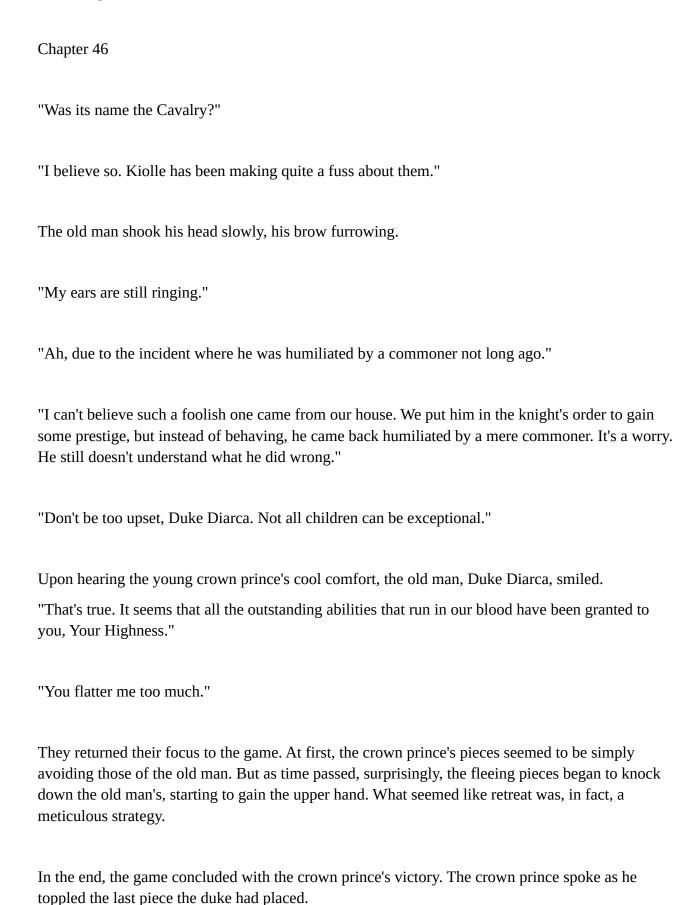
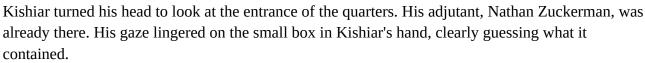
Turning 46



"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.





"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.'