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"The Red Stone... wait a moment. You're saying it wasn't in the palace, but here?"

"Yes."

"So, the power that was underground... Ah. My God. This is insane..."

Just a single phrase caused a considerable change in Enon's complexion. He was murmuring and piecing together the information, then turned to look at Yuder with an astounded face. Before Enon could ask further, Yuder nodded his head and opened his mouth.

"We'll talk about the rest later. First, check on Kanna lying over there."

"Do you think you're my parent or something? Stop ordering me around. What's important now is figuring out what you guys were up to down there..."

"Kanna fainted after using her powers on the Red Stone. There's nothing visibly wrong with her, but I thought you might be able to tell something, so please check on her first. It's a request."

"...Why are you telling me this now?"

Enon, swallowing a myriad of unsaid words, turned towards the bed where Kanna lay and scrutinized her.

"She seems fine. She's not completely drained like those mages. Her energy is a bit unstable, but it's not as bad as yours. It's common for someone with less inherent power to overuse their power suddenly and then be unable to handle it."

"So... there isn't any major problem then?"

"Yes."

Hearing the short response, Yuder exhaled deeply. He felt a slight sense of relief.

"Let me know as soon as Kanna wakes up. And... can you call Priest Lusan?"

"Why, did he get an injury that needs holy power? If that's not the case, just tell me. That guy is busy enough treating those mages."

Yuder fell silent for a moment and then took off the glove on his right hand. Showing was easier than explaining.

"...What's that?"

Upon seeing Yuder's exposed hand, Enon wore an unexpectedly strange expression.

"A bruise?"

"No...."

The problem was that Yuder, who should answer, was also greatly surprised. The purple spot that he thought would be noticeably spreading at least to his shoulder was much smaller than expected. He blinked at the spot, which occupied no more area than a thumbprint, and clenched and unclenched his fist a few times, but the situation remained the same.

"This... appeared after I accidentally got hit by the power from the Red Stone. Whenever I use my power, it spreads upward and recedes when it's subjected to divine power."

"What?"

"I meant to show you this before we left..."

"Wait. Enough. Bring your hand closer."

Enon grabbed Yuder's hand, bringing it close to his face to examine. As he meticulously inspected the palm, flipping it back and forth, his eyes were serious. However, the expression he wore after he let go of Yuder's hand and lifted his head didn't seem to carry any satisfying conclusion.

"...It's not a curse."

Of course, it couldn't be. The spot had formed after getting hit by the power of the Red Stone, and if it was a curse, both he and Kishiar would have recognized it. Yuder looked at Enon's seriously troubled eyes and finally voiced the question he had wanted to ask before heading to the basement.

"I wondered if this might be the cause of the fluctuating energy you mentioned."

"If what you're saying is true, then it's certainly possible..."

Enon was naturally mumbling in agreement, but suddenly jerked his head up and looked straight at Yuder again.

"But you know, compared to when you were leaving, you actually look a bit better now?"

"Better, you say?"

Just as Enon's expression was confused, Yuder also found the situation equally baffling.

'Could it be related to my ability to control the power from the Red Stone?'

As Enon scratched his head, observing the thoughtful Yuder, he mused.

"I really don't know. All you do is pose questions. Let's bring Lusan and see if this truly disappears with divine power."

Then, he called Lusan out loud.

"Lusan! Come here for a bit."

"Sir? I haven't finished infusing divine power into the elder mage yet."

"Leave it. As long as he can eat and go to the bathroom, he'll recover. This here is more urgent."

Enon's gruff and straightforward words might have irked Thais Yulman, but luckily, the Elder Mage had fallen asleep as soon as he arrived at the medical division. A moment later, Lusan appeared, holding a holy symbol carved from stone, and shot a puzzled look at Enon and Yuder.

"Isn't he in good health? Why..."

"He's not fine. Come here and pour some divine power into his hand."

"His hand? Is it injured?"

Lusan's gaze fell on the back of Yuder's hand. He noticed a small, bruise-like spot, and despite his confusion, he assumed it would only require a small application of divine power, so he quickly put his ability to work.

A bright, warm light, silently bursting forth, sprinkled down from Lusan's hand onto Yuder's like powdered light. Then, the spot on the back of Yuder's hand that had absorbed the light slowly began to shrink. Although it seemed like a natural outcome on the surface, both Lusan and Enon simultaneously wore grave expressions.

"...Huh? I thought it was a bruise... What's this? It's not healing properly."

While a light bruise or a minor injury would normally disappear instantly upon contact with the light, the spot on the back of Yuder's hand only began to fade from the edges after pouring in a divine power that would normally mend a severely broken bone. Even after it had reduced to a tiny point, no matter what they tried, it wouldn't completely vanish, which made Lusan momentarily doubt his own divine power.

"You can stop there, priest."

"No, I should be able to heal this... Oh... Why isn't it working?"

Yuder, feeling slightly apologetic, addressed the young priest, who wore a look of injustice.

"I reached the same limit when I tried to heal it with divine power elsewhere. It never completely disappears."

"No, I've never failed to heal anything with my divine power. Let me try a bit more. Just a moment."

"That's enough, stop. Don't collapse yourself."

Enon stopped Lusan by grabbing his arm.

"Divine power isn't omnipotent. The healer's job is to make calm judgments without being stubborn."

"True, but..."

The puzzlement in Lusan's eyes, trailing off his words, never fully dissipated.

"May I ask how this symptom came about, Yuder? It doesn't seem to be a curse..."

"That's for you and I to figure out. This guy here doesn't know either. Let's finish up everything else first, and then we can look into it."

Before Yuder could respond, Enon pushed Lusan away. After displaying his resolve to find a way to cure Yuder's spot, Lusan turned back to attend to the other mages. Watching Lusan's priestly robe flutter away, Yuder murmured to himself.

"Thanks, Enon."

"I didn't do it for you."

Enon spat out his still not entirely honest reply, looking down at Yuder with a scrunched face.

"Didn't such things happen where you came from? If you knew about that strange blemish, you could have avoided it in advance, right?"

"Well..."

Recalling the ghastly face of Kishiar he'd seen in his dream, Yuder casually replied.

"There might have been, but I didn't know about it because it wasn't related to me then."

"Hmph. I see."

"And the blemish isn't such a big problem."

"If a blemish that doesn't disappear even when poured with divine power isn't a big problem, then what is? Ordinary people would despair as if they were going to die if such a thing happened to their bodies. Even if it's a blemish that doesn't hurt..."

"It's not that it doesn't hurt."

"Then isn't it a bigger problem?"

Enon inquired as if he was extremely curious. Yuder slowly opened his mouth, gazing at Enon's face where a keen interest was evident.

"Even if I have a blemish like that, I can still use my power and I don't die. It doesn't interfere with achieving my goals. That's enough, I think."

When the blemish flared up, it was a bit painful, but it didn't feel severe compared to the many injuries and tortures he'd endured in his previous life. It was an exceedingly cool-headed assessment.

"Goals, you mean, protecting your boss?"

"That's right."

And Enon too, and the rest of the people and the world. He swallowed the rest of the words, responding briefly, yet his underlying feelings seemed to have been conveyed well as Enon's eyes darkened.

"If that's your true intention, there are two possibilities."

"..."

"Either he becomes a very important person in the future, or you had a deeply loving relationship with your boss. Or both. Which one is it?"

Yuder couldn't immediately open his mouth. While the former was a logical inference, he couldn't understand how the latter thought had sprung up.

"Love? I don't know why you would think that, but anyway, it's different."

"What's so different? From your expression when you talk about it..."

"Sir Aile, are you still awake?"

Their conversation came to an abrupt end as Nathan Zuckerman entered the room just as the door opened. Enon, with a furrowed brow, stepped back, and Yuder turned his head towards him. Nathan, who had brought the patients to the medical division and then went back down to the basement where Kishiar was, was holding a few unfamiliar papers in his hand.

"Did you receive treatment from the priest?"

"I did."

"That's fortunate. The Duke wanted to ask about that first."

"...Is the Commander alright?"

What had Kishiar, who had been left alone in the basement, been doing? As he recalled the face that looked the most weary since he'd returned to the past, Nathan lightly nodded and drew the curtain around Yuder's bed and came closer.

"After inspecting inside and confirming there was no problem, he went to calm the members."

Enon had said the building shook. He'd felt the tremor, so the other members must have felt it too. He belatedly thought that it must have been quite a chaotic situation outside, even if they weren't aware of it.

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"...I'll go out and assist," Yuder offered.

"There's no need," Nathan replied, "only a few were startled from their sleep and have come out. Instead, please take this."

He handed him a bundle of papers he was holding. Instinctively, Yuder scanned the contents written on it and was taken aback.

"This is..."

The papers were filled with observations concerning the interactions between Alpha Awakeners and Omega Awakeners. It was the research record of Beltrail, which Kishiar had promised to deliver on the day he returned from the Imperial Palace.

"The Duke said he had promised to give this to Sir Aile. He actually intended to give it to you as soon as today's business was concluded, but with things turning out like this, he asked me to deliver it."

"Thank you."

His leisurely reply sounded oddly unfamiliar. Yuder looked down at the papers in his hand and casually placed them aside. Right now, there were more pressing issues piled up like a mountain.

"May I ask something, Sir Zuckerman?"

"I was just about to ask something from Sir Aile as well. Go ahead."

After getting his permission, he promptly opened his mouth and quickly asked the question he was most curious about.

"Was the power the Commander used earlier... real?"

His question was vague enough that anyone overhearing wouldn't be able to discern its context. Yet both of us knew that 'power' referred to Kishiar's control over the magic circle.

"Yes, just as you saw."

As expected. He lightly bit his dry lips, recalling Kishiar's adept control of the magic circle, even more proficient than Alik.

'Awakener's power. Divine power. Sword aura. And now, magic?'

Although he was a human, Yuder never imagined he would be able to wield magic. He had shown himself using numerous magic tools, but that didn't necessarily mean he was a mage.

However, thinking about it, the fact that one person was using the other three powers was unbelievable in itself. If only one astonishing fact existed, it would be startling, but when several overlapped, the shock gradually numbed. That's why he wasn't as surprised as the others when he saw Kishiar stepping on and controlling the magic circle.

Among the information related to Kishiar that Enon showed him, there was a rumor that 'he learned magic from Imperial Mages in his childhood.' This flashed through his mind when he returned to the medical division and lay down again on the sickbed.

"I see. Thank you for your answer."

"Is that the only thing you're curious about?"

"Yes."

He could ask the rest to Kishiar himself. If he didn't answer right away, it would be as simple as stepping back.

Upon hearing his response, Nathan showed a rare expression on his distinctively red, soYudern face.

"...Then now, I'll ask my question. Just how did you, Sir Aile, manage to do what you did back then?"

His gaze fell on his right hand. His eyes, weighed down heavily, seemed to recall the moment when he had grabbed the end of the energy emanating from the Red Stone and stopped it.

"I'm not an Awakener, but that thing back then..."

"..."

"I can use sword aura too, and my lord is a somewhat extraordinary person, so I thought I had a good understanding of abilities that surpass ordinary people. But that was the first time I had seen something like that. Even just imagining for a moment what would happen if the person who could perform such a miracle was my enemy made me feel like I wouldn't be able to win."

"You have a good imagination."

"It's no joke."

Nathan replied in his terse manner.

"You mentioned before, you felt confident that given time, you could surpass me."

"Yes."

"Was that prediction made considering the power you now hold?"

A faint glimmer of suspicion and caution towards Yuder could be read deep within Nathan's eyes. He was worried about the uncertainty surrounding this unknown person. He was unsure whether Yuder could turn out to be an enemy of Kishiar, or even if he wasn't currently, whether he could ever be trusted fully.

Such emotions from Nathan were, however, greatly welcomed by Yuder. His doubts were natural responses from a knight loyal only to Kishiar. Had Nathan been easily overwhelmed or had his doubts quelled by the power Yuder demonstrated, Yuder would have deemed him untrustworthy.

Yuder found himself thinking back to the Nathan Zuckerman from his previous life. The loyal knight and formidable swordmaster was absent from Peletta Castle on the day of Kishiar's death. The Katchian Emperor had claimed it was the optimal day to execute their plans as Nathan Zuckerman had been away, obeying the orders of the Duke of Peletta.

What would have happened if Yuder had encountered him that day? The mission might not have been accomplished so easily...

"You're suspicious of me, Sir Zuckerman."

"I can't deny that."

"I told you those words before I injured my hand. I don't know why what happened today happened, but I guess it might have something to do with my injured hand."

"..."

"Just as you worry, I will never betray the Commander or become an enemy. However, I will not ask you to trust me. If you have doubts, keep observing me as much as you need."

The stronger his doubts and caution grew, the better it would help to prevent Kishiar La Orr from dying a fruitless death as in his previous life. Yuder gave a cold smile, feeling content.

"I don't understand you, Sir Aile."

A hollow voice finally escaped the lips of Nathan Zuckerman who had been looking at Yuder with a foreign gaze.

"You don't need to. Just continue as you have been."

"..."

Nathan Zuckerman did not respond. Before turning away from Yuder, he left one last statement.

"Nevertheless, you saved my life today. I will repay this debt someday. You should rest."

After he disappeared, Yuder closed his eyes to shake off the memories from his past that kept visiting him. What happened today would end with today. With so many tasks piled up ahead, there was no need to dwell on the past.

The following day, the mages, finally freed from their exhaustion, opened their eyes. Thais Yulman, with a face eager to say so much, circled around Yuder, but Yuder did not say a word to him.

Alik Pelgin was slightly amnesiac from the moments before he fainted. Having been extremely afraid that the experiment might have failed, he was elated to hear it had succeeded, but after hearing 'how' it was made possible, he chose to remain silent.

The simple explanation that Duke Peletta had stepped in to help Thais finish the work should have given an approximate idea of the unbelievable event that had occurred.

However, the unfortunate and astonishing incidents that happened to Alik did not end there.

"...Your magical power has changed peculiarly? Although you've recovered from exhaustion and depletion... I wonder why."

Lusan, standing by Alik's bedside, asked with a grave face. Alik shook his head anxiously and looked down at his hands.

"Something feels different from yesterday. Ever since I woke up, something inside me feels...odd, as if a foreign magic has entered. Priest, am I really okay?"

"Alik, why don't you try a basic magic operation again? Perhaps it will give us a clue."

Even in response to the advice of the elderly mage lying in the bed next to him, Alik's furrowed face remained unchanged.

"I've already tried that, Master. However, this unfamiliar energy and my original magic feel as if they're occupying my body separately, rendering it useless."

Having been lying down and listening to their conversation, Yuder suddenly had an intuition and sat up.

"...That power. Can you control it separately?"

Surprised by Yuder's sudden interruption, Alik nearly fell out of the bed, but soon he lowered his eyes and murmured a thoughtful "Hmm..."

"Well... It seems possible..."

"Don't try to control it like magic, just use it naturally as it flows."

"Naturally? How... Huh?"

In that instant, something astonishing happened before Alik's eyes. His mouth gaped open at the sight of droplets of water that had suddenly materialized before him.

"Water... elemental magic?"

"But Alik, you've never learned elemental magic. How is this possible?"

"I don't know, Master. I didn't even try to use any magic..."

"It's an awakening."

Yuder quietly revealed the cause of the situation to the two astonished mages.

"It seems you've awakened the ability to summon water."

"Me... I've awakened?"

Alik looked back and forth in disbelief between the hovering water droplets before him and Yuder's face. The elderly mage was equally astonished.

"An awakening? Are you certain? My disciple... has become an Awakener?"

"Isn't the power you just used the most solid evidence?"

Without predefined magic formulas or intensive training for manipulating mana, without gathering energy through years of sword training like a knight, a power that can be used as if it was innate since birth.

That was indeed the distinct characteristic that set the power of the Awakeners apart from all other abilities.

At Yuder's serene words, everyone's eyes were drawn to Alik. After repeating the action of summoning and vanishing water several times, Alik opened his trembling eyes.

"It seems... it's real. How can this be... I'm a mage, how can I become an Awakener?"

"There's no rule stating that a mage cannot be Awakener, Alik."

There were likely other mage Awakeners out there, just yet to be discovered. And although rare, more would continue to emerge in the future.

'Even though there was no famous individual who was a mage and an Awakener in my previous life...'

Alik had not been among them.

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The only clue pointing to the reason for his awakening in this life was a single fact: Alik had been working close to the Red Stone, roaming around underground all this while.

Yuder recalled the soldiers who had been guarding the mountain where the Red Stone had fallen, a far higher proportion of them had awakened compared to other places. He had a creeping suspicion that a similar cause and effect could be behind Alik's current situation.

"It's fascinating. I've always wanted to learn elemental magic, but my inherent magical power was insufficient. Who would've thought I'd get to experience it this way... haha. I can't wait to show it off to those haughty colleagues at the Pearl Tower!"

While Yuder was lost in his thoughts, Alik kept summoning droplets of water. He had never used elemental magic before, but perhaps thanks to what he had seen and heard over someone's shoulder, he adapted quickly. Watching Alik test his abilities in a variety of ways, Yuder could sense how thrilled he was.

'The amount of water he can summon isn't much... but he's a mage. He'll certainly find a way to use it effectively.'

In any case, the mages who received respect were those who could use fancy elemental magic. After all, every one of the legendary archmages had done so.

Yuder glanced at Alik's mentor sitting next to Alik's bed. Unlike the excited student, Thais Yulman had a somewhat subtle expression.

"Awakening..."

He hadn't said anything for about an hour. Yuder, who thought he might be dispirited, realized he was wrong when Thais rushed to his side the moment Alik got up to go to the bathroom. The emotion brimming in his wrinkled eyes was the surprise of someone who had realized something different from before.

"Yuder. A new hypothesis about an aspect I previously overlooked popped into my head. Can I get your opinion on it?"

'He won't ask about yesterday's incident at all, will he?' A hint of the madness from when they had been conducting the experiment yesterday flickered across his rapidly whispering face. Yuder nodded at him and got up from his seat.

"Of course. Go ahead."

"After seeing my student awaken, I had a sudden thought."

The old mage who had blocked the surrounding eyes with a curtain, perhaps worried that Yuder might change his mind, sat firmly on the chair next to him and opened his mouth very covertly.

"We've been taking it for granted and not thinking deeply about it, but didn't you all awaken after the Red Stone fell from the sky? Therefore... it must be because the power emitted by the Red Stone spread across the whole continent."

"Yes."

"Yuder. Do you know how many Awakeners there are in each country currently?"

"Is there anyone who would know that accurately?"

"Indeed. But what is certain is that the most Awakeners occurred in this empire where the Red Stone fell. I have a friend living far north, on the edge of Kham. He said there's only been one Awakener there

so far. Kham might be a small island nation, but it's populous enough to form a kingdom. And not just Kham, the nearby countries are also known to have few Awakeners."

After saying this, Thais Yulman swallowed as if his throat were burning.

"My apprentice and I were at the same place as the Red Stone for several days while preparing for the experiment. So, wouldn't it not be a strange assumption that the closer one is exposed to the stone's power, the higher the probability of turning into an Awakener?"

The words had been in the form of a question, but there already seemed to be certainty within Thais. Yuder kept silent for a moment before responding to Thais' anxious anticipation with a nod.

"Actually, from what I saw and heard when we got that stone, I too was thinking there's a high possibility."

"What you heard and saw? What was it?"

Currently, aside from Yuder, only Kishiar was aware of the report that an unusually large number of Awakeners had emerged among the soldiers guarding the vicinity where the Red Stone had fallen. He could tell Thais Yulman, who might be able to pierce through something unexpected, but he was somewhat dubious if it would be okay to trust him and tell him based on his own judgment alone.

Whether he noticed Yuder's pondering expression, the old mage quickly grasped Yuder's sleeve and made a desperate face.

"I've already pledged to not mention what happened here anywhere else. You know, don't you? I'll keep it a secret, so tell me. I'm ready to devote the rest of my life to this research."

"...Alright."

In the end, Yuder briefly summarized and told him what had happened at that time.

"It's not much, but I heard a story from the soldiers I met when I went to get the stone..."

Among the regular soldiers searching the mountain range where the Red Stone had fallen, an astonishing number of Awakeners had continually emerged. But the upper ranks of the Imperial Army didn't pay any mind, and the soldiers themselves didn't think much of it, so there hadn't been any reports on it for two years. He told him this, leaving out the fact that Yuder himself had heard and investigated it, and vaguely added that Kishiar had found it unusual after learning about it.

Thais Yulman, who had been silent for a while, suddenly started laughing.

"I knew it. I knew my thoughts were not mistaken."

"..."

"Change. That stone has the power to change humans."

Even without Yuder's response, he continued speaking rapidly, as if obsessed with something.

"I wonder what determines the change. The main cause would be how closely, and how much power is received. I wonder what the difference is with children born with magical power. Perhaps the reason most Awakeners are young is because they are accustomed to change and growth. I wonder how it changes the body, how it induces change! I really want to know, I can't stand it. Could we separate the powers already dispersed in the air and contain them in our bodies like magic? If that's possible... ah, I don't have time for this."

The old mage who stood up from his seat, unable to sit still, had a gleaming look in his eyes that showed a desire even greater than when he was experimenting yesterday.

"If it works out, we might be able to use the power we've separated to turn anyone we want into an Awakener, or give more power to those who are already Awakeners! Just like the magic revolution of Archmage Luma a thousand years ago, when magic first appeared, I, no, we might be able to do it!"

As he muttered on, making sense of his own words, his excited breath couldn't be concealed. He finally opened the curtain and ran outside. In place of the absent Enon, Lusan and Alik, who had been trimming herbs, were startled and looked at him.

"M, Master? Where are you going?"

"I need to see the Commander! Right now!"

Leaving only those words, he disappeared, leaving Alik who was blankly staring at his retreating figure to turn towards Yuder, as if asking what on earth was going on.

"Why did Master behave like that? He mentioned something about Luma's magic revolution just before... Did I mishear?"

"No, you're correct. He was discussing his research and then suddenly rushed off."

"He must've jumped into his own thoughts and skipped over a lot of details again."

Alik sighed with a face that suggested he had expected such behavior. Yuder, reclining on the bed, pulled the blanket over him and faced Alik, opening his mouth to ask, "But, what is this magic revolution?"

"Ah, that."

Seeming relieved to have a topic he could explain, Alik began his exposition.

"It's an incident that cannot be separated from the research Master and I were conducting on early magic and magic powers. There are so many legends about Luma that many people, including myself, are skeptical about whether they're real."

Just then, Enon returned to his place, paused his steps upon hearing Alik's words. Yuder noticed his reaction to the name 'Luma'.

Regardless of Enon's return, Alik, who saw no reason to stop speaking, continued his tale.

"It's said that a thousand years ago, when Luma was active, magic was treated like devil's sorcery. The mages of that era were few, dealing with immense power without a systematic method, making it difficult to train successors. Luma, having overcome ten trials, proved that magic and magic powers can be harnessed by human strength and spread magic throughout the world as we know it now."

"If that's true... it's incredible."

Yuder replied while observing Enon's expression. Enon, sitting quietly next to Lusan and trimming herb leaves, didn't look much different from usual.

"Indeed. But for this story to hold up, one must assume that magic did not exist at all a thousand years ago, which is hard to believe. Hence, Master and I have been researching the unique, unexplored properties of magic, believing that magic and magic powers existed in the world before, but the records have been lost."

"Ah, Enon! You can't tear the herbs like that."

Just then, Lusan, who had been quietly listening to the conversation, suddenly cried out in surprise. Yuder saw the leaves in Enon's hand, which were now harshly torn compared to their previous state.

"...I see."

"In fact, if you look at the ancient records before the establishment of the Orr Empire... well, of course, it's hard to be sure about their authenticity. Anyway, there's no record of mages or magic then, which is why many people believe in Luma's magic revolution."

"There must be at least one, surely."

"No, there really isn't a single one among those discovered so far."

"Could it be due to the great destruction a thousand years ago?"

Lusan, who had taken back the torn herb leaf and was trimming it, interjected unexpectedly.

"It's mentioned in the Scripture of the Sun God. The part related to that great destruction."

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Lusan murmured, seemingly reciting a section of the scripture.

"— All shackles that had bound mankind disappeared, and all that had been achieved until then sunk into oblivion, yet only the glory of God survived... Since everything disappeared, there would be no records left. Hence, there are hardly any records prior to a thousand years ago, other than the scripture."

"Hmm, you're right. As you've said, Priest, it might be related. It's difficult for us to understand now, though."

Alik agreed with a smile. Afterward, everyone fell silent, lost in their own thoughts. Lusan, who had finished sorting the herbs, was the first to speak again.

"I was not aware of the magic revolution, but after hearing about it, I get the feeling that similar events happen in every era. In fact, there's a legend in the first chapter of the scripture, covering a time much earlier than the great destruction, that mirrors our current discussion."

I seem to recall hearing it in the temple as a child, but my memory fails me. I rarely visited the temple after entering the Pearl Tower at the age of seven. Ha-ha."

"That's understandable. It's a section full of historical tales, so priests usually do not bring it up during sermons. I wouldn't have studied it either if I hadn't spent time in the Temple."

"So, what's the story?"

At Alik's question, Lusan looked up as if searching his memory.

"When the Sun God first sent power down to the world, the ignorant people refused to believe. The world was full of chaos and disasters, so everyone believed in the power of the Black Moon. That's why 'Orhe', a manifestation of the god and his emissary, sacrificed himself, confronting the Black Moon to prove the true existence of the god's power before the people."

Yuder recalled the contents of the Sun God scripture he had read a long time ago. On hearing it, it seemed like such a story had been there.

'The story of the emissary Orhe... Perhaps it was about the miracle where he was torn to pieces ten times and each time healed by the divine power.'

Now, reattaching torn limbs ten times could be done by a few priests with strong divine power, so it was not surprising. However, it would have been quite astounding in the olden days when they did not know about divine power.

Even after the topic had passed, Lusan and Alik continued their conversation like well-matched friends. Yuder was looking after Kanna, who was still struggling to regain her senses. Her closed eyes showed no sign of opening yet.

'I should have inspected it a bit more before asking her to read it.'

The information Kanna had deciphered so far had mostly been related to sentient and willful humans. Therefore, he had thought it more likely that she would fail to read anything, even if she used her power on the Red Stone, but Kishiar and Yuder had decided it was better to try than not.

Yuder sighed and turned his head.

"Enon."

Enon, who had been idly sitting after finishing sorting the herbs, turned his head.

"May I ask why you did that earlier?"

"What?"

Enon retorted, seeming unsure of what Yuder was asking. But Yuder still had the image in his mind of Enon carelessly handling the herbs, as if he were mashing them.

Enon was known to be the Guardian of Luma, an ancient being. This was a fact revealed by his past self. Yet, how Enon was precisely related to the great Archmage Luma, and what he thought about him, remained unknown.

'I've only heard Enon speak about Luma directly once, if I remember correctly.'

When Enon had heard about Yuder's journey back in time, he had become irate, claiming it was a magic that even Luma had never successfully cast.

"Could you perhaps..."

"If you have the time to care about other things, why not eat or take a walk? There's nothing worse than being looked at that way by someone who was bedridden until yesterday."

Before Yuder could voice his inquiry about Luma, Enon curtly cut him off. Enon's icy gaze pinned him down as he closed in.

"Even if that 'me' who taught you my name did exist, the me here and now doesn't want to engage in such an intimate conversation with you. We aren't that close yet. Understand?"

His mood was clearly off. That much was certain.

However, Enon was still Enon. After a moment of silence, Yuder apologized.

"I'm sorry. I overstepped."

"..."

Enon ruffled his bangs and turned away. Yuder thought he should bring him some lemons later.

Not wanting to leave while Kanna was still unconscious, Yuder took out a bundle of paper he had fallen asleep without reading the previous night. It was Beltrail's research records that Kishiar had sent. To prevent the mage Alik from becoming interested, he firmly drew the curtain before spreading out the paper. The elegantly transcribed handwriting met his gaze. Not noticing it when he had briefly glanced at it yesterday, he quickly surmised who the familiar elegant script belonged to.

'Kishiar...'

When did he find the time to write all this amidst his relentless busyness? As he observed the lines of writing, meticulously aligned without a single smudge, he recalled the face of Kishiar who had pushed off his uniform with a tired face yesterday.

Yuder quickly read through all the documents organized on a few sheets of paper. To make it easier for the reader to understand, Kishiar had transcribed sentences from the original text of Beltrail's research records and added a brief summary at the end.

Although Beltrail's research was a reckless criminal act carried out haphazardly without consistency or standards, there were still a few phenomena that appeared repeatedly. Yuder read a few eye-catching phrases from the summaries Kishiar had added multiple times.

In Alphas and Omegas who have reached their mating cycles, sexual attraction always occurs. However, the degree of attraction varies from person to person. One Alpha copulated with an Omega for several days but did not engage in any sexual activity for a day after changing partners. Even if one party is not in heat, sexual attraction can occur, but the probability of copulation appears to be extremely low if one party is in a normal state.

Pregnancy does not always result from copulation between Alphas and Omegas who have reached their mating cycles. However, it is believed that Omega Awakeners have a high probability of becoming pregnant even through sexual intercourse with non-Awakeners.

Among Awakeners who have completed the manifestation of their second gender, specific physical reactions occur even when not in heat. The most notable is the so-called 'scent', a smell that only they can detect, along with heightened senses, sexual arousal, excessive protectiveness, a sense of unity surpassing camaraderie, etc. Even in same-gendered pairs, it's as if they recognize each other as if they were opposite genders.

It is uncertain whether the body, which undergoes another transformation after awakening and the manifestation of the second gender, has a positive effect on diseases and the like that had been present before the awakening. However, Awakeners who have manifested their second gender certainly become vulnerable during heat, so it can be assumed they have weaknesses compared to Awakeners who haven't manifested.

Upon reading everything repeatedly to the very end, there was another note added by Kishiar on the back of the final page.

In fact, there's no need to believe all these distasteful writings. Proper research will soon begin.

It was written very small and faintly. However, the moment Yuder saw this sentence, he felt the gravity of the situation lift.

He rose from his seat, donned his outer garment, folded the papers several times, and put them in his pocket. As he moved to step outside, Enon grumbled a question.

"Where're you off to?"

"The Commander's office."

While leaving the medical division and heading upwards, several Cavalry members he met on the way asked if he was now fully recovered. As he passed them and arrived on the fifth floor, he found Thais Yulman with a desolate look on his face, pacing in front of the Commander's office.

"Yulman, why are you out here?"

"Ah, you've come as well?"

"Have you finished your conversation?"

His face, which had briefly brightened, darkened again at Yuder's question.

"No, actually, I haven't even been able to enter."

"Excuse me? The Commander isn't inside?"

"No, he is. But that adjutant told me the Commander hasn't woken up yet and to come back later. It's midday and we're in a hurry...!"

Thais, who had been anxiously glaring at the closed door, let out a heavy sigh.

"Try knocking yourself. I've been knocking for a while now, and he's not even coming to the door. You're his assistant, so even if he's sleeping, he'll let you in early."

"Well, I..."

Yuder didn't want to disturb Kishiar's rest if he was really asleep. He opened his mouth to say he would come back later, but coincidentally, at that moment, the door opened and Nathan Zuckerman poked his head out.

"...Sir Aile. Please come in."

The Elder Mage looked taken aback by how naturally Nathan seemed to have anticipated his arrival.

'See? Go in and take me with you!'

Turning

Chapter 185

Leaving Thais Yulman's heated gaze behind, Yuder stepped timidly inside. As soon as the door closed, he turned to question Nathan Zuckerman.

"How did you know I had come?"

"The Duke sent word."

"...And how did the Commander know I was coming..."

"From time to time, he discerns the movements of those far away from his place."

'So, did Kishiar sense my arrival from inside?' After a moment's hesitation, Yuder opened his mouth.

"If he is awake, why did you not allow Yulman to enter?"

At his words, Nathan, who was walking ahead, halted and looked back.

"It was a matter of trust. In fact, I thought it was not yet time for Sir Yulman to enter."

A low voice laden with a subtle undercurrent of meaning. Yuder silently surveyed Nathan Zuckerman's face.

"Is the Commander... perhaps ill?"

Nathan did not immediately respond to his question. Yuder watched as the man facing him turned without confirmation or denial and continued walking forward, then quickly followed.

The interior of the Commander's office was much quieter than usual. The furnace, unlit, had lost its glow, and the large, usually sunlit window was veiled by dark curtains. As they passed the desk where Kishiar usually worked and entered the inner corridor, private areas accessible to the Commander were revealed. Nathan Zuckerman approached the furthest room, a bedroom, and knocked respectfully.

"Go in."

"Are you not coming in, Sir Zuckerman?"

"The Commander ordered that when Sir Aile arrives, he should enter alone."

Leaving these words behind, Nathan turned and disappeared in the opposite direction. Yuder, looking down at the closed door handle, slowly reached out and pulled it open. The door swung open silently, revealing the familiar room.

The dome-shaped ceiling soaring high above. A small glass skylight at its apex. The colorful flames flickering in the marble fireplace, identical to the one in the Commander's office. And a large bed made of white wood, befitting the dignity and nobility of the owner.

Everything was identical to a dream he had had the day he had awoken from the manifestation at the Imperial Palace, causing a strange sense of déjà vu.

"You're here, so why are you silent?"

While he was blankly observing the room, a languid voice came from the bed. Only then did Yuder come to his senses, as if waking from a dream, and bowed his head.

"It's Yuder Aile. I didn't intend to disturb your rest, but since you knew I was here and called for me... I apologize."

"That's fine. I told Nathan to have you come in. There's no need to apologize. But... I can't see you from here. Will you come closer?"

Even though he usually spoke slowly, his voice now was slower, much lower and deeper than usual.

'Could he really be ill?'

As Yuder cautiously moved closer to the bed, a faint scent wafted in the air. A small candlestick beside the bed was lit, giving off a gentle light.

Following that light, Kishiar's face finally emerged from behind the curtain. Instead of his usual robe, he was loosely draped in a nightgown, half-reclined on the bed, with an opened book lying upside down on his lap.

Kishiar's normally neat, golden hair was disheveled, sticking to his forehead in an unfamiliar way. Unable to look away, Kishiar let a small smile tug at the corner of his lips. His face was marked with clear signs of fatigue, but his smile managed to lighten the atmosphere as if the exhaustion had momentarily dissipated.

"Even though your expression doesn't change, I can tell you're surprised. It seems I've become quite adept at reading your face."

"Are you unwell?"

"Hmm... You know about the unpleasant event that took place yesterday, don't you? Ah, there's a chair nearby, why don't you sit?"

Kishiar gestured towards the chair after closing his book and setting it aside. Only after Yuder had taken a seat did Kishiar exhale deeply, resuming the conversation at a relaxed pace.

"Magic is more taxing than swordsmanship or divine power. The stronger the force, the larger the ripple it creates when it moves. I would have preferred not to use it directly, but given the circumstances..."

"So, you're saying your current state is due to the strain from controlling the magic circle yesterday?"

"You could say that."

Under the flickering candlelight, Kishiar's face glowed pale, devoid of any color. Seeing his lips look noticeably drier and paler than usual, a sudden unease arose.

Yuder had seen Kishiar like this in his previous life. More times than he could count.

"I thought you might have noticed from before, but I can't use my power recklessly. I can't freely utilize what I possess like others. I can't, and I shouldn't. If I violate this, as you can see, this happens. But today is a bit better. A day's rest should see me improved."

Yuder had guessed there must be some reason Kishiar had hidden his powers and used them sparingly. However, in Kishiar's words, he sensed a compulsory cause beyond simply not wanting to expose his powers to others.

"I can't let Thais Yulman see me like this. Maybe if he were trustworthy, but as long as he's part of the Pearl Tower, it's not possible. It's fortunate you came at an appropriate time."

'So, does that mean you trust me enough to show me this side of you?' Yuder wanted to ask, but swallowed the words at the last moment. It was only now that he understood what Nathan Zuckerman had said before he entered.

Concerns about Duke Peletta's health were something he could not reveal, especially when he already had many enemies. After opening and closing his mouth a few times, Yuder finally managed to force out a question.

"May I ask how long this has been going on?"

Since when had using his power been so strenuous? When had this condition started?

"Well... It's been quite a while. Not since birth, though."

"I see. Is it an incurable symptom? What exactly triggers these symptoms when you use your power? Is it part of a curse? Or perhaps..."

"Haha. Don't be too serious. I know the cause. As for the cure... I'm not sure yet. But it's not something you should worry about."

If this wasn't serious enough to worry about, then what was? Yuder wanted to say more, but Kishiar spoke first, leaving him unable to continue.

"Yuder, have you ever heard that each person's body has a predetermined capacity for holding energy?"

"...I've heard that the amount of magic power a mage can absorb without burdening the heart varies innately."

This was, of course, a story from his previous life. Drawing from that tale, Yuder had discovered the presence of a mana hole within the body of an Awakener, which could absorb, store, and release energy. Kishiar nodded and continued.

"It's a similar concept. Among those who wield power, this belief exists universally. No matter how much a person trains, the amount of energy the body can accommodate is believed to have a limit. But what if the vessel becomes overly filled with energy, to the point where it creates turbulence within?"

"...It would exert pressure."

"Yes. And in unfortunate cases, it can even shatter. A knight who has suffered this would no longer be able to use his swordsmanship, and a mage, his magic. They would remain alive but their life force would cease to accumulate and gradually leak out. Eventually, when all is drained, death comes. A most painful process indeed."

"...Are such cases, common?"

"Not common. It happens very rarely among seasoned swordmasters or senior mages who have become too old and frail to withstand the power they've accumulated over the years."

"..."

The reason for his speech was clear, even without asking. Yuder hesitated, then cautiously ventured another question.

"Commander, you're not implying that... your current condition is... like that, are you?"

"Of course not."

Kishiar's response was swift and resolute.

"Not at the moment. Although, there were times in the past when I thought it could happen."

When he thought his vessel might break and lead to death. When could that have been? As Yuder looked at him with hesitation, a gleam of amusement flickered in Kishiar's eyes.

"That was two years ago. Before the Red Stone fell. Haven't I told you before?"

"If it was two years ago..."

"When I awakened and manifested, I experienced such intense pain that I expelled everyone, and stayed alone in Peletta Castle, ready to die."

The words he had spoken then briefly flashed across Yuder's mind before dissipating.

"Well, since that day, my vessel has become quite robust, so there hasn't been a need to contemplate death. However, I still can't move a great deal of power at once. A vessel that nearly broke needs to be used sparingly, don't you think?"

"That's... a relief..."

As he blankly responded, a thunderbolt of realization struck him. Memories and dreams from a long time ago fluttered through his mind.

Kishiar, gradually weakening as his resignation as the Commander loomed closer. The glove he never took off. The faint whisper in a dream, hoping that his vessel didn't shatter due to the injury incurred while recovering the Red Stone.

The vessel. Yes. He had also referred to it as a vessel back then... He had never understood that term and yet, surprisingly, he heard it again here. A chill ran down his spine.

Turning

Chapter 186

"Since I've now exposed all my power, I thought it was high time I revealed everything. Had I known you'd be this shocked, I would've waited a bit longer to speak."

"Excuse me?"

Kishiar's words barely registered with Yuder, who was in a daze from the shock. It was only when Yuder finally managed a weak response that Kishiar chuckled softly.

"You look as if I've done something terrible to a child."

"Terrible..."

Absent-mindedly echoing Kishiar's words, a spark of understanding flashed in Yuder's mind.

"What are you implying? Despite your ill health, do you still have the energy to jest?"

"Hmm, good. It seems your eyes have regained their focus."

That's more like Yuder. Kishiar, seemingly satisfied, narrowed his eyes as he responded nonchalantly.

"All right. The real problem isn't with me. The reason I'm bringing this up now is that there's one more thing we need to understand in order to move forward, based on the achievements we made yesterday."

"And what would that be?"

"The reason why the Emperor hasn't shown himself outside the Sun Palace for years."

Speaking carelessly about the Emperor's health was always strictly forbidden, considered highly confidential. Yuder began to wonder just how far Kishiar intended to share with him today.

"As everyone knows, His Majesty has been in ill health for some time now."

"I've heard about his illness..."

"Yes, indeed. But when we met him in the Sun Palace, did he truly seem so seriously ill that he couldn't possibly venture out anywhere?"

Yuder recalled the Emperor Keilusa he'd met at the Sun Palace. This young Emperor, resembling a sensitive scholar with glasses, didn't seem so severely unwell that he couldn't even attend a party within the palace, even though signs of illness were somewhat apparent.

One peculiar thing Yuder had noticed then was that the Emperor seemed to carry out his work and rest in one place only, without letting even his attendants or servants into the same space.

Invisible illness preventing him from going out, curious dialogues Kishiar has been dropping... Lost in thought, Yuder met Kishiar's gaze.

"...I apologize if I'm jumping to conclusions, but are you suggesting that 'the vessel' you mentioned is the reason?"

"Correct."

A soft compliment returned in a whisper.

"His Majesty's vessel is currently cracked. He's been trying to minimize movement to prevent the leakage of life force, but if he can't find a way to mend it, he'll eventually weaken rapidly until he reaches his limit. It's similar to the situation I found myself in after the cracks started forming."

"Do you mean..."

"Yes. We're hoping that the power of the Red Stone might be the answer to restoring His Majesty's health. More accurately, I am."

It was then that Yuder started to understand the connection between the retrieval of the Red Stone and the actions of the Emperor and Kishiar thus far.

'So that's it. Kishiar, who was in the same situation, improved after awakening the power of the Red Stone. So, they're hoping that by studying the retrieved stone, they might find a cure.'

They probably made the same decision in their past life too, although what followed must have been different from the present.

While seeking a cure for the Emperor by retrieving the Red Stone, Kishiar's vessel was instead significantly damaged. What might they have thought then? They presumably succeeded in separating the stone's power then as well, but Emperor Keilusa died quickly, and Kishiar, after becoming extremely weak, was assassinated.

'Does that mean they failed to heal both the Emperor and Kishiar with the power of the separated stone in their previous lives?'

'Or maybe some problem arose in the Pearl Tower where the research was carried out.' Lost in thought, Yuder listened to Kishiar's continuous words.

"It took quite a while to convince His Majesty, who had initially given up, and prepare to come here. After the vessel started to have serious issues, the time it takes to reach the point of no return varies from person to person. For me, it took about five years to reach my limit. However, it's likely His Majesty has a shorter amount of time."

Kishiar's voice echoed gravely.

"After the experiment ended yesterday, I sent a letter to His Majesty to finalize the one-month period he had given. We'll discuss the details later, but for now, consider it as if we've passed the test given by His Majesty."

Had he done all of that while still bedridden due to his ill health? Catching Yuder's questioning gaze, Kishiar continued with a slight, troubled smile playing on his face.

"A promise is a promise, isn't it? Regardless of how sick I get, I must fulfill my duties before I rest. Compared to my reckless assistant, I at least know my health is precious, so don't look at me that way."

"...I haven't said anything."

Yuder quickly averted his gaze.

"It'll be good news for Yulman, who's outside."

"Yes, his idea played a crucial role in this matter. If his brilliant idea had been mishandled, we all could have been in serious trouble."

"..."

"In fact, since the time when Thais Yulman sent the mid-term report about this experimental plan, I've been communicating with His Majesty. His Majesty had said that if the experiment were successful, he would let me take all priority in future research related to the Red Stone. He affirmed his promise in the response he sent this morning."

"That's fortunate."

"Yes. When you told me in the carriage that it would be a waste to send the Red Stone to His Majesty without utilizing it... I honestly didn't expect such an outcome."

At Kishiar's words, Yuder instinctively thought of Kanna. He had managed to fulfill his promise to Kishiar and enabled Kanna to properly interact with the Red Stone once again. However, she still hadn't woken up. A heaviness settled in his heart at the thought of her.

"I'm worried about Kanna. She hasn't woken up yet."

"From what Nathan told me, both the doctor and the priest said there were no major issues with her physical condition."

"I've heard that too. But if I had been more careful then..."

As Yuder's voice trailed off, he couldn't help but feel a pang of regret.

"Even if you had been more careful, the outcome might not have been different. You did the best you could at the time. You were the one who stopped the power of the Red Stone from exploding. So, by that logic, wouldn't it be my responsibility for not properly protecting the members? When Kanna Wand wakes up, the one she should resent is me, not you."

Yuder's head snapped up at this.

"I didn't mean to imply that it was your fault, Commander."

"I know."

Kishiar's response was soft, almost comforting.

"Don't worry too much, let's wait another day. If she still doesn't wake up, I'll find a way to wake her up."

Coming from anyone else, these words might have felt like an empty promise, but when spoken by Kishiar, they oddly resonated like a powerful prophecy. Yuder felt his heavy heart lighten slightly, realizing he had been more tense about this than he had thought.

"...Thank you."

"You mentioned before that you couldn't understand how you were able to stop the power of the Red Stone."

Yuder recalled his conversation with Nathan last night and responded, "Yes."

"At that time, I saw a red light, similar to the energy of the Red Stone, leaking from the glove you were wearing. The two lights seemed somewhat connected. How did you feel about it?"

"Connected... I'm not sure about that."

Yuder carefully recounted his memories of that moment, details he hadn't fully disclosed to Nathan Zuckerman.

"Given the urgent situation, I felt like I could somehow stop the stone from exploding. I reached out... and the next thing I knew, I had done it."

"It's really fortunate nothing bad happened."

"Yes."

"No, I mean you."

Thinking that he meant it was fortunate for everyone, Yuder was about to respond when Kishiar gently but firmly corrected him. Expecting to be reprimanded for his recklessness, Yuder fell silent as Kishiar paused.

After a few seconds of silence, Kishiar's next words held a completely different meaning.

"...But if it hadn't been you, everyone might have been hurt."

Yuder lifted his gaze that had unconsciously lowered to the floor. Kishiar was smiling, his eyebrows slightly furrowed.

"You did well."

"I didn't expect... you to compliment me."

Taken aback, Yuder stuttered a reply, causing Kishiar to shake his head.

"While I'd prefer my members not to engage in life-threatening risks, we can't always avoid it. If it hadn't been you, the situation could have gotten out of control."

"You did well," Kishiar muttered. As Yuder met his gaze, his heart pounded unsteadily.

As Yuder found himself at a loss for words, Kishiar furrowed his brows a little more, reaching out to ruffle Yuder's hair. Surprised, Yuder blinked a few times, and Kishiar's hand brushed past his ear, returning to its original position.

'What was that?'

Was there dust in his hair? As he stared blankly, Kishiar glanced at his hand and grumbled.

"Don't let your guard down too much."

"Pardon?"

"When someone who's usually alert shows an unexpected response, it seems I have developed a disease where I unknowingly want to touch more."

"..."

The uneasy feeling faded quickly.

Turning

Chapter 187

Yuder leaned back slightly in his chair, deftly steering the conversation back on track.

"Regardless, if there are any further developments or changes regarding yesterday's incident, I will report to you immediately."

"Please do."

Although Yuder found Kishiar's tiny smirk, indicative of an expected response, rather displeasing, he continually reminded himself of Kishiar's poor health, striving to regain his composure.

"Speaking of which, did you hear why Thais Yulman is so insistent on meeting me first thing in the morning? He said he had something to say about the power of the Red Stone, so I thought I would listen to him later."

"Ah, yes. That's..."

The reason for Thais Yulman's excited departure suddenly sprang to mind as he opened his mouth to reply without a second thought.

'Right. I should have reported about Alik's awakening first.'

He had forgotten, taken aback at the sight of Kishiar lying in bed.

"I apologize. I should have mentioned this sooner, but Alik became an Awakener this morning. That's why Mr. Yulman sought you out."

"The young mage who fainted yesterday? He became an Awakener?"

The news seemed to startle even Kishiar. Rising from the cushion, Kishiar questioned him with a serious face.

"Are you certain? What's his ability?"

"I am certain from what I observed. He has the ability to summon water, and given that he couldn't use elemental magic before, there doesn't seem to be room for doubt."

"If you saw it that way, then it must be certain."

Accepting Yuder's answer, Kishiar leaned back on the large cushion again.

"A mage awakener... I thought such a case might exist, but I never expected it to appear so close to home."

"Mr. Yulman seemed to think that Alik's awakening was due to the environment he was in, which was heavily exposed to the power of the Red Stone."

"That makes sense. There was also the rise in the rate of awakenings among the imperial soldiers during the Red Stone retrieval operation."

"I thought the same and informed him of this."

Kishiar rubbed his chin lightly and nodded.

"Good job."

"Mr. Yulman, after hearing the story, thought of a few new hypotheses linking that incident and this one. It might be best to discuss them once you're feeling better."

"I was planning to do that... But hearing you say this, it might be better to meet him right away."

Before Yuder could protest, Kishiar had fully risen.

"I'm sorry, but could you bring me the clothes I left over there?"

"Commander, you don't need to push yourself to meet him right away."

"I'm fine. Talking with you seems to have healed me more than ten revitalizing incense sticks could. It was a conversation more invigorating."

"What are you..."

"If you won't bring them, I'll just change myself. Or do you prefer to stand there and admire my body?"

'Inspecting the body of an imperial family member could be punishable as a sacrilege, but I'll allow it for you,' Kishiar untied the string around his waist with a playful grin. Yuder averted his gaze from the suddenly exposed chest and silently moved toward the clothes Kishiar had requested.

A set of top and bottom clothes, seemingly prepared in anticipation of needing to change at any moment despite his poor health, were neatly placed in a noticeable spot along with a robe. Seeing this, he couldn't help but question the truth behind the saying that Kishiar indeed knew how precious his body was.

"Fetch the undershirt and trousers first. The overcoat follows."

As per his command, Yuder returned to the bed with the trousers and undershirt in hand, the overcoat slung over his arm.

"Is it alright if I do not assist you?"

He asked quietly, eyes lowered. A lighthearted chuckle responded.

"It's fine. As I've said before, there's no imperial family member who can dress himself as well as I. Yet, why do you avert your gaze even after I've said it's alright?"

Rather than replying, Yuder chose to turn away immediately. Fortunately, Kishiar did not further engage in conversation, quickly changing into the clothing.

"Now hand me the overcoat."

Upon hearing the command and turning around, Yuder saw Kishiar just buttoning the last button of his shirt. Yuder held up the overcoat he had draped over his arm, spreading it so Kishiar could slip his arms straight into it. Kishiar's clothing felt surprisingly large, a testament to his larger-than-average stature. Kishiar turned around, a small, wry smile lifting the corner of his mouth as he raised an eyebrow.

"Even when I said it's alright, you still help. I appreciate it."

Once fully dressed and with his hair casually combed, he seemed in perfect condition save for a slightly paler complexion than usual.

"Let's go now."

Nathan Zuckerman, who had been standing near the dressing room entrance, seemed surprised at the sight of his lord swiftly emerging dressed. However, he quickly sighed and summoned Thais Yulman, who was still waiting outside.

"Commander! You're finally awake. I've been waiting for so long."

The old mage, unable to hide his excitement, exclaimed as he rushed in. Spotting Yuder behind Kishiar, he sent a brief glance of gratitude his way.

"Please hear my story. Amazingly, my apprentice Alik this morning...!"

"He's an Awakener now, I heard."

"Yes, that's correct. But the important thing is not that...!"

Kishiar, with a nonchalant demeanor, managed to escort the excited mage to a sofa and patiently listened to his tale. Frankly, Yuder had difficulty understanding the phrases and terms that Thais rambled breathlessly, often skipping from one point to another. Yet, Kishiar seemed to comprehend it all.

"... so, if we can find a way to validate this theory, something incredible will happen."

"If it happens as you say, indeed."

"Do you think the same, Commander! Then the future research...!"

"Before that, I have something to address."

At Kishiar's firm tone, which broke off the conversation with a smile, Thais Yulman was momentarily taken aback. His excitement over the research seemed to cool down.

"While I have faith in your capabilities as a researcher and a mage, what's most crucial in dealing with this matter is mutual trust and caution. Should I continue to entrust this task to someone whose greed and excitement, like yesterday, might get ahead of his reason, potentially bringing danger to all... I've been pondering this since last night."

"Your Highness. That is..."

Thais Yulman, who changed his address in his haste, was silenced by a raised hand from Kishiar. The old mage felt crushed under the gaze of the young duke, much like a prey before a predator, and closed his mouth.

"...I apologize. As soon as I saw you, I should have asked for forgiveness and promised there would be no recurrence, but in my excitement, I mistakenly prioritized."

After he respectfully bowed his head in apology, he seemed to finally break free from the oppressive force that weighed him down.

"I hope there is no repetition of what happened yesterday. We will also change the location for future research. A new oath must be written, and we might need additional manpower for the research. Is that acceptable?"

"Of course, it's acceptable. It... will ease our minds as well."

"That's good."

A soft yet threatening smile briefly swept over his red eyes.

"We'll discuss the details later. You may leave now."

Thais Yulman promptly rose, said his farewell, and hastened out of the office. Yuder watched his retreating figure, apparently shell-shocked, and felt relieved that he probably wouldn't be reckless as he had been before.

"Commander, then I shall also..."

"Ah, you stay here a moment."

Kishiar, who had been quietly watching the door until Thais Yulman disappeared, finally exhaled deeply and leaned back on the sofa.

"Nathan, bring that along with the water."

'...That?'

Seeming to notice his puzzlement, Kishiar slightly opened his previously closed eyes. The gaze that had been so stern when dealing with Thais Yulman had entirely softened.

"You'll understand once you see it. It's for you."

"Here you are."

Nathan Zuckerman returned, placing a glass of ice water in front of Kishiar, and a paper bound with string in front of Yuder. After a moment of hesitation, Yuder untied the string and promptly read the written contents.

I, Cavalry Commander Kishiar La Orr, grant Assistant Yuder Aile the authority to continuously appoint five subordinates and allies directly under his command. Appointments are limited to Cavalry members and exclude anyone in a Deputy Commander position. Apart from this, it is left to Yuder Aile's discretion.

No matter how many times he read it, the content was the same. It was an order giving him the power to have colleagues and subordinates to assist him in his work under Kishiar.

"Commander, this is..."

"Didn't I say I would reward you if you rested well for three days? Although there was an incident yesterday, I thought I should give it now, as a form of praise."

He had promised a reward, but Yuder never expected it to be something like this. As Yuder blankly stared in surprise, unsure of the intention, Kishiar chuckled softly and waved his hand.

"You always strive to go beyond what you're commanded. After some thought, I decided it would be better to give you extra hands to assist you."

"I am fine without such authority."

His objection was promptly overruled.

"You don't have to decide immediately, just accept it for now. Also, there is actually another reward."

"Excuse me?"

"You'll find out when you return to your quarters from the medical division."

"You will probably like that one better," Kishiar mumbled, a mysterious smile on his face. Seeing this, a strange sense of unease stirred within Yuder.

Turning

Chapter 188

"Did you see that final expression, Nathan?"

After Yuder Aile left, Kishiar, who had gulped down all his water in one go, exhaled deeply and broke into a faint laughter.

"One would typically be happy with two gifts, but I can't figure out his expression. I nearly burst into laughter right in front of him. It's a shame that I couldn't see his face after he accepted them."

Nathan refilled the mug once more while observing the Duke's face which seemed extremely delighted.

"From what I saw, there was no change in his expression."

"Really? You didn't see his eyes rolling in worry, wondering what strange thing I might give him next?"

When did Yuder Aile ever show such a vulnerable expression? As per Nathan's observations, Yuder, with a face far too stern for his age, had only stepped back from Kishiar's words, consistently expressing an intention to refuse.

In response, Nathan maintained silence. Kishiar, having downed half the water Nathan had just poured, exhaled deeply and gently closed his eyes.

"It's a relief in any case. Distracted by the gift, he left without asking the most sensitive question. To be honest, I thought he would ask up to that point."

"..."

"But well, it's an inevitable question if you think about it a little. He'll be back soon."

Kishiar did not explicitly state what it was, but Nathan, who had served him for a long time, knew the answer and did not question it. Essentially, the Duke had said he wouldn't mind telling Yuder Aile everything, even the deepest and darkest secrets related to the imperial bloodline.

Among the nobility, they had speculated all there was to speculate over a long period, but it wasn't the same for commoners. The word 'truth' was as dangerous as it was sweet.

"Are you really sure it's okay?"

Nathan asked, almost unconsciously. Kishiar responded without opening his eyes.

"Do you think he will betray me when he hears the truth, Nathan?"

"..."

No, that's why it seemed even more dangerous.

Considering Kishiar La Orr's upbringing, he was an incredibly relaxed person, filled with the composure of a strong man, yet he wasn't generous to everyone. Yuder Aile was the first one to gain his trust in such a short time, and also demonstrate an ability and loyalty worthy of that trust.

So, Nathan made a conscious effort to remember that the Cavalry had not even been formed for a year yet. If he didn't, he feared he might get too familiar with him too quickly.

Even that balance was shaken in confusion when he saw the inexplicable face last night, who had said 'you can keep doubting me' quite willingly.

"Nathan. As the days go by, I become more certain that I must make him entirely mine."

Facing Nathan who was recalling the memories from last night, Kishiar spoke quietly.

"It might be the first time since I taught you the sword that I've wanted to keep someone this close to me."

There was indeed value in Yuder Aile's abilities. Every time Nathan recalled the precise judgment and immense power that Yuder displayed in the violently shaken space on the brink of explosion, he still got goosebumps. There could be no greater disaster than having such a person as an enemy. Especially when he heard that, unlike before, Yuder didn't show the spreading of spots even after using such power last night.

"To gain something, one must first pay its price. The future I'm trying to forge needs such a unique card."

His voice was unhurried, not unlike his usual tone, but Nathan discerned an unfamiliar longing in his lord. It was an uncharacteristic display for him, who typically never revealed deep regrets, no matter the circumstance.

"...Your aspiration to win hearts is admirable, but you mustn't become overly consumed."

"You've told me something similar before."

Kishiar chuckled.

"Yes, I have. To be frank, I've been feeling a bit at risk lately. I never realized how difficult it was to maintain a proper distance from someone. Maybe this is a preference I never knew I had."

"Is this not just the aftereffect of the second gender manifestation of Yuder Aile?"

"Well, that's highly probable. He did look quite adorable today."

Kishiar did not deny it. Nathan sighed a little at his lord's playful response.

"What would His Majesty say if he heard you?"

"Do you think His Majesty would pay so much attention to my affairs?"

With a smile, Kishiar replied, then tilted his head and opened his eyes.

"Speaking of His Majesty, has a response arrived since he received it?"

"No, not yet... Ah, it just arrived."

As if it had been waiting for the conversation to flow in this direction, a small courier bird pecked at the window with its beak. Nathan hurriedly opened the window and retrieved a small rolled-up letter from the pouch attached to the bird's leg.

"Here it is."

"Let's see..."

With a small knife, Kishiar broke the seal on the letter and read it quickly while lounging.

"It seems he has received it. He doesn't entirely trust the advice to keep the enclosed power of Red Stone as close to his body as possible, but he will likely heed it. Thankfully."

"That's good."

Nathan also agreed with Kishiar's words. The previous night, following Kishiar's command, he separated half of the medium containing the power of the Red Stone and sent it to the Sun Palace. The power contained within the medium was no longer painful to touch or keep close, unlike when it was freely radiating within the Red Stone. As a result, it was transported secretly, unnoticed by anyone.

"Things are looking up. Although I sent it ahead just in case, it's quite something that a mage awakened this morning. I hope this power will also have a positive influence on His Majesty."

Kishiar looked toward the masonry heater where he'd hidden the basket containing the other half.

"That said... I'm feeling so languid. I really need to rest all day."

"Isn't that because your cycle is nearing?"

"Hmm... it seems a bit too much to attribute it to the cycle."

"You also used your power suddenly yesterday."

"That's true, there's that."

"You even mentioned having a bad dream this morning."

"Ah, I did say that. I can't remember it well now, but it was truly an unpleasant dream."

As Kishiar lightly clenched and unclenched his hand, he mumbled. Each time, four different colored energies within his hand entwined, showed themselves, and then dispersed with a flickering sound.

To anyone watching, it would've been a fascinating display of power. However, the red eyes that were witnessing the spectacle were filled with nothing but discomfort and fatigue.

"...Perhaps the heat period has arrived earlier than anticipated."

"Pardon?"

"Nevermind. I'm heading back now. You should carry on with your duties, Nathan."

Kishiar, having risen from his seat, moved toward his bedroom. Nathan bowed his head respectfully toward his lord's receding figure and then turned away.

"Sir Yuder. You've arrived just in time. Lady Kanna has regained consciousness."

Upon descending to the first-floor Medical Division, Yuder immediately quickened his pace at the good news shared by the rushing Lusan.

"When did she wake up?"

"Not long after the mages left to tidy up the basement, she opened her eyes. She has now consumed a bowl of thin soup and we've infused her with more divine power."

"Thank you."

Expressing his sincere gratitude, Yuder quickly spotted Kanna sitting up in bed. She seemed lost in deep thought, her eyes vacant as she stared down.

"Kanna."

"...Ah, Yuder."

At the sound of her name, she managed a faint smile and waved her hand.

"You said I fainted? I was so surprised when I woke up because I didn't remember a thing."

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine. A little low on energy, but I feel refreshed, like after a good night's sleep."

Her honesty was truly a relief. Yuder let out a soft sigh as he took a seat beside her bed.

"I suppose my sudden fainting must have surprised everyone. What did the Commander say? Was he very disappointed?"

"There's no reason for him to be."

Kanna finally smiled with her usual warmth at his firm reply.

"...Yes, you're right. I knew that, but I couldn't help worrying."

"Do you remember what happened when you used your ability before fainting?"

Yuder asked the most important question. Kanna's smile faded, and she lowered her head slightly.

"No, I don't remember clearly. Other than the feeling of being bounced off something as soon as I used it..."

As expected, even though she used her ability, she couldn't recall any retrieved information. But the phrase 'bounced off' was a bit unusual, prompting Yuder to ask about it again.

"Being bounced off, you said?"

"Yeah. How should I put it? It was like trying to see a gigantic mountain inside a small stone, and that was something... no, it was like trying to see something not permitted to a human."

"...I don't understand."

Yuder shook his head; he honestly had no idea what she meant. Kanna gave a small laugh.

"To be honest, I don't understand either, even while I'm saying it. It was such a strange experience, the first time I've felt something like that."

Was it simply because Kanna's ability wasn't advanced enough to read the stone, or was it truly something beyond human comprehension? It was hard to tell, but regardless, Yuder felt content that she had woken up unharmed.

"Well, if you're not injured, let's watch for another day before going back. I will tell the Commander."

"Hm? No, I'm fine. What for? I want to go back now."

Turning

Chapter 189

"I think I just want to go back now."

At that moment, Enon returned, casting a glance at Yuder, his brows slightly furrowed. It seemed that the lingering tension from their morning conversation had not completely dissolved yet. Yuder secretly wished that Enon would tell Kanna to rest a bit more, but such an occurrence didn't happen.

"If you wish to leave now, you may. Your condition is stable."

"Really? That's a relief."

Leaving behind words of caution to revisit should any problem arise, Enon left the room with a sullen expression. As Kanna got up and started preparing to leave, Yuder swiftly followed Enon, catching him by the shoulder.

"What is it?"

"Come by my quarters later. There's something I want to talk about."

"Didn't I tell you not to command me around, even if you know a bit about me?"

"It's about what happened in the basement yesterday."

At these words, Enon's angry eyebrows relaxed slightly. He must have been genuinely curious.

"Hmm..."

"I'll have lemons ready."

"Do you think just having lemons will do it? What exactly did you learn from wherever you've been?"

Regardless of Enon's grumbling, Yuder informed him about the location of his quarters before leaving the infirmary with Kanna.

"Yuder. That handsome apothecary in the medical division..."

As they traversed the quiet corridor and ascended the central staircase, Kanna suddenly started talking about Enon. Yuder took a moment before slowly responding.

"Hmm?"

"Doesn't he seem a bit... unusual?"

"In what way?"

For a moment, Yuder wondered if Kanna had overheard his conversation with Enon, but it didn't seem likely. Kanna continued, her face thoughtful as she climbed the stairs.

"Well, when I woke up earlier, I really looked at his face for the first time, and something strange happened."

"A strange feeling?"

"Remember when I told you that I've been training recently to faintly sense other people's emotions and feelings? Do you remember?"

Yuder remembered her mentioning it when they went to interrogate Gayle and Doyle.

"I can't completely control this ability yet, so it can be draining. But the moment he saw me, he told me that if I don't learn to control it, my body will quickly deteriorate. I haven't told anyone else about this ability except you and the Commander. How could he know? He's definitely not an ordinary apothecary. Shouldn't we investigate?"

"..."

'...I guess I have one more thing to talk about with Enon.'

Enon still seemed to struggle with knowing what should and should not be said to others. Yuder was left pondering how to resolve this situation.

"Hey, Kanna."

"Hmm?"

"That apothecary... I mean, Enon, he's actually someone I know."

"What? Really? Was he introduced by you?"

"Not exactly, but..."

Yuder trailed off, watching Kanna's expression closely.

"In concern for you, because you were unconscious for so long, I discussed your ability in a bit more detail with him. I'm sorry."

"Oh... I see."

Finally, the suspicion and surprise that filled Kanna's face subsided.

"I even imagined he might be a spy who detected an ability I hadn't mentioned. So, he knows you... was he someone you knew from your hometown?"

"No, it was someone I met here after coming. It happened coincidentally... I received a bit of help, and that's how the bond formed."

It wasn't in this life, but it had been in the previous one. Hence, it was not a complete lie.

"Really? You, receiving help?"

Kanna seemed genuinely surprised, as if she had never even considered the possibility that Yuder might need assistance from someone. Nevertheless, her guard against Enon seemed to soften considerably with his words.

"You must have met someone truly skilled, then. I apologize if I misunderstood."

Unable to reveal the truth that her suspicions were, in fact, reasonable, Yuder simply responded with an ambiguous silence. Just then, they reached the floor where their lodging was located, and the two exchanged brief pleasantries, the central staircase between them.

"Yuder. You still have one more day off, right? Would you mind attending training with me tomorrow?"

"That's fine, but... I think it would be better for you to rest a bit more."

Continuous training certainly aids in enhancing skills, but it's not worth pushing oneself to exhaustion. In response to Yuder's concern, Kanna shook her head.

"No. After this incident, I realized that compared to the Commander or you, Yuder, I still have a long way to go. I'm ashamed of my previous arrogance, so I'll work harder. See you tomorrow!"

As Kanna turned and sprinted away, her retreating figure soon disappeared around the corridor. Yuder slowly turned and headed down the opposite corridor to his own quarters. Before opening the door, he paused, remembering Kishiar's words that there was one more gift, but he had to go in nonetheless.

What would the second gift be? He turned the doorknob with a subtle sense of unease, revealing his usual small room. What he discovered while cautiously surveying the room was a set of white clothes neatly laid out on the bed. Yuder instantly recognized the familiar outfit.

"...A ceremonial suit?"

It was definitely the ceremonial suit he had worn on the day of the manifestation. He hadn't paid any attention to the missing ceremonial dress since he had already changed into different clothes by the time he had regained his senses, but he hadn't expected it to return here.

"Could this be the second gift?"

Kishiar had said that he would probably prefer the second gift, but he wasn't particularly thrilled about getting his suit back. As he picked up the suit with a strange feeling, Yuder stopped as he noticed a few objects that had rolled out from the folds of the garment onto the bed.

One of them was a round object wrapped in brightly colored paper, its identity uncertain. However, the other was unmistakable. A fist-sized piece of stone, glowing a dark red, was unquestionably the medium of the Red Stone power that Thais Yulman had created the night before.

"This is....."

He cautiously reached out and grasped the small stone. Despite being shattered, the medium holding the power of the Red Stone possessed an odd allure, much like a top-quality gemstone. Unlike when it was the Red Stone, it was now quiet even when held in hand. After setting it back down, Yuder unwrapped the second object in the colored paper.

What could be worthy to be placed next to the medium of the Red Stone's power?

Fifth generation store in the center of the Fifth Wall district. The Candy Store of New Bellaria.

A taste sweeter than love. Now share it as a gift.

"..."

Inside the colored paper wrapping lay objects no larger than a fingernail – little candies. Yuder silently looked down at the clusters of candies that shone like jewels in various colors, eventually picking up one and placing it in his mouth. From the ruby-red candy came a sweet taste so intense, it made him wonder if it was his tongue melting.

'I suppose... I have to admit...'

Yuder covered the candy wrapper again and lifted up the artifact, bringing it close to his eyes.

'This one certainly appeals to me more than the first gift.'

The reason Kishiar had given it to Yuder was because it didn't matter how he scrutinized or used the artifact, as long as its power was worth one artifact. By giving away part of that dangerous power without any conditions, Kishiar was sending the most certain message that his trust in Yuder had not changed. It was indeed a daring distribution.

A fleeting smile rose and vanished from the face reflected faintly on the surface of the artifact. Yuder, feeling satisfied, stashed the artifact in his bosom and stood up.

There was no time to rest; he had things to prepare before Enon arrived.

He went down to the dining room and picked up some bread for himself and a few lemons for Enon. After tidying up the uniform that the cleaning staff had laundered for him and checking the state of the room, his long-awaited guest finally knocked on the door after finishing all of his day's work.

"All the room locations here are confusing. There's no name on the doors, and when all the colors are exactly the same, even the owner would have a hard time finding the room."

"It's deliberately designed that way to make it hard for intruders if they come in. Come in."

After answering him, using memories from his past life, he went in first, with Enon grumbling quietly and following him.

"So, what exactly happened yesterday?"

"It's a bit of a long story."

Despite being a small room, it had everything. Upon seeing the lemons washed and laid out on the small table, Enon's expression softened significantly.

"Alright. Start talking."

Explaining what had happened the night before wasn't that difficult. It was just an unexpected accident during an experiment to separate the power from the stone for the purpose of researching the power of the Red Stone.

However, explaining the mysterious situation that had occurred between the power of the Red Stone and him at the time of the accident was rather difficult. To talk about his hand that had emitted light, he had to reveal the circumstances under which the spot had formed, but it was tricky to explain without violating his oath since it happened during a secret mission.

So, Yuder carefully continued his story using incidents before and after the mission that wouldn't violate his oath, allowing Enon to infer the gaps. He believed Enon could make an educated guess about the missing parts, but the only response from Enon, who was casually eating through the tough lemon peel as if it were pudding, was an occasional non-committal "Hmm."

"...and that's what happened."

Finally, the story came to an end, and his mouth felt dry from all the talking.

"Hmm. I see. Now I understand a bit more."

Enon, having polished off two lemons, squinted his eyes and twisted the corners of his mouth into a smile.

"So, what's the opinion you want from me?"

"I want to know what you think about what happened to me during the experiment yesterday."

"You say you don't know, and you want to know if I know, right?"

"You've lived for a long time."

"Even though I've lived for a long time, the fact that the Red Stone fell two years ago hasn't changed. I never really cared about you Awakeners in the first place."

Although he spoke those words, Enon's gaze was serious. Lost in thought, he held the third lemon in his hand and rolled it rhythmically.

"The power of the Red Stone is all about change..."

"..."

Enon mumbled something under his breath as if he had caught on to what Thais Yulman had said, and he tilted his head, his throat letting out a dry, hollow sound.

"So, you were talking about the magic revolution and all that in that context. That arrogant young mage. How audacious."

Turning

Chapter 190

If the saying that Enon lived for a long time is true, then he could treat Thais Yulman, an old man, like a child. But actually seeing that in front of his eyes made him feel strange.

"Well, the story you told me is interesting in itself. Since there are many gaps and I haven't seen it with my own eyes, it's difficult to say anything just by listening."

"That..."

"Well, as long as you belong somewhere, I know you can't just say everything you want. I can roughly tell that you have various restrictions."

While excluding the parts that couldn't be discussed, some parts inevitably had to be condensed in order to speculate on the cause through unrelated events. Since the change in the spot on the back of the hand and last night's experiment were the important things, Enon seemed to pay little attention to other details.

"I'm sorry I can't give you the answer you were expecting, but there is something that came to mind while listening. Should I tell you that?"

"Anything is fine."

"Let's assume that the old mage was right, and just a slight exposure to the power of the Red Stone can transform a person into an Awakener. It sounds good in theory, but in reality, you could think of it as a

poison. A small amount can be a medicine, but if used in large quantities, it becomes a poison. There are plenty of materials in this world that become toxic when used in large quantities."

Although Yuder didn't know why he chose to compare it to poison, Yuder could relate to the feeling, so Yuder decided to continue listening to his words.

"If the cause of the spot on the back of your hand is indeed the power of the Red Stone, it might be better to understand what happened afterward as an attempt to poison someone who is immune to a specific poison. Even if you're immune, it takes a very long time to fully recover once a lethal dose of poison is injected. The more dangerous the poison, the longer it takes."

"...An attempt to poison."

Yuder repeated his words softly. It felt strange because he had a physical body that was immune to naturally occurring toxins and didn't suffer any harm from them.

"The same goes for divine power. It doesn't recover easily. A body immune to poison is no different from a living poison in that it can't be completely eliminated. So detoxification doesn't mean completely eliminating the poison from the body, but rather weakening it and then helping to absorb it so that the body becomes more toxic. That's what it means to be 'recovered' from poison. Do you understand what I mean?"

"To some extent."

"Consider a body that has been constantly trying to assimilate and tame that powerful toxic power, which is like concentrated poison, as its own after digesting the power of the Red Stone. If it has succeeded to some extent, what do you think will happen?"

Yuder remained silent for a moment before opening his mouth.

"Does that mean my body has become like that?"

"I don't know. It's just my thought."

Enon shrugged his shoulders in response.

"As someone who has been running an apothecary for a long time, I thought about it while listening to your story. The second gender manifestation is an event where the body undergoes a significant transformation, just like the awakening itself. And you survived that transformation with poison in your body. Moreover, your energy has become more stable since yesterday."

"It's not poison, but power, I suppose."

"Well, well."

Enon mumbled absentmindedly as he looked at the lemon in his hand.

"If you have succeeded in absorbing or assimilating that power to some extent, you might be considered a living medium... No, no different from the Red Stone itself. Or maybe by adding the essence to your original power, you could become several times stronger than before."

"..."

It seemed like a wild guess, but there was a strange sense of reason behind it.

'If I felt like I could touch the power of the Red Stone with my own power... Then maybe the origin of the spreading spot that caused pain in my body wasn't like a festering wound, but the original power of the Red Stone gradually entering and expanding within my body.'

While contemplating this thought, Yuder continued to gaze at his right hand wrapped in a glove, while Enon's voice kept echoing in his ears.

"If you think that way, there might be some reason to speculate why your energy is fluctuating like that. Since you suddenly accepted such a powerful force and have been fighting against it, do you think the foundation might remain intact?"

"I don't think I've been in such a bad condition to the point where it's dangerously unstable."

"That's because your constitution is so good. If you were like the others here, you would have already been unable to endure and died."

"...Good constitution?"

With a perplexing compliment, Yuder tilted his head and asked. In response, Enon frowned deeply.

"Enough. Don't keep making me hear compliments like that."

He was about to deny that such a thing existed, but Enon had already flexed his arm and stood up abruptly.

"I think I've heard enough for now."

"Enon, wait a moment."

"What now?"

Seeing Enon's sharp fangs exposed as he turned around, it seemed like it would be better not to hold him back any further. Yuder remained silent for a moment, then picked up a lemon from the untouched table and handed it to Enon.

"Take this too. I won't eat it."

"Oh, okay."

"Today, it felt like I was the only one who kept listening, so next time, feel free to ask me anything. If I can answer, I'll tell you everything."

'Including about my previous life.'

Sensing the underlying meaning, Enon narrowed his eyes for a moment before turning away.

"Fine. Got it."

He put the two lemons in his pocket and swiftly disappeared without giving Yuder a chance to say goodbye.

'It's almost as if he joined the Cavalry just to watch over me.'

Yuder sighed deeply and sat down on the road.

Come to think of it, although Enon wasn't a member of the Cavalry, he belonged to the same unit. Could he be considered as an ally? Even though he didn't specify, if there was a need to ask for help, Yuder planned to shamelessly seek him out. But it would be better to get closer before making any immediate proposals.

'He might dislike it if I propose right away... I should wait until we become a bit closer and find an opportunity.'

The next day, as soon as Yuder woke up, he finished his meditation and went out to the training ground behind the accommodations. Even though it was morning, enthusiastic soldiers had already gathered for individual training.

"Yuder!"

Among them, Gakane, who was running around the training ground with a noticeable shadow clone, spotted Yuder and rushed over with a bright face to greet him.

"Are you completely released from the medical division now?"

"Yeah."

"That's great. Maybe it's because of the hard work you put in all this time, but it seems like you've lost some weight. Did you have breakfast?"

"Yeah, I did."

"That's good. Let's train together today!"

Yuder nodded slightly to indicate that he had eaten, and Gakane lightly patted his back, sporting a smile. His face was so refreshing that it made him momentarily forget the fact that he was drenched in sweat. At the same time, Yuder felt a slight release of the energy that had been surrounding Gakane's body, making him realize once again that he had manifested a second gender.

'Come to think of it... Gakane is also an Alpha.'

The energy that he couldn't feel before his second gender manifestation was probably the presence of Gakane as an Alpha. It wasn't as overwhelming or tense as when facing Kishiar's energy, but it definitely made him aware that Gakane was a being with a different nature than himself.

When he manifested as an Omega without a scent in his previous life, he had been completely dull to his own scent as well as the scents and energies of others who had second gender manifestation. He had hardly ever experienced this kind of sensation.

'Manifesting with a distinct scent definitely feels different.'

"Why are you looking at me like that? Did something get on my face?"

As Yuder thought about it, he must have been staring too intensely because Gakane wiped his forehead and cheek with a bewildered expression. Of course, there was nothing on him except sweat.

"No, it's just that after the manifestation, I can clearly feel that you are different from me."

Gakane widened his eyes in surprise at the honest answer, then burst into laughter.

"Haha, you're only realizing that now? It's interesting to see that Yuder has some areas of inexperience."

After saying that, he advised Yuder that he would start experiencing that sensation quite frequently from now on, and warned him to stay away from Alpha members who exude a strong scent right before their heat.

"I know from my own experience that the emotions of an Alpha Awakener in heat can become intense. According to the rules set by the Commander, as soon as the heat comes, it's mandatory isolation and leave, so there probably won't be many chances for encounters... But it's always good to be cautious and avoid any harm from both sides."

"Gakane, have you ever met an Omega Awakener during their heat?"

Suddenly curious, Yuder asked, and Gakane casually shook his head.

"No, I haven't. I saw an Omega Awakener for the first time only after joining the Cavalry. But even if the heat comes, I don't have any intention to meet someone within the unit, so I'll take my leave and just rest."

It was indeed an exemplary answer. Yuder recalled the incidents of promiscuity within the unit caused by individuals who would use the heat as an excuse during his time as the Commander. Even though there were sleeping scents and calming medicines prepared to spend the heat comfortably, there were always those who wanted to undermine the discipline within the unit.

'Some of them even snuck into my bedroom, claiming they could suppress the scentless Omega Commander with their scents...'

Those culprits had vanished only after he'd beaten them until all their limbs and d*cks were broken and then hung them upside down on the barrack roof. However, the rebellion continued every now and then, arguing about how a half-wit who never experienced a heat period could oppress them.

While recalling bitter memories, Yuder took out two papers he had prepared in advance from his lodging and stuck them on the nearby wall.

"Yuder, what's this? A plan?"

"It's the revised training schedule for the Cavalry from now on."