

Turning 65

Chapter 65

While Alik grumbled internally, Kishiar invited the old mage and his apprentice to take a seat. Yuder stood behind Kishiar, an assistant in his stead. Although Yuder's face was cleaner than before, his attire was still unkempt, yet Kishiar seemed unconcerned with his subordinate's appearance.

Did this signify the grandeur of the Duke, or was it a silent warning to Thais and Alik, stating that they didn't even need to show the slightest courtesy? Alik's mind raced.

It was Thais who spoke first.

"I am grateful, sir, that you personally greet an old man who came uninvited. I am Thais Yulman, a mage from the Pearl Tower. This is my unruly apprentice, Alik Pelgin."

"I am Alik Pelgin, a mage from the Pearl Tower."

After acknowledging the greetings of the two mages, Kishiar gracefully raised his hand towards Yuder.

"This is Yuder Aile, my assistant. I've heard that my assistant had an encounter with both of you at the palace previously. Seeing as we meet again today, it seems like there must be a deep connection."

In reality, Kishiar had been secretly observing while in disguise, but the two mages didn't know that.

"Indeed, sir. If it weren't for Sir Aile, I wouldn't have been able to make it here today. I didn't have the opportunity to express my gratitude earlier. Thank you, Sir Aile."

"I just did what I had to."

Alik was quite surprised by the identity of Yuder, something he couldn't have guessed just by appearances. A young man held a position usually occupied by those with much more experience,

and he'd already received a last name. There was indeed justification for his confidence, even in front of nobles.

‘Well, considering he knocked out that Knight named Kiolle at once, he's no ordinary skilled person. It's rare to see someone not from the Pearl Tower who can use attribute magic so quickly and simply. Are there many people of that level of skill here? Or is Yuder Aile extraordinary?’

Alik examined Yuder's pale face. The inscrutable cold expression and shadow-draped eyes were a bit intimidating, but considering he'd helped save him and his master, Alik felt a sense of goodwill.

“Thais Yulman. I've heard your name before. You are a renowned elder within the Pearl Tower, currently focused on research. May I ask why you've come here, concealing your name and identity?”

“If you know me, haven't you already guessed my purpose?”

Thais stroked his long beard with a calm smile.

“I heard that you managed to acquire something that no one else could for the past two years. As a researcher of magic, how could I resist coming when I heard the news? I am here to see it.”

“So such rumors have spread. Don't you think they are rather exaggerated? I wonder who could have spread such a story all the way to the Pearl Tower.”

“Does it matter what it is? The fame of you and the Cavalry has spread throughout the continent. Naturally, everyone will find out. Isn't there a saying that a tongue is the hardest weapon to control in the world?”

Thais Yulman's rhetoric was very cunning. While he didn't hide his eagerness to investigate the Red Stone, he brushed off the issue of how he got the information as if it wasn't important.

A trace of chilliness spread over Kishiard's smiling face, as if he had noticed something.

"His Majesty the Emperor values sincerity above all else when he embarks on a significant task. I do not think it was such a good choice to come here, escaping his sight."

"Commander, isn't it true that, even if everything else was exaggerated, the Red Stone indeed disappeared from its original place? At first, I intended to meet His Majesty the Emperor. However, when I found out that he has long stopped seeing even the envoys from foreign nations, I thought it better to grasp at straws than to wait aimlessly. Wouldn't anyone think the same?"

As Kishiar remained silent at his words, Thais seemed to gain strength and continued speaking honestly.

"I do not mean to boast, but I have devoted myself single-mindedly and earned the title of an elder. No one on this continent can investigate the Red Stone as thoroughly as I can. All this old man desires is the chance to see it even once and research what is hidden inside it. Please do not doubt this. Who sent me here is not important to me. If necessary, I will even write a vow."

"..."

"Commander, isn't it true that you also need someone to thoroughly investigate the stone? Isn't that why we are face-to-face like this?"

'He had confidence from the beginning.'

Yuder quietly speculated as he watched Thais.

'Thais Yulman must have known that the Emperor and Kishiar wouldn't completely trust the court mages, so he came running. He believed that someone would eventually need to investigate, and that his skills were the best, so he came with such confidence.'

If the Emperor and Kishiar really wanted to possess the stone, the best course of action would be to accept Thais's proposal. The old mage offered quite a tempting proposal: he would overlook everything else if only they entrusted him with the research. Now, it was time to see how Kishiar would respond.

"Well, in fact, His Majesty the Emperor once said that it would be better to destroy the stone right away rather than letting the peace of the entire continent shake due to it. And as we all know, we don't necessarily need to investigate in order to destroy."

"Are you saying... it was retrieved for destruction?"

Thais's expression subtly changed for a moment.

"Haha. I didn't say for sure whether it has been retrieved or not. But if needed, it could be so."

Various thoughts seemed to flicker in the old magician's head.

Was Kishiar's certainty a sign that the Emperor's side had already completed some investigation of the stone? Did they conclude that the power within the stone was, in fact, trivial? Or was this merely to shake Thais Yulman?

Thais Yulman scrutinized Kishiar's face meticulously. He could not read any real intentions from his languid smile. However, when he spoke of destruction if necessary, it felt undeniably sincere.

'The Empire wouldn't want change... They'd probably think it better to destroy it unless they deem it a power worth risking. It's a plausible story.'

But even if the stone held no particular power, Thais Yulman desired to see it. The Pearl Tower had ordered him to bring the stone, but Thais wanted to monopolize this golden research opportunity, if possible.

Thinking that his opponent would be the one regretting, he had mustered up courage, but now it seemed he was the one feeling regretful.

Thais Yulman hesitated, then opened his mouth.

"The House of the Four Dukes... I believe they might have a better solution than destruction."

It was a veiled hint. It implied that among the four ducal houses, someone had leaked information about the Red Stone to the Pearl Tower and Thais Yulman.

'Or perhaps, it was all of them.'

While Yuder finally watched Thais Yulman play his cards, Kishiar lightly tapped his crossed knee with his finger.

"A better solution, huh? Do you think so too?"

It was a short question, as if asking him to choose between the emperor and the four ducal houses. However, Yulman grasped another implication within it.

A smile spread across his face after a moment.

"Oh dear. I am merely an old mage. Did I not tell you I have no interest in such important matters?"

Kishiar's tapping finger halted on his knee.

"That's a pity. I hoped to benefit from the wisdom of a wise elder."

After saying this, he turned to Yuder and gave him a slightly different smile than before.

"Yuder, please prepare guest quarters for these two."

"Understood. Should I request the oath from Sir Nathan?"

‘You're always so quick to catch on.’ Pleased, Kishiar lightly tapped Yuder's gloved hand before rising from his seat.

"Heavens... I have no idea what just happened. Would you believe me if I said the conversation between the Duke and Master was harder to understand than an introductory magic textbook? I still have chills."

Entering the guest room Yuder had prepared, Alik shivered and threw himself onto the bed. He didn't want to imagine the hidden blades that must have been exchanged in the conversation that had just taken place.

All he remembered was signing the oath with a trembling hand under the terrifying smile of Duke Peletta, and Yuder kindly offering to transfer their luggage from the palace.

"Well, at least we've found our destination. Isn't that good enough?"

"What's good about it? Why were the rumors about Duke Peletta like that until now?"

Alik shuddered as he remembered Kishiar. The Duke's smile when he casually questioned Thais at the end had seemed more terrifying than his master's angry face.

"A young, unripe beast hiding its claws is not a rare event in history. As long as we don't provoke it, it will leave us alone. We only need to finish examining the Red Stone, so be careful with your words until then, Alik."

"Do we have to go through all this just for research....."

"If you don't like it, you can go back to the tower."

"Ah, damn it..."

Alik sighed heavily, looking out the window of the guest room.

'Does the Red Stone really exist here? It's unbelievable.'