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For a moment, the tips of his fingers stopped twitching. The damp, foul smell that irritated his nose was not merely because the basement was humid. Yuder silently stood up from where the fainted man lay and moved closer to the corpse with agile motions.

The sight reflected under the flickering light was truly horrific. Beneath the torn dress and formal wear, severed limbs were piled like a heap of broken dolls, and pale, cold faces were visible, mouths agape in terror. Though soaked in blood and the hair was tangled, their identities were still recognizable.

They were the second younger brother and his wife of Baron Willhem, who had disappeared without returning after changing their clothes.

‘It looks as though the clothes and bones were all cut simultaneously, and I can feel a terrible rage. This method... it's almost identical to how the Knights of Tainu were killed in Great Sarain Forest.’

Yuder's mind briefly recalled the face of the woman who had been beside Nahan before it vanished.

‘Her name was... Ershi, wasn't it?’

Though the small flicker of light made it hard to confirm, there were almost no bloodstains on the ceiling and walls, and only the floor was sopping wet. Blood was still trickling from the corpses. If they hadn't been dead long, the murderer might still be nearby.

‘Were they killed somewhere else and then brought here?’

Without caring that the formal wear he wore was getting dirty, Yuder knelt down and examined the corpses a bit more under the light, noticing that their clothes and shoes were already soiled with something other than blood.

‘...Mud? Or some other filth?’

Standing up to look around, he faintly saw a small door beyond the barrels filled with alcohol and preserved food. Yuder carefully moved towards it. The door led to stairs going up, seemingly leading to the garden rather than inside the house. Though he strained his senses, he felt no signs of anyone.

‘This is where the servants bring in supplies... So the fugitive came here as well.’

Yuder didn’t go outside but turned back inside. In such a situation, he couldn't afford to wait for the fainted man to wake up. As he slapped his cheek without hesitation, the man's eyelids fluttered open with a faint moan.

“Uh... Uh?!”

The man, upon seeing Yuder, was shocked, struggling with his bound hands. But before he could resist, Yuder quickly grabbed his collar and forcefully lifted him so he could see the corpses. The man’s eyes widened and his mouth gaped at the sight of the blood and bodies illuminated under the flames.

He had intended to silence the man if he screamed, but thankfully he didn’t.

“Baron Willhem's younger brother and his wife were killed. Did you participate in the murder?”

“What? No!”

“Then why were you sneaking around here?”

Voices were heard from the upper floor. People were about to rush in. The man also sensed it, as his breathing quickened.

“I, I came to find someone.”

“Someone?”

“People from our village who were driven out and disappeared from the security management team's prison...!”

As Yuder's eyes widened at his words, a voice from the upper floor shouted, “There they are!” Before he could understand the situation further, people had come down. The servants, armed with weapons and torches, saw Yuder, covered in blood, and the corpses beyond, and all screamed in unison.

“A corpse! Someone has been murdered!”

“Someone fetch the Baron!”

“Don't move!”

Yuder, looking at the weapons aimed at them, inwardly clicked his tongue. To anyone looking, this was a situation ripe for misunderstanding. It seemed like the conversation was going to end here.

“...So,”

Kishiar muttered as he exhaled deeply.

"Do you wish to send my assistant to the Security Management Team just because he was the first to discover that place? How is that different from saying you'll arrest him?"

"Your Highness. My sibling Fayfe and his wife Nellisabel were brutally killed in my own home, in the basement no less!"

Baron Willhem, whose face had turned as pale as a blank sheet of paper, opened his mouth in a sharp voice.

"The examiners assert that cutting a human body in such a way is something that can't be done by someone with ordinary strength. They said it must be the work of an Awakener, if not a knight skilled in swordsmanship. If two Awakeners were caught at the scene, shouldn't both of them be sent to the Security Management Team for investigation?"

"Just because you want to send your servant to the Security Management Team there is no reason for my assistant to follow him. The priority right to investigate and punish the Cavalry members lies with me, the Commander, and His Majesty. I have no intention of sending anyone under my command there."

"But...!"

"If an investigation is necessary, isn't it possible to call those who will conduct it to the mansion? I'm more than willing to cooperate with that."

"Your Highness. Please understand that the more you shield him, the more complicated matters will become!"

Finally, Baron Willhem raised his voice. Yuder sat behind Kishiar, still unable to remove his blood-stiffened formal attire, and let out a small breath. A throbbing headache settled in from the prolonged confrontation.

After the bodies of Baron Willhem's brother and sister-in-law were discovered, the mansion was turned upside down. Yuder was arrested along with another man and immediately isolated in a room. The Baron wanted to send both of them to the Security Management Team right away. The only reason he couldn't send Yuder was thanks to Kishiar and Pruelle, who had rushed over as soon as they heard the news. However, that very action had led to the current situation, and it was not all fortunate.

Yuder calmly assessed the situation. It was a rather aristocratic and absurd affair, but the Baron, while nauseated by the gruesome corpses, seemed not to grieve for the fact that his brother and sister-in-law were dead. The reason he hounded Yuder was not that he believed Yuder was the real culprit, but more likely because he wanted to gain something from Kishiar by doing so.

'If he can catch the culprit here, he can get the cooperation of the Cavalry for free, and stand above Duke Peletta, reversing everything he has suffered so far.'

Of course, he probably thought the real culprit was the servant, so he would likely try to kill him quickly without proper investigation or anything else. Yuder envisioned him torturing the man to extract a confession, since an escape by the Awakener's power would be troublesome.

'But that man is certainly not the culprit.'

Yuder had only exchanged the last few words with the man, and the only thing he remembered was the face he had seen during the Pethuamet lure operation, but his experience and intuition strongly insisted that the man had no connection to the culprit.

The only people who could have come this far in search of those who had been expelled from the Awakener village were the moderate Awakeners who might have been in that village. Since they would be opposed to Nahan, who were allied with Ershi, the possibility of them being involved with the murdered bodies in Ershi's style was low. Although Marty, who was expelled and lost memory but recovered, said that even the moderate Awakeners might have betrayed them, could that really be the case?

'I should have heard more information from that man.'

No matter how much he thought about it, it was terribly regrettable.

'How should I meet him again before the Baron kills him? To get him out as quickly as possible without delay...'

Yuder hesitated for a moment, glancing sideways at Baron Willhem, who was still raising his voice. Following Kishiar's words, he was loudly proclaiming that the knights assigned to investigate would be summoned here, and they must cooperate when they arrived.

"I trust you will not forget your promise to cooperate if we summon the knights here for investigation."

"If the investigation is conducted properly, why would there be any reason to forget?"

At Kishiar's sarcastically gentle retort, the Baron wrinkled his nose indiscriminately and called for the butler who was outside the door.

"Where is Sir Jeymer, the Commander of the Knights, now?"

"Since you ordered it yesterday, my lord, he has been guarding the front of Lord Graham's house, but I heard he will soon return to the Security Management Team for this investigation."

"That's enough now. Leave Graham and the security management team to others and tell him to come here immediately!"

"Yes? But..."

"Hurry!"

Under the Baron's spirited and angry pressure, the butler replied that he understood and quickly disappeared.

"The knights are guarding your brother? It wasn't just a simple illness then?"

"...Lately, there have been frequent accidents around Graham's house, and I was worried, so I asked the Commander of the Knights to take care of it."

"Really? The Knight Commander doing such a thing, you must be close."

At Kishiar's response, Baron Willhem once again clenched his teeth and then eased his pressure.

"Lately, the situation in Tainu has become quite chaotic, so it was inevitable. Of course, Your Highness might not have paid attention to the outside situation since you are here."

"That's right. I've been busy playing with my assistant here."

When Kishiar answered, neither ashamed nor afraid, Baron Willhem was momentarily at a loss for words and then burst out laughing.

At that moment, a rather good idea popped into Yuder's head.

'Right. If I want to meet him, isn't it a matter of me going to him?'

"Sorry to interrupt your conversation, but may I also say something?"

Yuder quickly interjected, opening his mouth before Baron Willhem could say anything else.

"I don't mind just going to the Security Management Team for the investigation."

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"...What?"

"..."

The sharp contrast between Baron Willhem, who asked in disbelief even though he had received the answer he had hoped for, and Kishiar, who collected his smile as though he were trying to gauge Yuder's intentions, was clear.

"Didn't I explicitly tell you to keep your mouth shut? Now, believing His Grace the Duke is by your side, you speak very recklessly!"

When confining Yuder, Baron Willhem had refrained from binding him, instead laying down a stern warning that opening his mouth or using his powers would be taken as a confession. He had wanted to use Yuder as a card to get what he desired, but he didn't want to provoke unnecessary anger by mishandling him. Thus far, he had sat quietly behind Kishiar, but not out of fear of the Baron's threats.

"Why would I? I simply thought that while listening to your conversation, following your instructions for a fair investigation would better prove my innocence. Hence, I took the liberty to request permission to speak."

Of course, Baron Willhem had never used the word "fair." However, Yuder chattered on, his face like iron, as though it were self-evident.

"Didn't you just mention the opinions of those who have examined the case? I agree with them. Even when I saw the deceased, I thought it was clearly not the act of a commoner."

"Tha..."

Before the Baron could speak, Yuder quickly continued.

"If it is a crime committed by an Awakener, how could our Cavalry be left out? We couldn't help directly when Tainu's Knights were killed in the Great Sarain Forest, but this time will be different. I will cooperate fully with the investigation and do my best to catch the real culprit."

"Wha, what are you talking about? The real culprit?"

"...Do you think the servant caught by the assistant is not the criminal?"

Kishiar quietly interrupted the Baron's words and asked. Yuder nodded his head.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because he said he didn't do it."

"You expect me to believe such nonsense now... Do you think this situation is a joke? In fact, you and the Awakener who disguised himself as my servant were in collusion! That's what you're confessing now!"

Regardless of the Baron's shouting, Yuder focused solely on Kishiar's reaction.

Since his capture at the scene and until now, Yuder had not had a chance to talk privately with Kishiar or the others. Kishiar, who had rushed here upon hearing the news and had been fending off Baron Willhem, would not have a clear understanding of the situation beyond what the Baron had told him.

The Baron had already admitted that an Awakener was definitely the criminal. He might have wanted to pin the crime on Yuder, but since the crime was related to an Awakener, the Cavalry had priority in the investigation.

The Baron may have found them infinitely ridiculous, looking as if they knew nothing and did nothing, but in reality, Kishiar and the Cavalry had no reason to bow to him on this occasion. As long as they did not retreat from protecting Yuder.

'We need to find out why, how the Star of Nagrah has done such a thing. There might be someone there worth saving for information. We don't have time to be doing this because of Baron Willhem's petty power struggles.'

Yuder looked straight into Kishiar's eyes. He couldn't say it directly, but he believed that Kishiar would understand his intention to this extent.

"Commander. Please allow me to go to the security management team."

"..."

If Yuder remained here for the investigation, the chances of saving the man would be infinitely low. But if he stepped forward to be investigated first, the story would be different. After all, the Baron didn't truly want Yuder's innocence to be revealed. His insistence on sending Yuder to the public safety team was merely to hold onto Kishiar, not out of sincerity.

In the end, it was all a hidden struggle among those wearing masks to hide what they really wanted.

In this situation, the best way for Kishiar to proudly stand with the Cavalry without being caught by Baron Willhem was on this side. If he could meet the captured man along the way, all the better. That's what Yuder thought.

The met red eyes blinked a few times, seemingly wanting to say something, then narrowed, and repeated this pattern until finally disappearing beneath the eyelids with a sigh.

"Commander."

"... Must we do it this way?"

The question returned, laden with many meanings. Rarely was there a voice that did not feel firm, small and fragile. Despite momentarily feeling certain that his judgment was right, a ripple emerged from somewhere deep within his heart, but Yuder slowly nodded.

A moment later, Kishiar opened his eyes. He stood up, looking down at Baron Willhem, his face not that of a wayward Duke but of a composed Commander. Before the Baron could even react to the sudden change in atmosphere, a voice containing immense power struck his head like a cold stream of water.

"I will send Assistant Yuder Aile for a fair investigation to the public safety team as you say. You surely know how much of a concession this is?"

"... Yes?"

"Since we have confirmed that the circumstances of the case are closely related to the Awakener, from now on, the Cavalry will participate in all investigations."

“... No, Your Highness. Please wait.”

“Let us restart with the on-site investigation. If the real culprit is elsewhere, there's no time for this.”

“Your, Your Highness!”

“Inform Commander Jeymer Phil of Tainu's Knights. Tell him to go back to the public safety team, not here.”

Kishiar pulled Yuder up by his shoulder.

“For Yuder Aile's investigation, the Cavalry will send Deputy Commander Ever Beck, Emun Philang, and Finn Eldore together. All investigations will be conducted under the cooperation of the Tainu Knights and the Cavalry, and opinions regarding the Awakener will prioritize the judgment of the Cavalry. Anyone refusing will be judged as defying the imperial order.”

The Baron, stunned by the sentence pronounced like a verdict, only came to his senses and stood up after they had left.

“What exactly... What are you saying, Your Highness! Wait, please.”

It was a moment when the opponents he thought he had completely understood, the flag of victory he thought he had seized, suddenly seemed far away.

“You will know who did it as soon as you see the corpse.”

Yuder whispered quickly and quietly, hearing Baron Willhem's pursuing footsteps from behind.

“I don't know how they came and went, but ‘why’ they did it is more important, I think.”

"Why."

Kishiar muttered, following Yuder's words.

"That part cannot be understood by investigating from one side only. I will find out in that place myself."

"They said they found nine body parts according to Pruelle's words."

"He came to find those who lost their memories. So, that part as well, please..."

"Your Highness!"

Yuder closed his mouth, hearing Baron Willhem's footsteps approaching.

"I beg you. I will be back shortly."

Kishiar sighed and bowed his head. Yuder did not avoid the descending lips but accepted them.

"...I brought you here to rest, but who would have known that the place to rest would turn into a prison?"

A faint whisper came through the falling kiss.

"I wanted to change your clothes and send you off, but my heart hurts."

"I'm fine."

"I knew you would say that, so it hurts."

When he glanced to the side, Baron Willhem was standing frozen, his mouth agape. Yuder nonchalantly brushed past him and went down.

"Investigate this person too? For that murder case? But the criminal has already been captured..."

"Be quiet. Anyway, Commander Phil has not arrived yet..."

The Knights who greeted Yuder, who had come to Baron Willhem's residence with the security management team, were all wearing expressions of incomprehension. From their perspective, it was bewildering to suddenly have another suspect added when the criminal had already been caught.

But those who remembered that the suspect was the very same arrogant Cavalry member who had come to the security management team with the Duke of Peletta not long ago tried to intimidate Yuder with loud laughter.

"The hero of the West, saved the Great Sarain Forest, but the Cavalry is nothing special."

"Maybe the real criminal is that guy, and he was caught trying to pin it on a servant. I thought it was suspicious when he was acting arrogant here, using his abilities."

"What did you say just now?"

As Ever, who had come here with Yuder, coldly retorted, the Knights promptly closed their mouths. But a low chuckling continued.

"I'm so annoyed, I'll go and beat them up."

"You don't need to, Finn."

Yuder calmly stopped Finn, who was about to ball up his fists.

"Anyway, the investigation will start with you after the Knight Commander arrives. Until then, they can only do that."

"But still."

"Cleaning up the trash is done in proper order after the work is finished."

"Damn."

Emun, who had been silent with an angry expression, seemed to have trouble holding back laughter and blinked his eyes.

"...Yuder, how can you say that in this situation?"

Ever frowned, bewildered, but her tone was much calmer. Thinking that she needed to maintain composure for the investigation, Yuder was led to his feet by the soldiers who had come to escort him.

"I'll be back then, please take care of the investigation."

"...It's my first time doing this, so I'm worried, but we have to do well for Yuder to come out quickly. I'll do my best."

For the joint investigation, some conversation between the Knight Commander and the Cavalry was needed, so Yuder was planning to wait in the prison for a while. And that was exactly where Yuder had intended to go.

'Usually, related persons in the same case are put in the same area.'

After following the dark stairs for some time and entering through the open door, the prisoner, crouched with one iron bar between them, flinched and looked up. The Awakener man, whose face had been severely injured in just a few hours, looked up at Yuder as if he couldn't believe it.

"You...?"

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Yuder raised his finger to his lips before the man could raise his voice any further, gesturing for him to be quiet. The man, who had become aware of the soldiers near the prison where they were trapped, promptly closed his mouth.

Looking back at his previous experience, the Tainu Security Management prison was not heavily guarded in proportion to its size. Even without that, this was a time when manpower was even more lacking. If they had behaved, those guards would soon have lowered their defenses and moved elsewhere.

Yuder quietly sat in the darkness that shrouded the prison, maintaining silence. As he expected, the soldiers watching them outside the prison soon judged that there was no problem, telling them to stay put before they turned away.

"...Finally, we can have a proper conversation."

"What the hell happened? Why are you here..."

The man, seeming to have been waiting, raised his head and asked in a feeble voice.

"I came for investigation, just like you. Well, that's not important. I'm glad you didn't cause a disturbance or try to escape here. It would have been difficult for us to talk if you had."

The biggest worry on the way here had been that part, but fortunately, the man had obediently stayed in the prison so far. Upon hearing Yuder's words, the man coldly let out a "Ha, what are you talking about?"

"I don't use my abilities to kill or attack people like others. My ability isn't even suitable for that. If I tried to escape, I would die before leaving this place. Why would I seek a swift death?"

"Quick judgment is good. Then first, tell me who you are and what you know about today's incident."

"Why should I?"

"Because both you and I have to prove that we're not the culprits and catch the real culprit."

The man's dark brown eyes hesitated for a moment.

"...You believe I didn't kill?"

"That's why I came here."

"You're... from the Cavalry."

"So what?"

The man was silent for a moment before speaking again.

"It's strange to hear that the person who came to catch me believes in me. If I die, it would be a favorable situation for you. Why would you ask me to speak?"

Time was running out, and the man was annoyingly stubborn. Yuder sighed heavily and opened his mouth towards the man.

"If things stay as they are, you will die. If it were better for you to die, I would have finished you off before I even opened my mouth."

Whether he felt the truth in Yuder's emotionless tone, the man's body stiffened.

"I tried to catch you because I knew there was an Awakener who had infiltrated the Baron's house. If you hadn't run and had obediently told your purpose, the situation that could have ended quickly was complicated by you. I already know that the real culprit is related to Nahan, and I need the rest of the information. You're on the other side from him, aren't you?"

"...How do you know that?"

"The ones you're looking for are protected by the Cavalry in the mansion. I thought you came there to rescue them, but was I wrong?"

For a moment, the man's eyes changed. Despair and resignation filled the darkness, and suddenly, a heated emotion burst forth. The man straightened his crouched body and clung to the iron bars.

"So, they were there after all. They were alive...! It, it's not a lie, is it?"

"Why should I lie? You can confirm it yourself as soon as you leave here."

"Are they all safe... No, are they safe? How on earth....."

At that time, the distant noise of soldiers was heard, as if they had picked up on some commotion. Yuder signaled with his eyes once again, a gesture for silence. The man held his breath, his hand gripping the iron bars. Only after the noise had vanished did the conversation resume.

Yuder briefly explained the process of finding the people who had lost their memories and the subsequent treatment. Upon hearing that some had regained consciousness through the care of the Priest and Cavalry members, the man bit his lip tightly.

"They were driven mad... some of them are already dead," he stammered.

"It's unfortunate, but there was nothing we could do. It happened before we found them."

“Then was there, by any chance, a woman with long hair like the rainy sky there? Her name is Marty... she’s from Nelarn...”

The man couldn't finish his sentence, bowing his head while tightly gripping the iron bars. Yuder was momentarily surprised by the unexpected name, but he calmly answered.

“She is with us. She was the first to regain consciousness.”

“...By God.”

Strength drained from the hand that had been gripping the bars as if to shatter them. The man knelt before Yuder, repeatedly expressing his gratitude, his shoulders heaving. Despite the lack of time, Yuder didn't reproach him for his sobbing, pretending not to notice. A moment later, the man, his tears dried, asked more carefully, his attitude much gentler than before.

“Did Marty... happen to mention me? I am Marty’s...”

“She mentioned having a lover in the village.”

“I see.”

The man quickly raised his head in response. His face was battered and swollen, but his eyes were clearer than before.

“You are right. I am part of the Star of Nagran, and have long severed ties with those who follow Nahan. I thought that even if I died, as long as I could find Marty, I could grasp at a final hope, so I went there.”

Determination flowed over his face, hidden in shadows.

“If I trust you, can I leave here alive? Can I meet Marty again?”

Yuder reached his hand into the iron bars towards him.

"I promise, in the name of Yuder Aile, assistant to the Cavalry Commander."

"I will believe you. My name is Robel Gemson."

Robel slowly reached out and shook hands, then let go. He revealed that he was from the west and had coincidentally joined the Star of Nagran after awakening, then informed Yuder of his ability.

"I have the ability to lighten weight."

"So that's why you could escape so quickly."

"Well, yes. It works on objects too. It's nothing special, though."

Robel, having exposed his information, seemed to try to lighten the mood, offering a faint smile on his bruised face.

"It's not an insignificant ability. Depending on how it's developed, it can become terrifying. You only think it's not special."

"...No one ever said that to me before. They all said it was a silly ability."

"If you hadn't used that ability to return my sword, I wouldn't have been able to kill the monster. It's not a silly thing at all."

"That is... true."

Robel seemed to awkwardly agree, still clearly remembering when he had met Yuder while defeating Pethuamet.

"I didn't think you would remember me."

How could Yuder not remember those who had helped in a crisis? Moreover, at that time, Robel and his companions had risked their lives to protect the village in the forest, even rescuing unknown mages. Even in such an urgent situation, it could not have been an easy decision.

"At that moment, I saw your figure... I must say now, it was really extraordinary. I thought you were not like me. Because I saw that, I quickly accepted Nahan's moving decision. If someone with such power listens to us, it would be fortunate, but if not... it would become a natural disaster worse than monsters. I chose it for safety."

It seemed like a way of saying that everything that had happened was all his fault, but Robel shook his head as if that wasn't what he meant.

"I regret it. I should have watched what that man's secret plan was and made a more cautious decision..."

Regretting it won't change what's already happened. Yuder said nothing. Instead, he changed the subject and asked a substantive question.

"Do you have any clues as to why they came all the way to Baron Willhem's house and left the corpses?"

"...Actually, I've been feeling a bad vibe from the surroundings since yesterday."

Robel answered, lost in thought.

"Before infiltrating this place, I asked my colleagues to keep my whereabouts a secret from Nahan's side. Then, after becoming a servant, I communicated with them once a day at a designated place. But yesterday... there was no contact from my colleagues."

Robel had guessed that his colleagues were busy or perhaps prevented by some other matter, and so he had returned to Baron Willhem's house. However, after returning, he said he couldn't shake off the ominous premonition.

"While doing servant's work, I learned the structure of Baron Willhem's mansion to some extent, and I also found out the escape route in case of an emergency. I didn't inform all of my colleagues, but..."

"You're thinking that information might have leaked to Nahan's side."

"...Yes."

"Even so, why the Baron's younger sibling and spouse, and why today?"

"I'm not sure... but the people I know don't particularly make elaborate plans and move accordingly. Perhaps, they were loitering around the mansion's surroundings at an opportune moment, and the couple caught their eye."

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Robel seemed to feel that the siblings of the Baron had become the targets, but there didn't appear to be a specific reason for the murder that occurred today.

"I believe the main intent was to show an example that the mansion's security was breached, to disgrace the Baron and the Tain family. If that's not the case, then..."

"Then what?"

"If they knew that the Cavalry was staying at the Baron's mansion, they might have wanted to sow discord. In the meantime, they could do whatever they wanted. They were capable enough to do just that."

Though his words were mixed with strong personal emotion, they were not overly absurd.

'Utilizing a method to identify the culprit as an Awakener, they might have intended to cause confusion between the Tain family and the Cavalry... The possibility was there. More precisely, they probably aimed to hinder the Cavalry.'

Nahan had already met Yuder and Kishiar in the Great Sarain Forest. If Nathan Zuckerman, who sensed something odd during the visit to the Red Deer Consortium building and missed something, was right, the probability that Nahan already knew where the Cavalry members were was high. It wasn't exactly a secret that the Cavalry was staying at Baron Willhem's mansion, even though it wasn't widely known.

'Through the conversation we had when we met in the Great Sarain Forest, he knew Kishiar was interested in Tain family's illegal trade business... Was this a preemptive strike at this point?'

It was something he might have done. Of course, he probably didn't anticipate that Yuder would discover Robel and both would end up in prison following a chase.

'But something still feels missing.'

A sensation he felt when he saw the corpse. The fog-like doubt he felt while Baron Willhem and Kishiar were talking remained unresolved, still vague.

'What could it be? What am I missing right now? ...Will I be able to find out more from Kishiar's information?'

As Yuder remained silent and lost in thought, Robel continued his story. He spoke of the two initial explosion incidents in Tainu, revealing that while they had infiltrated the Red Deer Consortium building, the actual invasion was done by himself and his colleagues. He wore a sullen expression as he spoke.

"We were planning to secretly rescue Marty and others there while Nahan's guys were in another... But nobody was there. Now that I think about it, it feels like I got tangled up with Nahan somehow."

He seemed to carry significant guilt at the fact that soldiers were injured in the explosion caused by his colleague while fleeing. Since he never attacked or killed anyone and just wanted to live quietly, it was understandable.

Yuder shifted the subject before Robel's eyes could darken further.

"Regarding Nahan's side attacking the Red Deer Consortium building, do you recall anything else? Anything at all will do."

"Um... To be exact, it was actually a person named Ershi who led that. Nahan was just helping under the pretext of aiding her revenge. I heard Nahan helped because Ershi targeted the place."

"I've encountered that person before."

"Ah. Then, by any chance... Were you the Cavalry member who almost cut off Nahan's arm?"

Yuder shook his head.

"I didn't do that. But... his arm was almost cut off?"

He had thought that Nahan must have been quite injured since Kishiar had intervened and there was a lot of blood, but he did not know he had inflicted such a major wound on Nahan.

"He said he was seriously injured while protecting Ershi. It's a little surprising and disappointing that it wasn't you. Anyway, Ershi had targeted the Red Deer Consortium building and went there with Nahan and a few others. They brought back many bundles of paper. Nahan examined them for a while. I don't know what happened after, since I had a big argument and left the place when he almost finished reading them."

The fact that Nahan's side had robbed the secret vault of the Red Deer Consortium, which had been speculated, was now revealed to be true. What content did those documents hold? Perhaps the actions that Ershi and Nahan were undertaking now were related to them. Yuder memorized this information well.

"There's nothing else I can think of for now. I'll tell you if I remember anything else."

Robel was extremely cooperative. Perhaps it was because something more precious than his life was at stake, he was more unreserved in speaking than even the Gayle and Doyle brothers within the Cavalry.

'They seemed disheveled but always kept their mouths shut about the group's secrets or the sage. What if I ask Robel?'

Although it could be a good opportunity to find out about the sage, urgent matters were at hand, so that part was postponed for now.

"Over there! Commander Phil has arrived, so be on your feet. He will come up for investigation as soon as the conversation with the Cavalry is over."

A soldier shouted from beyond the dark prison bars. It seemed that the time for the investigation had finally come. Robel was startled and then nervously swallowed his dry saliva.

"... What should I do during the investigation?"

"You didn't make any false confessions before I came, did you?"

"I didn't. If I had, I wouldn't be in this state. Of course, they seemed to have already marked me as guilty, regardless of what I said."

"That'll do. I knew you were an Awakener and tried to arrest you as an intruder, and you were only startled by the sudden situation and stumbled while fleeing. Finding the body was a coincidence, and none of us killed them. Just remember that fact. No need to say anything else."

"...Strangely, that's not a lie at all."

Relieved, Robel moved his battered face with difficulty and smiled.

Soon, soldiers came to fetch them. Yuder further examined the prison structure as he came out. Although it was a more monotonous structure than other prisons he had been in, it was certainly robust.

"To see you again like this."

Knight Commander Jeymer Phil said with a scowl as he saw Yuder again. Yuder ignored him and examined the faces of Ever and his colleagues beside her. There was an extra face that wasn't there before. Pruelle Van Taine was sitting next to the Knight Commander and faintly smiled as he saw Yuder.

"Oh, assistant Aile. I couldn't stand still, feeling sorry for having you go through this trouble while visiting my cat. I decided to help with the investigation by conveying what I remember."

"...So you have."

Yuder suspected that Kishiar had sent him but silently nodded his head. In the solemn atmosphere, the Knight Commander stood up and gave an order.

"Seat them."

The soldiers tried to make Robel and Yuder kneel. Robel complied obediently, but Yuder did not.

"Is it the rule of the Tainu Knight to treat those who came for the investigation as criminals? Or do you lack chairs?"

At his retort, confusion and incredulity fluttered over the faces of the Knights standing around.

"Yuder is right. The Commander only said that Yuder was sent for cooperation in the investigation. Such treatment from the start is unpleasant."

"Ha, it's outrageous."

Ever, with a cold face, sent support, and Jeymer Phil finally ordered a chair to be brought. That alone caused the tense atmosphere to ease in an instant.

The investigation was much more chaotic than Yuder had anticipated. Jeymer Phil and the Tainu Knights insisted that either Yuder or Robel could be the perpetrator since the criminal was an Awakener, but they were unable to present any evidence or logical reasoning. On the other hand, Yuder had witnesses from the Cavalry, able to describe the ability that killed Baron Willhem's sibling and spouse, and what Yuder had been doing that day.

"I went up to the room with Sir Aile, to meet the cat at my request after the meal. He was with me all the time until he saw the servant and ran off," Pruelle said, taking a relaxed seat. Jeymer Phil, who had been continuously pressing Yuder and Robel, clamped his mouth shut.

"And before I came here, I heard from Duke Peletta that it's certain the Fayfe and Nellisabel couple were murdered outside the mansion and then moved to the basement. Bloodstained mud on their clothes and shoes was found outside, you know."

Yuder realized that Pruelle's words were information being conveyed to him by Kishiar. Pruelle met his gaze and faintly nodded as if confirming his thoughts.

Commander Jeymer Phil inquired among his subordinate Knights if the words were true, but the response was that they were unable to confirm as communication with the Knights at the mansion was not smooth.

"Then, since both this servant and I were inside the mansion all along, we cannot be the culprits."

After hearing the coordinated statements from Yuder and Robel, the Knight Commander's face turned sour. Everyone was complicating the matter, which would have been easier if they could simply pin the blame on Yuder or Robel. It was enough to make him angry.

"Duke Peletta and the Cavalry have conveyed that the real culprits are those who killed the Tainu Knights in the Great Sarain Forest, but frankly, it's hard to believe that those bastards came in, killed people, and left without doing anything else. The joint investigation continues, so we'll reconvene for a second inquiry in a day."

In the end, the investigation concluded without any clear resolution. Before Yuder was returned to prison, Emun covertly handed him something while pretending to greet him.

"The Commander sent this. Take it."

"..."

Yuder felt something inside the small cloth bag. He hid it in his formal sleeve.

"Are you not scared of the prison?"

"I'm fine."

"What about the cold? The floor is bare there."

"That's fine too."

Yuder's colleagues sighed at his response, patting his shoulder.

"Don't ever endure if someone says something. It won't be a problem for you."

"I plan on it."

Yuder was taken back to the prison. After the soldiers were gone, he opened the bag and found a small bottle of holy water, effective for wound healing, and a red heating stone that briefly aided in maintaining body temperature.

"..."

Until that moment, he had been perfectly fine, but seeing those items made him feel oddly moved.

Turning

Chapter 365

'When did he manage to obtain these?'

They had not left the mansion for more than a few hours. The heating stones were expensive, and the duration they could maintain warmth was disappointingly short for their price. Kishiar had no concern about money, of course, but the thought that he had ordered these for Yuder even when he was insanely busy naturally led to a sigh.

'There's no need for this.'

Everyone was paying so much attention to him, even though they knew he would leave as soon as the investigation was over tomorrow, if nothing else came up. In the past, he had been a bit confused about how to respond whenever things happened that had never happened before, as if they were natural.

"Robel."

Yuder put the heating stones that Kishiar had sent into his pocket and handed them to Robel through the window bars. Since he was not injured, it seemed better for the injured to use them.

"Apply them to your face sparingly to avoid arousing suspicion, and use the rest on your body."

"Such a valuable thing... Isn't it something you secretly brought from the Cavalry? I can't use it."

"You never know what might happen, and if there's an injured person next to me, it will be hard on both of us."

"But still..."

Despite his explanation, Robel hesitated several times under Yuder's gaze, but eventually, he carefully used the holy water. His face was covered in wounds, but the parts hidden by his clothing were so messy that it made Yuder involuntarily frown.

"Did they beat you to make you confess?"

"Well... at least I wasn't tortured. When I think about Marty and the others who were trapped here longer and suffered more, this is nothing. If I think about Marty, I... even if I die, I have no complaints."

Thanks to the effective holy water, Robel's body became visibly clean before long. He thanked Yuder formally and then hesitated several times as if he wanted to say something but turned his gaze away each time.

"If you have something to say, say it."

"It's just... now that I know Marty is alive, I'm so curious... I heard she regained her memory; is she doing well? How's her health? Is she eating well... Can I hear even just a little?"

Yuder had suspected it, but Robel indeed seemed curious about his lover's wellbeing. Despite his best efforts to suppress it, the desperate look in his eyes made Yuder feel a strange sense of déjà vu.

A certain desperate gaze filled with bitterness.

'That sometimes gaze upon me...'

"...it's probably difficult, isn't it? I apologize."

Yuder suddenly came to his senses from his absent-minded reverie.

'...What was that?'

"No, she was... doing well. But there's something I want to tell you; it seems like she's misunderstanding something about you."

"Misunderstanding?"

Yuder told Robel the story he heard from Marty. Marty seemed to resent and suspect that Robel and the other moderate Awakeners had betrayed and abandoned her. Upon hearing this, Robel covered his face in shock, silent for a moment, but then he calmed down and spoke.

"It's understandable that she would think that way. Even if something happened to me, she wouldn't know... Now that I think about it, it wouldn't be strange if she felt disillusioned with all the Awakeners after going through that... I was just happy to know we found her."

"She was friendly with us, and her hatred for Nahan's side seemed greater, so it probably won't be that bad. Talk to her when you meet."

"...Yes."

Robel said that he had coincidentally left their temporary residence with a few colleagues on an urgent mission before the event that drove the non-Awakeners away. Perhaps the other side had plotted it.

Yuder recalled the words that Kishiar had spoken before. Nahan would not feel anything for those who were originally friendly to the Awakeners and even committed such merciless acts against them. What was it that he desired at the end of his hatred? Was it to complete a world filled only with Awakeners, after all revenge was exacted?

'I remember what Enon said. He said that among the ancient mages, there were those who acted in such a way.'

A plant that kills the roots of other plants as it grows will not die just by being left alone. The easiest way to kill it was to pluck it out while the sprout was still small.

'Certainly... Seeing the increasingly reckless actions day by day, I cannot leave it to grow any larger.'

Yuder decided to hope that, as Kishiar wished, he could pluck both the Tain Duke and Nahan through this matter.

As night deepened, a sound like a beast howling came from not far away. It was an eerie sound, as if the wind was blowing fiercely, and yet not.

"Ugh, it's that annoying noise again. It sends shivers down my spine every time I hear it."

"It's been nearly a thousand years since the prison was built, so the wind leaking through and making that noise can't be helped."

"But it's gotten worse lately, hasn't it? It wasn't that bad before. We need to find where it's leaking from, but we're short of people..."

As the grumbling soldiers passed by and disappeared into the distance, Yuder and Robel kept silent, their lips sealed.

'Come to think of it, we're on the third underground floor, and there are no windows. Are there many places where the wind can leak in?'

The place where they had rescued the memory-lost individuals was on the first underground floor, but Yuder and Robel had been confined to the third floor, considering the importance of the matter. It was good that it was very quiet, perhaps because there were almost no others confined on the same floor, but it was a bit inconvenient that there were no windows to gauge the passage of time. Even so, Yuder thought it wasn't much different from his own room, as the body was comfortable and there was no one to disturb him.

'There was a part in the book that Prince Pruelle gave me that mentioned rumors of a fourth underground floor here. Could that be true?'

Pruelle had noted the security management team's prison as a place to hide 'items' related to the Tain Duke's secret trade. If the existence of the fourth floor were true, now might be the time to verify it.

'I hardly see any soldiers around here... It probably won't be a big problem if I slip out for a moment and then return.'

The bars he casually tested were very solid, but they were only iron. Although his power had diminished, he could still easily get out if he wanted to.

Yuder, after a moment's thought, decided to sneak out and visit the fourth floor once things had quietened down a bit more. Robel, unaware of what Yuder was thinking, repeatedly nodded off and woke up, worn out by the cold and sleepiness. He looked as if he could not sleep because the other person was awake. Seeing the obvious sign, Yuder sighed and suggested that he sleep.

"If you're tired, just lie down and sleep."

"Oh... Are you not tired, sir?"

"I'm comfortable like this."

"You're truly amazing..."

Robel looked at Yuder as if he were not the same human being. He tried to hold out a little longer but soon leaned against the wall and began to snore quietly. Yuder, not yet asleep, closed his eyes and checked the movements of the patrolling soldiers from afar. When he thought that they had almost disappeared and it was time to move, he felt the sound of someone coming down the stairs toward the second floor.

"The soldiers patrolling should not have returned yet. What's going on?"

Yuder continued to keep his eyes closed without reacting. The sound of approaching footsteps, coming directly toward where he was, stopped momentarily in front of him.

Huff.

The moment a very soft breath from the other person reached his ears, a tingling shiver ran down his spine from the back of his neck. The cold blood that had been chilling his entire body surged hotly, as if being pumped in reverse.

Yuder's eyes flashed open, and he saw Kishiar holding a small lamp.

"..."

He opened his mouth, but he couldn't figure out what to say. He couldn't immediately discern whether Kishiar being there was a dream or reality. The man, who had been looking down at Yuder, gracefully knelt and placed the lamp beside him. Only after the unique fragrance spread and their eyes met at the same level did Yuder finally become convinced that this was not a dream.

"... How on earth did you get here?"

With a very soft voice, his lips, which had been mindlessly straight, finally lifted slightly.

"I paid the appropriate price."

"I will be out tomorrow, why..."

"Uh... Stop saying such harsh words. Can't you come this way? I can't see your face well."

Yuder bit his lip lightly and released it. Slowly approaching the window bars, Kishiar reached out towards him. The warmth that caressed his cheek felt hot, as if it would scald.

'No. Is it that I have become cold?'

"Where is the heating stone I gave you?"

Kishiar seemed to have the same thought and asked. When Yuder took out the heating stone he had kept in his pocket, Kishiar slightly gripped it. The red light flowed, and the warmth felt even stronger.

"Did you infuse it with magic?"

"It's no problem to this extent."

A man who seemed to know what Yuder wanted to say returned the stone. There were not many words exchanged, nor changes in expression, but each small expression or touch felt piercing to the skin.

Only when the cheek that had absorbed the warmth became a little warmer did Kishiar finally release his hand from Yuder's face and deeply exhale.

"...You're too cold. I should have at least changed your clothes."

"I am fine."

"Have you eaten anything? You barely touched the food at the Baron's wedding anniversary dinner."

Had he been watching all that time? Yuder was not particularly hungry, but the soldiers had given him water and bread in between. Kishiar, hearing the answer, seemed somewhat relieved and took something out of his pocket. It was a small folded cloak.

"Wear this. It has a magic spell to retain warmth."

"The soldiers will notice it tomorrow."

"It will become invisible to those paid eyes, so don't worry."

"..."

Seeing that there was no intention to listen even if he refused, Yuder silently took the cloak handed over through the window bars and wrapped it over his shoulders.

"But... Did you come alone?"

Turning

Chapter 366

"Nathan is waiting outside. Why? Do you want to see Nathan's face?"

"No, I don't."

Yuder immediately shook his head. The faint smile on Kishiar's face deepened a bit. His gaze turned to Robel, who was sleeping soundly, oblivious to anyone's presence.

"Is that the person sleeping over there Robel, who sneaked in as a servant?"

"Yes."

"When we asked those who had lost their memories after the investigation was over, there was someone who knew him."

"Could that person be a woman named Marty?"

At Yuder's question, Kishiar nodded in agreement.

"Yes."

"I've also heard a bit more about that part here."

Yuder quickly finished his report, summarizing the fact that Robel had promised to cooperate for Marty, as well as the assumptions he had made based on the information he had heard from him.

"Contrary to his speculation, I think there might be another motive behind this murder. However... I still don't know exactly what it is."

"I can see that my assistant has been working non-stop even while he's here."

With a strange expression, Kishiar let out a short laugh and soon withdrew his gaze from Robel.

"From our investigation, we judged the murder to be a mere pretext for the real purpose. There was not even a minimum intention to hide the perpetrator. Then, should we assume that there is something they hoped for in the subsequent movements of those who discovered this case?"

That was true. Yuder nodded cautiously, and Kishiar began to summarize the current situation after the incident.

"We don't need to talk about our movements anymore, and Baron Willhem has now concentrated all his forces on the investigation of this matter. He has strengthened the protection around the mansion several times and has withdrawn the knights patrolling throughout Tainu, leaving only the minimum number."

"...It seems he started to be scared after feeling that those who he hasn't even managed to catch even the tail can boldly come up to his doorstep."

"Yes. Although he seems to be half-doubting so far, it's clear what he's thinking when you see the soldiers blocking between the annex and the main mansion since the murder occurred."

The turnaround in attitude, which was trying to frame Yuder as the culprit just a few hours ago, was surprisingly quick.

"It seems that he's been locked in his office since then, so he must be in contact with Duke Tain. He's late in realizing the seriousness of the situation."

Kishiar spoke with a cold smile.

"As a result, the security of Tainu is almost blank, except for a few places like the Security Management Team and the Willhem family mansion. Of course, I sent the Peletta Knights and the Cavalry to various places to wait, but... By now, Duke Tain should realize that it's time to give up his stubbornness. I think they will formally ask us for help tomorrow."

"Then I might be able to leave here sooner than expected."

Knight Commander Jeymer Phil might be quite disappointed, but in the end, he was in a position to follow Baron Willhem unconditionally. Yuder was quite looking forward to seeing his reaction when he suddenly received the news to release Yuder without a proper second investigation.

"...Did you want to leave?"

Kishiar asked with a curious look in his eyes.

"Isn't it obvious?"

Yuder's purpose in coming here was primarily to meet Robel, save him, and obtain information, and secondarily to ensure that Kishiar and the Cavalry were not held back because of him. Since everything had been achieved, there was no reason to stay any longer.

"Seeing from the outside, you're sitting so comfortably that I was almost confused for a moment whether I sent my assistant to prison or to rest in his room. Thankfully, that is not the case."

Yuder, who had thought that this place was no different from his own room, silently averted his gaze.

"Before I came here, even when I sat down, it didn't feel like I was sitting," he said. "The one who should feel that way is completely unchanged, so it feels quite disheartening."

"...Did you really come to scold me?"

"You think I would willingly come here and think you wouldn't even listen to this much?"

"I'm sorry, but..."

"You're going to say this was the best choice, right? I know. There's no need to apologize."

The man who seemed to fully understand Yuder's choice and reason responded in a low, subdued voice, then took a deep breath, closing his eyes and opening them again.

"Next time, however, I'll make you think that a different choice is the best."

After uttering a cryptic sentence, Kishiar skillfully masked his emotions.

"Now, let's think about what those who have stolen everything from the secret vault in the Red Deer Consortium are really after based on the current situation we summarized."

"...Understood."

What do Nahan and Ershi currently want?

Their original goal was to uncover the secret trade conducted by Tain Duchy and expose it to the world, delivering punishment. In fact, that goal was not very different from Kishiar's. The difference was only in the method used to achieve the purpose.

'They've already obtained information related to secret trade in Great Sarain Forest and Tainu. They caused an explosion, creating chaos in the city, and have probably tracked the movements of Baron Willhem.'

Yet, they seemed to have not reached the real core of the matter. It could be that the information they obtained was not complete, or something was blocking them, even if they had the right information.

Would those persistent individuals give up, though?

'If they were to, they wouldn't have committed murder in Baron Willhem's house after the explosion incident.'

Nahan's side was intentionally increasing the city's terror. Until now, the nobles had only recognized these events as minor incidents while hunting down the Awakeners terrorist group that had killed Tainu's Knights. But after today, that would no longer be the case. As chaos intensifies, it becomes impossible to dismiss or hide this matter. Chaos was also the best emotion to paralyze human judgment.

A fearful Baron Willhem. The current situation in Tainu, where the city gates were closed, and internal security was focused in one area. The explosions that had occurred so far. The current locations of key figures involved. Possible strategies Nahan might take based on experience. All the words Yuder had heard so far... Yuder's mind was tirelessly working.

"...Ah."

A moment later, he unknowingly let out a small sound.

"Did something come to mind?"

It could be a guess. However, he wanted to confirm one thing.

"Commander. Among the few places where the Knight has not withdrawn yet, except for the Baron's mansion and the security management team... Is the house of Graham Willhem included?"

Before coming to the security management team, Baron Willhem had ordered the Knight Commander, Jeymer Phil, to be summoned from Graham Willhem's house to investigate Yuder. If the most significant change caused by this murder was the reassignment of forces within the city, the relocation of the Knight Commander was one of the most critical matters.

Yuder's words seemed to have triggered some suspicion, and Kishiar narrowed his eyes.

"...According to Nathan's investigation and report today, he was involved in the explosion in the warehouse district that happened yesterday," he said.

"It must have been in the Red Deer Consortium warehouse area, right?"

"Yes. It was one of the places the Pelleta Knights were keeping an eye on."

Yuder finally drew a conclusion.

"The real target they were after through this incident might have been that person."

Even though the death of the second younger sibling and spouse didn't faze him, Baron Willhem had sent even the Commander of the Knights to guard the front of Graham Willhem's home. Was it simply because the second younger sibling and spouse were leeches on the Baron's fortune, and Graham Willhem was a capable person trusted with the Red Deer Consortium? The Baron that Yuder knew was not that kind of person.

What was the first incident that the enemy had instigated in Tainu? Even after the Red Deer Consortium building explosion that Robel had mentioned, they again caused an explosion in a warehouse-dense area of the consortium warehouse, 'coincidentally' injuring Graham Willhem. Could all of this have merely been the result of chance?

From the beginning, they had been focusing on the Red Deer Consortium warehouse. Graham Willhem, a central figure in the warehouse, could have been a target as well.

"Then, the likelihood that yesterday's incident was aimed at Graham Willhem to unravel the warehouse and fan the flames of chaos is high."

Without any further explanation, Kishiar quickly understood Yuder's intention. His words were exactly what Yuder was about to say.

"Robel said he has read almost all the papers taken from the secret vault. But considering there was no movement for a while afterward, I think the information obtained was either incomplete or something was blocked. So then..."

"First, create a noisy event to divert the enemy's attention, and then target the real goal... The tactics of someone who knows how to deal with the military. Attempting this despite knowing the huge difference in power must mean they were very confident."

"Or they might have committed it, considering all the possible damage as well."

"Right. Bold and ruthless. Very like them."

Kishiar uttered with a sharp smile, and Yuder agreed with his words.

'Yes, that's their way. Whether it's a dangerous strategy where their comrades take great risks or not, if they survive and succeed, they'll have achieved their goal.'

It wasn't merely a plan to trip up the Cavalry or create internal strife; they had thought of taking it a step further. As Kishiar said, it was indeed bold and risky. Yet surprisingly, up to now, coincidences had piled up, and they had achieved much more significant success than expected.

Baron Willhem quickly moved his knights and troops, thinking that they were targeting him. There were still some guarding Graham Willhem and the Red Deer Consortium warehouse, but the number must have been much less than before. Moreover, with Yuder's involvement, the attention of the Cavalry was now focused on the murder and security management team.

With one audacious murder, they diverted the enemy's attention, created chaos, made an opportunity to get what they wanted, and even tied up Yuder's feet. If they wanted to move, now was the perfect moment.

"We have no time. We must move immediately."

Kishiar turned the sapphire embedded in the bracelet-shaped magic tool he had on. It flashed once, and shortly after, Nathan Zuckerman appeared.

"Did you call me?"

Nathan Zuckerman looked at Yuder, who was inside the room, with a momentary, complex gaze.

"Nathan, have there been any changes in the situation?"

"None so far."

"Good. Contact those near the broken building of the Red Deer Consortium and Graham Willhem's house, and we'll move immediately. Time is of the essence."

"I will go ahead and send the message."

Nathan did not ask his lord why he gave such an order. Before rising from his seat, Kishiar looked briefly at Yuder's face beyond the bars.

"See you tomorrow."

"Take care."

The farewell was simply that. Kishiar and Nathan melted into the darkness and vanished as quietly as they had come. Yuder sat for a while as if he had dreamed the entire event, putting his hand into his pocket. The warmth emanating from the heating stone and the lingering cool scent in the air made him realize that it had all been real.

'...Then shall I make my move now?'

Turning

Chapter 367

Considering that Kishiar would be moving all night without rest, Yuder couldn't waste time sitting still inside the prison. He had no intention of sleeping anyway, and his mental fatigue had subsided thanks to the unexpected visitor.

Yuder glanced at Robel, who was still sleeping, then rose from his seat. Adjusting the cloak over his shoulders, he checked for any presence around him, then exerted strength to grab the bars of the jail. A suffocating sensation spread through his chest as the space widened just enough for one person to slip out. When he went outside and returned the bars to their original position, only an empty jail cell remained as if no one had ever been there.

'Normally, it's something I wouldn't even have to move my hand for.'

He quieted any noise and hid his body in the shadows as he began to survey the third floor of the underground. He had speculated that there were almost no prisoners trapped on the third floor since it was quiet, but looking closely, it seemed as if there had never been anyone there except them.

'Perhaps the first floor is for petty criminals... if the second floor is for serious criminals, then the third must be a space for others.'

The soldiers had said that this place had been around for nearly a thousand years. That meant it had been created almost as soon as Tainu had appeared.

'It must have been that the situation was so chaotic back then that so many prisons were needed, even though the Empire hadn't been around for long.'

Though he wasn't particularly interested in ancient history and didn't know much about it, the fact that there were so many prisons relative to the size of the city could not be a good sign. He thought the book that Pruelle had given him might have more detailed information, and at that moment, the face of the person who had given him the cloak and the warm stone also came to mind.

Normally, at this time, they would be wrapping up their day in their respective places. Before going to bed, Kishiar always read his received letters again or inspected his sword. In front of Yuder, it was just wrapping and tying the sword sheath, but he was slightly surprised when he learned that Kishiar got up early in the morning and consistently swung his sword in another room.

Just as Yuder had time to close his eyes and gather his strength as soon as he woke up, the practice of rising at dawn, training, and washing seemed to have a similar function for Kishiar. It was not surprising that the callus of a swordsman, so accustomed to striving without attracting others' attention, did not fade.

Although he seemed to live a reckless life fitting a Duke of Peletta, the fact that he meticulously commanded work and never neglected training seemed like him, but Yuder did not express this outwardly, fearing it might be a distraction. Kishiar also probably had similar thoughts since he never mentioned it, knowing that Yuder did such a thing as soon as he got up.

It was a brief time, somehow made special by the lack of back-and-forth conversation.

Lost in thought, Yuder heard again an eerie and sharp sound of the wind from somewhere. He quickly erased the image of Kishiar's face reading the report by the light and strained his ears to identify the direction of the sound.

The distant scream, mixed and distorted as it passed through long, rough crevices of rock, definitely felt alien compared to an ordinary wind sound.

'It sounds like something that would happen if you didn't close the door properly during a snowstorm in winter... But now it's not winter, and this is a deep underground place. Something is definitely strange.'

After the sound ceased, Yuder changed his direction. For ordinary people, it might have been hard to discern, but with experience in tracking targets, it was not difficult to find the direction with such traces.

A short while later, Yuder arrived at the point he deemed closest to where the sound had come from.

"Is this the place...?"

It was the end of an empty corridor. The cells nearby were vacant, and naturally, there was no sign of human presence. However, something about the location bothered him.

"If there were a fourth floor, the stairs would have been located around here."

The prison had been constructed in such a way that the stairs were placed at opposite ends on each floor to counter any potential escape attempts. If the stairs going down from the ground floor to the first floor were at the right end, then to go down to the second floor, one had to go all the way to the left end. And to go down again to the third floor, one had to go back to the right end.

And where Yuder was standing now was at the far opposite end from the stairs that led down to the third floor. He began to look around, searching for anything unusual, but nothing caught his eye.

"There's no place for the wind to leak through. But I definitely heard it here..."

Then, louder than before, the sound of the wind came again. Because it was the loudest in that place, it seemed as though human voices were strangely mixed with the wind.

Hooooo... uuuuu...

Woo...

The sound quieted down again. Although the surroundings became still as if nothing had happened, Yuder's senses remained sharply alert.

"There might be something after all. But it's too dark to examine properly. I have no choice but to conjure a flame."

Summoning a flame the size of a candle, he began to scrutinize the end of the corridor and the nearby cells in greater detail. As he felt along the weathered stone wall, he suddenly perceived an unexpected texture. Upon illuminating it, he discovered it was some faintly carved symbol.

"Is this not the crest of the Tain family?"

The Tain family's crest was a shield entwined with deer antlers. It was a symbol that almost exactly matched the seal Yuder had seen at the end of the letter from the Duke of Tain. Finding it engraved on the prison wall was quite mysterious. He continued to feel around and soon found a second symbol not far away. The two symbols were engraved at the same height, facing each other.

After confirming that no other wall bore the same symbol, Yuder decided to step back for the time being.

"The patrol should be coming around again soon."

During his time in the prison, he had been mentally counting to gauge the soldiers' patrol intervals. Since the number he had been estimating was almost at its limit, he had to leave soon.

"I timed it just right."

Yuder had just reentered his cell when he heard the soldiers coming down from the second floor. Robel was snoring in oblivion. As he pretended to sleep, Yuder heard the approaching soldiers muttering.

"The Duke thought he was as good as dead, and yet he even gave him that expensive cloak. Look at the jewels on that guy's clothes. Wonder how much they're worth."

"One of those would be enough to live on for a lifetime. Must feel great to have someone to get you out even when you're locked up. Ptooey."

"Anyway, we agreed to act like we didn't see anything. Let's go."

"..."

After they disappeared, Yuder silently opened his eyes. It was a comment that might have offended him before, but he didn't feel bad at all. Satisfaction swelled within him, knowing that finally, his efforts were bearing fruit.

'I hadn't realized... Thinking about it, this situation must look even more so from the outside.'

Feeling content, he sat down and spent the night reflecting on the information he had gathered, pondering over what might be happening on Kishiar's side. It promised to be a night far from tiring.

...

The next day, Yuder was eating breakfast with Robel brought by the soldiers, who were astonished by the fact that he had slept so soundly, when Tainu's Knight commander, Jeymer Phil, arrived. He wore a disgusted expression as he informed him that, just as Yuder had expected, there would be no second investigation, and that he would be released soon.

"Last night, His Grace Duke Peletta and the Cavalry found the real culprit behind the murder. Regrettably, they did not capture the culprit, but they did rescue Graham Willhem, who was nearly abducted by them. Therefore, you will be released soon."

"Is that true?"

"Release him and let him go."

Whether Robel was surprised or not, Jeymer Phil turned away after saying what he needed to say. Yuder rose abruptly from his seat, watching the soldiers unlocking the closed door with keys.

"Go on."

"I don't know what happened while I was asleep. Suddenly, so quickly..."

Seeing Yuder, who was not surprised at all, Robel seemed to want to ask something, but he closed his mouth, perhaps conscious of the soldiers. When they stepped outside the prison, those who had been waiting greeted them enthusiastically.

"Yuder! You're out!"

"Sleeping in a cold place for the night, home is still the best, right? Huh?"

Ever was not seen, but a substantial number of other familiar-faced members had gathered. Though not surprised by his release, seeing Yuder slightly disconcerted by his colleagues who proudly pounded on him in front of the security management team, Robel wore an expression that seemed both knowing and unknowing.

"Why are you looking like you're wondering why so many have gathered?"

Finn Eldore, standing at the front, grinned mischievously and slapped his arm for the first time in a while.

"Yuder said that garbage is to be cleaned up after everything is done. So we've come to clean it up!"

"Let's go!"

The Cavalry members charged unanimously at the Tainu Knights, resonating with Finn's words.

"Get out of the way! The Commander said he's going to make a Cavalry investigation headquarters here, so make room!"

"This is our place now! We're taking the chairs, one for each person!"

"What, what?"

Before the bewildered knights could react, the Cavalry members rushed inside the security management team with a cry, an air of determination not to let anyone stop them.

As Yuder looked on impassively, someone standing beside him chuckled.

"My assistant's prediction was spot on. Of course, the real beginning is now."

"Commander."

Kishiar pulled Yuder's shoulder, directing him towards a carriage on one side.

"Where are we going?"

"We've been working all night; isn't it time to rest? Let's talk on the way."

The Peletta knights led Robel, who looked bewildered, towards another carriage in the back. Yuder, along with Kishiar, climbed into a carriage and left the security management team, heading back to the mansion of Baron Willhem.

Turning

Chapter 368

"I heard that you saved Graham Willhem from being kidnapped."

"Yes. If I had been even slightly later, he would probably have been snatched away right before my eyes."

Amidst the faint noise of the carriage running, Kishiar smiled as he replied.

"Exactly what happened?"

"It's probably not much different from what you expected."

Last night, just after meeting Yuder, Kishiar had headed straight for Graham Willhem's house along with Nathan Zuckerman. Already in the vicinity were several members of the Peletta Knight and Cavalry, who had gathered while waiting for Nathan's summons. Within them, Kishiar found the face of Deputy Commander Ever Beck.

“Many have gathered despite the sudden call. We have no time to wait, so we’re departing with the current personnel.”

Upon hearing that the Star of Nagran might be targeting Graham Willhem, a tense look spread across the faces of the Cavalry members and Knights. Kishiar instructed Nathan Zuckerman to take the Knights and surround Graham Willhem's mansion, hiding and waiting, and then personally proceeded with just the Cavalry. Though the Knights had more experience in these missions, this task had to be accomplished solely by the strength of the Cavalry for it to have meaning. The members, who had not fully guessed this fact, thought they were going alone to fight the Awakeners.

Graham Willhem's grand and old-fashioned mansion was eerily quiet, even considering the late hour. There were soldiers guarding the front with torches, but their motionless faces, as they stared ahead without a word to each other, looked almost doll-like and grim.

“Emun Philang. How does the situation inside the mansion look?”

Asking this of Emun, who had brighter eyes than the others in the darkness, a response came after a moment.

“It's... unnatural. Despite the lights being on, no one is seen passing through the internal corridors, and all six dogs in the garden are asleep.”

“There's no need to look further.”

Even as he boldly advanced towards the front door, the soldiers guarding Graham's house gave no reaction. When Kishiar stretched out his hand and exerted his power, they fell like wooden logs. Though they didn't bleed, they were in a state as good as dead.

“We will split into two groups and simultaneously enter through the front and back doors. Ever Beck will lead those entering from the back.”

As he finished speaking, everyone drew their weapons in unison. Even Kishiar drew his sword, and all eyes were fixed on him. The members had often seen their Commander participating in training, but this was the first time most of them had seen him holding a real sword.

Shortly after Kishiar had left for the west, Emperor Keilusa announced that he had become the new owner of the Divine Sword Orr. However, Kishiar himself had yet to comment on this rumor.

Whether their Commander truly owned the Divine Sword or not, the members didn't care, but at this moment, they couldn't help but feel excited. They were about to witness the strength of the man leading them, and this fact alone filled them with indescribable reassurance.

“Those entering from the back door will prioritize searching the inside and rescuing survivors. If you encounter the enemy, suppression is the priority, but more is permitted if necessary.”

Quickly giving orders, Kishiar scanned the faces of the members.

“Lastly, just in case, if anyone feels unprepared to proceed, speak now.”

“...”

No one backed down. The eyes of the members, who had undergone long training and waiting, were filled with determination and anticipation.

“Are there no questions?”

“Commander. If we finish this well, Yuder can return sooner, right?”

All the members listened intently to the careful inquiry from Ever, who had raised her hand. Kishiar seemed momentarily surprised and fell silent, but soon relaxed his face and smiled.

"Of course. I should have mentioned first that Yuder Aile was the one who guessed that our enemies would target this place."

The faces of those who heard the answer brightened.

"We will see you when it's all over!"

Kishiar, leading half of the members, entered through the main gate via the garden of Graham Willhem's house. As Emun had said, there was no sign of the dogs that should have guarded the garden. The heavy main gate also opened weakly towards the inside as soon as Kishiar reached out.

The mansion was eerily quiet. Before long, a member who sensed a presence through the wind pointed to a room. Inside, there were servants lying in a pool of blood.

"It's too late to save them."

"The injuries are the same as the bodies in the mansion. It seems they have not been dead for long."

The manner of killing was similar to that of Baron Willhem's younger brother and sister-in-law in the mansion. This meant that, at least, Ershi was certainly here. Praising the members for excellently deducing that the enemies were few since no one was left at the scene, Kishiar headed to the floor above.

The elite often used the top floor as bedrooms, and in this mansion, the top was the third floor. As they climbed the grand staircase and neared the third floor, a faint scream was heard.

"Sa, save me...!"

Kishiar confirmed that the voice belonged to Graham Willhem and raised his sword, signaling his members. At the same time, his power thrust all the doors open in the mansion, revealing the interior.

The vast bedroom was in complete disarray. Beyond the bodies of servants and Tainu Knights, a few men and women with covered faces stood. Graham Willhem was among them, tied up in his nightwear, pitifully sobbing and struggling. Kishiar, catching a glimpse of the wide-open window, smiled.

"Your Highness!"

"It's the Cavalry. Step back."

No sooner had Graham Willhem shouted at the sight of Kishiar than a woman with a white mask on her face threatened him with a blade at his throat, warning her comrades. Kishiar confirmed that she was the woman, Ershi, who had been with Nahan.

"How did you get here so quickly...?"

"Shut up."

The woman, Ershi, failing to hide her surprise, roughly snapped at her mumbling comrade and pulled Willhem closer without loosening her grip.

"It seems we surprised you by arriving so soon."

"..."

"Let him go. He seems about to wet himself."

Ershi did not respond. As her grip tightened, blood dripped from Graham's throat. It was an unbelievable sight. Graham Willhem let out a stifled scream and wetted his pajamas, then fainted, overcome by shame and terror.

"Indeed. He's as weak as his brother."

Kishiar was nonchalant, but his calm only sharpened Ershi's gaze. She was the only person who had seen how this man had attacked Nahan. Intense hatred and caution surrounded her, but Kishiar did not react at all.

"I thought Nahan would be here too, but since I don't see him, he didn't come with you?"

"It's not that the wound on him hurts, and he can't come; it seems like he's waiting somewhere else."

"..."

"It's a shame if you planned to kidnap the counselor of the Red Deer Consortium to extract information. If you had been a little later, you could have succeeded. I acknowledge your boldness, though."

Even without a response, the eyes of those who looked at Kishiar, who accurately deduced the entire situation, quivered in surprise and terror. Most of them were not accustomed to such situations. It was the limit of people who originally lived ordinary lives, who did not even know the minimum way to keep their intentions from being read by an opponent in a battle situation.

Kishiar stared quietly, as if trying to read their faces hidden behind masks. When Nahan's name was mentioned, one among them showed an even more intense reaction than Ershi. Seeing the skin color revealed between the folds of clothing, it seemed likely he was a Southerner.

'A Southerner.'

"What are you looking at? Move even a little, and I'll kill this person."

"Well, killing him will only hurt you; I recommend against such reckless action."

There is no enemy as frightening as the incomprehensible one. As the Awakener, who felt instinctive fear from the unnervingly unconcerned opponent, swayed, Ershi pushed Graham Willhem backward, baring her sharp teeth.

"Aaargh!"

As Ershi swung her hand, yelling, a force as sharp as a sword erupted, flying indiscriminately toward Kishiar and the Cavalry. Those Awakeners standing around her also moved quickly as if they had planned it. The flying force was blocked by the members who had stepped forward before Kishiar could even move his hand. Still, the black smoke dispersed by one of the Awakeners as an ability exploded with a loud noise, and the attack began in an instant.

"Hosanna! Quickly!"

"Drive the smoke away with the wind!"

A very brief moment filled with coughs and shouts, the sounds of fighting.

Kishiar moved straight ahead without closing his eyes, reaching the spot where Graham Willhem had fallen in an instant. Someone attacked desperately to prevent Graham from being taken, but it was in vain. In a few concise movements that would have made others doubt their eyes, all the attacks aiming for him within the unseen smoke were torn apart, and it was enough to go beyond and cut down the opponent.

Along with a scream, a great wind blew, and the entire house vibrated.

A moment later, the Cavalry members found their leader, half holding a partly collapsed wall and Graham Willhem, like a piece of luggage.

"Commander!"

Turning

Chapter 369

In the darkness, a swift exchange of attacks left a few among the members slightly wounded, but Kishiar was untouched, not even a crease in his clothing. The members caught their breath at the sight of a wall, collapsed as though bent by a sword, in a very neat ruin to the point where the roof was visible. It was clear to anyone who looked that it was Kishiar's doing.

Although he simply stood there and did nothing, he felt somehow different than usual. Just holding his sword wrapped in blue sword energy and suppressing a smile, no one dared approach him. Kishiar, gazing indifferently at the night sky through the gap of the broken wall in the silence, withdrew the energy from his sword and sheathed it a moment later. Only then did the chill that had been lingering around him vanish as if it were a lie.

"Is everyone safe?"

"Yes!"

Kishiar's cool gaze moved from the blood scattered on the ground to his own hand. He sensed that one more person had been caught besides Graham Willhem, but after the smoke cleared, no one was there.

Kishiar recalled the teleporter from the Star of Nagran that his assistant had met at the Apeto Duke's mansion. It appeared that the young man from the South was here.

"It's unfortunate, but... I'll have to postpone returning the favor for putting my assistant in prison."

The members looked outside just in case, but naturally, there was no sign of the escapees. Kishiar handed over the limp Graham Willhem to the members and ordered them to clean up the surroundings. Shortly after, Ever and other members who had finished searching the mansion joined, and Nathan Zuckerman arrived leading the Knights.

Except for two servants who had luckily hidden and survived, everyone who had stayed in the mansion was killed or gravely injured by Ershi's hand. Graham Willhem, who woke up in Baron Willhem's house, pleaded for his life with half his mind gone. The Baron could no longer deny who had killed one of his siblings and left another in such a state.

"If they hadn't insisted on killing everyone in the mansion, we might not have been able to rescue Graham."

However, that terrible vengefulness had tripped them up, and the Cavalry could not miss the opportunity.

After hearing Kishiar's entire story, Yuder fell into thought for a moment.

"If you heard the name Hosanna, it seems certain that the Awakener with teleporting ability was there. I must ask Robel about it too."

"There's quite a bit I'd like to ask him as well. But let's rest today and do that tomorrow."

It was a gentle but firm voice. Yuder, who had intended to ask Robel immediately, agreed to wait.

"Did Graham Willhem say anything to them?"

"He hadn't come to his senses when I left. We'll know soon when we go back. Baron Willhem formally asked for our help this morning."

Of course, he only asked for help in capturing those who were disturbing Tainu, keeping his lips sealed about the secret trade. But that alone had already achieved the goal.

"My assistant, alone in the cold place, must be waiting for me anxiously now since I said I would listen to the story in detail after bringing him back."

Kishiar said, smiling, and his face did not show any signs of fatigue.

Many people were out in front of the returning Baron Willhem's mansion. The Cavalry members who came out to greet Yuder, Enon and Lusan, Nathan Zuckerman and the Peletta Knights, and Pruelle, holding a cat. Funnily enough, among them, the homeowner, Baron Willhem, seemed the most out of place.

With a very uncomfortable face, Baron Willhem, who had been enduring, quickly approached Yuder and opened his mouth just as Yuder landed.

"Thanks to the information provided by Sir Aile, I've heard that my brother Graham was able to escape the hands of the lawless. I also heard that you had a hard time during the investigation due to a small misunderstanding yesterday."

"Yes."

"Despite my orders to investigate courteously, Knight Commander Phil and the Knights did not listen to me. I plan to speak directly to them, so please calm your mind. I also hope that you will help us with your abilities in the future. If you need anything, just say it."

Whether disgusted by his sudden change of attitude, Finn Eldore, who was standing in the back, secretly made a retching gesture. Having seen men like Baron Willhem in his previous life more than once, Yuder simply reacted calmly.

"Then, Your Highness, I will visit you again soon."

After the Baron disappeared, Pruelle, who was holding a cat, came up and congratulated him.

"Congratulations on coming back, Sir Aile. How do you feel?"

"Thanks, I'm fine."

"I'm glad I could help. When I asked if it was alright to go out to greet you in the presence of Duke Peletta, he graciously allowed it."

So far, Pruelle had maintained the official stance that he had only had personal meetings with Kishiar, who had found the cat for him. The fact that he was an Awakener, the identity of the cat he had brought, and other details remained a secret known only to Kishiar and Yuder. But from today, as the Cavalry formally developed into assisting Baron Willhem and others, Kishiar seemed to intend to reveal his closeness with Pruelle a little more.

Those who knew that the first prince had gone to the security management team for Yuder yesterday were not as guarded towards Pruelle as they were towards Baron Willhem.

In the eyes of the members who each threw a word of hardship to Yuder, there were not only simple worries and comforts but also some unfamiliar emotions. Yuder was caught among them, who came to pat his back and bump fists, and only returned to the quarters with Kishiar after a long whirl. Stopping at the sight of the magic stove, which had not been there yesterday, burning with warmth and light in front of the fireplace, Kishiar playfully asked,

"How does it feel to be back?"

"...It's only been one night."

Kishiar laughed at the trembling answer.

"It was a night like 10 years."

"Are you planning to go see the Baron right away?"

"I plan to do so after seeing my assistant change clothes and lie down."

Yuder looked down at the formal attire still weighing heavily on his shoulders.

"I just remembered... I have something to tell you."

"What? I hope nothing else happened while you were in prison."

"...It's something like that."

At Yuder's words, Kishiar's eyebrows went up slightly.

"Yesterday, while I was locked up, I kept hearing strange noises from somewhere. The soldiers thought it was the sound of wind leaking, but I thought it was strange, so I went out for a while to check."

"...You went out?"

"Of course, I wasn't caught."

Kishiar stared at Yuder, who answered calmly, for a long time, then tilted his head.

"...So, what did you find?"

"I found the mark of the Tain family engraved on the wall in the place where I judged the sound came from, and I remembered it, but I think we need to compare it with the book that Pruelle Van Tain gave us to check."

Yuder detailed the location and condition of the mark he saw, as well as the structure of the stairs. After listening quietly to the story, Kishiar sighed and replied after it all ended.

"I figured you wouldn't rest even in prison, but you've managed to get quite a lot done."

"I'm sorry."

"What's there to be sorry about? So, how's your body?"

If Yuder was going to get scolded for acting on his own, he was prepared to accept it, but he did not sense any anger from Kishiar. When Yuder replied that his health was fine, Kishiar quietly pointed to the place where the change of clothes was laid and ordered him to rest.

"The security management team has now become our new workplace, so we'll look into that part soon. First, wash and eat. I've ordered Lusan and Enon to come, so you can receive treatment as well."

"There's no need for that..."

Yuder, continuing to speak, nodded his head upon seeing Kishiar's casual smile.

"Understood."

"That's a good answer."

The man, smiling a bit more deeply, reached out and brushed Yuder's eyes. Unlike the night before, today his hand felt a little colder. His body temperature had returned to normal.

Strangely enough, it was only then that the reality of having "returned" truly sank in.

"Yuder, it seems like you've lost weight overnight. No matter the investigation, how could they be so harsh as to make you spend a night in prison... These people really have no compassion."

"Why didn't you eat more than that? You usually eat more."

Yuder, squeezed between Lusan and Enon for a meal, received nagging under the name of treatment as Kishiar had foretold.

"I already ate bread in prison."

"Is that all they gave you?"

"They gave me water, too."

"... If I didn't know what kind of person you were, I would have thought you were joking and slapped you."

Turning

Chapter 370

Why did they think it was a mere joke? It had been only about an hour since Yuder had devoured precisely seven and a half of the bread given to him in the prison, facing the trembling expressions of the soldiers and whatever you could say of Robel's unease. In such circumstances, having emptied the stew bowl twice, he had not eaten less than usual. Just for reference, the reason he did not eat the eighth piece of bread was because Jeymer, the Knight Commander, had come to release him in the middle.

Of course, the bread he ate there wasn't as soft or warm as the bread set out on the current table, but it wasn't stony or rotten, and the water was clean. From past experience, the food given in prison was a considerable guest treatment.

Still, seeing Enon's concern for him as much as Lusan's, Yuder silently ate more of the prepared dishes. Only after finishing the meal was he finally able to receive a proper examination instead of a mere verbal check-up.

"Sir Yuder, I heard you used your power extensively yesterday while chasing someone within the mansion before going to the public security management team. Are you feeling all right?"

"Yes."

"The spot on your left eye is still there. What about the back of your hand?"

Yuder quietly removed his glove. A faint black stain remained on the exposed back of his hand. Between them, bright red spots appeared, which Enon and Lusan carefully examined.

"The black stain seems to have diminished since we last saw it."

"But the range of the spots is the same, isn't it? Hasn't it actually increased?"

Enon's sharp gaze was directed at Yuder.

"What do you mean? How much did you use when I told you not to use your power unless necessary?"

"Don't be like that, Sir Enon. Yuder has returned after a hard time."

Lusan, in his innocence, stopped Enon and began to pour divine power into Yuder's hand. As a white light covered his hand, it felt like hot water had been poured from his arm into the inside of his body. Yuder took advantage of the moment to ask Lusan about the people who had lost their memory.

"How are the people under Priest Lusan's care?"

"They're getting along as usual. Is it because of what you asked the Commander yesterday?"

Lusan quickly seemed to realize why Yuder was asking about them.

"That's right."

"When I informed Marty of the appearance and name of the servant that Sir Yuder caught, she was greatly surprised. She never thought that person would have infiltrated here... What happened to him?"

"That person was Marty's lover, as it turns out. Thanks to that, I was able to quickly gain cooperation as soon as I informed him of Marty's survival."

Yuder explained the incidents that Robel had experienced and the circumstances that led him to undertake the reckless infiltration alone. Lusan expressed surprise and regret at the tragic misunderstanding of the lovers, which was distorted by Nahan and his followers.

"For now, Robel has been released with me and brought here. He wanted to see Marty, but... what do you think, Priest?"

Robel desperately wanted to meet Marty, but Marty's opinion was also essential in this matter. They couldn't forcibly make them meet if one side did not want it. Believing that Lusan, who had been taking care of those who had lost their memory the closest, would make the most accurate judgment, he asked, and Lusan opened his mouth with a thoughtful expression.

"Among those who have regained their memory, Marty's condition is indeed the best, but ... it might be difficult right now. Shall I first inform her of the situation and ask her opinion, then let you know?"

"Of course."

If that was the case, it would have been rather appreciated by Yuder.

"Then I should go meet her first since the matter has come up. The divine healing is over, so I'll leave the rest to you, Enon. Call me whenever you need me."

"Alright."

Enon waved his hand dismissively, as if urging him to leave quickly. As Lusan left the room, Yuder felt Enon's gaze on his cheek change, becoming a little more biting than before.

"...Now, tell me honestly. How much power have you used?"

"Other than a slight use to check how much power has returned every morning... only a little when catching Robel yesterday, and a bit within the security management team."

"Why did you use it within the security management team?"

"I briefly escaped the prison to scout outside."

"Oh really... Did you think I'd accept that? Is that a little? Huh?"

The pharmacist's words didn't make sense, did they? A sharp voice came closer, accompanied by a pinching and shaking of the cheek. It felt chilly under the skin, but Yuder obediently offered his face. Losing enthusiasm because his opponent didn't resist, Enon sat down again, his face looking as if he were dying in agony.

"Were you really okay? You took the medicine I gave you that time and suddenly had a fever... and acted all weird, didn't you?"

Unable to utter the word "lust" directly, his words momentarily faltered, but Yuder didn't care and answered obediently.

"Nothing like that has happened since then. I've recovered some power, too. But... sometimes when I use my power, it feels like something is blocking me."

"A blocking feeling?"

"It feels like there's more power I can unleash, but only a much smaller amount comes out. Like a feeling of suffocation, should I say...?"

"You crazy fool. You should have said that first!"

Enon grabbed Yuder's opposite cheek once more.

"...I thought it was a temporary phenomenon at first. I realized it wasn't only yesterday."

The pronunciation was muffled due to the pulled cheek, but the meaning was understood, and the hand soon let go.

"The feeling that there's more power to be unleashed, but something is blocking it, so less comes out... Maybe it's not such a bad sign."

Enon's conclusion, after much thought, was unexpectedly positive.

"It means that the energy-recovering medicine has had its effect after all. Your original power is returning, but the unorganized foreign power is blocking the channel to release it. Hmm, do you know what the channel is?"

"I know."

Knights, Mages, Awakeners, and those with powers need a process to release the inner energy. People often refer to this as a 'channel.' Originally a term used by swordmasters, it's now used by mages, and it wouldn't be long before Awakeners would also naturally use it.

"If your original power had been small, it might not have been so uncomfortable, but since you have enormous power, it's entirely possible. Perhaps I should say, it takes a tremendous amount of time to digest because it is recovering its original strength with a monster-like adaptability, but it also combines the monster's poison and magic power."

"So then..."

"If the desire to heal within you is working properly for now... It might be good to slowly try another method."

"Is there a way?"

"Look at that. The eyes change at the word 'method'. If you wanted to get better so badly, why didn't you listen to the pharmacist?"

Enon, holding his chin, chuckled briefly.

"During this time, I have spent some time observing that small monster in the room of that stone-like knight gentleman. It seems that the monster's power to swallow and digest magic may be in the poison component that replaces its body fluid. So, if my speculation based on your current state is correct... you might be able to use it too."

"..."

What could he mean by that? Enon tilted his head, looking at Yuder's face, slightly frowning in an almost knowing feeling.

"It sounds crazy, but you're surprisingly calm. Do you want to hear more here?"

The answer was obviously predetermined.

...

"Damn it... I had a bad feeling ever since those untimely monsters started disturbing the western outskirts. How could such an absurd thing happen!"

The expensive dishes on the table struck by Duke Tain wobbled, making a noisy sound.

"Those wretched things dare to run amok in Tainu without knowing their place, and now that cowardly Duke Peletta, who had been ignoring it, tries to intercept the situation? That incompetent Willhem closed the gates in fear, and now even the Emperor is showing interest. What to do!"

"Calm yourself."

The man sitting before Duke Tain opened his mouth indifferently. Except for his eyes, his entire body was wrapped in long fabric-made clothes and a veil, but the fact that he possessed the unique red skin tone of the southern people couldn't be completely hidden.

"It is only a matter of that degree. What Your Highness is working on has not yet been revealed to anyone."

"Willhem's being so stupid there, how long can that last! I repeatedly told them to move the goods a day earlier..."

Duke Tain held his head and gritted his teeth. In his shaking hand, unable to contain his anger, was the piece from the dice game he had been playing for a high stake just moments before.

"The intervention of Duke Peletta and the Cavalry might actually be an opportunity for Your Highness."

"Opportunity? What opportunity."