his divine power, to its fullest.

A moment later, the light receded, revealing the man with slightly widened eyes. The wound on his neck had long since vanished without a trace.

"You're young but you possess incredible divine power."

Kishiar, who had been watching a few steps away, commented with an intrigued tone. Not expecting the noble Duke to speak to him, Lusan responded cautiously, feeling a tightening in his chest.

"Ah, yes. As a sign of gratitude... I poured more to aid your recovery."

"With that kind of skill, you must be from the Healer's guild. What's your name? How long have you been a priest?"

"No, not from the Healer's guild. I'm still a novice priest, not yet a full priest. My name is Lusan, and it's been about four years since I started walking the path of a priest."

The Healer's guild was one of the internal groups of the Grand Temple. It was famous for being composed of priests renowned throughout the continent for their exceptional divine power. But

Lusan, who hadn't even advanced to the level of a full priest, was in a position where he had to worry about whether he could even become an ordinary priest, let alone join the Healer's guild.

"A novice priest?"

Kishiar furrowed his brow, candidly showing surprise in his eyes.

"Unbelievable. With such impressive skill."

"Thank you. But just because my divine power is strong, doesn't mean I can become a full priest straight away..... haha."

In truth, Lusan hailed from a humble shrine in the western countryside, having been recommended to the Grand Temple due to his remarkable divine power by an elderly priest who recognized his abilities. Upon reaching the Grand Temple, it was suggested that he would quickly move through a few months of priesthood training before being placed in the Healer's guild, given the level of his divine power.

However, the problem lay with his character. Lusan did not obediently follow his superiors like the other novice priests. If he deemed something wrong, he would refuse to do it even at the risk of his own life, and this attitude quickly drew the ire of those above him. In the end, he fell from grace in the Grand Temple where political maneuvering was often more important than divine power.

"...I see."

Even without hearing the full story, a twisted smile momentarily danced on the lips of Kishiar, suggesting he had inferred the circumstances.

"There are too many blind leaders in this world who insist on ignoring what is clearly in front of them. However, does that make the existing issues disappear? Was it Lusan, you said? You'll soon be ready for your priest ordination, so keep your spirits up."

"Thank you."

Lusan was touched and almost grinned foolishly as the noble descendant of the Sun God's bloodline not only called his name but also gave him lavish praise.

"Thank you for the healing."

The Cavalry member with black hair who had been standing quietly expressed his thanks formally. Lusan nodded with a small smile.

"Don't mention it. As a novice priest, I rarely use my divine power, so please seek my assistance anytime if needed."

However, in reality, Lusan assumed that he would likely never meet them again. He had always said the same thing to many people he had healed by chance, but no one had ever sought out an insignificant novice priest like him again.

'Life can indeed bring about such events. It's a relief that I'm creating a good memory before getting kicked out of the Grand Temple.'

Days later, he was suddenly and inexplicably ordained as a regular priest. If he had known that a request for a permanent priest would arrive from the Cavalry as if they had been waiting for this moment, he would not have agreed.

With the disturbance at the Sharing of the Sacred Flame ceremony, another storm of controversy swept across the capital. However, the focus was not on who the culprit was or what efforts were being made to solve the problem. Whenever people gathered, they enjoyed gossiping about the uproar between the two ducal houses.

"Do you think that young lord can really become a Cavalry? I heard that the House of Apeto is completely upset."

"Duke Apeto was so angry upon hearing the news that he beat his servant to death."

"Duke Peletta announced he would visit the House of Apeto to meet the third son. Would they even open their doors for him?"

"There's no way they'd open their doors if the third son might be taken from the house. They'll definitely reject him at the gate!"

While there were many rumors, all the reactions were not much different from what Kishiar had anticipated.

Duke Apeto officially denied that Revlin was an Awakener and claimed that an ordinary person like him couldn't join the Cavalry. Kishiar, however, using his authority as the head of the Cavalry, publicly transmitted a request for a meeting. Rumors that Revlin was being confined and abused were already rife in the capital. Kishiar also added that he needed to confirm Revlin's safety with his own eyes.

The numerous foreign envoys present in the capital, along with the citizens, took great interest in this matter. The unfolding drama in the Orr Empire, known as the continent's loser and boasting the oldest history and culture, brought them a hidden pleasure. For a long time, they had been watching the situation with curiosity, wondering whether a power shift would finally occur within the ever-unchanging empire.

As the conflict between the two dukes who refused to yield even an inch became more intense, the Emperor finally intervened. Emperor Keilusa, who had not once made an appearance outside of the imperial palace despite the festivities, conveyed his opinion to the two dukes via a letter.

In summary, it was an order to stop disturbing the capital for unnecessary reasons during a time when all eyes were on them due to the festival, and to resolve the issue according to the law.

Upon receiving the letter, the two dukes had dramatically different reactions.

By law, it had to be determined whether Revlin was truly an Awakener before deciding whether it was appropriate to accept him into the Cavalry. The Apeto family had consistently claimed that the third prince was definitely not an Awakener, but they had not tried to provide any evidence to support this. It was because they knew they would be at a distinct disadvantage if the matter were to be verified.

Many nobles, including Duke Apeto, protested vehemently, arguing that the Emperor was blatantly favoring his younger brother, Duke Peletta. However, public opinion sided with the Emperor. His words to resolve the issue according to the law sounded much more just than the Apeto family's attempts to sweep the matter under the rug, so this result was only natural.

After protesting and getting nowhere, the Apeto family, unable to withstand the unfavorable public opinion, took a step back. They eventually allowed Kishiar to visit the Apeto family's main estate to meet Revlin.

"Revlin, I just can't understand why you're doing this. Even now, you can say that you're not an Awakener, and that all of this was simply a misunderstanding on Duke Peletta's part. It's a simple matter," said Second Prince Lenore, as he faced Revlin, who was confined to his room. Since Revlin's return from the Sharing of the Sacred Flame ceremony, the brothers had repeated this conversation numerous times. However, the conclusion was always the same; Lenore, in his anger, would leave the conversation unfinished.

But today, things could not end that way. After all, the disgraceful event of their father, Duke Apeto, accepting Duke Peletta's demands had occurred.

Lenore recalled the brief conversation he had had with his father just before coming here.

"I just can't understand what's gotten into that boy. They say an enemy within is more dangerous than one outside, but I never dreamed I would see my own son siding with the enemy in my lifetime! Are you telling me, Lenore, that as his elder brother, you had absolutely no inkling about what was happening?"

Duke Apeto, imagining the Cavalry and Kishiar stepping into the prestigious Apeto family's main residence, trembled in rage. With Revlin confined to his room, all his anger was directed toward his second son, Lenore.

"I apologize. I also had no idea that Revlin was taking the fact that he was an Awakener so seriously. If I had known, I would never have allowed him to meet the Cavalry..."

"I don't want to hear it! And yet, you're saying you want the position of the heir?"

Facing Duke Apeto's annoyed gaze, Lenore clenched his fists in humiliation and gritted his teeth.

Chapter 132

"Absurd. I have no need for a merely healthy child! Despite his slight weakness, Aishes has never acted like you. It's natural, given the difference in bloodline!"

“Father.”

Lenore called to the Duke with a face gone pale. The mother of the current heir and the first-born son, Aishes Shand Apeto, was of noble lineage, originating from the Tain Dukedom, one of the four ducal families standing shoulder to shoulder with Apeto.

However, Lenore and Revlin were born to the woman whom Duke Apeto had remarried after her death, a daughter of a count's family. That family wasn't weak, but they didn't match up to a ducal one. Duke Apeto would often remind Lenore of this fact, stoking his feelings of inferiority.

“Go convince your brother. If you can't, be prepared to give up all the things you've been doing!”

After being driven out by the Duke, Lenore immediately went to see Revlin. He desired nothing more than to kill the brother before his eyes on the spot, but the thought that he would surely forfeit any chance of being the successor if he did so held him back.

He strained to maintain an air of calm and affection as he tried to convince Revlin.

"You surely don't want those guys to trample the lands of Apeto with their dirty boots, do you? Eh? Why do you like a group of jesters from Duke Peletta's Cavalry so much? Do you really think Duke Peletta likes you?"

"..."

"No. He is simply using you to mock Apeto. Please, come to your senses. I will give you anything you want. Ok?"

Lenore rattled off the names of things that he thought his brother might desire. However, neither the sword, nor the jewels, nor the famous horse could open his brother's mouth.

Lenore, who already had a short fuse, eventually reached his limit.

"Damn it. Do you know what I had to hear from father because of you? If I can't become the heir because of the foolish thing you've done, do you think you will be safe, Revlin!"

The vase he threw shattered against the wall. He proceeded to smash the objects around Revlin before falling into a chair, panting for breath. Surprisingly, Revlin was still calmly looking at him, showing no signs of fear. The boy finally opened his lips slowly with a cold look in his eyes.

"You finally seem like the brother I know."

"What?"

"It was strange when you suddenly started being nice. You're not the type to hold back your anger, so I feel relieved now."

Lenore was momentarily at a loss for words.

"You..."

"Do you know what? Among all the things you mentioned, there wasn't a single thing I wanted. Not from father, not from the uncle, everyone's the same. They either get angry or treat me like a fool, keeping me locked up, and no one listens to me."

"So, you mean that man is different? Duke Peletta is different?"

"Yes. He is."

Revlin responded nonchalantly.

"He listened to what I wanted right from the start."

"Ha. Really? What is this thing you want, exactly? Let me hear it too!"

"I've already told you. Many times."

"Told me? When did you?"

Lenore thought his younger brother was lying. However, when he caught sight of his brother's icy glare filled with hatred, he was suddenly at a loss for words.

"I've told you countless times. I've pleaded desperately, over and over! If anyone can't remember, it's you, not me! Stop bothering me and go strive to secure the heirship you so desire!"

Lenore was rendered speechless in the face of that rage and mocking gaze.

'When did Revlin start wearing such an expression?'

In Lenore's memories, Revlin was always a frail boy who seemed perpetually on the verge of death. While Lenore was largely indifferent towards his pitiful younger sibling, he would occasionally show him some sympathy, due to their shared brotherhood. However, the boy before him was different. The Revlin of the present didn't appear weak at all. He had grown enough to hold his stand against Lenore.

Having realized this, a deeply shocked Lenore exited Revlin's room, only to be approached urgently by a servant who reported that their uncle Beltrail, an Elder Priest, was looking for him.

"The Elder Priest is seeking me? Why are you only telling me this now? You fool!"

Letting out his anger that he had garnered because of Revlin on the innocent servant with a slap to the face, Lenore headed towards the annex. The basement of the annex was no different from the last time he was there, but the expression on Beltrail who awaited him there was starkly different.

"Your Grace, as long as your father still bows down, it seems that the arrival of Duke Peletta is a done deal. Therefore, should we not make preparations, Second Prince?"

"What preparations are you talking about?"

"You surely don't plan to leave the people here as they are."

Only when Beltrail surveyed the surroundings did Lenore realize what he was implying.

'I wondered what he was talking about.'

Lenore had assumed that Beltrail would suggest a solution to his current predicament. However, all his uncle wanted was to ensure his research wasn't damaged.

'How can he only care about his own interests in this situation?'

On reflection, the direct cause of this whole mess was Beltrail himself. If Beltrail had not vacated his seat and kept a close eye on Revlin during the Sharing of the Sacred Flame Ceremony, none of this would have happened. Yet, Beltrail evaded responsibility under the pretext of being a priest, leaving Lenore to bear the brunt of Duke Apeto's fury.

And now he had the audacity to summon the busy Lenore without a word of apology, asking him to hide his research subjects from the eyes of Duke Peletta.

'Initially, the only reason I helped my uncle was because I thought it might help me secure the position of heir. I'm in such trouble, but instead of repaying the assistance he's received, he's only thinking about his research.'

It was unfair. It was exceedingly unfair.

'If I fall, it won't just be the end for me. This useless research he's been funding thanks to me will also go up in smoke!'

"Second Prince?"

"Yes, Uncle."

Lenore answered Beltrail's call, maintaining an expression no different than usual.

"So... you wish to move these people before Duke Peletta arrives?"

"That's correct. Rumor has it there are individuals within the Cavalry who can sensitively detect the presence of Awakeners. If Duke Peletta brings such a person and they discover this place, what will become of us?"

That rumor had been a deliberate leak by Kishiar, but they hadn't considered that far.

"What does it matter. If things get tough, they'll just push it onto me again."

Once suspicion set in, Lenore couldn't stand to see even the benevolent smile on Beltrail's face. He turned his gaze away from his uncle's face and opened his mouth in a heavy tone.

"Understood. The Duke of Peletta is coming tomorrow, so let's have the servants move them out before then."

"They must not be allowed to escape. They could run away."

"So, what are you suggesting?"

Beltrail was taken aback by the unusually sharp retort. Utilizing his sense, honed by internal power struggles in the temple, he quickly grasped that his young nephew was growing irritated with him.

"...Second Prince. I ask this of you for your own good. Don't you understand?"

"I wonder. I'm not sure if you really intend to help me. If you wanted to help, you would have produced a decent result during the year or so that's passed."

"I understand your frustration. But us falling apart due to internal mistrust is exactly what the Duke of Peletta wants. You must protect the Third Prince from falling into their hands and keep this place safe."

Beltrail didn't particularly like the cruel and selfish Second Prince Lenore, but he knew all too well that his research could only continue if Lenore was there. Reluctantly, he had to placate and persuade him.

"And besides, our research is at a critically important juncture. Three of the test subjects here entered their mating period yesterday. I've discovered that an Awakener in heat exerts an involuntary influence on Awakeners who haven't manifested their second gender...Cough, Cough!"

Beltrail, who had been speaking faster than usual, suddenly broke into a fit of coughing. When he removed his hand from his mouth, his white priestly robe was stained with blood in several places.

"...Phew."

Seeing this, Lenore frowned and let out a sigh. It wasn't surprising to see him coughing up blood; it was a sight all too common in the Apeto household.

The 'Blood of Blessing' of the Apeto family affected Beltrail, who had become a priest, long before leaving his family, without exception. He, too, had been terribly frail since childhood, much like Aishes or Revlin.

"...In any case, trust me, this time we will make progress."

In truth, Lenore knew that Beltrail was so dedicated to his research because of his frailty. His trust in his uncle wasn't unfounded.

"I'll send the servants tomorrow morning. When they arrive, please take the test subjects and follow the food supply tunnel to the western forest. Even if the Duke of Peletta comes with his entire Cavalry, they won't be able to find you there."

At Lenore's words, Beltrail nodded without hesitation.

"I understand."

"Please keep your promise to make progress. This might be the last time."

With those words, Lenore left the annex without looking back.

The beautiful main house of the Apeto Duchy was enveloped in an eerie silence and remained uneasy throughout the aftermath. Even the servants moving between the buildings couldn't manage their usual cheerful expressions.

And finally, a day passed.

The Duke of Peletta, riding a horse with a crest that combined symbols of the sun, tree, and fire, finally appeared before the Apeto family.

Chapter 133

"I can't believe such a grand mansion exists in the world... The capital is truly impressive."

"The Imperial Palace is even larger, Sister Ever. There, an entire wall is the palace."

"Really? It's hard to even imagine."

Yuder silently watched Ever and Kanna, who seemed to be enjoying themselves. Today was an important day when Kishiar finally set foot in the Apeto mansion.

Normally, befitting a Duke's procession, many would follow behind him, but Kishiar brought only seven Cavalry members, including Yuder, Kanna, Ever, Jimmy, Gakane, and the Eldore siblings, and his adjutant, Nathan Zuckerman. It was an exceedingly small number for an official visit by a Duke.

The reason for such a small number was simple. The Apeto family had notified Kishiar of a limit on the number of people he could bring. Although it was a petty scheme intended to humiliate him, Kishiar had enjoyed the restriction, personally selecting those he would bring.

'If they're going to impose such a limitation, then we should bring those who appear to be the least threatening. In fact, it will be easier for us to do what we must do there if we appear harmless.'

Thus, the selected Cavalry members, unsure of the criteria by which they were chosen, were inside the Apeto mansion, enjoying the beautiful view of the garden from the reception room. The magnificent garden, as if actual nature had been transplanted, was more dazzling than even the Imperial Palace's garden. It was a sight that could easily tire one's eyes and a testament to the power of the Dukedom.

"You all are enjoying the refreshments. Feel free to ask for more once you finish, don't hesitate to eat as much as you'd like."

"Can we really?"

Kishiar, who was elegantly sitting in the center of the reception room, watching the members chattering, kindly opened his mouth after noticing the snack plate quickly emptied. Seeing Jimmy, who couldn't put down his fork out of regret, Nathan, who had been standing behind Kishiar, motioned to the Apeto family's servant, who was growing weary.

"Please bring more snacks."

"Understood..."

As soon as Kishiar and his party arrived, the Apeto family had led them to the reception room and then left them alone for over an hour. Despite a situation that would usually provoke rage, the servants of the Apeto family were growing increasingly frustrated by the calm and carefree Cavalry members, who were eating snacks, admiring the garden, and chatting.

'Even without guidance on how to handle such a situation, they're all managing well on their own.'

Yuder watched fondly as the Eldore siblings played, carelessly breaking various items, Jimmy ate snacks earnestly, and Gakane joined Kanna and Ever, enjoying a lively chat. He couldn't help but wonder how infuriated the Duke of Apeto, who had left them alone, must be by now. Kishiar, too, had a full smile on his face, likely harboring a similar thought.

"The tea tastes especially good today."

"I'm glad you think so."

"Did everyone check whether the map drawn by Revlin aligns with the actual location of the buildings?"

Hiding his lips slightly behind a tea cup, Kishiar asked in a relaxed tone. Yuder nodded, glancing briefly at the huge window where Kanna, Ever, and Gakane were standing.

"We checked as soon as we arrived. The window location provides a good view of the entire mansion."

"Ah. It's just like the esteemed Apeto Dukedom's mansion. They certainly know how to treat guests."

"I agree with you."

At Yuder's calm response, Kishiar laughed softly.

"Everyone has reviewed the plan I handed out yesterday, right?"

"Of course."

"Your role is the most critical, but remember, there's no need to overdo it."

Kishiar had gathered the members the night before to explain their duties at the Apeto mansion. In order to deal with various issues as quickly as possible at the Apeto mansion, the seven members each had a distinct role. Yuder had been assigned the most crucial role, that of locating and aiding the escape of the captured Awakeners.

"Here, as you requested, I've brought more snacks."

As Yuder was reviewing his tasks for the day, a servant cautiously approached the table, carrying a bowl piled high with pastries.

"Wow, these look delicious."

Jimmy's eyes lit up with anticipation. The boy, who had been growing rapidly since his second gender manifestation, was displaying an appetite that was several times more robust than before.

"Is the Duke of Apeto still not ready?"

Kishiar addressed the servant who was hastily attempting to retreat after setting down the pastry bowl. The servant, hoping Kishiar wouldn't kill him out of anger, cautiously repeated the response he had been instructed to give.

"Yes, yes... His Grace is unfortunately feeling unwell, so his preparations are taking longer than anticipated."

"I see. What about my dear temporary member, Prince Revlin?"

Kishiar's casual mention of the third prince's name, as though referring to a pet, sent a chill down the servant's spine.

"Prince Revlin is also... taking a long time to prepare...."

"It's been an hour."

"Yes... He's frail, so we can't rush him...."

"Hmm."

The moment Kishiar let out a sigh that sounded more like a groan, the servant squeezed his eyes shut. If he gave such a response to the Duke at the Apeto mansion, he wouldn't have a word to say for himself if he ended up dead with his head smashed against a wall. Recently, many of the servants serving the Duke had been severely injured and replaced.

The servant thought that Kishiar wouldn't be any different, but all he heard was the rustle of clothing as Kishiar stood from his seat.

"Can't be helped then. I've waited as long as I could, I'll have to go and meet them myself."

"...Pardon?"

Kishiar spoke softly, but his voice contained an undeniable power.

"I'm a busy man. I've waited as long as I can. Now it's time to take action."

Caught off guard, the servant shook his head desperately.

"It's not possible. Duke Apeto is still not....!"

"I originally came to see my member, not the Duke of Apeto. Tell the others when they're ready to come to where I am. Step aside."

"Don't block the Duke's way."

At Nathan Zuckerman, Kishiar's adjutant's, light instruction, the path was cleared and Kishiar began to stride forward. His members, as if they had been waiting, uniformly followed him.

"Ah, what a shame. I wanted to eat more."

"I almost died waiting for you to move."

"Are we finally going to search for Prince Revlin now?"

Their comments lacked manners, but there was an unexpected weight to them, impossible to imagine from the people who had just been lazing around. Unconsciously, the servant backed away at their energy, breaking out into a cold sweat.

"Ah, this can't be..."

By the time he managed to collect himself and evacuate the desolate reception room, the entourage of Duke Peletta had long since disappeared from sight. It was an urgent situation. The servant dashed off to report the situation.

"I will go find Revlin right away."

Exiting the reception room, Kishiar walked briskly, only looking straight ahead as he spoke.

"Everyone remembers how to signal in an emergency situation?"

"Yes."

"Remember, your safety and life are more important than the mission. Now, let's split up and move."

As soon as he finished speaking, Kishiar smoothly turned his body toward the appearing staircase. Nathan, Kanna, Jimmy, and the Eldore siblings followed his lead, changing direction. Yuder did not watch them disappear, but continued walking down the hallway before turning in a completely different direction. He felt the presence of Ever and Gakane following him.

Using the information Revlin had written in his letters, they cunningly avoided people's eyes and descended. Before they exited the main building entrance, they nearly encountered a servant, but they hid in the next room, pretending to be newly arrived workers, and made loud conversation. The servant walked past their room without suspicion and disappeared.

Revlin had informed them that due to the Duke's ill-tempered nature and Lenore, the servants of Apeto House changed quite frequently. Thus, the servants of the Apeto House did not pay much attention when they heard unfamiliar voices or sensed unfamiliar presences.

Yuder, who safely left the main building, quickly checked the shortcut mark to the annex and started to move, speaking to the two behind him.

"Once we reach the annex, we'll first check if there's anyone inside. Action comes after."

According to the plan, Ever was to go up to the third floor of the annex to rescue Dandenion, and Gakane was to go downstairs to find traces and evidence of the Awakeners.

"We understand. As soon as we rescue him, we go straight to the agreed-upon place to join up. Right?"

Ever pulled at the tips of her combat gloves as she asked lightly. The sky-blue gloves made from special monster skin were a piece of protective gear specially made for her ahead of this festival.

"That's right. If Dandenion doesn't listen..."

"You said to make him faint quickly before our eyes meet. I'm confident."

Ever shook her finger lightly with a smile. No one could have guessed her power from her seemingly innocuous appearance.

Chapter 134

The ability of Dandenion, as told by Revlin, was to stiffen the body of anyone whose gaze he met. Since he could not stiffen everyone all at once, it would be challenging to win against Ever.

Regardless of Dandenion's poor condition, having been imprisoned and drugged for a long time, he could be reasoned with, or perhaps even overwhelmed, if Ever were involved. This was the very reason why Kishiar had designated her for this role.

"What will we do, Yuder, if there are more pieces of evidence left underground than we expect? Upon reflection, I find myself unable to discern what matters most," Gakane asked, as if he had been waiting for the chance to do so.

Yuder, without hesitation, responded promptly, "Prioritize papers, books, or any belongings that Kanna would find useful to read. If you can't take everything, use your shadow clone to hide the rest appropriately."

"Papers, right. Okay, got it."

Gakane reached into his uniform coat and pulled out a leather pouch that he had hidden, folded several times. On the surface, it looked like a regular pouch, but in reality, it was enchanted to lighten the weight of anything it contained.

Soon, they saw a detached house with a white roof. The three exchanged silent glances before heading towards the back entrance, typically used by the servants. This entrance, which led straight to the detached house's kitchen, was the easiest point of entry, a fact taught to them by none other than Revlin.

'A servant I had bribed should have left this door open today,' Yuder thought.

Without any hesitation, Yuder approached the small door and pulled the ring handle. The door opened smoothly, without resistance.

'Even though the kitchen still has all the food intact, there is no sign of anyone... Kishiar's predictions must have been right,' Yuder surmised.

He looked around the kitchen, noticing the piles of dishes that had likely been washed just hours before, and neatly arranged fruits and grains. The only explanation for the absence of any servants, despite these clear signs of recent activity, was that everyone had been deliberately sent away, excluding those needed to move the experimental Awakeners trapped underground.

'Even though they did this fearing Kishiar might show up, they probably didn't expect it would make our job easier as well,' he mused.

Kishiar had predicted that even if Apeto's household sent all the servants from the detached house away, Dandenion, confined on the third floor, would still be held captive. Dandenion was not an experimental subject but an official escort of Revlin, who was technically imprisoned to serve a punishment. There would be no reason to hide him, since they had nothing to fear even if his presence was discovered.

Could the humans of Apeto's household have imagined they were so tightly within Kishiar's grip? Yuder gestured for Ever and Gakane to proceed inside as he glanced at them.

" ... "

Words of greeting were unnecessary among the trio. Once he confirmed that Ever and Gakane had entered through the open door and moved in opposite directions, Yuder closed the kitchen door. His destination wasn't further into the building, but the shed next to a well outside.

According to Revlin's map, that place was the entrance to the basement passage of the detached house. With no hesitation, Yuder stepped in, inspecting the ground. He soon found a door, not entirely closed, hidden amongst the food sacks stacked around him.

A faint scent of blood seemed to waft amidst the faint footprints scattered haphazardly around him. Yuder took a deep breath, then opened the door and descended downwards. The words of Kishiar, who had talked about this place last night, sprung up vividly in his mind.

'The ultimate destination is likely to be the forest at the far west of the mansion grounds. It's dense with trees, out of sight from anyone, and with a shrine and prayer house set up, it's deemed ideal for hiding people.'

The underground passage was big enough for a cart to pass through, and magic stones were embedded in the walls, preventing it from being too dark. As a place originally used to deliver groceries from outside to Apeto Mansion at dawn, it was indeed well maintained for its purpose.

Yuder walked, finalizing the tasks he had to do.

'First, as soon as the Awakeners, priests, and servants, including the Elder Priest of Beltrail, are found, they are to be immediately suppressed and rendered unconscious. Then, after taking the Awakeners who are held captive, return via this passage to complete the mission, and meet up with Ever and Gakane. After that, go outside and make contact with the waiting Peletta Knights. That's it.'

In order to lead the Awakeners, said to number around 20, quite a lot of people must have been mobilized from Apeto Mansion. To suppress all these people with a single message before they properly grasp the situation, a considerable power would need to back it up. Yuder looked down at his own hand, wrapped in black gloves, and clenched and unclenched his fist lightly.

'The condition is... good. I can do this.'

However, not long after gathering his resolve, Yuder suddenly smelled a pungent odor. At first, he thought it was just his imagination, but it wasn't. The source of that familiar and intense smell became clearer as he moved forward.

'This is...'

Yuder stopped in his tracks in front of a corpse lying dead in the middle of the corridor. The nameless man lay dead with his mouth open, displaying an expression full of terror, tightly grasping the handle of a dagger buried in his chest.

A foreboding chill brushed his spine. Yuder instantly sprinted forward. More corpses appeared in his path. He ran past all the other bodies, but he couldn't ignore the body of a man dressed in white priestly robes.

The man in the priestly robes was lying in a slightly different position than the other corpses. Yuder noted that the priest must have died due to his head being smashed against the corridor wall.

He cautiously reached out and pulled the corpse by the shoulder. The stiff body fell to the side. The blood-soaked face was no different from the other corpses he had seen. His eyes were wide open and his mouth was agape, an expression clearly reflecting intense fear.

All the bodies lay dead with expressions of sheer terror. The priest had died by smashing his own head, but all the others had their chests pierced by a weapon, clutching the handle as they fell.

Could all this really be a coincidence?

Yuder left the body of the priest and turned to run again. His heart began to pound even harder than before, perhaps because of the growing sense of dread. Soon, the exit leading to the western forest appeared. A noisy sound came from the wide-open exit. Slowing his pace and killing his presence, Yuder hid against the wall and peered out at the landscape beyond.

"Who on earth are you? An underling of Duke Peletta?"

The first sight that met his eyes was the back of a man, donned in a large hat and cloak, and countless bodies laid out before him. Yuder's eyes widened when he noticed among the fallen, the one struggling to stay upright and howling in pain was none other than Elder Priest Beltrail Shand Apeto.

"How dare you do such a thing... If I knew, if I knew you were an Awakener, I would have... I...cough...!"

Beltrail, his forehead split and half of his face soaked in blood, raised his bloodshot eyes to howl in despair. Then he suddenly coughed, spewing blood. He kept coughing up blood until his face turned deep red and then finally fell forward, gasping for air. The cloaked man who had been quietly watching him finally chuckled and flipped his hat backward to remove it.

"For someone who claimed to know more about the Awakeners than anyone else, you seem quite surprised. That's not entertaining at all, Priest."

"..."

A chill ran down his spine the moment he heard that cold voice. Yuder instinctively clenched his fist, then slowly relaxed it. He had a hunch, seeing the corpses on his way here, but confronting the reality was a different matter.

It was Nahan, the Awakener with illusion ability who had left a strong impression on Yuder in the East and had since disappeared. He stood in the Apeto estate, nonchalantly stepping over bodies, laughing.

Beltrail Shand Apeto, who had lived his entire life as a revered Elder Priest, was trembling in shock as he looked up at the horrifying face of the man standing over him, half distorted and half unscathed, laughing. He had researched the Awakeners since their first appearance in this world and had always thought he knew them better than anyone else. This current situation was beyond his belief.

'He was just an ordinary servant a moment ago. He showed no signs of using his power, and the mercenary Awakeners didn't say anything either. How did this... when did this man infiltrate my side and bewitch everyone...?'

Beltrail remembered the first time he had acknowledged the man, no, the servant he had been disguised as, a very long time ago. He had known there was such a servant moving between the guest house and the main hall. But back then, that servant had been no different from other ordinary ones. He had feared Beltrail and had never approached him without cause.

That servant had handed Beltrail a letter two days ago. It was not unusual for those wishing to send messages to the main hall through Beltrail to send letters to the Apeto estate, so he did not find this strange. But the contents of the letter were a little peculiar.

The author of the letter introduced himself as an emissary who had come for the festival from abroad. He had expressed his personal interest in the research on the Awakeners that Beltrail had been publishing and politely requested to meet and have a conversation, if possible. To Beltrail, who was seeking a path to continue his research beyond Lenore and the Apeto family, this letter had arrived at a very opportune time.

Chapter 135

Beltrail conveyed his intention to the owner of the letter immediately, indicating that he wished to arrange a meeting. The response arrived the next morning, a day after, delivered by the servant who had handed over the letter.

“I am deeply impressed by the wisdom of the Elder Priest, and I look forward to meeting you today to discuss matters in greater detail.”

Today? Who sets a meeting on such short notice? He was initially puzzled and annoyed, but remembering that the other party was a foreign emissary, he quickly regained his composure.

“Such an uncouth individual.”

Though the content of the letter was intriguing, Beltrail was not leisurely enough to accept such a sudden visit.

After all, if the visitor came to the Apeto family residence and Beltrail chose not to meet him, that would be the end of it.

“What will you do, Elder Priest? The servant who brought the letter is waiting outside the mansion. Should we send an immediate reply?”

“Never mind. I don't have time to bother with that right now. Weren't you once one of the servants in the outbuilding? Go down and help with the work.”

In order to move all the test subjects who had been isolated in the basement of the outbuilding before the arrival of the Duke of Peletta leading the Cavalry to the Apeto residence, they needed to act swiftly. Beltrail promptly withdrew his interest from irrelevant matters.

However, as he walked through the underground passage with the mercenary Awakeners and the servants leading the test subjects, a strange incident occurred suddenly.

“Ahhhh!”

In the passage, where the only light came from the magic stone, a shrill scream reverberated as one of the servants fell.

“Save me. I... I did wrong! I won't touch those guys ever again! Please, no!”

He stared into thin air like a madman, writhing on the floor and screaming. Because of him, the quiet passage instantly descended into chaos.

“What in the world is happening? Can you not quiet down immediately?”

First, Beltrail silenced the terrified screaming servants and went over to where the collapsed servant lay.

“You there. What are you doing? Can't you pull yourself together?”

Beltrail instructed one of the assistant priests to imbue the fallen servant with divine power. Once done, the servant looked around as though he had regained some semblance of sanity. Seeing the terrified people and then Beltrail's cold face, he broke into a fit of tears and gasps.

“I did wrong. It's all my fault. Elder Priest, please save me, save me!”

“Save you? What did you do wrong?”

“I, I disobeyed your orders, and... and I laid hands on those Awakener bastards... ugh!”

The servant couldn't finish his sentence and fell again. This time, no one was able to use divine power on him.

Like a puppet being controlled by a massive hand, the servant contorted his body weirdly. He drew a dagger from his waist, trembling violently, and in a flash, stabbed himself in the chest. The dying servant's eyes were wide open, as if he had seen something truly horrifying.

“What a pity. He died too quickly. This is why one should not talk carelessly.”

A voice that was somehow familiar yet strange cut through the shocked crowd. Recognizing the voice as belonging to the servant who had brought him the letter, Beltrail barely managed to respond.

“What are you babbling about? If you're a servant, act like one and...”

"Darn it. Shaking in fear and speaking won't lend any dignity, Elder Priest."

A servant, no, a strange man, smirked at Beltrail, looking like a devil in the dim darkness. Only then did Beltrail realize that this man's face was not familiar, it was completely strange, and he felt shocked.

Dark navy hair, a left face twisted red as if it had been burned, and a right face that was, in contrast, cold and handsome. The moment he saw the man's left eye, unfocused and pale, he felt a sting in his stomach, and his legs went weak.

The man had surely been among Beltrail's group from the beginning. But when did he start to look like this? Even after reflecting on his memories, he couldn't find an answer. Beltrail only then realized that he couldn't be certain even of the servant's demeanor that he thought he remembered. The servant's name, his face, all were blurred as if someone had wiped away his memory.

"You, who... who on earth..."

"What does it matter who I am?"

The man with the horrific scar smiled grimly, raising just one corner of his mouth.

"We're all going to die here, anyway."

"Cocky bastard. What are you doing, kill him now!"

Beltrail did not want to admit that he felt fear under the man's oppressive aura. He hastily ordered the mercenary Awakeners to attack the man, but they disappeared without a trace before they could even approach the man. The shocked servants screamed and pointed their fingers.

"How can he kill so many people without leaving a trace!"

"Perhaps those people never existed here in the first place."

"Is this magic? Or are you an Awakener? Where the hell did you come from!"

Instead of answering, the man pointed towards the exit.

"Have you ever played a game of tag?"

When everyone was too horrified to speak, the man gently continued his words.

"No? Then you'll learn now. You'd better run, or who knows what might happen to you."

"It's going to be very fun."

Beltrail wanted to smack the man's taunting face, but he couldn't because the assistant priests started running, supporting his arm.

"Elder Priest, that man is not in his right mind. He doesn't seem normal, so please get out as soon as possible and ask for help from the headquarters! That's the priority."

They were right. He couldn't ask for help from headquarters while underground, so he had to get outside first. For the first time in his life, Beltrail had the strange experience of running with all his might. He felt the discomfort of his beautiful priest's robe for the first time. While he was running clumsily, clutching the heavy, clingy hem of his robe, he kept hearing the sound of horrified screams from behind him.

In the end, Beltrail finally emerged from the exit. But he was not given the time to be glad that he had reached the western forest, his original destination. Unbelievably, the man with the scar had arrived first and was waiting for them.

"Haha. You look like you've seen a ghost. So, did you enjoy the game of tag?"

"How the hell did you get here first...?"

"The way you abandoned even your cherished test subjects, fleeing as you did, was indeed impressive, Elder Priest. I doubt I'll see a sight more amusing in my lifetime."

His smiling face was indeed the embodiment of a devil.

"No!"

Beltrail, gripped by extreme fear, floundered. He desperately cried out for others to strike down the demon and protect him. But as if by magic, all the mercenary Awakeners around him vanished, and the priests fell vomiting blood, even though the man hadn't touched them.

Beltrail collapsed, feeling as if he were living a terrible nightmare, vomiting blood from intense emotions.

The perpetrator had to be a Cavalry member, sent by Duke Peletta Kishiar La Orr. Without doubt, they had dispatched the Cavalry to seize the test subjects and kill him, the obstacle. Beltrail's despair-ridden mind didn't question the man's identity.

"Yes, the letter you brought was all a lie from the start, wasn't it? You lulled me into complacency to seize the test subjects...! What did you do to my test subjects? Did you steal them from the underground tunnel? Or did you kill them?"

"Why so curious about what happened to those lives you discarded, Elder Priest?"

The man asked, seemingly genuinely puzzled. Overwhelmed by a sense of profound humiliation and anger, Beltrail coughed up a mouthful of blood.

"Regardless of securing those test subjects, you won't be able to kill me. Don't you know who I am? I am one of the Elder Priests of the Grand Temple from the Apeto family. Even if this incident comes to light, I can easily secure other test subjects and continue my research!"

But Duke Peletta would regret turning him and Apeto into enemies so carelessly. The man, upon hearing Beltrail's blood-soaked curse, chuckled softly and cocked his head, opening his mouth.

"Hahaha. That's all well and good, but there are a few things you've got wrong, and I think it's only fair I correct you."

"What nonsense are you spouting?"

"Firstly, I am not a subordinate of Duke Peletta. Nor am I part of the Cavalry."

"...What?"

Beltrail, who had sworn not to believe a word the man said, was momentarily stunned into silence, forgetting even that resolve.

"What are you even talking about?"

"They might have realized by now that they've lost the advantage to me and might be rushing here. But that doesn't really matter."

"Then who the hell are you? To claim that you are not with Duke Peletta but managed to infiltrate Apeto's stronghold alone, that's nonsense!"

"That brings us to the second point I'd like to correct."

Having said that, the man slowly moved closer to Beltrail. Beltrail instinctively retreated, shaking his head.

"Do... Don't come any closer!"

"We can. As long as we have brothers and sisters who need us, we go wherever we must."

"We...?"

As Beltrail stammered out his question, a light sparkled in the man's eyes, a look of pure joy as if he had been waiting for just that question.

"The 'Star of Nagran'."

Beltrail didn't recognize the unfamiliar phrase that slipped from the man's lips.

"The 'Star of Nagran'."

Beltrail did not recognize the unfamiliar words that flowed from his mouth.

"What... star?"

Seeing that Beltrail did not understand the word he had spoken, the man smirked.

"It's a pleasant term meaning paradise. The Star of Paradise. A place created solely for the salvation of our brethren. And we despise garbage like you the most."

Did you think I wouldn't know what you've been up to in the basement of the outbuilding? His cold, warmthless eyes seemed to suggest as much. At that moment, Beltrail instinctively realized that this man intended to kill him and trembled fiercely.

The reason he had saved Beltrail for last wasn't merely because he was an Elder Priest or because of his high status. He simply wanted to inflict longer terror, greater pain, on his prey.

"No, I was, I was just, I was just conducting, conducting research...."

"Research.... that sickening study where you were trying to find a way to transform a human into an Awakener by replacing their entire blood with Awakener blood? Or are you talking about the damned experiment to see if an Awakener in heat could give birth to a child that isn't cursed by your family's accursed bloodline? There's just too many for me to even know what you're talking about."

The once-respectful man mocked Beltrail with icy eyes.

"That's not what you call research."

"Ah, ahh!"

As soon as the man finished his words, the corpses around them began to rise and crawl towards them. Beltrail struggled to escape from the reaching hands of the clinging assistant priests' corpses with empty eyes, but his legs felt rooted to the ground.

"No!"

Claw-like hands grabbed his limbs, and teeth soaked in blood tore into his flesh. Despite the gruesome sounds of flesh tearing and bones breaking, his mind was painfully clear, to the point of madness. Beltrail screamed in agonizing pain.

"Aaah! Save me! I admit, I've done wrong! Please, get these things off me!"

"Didn't you ignore them when your test subjects said the same thing?"

The man's slow words echoed clearly amidst the pain. Beltrail shook his head, crying out.

"It was all for the children of families suffering from the 'Blood of Blessing'! Is it a sin to research for the sake of the children who were born to die immediately!"

""Blood of Blessing', what a joke. It's 'Cursed Blood', isn't it? If it were truly a blessing, would trash like you be so desperate to resist it? Isn't it all a result of you lot greedily desiring forbidden power?"

"Ah, ah!"

Incredibly, even though Beltrail had been half-eaten by the corpses, he hadn't died yet. Of course, the reason was that the eating corpses and the pain were all illusions, but Beltrail's mind, filled with extreme pain and fear, had already been paralyzed beyond the point of questioning this.

"Despite having coveted divine power, you're not satisfied. Now you're greedy for your brethren's power and lives as well. It's more righteous to dispose of trash like you for the greater good."

Beltrail couldn't hear the man's cold voice properly as he was screaming in pain from a corpse gnawing at his face. However, he could sense the killing intent becoming increasingly potent, so he desperately screamed his plea.

"No, please, I'll do anything. Please, save me!"

The man, void of any sign of hesitation, slowly opened his mouth to issue his final command to Beltrail.

"Now, it's time for you to die..."

At that moment, an unfamiliar force from somewhere rushed violently towards the man. He swiftly retreated, avoiding the power targeting him, but due to this, his attempt to kill Beltrail was left incomplete. His gaze turned towards the underground passage behind Beltrail.

"Well, they've arrived sooner than expected."

"Nahan."

Yuder, revealing himself from within the passageway, quietly called the man's name.

"Step back."

"What a pleasant face. Are you here to save the trash again, brother?"

"I told you clearly last time not to refer to me like that."

Nahan grinned at Yuder's cold retort, his sword drawn. His gaze briefly shifted towards the corridor where Yuder had been hiding, then swung back.

"Did you hear our conversation from inside there? Then you must know what trashy things this guy has done. And yet, you intend to interfere again?"

Yuder did not respond to his words. It wasn't that he agreed with Nahan's words, but his emotions were confused for other reasons.

'I suspected that Nahan wasn't acting personally, but I never thought I'd hear the name Star of Nagran here.'

In his previous life, he had heard about a group called Star of Nagran.

During the period when the Katchian Emperor was seriously reaching out to domestic and foreign powers to increase the forces that followed him, a terrorist group had made a plan to gather the Awakeners and attack the nobility and royalty of various countries. However, their plans collapsed due to internal division. That group's name was the Star of Nagraan.

While their base was destroyed due to infighting, fortunately, it was near the southern desert and the damage to the public was minimal.

Because the Katchian Emperor didn't pay much attention to the incident, Yuder personally sent a few members to investigate, confirming that Star of Nagraan had completely collapsed and there was no chance of regrouping.

However, a few years later, after Yuder had been away from the Empire for a long time to investigate a massive earthquake that marked the beginning of a disaster, and the appearance of a monster from a crevice in the ground, he unexpectedly heard the name again among the rumors in the social circles.

There was a rumor that a sage, leading numerous followers, was traveling all over the continent, teaching foreign kings and nobles, and the name of this follower group was called Star of Nagraan. There were even some imperial nobles who went abroad to meet him.

As time passed, the sage and Star of Nagraan grew their influence, resembling a massive religious group. At that point, even the Katchian Emperor started to show interest in the sage, who appeared in the Sun Palace, looking like an old and wise mage that people typically imagined.

Although the sage quickly captured the heart of the Katchian Emperor, Yuder could not shake off his suspicions. After investigating him secretly for a long time, he found out that the sage was an Awakener with the ability to influence people's moods and was connected to the former terrorist group 'Star of Nagraan'. On the orders of the Katchian Emperor, Yuder killed him.

That incident had made many enemies for Yuder. While the sage was dead, his fanatical followers remained scattered in various places, even within the ranks of the Cavalry. Even the Katchian Emperor, who had ordered Yuder to kill the sage, had become increasingly paranoid and had come to trust no one, leaving Yuder with the feeling that he had lost more than he gained.

The name "Star of Nagraan" might have been insignificant compared to the countless natural disasters that had struck the continent. However, Yuder considered it as one of the biggest disasters in a tangible sense.

'I intended never to let such charlatans appear in this life... I can't believe I'm seeing this preliminary battle here.'

The image of the Star of Nagran that remained in Yuder's mind was primarily of the sage who led the religious group and his followers. Therefore, after he returned 11 years to the past, he believed there was no need to worry about the Star of Nagran.

He thought it would be a group that hadn't even been formed yet, so he planned to casually conduct Cavalry activities and then immediately beat up anyone who looked suspicious, potentially the future sage. However, seeing Nahan in front of him now made him question that judgment.

'If the Star of Nagran existed much earlier than I thought, there's a high probability that the internal division that occurred in my previous life wasn't fully understood by the investigation back then.'

The members of the investigation team Yuder had dispatched in his previous life reported that the cause of their division was a power struggle between a faction trying to ally with nobles and a faction that wanted to shun them. If everyone had the same mind, they would not try to join hands with the nobles who looked down on the Awakeners, but when several people gathered, power naturally divided.

Among the followers of the Star of Nagran that Yuder had met, there was no Nahan, so Yuder hypothesized that Nahan might have died when the Star of Nagran first collapsed in his previous life.

'A group made for the Awakeners... Its purpose is not less than Kishiar's.'

But the difference between Kishiar, who tried to save as many people as possible, and Nahan, who was willing to kill anyone for his goal, was quite stark.

Nahan, who could not guess Yuder's complex feelings, seemed to think that Yuder agreed with him because there was no answer. He raised the corner of his distorted lips and smiled.

"Do not interfere, brother. I've already taken care of everything here. Only that guy remains."

"Uh, ugh...!"

As soon as Nahan finished speaking, Beltrail, who had collapsed as if dead, writhed and moaned. Yuder did not look at him but frowned and spoke.

"Where did you take the Awakeners trapped here? You couldn't have let them go already."

"Well, where could they be?"

Yuder turned his gaze away from Nahan, who showed no signs of answering. He noticed many footprints and the marks of cart wheels among the fallen bodies. The marks led into the forest. Considering Kishiar had said there was a graveyard and a prayer hall in the west of Apeto's mansion, the only place that could hide a large number of people would have to be there.

Chapter 137

'It seems quite obvious where they're hidden... but the fact that I appear to have come here alone is nagging at me.'

Nahan's illusionary abilities were impressive, but they were not enough to evacuate a crowd of people. Surely, the probability of having at least one ally nearby was high.

On the other hand, it would take quite a while for Yuder's companions, Ever and Gakane, who had completed their individual missions and discovered Yuder's absence at the rendezvous point, to reach this location.

'I did leave a signal inside the underground tunnel... but still, it will take some time.'

In fact, he didn't think being alone was necessarily a disadvantage. Against someone with abilities like Nahan's, having a large group could even be a hindrance. The only concern was the warning that Kishiar had drilled into his ears, not to get hurt.

...Remember, what's most important isn't the mission, but your safety and lives.

“...”

After a moment of silence, Yuder shook his head, dispelling the voice of Kishiar that echoed in his mind.

'What about this situation?'

The priorities do not change regardless of the situation. The primary task was to find and protect the Awakeners, and the next was to suppress Nahan and save Beltrail's life. As Yuder clenched his sword hand and steeled his resolve, Nahan, sensing something amiss, extended a hand to stop him.

“Don’t move. You have a dangerous power, brother. If you come any closer, I’ll have no choice but to use mine.”

“Go ahead.”

With no hesitation, Yuder continued walking into the forest. Nahan, with a frown, curled his lips up in a smirk.

“I can’t tell if you’re brave or if you have another trick up your sleeve. If that’s what you want then...”

The moment Nahan put power into the hand he stretched towards Yuder, Yuder saw Beltrail, who had been writhing behind Nahan, suddenly go limp. It was proof that Nahan had withdrawn the power he'd been using in the area around him - the very opportunity Yuder had been waiting for.

‘Now!’

Yuder immediately crouched low and sprinted full speed towards Nahan. The wind power beneath his feet flared, exponentially increasing his speed.

Seeing the surprised Nahan dodge to the side, Yuder charged into the created space and grabbed the back of the fallen Elder Beltrail with both hands, throwing him into the entrance of the underground tunnel behind him.

Thud!

Seeing Beltrail's body roll down into the dark tunnel, Yuder didn't stop. He immediately changed direction again and ran towards the forest.

'Although the illusion power is strong, it ultimately only works within the set range. There's bound to be a gap when the range is changed. Besides, no matter how strong the illusion, it can't affect everyone in the same way. That's your weakness.'

Yuder and Nahan had already measured each other's power in the East. At that time, Yuder hadn't quite caught on to when Nahan was changing the range of his power and had suffered a great deal. But this time was different.

From that experience, Yuder had learned that Nahan barely moved when using his abilities. When focused, he could distinctly feel the faint energy, like a mirage, stretching out from Nahan's fingertips.

Nahan, too, having seen how relentlessly Yuder could break through his illusions, felt his guard rising considerably more than before.

To face someone capable of shattering illusions so quickly, one needed to use equally powerful strength. However, having already exerted considerable power in dealing with Beltrail's group, he didn't think he had enough strength left to restrain Yuder as he had done before.

'And once I find the Awakeners and his comrades in the forest, the odds will be in my favor.'

The more people one had to protect, the harder it was to use power, a principle that applied to everyone. The 20 Awakeners thought to be in the forest were beings that Yuder had to protect at all costs. However, the fact that this also held true from Nahan's perspective was crucial.

If Nahan recklessly demonstrated his illusions as before, and Yuder unleashed his power indiscriminately, it would ultimately be he and his comrades who suffered.

'If it were like before, I would have turned this forest upside down and ended it.'

But how could he help it when someone's words, instructing him not to hurt anyone, kept nagging at the corner of his mind? Thanks to the map Kishiar showed him before he came here, Yuder did not wander and found the sanctuary right away.

In front of the beautiful sanctuary, built in an ancient style, a few unfamiliar men were loitering. They were taken aback by the sight of Yuder and Nahan rushing toward them.

"Who... is that?"

"Stop him! Don't let him in!"

Nahan shouted sharply. But by the time he had said that, Yuder had already kicked off the ground, took a step in mid-air, and landed on the roof of the sanctuary.

"Hosanna!"

As Nahan desperately called out, seemingly summoning someone, Yuder ruthlessly struck the skylight on the sanctuary roof with his sword.

Crash!

The thick colored glass depicting the symbol of the Sun God shattered in an instant and fell downwards. Yuder jumped through the broken glass.

'I've found the right place.'

The sight that greeted him as soon as he landed confirmed that he had found the right destination. The space, cleared of all interior furniture, was filled with shabby carts. People lying powerless or crouching on top of them opened their eyes at the loud noise, looking up at the uninvited guest. Yuder sighed as he saw some of them panting feverishly.

'Is it the fever caused by being in heat?'

A rough count told him that there were just over ten people there.

"Who... who are you exactly?"

One of the more intact-looking Awakeners coughed and asked while I was observing them.

"It doesn't seem like you're the ones who saved us... how did you..."

"I am Yuder Aile, a member of the Cavalry following the Emperor. I'm here to protect you and get you out of here."

Upon hearing his swift answer, they widened their eyes at the sight of the uniform he wore.

"The Cavalry...? The Emperor... Then who are the people who saved us?"

"They are..."

Just as he opened his mouth to answer, there was a loud bang from outside. Yuder tightened his grip on his sword and moved forward.

"I apologize, but do you know where the other people who were with you are now?"

"If you're talking about the Omegas... they took them elsewhere to separate them from those in heat."

At those words, Yuder paused for a moment.

"The ones here were Alphas."

He was really lucky he hadn't manifested his second gender yet. Even with several Alphas in heat nearby, he hadn't even known they were Alphas.

"Those who brought you here are a group of Awakeners known as Star of Nagran. There isn't enough time to explain everything now, but you must never follow them."

"Star of Nagran...?"

"I'll go to fetch the Omegas, in the meantime, if someone comes in, scream to alert me."

After uttering these words, Yuder carefully approached the door, holding his breath.

'Can't hear a thing.'

After counting to three in his mind, he swung open the door, revealing an empty hallway. Across from the large prayer room where Yuder had been, there was a smaller one. Those who had been there were already gone. Yuder ran towards it, recognizing another door behind the open one, and moved quickly.

"Nahan!"

"Damn it, they're here! Release them quickly!"

Exiting through the back door, Yuder saw several men moving a group of people. They were the same ones he had seen outside the chapel. Spotting Yuder, they blocked the way, brandishing their swords with grim expressions.

"We wouldn't face a brother, but we have no choice. We need to buy some time...!"

"Stand aside."

Yuder attempted to brush past them and pursue the disappeared ones, but the energy swirling around the men's brandished swords followed swiftly and flexibly, preventing him from doing so. They seemed to have been harmonized for a long time, skillfully pushing Yuder from both sides. Although they appeared tense and their swordsmanship wasn't particularly impressive, the blue energy bound to their swords was undeniably threatening.

Yuder instantly drew his sword to confront them. A common sword wouldn't have lasted a few seconds against the blue energy wielded by his opponents and would've shattered instantly. However, the sword given by Kishiar was anything but ordinary. As it effortlessly withstood the energy akin to a sword aura, the two Awakeners couldn't help but reveal their disconcerted expressions.

"He uses fire and wind, and now he's good with a sword too?"

"I told you he's not a common brother!"

"No matter what...argh!"

‘Did you really think I, who have lived and rolled around for over a decade in this business, would be pushed back by novices like you?’

Yuder, regretting that he couldn't respond, seized an opportunity and forcefully knocked away one man's sword. Then, he exerted force towards the iron that made up the other man's sword, making it whirl in different directions, instantly losing all its functions as a weapon.

"By God, is he human?!"

"Run...Ugh!"

Before they could finish their sentences, Yuder remorselessly lifted his leg and struck their heads. That alone was sufficient to knock out the two disarmed men.

Chapter 138

‘The best part of coming back to the past, without a doubt, is having a young body.’

In his previous life, he was constantly in a state of ill health after having suffered life-threatening injuries. Despite receiving treatment, there was a limit to its effectiveness. Towards the end, he had to start his day by chewing on herbs for pain relief as if it was his meal. Compared to that, his current state, where he could move swiftly as he pleased, felt like heaven.

"Gayle, Doyle! It's your turn now! Quickly...!"

Just as Yuder was about to step over the unconscious men, a stranger appeared, poking his face out from between the trees. Startled, he quickly retreated. It was a young man with the typical southern complexion, a strong red tint to his skin.

"You're the Cavalry member that Nahan spoke of...?"

"Hosanna. Don't come any closer."

Then, Nahan appeared from behind the man, grabbing his shoulder as if to protect him and pushing him behind. Yuder, feeling no signs of threat from the two, strained his senses towards them and opened his mouth.

"Where did you take the Omega Awakeners?"

"The brothers and sisters are no longer here."

"...Gone?"

"Yes. By now, they've probably met with their other siblings far away. Unfortunately, you're a step late."

There was only one logical deduction left since the words didn't imply that the Omega Awakeners were killed. Yuder looked directly at the young man who seemed extremely strained behind Nahan and asked,

"So, you're the teleporter?"

"How did you...?"

Hosanna, the young man, looked momentarily taken aback as if he'd been exposed. His face was a picture of confusion, unable to comprehend how Yuder had deduced it.

'Well, the reason why we employed the Eldore siblings was because of their teleportation ability.'

The teleportation ability of the Eldore siblings, although quite limited, was most useful in unexpected circumstances during missions like this. If Yuder had successfully helped the Awakeners escape, they planned to use that ability in the most heavily guarded section leading from the underground passage to the outside world.

Teleportation is a rare ability that's hardly even heard of nowadays, but it wasn't so in the future. By the time Yuder was nearing his end, there were quite a few exceptional teleporters within the ranks, assigned to assist the members dispatched for urgent missions.

'In any case, they also have a teleporter. As expected.'

Just because they both have the same teleportation ability, their skill levels can differ greatly. It's impossible to gauge how capable that young man might be. But a teleporter who not only assisted Nahan and his colleagues to escape but also transported nearly ten Omega Awakeners, judging from his previous life's experience, couldn't be of a weak ability.

That explains why Nahan was calm, despite stirring up trouble in one of the four most heavily guarded ducal mansions in the capital. Because he had such a person with him.

'Always prepares a secure escape route before getting into any work, just like last time. Such a cunning guy.'

During the tense standoff, Hosanna, the young man with a hardened face, pointed toward two of his colleagues lying at Yuder's feet and asked.

"...Are my colleagues dead?"

"They've only passed out."

"I see."

Hosanna let out a sigh of relief, only to have Nahan seize his arm and push him back.

"That's enough confirmation. We can't save those two right now. We must retreat."

"But, Doyle and...."

"The moment I step any closer, I might end up just like them. Is that what you want?"

"No, of course not. But if we just turn back like this, I wonder what he would say..."

Nahan, seeing the faint-hearted Hosanna, coldly retorted and looked towards the prayer house with a hint of regret.

"I regret not being able to save everyone, but we've done our part. He'll understand. We can save Gayle and Doyle later. So..."

'Huh. As if someone would just stand by and let that happen.'

Just as Yuder was about to chime in, looking incredulous, he heard his name being called from a distance.

"Yuder!"

Yuder paused unknowingly for a moment. Seizing the opportunity, Nahani quickly urged Hosanna on.

"Quickly, Hosanna!"

A burst of light erupted from Hosanna.

"Yuder, are you alright?"

Before Yuder could even raise his hand to attack, the two vanished in the blink of an eye. Following their disappearance, Gakane appeared, having run up with his shadow clone. His gaze rapidly scanned the two men collapsed at Yuder's feet and the open prayer house.

"What happened? There are a ton of corpses over there..."

"...It's been eventful."

Yuder glared at the spot where Nahan and Hosanna had disappeared, then turned away.

"Bind the unconscious ones here and have the clone carry them. Some of the Awakeners who were imprisoned in the annex are inside the prayer house. They need to be taken as well. Where's Ever?"

"Ever has successfully rescued Dandenion. But since you weren't at the promised location and the passage was filled with bodies, plus the signal you left... Ever went to relay the news to the Commander, and I came here first."

"Good job. Did you see the Elder Priest Beltrail inside the passage?"

"Ah, yeah."

Gakane scratched his head, giving a somewhat awkward smile.

"He fainted after screaming at the sight of me... But he's alive."

"What about the evidence I told you to find in the annex basement?"

"There was more left than I expected, so I filled my pocket and buried the rest on the floor. That should be fine, right?"

"Yes. That's sufficient."

Though he hadn't expected things to turn out this way, he was relieved that Nahan's comrades hadn't made it to the main building where Kishiar was. Kishiar, having heard the news, would take care of the rest. It felt incredibly comfortable knowing he didn't have to bear all the responsibility alone.

Thinking about Kishiar, who should be rescuing the third prince, Revlin, and dealing with the raging Duke Apeto, Yuder sighed deeply. After catching his breath, he only then noticed the subtle throbbing in his gloved fingers.

Despite trying to use as little strength as possible, it seemed there was still some strain. Thanks to the gem embedded in the sword and the strap given by Enon, the progress of the pain was slower than before, a fortunate turn of events.

"Yuder. Are you feeling okay? You didn't get hurt somewhere else, did you?"

Despite only glancing at his fingers, Gakane seemed to sense something was off, looking over at him with concern. Yuder quickly composed his expression and shook his head.

"No."

"But you seem...."

At the tail end of his words, Gakane tilted his head and extended a hand to touch Yuder's forehead.

"What's going on...?"

"You don't seem feverish...."

"I'm fine. Just leave me alone."

Yuder brushed away his hand lightly and started walking towards the prayer house.

"If you're not feeling well, you can't hide it like before. If you suppress your pain, it will only get worse. Understand?"

Ever since seeing Yuder's arm turn completely dark purple due to the enlargement of the small spot in the East, Gakane's worries had noticeably increased. To be honest, even if both of Yuder's arms were gone, he would still be much stronger than Gakane. However, seeing the sincere worry in Gakane's eyes, he couldn't bring himself to say that.

Yuder sighed, looking at the red-haired handsome man following him, full of worry and nagging.

"Let's go quickly."

The day when everyone had their eyes fixed on the potential emergence of the first-ever noble-born Cavalry member had passed, and the Capital was once again in an uproar, this time for a different reason.

"My goodness, the Elder Priest Beltrail was caught doing awful things with dozens of Awakeners. I attended the service he held at the Grand Temple once, and I would've never imagined him capable of such things."

"How could a priest who serves God do such things? It's no wonder he ended up like this!"

Enon, a man with a head full of ashy hair, was passing by the people chattering excitedly in the market when he suddenly stopped to listen. All day long, wherever he went, everyone was talking about the same thing: the terrible incident that had occurred at the Apeto House the previous day.

"The third prince, who was the problem child, has only been left as an honorary member of the Cavalry. Ultimately, the entire Apeto House has canceled all festival schedules and has declared they won't be receiving any visitors. Looks like they've lost."

"In the end, the only winner is Duke Peletta. Wasn't it the Cavalry who discovered that terrible thing?"

When the conversation shifted to the Cavalry, the people, who had been adding their own comments to the conversation, wore different expressions, filled with anticipation and excitement.

"Haha. That's right. The commoner members of the Cavalry were the ones who discovered it, which must have hurt the pride of the nobles! They must've closed the mansion doors out of shame. Honestly, it's refreshing to see."

"How many servants went to work for that family only to end up dead? In the past, I used to be a bit scared whenever I saw an Awakener, but thanks to the Cavalry, I don't feel that way anymore."

"Right. Doesn't Amber from the upper house has a daughter who's an Awakener? Haha. Who knows, she might join the Cavalry when she grows up. That would be a real rise to success..."

After hearing that, Enon started moving again. The place he stopped at was a small fruit shop, fitting for the humble market.

"Two lemons."

The young shop owner, who had been busily moving boxes, didn't bat an eye at Enon's abrupt request for lemons.

Chapter 139

"Enon, isn't it time you started eating something other than that?"

"Just give me what I want, you bastard."

"I'm busy right now. So just leave a coin here and take what you need."

Enon tossed a coin into an empty can placed next to the fruit boxes and picked up two lemons. He put one in his pocket and began eating the other one like any ordinary fruit. Watching him do this, the young shop owner scrunched up his nose.

"I've always been curious about how you could possibly eat that so casually."

"Do you want to stop doing business here?"

"To be honest, after five generations, I wouldn't mind quitting if I could."

After this cool reply, the young man moved all the fruit boxes and turned around to wipe the sweat off his brow.

"But judging by the fact that you're still here... do you need something else?"

"I'm curious if anything unusual is happening around here."

"Nothing much today. You must know about what happened in Apeto yesterday."

The shop owner nonchalantly responded to Enon's question, then suddenly let out a small "Ah."

"Speaking of Apeto, there is one thing that comes to mind."

"What's that?"

"It's not much, but you know the Cavalry that recently delivered a huge blow to the Apeto House?"

"The Cavalry?"

"Yes, that's right. The Cavalry. They're looking to hire some people."

The shop owner laughed softly at his mistake, took off his hat, and sat down on the small chair in front of the stall.

"What's so interesting about hiring servants?"

"Well, they're not hiring servants per se, they're looking for a physician and a pharmacist."

Enon, who had been expressionless, showed a slight change in his eyes at these words.

"A physician and... a pharmacist."

"Quite unusual, isn't it?"

The young fruit shop owner's mouth curled up into a satisfied smile.

"The local doctors and pharmacies have already heard the rumors. It's a place set up by the Duke of Peletta, so naturally, people assumed that they would only use the highest grade holy water for treatment from the Temple. So why do you think they're looking for a physician and a pharmacist?"

After chewing and swallowing the last bit of his lemon, Enon licked his lips.

"I'm not sure. But it does sound intriguing. So, are they offering good pay?"

"Why? Are you interested, Enon? Haha."

Despite his mocking tone, the young man didn't really expect Enon to show any positive interest. Therefore, when Enon, who had been thoughtfully chewing on his lemon, nodded his head, the young man was taken aback enough to nearly slide off his chair.

"Really?!"

"Yes. So, tell me where to apply."

"No joke, you're serious? It's not like you're short of money, right?"

"Noisy are you. I asked where I should go."

"Wow, there really is a first time for everything."

The flustered young man, getting to his feet, informed him that there was an inn nearby where several members of the Peletta Knights were staying long-term. He suggested Enon could apply there. Instead of a verbal response, Enon flicked another coin from his pocket toward the young man.

"Take it. I'm off."

"Yes, do take care."

Watching the young man smiling cheerfully as if nothing had happened, Enon clicked his tongue and strolled leisurely toward the inn he'd been directed to. Along the way, he noticed people talking about the incident that had occurred at the Apeto clan's place the previous day.

Given the festive period, it was truly a remarkable situation. Yet, Enon understood their excitement. After all, the scandal of one of the four ancient ducal houses, tracing back to the founding of the Empire, had been made public. What could be more thrilling?

For a while now, the Apeto House had been conducting cruel experiments they should not have, using the Awakeners. Fearful that the Duke of Peletta and the Cavalry would discover the truth, they hid the test subjects deep within their estate's forest. However, this act ironically led to an accident, unveiling their secret.

The exact cause of the accident remained undisclosed, but given that the Duke of Peletta announced that some of the Awakeners who were undergoing experimentation had vanished, most people suspected that the missing ones had sparked the incident.

What everyone found most intriguing was the fact that as a result of the accident, Beltrail, the Elder Priest who had been overseeing the research, went mad. Furthermore, several assistants and servants who had been under his command perished.

The Duke of Apeto naturally wished to question him about the incident, but since the Cavalry and Duke of Peletta were first on the scene, preserving the site and summoning the imperial security forces, he was unable to do so. News of the incident spread like wildfire.

The Emperor, foreseeing a potential conflict between the two Dukes, had placed security forces on standby just outside the mansion. Who could have predicted such an event? There were credible rumors suggesting that even this was a divine arrangement for revealing the unjust incident.

After calmly investigating the scene, Kishiar La Orr, Duke of Peletta freed the detained Awakeners and accused Elder Priest Beltrail from the Temple. Beltrail, who had lost his mind, could not defend himself, but no one offered him help. The Temple, recognizing the gravity of the situation, expelled Beltrail from his position as Elder Priest within a day and announced that they would investigate the ripple effects.

The Apeto House claimed that Beltrail alone had committed all the deeds. However, as soon as the incident became widely known, they announced they would close the doors of the mansion and refrain from going outside for a while. No one believed their words at face value.

Kishiar did not slacken the noose he had thrown around the neck of the Apeto House. He immediately sent an open request to the Emperor for the Cavalry to investigate the incident. His sweeping proclamation promising not to miss a single detail—where Beltrail had collected the Awakeners to be studied, how many people were involved in his research—had the people at peak excitement.

According to imperial law, nobles too were to be punished for their crimes, but in reality, such events seldom occurred. However, this time the one to investigate them would be the Cavalry, led

by the Emperor's brother, Duke of Peletta. Everyone believed this was the perfect opportunity to deliver a significant blow to the Apeto House, which had been at odds with the Emperor.

The obscure fact that the Cavalry had the authority to investigate and punish any incidents related to the Awakeners was etched into everyone's minds due to this incident. Now, no one cared about the previously intriguing incident concerning the third son of the Apeto House.

Enon walked past the visibly excited crowd. He halted his steps in front of a dilapidated two-story inn on the verge of collapse, "The Giant's Sleep."

"Enon. It's been a while," someone greeted.

The middle-aged man, who had been sitting at the table trimming vegetables, lit up with a welcoming expression as soon as he saw Enon.

"What brings you here? I have nothing more to say about the guest you asked about before...?"

Enon had visited him a while back, asking about the people who had stayed at The Giant's Sleep before taking the Cavalry test. Two people had lodged there before heading to the test, but the owner only remembered a handsome man with flamboyant red hair. It took him a while to remember the pale man with black hair who was with him, and even then, he could only vaguely recall his existence.

Enon paid little attention to the owner's apologetic face, and glanced towards the staircase leading to the second floor, where the guests' rooms were. He promptly broached the subject at hand.

"Nevermind that. I heard the Knights of Peletta are staying here. Where are they?"

"Oh, the ones who were interviewing all day for a physician and pharmacist."

The owner's face brightened up even more at the familiar topic.

"They're still here. They've been taking turns guarding room three. I asked them this morning if they knew anything about the incident in Apeto yesterday, but they seemed clueless. Did you come here because you're curious about that, Enon?"

"No, not really."

Enon left the talkative owner behind, who was keen on discussing the recent event in Apeto, and promptly climbed the stairs.

"Eh? Then why are you here? You're not here for the interview, surely..."

The voice of the owner, tilting his head in confusion as he considered that unlikely possibility, no longer reached Enon's ears. What filled his mind was the face of a man who had visited him not long ago, shaking up his monotonous life with a substantial ripple.

Even after deciding to write off the man who casually claimed to have come back from the future as a madman, something about him continued to nag at Enon.

Despite the fact that nothing seemed remarkable about his origin, the dormant power within him was mind-boggling, a fact that stirred Enon. He hadn't felt this way in a long time.

"Well... strange man. I'll see for myself whether you really reversed time or not."

Enon briskly opened the door to the room where the Knights of Peletta were staying and entered, dismissing the idea that someone else might be chosen from his mind.

At that moment, Yuder was sitting in the Cavalry Commander's office, quietly extending his gloveless hand. Each time Kishiar, wearing the holy symbol, channeled his divine power, the purplish spots spreading on the back of his hand disappeared, accompanied by a prickling pain.

"I'm glad I can fulfill my promise to you."

"...Yes."

"Lift your head. Seeing that it didn't spread much, I can tell you've put in the effort."

Despite his words, one could only wonder how many people in the world could look straight into Kishiar's chilly smile. As Yuder sighed and lifted his head slightly, Kishiar smiled softly, gently gripped his fingers, inspected the palm of his hand, then flipped it back to its original position.

"Good. It seems to be all cleared up. You may put your glove back on."

"Thank you."

Chapter 140

Once he saw that Yuder had put on his gloves, Kishiar turned to Nathan Zuckerman, who had been standing quietly behind him, and ordered him to fetch some snacks. It was an unusually mundane command to give to a man said to be the continent's greatest swordsman, but he complied without a hint of dissatisfaction, stepping back discreetly.

"Well, let's begin our discussions that we need to tackle now. First, about these people called the Star of Nagran."

Since the incident at the Apeto House yesterday, Kishiar had been working non-stop. Even when unexpected events unfolded, he neither blinked nor hesitated, relentlessly pressuring the Apeto House. Simultaneously, he was striving to extract everyone, including Revlin and Dandenion, as well as the two Awakeners belonging to the Star of Nagran, whom Yuder had protected.

At the end of an all-night offensive, when the Apeto Duke finally declared that he would refrain from stepping out for some time, Kishiar finally allowed himself to sit. Though he must have desired rest, his eyes remained clear and bright, seemingly immune to fatigue.

Observing him, Yuder found himself faintly reminded of his past self, who used to gaze off into the distance with tired eyes. It was a minute difference, but a vast change nonetheless.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"No... nothing."

Caught off guard, Yuder quickly lowered his head and regained his usual expression. Fortunately, Kishiar didn't probe further and immediately began his discourse.

"Based on the information shared by you and the Awakeners we've rescued from the Apeto House, we plan to initiate a primary exploration into the Star of Nagran. Nathan confirmed what you heard, 'Nagran' does indeed mean 'paradise' in the southern language."

"I see."

"It certainly seems there's some connection with the south. But the south is a place where understanding the political climate is more difficult than in other regions... For now, we plan to interrogate the two you've captured once they've woken up and calmed down. We need to know who 'he' is and understand the purpose and direction of their organization."

The two men Yuder had knocked out with a precise hit to the mandible were still unconscious, quarantined in an empty room.

'Were their names Gayle and Doyle?'

Considering the words spoken right before Nahan disappeared, they would likely come to reclaim their comrades at some point. Of course, he had no intentions of handing them over easily, but it would be beneficial to glean as much information as soon as possible for the Cavalry.

"May I take responsibility for the interrogation of those two?"

"You?"

"After all, I was the one who captured them."

Kishiar looked at Yuder's face for a moment before replying with a faint smile, "Very well."

"But remember, it should only be a conversation. Do not intimidate them."

"For that part, I'll ask Kanna for help."

"That's a good idea."

With her ability to read information, Kanna had a knack for quickly befriending strangers. Her ability to rapidly break down emotional barriers would undoubtedly be beneficial in this situation.

"And regarding the Awakeners we've brought back from the Apeto House."

"Yes."

Yuder responded, recalling the Awakeners he had saved and brought from the prayer house. Among the twelve Awakeners who were thought to be Alphas, only five turned out to be true Alphas. Among those, four had entered the mating period. The remaining Awakeners had been part of Beltrail's research, in which he forcibly induced second gender manifestation.

The notion of forcibly manifesting the second gender into an alpha or omega was, to Yuder's knowledge, unprecedented, even in the future. The thought of how many had been sacrificed to commit such a reckless act made him regret that Beltrail had not lost his mind sooner, before paying the price for it.

"After those in heat get through that period and recover, those who want to return to their hometown will be sent back, and those who don't, if they wish, will be allowed to work here."

"Here, you mean?"

"As the lands and buildings for the Cavalry will continue to increase, we need to continuously recruit people. After all, we planned to fill most of the positions here with Awakeners from the start. I have already assigned Nathan with the related tasks, but in the future, you and the Deputy Commanders will also do so."

"I understand."

"You're not surprised at this reckless plan?"

What was there to be surprised about? Though currently there was barely any administrative or managerial work to attend to, there was no choice but to need people to handle such tasks in the future.

Those who understood and could best aid a Cavalry composed entirely of Awakeners were, of course, those with the same powers. In his past life, Kishiar had done the same thing, and as the size of the Cavalry grew, it was clear his decision was right.

Yuder responded in a word, embedding all his emotions in it.

"I don't think it's reckless if it's something the Commander is doing."

At those words, Kishiar was silent for a moment. After a pause, the corners of his lips drew a graceful arc upward.

"Sometimes, I feel like you're a tempting demon who came to tempt me."

"Temptation, you say?"

When Yuder questioned in disbelief, Kishiar let out a low chuckle.

"You keep on saying sweet words."

"When did I ever?"

"Now."

"I didn't mean to flatter. What I'm trying to say is..."

"I know. No need to explain."

Looking at Yuder, who was frowning as if trying to gloss over the situation with a joke again, Kishiar murmured with a smile.

"It's strange. I, who have always learned to doubt myself, when you speak in such a manner, feel baselessly reassured that what I am doing is moving along the right path."

"...That's because it is actually moving in the right direction."

"See. There you go again."

Saying that, Kishiar leaned his chin on his hand and exhaled with a small laugh. His staring red pupils seemed to pierce through Yuder's soul.

"How fascinating. I wonder where someone like you came from."

"..."

"From the start, you were like that. You've always had an inexplicable conviction, as if you already knew where my journey was headed."

At the unfamiliarly low voice, Yuder momentarily hesitated. He could vividly feel Kishiar's gaze slowly scanning him from his face to his toes. He looked away to avoid reacting to the gaze, but still, his voice penetrated clear and unescapable into his ears.

"I wish I could be the one to answer your inexplicable conviction."

Only then did Yuder turn his eyes back. Beneath the shade cast by golden eyelashes, he reluctantly opened his mouth to those beautiful eyes shining like a rising sun.

"Do you, perhaps, doubt me?"

Yuder had been trying to keep his identity hidden to the best of his ability, but if Kishiar was to suspect him, the circumstances certainly allowed for it. Of course, he probably harbored more plausible suspicions than the outrageous conjecture of Yuder returning from the future. Despite this, he found it difficult to meet Kishiar's gaze directly.

"Well, it's hard to doubt you when you're so committed to me and the Cavalry."

Kishiar's response was succinct. Yuder blinked a few times before replying slowly.

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"That in itself is enough."

After shutting down Yuder's inquiry in a single phrase, Kishiar casually steered the conversation back to work.

"Anyway, that's not our immediate concern. With the remaining festivities to wrap up, and dragging Apeto back out of the house they've sequestered themselves in, we'll be more than busy enough for one day."

People had been saying that just by Apeto locking themselves in their mansion, Kishiar and the Emperor had landed a significant blow. But Kishiar made it clear he wasn't going to stop there.

"...Do you plan to bring something else to light besides the statements of the Awakeners brought from the Apeto family?"

At Yuder's question, Kishiar responded as if he'd been waiting for it.

"Did you forget? I'm talking about the Hartan case you reported. You said that two of the mercenary Awakeners hired by the Apeto family escaped."

"Yes, I remember."

"This morning, the deputy Lord of Hartan sent a letter saying they've been found."

"In that case....."

"I plan to bring all the Awakeners who are still in Hartan, including those two, to the capital for a trial. I have plenty of evidence gathered from before. I'm going to break the Apeto name so thoroughly that anyone who bears it won't be able to show their face for about a hundred years."

At his smooth yet resolute words, a faint shiver ran through Yuder.

'He plans to bring down the Apeto family?'

In his previous life, Kishiar had never hinted at such an intention, let alone voice it. But the man standing in front of him now was casually declaring that he'd been gathering evidence for a long time. What was his intention for revealing this and telling him? Was he testing him because of their earlier conversation? Amidst a slight confusion, Yuder cautiously spoke.

"I beg your pardon, but when you say 'from before'... do you mean that you had always planned to overthrow the Apeto family?"

"Not just the Apeto family."

Kishiar's answer was crisp.

"Every noble family, and all those who parasitize the Empire ineffectively, are my targets for cleansing. This is just the beginning."

At his enormous ambition, Yuder was left speechless.

'Is he serious?'

As fanciful as it sounded to dream of world domination, Kishiar was utterly calm. Amidst his confusion, Yuder managed to steady his heart and open his mouth again.