

Turning 76

Chapter 76

Having obtained the answer he wanted, Yuder escorted the three who had eaten their fill to a proper guest room, a stark contrast from their previous accommodations.

"They claimed that everything else was completely burnt down, and only that storage-like room was left. But that was a total lie."

"I know, right? There's not even a hint of smoke and everything seems to be in perfect condition!"

Listening to the outraged voices of Gakane and Jimmy, Yuder turned towards the window. From his vantage point, he had an overview of most of the Hartan territory.

The small fiefdom, which should have been charming and peaceful, bore stark, black scars under the sunlight, revealing the cruelty it had suffered.

'Weren't they saying there were hardly any casualties?'

Nahan had indeed said so, but seeing the village filled with the remnants of a fire caused him to doubt this information.

'Of course, of the people I've met here, the most suspicious one is Zakail Hartan.'

Yuder turned his back to the window and recalled the conversation he'd just had with Zakail Hartan. Even though Zakail had reluctantly agreed upon hearing Kishiar's name, he hadn't hesitated much in accepting Yuder's request.

If there had been anything to worry about, it would have been that an outsider from the capital was so willing to pry into the affairs of the village. Zakail didn't respond as easily to that. Considering Zakail's demeanour, he seemed too proud and not very good at hiding his emotions, which only increased Yuder's suspicions.

Hadn't he purposely disrupted Zakail's composure to take a peek at his intentions, asking his companions to show their lack of manners during the meal?

Despite all this, if Zakail still behaved as such, there could only be one plausible answer: Zakail was confident that no matter what Yuder and his Cavalry did, they would not discover his secret.

However, not everything in the world goes as planned. Yuder, recalling the messenger pigeon that would have reached the capital by now, formulated his next plan.

"Haha. This is the first time I've heard such nagging since the Emperor's passing. Seems like I must not have gained much trust."

"...Who are you referring to?"

"Who do you think?"

Kishiar waved the letter in his hand with a slow, elegant smile. His adjutant, Nathan Zuckerman, squinted at the letter with a frown.

"My assistant."

The moment Kishiar woke up from his morning nap, he had been greeted by the messenger pigeon.

The little bird that flew from Hartan was honoured to drink water directly from the Duke after delivering the letter. The pigeon, currently perched on a small statue on the desk and preening its feathers, looked extremely comfortable and content.

"What has he written to make you say such things?"

"Curious, are you?"

"Why not take a look for yourself? Especially you, Nathan, I'll let you see." Handing the letter to his adjutant with a light voice, Kishiar watched as Nathan scrutinized the brown characters that filled the small sheet of paper, furrowing his brows slightly.

"The ink color is unusual."

"It's not ink."

"Excuse me?"

"Take a closer look. It's not written, it's been lightly burned onto the paper. Quite a skill, don't you think?"

Indeed, it was as Kishiar had said. Nathan rubbed the characters with his finger, noticing they didn't smudge at all, and realized his lord was correct. The technique was incredible and almost unbelievable.

"His rate of improvement is beyond monstrous."

Nathan Zuckerman had reached the pinnacle of Sword Mastery at a very young age. It was a lofty position only those who boasted they could accomplish anything with a sword could reach.

However, even he found it difficult to accurately write a letter on a piece of palm-sized paper with the tip of his sword. The challenge was not just about strength but the ability to delicately divide and control that power.

And Yuder Aile accomplished such a feat with ease. His control was terrifying enough to send shivers down the spine of anyone who knew he was an ally.

Dodging the gaze of his lord who seemed to have no sense of caution and was just smiling, Nathan cast his eyes once more on the letter. Although the script was small, it wasn't unreadable.

A moment later, Nathan, who had been rapidly scanning the letter, looked up with a puzzled expression.

"Lord Hartan and the heir are already dead, and the member we need to save is imprisoned, facing execution for setting fire to a village... and on their way there, they've encountered a bandit group composed of Awakeners... shouldn't you send more people?"

"He said he doesn't need them."

Kishiar's answer was clear-cut.

"Despite all these troubles, he is confident that he can resolve everything within three days, so he doesn't need extra people. I can't do anything if he tells me to focus on investigating the Red Stone here and not to forget about it."

"...He didn't write it that rudely, though."

If one took out all the courtesies that could be found in a book teaching the basics of letter writing and summarized, that was roughly the message in the latter half of the letter.

"Even if the missing member is still alive, how can they possibly rescue a prisoner facing execution? Shouldn't I go there myself at this point?"

"If he felt the situation was urgent, he wouldn't have said that. He would have asked to smash everything first and then requested us to clean up afterward. Or he would have retreated and contacted us from somewhere else."

Kishiar replied leisurely, as if he could read the writer's thoughts.

"But judging by the fact that he chose to accompany the bandit leader he met there and even sent the name, it's clear that Yuder Aile thinks this person is extraordinary. I think it's a pseudonym though... what do you think?"

"If it's a pseudonym, it's possible he's from the same country as me."

There was a strange certainty in Nathan's words.

"Yes. The name, after all, means 'revenge' in the language of the Southern Kingdom. It seems like there's an intention there."

The empire knew little about the Southern Kingdom, which was separated from it by a desert. However, Nathan, who was from the South, and Kishiar, who had been with him for a long time, knew more about the language and culture of the South than others did.

The Southern Kingdom had a language and culture system completely different from the surrounding countries, including the empire. As a result, their naming conventions were also significantly different.

A brief smile of interest flickered across Kishiar's beautiful face before disappearing.

"In any case, investigate the bandit group. And find out more about Zakail Hartan, the youngest son of Lord Hartan, who has currently assumed full authority. And..."

As Kishiar casually piled on additional tasks, his red eyes lost their smile and became calm for the first time.

"If there's no further contact after three days, Nathan, you take the seal and proceed as planned."

"Yes, sir."

"Even though one can quickly clear the garbage piled in front of them, no one knows what kind of mess might unfold beneath it."

As Nathan lowered his head, Kishiar's expression once again transformed into its usual ease.

"What about the mages? Didn't they say they needed help?"

"So far, no. They spent the entire day writing and observing from a distance."

Kishiar had personally moved the Red Stone into the building's basement yesterday to facilitate the mages' investigations.

It was a huge, open space, making it easy to maintain a distance from the Red Stone's power, and also convenient to store necessary items. As no one knew there was space beneath the lodging building, there could be no better place for investigation.

Having listened to Nathan's report, Kishiar nodded, leaning deeply back into his chair.

"Good. Caution is a virtue. And the members?"

"As usual, they're dedicated to their training. There's nothing in particular for you to worry about."

"I see. Keep observing."

Kishiar, having ended the conversation, smoothly extended his hand.

"Give back that report."

Having most likely memorized it upon reading, he must have something more to examine. Kishiar began to look over the retrieved paper again. To avoid disturbing his lord, Nathan silently retreated.

The blunt but loyal adjutant's gaze shifted over a scripture being meticulously organized, then out to the sky through the window.

"Oh, well, I really don't know."

"The fire was such a huge event, I can hardly remember what happened that day."

"I don't know. I was... I was too preoccupied with protecting my family."

After obtaining Zakail's permission, Yuder ventured outside the castle to explore the surroundings. All the townspeople he encountered were on their guard, nervously retreating at his approach. Whenever he managed to corner someone and ask about the day of the fire, their answers were all the same: they couldn't remember or they didn't know.

"It's like we've become a plague to them, avoiding us at all costs. People are so suspicious."

Gakane muttered a self-deprecating comment as he looked around the deserted surroundings. The townspeople's suspicion was so profound that even his handsome face and amiable manner failed to break through.

People turned and ran as if they had seen a monster, creating a line of people fleeing from him. It must have been an experience that Gakane Bolunwald had encountered only a few times in his life.

"It wasn't always like this, was it?"

Yuder quietly asked Nahan, who was following them. Nahan offered a faint smile and a nonchalant shrug.

"Of course not to this extent. It seems the lord must have issued some directive."

"What should we do? If people keep refusing to answer and avoiding us..."

Yuder turned his gaze to Jimmy, who looked worried as he surveyed the surroundings. Perhaps because he hadn't slept well and had been exposed to the morning chill while wandering around, the boy's cheeks seemed a bit more flushed than usual.

Noticing that, Yuder lightly touched Jimmy's forehead with the back of his hand.

"Uh, Yuder? Why are you doing that?"

"You seem to have a bit of a fever."

"Fever?"