

Turning 321

Chapter 321

Without restraint, Enon finally withdrew his piercing gaze only after thoroughly examining Yuder's hand, where the black stains hadn't completely disappeared. Seizing the opportunity, Yuder filled Enon in on his condition as Kishiar and Lusan had speculated. Enon only heaved a cold sigh in response to the explanation that it was recovery to this point after the magic to remove the traces of amplification succeeded.

"How long will it take for my power to fully recover, do you think?"

"Do you think I'm some sort of god? How would I know all that?"

Though he spoke those words, Enon opened his mouth again a moment later with a sullen face.

"You said your body improved after the magic succeeded, so I suppose our Commander's thoughts on this won't be too far off. But unless there's been another case like this, who would've experienced such a thing?"

Hence, Enon stated that no one could guarantee what would become of Yuder's body from here on.

"The pure power, like a poison existing within your body, that absorbs or repels outside forces, indeed seems to be continuously influencing you. To reduce the variables and ensure your condition, the body's owner must behave, but knowing you, that seems unlikely."

"..."

"Please, try to live more sensibly. Are you the only one in the Cavalry who does any work? No, with your personality, you'd probably insist on doing everything yourself, no matter what your friends or colleagues do to stop you."

Enon looked at Yuder with a mixed expression of irritation, sympathy, doubt, and a strange sense of realization, his words striking with precision as if he had read what the Cavalry's comrades had been saying.

"So, what was the reason for this action? Was it simply because you seemed to be the only one who could deal with that monster? Or was it related to your 'goal'?"

Yuder did not respond immediately, maintaining silence before finally nodding heavily.

"Yes. I thought you would answer like that."

"..."

"Was it such a dangerous monster? So much so that it had to be killed right then and there?"

"If I waited longer, it would've been too late. I had to deal with it alone when I could. Otherwise..."

Yuder's words trailed off, his gaze falling downward. All the disasters caused by the massive Pethuamet in his previous life flashed vividly in his mind once again. The shattered west, the stain of resentment and suffering on the Cavalry, and then.

The back of Kishiar, wavering on the breaking cliff.

"...It would have been too late to turn back."

Yuder erased the events that would never occur again from his mind.

"That's why I'm not regretting even after ending up like this."

Enon murmured with wide-open eyes as if he had finally found some answers, a strange energy seeming to emanate from beyond his gaze.

"Now I think I understand what you meant by the 'non-personal' goal."

No answer was returned. It seemed there was no need.

"...Then... No. I thought it was not yet time, but no, maybe not."

Muttering under his breath, Enon eventually fell silent, his forehead and eyes furrowed. Yuder waited for him to open his mouth again, but instead of speaking, Enon, who had risen from his seat, handed him something.

"...Take this."

"...This thread, how many do you have?"

"This is all I have now!"

Enon, who handed over a new thread similar to the one that had become ashes and had been cut off, exclaimed nervously. His appearance, which had seemed confused just a moment ago, had now returned to his usual demeanor.

"Don't break it again. I brought this just in case, so there won't be a next time."

"I'll try my best."

"Not try, say you understand!"

"Thanks, Enon."

Whether he had no words left for Yuder's curt expression of gratitude, Enon simply pressed his forehead and replied, "That's enough." To calm him down, Yuder proposed visiting the Magic Spring Ruins before leaving this place. But the response he got pointed out an unexpected aspect.

"The mages here thought that was the Magic Spring?"

"The Commander said it wouldn't be."

"Of course not."

Enon answered concisely and heaved a sigh towards the void, as if baffled.

"The Magic Spring isn't... like, a real spring. Even though the concentration of magic power has been getting thinner recently, and the level of mages has dropped, to have such a misconception. I don't know when the magic power began to pool here, but in my eyes, it was clearly artificially created."

"...By human hands?"

"Natural forces don't gather abnormally like this. The pure power that sustains the world has neither form nor will. Just as water can't stop if there's no place to pool, it means that someone must have dug the ground here to make the magic power gather."

"Who could it be?"

"I don't know. Probably some greedy human common everywhere."

Enon said no more. His face looked as though he regretted speaking, yet also as though he did not. For the first time, Yuder felt within his familiar yet unfamiliar expression, a weariness like that of a truly aged elder.

On the surface, Enon might seem nothing but young and not at all dangerous, but what was his true nature? What is a guardian? How much does Yuder not know about him, and will there be another chance in this life to learn the answer?

As Yuder hesitated and was about to call his name, Enon abruptly turned and said, "Let's go."

"Don't worry about useless things and take care of yourself."

And then he was gone, as swiftly as the wind. His resolute back seemed not to allow any more questions.

The next day, Yuder rose at dawn and went outside. Outside the base, fellow members who would accompany him, a few members of the Pelleta Knight, those who had come to see them off, and a pile of already stacked luggage awaited.

"Yuder."

Amid the cold dawn air filled with mist, Gakane approached and lightly tapped Yuder's shoulder.

"I'm sorry I can't go with you. Rest well until we meet again in Tainu, and take your treatment seriously. I'll send you letters, so reply. And... remember what you said to me before?"

"The appointment offer?"

"Yeah. That. It's still valid... right?"

Yuder nodded, looking into Gakane's green eyes, which seemed mixed with excitement and tension.

"It's valid."

Then Gakane finally smiled brightly, clenching his fist. The crisp dawn air made his reddened hair look even more vibrant. His appearance naturally justified the nickname 'Living Rose.'

"Good. I'm going to do a perfect job here, so look forward to it."

"By the way, I forgot to mention something back then, but success isn't the only thing that counts as doing well in a mission."

"Huh?"

Yuder responded softly to the handsome man who opened his eyes wide.

"Sometimes, the best outcome is when everyone is safe, even if we fail."

"What are you talking about? If anything, that's what I should be saying to you!"

Gakane burst out laughing.

"It seems you've learned a lot from being seriously injured this time. Yuder even said all these things."

"It's no joke."

"Yeah, I understand. I'll do my best to make sure everyone returns without injury."

Gakane eagerly shook hands with Yuder, clearly in high spirits. Following him, Kanna, who appeared a little later, spoke to Yuder, echoing similar words.

"Yuder, heed the Commander's words, and never overdo it. I'm worried that your eye should be fully healed when we meet in Tainu..."

Yuder faintly smiled at Kanna, who was looking worriedly at his still unrecovered left eye. Meanwhile, as he earnestly replied to the words of Jimmy and other members who remained there, an unexpected new person approached Yuder.

"Excuse me for a moment."

As Micalin, cloaked in a mage's robe, intervened, the Cavalry members quickly withdrew, adopting a nervous stance.

"What is the matter, Leader?"

"You've suffered a lot on our behalf here, so I must pay proper respects."

However, Micalin couldn't easily speak. The old mage, who scanned the black stain left on his forehead and his left eye for a long time, sighed deeply and bowed his head.

"I, Micalin Punt, will never forget the immense favor I owe you for this incident. I'm truly thankful for saving me and our union mages. If a day comes when you need help, contact me anytime."

"...I didn't do it to erase a debt."

"That's why it's even more embarrassing. I know it's not so."

Micalin said that he himself would go to Tainu soon, and if Yuder ever came to the Western Mage Union there, he would entertain him. Although Yuder wondered if he would ever contact them again, he said nothing.

"Ah, and about the magic spell that succeeded this time."

As talk of magic suddenly emerged, the eyes of the surrounding watching Cavalry members simultaneously turned fierce. Micalin continued, a little sheepishly.

"When a new magic spell is completed, it must be given an official name to report to the academic community... If you agree, I'd like to name this magic spell 'Yuder No. 1' after you."

He asked what Yuder thought, adding that naming a new magic spell was considered a great honor. But honestly, from Yuder's point of view, it was none of his business.

"...Do you have to use my name? Are there no other candidates?"

"I won't force it if you don't like it, but other candidates... hmm."

Micalin's eyes shifted more subtly.

"Names like 'Black Death's Anomaly Destruction Magic' or 'Malignant Infinite Amplification Addiction Removal Technique' are a bit too much, don't you think?"

For a moment, Yuder doubted his ears. The expressions of the other members changed to ones of astonishment as well. Amidst their inability to speak easily, a soft yet cold voice intervened from the fog.

"To be honest, I find all three options strange, but among them, 'Yuder No. 1' seems best."

"Commander."

Kishiar was dressed in a smooth black fur cloak that reflected light like flowing water, and ash-gray gloves. On one of his shoulders, there were two silver ornamental pins, each engraved with the crest of the Peletta Ducal House and the Cavalry. Unlike when he concealed his identity by covering his face, his appearance now conveyed a concise yet definite intention to reveal himself. With a new sword added to his waist, he looked as though he could be believed to be the second coming of an Emperor from legend.

Upon the Commander's appearance, Yuder turned his head, watching his suddenly energized colleagues with slight consternation. The red eyes met his, seeming to have been waiting for this moment, and sparkled with a pretty smile.

"How about it? Opportunities to leave one's name in history aren't common."

"If that's the Commander's opinion, then I'm fine with it."

"Then let's make it 'Yuder No. 1.'"

Micalin quickly made the decision. Kishiar watched the retreating figure of the old mage, a smile playing at the corners of his lips.

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"Mages have always been notoriously bad at naming. If it's going to be a strange name anyway, it's better to leave your name in it."

"..."

"Isn't it cold? It's quite chilly."

"I'm fine."

"Did you rest well last night? There were many things to check again before leaving, and I regret not having had the chance to look them over. Ah, I also received a report that the pharmacist Enon has arrived. Did you meet him?"

"Yes, I met him. I rested well at night, too."

The excessively sweet voice was bothersome, but fortunately, no one around seemed to be paying much attention to their conversation. Yuder hesitated for a moment before cautiously speaking.

"Did you rest well last night, Commander?"

"No."

Kishiar's eyes sparkled as if they had been waiting for those words.

"So when we join up with Nathan and get on the wagon, I plan to catch some sleep there."

"Ah, yes. That's good."

"There's no need to move quickly like on the way here, so it worked out well. You know that you must ride with me, don't you?"

"I... didn't know."

"Don't forget it now."

Yuder blinked silently, and Kishiar laughed lightly.

"Isn't there anything else you're curious about besides whether I rested well? I thought you'd ask by now."

'Ah.'

Only then did Yuder remember something he'd momentarily forgotten, mesmerized by Kishiar's appearance.

"... What have you decided to do with that monster from yesterday?"

He should have asked this first, but he forgot. Kishiar elegantly gestured toward a pile of luggage.

"Do you see that box wrapped in black cloth?"

"Yes. ...Have you decided to take it with us?"

"I've summoned some people from Tainu who know about monsters. We'll examine it properly there and then decide how to dispose of it."

His decisive voice was impeccably clear.

"The Mages will think we've discarded it, so keep it a secret even in Tainu."

He lightly brushed Yuder's left eyelid and turned away.

As the time to depart drew near, the Cavalry members shared their farewells, each filled with regret. For the first time, the Eldore siblings, who were separated by this incident, couldn't hide their gloom, and Ever was worried about young Jimmy, who would stay behind. However, Jimmy was excited and his cheeks flushed at the thought of carrying out an extermination mission in the vast Great Sarain Forest.

Yuder glanced up at the Western Mage Union's base building one last time. He didn't feel particularly sorry, but the fact that no one here had died this time gave him considerable satisfaction. Savoring the sensation, which seemed to warm his previously unnoticed hungry stomach, Yuder turned away.

The small base soon disappeared, hidden by the lush green forest of Great Sarain Forest.

"My lord! We finally have news from the Great Sarain Forest region."

Tainu's Lord Baron Willhem sprung up at the call, his eyes rolling anxiously.

"Is that so? Did they handle the base matter well? The Duke of Peletta? No, what about the Cavalry and those Western Mage Union rascals? And why was the news so delayed? I clearly told them to contact me at least once a week!"

Baron Willhem had never felt so impatient in his life. Recently, a series of events had befallen him, all of which seemed unbearably harsh for someone who had lived diligently without fault.

Without warning, the Cavalry member, known as Yuder, suddenly appeared in the Great Sarain Forest and silently vanquished the massive monster that had strangely emerged. That much could be accepted. But why was Duke Peletta Kishiar, who was supposed to be in the capital, present there? And why had the Western Mage Union not interfered with them?

Ever since Emperor Keilusa boasted of the achievements of the Yuder and Duke Peletta, Baron Willhem's days had been as painful as sitting on a bed of thorns. Day after day, angry messages mixed with rage from Duke Tain, blaming his incompetence, came flying his way, and the nobles and commoners of the west resented the house of Tain for not stopping the monster in time. Naturally, as the fame of the Emperor, Duke Peletta, and the Yuder grew, the blame and finger-pointing were directed at Baron Willhem, who managed Tainu.

Adding to his troubles, the knights sent late to defend the honor of the house of Tain did not even report properly, and his anxiety reached its peak. He spent his days in fretful anticipation, waiting for letters, often lashing out in anger at anyone within reach.

He hoped that Duke Peletta truly did not possess the divine sword. He wished that the news of the giant monster was nothing but an exaggerated rumor, and that in reality, the situation had been a complete disaster, resulting in many deaths. The secret trading post of the house of Tain should never have caught their eyes.

However, the expression of his attendant, who stood before him with the newly arrived news, was as pale as a ghost. Seeing his hand holding two letters trembling, Baron Willhem, filled with anxiety, commanded him to read quickly.

"M-My Lord, the knights we dispatched to the Great Sarain Forest... That is..."

"What is it? Don't tell me they discovered our trading post?"

The truth within the first letter, read in the attendant's faltering voice, was worse than that. Baron Willhem was shocked to learn that all three knights he had sent were killed in an ambush, and that Yuder, who had recovered the bodies, had sent the results of their investigation in a letter. He fainted momentarily from the shock.

Upon awakening, he learned from the next letter, which he hadn't fully heard, that the Commander of the Cavalry, Yuder, and other Cavalry members were planning to come to Tainu together. He fainted once again.

None of the things he had wished for had come true. Baron Willhem, a devout follower of the Sun God, lay cursing the deity's indifference, but he was scarcely allowed any rest. This was because of the command sent by the Duke of Tain.

'Chase the audacious Awakeners who dared to kill the knights of the house of Tain and stole their belongings. Using the stolen information, they will surely go to the Tain's middle trading post if they intend to harm us. And somehow invite Duke Peletta to find out how much of the rumors about the divine sword or Yuder are true, and what they know about our secret trade.'

The stern command from the Duke of Tain contained a threat that Willhem's safety could not be guaranteed if he failed again. Though it angered him that the duke only gave commands without providing the necessary manpower or funds, he had no choice.

"My Lord, Yuder and the Peletta Knights have just passed through the city gates. They will arrive here soon, so please prepare yourself."

"Understood."

Baron Willhem, his face having grown haggard in just a few days, dressed himself and went outside. He planned to meet Duke Peletta first and, under the guise of thanking him for the achievements of Yuder in the Great Sarain Forest, invite him to his mansion.

But when the horses and carriages that had run across the road stopped in front of him, and those who seemed to know nothing of courtesy or decorum clambered out, even the astute Baron Willhem could not help but become momentarily dazed.

"Ah, thought I was going to drop dead from exhaustion. Finally, we can take a rest!"

"Is this Tainu?"

"I'm a bit thirsty now... Where's the bathroom?"

Oh, God. Were these filthy and rude commoners really all members of the Cavalry? No matter how much he railed against it, the scene before his eyes remained unchanged. Standing behind Baron Willhem, the priests and knights could not hide their discomfort and confusion as an unusually striking tall man disembarked from the carriage.

He stood a full head taller than even the well-built knights, but his movements were more graceful, and he possessed a beauty that captured one's attention and would not let go. As Baron Willhem watched the man brush back his windblown hair and slowly close his red eyes, he found himself unexpectedly entranced and let out a subconscious sigh.

'I can't believe it. That man is the very same dissolute Duke...'

Up to now, the most representative information Baron Willhem had about Duke Peletta was stories of him being a dissolute and foolish Duke. Up until now, he hadn't found the other parts of his character even worthy of consideration.

But the man before his eyes was so radiant and overwhelming. Was he truly the problem child of the imperial family, that had been said by the Duke of Tain to be unworthy of serious consideration?

While Baron Willhem was lost in confusion, another person exited the carriage from which Duke Peletta had emerged. This one was a particularly pale youth with bloodless skin, only noticeable by his exceptionally black hair.

'Who is that? A servant... or an aide?'

In Baron Willhem's wonderment, the youth turned his head and looked straight at him. Baron Willhem felt a chill run down his spine as he met the gaze of that one eye covered in black spots. It was an eye that simultaneously drew and repelled attention, displaying an outstanding ability to induce discomfort.

As Baron Willhem unwittingly averted his eyes, the youth spoke to Duke Peletta, who then purposefully strode towards where Baron Willhem stood. The rowdy Cavalry members quieted as he moved.

"Are you Baron Willhem?"

"Yes, I am... Joseph Willhem. It is an honor to meet you, Your Grace."

Though he stumbled a little, Baron Willhem managed to greet the Duke with practiced etiquette.

"I hear from the guards at the gate that you wished to meet us."

"Yes. You have come a long way from Great Sarain Forest to Tainu; how could I, as the lord, remain idle? On behalf of all the citizens of the Empire on the western border who can now sleep peacefully thanks to Your Grace and the Cavalry, I wish to express my gratitude. I beseech you to accept it."

There had been no slip of the tongue so far. Baron Willhem reviewed his words and looked up from his reverent gaze. Kishiar was watching him with an inscrutable face. In truth, even before the Cavalry's arrival, he hadn't expected this proposal to be rejected. But now, seeing Duke Peletta's face in person, he felt uncertain and inwardly conflicted. If such a thing did happen, what could he say to the Duke of Tain?

Baron Willhem clutched at his racing heart as if in joy, scrutinizing the parting lips of Kishiar. And the next moment, the exceedingly elegant and beautiful man transformed into a serene face that appeared devoid of any thoughts, nodding and smiling broadly.

"Excellent! I've been worrying about where to sleep, so I'm truly thankful for your offer. Isn't that right, assistant?"

"Yes."

As the Duke asked, his arm casually draped around the shoulder of a black-haired man standing beside him, the man silently nodded in reply.

"Make sure to accept that favor."

"..."

Baron Willhem's first impression of the Duke of Peletta, who was considered to be very difficult contrary to rumors, noisily collapsed at that moment.

"I've gathered quite a bit of fatigue on the way. I'd like the evening meal to be prepared monastically... Ah, are you planning a party, too? Then I'll need to prepare new attire. Where will I be staying?"

"Ah, the... the guest house... has been prepared."

Still unable to completely detach himself from the discrepancy between his initial impression and reality, Baron Willhem clumsily responded, to which Kishiar chuckled and nodded.

"The guest house! That's good. It should be tolerable. I don't have many people in my current retinue, but personally, I don't like cramped spaces. Too much external attention and interference are bothersome. I trust you'll understand."

"Ye, yes... I understand."

"Ha ha ha. I get the feeling that you and I will get along quite well."

Kishiar burst into an endlessly light-hearted laugh, his eyes twinkling. If not for his appearance that seemed to fit anything he did, his attitude would have been so frivolous that he might have been dismissed at once. Baron Willhem remained stunned even after they had been led away to the guest house and disappeared, only snapping to attention after quite some time at the call of his attendant. A massive shock and relief had simultaneously struck his head.

"...My lord. Are you alright?"

"Heh. The rumors were not wrong at all."

"Yes?"

"It's nothing."

Baron Willhem offered his thanks to God with a lighter heart. He secretly commanded those who were attending the Duke of Peletta and the cavalry not to miss anything that they said or did.

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"Look at the dishes in this display cabinet. The gold trim is quite beautiful, isn't it? They must be very expensive."

"I saw some dishes just like these in another place earlier. They're so plain. Want to go count how many identical ones are here? It'll be quick if we use the wind ability."

"Sounds fun!"

"Why are there so many paintings of people here? I'd be too scared to come in at night, fearing making eye contact."

The Cavalry members' behavior as they explored the lavishly decorated mansion was bolder, brighter, and noisier than ever before. Watching the confused servants of the Willhem family scurrying around after them, Yuder felt a sense of déjà vu from a visit to the Apeto Duke's mansion.

‘Back then, the servants couldn't hide their contemptuous glances at the Cavalry members.’

Perhaps the reason the members were acting rowdier than necessary was that they felt those disdainful looks. Did they really need to show good behavior to those who would look down on them, whether the Cavalry members were behaving or showing more courtesy than nobles?

Comparing the present with the early days of entering the service, when they were intimidated before the Imperial Knights, Yuder swallowed his satisfaction, thinking it was truly a significant advancement.

"Yuder, shouldn't we go see the Commander soon? It seems like it's about time."

Sitting beside him, Ever, who had been wearing a refreshing expression, whispered in his ear. Yuder estimated the time and nodded, rising from his seat.

"...That's right. I'll go ahead."

"Good luck. Your role in this matter is the most important, after all."

Ever waved with a grin that was irresistibly joyful. Yuder let out a small sigh and turned his back.

Kishiar had predicted almost exactly the behavior of Duke Tain and Baron Willhem before coming to Tainu and planned to use it. The Tain family would think they were keeping the Cavalry members close and using Kishiar, but in fact, it was the opposite.

Kishiar was acting openly dissolute as Duke Peletta to lower the Tain family's guard and facilitate his later plans. To others, this behavior seemed rather like the well-known Duke Peletta, leaving no room for suspicion.

The only problem was that Kishiar wasn't the only one who had to act. No matter how wantonly Kishiar behaved, it was futile if his companions didn't support him, so everyone had been assigned their roles just before arriving at Tainu.

The Cavalry members had the role of a 'commoner group,' freely wandering the annex and thoroughly unnerving Baron Willhem and his servants. The Peletta Knights were assigned to loiter unnoticeably, lowering the surrounding vigilance. Yuder's role was entirely different from the others.

He saw the Tain family's servants gathered in front of Kishiar's nearby lodging. They were at a loss, neither daring to open the closed door nor leave, but they cleared the way, wearing strange expressions when they saw Yuder.

With looks mingled with fear, curiosity, and faint contempt, Yuder silently knocked on the closed door.

"Commander, I'm here."

"A person claiming to be me? Who am I, then?"

"...It's Yuder Aile."

At that, the closed door opened, and Kishiar poked his face out. The dazzling smile he blatantly displayed was so bright that it seemed to make the surroundings lose their light momentarily.

"Oh, my! My adorable assistant has finally arrived. Well, then, I can't not let you in. Come in, quickly."

"I, I... Your Grace. Baron Willhem has conveyed a message for... Your Grace!"

The servants of the Tain house who had gathered around were calling Kishiar desperately, but he calmly ignored their voices, gripping Yuder's waist and pulling him close. Yuder read clear astonishment in the eyes he met just before the door closed. A complicated emotion welled up inside him, and at the same time, Kishiar burst into bright laughter after looking at Yuder's expression.

"What's with that face?"

"...I was thinking whether it's really okay for me to play this role."

"Oh come on. I thought we all agreed on the necessity and purpose of the role of a cute lover to whom the lecherous Duke of Peletta is showing keen interest? If we remove some strange words from that, sure, I agreed. But that's because I didn't think I would be the one playing that role."

In the carriage on the way to Tainu, Kishiar had said that it wouldn't be difficult to portray the 'lecherous dissolute Duke of Peletta' that was rumored, but there was one problem. When asked what it was, the answer was that he would have to play with strangers whose identity was unknown.

"It's not only a waste of time but also highly dangerous. You never know who might approach with ill intent."

It made sense. However, leaving that part out wouldn't be in line with the character of the Duke of Peletta in the rumors. Therefore, Kishiar suggested adding the role of 'someone acting like a lover who is currently receiving much attention from the Duke of Peletta', and Yuder had reluctantly agreed.

The next day, Kishiar handed over that role to Yuder Aile in front of everyone. When Yuder protested, Kishiar silenced him with a perfectly reasonable explanation.

"There's no one better suited for this role than my constant companion. If I chose someone else, I would have to deliberately exclude other people around me, including my assistant, which would be bad for the progress of the plan. Also, once they know your true identity, they will start watching and attempting to trap you. By accepting this role, you could easily avoid such annoyances and dangers."

The fact that Yuder was a man wasn't a reason to refuse. Everyone knew well what Kishiar's and his second gender were, and since they were different, it would be better for embellishing the situation, and it would be easier to correct the facts afterward using the primary gender. Yuder was silent for a long time, looking at Kishiar, who calmly stated that everything had worked out well. Yuder didn't know when Kishiar had started planning this, but it was utterly foolproof.

However, to perform such a role while not holding hands with the other party in the present relationship seemed too cunning. It was even more so when he thought of their relationship in his previous life that Kishiar would not know about. But excluding those personal reasons, which he couldn't tell anyone, Kishiar's choice was highly efficient. That was the biggest problem.

Kishiar finally said that he would change his mind if anyone else volunteered, but of course, no one did until they arrived at Tainu.

And so, Yuder ended up with the single unique role.

'I was wondering what I would have to do since he was so confident that there was no need for me to do anything special on my side, but...'

Kishiar's ability to control the reactions around him with slight changes in expression and small gestures was outstanding. Looking at the faces of the servants they had encountered earlier, it seemed that even if Yuder did nothing, everything would go according to that man's intention.

"By dinnertime, the rumors should have spread nicely. I'm looking forward to seeing Baron Willhem's expression at the feast."

Baron Willhem from Yuder's previous life had died fleeing when the western area suffered heavy damage from monsters, so this was the first time anyone had actually seen his face. Yuder thought

he looked remarkably weak for someone who had meddled with the Western Mage Union and Cavalry in order to profit, despite being a cunning schemer.

"When may I leave from here?"

"The servants of Baron Willhem are still waiting outside, so it's not wise to leave too soon. How about we have some tea together?"

"I understand. But do you intend to keep ignoring their summons? From what I heard earlier, it seems they have come to convey Baron Willhem's message."

"It's a request to come to the banquet with the person I'm designating. Probably wants to gauge my intentions by sending his family. It's not even worth responding to."

There was nothing more to say. Yuder sat down as Kishiar suggested and they drank tea together. Even if it was to kill time, he later thought that consuming most of the many refreshments on the table by himself was a bit excessive, but Kishiar didn't seem to mind at all.

"Would you like to eat more?"

"No, I'm fine."

He probably wouldn't be able to eat much for dinner due to consuming so many refreshments. After judging that enough time had passed, Yuder rose from his seat to leave. Kishiar opened his mouth, striking a pose befitting a stubborn duke, resting his chin on his hand.

"Yuder."

"Yes."

"Before you go, I want to make one thing clear."

"Please, speak."

"The ensuing scandal is entirely my responsibility."

A nonchalant word made Yuder's mind stop for a moment. He couldn't take his eyes off Kishiar's smiling red lips, listening to the words that followed.

"No matter how much a role is just a role, and not real, it may be perceived differently by those who might misunderstand. I'll bear all responsibility for it. So don't even think about it, or accept anything else."

Yuder couldn't remember what response he gave to those words. When he came to his senses, he was already outside.

The two or three servants who had not given up and were still waiting outside the door were astonished and averted their eyes at the sight of Yuder. If their previous gaze had been one of fear and curious admiration towards the awakened commoner, this one clearly revealed a primary-colored curiosity on top of that.

However, that only brushed by Yuder momentarily. Watching the sticky glances that were shot past the door behind him, Yuder felt as though he had realized the meaning of what Kishiar had just said.

'Did he seriously say that I don't need to do anything on my end...?'

In the blink of an eye, his doubts turned to confusion, and his confusion to a numb emotion. Suddenly, an old memory that had tediously followed him from his previous life to now went pale. The old and rough resentment that never completely disappeared, even when suppressed, lost its place and wandered restlessly, but Yuder could not turn to look at them.

Even after the frightened servants had slowly disappeared from Kishiar's door, Yuder stood for a long time, dumbfounded, staring at the ground.

Chapter 324

Baron Willhem had prepared a sumptuous evening banquet in the spacious hall of his estate, and attendees were expected to include not only the Willhem family but also the day's guest of honor, Duke Peletta, the Cavalry that he had brought with him, and a few other members of the Peletta Knights, as well as several nobles. Most of them were long-standing residents in the west, people

from ancient families who had been troubled by monsters appearing in the borderlands for some time.

Originally, the Baron had planned to go along with them, feigning praise for Duke Peletta to lighten the mood. But Willhem's mood was far from comfortable. He looked down at the ceremoniously prepared banquet dishes, recalling the news he had heard from the servants, news that he could hardly put in his mouth.

'Duke Peletta called one of the Cavalry members into his room in broad daylight... and it was a man at that.'

Baron Willhem's respectful suggestion had been ignored without even a response, and the Duke had pulled a young man into his arms in front of the servants and spent a long time alone with him. When the servants went in afterward to clean the room, they found the Duke lying on the disheveled bed, his clothes loosened, drunk. From the scattered bottles and wine-stained sheets, it was impossible not to guess what had occurred inside.

According to the servants, the man had been personally led to the annex by the Duke when he first arrived. His name was not yet known, but it was certain that his position was that of an assistant.

'How could such a disgraceful thing happen...? I've heard rumors that he's lascivious, laying his hands on anyone, but how could he do such a thing with a commoner man here, right upon arrival!'

Baron Willhem speculated that this so-called assistant was likely nothing more than a catamite placed in his position to please Kishiar's eye. While there were nobles who were attracted to men, there was no precedent for someone doing it so blatantly. How could an imperial family member, with the blood of God, do such a thing? The mere thought made his stomach turn.

"My Lord, Duke Peletta and the Cavalry, along with the Peletta Knights, will be arriving soon. Please prepare yourself."

Baron Willhem forced his face to relax upon hearing the servant's whisper that Duke Peletta and the Cavalry were coming. In reality, the banquet should have started by now, but everyone had been waiting awkwardly due to their unexplained delay. The Baroness, dressed in her finest gown to receive the guests, was full of dissatisfaction and anger about the situation.

"My love, it is the first day, and we must show our gratitude, but you don't intend to let them stay in the annex the whole time, do you? For the sake of our children, we must not."

Between the Baron and Baroness Willhem, there were two daughters. The Baron, worried that the notorious rake Duke Peletta might inappropriately touch his daughters, had strongly warned them to be cautious. However, now that he knew the Duke's licentiousness was even worse than anticipated, he had no idea what to do.

He would have liked to ask Duke Peletta to leave as soon as possible, but the eye of Duke Tain and the opinions of those around him were against him. After all, the Cavalry were currently heroes, defending the west on behalf of the Tain family.

"...Duke Tain has asked us to keep a close eye on Duke Peletta and the Cavalry, and to plot accordingly, so there's no choice in the matter. Ensure that the children never approach the annex, and you too, be careful."

"But..."

"Others are watching. Be mindful of your words."

The Baroness, who was about to vent her dissatisfaction, caught sight of the other nobles watching them with curious eyes, and closed her mouth. At that moment, a voice rang out announcing the arrival of the Duke of Peletta and the Cavalry.

All the nobles rose from their seats and behaved with decorum. Many people had entered, but there was no need to ask who among them was the Duke of Peletta Kishiar La Orr; it was unmistakably clear. Watching the faces of the other nobles go blank at the sight of him, Baron Wilhelm momentarily forgot even the shameful behavior of a short while ago, thinking them all fools.

Nevertheless, it was indeed true that Kishiar was a breathtakingly handsome man. Looking at his neat attire and elegant smile, no one would guess he had engaged in such disgraceful acts just a few hours earlier. But Baron Wilhelm noticed Kishiar's slightly flushed cheeks and thought that the rumor of him being drunk was probably true. Suddenly, he felt nauseated, and the handsome face no longer seemed so appealing.

'Where is that assistant?'

Baron Wilhelm quickly shifted his gaze and found the man Kishiar had been dragging around since midday. The black-haired Cavalry member with a dark spot in one eye was standing silently right next to Kishiar, dressed no differently from the other members.

He was unmistakably masculine, and taller than expected. When he first came to the mansion, Wilhelm thought he looked repulsive, but now he didn't seem so bad. In any case, what was certain was that he did not look like someone who had played with men, unlike the Duke of Peletta. Although the shadowed, long eyes, pale lips, and pale neck visible through the collar somehow stimulated a feeling of decadence, that was all there was to it. If Baron Wilhelm had seen him without any prejudice, he would probably remember him as a tolerable commoner youth.

Then, the man seemed to notice Baron Wilhelm's gaze and turned his head, causing the Baron to hastily look away. He approached the Duke of Peletta, praising his extraordinary appearance, and led him to the head seat.

As the other invited nobles greeted the Duke of Peletta, thanking him profusely for the great favor through this occasion, the Duke smiled as though extremely pleased. The fact that he was a licentious man with unnatural affections was truly repulsive, but everything was going according to plan, so it was fortunate. Baron Wilhelm took a deep breath and began to speak to Kishiar, who had started his meal.

"As you requested, we've prepared a traditional capital dish. Does it suit your taste?"

"It's not bad. But for a traditional capital style, you should have applied spiced oil both inside and outside while roasting the duck. This one's only applied on the outside, so the crispiness is a bit lacking."

The Duke of Peletta's face, smiling as though a new experience was acceptable, seemed to mock Baron Wilhelm as a country bumpkin. Wilhelm, with a trembling smile, made excuses that he had given proper instructions, but the chef must have forgotten. He felt the eyes of other nobles, smirking subtly, and anger welled up within him. He resolved to whip the unfortunate chef later and ordered a precious bottle of wine he had prepared in advance.

"Then please have this. It is a special Lyung wine from the West, made 15 years ago during a particularly good year. It's one of only a few bottles. How is it?"

"I've heard of the fame. May I drink something so precious?"

"Of course. In the west, when drinking Lyung wine, a little sugar and salt are dipped into the glass. It's a good combination that makes the taste even cleaner."

Baron Willhem had just failed, and was determined to make amends by pouring the alcohol directly into the glass. Kishiar took a sip and praised it as a drink worthy of its name. But what he did next was something no one had expected.

"Yuder, will you try it? The taste is quite good."

The black-haired man sitting right next to Kishiar, his assistant, raised his head. He had been quietly eating, so the other nobles, who had paid him no attention, were taken aback by the sudden focus on him.

"I'm fine."

"I've already confirmed that there's no poison by drinking it myself. Don't refuse, come on."

Despite the refusal, Kishiar shamelessly held the glass to his assistant's lips. It would not have been surprising if he had been told to serve with separate glass, but offering a drunk glass to someone was a very secretive and hot act, something done only in bed. Even Baron Willhem had never done so, even with his wife! It was clear from the looks of the surrounding nobles, their expressions irrepressibly changed, that they were also in no condition to manage their shock.

He quickly ordered someone to bring another glass before the black-haired man could drink it and make the situation irreversible. In no time, the precious drink, of which there was only one bottle in Baron Willhem's house, was placed before the commoner.

"Your Grace seems...to value your subordinates greatly. Speaking of which, I've heard that there is a brave Cavalry member who defeated a gigantic monster all by himself. Where is he?"

"Ah. I almost forgot to tell you, that's this man right here."

Baron Willhem, who had opened his mouth to defuse the situation, doubted his ears for a moment.

Everyone's eyes turned incredulously toward the black-haired man. The man said nothing. Instead, Kishiar once again broke the silence with a cheerful opening.

"Allow me to introduce him. My assistant, whom I adore and cherish, a promising talent in the Cavalry, who single-handedly defeated a gigantic monster, the bright future of the Cavalry - Yuder Aile."

"What?"

That black-haired man, who was he?

Baron Willhem felt a dizzying sensation from the consecutive shocks. He wanted to say something, but his parched mouth seemed to be clogged with sand, and no sound came out. Other nobles quickly asked questions on his behalf.

"Oh, Aile... So you have already been bestowed a last name from His Majesty the Emperor?"

"No. The last name was received not long after the Cavalry was formed. When I return this time, he'll probably get a bigger reward."

"Ah, that... I see. You must be very pleased to have such an outstanding subordinate."

"Pleased or not, I have quite a few people I favor."

Chapter 325

Kishiar began to prattle all sorts of words, tinged with praise for his assistant Yuder Aile, as if he had been waiting for the opportunity. The Baron strained his ears, thinking that some valuable information might emerge, but it was all nonsense, so absurd that it made him suspect he was drunk.

'If Yuder really defeated the monster by himself, tell me how he did it, what his abilities are. What business of mine is it what a commoner likes or dislikes!'

Even amidst the praise, to the point where it could become tiresome to the listener, Yuder Aile maintained a stoic expression. The Baron thought it was quite impressive that he could remain so calm in a situation where even nobles could not manage their expressions. Although he didn't consider the power of an Awakener to be so extraordinary, there was a feeling that someone like him might actually be capable of slaying a gigantic monster by himself. It seemed that Emperor Keilusa's interest in the Cavalry was not solely due to his younger sibling becoming an Awakener.

Other nobles appeared to feel the same, their glances at Yuder Aile subtly changing.

"Uh... Sir Aile, may I ask what your abilities are? I'm curious how you were able to kill that huge monster."

"Yes, I, too, was curious as soon as I heard the rumor. Is that black mark on your face a wound from that time?"

As they, who had previously displayed disdain for commoners, softly cajoled and asked questions with smiling faces, Yuder Aile's expression shifted slightly. But before he could open his mouth, Duke Peletta interjected and poured cold water on the conversation.

"Oh my. No one knows the answer better than I do, so why not ask me first? Do you not know that I'm the only one who can talk to my assistant?"

The statement seemed ludicrous, but there was nothing to be said since a person of the Duke's standing had spoken. Kishiar continued to obstruct any covert conversations or questions directed at Yuder, blatantly blocking them every time. The Baron couldn't even sigh at his unbelievably petty behavior, completely ignoring any semblance of dignity.

'Anyway, seeing that this Yuder has received a last name not long after joining the Cavalry shows that he is indeed talented. The only problem is that he's in the hands of such a petty person.'

To anyone who looked, the relationship between Duke Peletta and his assistant was evident. It was a mismatched pairing to the point of laughter: a Duke who was not only dissipated but also interested in men, treating his hapless subordinate like a toy, and a commoner enduring that humiliation because he had no power to refuse.

What if he had a little ability? How could he dare to rebel against Duke Peletta? Receiving a last name and success as a commoner was certainly significant, but to Kishiar, it seemed like a mere mirage that would vanish if he simply muttered to the Emperor. Yuder himself probably knew this well, hence he likely played deaf to the Duke's advances and simply wished the Duke's interest in him would wane soon. If he had any understanding of his position and ambition for a better future, anyone would do the same.

'So obvious.'

Baron Willhem did not think his conjecture was wrong at all. Instead of focusing on Kishiar's nonsense, he secretly observed the atmosphere of the Cavalry and the Peletta Knights.

They all seemed to have very subtle and pained serious expressions, staring at their plates, entirely absorbed in their meals. Some sent sympathetic glances toward Yuder Aile and even shook their shoulders in agony. They, too, must have found it anything but amusing that someone who had risen to the position of assistant had to endure such foolish talk throughout the meal.

"Commander."

It was around the time that Kishiar's unceasing nonsensical chatter about his assistant's black hair and pale skin, which reminded them of a classical beauty, started to emerge. Finally, Yuder Aile put down his fork and knife and quietly opened his mouth.

"I believe that introduction is more than sufficient. Won't you continue your meal? It loses its taste when it's cold."

His attitude, blunt and not even hiding his dislike of the situation, caused all the nobles who had been bearing their discomfort in silence to be taken aback. However, Kishiar, the one being talked about, didn't show the slightest anger. With a lustful look in his eyes and a sultry smile, he declared that he would stop talking even though he hadn't said half of what he intended. It was clear to anyone that he was thoroughly engrossed in a unique game with the commoner man.

It was indeed unsightly to see the banquet disturbed by a single word from a commoner, but it provided Baron Willhem with an opportunity to speak to Kishiar.

"Your... Your Grace, Duke."

"Hm? What is it?"

"I'm sorry to interrupt something important, but I heard a rumor related to Your Grace a while ago... May I ask about it now?"

"Go ahead. Speak."

"Is it true that you have become the new owner of the glorious Divine Sword Orr? There were rumors that you used its power in the Great Sarain Forest, and I've been curious since before meeting you."

Of all the rumors that had stirred up the entire West, the most significant was, of course, the defeat of the giant monster by Yuder Aile, but the enormous divine power detected within the Great Sarain Forest was not a small matter either. Emperor Keilusa had let slip that this divine power was undoubtedly related to Kishiar's becoming the new owner of the divine sword, but Duke Tain had dismissed this as nonsense to Baron Willhem.

Baron Willhem carefully gauged Kishiar's reaction. If it were untrue, he expected some sign of irritation, but what returned was a calm smile.

"Oh, how embarrassing. Word of what I did in the Great Sarain Forest has already spread this far."

"Yes? So it's really...?"

"Yes, it's true."

"That... then... You really are... the new owner of the Divine Sword... and you even brought it to Tainu...?"

"That's right."

Although Kishiar affirmed it twice, his attitude was so flippant that it seemed utterly unbelievable. Baron Willhem reflexively shifted his gaze towards Kishiar's waist, where the sword would be, but naturally, it was empty, as no one had brought a weapon to the banquet.

"Hmm. Don't believe me? Well, I thought someone might have doubts, especially considering your lineage and position... But no, this is not something to discuss while enjoying a fine meal."

Kishiar deflected the question with a laugh, but Baron Willhem understood the underlying meaning. No matter how foolish and dissipated Duke Peletta might be, he was the Emperor's brother and hostile to the Dukedom. It was not unexpected that the attitude of Baron Willhem, the Lord of Tainu, and a descendant of the Tain family, might be perceived as slightly offensive.

Baron Willhem bowed his head, worrying that he might have overstepped and aroused the Duke's suspicion.

"No, I didn't dare doubt..."

"Your Highness, our Willhem family has been devout followers of the Sun God for generations. My husband has long regarded the existence of the Divine Sword as sacred. It appears his eagerness to see it has led to his impatience. Please, do not be angry."

The Baroness, who was watching Baron Willhem's behavior, quickly came to his defense.

"Is that so?"

"Yes, it is. Isn't The Divine Sword the legendary sword we all grew up hearing about in our childhood? Only the chosen one can touch it. The thought of seeing its owner was overwhelmingly thrilling."

Baron Willhem swiftly replied, grateful for his wife's support.

"I understand that feeling. Even in my youth, I grew up listening to the legends of the first Emperor, with the Divine Sword, and the Archmage Luma."

"Indeed, it is so."

"Very well. If the opportunity arises, I shall show it to you."

Baron Willhem breathed a sigh of relief. Somehow, it seemed he had managed to get through without revealing his excessive doubt.

'It still seems like a lie... Whether the Duke of Peletta really possesses the Divine Sword will become clear later on. For today, this should suffice.'

As far as he could tell, the Duke of Peletta and his Cavalry seemed to have not noticed anything about the secret trade matter. If they had, they would surely have asked probing questions. Kishiar did not utter a word of common mourning for the Knights who had died in the Great Sarain Forest

throughout the meal. All he did was continually giggle at the surrounding nobles' forced praises, and flirt with the assistant seated beside him.

'The exterior may be rather beautiful, but inside is a nauseatingly lecherous, stupid, and temperamental man.'

Baron Willhem made his judgment of Kishiar La Orr, and resolved to include in his new report to the Duke of Tain, 'Duke Peletta is more dissolute than rumored, and his relationship with his Cavalry does not seem as good as perceived from the outside.'

The abilities of the Cavalry below were good, and they had been fortunate in defeating monsters in the Great Sarain Forest. But if anyone thought that such luck would continue, they were mistaken. He devised an ambitious plan to ease surveillance on the Cavalry and Duke Peletta, and focus more on the secret trade.

"The feast tonight was quite enjoyable. This is my first time in the west, but it seems it will create good memories."

"I'm glad to hear you say that."

"About this Lyung wine, could you bring the rest to my room? I'd like to drink more tonight."

"O-of course."

Though it was terribly unpleasant, Baron Willhem obediently ordered the more than half-remaining bottle of wine to be taken to Kishiar's room. Kishiar smiled contentedly and lightly pressed his lips to Yuder Aile's temple, who was seated beside him, causing the surrounding air to instantly become chilly.

"Now, shall we go?"

"..."

What was thought to be a pleasant end to the feast turned into a dreadful conclusion. Baron Willhem, in shock, supported his staggering wife and glared resentfully at the retreating figure of Kishiar, who merrily led away the wooden-faced man.

"That nauseating man couldn't possibly be the true owner of the Divine Sword!"

Chapter 326

"Commander, you never said you would go to such lengths to play the role of sowing misunderstanding," the voice stated.

"What are you talking about? I thought it was obvious that I had considered this much and accepted it."

Yuder leaned against a chair, gazing at the back of the man undressing with a nonchalant face. There was a faint throbbing inside his head, but the other man merely seemed pleased.

They had just returned from spending dinner time at Baron Willhem's main residence. Kishiar had led Yuder to his room as if it was the most natural thing to do, and Yuder had no choice but to watch the backs of his disappearing comrades, his shoulders shivering behind him.

Whether they were nearly dying to hold back laughter or not, the stares reflecting from Baron Willhem's servants as Yuder entered Kishiar's room were utterly impossible to ignore. Until the door was completely closed, the servants watched Kishiar's retreating figure with eyes no different from the nobles at the banquet. That contemptuous yet somehow trivializing view was so disgusting that, if his abilities had been intact, Yuder would have wanted to wrap it in the wind and throw it out the window.

Pretending to be the dissolute Duke of Peletta to break down Baron Willhem and other people's wariness, Kishiar's plan was a perfect success—excluding Yuder's complicated feelings.

Yuder watched Kishiar humming and wandering around, recalling the last day of the harvest festival party. The event that should have been joyful shattered into pieces with the assassination of the second son of the Apeto family, Lenore Shand Apeto. He had felt a similar sensation then, staring at the back of the man standing alone in splendid formal attire.

This time, it was supposed to be different, as everyone already knew about the 'dissolute Duke of Peletta,' but it wasn't. Watching Kishiar skillfully control the atmosphere of the banquet and direct everyone's emotions toward him was, in some ways, even more difficult than before.

'Would it have been better if I had not heard that remark?'

He found no answer in those red eyes that declared every accusation his own. He must have been lost in thought, as he only realized that dinner time was nearly over when someone came looking for him.

The fact that his calm had been so greatly shaken by a single word was hard to believe even for himself, but the reality was clear. Kishiar had truly made all the accusations target him. And as promised, he would take responsibility to ensure that Yuder suffered no harm.

Responsibility. That unfamiliar word dried and vanished in his mouth.

"Why such a serious face? Was that last kiss too intense?" Kishiar asked, placing the wine and glasses that Baron Willhem had ordered before Yuder.

"No."

"Then why?"

"Commander, are you really alright?"

"What do you mean?"

Kishiar tilted his head as if he truly didn't understand. Yuder swallowed back the words he was about to say, 'being despised by others and hearing their accusations.' He didn't want to mention anything related to those irritating people. In the end, all he spat out were words no different from before.

"You didn't have to go this far..."

There was no need to play the role of the dissolute duke so thoroughly. It would have been enough to display a haughty demeanor just a bit, act a touch fussy, and show a nuance of flirting with men. Even then, Baron Willhem would have considered Kishiar as good as the rumors. Was there any reason to stir the pot more? Especially the moment he saw the noble's face scoffing at Kishiar and snorting at the mention of Yuder being called a beauty, he simply couldn't hold back his words.

"Perhaps the problem was that I did the job too well."

Kishiar, who had come to his own judgment, sat beside Yuder and skillfully poured a drink. He filled another glass halfway and handed it to Yuder.

"In my excitement, I may have lost control a bit. If you ask if it's okay, the problem was that it was too much fun."

"... How can that be fun?"

"Do I look like I'm lying? It was really fun. It's been a long time since I had such a good time."

Kishiar let out a lingering smile.

"You should have seen their faces when I kissed you. I can't wait to see how much Baron Willhem writes about me in the letters he sends to the other dukes. If he writes less than ten lines, I'll be disappointed in him."

"...Did you work so hard in anticipation of that?"

"Actually, there was a bit of personal motive involved."

At the word 'personal motive,' Yuder frowned, and Kishiar raised his hand to lightly press and smooth his forehead. Unlike the perfume, Kishiar's unique body scent that swirled coolly like peppermint slid down from his forehead, touching the tip of his nose as it passed.

"I don't often have the chance to do as I please with you in public. I simply took advantage of the opportunity and gave it my all."

Was that really all? Were there really no other feelings of humiliation, anger, or hurt?

Yuder was confident he would detect any hint of concealment from Kishiar. But those eyes, more transparent than the glass in his hand, were as straight and calm as ever when they revealed the truth to Yuder. He truly harbored no resentment for the scorn and insults he had to bear unnecessarily and sincerely enjoyed the situation... The realization of this made Yuder feel weak.

‘How can you act like that?’

Yuder silently repeated the unanswerable question.

Though he had seen many in his previous life, he had never seen one as strong as Kishiar. He was indeed a special being. And because he was so strong, Yuder Aile felt all the more pained.

The realization of how agonizing it was for such a strong person to be so troubled by Yuder's insignificant wound was particularly painful because he had keenly felt and watched it all this time.

Some facts sometimes strike more heavily after time has passed than they did at the moment. It felt that way now.

"Anyway, we have to sleep here tonight, so tell me in advance if sharing the bed will be uncomfortable."

"...Wasn't it just to spend time and return, as before?"

"We have to sleep here while we're here. Don't you remember what I said?"

"When did you say that?"

Kishiar said he had explained on the way back to the annex. It seemed that the anger piled up by the nobles and servants was quite intense, as he didn't remember it well. Yuder kept silent for a moment, then agreed, and touched his lips to the glass. The golden liquor burned his throat as though trying to ignite anger, but of course, he did not feel the least bit drunk.

"I thought you would refuse, but you accepted quickly."

"Isn't it something we've already agreed to do?"

"Yes, but I won't force you."

"You praise me so warmly in front of others, even flattering me, and yet you say such things."

"Personal feelings are one thing; this is something else."

"Anyway, I'm... okay with it. If it bothers you, Commander, I'll sleep on the floor or in a chair. Just speak freely."

"Surely I wouldn't make you sleep in such a place."

Kishiar laughed as though he had heard a very amusing joke. He picked up a bit of the salt and sugar that were piled on a small dish carved in the shape of a flower from crystal, spread it on the rim of his glass, and lightly clinked it against Yuder's glass.

"Now, let's commemorate the success of today's operation."

The liquid trembled with a clear sound. Yuder took a sip of the liquor and suddenly focused on Kishiar's wet lips. A white powder, whether sugar or salt, was smudged on his red lips, tracing a fine line. It was a truly poisonous sight to the eye.

"If you keep staring at me like that, it's a bit embarrassing."

"...It was the powder that caught my attention."

"The powder?"

Kishiar, who seemed to question back, discreetly licked his lower lip and shook his head.

"I don't really know. It'd be nice if a lover wiped it away."

"Isn't it a time when we don't have to play that role?"

"Then I'll change it to 'It would be nice if an assistant did it.'"

Even though it was clear he knew, there was no argument. It was still a bit painful to look at him every time, yet there was also an intense attraction.

"If my efforts today have pleased you, then reward me with this. That's enough for me."

There was no way to refuse his proposal, looking at how vivid and beautiful the man was with regained sight.

Yuder slowly raised his hand and brushed Kishiar's lips. The tiny powders tickled his fingertips momentarily, but that was fleeting. No sooner had his hand touched the middle of his lips than the man, who seemed to have waited for it, sucked it in as if swallowing. The moment he mischievously bared his teeth and bit down hard on the fingertips soaked in liquor, Yuder inadvertently held his breath and shuddered.

"Aah..."

A shock like lightning struck him from the bitten part, radiating throughout his body. Heat rose from the pit of his stomach, and the emotions he had barely suppressed exploded all at once.

Yuder abruptly pulled his hand away and pressed his lips to the spot instead. Even though he knew that it was not long ago that he had reached out and kissed Kishiar first, it strangely felt like a very distant memory. Though his impulse had been somewhat rough, Kishiar, without any sign of surprise, embraced Yuder's neck. He welcomed the charging lips and tongue, which he had desired, as if a satisfied beast had devoured them.

Yuder tasted the bitterness of the liquor, the sweetness of the sugar, and the saltiness of the salt all at once. As their tongues entwined, one of the three would unexpectedly pop up to strike his head and then vanish, repeating the pattern in a frenzy.

By the time he came to his senses, he was lying atop Kishiar on the sofa. The fact that he continued even without realizing he had been swept up in the momentum was astonishing.

Chapter 327

"I'm sorry. I, just..."

What on earth had he done? He had only sucked and lightly bitten his fingertip, but his mind flashed wickedly, and this was the result. There were indeed times in the past when he had acted impulsively around Kishiar, but back then, there was at least some minimal hesitation. This time, however, there was no warning whatsoever. It was as helpless as a spark catching dry firewood and instantly spreading into a massive fire. Doing something like this, and not even during the heat period, was a first for him as far as he could remember.

As Yuder tried to rise, stammering, unable to speak properly, Kishiar tightened the arm around his waist, stopping him.

"The temptation was mine, and you only reacted to it. There's no need to be so flustered."

Though they had separated, the lips that were still too close showed remnants of white powder, faintly twinkling in the soft light.

"I never knew you'd react so intensely... but I feel like I've received a proper reward, so it's good."

"Good, you say?"

"The fact that you've revealed your desire so honestly means that the possibility of you accepting me is higher, so of course, it's good."

Kishiar answered Yuder's slow retort with a pleasurable smile, casually shifting one leg. Only then did Yuder realize what had changed below him where he was in contact with Kishiar, and he became even more flustered than before.

'...Oh my God.'

Yuder had always thought of himself as quite dull when it came to lust. Even after Kishiar died in his previous life, he never felt discomfort from not having been with anyone, mainly because Kishiar had usually taken the lead in their relationship.

Perhaps it was because he was an Omega without a scent, but it didn't matter. He never needed to think deeply about that part, especially since his first heat period in this life coincided with the manifestation of his second gender, and he had passed out for the entire duration.

But this was different. Kishiar hadn't touched him with the intent of making love, but merely played a light prank. Yet Yuder's front was unmistakably prominent and swollen.

The hot sensation he'd felt inside his stomach earlier must have been this, and the realization was utterly embarrassing.

'I never felt like this when we kissed before.'

Until now, the longing and attraction he'd felt toward Kishiar seemed to reach beyond the physical and touch something inside him, a thrilling satisfaction that made him lose track of time and become entranced.

This sensation, however, was both similar to and different from the stinging in his body and the heat in his lower half that seemed to weigh down his head.

"Could it be that something's wrong with me because of my injury?"

"What?"

Kishiar's eyes widened, as though he'd heard something ridiculous, and then he burst into laughter.

"That can't be. Kissing is natural, and do you think this is strange?"

"It's not normal to react like this just from a light bite on the finger."

"It is normal. Your body just reacted a little sensitively, that's all."

"But you're perfectly fine, aren't you?"

Kishiar seemed unable to contain his enjoyment of the situation. But Yuder's mood had darkened even further. The fact that his partner remained undisturbed, while he was still engorged, made him feel even more ashamed when compared to his previous life.

Certainly, it hadn't been like this in his previous life. It was always Kishiar who would unexpectedly knock people over, running like a person who had lost his sanity. He still had memories of being flabbergasted by Kishiar's sudden strange touches in the middle of a perfectly normal conversation, but now the situation was reversed.

"Damn it, if that's the problem, there is something I haven't confessed so far. I think I need to tell you now."

"What is it?"

"Promise me you won't look at me like a beast after you know."

"I will think about it after I hear it."

Then Kishiar's eyes seemed to narrow, but he quickly suppressed a smile.

"I usually exert a considerable amount of strength to stabilize my bowl, and if I apply that, I can do something quite useful. Do you understand what I mean?"

"..."

"It means I can control the situation down there to some extent."

This was truly... unexpected. Kishiar, who had noticed Yuder's subtly changed expression, whispered that it was true.

"Especially lately, I've been putting a lot of effort into that."

"So, you mean you're still doing that now?"

"Of course."

Kishiar, who had answered, slightly lifted his head and gently brushed Yuder's eye with his lips. At the same time as he felt a little more strength in the big hand that had been wrapping around his

back and waist, Yuder felt something expanding at a tremendous speed beneath their intertwined bodies.

"Do you believe me now?"

He had no choice but to believe it, even though he didn't want to. Something much harder than Yuder's slightly swollen front was poking between his legs. It was a sensation he must have felt many times in his previous life, but due to his faint memory of that time, it felt astonishingly large. Startled by the heat rising from the contact, Yuder lifted his body.

‘What is this...?’

In his surprise, complex thoughts vanished in an instant. Unlike Yuder's, which was only half-swollen, Kishiar's was boldly asserting its intent, as if it had never been dormant. Unable to continue his words before the vividly revealed physical desire, Kishiar faintly lifted the corner of his lips as if he had expected this. Whether it was true that he had let go of the restraint, sweat had formed faintly between his brows.

"You thought I was beast-like, didn't you?"

"No, it's not that..."

Yuder closed his mouth, unable to articulate exactly what he was feeling, and the slight swelling he had felt completely subsided due to his surprise.

"Why in the world... were you holding this back?"

"Because I thought you wouldn't want it."

"I don't remember ever saying that."

"People convey more meaning through their eyes and bodies than words. Even though it may seem complicated, it's surprisingly simple. Desire doesn't always overlap with longing, just like how you've been suppressing yourself by hiding the back part..."

Even though his lower region seemed about to burst at any moment, Kishiar spoke quite calmly. However, his flushed cheeks could not be hidden.

"So, I wanted to walk at the same pace as you."

"So, you mean you would have held this back for a lifetime if needed?"

"While I'm not as extreme as the priests who claim that physical desire is merely a trial and a greed to be discarded, I don't attach much significance to it. Naturally... conversing with you, even if it's just a single word, is more enjoyable than this."

At the same time as his words ended, a hot breath tingled at his ear. He seemed to have said something like this a few times before, but it was the first time it had struck his heart so profoundly. He felt both awestruck and desolate, and then, once again, memories from a past life welled up, making his throat feel scorched and dry.

‘...So am I.’

Yuder couldn't let go of the hand holding the man in front of him. Even if he didn't have the right to do so as a prisoner condemned to death, he did so anyway. If he had to endure a pain that would forever pierce his heart, rather than longing for Kishiar by his side, he thought it wouldn't matter.

For the first time in his life, an intense longing mixed with desire surged up from beneath his mind, boiling with desperation. It made him feel as though he would drown in its intensity, and Yuder closed his eyes for a moment.

"Commander... You really are too much."

Kishiar chuckled softly at the single sentence that flowed out with great difficulty, laden with many emotions.

"I think so too."

Each time he laughed, his overlapping body also received stimulation simultaneously.

"Every day, I'm scheming, wanting to monopolize such an attractive partner all to myself, even if it burns my mind to ashes. I truly am a wicked person."

"That's not what I meant."

"I know."

Thus, saying such things in itself meant that he was too much.

His dark, sunken eyes were hot. His slightly parted lips were hot. The flames that began to burn inside him were hot.

And the arms that completely bared everything and embraced Yuder were too hot to bear. Unable to withstand the heat, Yuder opened his eyes again and saw his own face reflected in his reddened eyes.

A man, as flushed as Kishiar, revealed his intense desire for his opponent, gritting his teeth and panting. Kishiar's words that had distinguished between longing and desire were only then clearly understood.

Yuder barely suppressed the desire to kiss him and lifted his body a little. The arms around his waist were bothersome.

"First... please let me go."

"Why?"

"Don't you have to calm down?"

"You can calm down right now, so can't you get up a little later? It's a rare opportunity, so I wanted to enjoy it a little more."

"...Please stop doing things that seem bad for your body."

No matter how he thought about it, enduring it didn't seem healthy. Yuder cautiously twisted his body a little, placing his hand between his legs where it kept poking through the space revealed.

For a moment, the fingers that had been fondly tracing behind Yuder's ears flinched and stopped. Yuder slowly felt a very secret satisfaction, looking into the red eyes that began to lose composure. Only now did the shame he felt when he thought he was the only one inflamed fade away.

‘You may not know me, but I know you.’

Yuder knew exactly what kind of look that beautiful and composed man had when he was burning with desire.

"There are ways to calm down other than that, aren't there?"

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The moment he tried to put strength into his hand, Kishiar grabbed Yuder's arm. Facing Yuder, he slowly shook his head.

“Provocation is not what you do at this moment. Don’t make the decision so easily.”

“I don’t make such decisions lightly.”

“You haven't even fully recovered yet.”

“That doesn’t mean there’s a particularly painful part either.”

“You think I wouldn’t know that you had difficulty gauging distances because of your eye?”

It had been such a subtle difference that others would hardly have noticed, but Kishiar had obviously seen everything. Yuder hesitated momentarily, but still did not withdraw the hand he had extended. He opened his mouth, gazing intently with one eye at his sweat-dampened white forehead.

"I know you've been concerned about my unhealed eye, Commander. But honestly, it's fine if the other eye never heals. So please, don't worry too much about it."

Kishiar frowned at those words. Observing his red eyes, where a painful emotion briefly flitted across, Yuder considered the emotions he must have hidden and swallowed every time he looked at his one eye.

"...How can you say that?"

"Wouldn't it be nice if you could think of it?"

'How could I,' Yuder thought, bending his body towards him. The two pairs of eyes facing each other mirrored one another.

"I can think of anything that is good. I saw everything I wanted to see before losing my sight, so I think I stored it all in one eye. I have no regrets."

"..."

"Isn't that enough?"

He had thought this way ever since both his eyes had stopped seeing. The last thing Yuder saw before losing his sight was the giant corpse of Pethuamet and Kishiar's face, symbols of having escaped the tragedy of his previous life.

He was glad the last thing he saw was his face. He could vividly recall it even in darkness, so there was little regret. Especially now that he could see everything again, he had no complaints. That was still the case.

Yuder did not miss the slight tremble in Kishiar's eyes as they slowly closed. When he opened them again after a long wait, his red irises were filled with emotion other than the previous pain.

"...Ah."

With a faint sigh and eyes wavering as if melting, Yuder was stared at. Astonished for a moment at the hungry and entranced expression, Yuder was embraced so tightly he couldn't breathe.

“I really can’t win against you.”

“...”

“That’s cheating. I really...”

He couldn't hear the next words. They were stolen by a kiss. The sofa, unable to bear the weight of the two men, made a small sound as Yuder felt the soft cushion press against his back during their intense embrace.

Heat poured from the sensation of a thigh pressed against his, and unconsciously he tilted his head, letting hot breath escape between parted lips. Kishiar seemed determined not to let that go either, sucking it all in.

Yuder felt a dazzling pleasure inside his head as he fumblingly moved his hand to Kishiar's pants. The moment he forcefully yanked at the button trapping the front, the heat felt a degree stronger.

‘It was the first time I ever climbed on top, or took off my clothes.’

Seeing Kishiar's face, melted by desire, so clearly was, in truth, a first for Yuder as well. In a feeling both familiar and foreign, Yuder's gaze was stolen by the sweat nestled between Kishiar's furrowed brows. Just by looking at his flushed eyelids and his long, lowered golden eyelashes, a stomach without hunger became empty, and thirst spontaneously arose.

A little more. Yuder couldn't bear it, wanting to see just a bit more.

The greed that arose at being able to desire something tangible like this was unbelievably intense. What was thought to have settled flared up instantaneously, bringing heat to the body, a warmth that spread inside.

When Yuder opened the lips a little wider, giving a burning cry, a kiss, deeper and more intertwined than expected, quenched that thirst. Yuder felt hands reach in between their rapid breaths. The touch, softly exploring and lowering Yuder's pinned clothing, soon unbuttoned and freed them, just as Yuder had done earlier.

Feeling the sensation of something that had never before been touched exposed to the air, Yuder twisted uncontrollably, gasping for breath. That caused their lips to part, but Kishiar, like flowing water, traveled down the cheek to under the ear, pressing his lips once more to the soft flesh.

Breath paused again at the spark-like small stimulation. The sound of mucous membranes and flesh sticking to each other wasn't loud, but the shock felt immensely enormous, causing the entire body to tremble faintly.

Finally, when they fully exposed and held each other, a low moan mixed with heat and shock leaked out from both simultaneously.

Ah.

The sight of the wet, swollen red lips releasing breath in front of Yuder was too provocative, making resistance impossible. Yuder stared blankly at Kishiar, who was exuding a much deeper body scent than usual, his untamed wildness still held in check. The rich scent of an Alpha Awakener was spreading thickly, yet there was no fear at all. The heavy scent, trying to envelop Yuder's body, was as comforting as a long-lost, dear friend.

The day had come when Yuder could so calmly watch the clear desire in the eyes of the man gazing down through disheveled bangs.

If he had faced this situation just after returning back in time, or when the second gender manifestation had begun, he would have considered it a dreadful nightmare. But now, not a bit of such emotion was felt. The fact that Kishiar had fallen head over heels for Yuder, unable to see anything else, breaking down his usually ironclad reason, unbelievably felt good. Even Yuder's own disheveled body did not feel so bad.

The pain existed only within Yuder's unseen interior.

Yuder took a deep breath, slowly feeling the two hot entities held in his hand. Kishiar's fingers and Yuder's intertwined as they held hands, releasing another suppressed sigh simultaneously, but once the movement started, it couldn't stop.

The sensations and memories that had been forgotten for so long sprung to mind, restless like the water of a lake when a stone is thrown. Yuder fumbled blindly, following instinct and memory, moving his hand slowly over something too enormous to grasp entirely. The pleasure in Yuder's

head seemed ready to explode just from the sight of his partner's face, tensing and grimacing, releasing suppressed breath each time Yuder's touch connected.

The two forces of heat collided and slid against each other within his hands, repeating the process again and again. The quicker the movements, the more the hot breath erupted repeatedly, scalding his biting lips. At some point, a liquid began to flow, unpleasantly wetting between his fingers, but he had no concern for it staining his clothes or the sofa. The sticky, resonating, and searing noise might have struck his ears, but it only added to his excitement, failing to cool him down.

Every time Kishiar swept his large hand down, Yuder lost himself in shocking pleasure. Unable to bear it, he would gasp and open his mouth, only to have the man, who seemed to have been waiting, entwine his tongue once again. The deep and intimate kiss that reached even deeper than before made his whole body jolt once again.

Despite one of the two entangled bodies not being his own, the terrible unity shook his mind to the point of disbelief. The pleasure was so excessive it seemed almost unreal.

It's not even heat period. Such a thought briefly brushed his mind.

Neither of them in this place was in their heat period. They were performing this act while maintaining a perfectly normal rationality.

Yet, why had he not known before that it could be so desperate, so hungry? He could not understand. The past, when he thought there could be no act more irrational and disgusting than being immersed in primal sensation, was no longer remembered.

As the trembling movement reached its limit, accelerating and more strength entering his hands, his head became light. Yuder, wanting to see Kishiar's face without missing a single detail, roughly brushed away the messy hair stuck to his forehead with the back of his other hand, staring straight into his eyes. The beautiful face distorted in pleasure looked momentarily similar to when it expressed painful emotions, yet it was definitely different in some way.

Trying to see the difference a little more closely, Kishiar's hand suddenly gripped Yuder's more firmly, sweeping from the bottom to the top without mercy. Yuder's mind went blank as his body stiffened at the touch, as if it was trying to wring and swallow everything.

A gasp, not fully formed into sound, escaped from Yuder, and he tilted his head back. Kishiar wrapped his body, rounding his back, and closed his eyes with a clenched jaw. A few strands of

golden hair stuck to his eyelids, quivered a few times, and strength filled his wrist visible between the sleeve and bony back of his hand. Yuder could not take his eyes away from that obscenely explicit sight.

Finally, as the inside of their palms became wet with heat, the tension in both their bodies relaxed simultaneously. Yuder stared blankly, panting, as Kishiar slowly opened his eyes again. The fact that only Yuder himself was reflected in those red eyes felt like something impossible.

He had seen a sight never witnessed in his previous life. That fact finally hit him, and his heart pounded heavily inside his chest. Amidst a pain and turmoil as if someone was squeezing his insides, he finally closed his eyes. An unprotected and exposed kiss, as soft as down yet as heavy as a brand, settled over his throat and nape.

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Even after his panting breath had somewhat subsided, Kishiar did not remove his lips from Yuder's neck. Yuder, too, did not try to struggle out of his embrace. In the past, once his task was completed, he would only be left with cold darkness, but this moment was different in every way.

Crumpled on a sofa that was too small to comfortably hold them both, Yuder vividly recognized his own change when he did not feel at all suffocated being enveloped in a strong hold still warm and moist. If possible, he thought it might even be okay to stay like this a little longer.

But he was also well aware of how enormous and excessive such a desire was.

"... I know we should get up and clean up, but I don't want to move."

Then, a whisper, as though reading Yuder's thoughts, reached his ears. As he slightly turned his head, Kishiar, with his eyes narrowed like a sated beast, half buried his face in Yuder's shoulder and let out a smile. His disheveled hair dampened by sweat couldn't conceal his beauty. The man, who was openly exuding a tremoring scent and satisfactory joy, felt like the summer sun that held all life on earth in his sway.

"Sorry, but would it be alright if we stayed like this for just a little while longer?"

Yuder nodded lightly in response. With a smile, Kishiar pressed his lips lightly once again to the lower part of Yuder's neck.

"I know it might sound funny to say this, but it feels like I've finally come to realize that you're alive, right here in front of me."

"... I apologize for causing so much trouble because of my eyes."

"It's not just because of your eyes... well, that too, but..."

As Kishiar tried to deny something then stopped, a curious glance was sent his way. A moment later, the reply came.

"More accurately, it's because of the illusion."

There was only one thing that could be associated with the word illusion. Yuder's once languid senses contracted sharply and he forced his eyes open.

"... You mean my illusion?"

Kishiar didn't answer. His silence was affirmation.

Yuder remembered the time when Kishiar had rushed out alone to confront Nahan. Then, Kishiar had said he saw Yuder in the illusion, but he had not gone into detail. There had been no mention of it since, so he thought it was quickly forgotten, but it seemed that wasn't the case.

"I had no idea... that you were still concerned about that."

"I didn't plan on dwelling on it either. But it seems it's not as easy to put out of mind as one would hope."

"Did I attack you in the illusion?"

"What? No."

Kishiar gave a small shake of his shoulders as he laughed.

"If that was the case, I wouldn't have been worrying about it for so long. It would have been just ridiculous."

A pain shot through Yuder's chest. The tone of his voice seemed to suggest it was something that could never happen, and Yuder was left without a response.

Even though it hadn't happened yet, at least in Yuder's memories, the event existed clearly. He had no intention of repeating such an act in this life, but since the memory did not disappear from within him, Yuder kept his silence.

"I heard that his illusion is based on the thoughts in the mind of the recipient, is that correct?"

"Yes."

Recalling the report he'd given previously and the subsequent encounters with Nahan, Yuder responded briefly.

"So that's the strange part. What I saw was a scene I had neither imagined nor ever seen before."

"What on earth did you see to make you so?"

"I saw you in my clothes. To be precise... you wore the Commander uniform."

A huge shock hit him at once. If Kishiar had said he saw Yuder dying or severely injured, he might not have been so surprised. But Yuder, clad in the Commander uniform?

Wasn't that the figure of Yudrain Aile, the Cavalry Commander from his previous life?

Kishiar, seeing Yuder's greatly shaken eyes, quickly added an explanation.

"Just to be clear, I have never once thought that my assistant is vying for the position of Cavalry Commander. If you wanted to, you would have accepted the Deputy Commander position when I offered it to you before."

Kishiar laughed, saying it was only natural considering how long it took to convince him to accept the created assistant position, but Yuder could not laugh back. His mind was colder than ever.

He had to think calmly. He didn't want to arouse Kishiar's suspicion by appearing overly shocked. If he had merely seen a vision of himself dressed in the Commander's uniform, he couldn't definitively conclude that he was entirely his previous self.

"... So, did you only see me wearing the Commander's uniform? Or did I do anything else?"

"Just that."

Kishiar, having responded, added after a moment.

"Upon reflection, the most likely guess would be that, perhaps after going through a possibly fatal situation, my anxious mind reflected in such a way."

"I... I don't see the connection."

"Hmm... I need to explain how much of a self-conceited coward I was... but I can't delay cleaning up any longer. Let's continue the talk as we get cleaned."

Looking at Yuder's seriously furrowed brow, Kishiar squinted gently. Like a beast stretching, he reached out for the small water pitcher on the table and began to clean them. He poured water over a handkerchief he had taken out of his pocket, dampening it. His movements, as he cleaned the two of them, were incredibly smooth as if performing a completely natural task. Yuder had to awkwardly accept his touch, having missed the opportunity to say that he would do it himself.

"I told you before. I quite like breaking down walls."

As he finished cleaning his own hands, the man lifted Yuder's wrist, diligently wiping between each finger while mumbling.

"But that's only when there's a wall to break. If there's nothing there, I can't do anything at all. And I was full of arrogance, thinking that wall would never disappear. Because that wall was so strong, it wouldn't allow anyone's approach."

As he continued to clean Yuder's fingers, Kishiar kept talking, his gaze fixed on his task.

"But this time, I've realized something. Even when I was full of arrogance, that wall could suddenly disappear. And if it did, I would be standing forever in its place, unable to do anything, falling into despair."

"..."

"The essence of composure comes from certainty. When certainty shakes, no amount of composure can stand. So I would have wanted to hold onto you. I would have wanted to rebuild the certainty that, no matter what happened, you would not disappear from my side."

As he finished wiping Yuder's last finger, the man who mumbled indifferently as if he was analyzing someone else didn't let go of the hand he held. His red gaze traced over Yuder's rough fingertips.

"In other words... I was suddenly afraid. Being afraid means feeling fear, and it's not strange that my fantasy capitalized on that fear and manifested in a distorted form. In fact, I was quite taken with it there."

Yuder, whose words were abruptly and strangely interrupted, looked up to see the man holding his own hand with elegance and smiling self-mockingly.

"...Taken with it, you say?"

"Yes."

"You mean it wasn't fear?"

"It was shocking and strange, but not frightening. Just, well... I couldn't take my eyes off it. Even knowing it was a fantasy, I thought it would be good if I could hold onto it, even if it meant giving up my seat to you."

Kishiar pulled Yuder's hand towards him and kissed him.

"Tell me anytime if you want to try."

"I don't."

"Even if I say I'll grant you whatever you want?"

"What I want is for you never to say such things again."

"Indeed, you're relentless. You did look good in white."

Looked good? Yuder had worn that uniform for a long time but had never once thought that.

"Don't even suggest I try it on as a joke. I really don't like it."

At the end of his serious remark, Kishiar replied, "I understand," laughing. His movement of softly rubbing his nose against the back of Yuder's hand and deeply inhaling conveyed a tingling sensation.

"Your scent has gotten stronger. Can you feel it?"

"...I can only feel your scent."

"They say you usually can't smell your own scent. But it's very strong now."

Yuder was caught in a strange mood. It was almost the first time someone had told him about his own scent.

'...Right. This time, I'm an omega with a scent.'

Yuder realized anew that he too could emit a scent, just as much as it emanated from Kishiar.

'It's different from before.'

So let's not think too deeply. The fantasy that Kishiar saw was not Yudrain. He hadn't said so himself.

Yuder wanted to feel relieved, but a part of his mind couldn't shake off the chill.

'Really?'

Was it just that?

Was the fantasy of Yuder Aile in the white uniform merely a twisted manifestation of fear derived from Kishiar's desire to hold onto him?

It was unknown. Yuder wiped his sweaty forehead and slowly got up. Only then did he see the surrounding devastation that had been out of sight while lying down. The expensive liquor-filled glass was rolling on the carpet, horribly soaking it, and the soft, cloth-covered sofa was a complete mess after their intense activities on it.

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As Yuder watched him silently, Kishiar, with a slightly mischievous smile, said, "You don't need to clean it up."

"Those outside will clean it up happily."

Then they would probably scold Kishiar for leaving his precious drink so nonchalantly, and blink their eyes while looking for some other flaw to pick on. Yuder swallowed the words he couldn't say.

Thinking about it, what they were imagining had become reality in some ways. Unlike before, when they had merely acted out roles to kill time, they really had done things on the sofa that shouldn't be seen by others and shared a passionate heat together.

But Kishiar would dismiss those shared moments lightly, taking all the responsibility into his own hands again. He talked about his fantasies and said he was a cocky coward, but what kind of coward could do such a thing?

In retrospect, the real coward might have been himself. The fact that he was pathetically stifling his own throat with the pain of concealing a secret, unable to move on forgetting his past life completely or reveal the secret, was pitiful beyond words.

‘But I have no intention of leaving here.’

It was truly contradictory. His heart turned cold enough to lose his composure just at the thought that the figure he saw in Kishiar's fantasy might be Yudrain because he knew himself so well.

As the empty holes within him were filled, and the forgotten memories and emotions resurfaced, the contradiction also deepened. It was painful to think that this would become more profound, but if he were asked if he wanted to go back to when he couldn't recall anything, the answer was no.

Yuder wished earnestly that Kishiar would never understand his contradiction. However, as long as he was so deeply attracted to Kishiar, the chance of being caught in that contradiction would inevitably increase.

He hadn't thought keeping a secret would be so heavy before. But now it felt like a huge shackle made of cloth. It was a special cloth that didn't feel any weight usually, but once it got wet, it absorbed the weight and became increasingly tough and heavy. This shackle, made of this particular cloth, was a handy tool used to immobilize prisoners in water dungeons. Yuder thought that the weight he felt when he was wearing those shackles before his execution was quite similar to what he was feeling now.

‘I endured until the end back then... but what about this time?’

A prisoner who had endured the water dungeon and the cloth shackles for over a month had his leg bones ripped out by the hands of soldiers who were showing off their strength. He ended up on the execution block, staying alive stubbornly even after being transferred through several prisons.

Back then, he had endured to prove his innocence, but now he thought that this pain might be the inevitable consequence given to him. That was the only difference.

When Kishiar asked him what he was thinking about, Yuder said it was nothing. Kishiar, thinking that Yuder was tired from what they had done, cared for him so he could wash up and go straight to bed.

In the extravagant bathroom where warm water would flow abundantly at the touch of a hand due to the engraved water magic, Yuder washed his body and thought about Kishiar, whom he had seen today for a long time. Even though he knew that Kishiar was strong, not caring about others' gaze and instead using it, he still didn't want to see Kishiar flipping all the rumors on his own. Every time he thought about Kishiar, the uncontrollable desire that welled up, the heart-wrenching pain, and the reason he had decided to do everything he could to protect him, all said the same thing.

Then there was only one thing to do.

"Yuder! How was last night? Was it okay?"

"Do you know how worried we were all night? Sharing a room with the Commander... Even if that room is ten times larger than the house I grew up in, it's not ordinary. I could never do it."

"Did you manage to sleep?"

The next day, Yuder glanced around as he listened to the members whispering their condolences that didn't sound like condolences, their faces strangely contorted in suppressed laughter. Baron Willhem's servants were silently cleaning around, but their ears were pointed in his direction. Having confirmed this, Yuder casually turned his head towards Ever, who had first spoken to him, and opened his mouth.

"Of course, I had a good night's sleep in the same bed as the Commander."

"Ah, that. Is that so?"

"Yes. It was pleasant."

Suddenly, everyone around them froze as if time had stopped. After a moment, Baron Willhem's servants began to whisper with strange expressions. It was a slightly different reaction than he had expected, and Ever, who had leaned close to Yuder, whispered urgently in his ear.

"No, Yuder... Who would believe you if you said that? It's too awkward, better to say nothing at all."

"..."

"I've felt this since the banquet yesterday, Yuder, you're not particularly talented at this kind of thing. Should I say that God is fair?"

Caught off guard by his comment, Yuder couldn't respond when he was suddenly called from not too far away.

"Sir Yuder! Come over here."

The priest Lusan, who had recovered significantly during their journey to Tainu, was gesturing at him with a flushed face. Yuder, seeing Enon, who was sitting next to him nonchalantly munching on a lemon, moved away from the other members and headed toward them.

"My goodness. Watching you, I thought my heart was going to drop. Why on earth did you do that?"

"What are you talking about?"

"What he means is that even if I had opened the window and yelled that this was all a setup, it would have been better than what you just did."

Enon's words were more direct than Lusan's. Yuder took a moment to reflect on his behavior. It was just an apt and straightforward statement in line with his goals, so he couldn't quite guess what the problem was.

"Do I seem unsuited for my role?"

"Yes."

"I don't understand."

"What don't you understand? Which lover of any noble in the world would behave like that? Even if I threw this lemon in front of the Commander's room, it would look less suspicious than you."

"That's too harsh, Sir Enon. If you talk like that, even Sir Yuder would feel hurt."

Honestly, Yuder thought Lusan was being more harsh, but he kept his mouth shut.

He had decided just last night to spread rumors about Kishiar. He had already experienced this in his previous life, so he thought he would easily achieve his goal in Kishiar's absence, but it was a bit embarrassing for everyone to react this way.

'What's the problem?'

He couldn't remember what he did and how he did it in his previous life. At that time, even if he did nothing, everyone would deepen their misunderstanding and added more malicious rumors, so he never felt the need to make things worse. Rather, the more he tried to quell it, the more people picked fights, and it was a headache.

'Rumors were easy to spread when I didn't want them, but now when I really want them, they don't.'

"...But it's true that we slept together last night."

Other than briefly intertwining on the sofa, nothing happened, but it was a fact that they slept in the same bed.

"Ah, is that so?"

"We even drank."

"Did you hear about how the Commander insulted Baron Willhem by recklessly pouring that expensive wine under the sofa?"

Lusan shared with a grin, recounting the rumor he had overheard from the whispering servants earlier.

"Baron Willhem is said to be extremely upset about it. I heard that's why the Commander wanted to meet with him alone."

It was true that Kishiar had gone to meet Willhem alone for a while, but he had not known this was the reason. Strictly speaking, the one who made him spill the wine without drinking properly was more Yuder's fault. However, even when he said this, Lusan did not believe him.

"Hmm. Yuder. It seems like you're trying to cover for him. I suggest you avoid saying that in front of others. Wouldn't it be better to stay quiet and just say that the Commander did it?"

"..."

Instead of answering, Yuder looked at Enon. Enon quietly put the second lemon in his mouth. Whether the servants of the Willhem family were shocked by the strong man easily eating a lemon, peel and all, he didn't care at all.

"Anyway, I think I'll be able to give you the divine power again from tomorrow. Has your condition improved a bit?"

The stains that remained on his face and skin had almost disappeared. But his strength was still not fully recovered, and the spot on his left eye had only slightly faded. After examining his condition, Lusan gave him a few recovery pills that Enon had made.

After that, Lusan was called by the other members and had to get up from his seat. It was just Yuder and Enon left. Perhaps because of the unique atmosphere Enon had, there were many members who found him more difficult than Lusan. Hence, no one dared to approach the table they were sitting at.

"But... Why are you suddenly showing an interest in role-playing all of a sudden?"

Enon muttered in a voice no one else could hear.

"You, until yesterday, you were just glaring at the others with a face completely devoid of motivation. The Commander seemed to enjoy it, though."

He must have been sitting at the very end of the long table with Lusan, but it seemed that he had seen all the way up to there.

"...My mind changed."

"What thought?"

"The thought that not just one person should take responsibility."

Enon asked what he meant, but Yuder did not elaborate. Instead, he recalled something Enon had asked him in annoyance once.

"Enon. You remember what my goal is, don't you?"

"You said we need to protect. Why? Is it related to this situation? Do you think it will cause some problems to the Commander?"

"No."

Enon, who had omitted the subject Kishiar, replied gruffly. Yuder recalled another statement that Enon had made afterward, his eyes lowering silently.

In the future, either the Commander really becomes important, or if he and the Commander were in a love relationship to death. Or both. Which one is it?...

In his previous life, it was neither. Kishiar might have been a person who was potentially important for the future, but he was not important to Yuder, and they had never exchanged deep emotions beyond physical intimacy...at least according to his current judgment.

But what about now?

Yuder turned his head towards the window instead of voicing his answer. The sound of clamorous voices echoed from the front gate. Kishiar must have returned from the meeting.