

Turning 231

Chapter 231

He seemed desperate to declare, "You're such a pest," but the oath prevented him from doing so. The fact that he didn't want to acknowledge their acquaintance was evident in his awkward phrasing. Yuder clenched his jaw inwardly at the strange dialogue.

'So be it... Well, Kiolle complied with my request during the second gender manifestation, so I can fulfill this small wish of his too.'

Even if Kiolle, the person he was dealing with, had hardly met his expectations, he had to admit he was grateful.

Scanning over Kiolle and the other knights, Yuder responded in a low, even voice.

"What do you think we came here for? You should know why we are here, yet you ask. I find it hard to guess why."

"What don't you understand? What are you talking about?"

As Kiolle raised his eyebrows, the knights standing beside him raised their voices all at once.

"There's no need to listen, Sir Diarca! Sir Diarca may not know because he arrived late, but they've been making unreasonable demands from before training started."

"That's right. Despite the time for using the training grounds having passed, they insisted on entering! You should stop listening."

Ah, that's when Yuder realized. Kiolle must have arrived at the training grounds later than the other knights, hence he didn't know the details of what happened. The entrance was at both ends, so if he had come from the opposite side, he wouldn't have encountered the Cavalry members on this side.

"Our team dropped something during training here. We said we'd leave as soon as we found it, but you wouldn't listen. How is that unreasonable?"

"Nonsense! Clearly, it's an excuse to interrupt our training!"

It was a childish and malicious interpretation, doubting its very credibility. Yuder turned his head toward the knight who had yelled at him.

"Unlike you, sir knight, we are very busy people. Would over ten of us, including the Deputy Commander and Commander's assistant, be here digging in the ground for no reason?"

"What?"

The knight who asked in confusion soon grew furious, as if he were about to breathe fire.

"You, you insignificant wretch, what are you saying? Are you implying I have nothing to do?!"

"I didn't say that."

"Cursed fool, draw your sword, now!"

"Quiet!"

Kiolle raised his hand to calm the enraged knight. His deep, coal-black eyes skeptically scanned Yuder's face.

"So... you came here just for an item?"

"As I've mentioned."

What conclusion would Kiolle Diarca draw? Whether he believed or not, Yuder's task wouldn't change, but seeing the man's furrowed face and hesitation, he realized that the man had indeed changed since their first meeting.

'If it were the past, he wouldn't have listened to a word and would have attacked immediately.'

He had thought the man had no ability to learn, but it seemed even he accumulated experience.

"Sir Diarca! Why are you hesitating? Are you thinking of listening to this guy?"

As Kiolle's moment of hesitation lengthened, the knights at his side became restless.

"Sir Diarca, you must know these guys are..."

"Enough with the chatter. It's too loud!"

Kiolle finally exploded due to the knights who didn't allow him time to think, raising his voice sharply.

"You think I've been thinking, don't you? Because I've been quiet recently, you must think it's amusing. I'm the highest-ranking here, yet looking at your attitudes, it's like you're the superiors. Is my decision-making really that detestable?"

"N... No, not at all."

In truth, the knights had begun to take Kiolle, who had been quiet of late, lightly. They became instantly anxious at his words and clamped their mouths shut. Kiolle, too, with an insider's instinct, quickly realized their momentary prick of conscience. He glared at the knights, grinding his teeth, then turned his head towards Yuder.

"You!"

"Yes?"

"I will give you five minutes. Find whatever it is within that time!"

"Sir Diarca!"

The knights opened their mouths in surprise, but Kiolle's fury did not abate.

"Training will temporarily halt. Everyone will gather around and commence Basic Training Drill Number 16, from beginning to end. Move, now!"

The knights' lips twitched, as if they wanted to protest. However, nobody wanted to make an enemy of the Diarca Family, so they did not dare voice their objections. In the end, they had to gather their comrades and perform the hardest physical exercise routine that could be done on the spot, known as Basic Training Drill Number 16.

'I did not anticipate things would turn out this way... Well, let's observe for now.'

Watching the pitiful sight of the knights, who had once looked down upon the Cavalry, straining so much their faces turned bright red, Yuder turned away as the members approached him.

"Yuder."

"Did you find the item?"

"Um... that's the thing, we found it, but..."

One of the members replied with a peculiar expression on his face.

"Well, it's a bit..."

"What? Is there a problem?"

"Well, it's in pretty bad shape."

"Bad shape? How bad?"

Upon Yuder's inquiry, Phieny, the owner of the item, came forward, showing a pouch she was holding.

"...This is it. Found it near the entrance on the opposite side where I've never been."

The leather pouch resting in Phieny's hand was in shambles, as if it had been slashed with a sword. Fortunately, the bow pattern had not broken, but it was severely scratched and dust-covered as if someone had deliberately stomped on it. To anyone who looked, it was an act committed with malicious intent to insult.

The warmth faded from Yuder's eyes as Steiber's expression darkened.

"...Who would do such a thing."

"All the commoners' stuff is the same, why act so shocked?"

At that moment, the knights, who had finally finished their basic training routine and risen from their spots, jeered loudly as if they wanted everyone to hear.

"Now that you've found your precious item, stop dirtying the Imperial Knights' training ground with your filthy feet and get out!"

Phieny moved her shoulders roughly as if trying to suppress a sob. The eyes of the Cavalry members filled with a sharp light.

"Hah, glaring at us? What are you going to do about it? After all, you're just a bunch of nobodies."

"..."

There wasn't a single person present who didn't know that the term 'nobodies' was a derogatory nickname referring to Kishiar, the leader of the Cavalry. Some of the knights gave disapproving glances to the one who had uttered these words, but he showed no signs of remorse.

'Well, I guess it's not surprising, considering this is the same man who disrespected Kishiar himself.'

Yuder took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and then opened them again.

Kiolle involuntarily swallowed a gulp as he faced Yuder's darkened gaze. He had seen Yuder wear such an expression several times before. Each of those times had ended with a not-so-pleasant outcome for him.

"Kiolle, Diarca."

"What, what is it?"

"I am going to personally find out who tampered with our member's item, starting now. If you want to stop me, come out now."

Kiolle had joined the training late, so he wasn't involved in this incident. Despite his wounded pride, he had allowed the members time to find their item, so he was willing to give him a chance.

"If you step back, I won't lay a hand on you. But if you come forward, you will have to remember the consequences."

"How dare that arrogant brat disrespect Sir Diarca!"

"Sir Diarca! Do not forgive him!"

However, Kiolle did not point his sword at Yuder as the knights had hoped. Although his face expressed immense anger at the insulting speech, he turned his body slowly after a long silence and stepped back.

"... Sir Diarca?"

"I can't be bothered to intervene in matters that have nothing to do with me. I won't deal with this personally."

Although his words sounded arrogant, they were clearly an act. The memory of Yuder easily rendering several men helpless with a single button at the Harvest Festival was vividly stirring in his eyes. He did not want to experience that again. The man in front of him from the Cavalry was the most powerful and ferocious monster Kiolle had ever met in his life.

Yuder removed his gaze from Kiolle, who had made the wisest decision of his life, and looked at the remaining knights.

'The rest... 23 of them.'

He handed Kishiar's clothes, which he had been wearing on his arm until now, to one of the members next to him.

"Sorry, but can you take care of this outfit for a while?"

"Huh? Oh, sure."

"Stay back where you won't be affected."

"What's he saying, that arrogant brat. Ha ha ha. I guess he's finally feeling scared?"

Yuder confidently stood in front of the knights mocking him. He had a sword on his waist but had no intention of drawing it.

"It seems you're ready to shed tears for your comrade, but from the beginning, you and us were never in a position to duel... Oh!"

One of the knights who was sneering suddenly slipped and hit the back of his head on the ground. His last memory was of a flash of light in front of him before he passed out without a sound.

"That's correct. There's no need for me to duel with you guys."

Yuder, who had easily knocked out the knight by manipulating the ground under his feet, quietly replied to the astonished knights.

"Because there's no need to draw my sword against those who are far inferior to me."

"You... you arrogant...! Aaargh!"

The knight who had eagerly drawn his sword screamed in surprise as Yuder's gesture made his sword swing forward uncontrollably. Kiolle, who was watching from afar with his arms crossed, furrowed his brows, feeling a sense of déjà vu.

"You call yourself a knight but you can't even handle a sword properly."

"You damn brat!"

The knight, angered by Yuder's nonchalant voice, grabbed his sword and charged again, only to stumble awkwardly forward due to the ground and sword not moving as he intended. Strangely, the ground where his face had hit had suddenly become soft, and he had to flail around, trying to get up, his face buried in the dirt.

"What, what is this. Ptooeey! Spit! Ugh!"

"Quite a brave display, indeed."

The knight, his face covered in dirt, spat out the earth that had entered his mouth, his face turning crimson as he hurled abuse.

"You bastard, die!"

However, moments later, he shrieked in terror as he saw his sword, which he had hoisted up to strike down with full force, warping and twisting as if it were soft clay.

"Ahhhh! My sword!"

The knight, who had thrown away his beloved sword, took several steps back as he looked at Yuder with eyes full of terror. Overwhelmed by humiliation, disgrace, and fear, he turned and sprinted, only to slip again, hit his forehead on the ground, and lose consciousness.

'I'll make sure they fall in the most humiliating manner in front of everyone. Because that's what hurts them the most.'

His power had appeared much stronger than usual. There was no pain in the back of his hand. On the contrary, he felt an overwhelming sense that he could do anything, even if he only tried a little. It was somewhat difficult to control.

"Randen!"

"You monster, we won't let you get away with this!"

A few knights charged at Yuder simultaneously, crying out the names of the fallen knight. They seemed to think that there would be a chance if there were many of them. However, the skills of these mere knights, who hadn't even produced a piece of Aura yet, were only pitiful.

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Yuder leisurely watched those charging at him, not moving until they came close. A flurry of swords ruthlessly descended on him all at once.

"Yuder!"

Despite knowing his strength, his companions screamed in surprise from behind, but the horrendous scene they imagined did not materialize. The steel swords, failing to penetrate Yuder's body, paused in mid-air as if struck against the void. At his casual gesture, they exploded outwards.

"Ugh, damn!"

"Arggh!"

The clash of steel against steel sounded as those who lost their grip on their swords appeared one after another. Their weapons, too, bounced away, scattering in all directions before tumbling to the ground.

"Ah, it hurts. My wrist... my wrist..."

"This can't be... it's a nightmare... it's not true...!"

There were those who, writhing in pain from their broken wrists, rolled on the ground clutching their arms. Some, terrified, scrambled backward, and some murmured in denial, shaking their heads. No one dared to pick up their fallen swords. As they frantically retreated, more knights charged forward, but their movements were bereft of vigor.

"You, insolent cur!"

'Who's the insolent one here,' Yuder thought, as he deftly dodged an incoming sword with a slight duck of his head. He swiftly cut at the exposed wrist of the knight, sending his sword flying.

"Ah, monster!"

"You can't blame others when you can't even master the basics."

The knights who had charged so far were all riddled with flaws, their bodies stiff from inadequate training. They lacked even the determination to fight till the end. They were worse than Kiolle, who at least fought fiercely till the end. The name of the Imperial Knights was laughable. He had suspected it since they began their pointless exercises in the name of training. Most seemed to be idle nobles who had joined the Knights just for their lineage.

Yuder coolly addressed the remaining knights, who were hesitating to charge at him.

"Do you not even have the courage to charge?"

"..."

"If you won't come, I will. Is that fine with you?"

At his cold, uncompromising tone, as if training subordinates, the knights charged again, their faces filled with rage.

"You, damn you, you think I'm standing still out of fear? Ah, aaargh!"

However, in the end, no one's sword could land a proper attack on Yuder. The ludicrous confrontation, unprecedented, insulting, and relentless, continued. The knights stumbled around, falling between their uncontrollable swords and the rebellious ground, their screams echoing as they rolled and writhed.

In this process, where all twenty-three of them were impartially struck down, Yuder made sure to deal a slightly more heartfelt blow to those whose faces he had taken care to remember.

Those who had insulted Kishiar, those who had looked down on him, those who had threatened to make Yuder kneel and lick the ground, all were taken aback by the force from behind, and screamed as their faces hit the ground. They couldn't regain their senses as the ground shook when they tried to escape, the wind blinded them, water and fire charged at them, and their weapons refused to obey.

"Ah, please, save me!"

Witnessing the scene, the Cavalry members were newly immersed in a surge of emotion. Everything they had imagined, everything they had swallowed down in irritation and anger, was unfolding into reality before their eyes.

None of them would have lost against the knights if they had stepped forward, but none could have manipulated their opponent and made them look so ridiculous as Yuder. The knights, stumbling about and shouting, did not look noble in the slightest. It was doubtful they would ever witness such a hilarious spectacle again in their lives.

"Ah... haha. Hahaha."

At first, they had remained on edge, ready to assist Yuder if necessary. Gradually, however, they began to laugh, one by one. The laughter grew, and as time passed, they transformed into something akin to a cheering squad.

"Watch out, Yuder! One's coming from behind! Yes! That's it!"

"Where's that cockiness they showed when they were laughing at us earlier?"

"Hang on a little more! Is that all you can do after boasting about your daily training and swinging your swords around? Even Jimmy, the youngest in the Cavalry, would do better than ten of you!"

"..."

But the knights no longer had the spirit to even hear their taunts.

'That monstrous guy...!'

Watching from afar, Kiolle shivered privately at the chilling sensation running down his spine. He was tremendously relieved he had made the pretense of retreating. If he had stepped forward, he would have ended up just like the others, groveling on the ground. When he had faced Yuder before, he had passed out instantly and had not known what had happened. Now, watching from a distance, it seemed like the ones charging at Yuder were like small insects rushing into a great natural disaster and falling.

'No matter how I look at it, he's not doing his best. He's intentionally showing weakness to let those on the receiving end feel their powerlessness.'

Those on the receiving end might not realize, but from the outside, it was clear that Yuder was purposefully showing vulnerabilities so they wouldn't completely lose hope. When a desperate man rushed in, the gap would disappear in an instant, and all that would return was punishment as if he had been waiting.

"Why are you doing this? We haven't done anything to you! What have I done wrong?"

Finally, a knight who had fallen into utter despair cried out in terror. Yuder, who had been exerting his strength, momentarily halted and looked down at him with a blank expression. The knight, guessing that Yuder had stopped moving due to his words, shouted even louder.

"Do you think might makes right?! Or are you prancing around because you trust the Duke of Peletta behind you?! Either way, doing this without clear reasons is cowardly!"

"Why do you think they did it then?"

"What?"

"Isn't that what my comrades should have said to you guys? Even when we endured it numerous times and tried to let it pass, you kept insulting us just because you were part of the Imperial Knight. Now you're saying that me, a member of the Cavalry, shouldn't do this to you? Why?"

For a moment, the knight's mouth hung open, his face resembling someone who had been hit over the head. He seemed to want to respond but couldn't find the words. A cold air settled over Yuder's face.

"If I weren't stronger than you, you wouldn't be saying any of this now. Am I wrong?"

"No, no..."

"I have no intention of listening to the words of weaklings who, with nothing but the title of an Imperial Knight, mistake the prestige built up by their predecessors as their own."

"Do you honestly believe that a mere Cavalry deserves to be compared to the Imperial Knights? Don't insult us!"

"Insult?"

As Yuder snapped his fingers, water formed from thin air and smacked the knight across his face.

"Splutter, ugh!"

"I'm not sure who's insulting who here. The real insult to the Imperial Knights seems to be you, who've forgotten both your knightly code and your honor."

"..."

"And the Cavalry has no need to stand shoulder to shoulder with anyone else. We'll make sure of that."

Kiolle swallowed his dry saliva. The way Yuder paid back any insult several times over was terrifyingly devilish. Yet, he couldn't help but be drawn to the man who was devilish in his own right.

He absentmindedly gazed at the small mark, a testament to the oath, imprinted on his hand. The restrictive symbol left by the man before him didn't cause much practical inconvenience, but it tormented him effectively nonetheless. At first, he couldn't reveal this shameful proof to anyone, then he couldn't find anyone capable enough to release the oath without crossing his father, and he didn't dare free the oath against such a monster, not knowing what kind of repercussion he'd face. Now looking at the mark, the harsh words Yuder had thrown at him came flooding back.

'Do you always have to offer something to persuade others, is that it?'

'All I asked for was a reason for you to survive here, not unnecessary wealth or status. Can't you even provide that? Are you really more exceptional than a corpse?'

'Those who know neither knightly code nor honor.'

Watching the knights struggling and thrashing before him, he felt an odd sensation. But no matter how much he pondered, he couldn't pinpoint the reason for his confusion. All that remained was his profound question about Yuder.

How could that man go so far for the Cavalry?

Was there something so prideful about working under a powerless Duke Peletta that he could reject an enticing recruitment offer from Diarca Family and relentlessly beat down noble knights as if there was no tomorrow?

Up until now, he'd thought him to be a madman, but somehow, his words carried a certain consistency. The man was speaking of a value unknown to Kiolle, who had grown up in Diarca Family.

While Kiolle was still puzzled by this newfound question, Yuder finally paused and scanned the area. No knights stood on their own two feet. Only the 23 defeated, trembling in fear, sprawled on the ground.

'I intended to prolong their humiliation as long as possible, yet the resilience of the Imperial Knights is merely this?'

"Stand up. Is this all you've got?"

He nudged a fallen knight's side with the tip of his foot. The knight gasped and violently shook his head.

"S-stop. Enough! Please, n-no more!"

His speech was muddled due to a broken tooth, sounding like a child with a lisp. The immense humiliation and shock reduced him to tears. It was truly pitiful, but there was no one there to feel sorry for him.

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"Why should I stop when no one has yet to apologize?"

"This...this devil!"

"Yuder. Why bother being kind? Judging by your cheeky backtalk, you certainly don't act like a loser. Why don't you grovel a bit more? Or should we do it for you?"

One of the Cavalry members watching from a distance shouted loudly, causing the knight to flinch. Yuder tilted his head and looked down at him.

"...Maybe it's time for a switch."

"If we're switching, Finn and I want to go first!"

Upon hearing talk of a switch, the knights who were lying down felt a mix of despair and hope at the sight of the cute faces of the Eldore siblings who had suddenly stepped forward. The despair came from the severe humiliation, while the hope came from the thought that they might stand a chance against the other Cavalry members who were not Yuder.

‘Yes, yes. We could beat those seemingly weak individuals...!’

But at that moment, the Eldore siblings began to inflate like giant loaves of bread, crushing the knights' hopes.

"It's been a while since we did this."

"I'm not sure if I can control my strength."

‘Oh, God!’

Looking up at the Eldore siblings who were growing endlessly large, each knight called out to God internally. Their uniforms, made from specially processed fabric, strained and seemed ready to rip, as their bodies transformed into solid, muscular stone from the neck down. Yet their adorable faces were still small, perched on top of their shoulders, a sight both terrible and horrifying.

The horror peaked when Finn, having completed his transformation, casually stepped forward, instantly shattering a sword beneath his foot like a piece of hard candy. The knights, having lost all fighting spirit and reason, simultaneously bowed their heads and screamed.

"We surrender! We admit defeat!"

"Please stop now! We apologize! We'll tell you who ripped the pouch!"

Yuder, looking down at them, chuckled. They had proven themselves cowards and fools to the very end.

"Darn, what a waste. We rarely transform, and we didn't even get to touch them."

"But it was fun when Phieny shot invisible arrows at the pouch ripper at the end, making him pee his pants."

"That was fun."

"And it was funny when the guy who insulted our Commander cried in punishment."

"Did he pee his pants too? Why are there so many cowards in the Imperial Knights?"

Yuder, hearing the Eldore siblings' chatter, barely cracked a smile.

They were on their way back to the Cavalry building, having left a warning for the defeated knights. If they didn't want today's events to become public, they should behave better in the future. Of course, there had been a bit of additional punishment before they left, but it was a fitting consequence.

As Yuder mused on this, Steiber approached him and whispered something out of earshot of the other members.

"Yuder."

"Yes."

"Do you really think we should leave the red-eyed knight's mouth unchecked?"

The red-eyed knight Steiber referred to was Kiolle. He was the only one who had escaped the Cavalry's punishment. Looking scared yet eager to speak, Kiolle watched Yuder but ultimately didn't say anything and vanished after tending to the other knights.

'Considering he didn't run off and actually helped, he might have changed... just a little.'

"It will be alright."

Based on his observations so far, Kiolle wasn't particularly kind or intelligent. Yet, he lacked the shadowy demeanor often associated with scheming. Perhaps, due to his pampered lineage, he had lived comfortably without needing to flex his intellectual muscles. But thanks to his simplicity, Yuder found it somewhat easy to understand him.

'Had he been smarter, he could have made better use of the information he had observed and heard during our encounters. However, seeing as that has not happened... probably the most he can do in this situation is to report it to his superiors.'

Truthfully, he wasn't of good quality as an heir of power. Despite his pride in his bloodline, he didn't seem overly ambitious, and whenever he opened his mouth, he made enemies, making it hard for him to survive for long.

Could such a person really change?

If so, to what extent?

'If Kiolle manages to survive a long time in this life... would that also be considered a variable?'

Nonchalantly contemplating thoughts that would have offended Kiolle if he knew, Yuder moved on. Despite having exerted quite a lot of effort, he felt more energized than before he went out. He wasn't sure if this was a normal situation, but he intended to keep an eye on the situation.

"Yuder! Where have you been?"

Upon returning to the Cavalry building, Yuder was greeted by Kanna, who had been busily scurrying about.

"I went out briefly to assist Steiber with some Sul Division related matter. But why?"

"The Commander has decided to change the departure schedule for the west! Originally, the Commander was planning to depart last with the third detachment, but now he's going with the first. He was looking for you; hasn't he seen you yet?"

"What?"

"Is that true, Kanna? The Commander definitely left his office... when did he come back?"

Simultaneously doubting his own hearing at the shocking news and questioning Kanna, Steiber, who was next to him, anxiously chimed in. Only then did Kanna seem to recognize his presence and widened her eyes slightly.

"Ah, Steiber. I'm sorry. The Commander had left his office? I'm not sure about that. He came back with Zuckerman just a while ago and asked if I had seen Yuder while discussing the schedule change."

"Kanna. Did you see the Commander yourself?"

Yuder unusually asked hastily. Kanna, with a flustered face, nodded her head.

"Yes."

"Then his health is... no. Thank you. I need to go up right away."

He intended to ask if he seemed to be in good health, but it hit him that it would be faster to see for himself. Holding Kishiar's clothes draped over his arm tightly, Yuder left Kanna and Steiber behind and ran up the stairs.

"This is Yuder Aile. May I come in?"

Standing at the Commander's office, knocking and waiting for a response felt like several years. He was trying to suppress his anxiety when, after a moment, the door opened. But the person who appeared was not the expected Nathan Zuckerman, it was Kishiar himself.

"..."

Surprised but at the same time deeply relieved. His heart, which had been anxiously racing, slowed to a steady pace as if it was never agitated. Yuder looked up at Kishiar, who was dressed in white, and slowly scanned his entire body.

He didn't feel the precariousness he had sensed last time, nor did he feel the uneasy, wild energy. Kishiar was as robust and composed as ever. Only after he was certain of this fact did he discreetly let out a deep sigh.

‘Given that he had disappeared from the quarters, I wondered where he had gone.’

Kishiar, who had similarly been scrutinizing Yuder for a similar length of time, quietly opened his mouth.

"I couldn't find you at the training ground at the back, or in the dining hall. Where did you go?"

"I stepped out to return something you left behind and ended up assisting with some Sul Division issues."

"Issues? In such a short time?"

Kishiar, who had responded by raising an eyebrow, took a step back after a moment, uttering an 'Ah.'

"I was so impatient that I nearly left you outside. Come in and talk."

Yuder followed the space Kishiar made for him inside. The Commander's office was no different from usual, but just the fact that the owner had returned and taken his place made it feel strangely different.

"Sit down."

Kishiar, sitting in front of the guest table, invited Yuder to the seat across from him. As soon as Yuder settled into the chair, he quickly asked the question he was most curious about.

"I heard from Kanna that you're planning on changing the schedule. May I ask what happened?"

"Just as you heard."

A brief response from Kishiar was followed by a soft smile passing over his eyes.

"When I woke up this morning, I found it strange that my body felt incredibly light. Up until yesterday, my energy was so rough, I felt rundown. But today, it was peaceful as if a throbbing tooth had been removed. I thought there might be a discrepancy between what I was feeling and reality, so I paid a visit to the palace."

He had gone to the palace with Nathan Zuckerman in a carriage. Yuder tried to calm the rapid beat of his heart and lightly cleared his throat.

"So..."

"The head court mage and His Majesty's personal physician both confirmed that my cycle had passed. They assured me that I would soon return to my usual state."

‘My God. I really did it.’

The mysterious events of the night before, which had happened as if enchanted, passed through his mind in a flash. Yuder, who had unknowingly been gripping his hand tightly, loosened his grip and let out a quiet breath. Not knowing what to say that would seem natural, he hesitated for a moment before finally uttering a sentence.

"I'm truly relieved."

"Yes, I am too. Not just that my energy has calmed down, but even the early symptoms of the upcoming heat period that I had anticipated have completely subsided, except..."

"..."

Suddenly, it felt like cold water had been poured over his head, leaving him chilled.

'...The early symptoms of the heat period have subsided?'

"What do you mean by that?"

"This part, honestly, no one can confirm for certain, so I will have to rely on my instinctual judgment. But it's exactly as I said. Until yesterday, there were signs and a fever that it was coming soon, but today, even that has completely subsided."

"Could you be mistaken?"

In response to Yuder's question, Kishiar tilted his head.

"Well... However, I decided that keeping my perfectly healthy body cooped up in my bedroom just to check would be a waste."

Could such a thing be possible? No. Everything that had happened yesterday was strange, so he should not think about it rationally. Just because his cycle had passed, there was no way that the careful Kishiar would suddenly move up the departure schedule. He had failed to consider that point first, focusing only on the fact that his condition had improved.

'If I was only trying to deal with the tangled energy mass and accidentally touched the part that was functioning normally...'

Suddenly, his mind felt even colder. Without hesitation, Yuder opened his mouth and called out to him.

"Commander, I..."

"Do you have something to say?"

Kishiar responded as though he was waiting. Yuder bit his lip once, then took a deep breath.

"It seems that what I did last night... may be related to your changed physical condition."

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"What happened last night?"

Kishiar countered with a peculiar expression.

"What's the relevance?"

"Something unusual happened after you suddenly fell asleep yesterday. In fact..."

Yuder was unsure of how Kishiar would take this information, but he continued speaking at a slow pace.

The surge of power that occurred when he had laid his hands on Kishiar to check his condition, the explosion of red energy that resulted, the four powers he had seen clearly like a picture. Recounting all that happened while he was in a half-dazed state was not an easy task.

"...Therefore, after exhausting all my energy, I unknowingly fell asleep."

After finishing his tale, Yuder hesitated for a moment before lowering his head.

"Even though it started from a place of concern, I have no excuse for acting rashly without your permission. I apologize for not telling you as soon as I arrived."

Kishiar was silent for a moment. Yuder could feel his gaze sternly scrutinizing him from above his bowed head.

"Is that the end of it?"

Kishiar asked.

"As far as I remember, yes."

"Are you sure there's nothing more you're not telling me?"

"Nothing."

"Really?"

"Yes."

After a moment, Kishiar exhaled deeply. The sound of him leaning back into his chair was audible.

"I see... so that's what happened."

You, me.

His voice was a mix of complex emotions, even in its flatness. Yuder heard this tone for the first time in his two lifetimes. Fighting the urge to look up at his expression, he remained silent, staring down at his knees. Shortly after, Kishiar's voice echoed in his ears once more.

"In reality, there are hardly any true coincidences among all miracles that appear to happen by chance. I had a hunch. Even after verifying it at the palace, I thought there must be a reason all the way back. Whether a real fairy visited, or there was a cause I failed to notice."

"..."

The word 'fairy' resonated strangely in Yuder's ears, yet he remained silent, only looking down at his knees.

"So, are the spots truly gone?"

"Excuse me? ...Yes, they are."

The subject changed abruptly, catching him off guard. Yuder reflexively responded before blinking his eyes in surprise.

"I find it hard to believe. Give me your hand."

Kishiar extended his hand with an inscrutable expression. Yuder glanced at the hand and slowly clenched his fist.

"If you mean my gloves, I can take them off."

"Isn't that unfair? If you manipulated the energy of a sleeping person without permission, then I should be allowed to do the same."

He didn't understand the logic, but Kishiar gestured for him to hurry up and extend his hand. Yuder eventually reached out his right hand, covered in a black glove, with an awkward movement. Kishiar, holding his hand elegantly with just his thumb and forefinger, proceeded to pull off the glove. His incredibly slow motion felt as intense as a bee's sting.

And finally, the back of his hand, marred by a faint bruise-like stain, was revealed.

"You said they were all gone?"

"I had to use my powers to help with the Sul Division issues earlier, so it seems to have spread a bit."

"I see. So, you used your power there too..."

He felt a piercing gaze on his cheek. The grip on his hand tightened, causing his fingertips to shudder momentarily.

"There was no part of it that wasn't reckless. I don't know what to say."

"...I'm sorry."

"Apologies are not for me to... Never mind. It's done."

Kishiar let out a long sigh. Moments later, a white light began to trickle from the hand he held. Once the gently infused power dissipated without pain, a pristine back of the hand was revealed.

"...Commander?"

"I've been thinking about what to say... but I can't come up with anything."

Yuder cautiously called him, wondering why he exerted energy even when healing from Lusan would have been enough. But instead of an answer, what came back was a completely different statement. Even after the healing was complete, Kishiar continued to hold his hand and slowly spoke.

"It's surprising to see how much you worried about me. And it's frustrating how you don't take care of yourself no matter how much I say... On the one hand, I also feel a bit anxious. It feels strange deep inside my chest."

"What should I do?" As his mumbling voice lowered, the touch of his long fingers tracing the now clean back of Yuder's hand also slowed down.

"It's tough."

A very small violet dot, faintly remaining, shivered as if responding to his whisper.

"...You weren't angry, were you?"

Swallowing the eerie sensation, Yuder struggled to open his mouth.

"Angry?"

"You mentioned that the early symptoms of the heat period unexpectedly disappeared... Uh."

For a moment, Yuder's words were cut off as the tip of Kishiar's finger that was stroking his hand suddenly pressed a little harder on his skin.

"No, that's not something to get angry about. How can I be mad at someone who acted for my sake? Rather..."

As Kishiar continued to speak while looking into his silent eyes, he turned his face as if to hide the naked expression that seemed to have melted away.

"It's unbearable to worry so much."

For a moment, an odd pang of pain brushed past his chest. His crimson gaze skimmed the trace of a spot left on the back of his hand.

"If the same thing happens again as it did last night, would you act the same way without hesitation?"

That wasn't a question. It was more of a certainty. And because his words were right, Yuder couldn't easily respond. As Kishiar narrowed his eyes in the silence, confirming his words were correct.

"Didn't you think it was dangerous?"

"...I thought the chance that might not come again was more important."

"Seriously..."

With a sigh, Kishiar raised a hand to his eyes. After a few breaths, he revealed his face again.

"Even so, it was too dangerous. Fortunately, nothing happened this time, but if anything had happened, can you imagine what I would have thought? I probably wouldn't have been able to forgive myself for seeking you out in such a way yesterday. Compared to that, what does the disappearance of the symptoms of the heat period that didn't even come matter?"

"No, you can't say that. That's..."

What Yuder wanted to say was towards him who had appeared after tearing his arm. As he was about to answer, a sudden realization came to him.

'... Did he bring out this reaction on purpose?'

It felt like an extension of the conversation they had last night.

Watching him stop in mid-sentence, Kishiar met his gaze as if to say 'Do you understand?' and firmly opened his mouth.

"That's right. It's the same."

He was saying that the resolve Yuder had to face the unknown for him, the origin of that impulse and desire, exists within him as well.

Distractedly, he quickly averted his gaze, and only then did Kishiar let out a faint laugh.

"So don't repeat the same thing until we know more about what happened yesterday. Understand? It seems to be not entirely unrelated to me, so I'll look into it based on the stories you've told me today."

"...Understood."

Just as it had been before, there was no winning against Kishiar in a war of words.

But if that red light flowed out of his hand again, and once more connected with another power, if he fell back into that dreamy state, filled with strange certainty and entrancing madness, and got the answer he needed...

Could he really resist that impulse?

Especially if it had something to do with Kishiar...

Yuder looked at his hand, still held by Kishiar, and slightly furrowed his brow.

"But, Commander."

"Hmm."

"When will you let go of this hand?"

He wanted to put on his glove slowly, but there was no sign of him releasing his held hand. Every time he slowly stroked it, a ticklish sensation arose, as if every hair on his skin was standing up. When he cautiously asked, Kishiar countered without changing his expression.

"Why? The cycle has passed, so I thought it would be okay to touch the approved part freely... Was that just a throwaway comment?"

"..."

It was difficult to respond because he remembered agreeing that it was okay for him to touch, and there was also what happened last night. Watching Kishiar's fingers slowly stroking even the inside of his palm, Yuder gritted his teeth.

'No other way...'

"...No. Please continue."

"Haha."

However, Kishiar, who Yuder thought would happily continue, instead released his hand with a disappointed smile at his reply. The man looked over Yuder's puzzled face and lowered his gaze deeply, pressing down his fine eyebrows.

"I'm getting worse, aren't I?"

"Pardon?"

He didn't hear well, so he asked again, but Kishiar only smiled and didn't answer.

'...At least he doesn't seem really angry. Should I consider this a blessing?'

Yuder, with a heavy heart, put his glove back on and finally noticed Kishiar's coat that was still next to him. He had been holding it all this time to return it, and he couldn't believe he had forgotten it in this short period.

"I...and I will return this as well."

"Actually, you didn't have to return it right away."

"Weren't you leaving it there for me to bring it back today?"

"There's no reason to. Why would I torment someone who's likely exhausted from staying up most of the night with such cryptic nonsense?"

"Then why..."

When Yuder asked back, surprised by his incorrect guess, Kishiar maintained a brief silence, then smiled with his chin propped up.

"Well... Let's say I just didn't want to leave it behind."

He didn't ask what Kishiar didn't want to leave behind. The intensity in the gaze he met was already hard to ignore, let alone the thirst that gradually grew more intense. Yuder braced his legs and rose from his seat.

"I see. Understood. Then, I will take my leave."

At that, Kishiar also stood. Yuder had assumed Kishiar must have some business to attend to as well, but that wasn't the case.

"Yuder."

At the call from behind, which sounded as if it was holding something back, he turned his head reflexively. An approaching hand cupped his cheek. As soon as he tilted his head up guided by the cool touch, Kishiar, bending his body, met his lips in a deep kiss.

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"..."

The same yearning and hunger as before were absent. However, their kiss seemed to convey even deeper emotions.

The surprise gasp that slipped out between his parted lips was sucked back in, sending a shiver down his spine. As he stumbled back, another hand came forward to firmly encase his waist. The heartbeats of both bodies pressed together were indistinguishable. Yuder swallowed the emotions Kishiar continuously fed him, unable to comprehend them.

"How am I supposed to deal with my assistant, who is ready to leave without even a word of thanks?"

His whisper, thin as it was about to break, flowed between their lips.

"How did someone like you appear before me..."

Underneath his lowered eyelashes, his twisted red eyes were too close.

Through his transparent eyes, like mirrors, Yuder could clearly see what expression Kishiar, and he himself, were making, enough to send shivers down his spine.

'Ah...'

The moment he read the intense longing in his eyes, as if he was looking at light, an indescribably strange emotion welled up. Unable to bear the weight, Yuder bit his lip, only for Kishiar to gently stop him with another kiss. From within the cheek that he held, heat rose as if a flame had been passed.

Perhaps that's what he felt last night when his hand touched his cheek.

A powerless feeling that he couldn't resist, just by being touched, and a hotter regret than that?

They continued to kiss for an indeterminate amount of time. The deep connection that first seemed to resolve the regret built up over a missed heat period became softer each time they separated and reconnected. In the end, it was as gentle as a small bird pecking, a tingling sensation marking its conclusion.

In the satisfaction and lingering feelings, as if his head was filled with hot water, Yuder, without thinking to wipe his wet lips, rested his head on Kishiar's shoulder, catching his breath. His head was completely blank.

"...Today, I received a report that the second prince of Nelarn has arrived in the west. A little ahead of schedule."

Holding Yuder's waist, Kishiar whispered in a somewhat hoarse voice.

"The first expedition will therefore leave tomorrow, moved up in the schedule. Originally it would have been just you and a few others who were already selected, but now the plan has changed."

Kishiar's news about the first expedition team, as Kanna had mentioned, floated vaguely in the heat that had not yet subsided.

"Are you really coming with us?"

"You're too reckless when left alone."

The hand that reached out was unbearably soft, tracing from Yuder's hair, his sweaty nape, to behind his sturdy ear.

"And there's one more fact that I haven't told the others."

"...What is it?"

"Tomorrow, the Emperor plans to publicly announce that I am the owner of the Divine Sword."

A surprise that almost stopped his breath washed over him. Yuder, forgetting even the passion that had just subsided, lifted his head sharply.

"Is that true?"

"Yes. The last trial, mainly for the supporters of the Apeto family, has now ended. There's still an ongoing investigation related to the issue... anyway, the time has come."

As he said in front of the wall engraved with the mark of the first Emperor's sword. His chest warmed as he recalled the omitted memory.

"Is it okay for you not to be there?"

"It's alright. There's no one here who will simply believe upon hearing the announcement."

Kishiar softly chuckled, gently caressing Yuder's ear.

"So this is also about presenting undeniable evidence."

It seemed that he had already discussed everything with the Emperor earlier that day. Although he didn't go into details, the news Yuder just heard was sufficiently surprising.

Yuder took a deep breath and bowed his head.

"Congratulations."

"It might be a bit early for congratulations... but thank you."

Kishiar chuckled in an unusually genuine way, his face honest. Seeing that boyish smile, Yuder suddenly knew that he would never regret what he had done the day before. It was a selfish emotion, surprising even to himself.

"...I should really get going now."

He had to descend now. There wasn't much time left for preparation, and yet, for some reason, his body was unwilling to move. It seemed Kishiar felt the same, his fingers playing with Yuder's hair and ear wouldn't stop.

"Alright. I should leave."

Only after giving a firm squeeze to the arm he had been holding and caressing a few more times, did Kishiar finally let go. To cool down his passion, Yuder took a few deep breaths before leaving his final words to Kishiar.

"But, Commander."

"Hmm?"

"You said I acted recklessly, but you too, Commander, must not take such risks as yesterday. Especially if you are to become the master of the Divine Sword. For me, your safety comes before anything else in any situation. Please consider this when evaluating my actions."

It seemed Kishiar didn't expect those words, his eyes slightly widened. Yuder didn't wait for his response and promptly turned to leave.

During his descent down the staircase, a mix of various feelings ambushed him. Excitement, anxiety, and a lingering warmth intermingled, making it difficult to stay composed. He questioned why the impulse he felt whenever he saw Kishiar only grew stronger the more he indulged it.

For the current dispatch mission to the West, Kishiar divided the Cavalry into three groups. The first dispatch team was an elite few tasked with making contact with Nelarn's second prince, Ejain, ensuring his safety and escorting him to the destination. The second dispatch team was to head west a bit later to scout the situation and determine how far the monsters had spread.

The third group was to stay back in the Capital, maintaining the Cavalry. After the first and second dispatch teams joined up, they would decide whether to send the third group based on necessity.

Naturally, Yuder was included in the first dispatch team. Originally, he was supposed to lead the first dispatch team, but Ejain's schedule in the west was earlier than expected, and Kishiar's cycle ended suddenly, causing a change in plans.

"Everyone's here on time."

Under the dim dawn, Kishiar, clad in a deep navy cloak, lightly surveyed the members of the first dispatch team gathered before him, a smile on his face. At his side was Nathan Zuckerman, similarly cloaked, inspecting a few Misty Wind Horses, their hooves cloaked in soundless fog, in a manner that suggested his proficiency with the magic marker for controlling these creatures.

"In order to keep today's agenda a secret, I made up another reason and borrowed those horses, wondering who would care for them... it seems Nathan Zuckerman has been taking care of them all along."

Nathan had been appointed to accompany Kishiar on this mission as his adjutant. It was somewhat of a sudden decision, but no tension was apparent on the knight's face.

Yuder glanced at his colleagues standing next to him. The ones selected for the mission had abilities suited to protecting Prince Ejain while demonstrating swift mobility. Kanna, who could comprehend information under any circumstance, Gakane, who could pierce the enemy's weak points by moving his shadow clone silently, Emun Philang from Sul Division, who wielded the power to summon

darkness to conceal his body, the Eldore siblings who could teleport short distances instantly, and finally, Lusan, the priest from the medical division, were selected.

Although most of the members who had been part of the mission to retrieve the Red Stone were present, reducing the overall tension, Emun and Lusan couldn't hide their trembling nerves.

"I wish Enon had come along too... but if he doesn't want to, there's nothing I can do."

In fact, Yuder had asked Enon if he was willing to participate in the mission. However, the response he received was an outright refusal.

"I don't want to. It's not like I have to go. I don't want to leave the capital if I can avoid it. Of course, if you ask me to assist you in the name of Luma's guardian, I would... but I doubt you'd do that."

Yuder, of course, had no intention of forcing him, so he accepted Enon's decision.

However, it seemed that Enon was still bothered by his refusal because he sent a variety of medicinal herbs and helpful drugs through Lusan today. Seeing Lusan's shoulders drooping under the weight of the heavy pouch, Yuder couldn't help but let out a small chuckle.

"He didn't seem to have any problems when I met him briefly yesterday, so I guess I can trust him."

During the preparations to leave, what concerned Yuder most was checking his physical condition. There hadn't been any issues when he fought the Imperial Knights, but his power flowed so smoothly that it was difficult to control, which worried him.

Enon, whom he had briefly met under the pretext of needing wound medicine, swore a bit upon hearing Yuder's story, but fortunately, he didn't see any major issues.

"If you don't want to die soon, stop doing crazy things. Even if you really came from the future, you should at least value your life, shouldn't you? Is my thinking strange?..."

"Even though the schedule was changed suddenly, I appreciate everyone gathering here. There's no time for long speeches. You've all been briefed on the mission, so let's move immediately."

While Yuder was thinking about Enon, Kishiar, who had finished his inspection, started speaking softly. The members clad in black capes all nodded and climbed onto the Misty Wind Horses that were prepared in advance. After Kishiar and Nathan Zuckerman had mounted their horses, they dashed out without anyone seeing them off.

"I, I, this is my first time riding a horse."

Only when they had left the capital in a blink of an eye and the city walls were visible in the distance did Lusan, holding tightly onto the horse's mane, loosen his grip a bit and speak with a trembling voice.

"This feels so strange. Are you sure it's okay?"

"Just relax, it's fine. If you're tense, they'll sense it."

"Really?"

Gakane was running by his side, trying to console him, but Lusan was even more surprised by his words. From behind the priest, whose eyes were wide as a frightened rabbit's, the Eldore siblings let out joyous laughter.

"Priest, don't be scared. Even if you fall off, we'll catch you."

"That's right. We're really strong, you know."

Lusan, who had never seen the transformed Eldore siblings, took their reassurance with a grain of salt. Only the other members, who knew the truth of their words, held back their laughter.

The tireless Misty Wind Horses ran at a speed that would have taken over a week if using a carriage or regular horses. With each stretch of their fluid, unruffled bodies, mountains and fields disappeared behind them in the blink of an eye.

Minimizing their meal and sleep times, they kept running, and within two days, they reached the boundary of the region referred to as the West.

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"The atmosphere here is definitely quite different from where we've been," Kanna said cautiously, after they had passed through several cities and towns in the West.

"Even if people's expressions seem normal, there's a tension that's palpable everywhere."

Even without Kanna's ability to read information, Yuder could see that the Western regions were unmistakably on edge. It wasn't yet the period when monsters were massively emerging within the country's borders, but it seemed that news of damage from other countries had reached them piecemeal.

"Especially during such times, planning to pass through the Great Sarain Forest... the second prince of Nelarn must truly be desperate."

'Indeed, even if he didn't know, his life and throne were at stake...'

Yuder responded silently to Kanna's words, focusing on the muffled sound of hooves hitting the ground as their Misty Wind Horse galloped on. They had planned to reach a small town to meet with Prince Ejain by nightfall, but for some reason, the sky had started to cloud over a few hours earlier and was growing steadily darker.

"It's become cloudier than before, hasn't it? We should reach our destination before it starts raining."

Lusan, the priest who had been following closely behind Yuder, initiated a conversation with a loud voice, seemingly noticing his surveying of the sky. Unlike the others, who still had energy despite days without proper rest and continuous riding, Lusan looked extremely drained. He would've likely fainted if he had been riding a regular horse.

"Yes, but there's no need to worry too much."

"Haha... I suppose. I'm not worried. What could concern me when I'm traveling with such extraordinary people?"

Rubbing under his tired eyes, Lusan gave a wry smile. Turning away from Lusan's face, heavy with the desire to arrive and rest as soon as possible, Yuder glanced at the edge of the dark cloak of the person leading their party at the front.

To an unfamiliar observer, Kishiar seemed untiring as he rode his horse without showing any signs of exhaustion, it might have appeared that his previous sickness and rest were a lie. Guided by the direction-indicating magic tool bracelet on one arm, Kishiar moved forward without hesitation, the tip of his sheathed divine sword, Orr, rhythmically swaying to assert its presence.

'Has the Emperor made the announcement as planned?'

Kishiar had secretly mentioned the day before they left that the Emperor was planning to announce the new owner of the Divine Sword. However, during the more than two days of traveling to the West, Yuder hadn't heard any related follow-up news or rumors.

That was only to be expected, considering they had been riding non-stop, leaving no chance to hear any news. Yet, Yuder found himself increasingly curious and bothered each time he saw the Divine Sword at Kishiar's waist.

'While he himself doesn't seem to care at all, why am I...'

"Everyone, let's stop for a moment."

Then, Kishiar, who was leading at the front, raised his hand, signaling them to halt. As the entire party came to a stop, he pointed towards the horizon, where only the vast plains could be seen, and opened his mouth.

"There seems to be some movement over there, what does everyone think?"

"..."

Yuder turned his head toward the direction Kishiar pointed. Narrowing his eyes and focusing, he could indeed see something shimmering and moving in the distance.

"If it were the energy of the Awakener, it would have appeared clearer... What is that? A monster?"

"It seems like... monsters are fighting with humans."

Gakane cautiously answered, his companions apparently sharing his thought.

"It sounds similar to the clashing of weapons."

Nathan Zuckerman, a swordmaster, agreed.

"It seems so to me as well. Let's go and see. Everyone, be careful and follow."

They slightly diverted from their original direction and spurred their horses. Soon, the indistinct figures in the distance began to clarify.

"Ah!"

"Run... quickly...!"

A handful of people were wrestling and tumbling on the ground to evade long, sharp objects jutting out from the earth. Bags and other belongings were scattered in disarray, and a few individuals, either injured or dead, lay nearby. The direness of the situation was beyond their expectations, prompting them to dismount immediately.

"What should we do, Commander?"

"We must save them first."

In response to Yuder's question, Kishiar, without hesitation, took a look around and issued orders.

"Emun. Gakane. Use shadows and darkness to conceal the survivors and bring them to us."

"Yes!"

"Kanna, get information from those we rescue. Priest Lusan, please provide healing. And Hinn, Finn, Yuder, and Nathan, hold off those monsters. You don't have to kill them, just buy time until all survivors are rescued. Understood?"

"Understood."

Yuder leapt off his horse and sprinted, stepping on the wind.

"Ah, Yuder. It's unfair that you're going first!"

He heard the Eldore siblings, bickering and following behind him as he ran, stepping on the wind as if hopping on stepping stones. Gakane's shadow followed swiftly behind him. As Yuder arrived at the battleground, he grabbed the arm of a man who nearly got pierced by something jumping out from the ground, then leaped high into the air.

"Ah!"

The man, who was abruptly lifted into the air by Yuder, screamed with his eyes shut tight.

"Save the people!"

Yuder felt as though he had heard that voice somewhere before.

'Strange. Where have I seen him? In my past life?... No, that's not it.'

In such cases, his intuition was usually correct. Landing on the ground, Yuder shook the trembling man's shoulder.

"Compose yourself. We are here to rescue you. What's your name?"

"Me, Me, Melbon Clant...."

The man somehow understood they were there to rescue him. He curled up, whispering his name in a very small voice.

'Melbon Clant?... Melbon... Melbon, huh.'

"Ah."

As he repeated the name, a memory sparked in his mind like a bright flame. The face of the somewhat disoriented servant who had come looking for Prince Ejain while he was walking in the palace garden.

The man Yuder had saved was the same servant he had briefly encountered at that time.

"Do you know the Second Prince of Nelarn?"

"How do you know that!"

The man was taken aback, his head jerking up. Fear and caution clouded his battered, bloodied face.

"I have seen you briefly at the Imperial Palace before. Do you remember?"

"Im...Imperial Palace, you say? My memory is a bit..."

"Would you remember if I say I'm a member of the Cavalry?"

A tremendous sound erupted from behind, where the Eldore siblings were exercising their abilities. At that moment, Melbon gasped, swallowing a groan, and his eyes widened in surprise.

"Aha! I remember now! That time, in the garden, when I saw the lost prince...!"

"Correct."

"The Cavalry. I heard we're about to meet with them..."

Despite his stuttering, a look of joy spread across Melbon's face as he repeatedly exclaimed 'Oh my!'

"Yes, that's us. But what on earth has happened here?"

At Yuder's question, Melbon quickly grabbed his hand.

"We encountered assassins on the way! We managed to handle them, but something must have been triggered during the process, and monsters started leaping out of the ground. And, but the prince... Our prince is still over there. Please, save him before me!"

Yuder glanced toward the direction Melbon had pointed. As the Eldore siblings and Nathan fought with what looked like tails sprouting out of the ground, he saw someone struggling to get up in the distance.

'Oh no.'

"Understood. You should go ahead."

Gakane's shadow swiftly approached them. Thinking the shadow was a monster, Melbon screamed. Yuder quickly handed him over to the shadow and turned around.

"Arrgh!"

Ignoring the sound of Melbon flailing in the arms of the mere shadow, Yuder took another leap into the air. As he momentarily hovered, the situation below became clear.

The movements of the people, the attacking monster, and even the current location of Prince Ejain.

'From here it's clear. That monster is undoubtedly attacking by extending its tail from the body hidden underground.'

It was a monster he had faced a few times in his previous life. It wasn't recorded in the monster book because it rarely showed itself. It lived by hunting with its long, sturdy black tail, usually

satisfied with plants, and rarely preyed on humans. However, if its body hidden deep underground was provoked, things changed. The body, much smaller and weaker than the tail, was its weakness.

'It seems like Prince Ejain and his party touched where its body was buried while dealing with the assassins.'

In dealing with the monster, one shouldn't focus on the tail. It was crucial to expose the body first and attack it for a swift defeat.

Yuder etched all the information clearly in his mind and stretched his hand downwards.

"Everyone, back off!"

And as he descended, he conjured a massive force.

With a deafening wind noise, his clothes and hair fluttered wildly. The land below, reacting to the power flowing from Yuder's hand, erupted upwards, creating multiple hollows. As soft grass and gentle soil scattered in all directions, someone screamed.

Chapter 237

"What on earth are you doing!"

Nathan Zuckerman wore a baffled expression. Rather than responding, Yuder finished landing and sprinted towards Ejain, leaving behind a single phrase.

"Attack the main body, not the tail."

"What! Something came out from the ground!"

"What's that? It looks like a sphere, and it's connected to a tail?"

The Eldore siblings had just managed to find the main body burrowed in the ground, conjuring up their magic stones.

'Now that they've found the main body, they can handle the rest.'

Ejain was lying a bit further from where Yuder had last seen him. His body was a mess; he must not have evaded the piles of dirt properly.

"Are you the Second Prince of Nelarn?"

Even from the silver strands of hair alone, it was clear that he was Ejain. However, Yuder approached and asked out of courtesy. Ejain groaned and lifted his head in response to Yuder's voice. His face was smeared with blood, as if his forehead had been torn open.

"You are... that... from the imperial garden back then?"

"Yes. The one from the Cavalry."

"Yuder... Aile. Right."

Surprisingly, Ejain remembered Yuder's name correctly.

"Yes, that's correct."

"What happened? The presence of the Cavalry here..."

"I am a member of the first dispatched Cavalry sent to escort you, Your Highness. We happened upon this monster attack while on our way to the rendezvous point."

Yuder never expected to run into Prince Ejain and his party in such a place. Upon hearing Yuder's indifferent response, a faint smile crossed Ejain's face as the hard lines of his wary expression faded.

"... Astonishing. I thought I was going to die, but not only did I survive, I ran into you again, in this way. It seems God hasn't abandoned me yet."

"Are you able to stand up?"

"Yes, if you could help a bit."

Yuder helped Ejain to his feet by draping the prince's arm over his shoulder. As Ejain leaned on Yuder and staggered, he glanced at the churned earth and the fallen monster and his eyes widened.

"Did you defeat it?"

"Yes."

"We couldn't even scratch it despite our numerous attempts... how did you manage?"

"Every monster has a weakness. The weakness of this monster is the main body buried in the ground. Unless you attack that, it cannot be brought down."

"I see... So, that's why..."

Ejain, sounding rather resigned, began to step forward, then grimaced with pain, biting his lip.

"Argh..."

"Did you injure your foot?"

"I can walk. I'm okay."

One of his ankles was bloodied, but Ejain stubbornly tried to keep walking. His previously calm expression was replaced by the fleeting shadow of a wounded pride. Ignoring this, Yuder spoke.

"Don't push yourself. Stay still. A shadow that can transport you will arrive soon. Please endure until then."

"A shadow?"

"Yes, it's my colleague's ability. Using it, you can travel without any jostling and arrive safely at the rendezvous."

Upon hearing Yuder's response, Ejain was silent for a moment.

"...I envy you."

"Pardon?"

"Even though I've trained enough to gather some aura and received praise for my talent with the sword, all I felt was frustration against that monster. But the power you and your companions have, to deal with such a creature so easily..."

It was a power that had come to him without effort, yet it was incredibly potent. Jealousy radiated from Ejain's eyes.

"..."

Not knowing how to respond, Yuder opted for silence. After a moment, Ejain gave a bitter smile, his mysterious purple eyes twinkling.

"I apologize. That was not something I should have said to the person who saved my life."

"No, it's fine."

"I've thought this before, but you... you seem like a really good person."

Yuder Aile, a good person? If the knights from the Imperial Knights, whom he had soundly thrashed not too long ago, heard this, they'd be astounded. Regardless of his perplexing expression, Ejain looked down at Yuder's shoulder that was propping him up, and continued speaking.

"Perhaps our encounter is a matter of fate, going beyond mere fortune..."

"Pardon?"

"I don't mean it in a weird way."

Ejain quickly added, concerned that Yuder might misunderstand.

"I just think that us crossing paths twice now might suggest some powerful connection between us."

The first to detect this crisis situation was Kishiar. So if it's a matter of fate, wouldn't that fate be between Ejain and Kishiar? Yuder decided not to explain this, fearing it might upset the bleeding prince.

'He must be disoriented from losing so much blood. The shock must be significant... He needs medical attention soon.'

Just then, Gakane's shadow approached rapidly, allowing Ejain to receive treatment shortly.

"Prince!"

The moment they returned to where Kishiar, Kanna, Gakane, and Lusan were, Melbon, bandaged in various places, rushed over with a pained expression.

"I'm so relieved you're safe. By God... God has watched over us. Thank you. But the amount of blood you've lost... Oh my goodness."

"I see you're safe too, Melbon."

"Yes, thankfully, these people saved me. Jen and Feyti are safe too, so don't worry too much."

Tears welling in his eyes, Melbon wiped them with his sleeve.

"Priest. Priest. This man is our prince. Please, tend to his wounds...!"

"Understood."

While in the middle of healing others, Lusan rushed over to examine Ejain's condition.

"Fortunately, your injuries are not severe. Receive a bit of divine power and rest for a day or two, and you should recover quickly."

Lusan carefully cleaned the blood from Ejain's face, ankles, and other parts with a wet cloth, then used his divine power. In no time, Ejain was able to stand on his own, looking pale but otherwise recovered.

"Thank you. It's fortunate to meet such a skilled priest here."

"You flatter me."

As Lusan scratched his head and looked down, blushing, Ejain bowed his head in thanks.

"No, it's us who should thank you for healing me and my men."

"Prince Ejain."

At that moment, Kishiar, who had been nearby, approached. The atmosphere changed instantly at the arrival of the man with extraordinary appearance and physique.

"It's the first time we are having a personal conversation. I am Kishiar La Orr, the Commander of the Cavalry and the Duke of Peletta, here to assist with this incident."

Ejain stared at Kishiar's extended hand for a moment before quietly accepting it.

"I am Ejain Afnan Nelarn, the Second Prince of Nelarn. I was well aware of your reputation, Duke, and that of your Cavalry. We owe you a great debt this time."

"I came here to help, so it's only natural I did my part. I'm just glad we didn't arrive too late."

After the gentle exchange of pleasantries, the two men released each other's hands. Yuder, who had never seen the two men meet in his previous life, was momentarily captivated by the sight of their smiling faces greeting each other.

"Yuder, Yuder. That's the Second Prince of Nelarn, right?"

But he had no time to be absorbed in contemplation. Kanna, who had appeared late, asked him a question in a whisper, her face bright with excitement. This prompted Yuder to promptly withdraw his gaze from the fascinating scene.

"Yes."

"Wow. I saw him from a distance at the party before, but I didn't realize how mysterious his eye color is up close. It's beautiful, like a gem."

The lilac-colored eyes passed down through generations of the Nelarn royal family were not clearly visible from a distance. Only when viewed up close did they reflect the light, shining like amethysts.

"Aren't you amazed, Yuder?"

"Not really."

Even if they were mysterious, they were still parts of a human body, just like his own. He didn't find it particularly noteworthy.

While Yuder watched Kishiar and Ejain conversing, Gakane also approached and stood by his side. He looked worn out from having used his shadow clone to transport not only the injured but also the bodies of the monsters and others who had fallen in the vicinity.

"You were both here."

"Gakane, have you finished moving everything?"

When Kanna asked, her eyes wide, Gakane nodded.

"Yes."

"You must be exhausted. Go and get some healing from the priest."

"I'm more worried that Yuder might have hurt himself using his powers."

Despite being likely the most exhausted among them, Gakane was concerned for Yuder.

"I'm okay."

Yuder reassured him before adding that he should go and get healed. Gakane cast a worried glance at Yuder's gloved hand before turning away.

"Now, we should prepare to leave soon. We must protect Prince Ejain and his entourage cautiously until we reach our destination. From now on, two people will ride on each Misty Wind Horse."

Not long after, Kishiar concluded his conversation with Ejain and issued new orders to his men. It was a command for them to share their horses temporarily to protect Prince Ejain and his party, who had lost all their horses and carriages in the chaos.

The men dismounted their horses and welcomed their new companions. The surviving entourage of Prince Ejain rode with Gakane, Kanna, and Emun, while the Eldore siblings naturally ended up riding together.

And Yuder found himself face-to-face once again with Prince Ejain, whose eyebrows were lowered in a playful smile.

"Here I am, in your debt again. I appreciate your assistance."

"The pleasure is mine."

Yuder extended his hand to aid Ejain in mounting his horse, his expression carefully unread. The gaze of the young prince had settled far more calmly than when they had met moments ago. Despite still being under the shock of the sudden battle and his injuries, his composure and hardened demeanor swiftly masked his vulnerability. Truly, he was an extraordinary talent.

"I heard from His Highness the Duke... or should I say, Cavalry Commander, that your position is Assistant to the Commander?"

As Yuder contemplated this, Ejain, too, seemed to harbor a question for him.

"Yes."

"For such a young man to have already received a last name, you must be an exceptionally gifted individual."

"Not at all."

"You need not be so modest. Isn't it something to be proud of, having such exceptional abilities?"

"There are many others here who have also received a last name."

Upon hearing this casual reply, Ejain expressed surprise, as he was unaware of this. He had heard of Yuder while conversing with Kishiar, but he had not received any information about the rest of the Cavalry members.

"Then, how should I address you? Sir Aile? Assistant Aile?"

"Either way is fine. Please address me as you see fit."

In his past life, he was addressed as Commander Aile, but now, he was not the Commander of the Cavalry.

"Hmm. Then... Yuder?"

Yuder, for a moment, almost clenched the mane of his Misty Wind Horse too tightly, and glanced back. Ejain wore an innocent smile, making Yuder question if he had heard wrong.

"I want to get to know you better, since you're the one who saved my life. If it's difficult for you, just tell me."

How could he refuse when the prince himself wishes to address him so?

Moreover, Ejain was not just a prince of a minor country. If things were to go the way they did in his past life, he was to become one of the best military leaders on the continent, the sprout of an emperor, and an Awakener who would have great power. Yuder, too, did not particularly want to keep his distance from such a person.

'In order to prepare for a future that may yet again repeat itself...'

Even though Ejain from his previous life did not readily believe or assist when Yuder warned that the world was headed towards its end, he was still a person who tried to prevent his death by evaluating his abilities till the very end.

Yuder, for the first time in a while, found himself calculatngly indifferent.

"...No, either is fine with me."

"Good. Then Yuder it is."

Ejain chuckled.

"I find it rewarding to exchange conversations with the one who saved my life, thus why I switched places with Melbon."

'Switched places?'

Apparently, Ejain seemed to have developed a stronger fondness for Yuder, who had saved him. Yuder, feeling a substantial amount of pressure, was at a loss for words.

'I do question whether he would still show such fondness if I was the one who was covered in dirt... His curiosity and envy of the Awakeners are so large, it's probably why he behaves this way.'

"Yuder. Do you remember the last thing we talked about the day we first met?"

"What are you referring to?"

"That's disappointing. We promised to talk more about the Awakeners."

"Ah..."

While Ejain had indeed made a similar one-sided declaration, Yuder didn't recall making any reply to it. Yet, it seemed as though the recollection had somehow changed in Ejain's mind. Yuder remained silent, but the young prince continued regardless.

"I had planned to visit the Cavalry for sightseeing once, but an unexpected return home hindered me. You have no idea how regretful I was. But seeing we've met again like this, I guess fate is indeed fate."

"Is that so?"

"Was your presence in the imperial garden due to your assistant duties?"

Yuder paused for a moment, turning his gaze naturally to avoid being caught off guard.

"Yes, well..."

The truth was, he had stayed in the palace for a few days due to an unexpected manifestation of the second gender, but he could not openly admit that.

'I hope he doesn't ask any more about this.'

"Then, later on..."

As Ejain, oblivious to Yuder's inner thoughts, was about to continue, suddenly Kishiar's voice came from ahead.

"Prince Ejain."

His call was as gentle as always, but firm enough to interrupt the conversation.

"My adjutant has reported, as he said earlier, that the inspection of the assassins' bodies has been completed. They indeed left no significant evidence. Is it okay if we erase the traces and leave now?"

"Ah, yes, of course."

Thanks to his timely intervention, the conversation with Ejain did not continue. Yuder silently felt grateful and looked at Kishiar. As if he had been waiting for this moment, Kishiar's eyes precisely met his.

"..."

After a moment, Kishiar slightly squinted his eyes and lifted the corners of his lips, then turned his head again, so subtly that others would find it hard to notice.

'...What?'

Yuder blinked, staring blankly at him before finally realizing the meaning behind his actions. Kishiar's interruption hadn't been coincidental. He had intentionally intervened to prevent the conversation with Ejain from progressing in a direction that could be uncomfortable for Yuder.

'Ah...'

While he had been busy receiving the last reports and inspecting the site before leaving, he managed to keep track of even the small conversations here. It seemed unbelievable, but it was indeed possible for Kishiar. Nobody except Nathan Zuckerman and Yuder knew that he could read the movements of those passing outside even while lying behind closed doors.

'Did he know I was uncomfortable talking about the second gender manifestation and help me out?'

The thought made a strange surge rise from deep within his chest.

"Now, as the last member is on the horse, let's erase the traces and leave. Yuder."

"Yes."

As soon as Nathan Zuckerman, who had completed his inspection of the scene, lightly mounted the horse behind Priest Lusan, Kishiar reached out and called Yuder.

"I leave the rest to you."

"Understood."

It didn't take long to erase all traces of battle and deeply bury the bodies with his earth-moving abilities. Yuder accomplished all this in an instant without moving a single finger.

As the trembling ground swallowed the bodies of the monsters and assassins, pulling them deep beneath the surface and smoothly flattening out, the people from Nelarn let out a mixed gasp of fear and admiration.

"Whew..."

Later, if someone came here and tried to dig up any traces, it would be almost impossible to find the deeply buried bodies with human strength. Yuder checked that the ground, previously torn up by the aftermath of the battle, had been neatly restored and then withdrew his power.

"It's done."

"Good."

Kishiar, after a quick survey of the surroundings, nodded in satisfaction.

"Let's move out now. It looks like it might rain on the way, so everyone, be careful."

The Misty Wind Horse that Nathan, who was leading the other horses, rode stood at the forefront, followed immediately by the one Kishiar was on. Yuder, being with Prince Ejain, who was the most important person in this mission, maintained a position that did not deviate from the center, keeping a lookout around them.

The Misty Wind Horses quickly moved away from the land where the battle had taken place, advancing without hesitation. The long hair of Prince Ejain, who was sitting behind Yuder, occasionally brushed against the side of his face.

"Speaking of which..."

After a long silence, Prince Ejain suddenly murmured from behind.

"Wasn't your ability to fly? Melbon said so."

"...I don't have the ability to fly. It seems you felt that way seeing me treading the air using the wind."

"Wind?"

Prince Ejain, after a brief counter-question, fell silent for a moment, then let out a voice unable to hide his astonishment.

"So does that mean... you have more than one ability?"

"Yes."

It was okay to say this much, as he would eventually see Yuder using his powers while carrying out this mission. Besides controlling wind and earth, he could freely handle four elements, including fire and water, and there were several other peculiarities, but Yuder did not initially mention them in detail.

"It takes decades of training for mages to properly control a single attribute... It's incredibly hard to believe. Is it common among the Awakeners?"

"Unlike mages, it's hard to think the same, but even here, it won't be too common."

"I see. Right....."

At the time, there were hardly any people in the Cavalry who could use multiple abilities. Yuder was the only one who could handle several natural attributes. However, he knew this wouldn't always be the case.

As time passed, some would develop the abilities they initially possessed, gaining new power that seemed completely different from before. There would also be Awakeners who were born with more than one power.

And Prince Ejain, who was expressing his astonishment at Yuder's abilities from behind him, was one such Awakener in his previous life.

'The silver king followed by six stars. Guardian of the barrier.'

Yuder recalled Ejain's nickname from his past life and then erased it from his mind.

"..."

Prince Ejain was silent for a while. He spoke again when Yuder used his power to gently bend the rough branches that could hit their faces while rushing through the forest, like drawing a curtain aside.

"...I had been curious about the Cavalry before coming to the empire, but seeing and hearing directly, it feels like the information I had was an understatement."

The sigh Prince Ejain breathed out rang long in Yuder's ears.

"The more I know, the more I realize how remarkable it is."

Chapter 239

Before they reached their original destination, a small city, the murky sky began to pour rain. The Cavalry members flipped over the hats attached to their uniforms, and the people of Nelarn wrapped their cloaks around them to keep their heads from getting wet.

Although the rain was unpleasant, it had its benefits. Due to the fewer visitors, the city had far fewer guards than usual who would have normally kept a keen watch.

"The Red Butterfly Knights dispatched for the mission from the Pearl Tower...and the mercenaries hired as assistants... Alright. Identity cards and certificates, all verified. You may enter."

The guards, standing by the gate where the rain was relentless, hastily checked the counterfeit identity card Nathan handed them and declared a quick passage. No one paid any attention to the unique appearance of the Misty Wind Horse as they entered the city, as there was no one out in the rain.

"We originally planned to take a detour by using the mountain near the back door, but the rain has made things much easier."

Kishiar, whose conspicuous appearance was deeply hidden by a cloak and hat, said in a cool mutter. They soon arrived at a dilapidated mansion located in a hardly visible part of the city.

"This place is...."

"This is a safe house prepared in advance by the Peletta Knights who were dispatched to the West for this mission."

Nathan Zuckerman kindly answered Kanna's murmur, dismounted, and opened the mansion door.

"Please go in. I will take the horses to a safe place and then follow."

Everyone dismounted and entered the mansion. The inside smelled of stale dust as if it had not been taken care of for a long time, but it was spacious enough to accommodate several people.

"Welcome, Duke. We received your message and have been waiting."

Two men who revealed themselves from inside knelt in front of Kishiar and saluted him knight-style. They were undoubtedly members of the Peletta Knights, as could be seen from the sword at their waist and the formal demeanor, despite their casual clothes.

"We thought something happened because you were late. We're really glad you made it safely."

"We had a bit of a situation in the middle. You guys must have had a hard time."

Kishiar, who briefly commended the knights' efforts, turned his head and smiled at Prince Ejain's party.

"I understand that we can't afford any delays, but it would be difficult to discuss the main issue with wet bodies. Let's have a meal and rest for a while before we start the discussion. Would that be alright?"

"Of course."

Ejain swept back his wet hair and responded firmly. The party was led to their rooms for the night by the Peletta knights. Yuder was assigned the room next to Kishiar, as he was the Commander's assistant. Judging by the two beds in the room, the other bed seemed to be for Nathan Zuckerman, who had not returned yet.

He looked at the bed, seemingly after a long time, then lowered his gaze towards the end of his still-dripping cloak.

'It's a relief that only the cloak got wet...'

After taking off the wet cloak and hanging it on the wall, he sat on the bed and took off the glove on his right hand. He had used his strength all day, so it was natural that his spots had spread quite a bit.

'But the color is almost... barely visible as a slight red.'

He clenched and unclenched his fist. There was no pain to be found. It seemed he could forego immediate medical treatment.

'Although I still feel that my strength is being amplified more than usual, it hasn't interfered with my work.'

Simply put, one could be pleased that he'd become stronger than before, having absorbed the power of Kishiar. However, Yuder couldn't help but harbor a strange feeling of unease.

It seemed unwise to feel pleased about a sensation of continuous change within his body.

"Sir Aile, are you in there?"

At that moment, a knock resounded from outside.

"Yes. Please come in."

After slipping on his gloves and answering, the door opened to reveal the face of Nathan Zuckerman.

"Dinner will soon be prepared. Please accompany the Duke. I have some business with the Peletta Knights and will not be able to join you for dinner, but will leave immediately."

"Understood."

"Oh, and..."

Just as he seemed about to turn away, Nathan paused, then turned back to Yuder.

"I had something I wanted to ask earlier but didn't get the chance. May I ask it now?"

"Go ahead."

From his questioning look, Yuder could guess what he might ask. After hearing Yuder's concise reply, Nathan Zuckerman lowered his voice and continued his question.

"How did you know that the weak point of the monster we defeated earlier was the body buried beneath its tail? The monster guide taught by the Cavalry does not contain such information, nor was it a monster known from the data we've collected... No matter how I think about it, it seemed as if you knew beforehand."

As expected, that was the question. Yuder let out a small breath and gave the answer he had prepared beforehand.

"That's because I did know beforehand."

Surprise flickered in Nathan's eyes.

"You knew? But how...?"

"I had encountered that monster before I joined the Cavalry."

"Ah..."

"From that experience, I learned about the monster's body and weak point. At that time, due to my limited experience, I didn't realize how rare that monster was... Today, seeing it again, it reminded me. You know I have good eyes."

This was not entirely a lie. In a sense, having encountered the monster in his previous life did count as meeting it before joining the Cavalry, and Yuder was naturally good at identifying the weak points of monsters he saw for the first time. As he couldn't directly use his power against monsters, he relied heavily on observation. This skill was the result of that practice.

"But, thanks to your quick memory recall, we were able to defeat the monster without anyone getting hurt. What a relief."

"..."

Nathan was silenced by Yuder's audacious yet irrefutable argument. Yuder saw the suspicion gradually disappear from the earnest knight's eyes, replaced by the usual tranquility.

"Certainly... With Sir Aile's abilities, even before joining the Cavalry, you probably could have defeated a few dozen monsters. I understand. I must have asked an unnecessary question."

'I'm sorry, Sir Zuckerman. If I were my past self, defeating a few dozen monsters alone before joining the Cavalry would have been beyond even my wildest dreams...' Yuder swallowed the answer he could not yet reveal and remained silent.

"Thank you for your answer."

After Nathan left, Yuder quietly counted to ten in his mind. Standing, he opened the door to check if Nathan Zuckerman was still around. There was no sign of him.

'Can't be helped. I can't allow my allies to be hurt by keeping my knowledge to myself, but neither can I admit to having known everything from the beginning...'

The most plausible excuse he could offer was that he'd learned everything before joining the Cavalry.

While contemplating when he should reveal his own weaknesses, the savory scent of soup wafted in from a distance.

"Wow, it's been ages since I've smelled real food."

"My stomach feels like it's going to burst."

The members, with their uncanny ability to detect delicious smells, bolted out of the door across the hallway. Having cleaned up from the rain and taken a brief rest, their expressions were notably brighter than before.

"Yuder! Let's go eat together!"

"I have to accompany the Commander. You go ahead."

"Can't you eat if the Commander doesn't? It wasn't like this back in the headquarters."

"I'm on duty now... and I'm the Commander's assistant."

There was also Nathan Zuckerman's request, but he decided to omit that.

"I'd never be able to resist!"

"I'm so glad I'm not an assistant!"

As if they sympathized with the woes of an assistant who had to accompany the Commander at all times, the Eldore siblings jovially patted Yuder on the back and then hurried down the hallway. Following them, Gakane and Kanna also patted Yuder's shoulder with regretful expressions, each leaving a whispered message.

"Yuder, do you want me to stay with you?"

"Even if there's something delicious, I'll save some for you."

"...It's okay. Thank you, both of you."

Surely, the food wouldn't run out before the Commander, Kishiar, got to eat, but their words still warmed his heart. Yuder momentarily forgot about his cold deliberations, responding to his comrades with a smile.

"Commander, it's time for dinner."

Even when all the members had left for their meal, Kishiar did not leave his room. After waiting for a bit, Yuder knocked on his bedroom door.

"Commander, may I come in?"

Again, there was no response. With no other choice, he carefully opened the door and stepped inside. There sat a man, staring blankly at a map under the lamplight at the table, showing only his side profile.

"Commander?"

Chapter 240

"Commander?"

"...Ah."

Only then did Kishiar, having blinked once, shifted his gaze to see Yuder's face and paused momentarily.

"When did you arrive?"

"Mealtime was upon us. I knocked repeatedly but received no response, so I let myself in."

"Has it gotten that late already?"

"Do you perhaps not feel well?"

It wasn't normal for such a sharp man to be oblivious to the sound of knocking. It seemed his choice to push his body to the limits, heading west as soon as his duties ended, might have been overzealous. Yuder, carefully observing Kishiar's face, asked cautiously. Kishiar shook his head slightly, a faint smile gracing his features.

"No, I'm fine. I was just deep in thought, more so than I realized."

Yuder sneakily peeked at the map Kishiar had been looking at.

'... It seems to be a map of the West... what are these red markings all over?'

But before he could inspect it more closely, Kishiar completely folded the map. Yuder realized that if it was an important matter, he would come to know of it eventually without having to ask. So he withdrew his interest from the map.

"You must be hungry. If I didn't respond, you should have eaten first. I recall no strict rule that everyone must wait for me to start eating."

"I'm not particularly hungry, and of course, your mealtime takes priority, Commander. I was worried about your health."

"Ah... I see. Was it Nathan who asked you to check on me?"

The man, quick to comprehend the situation, rose from his seat.

"Alright. Let's go eat."

"Yes."

"Weren't you tired on your journey? You must have used a lot of your abilities."

Kishiar asked as he opened the door and walked out. Yuder followed behind him.

"Actually, I was so energetic that it became a problem, so I'm fine."

Although it was a sincere answer, Kishiar chuckled as if he found something amusing.

"Is that so? You seemed like you might be feeling trapped while at the headquarters. To the point where I thought you might have felt liberated using your abilities freely without restrictions or pain outside for the first time in a while."

It was true that he felt a sense of freedom, being able to use his abilities outside without any constraints or pain. However, he had never felt as if he was doing something he didn't want to do out of obligation while at the headquarters.

'Did I show any signs of disliking my work recently?' Yuder hesitated briefly before responding slowly.

"I didn't feel that way... Did you notice anything strange about my behavior?"

"No. Nothing was amiss."

Kishiar responded in his usual tone.

"The problem always lies with me."

It was an ambiguous answer, seeming like a joke and not, making it difficult to discern his intentions. As Yuder pondered whether he should ask about the meaning behind those words, Kishiar suddenly stopped in his tracks.

"Hold on."

"...Commander?"

Kishiar, who had halted abruptly, reached out toward Yuder's head and plucked something from the hair. What he had assumed to be a speck of dust was, upon closer inspection, a silver strand of hair. It must have attached itself during their journey, where Yuder rode the horse together with Ejain.

"It was bothering me."

"...You should have just told me."

His body, left unclean and even soaked in rain, was bound to have more than just a single strand of Ejain's hair stuck to it. That Kishiar would directly pick something from there without hesitation was not a typical act for a member of the imperial family.

‘At this rate, there will truly be no words to say if I’m arrested for insulting an imperial family member one day.’

But the problem was that, unlike before, he didn't vehemently avoid it. Yuder quietly lowered his gaze and followed behind him as if nothing had happened.

"Speaking of which, you seemed to be conversing quite a bit with the Second Prince of Nelarn while riding together."

"Yes."

"From what I heard, he seemed to have taken quite a liking to you since the time you encountered each other in the palace... but how did you find him on your journey?"

Was he asking about how Yuder felt about Ejain?

Yuder reflected on the conversation he had with Ejain while riding. He had demonstrated a diplomatic skill capable of gaining the cooperation of Emperor Keilusa, despite still being a prince. He was curious about Yuder, especially after having seen him several times up close, but he didn't have much to say.

The conversation with Ejain today was nothing but remarks about how he envied the Awakeners and felt the Cavalry was underestimated. Most of Yuder's impression of Ejain was biased toward the memories and information from his past life. If he wiped those out, nothing would remain.

"...Just as when I first met him, he seemed to still hold great interest in the Cavalry and the Awakeners. He said he had been interested in the Cavalry even before coming to the Empire."

"And?"

What else was he supposed to say?

He couldn't possibly say that he'd become a powerful Awakener, one of the few in the future, and that his power would make Nelarn a nation strong enough to compete with the Orr Empire.

He also couldn't mention the fact that he saw glimpses of Ejain's character even at this point, a character that valued talent and extended a helping hand to Yuder, who was facing execution. Yuder tried his best to recall only his encounter with Ejain today.

"Despite being injured, he quickly shook off the shock and stood up, showing a strong character."

"Hmm. Anything else?"

"...We've only met twice, so I don't know much more."

Finally, Yuder gave up on extracting more words and responded with a feeling of surrender, causing Kishiar's eyes to soften.

"But it seems my assistant views him quite favorably."

"If I must say, it's more that he seemed to view me favorably."

Although Yuder was Kishiar's assistant, he was only twenty and had just recently received a last name. He was a fledgling who had not even been in the Cavalry for a year, and the Cavalry was just beginning to stir.

Originally, it would have been impossible for him, a commoner, to assess a prince of a nation.

'I suppose Kishiar would ask me such a thing...'

"This mission is not only to assist the prince but also to observe who he is."

Standing in front of the bustling dining area, Kishiar responded in a voice so low it was barely audible.

"I will continue to observe whether he is a person who can bear the weight of the throne and keep his promise with His Majesty. He will likely be evaluating us in his own way as well."

"..."

"So, be careful."

Kishiar, who had lightly patted Yuder's shoulder, entered the dining room first. The members and knights who were eating at the far end of the long table stood up and greeted him all at once.

"Have you arrived?"

"You're late."

"I was briefly reviewing the report I received. Please sit, I'll continue."

"Yes!"

Yuder followed him, taking a seat on the vacant chair next to Gakane. As Kishiar, who was at the head of the table, sat in front of the untouched soup and bread, Prince Ejain, who had been seated right next to him, gave a polite greeting.

"Regrettably, we started our meal without you."

"Don't worry, it's not a formal occasion. I am concerned, however, whether these hastily prepared dishes will be to your taste."

"No, they are incredibly delicious. Having left in such a hurry, I didn't get to have a proper meal. Eating warm food after such a long time is like a balm to my fatigue. I am deeply grateful."

Upon hearing Prince Ejain's remarks, his retinue also expressed their gratitude.

"They would be pleased to hear you enjoyed the food."

"I wonder how can it seem like a different world over there, even though they are just having a conversation?"

Kanna, seated across from Yuder, mumbled curiously.

"They're eating the same food as us."

"Do you think it's because they can eat without making a sound?"

Emun, sitting next to her, with a full-faced smile, added.

"I would make a sound even if I were eating with a wooden spoon and a wooden bowl, but they are not making a sound at all."

"I see... that's true."

"Yuder. Kanna got your soup and she put a lot of meat in it."

Gakane whispered this as he listened to the conversation between Kanna and Emun.

"People don't know. So eat a lot."

At his words, the presence of chunks of meat became more palpable in the bowl. Yuder thanked Gakane in a whisper.

"Thank you."

"No problem."

Gakane muttered, seemingly embarrassed, that it was hard to sneak in a lot of meat near the hungry Eldore siblings.

"I drew their attention, and Kanna carried it out. It was fortunate we weren't caught."

The rose-like vibrancy was back in his hair and eyes, perhaps because he had eaten well. Yuder vaguely remembered a story about him being nicknamed 'Living Rose'. It seemed strange at the time, but it made sense now.

The meal ended not long after. After ensuring that everyone had finished their meals, Kishiar stood up and suggested going directly to the reception room to Prince Ejain.

"The largest space is there, so we should have our formal conversation there."

"Understood."

Yuder promptly followed Kishiar. With Nathan Zuckerman still absent, he had to guard the Commander. However, as soon as Kishiar sat in the chair arranged in the reception room, he gave Yuder an order.

"Yuder."

"Yes."

"Would you bring the map I left on the table in my room earlier?"

Yuder glanced at the Cavalry members who were following him in, nodded, and went upstairs. There was only one map in Kishiar's room. The paper he had been studying so intently that he hadn't even heard the door knock was still half-folded on the table. Yuder took it and went downstairs.

In the meantime, the conversation had already begun.