

Turning 301

Turning

Chapter 301

The following day, Yuder woke up in a state where he had not dreamed at all. The same was true for the day after that, and the day after that one too. Yuder spent the longest time doing absolutely nothing he had ever had throughout his two lifetimes. He spent most of his time sleeping, and when awake, he shared conversations with his comrades who took turns guarding him.

Kanna had cheerfully informed him of the news around them, and Gakane had earnestly pondered and sought advice on the best ways to use his abilities in different situations. Listening to the ceaseless chatter of the Eldore siblings often sent him back into a slumber, and he found himself able to have lengthy conversations with Emun, with whom he had had no particular ties before arriving in the West. He was becoming increasingly accustomed to Priest Lusan's nagging, who carefully looked after him. Yuder thought that even if he had retired in his previous life after aging, he would not have been so idle.

Yuder also shared his weaknesses and limitations with them. Talking about the limits of his abilities had always been his biggest secret, but surprisingly, it did not feel like such a significant weakness when he opened up to others about it. The indifferent reactions of his comrades who heard his story further reinforced this feeling.

"You're not entirely unable to use your power against monsters, right? It's impressive compared to me who has no combat abilities at all!"

Kanna had said, to which Gakane had added with an awkward laugh, "Kanna's right. Your indirect approach seems stronger than my ability to use power properly, so I don't think it's such a big weakness... Of course, we can't afford to have more situations like this last one."

The conversation flowed on, with Kanna followed by Gakane's words.

"What a letdown, I was thinking of learning about your weakness to tease you later, but it's no use if that's all it is. You can only use the power to create cliffs once a day, but what need is there to use it more than once a day in the first place?"

"That's right. Are you bragging now?"

"Still, it's a relief that you already know how to solve it. How did you come up with that? If it were me, I would have been too scared and would have just avoided encountering monsters."

Amid the Eldore siblings who quickly lost interest, Emun asked seriously. Yuder recalled Kishiar from his dream, who had given him the task to figure out ten ways to clean up debris without using his power directly.

If not for Kishiar's words, Yuder might have completely lost confidence in his power and retired as is. A wave of complex thoughts came crashing, then faded away with a minor pang of pain.

"...It wasn't my idea."

"Then whose?"

"I was advised to think of other ways if the power doesn't work directly."

At his casual remark, the eyes of all his comrades sparkled in unison.

"Wow, from whom?"

"Don't tell me, you've met another Awakener before joining the Cavalry?"

"I think it's the first time I've heard about Yuder's story before joining the group."

He couldn't tell them that he had turned back time. Yuder kept silent, then broke into a faint smile. His comrades inferred that the smile was a sign of affirmation and marveled at it.

"That's interesting. How did you meet such a person when you said you were living alone in the mountains?"

"Who is it? Did they also join our group? Are you still in contact?"

Kishiar was present within the Cavalry now. However, the Kishiar who had given him that advice had been long dead at the time. They were the same person, yet they existed in different times.

After a silence slightly longer than before, Yuder finally spoke.

"Now, we can't meet."

"Huh? Why... Ouch!"

Emun, who had been about to ask an intrigued question, shrieked as Kanna jabbed his side. Kanna gave an apologetic look towards Yuder, who remained as impassive as always, then motioned to the rest of the members.

Emun, receiving a potent look that clearly conveyed 'Can't you take a hint?', opened his mouth, feeling utterly wronged.

"Sorry, Yuder. We just remembered we have something to attend to, so we'll be off."

"That's fine. You've been here too long; you need to rest."

The members stood up in unison, leaving behind somewhat awkward farewells before disappearing. Outside the closed door, faint quarreling could be heard. 'Can't you tell from Yuder's expression? He's talking about someone who's dead!', 'No, how the hell am I supposed to know that from his blank face?! It's not like I can read minds!'

Yuder sighed once his thoughtful comrades had disappeared. He had tried his best to seem nonchalant, but apparently, he couldn't fool Kanna.

This was the first time he had spoken to anyone about Kishiar, even though it wasn't directly related to the topic at hand.

After Kishiar's death, he was quickly forgotten everywhere. Most of the members who had remembered him left the group, and it was only natural since the nobles had to mind their words in front of the new emperor. Peletta, welcoming a new lord, returned to its usual desolate, insignificant state, and the Peletta Knight Order, once known as the Duke's Knights, was dissolved on charges of rebellion and scattered without a trace.

The few initial members who remained refrained from mentioning Kishiar. At first, some people came to Yuder, asking if the rumor that he killed Kishiar was true, but when he remained silent, they each made their own conclusions and disappeared.

Years passed, and the continental political landscape changed dramatically. Unlike the Orr Empire, which was losing power rapidly due to continued disasters and chaos, Nelarn and a few other countries grew rapidly to the point of proclaiming themselves empires. With earthquakes, droughts, and all kinds of disasters continuing and countless people dying, people stopped remembering the names of the dead.

The same was true for Yuder. Kishiar was the first person he had killed, but not the last. He saw no reason to particularly remember the first person he had killed when the bodies of those he had killed to carry out the secret orders in the Cavalry piled up like a mountain behind Kishiar.

The memories and emotions he once had, too, he deemed it natural for them to become sedimentary, rot and vanish.

'...That's how it was until recently.'

Yuder leaned against the bed, smelling the thick scent of grass mixed with the soft wind blowing in through the window left open by someone. Perhaps it was the time when the fever fell and the body temperature lowered, even the breeze that would have been considered cool normally made his lips cold and his body shiver. However, he didn't cover himself with a blanket and just endured the chilling cold.

'Memories and emotions.'

After defeating Pethuamet, he continuously pondered over the puzzle-like emotions within him whenever he had time. He was unsure where these prismatic emotions, which he hadn't realized he'd lost, came from, or why they returned. Fully understanding the reason was still difficult, but after hearing what Kishiar had felt this time, one aspect occurred to him.

'I'm not sure about the one he called thread, or what... but there was indeed a commonality within the emotions that returned to me.'

Whenever he saw Kishiar in his dreams, the breathtaking emotions he felt were always accompanied by a sensation similar to a throbbing pain. Despite never experiencing such a sensation in his original memories, the unfamiliar yet familiar parts in his dreams overlapped with what he had previously considered.

'And another thing. Although it felt so familiar, I couldn't be certain that the pain was fully mine.'

It was peculiar to feel that even though he was feeling the emotion, he couldn't determine if it was his. If it wasn't his, whose was it? He had taken it for granted in his dreams and moved on, but when he cleared his head and reconsidered, it was not his usual self.

'But if those thoughts and emotions were actually the truth...'

If that made sense, there was only one cause he could infer. That aspect was also related to the foreboding feeling he had after hearing Kishiar's story.

'The accident that occurred during the second gender manifestation in my previous life.'

Just thinking about it made him feel stifled, and Yuder took a deep breath to suppress the sensation in his chest. He could feel his hand growing colder.

That accident was one of the most shocking incidents in his previous life, ranking within the top three. If the heat period overlapped with the second gender manifestation, the probability of the person who happened to be present at the time also having an opposite second gender while also in heat was minuscule. However, due to the unfortunate alignment of bad luck, Yuder had spent days cooped up,

entangling bodies with a beast-like Commander, and had to suffer the misfortune of being reduced to a wretched state.

He had very little memory left of what had happened then. But one thing was certain. While he was tangled up, he did not know whether the place had changed or whether days and nights had passed, but he continually felt as if something inside him was being ripped apart and was being messily mixed with something that came from outside.

The pain, as if something unseen and ragged pieces were arbitrarily stitched together.

It wasn't just a simple analogy. He couldn't explain it, but it truly was something that had happened within him.

Since that accident didn't occur in this life, he had pushed away the memories of his previous life with a somewhat relieved heart. He thought he could forget about it as if it had never happened, but if the disappeared emotions and memories inside him were related to it, what should he do?

Turning

Chapter 302

The thin thread Kishiar had spoken of and the sensation Yuder felt in his previous life, as if being torn and stitched together, seemed very different yet similar in the aspect that they both felt 'connected' to each other.

It was a complex feeling beyond description, to be reminded in this way of an experience never spoken of by any second gender manifestor in his previous life.

"What are you thinking about?"

Just then, a familiar voice came along with the sound of a closing door nearby. Only then did Yuder break free from his deep contemplation and turned his head. He felt an approaching presence from beyond the unseen darkness. It was a unique presence of Kishiar, silent like a beast stepping on the ground, yet its existence was so palpable, he could feel it on his skin.

"Just... thinking."

"You're so pale, and you're not even covered with a blanket?"

Kishiar, who had closed the window, approached and touched Yuder's forehead.

"You're cold indeed. Wait a moment."

Beside Yuder, who was constantly fluctuating between fevers, there were always towels, a chamber pot, and a heat-retaining grain pouch that kept warm for a long time.

Yuder felt the formless mist-like power moving right next to him. After a moment, he felt a warmth from the pouch on his belly, so comforting that it seemed to melt his previous chill.

"You used magic."

"You felt that?"

"Yes. Is it okay for you to use your power so freely?"

Since losing his sight, some of his senses had become more acute. In particular, his sense of detecting unseen energy was so refined that he could vaguely distinguish when Kishiar used a power other than that of an Awakener, as he did now. As Kishiar wrapped Yuder in a blanket, he spoke.

"Indeed, magic puts a larger strain compared to other powers, but this much is fine. It's just a very basic heating spell."

Anyone unable to conjure even a spark among the many mages would be envious to hear such a thing. Yuder was curious about the extent of this man's skills, who mentioned a heating spell as if it was a trivial matter. As if noticing Yuder's curiosity, Kishiar spoke as he draped a blanket over him.

"Curious about my skills?"

"If I say no, I'd be lying."

At Yuder's honest answer, Kishiar let out a gentle laugh.

"I am confident that I can compete with anyone in terms of theory and magic power control. But honestly, I haven't learned many formal spells."

"What does the number of learned spells have to do with skill if you're good at magic power control?"

"Well, you're right. I've limited it because if I learn too many spells, I might end up using them unconsciously."

Kishiar gave a crisp answer and explained that he couldn't be evaluated on the same standards as other mages due to this reason. His words indicated that his capabilities exceeded the ordinary in every way.

"I don't know when I'll start working on removing the amplification circle, but I plan to do some warm-up exercises with small spells to awaken your senses. And heating up the heat-retaining pouch is a very good warm-up exercise."

It was a truly eloquent and cunning argument. Yuder, having no words to refute the man who subtly implied he would continue to use magic at his convenience, just closed his mouth.

"..."

"If you want to say you're uncomfortable, just get better. Then I won't have to do this, will I?"

"If it were that easy, I would've been healthy a long time ago..."

Kishiar spent most of the day assisting with research where the mages gathered, but in his spare time, he made a point to visit Yuder. He personally changed his bandages and checked his condition. Kishiar had also claimed to be busy with other work, so it was hard to even guess when he might take some time for himself.

"But we made some decent progress today. We confirmed that the monster's tongue causes resonance in contact with the amplification magic stone, so we're going to conduct further experiments based on that."

"Is that so?"

"I was wondering what we should do if they throw a fit about needing materials, but they figured out a substitute on their own."

Kishiar's tone was always cold when talking about the mages. Before his aura could become any colder, Yuder changed the subject.

"I informed my comrades about the weaknesses of my abilities today."

"Today? I see. What was their reaction?"

Unlike when he mentioned the mages, Kishiar's voice became brighter. Yuder recalled their chatter around him and smiled faintly.

"...It wasn't as bad as I expected."

"Did you only talk about the weaknesses? Anything else?"

"I also briefly explained the limits of my abilities."

"You mean you can't exert the strength you demonstrated when defeating the giant monster more than once a day."

"Yes."

Kishiar had already heard as much from Yuder. Now that he had told his comrades the same, Yuder planned to disclose a slightly more advanced piece of information to him.

"However, there's one more thing I haven't told them yet."

At this, Yuder's hand, which was stroking the blanket, paused briefly. After a moment, Kishiar resumed speaking.

"One more thing?"

"Yes. I suppose you may have guessed from recent events, but I have very little power against monsters, and thus can't use my power on items made from monster byproducts."

This applied to ropes made from sinews, weapons made from ground teeth or bones, or poison made from mixing blood. While not commonly used due to the difficulty in processing, these items were not extremely rare either. After vaguely recalling memories from a previous life, Yuder added a sentence.

"I wanted you to be the only one aware of this, hence why I'm telling you now."

Kishiar was silent for a while. As Yuder wondered about his expression hidden in the darkness, a low voice echoed in his ear.

"...Alright. I'll keep it in mind since you trust me enough to tell me."

He had clearly understood the implication behind Yuder's words. Yuder nodded, feeling a slight relief.

Despite several protests, Kishiar ended up staying by Yuder's side until his temperature returned to normal and he fell asleep. Both of them could palpably feel that the weight of the time they spent together was growing heavier compared to before.

Even being with someone could bring about such a myriad of emotions, a fact that still surprised Yuder every day, despite experiencing it constantly. He hoped that the mages of the Western Mage Union would find a good solution quickly, before he drowned in that enormous wave of feelings, or perhaps before the second dispatch arrived.

"Within the Great Sarain Forest, the earth shook and mountains crumbled as a great upheaval occurred, and it is said that this was not caused by a natural disaster or monsters, but by human power."

When this rumor first started to spread, people didn't believe it as fact. The Great Sarain Forest was not just anywhere. It was a vast labyrinth-like forest that had slowly grown over nearly a thousand years in the western part of the Empire. Many swordmasters and mages had tried to conquer it using their powers, but none of them could stop the growth of the forest. All humans could do there was merely build a few mountain cottages or pave small paths for trade routes and prevent the growing trees from consuming these efforts.

The Duke of Tain, whose base was in the western part of the Empire, thought it more credible to believe that the Duke of Peletta had become the owner of the Divine Sword than to believe such a far-fetched tale. Indeed, after the incident, the Duke of Peletta had been conspicuously absent, residing within the Cavalry.

However, not long after, when new rumors began to spread with renewed force, it became difficult for anyone to laugh it off as fabrication.

"Reliable testimonies are flooding in from the western border villages that throughout the night, monster cries and earthquakes continued from the direction of the Great Sarain Forest."

"After the incident, the surge in monster abnormalities abruptly ceased."

"The one who caused this upheaval was an Awakener, dispatched from the Cavalry to find and stop the cause of the monster outbreaks in the west."

"Moreover, around the same time, it was reported that numerous Sun God Priests in the west detected a massive divine power moving in the Great Sarain Forest..."

As rumors and testimonies continuously flowed from the west, spreading everywhere via all sorts of routes, many began to be bewildered. And as if waiting for people's attention to gather, the Cavalry announced official news.

The news was enough to whack the back of the heads of those who had so far scoffed at the Cavalry, not paying it any mind.

"What is this all about? The ones dispatched first by the Cavalry are already in the west, and the Duke of Peletta, wielding the Divine Sword, is among them? And there are plans to dispatch a second group soon? Is this the so-called accurate information you've brought me?"

Angry, the Duke of Tain heaved a breath, raising his voice, causing his servants to tremble in prostration.

"Haven't I been told that the Duke of Peletta is still residing within the Cavalry? There has been no movement, and if this is true, what happens to my dignity?"

The fact that they had failed to properly monitor the movements of a power group that had infiltrated right into the middle of the Tain family, who had influence throughout the west, was a shameful enough matter to warrant ridicule.

Turning

Chapter 303

For quite a while, Duke Tain smoldered with fury, finally calming himself enough to speak with evident effort.

"No... it isn't so. We cannot blindly trust their words. Everyone knows that His Majesty the Emperor has been plotting lately, lending strength to his brother. Undoubtedly, his schemes are involved in this too."

The Duke immediately dispatched a message to Tainu, ordering them to verify whether the rumors circulating in the capital were true. He also summoned Theorado, the Commander of the Imperial

Knights, who might know if Kishiar was truly absent from the Cavalry. However, the responses brought bad news.

The urgent letter from Baron Willhem of Tainu read, 'I am not sure if the Cavalry is here, but it is true that a massive earthquake occurred in Great Sarain Forest. We are in touch with the people sent there, so please wait a little longer.' And from Theorado, the Commander of the Imperial Knights, 'Due to training schedules, I am unable to visit for a while. Please refrain from contacting me.' Holding these two letters, Duke Tain was consumed by rage.

"This is unbelievable..."

He had assumed that if the Cavalry were to send people to the West, they would undoubtedly pass through the major western city, Tainu, and meet with Baron Willhem. That was why he entrusted Baron Willhem with their management, but the outcome was far from satisfactory.

If the Cavalry had indeed done something in Great Sarain Forest, it meant they ignored his orders and didn't even stop by Tainu. Moreover, what had Baron Willhem, whose duty it was to oversee the West, been doing while all of this unfolded?

'In his previous letter, he said that they had sent mages and knights to Great Sarain Forest to protect the investment hub. If that's true, how could he not know about the incident there?'

The answer was obvious. Baron Willhem was just pretending to obey him while neglecting his duties. Even if he could tolerate his cousin Theorado, who was always indifferent to family affairs, it was hard to forgive the Cavalry, Duke Peletta, and Baron Willhem, all who clearly ignored him.

'Damn it. Leaving all those matters aside, I can't even confirm what happened to the Western trade hubs I've been painstakingly building.'

It was too soon to expect returns on his investments in the South, but he had been hoping that once the hubs were completed in the West, they would generate wealth. The possibility of complications arising there as well gave him a sudden headache.

As he often did when irritated, Duke Tain decided to visit the upscale gambling house he frequented. So engrossed in his desire to forget his troubles, he didn't notice the figures discreetly following him.

"Your Majesty. A courier from the West arrived at House Tain."

Emperor Keilusa, who had been reviewing documents, stopped at the attendant's distant report.

"I see... He must have heard the news. Any reaction?"

"He was furious, but for now, he seems to be behaving as usual."

"Understood. Keep a close eye on him and report any unusual activity immediately to Duke Peletta and me."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

After the attendant had withdrawn, the Emperor set down his pen and surveyed the clutter of tea cups scattered across his desk. Beside them, a basket filled with faintly glowing red stones. They were mediums infused with the power of the Red Stone, gifts from Kishiar. The Emperor picked up one of the stones, holding it in his hand, a fleeting hint of bitterness crossing his gaze.

"Foolish boy."

Moments later, he could no longer suppress the burgeoning cough and dropped his writing instrument. Blood splattered over the hastily covered handkerchief.

"Your Majesty!"

The chief attendant, who had returned to the room, quickly supported him. The Emperor brushed his hand away, gasping heavily for a while. Noticing the blood staining his lips and the hollow, dark circles under his eyes, the elderly attendant's face turned somber.

"Your Majesty..."

"Did I not tell you not to touch me."

"How could I not, Your Majesty?" replied the attendant, though the Emperor ignored him, turning his head. He firmly refused all suggestions, whether to summon the royal physician or to contact the head court mage.

"I need none of that."

"But you must at least receive a prescription to alleviate the pain. You haven't slept for days."

"Such things might alleviate the pain temporarily, but that's all. I dislike drugs that dull the mind. I still have much to do. If you're going to keep making a fuss, at least bring me some tea."

There was only one type of tea the Emperor desired in moments like these. It was brewed from medicinal herbs personally grown and sent by the Empress. The Emperor put down his pen and removed his glasses to drink the tea brought by the attendant. For a fleeting moment, a hint of warmth returned to his pale complexion.

"What is the Empress doing today?"

"She went to tend to the garden after finishing her duties. She also wished to inform you that she would like to have dinner together tomorrow evening..."

"I see..."

The Emperor lowered his gaze without giving a definitive answer.

"And Katchian, is he still confined in the palace?"

"Yes."

Though Katchian, the crown prince, had fully recovered from the physical wounds of the assassin's attack, his mental state had not improved at all. Every day, he lashed out and broke objects, as if his previously wicked laughter had been but an illusion. The primary cause of his madness was the unbearable scar on his face.

"Duke Diarca must be quite worried."

"Indeed, he seems to be. He's looking everywhere for a way to cure the madness."

"His coveted position is now precarious. His impatience must be unbearable. It would be best if they focus on that until this matter is settled."

The Emperor, who mercilessly mocked Duke Diarca without a hint of humor, coughed a few more times.

"I thought Herne would have something to say by now... but it seems they're still out of sorts."

"Yes, Your Majesty. If there was a problem with the Herne family, the Empress would have already chided them. Please, do not worry."

The Emperor faintly smiled at the mention of the Empress, but it quickly faded. A deep darkness washed over his sickly countenance.

"I still have a long journey ahead... yet my life is fading too quickly."

"Your Majesty..."

The bitter confession filled with regret brought a gloomy look to the attendant's eyes, who knew the meaning behind the Emperor's words.

"Do not worry. I have no intention of dying so meekly."

Sighing, the Emperor put on his glasses again. At that moment, the attendant noticed a royal courier bird circling outside the window.

"Your Majesty, a new bird has been sent from the west."

"From Duke Peletta?"

"Yes."

He immediately read the letter brought by the royal courier bird. As he perused the rather short letter, the eyes hidden behind his spectacles repeatedly widened and then narrowed.

"...I wondered why they are rushing to recall the second detachment from the Cavalry."

"Your Majesty, has something happened?"

Nothing had happened to Kishiar. If anything, the change concerned his newly appointed assistant. The Emperor recalled the memory of the time when Kishiar first reported the enormous incident that occurred in Great Sarain Forest via a letter.

When he first read the tale of a Cavalry member who single-handedly fought a colossal monster that could have potentially swept over not just Great Sarain Forest but possibly the whole western region, and eventually emerged victorious after collapsing a hill, the Emperor also doubted the sincerity of the story. He was well aware that his brother would not lie about such matters, but the tale was beyond imagination.

The Cavalry member had suffered severe injuries for killing the monster. And Kishiar was in a state of staying in Great Sarain Forest, even altering his original plans, in order to find a way to heal him.

The Emperor conjured up an image of his strikingly handsome brother. Kishiar might appear to live more spontaneously than anyone on the surface, but he was in fact more meticulous than anyone else. Although the letter cited various reasons such as not just for healing his assistant and increasing tasks to investigate, the Emperor's gaze lingered only on the place where Kishiar had written the assistant's name. It was something akin to a blood-bonded intuition.

'The assistant... Yuder Aile. Who was he?'

He had previously granted last names to a few Cavalry members who followed Kishiar. If he had come along then, he must have seen his face, but his memory was so faint that he couldn't quite recall.

The Emperor folded Kishiar's letter. He felt slightly worried, but also found it intriguing.

'It's strange. He had never shown such haste even for his treasured Nathan Zuckerman, or the Peletta Knights whom he raised himself...'

Kishiar asked the Emperor for a few things in the letter. As brothers engaged in a grand plan, they were not hard requests to grant.

"Tell those in the West to spread the word faster. It is necessary to recognize the Peletta Duke as the new owner of the Divine Sword as soon as possible. Also, make contact with the Pearl Tower."

"The Pearl Tower... you say?"

"Yes. There seem to be a few criminals we sent to them from Great Sarain Forest, and it appears the Peletta Duke does not want to let them off with a light punishment."

After hearing a few more directives, the chief attendant politely excused himself. The Emperor began to waver again, staring out the window. The crimson sunset staining the western sky resembled blood.

That blood would soon pour evenly over the heads of those who seized the West. At least until that day, he could not die.

Turning

Chapter 304

The Empire's attention was focused on the Cavalry, but ironically, the Cavalry building within the Imperial Knight's base was quieter than ever. This was because, after the departure of the second dispatched unit towards the west, there was hardly any personnel left behind.

Thanks to this, people other than the unit members who were working there finally had the opportunity to relax. Among them were two Awakeners from the Star of Nagran, Gayle and Doyle.

"There's no cleaning or dishwashing today. Can we really slack off like this?"

"Seems so. The kindly old man said if you want to eat, eat. If you want to exercise, go to the back and do it."

Of the three Deputy Commanders, Steiber, the only one left to guard the Cavalry, was seen by the brothers as nothing more than a good-hearted old man. In fact, apart from Steiber, everyone they met here seemed excessively kind to them.

"I used to think I'd just die if I got caught while working in a noble's house... but now, it feels like I could live like this for the rest of my life."

"Same here."

The Cavalry members were truly strange. They didn't torture Gayle and Doyle, nor did they make their lives miserable or force them to work. Occasionally, they would ask questions, but they never insisted on an answer if they refused to give one. When they complained about feeling suffocated in their room, they were allowed to roam within the premises. They even felt awkward when the brothers offered to help with chores.

Although they couldn't understand why they were still being kept here, the initial fear and aversion they felt upon capture had long since melted away. The brothers ate to their hearts' content and comfortably lay in the empty garden, looking up at the sky. They didn't know about the outside world, but their hearts were more peaceful than ever.

"Doyle, should we ask if we can stay here and help out when they come back this time?"

"Do you think they'd let us? Considering where we come from... And the Sage might be looking for us, do you think we should stay here anyway?"

Gayle's face darkened at the mention of the Sage. However, he soon mumbled, "They probably think we're dead and have forgotten about us by now. We're not betraying anyone by staying here a little longer."

"You know, when I was there, constantly being told to hold a sword and train was too much for me. You also hated seeing blood."

"..."

"Let's just close our eyes, pretend we never met the Sage, and earn some money here. You saw it too, right? The Awakeners who were rescued from the noble's house and brought here with us, they earn money working here too. I discreetly asked how much they make, and apparently, it's enough to buy a farm in a few years."

"Really?!"

"They all already know we don't know much about the Sage or the noble. They might agree if we ask."

Their lifelong dream was to own their own flock and house. Just as their resolve began to waver, a Cavalry member called out to them loudly.

"Hey, over there! Can you come over here and give me a hand?"

Originally, only a select few could converse with the brothers, such as the three Deputy Commanders and the assistant. But now, most of them were absent, and Steiber, the lone Deputy Commander, wasn't there. The ordinary member who had called out to them seemed to regard the brothers as just regular workers around the base.

"Uh... what should we do?"

"What do you mean 'what?' They asked for help. If we help nicely, won't they put in a good word for us when those guys come?"

The brothers nervously turned towards the Cavalry member. The member, clad in a black uniform, hurriedly took out several letters from his pocket and handed them to them.

"Could you deliver these for me? I'll pay you for the errand. I have something to do right now, so I can't go out myself."

"Uh... um..."

"In a little while, the cart that tours the Imperial Knights base every day will come to the front gate, so you just have to give them to the cart driver then. I'll count on you!"

In a blink, the brothers were left holding a few letters and coins. They were initially startled, but it seemed fine since they only had to go to the front gate of the Imperial Knights base. With uneasy faces, the brothers headed towards the main gate. As the member had said, it wasn't long before they saw a cart approaching from afar.

"H-here! Stop!"

When Gayle waved his hand and yelled, the cart slowly reduced its speed and came to a halt in front of them. The brothers tried to awkwardly hand over the letters to the cart driver who was coming down from the cart, but after a moment, they froze in shock. The face of the cart driver, who had taken off his hat, was an unexpected person to see here.

"N-Nahan?!"

"Quiet."

Nahan, dressed as a cart driver, clicked his tongue and signaled them to be quiet. Startled, the brothers closed their mouths.

"Nahan. How on earth... didn't you abandon us?"

"That's not something you should say to the person who came to rescue you."

His cold, gray eyes, hard as steel, scanned their faces.

"You two look well. It seems you've been doing quite well here."

Their faces turned red instantly. They thought that Nahan was mocking them for comfortably betraying them without any torture.

"It's all because of you! Because you abandoned us, we had to be here...!"

"Ah, no. It's all my fault."

Another foreign young man stuck his face out from the cart and interrupted with a face full of guilt. Nahan, despite his dislike, saw the brothers flinch simultaneously with surprise. Their remaining affection for the young man left them at a loss.

"Hosanna! You're here too? What on earth are we going to...!"

"I'm really sorry. I made a thoughtless request to you and you had to go through this... but it will be okay now....."

"Let's take the idle chat outside."

Nahan interrupted sharply, scanning the surroundings.

"It took me a few days to infiltrate undetected and call you two out. Come on, we have to go back."

"Y-you called us? When? We were asked to deliver a letter..."

Nahan chuckled.

"What do you think was the reason for someone to conveniently appear at this time and ask you two to deliver a letter?"

The brothers' mouths fell open. Nahan scowled at their faces.

"Get on the cart quickly. The surroundings are all protected by ancient magic, so Hosanna can't use his teleportation ability, and it's difficult for me to use illusion abilities."

"But..."

The brothers looked at each other with trembling eyes. The rescue opportunity they had only dreamed of had finally come, but they couldn't feel entirely happy. Seemingly reading their moment of hesitation, Nahan's eyes slightly narrowed.

"By any chance, don't you want to leave?"

"No. No."

Doyle reflexively denied it. However, Gayle didn't open his mouth.

"Gayle?"

Hosanna, who stood beside Nahan, opened his mouth anxiously. Gayle clenched his fist tightly and glared at Nahan. The scales of the fierce debate in his mind had just tipped a bit more to one side.

"I don't want to go."

"Gayle! Why would you say such a thing? Have you been brainwashed? Or..."

"Nobody did that!"

Gayle roared out loud.

"Nobody forced anything on us, and we didn't say anything. We didn't betray you or anything like that. Just assume we're dead and leave us. It will remain a secret that you were here."

The surroundings were suddenly enveloped in an icy silence. Gayle looked at Nahan with a slight fear, but he didn't relax his clenched fist. As Hosanna, pale and taut, looked up at Nahan, a chilly voice flowed from his lips.

"Well... If that's what our brothers want, I'm inclined to agree. But I'm not sure if the Sage would see it the same way."

"I'm sorry to the Sage... but I'm sure they will understand."

"Really?"

His gaze moved past Gayle and Doyle towards the Cavalry building.

"Do you know that a large group of Cavalry appeared near our western outpost? Our brothers and sisters, who didn't even realize they were Cavalry, were really surprised to find out late. I heard they even discovered our base."

"Wh, what...?"

Startled by the sudden news, Nahan spat out one more sentence to the disoriented brothers.

"You once stayed at that outpost too. Can you truly be sure that you didn't reveal our western outpost to them?"

"We didn't say a word! So, did the brothers at that outpost get killed by the Cavalry?"

"No. But they'll probably move soon. It's an outpost that was built with great effort, so many of our brothers and sisters will be upset."

The brothers were momentarily speechless.

"And I'm sorry, but I already reported to the Sage that you might be alive before coming here. I don't know what will happen if I report that you refuse to return."

"Nahan, you..."

Nahan exhaled, looking at the pale brothers, and opened his mouth with a voice cold yet soft.

"It's not like I wanted to do this. I naturally thought the brothers would return, and I had to prepare in case Hosanna and I were in danger, so I just reported. However... If you need time to think, I can help."

Looking at the two pairs of simple eyes asking, "How?" Nahan quietly answered.

"I won't report that you refused to return for now. Until we come back next time, you think well about whether the brothers here are really good people who leave you be. If your opinion hasn't changed the next time we come, we will do as you wish."

"...How can we trust you."

"I always keep my word to our brothers and sisters. You know that, right?"

Only then did the brothers believe what Nahan said. They heaved a deep sigh as they watched the departing cart as if nothing had happened. The emergence of a secret was immensely uncomfortable.

Turning

Chapter 305

"Sir, I have a question... if I may."

Nahan turned to the worried voice emanating from the carriage, his hand still holding the reins of the horses.

"What is it?"

"If Gayle and Doyle decide to stay here next time, will you really... let them do as they wish?"

"I made a promise, so I guess I have to."

"But..."

The words of Hosanna, seemingly about to continue, did not follow for quite a while. Nahan exhaled softly through his nose, gripping the reins a bit tighter, and casually opened his mouth.

"If you have something to say, say it directly, Hosanna. You think I've left them for another reason, don't you?"

"No, that's not what I... "

"Actually, you're right. I want Gayle and Doyle to learn more about the Cavalry."

For a moment, the faint sound of Hosanna swallowing his breath could be heard.

"You don't mean to... oppose the Cavalry, do you?"

"No. Even if they belong somewhere else, the Cavalry members are still our brothers and sisters. There's no reason to oppose them. But that also doesn't mean we should continue to ignore them completely."

Nahan's pale, lifeless eyes scanned over the Imperial Knights passing by in the distance. None of them seemed to find this ordinary wagon unusual, but in Nahan's gaze, a limitless cold emotion filled him as he watched them.

"They're tracking us, so we need to know about them too."

"But the Sage said..."

"To eliminate internal threats, sometimes you have to deceive even your own hands and feet."

His emotionless voice was so cold that Hosanna involuntarily shivered.

"I'm just... I've heard a lot of people saying that you're not listening to the Sage these days... and I'm worried about what might happen if this issue is added to that... "

"Hosanna."

At the low call, Hosanna's body flinched.

"My belief has not changed since the day the Star of Nagran was created. Whatever I do, it's for all of us, not just for me. So, if it seems like someone among us has let go first, it would be the Sage, not me."

The rolling carriage was then enveloped in silence for a long time.

"So... after your trip to the West, are you planning to go back to Gayle and Doyle?"

"Yes."

Nahan responded briefly as he slipped out onto a side road where the knights were coming and going.

"Honestly, I don't think there's a need for such a divide over the issue of moving our base, but if we don't resolve this problem now, all of our brothers and sisters will continue to be confused."

"If the Cavalry is there, the Cavalry member we met before might be there too... please be careful."

Nahan immediately recognized the Cavalry member that Hosanna was talking about. A surge of interest bubbled up as he recalled the black-haired Cavalry member whom they had encountered by rare chance several times.

"...Alright."

"Yuder. Did you hear? It seems the mages have finally found something that might heal you."

Yuder turned his head towards Kanna who had entered through the door while he was eating breakfast in bed.

"They... found something?"

"The Commander instructed Gakane, Hinn, and Finn to investigate the Magic Spring Ruins. As soon as they finish checking the surroundings, they'll start preparing the magic."

Yuder immediately put down his spoon. Lusan, the priest who had been helping him eat, exclaimed in an excited voice, "That's great news!"

"They really managed to do it, didn't they? Disassembled that enormous monster carcass and dragged it all the way here, and after all sorts of struggles."

"That's what I'm saying. I'm astonished myself. We've finally found the real answer this time, haven't we?"

Kanna and Lusan chattered away happily for quite a while. Yuder heard their conversation, but hardly any of it really registered in his mind.

'Did they really...find a way to remove the traces of the amplification circle?'

Just as Kishiar had hoped for, they had indeed found the answer before the second dispatch team arrived. His determination was remarkable, yet it didn't seem quite real.

Lost in his tangled, trailing thoughts, he realized a bit later than usual that the two had left and someone else had entered.

"What are you thinking about so deeply?"

"..."

With a cool, pleasant scent, Kishiar sat down next to him, reaching out to gently touch his forehead and cheek, feeling for a fever as he often did.

"You're burning up. We need to put a damp cloth on you."

"Commander, is it true that you've found a way to remove the traces of the amplification circle?"

As he asked his question, he sensed a pause in Kishiar's movement beside him.

"Did you hear it from Kanna? Yes, it's true."

A cold, wet towel was placed on Yuder's forehead.

"We plan to execute the dispelling magic by tomorrow evening if all goes well."

"What should I do then?"

"What should you do?"

Kishiar, holding the wet towel, let out a short laugh as though he'd said something amusing.

"Of course, the subject himself doesn't need to do anything. The mages and I will take care of the preparations."

"I've also heard that you've ordered the inspection of the Magic Spring Ruins..."

"From the time we've spent examining the spring, we've concluded that using its magic power wouldn't pose much risk. I intend to borrow from it, instead of using my own magic power."

After a moment of hesitation, Yuder quietly opened his mouth.

"The mages... they probably wouldn't like that."

"If they don't like it, what can they do? As long as the person I care about likes me, that's enough."

Everything else seemed superfluous. He felt an unusually warm and bright emotion emanating from the man who, muttering to himself, took Yuder's hand. He must have been pleased, having finally found an answer, even if it might not seem like it.

"And besides, this was originally an idea proposed by the Western Mage Union's leader. The only change is that the caster has switched from him to me, so they shouldn't have any complaints."

"That's a relief then..."

If Kishiar wasn't directly using his own magic power, it shouldn't put too much strain on his body. The thought of tampering with the Magic Spring was a bit worrying, but he supposed that would be considered by those who were more knowledgeable about magic, so he decided not to worry too much.

It was as if Kishiar had noticed Yuder's thoughts because he mentioned something similar.

"From their perspective, this situation isn't necessarily all bad. The casting of this magic might even provide an opportunity to understand the growth power of the Great Sarain Forest that has long been kept secret."

What did the dispelling magic have to do with the growth power of the Great Sarain Forest? After a moment of silence, a possible answer popped into Yuder's mind.

"Do you believe there's a connection... between the growth power of the Great Sarain Forest and the Magic Spring?"

"It's a hypothesis for now, but yes."

As the elegant voice explained a few things that it had discovered while observing the Magic Spring, Yuder momentarily lost his senses. He thought he only drifted off like this when he saw Kishiar's face directly, but nowadays he often found himself dazed even just by hearing his voice.

His entire senses were immediately drawn towards Kishiar with only the voice coming through his ears and the touch on his skin. The bias was so extreme that it was hard to notice anything else.

"...and also the fact that the strange crack no longer appears, I think maybe when the magic power gathered inside the spring fails to maintain a certain balance, problems like these occur."

His consciousness, which was floating intoxicated by the warm, pleasant voice, barely regained its footing at the mention of the crack.

"A crack... are you saying?"

"Yes. Didn't that crack look almost identical in shape to the ones that appear when monsters spawn? Of course, it was a little bigger and remained in place for a longer time, though."

"Yes."

"Old scriptures including Scripture of the Sun God often refer to the crack that appears when monsters spawn as a bad omen indicating the balance of the world is being disrupted. Magic is also one of the forces that maintain the balance of the world, so if it is disrupted, it could very well cause problems."

Balance of the world. Yuder mulled over the words. He thought he heard something similar when he was looking for a solution to the disaster in his previous life.

'Doomsday theorists who said that the reason for the constant appearances of great disasters and monsters is because the balance of the world has crumbled, and that eventually everyone will be destroyed, they often said things like that.'

"The spell I will cast tomorrow requires an immense amount of magic power. If we observe how the spring and the Great Sarain Forest change after draining a large amount of magic power that has been accumulating and amplifying for a long time, we may understand their relationship better. It's a good opportunity to closely observe the flow and changes of magic power."

"I see."

"It's a phenomenon that's almost impossible to observe now, but if you look at the journals of old mages, they say that in places where magic power of enormous scale occurred, sometimes changes occurred in the surrounding natural environment over a period of days, or even years. Either all the flowers and grasses would wither and die and not grow back, or the opposite would occur, or the seasons would change."

So, it seemed that Kishiar wanted to say that a similar phenomenon might have occurred between the Magic Spring and the Great Sarain Forest. Yuder let out a small breath as he listened to Kishiar's voice, who seemed to be quite intrigued by the story.

"...I'm glad to see you're in good spirits."

"Hmm? Was it that obvious?"

Instead of answering, Yuder nodded slightly. He heard Kishiar faintly laugh.

"Well, well. Even if you can't see, I can't deceive my assistant. As a reward... yes. Shall we go for a walk?"

Yuder paused at the sudden suggestion. It would be a lie if he said he didn't feel stuffy from being in the room all the time, but he wasn't sure whether it would be alright to go out considering his fever and weak physical state.

"Considering my condition... wouldn't it be difficult?"

"Don't worry about that."

Turning

Chapter 306

"Don't worry about that."

The confident tone in his voice evoked a strange, uneasy premonition.

"If I carry you, there won't be any issues."

The foreboding quickly morphed into reality. Yuder dismissed the suggestion immediately, without a hint of hesitation.

"I don't want to."

"What if I carry you on my back instead?"

"Whether you carry me or not is not the issue. I don't want to go out that badly."

"You make it sound so grave. There's no simpler way to take a walk together. You can't possibly dislike it because I suggested carrying you?"

"What are you saying...?"

Just as he was about to refute the unfounded certainty, he hesitated when he recalled the incidents that had occurred up until then. Starting from the moment Yuder clung onto him when his second gender manifested, until just yesterday when he compliantly allowed himself to be moved for meals, he tried to push these memories from his mind. Recollections of him taking the initiative to hold onto the other party also subtly emerged. It took a bit of time to come up with another reason as he tried to think beyond these.

"Inside and outside...aren't they different?"

"Different? What's different?"

His blood boiled slightly at the calm voice, feigning ignorance despite understanding his meaning. Yuder decided to drop the indirect expressions and speak directly.

"If we behave that way outside, we can't avoid drawing attention. Rumors will inevitably spread. I thought, Commander, you had always taken that into consideration..."

Yuder knew all too well what the consequences would be when such unnecessary rumors spread; he had seen it happen countless times in his previous life. Therefore, in this life, he strived not to let their relationship appear as anything more than that of a normal Commander and his assistant, seen by the public.

He did eventually succumb to the massive urges toward Kishiar, but that didn't mean he wanted to repeat the foolishness of his past. The multitude of emotions he felt for Kishiar and the potential dangers of their current situation were definitely separate issues.

He assumed Kishiar would be well aware of this too. Yet here he was, brazenly suggesting a public stroll while carrying him, fully aware others might see.

'Surely, he hasn't forgotten that we're not in our Cavalry base but in the heart of the Western Mage Union due to his overly joyous mood.'

The Cavalry members might not blink an eye at Kishiar's peculiar nature, as they were already well accustomed to it, but the mages were different. Memories from the past flooded Yuder's mind in an instant.

"Unnecessary rumors, huh... I'm surprised you think that way."

"What's so surprising?"

"I thought my assistant would be the least bothered about my status or name in this world. It's surprising to find out that's not the case."

Yuder was momentarily at a loss for words.

"...If I've seemed disrespectful until now, I apologize... but of course I know who you are, Commander, and I care more than anyone else."

"See? That's exactly the kind of response. If you were genuinely wary of me, you would never be able to answer like that."

For the second time, Yuder was speechless. Arguments formed and fell apart in his mind over and over again.

"...I believe anyone else could have given the same response."

"Is that so? If I'd said the same thing to Gakane Bolunwald or Kanna Wand, I don't think I would have received a similar answer."

"What are you trying to say, then? While I may not understand the necessity of going outside, my belief that there's no need for you, Commander, to carry me hasn't changed."

"Calm yourself. You're feverish."

After a sharp retort, he took a small breath, and a cool hand touched his cheek along with a calm voice. Yuder regretted that the pleasant atmosphere of moments ago had once again descended into silence.

Just as he hesitated and was about to speak, Kishiar began first.

"I apologize. I didn't mean to unsettle you. Perhaps I've upset you unnecessarily out of greed, thinking you were okay enough for this."

"..."

"But there's one thing I want to say."

After his fading words were cut off, the sound of Kishiar taking a slow breath could be heard.

"I don't find being with you even slightly disgraceful."

Suddenly, a sharp pain was felt inside Yuder's chest. The man who held his hand, seemingly to confirm that Yuder was still listening to him, continued speaking slowly.

"Rather, the opposite might be true. The scandalous rumor that the Duke of Peletta, who usually enjoys vulgarities, is trying to block the path of a promising young talent could circulate. And the Emperor, unable to bear it, could even give me a warning. That kind of outcome might even have a higher probability."

"What...nonsense are you speaking of?"

"It's not nonsense. You probably don't know since you've been lying down here the whole time, but stories of an amazing awakener who has shaken the entire Great Sarain Forest are currently spreading far and wide across the Empire."

There were faint laughter and unfamiliar emotions in his voice as he whispered that once this matter was over and they returned, a crowd of people, incomparable to before, would try to capture Yuder.

"Think about it. An unprecedented talent who also shines brightly with young and vibrant beauty is stuck under the Duke of Peletta. Even the Emperor would find it a pitiful story to just leave it be, thinking that such a person, who he himself would want to reward, is stuck in such a place. So, the story I just mentioned is also quite possible."

Yuder shook his head. In his previous life, he had caused enough trouble to destroy and recreate many western landscapes using his power, but no one came to recruit him. Of course, the time and outcome of the incident now were much different from then, but that didn't mean Yuder Aile's popularity would suddenly skyrocket.

And even setting aside the other fabricated parts of Kishiar's story, he had no intention of responding to whoever might try to recruit him. So all of this was meaningless from the beginning.

"That story has nothing to do with me. And, please don't speak of yourself in such a way..."

Whenever Kishiar belittled himself, he couldn't help but feel nauseous, just like before. Looking at Kishiar's tightly closed lips that smiled stubbornly, his voice was serious a moment later.

"Yuder. When all this is over and we return from the West, I plan to formally introduce you to the Emperor and Empress."

His heart pounded alarmingly for the second time, uncontrollably. A stronger force than before was put into the large hand that held Yuder's.

"What do you think I'll introduce you as?"

"..."

The assistant to the Cavalry Commander. A 20-year-old commoner Awakener.

There could be no other answer, yet Kishiar's words sounded as if there indeed was an alternative. He pulled Yuder's hand, briefly placing his lips on the fingers he held.

Startled by the heat, akin to being branded with a hot iron, Yuder stiffened. Kishiar looked at him, whispering with a conviction firmer than ever.

"You once said you could forever remain my cherished and adorable assistant and subordinate, if that's what I wished... But are you aware? The prerequisite for that statement."

"If you wish so." A sigh laden with deep longing escaped from the man's lips, uttering these words.

"My heart is already here. It was taken away so irresistibly, I have no method of retrieval - and even if I did, I wouldn't want to. ...But that doesn't mean you should naturally provide the same response."

"..."

"If you are willing to accept me beyond that, the story can change drastically. If I could get that worthwhile answer, no matter how long I have to wait, it wouldn't be in vain."

If you were to sum up his words with ordinary terms, the closest might be a proposal. Kishiar, who had given a clear answer that couldn't be ignored or perceived differently, exhaled a thin breath. The weight of the warmth he offered was familiar. He was certainly recalling the moment when he thought Yuder had died in his arms. Such a certainty sunk in for no apparent reason.

Yuder clenched his invisible eyes shut. As his heart warmed, a tremendous churning stirred in his belly. Despite several deep breaths, the pain did not abate.

When Yuder said nothing, the hand that had been stroking his cheek fell away. Feeling the signs of him letting go of his hand and standing up, Yuder was engulfed in a chill coldness. His body was hot from fever, but for some reason, it felt cold inside. An intense pain and urge that couldn't be explained kept shaking his head.

He bit his lip as he heard the door opening.

"...Tonight."

At that moment, the footsteps halted abruptly. Yuder strained to find his voice.

"When the sun sets, and the moon rises... then, it will be fine."

"..."

"You don't have to come if you're tired..."

"...As if."

The quiet, yet passionate response came back.

"So when the sun sets and the moon rises, it's okay to take a walk with me?"

"...Yes."

"Then I guess I must earnestly wish for the sun to hurry and cross to the west today."

With a bright laughter, the door closed. Yuder remained motionless for quite a while, pondering what response he had blurted out.

Turning

Chapter 307

The night that Yuder wished wouldn't come arrived all too quickly. As Gakane, who had tended to him one last time, bid him a good night's rest and left, Yuder let out a deep sigh.

In the meantime, he had inquired amongst the others and surprisingly found out that a portion of what Kishiar had said was indeed true. The speed at which the rumors about Yuder killing Pethuamet had spread seemed to have taken the other members by surprise too.

'We only heard information, we don't know how or what rumors spread. But... the mood among the mages seems to have changed from before.'

With a mutter about how surprising it might be once he was fully healed, Gakane left, making Yuder wish all the more for the success of the magic casting for removing the traces if the amplification circle that would happen the next day.

'Having been bedridden much longer than expected... it would be nice to be able to move about, even just a little.'

At first, he found it unbearable to just lie there without doing anything, but now, thanks to his colleagues who took turns keeping him company, spending the day eating and sleeping didn't feel like sitting on a bed of needles.

Even though he was almost oblivious to what was happening outside, the fact that he could feel so stable was undoubtedly because they, and Kishiar, had taken such good care of Yuder.

When he thought of Kishiar, his mind naturally drifted to the conversation they had earlier that day. In fact, what Kishiar had said lingered in Yuder's mind even while he was with the others. It was a conversation that had been shocking enough to do so.

Kishiar had said that being with Yuder was not a disgrace to him.

As he revisited those resolute words, he once again felt a tingling sensation deep within his chest.

What could he call this feeling? Shock? Or pain?

He hadn't expected Kishiar, of all people, who had been involved in the disgrace in his previous life, to say such things.

'The Kishiar of my past life... He used to tell me not to fight every time I got into trouble because of that disgrace, but he never mentioned his personal thoughts.'

Yuder had never wished to hear what Kishiar had to say. He assumed it would naturally upset him, and he did not want to mention the distasteful rumor, even inadvertently.

But what was the reality?

Did the Kishiar of his past life consider that rumor, and the truth behind it, an unpleasant disgrace?

'...I can't know.'

He can't know now. If it were before, he would have stopped thinking at this point.

However, now he couldn't just stop there, feeling a throbbing pain as if holes had been punched somewhere inside of him. Yuder thought about the Kishiar from his past life that he saw through dreams and memories that he knew yet didn't know.

The man who had hidden himself behind a cold and thick wall until his last day. The man from a distant past who knew the emotions Yuder felt for him but disappeared without giving a proper explanation.

However, he couldn't deny that the things he was forcibly taught by that man enabled Yuder Aile to survive this far.

'I thought he was a meaningless opponent... but perhaps that wasn't the case. If so, what did he think of me?'

What did the Kishiar of the past really think of Yuder Aile?

His successor, a casual bedmate, or perhaps there was something more?

He felt incredibly strange. It was the first time he had ever entertained such a thought. He had never really cared about how Kishiar viewed or thought of him, neither in this life nor in the previous one.

'There were many others aside from Kishiar who treated me differently in my past and current life... Why does he alone feel so peculiar?'

The result could vary tremendously depending on the type of relationship formed and the shared experiences with the same person. Gakane, the Eldore siblings, Enon, and his other comrades in the Cavalry were living proof of that.

So, he thought that the transparent and honest emotions Kishiar was currently showing towards Yuder could also be understood as part of such changes. Yet, something felt different, a feeling that wouldn't leave his heart.

"...Is he already asleep?"

At that moment, there was a rattle near the window, followed by the sound of a cool breeze and a familiar presence entering the room. Yuder reflexively turned his head, a sudden sense of bewilderment welling up.

“Why are you entering through there instead of the door...?”

“I needed to come and go unnoticed, so I climbed through the window.”

Yuder answered, his voice trembling slightly.

“I was told... this is the second floor.”

“Don’t worry. When I was in the palace, I managed to navigate even the fifth floor just fine. Nobody knew I was going in and out. Of course, it’ll be the same today.”

For a moment, Yuder recalled how his past self had often climbed through the office window even after retiring. Despite evading all sorts of surveillance and infiltrating successfully, it seemed he had been accustomed to such activities from the start.

Thinking of the man, who could portray a royal elegance better than anyone when he wished, shamelessly climbing through windows, stirred complicated feelings in Yuder.

“Please don’t do anything dangerous. You might get hurt.”

“I wish you’d express such concern for yourself a bit more. Now, are you ready to go?”

With a playful voice, the presence moved closer. The man who had confirmed Yuder’s temperature had gone down, and that he was dressed, seemed to ponder something for a moment, then placed a thin, long blanket over Yuder’s shoulders.

“Good. It was wise to bring a blanket. It’s a chilly night, so this will help. Now.....”

Hands supporting Yuder's legs and back lightly lifted him into an embrace. Yuder tensed, suddenly enveloped in Kishiar's scent.

"There's no need to be tense. I'll use my ability for a moment when we leave, so don't be surprised."

With confident strides, Kishiar began moving towards an unknown destination, then, without hesitation, he stretched out and jumped down. Yuder felt a faint energy lightly wrapping around his body.

'Is this... the power of an Awakener?'

What Yuder had believed to be Kishiar's power until now was a typical trait of a Shin Division member, an ability that strengthened the physical body. However, experiencing that power directly for the first time, it felt strangely different from what he had previously understood.

A strengthening ability should only affect the body. But Kishiar's energy was not only on his body but also moving in a certain direction.

'Moving the energy towards the ground, as if... pushing away...?'

Just as he got to that thought, their slowly descending bodies gently touched the ground.

"I tried to descend as slowly as possible, were you scared of the fall?"

"...Just now, what exactly did you do?"

"Huh?"

"You used the power of an Awakener that you possess, didn't you?"

"That's right."

Just as Yuder was about to say more, Kishiar, making a soft hushing noise, began to move, mumbling quietly.

"Let's find a place without people to talk. After all, this is a walk for just the two of us."

Unable to see, Yuder didn't know where they were going, but Kishiar moved without the slightest hesitation. Judging by the sound of trees in the great forest rustling in the wind close by, they seemed to have ventured deep into the forest.

"We're on the way to the Magic Spring. We'll be climbing up into the trees soon."

The man, kindly informing Yuder of their direction to prevent his curiosity, did just as he had said a moment later, leaping high into the air. Like when he fell from the bedroom, an Awakener's energy enveloped Yuder, and, feeling as though he was being pulled upwards by something, he managed to reach a great height.

"Alright, we're here."

"...Was the top of the tree our destination?"

"I climbed up earlier, and this is the best spot to see the moon. Can you feel it?"

Yuder shook his head. No matter how bright the moonlight, he could not see it with his eyes covered by bandages. Unlike sunlight, he couldn't feel its warmth, so he figured it must be nothing special.

Sitting on top of the tree, Kishiar took Yuder in his arms. He was so careful in wrapping his arm around Yuder's shoulder, it made his body instinctively shiver.

"It's a shame. The new moon is out tonight, and it's so bright with no clouds. Just like in daylight, I could see your face clearly."

His face, his hair, Kishiar murmured slowly, his voice uncomfortably close. Yuder, feeling a chill sensation inside his ears, slightly turned his head away to avoid it. But, being in Kishiar's arms, there was no escaping it.

"Aren't you cold?"

"...Yes."

"Right now, we're above a forest of trees that move like the sea beneath our feet. Every time the wind blows, the green forest sways all at once to one side, then rolls back, much like waves. Have you ever seen the sea?"

Yuder fell silent for a moment. He had seen the sea in his previous life, but not yet in this one. Not knowing how to respond, he simply closed his mouth. Fortunately, Kishiar didn't press for an answer, and his voice continued.

"The sea is beautiful during the day, but it's even more beautiful at night. As the sun sets, the boats that have been fishing all day start returning home one by one. Above these boats, countless birds follow along, dancing."

The sea that remained in Yuder's memory was just the sea itself with its rolling waves, he didn't have any impressive recollections of the people living there or the sight of boats. But as he listened to Kishiar, the scene he was describing began to take shape in the black darkness.

"You must have seen the sea quite often."

"Isn't Peletta located by the sea?"

A soft laugh brushed past his ear.

"From the top of the castle, you can see the black cliffs and the sea spread out below every day."

Turning

Chapter 308

Yuder was startled and, at the same time, felt a bitter taste at the unexpected fact that the sea described by Kishiar was indeed the likeness of Peletta. The Peletta that remained in his memory was far from such beauty.

"At first, I thought it was a desolate place, incredibly so. I had no enthusiasm because it was not a land I willingly went to. However, once I changed my attitude, I realized there was no sea as magnificent in the world. The truth is... nothing had changed."

Nothing had changed, yet the sea was desolate at one point, and at another, it was beautiful.

He had said he couldn't forget the landscape he saw then. Yuder painted in the darkness the rough sea below the black cliffs that Kishiar had softly described, a small fishing boat, and a flock of birds following the boat. He couldn't tell how beautiful it was just from the vague image he summoned in his head, but it was strange that he felt like he could understand how it appeared and felt when he heard it from Kishiar's mouth.

What kind of feelings did Kishiar have as he looked at the sea in those times?

Yuder couldn't even guess how someone who had become the Duke of Peletta unwillingly would have felt there.

"I still feel similar to that time."

Towards Yuder, who was vaguely trying to imagine Kishiar looking down at the sea from the castle, came a soft voice like a breeze grazing his cheeks.

"I never thought the meaningless Great Sarain Forest would feel as beautiful as it does now. How about you, my assistant?"

"I..."

Yuder hesitated for a moment, but then slowly continued his words.

"I cannot see it to feel it directly... But I think I understand that the scene you described would be beautiful."

"Really? It's an honor that my description was helpful."

With a smile, Kishiar answered and brought his lips close to Yuder's ear.

"Then someday... will you come to Peletta Castle? If your sight gets better, that is."

Sometimes, a phrase can unexpectedly become the key to a drastic change. To Yuder, those words served such a function.

Kishiar's words seemed to drop and knock inside his chest. It tumbled and crashed and then disappeared as if sucked into a vacant hole that was hiding in the deepest part of his bottom.

'Someday, will you go to Peletta? There's a sea there too.'

At the faint voice overflowing between the closed gaps, Yuder stopped breathing for a moment and slightly parted his lips.

What? When did I hear such a thing from Kishiar again?

As if responding to his question, a fragment of an old memory smoothly surfaced.

'Ah... yes. It was when I had just joined the Cavalry.'

The memory came back easily enough to make it strange why he hadn't thought of it. It was from the time when Yuder had just joined the Cavalry in his previous life.

Yuder enjoyed training late into the night, and occasionally, Kishiar would show up unexpectedly and give some advice to the one who stayed late, watching his movements before leaving. He remembered those words as something that had casually slipped out during their conversations...

'No. Were those really meaningless words?'

While Kishiar might not know, it could be that Yuder, who had heard those words, remembered them quite impressively. He thought that might be the case.

Why had he forgotten it until now? It was surprising and breathtaking to learn that such a small memory was linked to Kishiar and was one of the holes made inside him.

The weight of things he hadn't even known were gone suddenly weighed heavy on his head.

"...Commander."

Yuder called out to him in a daze.

"Hm?"

"I am..."

He wanted to say something, but the words wouldn't leave his mouth. What could he possibly say? Could it be that they have had a similar conversation before? That he had been to Peletta, but it was the day he killed Kishiar La Orr? He swallowed a multitude of stories that shouldn't have been said. Instead, Yuder decided to give a different response.

"...Understood. I will go."

For the first time, he was grateful that his likely distorted face was hidden behind bandages.

"Even if my eyes don't recover, I will go to see the sea."

"Really?"

Kishiar responded cheerfully. Yuder nodded, leaning weakly into him. The arms that held him tighter, as if they had been waiting, were extraordinarily warm.

Even though he started the conversation presuming rejection, Kishiar never once expressed any negative feelings towards that fact. The only time he showed negativity was when he revealed self-blame towards himself. That terrifyingly tender demeanor, that incomprehensible honesty, that warmth he had never experienced in his past life, felt like a punishment to Yuder Aile.

"Good. Make sure you don't regret it. Look forward to it. But I don't like the assumption that you will go even if your eyes don't get better, so let's leave that out."

"...Do you believe the magic you will cast tomorrow will completely cure my condition?"

Yuder asked slowly. The answer that came back was concise.

"Rather than believing, I have to make it so."

The sentiment behind those words, was it confidence or a wish? Either way, he could definitely feel that Kishiar was determined to heal him.

Yuder was suddenly reminded of the day Kishiar had said he wanted to become a hero. Although his dream of punishing those who were exploiting the Empire was still underway in a place unknown to anyone, and the Duke of Peletta, known to the world, was just a troublemaker, he was the one who would save Yuder tomorrow.

Then what would be the difference between him and a hero?

Even if he had accomplished nothing and had regressed in his previous life, this time, he will become the hero he dreamed of. He will make sure he does.

Yuder lifted his head towards where Kishiar's face would be. As he thought about how he wanted to see his expression right in front of his eyes, a voice tinged with a faint smile echoed.

"Do you think it's somewhat cool? I feel like you do."

"..."

"I'm kidding."

Yuder sighed. He couldn't imagine the calm man who had laughingly brushed off and manipulated all the malicious rumors surrounding him, showing an inhuman patience within that bright voice. But ultimately, that too was Kishiar La Orr.

'Ultimately... it was Kishiar La Orr.'

Yuder sensed something from his thoughts and recalled it once again.

Before Kishiar came to the bedroom, he was pondering why Kishiar felt different from the others, whose attitudes towards him had changed across his past and present lives. Suddenly, the answer he couldn't find then seemed to spring up from within him.

While comparing the two lives, if his relationships with others had changed from one to ten, his relationship with Kishiar, despite appearing to have changed the most, somehow still felt the same in some aspects.

'Yes... that was it. I'm not sure exactly what to call it...'

Once he knew the answer, once he filled all the holes, what would change?

He already felt as if he was being sufficiently punished. Would he experience even greater suffering here? Or...

"I think your body temperature is dropping. Shall we head in?"

"Commander, you mentioned earlier about your ability... I haven't heard it yet."

Yuder murmured, grabbing the hand that was adjusting the blanket wrapped around his shoulders, while gently brushing his cheek. The hand was devoid of strength, yet Kishiar halted his movements at once.

"Ability? Ah, were you that curious?"

"I thought your ability would be of the enhancement type, but was I wrong?"

"It's enhancement, yes, but... It feels a bit different from the kind of power that members with physical enhancement in the Shin Division possess."

Mumbling something unintelligible, Kishiar decided it would be faster to demonstrate with his body. He took Yuder's right hand and lightly held it.

"When I first awakened two years ago, I thought my power was simply to enhance my strength. As time passed, I concluded it was an ability to change the direction of power while in an enhanced state. But not long ago, my thoughts began to change slightly."

"Now, watch."

Kishiar loosened his grip, letting go of the hand he was holding. Naturally, Yuder's hand, which had been supported, should have fallen limp. Yet, astonishingly, it did not fall but seemed stuck within Kishiar's open palm.

Yuder felt an unseen force moving intensely upward from below Kishiar's hand. It was as if an invisible wind was lifting his hand from beneath. Shortly after, when Kishiar cut off the force, Yuder's hand fell powerlessly. Kishiar caught it swiftly and smiled briefly, as if asking if he had seen it.

"You, who are sensitive to power, must have felt how it moved, right?"

"...It felt like you were pulling the target and letting it go."

"That's right. In the enhanced state, I can pull the power toward me or push it away. It's still difficult to move consciously, so this is my limit. But, in others' eyes..."

"They would see you moving extremely fast, or deflecting before being hit."

"Yes, exactly."

Images of Kishiar from his previous life, facing Pethuamet in single combat, and training with his Cavalry members flashed quickly through Yuder's mind. The mystery of Kishiar's movements, which made it seem as if the enemies were hurling themselves at him, was finally resolved.

'So according to this, did he develop his ability in two stages...? All in just two years?'

Kishiar simply said his thoughts had changed, but Yuder's judgement was a little different. Depending on training and environmental factors, an Awakener's power could be refined or evolved indefinitely. It was an incredible feat that Kishiar, who likely hadn't received proper training like the others, had advanced his ability this far - something that even Awakeners ten years in the future would find unbelievable.

"...You're incredible."

"It's just a shift in perspective. When you sit down and have some spare time, what else is there to think about?"

Kishiar casually made a comment that could make the Cavalry members, who had toiled and sweated daily to develop their abilities, vomit in disbelief.

"The last time my thoughts changed was actually very recently. I realized something after the day I went to find you."

On that day when Kishiar had run through the forest to find Yuder, who had gone to kill Pethuamet, he had mentioned feeling a thin string inside him that he hadn't noticed before. But from the sound of it, that wasn't the only thing he had discovered.

"I was too overwhelmed at the time to realize, but after reflecting, I noticed that the flow of power I used while running that day was slightly different from before. I think at that moment, I might have desperately wanted to pull something towards me."

Kishiar cradled Yuder in his arms and stood up, uttering one last word.

"Even this might not be the complete form of my power. Unlike magic that operates on set formulas, there's no definitive answer to this power."

Kishiar, who used to move slowly as before, passed through the forest in an instant and reached Yuder's bedroom. The interior of the Western Mage Union base was absolutely quiet, everyone seemingly asleep.

"Well, everything turned out just as I promised. No one will know we've been for a walk."

The man laid Yuder on the bed, gently brushed his hair aside, and covered him with a blanket.

"You don't have a fever yet, but I'll stay here until you fall asleep. If you need anything, just tell me."

As he heard the sound of the man sitting down on the chair next to the bed, Yuder was engulfed in a mix of emotions that left him speechless.

"Just go and get some sleep."

"On a day like this, forcing myself to sleep would only make me feel more tired."

"But still..."

"It's more comforting and relaxing for me to stay here, so don't worry."

Despite hearing this, Yuder too felt like sleep was far away that night. After several failed attempts to fall asleep and a faint sigh, Kishiar murmured quietly.

"Why?"

"...No, nothing."

"Are you hungry?"

"No, not at all."

Despite the firm denial, Kishiar, who had been moving a bit, grasped Yuder's hand and placed something in it.

"It's late and there's nothing I can give you right now, but you should at least have this."

Yuder was startled to realize the object now in his hand had a surprisingly familiar feel to it. There was no way he wouldn't recognize the object wrapped in crinkling paper, with its round, hard surface.

"...This is."

Just as he was about to ask if it was candy, his fingers brushed against the worn, soft part of the wrapper. Yuder immediately recognized what the candy was.

"Isn't this the candy I had?"

"That's right."

"How did you..."

"I had it after it fell out of your clothes while I was treating your injury. I thought you didn't want to eat it and left it behind... but that doesn't seem to be the case."

"You've been keeping this since then? I thought someone had thrown it away because I couldn't find it."

"It's not something that rots easily."

After replying nonchalantly, Kishiar added after a moment of silence.

"...I couldn't help but pick it up, thinking it could have been the last thing left by my assistant."

Yuder, feeling guilty for surprising him, immediately closed his mouth. Kishiar gently posed a question.

"But the wrapper is quite worn, why didn't you eat it for three days? I gave it to you to eat one per day... didn't it taste good?"

"No, that's not it. The reason is..."

Yuder hesitated, gently biting his lip. It was only after he recovered the candy that he was able to objectively reflect on his own behavior, soothing his anxious heart by touching the candy until the wrapper was worn, especially when faced with this question from the person who had given it to him.

"...If you hadn't returned after three days, I was planning to eat it then."

"And after eating it?"

"I would have gone out to find you."

At Yuder's unwavering response, Kishiar exclaimed, "My goodness," and burst into laughter.

"Alone?"

"Haven't I already said that I would?"

"That's true, you did... but..."

The muttering man suddenly fell silent. The next moment, a sweet sigh filled with warmth and laughter flowed from him.

"...Hmm. What to do. Right now, I really... feel something irresistible."

Before he finished speaking, his lips approached and lightly kissed Yuder's forehead, then slid down to touch the tip of his nose, both cheeks, and finally his lips. Although Yuder was surprised by the sudden contact, he didn't stop the soft kisses that grew gradually deeper.

Finally, when their tongues entwined for a long moment before parting, an unmistakably hungry breath flowed between them.

"...I'm glad you didn't lose it. Sleep well."

It was the first time he had received such a farewell with their foreheads and noses touching.

Turning

Chapter 309

The next day, when Yuder awoke, his side was empty. But the hard, round candy still held tightly in his clenched fist assured him that last night's events were no dream. He fiddled with the candy, fumbling with the wrapper to open it. After a long time, he finally managed to put the candy in his mouth. The taste was as sweet and tangy as he remembered.

He lay there, listening to the boisterous voices echoing from somewhere. The exterior bustled with an unusual energy, as if the previously silent house had regained its owners, making the tranquility of the moments before seem like a lie.

It wasn't hard for him to guess why the atmosphere had suddenly changed. It was due to the magic casting scheduled for that day.

"Oh? Yuder, are you awake?"

Around the time he had completely melted and swallowed the candy, Gakane opened the door and entered. With his sharp intuition, he quickly noticed Yuder's wakefulness and came closer.

"Did the noise wake you? I kept asking them to prepare quietly, but they're all like that... Are you still sleepy? How are you feeling?"

"I'm okay. Not bad."

Upon hearing Yuder's reply, Gakane felt his forehead for a fever, then assisted him to sit up.

"Everyone's a bit frantic preparing for the magic casting this evening. But you, of course, just have to have a normal meal with the priest as usual, so don't worry too much."

"No, he must take his medicine too."

Priest Lusan, who had followed Gakane into the room, added from the side. It seemed Lusan was also looking forward to the events of the day, his voice notably brighter than usual. Yuder finished a simple meal with their help, then had the bandages on his arms, legs, and face changed.

"Since you'll be going outside today, I brought your bag. We thought you should dress warmly. Is there any specific clothing you'd prefer?"

"No, anything is fine."

"Hmm... Okay then... Oh."

While rummaging through the bag, Priest Lusan suddenly picked up something that had fallen out between the clothes, a puzzled look on his face.

"What is this? Is it a magic stone?"

There was only one item in Yuder's humble belongings that could be called a magic stone. Yuder remembered the stone, a power medium he had received from Kishiar before coming to the west.

"If it's the stone with a dark red hue... yes, it's something similar. May I see it?"

Yuder took the cold stone handed over by Lusan. The journey to the west had been quicker than expected, and he hadn't had the chance to directly examine the medium's power. Holding the medium after a long time, its touch felt strange and unfamiliar.

'Kishiar said this stone has an amplification effect when power is poured into it... I wonder if it would have been better to use this against Pethuamet.'

But even without it, Yuder had been confident enough to face Pethuamet at that time, and he had succeeded. Although the unexpected inversion of blood had led him to this state, he hadn't been desperate enough to gamble on an untested, uncertain element.

Yuder put the stone aside without regret. Gakane and Lusan seemed curious about the nature of the medium, but upon hearing it was a gift from Kishiar, they quickly accepted and withdrew their interest.

The rest of the day passed as usual. Through the members who visited in turns, Yuder heard about the preparations for the grand magic being conducted near the Magic Spring Ruins. Occasionally, when his fever rose or dropped, Lusan was by his side, offering a damp towel or a warm heat pack.

Finally, as the sun began to set, Lusan gave him a few pills.

"I've prepared a concoction with a greater proportion of pain-relieving herbs than before. I heard you might experience pain as the spell progresses. I'm not sure about its effectiveness, but... I wish this were the last time I had to offer you this."

"Thank you, Priest."

Lusan let out a shy laugh at the sincere thanks. He untied the holy symbol hanging around his neck and held it in Yuder's hand as he offered a short prayer.

"May the warmth of the Light shine equally upon you, Yuder, and upon us all."

As the prayer came to an end, there was a knock on the door from outside. The ones who entered were the Eldore siblings and an unexpected guest.

"I brought this mage here because she kept coming and going outside. She said she has some business with Yuder."

"...It's Lorna Beit."

Yuder was taken aback at the identity of the hesitating mage. He hadn't expected that she, who had been more devoted than anyone else to studying the Magic Springs, would come here.

She introduced herself and then remained silent for a long time. Yuder waited for a while, then sighed and took the initiative to speak.

"Have your injuries from before fully healed?"

"...Yes. Thanks to your help, there are no traces left now. I'm healthy."

"I'm glad to hear that."

Lorna had been injured in a fight with Pethuamet, who had absorbed the power of the amplification circle, and had been carried here. Yuder had been a bit worried about whether she would fully recover, given his last memories of her condition. It was a relief that she was fully healed.

"When I was injured and in danger... I later heard that you were a great help. I wanted to apologize for my actions then, but I only now have come to do so."

"You don't have to apologize."

Yuder had hardly expected someone like Lorna to heed his warnings from the beginning. He didn't want to hear an apology in this manner, not when it wasn't her fault that Yuder got hurt, and she didn't contribute any more to the injury treatment than the priests did. However, it seemed as if Lorna misunderstood his intention, her voice losing some of its energy.

"I see. I figured you wouldn't accept it. Well, it's only to be expected."

As Yuder considered whether or not to correct her, she hurriedly continued speaking.

"All along, I've always thought that a mage must naturally bear the minor dangers that occur during research. I also thought it was only natural for others not to understand mages. Especially for an Awakener. But... after going through this incident, I've had a lot of thoughts."

"..."

Lorna had been saved several times by Awakeners. The research they conducted almost caused great harm beyond the Great Sarain Forest to other regions, and the one who killed the massive monster and saved them from this crisis was also an Awakener. She confessed that she was shocked for the first time seeing her colleagues' humiliating inability to handle even the small monsters easily controlled by the Awakener, who knew nothing about magic, and their greed-filled obstinance.

People say that mages must be born ambitious to achieve greatness, but no one had taught her how ugly that could become. That ugly sight was the dark side of herself that Lorna had been ignoring.

"I used to be proud of being a mage... but now, I feel ashamed. Upon reflecting on the purpose of what I was doing, I feel even more so."

Lorna's gaze fell upon a black stain that couldn't be entirely hidden by the bandage. She kept silent for a long time, then lowered her head.

"It's hardly an adequate substitute for an apology, but I have worked really hard to find the solution for the spell that will be cast today. Because of this, I was able to gain the Commander of the Cavalry's permission to visit you."

Yuder was surprised to hear that she hadn't simply come on her own, but had received Kishiar's permission, but the other members were silent, perhaps suspecting something.

"I hope the answer I've found will be of help. That's all I wanted to say."

Lorna rose, gave a respectful greeting, and then left.

"I still don't like mages, but I heard she really worked hard this time. She even collapsed a few times from not sleeping and studying even though she was injured, so the priest had to be called in."

Gakane muttered a bit gruffly next to Yuder, who was remaining silent.

"I guess that's why the Commander allowed her to see you."

Yuder nodded with a strange feeling. After the members chattered about how they didn't need to accept the apology forcibly and how they needed to curb the pride of the arrogant mages, they finally calmed the atmosphere.

"Now, we're going to move you to where the source of magic, or whatever it is, is located."

The Eldore siblings surrounded Yuder and declared briefly.

"We decided to do this because, according to the results of yesterday's experiment, it seemed less burdensome than moving you directly. Kanna and the Commander will be waiting over there, so don't worry."

"And you?"

"We will follow after moving you."

Hinn and Finn held hands with Yuder between them. Yuder gently clenched the hem of his uniform cloak. The stone, the medium of power that he had taken out from his bag earlier, was in its pocket.

"We're moving now! Get ready!"

Yuder couldn't see the light flowing out from Hinn and Finn's arms, but he keenly felt the energy around his body fluctuating. It was like a small whirlwind-like storm swirling around him, and after a moment, he felt as if he was being swiftly pulled and flown somewhere.

After the fleeting sensation of being swept away like a leaf in the wind, the surrounding air changed and he was falling. Someone who had been waiting caught him gently and held him up.

"You made it alright."

Kishiar's cheerful voice came from above.

"How does it feel to move using the Eldore siblings' power?"

"...It wasn't bad."

"That's good to hear because you are fearless. Now, take this."

Turning

Chapter 310

Kishiar began to move without hesitation. Yuder, feeling the absence of anyone nearby, voiced his puzzlement.

"I thought Kanna and the others were with us."

"I sent them to the mages since I had something to look into. They'll meet us when we arrive, so don't worry."

Yuder was often amazed at Kishiar's acute perception. In his current situation, unable to walk on his own, he had no more to say, so he simply closed his mouth. Soon enough, the clamor of voices drew closer, and Kishiar finally set Yuder down, lightly supporting his shoulder so he could lean on him.

"Yuder! You're here!"

Kanna, the first to rush over, without hesitation, grabbed onto Yuder's opposite arm.

"Commander, I'm sorry we're late. We can support him now, so you can let go..."

Emun, who followed behind, faltered with a slightly frightened tone. Kishiar, who had been silent, slowly let go of Yuder's shoulder. Though the others didn't seem to notice anything unusual about this, Yuder detected a hint of subtle regret.

"Alright. Go ahead."

The vicinity of the Magic Spring was morphing into a state both similar and different from before. The barrier magic and amplification circles that previously filled the area were mostly deactivated, with new magic circles interspersed between them. The 14 mages, who were in control of 12 circles, were busy preparing for the end and thus only noticed Yuder's arrival a bit late.

"Well, well. You're here."

Micalin Punt, the leader of the Western Mage Union, approached while rubbing his grimy hands. Seeing Yuder being supported by his comrades, the old mage's eyes shook as if shocked, but he quickly collected himself and concealed it.

"All our preparations are complete. If you give the order, we can activate the circles at any time."

"Good to know."

Kishiar, who had been slowly scanning the area, directed his gaze at the still calm Magic Spring. Between the gaps of the magic circles that once surrounded the area like a wall, he could see a hint of magic power shimmering and flowing out like a mirage. Thanks to the long-term amplification, the region was pulsating more vigorously than ever with pure magic power.

The red eyes passed over the faces of those waiting for an unknown command and finally stopped on Yuder's face, quietly standing while being supported by two comrades. Despite having just arrived after an uncertain period, his forehead and neck were already beaded with cold sweat. Yet, he endured with calmness, not due to any pride or shame, but seemingly from familiarity with such a state. His pale face, revealed under the bandages, was utterly expressionless, as if he didn't even consider his situation to be difficult. In fact, he'd been like that ever since he woke up from his injury.

Just as Yuder's eyes darkened slightly, the last of the waiting Cavalry members finally arrived.

"Commander. We've all arrived!"

"Everyone, to your positions."

Turning his body, Kishiar issued his command to all. It was time to see the result of the solution they had been working on for so long.

Those supporting Yuder helped him sit on a circle close to the Magic Spring. The twelve mages, including Micalin, went to their respective circles, while the Cavalry members spread out as if protecting the perimeter. And Kishiar stood on the largest circle drawn in a position where he could face Yuder.

Even with Kishiar merely taking his position, all felt a profound sense of their Commander's presence, as though he had stepped up to the very front. With the formation where he stood at the center connected like spider legs to twelve other formations, Yuder's formation seemed like prey ensnared in the tendrils of the spider web.

"I will activate the first formation."

Following this declaration, the first mage muttered the spell in a tense voice. At this, the formation beneath him began to glow, and the power emanating from the Magic Spring increased explosively. It was evidence that the formation was drawing in the surrounding magic power correctly. Soon after, the second and third mages made the same declaration and activated their formations. The formations beneath them, outlined by the magic stones they held in their hands, began to gradually heat up, glowing brighter with every strained swing of their arms and chant of their spells.

"I will activate the eleventh formation."

"I will activate the twelfth formation."

In the midst of a whirl of enormous energy, finally, Micalin activated the twelfth formation. The surrounding trees and the forest shivered in unison as a strong wind blew. The Cavalry members, wary of being swept up in this power, braced themselves and observed the spectacle. They had been briefed about what to expect, but the sensation of witnessing it firsthand was in a completely different realm.

As each formation activated, the intensifying white light followed the connected lines toward Kishiar in the center. When all twelve formations had finally been activated, the gathered light was so intense that Kishiar's figure was barely discernible.

The Cavalry members, only just realizing the depth of their Commander's magic power, were intensely anxious for Kishiar's safety, while the twelve mages were tense for a somewhat different reason.

The success of the spell being cast today hinged entirely on how well the Duke of Peletta could manage this enormous magic and adjust each formation. Normally, such important work would be entrusted to the most proficient and experienced person, naturally expected to be the Leader Micalin, but the Duke of Peletta had firmly refused and taken the position himself. So far, he was chillingly perfect in controlling all the formations.

Kishiar, his hands wrapped in golden magic, controlled the light converging on the formation. As the gathered white light at the center changed to blue, then from blue to red, the magic power emanating from the well increased, causing the waves sweeping the surroundings to intensify.

As time passed, the mages were soaked in sweat and Kishiar, who was controlling the entire formation, started to breathe a little harder. Finally, the light gathered in the center turned black, and the strong wind subsided slightly. This was the moment when the power they had tried to complete through the formation had finally taken shape, signaling that the time had come.

The mages, through Kishiar's control, reached out unanimously toward the black light gathered in the central formation. They combined their powers to cover Yuder's formation with the light. As the blackened formation lifted into the air and whipped around, Yuder's figure inside was hidden from view for a moment.

"Is... is everything going okay?"

Kanna, standing right next to Emun, listened to his panting murmur without even blinking her eyes, her gaze fixed on the spectacle.

Where Yuder stood, his aura appeared as if alive, greedily devouring the light pouring into it in a swirling torrent. Despite having gathered and expended such light for so long, the speed at which it disappeared was so fast that, in the blink of an eye, Yuder's form was revealed once again to all present.

The mages chanted their spells with greater intensity, the spirals of power flowing from the Magic Spring increasing in strength. Still, Yuder's aura persistently devoured the light, again and again.

Not long after, one of the mages let out a stifled groan.

"The... the speed is too fast!"

He crumpled, unable to bear the excessive energy drain, dropping to one knee. The flow of magic power heading towards the central aura wavered. At the same time, one of Kishiar's arms, wrapped in a golden light, jerked and stiffened.

"Commander!"

Someone called out, but no disaster struck. Kishiar, as if anticipating the situation, calmly made a small wave with his hand. The energy erupting from the Magic Spring explosively increased, causing the golden light enveloping his hand to grow. Just this increase in light was enough for the wobbling power to regain its stability quickly.

Even when several other mages dropped to their knees afterward, Kishiar each time amplified the light with the same method, supplementing and controlling the unstable power of the aura. His gaze was solely fixed on Yuder Aile in front of him.

"I have no idea what's going on."

"...The spell is complete, but the target requires more magic power than that. If we continue this way, we might break due to insufficient magic power."

Emun muttered while tapping his foot, and the mage closest to them, stationed at the seventh aura, briefly explained while panting.

Finally, when all the mages besides Micalin reached their limits, the light absorbed by the aura enveloping Yuder was almost entirely golden.

"When will this end..."

Someone muttered in exhaustion when, finally, even Micalin Punt faltered and dropped to his knee. The elder mage kept chanting his spell until the moment he fell, but there was an instant of weakness in the power flowing toward the central aura.

When the only light flowing into the aura became Kishiar's golden light, brought forth through the Magic Spring, everyone present had a premonition of the impending failure.

However, Kishiar's next move was something no one could have predicted.

Instead of the twelve auras that had lost their efficacy, he directly reached out toward the Magic Spring. The golden power surged explosively, tracing a complex trajectory of light. Over it layered different colors of energy that seemed to protect the magic, and suddenly, a new light began to gush over the abandoned auras. A much more potent spell was being rapidly woven.

"Ah..."

With an awestruck gasp from someone, the newly completed spell was immediately cast over Yuder's aura. A tremendous burst of light forced everyone to close their eyes. They felt a strong wind sweep over them.

After a moment, when people raised their heads, they saw that all the light had faded, and the wind had calmed. The aura had not shattered and remained intact. No one was injured.

There was no failure.