

## Turning 57

### Chapter 57

"...I'm glad that your taste aligns with mine. It makes me feel that the effort to bring you on as my assistant was worthwhile."

"Pardon?"

Yuder was preoccupied with thoughts about Thais Yulman, and had missed Kishiar's comment. He turned his head a little too late to ask again, only to find that Kishiar was also looking in his direction with a slight tilt of his head.

Their faces had stopped at a very close distance.

"..."

In that instant, Yuder's gaze was seized by Kishiar's face. Kishiar, too, blinked, staring back at Yuder.

After a short pause, it was Kishiar who first broke away from the gaze and flashed a smile.

"We almost bumped into each other."

"Oh, yes."

Yuder finally regained his senses and turned his head away.

"Did you fall for my face up close? You were looking rather passionately."

The unfamiliar short pang Yuder had felt shattered instantly.

"No, that's never happened."

Despite his immediate, firm denial, Kishiar persisted as if he had a winning hand.

"You didn't? Weren't you just looking?"

"I never did."

"I should have just bumped into you. It seemed like a perfect angle for a kiss."

Yuder felt a sudden chill in his spine and inadvertently looked back again. Fortunately, Kanna seemed to still be following from a distance, seemingly engrossed in her own pleasant thoughts.

"Making such comments to anyone could lead to unnecessary misunderstandings. Please refrain. I am your assistant."

What was the point of making such a joke to Yuder, who had yet to awaken his second gender?

Although he had accepted the position of assistant, there was clearly nothing more than that. The future would not be like the past.

"Anyone? That's a bit hurtful. Are you 'anyone'?"

Kishiar, who didn't care about other people's feelings, couldn't suppress a small chuckle, shaking his shoulders as he slowed down and quietly fell behind Yuder. It seemed he just wanted to tease.

"Alright, I won't do it anymore. Don't purposely distance yourself. Weren't we just happily discussing plans together?"

"...."

"Choosing you as my assistant seems like a good decision. I think we'll make a great team, don't you think?"

Kishiar had an extraordinary talent for expressing the same phrase in a strikingly different manner. As Yuder sighed lightly, Kishiar laughed once more.

Looking at his laughing face, Yuder thought about the indescribable feeling he had just experienced. It was a face he had seen countless times, in his previous life and in this one he had returned to.

But something was different this time.

Was it the man with such vibrant eyes? He had always thought of him as someone whose smile concealed a world-weary blade and suppressed fatigue, but Kishiar's face up close showed none of that.

It should be natural, given that he had returned to a past where nothing had happened yet, but this ordinary fact was shocking.

The image of Kishiar in his dream, who had joked with a lonely face, empty as if it had been hollowed out, reemerged. It seemed as if he had just seen what that Kishiar, who had been facing death, had lost.

Yuder instinctively raised his hand to his chest and pressed it lightly, then quickly pulled it away.

He still did not know how to express the feeling he had just experienced.

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That day, Kanna shared her past with her comrades in the carriage, briefly but confidently. The members, who had been deeply worried about her, all felt a strong resentment towards Count Gallon. They comforted Kanna and pledged to keep everything she had shared a secret.

Kishiar returned holding the Red Stone in the box, just as he had when he first arrived at the imperial palace. The next day, he appointed deputy commanders and an assistant in front of all the members.

"Shin's deputy commander, Ever Beck. Sul's deputy commander, Steiber Rendley. Jung's deputy commander, Kanna Wand. And the Cavalry assistant, Yuder Aile. These four people will divide the duties of the commander and help each other."

Among the three deputy commanders, the only one who didn't have a close relationship with Yuder was Steiber of Sul. However, Yuder already knew what kind of person he was through the memories of his previous life.

Steiber was the oldest among the current members. He was a simple bakery owner and the head of a household, who was over 40. He had exceptional ability to handle water and was well-liked.

In his previous life, Yuder had been the deputy commander of Sul, hence Steiber was a regular member without any special duties. However, the members of Sul respected Steiber more than Yuder.

Yuder thought that Steiber Rendley would make a good deputy commander, and he once again admired Kishiar's insight. Kishiar seemed to know how the dynamics among the members flowed, and who stood out in what area, although it seemed like he didn't.

With the exception of Ever from Shin, all the deputy commanders were different from the previous ones. It was a good start.

And quite swiftly, that afternoon, a carriage bearing the emblem of Count Gallon arrived in front of the Cavalry's barracks within the grounds of the Imperial Knight's quarters.

As he watched the arrogant nobleman and the soldiers he brought with him enter, Yuder grinned ominously along with Gakane and the Eldore siblings.

The nobleman who had tried to sell off the unawakened Kanna from the Cavalry without even conducting a proper ceremony ended up in a terrible state just an hour later, which caused a huge shock within the capital.

The disgraced noble family, who had become a laughing stock, belatedly protested to Duke Peletta and the Emperor, but nobody listened to his complaint.

Are they supposed to believe and punish based on just one person's words about an event they didn't witness themselves? According to the complainer, dozens of robust soldiers couldn't handle just four Cavalry members. It was the complainer who had first declared he would attack and kill. Wasn't this a case of self-defense? If the opponent was a Swordmaster, could they have acted the same?

The written reprimand that the Emperor issued to the protesting nobleman served as an evaluation of the Cavalry members' skills that had been shrouded in mystery, and it was incessantly discussed among the people.

The nobles, who hadn't even known the name of the Cavalry until then, felt an unpleasant fear creeping up their spines for the first time.

The news spread rapidly beyond the capital to the empire, and eventually to the entire continent.

Everything was going exactly as Kishiar La Orr and Yuder had anticipated.

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"Your Majesty. The Empress has come to visit."

The Emperor sat at his desk, rubbing his weary eyes, the paper he'd been grappling with for some time finally set aside. Through his spectacles, his fatigue-laden eyes concealed, he didn't feel like the Emperor of the immense Orr Empire that had spanned a millennium.

"Let her in."

The door promptly opened and a woman with pale blonde hair entered under the guide of the chief attendant. After surveying the room, littered with empty tea cups, papers, and books, she sighed heavily as if to signal her readiness to hear more, then approached the Emperor.

"Whilst I understand you can't leave this place, didn't I tell you to at least clean up more often?"

"You're nagging the moment you arrive?"

Despite his words, the Emperor's expression was incredibly gentle. A faint smile, one he wouldn't even show his brother Duke Peletta, rose to his face. Seeing this, the Empress moved behind him. The sight of the Emperor's thin frame, visible through his shirt, hurt her inside.

"I worry for you. You look even more ill than before."

"My face is the same as always."

"No, it's not. You really do look unwell. Have you been drinking the herbal medicine I sent?"

The Emperor, feeling the Empress's slender fingers on his shoulder, smiled quietly. Even the times of excruciating pain that always ate away at his body, and the unbearable humiliation, felt like nothing in that moment.

"Of course. Why wouldn't I drink what you sent? I even had some just before."

Only after she had confirmed when and how he had taken the medicine did the Empress let her worry subside a little.

"So, you really did take it all."

"When have I ever lied to you?"

"Never. You've never lied... but...."

His grip tightened around the Empress's shoulder. The Emperor slowly raised his hand and held hers. The Empress's hand was soft and warm, but the Emperor's was rough like old bark and cold as a corpse.

"Sorry, did I startle you?"

However, before the Emperor's hand fully withdrew, the Empress's hand came down and held his tightly.

"I wasn't startled."

The Emperor was a little surprised, then he laughed. The two held hands for a long time, receiving the sunset that poured through the window.

After a while, as the Emperor's hand warmed from the heat transferred from the Empress's hand, the conversation resumed.

"By the way, did the Duke Peletta's visit go well? How was he?"

"I'm still unsure."

The Emperor responded in a soft voice.

"But he seemed more enthusiastic than I thought. I was a bit surprised when he volunteered to do the task we had planned to delegate to the mages. I wonder what got into him."

"Isn't that a good thing? Duke Peletta is undoubtedly worried about you as well."

"Well, he would be worried. The ordeal I'm going through will inevitably be his burden someday."

"There you go again, speaking so harshly on purpose."

The Empress applied a slight pressure to the hand she had placed on the Emperor's shoulder. Despite being brothers, closer and more caring for each other than anyone else, the Emperor never openly displayed it.

Considering the enemies scattered around them, it might have been inevitable, but the Empress felt a faint sadness whenever she saw the pessimistic attitude the Emperor displayed.