

Turning 311

Chapter 311

The vicinity of the Magic Spring was in complete disarray, covered in broken and bent branches. The crevice in the rock that had once violently spewed magic power was now eerily silent. Amid the quiet, Kishiar turned his head slowly and looked at the Cavalry members.

"Kanna Wand, Gakane Bolunwald. Check on Yuder's condition."

At his command, the two headed towards Yuder. The mages, leaning on the remaining members for support, retreated to the outskirts of the circles. Now, only Kishiar and Yuder remained within.

"Yuder. Are you okay? Can you hear us?"

"..."

In response to his comrades' call, Yuder moved his head faintly. Ever since the spell began to be cast, he had been swept up in an immense power encasing his body, unable to focus on anything external. Experiencing only the force in an unseen state was more painful than he had thought. It was like the moment when the spots created by the power of the Red Stone started to spread widely, making his whole body burn. The aversion, the immediate desire to escape from this place, rose like a wave in his mind, and it took immense effort to calm it down.

Nevertheless, the reason he could hold on till the end was because he sensed that Kishiar was somewhere beyond the invisible barrier in front of him.

The familiar energy that seemed to blend into the massive force circulating around him. It was undoubtedly Kishiar's power that he had seen and felt before. This energy helped calm Yuder and allowed him to accept everything.

'Accepting... yes, that's how it felt.'

He had thought that a spell to remove the trace of the magic circle that kept amplifying the venom from the absorbed Pethuamet's fluid would feel like something draining from him. Instead, it was the opposite. Yuder's body greedily filled itself with the energy coming from the outside.

Slowly, Yuder clenched and unclenched his fist, gauging his own physical state. His insides felt hot like a stove with lingering warmth, but it wasn't as heavy as before, when he couldn't even lift a finger. Seeing his movement, Kanna and Gakane's faces brightened simultaneously.

"It seems to have worked!"

"The spots, the spots are gone."

Everyone present, without exception, rejoiced at the sight of Yuder's now clear body. Until before the spell was cast, his body had been covered in black bruise-like spots. No matter how many bandages and medication were applied, the grotesque spots couldn't be completely hidden. But now, surprisingly, they had vanished significantly.

Listening to his comrades' cheering voices, Yuder finally reached up with both hands and untied the bandage covering his eyes. After several attempts, the tie finally came loose and fell around his neck.

He felt a dizzying pain when he first forced his eyes open, but it soon subsided. Yuder blinked carefully several times. His field of vision was still filled with black spots. One eye was still unable to distinguish light. However, the other eye could distinguish the fact that it was night and the shapes and colors of those around him, which was much better than before.

"..."

Yuder lowered his gaze from the sky. Not far away, a figure stood tall over the magic circle, looking his way. Even with blurry vision, Yuder couldn't mistake who it was. His senses were all too focused on Kishiar, there was no one else it could have been.

In his overlapping, hazy vision, Yuder felt for a moment that Kishiar was smiling.

As his heart jumped, Kishiar slowly knelt on one knee, and sat down.

"Commander!"

As he tried to rise in surprise, a thunderous roar echoed from behind him, trembling both the earth and air.

"Some, something is happening at the Magic Spring!"

The mages, who were maintaining a safe distance, screamed in urgency. The crevice behind Yuder, as if struck by an earthquake, shook violently. Yuder, feeling the danger of a possible explosion or collapse, didn't hesitate to gather his strength.

However, the strength he sought from the earth stirred only the rocks nearby, but failed to fully manifest.

'Damn it. My power isn't fully recovered yet.'

As he was about to muster his strength again, the earth rumbled once more, and the shadow clone summoned by Gakane enveloped Yuder protectively. In the sudden movement, something stone-like tumbled from his pouch.

'The medium!'

Without a second thought, Yuder seized it and turned his head toward Gakane.

"Gakane. Protect Kanna and the Commander first. Step back."

"What? What are you talking about?"

"Step back!"

If only he could muster his strength, nature would not harm Yuder. Dispersing the shadow clone, Yuder stood on his own feet. The moment he concentrated his power into the medium gripped in his hand, a brilliant red light burst forth.

In the spectacle completely different from when Alik Pelgin, the apprentice of Thais Yulman, used his power, Yuder was stupefied for a moment. He then belatedly discovered light flowing from his

own right hand as well. The two lights, both of the same hue, connected, causing an intense pulsation within Yuder.

After a while, the red light from the medium faded, but the light in Yuder's hand continued to glow intensely. He instinctively knew it. The purest form of power possessed by the Awakener was now pulsating in his own hand.

As long as he held this power, it seemed that there was nothing he couldn't do.

Yuder extended his hand toward the violently shaking crevice. Using his power, he tried to suppress it forcibly. The trembling rocks stopped for a moment, but pain shot through his hand. He was about to force his power once more when someone came behind him and grasped his wrist. Startled, he stiffened and tried to look back when he felt a firm chest bump against his back.

"...Don't try to suppress it."

Kishiar murmured lowly. Despite his weary appearance, his whispering voice was as gentle as ever.

"The magic power that had been bundled together for a long time is now rapidly depleting, releasing the things that had sunk to the deepest part. If you suppress it, it will only make things worse... Yes. Can you try to calm it slowly?"

"Commander, are you alright?"

"I am fine."

Kishiar let go of his hand. Yuder exhaled deeply and looked forward again. The red light from his hand became a little stronger, but the pain was now bearable. Feeling the weight of the person supporting him from behind, Yuder started to handle his power more gently. Soon, the ominous rumbling of the earth subsided slowly, and the violent wind quieted down as well.

As the slowly diminishing tremors finally ceased, everyone exhaled in relief. Yuder looked down at the red light fading within his hand, then raised his head. Kishiar, in his blurry vision, was making an unreadable face.

"...Yuder Aile."

"Yes."

"Can you see me?"

He had thought he would ask about the red light, but he asked a completely different question. Yuder blinked his eyes before nodding in response.

"Yes... I can see."

It was still challenging to say that his vision was clear, but he could now see Kishiar's face. It was strange, both familiar and different from the image he had drawn in his mind when he had felt his face with his fingertips previously.

In the darkness of the night, Yuder was mesmerized as he looked at Kishiar's golden hair, faintly illuminated by a distant light, his cheek that held a peculiar sensual aura due to the sharpness from being a bit thin, his exhausted but deeply emotional red eyes, and his long eyelashes casting a shadow over them.

Could this be the man he had been with just until this dawn? Even though he had touched, hugged, and kissed him countless times, he felt a strange sensation as if he had met him after a very long time. As he gazed at him, lost in the waves of emotions welling up within him, Kishiar also silently watched him.

"... Excuse me. Now, um. Has the explosion ended?"

Only after someone called out in a drained voice from afar did Yuder come back to his senses.

"About that red light just now... no, never mind. What happened to the Magic Spring? Can we go and take a look?"

Caught off guard as he had forgotten where he was while staring at Kishiar, Micalin pleaded with a desperate voice. Only then did Kishiar, who had shifted his gaze from Yuder, calmly open his mouth as if nothing had happened.

"It's still risky, so let's do it tomorrow. Until then, the Cavalry will keep watch here in shifts. Of course, after regrouping at the base."

"Understood."

Kishiar briefly praised everyone for their hard work. The mages, looking at Yuder who had managed to stand on his own, were speechless, filled with awe. Some were even sobbing. Following Kishiar's order, they did not argue any further and returned under the protection of the Cavalry members.

Finally able to stand on his own, Yuder returned to the base and was met with Lusan, who had been waiting for them.

"My goodness, Sir Yuder! You've finally recovered!"

The young priest who ran out scanned Yuder up and down before clasping his hands together to give a prayer of gratitude. Yuder had to experience the feeling of almost vomiting several times, as his companions, who had been trying to maintain their calm in front of the mages, suddenly rushed over and embraced him without considering their strength.

"Hey, stop. Yuder's gonna burst!"

Yuder wobbled in his companions' grasp, turning his head. A few steps back, Kishiar was lightly smiling. His small, insignificant smile, unlike his usual relaxed grin, remained deeply in Yuder's mind.

He had kept his promise to help him recover.

The weight of that promise was so heavy that he could not even measure how much it meant to him.

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"Alright, let's calm down now and assess how much your condition has improved."

Despite the significant passage of time, the members were reluctant to let Yuder go. Their pure joyous embrace had long since morphed into an enforced contact, a conduit through which pent-up anger was unleashed. As Yuder let out a small groan under the grip of their tight embraces, warning him not to even dream of engaging in the dangerous act of fighting monsters alone again, Kishiar, who had been leaning against the wall, intervened.

"But, Commander. Do you think Yuder would even tolerate this if not for the circumstances?"

"You're right. Let us scold him a bit more."

The members protested with a sense of regret, but Kishiar was a step ahead.

"Well, if you want to continue, I can't help it. I don't want to miss my turn to scold him either. Let me join in."

As Kishiar approached with open arms, the members quickly lost their will. Yuder sighed with relief, finally released from the intense pressure that nearly broke him. Lusan, who had been watching and laughing from a distance, approached to examine Yuder closely.

"The venom that had seeped into your skin is rapidly disappearing, and your body temperature is normal. Let's see if you can accept the divine power now."

Unwrapping the bandages around Yuder's limbs, Lusan scrutinized the remaining dark discoloration and infused them with divine power. Until recently, these spots would temporarily disappear when receiving divine power, only to increase again. However, this time was different. As Lusan noticed the spots gradually fading to a normal color without reappearing, a sense of relief and joy appeared on his face.

However, while his body was regaining strength relatively quickly, his eyes were not showing much improvement from their initial recovery. In particular, the left eye, where the black stains were most spread, was still unable to distinguish between light and dark.

Lusan posited that it was due to this area absorbing the most fluid from Pethuamet, and while slow, he believed that it would gradually improve over time. He then infused Yuder's body with divine power a few more times. In the brief respite as his comrades stepped back to guard the Magic Spring, Yuder quietly spoke to Lusan.

"Priest."

"So, because the depth perception might be different with one eye, it may be more comfortable to keep it covered until it gets better... Yes?"

Lusan, who had been mumbling, responded belatedly. Yuder, pointing to Kishiar with his eyes, who was not too far away giving instructions to the members, continued his words.

"I think I'm fine now. Could you perhaps also check on the Commander?"

"The Commander?"

"Yes. He looks tired, so please take a look when he returns to his room."

Upon hearing Yuder's request, Lusan glanced at Kishiar with a puzzled look. To him, Kishiar seemed no different than usual. But Yuder thought differently. He believed that Kishiar was merely maintaining his calm in front of the others, but was in fact very exhausted.

Lusan tilted his head at this but agreed to examine Kishiar discreetly as Yuder asked. Despite this reassuring answer, Yuder, who knew Kishiar's body was different from ordinary people, couldn't be entirely at ease.

Kishiar would undoubtedly come to find him tonight. Although they hadn't specifically discussed it, Yuder was certain Kishiar would sneakily come to check on his condition personally once again.

'I'll examine him then.'

For the first time since regaining his sight, Yuder walked into the bedroom where he had been staying. He hadn't realized it while he was blind, but the room was much more spacious than he'd thought. This couldn't be a typical mage's bedroom. It was clear he must have usurped Micalin's room or perhaps it was meant for Kishiar.

By the bed, which was positioned opposite the window, he could see a basin and a water towel, along with a nicely wrapped bag for room heating. Items that had now become useless. His gaze scanning the furniture – not luxurious, yet equipped with everything necessary – stopped at a table and chair not far away.

It was the very spot where Kishiar had moved him several times to feed him. Yuder approached and gently stroked the back of the chair. The fact that he and Kishiar had sat on this old wooden chair didn't feel real.

He carefully settled himself on the chair. The part that touched his back was extremely hard. As he closed his eyes and looked down at the empty table, his senses were subtly stimulated, evoking a curious familiarity different from moments ago.

The smell of dry dust. The deep scent of grass from the forest flowing in through the window gap. The slight creak of the table due to a slightly misaligned leg.

And the faint traces of a cool, stale body odor embedded in the chair.

“...”

Yuder opened his eyes again. The faint traces he thought he had sensed vanished in an instant.

'What am I doing?'

Later, he looked at himself in a mirror for the first time since recovering his sight. Even though some of the stains had faded, the remaining traces on his body were unsightly at best. He hadn't realized it when he couldn't see, but his forehead, the whites of his eyes, his neck, and the backs of his hands were all splotchy, like a person stricken with a plague. His colleagues and Kishiar, who hadn't shown any expression even after seeing him in worse condition, suddenly seemed formidable. Not to mention Kishiar hadn't said a word even when he impulsively kissed him...

The light violet spots originally on his right hand were now concealed among the black stains, but Yuder guessed they were probably not completely gone. It was due to the red light that had flowed from the back of his hand when he used the medium.

'Why didn't the power simply amplify as it did when Alik used it, but red light flowed out instead?'

The medium he pulled out again was now a transparent and faint black, as opposed to the deep burgundy it had been before. He infused it with power again, hoping against hope, but there was no change.

Yuder put the medium on the table and lifted his hand again. When he tried to use a tiny bit of water power, a thin stream of water spiraled around his finger before abruptly breaking off and falling.

'Recovery...seems to be happening, but this is not much different from before using the medium.'

There was only one conclusion he could draw from his attempts.

'Just as the Red Stone's power from my body absorbed the energy in Kishiar's body, this time, I think I used the Red Stone's power enclosed in the medium.'

The medium was a tool made by utilizing the principle of magic tools, which could automatically cast a specified magic if fueled with magic power.

Thais took advantage of the fact that magic power could be inserted into a medium for magic tools, and created a new, sturdy medium to confine the power of the Red Stone. It was a medium where nothing would happen even if power was infused because there was no magic to output originally. However, due to the peculiarity of the Red Stone's energy, it showed a behavior of amplifying the power considerably and releasing it when infused with an Awakener's power.

Yuder had once conjectured that his body might have become a living medium for the power of the Red Stone, given his unique characteristics.

'If that is the case, the event that transpired was an instance of two mediums simultaneously unleashing their power, hence the reaction differed from other times when others used their power. It might be an extension of the same phenomenon...'

The sensation that it wasn't the amplification of the infused power, but the pure energy within the medium itself being drawn out and connected to his hand, lingered faintly in his body. Yuder looked down at his empty hand, clenching and unclenching his fist. As he attempted to consciously summon the Red Stone power, it did not reappear. It seemed as though the power only manifested when Yuder was desperate or only half in his right mind.

'Nevertheless, seeing that the medium became transparent, it seems certain that the power contained within has disappeared.'

Fortunately, everything that had transpired that day occurred in the forest, under the cover of night. Even if the mages had seen what Yuder had done, they would not be able to accurately guess the

truth. The identity of the medium and the power of the Red Stone were matters that must remain secret for the time being.

'But what happened with the Magic Spring Ruins?'

Yuder recalled the voice that had whispered to him to hold back his hand and not forcefully suppress the ground. As he followed those words and did not resist the movement of the earth but instead moved as though gently coaxing and soothing it, the earthquake soon subsided.

Kishiar had said it was due to the long-accumulated magic power disappearing. Yuder remembered Kishiar speaking as if he was expecting some sort of change to occur around the ruins and the Great Sarain Forest after the magic power was exhausted from casting a gigantic spell. However, he had not at all anticipated that this change would be an earthquake.

'If the exhaustion of the magic power accumulated in the Magic Spring caused the earthquake... perhaps the balance has been broken again.'

The talks about 'balance' that Lusan and Kishiar had speculated upon each for their own reasons simultaneously came to Yuder's mind. Lusan speculated that the imbalance of the massive power at the Magic Spring Ruins could have caused the appearance of the monsters, and Kishiar said the cause of the abnormal growth of the Great Sarain Forest, including the cracks, could be the same.

If that was true, he began to worry terribly at the thought that the earthquake that occurred today might lead to the appearance of more cracks or abnormal behaviors in the monsters.

Just as Yuder was beginning to consider whether or not to leave his place, a sound was heard, tapping against the window. Despite being on the second floor, Kishiar, with his calm face, was jokingly smiling outside the window.

"May I come in?"

"..."

He had expected a visit, but not through the window. With an indescribable feeling, Yuder opened the closed door.

"What are you doing? Why didn't you come in through the door..."

"I was curious about the feeling of having someone answer when I knock."

Yuder was speechless at the sly response. After closing the window and looking around, he let out a small sigh.

"So, did you find it amusing?"

The answer he received was an embrace.

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The momentary disconcertment swiftly vanished. Yuder looked up at Kishiar who, hugging him tightly, hadn't spoken for quite some time. He felt relieved to witness firsthand the emotions shading his now smile-less face. As he cautiously raised his hand, Kishiar narrowed his eyes and pressed his cheek against it. The sight of this beautiful beast rubbing himself against him sent tingles down his fingertips. His smooth, white cheek, warm to the touch, was astonishingly silky. Between their chests, he could feel a powerful heartbeat that belonged to neither of them alone.

"...I'm...I'm okay."

A murmur escaped Yuder, feeling as though he should say something. The words, even to his own ears, sounded awkwardly clumsy. Instead of answering, Kishiar tightened his embrace before finally loosening it after what felt like an eternity.

Even after collecting his emotions, he continued to gaze at Yuder's face as though seeing him for the first time.

"You mentioned that you had asked Priest Lusan to examine me."

"Ah, yes."

Even though Kishiar had assured him that he was fine, he could still see signs of fatigue on his face. Worried that he might be hiding any physical discomfort, Yuder nodded. At his words, Kishiar laughed, remarking how exhausting it was to avoid Lusan because of his request.

"I'm fine, both in body and spirit, so don't worry. If I seem drained, it's probably because someone suddenly exerted a lot of energy as soon as they could move."

"..."

His concern for him had turned into a spear aimed back at himself. Yuder averted his gaze without a word. At the time, he had the medium in his hand and thought it could be dangerous, so he had exerted his power immediately, which must have been surprising from Kishiar's point of view.

"Speaking of which, I forgot to ask properly about the medium you used and the power it held. What was it, exactly?"

Kishiar's gaze landed on the empty medium on the table. Yuder picked it up and briefly explained the assumptions he had made thus far while Kishiar scrutinized its interior. He did not seem overly surprised as he listened, indicating that he might have had some suspicions of his own.

"You drew out the power inside the medium... Yes, that's the closest assumption for now."

"..."

"Weren't you hurt?"

Kishiar asked, his red eyes solemnly fixed on Yuder's face. While it wasn't entirely painless, Yuder nodded his head. Kishiar didn't seem entirely convinced but decided not to press the matter any further. He took the medium, tucking it into his possession.

"I will look into this myself. If you notice any changes in your body, let me know. And if any mages ask, simply tell them it was the power of an Awakener."

"Understood."

"And... next time, it would be nice if you could give some notice before moving. If I can at least brace myself, it might be a little better."

Yuder felt the sting of an unexpected jab and swiftly changed the subject.

"...What about the Magic Spring Ruins? I'm worried there might be more anomalies like before, with monsters acting strange or new cracks forming."

"Are you changing the subject now?"

Kishiar's eyes narrowed, but he soon let out a sigh-like chuckle, playing along with Yuder's pace.

"Well, it's hard to guarantee anything, but I don't think such things will happen again, at least for now. Remember what I said when you calmed the trembling earth?"

"You said the amplified magic power that had been pooling up was disappearing, and the remnants deep below were rising up."

"Yes, exactly. It's an extension of the conversation we had last night."

Kishiar had spent quite some time investigating the Magic Spring around Yuder, reading and re-reading the research notes of the mages in his personal quest to find a cure for Yuder. The mages, fascinated by the peculiar nature of the place where the pure magic power had long been concentrated, had grandiosely named it the 'Magic Spring'. Yet, to an outsider with no interest in power, different aspects of the scene became apparent.

"I'm not sure exactly why, but it's clear that magic power has been stagnated there for a long time. However, just because it's been there for a while, it doesn't necessarily mean it's natural," Kishiar stated.

In the research logs of the first mage who discovered the Magic Spring, Kishiar discovered that the range of the power beneath the accumulated magic power coincidentally almost matched the entirety of the Great Sarain Forest.

It couldn't have been a coincidence. The mages simply cared more about the prospect of gaining power than that particular fact.

Kishiar posited a bold hypothesis, stating that the Magic Spring was the point where the magic power concentrated beneath the Great Sarain Forest had managed to escape, and as the influence of the concentrated magic power expanded, so did the forest.

"If you try to inflate a pouch that's already full and is spilling out from a small opening, it's only natural for it to burst," he explained.

The Great Sarain Forest had long been suffering from abnormal growth. The western borderlands were notoriously monster-infested. If the magic power concentrated in the spring was the cause, the answer wouldn't be to contain and amplify it but to exhaust it and create a way for it to escape.

That night, when the enormous spell to dissolve the remaining traces of the amplification in Yuder's body succeeded and the earth tremor followed, Kishiar considered it a potential new path for the energy beneath the ground to escape. It was still a speculation, but in time, he would be certain.

"If I'm right, there will be no more severe monster outbreaks after this year. The expansion of the Great Sarain Forest will cease, or some change will occur."

It was a prediction like a dream. Yuder blinked and hesitantly asked, "If that happens... what will you do?"

"Well, first of all, I would have to stop those who are rushing towards the Great Sarain Forest out of greed? I'd have to assign more useful research to the mages here."

"Are you going to do it?"

"If I don't, who will? They owe us a lot. I intend to reclaim it, without leniency."

A radiant smile, loaded with significance, bloomed on Kishiar's face. Only then could Yuder also afford to smile.

"Also, I will inspect if the strange crack in the air phenomenon we discovered this time is occurring elsewhere."

Yuder suddenly looked up. If Kishiar intended to investigate the crack, which was like a harbinger of disaster, the most suitable person for that task was Yuder himself.

"Leave that task... to me."

"I thought you would say that. No."

A firm denial came back as if expected. When Yuder widened his eyes in surprise, Kishiar playfully tapped his nose with a laugh.

"You can apply for it once you're fully recovered."

"..."

"You shouldn't even look at it like that."

Yuder wondered why he kept laughing as if he had seen something. Yuder tried to plead again, but Kishiar took his arm and led him away, saying it was late.

"Now that we've confirmed your improvement, you should rest. If you want to get better quickly, you need to sleep a lot, right?"

"Are you going straight to sleep, Commander?"

"No, I am heading to the forest to inspect our members."

No matter how you looked at it, the one who needed to rest here was not Yuder but Kishiar. Yuder bit his lip as he watched Kishiar, who still looked weary.

"You should rest too, Commander."

"Are you still worrying about me? Even though I've said I'm okay."

"Everyone knows to take turns without needing instructions. If that's the case, why don't you take a short nap here? I'll wake you up."

"Just for a bit..."

Kishiar, who had been leading, suddenly began to be led. He displayed a rare moment of surprise. Seizing the opportunity, Yuder successfully pushed him onto the bed. The tall man lying defenselessly on the bed left his disheveled clothes as they were, looking up at Yuder.

"...This is quite an unusual feeling. Looking up at you like this, you seem more attractive than usual."

"Don't joke about this."

Underneath the tousled blond hair embedded in the sheets, the seductive eyes creating a captivating curve momentarily mesmerized Yuder. But he barely managed to ignore it. He cautiously undid the robe, worrying that Kishiar might get up and leave again, but Kishiar did not resist, just chuckling.

Finally, after making him lie down properly and covering him with a blanket, Yuder was already out of breath, though he hadn't done anything significant.

"You look tired."

"No, I'm not."

"Why don't you just lie down here too?"

"I told you I'm not tired."

Yuder sat on the chair beside the bed where Kishiar had been sitting the night before. The heated gaze that seemed to follow his every move made his skin tingle.

"...As promised, I'll wake you, so please rest now."

"This is me resting."

"If you keep looking at me, how will you fall asleep?"

"Do you think it's too harsh to deny me the pleasure of looking at you now that you've regained your sight?"

Kishiar chuckled softly, then exhaled a long breath. His gaze was still fixed on Yuder. Yuder felt a tingling sensation from the look in Kishiar's eyes as he stared at his black, stained left eye.

It was a look filled with insatiable longing, as if he didn't want to miss a single thing about Yuder.

"Please sleep."

"...I can't sleep."

Although he seemed too old to make such a complaint, Kishiar's expression was serious. Yuder hesitated, then opened his mouth.

"Shall I hold your hand?"

"You'll hold it?"

"If you want, I will hold it until you fall asleep."

It was what Kishiar had done for him, and Yuder was willing to do the same. However, unexpectedly, Kishiar did not immediately accept the offer. A sudden smile, tinged with warmth, crossed the face of the man who had been silently looking up at Yuder.

"...I want you to rest, and you want me to rest. So it seems the best thing to do is for us both to rest together."

"Excuse me?"

"If you're going to hold my hand, why don't you just lie down with me."

Finally, Kishiar gave up on behaving and pulled Yuder to him. By the time Yuder came to his senses, he was already lying under the covers Kishiar had opened.

"What are you doing?"

"Here, now we can both rest. Sleep well."

Despite Yuder's resistance, it was in vain. Yuder incredulously stared at Kishiar, who closed his once sleepless eyes while holding him tight.

"...Are you sleeping?"

"..."

"Stop fooling around and let go of me."

"..."

"Commander."

After several calls, Yuder finally sighed deeply, releasing the tension in his body. The thought of how to explain this if someone came in was daunting, but he didn't want to forcefully push away the sleeping Kishiar.

That's right. He didn't want to push him away. That was the problem...

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All Yuder could do while lying still was gaze at the face before him. Through the blurry vision, he found himself naturally reminiscing about a particular time in the past as he admired the handsome features reflected in his sight.

In his previous life, a life full of undone things, they often shared the same bed. Most of the time, it was for relations. In the darkness of unlit nights, even the sharpest eyes could hardly discern the outline of the other's face. Therefore, Yuder's memories of sharing a bed with Kishiar were mostly dim and hazy, marked by instances like the hand gripping his waist when they were lying face down, the cold intrusion beneath their clothes in their sleep, or the fleeting warmth when they were lying on their side, back touching back.

‘Thinking about it now, we mixed our bodies well even without showing each other much,’ Yuder mused.

After Kishiar's death, he hadn't shared a bed with anyone else. He was aware that others found his preference for solitude over the Emperor's marriage proposals, without even having a lover, quite off-putting. But he didn't care. He neither wanted to lay body to body with another, nor desired sex; he found it much better to spend that time working. After all, no one showed genuine interest in Yuder, a commoner. Even now, he thought his choices were right.

But the irony wasn't lost on him that it was Kishiar he found himself back in bed with. Even if he had decided not to deny the attraction he felt for Kishiar, he couldn't stop a bitter laugh from escaping his lips.

‘It's as if after all these years, I've circled around just to come back here,’ he thought.

However, even though they were lying in the same bed, things were different from before. For starters, they had never lain facing each other and looked at each other's faces in their past life. Despite knowing that Kishiar was an Alpha Awakener and that there was a chance of being overpowered at any time, Yuder didn't feel any apprehension or tension toward him. In fact, the transformation was so drastic that he was struggling against the urge to touch the face before him, which was quite chilling to consider.

He had noticed the changes in him for a while now, but today everything seemed even more apparent. He wondered how it would have been if Kishiar had drawn him into bed like this before his second gender manifestation. Although he wasn't certain, he wouldn't have minded using all his strength to escape.

Unlike other emotions, trust and faith required time. The man who loved breaking walls had indeed spent a long time breaking all the walls that surrounded Yuder.

After tearing down all these walls and gaining complete access, what did that man intend to do? What would become of the Yuder Aile of before? If Kishiar were to discover that he now felt more than just relief towards his endless patience, how would their relationship change?

Kishiar had handed Yuder the key that could change their relationship. Yuder had yet to fully grasp the weight of that small key in his hands, but at this moment, he had a vague sense that something would change if he decided to turn it.

Everything would change. The tranquil yet tense silence, and the desires both of them had melted and lumped together within the sweet serenity.

Those condensed feelings would burst out the open door, consuming everything. And then, there would be no going back to how things used to be.

Could he truly handle that?

In stark contrast to his cool and rational mind, a tumultuous unease arose and subsided within his chest, as volatile as a flaming fire.

Yuder drew a deep breath and closed his eyes. His intention was to remain so only for a moment until he woke Kishiar, but when he collected his senses, daylight had already broken.

"..."

Yuder jolted upright, looking down at the blanket that covered him snugly. The adjacent space was empty, but a paper-folded flower, glittering charmingly, was laid on the pillow. An overwhelming emotion swept over him speechlessly the moment he realized that the flower was fashioned from the candy wrapper he had left behind from his breakfast the previous morning.

'In celebration of your recovery. The real one will come later.'

On unfolding the paper flower out of curiosity, a line of text that seemed almost teasingly playful was revealed. At first, it appeared to be some sort of prank, but it was clear that it wasn't just a simple jest, but a genuine gesture to celebrate his recovery.

'...I should let him know that it's unnecessary.'

Yuder silently folded it back. He was beyond startled, even somewhat embarrassed, by the fact that he had slept unaware while Kishiar had gotten up, written this note, and folded this candy wrapper into a flower.

However, Yuder didn't discard the paper flower. He stored it in the deepest part of his bag where no one else could find it.

The Cavalry members were elated by the news that Yuder had recovered enough to walk on his own. Although they had taken turns keeping watch over the Magic Spring Ruins throughout the night, none of them seemed fatigued.

According to them, strange sounds resembling wind and trembling earth echoed throughout the Magic Spring Ruins all night. Kishiar, who had inspected the area with the members, agreed that his predictions seemed to be coming true.

He finally had a long conversation with Micalin, the head of the Western Mage Union, one-on-one. It was impossible to know what had transpired during their talk, but after coming out of the room, Micalin announced surprising news with an expression mixed with exhaustion, admiration, and a hint of fear. The Duke of Peletta had agreed to fully support the research that the Union was conducting.

However, the research would not focus on trapping and amplifying the energy present in the Magic Spring Ruins. Instead, it would monitor the current slow leakage of power and future changes, and examine the monsters appearing in the Great Sarain Forest. Although much had changed, the essence of the study – researching the effects of pure magic power – remained the same. Not all the remaining mages were excited about this proposal, but most of them had seen and felt firsthand how uncontrollable power could bring catastrophe. In the end, they all agreed this was the best course of action.

"They said that if no results are produced within this year, the Western Mage Union would have had to abandon the research due to lack of funds. I guess this worked out well, given how expensive it is to conduct magic research."

"In truth, discovering a method to neutralize the effects of the monsters that have absorbed the amplified power is regarded more highly among mages than grand dreams of harnessing pure magic power. After all, monsters are an immediate, practical problem. They say this result will set a great precedent."

Following Gakane's comment, Kanna grumbled in dissatisfaction.

"While I suppose the Commander and Yuder agreed partly out of fear and remorse, it's clear they didn't make their calculations without any benefits in mind."

Emun grumbled, and the other members nodded in unison. They had all gathered for breakfast, waiting for Kishiar who had left to personally receive the imperial edict.

Yuder, half-listening to his comrades' conversations, watched the mages wandering nearby. The mages, unable to dare approach the Cavalry members confidently situated in the middle of the base, wandered from afar. Occasionally, when their gaze met with Yuder's, they would flinch their shoulders, seeming both terrified and fascinated, before disappearing.

'Seems like my reputation is quite something.'

Just then, the door opened and Kishiar entered. In his hand, he held a small folded letter, and his expression was significantly more serious than when he had left.

"It seems we all have to move immediately."

His words caused a sharp change in everyone's gaze.

"What happened, Commander?"

"It seems that the 'village' that was in the Great Sarain Forest until yesterday has suddenly disappeared this morning."

Though he ambiguously referred to it as a village, there was only one village that could exist in the Great Sarain Forest. Yuder, recalling the members of Star of Nagran that popped up in his mind, opened his mouth.

"Did they... run away to avoid us?"

"That's the most likely scenario."

Kishiar had planned to secretly send a knight from the Peletta Order to the base village created by the Star of Nagran to gather information and initiate contact. He had predicted that they might flee after the rumors about Yuder spread, but it seemed even the knights hadn't expected them to disappear overnight without a trace.

"What about the people in the village who aren't Awakeners? Did all of them disappear as well?"

"The reports suggest so. However, not all may have vanished, so a search is underway."

The Peletta Knights were in the process of tracking the village and its members who had disappeared in an instant and looking for information left by, or potentially to be left by, those connected to them in the village.

However, there were limits to the search and tracking within the Great Sarain Forest by the non-awakened Peletta Knights alone. Kishiar had ordered some of the Cavalry members to join them to assist in the search and collaborate with the second detachment soon to arrive.

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"Besides Gakane Bolunwald and Hinn Eldore, who were originally scheduled to stay here, Finn Eldore and Kanna Wand will also move with the Peletta Knights to assist in the search. When the second dispatch team arrives at Great Sarain Forest, they will signal us. When you meet them, explain the situation and involve them in the search operation. As I mentioned before, Gakane will take command, while Kanna will handle the release of necessary information."

Yuder turned his head towards Gakane. Originally, Gakane had planned to stay at the Western Mage Union base until the arrival of the second dispatch team, and then join them to lead the remaining monster extermination mission. Despite being flustered by suddenly having to track the Star of Nagran, Gakane only moved his Adam's apple up and down once, showing no apparent fear.

"I understand. Leave it to me."

There was a newfound seriousness on his face, as if he had made a decision. Kishiar nodded and swept his gaze over the rest of the team, starting with Yuder.

"The rest of you have places to go with me in the meantime. Get ready and follow."

With a statement to meet again at the mages' base in the evening, Kishiar concluded the meeting.

"Didn't the villagers say they were the strange organization that fought with Yuder when they went to the Duke of Apeto's place last time?"

"That's correct, but it's a bit different. I'll explain the details on the way."

With excited expressions, the Eldore siblings nodded and followed Kanna. Yuder exchanged glances with them, then approached Kishiar with Lusan and Emun. Although he doubted whether Kishiar had really rested while he was asleep, his complexion was noticeably better than yesterday.

"Commander, where are we going?"

"To meet the Knights from Tainu."

"People sent from the Duke of Tain?"

"The one who gave the order must be Baron Willhem of Tainu, but above him is the Duke of Tain, so yes, in a way."

"Then why aren't we waiting here for them? Why are we going ourselves?"

At Emun's tense question, Kishiar smiled as if it were a good question.

"That's because they didn't come here to meet us."

Before departure, Kishiar instructed Lusan and Emun to prioritize Yuder's protection in case of combat. Yuder thought it was excessive, but Lusan and Emun agreed without hesitation.

"The Knights from Tainu have been surveying the surrounding circumstances from the border town outside Great Sarain Forest for quite some time. They finally headed towards the forest this morning, likely due to the aftermath of the magic we cast yesterday."

Even while leading three people with nearly no combat capabilities through the narrow spaces between the trees of Great Sarain Forest, Kishiar showed no hesitation. As if going for a leisurely stroll, he continued his explanation with light steps, and Yuder thought quickly as he listened.

"If they entered the forest this morning and didn't come straight to the Western Mage Union's base, it means they came here with another purpose."

"That's correct."

"Could it possibly be... Tain's trade base?"

"That's correct."

At Kishiar's agreement, the others looked at Yuder with surprise. Yuder, having already heard from the Western Mage Union, was able to consider this, and he briefly explained. Meanwhile, he recalled the conversation he had had with Kishiar not long ago.

Kishiar had spoken as if he had been aware of the illegal trade activities conducted by the House of Tain for quite some time. After discovering information that there were several victims of illicit trade within the village of the Star of Nagran, his plan to track down the matter had gotten somewhat derailed. Now, the Knights of Tainu who had voluntarily ventured into the Great Sarain Forest made for good prey.

'If the Knights who came into the Great Sarain Forest were really headed to locate the trading outpost of House Tain, it would mean that the Duke values it as a significant asset.'

His heart beat a little faster at the thought that he might finally uncover the answers to the illegal trade circumstances of House Tain that he couldn't fully grasp in his previous life.

"So... If what Yuder heard is correct, there are rumors that House Tain has established a trading outpost within the Great Sarain Forest and they've been buying strange things? But what on earth are they trying to buy that the Knights had to come all the way here and hurry there?"

"Slave trade. There were also talks of them trying to import dangerous drug ingredients."

At Yuder's succinct answer, Emun furrowed his brows.

"Slavery...? Wait. It isn't related to the human trafficking we heard about in the Awakeners' village before, is it?"

"Probably so."

"...Good Lord."

Emun covered his mouth. Lusan also recoiled, making a face as if utterly disgusted.

"Slave trade, you say? How could a place like House Tain attempt such a thing? It's something that will never be forgiven by God."

Yuder did not miss the fleeting, icy smile on the face of Kishiar, who was leading the way.

"Well. It can be argued that being a ducal house, they are all the more capable of carrying out such deeds."

His tone was soft, but the coldness in his eyes didn't change. Yuder felt a renewed realization that Kishiar did not harbor good feelings towards the ducal houses.

"There it is, finally visible."

Not long after, they discovered something and stopped. On the side of the well-kept road where trees were rare, there was a small, seemingly half-built cabin. Although there was no sign of people, the door was open as if someone had rushed out.

"According to Micalin Punt, that was the first outpost that House Tain began to build."

Yuder was surprised to learn that Kishiar had even asked about that while conversing with Micalin. There was nothing inside the cabin. However, they soon discovered a section of the floor in a corner that was unnaturally lifted.

After lifting the clumsily covered wooden piece from the raised floor, Emun found a hole beneath and immediately stooped to check its interior. Thanks to his ability to hide in the darkness, he could see better than others in the dark.

"There's a narrow basement below. Nothing's in it... wait a moment."

Emun who jumped down towards it, returned shortly holding something. It was a torn and ragged piece of a small garment. Everyone fell silent at the sight of the ragged piece.

"It looks like a child's clothing. I guess they really did confine people here."

"We'll need Kanna to confirm that."

Kishiar, who gave a brief reply, ordered the piece of clothing to be kept and exited the cabin. He then followed the trade route toward the location of another outpost. They discovered three more half-built houses, but they couldn't find other pieces of clothing or any other items. How long had it been since they started moving toward the fourth outpost? They abruptly came upon the people they had been searching for.

"...Ah, the blood..."

Emun muttered with a pallid face, staring at the gruesome scene unfolding before his eyes. In the middle of the trade route established by the House of Tain, three Knights clad in armor bearing the insignia of Tainu lay sprawled. The putrid scent of blood and flesh attacked his nostrils. At a glance, they were beyond saving - dead.

"Could it be the work of monsters?"

In response to Lusan's question, who had also turned pale, Kishiar pondered while examining the traces of blood splattered as far as the nearby trees.

"Well, it might be... but..."

"It was the work of humans."

All eyes turned to Yuder upon his assertive claim. He stepped forward and gestured to the deceased Knights. They lay mutilated, limbs and abdomen slashed, as if they were hacked up dolls.

"If they had encountered monsters and were fleeing, they would have fallen face down. However, all died facing upward. By their expressions, it's clear they died instantaneously, oblivious of their impending death. And..."

Yuder kneeled and gingerly lifted something draped on one of the Knights. What should have been a bag was reduced to nothing but a strap.

"A monster wouldn't neatly cut away a bag like this. It's definitely the deed of a human."

"I see."

Kishiar agreed with Yuder's analysis, approaching the scene. Emun, unable to muster the courage to view the brutally dismembered bodies up close, stayed back, watching from a distance.

"Considering the blood is still flowing, they haven't been dead long. It doesn't seem like a sword was used. The ability to kill three Knights in an instant and vanish without a trace...it's likely the work of an Awakener."

There were Awakeners who came to mind. Those of Star of Nagran who had lived in the Great Sarain Forest for a long time. Could those who were rumored to have suddenly disappeared actually still be here? Sensing a whirlwind of thoughts crossing his mind, Yuder turned his gaze to Kishiar.

"They might still be nearby."

At Yuder's words, Kishiar nodded. They began to survey the area, leaving the corpses behind.

Chapter 316

Emun and Lusan were full of tension as what was expected to be a straightforward encounter with Knights suddenly took a severe turn. Yuder, clasping his hands together, realized anew that despite their readiness for life-or-death struggles, they were people still more accustomed to peace. This was evident in Lusan, who constantly muttered prayers under his breath, and Emun, who tightly gripped the dagger at his waist, refusing to let go.

'If only half of my strength had returned, I could have reassured them.'

Though disappointed, Yuder was not overly worried. He was confident he could handle any considerable enemy with even the smallest stream of power. If the opponent was not an Awakener, his worries would reduce even further.

"There, the fourth outpost is in sight."

Kishiar, who was walking ahead, murmured, halting his steps. The place he gazed upon was the last destination the deceased Knights were aiming for. An eerie wind blew around a small house, neglected among the wildly grown grass and trees.

Yuder felt a strange familiarity tingling somewhere beyond his senses as the wind touched his skin. He instinctively hardened his gaze, surveying the surroundings. There were certainly no signs of human presence, but...

"Before we go in and investigate, first..."

"Wait! It's dangerous."

Driven by instinct, Yuder pulled back Kishiar, who was standing at the forefront. Simultaneously, a sharp, lethal attack flew from the front where there was nothing a moment ago. Along with someone's scream, all of Yuder's senses heightened to the utmost.

There was something. Since when, or from where...!

"So, we've been discovered after all."

Suddenly, faces that were not there just a moment ago appeared as space tore before his eyes. There was a woman with her hands raised in caution and a man with a calm expression—a pair. Yuder swallowed hard as he recognized the man's face.

"...Nahan."

"You still remember my name, how delightful."

The man, one side of his face distorted by burns, smiled cheerfully at Yuder.

"I was regretful to see how much your condition had worsened since our last encounter, but your sharpness is still intact. Admirable."

"..."

"I heard plenty about the tale of you and your brothers upon my arrival here. It would have been better if we had not met at all."

"I warned you not to call me that way the last time."

Hearing Yuder's emotionless, cold voice, Nahan let out a laugh, his face still distorted.

"No matter how much you deny it, just like blood ties cannot be undone, those of us who shared power are all brothers and sisters."

If he had the strength, he would have retaliated right then and there, and the fact he couldn't was deeply regrettable. Ignoring Nahan's provoking remarks, Yuder opened his mouth.

"Did you kill the Knights from Tainu?"

"That wasn't me. Ershi, standing next to me, did it."

Nahan nonchalantly replied and nodded towards the woman gasping beside him, who tightly held a blood-stained bag on her waist.

"Ershi has no patience. Well, they deserved what they got, and mercifully, we sent them away without pain, so they shouldn't have any complaints in the afterlife."

Nahan seemed unchanged from before, still casually spouting blood-stained words with a calm voice, still easily dismissing human lives, exactly like the last time Yuder saw him.

'Of all times to encounter him, it had to be now.'

The situation was not favorable. If his power had fully recovered, it might have been different, but dealing with Nahan was challenging at a mediocre level.

"Going by the name, is he the Awakener from the Star of Nagran who you met twice?"

At that moment, Kishiar, who softly gripped Yuder's rigid shoulder, whispered in a low voice, tilting his head.

"Yes."

"I see... finally meeting the one we couldn't find for so long, right here."

His red pupils slowly swept over Nahan. Only then did Nahan seem to fully acknowledge Kishiar by his side, slightly opening one eye.

"Since you've confessed to committing murder, you won't complain if you're arrested here. Let's retrieve the bag first, then we'll hear the details."

"Commander."

Yuder gently held the hem of Kishiar's clothing, who seemed ready to jump in at any moment, shaking his head. While he did not doubt Kishiar's strength, the situation was different with those he needed to protect involved. There was nothing more dangerous than having a weakness at your back when facing someone like Nahan, a mental type Awakener.

"So, you're the famous Cavalry Commander, the Duke of Peletta..."

Nahan caught Yuder's soft whisper, and an odd emotion flickered across his gaze, replacing his previous ease. It was a mixture of curiosity and caution.

"I've heard a lot about you. I was curious about what kind of man could have the strongest brother I've ever seen under his command. This is quite unexpected."

"Why. Am I more handsome than you expected?"

"Ha-ha. Hardly."

Nahan lowered his gaze to Kishiar's retort, and his eyes returned to Yuder. Yuder felt an eerie unease when he met his subtly smiling eyes.

"To be precise... I was surprised because it was a face I've seen before."

The moment unease became reality, a shocking, heart-stopping sensation vibrated throughout his body.

Yuder recalled Kishiar from his previous life when Nahan had used his illusion power on him. It was merely an illusion different from reality, and he had escaped quickly, but Nahan, the one who cast the power, would have known what Yuder had seen.

"You..."

"So, what do you plan to do with the bag you stole from the corpse?"

Kishiar, who hadn't noticed the exchange of some kind of energy between Yuder and Nahan, simply asked indifferently, ignoring Nahan's words. At that, Nahan twisted a smile.

"Well, what I'll do with it is Ershi's business, so let me ask her. Ershi, what do you plan to do with it? He's asking."

"..."

Instead of answering, the woman opened her mouth and showed her teeth in a grin. A heavy aura of brutality filled the surroundings. That alone was enough to tell what she was planning to do.

"I have a great interest in the illegal trades of the Tain Duchy. It's not pleasant when a third party intervenes."

"We're not intervening. Rather, it's the opposite, Commander."

Nahan rebutted, raising both hands lightly, as if enjoying it. With small movements that didn't use any powers, the atmosphere quickly became tense. He continued speaking, as if he found the situation amusing.

"This isn't murder, but punishment. Ershi is just a victim who was hurt by them, ran away, and did what she wanted when she came to us, and I just watched. The Cavalry happened to pass by, so who can say who's intervening in whose business?"

With his eyes twisted in red, he said while staring intently at Kishiar.

"It's not our fault that the Cavalry, the very ones who mercifully spared the trash of Apeto, were concerned with strangers."

"Such a statement is inappropriate. The guilty must be punished, of course, but it is not your place to make that judgment!"

Lusan stepped forward, rebutting Nahan's words. He was clenching his fist, unable to contain his fear, but it seemed that the horrific sight of the body he had seen earlier gave the young priest the courage to speak up.

"Hmm. So, you're suggesting we leave it to a god who does nothing? Or perhaps to biased, stupid humans? Or, to the Cavalry who do nothing but prostrate before enemies without power?"

Nahan's gaze at Lusan, clad in priest's robes, was extraordinarily calm and cold.

"No. That's not it. If you can do it, we can do it too. There's no need to listen to the words of idiots when you have the power to act."

The moment Lusan met the terrifyingly twisted, eerie eyes, he wobbled, seized by fear without realizing it.

"Uh, ugh, ah...!"

"Priest!"

"What the hell, ah. No, ah... Help, save me...!"

Yuder quickly supported Lusan. Facing the illusion that had suddenly overwhelmed him, Lusan helplessly floundered and screamed. Yuder was about to use his power at the sight of Lusan's agonized flailing limbs amid his screams for help, but Kishiar raised his hand first, snapping his fingers lightly.

A blob of light, similar to what they had seen at the harvest festival, instantly destroyed the buildings and trees around Nahan and his colleagues. With the booming sound of breaking and exploding, Lusan passed out and slumped down. Yuder rose from his place, watching Kishiar immediately fly towards the front.

"Emun, take care of the priest!"

"No, Yuder, the Commander told you to stay protected...!"

Yuder didn't wait for the rest of the sentence and dashed off. He chased after the traces of the three people who had vanished after the explosion. It didn't take long for him to find Kishiar standing still.

"Commander!"

"I told you to stay with the others in case of emergency, but you really don't listen."

Kishiar was alone. It seemed Nahan and his colleague had successfully evaded in that short span of time. His red gaze scanned the surroundings, cooled and stern.

Chapter 317

The moment Yuder saw Kishiar's clothes dyed red and the scattered blood on the ground, he felt a dizzying sensation for the first time.

"Commander, whose blood is that...?"

"Ah. This isn't my blood."

Kishiar calmly looked down at the blood stained on him and responded.

"I thought I almost had him... but he managed to escape."

Hearing that, Yuder finally took a deep breath and the chill in his stomach somewhat subsided. Had even a single drop of that blood belonged to Kishiar, Yuder would've undoubtedly gone to find Nahan and his companions, no matter what anyone else said. Yuder maintained his silence for a moment, then muttered, "I'm glad."

Kishiar, who had been staring at the blood staining the ground, finally lifted his gaze.

"When I only heard about his illusion ability, it didn't feel real... But having experienced it directly, I understand why my assistant gave it such a high evaluation."

"Did he use his ability?"

At Yuder's sharp question, Kishiar widened his eyes a bit, then soon smiled faintly.

"Just for a brief moment."

Kishiar explained that for a fleeting moment, when his eyes met with Nahan's who was trying to escape, he was briefly stunned due to the illusions that rapidly confused his senses. It was a very short moment, but enough for the enemy to hide.

"It felt strange. Despite knowing it was an illusion, it was so elaborate that I had to react."

"That's how his ability works."

Mental abilities might seem incredibly weak at a glance. If one has a decent amount of mental strength, they can distinguish between reality and the illusion, and the caster's combat ability itself is usually not at a significant level. However, the real power of the illusion Nahan presented was that even if one knew it was fake, it was still hard to break free from it. His illusions were not only created by Nahan himself but were formed within the mind of the one affected, making them more

persistent and vicious. Coupled with his unendingly fanatical commitment to his own beliefs and his ruthlessness in not exploiting his companions as weaknesses, it was hard to find a better mental ability user in all his past lives.

However, the illusion was so powerful that even Kishiar, who would not lose to anyone in this world in terms of mental strength, had to stop even knowing it was fake. What on earth had he seen?

"But... what illusion did you see?"

At Yuder's question, Kishiar lifted the corners of his lips.

"Do you want to know?"

"If it's uncomfortable, you don't have to tell me."

"It was you."

Yuder was momentarily taken aback at the immediate response. Kishiar, who had been observing Yuder's reaction, then gently laughed, as if to lighten the mood.

"You can call me a fool. I brought you all the way here to show you something impressive, but I've accomplished nothing. I deserve to be reprimanded."

"..."

How could he say such a thing? Something in his chest felt like it was being sharply pricked by a long needle. After a prolonged silence, Yuder finally managed to speak.

"No. I... would have done the same. So, you shouldn't blame yourself."

Yuder knew very well the dirty feeling after being subjected to Nahan's illusions. Although he didn't know precisely what aspect of himself Kishiar had seen, the chilling sensation he had felt when he saw Kishiar from his previous life in the illusion was still vivid in his memory.

But that wasn't real. Recalling his past experiences of breaking free from the illusions, Yuder spoke slowly.

"His illusions are formidable but not absolute. Now that you've seen his ability, it won't be difficult to recognize and counter it next time. I was also deceived several times at first."

Having encountered his illusion three times, Yuder began to grasp a certain unique feeling, hard as it was to describe. Kishiar would undoubtedly have been able to understand much more quickly than Yuder.

"Yes. That must be the case."

The words he finally managed to utter seemed to offer him some comfort as the dark shadow in his eyes faded.

"Come to think of it, I've never properly heard what kind of illusion he used on you. The report was too brief."

"..."

This time, Yuder truly felt as if he had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. He tried to keep his face as unchanged as possible as he responded.

"That's pretty much it. I don't remember it well anymore..."

Deceiving Kishiar was as difficult as deceiving Kanna, who could read information. The scrutiny from his gaze made his hands sweat, but Yuder maintained his poker face, emptying his mind. His unfathomable crimson gaze lingered on Yuder's unseen left eye for a while.

"I see... I see."

"Commander! Yuder!"

Fortunately, as Kishiar nodded, Emun appeared from behind.

"There you are. I thought something happened because you didn't show up even as time passed... oh, but is that blood...?"

"It's not my blood."

Kishiar calmly gave the same response he had given to Yuder.

"Oh... That's a relief. The priest has just woken up."

They carried the awakened Lusan back to the base of the Western Mage Union. Those who had left to search for the Star of Nagran had not arrived yet. After waking up, Lusan was so shocked that he couldn't have a proper conversation for a while, but after taking a rejuvenating potion, he slowly began to regain his usual self.

Kishiar called Micalin and provided information about Nahan to the mages of the Western Mage Union. He didn't elaborate on the part related to the Star of Nagran, but just the information that he and his companions had killed three Knights of Tainu today, and had committed several murders before, was enough to make Micalin's face pale instantly.

"We already had many injured mages, and were planning to extensively replace personnel and facilities before starting serious research. We might have to advance those plans and consider closing down the base for a while."

While Micalin was contemplating preventive measures, Emun called Kishiar from outside the door.

"Commander. You need to come out for a moment."

"What's up?"

"Kanna has returned. She says there's something she needs to report first..."

Yuder left his seat with Kishiar to greet Kanna. Seeing Kishiar, Kanna, who had returned alone ahead of others thanks to the power of the Eldore siblings, quickly started her report with a serious face.

"When I read the area around where the village used to be, I discovered information about an unexpected person who had been there."

"Who was that?"

Yuder waited for Kanna's response, feeling like he already knew the answer.

"It's Nahan. He's the illusionist who led those who appeared at the Apeto estate before..."

It was as he had suspected.

"Even so, we have just had an encounter with the man."

"Could it be... that man... right?"

Kanna, who was about to continue explaining about Nahan, gasped in surprise. Yuder sighed and briefly told her about their encounter with Nahan and his ally. As he explained how they had killed the Knights from Tainu, attacked Lusan, and vanished with a bag that could contain evidence related to illegal trade, Kanna's face transformed through a range of emotions.

"...Good heavens."

"So, when was he there?"

"I'm not exactly sure. Since he had hidden the entire village using his ability and only revealed it after everyone had moved, I couldn't ascertain every detail..."

But the information Kanna read about Nahan was concise and crucial. He had arrived there due to a conflict related to what happened in the village of the Star of Nagran and afterward had moved everyone to one place. That was all.

"A conflict... Likely related to the migration."

"That seems highly probable. I read numerous memories of people being anxious about whether they could migrate."

"The consideration of whether they could migrate... Was there a dispute about whether to take only the Awakeners?"

"Nahan appears to have more authority than anticipated. If a man who is only concerned about the Awakeners decided to move everyone, there must be a reason."

Seeming to align with Yuder's thoughts, Kishiar paused drumming his fingers on the table and looked up.

"Did you read anything more about that?"

"No. No matter how much I tried, I couldn't definitively find out. I apologize."

As Kanna apologized, she closed her mouth tightly and retreated into thought before speaking again.

"However... based on the information I've read from the Gayle and Doyle brothers over time, there are areas that seem plausible. Although, I cannot guarantee that my thoughts are correct..."

"I'll listen carefully and make adjustments, so go ahead and share anything you have."

The soft tone of Kishiar's voice seemed to give Kanna some strength; the tension in her face slightly eased.

"As I reported before, it seems certain that the interior of the Star of Nagran is divided into two factions. Regardless of Nahan's substantial authority, if the opposition faction had strong opinions... I believe he wouldn't have been able to completely reject them."

Chapter 318

The opposition party that Kanna had mentioned must have referred to the moderate faction, which included the brothers Gayle and Doyle. Gayle and Doyle were deeply cautious of Nahan expanding

his power within the Star of Nagran and candidly displayed their disapproval. As Yuder thought about the information he had obtained about them so far, Kanna's words continued to flow.

"So, we've assumed that the hardliners centered around Nahan were at odds with the moderates led by a person called Sage due to differences of opinion, but maybe the truth is..."

"That it might not be as simple as that," Yuder finished for her.

"Yes, yes."

Kanna nodded, her face flushing.

"Even based on the information we've collected so far, Nahan is incredibly dangerous and doesn't care about others' opinions. Such a person might either have much more power than I imagined, enough to make me change my mind and move, or... despite what others might think, their relationship might not be as bad as it seems."

Reflecting on future events, it seemed like a plausible opinion. The internal discord regarding the 'Star of Nagran,' which Yuder first became aware of in his past life, was set to occur much later than the current timeline. Although it was still unclear whether the 'Sage', who was said to be the mental pillar of the moderates, was the same person Yuder had met in his previous life, it was likely that their relationship wasn't as bad as they were trying to kill each other just yet.

'If it's true that the faction that tried to gather the Awakeners and cause terror and the faction that tried to join hands with the nobility fell apart due to internal discord... surely Nahan would be the former and the Sage the latter.'

So far, there was no information about such a group trying to approach the noble class of the Empire. It's possible that the Sage's faction had already started to make some moves without Yuder's knowledge, but if there were any movements related to the Awakeners, they would have definitely caught the eyes of Kishiar and the Cavalry.

Who was the Sage really? He seemed to have recruited the Awakeners like Gayle and Doyle and done various things, but seeing that he did not actively discourage people like Nahan's aggressive actions, was he secretly agreeing with them? Or he might have been trying to trap all those who were not Awakeners to carry out some plans.

"We'll have to prioritize gathering information about this Sage over Nahan in the future," Kishiar murmured, coming out of his deep thoughts.

"And Kanna, I'm sorry but could you do another search at the outpost of the Tain Family when you can?"

"Ah, yes! Of course."

Kanna straightened her serious expression and smiled. She left to meet Lusan with Emun, promising to investigate more about the Sage. Left alone, Yuder cautiously addressed Kishiar.

"What are you planning to do from now on? Will there be any issues due to this incident?"

The knights of Tainu they were supposed to meet were dead, and the bag that might have contained evidence of illegal trade had disappeared.

Even if members of the Star of Nagra were harboring grudges about the illegal trade conducted by the House of Tain, it would be a big problem if it interfered with what Kishiar was planning to do. Whether reading the worry in Yuder's eyes or not, Kishiar looked up at him and smiled.

"There's no need to worry. It's a bit regrettable that we didn't get the bag, but if the Star of Nagra behaves as they said, it shouldn't turn out too bad for us."

"Do you have a plan in mind?"

"Imagine, if the Tain family knew that the Star of Nagra was after them, who do you think they would ask for help?"

When an incident related to an Awakener occurs, the priority to handle it is given to the Cavalry. There was no better choice to deal with the Awakeners other than other Awakeners. Yuder blinked, feeling as if his mind was suddenly illuminated.

"That makes sense. But, they've already strained their relationship by rejecting our offer to help with the monster subjugation. I'm not sure if they will change their attitude so easily. Given the case's association with punishment, I think there's a high probability they'll try to handle it internally with their family's power alone..."

"That's only possible if the Tain family still has that much power left."

As Kishiar spoke with certainty, a childlike smile of mischief briefly played on his face.

"Of course, at first, they'll think they have to handle it that way. But think about why the Tain family asked us to handle the monster subjugation in the first place."

With a gleeful expression, Kishiar lowered his voice, as if revealing a secret.

"Although it's a secret to the outside world, the current Duke of Tain is known to have poured most of the fortune inherited over generations into risky investments. Can you imagine how hard it would be to handle this matter alone, with their power tied up everywhere? They won't be able to hold out for long."

"...I see. In that case, we can just continue with our original plan until they reach out again."

"Exactly."

Kishiar had previously stated he did not want a third party to get involved in the illegal trading activities of the Duke of Tain, but if things turned out as discussed, it was more like he had actually provoked the Star of Nagran into action. Yuder was newly astounded by Kishiar's skillful manipulation, drawing the opponent onto his palm in a tense situation.

"We'll have to chase both and apprehend both. Things are going to get busier."

It might have been a relief that they didn't have to worry immediately about the monster subjugation and the Magic Spring Ruins. Kishiar planned to inform all the members returning today about this matter and issue new orders.

"Now, there's no reason for me to stay here any longer. Those who have to stay, stay. Those who have to leave, should leave now."

"You're heading to Tainu."

Remembering Tainu, where the remaining half of the second dispatch team would be heading, Yuder spoke. It was the perfect place to command tasks in the west, to observe the Tain family, and it wouldn't arouse suspicion from anyone.

Kishiar, who nodded in agreement, cast a gentle smile at Yuder.

"You're coming too."

As an assistant, it was natural for Yuder to accompany Kishiar. But due to his not yet fully recovered condition, he felt an unexpected weight in those brief words, as if he had thought he might be left behind.

"You're taking me with you?"

"Did you think I would leave you behind? Unfortunately, I don't have any candy to offer this time."

"..."

When Yuder remained silent, Kishiar messed up his hair with a laugh.

"I won't put you straight to work once we arrive, of course. Tainu is the largest city in the west, so you can get more relaxed treatment there. Focus on recovering your strength."

Yuder had no choice but to respond affirmatively. But even after he had answered, the hand that had been ruffling his hair didn't let go so easily. To a casual observer, it may have seemed like the usual playful demeanor, but Yuder suddenly felt an odd sensation.

Kishiar hesitated, looking down at Yuder.

"...Commander?"

"Hmm?"

"When will you stop doing that?"

"No, the touch is too pleasant, it's been a while since I've touched it."

Of course, the strange feeling vanished like a fantasy as soon as he spoke, but the bizarre sensation, which seemed like an illusion yet wasn't, lingered like an aftertaste, tweaking a corner of his nerves. Yuder watched for a long time the bloodstains on the hem of Kishiar's clothes as he turned his body lightly and slipped out. Then he furrowed his brow.

After the sun set, all the Knights of Peletta and Cavalry members who had been searching around the ruins of the village of the Star of Nagan returned. Yuder was distracted all through dinner by the noisy greetings of his colleagues, whom he had met after a very long time.

They were all surprised to see the discoloration remaining on Yuder's skin and his left eye which had not yet regained sight. They were genuinely saddened to hear that his body had not fully recovered and he couldn't exert his full strength.

However, as the atmosphere became a bit more relaxed, the deflated mood dissipated and finally, unable to contain his curiosity, Jimmy's words triggered an explosion of suppressed curiosity.

"Yuder! Did you really kill that big monster by yourself? Can you explain just a bit about how exactly you killed it? Everyone says it was as big as a mountain, I can't even imagine. Can we still see its body?"

"Yuder. On the way here, people in every village were only talking about this, did you know? Although they don't know the name well yet, it's probably going to spread quickly once we return to the capital."

Jimmy, who hung on his arm and sparkled his eyes, and Ever who gleefully told him the news he didn't want to know, were simply overwhelming. The members who came with the second dispatch team were all curious about Pethuamet, and couldn't bear not knowing how it had been killed. The storm of questions only subsided a bit after Kanna intervened and mentioned that there was a warehouse where they were preserving the monster's dissected body. Only then did Yuder learn that there was a separate place for its storage.

Excited, the members decided to go see the body together right after dinner. Yuder didn't want to see it, but he couldn't refuse their request and reluctantly got up from his seat. Just his luck, Kishiar wasn't there as he had gone to meet the Knights of Peletta.

"The place where we store the dissected corpse is here. The Magic Tool Materials Storage."

Kanna led them down to the basement of a vacant building. Yuder realized it was the place where they had once held the assassins who had infiltrated to target Ejain. Even though the culprits had been caught long ago, it seemed that the place had continued to be used for storage.

"I wish you didn't have to cut it. I wanted to see how big it was in its intact form."

"They had no choice but to cut it because it was so large. The mages have to do their research, and they can't go to the forest, right? I was only able to see a portion that the Commander had cut, and it was so large it made my jaw drop."

"Really?"

Upon hearing Kanna's words, Jimmy and the other members who had been lamenting regained their curious expressions immediately.

"Yes. Just don't be too surprised when you go in."

The warehouse was incredibly dark. Unable to see ahead, one of the members who had been included in the second dispatch team lit a small flame to illuminate the surroundings. However, the sight of Pethuamet's huge head, with wide-open eyes right in front of them, made the members scream as if they had seen a ghost.

"I reacted like that the first time too..."

Gakane murmured, laughing aimlessly with Kanna. The severed head of Pethuamet was placed in the center of the warehouse. Behind it, boxes were stacked, containing severed limbs like legs or tails. However, the monster's body didn't rot even after death, so there wasn't a bad smell.

The members realized anew how terrifying the monster in the rumors that Yuder had killed was when they saw Pethuamet's body. Jimmy shivered, noticing that one of the spikes stuck in Pethuamet's tail was larger than his own sword, while Ever stood in front of the giant head, trying to measure its size.

"I've never seen such a big monster before. It's impossible to even pierce its skin with a sword, let alone kill it."

"That's why the Commander had to dissect it himself. It was impossible for others to cut it so cleanly. The head part is going to be sent to the Emperor as a tribute."

"Really? Can't I try cutting the skin too? I'll only try a little bit! Really just a little bit!"

Yuder watched the chattering members from a corner. When he killed Pethuamet, he had never imagined such a mundane future. It felt almost like a lie that the members in front of him were the same ones who had been pained by the endless swarm of monsters in his previous life, their expressions fading day by day.

"Who's making such a noise... huh?"

At that moment, a faint voice was heard from behind. Yuder, who turned his head, blinked his eyes as he encountered the mage Lorna who just popped her head out of a small door stuck to the wall. The surprised expression was mutual.

"...It was you guys. Did you come to see the monster's corpse?"

"Yes. We didn't know you were here, we're sorry if we disturbed you."

"No, not at all."

Lorna subtly shifted her gaze, scrutinizing the members who still hadn't noticed her and were making a fuss. Yuder tilted his head, sensing a fleeting feeling.

"But... what were you doing inside?"

The only reason to come to the warehouse was to find something, but Lorna's hands were empty. He glanced inside to see if there was anything, but couldn't see anything due to the thick darkness.

"Um, well... I was..."

"Oh, someone was here first?"

Just then, one of the members noticed them, and Lorna could no longer hide. Kanna, noticing her, seemed to grasp something and exchanged glances with Gakane before approaching.

"Mage."

"I apologize. Knowing it's due to be discarded tomorrow made me feel regretful, so I wanted to take one last look. I meant no other intent."

Upon seeing Kanna, Lorna immediately raised her hands in an honest plea of innocence. Her words didn't seem to hold any deceit, but the content was still difficult to grasp.

'...Discarded? What are they going to discard?'

Other members wore similarly puzzled expressions. Kanna sighed and opened her mouth, after looking at her companions.

"Everyone, please wait here for a moment. I'm going to have a little discussion inside with the mage."

"Can I listen too?"

When Yuder interjected, Kanna seemed lost in thought for a moment, creasing her brow, then agreed. Gakane, already seemingly aware of what Kanna would say, calmly whispered his intention to guard the door, and courteously closed it after them.

Once the noises from outside were blocked, a heavy silence filled the darkness that engulfed them. Lorna murmured in a worried voice.

"I was really just observing, I didn't do anything else..."

"That's something we'll find out once we read it."

"Are you going to use your ability?"

Lorna seemed to have realized the power of Kanna's abilities in the meantime. Yuder, for the first time, became aware of the fact that Kanna could have such a stern and determined look in her eyes.

"If necessary, I will. Where is 'it'?"

Lorna sighed and moved deeper into the room. As she stopped somewhere and activated a small magic device, light seeped out, illuminating the surroundings. Only then did Yuder see the small cage in front of them.

Inside the cage made of sturdy iron bars was a small monster the size of a palm, hunkered down, nibbling on something. Seeing the spikes that resembled pine cones attached to its long tail, Yuder finally understood why Kanna had acted as she did. It was the Pethuamet, something they thought they'd never see again. For a moment, Yuder felt a chill run down his spine, and was unable to say anything.

"...Kanna, why is this monster... why is it still here?"

"There was something I didn't tell you before."

Kanna opened her mouth with a stern voice.

Her explanation was brief. Several ingredients were needed for the magic to remove traces of the Amplification circle from Yuder's body. Initially, they researched using the tongue Yuder had voluntarily given, but that alone was insufficient. Then, Kishiar decided to use the body and tongue of a massive Pethuamet, and it was during this time that Lorna, who had followed them, found this little Pethuamet.

"It must have been a lucky survivor. Fortunately, it hadn't absorbed any magic or other power yet."

Lorna thought the pure Pethuamet could be the breakthrough they needed for their solution. She risked her life to convince the others not to kill the monster immediately, and under the supervision of Kishiar and the Knights, she was able to prove that she was right.

The monster, having served its purpose, was scheduled to be disposed of the next day.

"I also agree that disposal is the right thing to do. But considering this situation, I wanted to take one last look. After all, the chance to see a monster capable of absorbing and releasing power won't come again...."

Lorna quickly interjected.

"So, did you finish your observations?"

"...I'm more than satisfied with the answers we got from this research. I truly have no intention of being greedy."

Kanna lightly tapped on Lorna's shoulder. Her stern expression didn't soften, but the fact that she didn't utter a word implied that there was some truth to what Lorna had said.

'A monster that absorbs and expels power... Indeed, they said that because of the amplifier created by the Western Mage Union before, the power was only amplified within it, so it should be able to expel it in a normal state.'

Perhaps the answer that Lorna had found was somehow related to that expelling part. Yuder was watching Pethuameth, who was uninterested in what humans were doing and was chewing on a large leaf. As if sensing his gaze, Pethuameth ceased the movement of his jaw.

'But if it absorbs by eating, does it expel... through excretion?'

While he was considering this question he had never been curious about before, the small Pethuameth suddenly dropped the leaf it had been holding in its mouth. It began to howl sharply towards the direction where Yuder was, scraping the bars like a four-legged beast. Even though Yuder showed no reaction, Pethuameth didn't stop the movement of scratching the bars and wagging its tail. As a result, the conversation between Kanna and Lorna came to a pause.

"...Why is it doing that?"

"I don't know. This is the first time it's reacted like this."

“You didn’t do anything to the monster, did you?”

Upon Yuder’s question, Kanna, who was standing beside the flustered mumbling Lorna, lightly touched the bars. It seemed she was attempting to use her power. Before he could tell her not to, as it was dangerous, an odd expression suddenly surfaced on Kanna’s face.

"...Huh?"

In the midst of a tense atmosphere, Kanna turned her head towards the two of them and opened her mouth slowly with an uncertain look.

"I'm not sure if I read it right... but it seems like the monster feels that you, Yuder, are... how should I put it, a similar being."

"... It thinks I'm a similar being? Are you saying I'm a monster?"

“Of course, Yuder, you're a human. You’re a human, but... I’ll use my power again. Maybe I read it wrong.”

"Don't."

But the result was the same. Despite Yuder and Kanna's dumbfounded reactions, the small Pethuameth continued to scratch the bars and made strange sounds. Lorna, who had been watching this, suddenly raised her head as if she realized something.

"Could it be because of the toxin you absorbed?"

Upon hearing this, Yuder turned his gaze towards Lorna, who started to speak rapidly in an excited tone.

"You were able to recover after absorbing the toxic fluid. I speculated once that you probably won't be affected by the same monster's venom in the future. We still know little about how monsters recognize individuals of the same kind, but the stain that remained in your body has not fully healed. If that's why..."

It was a shocking conjecture, but it seemed to be the most plausible explanation given the situation. Yuder, looking down at the monster wagging its tail towards him, shook his head.

"...If I won't be affected by the same monster's venom in the future, that's good news."

From Yuder's perspective, who considered monsters to be his greatest weakness, it was indeed great news.

'Of course, it's uncertain when I'll encounter Pethuameth again, so it may be a moot point.'

"So before you leave, I wanted to ask if you could test the monster's venom..."

Lorna, who was continuing her sentence, promptly closed her mouth under Kanna's gaze.

So far, he had not felt any major changes except for the slow recovery of power, but as she said, there was a possibility that something might have changed without him knowing.

'What a bizarre turn of events...'

"You guys are here."

While he was lost in thought, someone who had come closer unnoticed, let out a voice from behind.

Chapter 320

"Commander!"

When Kanna raised her voice in surprise, Kishiar revealed himself from the darkness, smiling.

"What were you talking about?"

After Kishiar appeared, Lorna seemed even more intimidated than when she had faced Kanna. Having just heard from Kanna about the events that had just transpired, Kishiar glanced down at Pethuamet, who was still scratching at the iron bars, and then turned his eyes toward Lorna.

"Lorna Beit, do you have anything to add to what Kanna said?"

"...No, I'm sorry."

"It seems you've grown comfortable with yesterday's success, but I would like you to keep in mind that it is not yet time for such comfort. You still need to learn to discern what you should and shouldn't say to someone who has just regained their footing."

"I was... rash."

Lorna merely bowed her head, offering no excuse. Seeing her trembling fingertips and not daring to look directly at Kishiar's face, Yuder began to wonder how Kishiar had treated the mages before, to prompt such a reaction.

"Go out and tell Micalin about this."

"...Yes."

It was only then that Lorna seemed to breathe again, quickly rising from her seat and leaving. Kishiar did not take his eyes off her until she was completely out of sight. Only after hearing the distant sound of a door closing did he finally turn to face Kanna and Yuder.

"Anyway, about the emotions of a monster... strange information. Have you ever read about this before, Kanna?"

"No, this is my first time hearing of it too. It's not so much emotions, but more... a feeling that's hard to explain."

Kanna explained that the information read from Pethuamet felt more like a powerful instinct, although it was too brief to say definitively. Yuder reached out slowly towards Pethuamet, who was hanging on the iron bars. The creature tilted its body to follow Yuder's hand and then recoiled, its short legs flailing. Yuder found the scene pathetically reminiscent of the massive Pethuamet. Kishiar also slightly furrowed his brow at the sight.

"It might be dangerous, so come back."

"It's fine. I'm sure, as Kanna said, this monster doesn't seem to harbor any hostility towards me."

"What should we do?..."

At Kanna's perplexed question, Kishiar fell into momentary silence. He seemed uncertain whether to immediately eliminate the unknown element or to verify it before moving on.

"Yuder, what do you think, from the subject's standpoint?"

"I... "

Yuder opened his mouth and then closed it again. Although he was taken aback by the expression of sensing kinship, he realized that there were those in the world who could command monsters and that more would emerge in the future. What would be so different about this? Thinking of it as an extra ability, he felt surprisingly eager.

'What if... I could use the power that this Pethuamet has, like those Awakeners who handle monsters?'

Yuder recalled the ability of Pethuamet that Lorna had mentioned.

Absorption of strength, and discharge.

At that moment, a thought suddenly struck his mind, sending shockwaves through his consciousness.

'Perhaps studying this monster's ability could help with Kishiar's vessel problem. Even if not, maybe it could help find answers related to what happened to me after absorbing the power of the Red Stone...'

It was merely a hypothetical scenario. However, Yuder was engulfed by an astonishment so distinct that it made him wonder why he hadn't thought of it just moments before. It was as though a new

path, hitherto unseen, had revealed itself before his eyes. Looking down at the little Pethuamet that squirmed and wriggled along his fingertips, Yuder opened his mouth again.

“If you ask for my opinion, I believe it might be wise to ascertain the correlation between the transformation that occurred to me and this monster before making a decision on its disposal. Wouldn't it be better than leaving an uncertain element unattended?”

“...”

“Of course, I mean if there's a way to verify it without risk.”

“Without risk.”

Kishiar, who had quietly responded, turned his gaze toward the cage holding the Pethuamet.

“I agree with not leaving uncertainties, but we'll have to think about it a bit more.”

They left behind the Pethuamet, crying out with small squeaks, and exited the storeroom. Yuder sensed the inquisitive glances of his comrades but feigned ignorance. Kanna felt the same.

Afterward, Kishiar gathered the rarely assembled members to inform them that he would be leaving tomorrow and that there were changes in the personnel staying in the Great Sarain Forest.

“As you all know, the situation has changed somewhat from what we originally anticipated. Therefore, I will inform you again who will leave for Tainu with me tomorrow and who will stay here to assist in the search and subjugation.”

Originally, including Gakane and the Eldore siblings, several from the second dispatch were to stay here, while Kanna and Emun were to leave for Tainu with Kishiar and Yuder. However, Kishiar removed Ever and Finn Eldore from the list, inserting Kanna instead.

“Kanna Wand will stay here to gather more information about the ‘village’ and then come to Tainu. Ever Beck will accompany us to Tainu and lead those there.”

“Understood.”

To Yuder, the changes in personnel seemed to suggest a shift in focus towards tracking the Star of Nagran and investigating the Magic Spring rather than monster subjugation. The members swallowed their surprise, nodding in agreement without objecting to Kishiar's decision.

Kishiar ordered everyone except Deputy Commander Ever, Kanna, and Gakane to return to the base. Upon arriving there slightly later than the others, Yuder saw a familiar face.

“Enon?”

“...”

He thought he wouldn't see Enon among the members who had arrived first and that he would have to go to Tainu to meet him, but he was wrong. The man who had been reluctant to leave the capital sat with a few Peletta Knights, his face as cold as ice. Upon seeing Yuder, he immediately scowled.

“You... what on earth happened to you?”

Enon, who had risen from his seat, pulled Yuder upstairs before anyone could say a word.

“This is madness. This is what you call healing? Where's Lusan? Lead the way.”

“Priest Lusan is lying down right now; he's not feeling well.”

“What? Why?”

Clearly, he hadn't received a detailed explanation of what had happened that day. As Yuder explained what had occurred to Lusan, Enon's expression grew even grimmer.

“It's one thing after another. Damn it all.”

“I heard the Commander called you, but I really didn't expect you to come all the way here.”

“What was I supposed to do when those knight bastards rushed in, saying you were all dying, and threw me into a carriage without warning?”

Hearing the details, it was clear that Enon had not come with the second dispatched unit. Yet, if he had arrived almost at the same time, one could only imagine how hastily he must have rushed. Enon, seemingly bearing great resentment towards Kishiar, headed towards Lusan's room, constantly muttering curses under his breath.

"S-Sir Enon...? When did you arrive?"

Lusan, who had been lying down with a pale face, jumped up in surprise, but Enon held his shoulder down. After examining Lusan's condition, he clicked his tongue and pulled out a few medicinal pills from his pocket to hand over.

"He really did a number on you. Take all of these, and don't use your divine power for a few days."

"I'm sorry. As a priest, I've lost face."

"It's fine. Just rest."

After taking the medicine Enon provided, Lusan fell asleep quickly. They settled down in a spot where they could keep an eye on the sleeping Lusan. Yuder felt Enon's eyes scanning his face, eyes, and even inside, and opened his mouth.

"Enon. Remember the thread you gave me?"

"...Why?"

"It was severed this time. I couldn't figure out its meaning, so I wanted to ask..."

Enon was silent for a moment. When he opened his mouth again, his eyes had sharpened.

"As I told you before, it was a kind of amulet. It absorbed and dispersed any shock that would shake the holder's power and soul. So, if it's broken, it means you endured a shock of that magnitude."

It seemed to imply that he had almost died from this incident, but part of it was not easily accepted.

"It didn't feel that dangerous."

"It didn't feel that dangerous? I heard some of it on the way here, but you must really be insane."

Enon, who had coldly deemed Yuder mad, exhaled as he stared into space, seemingly trying not to lose his temper.

"I told you before. No matter how good your innate talent is, there are limits. If you've come this far, is it your wish to die young?"

"Didn't I tell you I still don't believe it?"

"Do you think it matters whether you believe it or not right now?"

Enon, suddenly angry, took a few deep breaths again.

"How on earth did I get entangled with someone like you...? It's driving me crazy."

"...I'm sorry for that."

"If you were truly sorry, you wouldn't have done something like this."