

Turning 72

Chapter 72

Yuder's gaze drifted towards the small birdcage hanging next to his horse. It seemed he might have to send a courier to Kishiar more swiftly than he'd initially thought upon arriving in the village.

"Your Grace, a courier has just arrived from the East," a voice informed him.

"Is it from the Lord of Hartan?"

"No, it's a report from our spy in a nearby village."

Seated at his desk, buried in paperwork filled with complex laws, Kishiar finally shifted his gaze to his adjutant, Nathan.

"A report?"

"Do you remember when you ordered me to recruit several spies in the East to monitor the long-term movements there? One of them. I inquired if he knew anything about this matter and the answer came quickly."

Kishiar had not taken lightly the fact that a Cavalry member, originally from the East and on leave, had not yet returned. The East, where the Ducal faction was gaining ground, had been subtly pushing back against the Awakeners ever since Kishiar expressed his desire to form the Cavalry.

While the incident was likely minor, there was a possibility that some foolish noble had insulted the Cavalry member, and by extension, Kishiar and the Emperor.

For this reason, he had instructed Nathan to investigate all possible leads for information, beyond the direct letter he sent to the Lord of Hartan. The reply from the Lord of Hartan was yet to arrive, but the answer from another source came unexpectedly quickly, which did not sit well with Kishiar.

Kishiar broke the seal on the letter Nathan handed to him and read it quickly. His red eyes cooled significantly after a moment.

"So, there's been a fire."

"...In Hartan?"

"Yes, and it's rumored that the Lord's castle burned completely. The timing coincides with Devran Hartude's stay in Hartan. Might be a coincidence, but we can't be sure."

"But there was no report from the Black Pigeon about this."

Of the countless events that occurred daily across the country, disasters were critical reports that needed immediate communication.

If a fire severe enough to consume the entire Lord's castle had occurred, naturally, an immediate report should have reached the capital administration via couriers. Yet, even their spies in nearby villages didn't know the extent of the casualties; something was suspicious.

One could argue that the delay in handling the incident caused the report to be late. Still, Kishiar remembered that Devran Hartude had the power to conjure fire.

"Oh, another courier has arrived."

At that moment, Nathan, standing by the window, caught another small bird that had flown in.

"Is it from Hartan?"

"I'm sorry, but it isn't. It's a letter from another spy in the East."

"What does it say?"

Kishiar asked his adjutant to read out the new message. As Nathan unfolded the small pouch tied to the bird's leg and read the letter, his expression shifted slightly.

"It's an irregular report unrelated to the current incident. It says that ten Imperial Knights have come to train at Mount Clayman."

"Isn't Mount Clayman near Hartan?"

Kishiar's memory, which had the entire continental map memorized, was unquestionably flawless.

"Indeed it is. And among the knights who went for training this time, it seems Kiolle da Diarca is present."

Kishiar's handsome lips curled into a subtle smirk.

"Huh. Is that scoundrel there? I thought he'd learned a lesson after getting scolded by my assistant, but it seems that wasn't the case?"

Kiolle da Diarca was the youngest son of Duke Diarca, who had spoiled him so much that he didn't listen to anyone and earned a notorious reputation. The Duke arranged a place for his youngest son in the Imperial Knight to lead a comfortable life, but this hope was beautifully shattered with the recent formation of the Cavalry.

Kiolle, who was humiliated for the first time in his life by a common-born Cavalry member, Yuder Aile, in the training field, could not contain his fury and contacted Kishiar numerous times. The calls were almost threats, demanding immediate expulsion of the audacious Cavalry member and sending him to the Diarca family.

Of course, Kishiar ignored all of it. Just when he thought the matter was finally settled and forgotten, a few days ago, Yuder once again encountered Kiolle and bestowed upon him an even greater insult.

Assuming that there would be another round of complaints, but receiving none, Kishiar thought Kiolle had finally learned some humility. However, it appeared that Duke Diarca had simply intervened, sending his son away for training.

"Predictable. The old man must have sent him away to cool his head, given all the trouble he's causing."

"Do you think the Duke knew something when he sent him?"

"If he had known anything, that old man Duke Diarca would never have sent Kiolle there, Nathan."

Unlike the cautious question from Nathan, Kishiar's answer was bitterly sarcastic.

"He may have lost a few teeth due to old age, but an old lion is still a lion. The person who best understands his youngest son's abilities, coldly and clearly, is none other than himself."

"Still, if they happen to meet again at that place... I'm not sure it will turn out well this time."

There was no telling what would happen if, by any chance, Yuder and Kiolle were to encounter each other again in the eastern region, where the reach of the Duke's family was strong. It seemed like a great misfortune.

When Nathan voiced his slight concern, Kishiar shook his head.

"There's no need to worry about my assistant, even if something happens. ...What's more concerning is the report about the fire."

"I'll look into that further."

"Do that. And Nathan, be prepared to go there at any moment if necessary."

"Do you want me to deliver the message personally?"

At the unexpected command, Nathan's eyes narrowed.

"Yes. It's better not to go, but just in case, we need to be prepared."

"Understood."

The loyal adjutant did not ask for reasons.

"Now, let's call upon the mages who have been on their feet all day."

Kishiar realized that the fact Thais Yulman and his disciple could come here was due to the information leaked by Duke Diarca. The fact that they simply provided information to the mages of the Pearl Tower, who didn't have much connection with the Duke's family, meant they didn't show much interest in the power of the Red Stone.

'Fortunate, indeed.'

All the nobles knew that the Emperor's health was deteriorating day by day. If they knew that Kishiar and the Emperor were hoping for a miracle through the unknown power within the Red Stone, the dukes would have done whatever it took to eliminate it. Or, knowing the power of the stone, they would have sent a perfect spy who would be prepared to die to report to the dukes.

In this regard, the deep-seated character of a true mage in Thais Yulman, who had come here, was quite fortunate for Kishiar. Thais was a leading authority in such research, and he was stubborn enough to willingly finger his pledge that he would keep his mouth shut forever as long as he could conduct his research.

Perhaps Duke Diarca had leaked the information thinking that Thais would investigate the Red Stone and eavesdrop on the news he would send to the Pearl Tower. But did he really expect that Thais would pledge to keep his mouth shut so easily and even bear a grudge against his youngest son?

Kishiar felt quite pleased when he thought about how the Duke would react when he found out about this later.

The face of Yuder Aile, who suggested using Thais, came to mind. His assistant seemed to have a great talent for ruining what the greedy Dukes wanted. It was a skill he liked.

"Once we pass through the guards you see over there, we'll be in Hartan."

The man with a scar on his face paused as he gestured towards the guards positioned not far off. Behind the stone wall and the watchtower they were guarding, the outline of a village could be seen just as he had described. Yuder stepped forward, leading the group towards the guards.

“Who are you?”

“We are Cavalry members who have been dispatched by Duke Kishiar La Orr Peletta, the Commander of the Cavalry.”

“The Cavalry?”

For a moment, Yuder noticed a heavy wariness pass over the faces of the guards.

“...Show us some evidence to verify your identity.”

“Here it is.”

Yuder produced the identity certificate he had received from Kishiar. After reading the paper several times with a cautious gaze, the guard returned it with a heavy voice.

“So it is. Seems correct. Four people, correct?”

Their gaze swept over Yuder and the others behind him. Yuder assumed that the guards would certainly be startled at the sight of the man with a huge scar on his face, but their expressions were remarkably calm.

Finding this strange, Yuder turned around and was surprised to see the face of the man standing behind Gakane and Jimmy had transformed into someone else's.

While the man still had a noticeable scar, his handsome face had disappeared, and instead, the average face of one of the bandits they had encountered on the mountain and fled from was there. Moreover, he was wearing a cavalry uniform identical to Yuder's.

It looked no different from the real thing, but it was definitely a form made by overlaying an illusion.

'Using illusion abilities like this.'

The man smiled slightly as his eyes met Yuder's. It seemed that there was no need to worry about the scar on his face thanks to the ability to show illusions, and indeed, it was a remarkable skill. If he hadn't seen and heard of his abilities beforehand, he might have suspected him to be a shape-shifter.

“...Yes. Four people. Correct.”

“And your purpose?”

“We wish to meet and speak with the Lord.”