

## Turning 64

### Chapter 64

"..."

An awful silence lingered.

Moments later, from the frozen crowd, Thais Yulman, who had been silent until now, burst out laughing for the first time.

"Hahaha! My goodness. The last time I saw something this ridiculous was eight years ago, when some fool vowed to create a spell that would force a monster to dance until it died of exhaustion!"

Shortly thereafter, as if caught up in his laughter, Yuder's comrades also began to chuckle, one by one.

"Hahaha... hahahahaha!"

Amidst the sea of laughter, Kiolle's fellow knights hurriedly helped him to his feet. Kiolle had fainted, his head hanging low.

They disappeared without a word, as if marching away in formation. It was a humorous sight, hardly befitting the reputedly most beautiful and honorable knights of the continent - the Imperial Knights of the Orr Empire.

"Yuder, how on earth did you do it? We thought you could only use fire and water!"

"Think of it as my own progress, just as you've progressed."

"Is it something to talk about so easily, having one more element you can use?"

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.

"Hello. Do you, uh, remember us? You only met my master, to be precise....."

"Yes. I remember."

Luckily, Yuder replied coolly.

"I heard you were looking for the Cavalry. You don't seem to be invited guests, so may I ask what your business is?"

"Ah, that's....."

Alik cast a resentful look at his master, who was still laughing heartily. It was about time for him to step in. But the master showed no signs of doing so.

"My master has something very important to say to Duke Peletta, which is why we came suddenly. But the road... uh, it was harder than we thought. Haha....."

"Yes. It is difficult."

A faint, cool smile flashed across Yuder's lips and then disappeared. He had noticed Alik cursing the knights who had ignored their request for help.

"Follow me. I'll guide you."

Alik was quite surprised, as he had thought Yuder wouldn't be so compliant in offering help. But Yuder had already turned and was striding ahead.

"Master, that man said he would guide us. Shall we go?"

Alik grabbed the arm of his master, who was laughing so hard that tears were starting to form, and followed behind him.

"Alik. That guy, he's not an ordinary one."

Thais murmured low enough for only his disciple to hear as they neared the Cavalry barracks.

"I came to see the stone, but it seems I have one more subject to study."

"So, they're downstairs now?"

"Yes."

After leading the mages from the Pearl Tower to the guest lounge on the first floor of the Cavalry barracks, Yuder went straight up to meet Kishiar alone. Gakein had wanted to accompany him, fearing that Kishiar might be angry, but there was no need. Kishiar was far from angry; instead, he seemed very interested in the situation Yuder had created and resolved.

"Good. I know you wouldn't act thoughtlessly. Meeting Kiolle Diarca again is nothing but bad luck... Anyway, now that the situation has been explained, let's move on to the next step."

Yuder looked at Kishiar, who leaned back comfortably in his chair with a leisurely smile, carefully choosing his words.

"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.

"Please... stop."

"We're almost done anyway."

He turned his face to evade, but it was in vain. Kishiar, who followed him till the end and wiped up to his nose, put the handkerchief back in his pocket. His nonchalant behavior left Yuder speechless.

"You could just tell me to wash up. Why do this?"

"What's wrong with being kind?"

"Why are you putting the handkerchief back? It's dirty, you should leave it."

"Don't be so sensitive. I'm fine."

Kishiar laughed merrily and patted Yuder's shoulder. If anyone should act sensitively, it should be the noble Kishiar, not the commoner Yuder. Yuder deeply regretted not washing his face earlier.

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"You must have had a long journey. Thank you for coming."

Kishiar, who had descended to where the mages were with Yuder, cheerfully greeted first.

"Are you His Excellency, Duke Peletta?"

"Yes, indeed. However, here, my position as the commander of the Cavalry takes precedence, so please call me that."

Finally seeing Duke Peletta in person, Alik was stunned once by his beauty, as if witnessing the incarnation of the Sun God, and twice by his seemingly snaky smile.

'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!'