

Turning 161

Chapter 161

"Are you His Grace, Duke Fellesta?"

"Yes."

The scent of raw iron lingered in the footsteps of those who approached.

"And who might you all be?"

"We are the Imperial Guard, under the direct command of the Crown Prince. We are relieved to see you unharmed, Your Grace. The Prince was deeply worried when you vanished abruptly and did not return for some time. He feared you might have encountered danger, especially given the assassination attempt earlier today..."

The soldier's gaze drifted to Yuder, wrapped head-to-toe in a golden cloth.

"But... if I may ask, what are you carrying?"

"What does it look like? It's a person."

Kishiar gently adjusted his grip on the figure in his arms, revealing a gloved hand from under the cloak. At the sight of its deathly pallor, the soldiers were visibly taken aback, allowing Kishiar to calmly interject.

"I didn't realize that my brief rendezvous with my lover would cause the Prince such concern. I should express my gratitude."

For a moment, the soldiers noticed the glove twitching.

"So... is that... person... Your Grace's...?"

Kishiar silently flashed a grin at the stammering soldier.

"Just a prolonged secret meeting. She grew weak in the legs, so I was helping her along. She's shy, hence the covering, isn't she adorable?"

Only then did the soldiers notice the disheveled state of Kishiar's hair and attire. His flushed face and sweaty brow induced scandalous thoughts in their minds.

Though they couldn't see the face of the figure Kishiar was carrying, they inevitably pictured a petite, delicate noblewoman, much like a doe. They were entranced by this illusion, unaware that it was simply the contrast between Kishiar's large build and the delicate white glove emerging from the cloak.

"So... that's how it was."

Well, of course, it was. What else could be expected from the Duke who loved to play more than to eat? As the soldiers' expressions conveyed their multitude of thoughts, Kishiar flashed them a roguish wink that befitted his reputation.

"So, keep this a secret, will you?"

"She's still young and overly shy. Claims she can't go home without me." As he murmured, the gloved hand twitched again, reaching out as if to grasp Kishiar's clothing, before falling limp.

Leaving the sneering soldiers behind, Kishiar gracefully strolled out of the Deluma Palace. It was only when he was far enough to not feel anyone's presence that he halted, lifting the cloak and revealing the face beneath.

Looking up at Kishiar, a pair of eyes, carrying many unspoken words, glared from a face pale with exhaustion.

"...I didn't realize when you spoke of cooperation, you meant... this."

"Didn't I play the part well? We managed to escape, didn't we?"

"..."

He was flabbergasted. How could he describe the dizzying sensation of being cradled in his arms and introduced as his lover? But as vexing as it was, Yuder couldn't deny Kishiar's quick-thinking helped them escape without incident. As a response, he heaved a deep sigh.

"...How far... are you going? Weren't you supposed to have dinner with His Majesty, the Emperor, today?"

"That's right."

With a curt reply, Kishiar began to move again.

"There is a small palace where I used to live during my prince days, right next to Deluma Palace. There are familiar servants still staying there. Rest there for a while."

"But, returning to the Cavalry..."

His words came out haltingly, but Kishiar understood Yuder's intention without much difficulty and replied.

"No, there are too many Alphas who have not yet finished their in-heat period there. It's better to rest alone here, where ordinary people are numerous, rather than sending you, whose manifestation is not yet complete, back alone."

Remembering the Alpha Awakeners they had rescued from the Apeto Family, Yuder agreed that it was best to follow Kishiar's words. His stiff body finally relaxed and Kishiar began to move again.

As Yuder looked up at his face, his vision began to blur and he closed his eyes. His breath was turning sweet, so intense that he could tell it himself, and it would be more stimulating for Kishiar, but there was not a hint of trembling in the hands that supported his body.

Why had such a being, with such strong patience, collapsed all at once in his previous life? Until now, he had thought that their in-heat periods overlapping had been the biggest reason, but now that he thought about it...

'Maybe it had something to do with why Kishiar always wore gloves then...'

His consciousness blurred at that thought. When he opened his eyes again in sudden agony that pierced his lungs, they had already arrived in front of a strange palace.

"Ugh... uh..."

"Oh dear, you're awake."

"Your Highness, please hand him over. We will take responsibility and look after him."

The two elderly servants standing by lowered their voices and pleaded anxiously, and Kishiar carefully handed Yuder over to them.

"Yuder, can you hear me? This is the palace I mentioned earlier. Hang in there until I come back from dinner. I will try to be back as soon as possible."

He wanted to say there was no need, but he could not make a sound. Yuder grimaced and writhed, trying to make an effort, and suddenly remembered something he had forgotten as he felt a strange sensation rustling inside his clothes.

'Ah, the letter he found on Lenore's corpse...'

He should have handed it to Kishiar as soon as he saw him, but he had forgotten in the confusion. Although he could not speak, it seemed that he could at least hand that over, so Yuder fumbled for it in his pocket with great effort.

"Why are you suddenly doing this?"

Regardless of the servants' surprise at his squirming, he desperately pulled out the letter and Kishiar looked at it with a strange expression.

"That is..."

Taking the letter from Yuder's hand, Kishiar opened the envelope without hesitation and quickly skimmed the contents.

"A letter from Lenore Shand Apeto."

He was a bit worried that the poison might still be on it, but Kishiar, a man with the divine power of a high priest, would not be affected by that. Gritting his teeth, Yuder gathered the last remnants of his consciousness and opened his mouth.

"...It's... done... Already... taken care of. That... from the... corpse... sorry... for the... late... report..."

His body sagged before he could finish speaking. Surprised, the servants began to fuss, but Kishiar, who had read the letter in a matter of seconds, raised a hand to calm them down and slowly exhaled, raising his head. Emotion akin to shock briefly flashed across his red eyes.

"Indeed... this is astounding."

"Your Majesty... shall we bring him inside now?"

"Let's do that. Oh, the room where you'll be taking him is the one on the top floor. Don't let anyone else in besides the two of you."

The two servants naturally made eye contact at the mention of the room on the top floor.

"That room is where you stayed when..."

"Yes. So it's the safest place, isn't it?"

Kishiar, who had been looking at the small palace hidden in the darkness with a bitter smile, quickly gave his instructions.

"Place a barrier around the bed. He's only manifesting, not dying of a disease, so just change his clothes and wipe off his sweat. That should be enough. And if there are still any purification stones left there, find them and bring them to me when I return."

"Understood."

After seeing the servants carry Yuder inside, Kishiar immediately turned around. His eyes, while holding Lenore's letter and returning to Deluma Palace, had already turned as sharp as a well-honed sword.

"Your Majesty, the Emperor sent me after hearing that you had left Deluma Palace. If you have any requests, please feel free to let me know."

As he approached Deluma Palace, one servant naturally followed him from somewhere and whispered.

"So it was His Majesty. He knows everything that happens within the palace."

Emperor Keilusa, who didn't leave the palace himself, had placed people in various places to act as his eyes and ears. The fact that this servant had appeared meant that Emperor Keilusa had already received the news of Lenore's death and the attempted assassination of Katchian, and had decided to assist Kishiar's movement.

"The reason I left the palace isn't of importance, so that's settled. However, this..."

Kishiar handed over Lenore's letter, which he had just read, to the servant.

"Judging from the contents of this, it seems to be something that His Highness, the Crown Prince, is desperately searching for. After I return alone, find an appropriate time to naturally deliver this to one of the Crown Prince's servants. Say that it was found while cleaning the second-floor hall. That should be believable enough."

"Understood."

Without harboring any doubt, the servant politely bowed and left Kishiar's side.

Left alone, Kishiar paused before returning alone and looked at his reflection in the window. It wasn't to fix his disheveled formal attire or hair. When he slowly brought his sleeve to his nose, the strong scent that still lingered on it was distinctly noticeable.

Chapter 162

Kishiar, left behind, slowly lifted his hand to his nose, burying it in the sleeve of his ceremonial suit. He still could distinctly smell the intense scent that had pervaded the area.

Since his Awakening and manifesting a second gender, Kishiar had met numerous people to learn more about his newly transformed body.

This was not the first time he had encountered the scent of an Awakener that manifested Omega second gender at the same time as entering their mating period. However, he had never before felt the need for caution, nor found it to be strenuous. This time, however, the overwhelming pressure was so potent that he had to deliberately wrap himself in a cloak to prevent direct contact.

He tried not to reveal his disquiet, but just the lingering scent on his sleeve evoked a burning sensation under his skin, as if he were repeatedly downing shots of potent liquor.

It was just the initial manifestation, not even the onset of the mating period, and yet it was this powerful. He recalled the moment when he sensed without even looking at the presence of Kiolle da Diarca, who rushed into the hall with a strong scent, and turned his head.

At that time, for the first time since his Awakening, Kishiar felt the clarity of his existence as a man and as an Alpha more than ever before. The stimulation was so overwhelming that it made the back of his neck tingle; the moment he took a breath, a part of the energy he had been successfully suppressing unknowingly leaked out.

The average person would not have noticed, but a few Awakeners froze in place with a faint look of shock, allowing Kishiar to regain control over his power.

Even though he didn't know who Kiolle's scent belonged to until he saw his face, as soon as he did, a certain face sprang to mind. Under normal circumstances, he would not have speculated about what might have happened to his usually competent assistant, but at that moment, he had a strange certainty that it was due to him. That certainty was not a product of rational thought, but something closer to intuition.

It was hard to believe that someone like Kishiar, followed by Nathan Zuckerman for a long time, had acted on a hunch.

Exhaling softly and lowering his arm, Kishiar smoothed his clothes and tidied his hair. As he bathed in the cool air, the incomplete heat that had been itching within his body gradually subsided. However, the sight of the man crouching in the corner of the warehouse, his teeth clenched, his eyes filled with fear and confusion, had not yet faded from Kishiar's mind.

A strange expression mired in refusal, confusion, and an indescribable despair.

Black eyes that seemed to have sucked in all the darkness.

The man was afraid, not of an enemy, but of an Alpha Awakener, of Kishiar.

What did the unexpected expression on the face of someone who had always moved so flawlessly and fiercely mean? Although he had pretended not to notice and left him in peace after that, the feeling of something scratching at his nerves remained. Whether this sensation was part of his intuition as an Alpha Awakener, or the result of worry for someone he cared about, he found it hard to distinguish.

'The refusal to accept sudden changes in the body during second gender manifestation is common. I experienced it myself... But that expression...'

Those with great power often feel an intense aversion and fear when they cannot control or govern themselves. This was not unusual. Many Archmages and Swordmasters, whose names are inscribed in history, have felt the same, and Kishiar's past life, in a way, was nothing but a result of his efforts to overcome such emotions.

So, Kishiar thought that even an Awakener with strong power like Yuder Aile could show a sense of denial due to a sudden second gender manifestation, but the despair he had shown was too heavy for that to be the case.

For the last time, Kishiar looked down at the sleeve of his ceremonial suit and stepped back into the hall.

Most of the Cavalry members and guests had left, but there were still a few guests in the hall. They were mainly people who wanted to look good in front of the Crown Prince and his faction. They

whispered about the duke's return without his cloak, speculating what he had been doing. Kishiar, however, did not concern himself with their attitudes.

He approached the Empress, who sat on the dais looking weary, with a calm smile on his face.

"It seems you're tired. Shall I order a peppermint tea with honey?"

"No, that's fine. My head is a bit sore, but I don't want to drink anything more."

Because she said this, Kishiar quietly sat down beside her. Unlike the crowd that flocked to the side of the Crown Prince, no one approached the pair. The Empress, who had been watching them, let out a soft sigh and lightly pressed her temples.

"I wish they would leave at a reasonable time, but the Crown Prince is delaying time, saying it is hard to dissuade those who are worried about me. It seems we'll have to leave first as he appears to have forgotten our dinner appointment tonight."

"That is a wise decision. Not all waiting leads to good results."

The Empress glanced at Kishiar's smiling face, who responded readily.

"That's very fitting for my current situation. I've been waiting to leave with the duke, but if I'd known he'd come back without his cloak, I would've left alone."

"Ah. That is..."

"Don't make excuses about finding a cute cat or puppy somewhere and bringing it to me. I'll inform His Majesty."

At the Empress's stern voice, Kishiar's mouth promptly closed. Instead, he smoothly changed the subject.

"I've been gratefully drinking the tea you shared last time. The scent was much richer than last year. It's clear how much you enjoyed it."

"Do you think saying that will get you off the hook?"

Despite her words, the Empress's expression softened a bit. Growing and drying herbs for the Emperor's tea was her most rewarding hobby.

"I've changed the blend and improved the species from the herbs I grew last year. It helps more with sleep and is effective in boosting energy."

"No wonder, I've been sleeping well."

As Kishiar played along with the Empress's words, he took a casual look around. By now, the servant he had sent should have delivered the letter to the Crown Prince's servant, and the news would be coming soon.

Once he confirmed what Katchian was planning after receiving the letter, he would be able to understand the emotions and determination with which he started this matter.

"Your Highness."

Sure enough, as if they had been waiting, Katchian's servant appeared from the back and whispered something into his ear. The Crown Prince's expression changed, and he stood up from his seat.

'It seems he intends to handle this immediately.'

As Kishiar casually watched him, Katchian raised his voice and opened his mouth.

"Is that really true?"

"Yes."

"What is the matter, Your Highness the Crown Prince!"

The young scholar who had been loitering nearby called out, prompting Crown Prince Katchian to turn his head. The prince's handsome eyebrows furrowed and he slumped back into his seat, his gaze shifting towards the Empress who sat on the stage and the Kishiar beside her.

"...Apparently, a cleaner just found this letter while cleaning the second-floor hall. They said it belongs to the deceased Prince Apeto the Second."

The Empress, startled by these words, widened her eyes.

"A letter?"

"Yes. But the content is..."

The Crown Prince let his sentence trail off, prompting a response from the Empress.

"What are you trying to say about the content? Send it over here."

"I apologize, Your Majesty. Here it is."

The chamberlain brought the folded letter on behalf of Katchian to the Empress. A spot of blood, presumably from the poisoned Lenore, stained the outside, so the Empress did not touch it herself but instead instructed the chamberlain to read it out loud.

Kishiar, who already knew the contents of the letter which had passed through Yuder's hand to him, then back to Katchian, sat quietly by the Empress's side, listening to the reading.

I have deeply pondered over Your Majesty's words. I, Lenore Shand Apeto, though I am originally a man of Apeto, realized that time is not important in following the right path. You must have chosen me to grant this revelation.

On the promised day, I will lay down at your feet and pledge my loyalty.

The letter was quite brief, but the content was anything but ordinary. Everyone who had been holding their breath stirred all at once.

Since the author himself mentioned his name, there was no doubt who wrote the letter. However, the problem was the title of the recipient.

Lenore referred to the recipient only as "Your Majesty" in the letter. Of the attendees at the party that day, only Katchian, the Crown Prince, and Kishiar, the Duke, could be called "Your Majesty". And among them, if one were to consider who had a deeper relationship with Lenore Shand Apeto, it was undeniably Kishiar, who exerted power to blockade his Family.

Lenore, a man of Apeto who wrote a letter pledging loyalty to 'Your Majesty' for 'following the right path', escaped from his blockaded Family Mansion alone and came here. If he had come here at Kishiar's call, the possibility that his death was not a simple coincidence was high.

Would Duke Peletta have acted alone? Was it actually the Emperor's will that Lenore came here? Perhaps the culprit who attempted to poison the Crown Prince was not an outsider but someone involved in this incident? If this matter was truly the Emperor's will, it would be difficult to decide where to stand next.

In an instant, a whirlpool of conspiracy theories spun in the minds of many.

Amidst the numerous gazes directed at him, the Empress clenched the armrest of her chair with a pale face.

"...Duke."

"It seems unlikely that the meal the Emperor wished for today will be possible."

However, trapped under numerous gazes, Kishiar only looked down on everyone with an inscrutable smile.

Chapter 163

"The atmosphere is so unsettling, it ruins my appetite."

"Is that all Your Grace, Duke Peletta, has to say after hearing the contents of the letter?"

The voice that questioned him came from a man standing closest to Crown Prince Katchian. He was the third son of a noble count family, a knight affiliated with a rather well-known order. Although he had a reputation for his fiery, justice-driven nature, those who knew him were well aware that this was simply a façade to mask his violent temperament, which often entangled him in brawls.

Most of those remaining in the room were eager, young men, with little inheritance and great ambition. They saw their future in the prince who was to be the Empire's next ruler, and they were desperate to gain his favor. Hoping to seize this opportunity to make a name for themselves, they loudly expressed their opinions with barely concealed intentions. In response, Kishiar pretended to be ignorant and tilted his head.

"What should I have said then?"

"Just a few days ago, Your Highness proclaimed a thorough investigation into the Apeto family, ensuring they would face the judgment of the law. And yet, it has been revealed that you secretly invited the young Lord Lenore here. How can you say that you have nothing to say? Shouldn't you clarify the true nature of your relationship with him?"

The young knight brazenly raised his voice.

"So, you seem quite certain that I invited him."

"Are you saying you did not?"

The young knight thought that Kishiar was lost for words, hence his pretense of composure. The rumor that Duke Peletta, who lived solely by leaning on the Emperor's generosity, was merely a pretty face who could hardly read a book, was well-known.

This was his first time seeing the Duke up close, but looking at his appearance, sans the cloak that had somehow been lost from his formal attire, he thought the rumor was indeed accurate.

Seeing the eyes of those observing the situation, regretting that they didn't act first, bolstered his confidence.

"Aren't we still unsure if the letter is genuinely from the second prince of Apeto?"

"There are circumstantial pieces that one could reasonably deduce from, are there not? If Your Grace fails to give a convincing explanation and continues to avoid answering, some might think that the death of Lord Lenore was more than just a coincidence."

"Circumstantial conjectures, is it? Alright, let me try my hand at that."

A strange smile appeared on Kishiar's face as he echoed the young knight's words.

"Let's concede for a moment that, as you suggest, the second prince of Apeto did come to meet me. However, the letter only promised a meeting. His death was an accident, so by your logic, shouldn't I be quite surprised that the person I was supposed to meet suddenly died? I think my conjecture makes more sense, what do you think?"

"What are you saying? This situation is entirely different..."

"Oh? So you still believe that I deceived the second prince of Apeto into coming here and that his death is closely related to me? If you want to believe what you want to believe, then there's nothing more I need to say."

"I... I didn't exactly say that."

Although he was indeed leaning towards that notion, the young knight didn't want to be cornered by directly stating it, so he took a step back.

"What I am saying is... given that Lord Lenore's death is related to the failed assassination attempt on the Crown Prince, we shouldn't overlook the shadows of doubt in this case. It's with this in mind that I felt the need to advise...!"

"You make such allegations without any suitable evidence, even though my name is not even written in the letter. You should also be prepared to take responsibility for the words you have spewed. Do not call irresponsible statements advice. You might regret it later."

The young knight was silenced by the Duke of Peletta's sarcastic rebuttal, laced with laughter and cutting through his speech. The thought of being pushed back verbally by a Duke he had just mocked sparked a surge of unbearable shame and anger.

"It seems... you're forcing me to close my mouth."

"Force? This is advice, much more practical than what you've given. If you can't differentiate, make sure to learn."

Momentarily speechless, the young knight tightly clenched his fists, his face turning beet red.

"Your words are too...!"

"Step back."

Then, the Crown Prince, standing behind the young knight, raised his hand and spoke with weight. As all eyes were drawn toward Crown Prince Katchian as he slowly spoke to Kishiar.

"Exactly as you said, any argument without solid backing, no matter how plausible, is nothing more than an irresponsible falsehood. I understand your displeasure entirely. But, considering he said it out of concern for me, could you, Duke of Peletta, possibly let it slide?"

The Crown Prince protected the young knight. The atmosphere, once again, seemed to lightly ripple. Kishiar directed a friendly smile at the innocent face of Crown Prince Katchian, who seemed to be in a slight predicament.

"Of course. I wasn't that bothered in the first place."

"I'm relieved. However..."

Katchian's gaze shifted towards the chamberlain who was still politely holding Lenore's letter.

"The Duke said this letter might be a fake, but I don't think so. We should find out through this letter who that poor soul was summoned by. Wouldn't the family's grief be lifted then? Hence, I'm considering ordering a more detailed investigation... Would that be okay?"

His rhetoric was sophisticated. By implying that Kishiar had some hidden agenda with the letter and skillfully asking for his consent, he made a high-class move. As a result, the surrounding gazes

became sharper, but Kishiar examined the prince's face with a deep smile, completely unfazed by their stares.

'Indeed. Is that the real claw you've been hiding all this time?'

Crown Prince Katchian had never openly displayed his feelings towards the Emperor or Kishiar since he ascended to his position four years ago. All the attacks were always through the Duke of Diarca.

However, the prince today stood alone, not hiding behind anyone. The undisguised hostility of the prince who stepped out alone for the first time without hiding behind the Duke of Diarca appeared strikingly clear to Kishiar.

'It was worth pricking his nerves during the festival.'

The reason Crown Prince Katchian attacked so promptly was probably because he had concluded he could no longer solely rely on Diarca. Kishiar didn't expect him to take such a bold step as killing Lenore, but this audacious attack was oddly satisfying to him.

If it were Duke Diarca, he wouldn't have stirred himself over such a trivial matter, but Katchian was still a teenager, and at that age, even a slight tremor can feel like an earthquake. A daring method of attack is good for puncturing the opponent's defense, but it can also leave you open to a counter-attack. He was going to learn this fact slowly over time.

Kishiar, trying not to give Katchian any cause for suspicion, made an effort not to appear too delighted as he nodded his agreement.

"An in-depth investigation... Of course, if needed, it must be done. We can't halt the ongoing investigation of the Apeto family by the Cavalry due to this issue, but if you request cooperation, I'll gladly provide it."

As he drew out his answer in a reluctant manner, the people surrounding Prince Katchian couldn't hide their excitement, as if Kishiar's guilt was already confirmed.

"In that case, I must retire early, for my head is starting to ache. I won't be able to attend the meal we had scheduled for today, but I plan to spend the night in the palace, so if you need me, please contact me."

Kishiar, leaving behind those who reveled in foreboding his misfortune, exited the hall. Shortly after, the Empress followed him out of the hall.

"Duke! Please wait."

"Yes. I knew you would come, so I've been waiting."

Seeing Kishiar standing nonchalantly just outside the hall, the Empress appeared briefly taken aback. However, she quickly regained her composure and lowered her voice.

"What are you thinking, exactly? You didn't really summon Apeto' second son, did you?"

"You still don't know me well. Of course, I did not."

At Kishiar's straightforward reply, the Empress's eyes flickered.

"Then why on earth are you acting like this...?"

"One must take a hit to figure out the opponent's purpose."

Of course, in reality, he had not taken a hit, and had managed to gauge all of Katchian's maneuvers as he had wanted. However, Kishiar swallowed these words, flashing a smile instead.

"Please tell His Majesty the Emperor that I'm sorry I cannot join him for dinner. I'll be going to the Eternal Palace where I spent my princehood."

"Are you really going just like that? Since you came all this way, wouldn't it be better to meet and talk with His Majesty directly?"

"That won't be possible today. There is someone waiting for me."

Normally, for his brother's sake, he would have chosen to have dinner with the three of them, but today was different. As he pictured Yuder Aile's pale face, still suffering from the pain of a manifestation, he shook his head. At this, the Empress's brow furrowed.

"Is it someone related to your lost cloak?"

His sister-in-law occasionally had an astonishingly sharp intuition. Kishiar hesitated for a moment before admitting it.

"How did you guess?"

"I couldn't say it earlier, but somehow, ever since you returned without your cloak... you've seemed a bit different."

"Different, you say...?"

"How should I put it? You seemed like someone eager to get up and leave. If it's not because of the Crown Prince, there can be only one reason left."

Chapter 164

Uncharacteristically, Kishiar delayed his reply again at the words of the empress, who carefully chose her expression. It felt as if he had been unexpectedly pricked, far more so than any insubstantial attack from Katchian.

"Was I wrong?"

"No."

After responding reflexively, Kishiar rubbed the corners of his mouth where his smile had faded, a slight frown appearing on his face.

"You're right. I... I did."

"But why do you look like that?"

Upon hearing the Empress's suspicious question, Kishiar quickly changed his expression. His usual smile surfaced between his fingers.

"I'm just surprised. You seem to know me better than I know myself."

"You said earlier that I still don't know you well, and now you're saying that I know you too well. Which one is true?"

"Both, of course."

After saying that, Kishiar quickly added a witty explanation before the Empress could respond.

"It's a secret, but I'm actually like a box with about six sides. When one side is visible, the other side is naturally invisible, so it's only natural that you might know me well and yet not know me at all."

"My, you're quite the talker."

The Empress momentarily forgot the gravity of their situation and let out a deep laugh, as if sighing.

"I wish His Majesty could also tactfully handle matters like you do... "

A candid remark slipped out unintentionally, carrying with it an unmistakable sorrow. Kishiar quietly asked a question as he looked at the shadowed face of the Empress.

"Is His Majesty's condition getting worse?"

The Empress, who had been biting her lips tightly, nodded.

"His sleep time has decreased. The palace head said that he wakes up often due to pain, even when he's asleep. But whenever he sees me, he always says he's fine... Sometimes, I find that the hardest to bear."

"He must be worried that the Empress might harm her health with her concerns. Don't fret too much."

"I know. It's His Majesty's way of showing affection to me. Such a considerate treatment to me who can't even properly accompany the Crown Prince to dinner. But knowing makes it even harder sometimes."

A fleeting emotion of regret passed over the face of the Empress as she vented her pent-up words.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have made such inappropriate remarks at the end. Please forget them."

"Your Majesty."

The Empress, about to turn away, turned her head at Kishiar's call. A wetness clung to the corners of her shadowed eyes. Kishiar scanned the maidservants following behind her and then spoke softly.

"We've been investigating an item in the Cavalry for a while. You may already know."

The Empress blinked at his sudden change of topic. Nonetheless, Kishiar continued.

"Thanks to the competent members and the mage, the investigation is proceeding in a rather interesting way. We don't know the result yet, but everyone is trying to help His Majesty in their own way."

"..."

"Who helped more or less, does it matter that much? Two years ago, if it wasn't for the letters you two sent me, I wouldn't have been able to hang on till the miraculous moment. His Majesty would be happy just knowing you are by his side, so do not doubt his feelings."

"Duke..."

"And the incident that occurred today was an attack intended for me and the Cavalry. It was wise of Her Majesty the Empress not to confront it directly. Those who were at the scene will likely regret today's actions. You may look forward to what follows."

At his words, the corners of the Empress's lips trembled minutely before they turned up slightly.

"Thank you for telling me that."

After the moon's shadow passed over the corridor, Kishiar and the Empress parted in opposite directions, each heading their own way.

His body felt as heavy as water-soaked cotton.

Yuder opened his eyes dully and exhaled deeply. Beyond his hazy view, he caught a glimpse of the darkened night sky.

'Where am I?'

Thinking it a familiar sight, he found himself lying in the most secretive space within the Commander's quarters, located at the very top of the Cavalry barracks. A bed made of beautiful, glossy white wood and stone. A towering dome-shaped ceiling, paneled with glass, allowed him to gaze at the sky. Everything was just as he remembered it, nothing unfamiliar.

'...What happened? Did I... dream?'

Could it be that after he was executed, the whole sequence of events, where he turned back the time of 11 years and started from the beginning, was all a dream and the reality was him lying in the Commander's bedroom now? As soon as he took a deep breath at this chilling conjecture, a large hand reached out from behind and pulled him close, wrapping around his waist.

'...Are you awake?'

Yuder's body stiffened in surprise, but slowly relaxed when he heard the low voice. Without seeing who it was, Yuder immediately recognized the owner of the voice. It was Kishiar La Orr.

The sensation of him breathing lightly with his nose buried in the back of Yuder's head sent a ticklish shiver down his neck.

'I didn't mean to make you faint... I'm sorry.'

'...It's okay.'

After hearing his own voice automatically respond, Yuder finally realized what was going on. It wasn't that he had dreamt of turning back time, but this moment was the real dream.

Indeed, it was easy to be confused since in the decade since becoming the Cavalry Commander, he had never once changed the arrangement of the furniture or items inside the Commander's room. As his muddled mind registered the dream, he began to feel an overwhelming fatigue.

As all the strength left Yuder's body, the hand that had been holding his waist moved slowly, caressing his stomach and chest. The touch was gentle, as if trying to soothe a child to sleep, but it was too affectionate to be seen as just that.

...Come to think of it, it was bare.

His muddled mind suddenly realized that the hand touching him was not, as it usually was, covered by a glove. The surprise came to him late.

Was there ever a day when the man who always wore gloves except in pitch darkness, acted this way? He wanted to look at the state of the hand caressing him, but just as he tried to lower his head, a nip at the soft skin behind his ear sent his thoughts scattering.

'...Hmm.'

As Yuder shook and shivered, the caressing hand became more audacious. Though it was a familiar touch, perhaps due to the fading consciousness of the dream, it felt strange and peculiar, as if he was experiencing it for the first time.

Yes, there was a time when he experienced such a moment. After the man behind him had died, there was not once when he felt anything other than repulsion at the touch of another, but there had

certainly been a time when he clenched his teeth in excitement, a weak thrill bubbling within him as another touched his body.

"Hadn't you said you would go to Peletta Castle when night fell?"

"So I did."

"Then why..."

"Why, indeed."

His slow, echoing reply sounded somehow cold and melancholy, or perhaps it was just his imagination. He wanted to look behind him, but his body wouldn't obey, and he was held so tightly, without any space to spare, that turning his head was difficult.

"Is it regret, since you thought this would be your last night here?"

"Regret... yes, perhaps that's it."

"What do you mean by 'perhaps that's it'..."

"Because everything you say is correct."

After spitting out incomprehensible words, Kishiar took another deep breath. Even though it was just a breath that resembled a sigh, Yuder could feel a shiver run down his spine.

The deep breathing. The unstable energy. A voice that betrayed fatigue and weakness. Even in the darkness, Yuder could feel Kishiar as though he were touching him with his own hand. It was a strange sensation of connection with another, as if he had eyes on his back, so alien that he tensed up. Then, in a faint voice, Kishiar called him.

"Yudrain."

"..."

When he didn't reply, the voice called out again.

"Yudrain."

"Yes."

He answered, as if shaking off the cold sensation sticking to the back of his head. The reply came very late.

"You will need to get used to that name now, are you alright with that?"

"After all, there are hardly any who will call me by the Commander's name..."

"Indeed."

Interrupting Yuder's words, Kishiar chuckled softly. It was a laugh that felt strangely melancholic.

"But it's a name chosen with good intention. Please cherish it."

A name chosen with a good intention. Hearing those words, Yuder remembered something suddenly and felt surprised.

The name Yudrain Aile was given to him when he ascended to the position of Commander along with the title of Count. He remembered that clearly but had completely forgotten who had given him the name Yudrain and how he received it.

So it was Kishiar who had given him that name.

But he still couldn't recall what it meant.

"Come to think of it, I forgot to ask what it means. You only said it was High language..."

Even the Yuder of the past had the same thoughts and asked a belated question. The hand stroking his skin stopped right where it was. It was right in between his chest, right below the likely position of his heart.

"..."

In the instant where he was held captive by the chill he felt on the skin above his vital point, Yuder woke up again from his dream.

This time, he truly was in a strange bedroom.

Chapter 165

'Where is this...?'

"Have you awakened?"

Turning his head towards the voice that resonated from the side, he saw a servant smiling kindly as he offered a polite greeting. It was only after seeing him that he managed to remember where he was. Kishiar had said he would leave him at the palace where he had been staying as a prince, so this was probably the place.

His mind was still fuzzy from the aftermath of the dream, but as he drew in slow breaths, the fog in his mind began to clear.

He was dressed in clean indoor clothes instead of formal attire. While he was unconscious, someone must have changed them. A peculiar discomfort washed over him as he observed his bare hands, devoid of any gloves. Despite spending more days without gloves than with, it was a strange matter to now find the lack of them uncomfortable.

He looked at a spot on his right hand, about the size of a gold coin, remembering the intense pain he had felt there, right before the manifestation began. Although the spot had not spread beyond this size, he couldn't help but think the severe pain was related to his second gender manifestation.

'Is the manifestation... complete now?'

The energy within his body had almost stabilized. His muscles still screamed whenever he attempted to move a little, and fatigue and warmth were still present, but his head was far clearer than before he had lost consciousness.

'Surely, a week hasn't passed while I was unconscious like before.'

Despite his improved condition, an ominous thought crossed his mind. Quickly raising his head, he turned to the servant and opened my mouth.

"I...cough, cough."

"You should drink water first before you speak."

The servant rushed to support him, who had ended up coughing due to the dryness of his throat while trying to ask how long he had been unconscious, and brought a cup of water to his lips.

"Do not gulp it down. Please, sip it slowly, dividing a mouthful into five parts."

The servant expertly lifted him slightly, helped him lean his head against a large cushion, and placed the cup against his lips. As the servant suggested, he divided one gulp into five and swallowed it slowly. It felt as if water had been sprinkled over a wound, the soreness in his throat subsided, and his breath became much easier.

"Thank you."

"It's all right. I was only doing what I should."

"How long... has it been since I came?"

"It's been exactly a day and a half since you arrived here."

A day and a half. He gaped in surprise, not knowing how to interpret the expression on his face, the servant cautiously continued.

"You had been suffering from high fever the whole time, and it's only been a few hours since the fever subsided. If the fever had persisted any longer, the Duke... I mean, the Prince might have had to call for a priest. It's truly a relief."

"Has the Duke been here?"

"He had to leave a few times to attend to matters, but he's mostly been here. He's probably working outside the isolation wall right now."

Kishiar had been here the whole time. Conflicted and unsure how to respond, he blinked for a moment and then recalled an unfamiliar term from the servant's words.

"But, what is an isolation wall?"

"Ah... It refers to a special barrier present in this palace. There are three installed in this bedroom, and the Duke ordered all of them to be drawn."

After he had spoken, he rose from his seat and approached the wall beside the bed. Astonishingly, as soon as he touched the wall, it receded backward, folding aside like a lady's fan. Yuder's eyes widened as he realized that behind the now collapsed wall, furniture and windows previously unseen now stood revealed.

At the same moment, the servant, who had returned, opened his mouth.

"That wall which just disappeared is the first isolation wall."

"Does that mean there are two more walls like that?"

"Yes. One on each of the three sides, excluding the back wall."

The servant's response was polite and serious. Yuder stared at the other two containment walls, which, for the life of him, looked nothing but real walls. Such cleverly crafted fake walls. Reflecting on his past life, he was even more astonished that he had never heard of a palace with such a mechanism installed.

If you look at the name, it was clearly a wall created for the purpose of isolation. This place was the palace where Kishiar, the former prince, had stayed, and it was his bedroom. What on earth could be the purpose of creating isolation walls centered around a bed in such a place?

"What is... the purpose of that wall?"

"It's a wall for isolation and protection, as the name suggests."

After answering thus, the servant turned to Yuder, his wrinkled eyes smiling.

"Perhaps you would find it better to ask the Duke instead of me if you are curious? I was just about to go and inform the Duke that you, Mr. Aile, have awakened."

With that one sentence, the servant, who had caused Yuder to close his mouth, said he would bring some edible food and disappeared lightly toward the open wall.

Once left alone, his body felt heavy again as if he would fall asleep, but having slept so long, he couldn't close his eyes again. Instead, what filled his mind was the servant's words that he had awakened after a day and a half.

'I had thought it would take a week to open my eyes as it did in my previous life...'

Come to think of it, in his previous life, the second gender manifestation itself had been completed in a much shorter time than others. Hadn't others suffered all at once because they went through the slow changes and the associated pain bit by bit over a long time? Then, it wasn't too strange that the heat that had come with it ended quickly as well.

Among the Awakeners he had met in his previous life while being a Commander, there were several who, like Yuder, had undergone the second gender manifestation and the heat simultaneously. Most of them had typically manifested their second gender over a week, and he had heard that the heat naturally subsided around the time the manifestation ended.

Back then, he didn't think it was strange as he assumed that when the manifestation and the heat came together, they typically subsided in about a week. But on reflection, there was no reason for him, who had finished the manifestation faster than others, to extend the heat for an extra week.

'Then, is this what would have happened if nothing had happened, and rather, was it the situation in my previous life that was abnormal?'

He wasn't entirely without a guess. Around the time Yuder died, among the Cavalry members, there was a rumor that if those in heat mingled their bodies, they would influence each other, making their heat period longer than usual. Someone as powerful as Kishiar could have easily turned that rumor into a fact.

In the end, the only variable that he could guess at was that Kishiar's in-heat period had not overlapped with his this time, just that and nothing more.

'Just that... and yet all these events ended so easily.'

Ensnared in a strange feeling while comparing the past and present, Yuder gently shook his head.

'No. That's not it.'

It wasn't just good fortune that resulted from their heat period not overlapping. It was still vivid in his memory how much Kishiar had suppressed himself, trying to reassure Yuder in the storage room.

'I am the Commander of the Cavalry, responsible for you. You took a stand for me, now it's my turn to return the favor.'

Could he just dismiss the shock he felt when he heard that voice resonating in his ears at the moment he was about to surrender to despair, as simple good luck?

Superior abilities didn't necessarily translate into superior self-control. In the world, those with great power often felt less need to exercise restraint, especially for the sake of the weak.

Yet, Kishiar had carried Yuder here, joking around as if nothing was wrong, sweating from his forehead. Yuder believed it was not right to dismiss Kishiar's efforts to save him as a fortunate situation caused simply by their heat period not aligning.

Remembering his face as he casually draped his cloak over him made Yuder's heart lurch.

This time, nothing had happened. Really, nothing at all.

So, even after the second gender manifestation had ended, he could face Kishiar with a clear mind, without any regrets.

It felt like an old thorn deeply embedded somewhere in his heart had finally been pulled out. Overwhelmed by a feeling of liberation, or something he couldn't quite identify, Yuder took a deep breath without realizing it. At that moment, the servant entered, pulling a tray.

"Upon hearing you've woken, His Grace was overjoyed. He said you haven't eaten for over a day and suggested you eat this soup before you see him."

"What... What is His Grace doing right now?"

Yuder asked, a bit hesitant. the servant, seemingly oblivious to his hesitance, gave a gentle smile and served the soup bowl and spoon from the tray.

"Today officially marks the start of the trial with the Apeto Ducal House. It seems he's been continuously issuing orders in relation to that. Now, please eat."

The soup, cooked with finely chopped vegetables and gently minced chicken for easy digestion, was tender enough not to need much chewing, and it had a savory taste. Yuder, who thought he had lost his appetite, felt an astonishingly strong hunger after one spoonful of soup, and began eating rapidly.

"You shouldn't eat too quickly. Please, take your time."

Even after getting reprimanded midway, Yuder finished the soup. the servant, with a contented look in his eyes, cleared the empty bowl.

"I was worried that the food might not suit your palate, but seeing this, I think you'll have no problem eating a regular meal for dinner. It's a relief. Do you have any food preferences or aversions?"

"No..."

As he shook his head to indicate none, a smile spread over the wrinkled corners of the servant's eyes.

"Understood. I'll prepare everything accordingly then. There's no time to waste if I have to prepare. Do you need to bathe before then?"

"... I'm fine."

He didn't know what Kishiar had told the servant, but the servant was exceedingly kind to Yuder. It was an excessive treatment for a 20-year-old young man who, despite serving the palace owner, was of humble origin and had only recently received a last name. Nevertheless, the servant diligently asked several times if there was anything else Yuder needed before finally turning away.

'T'd better tell Kishiar straight away that I'm going back to the Cavalry as soon as I see him.'

Soon, the sound of a door opening from afar reached his ears. The person who strode in with a large step was, fortunately, not the returning servant but Kishiar La Orr.

"You don't look well. Are you feeling better now?"

Kishiar was now clad in a white uniform, different from the last time he saw him. Meeting his slightly tired smile, Yuder was caught in a strange emotion and forgot all his thoughts. The determination to return to the Cavalry and everything else melted away from his mind. His response felt like someone else's voice, strange and unfamiliar.

"I'm fine..."

"Fine, you say. Your lips are all cracked."

As he chided him, Kishiar took a seat on one of the chairs nearby. Although it was quite a distance from the bed, there was no problem for conversation. The sensation of his gaze sweeping over him was so vivid that Yuder unintentionally held his breath.

Despite simply sitting across from him, it was clearly different from before the second gender manifestation. A new sensation that had not been there before recognized the clandestine and enormous presence Kishiar embodied. His more sensitive than usual sense of smell, as the heat was not fully over, detected a cool scent different from the sweetness of perfume.

Compared to before the manifestation, it was no exaggeration to say he had been looking at Kishiar with a thick wall between them.

'Was it like this before...'

He must have felt this sensation in his previous life, but something was different now. He couldn't identify what that difference was.

In an attempt to distance himself from the unfamiliar sensation different from when he had been talking with the servant, Yuder let out a thin breath. Upon that, Kishiar squinted his eyebrows and smiled.

"That's good.... It's only been a day and a half, but there was quite an interesting incident during that time. I've been looking forward to telling you when you woke up. Do you want to hear about it?"

His assumption that he would talk about his manifestation and heat period was pleasantly off the mark. Watching Kishiar talk about Lenore's letter nonchalantly, Yuder thought that perhaps his words were a form of consideration in their own way.

"Yes."

"The letter from Lenore Shand Apeto, the one you gave me. Did you read its contents?"

"No."

Yuder remembered the letter from Lenore he had handed to Kishiar, gathering his last ounce of strength before losing consciousness.

Inside, there was a pledge of allegiance written by Lenore Shand Apeto to the person he referred to as 'Your Highness'. After hearing words so compelling that he was willing to abandon his family and his father, he had promised to meet 'Your Highness' in person and seemed to have attended the party that day. If misfortune hadn't befallen him, he would have met 'Your Highness' and fulfilled his purpose.

Any remaining vestiges of fever disappeared completely at his words. With his mind having been in a daze, feeling a sudden sense of clarity, Yuder carefully opened his mouth.

"So... you're saying the letter merely referred to the recipient as 'Your Highness'?"

"That's right."

Various thoughts quickly moved within Yuder's mind. All the things he had seen and heard on the day of Lenore's death and the situations before and after were scrambled together, before neatly lining up under a single conclusion a moment later.

Kishiar watched Yuder's eyes, which had regained their sharp gleam, with interest.

"That's bold and clever."

"What do you mean?"

"I suspected that they might send someone from His Highness the Crown Prince's side to search Lenore's body after his death in an attempt to conceal evidence, but after hearing the contents, it may have been for a different purpose."

"Such as?"

Kishiar replied lazily to the question.

"Among those who attended the party that day, weren't the only ones who could be called 'Your Highness' the Crown Prince and Commander?"

"That's right."

"Lenore, who died, happened to be in a state of deep enmity with us and was about to stand trial as a member of the Apeto family. To pin the suspicion of murder on someone, there couldn't be a more plausible person than you, Commander."

However, from the perspective of knowing that Kishiar was not the culprit, there was in fact no reason for him to kill Lenore. What he wanted wasn't to overpower and kill his opponents easily, but to judge them under the law with clear justification and undeniable evidence.

At this point, where the elder priest Beltrail had gone mad, Lenore Shand Apeto was practically the most important person to prove the guilt of the Apeto family, so why would he kill him?

"...To those who don't know better, that letter would serve as great evidence for them to recklessly guess that Commander lured and killed Lenore to send a warning to the nobles, including the Apeto family."

It was likely that Prince Katchian was banking on this point, had Lenore write such a letter on purpose, and then killed him. He probably also calculated the chance to form an alliance with Aishes, who would benefit from Lenore's death, or the Duke of Apeto, who could breathe a sigh of relief from the disgrace of his family.

'And then he probably sent a subordinate to check if the letter was written as promised. If it wasn't written properly, he could simply annihilate it; if it was, he could release it at the right time.'

Even if Lenore hadn't written the letter properly, as long as the poison that he drank was known to have been meant for Prince Katchian, the prince wouldn't suffer any substantial loss.

How many in the world could guess that the prince had made such a bold move alone, risking his own life, unbeknownst to the Diarca family? If Yuder hadn't captured Kiolle and extracted information, he might not have been completely sure.

In his previous life, Katchian had never once opposed Duke Diarca until he ascended to the Emperor's throne. Hence, people speculated that, even after his ascension, Duke Diarca was the real Emperor, and Katchian was merely a puppet who followed his orders.

Therefore, Yuder believed that Katchian would not easily move independently, leaving Duke Diarca behind, until he became the Emperor. However, the outcome was unexpected.

Such a bold and flashy method, attempting to drag the opponent down while putting himself in danger, was quite different from the cautious and prudent Duke Diarca. It was also considerably different from the older Emperor Katchian that Yuder remembered.

In his previous life, Emperor Katchian was an extremely careful person who cared more than anyone else about maintaining his position. As the bloodline of the previous imperial family had ended and he had ascended to the throne, he was sensitive to external recognition, paid considerable attention to state affairs, and skillfully pacified and collaborated with the nobles. However, he was relentless if he ever suspected someone of coveting his position.

Yuder knew of his suspicious and stubborn nature, as he himself was often used as a tool of punishment when the Emperor suspected someone of treason.

The decisive reason Katchian had Yuder kill Kishiar in his previous life was due to the suspicion of Duke Peletta's rebellion, which had been bubbling beneath the surface throughout the first year of his reign.

"There might be a difference between those who ascended to the Emperor's throne and those who did not. Or perhaps he felt a much greater threat from the events that took place during this festival than I had anticipated."

He felt fortunate to have intercepted Lenore's letter as he thought about it. Yuder wrapped up his musings with a final comment.

"I presume he would've wanted to expose the letter, attributing it to the Commander after confirming whether it contains any elements related to His Highness, the Crown Prince. It's fortunate that I found it first."

"Well, I'm sorry to say this when you called it fortunate, but actually, I returned that letter to the Crown Prince that day."

Kishiar replied with a slightly apologetic expression.

"What?"

"I wanted to understand the intentions of the Crown Prince more accurately to respond accordingly. I returned it pretending that I found it on the second floor through a servant. He immediately publicized the letter in front of everyone. Thanks to that, the first trial of the Apeto family ended in chaos before both parties could present their positions."

"...What?"

Kishiar's eyes narrowed at the repeated questioning in disbelief.

"I also have the second letter of Lenore Shand Apeto, which Gakane Bolunwald found on the day of the party. Its content is much more interesting than the first letter you found. You could say that this is the main topic of today's conversation."

Kishiar playfully shook a small letter that he had kept hidden in his hand.

"Do you want to read it? It's going to be so entertaining that it will make you forget your pain. I guarantee it."

Chapter 167

Yuder hesitated, then nodded. At that moment, a blue aura flowed from Kishiar's hand, wrapping around the letter and causing it to float gently before setting it down onto his lap.

"...What did you just do?"

"It's a levitation spell stored in this ring."

As he mentioned it, Yuder noticed a ring on Kishiar's right middle finger he had not seen before. He wondered just how many magical items Kishiar possessed. With that lingering curiosity, he picked up the letter.

"There's... writing on both sides."

"Indeed. The front is written by the sender to Lenore Shand Apeto, and the back is written by Lenore herself."

Yuder began reading the front. The elegant, yet somewhat ambiguous handwriting wasn't too lengthy.

Lenore Shand Apeto, in response to the wisdom I saw in your letter yesterday regarding our country and future, I raised my cup of fluaville tea. They say the special fragrance of fluaville comes from its triumph over the harshest of environments, blooming only after a great struggle. Despite the multitude of flowers and fruits each year, is there anything as courageous as the fluaville that has thrived on a barren mountain, devoid of sunlight, rain, and fertile soil?

In you, who trusted me and made bold decisions even in difficult circumstances, I feel the spirit of the fluaville. I believe your cooperation will bring a hopeful future for me as well. The day when we will be together is eagerly anticipated.

P.S. Return this letter and hand-deliver your next response so I may believe in you as clearly as the rising sun.

The letter, using the fluaville tea, a flower that thrives in the black rocky mountain where no other plant could grow, as a metaphor, was complimenting Lenore for her decision to cooperate. After reading the postscript, Yuder flipped the letter over to reveal a completely different handwriting crammed on the back.

To my naive younger brother, Revlin Shand Apeto.

This letter was another one written by Lenore, this time to his brother Revlin. Ignoring the parts filled with resentment towards Revlin, the remaining content was short, but it was easy to see why Kishiar found it intriguing.

Just as you have made a new choice, I too plan to move along a different path. The previous letter was sent to me by someone from the Palace of Bright. This person reached out his hand, telling me the truth when I was ignorant of the situation outside. I can guess that the reason why this person, who no longer needed the help of others, chose me was because he was trying to face Duke Peletta in the trial using me as his proxy.

I will seize this opportunity and claim Apeto for myself. If that happens, wouldn't it be brotherly love not to include you? By now, you must regret your foolish choice, so upon receiving this letter, I hope you reflect deeply.

While Prince Katchian left no clues to identify himself in the letter he wrote, Lenore wrote the name of the Palace of Bright where the Crown Prince lived on the back as if mocking it.

"He asked to send the letter back, but Lenore managed to sneakily leave this behind."

"Perhaps he thought ahead, preparing for a scenario where the conversation with the Crown Prince didn't go well. He planned to extract information about me and the Cavalry from Revlin if things went according to plan."

Kishiar informed him that before his death, Lenore had secretly entrusted the letter to a servant, instructing him to deliver it to Revlin should anything happen to him.

"Fortunately, the Gakane Bolunwald had agreed to meet with him, guaranteeing his safety and pledging to deliver his letter on his behalf. Notably, Revlin had already made it clear that I was free to use this letter as I pleased."

"Then why did you not disclose this second letter immediately? If you had revealed it before today's trial, wouldn't we have avoided a scandal?"

"I discovered a somewhat troubling substance while examining the letter."

Kishiar raised his hand, pointing towards the letter.

"During the examination of the two letters, I noticed fine dust adhered to their surfaces. It seemed as though it had dried up, perhaps originally having been a liquid. The second letter had more of this dust, and I suspected it was not ink but something else. Despite much of the dust being lost, the remaining amount did not reveal its nature. However, I can't help but suspect that it smells of foul play."

Upon hearing this, Yuder looked down at the letter once more.

"Thus, my plan was to reveal it once I'd confirmed the identity of this dust, at a time when suspicions and doubts about me had peaked and the Crown Prince had made his move."

Yuder knew the identity of the unpleasant substance Kishiar was talking about. It was a poison that induced intense thirst.

'I didn't get the chance to report it because of the chaos, but he's already figured it out.'

The fact that Kishiar, who had no foreknowledge and was dealing with the situation blindly, managed not to overlook such a small detail made Yuder realize his brilliance once more. Kishiar tilted his head, seeming to have noticed Yuder's nuanced expression.

"You seem puzzled. I thought you'd find it intriguing. Do you have any guess?"

"Yes. I failed to mention it earlier, but when I found the body of Prince Lenore, I discovered the same substance all over his body and belongings. It's a poison I'm already familiar with."

"Poison?"

"It's not lethal, but when absorbed in large amounts through the skin, it causes severe thirst."

"How were you able to identify such a minute substance at a glance?"

"The poison reacts to fire. When I ignited a flame to examine the prince's body in the warehouse, I noticed its glow and response."

In truth, Yuder had confirmed it after suspecting Katchian upon witnessing Lenore's death as he suffered from extreme thirst and drank poison from a cup. Yet, Yuder calmly lied.

"That's an unusual poison, even for me to hear about. Impressive."

"It's understandable you wouldn't know. The ingredient is a non-edible mushroom, only used among the poor to induce vomiting by forcing excessive water consumption."

Yuder had learned this fact in his past life during a conversation with Enon. During the period when this poison was commonly used, he'd asked Enon, who ran a herbal medicine shop and may have known something, after hearing that the raw material was a certain kind of mushroom. It was trivial information he'd obtained.

"It seems you know it quite well. Surely you..."

Facing Kishiar, who seemed to misunderstand something and furrowed his brows, Yuder firmly shook his head.

"I have never used it personally. I just happened to learn about it while living in the mountains. I never imagined I'd encounter it in this manner again..."

"That's a relief. If you had learned of it because you were ill enough to need it, my heart would have ached even more for the miserable state of this empire."

With a faint smile, Kishiar changed his expression, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

"Anyway, we obtained unexpected valuable information, which will ease our investigation. We need to secure evidence and a trace of how the Crown Prince obtained and used that poison. It would be proof that Lenore Shand Apeto was systematically murdered by drinking the poisoned cup."

"Yes."

"It's fortunate that Lenore Shand Apeto's funeral is tomorrow, isn't it?"

Since the corpse bearing evidence and his belongings would still be there, Kishiar smiled as brightly as the sunlight.

It was indeed better than the exhausted, emaciated face he had in his dream. Yuder also, unknowingly drawn by that smile, lifted the corners of his mouth faintly. For a moment, an odd silence danced between their laughter.

"...Why are you...?"

"Excuse me?"

"No, it's nothing."

Kishiar, who had inadvertently moved his lips to say something, quickly changed the subject.

"...So, now that the intriguing story has ended, let's hear your story."

"Ah, yes."

When he responded with the feeling that what was bound to come had come, Kishiar also turned his gaze with a much more serious expression than before.

"I didn't ask before because the situation was urgent, but how did you happen to meet Kiolle da Diarca that day?"

"...Kiolle da Diarca, you say?"

He paused in silence at this unexpected question before questioning back, at which point Kishiar nodded.

"He said he came to help because he was in your debt, but I'm not sure how much you know about the situation at that time, so I wanted to confirm. While you were laid up, I've been looking into his activities, and other than the strange rumor that you two seemed oddly entangled that day, I couldn't find anything else."

"... "

Although it was slightly embarrassing, he did have a hunch about that rumor. It seemed the soldiers who had witnessed him asking Kiolle for information had spread some strange stories.

Yuder sighed and began to speak.

"You needn't worry. I bumped into Kiolle da Diarca that day, and he followed me without my knowledge and saw me manifest. Still, he won't go around spreading what he saw that day."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

If asked, Yuder had planned to talk about the oath he made with Kiolle. But after hearing this, Kishiar simply stared at him with his red eyes for a moment before giving a single nod, not inquiring further.

"I see. It seems you're confident about it, so I'll leave that matter to you and not worry further. He's not worth the time and thought."

Chapter 168

It was an evaluation that would have driven Kiolle himself to rage, yet as Yuder agreed with the assessment, he merely responded, "Yes. Don't worry about it," in a brief reply. Kishiar's face cracked into a fleeting smile again, though Yuder couldn't fathom what was amusing about his answer.

"Good. Hearing that response makes me feel like you've truly recovered, just as usual. Just this morning, your condition was so bad that I even thought we might have our first case of someone's life being endangered by the manifestation of the second gender."

"...Are you talking about me?"

Yuder could hardly comprehend Kishiar's words, as he remembered nothing of what happened while he was unconscious, and in terms of time, it was only a day and a half. When Yuder awkwardly asked back, Kishiar looked at him as if he couldn't believe it.

"Yes. Perhaps because the manifestation happened in such a short time, the pain seemed tremendous. It was so severe that even when your heat overlapped, causing your temperature and scent to escalate, there was absolutely no response to the touch of the caregivers."

"I don't remember any of it."

"That's probably for the best for you. I tried to help by giving you fever reducers and painkillers several times, but it seemed to have no effect. In the end, we even made you consume ground Fonesa powder."

Fonesa was a medicinal herb with potent analgesic properties that was only used for patients suffering extreme pain. The fact that they had gone to the lengths of feeding him this herb, which was difficult to obtain due to strict cultivation restrictions by Imperial law, indicated how severe his condition must have been. Yuder lowered his head, a sense of shock settling over him.

"I apologize for causing you concern."

"You don't need to apologize for being ill. If anything, I am the one who wants to apologize."

"For what, Commander?"

Caught off guard by his response, Yuder looked up to see a slightly bitter expression on Kishiar's face.

"I was aware that you, in the middle of your manifestation, were wary of and frightened by me, an Alpha Awakener. But I pretended not to notice and brought you here anyway, because of the situation."

He was prepared to reply that he had no regrets if Kishiar apologized for sending him on a mission alone, as it was his duty. However, his mind went blank at the unexpected response.

"Commander. That..."

What he felt towards the Alpha Awakener was not so much wariness and fear, but fragments of emotions stemming from memories of his past life. But how could he explain this? No. Come to think of it, since these were memories related to the past Kishiar, it was understandable that the man in front of him felt this way. As Yuder struggled to continue speaking, Kishiar spoke again, his tone gentle yet firm.

"You don't have to answer. It's a fact that I was less cautious than usual. I was just worried that my contact with you might have adversely affected your manifestation."

"That's... probably not the case."

"We can't be sure. Even though it's our own bodies, there's still so much we don't know."

With a thoughtful look in his eyes, Kishiar replied and then took a deep breath, swallowing whatever else he had intended to say.

"Anyway, it's truly a relief that your fever has subsided and you've awoken safely. You can rest here today, and we plan to move to the Cavalry tomorrow. Will that be okay?"

"Can't we just leave today?"

Yuder, remembering his intention to tell Kishiar that he wished to return immediately upon seeing him, cautiously counter-questioned.

The response came immediately.

"Others would have been sick for days, but you managed to get through it all in one day. Now, you want to leave without resting. Remember, we only have one body and health, so you should take care of it when you can."

"But."

"Didn't you promise not to act recklessly last time?"

"..."

With those words, Kishiar, who had sealed Yuder's mouth, rose from his seat with a smile.

"Resting one more day won't make the world crumble. You don't need to worry about Lenore Shand Apeto's funeral. Rest here quietly today, and even after you go back, take another three days to rest."

"Commander."

"It's an order, Yuder Aile."

His protestations lost their power at those words. Yuder read the worry reflected in Kishiar's red eyes, sensing the enormous energy that enveloped his body.

How could he insist further after seeing that look in his eyes?

"I understand...."

"Be good, rest well. Later on, I'll give you a reward, so don't be too upset."

He wasn't a child, what reward was he talking about? He was about to reply that he didn't need it, but Kishiar was faster, already rising from his seat.

"I guess I'll have to go out again. You must be tired since you just woke up, so rest. If you need help, ask the attendants."

Kishiar turned to leave immediately after he finished speaking but then twisted his body back as if he had discovered something.

"Ah, I see there are still two walls closed. It should be okay to remove them now."

Realizing that Kishiar was referring to the walls, Yuder, who had been curious about the isolation walls since hearing about them from the attendant, hesitated before asking a brief question.

"But why were those walls put up in the first place?"

"They're barriers that completely separate and isolate a space, so whatever happens inside doesn't affect the outside. Your condition during the manifestation wasn't good, so I ordered the walls to be put up just in case."

Kishiar readily answered. The answer was clear, but there were still lingering questions. Perhaps noticing Yuder's subtle change in expression, Kishiar turned his body.

"You're curious why such a thing is installed here?"

"I can't deny it."

"Actually, those walls aren't installed only here. They're also in a few other palaces within the Imperial Palace. They've been installed since a long time ago, and all have the same purpose. They're to prevent overflowing power from leaking out, to block and contain it."

Kishiar, who briefly answered, quietly stared at the still-closed two isolation walls.

"I had no idea."

"It's normal to be ignorant. In fact, the very existence of these walls is a secret."

"Is it alright to show such a thing to me?"

"Well, if I can't trust my assistant who risked his life for me, who else can I trust?"

Kishiar responded lightly, an inexplicable self-mocking smile flitting across his eyes.

"Besides, even if you were to tell the outside world about the existence of such walls, no one would find that information particularly interesting. Anyway, it's... just a wall."

Just a wall. It was the right phrase but somehow left a peculiar aftertaste.

Yuder hesitated for a moment before slowly opening his mouth.

"So that overflowing power is...."

"You can probably guess, but isn't my ability exceptionally outstanding?"

If anyone else had made such a claim, it would have been dismissed as a mere cocky joke, but coming from Kishiar, it wasn't a laughing matter. The one who possessed the divine sword, a priest-level divine power, and on top of that, the abilities of an Awakener— if he wasn't extraordinary, then who could be? With a smile, Kishiar nonchalantly praised himself and continued speaking.

"However, regardless of how innate abilities may seem commendable, during childhood, due to incomplete control abilities, one might inadvertently cause accidents, just like novice mages often make mistakes."

It was a well-known fact, often depicted in all kinds of fairy tales and legends, that novice mages who had just learned magic caused many accidents due to their clumsy control.

"So, that wall was for my sake and for the sake of others. It was the best choice. It was a friend of my childhood in its own way."

Kishiar, smiling and looking at the wall, turned around and left his final words.

"Now, let's truly rest for a bit. The scent seems to be fading, so when you wake up, it should be completely gone."

"Yes, understood....."

Yuder, who was about to respond absent-mindedly, suddenly paused in surprise, raising his head.

'Wait... Scent?'

He hastily looked around, but Kishiar had already left. Only the slightly askew empty chair was left, substituting for the traces of the person who had just been sitting there.

He was fast. Yuder, blankly staring at the empty chair, suddenly realized that it was in a perfect position to allow him to leave the room immediately after he got up.

'Come to think of it.....'

It seemed that the strategic setup was not just about the chair's position.

On reflection, even though he was worried that Yuder's manifestation might be distorted due to his contact, was there a need for Kishiar to hand over the letter by levitation magic from such a distance? Until the moment Kishiar left, he never approached closer while sitting in that chair.

Yuder raised his arm and sniffed his scent. But just like how one can hardly perceive their own body odor, it was difficult to discern the remaining scent of a second gender manifestor.

However, considering Kishiar's actions, there was only one guess he could make.

'So, the scent really did remain...'

In his previous life, Yuder was known as a half-Omega who had neither scent nor heat. Perhaps it was because he didn't have a scent, but he hardly ever felt or was influenced by the scents of other second-gender manifestors. Of course, he was well aware that not all second-gender manifestors were like him.

If Yuder had a scent left, it would have been quite stimulating to Kishiar, an Alpha Awakener, yet his complexion didn't change in the slightest. It was an astounding ability.

Yuder stared at his palm and slowly clenched it into a fist.

Chapter 169

His heart was roiling with a tumultuous mix of emotions. Relief that the event he had most dreaded from his past life didn't repeat itself; anxiety as he constantly calculated and weighed whether manifesting as an Omega with a scent was truly better than before; and fatigue from a body still running a slight fever. These emotions stirred into a complex blend within him.

However, when all these thoughts were pushed aside, there was one lingering residue.

The conversation he had with Kishiar during the pain of manifestation, the patience and consideration he had shown, and the unwavering smile he held till the end.

'If I were the Commander when this happened, could I have acted the same way?'

No, he couldn't have. They were too heavy burdens for one person to bear for a single member. Yet, these were the tasks that Kishiar accomplished without a hitch for Yuder. Yuder sighed deeply and closed his eyes.

There was nothing as futile as attributing meaning to each action of another. Yet, how could he not?

Separate from his resolve to do his best for Kishiar and the Cavalry after his return, he had set up a few walls in his heart to maintain an objective view of situations.

However, he eventually came to realize, far too late, that all the walls he had built were completely perforated. It was terribly disappointing, but strangely, it wasn't unpleasant.

The problem was that it was quite the opposite.

'If I didn't feel any pull after experiencing all this, that would be weirder.'

No matter how faint one's expression of emotion might be, being human, there are moments when one is seized by an emotion so massive it cannot be controlled. This was one of those moments.

'...Now that I think about it, I felt something like this before.'

An emotion that had been buried in the darkness after the accident caused by the manifestation. Yuder realized the name of the sensation that had returned after 11 years.

It was the blind fascination he felt when looking at the back of a shining being.

The Harvest Festival abruptly ended with a murder at the special award ceremony party on the last day, which left a stench of blood in the air.

Who was the one that invited Lenore Shand Apeto to the party by sending a letter that day, and who killed him? Who was the one who tried to poison the Crown Prince's drink and what did they want? Many speculated secretly and loudly about these questions.

Even more suspicion arose when the servant who had dropped the Crown Prince's glass was found murdered without anyone noticing, to the point that it overshadowed the trial of the Apeto family by half.

Most people who took interest in the matter speculated that the Emperor was behind it all and that the executor was his brother, Duke Kishiar La Orr. The late-discovered letter of Lenore fueled that speculation.

If the Emperor really put Kishiar in the front to target the Crown Prince and the four great dukes, would they just sit by and let it happen? The Emperor, who until now had appeared to acknowledge the Crown Prince's existence without any friction, though perhaps only superficially, suddenly stirred up such a situation. The nobles carefully watched the movements on both sides, wondering what his intentions were and how the situation would evolve.

"His Majesty certainly would not have wanted to adopt a successor from the Diarca family. Weren't there many rumors of foul play from that family during the selection of the Crown Prince a few years ago? Although His Highness is still young and blameless, the Diarca family has been too audacious recently."

"I've heard about it too. Rumor has it that the Emperor would have preferred to choose someone from the Herne Ducal House, the Empress's family. Wasn't the candidate put forth by them suddenly died after being confirmed?"

"Was it only the candidate from the Herne family? Virtually all the other candidates who emerged at that time took a bad path."

"Even so, it's surprising. I wonder if His Majesty's health is finally improving."

Within the temple, filled more with whispers of curiosity than voices of mourning for the deceased, the funeral of Lenore Shand Apeto was about to begin.

It was a meager temple, far too modest for the scion of a renowned Ducal House, but there was no one truly grieving as most of the attendees were there only to observe an interesting situation.

Lenore's father, Duke Apeto, refused to attend for the reason that he did not want to open the doors of his closed family due to such a disgraceful event, and only Lenore's elder brother, the first prince, Aishes, sat with the relaxed face of a leisurely winner, enjoying the attention of those who came to flatter him.

Those observing them exchanged glances, hiding their mouths beneath their black veils, and made all sorts of speculation.

"Come to think of it, isn't the third son, his younger half-brother, not coming at all?"

"It wouldn't be strange if he didn't come, since he was entrusted to Duke Peletta. It's a pity. I wanted to see his reaction and what he would say."

"That's quite something too. If it's true that Duke Peletta has caused trouble, the third son would be shaking hands with the one who pushed his own brother to a dead end, wouldn't he?"

"That would make a great scandal. Then again, that might be what's noble about it."

"But when is the funeral supposed to start? It's already much later than when the coffin would have come at other times."

The same thought arose in the minds of others at a question suddenly blurted out by someone who had been chatting for a while.

"Indeed. When was it supposed to start? Noon, wasn't it?"

"Right. It's been a long time already. This is ridiculous. I had somewhere to go after the ceremony. If it gets any later, I'll just have to leave."

As the murmuring grew louder, Prince Aishes called a servant and ordered him to bring the priests in charge of the funeral. But the servant, who disappeared for a moment, reappeared with a pale face and dropped a piece of shocking news.

"I apologize, my lord! The coffin, on its way here, has reportedly encountered Prince Revlin and Duke Peletta and is currently at a standstill."

"What?"

A flash of anger and surprise crossed the frail-looking face of Aishes.

"What are you talking about? Revlin and Duke Peletta?"

"That is...."

As the servant hesitated, unable to continue, Aishes, frustrated, rose from his seat.

"Enough. I'll have to check it myself. Lead the way."

As Aishes hastily exited, the guests, who had been watching each other, also quietly rose from their seats and began to follow him. No one wanted to miss such a stimulating and excellent spectacle.

Aishes, advancing down the long corridor outside the temple, soon discovered two groups of people sharply confronting each other. He quickened his pace towards them.

"What on earth is happening?"

"This is Prince Aishes Shand Apeto!"

As Aishes's servant loudly announced his identity, the attention of those quarreling finally focused on them. On one side were laborers and priests carrying a black coffin, and on the other were a few individuals dressed in Cavalry uniforms and a remarkably tall and handsome man who stood out even from a distance.

Aishes recognized him straightaway as Duke Kishiar La Orr of Peletta, and he furrowed his brow. He had previously sent a letter to Duke Peletta offering assistance to contain Lenore. Now that Lenore was dead, the proposal had become unnecessary, yet the awkwardness could not be helped, knowing that fact.

"So, you are the first prince. This is the first time I've seen your face so close."

"...Yes, indeed. But what is all this about? My deceased brother's funeral has not yet taken place because of your interruption. If you don't provide a satisfactory answer, you will have to take full responsibility for this disrespectful action."

"I couldn't help it, you see. Regrettably, it was only this morning that I learned how the poor soul in that coffin might have died, so I rushed over here. Despite my request to take a quick look, they insist they absolutely cannot open the lid. What else could I do?"

"Excuse me?"

The reason Lenore had died.

"My brother died from drinking from a poisoned cup. You were there as well, if I recall correctly?"

Aishes retorted, trying not to show his confusion, maintaining a cautious demeanor.

"I thought so. Until a letter sent by Lenore Shand Apeto before his death reached Revlin, your youngest brother and also the one who had been a temporary member who greatly assisted me."

"...A letter?"

"I can't disclose the details at the moment as the investigation is ongoing. Since you are here, won't you allow me to open that coffin for a moment? If you do, I assure you, you will see that I didn't come here in vain."

As Kishiar smiled, the Cavalry member standing around him looked defiantly at the laborers carrying the coffin.

'Is it true? Or is this a bold political show staged because he's being accused of luring and killing Lenore? What should I do?'

The right course of action would normally be to halt the funeral and suggest they go somewhere private to talk, but Kishiar was already putting the Apeto family on trial even without that. Aishes did not want to risk incurring his father's wrath by being seen dealing with Kishiar alone at such a sensitive time.

However, then he noticed the commotion caused by the crowd of onlookers gathering behind them. Hearing their noisy chatter, which would usually have irritated him, finally calmed his startled heart.

'Right. It would be difficult for him to put on a sham or a bluff in front of so many watchful eyes. It's none of my business to defend the honor of the dead, I have no choice but to wrap things up here.'

"...I understand. It is not something I can ignore as you have come with information that could potentially reveal a new cause of death for my departed brother. I grant permission to open the coffin for a moment."

"Prince!"

One of the priests who was acquainted with Aishes cried out with a grim look on his face, but Aishes avoided his gaze.

"Put the coffin down!"

In the end, in the midst of the temple, under the curious gazes of the crowd, the unprecedented event of a coffin being opened occurred.

Chapter 170

Originally, it was a tradition in the imperial aristocracy's funerals to momentarily open the coffin before the ceremony ended, allowing the family to bid their final farewell to the deceased and place flowers.

Unless the deceased's body was damaged beyond repair, this was always observed. Therefore, the body of Lenore that was revealed within the opened coffin appeared as if he was merely sleeping, perfectly restored to an undamaged state.

'It seems there's nothing wrong with it at all.'

'What can he possibly find out from that?'

Kishiar nonchalantly scanned Lenore's body, unaffected by the numerous suspicious glances cast in his direction. After a moment, he turned his head and signaled to a burly member of his group standing closest to him, issuing an order.

"Devran Hartude. It's your turn."

"Understood. Leave it to me."

"Wa...Wait! What are you doing!"

Without hesitation, the Cavalry member known as Devran strode forward, igniting a large flame above his palm. He brought it dangerously close to the body in the coffin, heedless of the priest's protest.

"Hu-huh. What the...!"

A commotion erupted, marked by panicked screams and gasps from all corners. One thought swirled in everyone's mind.

'Duke Peletta has brazenly come to burn the body...!'

'Was it all a lie about discovering a new clue, about receiving a previously unknown letter?'

"What the hell are you...!"

Even Aishes, who had permitted the opening of the coffin, cried out in shock. Kishiar, however, remained unfazed, a steady smile on his face.

"Just as I thought, it's still there."

"...What?"

Startled by his calm voice, those in attendance turned their heads back and cautiously focused their attention on one spot. The large flame conjured by Devran remained still, right in front of the body.

"Devran. Do you see it?"

"Yes. I see it. Just as you said, Commander."

As Devran murmured excitedly, Aishes, who had been leaning on a servant for support, barely managed to steady himself.

"Duke Peletta. What are you doing? You tried to set the coffin on fire without a word. Do you understand the consequences of such an act...?"

"Well, that's unfortunate phrasing. We've done no harm to the body of Lenore Shand Apeto. The flame was only necessary to reveal evidence still present. Now that what I wanted to confirm has been revealed, why don't you come closer and see?"

Aishes, perplexed by his remarks, gathered strength in his legs while he heard the murmurs of the confused spectators behind him. While his heart was strained, he did not want to show his weakness in front of others.

"...Support me to that spot."

"Yes, my lord."

Aishes had planned to rebuke Kishiar's rudeness loudly if he saw nothing unusual about Lenore's body. But when he stood right next to the Cavalry member that conjured the fire, he felt as if his heart, which had just started beating again, was once more on the verge of stopping, and he gasped in shock.

"This... What is this?"

"Do you see it?"

"What in the world... the light...."

The corpse of Lenore, which had seemed clean, was glowing under the flame in an eerie color. As if there were invisible stains under the skin, it was chilling.

"That is exactly the evidence I wanted to confirm. It is proof that the deceased had first absorbed another poison before drinking the poison that led to death."

"Another... poison?"

"A poison made by grinding a mushroom called Dudureli. Have you heard of it?"

He hadn't. As Aishes responded with a blank expression to the name he heard for the first time, Kishiar explained it kindly.

"It is mainly dissolved in water or absorbed through the skin in powder form. After being absorbed, it leaves traces on the skin for a few days until the poison completely fades, and those traces can only be seen under fire. The effect is rather mild, just inducing severe thirst, but I suppose that wasn't sufficient for what they wanted."

Severe thirst. Aishes realized what Kishiar was trying to say.

"Do you mean to say that someone made Lenore absorb that poison and then led him to drink the poison cup?"

"That's right. The deceased likely absorbed it without knowing anything. Normally, he would have had to drink a lot of water and would have been fine after a bit of suffering, but it seems that the unfavorable surroundings led to this outcome."

Aishes quickly noticed that the glowing stains on Lenore's corpse were most concentrated on his neck, chest, and the hand he'd brought together. Looking at the stains glowing more intensely under the pale bluish discolored fingers and fingernails, he felt dizzy again.

"But still... how can I believe you without reservation, given what people are saying about the Duke at the moment?"

"Ah, the rumor that I summoned Lenore Shand Apeto and made him drink from the poison cup."

At such a blatant remark, the surprised onlookers buzzed. Aishes bit his lip and kept silent for a while before opening his mouth.

"That's correct."

"I see. You might think that even revealing the nature of this poison now could be part of the plan. I understand that this cannot be definitive proof of my innocence. But."

With the word "but", Kishiar, who had crossed his arms, turned his head towards the back.

"Didn't I mention it earlier? Your youngest brother received a letter. Revlin, come out and show it."

"...Revlin?"

Behind Kishiar, who had a strong presence like the sun, a small boy who had been hidden among the exceptionally tall and large members stepped forward with a stiff expression. He was accompanied by another boy standing protectively next to him.

"It's been a long time, brother."

Only then did Aishes recall the servant's words when he first rushed in, that Revlin and Duke Peletta had arrived together, and he scowled. Instead of looking ill, the face of his youngest brother, who had regained his health since becoming an Awakener, was resolute. Seeing this made Aishes, who only remembered the timid Revlin who couldn't speak properly and always looked frightened, quite nervous.

"So, Revlin, what is this thing you want to show?"

"It is a letter that our late brother Lenore sent to me. Before he went to the party that day, just before entering the palace, he entrusted this letter to a servant, instructing them to bring it to me in case anything happened."

Revlin carefully took out a letter from his pocket and held it up for all to see.

"I swear to God, this letter was indeed written by Brother Lenore himself. Through this letter, I discovered who Brother Lenore was going to meet that day, and thought I should let the Commander know. The Commander, after realizing the poison that was present on the letter I gave him, conducted an investigation himself. Thanks to that, we were able to quickly understand the truth."

The truth was, Kishiar, who had obtained the letter through Gakane, had first confirmed its content. Then, he informed Revlin and they planned this course of action together. Although this dialogue was pre-arranged, no one had any suspicions.

From the start, Revlin showed no interest in any letter written by Lenore. Half of what Lenore wrote was nonsense, and the other half was about his ill-advised choices. If the pathetic letter served to vindicate Kishiar in some way, then it was fortunate.

The sole reason for Revlin's attendance at Lenore's funeral, a place he initially had no intention of attending, and for participating in this charade was a request from Kishiar, who had kept his promise to save his lover.

"...So, I heard that the servant who was supposed to perform duties on the day Lenore died ran away and never returned. Looks like he brought the letter to you."

Aishes, like everyone else, had no doubt about Revlin's words. He cast a fleeting glance at the nobles who were watching them in silence from behind, then let out a brief sigh.

"Alright. So what's this truth? Is it written in there who invited Lenore to the party that day?"

"Yes."

The voice of the beautifully doll-like boy echoed heavily enough for everyone to hear.

"The person who called Brother Lenore to that place that day, who cunningly orchestrated the events by even smearing poison on the letter to him, is now in the Bright Palace."

" ... "

When one hears such shocking news, they become speechless. The chatter among the crowd abruptly ended, even the temple personnel who were unable to hide their anger, and even Aishes, who everyone thought wouldn't be surprised by Revlin's words, fell into silence for a moment.

After a long pause, it was Aishes who broke the silence first.

"Do you... understand what you're saying right now? Even a single mistake could lead to more than your downfall. You know what you're saying, don't you?"

"I've merely mentioned the fact written in Brother Lenore's letter."

There was no way that could be true. Why would the Crown Prince do such a thing? There was no particularly close relationship or resentment between him and Lenore, and he had no reason to contact the Apeto family, who were about to face trial. Furthermore, the Crown Prince was the one who almost drank the poison that day, and above all, he had the illustrious backing of the Diarca Duchy.

The notion that Revlin, the obedient, doll-like boy, was asserting the real culprit who lured Lenore was the Crown Prince - a figure who had never once stepped ahead of the Duke of Diarca since his selection as Crown Prince - was utterly incomprehensible.

It sounded as if he was practically launching a direct attack on the entire Diarca family. The implications were bound to be perceived as highly controversial.