

Turning 60

Chapter 60

"If he can fight so well simply by spewing fire and water from his sword, he would become a complete monster if he mastered any more techniques."

"Do you see it that way?"

Upon hearing Nathan's muttering, Kishiar softly retorted.

"Do you think differently, sir?"

"In my eyes, I see a powerful beast trying to make itself small."

Kishiar, after taking a sip of his tea, followed Yuder's movements without missing a beat, his red eyes unblinking.

"Liars can recognize other liars. For some reason, that captivating beast is intentionally hiding his strength."

"You're saying he's hiding his strength?"

Nathan was the type who would believe his lord even if he claimed the sun rose in the west, but this time, he couldn't help but question him.

It was plain to see that Yuder Aile possessed exceptional skills, and he was an audacious man who had no intention of hiding his superior qualities. The idea that this man, who seemed least likely to hide anything in the world, was concealing even greater power within, was difficult to believe.

"He's hiding it. A lot of it."

"So he's indeed suspicious."

"But your investigation turned up nothing?"

"..."

"Nathan. It's time to trust your instincts over your suspicions. I've decided that he is essential to the Cavalry unit I plan to create. I don't know why, but that charming beast isn't sparing his body for me and the Cavalry unit. Isn't he boldly demonstrating his ability and teaching two people in an environment where he might be doubted? And doing both at the same time."

Nathan nearly blurted out, "What exactly is charming about him?" but managed to swallow the words. A charming beast? Was he referring to the formidable man before their eyes? Even he would doubt his ears if he heard such a nickname.

However, as Kishiar watched Yuder, his red eyes truly seemed filled with joy. He was always cheerful, but Nathan, having observed Kishiar for a long time, knew how to distinguish between his genuine and fake smiles. Surprisingly, his lord was sincerely smiling now.

"If it wasn't for him, I might have been seriously injured while retrieving the Red Stone this time. Or, using an unexpected amount of power might have put a crack in the balance I was barely maintaining."

"That's too speculative."

"Yes. But you also know that there's no guarantee that such things wouldn't have happened, right?"

Nathan remained silent, knowing that Kishiar's words were correct. His lord was always teetering on the edge.

But in the past few years, it had become even more precarious, the line he was walking on seeming as thin as a thread.

Kishiar, who seemed to have received all the blessings of heaven, became even more dangerous as these blessings accumulated. Neither friend nor foe left him alone. Such was his destiny.

"Regardless, it's true that he risked his life for me that day. If he was a spy sent by the dukes, he certainly wouldn't have left me in that situation."

"..."

"I wonder where such a character came from. It's really interesting."

"Too much attention can be dangerous..."

Nathan had only managed to utter a single word, but Kishiar merely responded with a soft smile, not a verbal reply. His gaze remained steadfast on the man with black hair, who was ruthlessly swinging his sword, not moving in the slightest.

"Well... it might be a bit late to worry about that."

His voice was so soft, even Nathan, the Swordmaster, couldn't properly hear him.

Nathan refilled the seemingly delighted lord's empty teacup. As he did so, Kishiar's eyes slightly narrowed at the sight of a small, neatly folded note that had slipped underneath the teacup's saucer.

"What's this?"

"While I was preparing the tea, a courier arrived from the Rik Mountains. You must have seen enough of the training, please take a look at this as well."

Kishiar knew this was Nathan's attempt to distract him from watching Yuder, but he showed no sign of it and merely smiled. As he unfolded the note to read it, a few unrecognizable emotions flickered across his eyes.

"Place this inside my quarters' desk later."

"Yes."

Kishiar handed the note back to Nathan after reading it. Nathan clutched it in his palm as if it were glued there, naturally hiding it from the view of others.

Yuder, Gakane, and Kanna continued their vigorous training, paying them no mind. Kishiar, while watching them, opened his mouth without changing his expression.

"It seems that they've discovered a place near the base that appears to have been inhabited by beasts. However, no evidence to suggest who might be behind this has emerged."

As this was expected, Nathan was not surprised.

"If they're that thorough, they won't give up just because of one failure."

"Indeed. The thought of those we didn't dare to touch over the last two years now flocking to us is already tiresome."

"Even so, didn't you bring the stone for His Majesty despite all this?"

Kishiar didn't respond to that. The conversation he had with the emperor when he went to the palace with the Red Stone he had retrieved a few days ago flowed through his mind.

'Kishiar. So, is your vessel still fine?'

'Thanks to your concern, brother, it's perfectly fine.'

When they were alone, Kishiar called the emperor 'brother'. Although this was against etiquette, when they were alone, the emperor called him by his real name, not his title, so it was all the same.

'What a pity. If the late empress saw you alive and breathing healthily without any outburst, she would undoubtedly have been so upset that she would have risen from her grave. It's quite regrettable that I can't show her that her most important decision was so wrong.'

The emperor's red eyes, visible through his glasses, shone with a cold, mocking smile. That mockery was directed not at Kishiar, but at the now-deceased empress. Guessing what era the emperor was recalling, Kishiar replied with a soft smile.

'Well, it's all in the past anyway.'

'Yes, it's all in the past. Her forcing you into the position of duke, and the fact that because of that, I had to hand over the throne to my enemies in my court, it's all in the past.'

The emperor's gaze, coldly muttering, turned to the box that Kishiar was holding. Kishiar was opening the box from a distance, as the emperor had expressed his wish to see the Red Stone.

'That worthless little stone is really the Red Stone. Even as I see it, I can't believe it.'

"Everyone seems to say so."

"If that tiny thing truly possessed the power to protect your vessel two years ago, I hope it could be of some help to me this time around..."

A bitter smile crossed the Emperor's pale face.

"After all that curiosity, seeing it in person doesn't instill much faith. Perhaps it's best to let go of any expectations."

"Such discouraging words after I went through all the trouble to bring it, don't you think that's a bit much? Would I have bothered to fetch this if it weren't for you?"

The Red Stone undoubtedly held an incomprehensible, immense power. However, Kishiar never once desired or admired its power. The Emperor knew this all too well.

"You have quite the way with words. Is this why the benevolent man I know put me through so much hardship by forming a Cavalry?"

"If the Cavalry hadn't been formed, we wouldn't have been able to retrieve the Red Stone safely, so it was a necessary step. Holding onto resentment for so long isn't good for your health."

"At this point, what's health to a man on his deathbed?"

All that was left was the slow tightening of the noose and the inevitable end. The Emperor's eyes told this tale.

"Oh dear. Where did the tyrant who hurried me every day to fetch the stone go? Did you really issue such an order just to torment your only brother? How disappointing. When did you stop believing in miracles...."

"Enough. Stop talking."

The Emperor waved his hand with a tired face. After telling Kishiar to close the box, he beckoned him closer.

Kishiar placed the box at his feet and knelt in front of the Emperor. The Emperor stared at the face of his brother, a face both similar and dissimilar to his own.

Bitterness, worry, relief, and countless other emotions surged in his eyes before receding, like sand washed away by the tide.

"Kishiar."

"Yes."

"I didn't order the quick retrieval simply because of a vain desire to expand my power. I believe you still have a chance, unlike me. If, after you and the mages have finished investigating and it turns out that the power of the stone truly helps the vessel, I will order you to use it first, even if it's just a moment sooner."

"Your wife would have been saddened to hear that."

The Emperor's gaze softened momentarily at Kishiar's calm response to his astounding declaration. A profound longing was replaced by renewed determination.

"I'm not joking. Listen well. But if the opposite happens..."

The Emperor coughed a few times and muttered with a grave look.

"If it turns out that the stone's power is of no help to us, I'll leave the next steps to you. Whether you take it or destroy it, it's entirely up to you. However, it must never fall into the hands of the Dukes or the Crown Prince...."