

Turning 52

Chapter 52

"Duke of Peletta, this is no joke. Answer my question."

"Very well. If something unsavory occurs while my Cavalry and I are investigating, I will take responsibility and step down from my position as Commander. Does that sound acceptable?"

His response was straightforward, but it only served to harden the Emperor's already grim expression. He stared at Kishiar for a long moment before letting out a deep sigh. That sigh bore down heavily on the shoulders of the Cavalry members, like a weighty burden.

"You have ten days."

"That's not enough time. If you're granting a favor, please extend it a bit more."

The Emperor's brows furrowed as if looking at a disobedient child. Yuder thought that Kishiar's audacity had finally tested the Emperor's patience, but he remained silent before speaking again.

"One month. Not a day more."

Only then did Kishiar turn to look at his men. It was a casual gesture, as if he wanted to gauge their reaction. His gaze met Yuder's, and his expression subtly changed.

Is this acceptable? His eyes seemed to ask. Yuder gave a tiny nod. Kishiar promptly straightened up and bowed.

"Your Majesty, I appreciate your understanding."

After smoothly ending the conversation, Kishiar rose from his place. The Cavalry members quickly followed suit, straightening their bent backs and legs.

"You may now leave. I have a few matters to discuss privately with His Majesty."

Kishiar's words were not surprising as they had been briefed before they arrived. The men did not panic and immediately bowed before the Emperor and withdrew.

"Follow me."

As soon as they left the Emperor's presence, Nathan, with his stolid expression, raised his hand to call them. Yuder and the other men quietly followed.

"Are we returning to the carriage to wait for the Commander now?"

After they had moved a considerable distance and were about to exit the seventh palace, Hinn finally decided it was safe to voice her curiosity and asked Nathan.

"We will return to the carriage, but we won't wait for the Commander there."

"Then where?"

"We're heading to the Black Pigeon in the Second Wall."

Nathan's response was concise and calm.

"The Black Pigeon?"

"What's that?"

"Do you remember going to the Blue Crown when you registered for the Cavalry test? It's similar but higher up. It's where all the affairs of the nation are processed."

In response to the curious Eldore siblings, Gakane kindly answered. True to his word, the Black Pigeon was one of the core institutions that upheld the Orr Empire. It handled administration and diplomacy, as well as all other minor affairs that needed to be dealt with in the palace.

Yuder surmised that Nathan was heading there because it was probably related to the palace's internal affairs, which dealt with the running of the imperial household.

'The Emperor's order will require administrative work, so the sooner, the better.'

"I see. Why is it named that way?"

"Hmm, I'm not sure about that...."

Gakane scratched his head and flashed an embarrassed smile. Just as Nathan, who probably knew the answer, was about to reply with an indifferent face, someone unexpectedly chimed in.

"...It's because they're constantly sending and receiving messages, working without rest. The name is an old joke that the pigeons worked so much, they didn't even have time to clean themselves, so they became black with dirt."

"Kanna?"

Gakane and the Eldore siblings turned in surprise. Kanna, who had been following silently with her head bowed until now, had spoken for the first time.

"How did you know that?"

"A long time ago, I heard it somewhere."

Kanna's response was soft and vague. Gakane and the Eldore siblings seemed to accept her answer, but Nathan closed his mouth with a peculiar expression. Yuder, too, narrowed his eyes.

'She heard it somewhere...'

Even if he had responded, his answer would probably have been just as evasive.

However, the reason Yuder knew the answer was because he had worked and lingered in the palace in his previous life, gaining all sorts of information. A commoner, growing up normally without a family name, wouldn't have known it even by chance.

Rumors associated with the name of the Blue Crown official could be picked up by the commoners living nearby. But the Black Pigeon official was different.

Even Gakane, who had grown up in a reputable family, was unaware of such minor and meaningless information. What was Kanna doing knowing it? What was he supposed to think?

Only then did Yuder realize that he knew absolutely nothing about Kanna's family circumstances or personal information. Thanks to his memories from his previous life, he knew at least a little about the information of the other Cavalry members, but Kanna was a person he met for the first time in this life. Unlike Gakane, she did not freely discuss her own information.

He had thought her a sociable person who got along easily with any colleague, but it was surprising to realize that she had this secretive side. If even Yuder was surprised, how had the others felt?

'The most likely possibilities are... she was related to someone working in the palace, or she hid her identity. It must be one of the two.'

The latter was less likely. Before the last name bestowment ceremony, Kisihar would have thoroughly checked the identity of each Cavalry member to be bestowed upon.

Kisihar La Orr, who seemed to be a carefree person who only knew how to laugh on the outside, was actually more meticulous and careful in his work than anyone else.

It was his nature to investigate again before the bestowment ceremony, even if it was a matter that had already been investigated when accepting them into the Cavalry. So if he had investigated Kanna and concluded she was a commoner, there was no need to doubt that.

Therefore, Yuder decided to put more weight on the possibility of the former.

'Those who work within the palace, or who have enough access to know the detailed internal affairs, are all nobles. But in the case of the Black Pigeon official, there are also middle-ranking managers and deputies who are chosen for their competence.'

In a few years, the Awakeners would break into key positions and receive titles, changing the situation, but so far, that was the structure.

So if Kanna was related to one of them, the likelihood was high that she was among those of the suspected status.

'It might be a completely different third possibility... Whatever the situation, I hope it's not a big problem.'

Yuder's gaze turned to Kanna, who wore a dark expression. Nathan, who had been leading them silently and skillfully crossing the paths between palaces, stopped at that moment and raised a hand.

"We are nearing the boundary of the wall. I will represent us during the inspection, so all you need to do is stay quiet behind me."

As they had been riding the imperial carriage until now and hadn't had to face an inspection directly, a slight tension swept over the faces of the members. As Nathan had said, the inspection post was soon revealed.

Inside the first wall, where only the imperial family resided in the palace, it was extremely quiet, with hardly anyone wishing to come or go. The expressions of the knights guarding the checkpoint were utterly relaxed.

"I'd like to head towards the second wall."

"What is your name?"

"I am Nathan Zuckerman, an adjutant of Duke Peletta."

The knights' gaze shifted from Nathan, who was clad in armor adorned with the duke's family crest, towards the Cavalry members wearing identical black uniforms. They merely glanced at the Cavalry members, not bothering to ask for their names.

"Understood. Please pass through."

The members of the Cavalry were surprised at how easily they were granted passage. Yuder realized from the knights' glances that they had assumed the Cavalry members were new recruits brought along by Nathan, but he decided to say nothing.

After all, Nathan had probably anticipated this and had offered to undergo the checkpoint procedures first. Being mistaken was actually beneficial for them as it expedited the checkpoint process.

Nathan courteously bowed his head in a gesture of acknowledgment before striding past the checkpoint without hesitation.

As soon as they passed through the checkpoint, the path widened dramatically, and the number of people passing by exploded. Huge buildings of various architectural styles were revealed.

The empire's court, built immediately after the founding of the empire, was clean and majestic with a single floor, while the new building of the Palace Magic Corps boasted a dizzying height of over ten floors. They were side by side, forming a harmonious blend that was typical of the second wall district.

'An area where all the institutions representing the empire gather...'

Yuder murmured the nickname of the area within the second wall as he looked around.

'It's been a while. With time, the Cavalry headquarters will appear among them.'

He turned his head towards the location where the Cavalry headquarters had been in his memory. Now, it was just an inconspicuous small auxiliary palace. In his previous life, that palace had been expanded and increased in floors to become the Cavalry headquarters.

The headquarters managed the operations of the Cavalry branches scattered throughout the empire and took on missions requiring coordination with other institutions. Yuder's official office had also been located there.

"Have we already crossed the wall?"

"I didn't see anything, how did that happen?"

Eldore siblings, who were distracted by the surrounding scenery, belatedly realized that they had fully entered the second district and were taken aback. Nathan, who had been walking silently, seemed to think he should answer their question, so he slightly slowed his pace and opened his mouth.

"We have already crossed the wall."

"When?"

"Just after we passed the checkpoint. The first wall is said to be in the form of a road paved with special magical stones, forming a circle and covering the entire area. They built a garden over it to deliberately conceal it, so it's natural that you wouldn't have noticed its existence."

"Ah..."

Only then did the Eldore siblings' expressions change, as if they had just remembered that the garden around the Sun Palace had been unusually long. Gakane, who had been quietly listening, also seemed excited by this new information, his cheeks flushing slightly.