

## Turning 351

### Chapter 351

“Understood. If that's the case, I will follow behind. Do as you wish.”

The half-hearted response by the Knight Commander, who seemed to have lost his motivation, was immediately followed by Kishiar, who then gestured to Ever, Emun, and Finn. Together with the jailer, they hastened to the place where they had discovered the imprisoned the day before.

“It's there!”

Yuder turned his head toward the direction Emun was pointing and yelling at. The place was a large-scale dungeon attached next to the door leading from the 1st to the 2nd floor of the underground prison. While the other cells they passed were relatively quiet, strange noises repeatedly emanated from this area, attracting attention.

The sounds of scraping against the wall, inhuman screams, and laughter that seemed like sobbing reached them. Jeymer Phil asked the jailer with a grimaced face.

“It's chilling. What sort of creatures are imprisoned here to make such a noise?”

He seemed as though he did not even know that such beings were locked away in the prison he was in charge of.

“That would be...”

As the jailer cautiously began to explain the nature of those trapped inside, the Cavalry members approached without hesitation. The guard in front of the door swallowed nervously.

Yuder stood beside Kishiar and examined those inside the bars. According to what he had heard from Ever, they were a diverse group in terms of age and gender. Their bodies were so filthy that it was difficult to recognize the original form of their clothes, and a foul smell wafted out even from a distance.

Most lay sprawled on the cold stone floor, shaking as they stared into the void. Some howled like wild beasts, while others repeatedly scratched at the walls. The scene was so unusual it was hard to believe that the prisoners were fellow humans, and Kishiar's expression turned grave.

“Were they in this state when they first arrived here?”

“Yes. They hardly communicate and show no interest in one another.”

The jailer answered with a tense face. According to him, the prisoners didn't show interest in each other, and managing them was difficult due to sudden fits and self-harm.

“Originally, there were about 20 of them captured, but with frequent fits and self-harm, there are about 16 left now.”

“Has there been any family or relatives looking for them?”

“Yes. Their clothes are so dirty it's hard to confirm, but among what they're wearing, many aren't in the style of the Empire. I suspect some foreigners might be mixed in, but there's no way to know where they came from...”

Yuder listened to the conversation and once again scanned the faces of the imprisoned individuals.

‘They certainly don't seem to be Awakeners. It's not merely that their memories are erased; their minds seem shattered... Is this the work of our side?’

If they were indeed ordinary people from the village of the Star of Nagan, there was every possibility that they had been driven out by Nahan, who favored only the Awakeners.

‘If they weren't abandoned when the village was moved but treated like this afterward, it's possible that a significant internal dispute occurred later.’

“Emun. Who among them did you and Finn recognize?”

“Uh. So, well...”

Emun, who was frowning as he looked inside the prison, pointed out several people. Among them were individuals with notable appearances, like a man covered in large scars and a woman with striking ash-colored long hair.

“Those people. Honestly, I wish I were wrong... but looking again, it seems I'm right.”

Having finished pointing them out, Emun sighed softly, saying his mood felt strange.

“To reduce them to this state to prevent them from leaking information, even if it didn't kill them, how is it different from death? I can't understand why it had to be done this way...”

Yuder wore a perplexed expression, silently observing the faces of his comrades.

"Open the door. I'll take them."

"Sir?"

At that moment, Kishiar, having finished his conversation with the jailer, gave the command. The soldiers around all opened their mouths in disbelief, only to clamp them shut again upon seeing Yuder's face.

"Surely they didn't commit any crimes to be locked up here? From now on, we'll take charge of the investigation."

"Yes, just do as he says. What more will we know by taking care of these lunatics ourselves?"

With an annoyed voice, the Knight Commander gestured, and without a word, the prison door was opened.

"Take them to the Baron Willhem's estate."

With their noses wrinkled at the stinging smell, the jailers tied the prisoners and led them out in a line.

"Thank you for cooperating even though you must have been taken aback by this sudden request, Commander Jeymer. I won't forget your cooperation."

"If I could be of any help in such a trivial matter, I'm glad."

Gently smiling at Jeymer Phil, who had answered in a roundabout way, Kishiar seemed to brighten the gloomy prison. Even the chattering Jeymer Phil momentarily lost his wits at that radiant smile.

"A trivial matter? If the Cavalry raises their merits because of this incident, it will be to your credit too, right?"

"..."

"Well, actually, the possibility that investigating as you say won't amount to much is high, but if it turns out otherwise, it can help Tainu. The Cavalry gains experience, Baron Willhem and you will have less trouble, so it's a good path for everyone."

"That..."

Jeymer Phil, who was about to mutter something, ended up admitting that he had nothing to say.

"This matter, keep it confidential externally, and if you find those people again or if someone related comes looking, contact us."

Kishiar turned away neatly, leaving Jeymer Phil behind. Yuder followed him, glancing back briefly. The expressions of Jeymer Phil and the soldiers, looking like they had chewed on bugs, were quite interesting.

Back at the estate, Kishiar ordered the prisoners to be washed and given empty rooms. While Baron Willhem's servants followed the order with faces like they might faint, Yuder sat in Kishiar's residence with Ever, sipping tea and cookies brought by the errand boy. Of course, that was just a pretense, and the actual conversation was a meeting related to the events of the day.

"As you already know, according to Kanna Wand's report, the location where the villagers from the Great Sarain Forest have moved to is likely near Tainu. However, around here, there are no mountains or forests where a large number of people could hide."

"Did they indeed confiscate an entire village?"

At Ever's question, Kishiar answered softly while sipping his tea.

"If they had the ability to build a village in the Great Sarain Forest and hide it, it might be possible, but unlike the forest, this area is closely linked to nearby towns and cities. That would be too risky."

"Then..."

"According to Kanna's read information, they have been interested in the trade situation of Tainu through the Great Sarain Forest for a long time. Considering the resentment one of them showed towards Tainu recently, they may have moved in a direction to help that objective this time."

"In that case, there's also the probability of hiding disguised as a mercenary group or merchant group."

Kishiar tilted his head at Yuder's words, who had been listening silently.

Certainly, the likelihood was higher. In Tainu and its surroundings, there were many commercial groups and mercenary bands engaged in trade with the Empire in the Great Sarain Forest. If they had to move quickly, taking over or looting such places would have been easier.

Commercial groups and mercenary bands were diverse groups with many passersby, varying in age and gender. If a sudden large number of people had to stay or disappear, no one would have found it strange.

"So I'd like to entrust the investigation to those who have worked in the relevant occupations in the Cavalry," he said. "As for who would be suitable, Ever, you'll take care of selecting them and then report back."

"Understood. I can think of a few suitable candidates."

Ever seemed to be recalling the faces of the members, mumbling to herself.

"The ones we brought in today should be kept in a state where they can converse for a while. Look for ways to make that possible. It'll be easier once Kanna Wand returns, but there's still something we should try before then."

Treating those affected by mental abilities from the outside was extremely difficult. If there were the will to improve oneself, it would be easier, but if that were so simple, then not so many would have died already in prison.

However, it was a problem that couldn't be ignored without trying, so Yuder agreed with what Kishiar had said.

"Oh, and both of you should be aware of one more thing."

As the tea the three had been drinking nearly revealed the bottom of the cups, Kishiar opened his mouth.

"I heard that regular auctions are held in Tainu when I was at the Western nobles' salon. Officially, they are unrelated to Tain's family, but since commercial groups receiving investment from Tain's family participate in large numbers, they can't be entirely unrelated."

Yuder realized that this was something Kishiar had intended to say after visiting the salon.

"Last year, quite astonishing items appeared there, causing quite a stir, but if it's going to be held again, don't you think we must participate?"

"Since the goods will be moving in large quantities, it'll be easier to catch the tail and find evidence."

"That's true."

"But... will it be held?"

At a time when they were trying to catch the Star of Nagran and protect secret trade from Tain's family, could such an event really be held again? As if reading Yuder's thoughts, Kishiar spoke softly.

"We'll have to make it happen."

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"Do you have any plans in mind?"

"No plans."

Kishiar's response was succinct. However, his eyes were shining like a predator waiting for the right time to strike.

"But if my guess is correct, thanks to the people we brought today, we might soon get what we want."

The auction will be held again because of the people brought today? Yuder's eyes narrowed at the very significant statement, and he became lost in thought. Ever also wore an expression that seemed to say she almost understood.

"Commander. It seems time for the other members who were outside to return, so I will take my leave. Thank you for the opportunity to enjoy delicious tea and cookies."

"What nonsense. This is but a trifle for saving many with your sharp observation. I appreciate the proper guidance today."

After Ever left, Yuder looked down at the almost empty cookie plate and swallowed the last remaining tea. Kishiar seemed to be waiting and lightly tapped the handle of the teapot.

"Would you like another cup? There's still some left."

"I'm fine, thank you."

"How were the cookies Nathan brought? According to Baron Willhem, they are a popular product that every noble family in Tainu sends someone to buy."

The thought of Nathan Zuckerman mingling among the servants lined up to buy cookies, beautifully garnished with dried fruits and decorated with colored sugar powder, was not something he wanted to imagine. Even if it was for the sake of pretending to be decadent, having a swordmaster like him run such an errand was something only Kishiar would command in this world.

"They were fine."

"Perhaps it's because of the fruit, but the first taste was too tangy for my mouth. Next time I'll have to order them to change it to chocolate."

"You plan to order more?"

"Shouldn't I have a good reason if I'm going to send my adjutant out often? Stores where you have to stand in line for a long time are quite suitable for that purpose."

He couldn't say anything more to that. Yuder put the last remaining cookie in his mouth. While it was certainly tasty, his mind was filled only with the last words Kishiar had said before Ever left.

If the auction was to be held today because of the people who had lost their memories, how could that possibly happen? Numerous possibilities filled his head and repeated their busy movement.

"What are you thinking so hard about?"

"I was pondering how your earlier words could come to fruition."

"Was that so intriguing to you?"

Kishiar smiled as if there was no helping it, propped his chin, and answered.

"Simple. It's because of the unrest I will cause."

Only then did Yuder finally understand his meaning.



The existence of those who had lost their memories meant an internal division among the Awakeners in the village of the Star of Nagran. If there were people like Nahan and his comrades who would stop at nothing to avenge others, then conversely, there would have been those who harbored great resentment because of this matter.

Internal opposition and conflict were the best factors to cause members to lose their prudence. Tainu's noble families and Baron Willhem were more likely to experience confusion much quicker and more powerfully than Kishiar had initially expected.

Then, the paths to choose would also narrow, and after that, things would unfold faster than they had anticipated before coming to Tainu.

"...I see. Understood."

"You're quick to understand, which is great. Would you like to eat more cookies as a reward?"

"..."

Yuder shook his head. But Kishiar, with a tender smile that said not to refuse, opened the second box of cookies.

"Hm?"

But he immediately paused without moving the snacks and looked inside the lid. There, a small folded note was secretly attached.

"Nathan left one more thing for us to see."

"What does it say?"

"It says that the ones we were going to meet here will arrive in Tainu soon. It worked out well."

Kishiar quickly read the note and turned his gaze back to Yuder.

"Remember what I told you? That we would meet some monster experts in Tainu?"

"Yes."

"They are the ones coming from Peletta. Once they arrive, it would be good to call pharmacist Enon and see them all together."

They were monster experts from Peletta. Even reflecting on his previous life's memories, their identity was not easily guessed. Yuder felt a faint tension and nodded.

"I will pass on the message."

The next morning in Tainu began with a different feeling. Sensing a faint tremor like an earthquake, Yuder, who had opened his eyes alertly, looked around and saw Kishiar, who was already awake.

"Did you feel it, Commander?"

"It's not near here. Seems like an explosion occurred quite far away."

Rising from his seat, Kishiar opened the window and looked out. In no time, he returned with three small messenger birds in his hand.

"The report is quick... let's see where."

While Kishiar read the notes from a small pouch hanging from his leg, Yuder gave water to the birds that cocked their heads.

"There has been a mysterious intrusion at the Tainu Security Management Team building and the Red Deer Consortium building we visited. The culprits haven't been caught, but they are being pursued now, and it seems a few guards and prisoners were injured."

The other reports were nearly identical. They were all sent by the Peletta Knights, who pretended to frolic and observed the situation outside Tainu.

"It must be the Star of Nagran."

"Yes. But we can't know if those who invaded both places had the same intention."

Yuder guessed that at least those who invaded the Tainu Security Management Team were undoubtedly looking for the ones who had lost their memories. Whether they meant to kill and silence them or find and rescue them belatedly was unclear, but sadly, they were a step too late. The memory-lost ones were already here.

"Things started earlier than expected, but Baron Willhem won't contact us right away. Shall we feign ignorance and take our time here today? We can call the firstborn in the evening."

Kishiar smiled, folding the letter neatly. Moments later, only a small amount of ash remained in his palm.

Yuder rested all day with Kishiar. Kishiar, not caring at all about the noisy movements happening in the main building, played card games or chatted with other members in the reception room. Despite any sinister looks from Baron Willhem's servants, he remained by his male lover's side, laughing cheerfully; he was the very picture of a libertine duke.

When evening came, Pruelle, cradling a cat and a book in his arms, came to dine with them. With polite manners, he thanked them for inviting both himself and the cat to dinner, then took care of his younger sibling's meal first. Watching the cat open its tiny mouth to eat before picking up his spoon, he looked more like a parent than a sibling.

"Your Majesty. You must have heard about the explosion incident today."

"Of course."

"It seems that Baron Willhem was in contact with the capital all day about the matter. My father seemed extremely angry that he still couldn't catch the people who killed the knights in the Great Sarain Forest, on top of Tainu being violated."

"The fact that you're here means it's no longer a concern."

"Yes. Thanks to the confusion, it was easy for me to get in touch with those I know."

The people Pruelle knew in Tainu were those who had worked under Baron Willhem for a long time, along with some nobles. During Pruelle's brief stay in Tainu as a child, these individuals had helped him and his siblings with compassion. They readily shared information without suspicion, at the request of a prince who wanted to know about the local situation.

"My father, through Baron Willhem, appears to have secretly hidden smuggled goods at a midpoint in Tainu and then redistributed them to the capital and the southern regions. In the south, he mainly sent 'horses brought from the west.' Though they called them horses, what they actually were... you can probably guess."

"People, I suppose."

"Yes."

Pruelle, who had answered succinctly, looked down at the meat he had been slicing and stopped moving. For a fleeting moment, a complex emotion passed over his expressionless face.

"According to the information... there are 'horses' that have not yet been 'distributed' at that 'midpoint' in Tainu. There probably aren't many places to hide living horses. So, I've marked a few places that are likely to be used as bases, according to my guess."

Pruelle handed over a book he had brought to Kishiar. It was a thick history book.

"This book is famous for detailing the history of the western area and Tainu. It was written by one of the ancestors of the House of Tain. The places are marked inside."

"Such a precious gift, thank you."

"It's nothing. But... I heard that unfamiliar guests arrived at the outbuilding yesterday. May I ask what happened?"

The rumor about the people they had brought from the security management team yesterday had quickly reached the main house.

"They're related to those who killed the knights in Great Sarain Forest. We suspect that their minds were shattered by some ability and then abandoned."

"...Such an ability exists?"

Surprise flicked across Pruelle's face.

"Then today's intruders at the security management team were because of..."

"It could be an extension of that. Fortunately, we were one step ahead yesterday."

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"Did Your Highness perhaps know not only about Tain but also about them already?"

Kishiar responded only with an inscrutable smile, instead of a direct answer. In Pruelle's eyes, tension, admiration, and trust simultaneously flashed by.

"I see. I think it would not be helpful if I knew too much, so I will not ask further. If you have any tasks for me, please tell me at any time."

The intelligence of Duke Peletta was indeed remarkable. Who would have imagined that Duke Peletta, ridiculed by the nobles as merely a pretty face, was concealing his true character?

Hiding oneself briefly in front of strangers is easy. But to maintain it for years among those who have been observing one for a long time was nearly impossible. After acquiring the ability to shape-shift, Pruelle, who had been practicing not to be suspected in the guise of others, knew how complicated and difficult it was.

And Duke Peletta had accomplished this, and was still doing so. The fact that more people were cautious of the Emperor in the background rather than Duke Peletta, who had come to the forefront even after the Apeto incident, was evidence of this.

Could there be a weapon as dangerous and robust as a sword that doesn't appear threatening?

Indeed, his eye for selection has never been wrong. Pruelle felt simultaneous deep relief and rare excitement, patting his younger sibling's small head, who was eating with a pitter-patter noise.

"Those are wise words, but understand one thing. There are many who deeply regret the deeds committed by Duke Tain, for reasons other than yours. Blind rage does not discriminate, so it might become dangerous if the fact that you are here and your identity becomes known. It's good to gather information, but try to stay away from the house of Baron Willhem as much as possible."

Nahan himself wouldn't attack another Awakener unless provoked, but his colleagues and the opposition might not do the same.

"I understand."

Pruelle's expression had become even more resolute.

"I will have to warn Nipollen to be more careful as well."

"Things will continue like this for a while, but until Baron Willhem himself comes looking, I intend to be a person who knows nothing. Therefore, I entrust you with understanding the situation of the main building and the Tain household."

"Leave it to me."

While the two were conversing, the cat that had finished its meal first jumped down from the chair. Shortly after, Yuder saw a round tuft of reddish-brown fur lying under his ankle. Nipollen seemed to have liked the quietness by his side all along.

"Nipollen. It's time to go."

As Pruelle stood up from his seat and called his sibling, the cat opened its eyes.

"I will contact you as soon as there are any changes. Please take your time to look at the book I gave you later."

After Pruelle left, Kishiar opened the book he had gifted him. Inside the book, exactly 4 pages were folded at the corners.

"A building of the security management team that is famous for a huge dungeon leading to the third underground floor, but there are rumors of a hidden dungeon beneath it. Kured Street, which once had a dense population of nobles but gradually became a commercial center and the common people's area. The ancient northern wall ruins left as a space to escape from monster attacks. The famous early Tain Duke's residence, now almost unused but preserved for its historical value. Is this how it is?"

"I never knew there was a hidden area in the security management team's dungeon. The rest seem worth checking out as well."

"Perhaps that's what we must do. However, it's this place called Kured Street that I'm talking about."

Kishiar muttered as he looked down at the folded page of the book.

"Today, the explosion occurred at the Red Deer Consortium building, and the address was Kured Street. So, we have already visited two places."

Yuder recalled the Red Deer Consortium building he had previously visited. He hadn't examined the surroundings thoroughly while inspecting the upper level, but he vaguely remembered that there were quite a few buildings closed even during broad daylight. That was one of the characteristics of the entertainment district where the commoners spent their nights.

'Entertainment district...'

"Commander, do you know exactly where the entertainment district is, where Baron Willhem has reportedly increased the number of patrol personnel?"

"Why do you ask?"

Despite questioning, Kishiar immediately recalled the information and answered.

"From what I saw when the report letter came in this morning, I think it was a place called Lemlin Street."

"How far apart are Kured Street and Lemlin Street?"

"Do you think the two places are close?"

"There were quite a few buildings near Red Deer Consortium that seemed to operate at night. Entertainment districts are usually closely related, so I think we need to find out."

"Very well. It's simple to find out."

Kishiar immediately pulled a cord, calling in a servant from outside.

"I heard that both Kured Street and Lemlin Street are good places for nightlife, can you tell me which one is better?"

The blatant mention of nightlife by the Duke of Peletta, who was seated with his young commoner lover, was truly remarkable. The servant answered politely, sniffing his nose.

"The distance between the two places is not so far... but Lemlin Street is too low-class for Your Grace to visit, Your Grace."

"Oh, a low-class place. Very good. You must show me how low-class it is compared to the capital. Since the distance is close, I must visit both. Thank you for answering."

"..."

The servant lost his words and withdrew, and it was clear what report he would make to Baron Willhem.

"My assistant's intuition was correct."

Kishiar closed the book given by Pruelle, smiling.

"Among the four candidates, it seems we've now determined which one to examine first."



"Given today's explosion, it will be chaotic for a while, making it a good time to investigate."

"I have already instructed Nathan about that part."

After all, Kishiar had initially found Red Deer Consortium suspicious and had intended to investigate it thoroughly. It had seemed strange from the beginning, from the younger brother of Baron Willhem acting suspiciously while guiding them to the basement to the suspected associates causing the explosion after first inspecting the place. All these actions suggested that the ordinary building was very far removed from the explosion.

The fact that Kured Street and Lemlin Street were close together was merely the final nail in the coffin.

'If we find out what was hidden in that building, we can move on to capturing decisive evidence against Tain House.'

How far had Nahan and his associates searched the building through the explosion? Looking at Baron Willhem not yet asking for help from Kishiar and the Cavalry, it was clear that they hadn't been severely affected, but it was likely only a matter of time.

"Well, let's wait for the new news coming in tomorrow."

Kishiar smiled and leaned back comfortably in his chair.

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The next day, Nathan Zuckerman, who had secretly inspected the explosion site all day, sat in front of Kishiar and began his report.

"The Awakeners who had infiltrated the Tainu Security Management Team headed straight to the prison, and I'm told they didn't touch anything there."

"Weren't there injured soldiers and prisoners?"

"They suffered wounds when caught in the effects of the intruders using their abilities to break the encirclement, but I heard their lives were not in danger."

"I see. What about the main building?"

"The damage there was more severe than when I first heard the news."

Nathan Zuckerman found it difficult to examine closely, as the Tainu Knights and soldiers had surrounded the main building of the Red Deer Consortium with multiple layers, guarding it like a fortress. However, he reported that he could confirm the appearance of a large hole in the wall even from outside. The scorched earth and walls gave the impression that a tremendous force had exploded within.

"I took advantage of the confusion when the main business was suspended, and briefly infiltrated last night. I found that the second-floor safe, which I couldn't open because of a spell, was shattered. All its contents were gone."

"Hmm. And?"

"I couldn't enter the basement because there were many guards, but I was able to get a sense of the situation through the conversations they were having."

The soldiers guarding the basement shivered as they talked about the 'nightmarish intruders.' Among those who had invaded the main building, there was a man with a strange power. Some soldiers who had locked eyes with him fell, screaming involuntarily, unable to move a finger, in a tale that seemed like a weird rumor.

"However, they seem to have failed to completely breach the magic around the interior and escaped halfway. If they broke the safe, I believe they safely acquired the information inside."

"I see... Then the next move is coming soon."

Kishiar replied with a thoughtful expression.

"You've done well, Nathan. Don't approach either side too closely, keep watching the situation, and next, inspect the locations marked in this book as well."

"Understood."

"Ah, and don't forget to bring chocolate cookies the next time you come to report."

"...Understood."

The response came, somehow a beat slower than before. Before leaving the room, Nathan Zuckerman stared at Yuder for a long time, then exhaled deeply and turned his head.

"Rest."

And another day of reckless play continued. Some members who had been working with Ever went out and returned often under the pretext of playing outside, but since there were also many members who genuinely went out to play, no one was suspected.

Those who had been rescued from the prison in a state of memory loss were kept hidden, cared for by Priest Lusan with the help of the members. Once cleaned and cared for in a safe place, their fits noticeably decreased, but their condition did not improve enough to engage in conversation.

"I've been under the influence of a mind-altering power myself, so I feel that one's own will is essential to break free from it. But creating that will require a stable environment and time. I don't think they'll improve in a short time, but... I want to make sure they get better."

Having been struck down by Nahan's power, Lusan was more dedicated than ever to the treatment of those who had lost their memories. Perhaps it was because of his efforts that they saw the light. Not long after, while Kishiar had briefly left to meet Pruelle, Lusan came with glad tidings, and Yuder was led by his hand to the room where the memory-lost were staying.

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"Yuder, sir. This morning, someone finally showed signs of consciousness!"

Lusan whispered excitedly, taking a sharp breath.

"When I was feeding her, she asked where she was. I told her it's a safe place and that I was a priest of the Sun God, and she cried, shedding tears. I calmed her down with a touch of divine power, fearing she might collapse. She's sleeping now, but she will wake up soon."

In the spacious room, people who had recovered tremendously compared to before were seated. Though they still appeared dazed, they no longer screamed strange noises or scratched the walls. Considering that only a few days had passed, it was a remarkable achievement.

"Yuder, you're here?"

"Where's the person who showed consciousness?"

"Over there."

Emun and Finn, who had been assisting Lusan, came over and greeted him. The bed where the person who had regained consciousness lay was in another connected room. Yuder looked down at the face of a woman with long ash-colored hair, which was curled and strewn about. In the western region, where many people had vivid and dark hair, her hair color and facial features felt foreign.

"I'll wake her."

Lusan, with a tense face, gently shook the woman's shoulder, and soon after, she quietly opened her eyes. Seeing Lusan, Emun, and Finn, she seemed slightly relieved, but her face turned pale with tension at the sight of Yuder, a stranger.

"Who, who are you?"

"Don't worry. You can relax. He's a colleague, working with us to help you."

The woman finally caught her breath after Lusan softly consoled her a few times. Yuder silently observed her, evaluating her condition.

'She seems to be fully aware of the situation. Communication is possible too.'

Lusan turned his head with an emotional look, as if asking for Yuder's agreement. Yuder nodded and pulled a chair to sit. Since his expression was naturally stiff, and looking down while standing might be intimidating, he needed to make the atmosphere as gentle as possible.

"Do you remember your name?"

"I, name. I, I. No, I, am."

The woman stuttered for a while, unable to form proper sentences, but as no one hurried or pressed her, her state gradually improved.

"My, my name is... Marty."

"Do you remember anything else? Like your age or hometown."

"Age. Age... Twenty... two. Hometown is, Messaria."

Messaria was a border region of Nelarn, adjacent to the Great Sarain Forest, as Yuder knew.

'So she's not a citizen of the Empire.'

After stating her name, age, and hometown, Marty's eyes began to clear. As she started to understand the situation a bit more, she looked around and asked fearfully.

"But where exactly is this place? It doesn't look like a temple."

"This is Tainu. You were found wandering around here. What do you remember about previous events?"

"Tainu?"

Marty's eyes widened and shook.

"Oh... Yes, that's right. I was going to... No, I came to Tainu. But then...!"

A moment later, she screamed, clutching her head. Lusan quickly calmed her down by channeling divine power. Yuder, Emun, and Finn stepped out of the way.

"Will she be alright?"

"She's regained her senses, so she'll recover more soon. Call me when she wakes up again. I'll bring the Commander with me."

"Um... Alright."

Emun nodded with a worried expression, but Marty rapidly regained her composure even before bringing Kishiar. Since she wanted to meet the three Cavalry members once again, they had to return to the bedroom.

"I remember now. You two, you've been to the Great Sarain Forest before, right? The villagers said that you were mercenaries back then, but you were actually dangerous people from the capital."

With an astonishingly keen eye, Marty recognized Emun and Finn, whom she had only seen once. Her gaze was much sharper now, compared to her previous dull expression. Her eyes, stained with anger and frustration, scanned the faces of the Cavalry members.

"Yes ... then you must have recognized us and brought us here. I really thank you for that. Otherwise, I would have already been dead."

In truth, there were quite a few who had died before they were saved, but the members did not say that.

"The reason you saved us is not just out of pity, is it?"

With an expression that seemed unable to find the right explanation, Lusan and Emun glanced at Yuder simultaneously. Yuder opened his mouth, trying his best not to reveal his emotions.

"Yes. We were tracking the remnants of the village where you were living. To be exact, the people who did this to you."

"I knew it. I knew it, I knew it."

Marty, clenching her fist, opened her eyes wide and spoke.

"Do you want information from me?"

Though the quick progression of the conversation was good, Yuder answered, "You can speak slowly if it's hard to say right now." However, Marty promptly and firmly shook her head.

"No. I want to tell you right now. What exactly do you want to know?"

"Then, I would like to hear the reason you joined that village and everything you remember before losing your memory."

"Okay. Since you probably know my origin already, it won't be such a surprising story."

Marty seemed to organize her thoughts, looking into the distance before she spoke.

"I'm from Nelarn. About a year ago, my younger brother and I were struggling to make a living and planned to go to the Empire. The Great Sarain Forest wasn't so dangerous back then. But, unfortunately, we encountered a monster. My brother died, and I was injured, almost dying, until the villagers saved me."

Through the Awakened villagers, Marty first saw a real Awakener. At first, she was terrified of their various appearances, but she gradually regained her stability due to their unconditional kindness. Even after recovering from her injuries, she stayed and worked in the village. Her affection for a man in the village significantly influenced her decision.

"At first, there were only really good people in the village. They saved people like me out of kindness and cared for us to live together. But the atmosphere gradually changed as Awakeners in the village left and were replaced."

As the number of ordinary people in the village increased, the Awakeners began to divide into two factions. One insisted on not receiving ordinary people for the village's safety and expelling them, while the other argued that living together was not bad since they were all in the same situation.

And this conflict reached its peak when monsters started occurring more frequently. They felt the need to abandon the dangerous Great Sarain Forest and move elsewhere, but they couldn't definitively decide whether to take ordinary people with them or move only with the Awakeners. The two factions of Awakeners began to grow increasingly antagonistic, and the village's atmosphere darkened.

During that time, the Cavalry appeared, and a gigantic monster that almost endangered the whole Great Sarain Forest revealed itself. Thankfully, the incident ended without any sacrifice, but only later did the villagers realize that the monster was slain by the Cavalry. Now that their village was exposed to the Cavalry, they could no longer stay there.

"At that time, strangers appeared. Among them, the village Awakeners followed a man with a horrendous scar on one side of his face with fear. He said he came to assist with the last decision related to the village relocation."

From the mere description, there was no doubt that the man was Nahan.

"After that man appeared, the Awakeners who disliked the non-Awakeners became more assertive. But that man surprisingly said it would be best to first take even people like me to the temporary shelter. I thought he was... contrary to the rumors, quite kind. Stupidly enough."

"What happened?"

"After living in the forest for a long time, everyone was overwhelmed when they came to the temporary shelter full of people. Some were hiding, but others went outside and met other people. That man observed this for a few days, and then..."

Marty, who was speaking, bit her lip tightly.

"Someone among the non-Awakeners leaked information outside."



Of course, if it really happened, it would have been a grave mistake, but the non-Awakeners initially knew little about the village Awakeners. Protesting how they could possibly leak anything was futile; Nahan and those aligned with him would not listen.

They carried Nahan on their backs and acted as if they were finally doing what they should have been doing all along. The non-Awakeners could not stop the power of the Awakeners. Those who strongly resisted were made an example of and were either grievously wounded or killed.

And then everything ended.

"..."

"I begged several times that only those who committed the wrong should be punished, but it was in vain. All of this was a testing period, and all the village's Awakeners agreed, they said. I couldn't believe it, so I asked to see my lover, but even that was denied."

"...Your lover?"

Emun, who had been listening quietly, asked with a furrowed face.

"The man I said I met in the village earlier and grew fond of, he's my lover. I thought he wouldn't agree to such a thing, but now... I don't know."

Yuder then understood the burning look of anger and despair in her eyes.

'She feels betrayed.'

"Whether you send me back to Nelarn or imprison me in the Empire's dungeon, I don't care now. But I can never forgive them."

Chapter 355

Marty had not shed a single tear until she finished her story. A person so resolute to decide to leave her hometown for the Empire, and so steadfast to find a new life even after her younger brother's death, it was possible for her to regain her composure so quickly.

Yuder wanted to ask her more details about Nahan and the Awakeners around him, but decided to leave that part for later, entrusting it to Lusan or others. Yuder organized the newly discovered information as he left the room.

The first impressions when they found those who had lost their memories, and the story that Marty told were not much different. They were victims of a civil strife that took place within the Star of Nagran. The appearance of those who would have died quickly or would have been killed if not saved by the Cavalry made them guess the blind hatred harbored by Nahan and his followers.

‘If they had followed a similar path in my previous life, there would be no doubt that they perished in the civil strife.’

Nahan's power was strong. His goal to unconditionally protect the same Awakeners was clear. It was not difficult to imagine how reassuring he must have felt to the Awakeners who harbored hatred and fear for the non-Awakeners. Since they even got rid of the non-Awakeners who knew the internal information and took the power from the group that had courted the non-Awakeners, it must have been quite a rewarding result for them.

Wielding power was so easy and convenient. However, they could not achieve everything with power alone. The outcome of their previous life, and Yuder himself, who had proven it with his life, were living witnesses to that.

"Yuder."

Kishiar called him from not far away. His coldly moving mind momentarily melted weakly like eyes exposed to sunlight. Yuder stopped thinking and looked at the smiling face of the man who waved his hand lightly.

"I heard you were suddenly called by Priest Lusan. What happened?"

"One of the people under the priest's care regained consciousness today, so I visited."

"Really? How much did they remember about the situation before and after?"

"She remembered most of it. The circumstances were not much different from what we suspected. I decided to ask the details after she recovered a bit more and came out first."

Kishiar was silent for a while after hearing Marty's story.

"Nahan has cunningly used his means. He is quite skilled at fueling people's hatred."

"I think so too."

"I wonder where that madness comes from at this point. Don't you?"

Yuder had never been curious about Nahan's circumstances, so he kept his mouth shut for a moment. Even knowing that Kishiar's interest in Nahan was pure curiosity unrelated to his illusion ability, a sudden cold sensation lingered around his heart.

"There's no need to be curious about such a person. He will not last long and will destroy himself."

"That's quite a prophetic statement. You didn't awaken a prophecy ability, did you?"

"..."

"I'm kidding. But when my assistant says something like that, it doesn't feel like just words."

Kishiar, who couldn't think of Yuder as someone who had truly seen the end, spoke in a light tone, making a chilling sound.

"I don't think I can achieve what they want in that way either. But knowing the cause may allow us to find ways to prevent innocent victims more quickly, or perhaps give me a warning not to become such a monster, right?"

The words that one could gain caution so as not to become a monster like Nahan somehow lingered in Yuder's heart.

"Why would you say that, Commander? No matter what you do, you will not become like that."

"Thank you for saying so."

Kishiar's face momentarily looked surprised as he answered, but he soon smiled with genuine warmth.

"But not forgetting to be cautious is also for the path I want to tread. If I'm always off my guard, I might easily fall into self-centered thinking. Humans are such beings. I'm no exception."

Kishiar defined himself as such a human without the slightest shame. Yuder, hearing his words, suddenly wondered how he had been. Had he ever been conscious of his weakness and strived not to forget the possibility of making a mistake? Had he ever possessed caution that a monster caught in hatred and madness could become him?

'...I never have.'

Even if he made an effort from now on, it wouldn't work. He was born such a human. It was truly fortunate that not him, but Kishiar, was the commander of the Cavalry. Yuder recalled how wise his decision to not take the Deputy Commander position in this life was, and felt relieved.

"You don't need to worry, Commander. You'll never commit such a folly."

"Hmm. My assistant thinks too highly of me."

"If it's burdensome, I'll stop speaking."

"Why would it be?"

Kishiar pulled him close by the waist and affectionately leaned his head on him. Just then, the servants of Baron Willhem, passing through a nearby corridor, were visibly shocked, covering their eyes and dodging out of the way. Red eyes followed their retreating forms, smiling sweetly.

"I told you, I like being depended on."

-----

"Are you here, Nahan?"

The door burst open, and several people entered. Nahan, who had been reading the piled documents on the table, calmly looked up, unfazed by their rough entry.

"What's the matter, brothers?"

"Damn it. Stop with that 'brother' talk. Why are we your brothers?"

"What do you want with Nahan? If you've come to pick a fight, get lost."

The ones sitting beside Nahan furrowed their brows and stood up, lightly assuming a defensive stance. Between Nahan's associates and the others, a sharp and tense atmosphere instantly filled the air.

"All of Tainu is in turmoil because of what you've done. Even our fellow Awakeners, who aren't culprits, can't go outside because of the rumors that Awakeners are the culprit. Don't you care?"

The Awakener shouting about how long this would continue was met with a sneer from Nahan's side.

"Is this all Nahan's fault now? It's probably because of the non-Awakeners who leaked our existence and the rotten Tain Duke!"

"You haven't even clearly shown proof that the non-Awakeners leaked our existence! You've gone mad. Why are you doing this?"

"Because, unlike you cowards, we have the power to avenge our brothers and sisters!"

The atmosphere suddenly became even more frigid. One of Nahan's Awakener associates growled harshly, trying to calm his breath, then finally couldn't bear it and burst out again.

"You who snuck into the security management team on the time when we were digging into the Tain Duke's secrets are no different from us. If you can't help with important matters, at least stop holding us back."

The faces of the moderate Awakeners went pale.

"We went to find those who were driven out! We're different from you!"

"So, did you find them?"

Nahan, who had been quietly watching the fight between the two factions until now, finally spoke. Though he uttered his words slowly, everyone fell silent in an instant. Even the moderate faction Awakeners, who were suppressing their anger, couldn't help but cower. There was a fearsome presence about him that forced them to do so. Whether it was because of the terrifying scar on his face, brazenly displayed, or because of his strange calmness that never allowed him to lose his temper with his Awakener comrades, no one knew. But they did sometimes feel a terrifying sensation from him whenever he moved.

"We... we couldn't find them."

One of the moderate faction Awakeners stammered a forced reply, trembling lips betraying his fear. Nahan sighed silently. He put down the documents he had been holding and rose from his seat. As he did, his overcoat, draped over his shoulders, fell, revealing a recently treated wound on his shoulder to everyone present.

It was an injury Nahan had sustained just before leaving the Great Sarain Forest, inflicted by the Cavalry. The wound had been so deep that, had there not been someone with even a meager ability to staunch the blood, there were talks that his arm might have had to be amputated. That's why even though it had healed to some extent, he still had difficulty moving that arm. However, this did not affect Nahan's abilities.

"Brothers, if you went that far using us as bait, you should have at least found some trace."

"Are... are you mocking us now?"

"I am always sincere."

Nahan's gaze swept over the moderate faction of Awakeners, answering with an expressionless face. They quickly lowered their heads to avoid eye contact with Nahan, due to the rumor that meeting his gaze would cast them into an illusion. In reality, the ability was only effective within a specific range, so whether or not they met his eyes, it had no relation to the manifestation of his power, but Nahan said nothing. Instead, he spoke other words.

"I asked earlier what you were doing while all the Awakened brothers and sisters of Tainu were suffering."

"..."

"I've been reading documents brought from upper management connected to the Tainu operation, searching for information. It's almost finished now."

Nahan's gaze moved meaningfully toward a stack of papers beside him.

"Even now, there are people out there filled with intentions to imprison and sell our brothers and sisters like objects. How long must we leave them alone? The more we ignore it, the more victims like Ershi will arise, unable to fight back and dying."

The eyes of the moderate Awakeners wavered at his smooth, flowing voice. They too had fled their homes and arrived at the Star of Nagran, knowing the suffering of their comrades better than anyone.

"The current inconvenience is nothing compared to that. Soon, Ershi and other brothers and sisters will step forward to rescue the victims of human trafficking hidden in Tainu's household, so bear it until then."

The moderate Awakeners lost momentum at his seemingly unobjectionable words, while those following Nahan straightened their shoulders with a solid expression. It seemed like the battle's conclusion had been reached. But then, a young man who was among the moderates quivered his lips and spoke.

"Nice words. Bear it? What exactly?"

"..."

"Driving away those we lived with, killing people... All we'll end up doing is revealing our existence we tried to hide. To my eyes, you're just gathering the strength of your comrades to instigate Ershi to take revenge on Tainu's house. Does the sage know about how big this has gotten?"

"That's, that's right."

Fueled by the angry shout, the moderate Awakeners muttered in agreement.

"The sage I knew wanted to create a quiet sanctuary for us. If he knew what you're doing here...!"

"I wonder. Will anything change if he knows?"

Nahan retorted, having been listening silently. The moderate Awakeners closed their mouths again.

"...What?"

"Brothers. It seems like you've stayed in the sanctuary too long and don't remember, but think about it."

A twisted smile appeared on his half-scarred, burnt face.

"Did the brothers come here voluntarily? We were all saved by the hands of our brothers and sisters. the Star of Nagran was started that way from the beginning."

His voice, so calm as to be terrifying, resonated.

"We rose to save ourselves and our brothers and sisters. We're just doing the same thing now; nothing has changed."

"..."

"The sage entrusted me with this matter, so I'm handling it my way. Is that wrong?"



However, the young moderate Awakener did not back down from Nahan's words.

"Your words are always clever. Is rescuing comrades who have been victimized and coming together the same as killing innocent non-Awakeners and waging war with Tainu's house like you? Don't make me laugh! You are just a vengeful ghost!"

Nahan rarely had a moment of silence. Everyone thought that for the first time, he might show anger towards another Awakener, but a moment later, he simply exhaled a long breath and offered a kind smile.

"Yes, my brothers. If it is too difficult, I recommend you head to the safe southern base. I understand that not all my brothers and sisters can move with me."

Nahan closed his mouth and said no more. In the end, the moderate Awakeners had to leave the room without gaining anything, as if being driven out.

"...Damn it!"

A young moderate Awakener, filled with frustration, pounded the wall and hung his head, taking a deep breath.

"It's always cunning words with him. I lost Marty because I was fooled by his tongue... What else does he intend to do here...!"

"Calm down, Robel."

Other moderate Awakeners gathered around him and offered words of comfort.

"The fact that we couldn't find Marty's body might mean she is still alive. Those guys said they didn't kill them."

"If Nahan uses his ability, even a healthy person will smash their head against a wall and commit suicide. What difference does it make that they didn't kill her immediately after falling victim to such a horrifying ability?"

The man called Robel pounded the wall a few more times to suppress his anger.

"If they're not with the security management team, where the hell are we supposed to go!"

"Hey, Robel. How about we go south and inform the sage of this matter and ask for his help?"

One of the moderate Awakeners beside him whispered.

"The probability is high that he doesn't know things have escalated this far, so if we ask for help, won't he surely assist us?"

"Don't talk nonsense. That's exactly what Nahan wants. You still don't understand even after being fooled once?"

Robel yelled out, denying the suggestion.

"Those bastards want us to leave here. That way they can handle matters as they please!"

"..."

The moderate Awakeners looked at each other's faces powerlessly. Ever since the news of a traitor among the Non-Awakeners and the rapid 'clean-up' operation, many who were originally close to the moderate faction had begun to think Nahan was right. Now, only about half a dozen, including Robel, were left to look for the expelled Non-Awakeners. Most of them had deep connections to the expelled.

Having belatedly gathered some information, they went to the security management team but found no one. The situation seemed hopeless.

"Robel, Robel!"

Just then, someone ran up and tapped Robel on the back.

"New information has come in. The expelled ones might be in a completely different place than we expected!"

"What?"

The moderate Awakeners, who had been sunk in despair, all lifted their heads at once. The one who ran in informed them with a flushed face.

"Did you know that part of the Cavalry was here right now? Just before we went to the security management team, a few Cavalry members visited there!"

"Is that true?"

Robel quickly grabbed his shoulder and asked.

"The Cavalry went there?"

"It seems to have been a secret externally, but I found out by eavesdropping on soldiers chatting at the main gate. When those people left, a large number of carriages followed them. Those on them could have been the expelled ones.

The Awakeners' gazes intertwined complexly. Robel's expression, too, was complicated for a different reason than before. However, he quickly composed himself and nodded with a determined face.

"...Yes. It's worth checking out."

"It's too dangerous. Have you already forgotten what we saw in the forest? They are the ones who could kill a monster the size of a house on their own!"

"I saw it. But they killed the monsters with that strength, not attacking us. When I spoke to them directly, they didn't seem like those who wouldn't communicate at all."

"You say that because you don't know they're after us?"

No matter what others said, Robel had already made up his mind firmly. He deeply exhaled and took in the appearance of his Awakened companions.

“I don't intend to ask you to come with me. First, I'll find out where the Cavalry is staying and whether we can enter without being noticed. I'll contact you once a day, but if you don't hear from me even after a week, don't look for me, go south.”

“Robel...”

“Tell the people on my side that I ran out in anger. Try not to be together if possible.”

Robel gritted his teeth, recalling Nahan he had just seen. He was someone who could do anything, even indirectly, to achieve his will. Thinking of the division of the village that started after his arrival and the current situation, he was literally trembling.

Robel left a brief greeting to his companions and turned away. His mind was filled with thoughts of his lost lover.

----

In the days that followed, those working in the mansion of Baron Willhem had become as accustomed to Kishiar's debauchery as they could. Building towers with the Baron's treasured liquor, playing with it, disregarding dining etiquette, and flirting with the male lover was nothing to them.

With his unruly subordinates, he turned the reception room into a playground, laughing and tossing balls, or drunkenly lying on a table and throwing tantrums for his assistant to get him water. Many were speechless, watching him commit accidents that even a five-year-old noble child wouldn't do. Those who observed were mortified.

“The Duke continues to act in ways we can't even imagine, so the servants in the annex dislike going there.”

“Is that all? The Duke keeps playing?”

“Yes.”

With dark circles under his eyes, Baron Willhem pressed his throbbing head, staring at the empty liquor collection. Originally, it had contained many precious liquors he had collected since he was young. However, now everything had been ruined by Kishiar's hand, leaving nothing behind.

“...Whether an explosion happens or not, I'm relieved that I don't care, but with this, I don't know if I'm raising a parasite or taking care of a precious imperial family member's body.”

## Chapter 357

Baron Willhem, whose cruelty knew no bounds, had dismissed the report about Kishiar and the Cavalry with a wave of his hand, as if there was no need to speak further on the matter.

“My head aches, so let's leave it at that. How is the First Prince Pruelle? Does he seem like he still has no intention of leaving?”

“Yes. When I casually asked, he said that he needs to take some more time to return, so that His Grace the Duke's anger about him suddenly coming here will subside.”

“I see. Indeed, it's fitting for a person of the same bloodline to know His Grace the Duke's temperament well.”

Baron Willhem, who had replied indifferently, changed his complexion as if something had crossed his mind at the mention of the word ‘Duke.’

“By the way, how are things with the children? I told them to meet with him daily and build a rapport, if possible. I have been too preoccupied to ask if it's going well.”

Baron Willhem had been making efforts to have his daughters meet with Pruelle whenever the opportunity arose. There were more instances of marriages within the branch family than with external noble houses. If things went well, one of his daughters might become the next duchess, and even if it didn't work out, at least the relationship with the main house could be strengthened. It was not a bad idea. The current duke and his wife had no interest in children, so capturing the heart of the one to be married was enough, and this was one of the reasons he was eyeing Pruelle.

“They have met a few times, I hear. But...”

“But what?”

Baron Willhem, who had recently come to hate the word ‘but’ more than anything else in the world, sharply asked. The servant, who had been making the report, reflexively hunched his shoulders and cautiously continued.

“The First Prince has been too preoccupied with taking care of the cat he brought this time to invite the young ladies into his room. Moreover... since finding the cat, he has frequently dined with His Grace Duke Peletta, making it difficult for the young ladies to visit.”

“...What? A cat?”

Baron Willhem’s eyebrows writhed uncontrollably. He vaguely recalled a report about Pruelle losing a cat and the servants of the main house being distressed.

“That must be an excuse, you stupid. Why did you not mention first that the two were meeting so frequently!”

“My, my apologies. But Your Lordship has been rather busy lately for Tainu. I was overstepping my boundaries and worried that if I delivered even the trivial reports surrounding the First Prince, it might cause strain on your body.”

“Even if I’m busy, still!”

Though he did lose his temper, Baron Willhem felt a little better at the servant’s words. At a time when the Duke of Tainu’s insulting messages were pouring in several times a day, and there was no sign of suspicious movements in Tainu settling down, knowing that there was someone who understood his situation satisfied him. His hot-headed thoughts cooled down, and his usual shrewd mind began to whirl.

“Hmm, no... Come to think of it, it might not be entirely a bad thing.”

The Duke of Tainu had been harassing Baron Willhem day and night with the task of secretly and securely moving the ‘items’ hidden in Tainu and chasing suspicious movements. It was quite like him to refuse to come in person even if he was so troubled, instead only losing his temper.

Because of this, he had not been able to focus on the investigation of Duke Peletta, or the recruitment of the Cavalry member who had achieved merit in the Great Sarain Forest, as he had originally planned. If Pruelle was taking over these roles, then it was rather a welcome matter.

‘Besides, if it had been before, I wouldn’t know, but now the First Prince... He clearly seems to have the intention to become the successor. Since he has started showing interest in family matters, his approach to Duke Peletta must surely be more than simple.’

Pruelle had not been here long when he subtly asked Baron Willhem about the secret trade. The Baron was deeply surprised. He had thought that Pruelle, who had been known for his lack of interest in family matters until now, had finally come to his senses and was laying the groundwork for his succession.

Anyone who was not a stranger would know about the recent Great Sarain Forest incident in their sphere of influence, so it appeared that Pruelle was striving to grasp information about it himself. Baron Willhem stroked his chin, unable to imagine that his speculation was completely wrong from beginning to end.

"You've found your way even though I was too busy to properly care for you; truly wise of you. I must inquire whether you can meet him and assist in the matter of Duke Peletta's new sword and that impudent Cavalry member's persuasion."

"Indeed, my lord, you read all the plays even while sitting down."

"You rascal, your tongue is indeed smooth."

Baron Willhem laughed heartily for the first time in a while. Then he began to check on the real matters he had been putting off due to a headache.

"Is there still no contact from the Commander of the Tainu Knights?"

"Yes. Those injured in the explosion still haven't come to their senses, so they don't even know the appearance of the culprit."

"Laziness and pathetic. How are they sleeping at night? Is it over if they can't catch him just because they don't know what he looks like? They should use some other means. They're just repeating the same interrogations without thinking of finding a new method."

Baron Willhem rubbed his forehead, not holding back his insults towards the Commander of Tainu's Knights, Jeymer Phil.

"I suppose it's because they don't know what was stolen from the Red Deer Consortium. I don't think those lowly people could read what was inside, but the fact that it was stolen leaves me with no excuse to Duke Tain!"

Baron Willhem recalled the dizziness he felt when he found out that the safe he had been secretly keeping in the Red Deer Consortium was ransacked by intruders. He didn't tell the Commander of the Knights or others, but inside were documents containing records of the new trade business that Duke Tain had been pushing, including the ledger of goods going back and forth during the operation.

To the ordinary eye, it would seem like a standard ledger, filled with all sorts of complicated numbers and nouns designated by code, but if one knew the content, the story was completely different. Even reading it properly would allow them to trace the flow of goods from the West through the Great Sarain Forest to Tainu.

"Those scoundrels are definitely targeting Duke Tain's trading business. So the next target must be the intermediate base. They must have infiltrated the Red Deer Consortium and the security management team to find it..."

"Why on earth those lowly people are making such a fuss over this, I cannot even guess."

At the housekeeper's words, Baron Willhem snorted and replied,

"What would those lowly people be thinking? You must look at the shadow behind them."

"Shadow, you say?"

"Those who were displeased with Duke Tain's business. It could be movement within the family, or perhaps something else. It's not for me to know, but the answer is obvious, isn't it?"

"Ah, I see."



"They must be hiring Awakeners to bother us, no doubt about it. With their protection, that's why so many of them can hide like rats inside Tainu."

"What will you do next, my lord?"

"Duke Tain said yesterday that he can wait no longer. Keeping the goods in Tainu any longer is too risky. So, from today on, rather than just focusing on catching those guys, we must find time to think about ways to move the goods."

In the meantime, Baron Willhem doubled his patrols and conducted surprise inspections in order to find a group of Awakeners who had killed Tainu Knights in the Great Sarain Forest and dared to come here and cause the explosion. However, the culprits had vanished without a trace. Days were wasted with no results, and the frustration had reached a point where merely reading Duke Tain's curses made Willhem's head ache. He could no longer solely focus on this matter.

"I must call that lazy Knight Commander and order him to search even the places that have not been searched yet. Check everywhere, including already verified inns, mercenary groups, and places recently visited by strangers. If anything is suspicious, even if it's from here, arrest them all."

Though it was a harsh measure that would further tighten the already tense atmosphere in Tainu, there was no other choice.

'What can I do? At least this way, I'll have a chance to breathe.'

Dealing with Duke Tain, who seemed to have no consideration for others' situations, was no easy task. If Willhem failed to produce results, he might face an assassin sent by the Duke tomorrow. So, he had to do this to appease the Duke's fury.

"My Lord! Just now, just now, Commander Phil has sent news."

At that moment, a servant urgently knocked on the door and raised his voice.

"That stupid fool must have finally woken up and written a report. Let him in!"

However, the news from Commander Jeymer Phil was not a simple report.

"I apologize, but just now, several warehouses of the Red Deer Consortium were completely destroyed!"

"What?"

Baron Willhem froze momentarily.

"The assessment of casualties and property damage is ongoing, and coincidentally, Advisor Graham Willhem was also severely injured."

"Graham?"

Baron Willhem opened and closed his mouth several times before finally rising to his feet, his face pale.

"Lead the way! I must see it myself. Hurry!"

----

"There seem to be few servants wandering about today, don't you think, assistant?"

"Yes."

Yuder, stretched out in the reception room, calmly replied as he sat next to Kishiar, who was looking out the window with the door open.

"It was fun playing games under their watchful eyes, but it's not so motivating without an audience."

Had Baron Willhem's servants heard this, they would have wept, but Kishiar was merely jesting.

“Well, it can't be helped. Such an incident happened yesterday, after all.”

Yesterday, almost simultaneously, numerous messages were received from many members and knights who were outside. The reports were related to mysterious events that occurred in various parts of Tainu.

The beginning was an explosion that occurred in the densely packed warehouse area located in the north gate. As the knights rushed to handle the situation, leaving their posts, prominent sites throughout Tainu were wantonly damaged. Most of them were places related to the Tain family. In particular, the statue in Finnard Square, a pride of Tainu, had been defaced with curses denouncing the Tain's work, delivering quite a shock.

Pruelle, who had been monitoring Baron Willhem's situation from the main building, reported that he had hurriedly gone outside, returning a few hours later with a distraught face. The locations where the incidents occurred were quickly closed off before many could see, and the city gates that had been guarding the boundaries were also locked and bolted.

The city was gripped by deep fear and confusion, but Baron Willhem didn't issue any official announcement even as a day passed. As a result, the atmosphere in the mansion had also become gravely subdued since yesterday.

‘He's probably asking for more support from the Tain family now, but...’

There was no strength left in the Tain family to help this place. Assistance was bound to fall through.

Even though Kishiar and his Cavalry had primary jurisdiction over matters related to the Awakeners, they had feigned ignorance about all this until now. However, with this incident, it felt as if Duke Tain and Baron Willhem would soon realize that they couldn't endure on their own for long, and the day they would reach out for help seemed not far off.

In the meantime, a few more people among those who had lost their memory and were being looked after by Priest Lusan had regained their consciousness, and Enon had dashed into Nathan Zuckerman's room to observe the hidden Pethuamet every time he returned.

Although Ever and the members who were searching for the place where the Star of Nagran was lingering hadn't produced any significant results, Kishiar didn't rush them. After all, the Star of Nagran would reveal itself soon enough, even if they didn't find it here; it was not urgent.

Entrusting the task to the members was more about letting them gain experience than it being truly necessary.

Since Kishiar suggested spending the afternoon leisurely with tea and cookies, Yuder stood up and followed him. However, as soon as they arrived at the residence, they found Baron Willhem's butler, who seemed to have been waiting for them, and politely bowed.

“I have a message for Duke Peletta.”

“What's the matter?”

“Today is Baron Willhem's 20th wedding anniversary, and a special dinner has been arranged. If distinguished guests like you would honor us with your presence, it would make the occasion even more glorious. Therefore, I've brought the Baron's invitation, hoping that you might grace us with your presence.”

The butler politely inclined his head, apologizing that the Baron was too busy with official duties to deliver the brief message in person. It was almost the first time that Baron Willhem had sent his butler for something as minor as a short note, rather than sending one of the servants.

Kishiar, reading the short note handed over by the butler, smiled and opened his mouth.

“A wedding anniversary indeed, a joyous occasion. Will Prince Pruelle also attend today's gathering?”

“Yes. All the members of the Willhem family and Prince Pruelle have expressed their intention to attend.”

“Good. Then my assistant and I will also attend.”

“Thank you. The Baron and his wife will be most thrilled.”

‘Thrilled, he says. He has a way with words.’

Somehow, the attempt to find an excuse and survey the situation was not even amusing. The butler bowed politely to the very end and then withdrew. Kishiar entered the lodgings, releasing a laugh he had been holding back.

“I guess they're desperate enough not to refuse even when I invited my assistant to go with me. It seems we'll have to postpone today's enjoyable snack time.”

“It's just mealtime, so there's nothing to prepare, right?”

“Nothing to prepare, you say? What nonsense is that?”

Kishiar responded gravely.

“I must show something entirely different from last time.”

----

“Welcome, Duke Peletta and... uh.”

Come evening, in the dimly lit front gate of the mansion, the butler who had greeted them stumbled over his words for the first time. Yuder internally sighed, watching the direction of his gaze.

“What are you doing? Guide us.”

“Ah, yes. I apologize. I will guide you immediately. Please follow me.”

The special dinner to celebrate Baron Willhem's wedding anniversary was held in the hall where the feast had been conducted before. Though the number of attendees was much fewer, the decorations felt even more extravagant. It seemed unbelievable that just yesterday, all manner of horrific events had taken place within Tainu. The grandeur was boundless.

“His Highness Duke Peletta and his Assistant Sir Yuder Aile have arrived.”

At the formal announcement, those already seated stood up in unison. There was the more emaciated Baron Willhem, his gaunt wife, and Pruelle with his red hair softly half-drawn up; Two girls in splendid dresses and two men resembling Baron Willhem, and their wives, whom they had brought along, were new faces.

Though the attendees were diverse, their expressions were similar. They all failed to conceal their surprise as they looked in this direction.

Yuder, standing a step behind, glanced at Kishiar, who was smiling brightly. His golden hair, matched with a blue ceremonial dress and belt, always seemed sufficient to captivate souls, but today it was harder to look at him so easily.

Yuder's seat was right next to where Kishiar sat. As soon as he sat down, Pruelle whispered in a very low voice.

"It's the first time I've seen you in formal wear, Sir Aile. I thought you were someone else. It suits you well?"

"...You flatter me."

At the previous feast, all the Cavalry members wore Cavalry uniforms instead of formal wear. However, Yuder was now attending, dressed in the formal wear that Kishiar had forcibly bought in Tainu.

If Yuder had known beforehand that Kishiar's grave declaration of 'an entirely different appearance' meant his attire, he would have said it would be better to bring Nathan Zuckerman instead. However, not knowing, he had no choice but to spend a strenuous time moving like a doll being forcibly dressed for several hours.

Kishiar seemed to have been bothered all along by the fact that Yuder had left all the gifted items untouched in their packaging. After laying out and repeatedly examining all the unpacked items, he chose a deep navy formal wear and a white cape. The garment, with elegant patterns embroidered in silver threads and generously studded with jewels, was the most extravagant clothing Yuder had ever worn, even including his Yudrain Aile days.

Adding the gloves and shoes bought at that time, Yuder felt like a walking pile of jewels.

Kishiar seemed quite pleased to have matched his clothing with Yuder's, but Yuder was not particularly thrilled. Fortunately, in this setting, the ornate clothing did not appear overly extravagant.

As he sighed again, Baron Willhem hurriedly collected himself and began to speak.

“Thank you for gracing us with your presence today, Your Highness. My wife, Elise, has met you before, but you'll be meeting our two daughters, Megalin and Melinda, and my two siblings for the first time. This is my second brother, Fayfe, and his wife Nellisabel, and my third brother, Gellian, and his wife Ganiyette.”

“Did you not have one more sibling? I remember meeting another when I went shopping at a certain store. I guess he didn't make it today.”

“Ah, you must have met Graham. I'm sorry, but he couldn't attend due to an accident yesterday that has left him feeling unwell.”

“Is that so? That's unfortunate.”

Kishiar opened his eyes wide and replied in a tone of regret. He wondered how likely it was that the 'accident' Graham Willhem had suffered yesterday was unrelated to the events that had overturned the whole of Tainu. Though he didn't know for certain, it seemed highly unlikely.

The individuals introduced by Baron Willhem all bowed politely. The Baron's two daughters seemed spellbound by Kishiar's face, and not even a pinch on the arm from the Baron's wife and a bite on her lip could bring them to their senses. The intentions of the Baron in bringing his precious daughters, who he had not brought to a previous banquet, to this meal were all too apparent, but given the circumstances, it was merely amusing.

‘He must be hoping to make a good impression, so he's even recruiting his daughters. How typical.’

Soon, the meal began. There were many elaborately decorated dishes in honor of the wedding anniversary. The fresh flowers decorating the table were fragrant, and, to an observer, everyone seemed amiable. As Baron Willhem was questioning Kishiar about his life in the annex, Yuder was conversing with Pruelle.

“Did you leave the cat in the room?”

“Yes. I fed him before coming, but I'm a little worried. He doesn't eat well when I'm not there.”

“I heard that the First Prince brought a cute cat this time.”

The one who interjected in their conversation was the young wife who had come with Baron Willhem's second sibling.

“I'm really curious about what the cat looks like.”

Pruelle paused briefly before describing the cat with a smiling face: a creature with yellow fur and green eyes. His lips were undoubtedly upturned, but his voice lacked warmth. Yet, the interest in them did not wane at all. Following the wife, Baron Willhem's sibling eagerly interjected as if he had been waiting for his turn to speak.

## Chapter 359

"I had heard rumors that Sir Aile is a promising talent with a bright future, but seeing him in person today, I indeed think it's true. May I ask where you hail from?"

A promising talent with a bright future. They couldn't outright say Kishiar's commoner lover, so they beat around the bush, making it all the more ridiculous.

"The central region."

"Oh, the central region. Then this must be your first time in the west. How do you find it? Tainu is as renowned as the capital, a city with a rich tradition."

If they had considered the current situation in the proud Tainu, they wouldn't have been able to speak so confidently. Though it wasn't new, it strangely soured the taste in his mouth that, despite the uproar of the recent incident, the nobles seemed completely disinterested in its cause.

Although Yuder said nothing, Baron Willhem's younger sibling, a married couple, prattled on about how impressive Tainu and the west were. They spoke with elegant words, but they couldn't completely conceal the condescending energy in their eyes.



When they finally began to offer to introduce Yuder to a few famous places among the Tainu nobility, Pruelle intervened and cut off the conversation.

"I've already introduced Tainu to Sir Aile sufficiently, so there's no need to continue."

"Oh, now that you mention it, indeed. The First Prince's judgment is truly exceptional, perhaps because you inherit the blood of Duke Tain."

Baron Willhem's younger sibling quickly praised Pruelle and smiled.

'The judgment of the First Prince. It's certainly exceptional.'

To hear it likened to his father's judgment, who was oblivious to his household's ruin and gambled everything away, was almost an insult from Pruelle's perspective.

"Let's talk about the Cavalry then. The heroes of the west who saved the Great Sarain Forest! I had many questions even before coming here."

"Is that so? Sir Aile is also an Awakener, right? What abilities do you possess?"

"..."

Pruelle frowned, about to open his mouth again, but Yuder stopped him with a glance. This gathering was clearly orchestrated to elicit some reaction from Kishiar and himself. Although grateful for Pruelle standing up for him, he had been in far more dangerous situations. From the perspective of Commander Yudrain Aile, this was nothing.

Before answering, he glanced to the side and saw Kishiar, who had been subtly watching them even while engaged with Baron Willhem's couple. Kishiar flashed a faint smile, almost undetectable by others, as if telling him to do as he pleased.

He knew Yuder needed no help in this situation.

"I use the sword a little and can control some nature-related powers."

"Like fire or water?"

"Yes."

"I'd love to see that sometime, but I guess not here. Pity. I once heard a mage say that water summoned by Awakener isn't real water and you can't drink it. Well, I'm sure that's not true, but I'm curious."

"Is that so?"

Yuder looked at the Baron's younger brother who had said this. His glass was almost empty. Yuder moved a finger slightly, exerting his power. A stream of water, created from thin air, gracefully spiraled into the glass.

The Baron's younger brother screamed. In his shock, he tossed the glass, causing his wife to shriek in turn. The distant servants gasped in surprise, and the shattered glass and water scattered all around.

"What is this sudden mischief!"

Baron Willhem, who had not properly seen what had happened while focusing all his attention on Kishiar, directed his anger at Yuder. Yuder calmly responded, deflecting the gazes of those looking at him.

"I simply filled an empty glass with water created by the Awakener's power because you wondered if you could drink it. I thought you'd be pleased to say you've tasted water made by an Awakener if the same thing happened again, but it's a shame the glass has broken."

"...What?"

"If you bring a new glass, I can fill it again. Just let me know."

It was a bit stifling to use even a slight amount of power, but filling one more glass of water was not a problem.

People in Willhem's family lost their words at Yuder's attitude, talking as if it was nothing. A moment ago, the one they inwardly found amusing now felt like an incomprehensible, unknown monster. Baron Willhem tried to get angrier, but Kishiar spoke even more quickly.

"Oh dear. It's such a shame that our cute assistant finally demonstrated his ability, and it's only a glass of water that frightens you so. Your siblings must all have weak constitutions, Baron."

"That..."

"What a noble and joyful opportunity to receive a glass of water filled by the hero who saved the Great Sarain Forest, isn't it?"

In the end, Baron Willhem agreed to Kishiar's words with a pale, embarrassed face.

"Yes, Your Highness' words... are right. My siblings have been weak since childhood and have caused concern. I apologize..."

Baron Willhem's sibling stood up from his seat, trembling. His eyes briefly looked at Yuder in fear before moving away.

"A new glass is... unnecessary. My wife and I need to change our clothes, so we will have to leave our seats for a while."

He hastily left with his wife, half bowing to Kishiar. Those who remained could no longer dare to look at Yuder as they had before. Except for Kishiar, who raised his glass with a smile, it was only Pruelle who had bitten his lip to hold back laughter.

The 20th wedding anniversary dinner of Baron Willhem ended in an extremely chilly atmosphere. The Baron had actually intended to obtain a cooperation agreement from Kishiar first, but in the end, he could hardly even mention it.

After the dinner ended and the Baron had excused himself for urgent business, Pruelle followed the two. Standing at the crossroad leading to the annex, he laughed for a while, avoiding others' attention.

"Tain's First Prince, it seems your mind was quite refreshed by what happened earlier."

"Call me Elle. I'm fed up with being called by my family name even here."

Pruelle, responding with a smile and taking a long breath as he looked up at the night sky, seemed much more comfortable as his neatly tied hair was tousled by the wind.

"Now that I've become an adult and am likely to be the successor, they fawn over me like that, but it wasn't like that when I was young. Often mistaken for a bastard because of my face unlike my siblings or parents."

"Is that so? To me, you look astonishingly like the portrait of the first Duke Tain."

"Yes. Those who know history well are aware that I resemble my ancestors more. But not everyone knows that."

After answering, Pruelle turned to Yuder and smiled mischievously.

"I'm glad I didn't overstep. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to see your brilliant move. Thank you for letting me enjoy such a great spectacle."

"You're welcome."

"Ah, but I've only just remembered... I actually had more to say about Nipollen, but I didn't get to mention it because of them."

"Was there a change?"

As Kishiar asked, Pruelle wore a thoughtful expression, muttering, "Hmm....."

"I'm not sure if it can be called a change, but something odd happened yesterday."

Pruelle had most of his meals brought to his room. It was a natural thing since he had to take care of Nipollen. Nipollen would typically be highly guarded or hidden when others entered the room, but yesterday, he did not show such behavior towards the servant who brought his meal. Pruelle was

quite surprised to watch Nipollen throughout the process of the servant moving the dishes, even smelling them from a distance like a cat sniffing.

"I might have ignored it before, but considering our previous experience, I thought it would be best to mention it."

Since it had been almost confirmed that Nipollen possessed the ability to distinguish Awakeners besides the ability to transform, it seemed necessary to pay attention to this information.

"Hmm. Was the servant someone you've seen before?"

"It was the first time. When I asked, they said it was a new person."

Kishiar's gaze turned toward the main house.

"If they are just an Awakener hiding their identity, there is no reason to be alarmed, but considering the timing, I have several thoughts."

"Yes. That's why, using Nipollen as a reason, I instructed that this servant be sent to my room for meals or any tasks from now on. If you wish to see them, please let me know."

"If they are dangerous, we shouldn't waste time as it won't do us any good. Shouldn't we investigate now?"

At Yuder's words, Kishiar lightly scratched his chin.

"That's true. But I have people waiting for my report as soon as I return. You also have urgent matters to attend to."

Yuder was already aware of this. While he was making all sorts of useless preparations to attend Baron Willhem's dinner, Nathan Zuckerman and Ever had returned and conveyed that they each had matters to report.

"Then I will go alone."

Kishiar's eyebrows twitched slightly. Before he could speak, Yuder forcefully opened his mouth.

"Don't worry, I'll only be gone for a short time."

In the end, Kishiar smiled softly.

"...I know best that my assistant is not an easy person. Go ahead."

## Chapter 360

"It seems that Your Highness really trusts Sir Aile."

On their way back to the main residence, Pruelle suddenly spoke.

"Well, since we share accommodations, it's only natural, I suppose."

"What are you talking about all of a sudden?"

Kishiar had been staying in the same accommodation as Yuder, and he had seemed to be convinced from the first time they met that their public claim of being lovers was not genuine. Now, his sudden and unexpected words were incomprehensible.

"While listening to the conversation earlier, I was surprised that the Cavalry, which has not been around for long, could exchange such deep trust."

Pruelle seemed deeply moved by the conversation she had overheard between Kishiar and Yuder.

"I've never tried to trust anyone other than my siblings. I learned that guarding against others is the only way to protect myself. Right? The more trust I give, the more likely my weaknesses are to be exposed."

"..."

"If I could have been a trusted person like Sir Aile... If I had paid more attention to my family affairs and tried to trust those around me sooner... Could I have prevented my siblings' danger earlier?"

His last words echoed softly, almost inaudible. Before entering the main residence, Yuder paused for a moment to catch his breath. He had not lived a life worthy of advising others, but he felt he couldn't let Pruelle fall into despair, especially with a big task ahead.

"I actually agree with Master Pruelle's..."

"Elle."

"...Master Elle's words. I had even refused the assistant position several times."

"You refused?"

Pruelle's face showed a startled expression. Yuder nodded in agreement.

"It seems to me that a person who is trusted must first be able to trust. Therefore, it's not me but the Commander who fits Master Elle's words."

Speaking the words out loud felt very strange to him. He never expected to say such a thing about Kishiar La Orr. During his time as Yudrain Aile, such a thing would have been unimaginable.

But he did not think what he had said was wrong. Trust is something that forms through giving and receiving. If Kishiar had not taken all the risks and approached repeatedly despite Yuder's resistance, Yuder would never have thought of reciprocating. The difference was subtle, but the outcome had changed entirely, and continued to change.

"And hasn't Master Elle already trusted the Commander, me, and the Cavalry to come this far? The Commander responded to Master Elle's request. Isn't that trust?"

So, there was no need for unnecessary self-blame. In this life, Pruelle and his siblings were all safe, and nothing bad had happened. That was enough.

"...Sir Aile is right."

Pruelle replied slowly.

"I said it out of jealousy, but I've somehow gained even more shame."

"If I went too far, I apologize."

"That's not it. Just... I feel even more impressed by Duke Peletta."

A brighter look returned to Pruelle's dark-red-colored eyes.

"But, if I join the Cavalry, can I call Sir Aile 'Yuder'?"

As Yuder stepped inside the main residence, he shook his head.

"You can call me whatever you like, so please feel comfortable to address me as you wish."

"Okay, I will do so."

From Yuder's perspective, Pruelle was quite remarkable in his own right. Regardless of having lived without concern for anything beyond his own world, it was exceedingly difficult for someone born a noble to deal so freely and without inhibition with those of different status.

It had been the same during the rebellion of Apeto Family, but it seemed there were more people existing outside the unseen framework than he had known in his previous life.

He couldn't reverse the fate of those who died or disappeared without a trace. But it seemed not entirely impossible if Kishiar was involved.

This emotion, this belief that felt vividly present even without logic or evidence, might be what people call hope.



"But why is the inside of the main building so noisy?"

Pruelle, with a bright face, suddenly halted and furrowed his brows, turning his head. Beyond the excessively glamorous entrance hall, seemingly designed to overwhelm guests, voices were heard that were unusually loud. What was being said was unclear, but it was definitely human noise.

Pruelle did not proceed to his quarters on the second floor but called over a servant who had appeared in the distance. Upon being asked what was happening, the servant, unable to conceal his fearful expression, cautiously answered.

"During dinner, Lord Fayfe and Lady Nellisabel left their seats as their clothes got wet. After changing, they have not returned, and we do not know where they went. We are all looking for them."

"I see, understood."

Pruelle dismissed the servant and suggested moving upstairs with an unhappy face.

"I shouldn't have asked."

"It's strange. Where could they have gone?"

"They didn't disappear; they probably just took the carriage they had brought in protest and went back. That couple often acts impulsively and carelessly, despite living off the Baron's property. They must have been angry with the Baron for not siding with them and took another carriage home."

When a guest invited to a noble's home became angry with the host, leaving while ignoring the host's hospitality was a sign of aristocratic insult. Pruelle entered his quarters as if there was nothing more to see, and a cat that had been sitting on a soft cushion and closing its eyes let out a tiny cry when it saw him.

Pruelle quickly changed his cold expression, cherishing the cat and stroking its body.

"Nipollen. Have you been waiting for your brother? You must have been scared. I'm sorry for being late."

"..."

After a while of pampering the cat, Pruelle turned his head as if recognizing Yuder's gaze and let out a slightly embarrassed smile.

"I always treat him like this when he's in this state."

"You don't have to worry about it."

Nipollen, who had jumped out of Pruelle's arms, circled around Yuder a few times and then rubbed its tiny head against his ankle.

"Nipollen certainly seems to like Sir Aile very much."

"...Did you not say that he acted similarly towards that servant suspected to be an Awakener?"

"That's true. But the frequency is different. He only approached that person once, but he's doing it several times with you. I wonder how surprised my siblings will be to know that this guy likes someone so much."

"..."

"Oh right. I have to call that servant soon."

Pruelle grinned and pulled a string to call the servant.

"He'll probably come right away if it's not a serious matter. Will you watch from a blind spot? Or will you stay here with me?"

"I'll stay with you."

Even if that person was simply an Awakener hiding his identity, it was necessary to stay near Pruelle and Nipollen to be prepared for any situation. Protection became more difficult the further one was from the one being protected.

A moment later, a slow footstep was heard from outside the door. Yuder thought that he wouldn't be surprised, no matter who appeared. But when the door opened with a knock and a man wearing servant's clothes appeared, that thought was splendidly overturned.

The young man who had just entered as a new servant, astonishingly, was an acquaintance of Yuder. It was the very Awakener who had been there to help rescue a fallen mage and had thrown a sword to Yuder at the last moment when he was trying to lure Pethuamet to defeat it.

It had been a brief moment, but it was an impressive experience, so Yuder recognized him immediately upon seeing his face. As soon as Yuder recognized him, the man's eyes widened, apparently recognizing Yuder as well.

"...You."

As soon as Yuder opened his mouth, the man slowly backed away.

"Wait...!"

Before he had even finished speaking, the man turned and started to run away. Without a second glance, Yuder shouted toward Pruelle.

"Is that servant the one?"

"Yes, it is. But why...?"

"It's an acquaintance. I'll catch him, so don't follow and please wait a moment!"

After quickly finishing his words, Yuder immediately took flight. As he went out into the hallway, he caught a glimpse of the man's retreating figure at the far end of the wide corridor. Normally he would have moved on the wind at such times, but now all he could manage without burden was a slight lift on the tip of his foot. Still, he was able to run at a speed incomparable to the culprit.

The man quickly ran down to the first floor. A few servants who saw Yuder chasing him shouted in confusion, but there was no time to respond.

'Damn. He's so fast. I don't know what ability he has, but...'

The man's shadow soon headed for the basement below the first floor. Yuder decided to exert himself a bit more before going down an unknown path.

"I told you to stop!"

"Kuk!"

Suppressing a suffocating feeling in his chest, he exerted his power, and the ground quaked and rose up in front of the man's feet. Tripping, the man fell flat, and Yuder successfully grabbed the back of his neck.

The two tumbled together down the hall and beyond, into the dark basement. Yuder felt sensations of hitting various objects all over his body but strained to hold on to his captive.

After a moment, their rolling bodies came to a stop. Yuder, panting for breath, held tightly to the man's clothing and conjured a small flame.

"Hey there."

"..."

'...Did he faint?'

Whether it was the shock of falling and tumbling, the man was unconscious. Yuder let out a small sigh and loosened the tie around the man's neck, then tied his wrists. Only then did he have a moment to look around, when suddenly his own blood-stained hand caught his eye.

At first, he thought it looked that way in the light of the fire, but it wasn't. It was blood.

'What's this?'

He examined the man he had tied up, but there were no wounds. Yuder increased the flame a bit more.

And then, not far away, he discovered two entwined corpses that had fallen.