

Turning 43

Chapter 43

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.