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‘Engaging with the southern countries was something unimaginable currently for the states north of the desert.’

Initially, those who had vehemently opposed engagement with the southern countries began to quiet down gradually as, under Emperor Katchian's resolute will, trade and investment started to flow. Long-standing beliefs were less important than the immediate benefits before their eyes.

Subsequently, envoys from the southern countries became common sights in the Orr Empire and other countries. Visitors from the South to the imperial palace of Orr were, like others, quite interested in the famous Cavalry commander Yuder Aile, but Emperor Katchian did not want Yuder to make contact with them.

At that time, though late, efforts were also being made in different countries to form organizations like Cavalry to accommodate the countless Awakeners who had sprung up across the continent. Emperor Katchian was always on edge, fearing that envoys from other countries, including the South, might extract information about the Cavalry or the Awakener management system.

Although the Emperor was not the originator of the Cavalry, highly praised for being the first to recognize and positively control the Awakener's power, he wanted to hold that glory in his hands for a long time. Even though it was no less prestigious or powerful, Yudrain Aile's activities were mostly constrained and continued only behind the scenes; there was a context for this.

At that time, there was neither the desire to interact with others nor the thought that moving inconspicuously would be better for the future of the Awakener and the Cavalry, so it seemed acceptable. After all, what good would it do to stand out for an institution that existed for Emperor Katchian and the Orr Empire?

But now, that choice seemed regrettable. If more interest had been placed in the South and other matters, work would have been much easier now. The fact that the unknown would not be filled even if time were turned back became increasingly frustrating.

'It's a shame, but... there's no helping it.'

What was important now was not Emperor Katchian or suspicious southern merchants of the past, but to prevent dangerous goods brought by someone's scheme from spreading throughout the Empire. There was not enough time to focus only on assisting Kishiar and ensuring that he was safe.

Yuder folded his concerns and reminiscences about unknown southern merchants and looked back at Kishiar. The face that had been transformed by a magic tool reverted to its usual smooth and beautiful appearance. But what reflected in Yuder's eyes were traces of faint moisture, twinkling dimly on the forehead beneath the golden hair.

He narrowed his eyes to look more closely at it, and simultaneously Kishiar turned his head and met his gaze. The reflexive smile on his face, narrowing his eyes, was radiant enough that one could not think he had been roaming dangerous places late at night.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"... I was thinking about how the Commander will handle the secret warehouse tomorrow."

Yuder quickly changed the subject.

"Was that really bothering you?"

"One cannot follow without knowing anything, right?"

"That's true."

Smoothly answering, Kishiar took off the black cloak he had been wearing as soon as he stepped into the residence.

"The task is simple. We will go there tomorrow and switch the items."

The man, who had quickly erased traces of his night's outing and returned entirely to his usual self as the Duke Peletta, informed Yuder in a calm voice. Yuder was silent for a moment and then slowly questioned back.

"If I'm not mistaken, I remember there being far too many items in that warehouse for the three of us to handle, right...?"

"That's right."

"Is there a way to switch out all those items in a short amount of time?"

"Indeed. No doubt about it."

Kishiar grinned and gestured. It meant to come closer. Since there was no one inside the lodging, there was no need to speak secretly, but without understanding what he wanted to do, he took a step forward anyway.

"Come closer."

"..."

Yuder sighed and approached right in front of Kishiar. As soon as he did, an extended hand reached out and pulled him in as though dancing, and when he came to his senses, he was seated on Kishiar's knee.

Sitting on the firm thigh, embracing his waist, feeling the touch of hair on the back of his neck, the sensations of his previous life felt overwhelmingly intense.

'...Whether then or now, his way of teasing is utterly the same.'

What had changed, however, was that if it had been before, Yuder would have struggled to rise immediately after such an act. But now, he sighed and obediently surrendered.

If Kishiar wanted to talk in this position, it was not something he couldn't accommodate.

"I thought you'd say something, but you're silent?"

"If you want me to be surprised, I can still look surprised now."

"No. That's fine."

A smiling voice came from right behind his neck. A laugh that seemed to dissolve one's defenses and soften the heart.

Then, a deep breath as though smelling a fragrance came from behind him, and somehow, his mood became utterly relaxed.

'...Ah. So that's it.'

Yuder suddenly realized something. The sensations from this act were not simply due to similar experiences in his previous life. The short and intense contact Kishiar had shown when his magic had overflowed and he had sought Yuder late at night was surprisingly similar to what he was feeling now.

After all, considering that throughout their brief night out Kishiar had used magic and magic tools, even tapping into the power of the Awakener, it must have been more tiring than usual, even though it didn't appear so. Magic was more exhausting to use than other powers.

'The fact that Nathan Zuckerman did not show great concern means there must be no problem, but...'

The moisture he had glimpsed on Kishiar's forehead earlier was undoubtedly sweat, not a mistake.

"..."

In the rhythmic beating of his heart, mixed with irregularly jumping emotions, words were taken from Yuder. He waited for Kishiar's words, his mouth tightly closed.

"...We don't need to prepare anything for the switch. The many items in that warehouse will help us."

"..."

"Do you understand what I mean?"

Indeed, he seemed to understand.

Thinking of the numerous magic tools and magic stones piled up inside the warehouse, a spark-like revelation flashed through his mind.

'He plans to use the magic stones and magic tools there to make the switch.'

Magic tools could be used by those with almost no magic power. If one had magic power, they could use the magic within the tools more powerfully and delicately, but even without that, the magic of the magic stones that acted as the core of the tools could easily be harnessed. If it wasn't a disposable magic tool, even if the magic within was exhausted, one could use a similar level of magic stone to reuse it.

And within that warehouse, there were countless magic tools endowed with various powers, and magic stones that could continuously supply energy even when the energy of those tools was exhausted!

Yuder turned his head and faced the playful smile of the man embracing him. This time, he could not help but admire the man's cunning purely.

"...Did you have that idea in the brief moment we entered the warehouse?"

"Don't forget that I have a particular expertise in collecting magic tools. The biggest reason people use magic tools is to easily accomplish things that can't be done with human power."

Among magic tools, the most common were those endowed with the power of storage-related magic that allowed valuable items to be stored in a small space. Next in commonality were tools with camouflage-related magic, which hid nobles' treasures from the eyes of intruders.

No matter how whimsical a new magic tool might be, it could not threaten the supremacy of those two types. For nobles who found it difficult to employ mages, there was nothing as convenient as magic tools.

"With me around, it won't take long, and we can finish the job very comfortably."

Who would have imagined that someone like Kishiar would come in and pull off such a trick? Kishiar, thinking of the incident he would cause tomorrow, added with a low chuckle.

"But for Calanesa... I'm thinking of a more direct replacement. Unlike other items, camouflage alone seems to be difficult."

"The white powder is easy to obtain, so there won't be a problem."

"You always understand twice as much from a single word."

Yuder looked down at his hand with Kishiar and let out a faint, satisfied smile.

'...Just thinking about it is refreshing.'

However, the fact that Kishiar would have to use his strength again tomorrow for that refreshing success was not so pleasing.

The event would take place the next night, so there was time until then. Yuder resolved to visit Hellem and Mick's residence during the day, where Enon might be.

'I'm curious if Ever and the others have found out what Baron Willhem is up to in the security management team.'

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Seeing that there had been no particular contact so far, Yuder figured it must have been handled well, but he couldn't help but worry about the Cavalry members, even though he knew better.

"Since you've answered what you'll do tomorrow, may I ask one thing now?"

A small voice reached Yuder's ears. Yuder turned his eyes towards the warmth of the man who still had his head buried in the nape of his neck.

"Is there something you're curious about?"

"What's the secret of being able to down a strong drink in one gulp without getting drunk?"

"...Is that what you're so curious about?"

"It's about you."

A sudden yet obvious statement, spoken as if it was nothing unusual, stirred the air and tingled Yuder's skin. Yuder looked down at the strong, large hand around his waist, briefly pondering how much and what exactly to say.

It didn't take long to respond.

"It's as I've told you. Ordinary alcohol doesn't make me drunk."

"Ordinary, you say... So it's not like you never get drunk."

"Yes. Well..."

To get drunk, he needed alcohol mixed with monster blood, not ordinary liquor.

He first realized this when he attended a party and drank a poisoned drink sent by someone targeting him. Unlike other toxins, which had no effect like water or ordinary beverages, Yuder had understood for the first time what it meant to be 'drunk' when he drank that alcohol. The sensation of deadened emotions awakening and the flames igniting inside his cold flesh brought considerable shock to his body, long devoid of human warmth.

Subsequent investigation revealed that the poison in that drink included some monster blood. His body's lowered resistance to monsters allowed the intoxication to creep in. Unlike normal poisons, there was no other problem, and since discovering this, Yuder would keep that drink and occasionally consume it alone when he wanted to experience the sensation of intoxication. That daring image added another stroke to all sorts of sinister rumors surrounding the dark-haired commoner-born Omega Cavalry Commander.

But there was no need to tell Kishiar that he couldn't get drunk unless it was that particular poisoned drink. To explain it would require telling the story of drinking the poisoned liquor, a subject not yet open for discussion.

Between what could be said and what couldn't, as the frail boundary became increasingly blurred, Kishiar's soft whisper reached him.

"Yes... The pleasure of the drink we shared last time was too brief to truly understand the limits. How do you feel about taking time to more leisurely gauge each other's tolerance once this matter is over?"

It was clear when he referred to "last time." It was the story of the Lyung wine, where they had gloriously sacrificed one sofa in their lodgings. Without realizing it, Yuder caught his glance, almost drifting towards the newly replaced sofa.

"...Yes. If you call, I will come."

Though the response was stiff, it wasn't difficult for a perceptive man to realize what had briefly crossed Yuder's mind before that answer. A bright laugh sounded near Yuder's nape.

"Good. I'll look forward to it."

Despite both discussing future matters, there was a significant difference between planning and anticipation. The hand that had been around Yuder's waist regained its strength, and the tired breath seemed to revive with vigor.

Contrary to the weightiness inherent in a plan, there was no weight to expectation. It was fine whether fulfilled or unfulfilled. But Kishiar La Orr was strangely awakened to the fact that what breathed warmth into him was exactly that future-oriented 'expectation.' He hesitated for a moment, then cautiously asked.

"Have you regained some strength?"

"Ah, you caught me?"

Kishiar, who responded coolly, smiled bitterly.

"I'm sorry if I seem to have worried you, but it's all right. There are not many chances to moderately wield the powers we possess, so I wanted to test them when I could."

"You mean you wanted to use both magic power and the power of the Awakener together?"

"Yes. You can't know anything without trying it firsthand. I'll have to bear it."

Kishiar's eyes seemed to be looking far away as he spoke. Born with enormous powers that were hard for his physical body to manage, he was living an ironic life where he couldn't utilize them properly. However, that didn't mean he had ever given up on what he possessed. He knew better than anyone that living quietly would be easiest, yet the will within Kishiar's eyes had never dimmed for a moment. That's why he had been able to come this far.

To tell such a person to be more careful would only be an insult to his determination. Yuder swallowed the words that had risen to his throat and instead wished more intensely for his own recovery.

'I need to recover as soon as possible, at least before the day of the auction.'

...

The next day, as soon as morning dawned, Finn Eldore knocked on the door. He was a messenger sent by Ever, from the security management team.

"Did you find out everything about what Baron Willhem did at the security management team last night?"

"Yes. It wasn't much different from what you anticipated."

Baron Willhem had secretly visited the Knight Commander Jeymer Phil at the security management team the previous night. Though he had hidden his identity under shabby clothes and a cloak, he couldn't avoid the eyes of the Cavalry. After quickly finishing his conversation with the Knight Commander, he descended to the underground dungeon, carrying a heavy bag, with only a lame servant in tow.

Ever, accompanied by Emun, who was good at hiding his presence in the dark, Jody, who was sensitive to sound, along with Finn in case of emergency, had secretly trailed Baron Willhem. It wouldn't have been too difficult to follow two ordinary people from a distance, except that the guard's shift change gave them the chance to descend to the third underground floor.

To everyone's astonishment, the Baron suddenly disappeared at the end of the wall on the third floor. Some time later, he reappeared empty-handed, without the bag, and nonchalantly returned to his mansion. The Cavalry members, hidden in the darkness conjured by Emun's abilities, all clearly witnessed him vanishing and then returning.

"It seems the wall Yuder discovered was indeed the door to a hidden passage leading to a concealed space," one of them reported.

After Baron Willhem left, those who went to examine the wall he had disappeared into found a faint bloodstain near a carved family crest. It seemed hastily wiped but not entirely cleaned.

"Bloodstains. The 'Protection of blood' must indeed be strong."

Concluding the matter, Kishiar gave Finn some directions to pass on to Ever, thanking him for the hard work. Yuder, who had gone out to wait while the conversation extended, approached Finn as he came out after the report.

"Finn, I called for a carriage for your ride back."

"Huh? I'm fine. Thanks, Yuder."

A boy with a face identical to the absent Hinn gave a faint smile and honestly extended his thanks.

"It should be me thanking you. You came to help me when I was being investigated, but I've been so preoccupied since then that I never properly thanked you."

"What's the big deal? I just did what needed to be done."

Although he had often seen the Eldore siblings together, it was almost his first time having a conversation like this with an individual. However, there was no need to fret about the topic of conversation. This was because Finn started talking with a cheerful face about the "small retribution" that he had been giving to the Tainu Knights since the incident during the investigation.

"...I'm glad I listened to Yuder at that time. Knight Commander Phil really enjoys being teased. Whenever I say something, he shivers so much, it's as if winter has come around him."

"It's a shame I couldn't see it myself."

"Right? If we go together now, we can see it. Want to come?"

"I have something to do right now."

As he answered, embedding his sincere regret, Finn laughed cheerfully. Yuder opened his mouth after momentarily gazing at his bright and innocent face.

"Recently, are you okay?"

Since coming here, Finn had been somewhat drained for a while. It was understandable, as he was separated from his sister Hinn for the first time since birth. But as he looked after the memory-lost ones with Lusan and gradually regained his strength, he was completely engrossed in teasing the Tainu Knights, and it seemed he had fully recovered his former zeal.

'Still, the difficulty he must feel from being separated from his kin wouldn't have completely disappeared.'

"Me? Of course, I'm fine."

The boy, catching right away what Yuder meant, answered brightly.

"Rather, everyone is being too considerate; it's a little strange. According to the letters from Hinn, she feels the same way, but I never thought Yuder would be worrying as well. I'll have to write this in the next letter."

Yuder, watching the excited boy, kept silent for a moment and then opened his mouth.

"That offer I made earlier. Do you still remember it?"

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The chattering mouth that had been prattling on suddenly clamped shut. Round eyes peeping through blue strands of hair looked at Yuder with a new excitement and anticipation.

"...A proposal for the right to appoint an aide?"

Yuder did not respond verbally, but quietly nodded his head.

Finn still remembered the short conversation he had heard previously at the Western Mage Union base in Great Sarain Forest, along with Hinn and Gakane.

"I remember, of course. But why? Are you planning to give it to me already?"

"If I am, would you consider accepting?"

Excitement surged through Finn's parted lips. The boy, whose soft cheeks had turned red like a young animal, seemed as if he would nod his head at any moment, but he did not forget his caution, curious as to why such a sudden offer was being made.

"Are you making this offer to me alone, or is it also for Hinn and Gakane in Great Sarain Forest?"

"It's a proposal made first to you. Those two are not here."

"Aha. You mean you need someone here to aid Yuder."

Finn's eyes narrowed as he quickly grasped the unspoken meaning.

Though the Eldore siblings sometimes appeared more naive and thoughtless than the youngest member in the Cavalry, in fact, their ability to read situations and judge matters was more exceptional than many adult members. It meant they hadn't lived as naively as they seemed.

"But why do you need help to the point of using the appointment right in advance?"

Yuder lowered his voice after confirming once again that no one was around.

"I'd like you to watch and investigate some people in Tainu on my behalf. Without anyone finding out. ...Can you do it?"

"Of course I can! I'm confident!"

Finn exclaimed, thumping his chest.

"But who are these people in Tainu? Someone I've seen before?"

"No."

Yuder looked into Finn's sparkling eyes.

"...They are southern merchants who came here yesterday under Duke Tain's orders."

Last night, Yuder had seen southern merchants in a tavern and inn connected to a warehouse filled with Duke Tain's secret trade goods. Kishiar had instructed Nathan Zuckerman to watch them, but Yuder felt the need to investigate them separately.

It wasn't because he didn't trust Nathan Zuckerman and the Peletta Knights, but because he sensed an indescribable premonition from the way the southern merchants seemed to detect his presence unusually quickly.

'I can't be certain since I didn't exert effort, but... I must consider the possibility that they might be Awakeners.'

The idea of appointing Finn as an aide in advance came from this reason. What Yuder wanted was a watchful eye to consistently monitor the southern merchants without anyone noticing. Finn was ideally suited for this task.

His unruly, mischievous demeanor meant he could move a bit freely among his colleagues without raising suspicions. He knew how to utilize his unassuming appearance and quick judgment, without exposing himself to danger.

He had planned to use the appointment right to gather individuals responsible for information gathering within the Cavalry, so advancing the start wouldn't be a poor choice.

"The Commander has already told Zuckerman to watch them, but I think..."

"You mean it's necessary for us to investigate on our own, aside from the Peletta Knights?"

Finn immediately caught on to Yuder's intention and interjected.

"Yes. I'd prefer to do it myself, but I think it's hard for me to pay attention to that right now, so I'd like to ask you."

"Hmm... you know what? Yuder is really lucky."

With eyes narrowed like a pleased cat, Finn suddenly grinned slyly and whispered.

"Actually, this was still a secret, but not long ago, I succeeded in using the teleportation ability by myself, you know? It would be perfect to use for this job, wouldn't it?"

The Eldore siblings originally possessed the ability to teleport people or objects within a short range when they held hands. Yuder had heard that the ability had been expanding in terms of distance, but he didn't know it had developed to the point where they could use it separately.

Yuder, surprised by the development that had not occurred in his previous life, rarely opened his eyes wide, and Finn made a satisfied face at the reaction.

"How did you..."

“Remember when we all gathered to hear advice from Yuder about developing our abilities? Yuder told us that, for us, extending the range of our teleportation ability is important, but we should also train to be able to use it in any situation.”

Of course, he remembered.

It happened just after he had been able to modify the Cavalry training methods. Many Cavalry members had come asking for personal advice to further develop their abilities, and Yuder had spent all day answering everyone. Of course, the Eldore siblings were among them.

“To use it in any situation, we first had to consider when we were not together, right? Actually, it hasn't worked so far, but it seems that being forced apart in Tainu helped us succeed.”

Although this was not the meaning of being able to use it in any situation, the fact that they had finally succeeded in using their abilities separately was a remarkable achievement.

The result of Kishiar separating the Eldore siblings had blossomed this way. Perhaps he already knew something about the siblings' new challenge.

“Then what about Hinn?”

“Of course, Hinn succeeded too. She first did it when Gakane was injured and needed quick treatment, and the road was blocked. Amazing, right?”

That was news to him. The development of the other members had contributed to Gakane surviving instead of dying, unlike in the previous life.

“So when did you first succeed, Finn?”

“Me? I, um...”

Finn, who had been answering confidently, for the first time closed his mouth and playfully scrunched up his nose.

“When I went to help Yuder investigate the prison.”

He managed to leave with a promise for next time, but Finn was still in a state of residual anger against the Tainu Knights at that time. It was only natural that he wanted to throw a piece of dog dung, that he happened to find while heading to catch a carriage back to Baron Willhem's mansion, under the knights' feet.

“But that... actually worked, you know.”

Although it was a ridiculous reason, if the Eldore siblings had advanced one step further for the sake of their comrades, it was a good thing. Yuder praised them honestly.

“I see. Congratulations to both of you.”

“Thanks. But we still have a long way to go. We will find a way to develop further together with Hinn!”

Finn said he would act for the mission as soon as he returned to the security management team and conveyed Kishiar's answer to Ever. Yuder informed him of the location of the inn where the southern merchants were staying and their appearance, emphasizing not to approach them excessively.

“They seemed very sensitive to signs. Be careful.”

“Don't worry. If we intend to, no one can suspect us. Ah, of course, it's just me for now.”

Some time had passed since Hinn had left, but Finn still often habitually used the word "we" to refer to himself. However, the fact that neither sadness nor regret was reflected in his awkward smile meant that the Cavalry and Kishiar were sufficient to fill each other's voids as siblings.

That fact was somewhat comforting.

"So is it time to start the historic first mission of the Cavalry's Secret Information Team? I'm totally excited! See you later, Yuder!"

Yuder silently watched Finn Eldore's departing figure before turning away. It was now time for him to make a brief outing as well.

...

"What's going on? I didn't call for you, why are you here so early?"

"I wanted to have a brief chat with you."

Enon opened the door to his lodgings with a scowl and stared at Yuder's face before snapping at him.

"Hmm. It seems something must have made you rather impatient?"

"..."

As usual, Enon had an uncannily sharp sense of intuition, different from Kishiar's. As Yuder said nothing, Enon let out a snort and opened the door a little wider, allowing him to enter.

"Come in for now. I don't have much time, so speak quickly."

The inside of the lodging looked somewhat different from the last time he had been there. Suspicious-looking magic tools and piles of paper were scattered everywhere, and pens rolled about in place of forks amid half-eaten food dishes.

Mick and Hellem were seated across from each other, talking over the cage of Pethuamet, completely engrossed in conversation and scribbling on paper without noticing their visitor.

"What are you looking at? Ignore them and come up here. You said you came to talk to me."

Enon's voice raised from the top of the stairs as Yuder observed them. Yuder turned his gaze and followed Enon into a small bedroom. The piles of dried herbs on the table beside the bed gave a true sense of Enon's dwelling place.

"So, what did you want to talk about?"

"I want to know how far the research has progressed. And... what's best for recovery when a mage has overused their power and become exhausted?"

"...Why are you suddenly asking about that when you're not a mage?"

Enon asked after a moment of silence. Yuder was surprised to see such an agitated expression on a face that usually remained unchanging even when biting into a raw lemon.

"I know people who can use magic even though I'm not a mage."

"What I mean is... No, forget it. Don't speak. Don't open your mouth! Enough!"

Enon suddenly yelled in anger, interrupting himself, and sat down a few steps away from Yuder.

"The research is progressing better than I thought. They know a lot of methods I hadn't thought of, so it's been a significant help. I've gained quite a bit of knowledge this time, especially from the mage named Hellem."

Even though Enon had lived for a long time, his knowledge didn't extend to every area. Watching Hellem and Mick researching the monster, he seemed to be quite impressed, even softening his previously furrowed expression.

"Anyway, right now, we're extracting the monster's fluid for investigation, and simultaneously feeding it pieces of magic stone to observe the absorption and excretion process. The latter is almost completed."

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The speed was unexpectedly tremendous. It wasn't a futile act that Kishiar had merely waited patiently for their arrival.

In Yuder's previous life, Yuder had been dispatched to deal with notorious, various monsters that were difficult to handle. Yet, knowing how to kill them didn't mean that Yuder knew how to study them.

'I was a little skeptical when attaching the title of an expert, but it seems reasonable.'

"The peculiarity I learned while repeatedly observing the monster eating and digesting is that digestion doesn't occur automatically at the same time as consumption."

Yuder turned his head at the surprising words that came while inwardly admiring them.

"Not digesting automatically? How does it eat all day without its body bursting?"

"For you, being a human, it might seem strange, but I can understand."

The non-human Enon calmly replied and continued,

"It eats all day because it needs magic to live. But when supplied with a steadily consistent piece of magic stone imbued with sufficient magic, I discovered that it doesn't proceed with immediate digestion and absorption as before."

The small Pethuamet usually digested almost simultaneously as it absorbed the faint magic found in the vegetables or grass it was fed. However, when continuously fed with small fragments of magic stones filled with abundant magic, even the size of a fingernail, it began to show a different aspect.

"The movements of the hidden poison sac beneath its belly stir and move when absorbing the magic that has entered its stomach. It doesn't move when not digesting. Mick discovered it."

Based on those movements, the three continued their research, and they became confident that Pethuamet could freely control its digestion and magic absorption.

“Then ...”

“Yes. What I’m investigating with its body fluid now is related to that. As I thought before, it seems possible to activate the toxicity you absorbed.”

The positive signal brightened the mood. Enon clicked his tongue, seeing the light in Yuder's eyes.

“You're that happy? Previously, you were not even worried about your power not coming back.”

“My thoughts have changed now.”

There was now a solid reason to recover quickly. Most of the reason was because of Kishiar, but Yuder didn't go that far in saying it.

“So, how will you activate the toxicity? When will you start?”

“We'll begin after ensuring it's as safe as possible... Even if we're quick, it will take a few more days.”

“That's too late.”

“Why? There was no deadline to finish everything, right?”

Yuder opened their mouth slightly, looking at Enon's moody side profile.

“You must have heard, but soon there will be a charity party and secret auction under the intention of Baron Willhem and Duke Tain. I don’t want to be in this condition by then. I must fully recover by that time.”

“I heard it’s going to happen... You, what are you going to do there? What has the Commander asked you to do? Or, are you just involved?”

Why had the spark suddenly flown toward Kishiar? Yuder frowned and replied,

“What to do? As a Cavalry member, I will be participating in some way, and if I think my strength is needed, I must step forward, but I can’t in this state.”

“You're not getting anxious because you think something will happen there?”

Only then did Yuder understand what Enon was saying. It seemed he was suspicious that Yuder was going to repeat the same act as before, confronting the gigantic Pethuamet alone, just like in a previous life.

“This time, it's not like that.”

Enon gazed into Yuder's eyes, penetrating the truth and falsehood. After staring intently for a long time, he finally seemed to realize that Yuder's words were not lies. His facial muscles twitched with an irritated expression as he looked back.

“You should have something I can believe in.”

“ ... ”

“But it's dangerous to proceed more quickly here. We need to repeat the verification process several times to grasp the possibilities and variables to some extent....”

“As long as there is the possibility of recovery, the danger doesn't matter.”

“...You might not care, but I do. Did you hear what I just said?”

His cheeks were grabbed and, with a rare shout of anger, stretched out. He looked ridiculous, but Yuder did not give up making eye contact with Enon.

“I must get better. Help me just this once, Enon.”

“...”

The strength drained from Enon's hand pinching his cheek tightly. Late to realize that his grip had loosened, he glared at his innocent fingers like they were the culprit, sighed deeply twice, and sat back down.

“How did I end up meeting such a guy?”

He grumbled, then pulled something out from a pile of medicinal herbs. It looked like black medicine that was in the process of drying.

“What's this?”

“A test sample of a medicine I'm making from monster poison.”

The long explanation that followed could be summarized as a potion made by processing the toxic fluid of young Pethuamet, neutralizing it with various medicines, and employing magic power. Enon explained that in terms of composition, it yielded the best results, but research wasn't complete as they hadn't yet confirmed the risks when applied to humans.

“I was going to improve it until I was certain that you wouldn't die from it, then give it to you.”

“...So then...”

Enon sharply slapped away the hand that Yuder promptly reached out.

“Listen to the story first.”

Yuder sat upright, hands on his knees, so as not to provoke him further. Still frowning, Enon's eyebrows twitched as he opened his lips to continue speaking.

“Based on current predictions, if you take this, the poison in the medicine will react with the poison in your body, breaking the current balance of power within you. There will be substantial pain, but magic herbs will alleviate some of it. Meanwhile, you need to activate the power of absorption to completely digest or expel the remaining poison.”

“Can I immediately use the power of absorption?”

“If you have a strong will to overcome the pain.”

Enon responded calmly.

“Power is a tool led by the will of the user. The simpler and purer the will, the more powerfully it is exerted. And you've already wielded a power similar to a 'medium,' so that experience will help. In fact, I trust that in making this medicine.”

While listening to Enon's words that it would be possible if he didn't forget, Yuder repeatedly recalled a new yet familiar word.

‘Will... huh.’

“I'll try to improve it as much as possible until the auction, but I'll give you only one in case it's not completed by then. Eat it after careful consideration only if you feel like you'll die if you don't use your power.”

"...I understand. Thank you, Enon."

"When you thank me, I don't feel happy at all."

Enon replied with a grimace, reluctantly dropping a pill into Yuder's hand with a truly reluctant face. Then he rummaged through his bag and threw a bottle filled with small white pills.

"And take this as well. You said it was stifling when you used your power, so these should help alleviate that."

"This is too much."

"Quiet, and take ten after each meal, morning, noon, and night. You need to lay the groundwork in preparation for when you take that poison medicine later on."

There was no room to argue when the pharmacist said so. Yuder silently tucked the bottle away, and Enon finally relaxed his eyes.

"And you said earlier that you wanted to know something? About a good recovery method when a mage is exhausted? Just get a good night's sleep and eat well. That's it."

Staring blankly at the too nonchalant answer, Enon crossed his arms, as if to say, what do you want from me?

"Why are you looking at me like that? Forcefully replenishing depleted magic energy is actually worse for the body. If you're in a situation where you've used up so much power that it's dangerous, you need to seek a priest, not a potion."

"...Alright, I understand."

"Is that it?"

"That's it?"

What more reaction did he expect after hearing all the answers? Enon, whose lips had subtly twitched as though he wanted to say something, exhaled a long breath and replied, "No, never mind." He then pulled something else from his bag and roughly threw it at Yuder. Catching it, Yuder saw that it was a small potion.

"Take it."

"What's this?"

"It's just a vitality recovery potion! If you don't want it, give it back."

Yuder slipped the potion into his pocket before Enon's hand could reach for it. Though rough and gruff, Enon couldn't hide his generous nature, and that part was so like him that Yuder let out a faint smile.

"I'll take it. Thank you."

Turning

Chapter 395

Enon, having vigorously rubbed his hair, seemed to regret his actions for a moment but ultimately said nothing. Yuder, to resolve his awkwardness, informed him about what he had speculated – that the 4th-floor dungeon of the security management team was indeed hidden under the protection of blood, and about the newly discovered magic ore vein in the Great Sarain Forest. Fortunately, when the story was over, Enon was in a state where he had completely forgotten his previous awkwardness.

"A magic ore vein, huh... We must definitely investigate that."

"I plan to do so. If we delve into it, we might find evidence to tell us who might have carefully infused magic there."

"What about 'before'? Isn't there anything that could help?"

Yuder shook his head. In his previous life, there was neither information to offer nor areas he could speculate about those things he hadn't known. Enon looked at Yuder with eyes lost in thought and suddenly mumbled,

"You act like you know everything, but there's a lot you don't know too."

"If I knew everything, I wouldn't be asking you questions all the time."

"Yeah... I suppose that's true."

Enon's eyes darkened as he responded.

"But why would you..."

"Assistant, Pharmacist, we're going to eat lunch. If you want to join, come down."

At that moment, Mick's voice was heard from behind the door. Yuder reflexively stood up and looked back at Enon.

"What were you going to say?"

"Never mind. It's nothing."

Enon also stood up, shaking his head. He looked irritated, as if he could see Mick beyond the door.

"That Mick Shuden guy. I know he's knowledgeable and exceptional, but he often looks at me in a strange way, and it bothers me. I don't like it."

"...Looks at you?"

"Yes. I should know what his intention is to respond, but he doesn't say anything and just stares. That's even worse."

Yuder had an idea about the intention. It was clearly related to Mick Shuden's peculiar ability.

"He's an Awakener. I heard he has the ability to see the essence. He might have seen something in you, so be careful."

"The ability to see the essence? Do you mean the soul?"

"Not quite, but something similar. He can even see it in inanimate objects," Yuder explained. Enon cursed that there were all sorts of abilities in the world.

"So, it's only natural that he pays attention to me. It's annoying that a guy with such an ability would come here, of all places."

"Will you be okay?"

"What's not going to be okay?"

Enon grumbled but his response was surprisingly tidy.

"As long as he doesn't talk about what he sees in me, I can pretend not to know. It will be annoying, but now that I know the reason, it's fine."

It was a relief, but Enon didn't seem to be even slightly curious about what the other person saw in him.

'But then again, unless you are in a situation like mine, where you know very little about yourself, there might be no reason to be curious.'

"Are you going to have lunch?"

"No, I'll head back right away."

Yuder immediately shook his head in response to Enon's question. Asking if he was going to have a meal even when he said he had no time was so like Enon.

"Oh, are you leaving already?"

When they descended to the lower floor, Mick, who was preparing the meal in the kitchen, widened his eyes and spoke.

"I appreciate the invitation, but I only came for a short visit, so I have to return soon."

"I see. It's a shame, but we're busy today too, so it can't be helped. Next time, let's have a real drink and talk."

Yuder walked to the door, followed by Enon, who maintained silence without offering a greeting or stepping inside as though he had something to say. Sensing this, Yuder didn't hurry him and instead stood quietly, waiting for him to speak.

"I've been revisiting memories that have long been submerged, and I think there might be something related to you in there," Enon said after a long pause. His words were vague enough to be free of suspicion to anyone overhearing, yet not so unclear as to be meaningless.

"Let's talk after this is over. There are some things I want to hear about."

"Okay."

"And you..."

Enon trailed off, seeming to consider his words for a considerable time before finally opening his mouth.

"Is it true that those who have manifested a second gender as Awakeners are only attracted to the opposite gender?"

"Why are you asking that all of a sudden?"

"Is it right or wrong, anyway?"

"I think it's generally true."

"I see..."

Enon, with a very complicated expression on his face, soon turned around, saying, "That's it."

"Take good care of what I gave you. Don't forget what I told you from above."

Yuder wondered what Enon had held back from saying but merely nodded slightly and turned away.

...

"Did your meeting with the pharmacist go well today?"

"Yes."

"I've heard that the research is progressing better than expected. Hellem was astonished that someone like Enon was working in a pharmacy in the capital. It's unbelievable."

In the blink of an eye, a day had passed, and it was night. Yuder, once again cloaked, followed Kishiar with Nathan, engaging in conversation.

"I haven't seen him admire someone like that in a long time."

"So it seems."

"When we get back, I think I'll have to give him a sincere gift plus several times his salary."

Yuder said nothing, uncertain whether Enon would appreciate it.

Returning the way they had come was not difficult. The protective magic of the Red Deer Consortium's underground storeroom, mended by Nathan Zuckerman the night before, no longer had the power to detain the intruders. Thanks to this, Kishiar could easily manipulate the deer-antler device to open the passage's door.

"According to reports, the southern merchants staying at the inn didn't move all day and only went out in the evening. Seeing that Baron Willhem has timely ordered his office closed to everyone, he probably intends to contact them somehow."

And their absence provided a golden opportunity.

Upon receiving a report about Baron Willhem's strange behavior, Kishiar immediately sent a reply to Pruelle, directing him toward the security management team. While they were breaking into a secret storeroom, Ever, waiting at the security management team, was to coordinate with Pruelle to ensure access to the underground dungeon's fourth floor.

'And if we finish quickly, we'll join them.'

Reiterating the day's tasks, Yuder summoned small flames as he opened the door leading to the secret warehouse.

The vast storehouse filled with goods looked no different from the previous night. Even though he'd heard the southern merchants were gone, the sensation of someone possibly hiding sharpened his

senses. Nathan Zuckerman also seemed to feel a similar tension, a glimpse of anxiety visible over his usually stoic face.

"Well, shall we begin?"

The only one who wasn't tense among them was Kishiar. The man, with a leisurely smile, approached the place filled with magic tools and selected a few.

"A 'duplication' magic tool that can create a fake through magic for a certain period. And the 'camouflage' tool that will make the fake seem real. Adding 'protection' and 'tracking' to that... all of them are of the highest quality."

Having picked the tools he needed, all that was left was to take the items in this space. Yuder observed Nathan Zuckerman disappearing without looking back, then stood in front of Kishiar, who was examining the magic tools.

"Commander, for a moment..."

"Hmm?"

"I'd like you to take this."

Handing over the potion that Yuder had brought all the way here, Kishiar's vividly shining red eyes blinked in puzzlement, even in the darkness.

"What's this?"

"I received it from Enon. It's a good medicine for recovery if you exhaust your magic power."

Perhaps because it was an unexpected item, Kishiar was silent for a while. The large man, gazing down at the small vial in his huge hand, finally spoke.

"You went not to inquire about research progress, but to receive this?"

"It was for both reasons..."

"I see. I'll use it well."

The man, slowly clutching the vial, put it in his pocket and looked up. Yuder had thought him overly composed, but the moment he faced that visage shimmering under the flickering light, his thoughts changed.

The joy and fiery redness spreading around Kishiar's eyes were as brilliant as a light that couldn't be described by anything else.

"Thank you for thinking of me."

"It's nothing."

Suddenly, a strange feeling made it hard for Yuder to breathe, and he quickly turned away. His heart pounded relentlessly.

Turning

Chapter 396

As befitting someone who had owned and used countless magic tools, Kishiar's movements were fluid and without hesitation. While he tirelessly used the magic tools and recharged them with magic stones, Nathan and Yuder ran about, ensuring that his work never paused for even a moment.

Yuder deliberately avoided stepping anywhere near the magic stones. Yuder did not want to encounter the red magic stone that was tied to his previous life again. After successfully duplicating and disguising items as varied as old, worn-out paintings, unverified small collectibles, and finally objects too large to carry easily, the three took a moment to sit on the ground and rest.

"You take care of these storage magic tools, Nathan. And don't forget to compile the list of items."

"Yes, understood."

In the sack before Kishiar were many illegally smuggled items contained within storage magic tools. As they were sealed using magic tools imbued with magic for weight reduction and appearance disguise, they looked no different from ordinary sacks of grain.

Yuder, noticing the sweat on Kishiar's forehead, cautiously asked, "Are you all right?"

"Of course I'm all right. I'm feeling great and invigorated."

Kishiar's eyes, looking down at the sack, seemed incredibly delighted and energetic.

"The duplicated items in this warehouse can't be recognized by just any high-level mage. I've also applied tracking magic tools, so we can use them to trace those who buy these at the auction."

Kishiar picked up a magic tool shaped like a hand mirror and chuckled. This magic tool was used for tracking valuable items if they were stolen.

"Now, let's go handle the remaining Calanesa."

After a sufficient rest, Kishiar was the first to rise. Yuder followed him, carrying the sacks that Nathan Zuckerman had brought all the way here.

The drugs, which looked dangerous enough to send chills down one's spine, were, as before, packed in raggedy sacks and piled up in one place.

Compared to the precious magic tools and magic stones, these few sacks of Calanesa would bring more money to Duke Tain. The white powders, piled up like trash, felt even more horrifying to Yuder.

"Now, shall we make the switch?"

Yuder set down the sacks he and Nathan Zuckerman had brought. Kishiar had not been idle while Yuder was meeting with Enon. Inside the sacks were several storage magic tools called 'Bottles of Infinity.'

'They're called infinite only in name; they're not much different from other storage tools... But they can preserve liquids and foods for a long time.'

Magic tools are hard to obtain suddenly, even with money. The fact that Kishiar had obtained so many, and so quickly, likely meant that he had taken them from his personal collection.

As Yuder was about to open the Bottles of Infinity together with Nathan while Kishiar was preparing, he found the tightly sealed caps harder to open than expected.

"Open it carefully. It's not a bottle that opens with force; you need a knack for it. Don't break it; give it to me."

Nathan, frowning at the sight, took the bottle from Yuder's hand with a brusque voice, showing him how to open it properly.

"If the contents touch your hand..."

"Is it dangerous?"

"No. It's white powder, so it doesn't wipe off easily and leaves traces. Just be careful."

The southern man quietly replied.

"You don't need to worry about that. Just wash it off with water and wind, and erase the traces."

"If you use your abilities too much... No, never mind."

"It's fine to use them little by little, as long as it's not excessive."

Yuder guessed roughly what Nathan Zuckerman was about to say and preemptively answered him.

"..."

Nathan Zuckerman looked at Yuder with an inscrutable expression for a moment but soon began to silently continue opening the bottle caps.

"Please be careful this time."

Yuder said no more and repeated the same task by his side.

"Have all the bottles been opened?"

In the meantime, Kishiar, who had easily pulled down and arranged all the bags filled with Calanesa powder, came over to check the progress of the work.

"What's in this bottle is ground grain mixed with Alos grass. It looks no different from Calanesa to the naked eye, but unlike actual Calanesa, it has no hallucinogenic effects or addictiveness and is good for insomnia."

Kishiar picked up a bottle and smiled.

"And there's one more effect. Can you guess what it is?"

Kishiar was smiling as if he somehow knew Yuder already knew the answer.

'Alos grass, huh... It's used for insomnia, but isn't it also usually used to bury food waste?'

Nobles might not know since they don't throw away garbage themselves, but commoners used Alos grass more as a good odor remover and an aid in quickly decomposing garbage. There were other plants good for insomnia, but none were as good for obtaining fertilizer without a rotten smell.

"Was it not merely a simple switch you were trying to make?"

"Unlike other goods, switching everything might cause a headache. But I just remembered that the plant that becomes Calanesa is very susceptible to decay. Unlike Ponesa, it loses all its original effects once it rots."

It was a pity. Looking at Kishiar's smiling face, Yuder felt a refreshing sensation running down his spine.

'I see. They probably made it this way to minimize the chance of decay, but if you mix in ground Alos grass, even that can be nullified.'

The efficacy of Alos grass was that strong. However, it wasn't knowledge that a noble-born Duke should know.

Although Yuder now knew that Kishiar didn't grow up as privileged as he seemed, it was still surprising to see him casually speaking of knowledge that nobles wouldn't know, without showing any signs of hardship.

Yuder watched Kishiar switching the Calanesa powder in the bags. After scooping out half of the Calanesa powder, the Bottle of Infinity was tilted into the bag, and white powder flowed endlessly out of what seemed to be an empty bottle, filling it completely. Nathan and Yuder also tilted their bottles to fill their assigned bags with powder.

Kishiar took only a handful of the collected drug powder and put it in a pocket pulled from his bosom. The remaining powder was transferred to the Bottles of Infinity, and with an impassive look, he nodded to Nathan Zuckerman.

"I will dispose of it as I leave."

"Yes."

Now the warehouse had returned to looking exactly as it had when they first entered. Only the fact that it was filled with fakes was something that the three people present, or perhaps an exceptionally skilled mage, would have known.

'We did it.'

Reflecting on items that, in his previous life, would have been easily sold off without anyone knowing, he experienced a peculiar sensation that slowly spread from his fingertips to his toes. At the very end of it, Kishiar was there, as always.

The three of them were not in the cleanest of states, having handled and tended to old objects. The same was true for Kishiar, who had touched many items. With dust-smeared cheeks, a sweaty forehead, and wearing a cloak that reeked of stale mold, he hardly looked like the well-known Duke of Peletta.

But despite that, somehow, he looked even more like himself. Would it have been strange if it had seemed that way?

"...So now..."

Kishiar, unlike Yuder, began to speak with no hint of pride in what he had accomplished, only meticulously scanning the surroundings with a gaze that seemed to be conducting a final check. He then halted abruptly, shifting his gaze somewhere else. Yuder and Nathan Zuckerman did the same.

In the blink of an eye, a sharp, alert sense informed them that a powerful mass of energy was rapidly approaching from somewhere.

'What is this...!'

Yuder extinguished the dim flame that had been illuminating the area, and the faint sound of Nathan Zuckerman drawing his sword reached their ears. All three moved swiftly, instinctively reacting to their senses. Yuder flung himself behind a shelf that was suitable for hiding.

Following that, a deafening noise, accompanied by an explosion, resounded not far from them. It was not from the direction they had entered. It was the opposite.

'Has the door leading to the tavern been blown open...!'

Yuder, relying on long experience, slowed his breathing to an almost inaudible level.

Soon, unfamiliar sounds and footsteps began to echo.

"...They said a rat had gotten in, but there's no one here?"

Turning

Chapter 397

The first thing I heard was the voice of an old man. His voice, coarse and mixed with phlegm, accused those who had come with him in a thick western accent.

"It's just the same as when we checked last night. I knew we shouldn't have trusted you folks and broken down a perfectly good door. What will the Baron say when he learns of this?"

"...A force definitely moved here."

The next voice that was heard was very low and slow, contrasting with the voice of the old man previously. Yuder quickly turned his head to glimpse between the shelves filled with counterfeit magic tools and catch sight of his opponents.

Beyond the shattered entrance, the shadows of three people were reflected in the flickering lamplight. The one holding the lantern was a hunched old man, and the other two were tall and well-built, their skin red where it peeked out from the heavy clothing that wrapped them as tightly as midwinter.

'The tavern owner and the southern merchants I saw before...'

Yuder had heard that the southern merchants were gone to meet Baron Willhem, but he hadn't expected them to return so quickly. Moreover, from the conversation, it seemed that they had accurately identified the movement of some force here for some unknown reason.

A sense of tension caused strength to surge through Yuder's body. He looked around to locate Kishiar but could not find him within his line of sight. The same was true for Nathan Zuckerman. Even though it was obvious and wise to hide separately to avoid the enemy's gaze, that fact felt terribly anxious at this moment.

'Damn it.'

Yuder bit his lower lip and clenched his fist tightly.

"There's nothing more to see here. Get out. Don't touch anything here until the time comes, even if it's you. I have to go out and make sure no one comes near this place!"

In the meantime, the old man began to push the southern merchants out, annoyed. He openly grumbled, visibly angry at the fact that the southern men had carelessly broken the secret door to the basement when nothing was wrong.

It would have been nice if they had simply left, but the southern merchants did not comply.

"We cannot leave. We need to check for intruders."

"Oh, there's nobody here! If anyone had come in here, I would have known!"

"There are not only this passage, aren't there?"

"The other side is guarded by the Baron's knights. Not even a bug can get in."

"We don't know that. If evidence of an intruder is found later, we will present your head to the Duke first."

"What... what? What did you just say...?"

A brief phrase in an incomprehensible southern language followed, and then one of the southern merchants bowed his head and began forcibly dragging the old man out.

"What, what are you doing? Why are you grabbing me!"

The terrified shout of what are you doing turned into a stifled moan. As those sounds gradually receded, the remaining southern merchant walked into the secret warehouse with heavy footsteps.

A long shadow spread inside the warehouse, and the air seemed to chill for a moment.

'...A gaze I've felt before.'

Though his face was almost hidden by the hat pulled low, sharp eyes like his were rare. He was undoubtedly the man who had turned his head when he felt Yuder's gaze at the tavern.

The man walked a certain distance inside, then stopped and looked around. A moment later, a resonant voice in the Imperial language came through.

"Intruder, I already know you're here. Come out."

The warehouse remained as silent as death. The man who had maintained his silence, waiting for a response, spoke once more.

"I've confirmed with my comrade that a great power is moving here in the city of Tainu. It must be you who have infiltrated various parts and caused explosions. If you come out now, I won't kill you."

For a moment, Yuder's eyebrows twitched in surprise.

'He must think we're from the Star of Nagran.'

"I am an Awakener, just like you. I have the power to kill you instantly if you try to escape. This is your last warning. Come out."

The Southern merchant spoke calmly, revealing that he too was an Awakener. It seemed that this fact was the source of his self-assured confidence in coming alone.

But knowing that he was an Awakener, Yuder regained his composure.

'I should probably thank him for revealing he's an Awakener from the start. I knew something was off when I first saw him.'

It's always easier to face a strong monster whose name you know, rather than an unknown one. Whether the opponent possessed a certain lineage of power or not, being an Awakener surely meant there was some way to deal with him based on past experience.

'And since he's already mistaken us, I should take full advantage of that.'

"I will give you one last chance to choose. I'll count to three. One..."

Yuder quickly thought, listening to the low voice coming from not too far away. Although he didn't know where Kishiar and Nathan Zuckerman were, they were probably all thinking the same thing: quickly deal with the Southern merchant and escape. There were three of them and only one opponent, so they had plenty of power to spare.

'And first and foremost, it's my job to handle him.'

Kishiar had already expended much energy today and was an important person who must not be discovered, while Nathan Zuckerman had a pile of magic tools that had to be safely taken out. Yuder was the only one free and with no reason to escape first.

'So first, I need to deal with the distractions.'

Yuder pulled his cloak's hood deeper and rummaged inside his garment, quickly finding the recovery potion given by Enon.

Enon would probably scoff at the situation, but Yuder couldn't complain. Who would have thought he'd need to recover so quickly?

"Two... Three...!"

Yuder roughly threw the potion into his mouth, swallowing it as he sprang up.

'Wind, and earth!'

As he used both elements at once, the surrounding shelves shook, and the duplicated fake items swirled in the wind, becoming a tangled mess. The sounds of shattering and breaking echoed like a scream from thousands.

Yuder, unable to overcome the shaking force, dodged a collapsing shelf and looked around. It was hard to tell what was what in the darkness, but he needed to find Kishiar quickly.

'I'm sure I saw him move this way...!'

At that moment, an unseen attack from the darkness aimed at Yuder's neck. He swiftly stepped on the wind and dodged to the side, just as the objects where he had stood exploded from the force of the Southern merchant's attack.

'Was it a wind-attribute attack? Or something like sword energy?'

Either way, a slight delay in dodging would have spelled disaster. Rolling to hide behind a relatively intact shelf, Yuder caught his breath, only to feel a sharp, stabbing pain below his abdomen.

'....'

Yuder clenched his teeth in silence, gripping the shelf and crouching down.

'...He said it would hurt quite a bit, but it wasn't just an empty threat.'

It was clear that the effect of the elixir Enon had warned him about had begun. The pain, which usually began inside the navel where an Awakener's power was concentrated, near the Mana Hole, rapidly transformed into a burning agony that spread to his heart, both arms, and legs. Among those, the most intense pain emanated from his left eye, as if something were branding it with fire in the unseen darkness.

Suppressing the urge to breathe too deeply due to the pain, Yuder rose again. Indescribable pain made his body tremble, but unlike before, he no longer felt suffocated in his chest whenever he exerted force. It felt as if everything that had been pent up inside him was finally touching the flames that would consume them, burning fiercely.

In the darkness, there was a sound like weapons clashing, as if someone were dealing with a Southern merchant. Kishiar had not brought his new sword today, so it must have been Nathan Zuckerman. The wind was still following Yuder's will, wreaking havoc all around.

'Kishiar.'

It was important to deal with the Southern merchant, but he needed to find Kishiar first and send him toward the passage.

'Where is Kishiar...?'

In that brief and simple desperation, the only thought left in the darkness.

Suddenly, amidst the eye-searing pain, Yuder 'saw' something.

A thin energy extending from his body.

That fragile and incomprehensible something, like a thread, was pointing somewhere. Instinctively, he realized that Kishiar was at the other end, even though no one had explained it to him.

Without a second thought, Yuder kicked the ground and ran.

And roughly grabbed the hand of the man who was twinkling alone like a light in the darkness.

"Commander...!"

Kishiar turned his head, as if he had been searching for something in the dark basement, breathing heavily. He could see that Kishiar's face had been altered with magic, but it did not feel strange. The quickly approaching hand had touched Yuder's cheek to confirm his presence before he could refuse.

The wind, following the turbulent emotions, swirled objects into a vortex, blocking the Southern merchant's path, and toppled a shelf.

"The exit is this way. Please go ahead!"

"Why is your body so hot? Didn't they say you shouldn't exert yourself too much?"

"I'm fine. The priority now is to secure the safety of the Commander and Zuckerman..."

At that moment, another attack came. Although he sensed it and guessed the direction, the attack was merely rough and blind, perhaps because controlling it was not easy due to the interfering wind. As Yuder was about to turn his body to exert force, Kishiar embraced him and reached out like lightning. A massive invisible power erupted from his hand, and the incoming attack was repelled as if it had hit a wall. Another shelf crashed loudly.

"...I have no intention of going ahead."

A small whisper, mixed with the wind, flowed into Yuder's ears.

"If we go, we go together."

Turning

Chapter 398

Had Yuder been as Yuder once was, Yuder would have refuted that statement. There were countless things that could have been said here.

Most important priorities.

Things that needed to be done.

And even the condition of Kishiar's body.

But Yuder, in the end, couldn't say a word. The powerful force, more potent than ever, that was felt from the hand embracing Yuder's back, and the emotion that emanated from it, blocked Yuder's mouth.

It was the same level of desperation as when Yuder had been wandering in the darkness, looking for Kishiar...

"..."

For a moment, forgetting even the pain, Yuder's fiercely pounding heart shivered with an intense agony as if being slashed by a knife once more. Yuder bit his lips hard enough to draw blood, suppressing the involuntary nausea that surged with the heat and pain that crawled up the skin. Cold sweat dripped down Yuder's back, but it snapped him back to awareness.

‘This is not the time to lose consciousness.’

Trying to convince Kishiar would be useless; Yuder wouldn't change his mind. Therefore, Yuder had to prioritize sending Nathan Zuckerman first, then plan to escape together later.

“I understand. Then I'll send Zuckerman first, so please let go for now.”

“The one who needs to go first is you. How can you be fine after using so much strength?”

“I took a medicine from Enon to prepare for this situation, so don't worry.”

“Medicine?”

“I'll report that part to you later.”

Yuder did not explain further and stepped back.

“The enemy is very capable of sensing our presence, and can even create concentrated energy and send it flying without weapons. It seems that he thinks of us as the Star of Nagran, so I'll move without conflicting with him. Therefore, Commander, you should also...”

“Deal with it with only the power of the Awakener.”

A man who had quickly interpreted what Yuder was trying to say gave the desired response.

“Can you lure the enemy to the right end of the shelf where there are many stone statues as soon as Zuckerman gets out of the way?”

“Planning to knock it down?”

“Yes.”

Kishiar tightly closed his lips, his face lost in thought for a brief moment.

“That's not a bad idea... but I'll push them towards the place where the Callanesa powder is instead, and when the enemy gets close, pour the water as soon as I signal. Then head for the exit together, knocking down the shelves to block the way.”

Would a charging enemy even care about Callanesa powder?

But something in Kishiar's expression conveyed certainty, and Yuder unknowingly nodded.

“Understood.”

“Then stop using the wind for now.”

Yuder obeyed his command and calmed the wind.

Even after stopping the use of power, the inner corner of Yuder's left eye grew hotter as time passed. It felt like it would burst at any moment. The energy swirling inside Yuder's body was painful enough just standing still, but the more strength Yuder exerted, the more the inner heat rose, feeling like burning alive.

It was a pain both similar and different from when manifesting the second gender.

‘Still... thanks to that, my senses seem even sharper.’

As the chilling pain surged, Yuder's senses sharpened proportionally. The strange thread-like energy that Yuder had seen after finding Kishiar had disappeared, but the senses, honed to the limit like a knife freshly sharpened, had not dulled at all.

Yuder could accurately perceive the diminishing wind in the darkness and the direction of the collapsing shelf due to its aftermath. The shapes and numbers of the objects tumbling on the floor, the places where the enemy and ally stood, and even the path that needed to be cleared to reach the exit – all were felt with astonishing clarity.

A disturbance was felt from the upper floor. Perhaps it was just thinking that the commotion coming from the lower floor was taking too long for a comrade's act.

"I will go ahead. Watch your step and follow me."

Yuder quickly made his way through the disordered storeroom towards where Nathan Zuckerman and the southern merchant were engaged in battle. Amidst the collapsed shelves, where various objects rolled about like trash, the two men constantly clashed swords and force, repeating the sequence of meeting and parting. Each time their invisible, condensed power collided above the flashing, glowing swords, an immense recoil occurred, causing the sound of air bursting to resonate repeatedly. Their movements were so swift that they were difficult to grasp even with the eye.

Nathan Zuckerman wasn't using his sword's energy, perhaps to keep his identity hidden, but even so, Yuder was considerably surprised that he could handle the situation to that extent just with the condensed force of his sword.

'Is that person... truly a merchant?'

It was unbelievable that a mere merchant could have the skill to compete with a swordmaster. Likely, that person was already an outstanding swordsman before becoming an Awakener.

'Who exactly is he?'

Yuder firmly resolved anew to discover the identity of the enemy, organizing the positive information he had gleaned from the two men's battle.

'If he was originally a swordsman and then became an Awakener, dealing with him would be somewhat easier.'

A sword is a tool utilized through a human's body. Too accustomed to it, the southern merchant, even after awakening the power to wield freely without human hands, only used it condensed like a sword or in a way similar to knights sending out aura, and used no other attacks.

That was evidence that he was still deeply ensnared by the original limits of a swordsman.

'He confines the power within the blind spots of his physical body. That's his limit.'

Having comprehended everything, Yuder moved the ground between Nathan Zuckerman and the southern merchant, deftly shaking beneath the enemy's feet. In an instant, due to the ground suddenly rising or shallowly sinking, the enemy lost balance, and the wind lightly conjured again swept up the fallen objects like a whirlwind, blocking the way. It was control only possible because of an extremely keen sense.

A bitter taste was felt in his mouth, as if his guts were shaken, but he restrained it, thinking of Kishiar.

Not missing the opportunity, Kishiar inserted himself in front of Nathan Zuckerman and pushed his shoulder, saying, "Go ahead."

The man carrying a bag with magic tools bound to his back turned his head. In Yuder's unusually bright vision, his face appeared messed up with all kinds of broken fragments and thin scratches from the aftermath of the force. The faithful knight hesitated for a moment but withdrew, taking a deep breath when Yuder lit a small flame in front.

"..."

No words were exchanged, but the brief glance exchanged was filled with concern.

Nathan Zuckerman's back quickly receded with the guidance of the flame.

"Where are you going!"

The southern merchant, noticing Nathan Zuckerman dodging, condensed his energy and launched an attack again, but it was effortlessly deflected by Kishiar's outstretched hand, losing its force and bouncing away.

'Is it a combination of martial arts and repelling force?'

Knowing Kishiar's ability, Yuder was able to understand immediately, but the southern man momentarily faltered, showing surprise. However, he didn't retreat but instead turned more aggressive, charging at Kishiar.

However, unlike Nathan Zuckerman's attacks, which were consistent in direction and force, Kishiar's attacks were not something he could easily handle in the same manner he had been using thus far. Though they appeared to be inconsequential at a glance, the experience of his own projected force being reflected and unpredictably flying back multiple times caused the demeanor of the southern merchant to slowly change.

He began to mutter short words in the southern language and started to use more power than before. But this became his decisive downfall.

Kishiar pulled in the force emitted by his opponent, gathered it, and thrust it into the enemy's chest as if it was his own power.

Swallowing a silent groan, the man's body flew far and slammed into something. Yuder realized that the place was precisely where the stacks of Calanesa fodder were, and turned his head. Just then, Kishiar, who seemed to have been waiting, looked in Yuder's direction and opened his mouth.

"Now!"

Yuder gathered all of his boiling, fiery pain. Even if the blazing agony were to burst his left eye, he was determined to accomplish this task.

As he released the power above his soaring hand, a stream of water created in midair began to grow. The amount was much more than what he usually summoned, and the pain reached its limit. Yuder spat out a clot of blood through his tightly clenched teeth.

“...Ugh.”

His hand trembled, and a sharp ringing sound filled his ears. But the power did not stop.

The swirling force within him finally gathered everything that remained inside Yuder, rising like a flame meeting a massive wind. Simultaneously,

The black stain that had long covered his left eye seemed to melt away, engulfed in a golden light as if burning.

‘Go...!’

Without knowing what had happened to his eye, he sent the stream of water, which spread like a wave in the air, flying towards the enemy like a shot arrow. The southern merchant, staggering to his feet, saw this and desperately moved his hands to exert his power, clearly attempting to block the stream.

And Kishiar, not missing this opportunity, quickly retreated and rushed toward Yuder.

Yuder saw his outstretched hand and reached out as well.

The moment their hands grasped and pulled each other, the sound of shelves collapsing one after the other, pulled down by the last force sent by Kishiar, rang out from behind them.

Turning

Chapter 399

He ran forward, relying on the warmth of the hand he was holding.

As soon as he re-entered the passage they had come through, Yuder moved the earth without looking back. Darkness could no longer hold him back. With a loud noise, the solid stone walls and stairs crumbled and collapsed, blocking the passage. At the same time, hot blood explosively flowed from Yuder's nose once more, but he did not feel it.

Only after the echoing noise had subsided did the person holding Yuder's hand stop. He pulled on the hand, signaling to move forward, but Yuder did not follow. Turning his head, he saw a pale face hidden in the darkness, looking down at Yuder with an expression he had never seen before.

"...The blood."

With a groan-like whisper, Kishiar pushed Yuder's cloak back and took it off. Simultaneously, the revealed golden left eye caught his fingertips' attention, but until the hand reached his own eye, Yuder had not realized what had happened to it.

He realized the anomaly when he looked at his own face, reflected small in Kishiar's eyes.

'...What is that?'

The left eye, which had been filled with an unremovable black stain no matter what he had done, was no longer there. But what did the bright golden light emanating from within mean?

He doubted his eye, looking closer, but the light did not fade. The light flowing from within the pupil, as if someone had lit a lantern, was neither an illusion nor a delusion.

'What on earth is this...?'

The brilliant light, as if gold had been melted, strangely resembled the magic possessed by Kishiar. It felt as if he were looking at Kishiar's magic swirling and shining within the small window of the pupil.

More unusual than his blood-stained, messed-up face and clothes was that eye, and as he gazed blankly at it, Kishiar closed his eyes, and the only mirror Yuder could look into also disappeared.

Only then did Yuder calm his boiling excitement and look down at himself. Although his body was still tingling in pain, the intense pressure, which felt as if something would burst out just moments ago, had disappeared. Compared to before he expelled the water, it was no exaggeration to say that only remnants of the pain remained.

'It literally feels like something burst... burst for sure.'

The disappearance of the stain that covered his eye was a good sign. He didn't know exactly what was what, but it seemed that he had managed to control the poison's strength that spread through his body in the chaos. The medicine created by Enon, based on the research of Hellem and Mick, had finally fulfilled its role faithfully.

His mind felt lighter after confirming success, but it felt quite difficult to figure out how to start explaining to the speechless Kishiar.

'I didn't realize I had lost so much blood... He must have been incredibly shocked. I must tell him first that it's not as bad as it looks.'

"...Comm."

Commander. He opened his mouth to call him that, but the blood still pooled in his mouth flowed thoughtlessly, causing his attempt to fizzle. As Yuder wiped his face roughly with his sleeve, the man, watching with a grim expression, exhaled deeply.

After a while, long fingers reached out and gently wiped away the blood smeared below his lips. Yuder realized a little late that the hand was much colder than usual.

"You don't need to open your mouth now."

An utterly composed and elegant voice that was low enough to send chills down the listener's spine echoed in the darkness.

"Report back, and then we shall discuss."

Kishiar never lost his calm, no matter the situation.

He treated crises as unexpected joys during a game, laughing off failure as nothing more than a silly joke, yet never losing sight of reality in blind rage. He knew how to plan rationally for a distant future.

But in this very moment,

Yuder saw an unmistakable deep scar hidden within the seemingly composed eyes of the man.

A soul-shaking, shocking sensation briefly swept over Yuder's entire body, chilling him to the core. He hurriedly opened his mouth, desperate to explain.

"I'm fine. This blood is... not because of an injury....."

"I said we will discuss it later."

A hand reached out and lifted him before he could blink. There was no opportunity to request to be put down.

"..."

Yuder heard the rapid heartbeat of the man who was urgently moving, holding him tight in the dark. Though the man's face and voice hid his emotions, the pulse racing as though about to burst could not be concealed.

A sound so desperate and pressing that it pained Yuder into silence.

The moment Yuder heard that small and rapid sound, holes inside his body seemed to open all at once, twitching as though the pain was subsiding.

What could he say to that sound?

Taking medicine was an unquestionably right choice, but the quietly moaning holes brought a familiar yet new pain to Yuder Aile.

He somehow felt like he understood the sentence they had been silently screaming all along.

You will regret it.

You will regret it...

'...Have I done something to regret again?'

Yuder squinted his eyes. A sharp pain throbbed in his head.

...

"What is this?"

Yuder roughly placed a piece of paper down before the smiling man. A mere glance would reveal what it was about, but the man feigned ignorance, jokingly.

"This is the thirteenth report about the unrest in Peletta."

"Oh my, thirteen reports. His Majesty must be tired of checking them all."

"You can't claim to be unaware that these reports keep coming, more frequent and negative. Why did you expel the Imperial Knights staying in Peletta?"

"Do you know how much they've been eating at my castle without working since I returned to Peletta? Margaret was angry, saying she couldn't feed them anymore. If I didn't deal with it, I might not get my meal either."

"Are you joking even now?"

"I'm serious... What response were you expecting? That I should rebel since we've shared a bed for a long time?"

Yuder was speechless at the man's smug smile. He took a breath, calming his excitement before he could speak again.

"...Why don't you deny it?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You could deny that going to Peletta and passing on your position doesn't mean you won't acknowledge the Emperor. You can say you'll reduce the scale of the Peletta Knights if they cause unrest, and you can explain the goods that were said to be heading to the castle if you want to."

"They call me Commander once again."

At the sound of the laughter-laden voice, his mouth automatically closed.

"It has been almost a year since you became Commander, yet you have not adapted to it? I hear the Emperor was quite impressed with the strength of the new Cavalry Commander."

"..."

How could the words on his lips disappear so suddenly? But he felt too wronged to reply, so Yuder only gnawed at his lower lip. Kishiar, who was watching, picked up a piece of paper in front of him with a leisurely gesture.

"...This, too, is the same. To bring something that should never be taken out to the person in question. Do you still think of yourself as a member who can fix things if you mess up? If our new Emperor had

known about this, he would never have let it go. Perhaps the beheading of a traitor would have been the responsibility of the new Cavalry Commander."

"...!"

Yuder knew it too, of course. Secretly stealing a report that went directly to the Emperor, especially one related to treason, was a grave crime. The man before him didn't know how much contemplation had led to this action. Probably, he didn't even want to know.

Although he knew that would be the case...

Yuder clenched his teeth and bowed his head as silent footsteps approached him. A hand in a white glove delicately folded the paper and handed it back to Yuder. The moment the cold touch of leather brushed against his fingertips, his shoulders shuddered. The paper didn't make it into Yuder's hand and fell limply, rolling around.

"...Yudrain."

The man with golden hair whispered, looking at the paper.

"You're fearless, and that's the problem. But I won't deny that it fascinates me."

"..."

"But there's a limit to what I can overlook out of mere interest. Even though you're young, don't you know what the priority is? Did you think that if I denied the rebellion, you'd simply believe me?"

Of course not.

His heart grew cold. A chill wind blew.

"I suppose I must go now."

Kishiar, bending at the waist, picked up the fallen paper again. This time, he extended his fingers and handed it over personally, his movement gentle enough to feel oddly affectionate...

Turning

Chapter 400

'...Ah.'

Yuder suddenly realized that the disappearing figure of Kishiar was not reality. The conversation they had just shared was a thing of the long-forgotten past.

An old dream.

With that realization, both the familiar sight of the dressing room and the figure of Kishiar vanished, leaving Yuder alone in darkness.

Staring into the unending darkness, Yuder looked at his hand to find that only a piece of paper Kishiar had handed him still remained. The coldness and anger, the unidentified emotions that Yuder of the past had felt, welled up inside his chest like a mirage, only to fade away weakly.

'Yes. Back then, I... I took this out and showed it to Kishiar.'

Unlike some forgotten memories, this was one of the conversations that remained relatively vivid in his mind. However, although the conversation itself remained impactful, the emotions and thoughts he had felt that day had dimmed and blurred with time, making some parts feel strangely unfamiliar.

The never-formally-accused treason suspicion against Duke Peletta.

But at the time, couriers had been busily going back and forth to the Sun Palace beneath the surface. The Emperor of Katchian had not revealed any particular reaction, but he indirectly showed his caution and warning by keeping an eye on Peletta.

Yuder threw the paper, unable to understand the man who entered the Commander's room over the wall with a calm face, whether he knew about it or not.

Had Duke Peletta Kishiar La Orr truly shut himself away in his estate with the intention of rebelling?

Were the ominous rumors secretly circulating the palace all true?

...Could he truly harbor the intent to rebel?

What Yuder probably wanted to confirm the most was the third question. In fact, when Yuder first heard the rumors about Kishiar's suspected rebellion, his immediate thought was, "What treason could there be from such a person?" Rebellion seemed ludicrous. The man was too frivolous, and everything about him seemed meaningless.

He had abandoned his handcrafted Cavalry without regret, shown no sadness at the death of his last blood relative. He escaped from Peletta because he had no gaming partners and jumped over the Cavalry's wall. Yuder could not fathom what he was living for.

Could someone who seemed to find no meaning in anything really harbor the intent to rebel? What would be the point?

The new Emperor had become the adoptive son of the previous Emperor through legal means, ascending to the throne after holding the position of Crown Prince. No one doubted that the previous Emperor had died of a natural disease. Although the situation was somewhat chaotic at the beginning of the new reign, many citizens welcomed the arrival of a young, energetic, and healthy Emperor. Even to the inexperienced eyes of the new Cavalry Commander, it was clear that the Emperor's position would soon become unassailable.

Yet, another thought crossed his mind.

If someone could so easily evade surveillance and rush to the Capital in an instant, wouldn't it be entirely possible for him to hatch a plot out of the Emperor's sight?

Was there truly nothing behind his strange and secretive facade?

Could the belief that he couldn't possibly harbor the intent to rebel be a horribly wrong judgment, as Kishiar had put it, made because they had "shared a bed for so long"?

Despite having been intimate with the man for so long, Yuder had nothing he could be certain of. Therefore, he had to ask in order to find the answer.

And the answer that returned shattered every nameless fragment of emotion inside Yuder, summoning a bitterly cold winter.

After that time, Kishiar never sought out his room again. Yuder also bolted the window through which the man used to pass and never reopened it.

Having thought up to that point, Yuder let go of the paper he was holding. The piece of paper, lost in the darkness, vanished without a trace.

'Perhaps then... I wanted to believe Kishiar.'

As time went on, looking back once again at that era, he saw something he hadn't felt back then.

At that time, Yuder might have wanted to believe in Kishiar more than he thought he did. Could he really have not known the expectation and fear that shone brightly in the unweathered face?

The word 'priority' that Kishiar left behind at that time had a sufficient effect in stimulating the sense of responsibility that was still unfamiliarly resting on Yuder's shoulders. Especially since it was a turbulent time with protests related to the existence of the first Cavalry Commander of commoner origin and the treatment of the Awakeners.

Whether they liked it or not, the status of the Cavalry was undoubtedly closely related to the treatment of the Awakeners throughout the empire, and Yuder was the only one who could protect all of them. It

was too difficult and heavy a task for someone who had lived alone without ever taking responsibility for anything, but after that time, he forgot the weight.

The anger and disappointment left by Kishiar La Orr made all of that possible.

He refused to admit it then, so he never even thought about it, but now he seemed to understand.

Yuder wanted to keep the Cavalry intact, so easily left behind by Kishiar La Orr.

From the moment he realized that he could no longer rely on anyone.

To stand on his own and move forward on his own.

Furiously.

‘But thinking about it now, that too is probably...’

Kishiar had returned the paper pulled out by Yuder twice. If he had wanted to use that fact, he could have easily taken advantage of Yuder at that time, but instead, he left something close to advice.

As a result, Yuder began to move with 'priority' in mind thereafter, as he mentioned, which was no different from following his words again.

Behind the old misunderstanding. Things that were hidden behind the unknown.

Yuder recalled the shadowed red eyes that had looked at him.

The deeply recessed, cold and gloomy eyelids, the lusterless, brittle ends of his hair, and the cheeks as pale as if the blood had stopped flowing. He had not found it strange because it was that man, but now that he knew the healthy version of him, nothing seemed normal.

'First of all, the situation in which Kishiar was in was like that.'

He didn't know it then, but now he knew the fact that the previous life's Kishiar might have suffered significant damage to his vessel not long after he had created the Cavalry.

Even in such a state, when Yuder suffered injuries that almost cut off both his arms, he knew that the wound healed for reasons that could not be explained unless Kishiar secretly used divine power.

He now knew that he had expected enough to tacitly approve of Kishiar's excuse of jumping the fence, using the tactical game he played with him as an excuse...

Did a real reason for Kishiar La Orr to rebel exist?

Were the things that he believed in then the truth?

Why hadn't he denied or affirmed the question?

He wanted to know.

Like the sudden realization of an unknown hunger, Yuder became acutely aware that he desperately wanted to know the answer.

'I want to know.'

Something that could not be understood by mere speculation.

The answer to something that had been lost, leaving countless empty holes within.

The secrets that Kishiar might have hidden from him, or perhaps had told him but were forgotten and might have vanished without him even knowing.

As he fiercely focused on this thought alone, a light suddenly burst forth from the darkness.

A familiar yet intense red energy obscured his vision, followed by a shimmering haze mixed with golden energy, enveloping it like a mist. The dreamlike and beautiful dance of light dazzled his eyes, and as they cleared once again, Yuder found himself standing once more in a dream of the past he had seen one day.

'...It's been a long time since this happened. I thought it was an illusion, but it's real; it's astonishing.'

A low voice that sounded incredibly elegant, though devoid of strength. Beyond the blurred view, he could see the face of a man sitting upright at a desk.

Gloved hands elegantly folded, and the interior of Peletta Castle he had seen just once.

It was Kishiar from that day.