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Chapter 341

'Duke Tain's first child? Who was that again?'

In his previous life, Tain's ducal family had faithfully kept their children low-key until Yuder's death, so his memory of the children was exceedingly faint. It wasn't a situation where noise erupted like in the case of Apeto's succession, nor was it a house closely connected with Emperor Katchian like Diarca's family, so it was all the more so. It was only after Yuder had fumbled with his memory for quite some time that he succeeded in recalling that Duke Tain had about four children.

'...but I don't think the successor was a duke's child.'

According to Yuder's memory, Duke Tain's successor was a Duchess. Even though usually the first child takes the position of the successor, there were plenty of cases like Lenore Shand Apeto from his previous life where the younger children became the successor, so it wasn't that strange.

'Did he die young? Or did he give up himself?'

Either way, it was impossible to know now, but Yuder was extremely curious as to why the Duke's first child, who did not become the successor in the previous life of the Tain's ducal house, had come this far at this time.

Yuder tried to recall more about the first child of the Tain family but finally gave up and left the room. Heading towards the reception room where the members often gathered, Ever jumped up to greet him.

"Yuder! Did the conversation end well?"

As most of the members had gone outside, the reception room was quiet. Yuder opened his mouth to answer after confirming the absence of the servants from the Willhem family.

"Yes."

"Nothing went wrong, right?"

"The Tain's family side is showing interest in me and told me to think about it," he said.

He had easily violated Willhem's instructions to not tell even the Commander why he had come.

"From the Tain's ducal family? Is everything okay?"

"It's something the Commander already anticipated. I have no intention of accepting it, so it's fine."

Ever, who had probably guessed why they were showing interest in Yuder, did not remove her furrowed face even after hearing it was fine.

"Still... be careful, Yuder. Don't forget to report to the Commander as well."

"Yes."

"I have to go to the security management team in Tainu now."

According to Ever, all the guards and knights staying in Tainu were at a place called the security management team, where they imprisoned and decided the punishment for the criminals.

"Have you found a way in?"

"When I asked the Commander for permission, he said I could use his name freely. So I'm planning to go there on the pretext that the Commander wants to hear opinions related to the knight murder in Great Sarain Forest and take a look at the prison."

"That's a good plan."

"Isn't it? I realized thanks to the Commander that to do this kind of work well, one must act as brazenly as possible."

Ever grinned.

"It would have been reassuring if Yuder had come with me, that's the only regret."

After Ever left, the annex felt even emptier. Yuder moved to Enon's room, looking for him, who had not come out to the reception room. As expected, he was inside his quarters.

"Are you taking a rest today and not following the Commander? Is your body feeling that unwell?"

"..."

Hearing the words spat out as soon as he saw his face, he realized that rumors spread incredibly well. Yuder briefly explained the anomaly in his body's condition that had started the night before.

"I've been having a fever since I took the medicine you gave me."

"I told you that would happen. Is it because your body temperature has risen too much?"

"It's not that kind of fever."

"What fever is it then, if not that one?"

Seeing that the other party was about to measure the temperature, Yuder raised a hand to stop Enon, who was approaching. He hesitated rarely, looked down towards his stomach, and muttered,

"When my sexual desire surges... I keep feeling this kind of heat."

"...What desire?"

"Sexual desire."

Enon lowered his hand again. He looked at Yuder with a skeptical expression, as if he was extremely dubious about what he had just heard.

"...That symptom shouldn't occur just because you took it, should it?"

"Are you sure?"

"I can't completely guarantee it, but usually, that's the case. Do you think I would give you something containing an aphrodisiac?"

Yuder, who had been believing that the fever and strange dreams he'd had since yesterday were somewhat caused by the medicine, kept silent for a moment. He didn't think that Enon was lying, but there could be unforeseen consequences, even unknown to the one who caused them.

"So, is there a chance that I had a strange reaction because my physical condition is different from that of ordinary people?"

"If I knew that, I wouldn't be listening to this nonsense!"

Enon, raising his voice in anger, grabbed Yuder's clothes and forcibly sat him down. After measuring the heat of Yuder's neck and forehead, he declared with a scrunched-up face that there was currently no problem with Yuder's body temperature.

"Your body temperature is normal, but do you still feel that heat?"

"No, I don't feel anything wrong right now."

"What about strength recovery or other aspects?"

"My strength seems a bit more restored than before I ate, but my eyes still can't see."

"Okay, so when did you feel this sexual desire?"

Yuder, once again drawing out a moment of silence, opened his dry lips.

"Do I really need to discuss this?"

"If you felt it towards me, don't tell me."

"It's not that."

Enon, who had wriggled the end of his lips upon receiving a firm answer, took a deep breath.

"That's a relief, but if you're claiming that sudden sexual desire arose due to the medicine I gave you, you'll have to explain why, when, and how it happened. Eh? Do you think I want to hear such a thing? I need to know to judge if there's a real problem!"

He was right. In the end, Yuder had to provide a proper answer.

"It happened when I encountered a specific person. And... it also happened after dreaming in the morning."

"What kind of dream? An erotic one? Did that specific person even appear in it?"

Although it was not something that could be explained lightly, Enon's expression wasn't entirely wrong. Yuder fell silent, and Enon furrowed his brows even more.

"...Is it true?"

He uttered in astonishment, then fell silent for a while.

"...Let's make this clear. It's not because of the medicine. It might feel that way if your body temperature rises more than usual when you're excited, but it's not acting as an aphrodisiac. That's certain."

"But before this, I never suddenly felt a surge of heat or had such dreams."

"I'm not sure if I have to be the one to tell you this, but humans tend to react that way when a target for their sexual desire appears, even if it's unexpected."

"...Who says?"

"Who cares who? Anyway, your condition proves it, doesn't it!"

"But before..."

"Just because it didn't happen before doesn't mean it must be the same this time. The guy who claimed he'd change the future is now refusing to accept that he himself has changed and is blaming the poor medicine!"

At such a direct statement, Yuder closed his mouth.

"Anyway, such things don't just happen without any signs. You should recognize that yourself and deal with it appropriately. I can't heal you from such a problem."

"...I understand. I've properly grasped that the medicine isn't the issue, so I'll handle the rest on my own."

Yuder stood up from his seat.

"Hold on. But you, that person you're talking about..."

Enon, who had been mumbling, lowered his voice as his eyes met Yuder's and eventually stopped speaking. He stared at Yuder without blinking and, moments later, let out an exasperated yell, tousling his hair.

"No, never mind. Go, just go."

"Why are you acting like that?"

"I'll dislike it if I'm right, and I'll dislike it even more if I'm wrong. Get out."

The door closed roughly in front of him. Staring blankly at the closed door, moments later, it opened again, and Enon forcibly placed several pills in Yuder's hand.

"Take these!"

"You should tell me what these are."

"An aphrodisiac suppressant."

And the door closed again. Yuder looked down at the pills designed to be swallowed without water and placed them in his pocket.

Kishiar's residence was still unoccupied by its owner. However, in his stead, there stood an unknown and uninvited guest who had been waiting. As Yuder returned to the dwelling, the visitor opened his eyes wide and stood upright.

"Are you Yuder Aile?"

"Yes, but... who are you?"

Yuder examined the stranger warily. He appeared to be about the same age as him but was a bit taller. Seeing the golden-red hair and much darker crimson eyes than Kishiar's, he felt as if he somehow knew who the person was.

"I am Pruelle van Tain. I came to ask about joining the Cavalry."

There was only one person who could have the surname van Tain and appear so suddenly. Yuder looked at the first son of the Tain family, whom he was seeing for the first time in both his previous and current life, and thought that today seemed to be a day filled with unexpected encounters.

"...Did you come alone by any chance?"

"Did you wish me to bring my servants? I thought it would be more convenient to talk if I came alone."

"No."

Yuder, who was looking at the young stranger that seemed to possess a slightly different personality than he had guessed, let out a brief sigh.

"Come in, for now."

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Upon close inspection, Pruelle, the firstborn of the Tain Ducal house, was quite distinct from other young nobles in both appearance and temperament. Most of the noble youth Yuder had seen so far had

extraordinary looks like Kiolle, Aishes, or Lenore, but often had less impressive personalities. Even in rare cases like Revlin Shand Apeto, where the character was miraculously good, their appearance was as smooth as porcelain dolls, allowing one to guess their noble lineage.

However, Pruelle was relatively ordinary, possessing features that could have led to the misconception that he was just a common young man, if not for his family's characteristic red hair and eyes. His clear freckles on the bridge of his nose and a seemingly sincere smile added to that image.

But Yuder read a slight tension in Pruelle's smile, rigid and anxious. Although he seemed to manage his expression well, like the child of a noble family should, maintaining composure for a long time in front of a piercing gaze was not an easy task. Such control typically developed over time.

A bold and secretive youth who had come alone, claiming that he wanted to inquire about joining the Cavalry. What was his intention?

Yuder quietly opened his mouth towards Pruelle, who was watching him as intently as Yuder was observing him.

“You said you came because you want to join the Cavalry?”

“Yes. I want to know how to join the Cavalry, like Apeto's third son.”

At the mention of Revlin, who was in the capital, Yuder's eyebrows momentarily furrowed and then relaxed. Pruelle continued, trying not to miss the slight change in Yuder's expression.

“I am also an Awakener, just like him. I've been hiding it in my family, but after watching Apeto's third son, I think I don't need to hide anymore.”

“Then why didn't you contact us in the capital but come now?”

“I had to wait for the appropriate time. If I had suddenly visited the Cavalry in the capital, I would have been suspected, but here, even my father would not find it strange.”

Pruelle mentioned that he had spent a brief time in Tainu as a child. He had occasionally made sudden visits to Tainu, so Duke Tain and Baron Willhem would think of this incident as an extension of that, he added.

"It's not strange to suddenly become interested when I hear that the hero of the western border, the Cavalry, is here while I'm in town. Moreover, if the person who defeated the giant monster alone is taking a rest alone, anyone would want to meet him."

His words were consistent. But somehow, Yuder felt that was not all there was to it. He stared into Pruelle's dark eyes, curious about the tension hidden behind the sorrowful smile.

"I understand what you're saying. But if you want to reveal that you're an Awakener, you don't necessarily have to join the Cavalry. It's hard to understand why you want to come here, leaving your family behind."

"If it's because I'm the first-born, you don't have to think it's strange."

Pruelle answered frankly, lifting the corners of his lips.

"If I reveal that I'm an Awakener, I will immediately lose my qualification to succeed. Maybe I'll even be ostracized for life. I may be hiding it well now, but there's no guarantee I won't be found out, right? I never wanted to succeed the Duke in the first place."

The bold statement momentarily chilled the surrounding air. Yuder looked into Pruelle's eyes and confirmed that he was speaking the truth.

"You really have no interest in the duke's position?"

"If I were to join the Cavalry, sure, it would turn the family upside down. Father and Mother would be angry too. But that's just it. Now is the most suitable time to break free since I'm not the heir, but merely the first son."

"So... you're saying you want to join the Cavalry instead of inheriting the family because you have no desire to inherit the family title?"

"Much more direct than what I heard from Baron Willhem. Yes, that's exactly it."

"You're speaking very dangerously. Don't you think that if that happens, there will be numerous disputes over the heir's position, just like in Lord Revlin's time?"

The relationship between the Cavalry, commanded by the Emperor's brother Kishiar, and the four major ducal houses had always been an unbridgeable gap. The temporary membership of Revlin Shand Apeto had solidified this fact, resulting from the quarrels between the Apeto family and Kishiar. Of course, in Revlin's time, it was an incident deliberately provoked as part of a scheme to destroy the Apeto family, so the subsequent disputes were also part of a premeditated plan. But this time was different.

As the first son of another house, Pruelle's will in this matter could not ignore political problems. Pruelle would not be ignorant of this fact, but the reason for his insistence on entering a place akin to the family's enemy seemed to be something more.

'...No. Perhaps he targeted that aspect from the beginning?'

Yuder looked at Pruelle anew. The tension hidden behind his smile had deepened a little more than before.

The insight sparked in his mind through years of experience.

"You don't just want to get out of the family..."

Pruelle maintained his silence at Yuder's words.

"Is it perhaps because you mentioned Lord Revlin first?"

"Yes. I told you. After witnessing that incident, I was motivated to think I could do it too."

The young man, who finally erased his smile as he interrupted Yuder's words, looked cold and listless, as if the cheerful first impression had been a lie.

"Based on my observations of a series of events that have occurred, I concluded that His Majesty the Emperor made a deal with Duke Peletta and the Cavalry involving Apeto's third son. So, if Apeto has changed as it has now, I want to make the same deal."

Yuder felt the need to slightly revise his initial impression of Pruelle. He was far from ordinary. Hidden beneath his seemingly average appearance was a remarkably clear judgment.

"...It doesn't seem like something I should decide on. You'll have to come back when the Commander is here."

"I thought you would answer that way."

Pruelle didn't press Yuder to make a decision immediately.

"When will Duke Peletta return?"

"He should return by today."

"Would it be alright if I come to see him late at night?"

"I will convey your request, but I cannot give a definitive answer."

"That's fine. Even that much is good. If he grants me an audience, we'll have a more detailed discussion then."

Pruelle nodded his head.

"I'm glad I came to see you first. I was curious not only about the hero of Great Sarain Forest but also about who would share accommodation with Duke Peletta."

Yuder paused momentarily. There was no hint of the disdain in Pruelle's eyes that one might see in Baron Willhem or other Western nobles.

"...So, have you judged what kind of person I am?"

"At the very least, it doesn't look like you are the type to bow down to authority and spread your legs, as I had heard. Even when I introduced myself as the first son of the Tain Ducal house, you weren't surprised at all. Your tone is polite now, but your eyes look as if you could kill me whenever you want. There's no reason for someone frightened by my status or pitiful power to do that."

"..."

"There are many things in the world you can't understand unless you see them for yourself. My father will probably never know in his lifetime."

Rising from his seat, Pruelle smiled again and extended his hand.

"I won't ask you to believe in my intentions immediately, but please convey my message to Duke Peletta. I'd at least like to meet him."

Yuder looked down at the hand but did not take it. Instead, he spoke.

"I realize I haven't yet heard what your ability is."

"You're very cautious. I suppose that's expected from a Cavalry member who has met various Awakened individuals."

Pruelle withdrew his hand, answering with a smiling face.

"But there's no need to worry. My ability is transformation."

"...Into what exactly?"

"I can transform into anyone I've met."

In the blink of an eye, as Yuder opened his eyes after closing them briefly, he saw that Pruelle's form had changed to that of Baron Willhem.

"See? It's precise, right?"

The voice, the clothes, everything was indistinguishable from Baron Willhem that he had seen earlier. Upon closing and reopening his eyes, Baron Willhem reverted back to the young man with golden-red hair. The change was so swift, it felt as though he'd dreamed it.

"..."

"I can't maintain it for long. To change perfectly, a lot of concentration is required. But it's quite useful when I want to hide and go somewhere, like this time."

The fact that Pruelle answered so candidly must have been a demonstration of the trust he was extending to Yuder. Yuder gazed at him for a long while before nodding.

"I see. You possess a rare ability."

"Thanks for the compliment. Since my desire to leave my family and join the Cavalry is sincere, I find myself happier than I thought to receive such praise."

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Awakened individuals possessing transformation abilities were something Yuder had encountered a few times in his past life. However, the cases where they could transform into humans were exceedingly rare. Most commonly, they could change into something resembling a specific animal or object, and some had even transformed into monstrous appearances to commit various crimes.

A common trait among them was that the more diverse their transformations, the quicker they reached the limits of their concentration, resulting in a shorter duration of the transformation. To achieve a perfect transformation, one had to be well-acquainted with the subject. Pruelle's ability did not seem to diverge significantly from this standard, but the mere fact that he could transform into a human was considered of considerable worth.

'That's why Nahan's illusion ability was so extraordinary.'

Nahan's illusion had a similar effect to transformation by changing the perception of targeted subjects within a specified range. Not only was the mental flexibility to develop the illusionary ability to such an extent impressive, but the truly remarkable aspect was the strong mental fortitude that supported it.

Mental strength refers to the willpower that can be exerted in an unshakable state of mind. Yuder guessed that Nahan's strong mental strength came from his unwavering beliefs. Even though they might be somewhat distorted, his intense stubbornness and faith were the foundation, enabling his abilities to exert such power. It was in the same context that Kanna's abilities had greatly advanced since her will had strengthened upon becoming the Deputy Commander of the Jung Division.

'So, conversely, that could also become a weakness...'

Yuder thought that the transformation ability Pruelle had demonstrated might be backed by a willpower that ordinary people wouldn't even consider, most likely very strong. Regardless of how long he had been awakened, if he could already wield power at that level, there was enough potential for him to become an extraordinary talent that no one could match, depending on his training. The fact that such a talent had gone unnoticed and unrecorded in his previous life seemed a waste to the former Cavalry Commander.

What had happened to him that he not only wished to leave the family he was born and raised in but also spoke of wanting to upend it like Apeto? Yuder thought long and hard about the brief emotion revealed by the seemingly calm young man, and the will that he might be harboring behind it.

"Pruelle Van Tain, the first child of the Tain family. He's known for being extremely restrained in his social activities; he has come a long way,"

Returning from a salon hosted by Western nobles, Kishiar recited this information as soon as he heard that Pruelle Van Tain had been there.

"The Tain family as a whole is known for this, but the current Duke and Duchess of Tain particularly do not seem to care about their children. There's almost no information about the children, including the first child, throughout their growing years. They don't appear in society, have no close friends, and thus have virtually no presence."

"So, they neglected their children?"

"You could say it's a liberal atmosphere if you want to put it nicely."

Unpinning the clasp of his cloak draped over his shoulders, Kishiar turned with a chilly smile.

"But hearing what Tain's eldest child came all this way to say, it seems likely that he doesn't see it that way."

"Are you thinking of meeting him?"

"It seems I must. I'm curious about what he has to say, and the cunning move of coming to you first to deliver his message is quite intriguing."

Kishiar, having wiped his hands with a wet towel, approached Yuder and sat down. Throughout the day, three people sat there facing Yuder, but none felt as distinctive as Kishiar. He leaned back, relaxed, as if he were the master of everything that existed in that place, and sighed deeply with his eyes narrowed. The warmth flickering in his eyes, now slightly tired as compared to before he left, was like the flames of a brazier.

"So... aside from meeting with a stranger, did my assistant do nothing else today?"

"I met with Ever and Enon for a moment as well."

Yuder first explained about the letters received from colleagues when he met with Ever. However, he did not want to elaborate on having received an aphrodisiac suppressant from Enon, so he simply mentioned, "I heard that there is no significant correlation between the fever that started yesterday and the medicine."

"That's good... It's fortunate that you seem to feel much better after resting."

Yuder hesitated for a moment before opening his mouth.

"How were you, Commander?"

"As boring as I expected."

The response came back immediately.

"Perhaps I couldn't bear the gloomy reaction, so I had to listen to Petrikun's Aria five times in a row."

Petrikun was a general known to have lived in the distant past, famous for his dramatic downfall when he was stabbed by a male lover after losing a crucial battle due to indulging in hedonistic pursuits. His story was often sung in songs and poems, even now.

"...You must have been uncomfortable."

"It's fine. Sorry to say, but I wasn't listening to them at all."

Kishiar replied with a smile, lifting the corners of his mouth.

"An unreached spear cannot hurt its target."

"..."

"More than that, I was much more worried about you."

Yuder felt a momentary trembling sensation at the tips of his fingers. His heart ached slightly due to an emotion different from the reflexive heat he felt in the morning.

"It seems like you got much better during your rest from what I can see, but it might not be the case from your own judgment... How is it? Do you think it was good to rest today?"

If a gentle warmth could conquer a person faster than a cold blade, Kishiar was undoubtedly the best striker in that aspect.

Yuder lightly bit his lower lip, then exhaled deeply and opened his mouth.

"Yes. Thanks to your concern, I rested well. I feel... better, I think."

The experience of stating that his mood had improved felt strangely unfamiliar, and his words hardly flowed. Had anyone ever shown so much interest in his mood?

The reality of being placed at the very center of attention of a single person felt like being a kettle burning on a hot wood fire. In some ways, it was more painful than being a boiling kettle, simply because that one person was Kishiar.

"Alright. Now let's enjoy a delicious dinner and make our hearts even happier."

Kishiar cheerfully pulled the bell cord to call the servants.

"If I say I came back early because I wanted to have dinner with you, would you believe me?"

Though his attitude seemed like a joke, the likelihood that it was true with Kishiar was high. He indeed returned earlier than expected.

"...Did you say that at the gathering and then come back?"

"Of course. The Aria was getting too long, and I thought I might miss the time, so I said that there will be many opportunities to listen to songs, but the honor of dining with a waiting beauty and tonight's dinner can only be enjoyed once. Everyone was shocked."

"..."

Kishiar laughed mischievously, his face full of joy.

When the servants of Baron Willhem entered, he ordered a few dishes made from the special products of the West that Yuder did not know about, saying that he wanted to eat them. Later, it turned out that they were all desserts made from ingredients he had never seen before, each one so sweet that it made the tongue tingle. It was to the point where he doubted whether that was the only information he had obtained from attending a gathering of Western aristocrats.

It was clear that Willhem was somewhat biased in judging Kishiar's assistant's taste, but Yuder silently moved his hand as usual and swallowed the food placed before him.

"The eldest son of the house of Tain seems to have no intention of coming yet, so in the meantime, I'll have to read the report letters from Great Sarain Forest," said Kishiar, who had finished his meal much faster than Yuder, as he unfolded the small letters he had taken out from his pocket. Naturally, there were many more letters than those Yuder had received.

"Kanna says she seems to have found circumstantial evidence related to the illegal trade of the Tain Duke's house. Is that true?"

"Mm... it seems so," Kishiar replied indifferently after quickly flipping through a few letters.

"Based on the information we extracted from the thousand pieces we discovered, we searched a few more places. There, we found the routes where the sold people and drugs had been exchanged. It seems to be headed toward Tainu via a base in Great Sarain Forest. Our judgment that there would be an intermediate base here has become even more certain."

"Nahan and the Star of Nagran side must already know this information."

"It's a matter of who finds that intermediate base first," Kishiar murmured, folding the letters.

"Baron Willhem is acting as if such a thing doesn't exist, but the words of the nobles I met in the salon were different."

"Did you find out something?"

"Their words were..."

Just then, a soft knock was heard from outside. It was the servants returning to clear away the empty plates. The servants who entered during the moment Kishiar paused hurriedly cleared the dishes and straightened up before leaving, but one servant did not leave with the others, staying behind to tidy the tablecloth.

After hearing the door close behind him a moment later, the servant, who had been left alone adjusting the tablecloth, looked up. He stared directly at Kishiar for a brief moment, then lowered his head to offer a bow.

"...I have the honor of meeting you for the first time, Your Highness Duke Peletta. Please forgive the rudeness of meeting you in this way."

"Are you Tain's first child?"

"I am Pruelle Van Tain."

The man, who had calmly responded while fiddling with the tablecloth, soon reverted to his original appearance in the blink of an eye. Seeing the golden-red hair, red eyes, and distinct freckles of the young man's face, Kishiar tilted his head and smiled, a completely different expression from when he faced Yuder.

"Indeed. Just as I heard from my assistant, you possess an interesting ability."

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"Indeed. You possess the interesting ability I heard about from my assistant."

"Thank you for saying so."

"So... I'm curious as to why you've come all this way to propose a deal."

Pruelle did not beat around the bush. He had secretly slipped away from the main residence and needed to return as quickly as possible.

"As you've probably already heard from your assistant, I wanted to leave my family and receive protection. However, it's not just for my own sake that I want to live. I've come here because I want to overthrow my father and protect my siblings' future."

"Siblings?"

At Kishiar's question, the corner of Pruelle's mouth tightened stiffly.

"Externally, I have three known siblings, but in reality, there's one more, making us five in total. The second, Priscilla; the third, Priam; and the fourth, Phileban are much more discerning than I am, and suitable for succession. But the youngest, Nipollen... he was born with a family-specific illness that made communication with others somewhat difficult. Therefore..."

"You hid his existence."

At Kishiar's flatly uttered words, Pruelle acquiesced with dark eyes.

"Yes. My parents have never met Nipollen since his birth, and I wonder if they even remember him now. To them, my other siblings and I are probably not much different, but I thought it was okay."

As Kishiar had said, Duke Tain had no interest in his children, even to the point of being bothered by their very existence.

Hence, Pruelle and his siblings were left to fend for themselves, typically growing up separately from their parents under the pretext of recovery at a villa or different regions until adulthood. Those who took care of and educated them were frequently changed almost every year so as not to get unnecessarily attached. They had neither relatives their age to socialize with nor friends at an appropriate time, so even after their social debut, they wandered around without any significant connections or interests.

However, an exceptional circumstance was that all five siblings had always been together, and thus their relationship as siblings was incredibly strong.

"I've been aware since childhood that I was not the person to salvage this family. So, when the time came, I planned to recommend Priscilla as the successor and quietly live with the other siblings."

But that small hope was threatened and seemed unlikely to be fulfilled. His father, Duke Tain, had become increasingly absorbed in speculative investments.

"My father never tried to share family information with us, who would inherit the family someday. Then, one day, he suddenly called me, saying that since I had grown up, he thought it was time to send all the other spare children to foreign countries."

By that time, Duke Tain's investments in foreign countries had tied up most of his assets. To gain more benefits in a market where vast sums of money were exchanged, he willingly decided to give away his children to foreign powers. To put it nicely, it would be a union through marriage, but it was a crude and foolish deal for a duke of the empire to choose.

"That's when I realized it. Even the matter of passing on the family wasn't that important to my father."

To Duke Tain, his children were merely strangers, like garbage cleaners who would take what was left after he died. Everything belonging to the House of Tain had to be in his hands until his death. As long as the one to carry on the family was of Tain's bloodline, it didn't matter whether they were his biological offspring or not.

Pruelle, too, had never felt much emotion due to his parents' indifference, perhaps because he had inherited such blood. Until then, the only thing that mattered to him were his siblings. However, he belatedly realized that responding in such a way was only to his own detriment.

After much difficulty using the name of the firstborn, his late investigation revealed that the family's financial situation was on the brink of collapse at any moment. The power, honor, and extensive connections brought by history, amassed from previous generations, were merely hiding the fragile embankment.

Pruelle couldn't bear the burden of a family that could collapse at any moment. He did not want to follow his father's nonsensical words. But his options were exceedingly limited, as he had neither built up any power nor gathered strength within the family.

"If I publicly reveal that I am an Awakener, Father will be unable to fulfill his intent to send away all my siblings except me. He must officially designate an heir to keep things quiet, so there will be a temporary reprieve. During that time, I want to overthrow my father, who is blinded by greed and seeking to destroy everything."

"How?"

Kishiar asked. Pruelle's dark eyes dimmed.

"I thought that His Majesty Emperor and Duke Peletta might want the same thing as me through the work of the third son of Apeto. Unlike Apeto, Duke Tain is good at hiding his faults and he involves many outsiders of the Empire, so you two would surely need an insider. I will be that person."

"Interesting. But what can a firstborn, who has nothing but a name, do? If you reveal that you are an Awakener, you might lose even that," Kishiar said, his words harsh yet piercing the reality.

Pruelle calmly responded, biting his lip slightly as if he had anticipated this.

"Having nothing but a name will make it unlikely that anyone will be on guard against me. The internal workings are currently divided into three factions, and if we use them well, I believe we can find a faction to support us. The same goes for my siblings."

"Three factions?"

"The first supports and aids my father's work. Including Baron Willhem and some of the Tain families, it probably includes foreign figures involved in trade and important matters with my father. The second faction, comprising many within the family, is not particularly interested in either side. Theorado, the current Commander of the Imperial Knight, is representative of those who could be either enemies or allies, depending on the situation. The last faction opposes my father's actions and includes long-serving family retainers and a significant number of Tain families."

Pruelle's voice continued coldly, revealing his surprisingly objective judgment of the situation, given his previous lack of interest in family matters. Kishiar seemed to agree, silently lifting the corner of his lips.

"Even after I've told you this, to Your Grace, I will just be that father's child. You will probably find my motives and desires to be suspicious and superficial. But please remember that the people of the Tain family, when they find the one thing that matters in life, will never let it go."

Having finished speaking, Pruelle bowed his head. Kishiar looked down at his red hair and maintained a long silence.

"You said that your siblings are what's most important to you. Are they so precious?"

"More precious than my life."

Pruelle answered without hesitation.

“And the truth is... I'm not the only one among us who is an Awakener.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“As I mentioned earlier, the youngest, Nipollen, is also an Awakener. That child finds it more difficult to hide his abilities than I do, so honestly, I don't know how long we can conceal them. Therefore... my desire to join the Cavalry is also for that child's sake.”

Kishiar tapped lightly on the table. Yuder knew that this was a habitual action when he was lost in thought.

“The information you've given is interesting enough, but haven't you considered that in the worst case, you might just be used and not be able to protect your siblings?”

“If either side reaches the worst outcome, the result will be the same. Losing my siblings and surviving alone, I'll only inherit a family ruined by my father, and fleeing together is improbable. But the third son of Apeto, even without anything, has neither lost his life nor become miserable. Then... wouldn't this be the relatively better opportunity?”

At those words, Kishiar's tapping fingers finally stopped. The eyes that had been concealing his thoughts with a trace of a smile deepened a little more.

“The matter of Apeto's third son seems to have made a profound impression on you.”

“I attended every trial that followed and watched the results.”

Pruelle calmly confessed.

“I heard everything Apeto's third son said in the courtroom. You would not know how it came to me, cornered in a dead-end alley, as a form of hope.”

"Hope."

After murmuring, echoing Pruelle's word, Kishiar turned his gaze to Yuder.

"What does the assistant think?"

Turning

Chapter 345

"How does the assistant think about it?"

As the question was suddenly tossed to Yuder, who had been silently listening all this time, Pruelle's gaze also turned towards him. With a look that held both desperation and surprise, Yuder felt a slight confusion. It was clear that Kishiar's will was almost determined, so he couldn't understand why his opinion needed to be publicly heard.

"I don't think it's a matter for me to comment on."

"Say anything you want. There must be something you were curious about while listening, isn't there?"

It was clear that Kishiar wouldn't let go without hearing something from him. Yuder thought for a moment before speaking.

"...Understood. May I then ask a question?"

"As long as it's something I can answer."

Pruelle quickly replied.

"From what I heard, it doesn't seem like Duke Tain had been interested in investing originally, but I wonder if my understanding is correct."

"My father... I know he has always liked to gamble."

Pruelle responded, his eyes focused far away, as if recalling something.

"He was deeply immersed in various hobbies, from horse racing, tournaments, to various gambling games held at the nobles' gatherings. He still frequents those places but began to take investing seriously only a few years ago after a trade-related investment in the southern region greatly succeeded."

"It was when the maritime trade between the Southern country and the Empire was hugely successful."

As Kishiar mumbled as if knowing something, Pruelle answered, "Yes, that's correct."

"From that time on, foreign merchants began to frequent the House of Tain. My father places great trust in the information and advice they provide."

"He even said that they shared the family's interests."

"Yes. I know that their influence has been exerted on many of the current investments."

Yuder looked back on the memories of his past life. Since Emperor Katchian took the throne, the Empire had been trading with other countries much more actively for a while. Katchian had poured effort into commercial policies with the goal of recovering the devastated western region and initiating changes in the Empire, receiving praise for this new direction, completely opposite to the previous imperial policies. Yuder remembered that Emperor Katchian was very pleased with this praise.

'If the advice was from Duke Tain's side... I roughly understand why the family didn't fail.'

The money invested to achieve that policy was truly enormous. However, the ambitious policy did not end well. The failure was due to the fact that Katchian's policy didn't bring about effective results without sufficient disaster recovery. Only a few, including the nobles, made money during that period, and the collapsed villages and forests in the west took a long time to recover. As those praising and

criticizing Emperor Katchian became starkly divided, Yuder had to visit the imperial palace more frequently to receive 'secret missions'. It was a chaotic time...

Yuder exhaled deeply, erasing the uncomfortable memory. Pruelle asked if there was anything more he was curious about, and Yuder shook his head, thanking him with a mere expression of gratitude.

After hearing Pruelle's words, Kishiar had been deeply lost in thought. Yuder wondered what extraordinary thoughts might be passing beneath his long, golden-shadowed eyelashes, but he silently waited until Kishiar emerged from his contemplation and opened his mouth.

"Indeed. Then... It seems the time has come to make a choice."

Upon hearing Kishiar's words, Pruelle began to tense up sharply.

"Tain's firstborn."

"Yes."

"Just like Apeto's third son Revlin, I can't accept you as a member right away. But... It's possible to grant temporary membership until the official recruitment next time."

Pruelle's eyes, which had been rigidly fixed at the beginning, trembled at the very last word. He slowly opened his mouth to ask if he understood correctly.

"Does that mean..."

"It means the deal is concluded."

"Ah..."

Finally, Pruelle's face revealed all sorts of emotions that he had hidden until now. Kishiar smoothly continued speaking.

"By the Emperor's grace and the name of God, I swear to ensure your safety and protection along with your siblings. The path ahead may be perilous, but if the youngest, who finds it hard to hide his abilities, wants it, he can be protected within the Cavalry in advance. Do you want that?"

After a moment unable to speak, he immediately knelt and pressed his lips to the hem of Kishiar's garment.

"Yes. Please... I sincerely thank you for your mercy..."

While watching this, Yuder felt a very strange sensation. He didn't know what had happened to Pruelle in his previous life, but since his younger sister had become the successor, his awakening must have come at some cost. Whether he chose this path himself or was forced into it, it hadn't ended well; but now, in this life, it seemed that it might not happen again. The realization suddenly loomed large.

Because Revlin, who had died quietly in his previous life, survived and proudly stood in the court, another person was standing here now. The chance to protect those who had courageously stepped forward and move towards a greater future was all because Kishiar La Orr was alive and well.

Yuder looked at Kishiar, who was gesturing Pruelle to stand. As he took a deep breath, his heart continued to beat loudly.

"Where are your siblings now?"

"The Tain children are in the capital, but Nipollen... actually, he came with me."

Pruelle said with a slightly embarrassed face. Yuder was not the only one surprised by this.

"He came with you? I didn't hear that."

"Even Baron Willhem doesn't know Nipollen is here. He's currently using his ability, so he's not easily noticeable to others."

"What's the ability?"

Kishiar asked, not hiding his interest, and Pruelle obediently answered.

"It's similar to mine... but there's some difference. He can only transform into a specific animal, like a cat we used to keep."

Perhaps because of their similar abilities, Nipollen only found stability when he was near Pruelle; otherwise, he couldn't control his ability properly. So Pruelle had brought his sibling, transformed into a cat, all the way here.

"He seems to find it harder to maintain his original appearance after awakening his ability. When he's with me, perhaps because our abilities are similar, he stabilizes quickly, but with others, he can't control it properly. It might be due to an innate illness from birth."

This was an extraordinarily rare case among those with transformation abilities. If someone was more comfortable being a cat, then it was probably better for them to come here than to stay in the capital.

'It wasn't like he had any significant offensive abilities, and if he could only transform into a cat, I could understand why his sibling would be so worried.'

Kishiar's expression changed slightly, as if he had had a similar thought.

"Then I hope to meet with him tomorrow. The sooner, the better; it will ease your mind, I think."

"I would truly appreciate that."

"I'll come find you tomorrow, so wait for me. Until then, I would like you to investigate the 'secret trade' of the Tain House, which is taking place here."

It was Kishiar's first request and a test for the one who had boarded the ship. A sharp look passed between the eyes of Pruelle, as if he had caught on to the meaning.

"I have heard news that His Grace discovered circumstances where three knights of our house were killed in Great Sarain Forest, accompanied by his cavalry. Is that what you're referring to?"

"One could say that. Although Baron Willhem spoke as if he had no idea what they were doing in Great Sarain Forest, I think otherwise."

He had already moved beyond thinking otherwise and was gathering evidence, but he did not mention that part, probably to test Pruelle's abilities. Pruelle seemed to organize his thoughts for a moment before standing up and bowing politely.

"I understand. I know what I must do. I'll strive to live up to your expectations and await your visit tomorrow."

Yuder escorted Pruelle, who looked much happier than when he had arrived, to the door of the lodging. Pruelle thanked Yuder with a flushed face.

"I really owe you one today. If not for you, His Grace the Duke wouldn't have listened so easily."

"I didn't do anything."

"Nonsense. Because I saw you first, I was able to have a certainty beyond my imagination about what kind of person Duke Peletta is."

After a small smile, he left one last meaningful remark.

"I'm glad I saw you myself. I've never looked forward to tomorrow before, but now, for the first time, I'm excited."

He transformed into the appearance of a servant, as he had been when he first came in, and left the annex. Yuder made sure he got back all right before returning to the lodging. Kishiar was looking at the fireplace, where no fire had been lit, lost in thought.

“Commander? Are you tired?”

“No, just lost in thought for a moment.”

Kishiar finally looked up and smiled.

“They say they don’t often use magic stoves in the West, and it seems true. This stove isn't for magic stones, but an old wooden wall stove left as it was.”

“...I see.”

Yuder's response was slightly delayed, having never paid much attention to stoves in his life. Now that he thought about it, it seemed that magic stone stoves, usually set apart in a corner, were rarely seen in the West. This was in stark contrast to Kishiar's office, where the magic stone stove was always in the middle of the room, always burning magic stones.

“Do you know what happened when magic stone stoves were first invented?”

Turning

Chapter 346

“I don't know.”

When Yuder answered honestly, Kishiar raised his head and smiled.

“The one who first made a stove capable of igniting and burning magic stones lived near the mine of magic stones. Up until then, the low-quality magic stones, which were not worth selling, were all buried in the ground. But he discovered that the poor were picking up this trash to use in the stove instead of firewood.”

Even though the magic stones were of low grade, they still contained a faint magic power. When the magic stones were put in the stove, the flames didn't burn as hot as when wood was used, but they retained their warmth for a much longer time. Though the heat was not enough for cooking, it had some utility for the poor.

The practicing mage, who found a way to make better use of the low-grade magic stones that were treated as trash, sought out a craftsman and made the first magic stone stove. However, his master and others in the world thought it was a highly dangerous and useless endeavor.

“Those who were accustomed to burning wood couldn't understand the need for a magic stone stove. The creator was expelled from the Mage's Association but continued to make and sell the stoves. What has become of it now?”

“...”

“Unless it's an area that pathologically loves tradition like the West, or where it's difficult to obtain magic stones for stoves, most use magic stone stoves. Nobody finds it strange anymore.”

Yuder thought of the mountain cabin where he had lived before joining the Cavalry. Even that crumbling house had a magic stone stove. Of course, it was incomparably small and worn compared to the beautiful stove in Kishiar's office, but it was sufficient to keep the house warm enough to avoid freezing to death in the winter.

“I like that stove. I'm very fond of how something once deemed useless became a necessity in the world, thanks to those who believed in its value and pressed on.”

“So, that's why you have a stove even in the middle of the office?”

“Exactly. Wherever I stay, whether it's my bedroom or the Peletta Castle.”

Kishiar, who replied lightly, flicked the cloak that had been draped over his chair. The pins and buttons affixed to the shoulder of his garment clearly bore the emblem of the Duke of Peletta.

“And that's why I included a flame when I had to decide on an emblem to use as the Duke of Peletta.”

“I never knew... you liked it that much.”

Even in his previous life, whenever Yuder thought of Kishiar, an image of a burning stove always accompanied him. However, he didn't realize that even the flame used in the Duke of Peletta's emblem held such meaning. The newfound fact was both surprising and intriguing.

“On the first day of forming the Cavalry, I wished for it to be like the magic stone stove. Something that may seem useless or weak at first, but will eventually become an essential existence that's recognized. That's what I mean.”

“...”

“When I heard the words of Tain's firstborn earlier, it suddenly reminded me of that day.”

Yuder looked at Kishiar's red eyes, seemingly captivated, as they were focused on the unlit wall stove.

“Maybe not now, but someday, the existence of the Awakeners will be recognized as naturally as mages, if not more. But that day will never be given without effort.”

And Kishiar made the first step of a foundation that could strive for that day with his own hands.

“I'll make today's event another big step towards that day. With you.”

“...”

“You'll be with me, of course, won't you?”

The heart pounded, large and incredibly fast.

Yuder Aile had never felt a positive emotion whenever he thought about the real future. But whenever Kishiar spoke about the future, he always felt as if his heart would burst.

The future he envisioned was as broad and vast as the throat can gulp, and it was beautiful.

Toward the man who dreamed of a future that Yuder Aile could not paint even if he died, he nodded with a painful and clear conviction.

"Yes."

"Good."

Kishiar smiled joyfully. He reached out and pulled Yuder to him. Led by the unhesitant pull that overcame the appropriate distance that the Commander and assistant should maintain, he soon found himself sitting on Kishiar's lap.

The man, raising his hand clad in a black glove, silently and yet overly long pressed his lips, breathed out sweet breath, and muttered,

"...You probably don't know how much joy I get from that answer."

"..."

The sticky and headache-inducing dream completely vanished at that moment. Yuder, looking down at his hand grasped by Kishiar, impulsively but cautiously bent down and pressed his lips to the white back of the hand.

'...You probably don't know either.'

The feelings Yuder felt every time he informed him that his previous life was different and that it would change in the future. And his thoughts.

He wouldn't know. And he wished he wouldn't know in the future...

Feelings that could not be uttered melted and disappeared between his lips, and Yuder raised his eyes to meet the slightly surprised red eyes. No more conversation was needed. The moment he closed his eyes again, strength entered the tightly grasped hand, and a warm heat overlapped on his lips.

"...Commander."

"Hmm?"

After a long kiss that ended with a sigh, Yuder opened his eyes and called him softly.

"Are you still deliberately controlling the power below?"

"..."

Instead of an answer, the smile turned a bit awkward.

"Why do you keep doing that?"

"If I don't, wouldn't it become inconvenient for us both? Having a nightmare just by restoring power once is enough, there's no need to do it twice."

"That's not because of you, Commander... Anyway, it's not just a one-time or two-time problem."

Yuder looked down at his legs supported under the raised knees and opened his mouth with difficulty.

"I thought this last time too, but it can't be good for your body, can it? You go to bed much later than me and wake up early, and constantly suppressing your power is going to be too burdensome, I think."

"..."

"Just a moment. Is it because of me that you're not sleeping properly?"

Thinking about it, Kishiar was a person who was good at hiding his condition with an indifferent face. Suddenly, the back of his head felt a little chilly as he thought that his unusually late bedtime and early waking might be because of that reason.

"I naturally need little sleep."

"But."

"I'm glad you worry about me like that, but I'd like you to know that I worry about you just as much. Who's worrying about whom, when your eyes and strength haven't fully recovered yet?"

With one word, the man who made Yuder close his mouth kissed him lightly on the forehead, smiling. Then he kissed his eyes and his cheeks. It was a pleasant kiss, imbued not with desire but a pleasant warmth.

"...Okay. Let's do this. Once this eye heals completely, I promise not to suppress it forcefully. As for sleep... hmm. If it bothers you that much, shall we sleep at the same time starting tonight?"

Still dissatisfied, there was no denying that his eye had not healed, so there was nothing to be said. Yuder silently nodded his head. Kishiar smiled and kissed him deeply on the eyelid.

That night, they lay side by side in the large bed, facing each other. Although they felt as if they were doing something they should not have been doing so casually, neither of them wanted to avoid it.

Lying next to each other and looking into each other's eyes felt very strange. Kishiar was incredibly beautiful, even with her hair and face slightly pressed against the pillow.

Suddenly, Yuder recalled the story of the Empress who had asked to place her coffin facing the first Emperor's. How might Kishiar, who had once said she understood the sentiment behind that request, be feeling now?

"What are you thinking so hard about? It's as if you're going to bore a hole into my face."

"...I was thinking about something I forgot to tell you and how I should say it."

Rather than revealing his true thoughts, he changed the subject. When Kishiar asked what it was, Yuder explained that Baron Willhem had come to relay the Duke of Tain's interest. Kishiar frowned at this news.

"Hmm... As expected, he came as soon as I left you alone. That man is really brazen."

"Yes. Everything he said was quite obvious."

"So, what did you say?"

"I told him to contact the Commander first if he wants to get in touch with me."

"You did well."

Kishiar let out a soft laugh. Seeing that laugh while lying face to face felt oddly unfamiliar.

"Are you uncomfortable with me here?"

"I am not uncomfortable."

"Really?"

"...Really."

"Alright."

Kishiar smiled and reached out to stroke Yuder's hair. The ticklish sensation made his bangs messy. Yuder left him to play with his hair as he pleased.

"Have you ever slept like this with anyone before?"

He was about to say no, but a faint memory from his distant childhood surfaced.

"I think I did when I was a child, sleeping with my grandfather."

"Hmm. That's right. You said you lived with your grandfather."

Kishiar seemed to recall the family details that had been on Yuder's application.

"You must have been quite pampered growing up."

"I don't know about being pampered... He was just normal. If I misbehaved, I was scolded, and we had occasional quarrels, but that's how we lived."

The memories of living with his grandfather were now mostly lost, buried under the many storms of his previous life. However, a twenty-year-old young man should still retain many memories of his grandfather, so he tried his best to recall and respond.

Although the answer wasn't particularly amusing, Kishiar couldn't seem to stop smiling with a peculiar expression.

"Why are you smiling so much?"

"Do you know? It's the first time you've talked about yourself like this."

Turning

Chapter 347

"...Is that so?"

"It is."

Yuder clamped his mouth shut for a moment. Life before joining the Cavalry did not need to be buried like events from a previous life, but neither was it a topic full of intrigue that he would willingly discuss. What could there be to say about a life in a secluded cabin, where one had to hike nearly half a day down a mountain to meet a neighbor? Seeing a smile at a small memory he'd deemed neither necessary to mention nor remember, Yuder felt a sense of complexity.

The fact that he had been able to act boldly until now, despite looking suspicious, was because Kishiar's silent consent and patience had supported him. Kishiar had shown faith so immense that it could be difficult for Yuder, the very subject, to fully comprehend. However, that didn't mean Kishiar was not curious at all, Yuder realized anew.

'...Well, it's only natural.'

Yuder, watching the happy man, cautiously opened his mouth.

"I didn't know you would be so happy about such a trivial story."

"It's your story, so how can it be trivial?"

Their eyes met, clearly gleaming.

"...If there's anything more you're curious about, please ask."

He wouldn't be able to answer everything, but he still wanted to say that. Kishiar brushed Yuder's forelock entangled in his fingers and lightly shook his head.

"Mm... It's always more joyful to receive such things as unexpected gifts. But it's a bit regrettable that I can't see what you were like as a child. You must have been as cute as an angel."

"No. Even my grandfather never said that."

Yuder responded honestly and coolly.

"Why? You're so cute even now."

The natural, playful question brought a retort to the tip of Yuder's tongue. If anyone looked like a child who would be called as cute as an angel, it was certainly the man before him in his youth. Now he possessed such excessive beauty; what would have been so different back then? He must have looked like the very manifestation of a real angel.

There might be a portrait from that time now, but in his previous life, Emperor Katchian had erased all traces of the entire imperial family. If he had tried, he might have found information, but as he hadn't, Kishiar's childhood remained largely unknown.

"I think only you would describe me that way."

"My aesthetic sense is just fine. I only speak as I see."

Kishiar answered seriously and then gradually moved from Yuder's hair to stroke his ear. Following down to the corner of the left eye, his finger playfully brushed downward, causing Yuder's eyes to close

involuntarily. As he slowly blinked a few times, a forgotten weariness washed over him, making him feel languid.

"You must be sleepy."

"No... I'm not."

'I had thought to make sure Kishiar fell asleep first since I rested enough today.'

He tried to resist, but the oncoming drowsiness was unstoppable. Kishiar saw him bite his lip forcefully and chuckled softly.

"You've been acting like you've forgotten all about you not yet fully recovered during the day, so your body must be tired. I'll sleep too, so goodnight."

With those faint words as the last, Yuder fell into a deep sleep.

The next day, Yuder woke up without dreaming at all. The sound of washing came from the nearby bathroom. He cracked open a window, and the cool breeze woke him fully.

After a deep breath, he raised a finger and pointed at a tree outside the window, sending a sharp gust of wind that shook its thick branches. The birds that had been greeting the morning were startled and took flight all at once.

'Certainly, I had more power to release than before taking the medicine, but something felt more oppressive.'

The left eye that he saw through the mirror was still veiled like a curtain with a black spot. The meaning of that black spot was clearer than anything else. It meant that the absorbed poison was still there.

'Why doesn't this anomaly disappear quickly even though the magic spell was successful?'

Whenever Yuder tried to exert power, Yuder felt an oppressive sensation, as if being obstructed by something. It was because the amount of power that could be released felt less compared to the amount of power possessed.

'Is it because the forces of different natures inside the body are not fused?'

Enon speculated that it might be the influence of the monster's toxicity already absorbed before Yuder received the magic spell to dispel the trace of amplification, slowing the recovery.

Until now, the power that existed in Yuder's body was the power that Yuder originally possessed, the pure power from the Red Stone, and the power absorbed from Kishiar, all of which ultimately had similar characteristics. But this time, whether because of absorbing the trace of poison and amplification through the blood of a monster opposing Yuder's own power, the recovery was slow.

Therefore, Enon prescribed a medicine to activate the body's energy that wants to recover, but could this oppression really be solved by that alone?

'Do I need to do something more? But what should I do?'

Previously, Yuder thought there was nothing to be nervous about because there would be no problems with his life even if he didn't fully recover, but the thoughts changed slightly since yesterday.

'Would it get better if I gouged out the top part of the eye and received some divine power?'

Yuder, who had a gruesome thought for a moment, soon shook his head. If the reason why the stain covering the eye did not disappear even after the trace of amplification was gone was because it had been absorbed too deeply and had become like a plant naturally symbiotic with the body, forcibly gouging and treating would only cause pain without solving the fundamental problem. Yuder was lost in serious thought until Kishiar, who had bathed first, called him.

"What are you thinking about with the window open?"

"I was examining the extent of my power recovery, but..."

Kishiar had every right to know the changes in his condition and the progress of speculation in detail. Yuder hesitated for a moment and then explained all the thoughts he had been having. Upon hearing the concerns, Kishiar faintly raised the corner of his mouth, furrowing his brow as if guessing why Yuder had suddenly shown a quick will to recover.

"But it's important that recovery is happening, so don't be impatient. Hurrying won't get things done."

"...Yes."

"Promise not to have such a terrible thought as gouging out your eye."

"I know the probability of it having no effect is high. It was just something I said."

Yuder said so, but Kishiar's expression remained tight for a while.

"Then let's have breakfast with the others today, and then go meet the firstborn."

As soon as he left the room with Yuder, who was ready, Kishiar naturally pulled him by the waist and stuck to his side. The servants of the Willhem family, who were passing the corridor, bowed their heads as if they couldn't see and retreated.

"Good morning, Commander!"

As they descended into the hall where the Cavalry members were gathering for a meal, those who were already there stood up all at once to greet them. They all looked much healthier, their faces rosy compared to before.

Yuder, suppressing a smile, brushed past his shaking colleagues and took a seat beside Kishiar. Shortly afterward, Ever, who appeared a little late, sat across from Yuder and greeted him.

"Commander, it feels like it's been a while since I've seen you in the morning. Good morning to Yuder as well."

"It might be good to get up early today for a change. Did you return after having a good time yesterday?"

Ever nodded with a calm smile at the question that implied, "Did you investigate well the matters related to the Star of Nagran at the Security Management Team yesterday?"

"Yes, I did. As I heard, there was much to see in the Finnard Square. It was even more fun than I thought, and I lost track of time. Ah! I also bought a gift for Kanna."

"Oh? Just for Kanna Wand?"

"Of course, I bought shares for the Commander and Yuder as well. It's nothing special, so it's embarrassing, but will you accept it?"

"If it's a gift from a competent Deputy Commander of Shin Division, I can't refuse."

The servants of the Willhem family, who placed food dishes in front of them and then disappeared, secretly snorted at their worthless conversation, but Yuder perceived entirely different information.

'The location must be near Finnard Square, and it seems a group of beggars who lost their memories was captured here. Mentioning Kanna probably means something related to the information that the village in the Great Sarain Forest has moved near Tainu... So Ever's speculation was right after all.'

"How about Commander and Yuder go to Finnard Square today? The weather is good, so it's sure to be a fun outing. If you go, I will guide you."

"Really? That's a good idea. What about my assistant?"

"Of course, it's really good."

It was an answer with all his heart, but the reaction was miserable. Yuder frowned, watching Ever's gesture to the servants and the rapidly bowing and shaking colleagues.

"Okay. If I have nothing to do in the afternoon, let's go. I may not want to go out, though."

The atmosphere relaxed a little only after Kishiar, who grinned leisurely, gave Yuder a slight wink.

'Why do they all believe even when the other side doesn't say anything, but I think I better not say anything at all?'

Yuder sighed and finished his meal. Kishiar took Yuder to the garden, ostensibly for a walk. Since no one wanted to walk with them, the garden was more deserted than ever.

"Do you think that my speaking hinders role-playing, Commander?"

"Why think that?"

"Every time I try to fulfill the role properly, the reaction seems rather bad."

"Does it matter? There was no problem either way, and there won't be in the future."

Kishiar responded lightly as he moved on.

"You don't need to try too hard to do well. If you've made up your mind, do as you like."

Turning

Chapter 348

It was a comfort very much in Kishiar's style.

And in some ways, Yuder felt a confidence in those words as if he could handle whatever clumsy act Yuder might perform. A somewhat subtle feeling arose in him as well.

'It's more comfortable to gather my thoughts, thanks to that.'

After all, the reason he accepted this role and resolved to do his best was entirely because of Kishiar. No matter how he looked at it, the fact that Kishiar would turn the situation upside down on his own if left alone, and that things would end that way, remained unchanged. So, even if he couldn't do well, he intended to do as much as he could.

'As I keep doing it, anything will improve. Just as always.'

He sorted out his thoughts and was scanning the surroundings while staying by Kishiar's side when, all of a sudden, a small ornamental tree not far from them rustled abnormally.

"Commander, be careful."

Reacting reflexively, Yuder stepped forward to use his abilities but stopped and froze his movements a moment later when he spotted a cat peeking out from between the leaves.

'A cat...?'

"How touching. You would even try to protect me from such a small cat. It was thrilling, but please remember that your body has not fully recovered," Kishiar said with a slight chuckle, while the cat looked at them for a while and then slowly approached, twitching its nose. Its chest and belly were white, but its face and back were tinged with red, and it had long, yellow fur.

"I apologize. I thought even someone like Nahan would be at Tainu, so I was a little... overly cautious."

While he was replying, the cat drew closer to Yuder's feet and brushed against his leg. When he looked down, it brushed against the other leg too.

"It seems to like you."

"...I think it's just hungry."

The existence of the cat itself somehow felt different, perhaps because of the story he heard from Pruelle the day before. But Pruelle's younger sibling wouldn't wander around a place like this, and they would meet them at the estate soon anyway. Yuder shifted his step to avoid the cat that kept rubbing against him. But the cat did not go its own way; it continued to follow Yuder.

"..."

"Judging by its clean fur, it is probably a domestic cat. We should tell the estate servants to find its owner."

As Kishiar bent down and reached out his hand, the cat retreated, appearing cautious. But when Yuder reluctantly lowered his hand, the cat approached again as if nothing had happened.

"That's a cat with a distinct taste."

Amid Kishiar's laughter, Yuder ended up carrying the cat to the estate instead of Kishiar.

But upon arrival, the estate's atmosphere was markedly different than usual. There were many servants wandering around the building, and the vibe was somehow anxious.

"Your Highness Duke Peletta! What brings you here?"

"We were out for a walk. But... I see more people here than usual; what has happened?"

"That is..."

The servants exchanged awkward glances as if they thought Duke Peletta would be displeased by the situation. But a moment later, someone spotted Yuder, who was standing a step back, and yelled out, forgetting the situation altogether.

"Wait. The cat! That's the cat!"

"The cat! We've found the cat!"

The surrounding servants all rushed toward Yuder. The cat's fur bristled, and it hissed in discomfort, but it calmed down again as Yuder stepped back.

"What on earth is going on?"

"You've found the cat? Where?"

Kishiar's eyes narrowed as he asked the question, his voice filled with urgency. From behind him came a desperate cry. The one who had run up to him was a familiar stranger with red hair, the same one he had seen yesterday.

As soon as Pruelle saw the cat that Yuder was holding, he looked overjoyed and squeezed his eyes shut before taking a deep breath and bowing to Kishiar.

"I present myself to Duke Peletta... I am Pruelle van Tain."

His hair and clothing were in complete disarray, incomparable to what he had looked like the day before. Even though he seemed flustered, he did not forget to act formally, as they were technically meeting for the first time. Kishiar smiled faintly at this.

"Ah, The first child of Tain. I heard you were coming. Is this cat yours?"

"...I regret to appear in such a state before you, but yes."

The moment that what was assumed to be untrue was revealed as fact, Yuder felt as if the weight of the cat in their arms had suddenly become incredibly heavy. Even though Yuder knew that transformation into an animal didn't affect behavior or habits, the cat looked so much like a regular cat that it was hard to believe it had once been human. Yuder had heard that it was more comfortable in cat form, but this was unexpected and slightly confusing. Kishiar also looked at the cat for a long time before turning his eyes back to Pruelle. A significant exchange of glances occurred between the two.

"So that's what happened. How did you lose it?"

"My cat is very skittish and afraid of people. When a servant opened the door to bring breakfast, the cat got startled and escaped through the gap, and we couldn't find it until now."

"Hmm... But the cat seemed to like my company. We met while I was taking a walk, and it refused to leave me. It was quite a struggle, but it was good that I brought it to find its owner."

Pruelle looked at Yuder, who was holding the cat, with a complex expression.

"So that's... what happened."

Yuder handed the cat back to Pruelle. The cat, which had not made a sound until then, let out a soft cry for the first time. Pruelle stroked the cat with trembling hands, repeating words of gratitude several times.

"I cannot just let you go without thanking you properly for finding my cat. Would you like to come up and have some tea?"

The situation had changed slightly from what had been planned, but the answer was already decided. Kishiar replied nonchalantly that he had no other obligations, and he headed to the guest room in Pruelle's residence with Yuder. After dismissing the servants, Pruelle put down the cat, exhaled the breath he had been holding, and looked at it affectionately.

"Oh, Nipollen."

His once stiff and dignified appearance had vanished like a mirage.

"This is not our home; I told you to be careful. It's fortunate that the Duke found you, but what would have happened otherwise...!"

The cat, as if acknowledging its mistake, looked away and licked its paw. Kishiar, who had been watching the scene with interest, spoke up as he sat down.

"Is that cat really your younger brother? It's hard to believe even after seeing it."

"Yes. It's true. This is my younger brother, Nipollen van Tain."

"Can he not turn back into human form here? I have some questions I'd like to ask him directly."

"After calming down a little, I will speak. As I told you yesterday, Nipollen was born with a disease peculiar to the family lineage, so he does not communicate freely with others."

"It doesn't seem to be a physical problem... Is it a mental issue?"

"Yes. That's correct."

After saying this, Pruelle petted the cat for a long while before finally explaining more about this 'disease peculiar to the family.'

"In the Tain family, there are very occasionally those born who, despite being physically sound and conscious, close their mouths and refuse to communicate with others, living their entire lives like this. Since most of their time is spent submerged within themselves, they either ignore unfamiliar external stimuli or become fearful of it."

Pruelle guessed that this condition was a symptom manifested in those who were born with a strong tendency of the universal trait in the Tain family to obsess over one thing. With that thought, he

considered that the difference might only be whether the trait was stronger or weaker, and that if so, all the people of the Tain family might not be very different from Nipollen.

In Nipollen's case, the symptoms were not very severe, so he occasionally communicated with others and even directly revealed his intentions, but only his siblings recognized it.

"If you meet him in person, you will see that he is a lovely child with no problem living together even though he has the disease, but his parents never visited him."

Pruelle said it was far better for someone to be interested in themselves than only interested in gambling. One could see where Pruelle's words, 'You don't know unless you see it,' came from.

Pruelle brought a small bowl of water for the cat. While the cat was drinking water and licking its fur to calm itself, the three began the conversation they originally needed to have.

"Last night, after returning as I was, I met with Baron Willhem. Based on what I know about the family, I questioned him, and he easily provided information about the secret trade. Fortunately, he firmly believes that I will be the next duke."

Baron Willhem was someone who faithfully followed the Tain family, but it was not from true loyalty. He was mindful that he could lose his place as lord of Tainu without the mercy of the Tain family. Therefore, he naturally showed weakness in the words of the first child, Pruelle, who had a high probability of becoming the next duke of the Tain family.

"According to the Baron, the three knights who died in the Great Sarain Forest were apparently tasked with eliminating information related to my father's new investment business at the base there. I thought this investment business was the 'secret trade' that you mentioned, and proceeded accordingly. Then..."

Pruelle's guess was not wrong. The new investment business that Duke Tain had been conducting for over a year, keeping it a secret even from most family members, was made up of vile and nauseating plans.

"My father seems to have invested a lot of money in bringing in things that were originally not importable, joining hands with powerful figures in a country to the west. According to the Count, there was talk of hardship in opening a new base about a year ago to bring these things in more covertly."

"What kinds of things were being brought in? Did he mention?"

"It seemed to be more than one or two things, but the most troublesome part... was people," he had said.

A dark shadow flickered over Pruelle's dark red eyes.

"I couldn't hear more details due to time constraints, but among the Baron's acquaintances, there are those I have known personally since childhood, and I have made contact with them. I should be able to tell you more by tomorrow."

Kishiar slowly nodded his head. There was nothing entirely new in the information that Pruelle had provided, but that very fact made it all the more trustworthy.

'He passed the test.'

"Thank you. It mustn't have been easy to find out that much in such a short time, risking suspicion. You've worked hard."

"Not at all."

As Kishiar praised him with a smiling face, Pruelle quietly bowed his head.

"The fact that Your Majesty mentioned the secret trade that even I was unaware of means that you already knew this much. Therefore, I cannot accept that I have worked particularly hard for this."

"Aren't you upset?"

"Why would I be? Rather, I am very pleased, as it confirms that my choice was correct."

Pruelle smiled silently and then rose from his seat. He approached the cat that had been sitting quietly, crouched down, and whispered softly.

"Now, you can return now, can't you? Nipollen."

At that, the cat's body puffed up while still sitting, swelling and growing larger. Moments later, a small and frail-looking child revealed himself in its place.

In contrast to Pruelle, who had ordinary features, Nipollen had an unblemished white complexion and an appearance that made it difficult to easily guess the gender. If it were not for their similar hair color and eye color, it would have been hard to believe they were blood-related.

"How old are you, child?"

"I turned 13 years old just after my recent birthday."

Being 13, Nipollen was older than Jimmy, the youngest member of the Cavalry. However, looking at the physique alone, it did not seem that way at all.

Turning

Chapter 349

Pruelle had told Kishiar that if there was anything he wanted to ask, he should pass it through him.

"Very well. There's one thing I want to ask first. I was curious why you approached my assistant in the garden and not anyone else. You seemed particularly interested, and I'd like to know why."

"Understood. Nipollen. Can you tell me why you approached that person earlier? What was the reason?"

Pruelle asked gently, and the child who had been silently staring at the ground, perhaps unaware that the conversation was about him, finally lifted his head slightly. His transparent dark pupils glanced at Yuder and then turned back to his brother.

"...Same, feeling, I had."

"Same feeling?"

"Brother, me."

Nipollen's voice was so soft and slow that it was hard to grasp if one didn't pay attention. But with a few words almost like a whisper, Pruelle seemed to understand perfectly, and his eyes widened a bit.

"Do you understand what he means?"

"Uh, it seems that the reason he approached Sir Aile might be because he felt something similar in him, something like what Nipollen and I have."

"You never mentioned that your brother has the ability to sense the energy of the Awakeners, did you?"

"Until now, I thought Nipollen only felt relieved around me because I had similar abilities. But it seems that it might not have been the only reason."

Pruelle couldn't hide his confusion, but his words didn't seem to be a lie.

"Then, will you also ask him why he avoided me when I reached out to him? He looked scared and avoided me."

Pruelle relayed the question to his brother once again.

"Nipollen, didn't you feel the same sensation from that person as you do from me or yourself?"

Nipollen's answer came even slower than before. The child, who had clamped his small lips shut and lowered his head, hesitated for a moment before nodding.

"What does that mean?"

"It seems that he couldn't be entirely sure whether he felt it or not."

Yuder's question was met with a troubled look from Pruelle.

"Even if he can sense the energy of the Awakeners, he might not be able to distinguish it completely."

'...No, maybe it's an ability that goes beyond just distinguishing.'

Yuder swallowed a response he couldn't give to Pruelle, looking at Nipollen. Pruelle and Nipollen may not know, but Kishiar was someone who concealed powers far more potent than the Awakener's energy. Yuder hadn't even realized these abilities until Kishiar himself confessed and demonstrated them. If Nipollen had sensed these from the start, then it was entirely understandable that he was wary of Kishiar, feeling that Kishiar was different from those who only had the power of the Awakener.

Glancing at Kishiar, he too seemed to be harboring similar thoughts, the interest in his eyes becoming sharper.

'It seems that Nipollen has awakened not only the ability to transform but also another ability closer to sensing power.'

Yuder also had an excellent sense for detecting when fellow Awakeners were using their abilities. However, that had been honed through long experiences and memories of meeting many Awakeners. It had to be different from someone born with this ability to sense.

'To meet such an extremely rare ability here. Along with Pruelle, there was another immense talent hidden.'

It would be confusing and frightening now, as he might not even know what abilities he possessed, but it was fortunate that he seemed somewhat less guarded against other Awakeners with the same abilities.

'It shouldn't be a problem to take refuge in the Cavalry. If it goes according to my thinking, it might even be helpful.'

"...Fine. My curiosity has been satisfied. Tell him thanks for answering."

"Thank you."

"When should I start protecting your sibling in the Cavalry?"

"I've already achieved the purpose of my visit, so after understanding all the information I can obtain from this place, I plan to return to the capital to discuss this matter with my siblings. At that time, I'll leave Nipollen behind, so please take care of him."

"Good. While you're here, let's see each other often and move together. I'll contact you again."

Before they left the room, Nipollen had transformed into a cat again. Leaving the well-behaved cat seated on the cushion, Kishiar dismissed the glittering-eyed servants and left the mansion, announcing that he would continue his walk.

"Nipollen van Tain; more interesting than expected."

"Yes. It seems like it's not just transformation abilities."

"I think so too."

At Yuder's answer, the man smiled, closing and then opening his eyes.

"Now that I have a beautiful cat to look after, I need to choose someone responsible for it. I'll have to think about who would be suitable."

After finishing the conversation disguised as a stroll, they returned to the annex and met Nathan Zuckerman, who was waiting for a report. He had been away on a nominal errand to buy something for Kishiar but had been chasing after Baron Willhem's knights.

"Here are the specially made fruit cookies from the famous bakery in Tainu you requested."

"Good. I'm pleased to finally have them. Well done, Nathan."

The man, now devoid of his previous gloomy expression since he had worked hard, casually handed over a few paper bags to Kishiar and immediately began his report.

"While tracking the movement of the knights and guards who had increased patrols in Tainu, I've identified a few places where a significantly large number of people were gathered."

"Where is that?"

"The warehouses near the Red Deer Consortium, located in the outskirts where the city gate is, and the streets dense with pubs that commoners frequent."

"Taverns and warehouses. They sound like places good for hiding something. Is that all?"

"The Peletta Knights are taking turns tailing them, but other than a change in the overall movement, it hasn't been easy to catch them. The warehouses are heavily watched, while the taverns are overrun with decoys."

"Report immediately if you find out anything more."

After Nathan Zuckerman withdrew, Kishiar called Ever, who had been waiting for them.

"I finished my walk but the day is far from over. I thought about getting a guide to the Finard Square you mentioned. What do you think?"

"I've been waiting for this. I will properly guide you today."

Ever's eyes sparkled, and he grinned.

This time, Ever, Finn, and Emun joined the carriage ride, which Nathan Zuckerman had previously taken. Ever complained lightly, mentioning that she had gone to the square with them yesterday.

"The security management team is next to Finnard Square. When the three of us went, they absolutely refused to believe that we were members of the Cavalry. If it wasn't for the note the Commander wrote, they wouldn't have let us in."

Kishiar thought to himself, 'That must have been the case.'

On the surface, they appeared to be just a woman, a child, and a scrawny, ordinary young man, which must have looked quite amusing. However, their true nature couldn't be discerned by their appearance alone. Ever and Finn Eldore were beings capable of unleashing destructive abilities several times greater than other members even when alone. Emun had the stealthy and observant ability to hide in darkness and see much more than others.

"The one in charge of that place is the Commander of Tainu Knights, a middle-aged man named Jeymer Phil, who has no enthusiasm at all," they said. "I mentioned that I wanted to gather opinions related to this investigation on behalf of the Commander, but he seemed very bothered by it. However, it was convenient to look around the prison since he didn't follow us."

"So, did he express his opinions?"

"According to the orders of Baron Willhem, he did strengthen the security of Tainu, but from his personal thoughts... He seemed to believe that the Commander was surely mistaken," they said.

Ever muttered this with a scowled face. Yuder made a mental note to remember the name of the knight Jeymer Phil, whom he hadn't met yet.

"Even after losing three of their comrades, they show that kind of attitude? Seems like there's little camaraderie among them."

"It seems that many members of the Tainu Knights were not originally from there. Many moved from other knight orders for different reasons. They consider themselves no different from mercenaries, and I overheard them having self-deprecating conversations."

This time, the one who answered was not Ever, but Emun.

"Really? Truly, they are knights fitting of a duke's household that must save money. How was the prison?"

"The prison was much larger than we thought. It is a place that incarcerates and punishes criminals not only from Tainu but also from the surrounding villages, so there were many people coming and going."

Ever said that the scale of the prison was enormous, ranging from the basement's first floor to the third floor, and there were many visitors for meetings. It did not seem as secluded as they had thought.

"As we passed by, we noticed some people in a corner of the basement's first floor. When we asked a guard, he said they were beggars who had recently been brought in from another village after losing their memories. But..."

A smile rose in Ever's eyes, one that she couldn't hide.

"Emun and Finn recognized a few faces among them."

Turning

Chapter 350

The reason Ever had taken the two of them along was that they had been the ones who had visited the Awakeners's village in the Great Sarain Forest as part of the first dispatched team. Although those who had lost their memory could not recognize the people and wasn't sure if they were the ones chased out of the village, she thought that Emun and Finn might be able to. And fortunately, her expectation had turned out wonderfully correct.

"Was it certain that the ones you saw in the village within the Great Sarain Forest were there?"

At Kishiar's question, Emun and Finn nodded simultaneously.

"It was when you, Commander, were conversing with the Awakeners of that village. After everything was done, the Nelarn Knights were busy preparing to leave, so there wasn't much time, right?"

"That's true."

"Do you remember that at their request, Finn, Gakane, and I went back into the village once more?"

"Didn't I want to check if there were any traces left by the captured criminal?"

"Yes. You had requested our help to finish the job without agitating the Awakeners living in the village."

This was a story that Yuder, who only knew the part that Kanna had summarized, had heard for the first time.

Even after capturing Jenn, the servant who had betrayed Prince Ejain and was hiding in the Awakeners's village, the Nelarn Knights wanted to carefully check where he had stayed. It was just for one night, but they wanted to be sure. Emun, Finn, and Gakane were the ones who went back inside the village to assist with this while Kishiar was conversing with Prince Ejain.

"The task was completed quickly as there were no specific matters, and the place we visited was a zone where ordinary people stayed."

"They were terribly uneasy when they saw us. We even briefly saw them fighting with each other."

Finn added with a scowling face. He had been in that state ever since he had left behind a hint in the Great Sarain Forest.

"Yes. Well, we couldn't remember all those people, but since it was such a peculiar encounter, it seems some of them still remained in our minds. I remembered them as we passed by the prison yesterday."

"If that's the case, it must be certain."

Kishiar's eyes sharpened.

"What did you tell the Knights of Tainu?"

"We said nothing. We thought it suspicious if they knew we were interested in the prisoners, so we planned to act after reporting to you, Commander."

"Good. Let's go and see for ourselves."

The carriage arrived at Finnard Square shortly after. Next to it was the security management team building, proudly welcoming countless visitors with its doors wide open, preserving its old style.

The soldiers guarding the doors were shocked at the arrival of the carriage bearing Duke Peletta, and doubted their eyes. The same was true for Jeymer Phil, the late-arriving head of the Tainu Knights.

"I greet His Grace, Duke Peletta."

His appearance was a mess, not befitting a knight. Without even a sword at his waist, and with his belt hanging loosely, it was clear he must have run out from a nap. Yuder, looking at the red face of the middle-aged man with a broad peeled forehead, thought Ever's assessment was indeed accurate. The fact that someone who didn't even do his duty dared to look down on others was merely laughable.

"I apologize, but may I ask what brings you here...?"

"I heard that my capable deputy Ever Beck and my members, whom I sent here yesterday, saw some suspicious individuals in the underground prison. Considering the urgency of the matter, I came to see for myself."

"Eh?"

The Knight Commander's gaze darted busily between Kishiar and the members standing behind him. The soldiers were no different, sending bewildered looks their way.

"Suspicious... people, you say? There was no mention of this yesterday... I don't quite understand what you mean."

"It's a bit uncomfortable to speak in detail here."

"But Your Majesty, this is Tainu. If you come like this without any prior notice..."

Was there any need to tolerate the man who, unable to hide his astonishment, stammered three times at Kishiar's words?

The moment Yuder raised his hand, the ground under Jeymer Phil and the soldiers surrounding them shook violently. Though the level of force was trivial compared to what they could normally exert, it was enough to make those who had been off guard scream and stumble backward.

"An, an earthquake?"

"Ah. I saw a pesky insect fluttering about, and I feared it might harm the Commander, so I used a bit of my power. I apologize for the inconvenience. It was my mistake."

Jeymer Phil blinked several times in anger at Yuder's completely insincere muttering and abruptly stood up.

"What is this? How dare you...!"

"Yuder, did I not tell you that it's not good to use your power like this when you're still not fully healed?"

But it was Kishiar who scolded in a stern voice before Tainu's Knight Commander could speak. Jeymer Phil had to reluctantly close his mouth.

"How can your body heal if you waste your strength on mere insects? Why won't you listen? It really hurts and worries me."

"...I'm sorry. But as someone closest to the Commander, I thought I must naturally do that."

The man who had been giving Jeymer Phil an infinitely unlucky glare bowed his head immediately in front of Kishiar. It was as if watching a wild beast suddenly turn meek before its master. Kishiar briefly widened his eyes, then chuckled softly. He gently caressed the black-haired man's cheek and whispered tenderly in a way that no one could misunderstand.

"I didn't expect you to use that as a shield here. But... you can't say such cute things and expect it to be okay."

"Yes."

"Be careful. Apologize to those who fell, too."

"Yes, I understand. I'm sorry."

Jeymer Phil finally accepted Yuder's apology. Though the voice remained insincere, he had no time to dwell on that.

'Surely not, that man is the one from the rumors...?'

Even the unenthusiastic Knight Commander of Tainu had heard some rumors about the Duke of Peletta and the male member who accompanied him. But he never imagined he'd see it with his own eyes. He swallowed in astonishment, recalling the whispers that had secretly circulated from Baron Willhem's mansion.

"Commander Phil, I apologize for the inconvenience. As you can see, my assistant worries about me too much and sometimes causes scenes like this. Earlier, he even mistook a palm-sized cat for an assassin and tried to fight it. Isn't it adorable?"

"...Yes?"

"So don't be too angry, and watch the road more carefully next time."

While the words seemed conciliatory, upon closer examination, each expression was anything but insulting. But the clarity of the smile and voice that delivered them was so spotless that in the end, Jeymer Phil could only lick his lips without uttering a word and turn his head away.

"The underground dungeon is that way. I will guide you, so please follow me."

Duke Pelleta and his soldiers, heading for the underground dungeon, received an entirely different gaze as they moved than when they had just arrived. Those who had seen an Awakener, especially a Cavalry, utilizing their abilities for the first time, felt an unavoidable, subtle fear even if they said nothing outwardly.

It was better to be shunned than to be ridiculed. Yuder thought so, proudly straightening his shoulders and looking around. All the people around him flinched and retreated when their eyes met, but only the fellow Cavalry members managed to suppress their laughter, their faces expressing relief.

The underground dungeon's first floor was not as dark as expected. Since the ground outside was partially dug out to create windows, there was some light. The appearance of the unusual visitors with the Knight Commander caught the attention of the guards and the jailers. Amid the surrounding tension, Jeymer Phil opened his mouth with a stern face.

"Who are these suspicious people, and why have they come? Can you now tell me if this matter is related to the recent incident?"

"No, it has nothing to do with that. We have only heard that there may be people imprisoned here who seem to have been harmed by an Awakener's abilities."

"What?"

Jeymer Phil's brows furrowed in confusion.

"Are you saying there is an Awakener here?"

"No, they're most likely ordinary people. They just seem to have been harmed by an ability. Phil, how much do you know about the abilities of an Awakener?"

Suddenly changing the subject, Jeymer Phil concealed his displeasure and shook his head.

"Of course, I don't... know much."

"To others, it might not seem significant, but all my soldiers who visited here yesterday are Awakeners. And the Cavalry has the priority to investigate matters related to Awakeners. There's no more time to explain, so I want to find them first."

In short, it meant that explaining in detail was meaningless unless they were an Awakener. Jeymer Phil let out a shocked breath and called one of the jailers to give instructions for the guidance.