

## Turning 41

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"I'll handle this quickly. The area within the wall is safe, so all you need to do is watch, Commander."

"Are you sure you can manage alone? From what I can see, there are at least ten of them."

Kishiar asked, glancing at the enemies with a look of interest. Like Yuder, he showed no signs of tension.

"No problem."

His casual tone, as if saying two plus two equals four, momentarily disrupted the enemies' murderous intent.

"Are you unable to grasp the situation? If you're choosing death...!"

'Does he sound like someone ready to die?'

Yuder shook his head at the masked figure. He sighed at the thought of having to expend energy against these people, who couldn't even properly assess his abilities.

"It's you who fail to understand the situation. You know the Red Stone is here, but you seem unaware of its nature - that it explodes the moment it comes into contact with an Awakener's body or abilities. If you falter, touching it could be fatal."

"What did you say?"

Of course, Yuder had no intention of wasting the limited power held by the Red Stone in such a way. However, the enemies would not know this and would likely flinch even if they believed his words to be

nonsense. In a battle between Awakeners, the one unable to fully use their abilities was at a distinct disadvantage.

"If you think we'll back down just because of that...!"

"Should I show you whether it's true or not? All we need to do is set up a defensive wall."

As if to make a point, Yuder moved his flame-encircled sword. The sight of the dancing flames caused tension to flicker across the enemies' faces.

They didn't know what abilities he had, but anyone who could easily snatch a sword, create a water barrier, and use flames while doing so was no less than a legendary mage. It was an incredible power.

"...What should we do?"

"Even so, we can't back down. It's a bluff."

Among the enemies, the one who seemed to be thinking the most called out loudly enough for the others to hear.

"No one knows we're here. He's just buying time. You'd better discard any hope that someone will come to help. If you want to lessen your suffering..."

"Goodness. Even when I explain kindly, you talk too much."

Before the enemy could finish his words, Yuder slightly swung his sword upward. Instantly, the flames surrounding the blade shot up like a pillar.

Boom!

It was a small pillar of fire, but its power was undeniable. The flame that pierced the ceiling and roof illuminated the night sky for a moment before disappearing. It was powerful enough for those far away to sense something unusual and rush over.

"..."

"Now everyone should know you're here."

Looking at the remnants of the fire falling from the sky through the shattered window, Yuder chuckled. The dumbstruck looks on the enemies' faces were quite amusing.

"And what was it you said? 'If you want to lessen your suffering?'"

Through the gaps in their masks, he could see their eyes trembling.

"I suggest you start hoping your suffering will lessen."

"Damn it. Everyone, attack at once!"

As the enemies rushed at him all at once, Yuder swung his outstretched arm.

'If you wanted to overpower us, you should have attacked the moment you broke in.'

Upon hearing Yuder's words, the enemies knew they couldn't fully utilize their abilities. After all, they didn't know the exact location of the Red Stone. But Yuder was the opposite.

Even a mere graze from his flame-engulfed sword sent the enemies screaming and collapsing. A normal sword might cause minimal damage with a slight cut, but when fire seeped into the wound, it was a different story.

The flames rapidly penetrated the wound, immediately spreading throughout the victim's body.

'Fortunately, they're all physical enhancement types.'

There was no one more familiar with the battles between Awakeners in the current world than Yuder. Those who strengthened their bodies appeared strong in close combat due to their high offensive power, but their defensive power was weak.

Even if they could enhance their skin, it wasn't invincible. Even the most conditioned individuals struggled to enhance softer parts of their bodies from the get-go, like the inside of their mouths or their eyeballs.

Yuder dodged a punch thrown by someone whose skin was as hard as stone and gently jabbed his sword into the opponent's eye before pulling it out.

"Argh!"

When another enemy attacked with nails elongated like a sword, Yuder momentarily erected a small ice wall, seizing the moment of hesitation to slash at their side. The burning smell accompanied the transfer of fire to the body.

Someone hurled a spell, but since it was ultimately made of metal, it was enough to direct it towards the ground, and he even managed to redirect a few back at their casters.

"Aargh!"

It took Yuder less than a few minutes to take down more than ten enemies. The mansion was filled with individuals who were scorched black and writhing in agony, unable to die.

"The wall will now be dismissed since it's over."

"Very well."

Yuder nonchalantly passed by these individuals, looking out through the broken window. He could see the torches carried by those rushing toward them from not too far away.

"Fortunately, no one has escaped."

Fearing that delaying would allow someone to escape, he resolved the situation as quickly as possible. He couldn't afford to let information about the Red Stone leak out.

Once Yuder verified the outside, he approached the pillar holding the Red Stone and brought the box containing it. Kishiar accepted it.

'Now then... shall we check the mastermind behind this?'

The moment Kishiar retrieved the stone, he eyed his private quarters. The enemy's intrusion was completely unexpected.

'I thought they would come after I left this place.'

The fact that so many had invaded meant that the enemy had prepared for this operation for a long time and had underestimated Kishiar.

In other words, the enemy wasn't someone who knew about Kishiar's power.

Had they been waiting for such a moment in the past? If so, it would make sense even if Kishiar had dealt with them wielding the divine sword.

Yuder checked the faces of the ones still breathing. Out of the thirteen, eight were dead, and five were still alive.

"Your Grace!"

"Commander!"

While Yuder extinguished the fire on the bodies of the living and gathered them in one place, the sound of General Gino and the Cavalry members' voices came as the door shattered.

"Your Grace, it's Gino. Are you all right?"

"There was an intrusion, but it was quickly suppressed. I'm fine, so be at ease."

At Kishiar's leisurely response, General Gino seemed to calm down.

"Due to the box, I cannot reach you. I will send someone."

Moments later, the Cavalry members passed through the corridor and entered the reception room. Their eyes, filled with urgency as they hastily put on their uniforms, turned to horror upon seeing the several bodies lying on the floor.

"My goodness. What in the world..."

"Don't come any closer, Kanna."

Although they were dead, one could never be too cautious. Yuder had Kanna, who lacked combat abilities, step back and then looked at Kishiar. As if waiting, Kishiar opened his mouth.

"These five are still alive, so I plan to interrogate them immediately. This place is messy, so let's move them to the next room."

"The next room...you say?"

Gakane swallowed nervously and asked.

“Understood. But who exactly sent these people?”

“We’ll have to find out now.”

Yuder's calm response cast a cold atmosphere over the room, which was broken by Kishiar's low chuckle.

“Yes, we’ll find out now.”

Gakane's shadow clone carried out the task of moving the intruders to the next room. The shadow clone, carrying all five people at once, strode into the room and threw them down.

“Kanna, Gakane, you two stand guard outside the room and make sure no one enters. Move the dead ones outside. The rest, come inside.”

“Yes.”

At Kishiar's simple command, everyone moved swiftly and efficiently. Yuder closed the door after making sure Eldore siblings, and Kishiar had all entered the room, preventing any sounds from escaping.

“Now then.”

Kishiar approached the groaning men, his relaxed smile gone. His cold, red eyes bore into the enemies.

“Who sent you? Answer me.”

“...”

Although they were clearly alive, the enemies did not answer. Kishiar turned his head quietly and looked at the Eldore siblings, who stepped forward.

“So, we just need to make them talk, right?”

“Leave it to us.”

The Eldore sibling’s specialty wasn’t their mobility, but their extraordinary physical enhancement abilities. Although there were many people with abilities to strengthen their bodies, the Eldore siblings’ abilities were quite exceptional.

As they stepped forward with their innocent faces, the siblings smiled, and their once slender arms and legs began to swell.

With thumping and ripping sounds, their clothes were torn apart without mercy. The enemies, who had been firmly clenching their mouths shut, began to tremble uncontrollably.

Moments later, two massive figures with rock-solid muscles stood where the Eldore siblings had been. It was the transformed Eldore siblings, their power activated.

‘Remarkable, every time I see it.’

Yuder thought that their ability was incredibly visually striking, as he looked at the cute faces attached to the grotesquely swollen bodies.

With their childlike innocence intact, their bodies had transformed like giants, causing most enemies to lose their will to fight and flee as if they had encountered a massive monster. The enemies before them seemed no different.

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"Finn. Should we start with the fingers? Or perhaps the toes?"



"I prefer toes."

"Fine. Let's crush the toes first."

"W-wait."

One of the enemies tried to crawl backwards, bowing his head. But Finn's foot moved faster.

"I'll talk. I'll talk... Wait! Aaaaagh!"

Thud. Finn stepped on the enemy's leg and a crumbling sound echoed.

"I'll... I'll talk...!"

"Hold on, wait...!"

The enemies gasped for air in unison, but Kishiar simply laughed and didn't stop the Eldore siblings.

Then, inside the room, the thumping sound of earth-shattering and faint screams reverberated.

"Ugh... ugh...!"

"So, ready to talk now?"

Kishiar casually asked again, looking at the enemies covered in burns, their faces wet with tears and snot.

"You attempted to assassinate a member of the imperial family. Your lives are already forfeit. Isn't it better to die cleanly than to be dragged off to the Pearl Tower for experimentation?"

"It might be more effective to say you'll spare the first one who talks."

Finn Eldore, back in his original form, suggested another method, tilting his head. Yuder also thought his method was much better.

"Really? Well then...."

"We, we wrote an... oath...."

Before Kishiar could finish, one of the fallen enemies murmured.

"We agreed... not to talk... so I can't..."

"An oath?"

A peculiar look crossed Kishiar's red eyes.

What they were talking about was probably similar to the magic oath that the Cavalry had used to promise not to disclose any information about the Red Stone retrieval mission.

Oaths were expensive and were rarely used except when those with considerable power were assigning important missions. Furthermore, they were not readily sold to just anyone.

This meant that the person who hired them had significant power. Kishiar, his eyes narrowed, turned towards Yuder.

"Yuder, keep this for a moment."

He handed a box containing the Red Stone to Yuder and approached the fallen ones.

'What is he trying to do?'

Yuder watched him curiously. Kishiar was known to have great physical abilities, as far as Yuder knew.

Breaking the power of an oath was not impossible, but it was known to be feasible only for high-ranking mages or priests.

"Keep what you've just seen a secret."

Kishiar turned to the Eldore siblings and Yuder, winked playfully, and extended his hand. Then a white light emanated from his fingertips, enveloped them, and faded after a moment.

'...Is that divine power?'

Yuder, who always maintained his composure, was momentarily taken aback. If his eyes weren't deceiving him, what he just saw was undoubtedly the power used by the priests of the Sun God to purge impurities.

"It's a useless power passed down through the blood. I never thought I'd use it like this."

The Eldore siblings, oblivious to all this, showed no reaction, but Yuder was different. The imperial bloodline had divine power? This was something he had never heard of, even when he had served the emperor closely in his previous life.

Moreover, Kishiar had never mentioned to him that he had such a power, not even at the moment of his death.

'There used to be Awakeners among the priests. But...'

Their numbers were too few, and those who did possess powers had abilities that were embarrassingly weak. As a result, the idea that divine power and the power of the Red Stone neutralized each other became accepted as a standard.

The fact that there wasn't a single priest-origin Awakener in the Cavalry until Yuder's death added credibility to this notion.

However, Kishiar was a powerful individual even among the Awakeners. Moreover, he was acknowledged by the divine sword, which was notoriously selective about its wielders.

The individuals the divine sword had chosen as its masters, though not at the time of acceptance, eventually all became sword masters with strength significant enough to make history.

There had been no precedent of a sword master becoming an Awakener, but it existed in the future. About a year later, one of the sword masters in a foreign country would awaken, serving as that very example.

And while not of the sword master level, there were quite a few instances of strong knights who knew how to use aura becoming Awakeners. So Yuder didn't find it strange that Kishiar, who was acknowledged by the divine sword, had become an Awakener.

However, there had never been a case of someone with such strong divine power that they could break the power of the oath becoming a powerful Awakener.

If he was deemed worthy of the divine sword's approval, then it was certain that Kishiar had the skill to become a sword master, even if not right now.

But on top of that, he possessed such extraordinary divine power that he could forcibly break the power of the oath, and furthermore, he awakened as a powerful Awakener?

That was truly an inconceivable matter.

Was such a case even possible? Even to Yuder, who could manipulate five attributes at will, it seemed like an absurdly far-fetched idea.

To his knowledge, there wasn't a single human who possessed all three aspects: the power of the Awakeners, aura, and divine power. Despite seeing Kishiar use divine power right in front of him, it was still hard to believe.

He had assumed that the reason Kishiar, despite having powerful abilities, didn't fully use his power was simply due to his leadership style, prioritizing command. But in truth, he could also use divine power and wanted to keep it a secret?

'What could be the reason for wanting to keep it a secret?'

If he was hiding such an unparalleled ability, there must be a reason. And perhaps that reason might provide the answer to the questions about Kishiar's death that remained for Yuder.

Kishiar La Orr, who at the moment of death, as if he had been waiting for it, quietly accepted everything and did nothing.

A duke in name only, unable to vie for the emperor's succession, and a man who had lived a lifelong bachelor. He had always wondered why such a smart and capable individual had accepted his position without vying for the emperor's throne.

If Yuder had the same power and had been born a prince, he would never have lived in such obscurity.

'When I get back, I'll have to investigate whether divine power truly descends to the imperial bloodline, and how the other dukes of prince origin who lived like Kishiar fared.'

While Yuder was lost in thought, Kishiar continued to interrogate the intruders nonchalantly.

"Now, you should be able to talk. Answer me, who sent you?"

"W-we, we don't exactly, um, know ourselves."

The intruder answered, gasping in pain.

"We are all mercenaries from different places. Our client never revealed their identity and only contacted us through intermediaries and letters..."

"Mercenaries?"

The Eldore siblings muttered to each other, glancing at each other's faces. Only then did Yuder stop his thoughts on Kishiar and lift his head.

'Not professional assassins, then... I see. They were all mercenaries.'

"You must have heard something from your client beforehand. What did you know when you came here? What were you planning to do after stealing the Red Stone? Or was the Red Stone just an excuse, and the client wanted me killed?"

"No, no."

At Kishiar's question, the intruder cried out with a contorted face.

"We're lowlifes, but we know we won't die a decent death if we do such a thing. Assassinating an imperial family member, we wouldn't accept such a request."

"How amusing. Assassinating an imperial family member is scary, but stealing the Red Stone is fine?"

When Hinn added her comments as if for the intruders to hear, regret and anger flashed across the bloodied faces of the intruders.

"...The client said there would only be one person, Duke Peletta, staying here. If we timed it right, we could have handled it easily. We didn't think anyone else would be here."

Fearful eyes discreetly turned towards Yuder. Even without moving a finger, Yuder, as reflected in the intruders' eyes, was as good as a grim reaper.

But Yuder was not looking at him. If those words were true, this was no ordinary problem.

'The information was completely leaked.'

Yuder took a fleeting glance at Kishiar's expressionless face. When was it decided that he would come here to retrieve the Red Stone? Whoever planned this daring act must have accessed that information very early. There was no doubt about it.

Furthermore, the fact that the location where Kishiar was staying was reported in real-time meant that the instigator was much closer than expected.

"Seems like they knew this place very well. Was that all the information they gave you?"

At Kishiar's question, the intruders hurriedly responded, each adding a little more information.

"No, at first they just told us to go to the Orr Empire and wait until the messenger arrived."

"We waited at the edge of the mountain range for a few days, and then we received a letter yesterday to move here...!"

"We were told to observe the mansion and if it seemed like the Red Stone had been retrieved, to invade and steal it. We really thought we only had to steal the stone. After retrieving it, we were to return to our original hiding place and wait until the client contacted us...!"

"A letter that arrived yesterday..."

Kishiar murmured meaningfully, narrowing his eyes. Surely, he must have realized what Yuder was thinking.

Even the Cavalry members who came to retrieve the Red Stone in person had only just found out that only the Awakeners could approach the Red Stone.

Therefore, the likelihood that the one who sent the intruders knew this fact in advance and gathered only the Awakeners was very low. Yet the fact that they sent only the Awakeners meant they deemed it necessary to have people with powerful abilities.

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Yuder visualized the unknown client in his mind. A figure of wealth and power, and incredibly meticulous. Likely, the client had chosen to hire mercenaries to ensure that even if the tail was stepped on, no harm would come to them.

They had gathered and dispatched over ten Awakeners, probably figuring that would be enough to confront a Kishiar and obtain what they wanted.

Had they known the extent of Kishiar's power, they would have realized that a dozen or so were insufficient. However, by sheer coincidence, Yuder's presence at the site was the client's downfall.

"The client had a proxy, you said. How did you contact them?"

"Th-they were always different people. Moreover, since we entered the Orr Empire, the proxy never appeared in person. It was always through letters..."

"Naturally, you burned all the letters."

"...Yes."



Kishiar fell silent, seemingly lost in thought. His gaze drifted to the box Yuder held. The box, containing the Red Stone, still radiated a heavy and sharp aura.

"Alright. I'll ask one last thing. If you were successful in retrieving it, where were you planning to take it?"

Where could they hide from the watchful eyes of the numerous Imperial soldiers patrolling the mountains, who had been guarding the Red Stone? Where could these ten or so people be hidden?

Everyone's gaze turned to the intruder's mouth.

"That place, it's, from here... uh...uh?"

Suddenly, the man who had been speaking choked and bent over, retching.

"Cough, hack. Urgh, aah!"

The man's body started to swell grotesquely at a rapid pace, turning a violet hue. Seeing his eyes bulging as if they were about to burst, Yuder felt an ominous premonition.

"A barrier!"

Instinctively, he created a barrier of water and air around everyone just as the man's body exploded. A black mass spread in all directions, releasing a toxic energy into the confined space.

"...What on earth happened?"

After the explosion subsided, Finn mumbled, his mouth agape in a daze. The scene that had unfolded was truly horrific. Even the remaining intruders, who had still been alive, were now all dead.

The room, from ceiling to floor, had transformed into a terrible sight, melted by the toxic energy. If Yuder had not quickly put up a barrier, they would have shared the same fate.

"What was that noise... Commander! Are you okay?"

Gakane, who had startled and opened the door, was shocked at the sight inside the room.

"I'm fine. Is everyone else alright?"

Even Kishiar looked around with a furrowed brow, seeming surprised by the unexpected event.

"We're fine."

"We're okay too."

After Yuder and the Eldore siblings responded, Kishiar's gaze turned to the box holding the Red Stone. Yuder subtly nodded to confirm that it too was intact. The Red Stone in his hand was safe, and so were his companions.

"That was a close call. I didn't expect they would have laid a double layer of the Oath's prohibition."

"The Oath's prohibition? But you said you broke it, Commander."

"Yes, I definitely did break one. But I didn't expect that they would use two different types of Oaths."

At Hinn's question, Kishiar let out a dry chuckle. It wasn't laughter born of genuine amusement, but more of disbelief that their enemy could have gone so far, something they hadn't anticipated.

"Originally, only one oath could be written at a time. But occasionally, there are cases where people use illegally made oaths to impose a double prohibition. The stronger the prohibition becomes, the more terrible the consequences of breaking it, a wicked strategy indeed. We've been outplayed."

During his time as the commander, Yuder had seen people imposing double prohibitions to control others. Such people usually knew the prohibition imposed on them very well and never dared to speak about it.

But those who had just died unexpectedly seemed completely unaware that a double prohibition had been placed on their oath. If they had known, even if Kishiar had used his power to lift the prohibition once, they would not have opened their mouths so easily.

'...Did they deliberately create this situation?'

The body of the man, shattered into pieces by the swelling prohibition, was saturated with a potent poison, lethal at the slightest touch. If it had grazed his comrades or Kishiar, even if it didn't kill them, it would have caused severe injuries.

Yuder felt an astounding, silent malice directed towards Kishiar. Now, with Yuder present, they could fend it off, but what about before his return? Had Kishiar also faced such attacks before, and was he truly unscathed?

"Commander, do you have any suspicion about who might be behind this?"

Yuder asked Kishiar quietly.

"Well..... I'm not sure yet."

Kishiar shook his head, his expression inscrutable, making it unclear whether he genuinely had no suspicions, or if he had some idea but did not wish to share it with his team.

"Unfortunately, we couldn't find out where they were hiding, so I plan to order General Gino to spread out and search."

"Now?"

"The sooner we find them, the higher the chances of finding traces they didn't manage to erase."

After saying this, Kishiar looked again at the box quietly nestled in Yuder's embrace.

"However, we should not participate in the search and should leave immediately. Pack up and get ready to move out, despite the fatigue."

Kishiar seemed to feel strongly that they could no longer remain here. Yuder agreed. It was the middle of the night, and they couldn't move alongside the Peletta Knights, so it would be dangerous, but being away from this place, which was under the unseen gaze of an unknown enemy, might be better.

"Understood."

The team members, with serious expressions, began to exit the mansion one by one.

Yuder looked at the bodies strewn on the floor, the shattered windows, the broken ceiling, and the destroyed furniture, and thought that the mansion's owner would shed quite a few tears later. The elegance of the mansion when they first entered had long since vanished.

"Yuder."

As he was about to turn around, Kishiar quietly called his name from behind. When he looked back, Kishiar was staring at the box containing the Red Stone again.

"Ah, I almost forgot to return the box to you, Commander."

Yuder, interpreting the gaze as a silent command to return the box, reached out his arm.

"No, the box is fine. But your hand, what happened to it?"

...Hand?

Only then did Yuder realize that it was not the box but his own hand holding it that had caught Kishiar's attention.

'Ah. That spot where the energy from the Red Stone exploded through yesterday... Hmm?'

On the back of Yuder's hand, a purple bruise had swelled to the size of a small bird's egg.

It hadn't been that large when he had gone to retrieve the Red Stone earlier in the day. It was a tiny bruise, as if punctured with a nail. When exactly had it grown this much?

There was no pain, and he hadn't felt any signs of the bruise growing, so Yuder looked at it in surprise.

'It's definitely bigger, it's not just my imagination.'

"Judging by your expression, you only just noticed," Kishiar said, apparently guessing the situation from Yuder's expression and sighing softly.

"I wanted to see the extent of your abilities, but I didn't wish for you to get injured in the process."

"No, it's not that. I didn't know because it didn't hurt."

"So, what does that make me, who said I'd treat you well?"

With that, Kishiar extended a hand towards Yuder. His palm faced upwards, as if inviting him to dance. Yuder was momentarily captivated by the elegant movement, almost forgetting they were inside a half-destroyed mansion.

"Put your hand here, I'll treat it. You should put the box down, just in case it reacts."

"...Are you going to use your divine power?"

"What else could it be?"

Kishiar's response was gentle when Yuder asked out of curiosity. He wanted to say it was okay, but his curiosity to verify if Kishiar could truly use his divine power was stronger.

As Yuder hesitated and put the box down, Kishiar immediately grabbed the bruised hand.

Yuder unknowingly tensed his shoulders.

"Relax. This is a pure contact with no impure intentions."

Kishiar whispered lowly, a twinkle in his eyes, as if he had sensed Yuder's movement.

"...I wasn't thinking that way."

"Hahaha."

Kishiar burst into laughter at Yuder's stiff response.

Living and working alone for a long time, Yuder's hand was knotted and scarred. Unlike his, Kishiar's hand was pale and smooth.

But that beautiful hand was surprisingly cold and hard, like a swordsman's hand hardened by the hilt of a sword.

The touch of that hand, which he had long forgotten, tried to force back memories into Yuder's mind.

Yuder bit his lip and tried to suppress unnecessary thoughts. From Kishiar's hand, a white light flowed out, gently covering the back of Yuder's hand. It was an unmistakably divine power, even more certain when felt directly.

'At this level, it would be among the top ranks of the priests of the Sun God.....'

"Is it that surprising for me to use divine power?"

Kishiar asked softly. Yuder was startled for a moment, thinking his thoughts had been read, but then he nodded.

"...Yes."

"Well, it's understandable, given that very few people know about this."

"Can... Can His Majesty the Emperor also use such divine power, besides you?"

"Of course, he can."

The answer came easily, as if it was the most natural thing.

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"Why then, do you keep that fact a secret? There's no need to hide it, is there?"

"I suppose so. But it's a power that, when revealed, wouldn't bring much good. It's as if it might as well not exist. I think it's better to believe it doesn't from the start."

At such a seemingly jesting response, Yuder blinked in puzzlement, to which Kishiar responded with a smile.

"Seeing you risk your life and use your strength to save others time and time again is what made me decide to use this power. If it were revealed that I've used it, my adjutant Nathan would be furious. He might even forbid me from going out at night. So, keep it a secret, will you? Let it be our little pact."

Yuder stared at Kishiar's smile, unable to discern what was truth and what was deception.

Could someone truly exist who, for such a simple reason, wouldn't use their healing power until the moment of their death? But he couldn't ask the Kishiar of the past for an answer.

"...I understand. But, may I ask one more thing?"

"Sure, as long as it's not whether I possess the power of the awakened, the divine power, and the power accumulated as a knight."

Yuder was momentarily lost for words. Kishiar smiled, looking like a boy who had successfully played a fun prank.

"You're the only one in this place who knows that I was chosen by the divine sword. I guessed you'd have questions as soon as you saw me use divine power."

Kishiar's red eyes, like a sun illuminating all, seemed to read everything in a person's mind. His nonchalance, despite seemingly having figured out Yuder's thoughts yet not hinting at it until now, was masterful.

"...Is that possible?"

Yuder asked softly, deliberately omitting the subject 'the three powers'. Though his comrades had left and there was no one within earshot, one could never be too sure.

"Well, what do you think?"



"If it's true, then what in the world could harm you?"

That is, assuming he deliberately chose not to dodge an incoming attack.

"...Even if anyone charges at you, they wouldn't stand a chance."

Kishiar, adept at reading people's intentions, couldn't discern the fleeting memories of the past that had momentarily flickered in Yuder's dark eyes.

"Haha, you're more skilled at flattery than I thought. I never would've guessed, considering you never seemed the type to say things just to please."

"I merely stated the truth."

"Yes, your words might indeed be true. But, what does it matter?"

A strange look briefly flitted over his red eyes.

"No matter what I possess, it's meaningless to me. What I truly need isn't anything like that."

His words suggested that all of it was insignificant. Yuder was once again at a loss for words.

Such things?

To belittle the incredible notion of a single human possessing the power of an Awakener, divine power, and aura...

The Kishiar he had met upon returning to the past was even more mysterious and unfathomable than the one he remembered. Even Yuder, who had experienced all sorts of things and grown over the past decade, couldn't clearly comprehend him.

"Then, what do you believe you need, sir?"

"Do you want to know that?"

The once youthful, carefree, and world-weary energy in Kishiar's gaze vanished in an instant. He once again adopted the leisurely and languid countenance of a duke, his eyes gently curving.

"Accept the position of Cavalry assistant, then."

"Assistant... please wait a moment. There's no such position, is there?"

Indeed, no such position existed in the past. Kishiar had delegated all assistant duties to his adjutant, Nathan Zuckerman. Anything relating to the Cavalry was entrusted to the deputy commanders, including Yuder. It had always been sufficient. But now, a position as Cavalry Assistant?

"Just make one. It seems like you're reluctant to take on the role of Deputy Commander, so I thought about creating a comfortable position that no one would be responsible for."

Kishiar responded in a smooth tone, as if he had thought of this all along.

"The Cavalry has been established not too long ago, so it should be possible to create such a position. I'm very fortunate."

"..."

"So, you don't like this idea either?"

Kishiar's hand, radiating a white light, tightened its grip on Yuder's hand. With his treatment not yet complete, Yuder had no choice but to neither resist nor flee.

Yuder shot a somewhat disrespectful look at the man before him, who seemed to thoroughly enjoy seeing him in a predicament.

"Why do you value me so highly?"

"Isn't it obvious? Your determination to repay those who threaten your life with their own lives, your excellent judgement to protect others at the cost of your own safety. Your combat skills are as proficient as a knight who's been through countless battlefields. If I don't value you highly, then who should I value?"

"I'm not the only one like that. Everyone else was the same."

"The other members did very well too. But the calmness you showed is something that can't be acquired through just a few months of training. I highly regard that."

The light flowing from Kishiar's hand stopped. However, he still held Yuder's hand. In his grip, a certain determination could be sensed. Looking down at the hand held by Kishiar, Yuder opened his mouth.

"If I refuse again..."

"Then I will create the position of Cavalry Training Officer."

Even if he refused that offer, another similar one would follow.

Yuder realized that Kishiar had already made up his mind. When he had suggested it before, it felt somewhat tentative, but this time was different. As Yuder had rejoined the Cavalry, there were limits to refusing the Commander's will. Even more so if it was sincere.

"I understand."

In the end, Yuder nodded.

"You've made a wise decision. We'll discuss the details when we return."

Kishiar released his grip with a smile.

"...Hm?"

However, a moment later, he opened his eyes wide in rare surprise, his face a picture of confusion. Yuder also felt a sense of bewilderment.

"This is..."

The bruise on the back of his hand, which should have completely healed by now, hadn't vanished entirely. It had only shrunk to its original small size, a small, dark red spot remaining on the skin. The two fell silent, looking at the spot.

"...It wasn't an ordinary injury."

Kishiar's eyes narrowed.

"Tell me exactly how you got hurt, Yuder Aile."

There was no need to hide the reason for his injury. Yuder looked at his hand and opened his mouth.

"When the Gakane's shadow clone touched the Red Stone and exploded yesterday, I was a bit late in putting up the barrier. I think it's a trace of the energy from the stone that pierced through my hand."

"Energy from the stone?"

Kishiar furrowed his eyebrows as he looked at the box placed at Yuder's feet. His eyes seemed to race with countless thoughts in an instant.

"So... there's no pain?"

"Yes."

There was no pain even when the bruise grew. It was the same now. Yuder clenched and unclenched his fist lightly, feeling a strange sensation.

"That's fortunate at least. But if anything feels off, report it immediately. We will need to investigate the injury once we return."

"Understood. I will also check if the other comrades have similar injuries."

"Commander, Yuder! What happened inside? General Gino is worried."

Just then, Gakane's voice rang out. Kishiar and Yuder briefly met each other's gaze before rushing out of the mansion.

Outside the mansion were the Cavalry members, General Gino, the Peletta Knights who had rushed here without sleep, and the soldiers. General Gino and the Peletta Knights were able to stand at a similar distance as the Cavalry members, but others could not. Faces staring from afar were full of confusion.

Despite having protected the place for two years, the Imperial Army was of no help when those coveting the Red Stone infiltrated.

It was fortunate that Kishiar was unharmed; otherwise, it would have been a great calamity. Naturally, General Gino, who led them, didn't look well either.

"I'm glad to see Your Highness unharmed. However, the fact that those beasts could reach this place is my responsibility. It's deeply shameful. Now that they're all dead, what should we do?"

"I haven't been hurt at all, so don't worry, General. However, since the dead had been hiding around here for days, release your soldiers to search the vicinity immediately, and inform me as soon as you find anything."

"Understood."

General Gino turned around and immediately began giving orders to his soldiers loudly.

After most of the soldiers quickly disappeared, Kishiar called the general closer and said he would be leaving soon.

Having seen the audacious moves of the enemy, General Gino didn't stop Kishiar. He immediately called one of the soldiers who remained at his side.

"Go and fetch the Misty Wind Horses right away."

Despite it being late at night, preparations for departure were made in an instant. Kishiar, having draped a long cloak to cover his uniform, received the box containing the Red Stone from Yuder.

His figure, lightly leaping onto the Misty Wind Horse and grabbing the reins, resembled a manifestation of the Sun God who had emerged to illuminate the darkness.

"I will lead the way. The Cavalry members will follow right behind, and the Knights will follow as closely as possible. We will run without rest, so be careful not to lose your way."

"Understood!"

Turning

Chapter 45

The Peletta Knight, who had served as a guide on their journey, had given Kishiar the special magic stone that indicated he could handle all the horses.

When their lord, whom they should protect, decided to lead in the most dangerous situation, the Knights should have naturally tried to dissuade him, but they remained relatively calm. Yuder read an absolute trust and belief in Kishiar from them.

"We're setting off!"

Leaving General Gino behind, they departed from the Southern Army base. The mood was extremely heavy and solemn due to their sudden departure under unfavorable circumstances.

Eleven Misty Wind Horses ran unimpeded across the fields blanketed by the darkness of night. These horses faced no difficulty seeing in the dark, easily avoiding any obstacles in their path.

The bodies of the horses, glowing as if sprinkled with powdered pearls, were the only sources of light in the place. Yuder gripped the reins more tightly, enduring the chilling and hair-raising sensation.

No matter how convenient and fast a mode of transportation, an entity not born from nature was diametrically opposed to it.

Kishiar rode his horse in a completely different manner than when they had arrived. Thanks to the incredibly fast pace, harsh even, by the time day broke, they had already traveled far beyond the mountain range.

"Yuder. We need to talk."

Gakane, who had dismounted the horse to rest, approached Yuder and spoke in a lowered voice.

"What exactly happened yesterday? You took down those guys with the Commander, so you must know something more?"

"I'm not really sure."

In truth, Yuder had taken them down alone, but he didn't bother correcting Gakane. There was no benefit in flaunting his abilities.

"I was about to leave the box when they showed up. I just took them down to defend myself."

"How could so many of them have been here in advance? They figured out that we had recovered the Red Stone so quickly...."

"Kanna Wand. Come over here."

Just then, Kishiar called Kanna. Everyone's gaze instantly focused on Kanna. Surprised, Kanna, who was opening a water bottle, turned her head.

"Yes?"

"Can you read these items while we rest?"

Kishiar took out several items from his pocket. A torn glove, a broken dagger handle, and a shattered piece of dice. Yuder recognized them as belonging to the dead intruders.

It seemed he had taken them when he briefly entered the mansion before their departure.

"Of course. I'll give it a try."

Kanna's expression turned serious. She had been unable to shake off her worry, believing that she had been of no help in this mission. She took a deep breath at the opportunity that had come once again.

First, Kanna held the glove. As she closed her eyes and focused, a faint energy rippled within her palm.

"...I can only read personal information about the owner. This is the toughest material the owner possessed, so he often wore this glove during battles. And... he also used it when shaking hands with



someone. It seems like a very strong memory. He placed a large bag of money on top of the glove. After counting the money, he removed the glove and marked the count with his finger...."

After saying this, Kanna opened her eyes. She had made a lot of progress over the months, training and using her ability countless times.

Before she joined the Cavalry, there were many things she couldn't read, and most of the information she could decipher amounted to fragments of words. But now, she knew she could always decipher something. The information she could read had become much more detailed. Mostly, it consisted of the most potent memories related to the object.

"The one who gave the money is likely connected to the one I'm seeking."

Kishiar nodded and handed her the next object. It was a broken dagger handle. Kanna gripped it and focused once again.

"Fear. I can read the immense fear and regret the last person who held this felt. And resentment towards someone. The person who commissioned them... a stranger they'd never met... a noble from the Empire."

"A noble from the Empire?"

Gakane, who had been silently listening, asked in surprise. Kanna opened her eyes. Her blue irises were filled with a serious look.

"It's a word the person holding the dagger thought strongly of. They seem to have speculated among themselves that the identity of the person behind the commission might be a noble from the Empire."

The atmosphere turned cold in an instant at Kanna's words. The one to break it was Kishiar, who still bore a look of interest.

"Well... considering what they've done, it's not an impossibility."

"But why would a noble from our nation dare to act against our commander, a member of the imperial family? Isn't the commander's retrieval of the Red Stone for the peace of this nation? Why on earth would..."

As Gakane mumbled in confusion, Kishiar responded with a slightly deeper smile instead of an answer.

"Nobles have their own ways, Gakane Bolunwald. If everyone had the same loyalty as you, we would be quite comfortable by now."

It was a loaded statement. Gakane seemed taken aback, as if he'd said something inappropriate, but Yuder recalled memories from a past life.

In his previous life, Yuder had gained some insight into the power structure of the Empire by attending many parties and gatherings at the Emperor's command.

The people believed that the Emperor held the greatest power in the world and that those serving him were filled with genuine loyalty. But that wasn't the reality. The four Duke families, long-standing throughout the Empire's history, were as arrogant as if the nation had four additional kings.

Remembering the audacious faces of those even the imperial family had to tread lightly around, Yuder could understand what Kishiar meant. Indeed, nobles had their own ways.

"Now, the last object."

Kanna held the last object, a broken dice, in her hand. From her concentrated face with closed eyes, a deep focus unlike anything seen before emanated.

"The owner of this object... was addicted to gambling. They needed a lot of money. They had awakened their power, but seemed dissatisfied with their unchanged life. Besides, fear and regret... similar to the previous objects I read."

Kanna opened her eyes and looked at the commander's face. He was nodding with a satisfied look.

"Good. Thanks to you, we've obtained some interesting information. But can you read the stone inside the box?"

Kanna, who had just been smiling brightly at having her ability acknowledged, became serious again.

"I can only read the history of the box. I'm sorry."

"What a pity for such a good ability."

Kishiar expressed his regret sincerely. Yuder agreed as well.

How wonderful it would be if Kanna's ability had advanced enough to read stones without direct contact. Judging by the current rate of progress, it wouldn't take long.

However, if things went as they had in the past, Kishiar would head to the palace with the Red Stone as soon as he arrived in the capital. By then, even if Kanna's ability had developed, the stone would have already become the World Sphere.

'If only I could prevent or delay that.'

Previously, he had thought that the ignorant mages of the Pearl Tower had recklessly chipped away at the power of the Red Stone and damaged the original. But having participated in this mission and realizing the extraordinary power within the Red Stone, his thoughts had changed.

Several ways to protect the Red Stone whirled confusingly in Yuder's mind and then disappeared.

The easiest way, of course, was to make Kishiar himself realize the value of the stone. Then, he could persuade the emperor not to send the stone to the Pearl Tower.

Yuder's gaze stealthily turned toward Kishiar.

At the same time, in the imperial palace in the northern part of the Orr Empire's capital.

A man with grizzled hair and a young boy were sitting across from each other, setting up several intricately shaped pieces for a strategic game. At a glance, it seemed like an old man playing with his young grandson, but a closer look revealed that their relationship was not so close.

The old man's eyes were well-collected, cruel, and cunning, and the boy sitting in front of him had a fierce beauty that did not match his young age.

"The Duke of Peletta seems to have succeeded in his retrieval. He said he would be back soon," the old man muttered as he moved a piece on the board. His voice was nonchalant.

"Is that so?"

"Were you already aware?"

"I had to know naturally when the excitement in the Sun Palace reached the Bright Palace."

The Bright Palace was a palace built for the crown prince. And the boy, with the golden hair and red eyes characteristic of the Orr Empire's imperial family, was none other than Prince Katchian La Orr, who was to be the next emperor.

"Did you also hear about the incident of those who coveted it appearing in the middle?"

The old man added another piece to his offensive. Despite the aggressive move, the Crown Prince was not flustered. He skillfully moved his piece to dodge and opened his mouth.

"Yes, I heard about that too. They say the subordinates of the Duke of Peletta resolved it adeptly. They say the monsters came from somewhere."

"Unfortunately, it seems that has not been revealed."

"Indeed. Quite a pity. They could have been on good terms with us."

The words carried a ruthless intent, but the Crown Prince's expression was utterly calm.

"The Duke of Peletta is not the fool others make him out to be. He cunningly managed to establish that organization. He must never be underestimated."

"I thought he was a man too busy looking after himself to hide such a claw. It turns out those who scored this time were not Peletta Knights but members of a strange group the Duke established."

At that, the Crown Prince stopped moving his piece for the first time and lifted his head.

"Was its name the Cavalry?"

Turning

Chapter 46

"Was its name the Cavalry?"

"I believe so. Kiolle has been making quite a fuss about them."

The old man shook his head slowly, his brow furrowing.

"My ears are still ringing."

"Ah, due to the incident where he was humiliated by a commoner not long ago."

"I can't believe such a foolish one came from our house. We put him in the knight's order to gain some prestige, but instead of behaving, he came back humiliated by a mere commoner. It's a worry. He still doesn't understand what he did wrong."

"Don't be too upset, Duke Diarca. Not all children can be exceptional."

Upon hearing the young crown prince's cool comfort, the old man, Duke Diarca, smiled.

"That's true. It seems that all the outstanding abilities that run in our blood have been granted to you, Your Highness."

"You flatter me too much."

They returned their focus to the game. At first, the crown prince's pieces seemed to be simply avoiding those of the old man. But as time passed, surprisingly, the fleeing pieces began to knock down the old man's, starting to gain the upper hand. What seemed like retreat was, in fact, a meticulous strategy.

In the end, the game concluded with the crown prince's victory. The crown prince spoke as he toppled the last piece the duke had placed.

"His Majesty will bestow rewards upon Duke Peletta and his subordinates this time."

"To make a name for themselves throughout the continent, that would be best."

"I'm very curious about what grand game they plan to play, investing so much effort. My expectations are high."

"Is that all you're curious about? Aren't you finally going to see the famous stone? That's what I'm most curious about."

At the duke's words, the crown prince simply grinned.

"Yes, everyone will see it soon."

Duke Kishiar La Orr of Peletta returned to the capital, having successfully completed the secret mission assigned by the emperor. As his departure and return were both quiet, almost no one knew he had left his post.

Only Kishiar and those who journeyed with him felt a mix of emotions as they entered the capital. The worrying times, fearing someone might target the Red Stone before they returned to the capital, were over.

"You all did well."

Upon reaching the front of the Cavalry barracks, Kishiar dismounted and briefly praised everyone.

"It was a difficult journey, but thanks to you all, who willingly followed me, we were able to return safely. Neither I nor His Majesty will ever forget your hard work. As it's late, go rest now. After breakfast tomorrow, come up to where I'm staying."

The Peletta knights, who had kept a respectful distance due to the box containing the Red Stone, saluted with emotional faces. The Cavalry members' faces showed a mix of fatigue and pride.

Kishiar turned his head to look at the entrance of the quarters. His adjutant, Nathan Zuckerman, was already there. His gaze lingered on the small box in Kishiar's hand, clearly guessing what it contained.

"Nathan. We need to return the Misty Wind Horse, call someone."

"Understood."

"And after that....."

Yuder left behind the brief conversation that Kishiar was having with his lieutenant and headed into the quarters with his fellow Cavalry members.

The inside of the quarters, now shrouded in darkness, was not too dark, thankfully, thanks to the regular placement of glowstones. During the day, these stones looked ordinary, but at night, they shone as if a lamp had been lit. They were so expensive that even a well-off household could only afford a few.

That such stones were generously embedded throughout the quarters was testament to how highly Kishiar regarded his Cavalry.

"I'm really tired from riding non-stop. I want to go wash up and sleep right away."

"Me too. I hope they've cleaned while we were away."

The Eldore siblings yawned and chatted quietly. Nearby, Kanna was discussing with Gakane how it still felt like a dream that their mission had ended successfully. Everyone was in a peaceful mood with their tension relieved, but only Yuder was engulfed in deep silence.

However, the other members did not find his introspective demeanor odd, as he had often been lost in thought before. They well knew the remarkable things he had accomplished during this mission.

"Yuder, see you tomorrow."

"Rest well, and don't think too much."

Yuder nodded at his colleagues' greetings and entered his room. The room, designated for one person, was small, but it had everything he needed.

However, his gaze did not linger on the cleanly swept room, even though it had been cleaned in his absence. No sooner had Yuder placed his bag down and sat on the bed, than he rolled up his sleeve to inspect his hand.

'Still the same.'



The purple spot, which had not completely disappeared even after receiving Kishiar's divine power healing, had neither grown nor shrunk during his journey here. But Yuder could not be reassured. Despite his continuous pondering on the way, he could not figure out why the spot hadn't completely disappeared.

While returning, he had pulled his sleeve or crossed his arms to hide it from anyone's view. If someone noticed the bruise-like spot that inexplicably grew or shrank, it would attract unnecessary attention.

It was an injury sustained during a crucial secret mission they had sworn not to mention. To avoid any unnecessary trouble, he thought it would be best to get a separate glove.

'And I need to find out if there are similar curses or diseases like this spot, and if they can be cured.'

There had been many things he had planned to look into once he returned to the capital, but the spot had suddenly changed the priorities. He didn't like it, but he had no choice. If his body wasn't well, he wouldn't be able to do anything.

Yuder finally stopped his worries after thinking up to this point. The accumulated fatigue from his long journey without proper rest surged in like a burst dam.

He barely managed to undress and prepare for bed before collapsing onto it. Sleep washed over him as if it had been waiting.

'...I have no regrets. Just a little... disappointed.'

His voice held no strength, yet it sounded exceedingly elegant. Yuder blinked blankly. Through his blurred vision, he saw a figure.

A man sitting upright at a beautifully carved desk, wearing a faint smile. Under his faded golden hair, his darkened red eyes shimmered.

Yuder, upon seeing that smile, recognized who the man was, and when this scene took place.

The man was Kishiar La Orr, as he appeared on the day of his death at the Duke's mansion in Peletta.

The desk in front of him was carved from a unique wood that only grew in his territory of Peletta, as was the chair.

The rugged yet stylish stone fireplace was completely empty and incredibly dark, as though it hadn't been used in a long time. The only thing in that space that hadn't lost its light was the divine sword, which lay atop a transparent scabbard on the fireplace.

Everything was as vivid as reality, but it was undoubtedly a dream. An old memory was unfolding once again, of its own accord. Even though he was aware of this, Yuder couldn't escape from the dream.

Was this a kind of punishment, to have to watch this nightmare until the end once it had begun? He wasn't pleased, but there was nothing he could do about it. Yuder decided to hope that it would end quickly. According to his memory, he was about to swing his hand, and everything would end.

But then,

"What are you saying?"

Yuder was taken aback by the sound of his own voice in the next moment.

What on earth was happening? He had no memory of giving such a response. Unaware of Yuder's confusion, Kishiar opened his mouth again.

"...I wonder where it all went wrong. Thinking about it, it seems like it was when we retrieved the Red Stone."

"..."

"Yes... That's right. It must have been then that everything started going wrong. But even knowing that, I couldn't stop it. Because I had no other choice."

In Yuder's memory, Kishiar hadn't said anything like that as he faced death. Amidst the immense confusion, Kishiar's words seemed to continue, teetering on the brink of stopping.

"If the injury I sustained from touching that stone hadn't shattered my vessel....."

"..."

Yuder awoke with a start, drenched in cold sweat.

The familiar ceiling of his quarters greeted him. He had finally woken from his dream. However, he wasn't able to calm down easily and spent quite some time panting heavily. It was no wonder why.

In the dream, Kishiar and Yuder had a conversation that was not in the original memory.

And it was precisely about the retrieval of the Red Stone.

It felt too real to be simply a dream mixed with delusions. It felt so real that it seemed as if his original memory was the one that was wrong.

Holding his throbbing head, Yuder recalled the words that Kishiar had said in the dream. He was saying that everything went wrong from the injury he got when retrieving the Red Stone.

That was something that hadn't happened in reality. Currently, the one injured by the red stone was Yuder. He let out a long sigh while looking at the unchanging spot on the back of his hand.

'I should consider the possibility that what I thought I remembered from that day might not be the complete memory.'

Turning

Chapter 47

It was a story that didn't make sense in any conventional sense, but then again, being dead and returning to the past was already far removed from the realm of common sense.

Yuder pulled his hand away from his now calm head, the headache having subsided. Gradually, light was seeping in through the window. He was not likely to sleep anymore, so it seemed better to get washed early.

However, the moment he saw the small table set up in the room, the image of Kishiar from his dream unexpectedly resurfaced in his mind. Red eyes staring at him as he sat quietly at the desk.

Although he had claimed to be free of regret, the look in his eyes would have been impossible to believe for anyone who saw him.

What exactly was the emotion wavering in those eyes?

Had that really happened?

If something in his memory had been wrong up until now, where was the line between truth and lies?

Who dared to meddle with the memories of Yuder Aile? Yuder sighed as he wrestled with the unanswered question.

'Even if that memory was true... everything is different now.'

This time, Kishiar had not received any injuries during the operation to retrieve the Red Stone. Moreover, he had not used the divine sword when the invaders attacked. The fact that he was the master of the divine sword was still a secret known only to a few.

That was enough. So far, Yuder's objectives were proceeding smoothly. With a firm clench of his fist, he decided to be satisfied with that fact for now.

His hand bore a small, purplish bruise.

Yesterday, Kishiar had told Eldore siblings, Gakane, Kanna, and Yuder to come to where he was staying the morning after breakfast.

However, Yuder couldn't go down to the large dining hall where the Cavalry members gathered to eat. Thirty minutes before breakfast time began, someone knocked on his door.

It was Nathan Zuckerman, as always, his face calm.

"The Duke is asking for you."

"...Now?"

"Yes."

Yuder had assumed that Kishiar had summoned all the Cavalry members who had accompanied him on his mission because something urgent had come up.

But when he arrived, all he saw was Kishiar sitting leisurely alone in front of a table set for a simple meal. There were no other squad members in sight.

"You're here. Sit down."

Kishiar waved his hand in a light manner, holding a piece of bread cut into bite-size pieces, skewered with meat and vegetables. His demeanor was so casual that, if not for the setting, one might have mistaken it for a picnic.

Without realizing, Yuder turned his head to Nathan standing behind him. Nathan silently nodded. This meant that Kishiar had indeed called for Yuder alone.

With a slight sense of apprehension, Yuder made his way towards Kishiar, surveying his surroundings. He could feel the heavy and tingling aura of the Red Stone pervading the entire space, but he couldn't see the box containing the stone. It must have been placed somewhere deep inside.

"Why have you called for me alone?"

"Let's eat first and then talk. You haven't had breakfast yet, have you?"

Yuder looked down at the dishes set before him. He was slightly taken aback, not being able to guess the purpose of the summons, but it was indeed something Kishiar would do.

'Anyway, once Kishiar said let's eat and talk, he'd keep his word.'

Yuder, sensing that further speech would yield no results, sat down before him.

"It's all simple food that you can eat. There's no need to mind your manners, so feel free to enjoy. Just so you know, I like the dish that's right in front of me."

The dish Kishiar indicated with a casual nod was a food skewered on a wooden stick. It was made by grinding various grains into dough, shaping it into a round form, and grilling it. Inside, it was filled with a variety of ingredients, making it easy to eat and tasty.

While waiting for Yuder, Kishiar had already eaten a few, as evidenced by the neatly stacked empty wooden skewers on his plate.

Yuder, looking at it, slowly picked up a skewer. As he awkwardly opened his mouth and bit into the well-grilled white lump, a wave of heat spread in his mouth. The dish Yuder had chosen was filled with meat that had been stir-fried and seasoned with a savory sauce.

Despite his lack of appetite due to the nightmare he had the night before, he thought he could manage to eat a decent amount, as the food was not overwhelmingly flavored.

Quietly chewing his food, Yuder caught sight of the red eyes looking at him, smiling as if expecting something. He began to feel a strange sensation.

"Do you have something to say?"

"How's the taste?"

"..."

Yuder maintained a brief silence. It was difficult to ascertain whether the question was genuinely asking for his opinion about the taste, or whether it was a probe for something else.

"It's delicious..."

He responded in a mundane, safe manner. But it wasn't sincere. Yuder had never really experienced a craving for food in his previous life.

To him, there was no significant difference between the soup he ate at the rundown inn when he first met Gakane and the beautifully skewered dish he was eating now. If there was a way to live without eating, he would have been the first to adopt it.

"No, not such an insincere answer."

Kishiar shook his head.

"Being my assistant means you have to answer such questions sincerely. Now, answer again. How's the taste?"

Yuder's eyebrows twitched slightly.

'Surely being an assistant doesn't just involve answering questions about food?'

Was he just messing around? Anyway, if he wanted such a 'sincere' answer, he could give it. Yuder pieced together plausible words and spat them out in a lengthy response.

"Though simple in appearance, one can feel the care and time that went into making it. The flavor is mild and clean, making it suitable for a morning meal. I can't express what a great honor it is to share such a meal with you, commander."

There, was that alright? He'd done as requested, and he thought that would be enough, but Kishiar surprisingly shook his head again, a suppressed laugh shaking his shoulders.

"Disappointing. That's not the answer I wanted. You still don't get it?"

What was he supposed to understand from a question about taste? Yuder had never encountered such strange inquiries when he was Kishiar's assistant.

Of course, Kishiar had been a very peculiar person then, too, but at least he hadn't started off like this from day one of Yuder's deputyship. Feeling slightly frustrated, Yuder opened his mouth.

"I've been indifferent to the taste of food since birth. There's hardly any difference between gruel and gourmet cuisine on my tongue, so whatever I say, I fear it won't satisfy you..."

"That's it."

"Pardon?"

"That honesty, that's what I wanted."

Yuder blankly stared at Kishiar, who was finally nodding with a satisfied expression.

"Do you really expect the one chewing food with the expression of eating sand to say it tastes good?"



"..."

"If it tastes bad, say it tastes bad; if you have no appetite, say so. That's what I expect from my assistant."

His voice, soft yet carrying an undeniable weight, resonated.

Only then did Yuder comprehend the true intent behind Kishiar's persistent questioning. He didn't want to hear a superficial, polite answer.

Kishiar had used the seemingly light and unexpected medium of a meal to break down the walls Yuder had erected and draw out his true feelings.

It was surprising that such a serious matter lay beneath a seemingly trivial question. His method of making one let down their guard for a moment was brilliant. It was baffling but at the same time genuinely admirable.

'Even knowing that Kishiar uses such tactics, I let my guard down.'

Yuder blinked, then let out a small sigh.

"...In that case, I'll stop eating now. I'm not hungry."

"Hahaha! Do as you please. But at least have this juice. Nathan personally squeezed it for us."

Kishiar laughed heartily, pointing at two glasses placed on one side of the table. It was juice made by grinding a mixture of vegetables and fruits.

Yuder looked at Nathan, who stood behind him with a stern expression, then lifted his glass and drained it in one gulp. The green juice seemed like it would taste very strange, but it was surprisingly sweet.

"You're giving me a profound lesson on my first day as an assistant. Is this why you called me first?"

"Not at all. The real matter is this."

Kishiar, who seemed to be preparing to finish his meal as well, elegantly wiped his mouth with a white cloth and extended his hand towards Nathan. Nathan approached the large desk, picked something up, and respectfully placed it on Kishiar's hand.

It was a pair of black gloves.

Yuder's expression changed in an instant.

"You seem surprised. The wound hasn't healed yet, so it needs to be covered. These are special gloves with magic that sticks to the wearer's skin and promotes healing. They won't be damaged even if they get wet or bloody, so wear them without worry. There's no need to thank me for a wound you got while protecting me."

He had been thinking that he would need to get a glove anyway. It was fortunate that he didn't have to go out and buy one, but that wasn't why Yuder was surprised.

In his previous life, Kishiar often wore such gloves. Among the gloves he wore, there was definitely one that looked exactly like the one in front of him. The memories from that time, vivid as if he had forgotten them, suddenly came flooding back.

Turning

Chapter 48

In the past, Yuder hadn't paid much attention to Kishiar's attire. There were occasionally members with unique abilities who wore odd clothes, so the fact that Kishiar often wore gloves wasn't particularly unusual. However, on reflection, Yuder realized that since his return, Kishiar had never once worn gloves.

As soon as he realized this, naturally, a dream from the night before flashed through his mind.

Could the Kishiar of his previous life have truly suffered the same injury as Yuder during the Red Stone retrieval operation? Could that be why he always wore clothing that covered his body, even needing to wear gloves?

'Come to think of it, whenever I had to meet Kishiar regularly, it was always in the darkness of the night.'

If he had been injured by the Red Stone, there would be a purplish bruise somewhere on his body. Yet, even Yuder, who might have seen Kishiar's body more than anyone else except for his wet nurse, had never noticed it.

Kishiar always appeared out of the darkness and disappeared before Yuder awoke. The fact that Yuder had never found this odd was because, before Kishiar's death, he had simply accepted it as a part of who Kishiar was, and after his death, he had tried to bury those memories in oblivion.

If he had realized something was amiss earlier, if he had taken an interest in Kishiar's condition, could things have changed?

"I said I didn't need any thanks, but isn't that expression a bit much? You're looking at me as if I'm a ghost."

Kishiar, having noticed Yuder's expression, asked him with narrowed eyes. Only then did Yuder manage to calm his shock and complex thoughts, shaking his head.

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

"When someone asks, say it's a reward I gave you for accepting the position of aide."

If Kishiar said it was a reward he personally gave, even if Yuder wore it every day, people around him wouldn't find it strange. Besides, it was even enchanted to be helpful, so not wearing it would be the odd thing.

As Yuder nodded, Nathan, who had been standing behind them, quietly spoke up.

"It seems we will have visitors soon."

"Must be the other members. Nathan, clear away the remaining food."

Kishiar nonchalantly ordered Nathan, one of the continent's top Swordmasters, as if he were a servant. There was plenty to say about such treatment, but Nathan simply followed his orders as if it were the most natural thing.

While Nathan quickly stacked the plates and disappeared into the inner room, Yuder put on the gloves he had received from Kishiar.

They seemed to be made of leather on the outside, but once worn, they felt slick, like a slightly cold liquid adhering to his hand. Even when he clenched and unclenched his fist, there was none of the stiffness characteristic of leather.

"Just as I thought, they suit you well. My judgment was indeed correct."

Kishiar proudly complimented himself with a satisfied expression. Yuder didn't respond. He felt no need to feign agreement with insincere politeness when honesty, however unpleasant, was preferred.

"By the way, did you confirm that none of the other members were injured?"

"Ah, yes. There were none."

Throughout his return journey, Yuder had taken the time to ask his companions individually about any injuries. While some had minor scratches or muscle aches from climbing the mountain, no one else had sustained injuries like his own. It was a relief.

At the time of the explosion, Yuder had been closest to the Red Stone. It was just a few steps away, and he had thought he shielded everyone, but that small distance had created the current outcome.

'Looking back, I should have put up the shield from the beginning.'

Regret filled his mouth with bitterness.

A while later, a knock on the door came along with the murmur of conversation from outside. Since Nathan hadn't yet returned, Yuder got up to open the door himself.

"Commander, I apologize. I was about to bring Yuder with me, but he wasn't in his room... Oh... Yuder!"

"Yuder, you were here? What happened?"

As soon as the door opened, Gakane, who had been apologizing loudly with his head bowed, was startled to see Yuder and shouted out in surprise. The other comrades were equally surprised.

Yuder gestured for them to come inside as he looked at their faces filled with betrayal and confusion.

"...Come in."

Once everyone had settled into the long chairs, Kishiar greeted them as if he had been waiting.

"Did everyone have a restful night? I called Yuder here for a personal matter. I apologize for not informing you earlier."

"Ah... I see."

Gakane finally collected his surprised expression and calmed down. The Eldore siblings wore expressions of curiosity about what might have transpired between the two.

"You all look curious. Would you like to know what you'll soon find out anyway?"

"Yes."

Between the firm responses, Kishiar gave a soft smile.

"Today, you all will accompany me to the Imperial Palace with the Red Stone. We will show the Emperor the stone, and receive our reward for completing the mission. It's a secret mission, so we can't celebrate in front of many, but please be satisfied with meeting the Emperor directly and receiving an award. And while we're there, I plan to appoint Yuder Aile as my Cavalry assistant."

Such enormous news came out all at once, the members were momentarily speechless.

"The Imperial Palace?"

"We're meeting the Emperor?"

"Yuder will be the Commander's assistant?"

Each member exclaimed the most surprising fact to them, and they all looked at each other. The Imperial Palace of the Orr Empire was not a place anyone could visit. Even those born into nobility sometimes never set foot in it in their lifetime.

Moreover, the current Emperor had not shown his face at official banquets for several years, citing health reasons. It was only natural that everyone's expressions froze in surprise at the news they'd be meeting such a person and receiving a reward directly from him.

Yuder had been in and out of the Imperial Palace countless times in his previous life, so he wasn't surprised for that reason. But the fact that they were going to the Imperial Palace before he could convince Kishiar not to take the Red Stone to the Pearl Tower, and that he would directly meet the Emperor, whom he had never seen in his previous life, was quite shocking.

The Emperor, Kishiar's only full sibling. In his previous life, he had died not long after this point in time, so Yuder expected his health to be extremely poor. But if he was well enough to give a commendation today, the known and actual conditions might be different.

'Well, I have to tell Kishiar not to send the Red Stone to the Pearl Tower... but it's going to be hard to find an opportunity like this. What to do?'

"If we're leaving today... when are you planning to set off?"

"Right now."

Kishiar's answer to Yuder's speculative question was clear cut.

"So, we don't need to prepare anything?"

"What's there to prepare? As long as you're in your proper uniform, that's sufficient."

Kishiar, who appeared to find the question amusing, rose from his seat with a smile. The members followed suit, getting up with hesitant expressions.

Yuder scanned the faces of his comrades, his gaze stopping at Kanna, whose face was unusually pale.

'...What's going on?'

Her face was as white as a sheet, too pale for someone simply nervous about a visit to the Imperial Palace. Even a casual glance told him something was very wrong.

Yuder approached Kanna slowly, lowering his head after seeing Kishiar head towards the inner corridor to fetch the box containing the Red Stone.

"What's the matter?"

"Ah!"

Kanna, looking as though she had been deliberately startled, stepped back a few paces, casting a glance at the others with sweat beading on her forehead.

"I'm sorry. I, I mean. That is..."

"Kanna?"

"Oh, well... I mean, if I go there... I mean..."

Kanna was trembling, stuttering, a far cry from her usual lively self. Her behavior was puzzling.

"What's wrong, Kanna? Are you not feeling well?"

Upon hearing Hin's worried question, Kanna stepped even further back. Her shaking head revealed a mixture of confusion and fear.

"I mean... do I have to go there?"

"Where do you mean? The Imperial Palace?"

The mention of the Imperial Palace drained Kanna's face of all color. It was clear that she was reacting excessively to the word 'Imperial Palace'.

"Why all of a sudden?"

"No, it's not... I mean... I apologize for talking nonsense."

"It doesn't seem like nothing..."



Finn, standing next to Hinn, tilted his head in confusion. But Kanna closed her mouth. Their conversation was cut short by the return of Kishiar and Nathan from the inner corridor, Kishiar wearing a splendid cape.

"Alright, let's depart now. We'll be riding in a carriage this time, so it'll be comfortable."

Kishiar, holding the box containing the Red Stone, led the way with a calm demeanor, unaffected by the tingling sensation penetrating his skin from the energy of the stone. Nathan and the members hurried after him.

The carriage they would be riding was already waiting at the rarely used back gate. The carriage, large enough to comfortably hold seven people, was emblazoned with the emblem of the Imperial Palace. Its opulence, including the lavish use of gold, was overwhelming.

Even the eight horses pulling the carriage had been replaced with Misty Wind Horse, possibly for fear that ordinary horses couldn't withstand the energy of the Red Stone. This sight drew spontaneous gasps from the members.

"Incredible..."

"Nathan, I'm counting on you to handle the coachman's role."

Turning

Chapter 49

Kishiar gave Nathan a light command and stepped briskly into the open carriage door. Looking at the large door which allowed the tall Kishiar to enter without bending his body even slightly, Gakane swallowed his saliva.

"Is it really true that the imperial carriage has been designed by grand mages to prevent even the slightest jolt?"

"We'll know when we get in."

Yuder swallowed his affirmation silently and replied just so.

Kanna did not marvel at the royal carriage like the others. After getting on, rather than being surprised at the smooth ride, she was constantly fidgeting as if there were thorns beneath her buttocks.

Her gaze intermittently turned to the window, swirling with unfathomable thoughts.

Why would she, a commoner, be so anxious upon hearing that she was going to the palace?

Yuder kept his gaze on Kanna, perplexed. Yet, Kanna seemed not to feel his intense gaze, her mind continuously elsewhere.

'The Red Stone issue is a problem, but something's off with Kanna too. If she stays like this even after we arrive, I'll need to keep an eye on her.'

The Imperial Palace of the Orr Empire, La Luma Palace, was situated in the deepest part of the capital. Built in an era when the relics of ancient times had not yet disappeared, the palace had maintained its unique beauty for a thousand years and enjoyed a special reputation.

Poets praised it as the most sacred paradise in the world, and everyone wished to see the Sun Palace spire, said to bear the touch of extinct races, at least once from afar.

"I can't believe I'm crossing all seven walls of Luma."

Hearing Gakane's trembling voice, Yuder offered a faint smile. He had had the same thoughts on his first visit to the palace.

Even a commoner living deep in the mountains knew the tales of the heroes who aided the founding emperor of the empire, and the legend of the wicked black mage Modal.

Among these tales was the story of the Archmage Luma, who helped the emperor and chose the place to build the new palace, constructing seven walls to protect it.

The Archmage surrounded the palace with seven walls, each infused with different magic and made of materials possessing seven different powers. To reach the Sun Palace at the center, one had to pass through all these walls.

There was a significant distance between each wall, so those staying at the palace remained in specific sections within the walls, according to their purpose, status, or profession.

What people generally thought of as the capital was actually the area within the outermost seventh wall, where commoners or middle-class individuals resided.

It was a matter of course that the quarters of the Imperial Knights, where the cavalry barracks were located, had been there since ancient times. It was the duty of the Imperial Knights to guard against external invasions from the outermost edge of the palace.

Unlike the seven walls, which were raised high like typical city walls, the walls from the sixth inward greeted visitors with some rather unconventional sights. Yuder casually observed the swiftly changing scenes beyond the carriage window.

Tall white trees growing in regular intervals, twelve fountains each bearing the sculpted figure of a sage, statues of seven knights holding a large window and riding horses, and the sweet and special scent of flowers that, while invisible, seeped into every corner, uplifting the mood....

All of it was the walls that divided the districts, they were living legends.

The carriage occasionally halted in front of the soldiers guarding the district boundaries, only to speed off again. The carriage, bearing the imperial seal, was in itself an absolute pass.

"We've passed through three walls. We should be at our destination soon."

Kishiar, who had been sitting quietly with his arms folded, murmured as he casually glanced outside the window.

"The more I visit this place, the more I pity the Archmage Luma. Despite the trouble of creating seven walls, humans still conduct their own inspections before them. What a pointless effort. Don't you think so?"

It seemed like a joke, but on the other hand, it was a statement that was difficult to laugh at. It was a daring remark, especially for Kishiar, who was born and raised in the imperial palace.

However, Kishiar's eyes were languid, as if they held no intention. No one could decipher the sincerity hidden in his smile.

"We have arrived."

A while later, the carriage came to a smooth stop. A small window connected to the driver's seat opened, and Nathan's voice was heard in brief.

The Cavalry members looked at the slowly opening door with tense faces. Kishiar, who was holding a box with the Red Stone in one hand, opened his mouth leisurely as if to reassure them.

"Don't be tense. Hardly anyone knows we are coming today. Our meeting with His Majesty will only be brief. After that, I will be the only one left to have a private audience with His Majesty. Follow Adjutant Nathan and wait. Everything will be over then."

"Yes."

It is customary that the highest-ranking person gets off last when alighting from a carriage. The Cavalry members got off the carriage one by one, leaving Kishiar, who had been sitting inside. When it was Yuder's turn, he paused instead of immediately getting off.

He had cleverly wasted time to let the other members get off first, leaving only himself and Kishiar inside the carriage.

The reason was simple. After considering it during the journey, the only moment he could express his opinion to Kishiar was now.

"Commander, is that box to be delivered to the palace today?"

As Yuder spoke quickly and quietly, Kishiar's eyes narrowed as if interested.

"Why do you ask?"

"You tried to examine the stone with Kanna's ability during the recovery operation."

"That's right. But it was impossible."

"It's too much of a waste to give up just because it was impossible at one attempt. Maybe... could you think about giving it a little more time?"

Yuder cautiously but clearly expressed his opinion. Kishiar, who had been examining Yuder's face as if trying to understand his thoughts, tilted his head and gently raised the corner of his lips after a moment.

"Well... Do you think that with more time, it would become possible even though it was entirely impossible?"

Kishiar's reaction wasn't as bad as he thought. Judging by his words, it seemed that it hadn't been decided from the start to send the stone to the Pearl Tower. If it had, he probably would have reacted much more negatively.

Then, there was only one thing left for him to show in the negotiation.

Confidence.

"I will make it possible."

"Hmm, this is difficult. Such a proposal just before I have to present it to His Majesty. This is indeed, unexpected."

Contrary to his words, Kishiar, who smiled while gently stroking the lower part of his lips, sank into his thoughts for a moment. Yuder was teetering on the edge of whether he should prepare a fallback plan in case Kishiar refused his proposal.

After a few seconds that felt like an eternity, Kishiar lifted his eyes again. Their gazes met.

"Originally, I planned to deliver the box today. His Majesty was very curious about it, and I thought I had examined it enough."

"..."

"But, considering this is the first request from an assistant who I had to coax into service... I can't help but accommodate. I can't give you a lot of time, but since I've given my word, you must succeed."

The nefarious plan that had been swirling in Yuder's mind, contemplating even breaking into the imperial palace with a mask on to steal the box if necessary, evaporated instantly.

Looking at Kishiar, whose interest was hidden behind a lazy smile, Yuder blinked and slowly bowed his head.

"Thank you."

"What for? It's just this much. I'm a man who keeps his word. Aren't you glad you accepted my offer?"

Without answering his question, Yuder quickly descended from the carriage, feeling a great weight lift off his shoulders. Following him, Kishiar elegantly stepped down onto the ground.

The place they arrived at was the dazzlingly bright palace. Despite reflecting only the sunlight and devoid of any grand adornments, it was a place that made those standing before it seem tiny. Even the imperial carriage, grand as it was, lost its glow before the mystical majesty of the palace.

The palace, with its unique beauty as if the greatest painter had drawn it on white paper using only bold lines, was the Sun Palace where the emperor resided.

Yuder quietly gazed up at the palace he had visited countless times in his previous life. Whenever the emperor called, Yuder had to come here, regardless of where he was or what he was doing.

He knew a considerable number of the countless secret passages hidden in this mysterious palace and remembered what was where like the back of his hand.

He had never wanted to return here at the moment of his beheading, but fate had quickly brought him back to this place. It was strange.

"Your Highness. I have been waiting for you."

An elderly man who had walked out from the inner court bowed deeply in greeting. Though his hair was as white as snow, his back was still straight, and his eyes sharp.

'He's more capable than he appears.'

Yuder inwardly admired the old man's ability to greet Kishiar, who was holding the box with the Red Stone, without showing a pained expression despite their surprisingly close proximity.

Like most palace servants, he wore a belt tied with a special knot around his waist.

The color of the belt and the number of knots gave a rough idea of one's rank. The old man's belt was a deep sea blue with five knots. Yuder's eyes narrowed slightly at the sight of the golden tassel hanging from the end of the belt.

Turning

Chapter 50

The blue belt signified the individual who served the Emperor directly, and the five knots represented over fifty years of service in the palace. The golden tassel symbolized the most brilliantly shining sun, a privilege only the head of the Emperor's attendants held.

Yuder had no memory of seeing him in his previous life. The man seemed to have vanished with the death of the current Emperor.

"His Majesty is waiting for you in the Second Palace. Please follow me."

"I'm here today not as the Duke of Peletta but as the Commander of the Cavalry. I'd appreciate it if you could address me accordingly."

"Ah, indeed. This old man's memory fell short."

The head attendant seemed quite familiar with Kishiar. Yuder didn't miss the swift but careful glance he cast over the Cavalry members.

"..."

The Cavalry members hardly dared to breathe as they passed through the long corridor and the garden. Among them, Kanna was by far the most nervous.

Yuder saw that her habit of bowing her head and walking excessively low was a continuation of the peculiar behavior she had displayed before they arrived here.

She seemed to want to hide her appearance from the gaze of others. He was curious about the reason, but in this quiet situation, he regretted that he couldn't strike up a conversation.



The head attendant confidently traversed the third corridor and walked through the garden. Since he mentioned the Second Palace, they would have to cross a few more corridors. Yet, despite walking for so long within the palace, there was hardly any sign of people in the Sun Palace.

In his memories of a previous life, the Sun Palace was always bustling with numerous attendants, visiting nobles for the imperial audience, and foreign diplomats. This tranquility felt odd to Yuder, but the head attendant and Kishiar seemed used to it.

'Is the Sun Palace devoid of people due to the current Emperor's decree?'

Just as he thought this, the head attendant suddenly halted.

"Someone is coming."

Moments later, as he had said, they felt the presence of several people coming from beyond the pond on the right side of the garden. As soon as they spotted the head attendant, Kishiar, and the Cavalry members, they stopped in unison.

From the belts around their waists, they were attendants. However, the belts they wore were as deep a red as twilight. Yuder knew what that red color signified.

Red was the color of the Crown Prince, the future of the Empire.

And the current Crown Prince was none other than the Emperor, Katchian La Orr, whom Yuder would serve until his death in the future.

"I was taking a walk and thought I saw a familiar figure. It turns out Duke Peletta is visiting."

The tall group of attendants parted on both sides, revealing a boy from within. His appearance bore an undeniable resemblance to the imperial bloodline, much like Kishiar La Orr.

The beautiful golden hair blessed by the Sun God, red pupils, and outstanding looks, though still youthful, were unmistakably traits of the imperial family.

Although he appeared much smaller and younger than when Yuder first saw him in his previous life, how could he ever forget that face?

Without realizing it, Yuder clenched his fist tightly. The sharp pain digging into his palm helped distinguish between the past and the present.

The boy before him was still the Crown Prince. Katchian La Orr didn't even know who Yuder Aile was. At this moment, his gaze was solely on the head attendant and Kishiar.

Observing it, Yuder reiterated to himself several times.

Now was not the past. Many things had changed since then and would continue to change.

Preventing the Crown Prince, in a few years' time, from calmly issuing an assassination order against Kishiar La Orr. That was the future he wanted to stop.

If he said he held no resentment against the Emperor before his execution, it would have been a lie. However, even such emotions eventually vanished. Yudrain Aile, the Commander of the Cavalry, didn't have his regrets rooted in that.

He once again recalled the thoughts he had reflected upon with bitter self-deprecation moments before death, utterly exhausted. In them, there was no longing for revenge.

He hadn't returned to the Cavalry for revenge.

Of course, there were no intentions of letting Katchian La Orr become Emperor as smoothly as before, given that he had to save Kishiar and also survive.

In his previous life, the person he had watched over was far from being an excellent ruler. But now wasn't the time when he had accumulated enough power to intervene. The timing was too early.

Yuder opened his eyes that he had closed and looked forward. Coincidentally, the first thing he saw was the straight back of Kishiar La Orr. He stood leisurely, like a large tree casting a shadow over the members behind him.

Seeing just that, the emotions boiling within his chest began to slowly subside, and his usual composure returned. After a few deep breaths, he was able to observe the conversation between Prince Katchian and Kishiar with cool eyes.

"What a surprise. To meet Your Highness the Crown Prince here, it seems like it's going to be a lucky day for me."

As Kishiar responded with a leisurely smile, a grin also spread across the prince's lips. If you judged by his face alone, he seemed genuinely pleased.

"Duke Peletta must be busy. I heard you have been even busier these days, but I'm glad to see you looking healthy today."

"You've been concerned about my health? I'm honored."

"But who are the strangers following you, Duke? I don't recognize these faces."

The prince's gaze skimmed over the Cavalry members. During that brief moment when his gaze landed on Yuder's face, Yuder clenched his fist tightly then gradually released it.

"They are members of the Cavalry I created a while ago. They are talents who will become the power of our empire."

"Oh? I've heard the story. Hearing the Duke say that, I suddenly have high expectations. I hope one day to see their skills firsthand."

"Haha. You'll certainly be surprised."

While pleasant conversation was exchanged, the Cavalry members glanced at each other. After a few more words about the Cavalry, the Crown Prince finally got to the point.

"Actually, I felt a strange energy from afar, which led me here, and only after meeting you, Duke, did I understand its source. What exactly is inside that box that gives off such an impression that I should not approach it any further?"

His tone was smooth, but his intent was clear. Yuder glanced at the small box that Kishiar was holding.

Judging by his intuition, after observing Katchian La Orr for nearly ten years, the prince wasn't asking because he didn't know. He already knew what was inside. He simply wanted confirmation.

'Coming to see for himself, even though he already knows, indicates he wanted to verify something. It might be nothing, but if not... it could be related to whoever was behind the targeting of Kishiar and the Red Stone.'

All the way to this place, Yuder had been pondering the identity of the intruders' mastermind. There were countless possibilities.

Kings of other nations greedily eyeing the Red Stone, the Sun God's church, which, although proclaiming this newfound power as a divine gift, might not be thrilled about the current situation, the Pearl Tower mages who couldn't resist their desire to study the stone, and many more were possible culprits.

And among them was Katchian La Orr, who in Yuder's previous life had directly ordered the assassination of Kishiar La Orr. Knowing that the prince, who was about to become a power within the empire, had no reason to covet the stone in such a way, this possibility was low, but it was still a potential scenario that could not be completely dismissed.

Unaware of Yuder's scrutiny, the prince merely smiled.

"I apologize, but it's difficult for me to speak about it, as it pertains to a task His Majesty has assigned. I can't disclose anything before reporting to him."

Kishiar, too, was smiling. Unlike the prince, who appeared quite cold and fierce when not smiling, Kishiar maintained an inscrutable tranquility and leisureliness.

"Ah, if your visit is due to such pressing business, I can't keep you any longer. Let's have tea together some other time when we meet."

With the Emperor invoked as an excuse, the prince immediately stepped back.

"I understand. Today's weather is lovely, so I hope you continue to enjoy this beautiful scenery."

From behind Kishiar, the Cavalry members also bowed in unison. But their uneven salutes, each different from the other's, caused the prince's attendants to frown. It was clear from a glance that they looked down upon the Cavalry members as uncouth individuals.

Yuder followed behind Kishiar for a while, then stealthily turned his head. He saw the retreating figure of the prince, disappearing into the distance along with his attendants.

"Would you mind waiting here for a while? I need to report to His Majesty."

Even after parting with the prince, the squad walked quite a distance across the palace. The building they arrived at was the Second Palace, located in the innermost part of a complex linked by corridors and gardens.

The Sun Palace was composed of seven buildings connected in a unique pattern. When inside, it felt peculiar, but it was said that from the sky, it resembled a constellation.

The reason the number attached to each palace seemed unrelated to its actual position was due to this design. The Second Palace, being the furthest from the entrance among the seven buildings, was extremely inconvenient to visit.

In his previous life, when Katchian La Orr was the Emperor, he barely used the Second Palace. Previous emperors only used it when they were old, tired, and wanted to cut off communication with the outside world.

The head attendant informed them that the current Emperor, Keilusa La Orr, was waiting for them there.