

Turning 49

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.