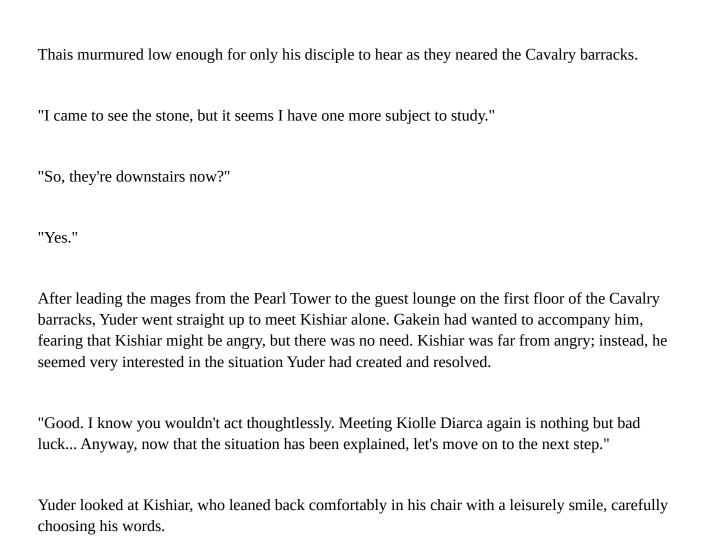
Turning 64



Amid the unending laughter, Yuder, conversing calmly with the redhead, turned his gaze toward Alik. Alik, feeling as if his thoughts were being pierced by those eyes, nervously stammered.





"They did not clearly state so, but to my eyes, they are mages. Probably from the Pearl Tower. For such people to visit here, uninvited at this time, and only stating they need to see the Commander without making their purpose clear. They must have come for the Red Stone."

The old man with a long beard who casually mentioned magic. The disciple who respectfully called such an old man his master - they perfectly embodied the tradition of one-on-one mentorship typical of mages. If they were court mages, there would be no need to hide their identities, so the only remaining possibility was clear.

Of course, Yuder knew who they were immediately due to his memories from his past life, but he did not tell Kishiar that.

"If that's your interpretation, then so be it. So what?" Kishiar's eyes softened as he rested his chin on the hand propped on his armrest.

"How should I deal with the mages who have come for the Red Stone?"

"I think you need to figure out how they knew the stone was here and what they want to do with it. After all, you need to understand their intentions before you can use them."

"Use them..."

"Even if they came here because of the Tower's will, in the end, they are mages. 'Even if the tower crumbles tomorrow due to the magic cast today'..."

"If you want to cast, cast it and face death.'... That's a maxim inscribed at the top of the Pearl Tower."

That saying was known to have been left by a mage who dedicated his entire life to the magic of moving objects and ultimately tried to pull the moon to the earth hundreds of years ago. His magic failed, but his words remained, etched as a motto that symbolizes the spirit of the entire Pearl Tower.

"So, are you suggesting that we should try to persuade them by appealing to the mages' greed?"

He didn't say it directly, but Kishiar immediately understood Yuder's meaning.

Mages of the Pearl Tower were famous for their fanatical obsession with the magic they were practicing. They didn't hesitate to engage in all sorts of unethical behaviors for the perfection of magic.

If Thais Yulman had no particular interest in the Red Stone and was forced to come here due to the will of the Tower, he wouldn't have bothered to leave the palace and even seek out the Cavalry. But he came here in his shabby clothes and endured insults from the Imperial Knights without revealing his identity. Considering his major was researching such things, it could have yielded a good result.

"They did not seem like bad people. I plan to investigate the Red Stone with the help of a few members, including Kanna, but wouldn't it be better to have more help?"

"Originally, the court mages were going to investigate the stone first. Why should I persuade a mage from the Pearl Tower instead of them?"

"If you trusted them, wouldn't you have already entrusted the stone to the court mages, regardless of what I said?"

Yuder calmly spoke the most reasonable answer. Satisfaction spread across Kishiar's face.

"Indeed, my assistant is smart. It's fortunate that not everyone is as quick-witted as you."

Yuder had seen in his previous life how sensitive the court mages were to power. It was only natural since those who wanted to gain power rather than improving their magic skills often became court mages.

On the surface, they professed loyalty to the emperor alone, but behind the scenes, they colluded with various nobles and engaged in dirty dealings.

What the current emperor was thinking, one couldn't be sure, but Kishiar certainly couldn't trust them fully. Considering the risk of information leaking, it was much safer to win over a single archmage obsessed with magic research rather than entrust the palace mages. This likely played a part in his easy acceptance of Yuder's suggestion.

"Fine. Let's go down then. Let's see what kind of talent the Pearl Tower has sent us."

Kishiar rose from his seat. Yuder thought he would head straight out of the quarters, but surprisingly, he approached Yuder and peered closely at his face.

"...Commander?"

Yuder instinctively tensed and cautiously questioned.

"You seem to have had no time to wash your face after training. You're a mess."

He took out a handkerchief and wiped Yuder's cheeks and forehead. The fragrance emanating from the handkerchief made his back stiffen for a moment.

Yuder recognized Kishiar's slightly sharp body scent. It had been a faded memory in his mind for a long time. The sudden reality of the scent unsettled him.



'I heard he was a spendthrift, unintelligent, and impulsive, but what's with these rumors?'

Casually glancing to the side, he noticed no change in Thais's expression.

'Master is something. If you knew the rumors were wrong, you could have told me earlier!'