

Turning 401

Chapter 401

Yuder's chest roared to a boil in an instant.

It was a time slightly ahead of the dream he had had that day.

The day he secretly left the capital, following Emperor Katchian's plan, and had managed to sneak into the depths of Peletta Castle in the dark. Bizarrely, he had succeeded in hiding in the lord's chamber, in relatively good shape, without encountering the Knights or Nathan Zuckerman that he had expected to face.

The man he encountered as soon as he entered greeted him with a faint smile, his sharp, gaunt face looking as if he was pleased to meet a long-lost friend.

“...”

Yuder held his sword, looking around cautiously, but Kishiar did not move an inch. His deeply sunken red eyes were fixed solely on Yuder, not even glancing at the divine sword.

With an indescribable emotion, just like that.

“Shall I pour some tea? Ah, but I need to fetch the teapot and cups.”

“Do not move. I believe you already know why I am here.”

“To play a tactical game?”

“I bring the Emperor's decree.”

Though he knew what it meant, the smile on his pale cheek did not change a bit. An inscrutable smile, as if mocking his opponent, or as if he had been waiting for this all along. His eyes betrayed neither discomfort nor fear, and there was no sign that he intended to rise and punish the armed

intruder. His guard was naturally stimulated by this appearance, where no hostility was shown, yet, on the other hand, the man's behavior felt strangely acceptable.

“Yes..... I see.”

Yuder watched his own face as he frowned and spoke.

“Is that all?”

Kishiar's eyes narrowed, and a remarkably calm answer for a man facing death flowed out.

“I have no regrets. ...Just a bit of regret.”

“What do you mean?”

Yes... from here on, his memories were different.

But what he had remembered or thought he had remembered before was now meaningless. Yuder wanted to know the next part, and even what came after that.

Kishiar spoke of his vessel, just as in the dream Yuder had had before. Seeing the same scene twice had nearly eliminated the shock.

“If the injury I sustained by touching that stone hadn't shattered my vessel..... what would have happened?”

Ah.

Finally, the words that had faded away before he could hear them last time flowed out.

There was indeed more to come.

Yuder tried to see Kishiar more clearly, shivering slightly. The bloodless lips moved very slowly in the dim darkness.

“Of course, "what-ifs" are meaningless... but still. Could it have been a bit better?”

Yuder saw the tip of his sword tremble slightly. It was a clear, unmistakable disturbance, and he knew exactly the emotions his past self must have been feeling, even without a sound.

Questioning. Confusion, anger... all negative emotions mixed together.

“You look like you don't know what I'm talking about. Yes. Think of this as mere drunken babbling. It's all just a joke. I know best that it means nothing. Now is the best time.”

Kishiar chuckled softly. But that laughter turned into a stifled cough a moment later. The man, raising his gloved hand to wipe his mouth, swallowed his cough with a throaty noise, then sighed deeply and leaned back in his chair. In that moment, Yuder read an intense and deep fatigue from Kishiar's shoulders, layered over time like thick, blue dust.

With a face akin to a piece of bark hanging from the end of a withered branch, the man looked at the assassin standing before him.

"I have no intention of getting up from here."

"..."

"Now, let's see the skills of the one who followed me after a long time."

Yuder's hand, which held the sword, tightened with strength at the taunting jest. The bones of his protruding hand and the tips of his fingernails turned pale.

But a moment later, Yuder swung his sword no more and spat out words not found in his memory.

"...You have not answered."

His voice was filled with a painful and perplexed tone, as if he couldn't believe he was doing this himself.

"What's regrettable is that you still haven't answered."

Kishiar blinked his eyes, with an expression as if he hadn't expected such a response. Yuder glared at him, grinding his teeth and spoke the words, biting them off one by one.

"If... if you regret it, surrender now. If you intend to do so, I can at least help you deliver the message to His Majesty..."

"..."

"This is truly the last chance and question I can offer you."

"My goodness... Unbelievable. The one who came to kill me is now offering to help?"

A bitter smile spread across Kishiar's face. While the previous sullenness had completely turned into a sincere smile, Yuder's face only hardened further.

"It doesn't matter if you don't believe, but I..."

"No. I believe. It's too sincere, that's the problem."

The man who answered firmly swallowed a low cough once again. A heavy question remained where the sound of coughing disappeared.

"Do you intend to betray the Emperor, Commander of the Cavalry?"

"If His Majesty hears my story, it cannot be betrayal. Of course, if I have nothing to convey..."

"This is a decision made by one who has ambitious challenges to break free from the old age; there won't be any mistakes. The new Emperor is testing whether he can build a wall by pressing his surroundings with the intact Cavalry and its trusted Commander. I hope you pass this test."

"...What do you mean?"

"I've bet everything on you. Because I'm selfish and greedy."

Kishiar gave an inexplicable answer and laughed listlessly.

"So, I have no intention of begging for forgiveness or craving a conversation. This must happen. For you and for me."

"..."

"You have no idea how hard I worked to have this conviction. I promised to tell you the answer I found a long time ago, and I'm really sorry to only keep it now."

"What are you... talking about...?"

"The mysterious 'connection' I committed to you. Remember?"

Thump.

At that moment, something once again filled Yuder's previously empty chest.

Though simply described as a connection, he understood immediately that it was related to an accident during the second gender manifestation. Had Kishiar talked about that on that day? Why?

In the midst of immense confusion, only the calm voice continued.

"Perhaps what connected that day went beyond our bodies, something deeper... something like a soul. After a long search for what to do to sever something invisible, I concluded that I could achieve the best result with my power."

"What are you talking about? Why now...?"

"...Because there's no other time."

Kishiar tilted his head and smiled with a weary face.

"So I will decline the tender and virtuous suggestion you have made. Only the lamentation that it will not be remembered by posterity is regrettable."

It was a cold joke. A graceful and cruel meaning of refusal.

But at the same time, contradictorily, Yuder felt a vast pain rising like a tsunami from deep within his heart. Whether it was anger, sorrow, or agony, he could no longer distinguish.

Whether all this pain was his own, or,

Even if it was Kishiar's.

"...It will be over soon. Until all connections are forcibly severed... and then..."

In the quiet darkness, a faint voice rang out.

A lightning-like shock struck down, and everything went dark...

"..."

Yuder blankly stared at the ceiling, only then realizing that he had woken from his sleep. Hearing the sound of his heart beating furiously amidst a pounding headache and shock, he heard someone's voice not far away.

"Are you awake?"

A heavy and gruff voice from Enon.

Turning his head, he saw a haggard face sitting under the lavish chandelier of the room, incongruent like a crumpled bundle. Seeing Enon's face looking angrier than ever, yet with a hint of relief in his eyes, Yuder's sense of reality slowly returned.

"Do you know who I am?"

"...Enon."

"Ha. Yes. You seem fine."

Glancing reflexively around, Yuder realized that Kishiar was not there.

'I remember... moving through the passage while nestled in Kishiar's arms. What happened after that?'

"You, while fighting, took medicine and threw up a bowl of blood and fainted. Do you remember fainting?"

"...No."

"You did well. Very well."

Hearing the clear irony in the praise made his heart feel a bit heavy.

He thought he was fine, but maybe the effect of throwing up quite a bit of blood was significant. Regardless, the hall and its surroundings were incomparably serene compared to before.

"...Where is the Commander?"

"The first thing you ask after waking up is that?"

"I'm sorry to you. But at that time, I thought it was a situation where I needed to take the medicine..."

"Enough. Let's stop talking about that. I thought you would say something like that, but hearing exactly those words annoys me."

Chapter 402

Enon, who cut off Yuder's words in an instant, came closer and sat down. Eyes resembling his favorite lemons stared intently at Yuder's face, specifically aimed at his left eye.

"So that settles it."

"What?"

"Your eye."

Enon picked up a small decorative mirror that had been lying on the table and handed it over.

"According to the Commander, your left eye was shining gold, but when I came and turned the eyelid over, it was not. But when you woke up, it was the same, so it's certain that it has returned to its original color."

Taking the mirror, Yuder was slightly surprised to realize that both his eyes were indeed the same color. The gold he had seen himself had vanished without a trace, leaving behind a look no different from before his injury.

'The color... has returned.'

He looked strangely at his own eyes, whose deep shade had been the subject of countless remarks about its terrifying appearance. No matter how closely he looked, the only other color present was a faint violet that momentarily reflected the light, as was usually the case. It was an ordinary and familiar phenomenon that occurred when light hit the overly dark shade.

"I also saw the gold in my eye... What happened?"

"Well, I can only guess one thing. During the magic that erased the traces of amplification, the absorbed magic power remained attached inside and eventually flowed out with the disappearing toxicity."

“Is that something that can happen?”

“Eyes are as good a place for magic to linger as the heart is. Ever heard the story that when ancient great mages used magic, their eye color changed to the color of their magic?”

“...I think I have.”

“It's a phenomenon called the 'Eye of Magic.' Something similar happened to you.”

Enon went on at length with his explanation of magic, but the point was concise. It seemed as though something had pierced through Yuder's left eye like a path for magic, due to the toxicity and magic that had remained in his body.

“It might not have been visible due to the poison stain, but after it disappeared, the magic started to appear. It's only in one eye for you, but it's usually something that only great mages can do.”

“I don't see anything different from before.”

“It hasn't been long since your eye recovered, that's why.”

Enon told Yuder that his left eye might react more sensitively to magic or other energy than before and that he might be able to see things he couldn't previously see. It was an unimaginable power for now.

‘...Well, I'm not going to become a mage, so I should be satisfied with the mere fact that my eye has recovered.’

As Enon paused to gather his thoughts, Yuder put down the mirror. Then he noticed something different in his bare hand, which was without gloves. A strange sight, replacing the vanished black spots. Spiderweb-like violet specks spreading along the veins of the back of his hand.

“What is this.....”

“Oh, right, yes. There was that too.”

Enon looked down at Yuder's hand and muttered somberly.

“Didn't you see those spots spread before you fainted?”

“...I didn't know.”

How could he have known what was happening inside his gloved hand in the chaos of battle? He hadn't even noticed the light coming from his eyes. What's more, what had merely looked like spreading dots under his skin was now startlingly transformed into something that resembled veins.

Yuder looked down in alarm at the faint spots that had almost faded before he came west but had now darkened again as much as when they first appeared. Slowly rolling up his sleeve, he noticed that the spots, looking like streaks of blood, had spread quite a bit on the hidden part of his arm, but thankfully, they hadn't gone past his elbow.

Yuder clenched and unclenched his fist several times. Despite its more grotesque appearance than before, there was no pain.

"It doesn't hurt though."

"It doesn't hurt? Is that all you have to say? Huh? How many times did I tell you to think carefully before taking that medicine?"

Enon replied, his face filled with rage, and clenched his fist. He was evidently struggling to contain his desire to punch. If it would calm him down, Yuder was willing to take a punch or two, so he even considered bowing his head, but Enon eventually relaxed his clenched fist.

"Yeah... It's my fault for being weak and giving you the medicine. It's my fault, not yours. I should be the one to blame, not you."

"Don't say that, Enon. If it weren't for that medicine, I wouldn't have been able to escape so easily. If you're angry, just be yourself as usual. Don't blame yourself."

"You really demotivate me, you know," Enon said, slumping his shoulders, looking utterly defeated.

"You wake up and say that without changing your expression one bit? What kind of life have you lived, you young kid?"

"You know. It's not that hard."

"...Compared to me, everyone's life is hard!"

Perhaps due to his mood, Enon's expression seemed more troubled than before as he answered.

"Anyway, now that you're awake, let's test something. Try using some strength on anything."

Yuder didn't ask why. Lifting his hand, where purple lines had spread like a messy drawing, he lightly exerted force, and a small flame ignited with a whooshing sound.

At that moment, the lines on his hand contracted and expanded erratically, and the color of his left eye changed. Unlike before, when the light seemed to blaze brightly within his pupils, this sudden transformation occurred silently. Enon observed the change without surprise, just furrowing his brow, then nodded.

"Now, make it go away."

As the flame vanished, the color of his eye returned to normal. The spots on the back of his hand remained, but inside the rolled-up sleeve, the faintest areas were still wriggling, moving along the streaks of blood.

"Again."

Enon made Yuder repeat the action several times before letting out a sigh. Yuder, sensing that he could stop now, ignored the still-wriggling spots inside his wrist and lowered his sleeve.

"Is there any pain?"

"No."

"It's a relief that there's no pain, but it seems the hasty consumption of the medicine and continuous use of the Awakener's power to adjust the toxicity has caused some side effects."

Enon succinctly explained why he had Yuder exert his strength and what he thought the results meant.

"Every time you use the Awakener's power, the red energy not yet fully absorbed through your hands, and the remaining magic energy in your eyes seem to move together. We need to keep an eye on it, but... perhaps the innate magic energy you originally possessed might also be affected."

"...My magic energy?"

"Every member of this world, including humans, naturally possesses magic energy to survive, whether they are a mage or not."

Just as a body would reject the blood of a stranger if it did not match, naturally, the result of someone else's magic power entering a body was that it would not linger long and would vanish. However, the power of Kishiar that Yuder had absorbed from a massive spell cast to remove the specific magic effects that had settled in a human body seemed to linger for some reason. It had not disappeared and seemed to have fully adapted, moving as if it were a part of the body itself.

‘Had the body transformed into a medium that accepted and absorbed external forces? Or was it something else...’

“Anyway, we'll need to investigate further, but your hand is quite noticeable. It would be best to continue wearing gloves.”

Indeed, if someone saw a hand writhing like this, they would likely scream and run away. As there would be no benefit to being remembered so intensely by others, Yuder silently nodded.

“And the rest... honestly, it's not that bad.”

Enon grimaced, as if extremely reluctant to admit it.

“While you were unconscious, Lusan and I examined you, and the blood you vomited was toxicity escaping from within, and your previously unstable spirit has stabilized considerably. If you have no difficulty or pain when using your power, then the medicine has fully taken effect.”

Yes. That seemed right.

The sensation of pain that had been burning his body, and the blood he had vomited, rather than weakening him, felt like something was burning away and trying to purge a build-up. Even if the power of the red stone, which had almost been absorbed into Yuder's body, had flared up once more when something stimulated it again, if it didn't cause any problems when using his strength, then all was well.

Yuder finally exhaled deeply, feeling as though he had escaped a long quandary. Now, there was nothing to obstruct his path.

“Enon. So... where is the commander?”

“...”

With a look that seemed to say he never gave up, Enon looked at Yuder, bowed his head, and opened his mouth.

“He waited until he was assured that your condition wasn't serious, and then he left.”

“He left? What about Priest Lusan...?”

“That guy is... Ah, he's coming now.”

“Sir Enon! I've brought what you asked for. Is this it?”

Lusan, holding a handful of freshly plucked leaves, stopped in his tracks as his eyes met Yuder's.

“Sir Yuder! You're awake.”

Chapter 403

Contrary to Enon's grumpy face, Lusan had honestly taken Yuder's hand and started with a prayer of joy. Little by little, an awkward gratitude welled up while listening to the prayer, expressing relief that no serious trouble had arisen and that the long-standing injuries had improved.

Once the prayer ended, after hearing a brief account from Enon, Lusan opened his mouth with great relief.

"So you don't have to worry as much about this hand as before. That's truly fortunate. You can't imagine how surprised I was when I was suddenly called here in the middle of the night..."

"...I'm sorry."

"No, it's I who should be sorry. Unlike Enon, I haven't been much help, so I feel more apologetic."

"Why are you speaking so nicely? I thought I was being kidnapped and interrogated or something. You were dragged here from sleep too."

While he had guessed that Kishiar must have been incredibly surprised, having vomited blood and even fainted, the reaction from Lusan and Enon at being pulled from sleep seemed to have been more significant than he had imagined. Yuder, recalling the deep scar in the red eyes that looked down at him, closed his mouth and bowed his head in silence.

Lusan quickly extended his hand, assuring that he was fine.

"It's only natural that you were called secretly since you were on a confidential mission with the Commander. Earlier, Enon even told the Commander such things because he was worried about Yuder. Why are you saying such mean things now..."

"When did I? I never did. Anyway, give me those herbs."

"Yes, yes, take them."

Enon vehemently denied it, but Yuder had already heard Lusan's words. Enon was worried about him and had said 'such words' to Kishiar. What did 'such words' mean?

"...Enon. Was the Commander not just going out?"

"...I'm going for this."

"Tell me what that means... Enon."

Before he had even finished speaking, Enon hurriedly left. Watching his retreating figure, Lusan made a face as if he might laugh.

"...He's truly remarkable. I knew he wouldn't be cowed even in front of the Commander, but earlier, he was really..."

"What on earth happened?"

With Enon gone, Lusan was the only one left to speak. Upon seeing Yuder's gaze, Lusan hesitated momentarily before opening his mouth.

"When I was called and came here, Enon was already here. At that time, the Commander was sitting here, watching Yuder... The atmosphere was not good. It seemed like he didn't even hear my greeting."

Kishiar sat quietly, not even changing his blood and dust-stained clothes, watching as Enon and Lusan examined Yuder's body and infused it with energy. His eyes remained still and dark.

During this time, someone outside continually sought him. Whether it was a Peletta Knight who had run from somewhere in Tainu, a messenger from the security management team, or a servant from Pruelle Van Tain, all called for Kishiar, but he did not respond. Normally, Natan Zuckerman alone might have spoken to him, but strangely, even the Southern Knight looked at his lord with an unknowable expression, unable to easily speak.

Eventually, Enon, his nerves sharpened by the continuous calls from outside, exploded. He turned to Kishiar and opened his mouth with fierce eyes.

"Excuse me, but may I say something?"

‘...’

"This fellow is surprisingly alright, despite how he looks. It's quite astonishing, considering what he's been through. So, there's no need to look at him as though he's about to die."

A rough and unrivaled voice made Lusan's gallbladder chill, but Enon continued speaking.

"But there's no environment as toxic to the patient as the noise outside. I understand that you want to be angry with me, but it's incredibly uncomfortable when you interfere like this."

"Sir Enon!..."

Lusan was startled, but Kishiar laughed softly at those words. The man, waking from a long contemplation and wiping the dried blood from his eye with his hand, stood from his seat with his usual expression shortly after.

"Yes, good. It's a relief that he's alright, despite appearances. I'll leave for a while, so please take care of things."

The man, who had been looking down at Yuder's face, soon turned and walked away. Nathan Zuckerman also followed him, but just before opening the door, Kishiar paused as if struck by a thought.

His final command was as follows:

"Help Yuder Aile to rest as much as possible, but have someone watch over him until he wakes. If I haven't returned by then, that's the message."

After hearing Lusan's story, Yuder swallowed dryly. He learned the names of some emotions he hadn't known before, but what he was feeling now was different, and he couldn't express it in words.

Only that inside his chest it stung a bit, as if he had just woken from a dream.

"I already knew that the Commander cares for Yuder, but... this time I was really surprised. Yuder must not be harmed even by a scratch from now on. Of course, no one in the Cavalry should be injured either."

Lusan jokingly said, half-seriously, half in jest, a smile playing at the corner of his lips. Yuder could not respond to him.

Afterward, he gulped down very bitter herbal tea and various medicines until he was almost bursting. Whether there was a sleeping drug in it or not, he closed his eyes unknowingly and when he woke up, the presence of the two was gone, and one person was sitting in their place.

At the sight of Kishiar sitting in the dim dawn, Yuder thought the dream had started again. The posture with clenched hands on his knees and the shadowy, haggard eyes looked remarkably similar to then. If it were not for the rainbow-colored flame of the magic heater crackling behind him, he might have doubted his sense of reality.

"...How's your body?"

A soft voice came. Yuder, calming the momentarily disturbed emotions, cleared his throat and opened his mouth.

"I'm fine. When did you arrive?"

"..."

"It's dawn. You haven't slept, have you?"

Kishiar didn't answer again. It was neither affirmation nor denial. Perhaps he didn't even want to speak.....

'It's understandable.'

Yuder breathed out softly and raised himself. As he stepped off the bed, the soft rug wrapped around his bare feet. He approached where Kishiar was sitting, intending to kneel, but Kishiar, as if understanding his intention before he could bend his knee, shook his head to stop him.

With no other choice, he stood straight in front of the seated man and opened his mouth.

"I apologize."

"..."

"I have caused you worry and concern with my immature judgment. I should have told you about the medicine that Enon provided, but...judging that the condition was not serious and the situation needed to be resolved urgently, I delayed a detailed report. You must have been quite surprised when I suddenly vomited blood and fainted."

"..."

"Thank you for bringing me here, nonetheless. I've heard from Enon and Priest Lusan that you took great care...in many ways."

Only the sound of the burning magic stone stove resonated louder in the silence. It was so quiet that one might even hear the beating of one's heart. At that moment, Kishiar finally relaxed the strength in his hands that were resting on his knees.

From the space where the ten intertwined fingers like two trees unraveled, there appeared a small, transparent potion bottle that Yuder had given him.

The moment he saw it, a painful cry rang out inside his body.

Yuder could not know what thoughts were in his mind as he watched him lying there, clutching it.

"...I asked Apothecary Enon, and he said this potion was handed over due to your questions and requests. Is that so?"

"..."

"When I found out that you had taken poisonous medicine for yourself and handed this to me...I could say nothing."

It was really Yuder who could say nothing. He was about to open his mouth to clarify that he hadn't wanted Kishiar to feel that way, but Kishiar spoke first.

"That is..."

"You don't hesitate to hide the process for a better result, no matter what happens to you... You must have thought it acceptable for a greater goal. You were sure it wouldn't kill you, so you judged it to be so natural, so even if you apologize to me, you will be satisfied with the current result itself."

Each slowly spoken word pierced his lungs. The red eyes were reading Yuder's inner thoughts very precisely.

"..."

"That certainty hurts me very much, Yuder Aile."

Chapter 404

There was neither anger nor anything else; just the calmly delivered words. Before the shock could even register, Kishiar continued speaking.

"And so, I'm sorry for that."

"What... What are you apologizing for?"

"Even considering all the variables, knowing better than anyone that my assistant had such certainty, I'm the one who led us there in the end."

Yuder was about to open his mouth to tell him not to blame himself. Everything was because of him, and what Kishiar had gleaned from his inner thoughts was not incorrect in the slightest. Yuder could have knelt down on the spot and apologized over and over, but if it would keep Kishiar from

getting more tired and send him safely in the dark, he would have drunk the burning potion just as many times.

When he saw the scar deep in Kishiar's eyes, he felt something akin to regret for a moment. However, having dreamed a long-ago dream and awakened anew, such sentimental thoughts had long since vanished. It was his fault. He was Yuder Aile. And probably would be in the future as well.

But, as he met Kishiar's inscrutable, powerful gaze, all of this became difficult to articulate. Seeing Yuder's hesitant face, the corners of Kishiar's lips faintly lifted.

"I've thought about it ever since I returned here. Just as my assistant has judged right, drinking the potion, and ultimately seizing what he desired, I would have ended up taking you to that place with me, regardless of how many times the situation repeated. My conclusion would not have changed." Because in the end, he did not doubt that it was right.

The slowly uttered voice carried heat, sinking hotly into his ears.

"So who can we blame? What I said to you is something I should say to myself as well."

"..."

"Perhaps as long as we're together, the same pain will keep repeating. But, if that fact discourages us from doing anything, then what could we have started in the first place?"

Yuder looked down at the transparent potion bottle that Kishiar was slowly rubbing between his hands, listening to his words. A sensation that felt both familiar and unfamiliar swirled slowly in his chest.

"So don't apologize to me even if the same thing repeats in the future. I know that's your kindness. But I don't want to see someone who has courageously faced and overcome himself kneeling to comfort my mere pain."

"..."

"Don't diminish the judgment you thought was right in such a way. I'll deal with my pain on my own."

"But..."

"Didn't you promise to accompany me on my path forever?"

Yuder's words stuck in his throat for a moment.

He had promised Kishiar.

The future of Kishiar La Orr's newly formed Cavalry unit. A time when the useless and rejected Awakeners would finally take their rightful place in the world. He had vowed to go with him to the end of that long road.

"As long as you don't forget that, it's enough."

Kishiar's eyes curved gently into a smile. Above the red irises, the shadows of multicolored lights leaped incessantly, reminiscent of the fireworks display held in the capital every New Year's Eve. In that tragic yet vibrant beauty, Yuder momentarily lost himself.

It was different.

Everything was different, to the point where he felt embarrassed for having momentarily mistaken the shadow of dawn on his face for 'that day's' Kishiar. Everything was different...

"Why are you making that face? You look like a child who doesn't know what to do because they haven't been scolded."

"...I am past the age for such a childish comparison."

He responded reflexively, but in fact, he himself felt that Kishiar's words were not entirely wrong.

He had thought it would be natural for Kishiar to be angry. He exhaled heavily, thinking about what he needed to do to erase even a small part of the deep scars etched in Kishiar's eyes. But when the situation turned out to be the opposite of what he had anticipated, he didn't know what to do.

"Think simply," Kishiar extended his hand. Yuder hesitated for a moment, then took it, and sat on his knee as he was pulled.

"In the end, being alive means you can do anything."

'...Being alive means you can move forward.'

Mixed with Kishiar's words, a voice that was the same but a slightly different statement spread inside him, like ripples on the surface of water.

'What was that?'

Yuder blinked blankly.

Had he heard those words from Kishiar before? When? He tried to think more clearly, but the ripples, like a small stone that had been thrown, had quickly sunk without a trace. Above his furrowed brow, Kishiar raised a question, holding his hand up.

"Does your hand not hurt? According to Lusan, even his divine power can hardly change it now."

"Ah... Yes. It's fine since it doesn't hurt. It moves every time I exert strength, but..."

"I see. It still seems to be moving a bit. Has the power seeped into the veins?"

Kishiar, who had lifted Yuder's hand, let out a soft breath, looking at the ragged line along his arm. Yuder flinched when Kishiar's breath touched the back of his hand, but he quickly shut his mouth, recalling the words that had said to leave his own pain to himself.

"I'm not sure about that yet."

"Okay. Then... how about your eye?"

"My eye is fine."

"Don't you feel bad that your power is leaking every time you use your ability?"

Yuder lifted his head to meet the gaze looking down at him. Kishiar had apparently already received a report on that part.

"Why would it?"

In fact, whether one eye turned gold or red, or was covered in black spots and not visible at all, it was heavenly compared to before. His halved field of vision had widened, and he no longer lost his sense of distance. As long as it didn't distract him during battle, it didn't matter since he himself couldn't feel the color change.

"Could you... show me?"

Kishiar asked cautiously. It was not difficult. A stream of water generated from thin air spiraled softly between Yuder's fingers as soon as he raised one. At the same time, golden light sprang from the inner corner of his left eye.

"Is it done?"

"Yes. It has really changed. But it's a bit different from that time."

When his eye color first changed, it emitted a bright light even in the darkness, but now it was not that intense. Yuder flinched at the touch of the cool fingertips moving from under his left eye, across his eyelid to his ear, and then back again, but he obediently offered his face.

"I will remove it now."

"Okay."

Yuder withdrew his power, and at the same time, the golden pupil shrank. But Kishiar's gaze remained fixed in the same place. Yuder silently waited for him to speak.

"The feeling is peculiar."

"If it's too strange, I'll think about a solution."

"When you were with me, you seemed so unreasonably fussy, but curiously, you're beautiful."

"Really?"

Kishiar did not repeat himself. Instead, he gently changed the subject and informed Yuder of the matters he had dealt with while Yuder had slept. All the while, he wore a smile.

Despite not joining them, a report that Pruelle and Ever had succeeded in opening the way to the 4th-floor dungeon. Although the underground storage had been wrecked, the tavern maintained an abnormally usual appearance, and Baron Willhem seemed to know nothing about it. Then the news that Nathan Zuckerman had destroyed the bottles of Infinity, forever eradicating the dangerous drugs of Calanesa inside.

Ordinarily, Yuder would have focused on those astonishing revelations, but today, Yuder couldn't tear his gaze away from the smile that appeared on Kishiar's face as he spoke.

Kishiar must have once been a person who smiled like this.

A sincerity revealed, not hidden between eyes that seemed to have swallowed all the secrets of the world. Unlike natural beauty, it was a product carved and chosen through the path he had lived. How special must one feel to be allowed to share such contrasting charm? Did that man truly understand?

After thinking to that point, a smile from a previous life he saw in a dream overlapped with the current one.

How would it have been if he had shown him such a smile back then? Would something have changed?

...Could it have changed?

There were still many holes within Yuder. Some things had been filled, but others might never be. But one thing was clear: all of this was related to the man before him.

Yuder recalled the thin thread-like energy he had witnessed in the darkness of the secret storage. If it was the same energy that Kishiar had seen when he found him in the Great Sarain Forest, what could its identity be?

The inside of his mouth and tongue tingled as if wanting to say something. Yuder looked down at the small glass bottle still clutched in his hand, even after all the talk had ended.

Since escaping the secret storage and handling all those matters, without even a moment's rest, anyone, even a Swordmaster, would be tired. But he had ignored all of that, prioritizing Yuder and staying here without even taking the medicine.

Suddenly, he remembered the dream man, suppressing coughs within his tightly closed mouth.

An almost unique pain that even the patient, current Kishiar had said he couldn't endure. It was pain related to the vessel, suffered just before becoming an Awakener.

The pain that a man, strong as iron refined through thousands of smeltings, considered death preferable to bear. Was he swallowing that kind of pain now?

For what purpose?

"...Commander, will you ultimately not take it?"

Unable to hold back, Yuder spoke, and Kishiar smiled slightly.

"Do you want me to drink it?"

"If it's not uncomfortable since I gave it to you... I wish you would."

"Now?"

Now. When Yuder nodded, Kishiar silently fiddled with the bottle for a moment, then opened the cap. Only after watching the potion flow smoothly down his throat did Yuder feel entirely free from the remnants of the dream.

Chapter 405

"I still can't believe it. That I've been there."

As soon as morning arrived, the first to rush to Yuder's side was Ever, who didn't know precisely what had transpired with Yuder the previous night. Hence, she was initially startled to see the black spots gone, and his eyes cleanly healed, but soon congratulated him with a joyous face.

What followed was the revelation about the hidden basement on the fourth floor of the Security Management Team's dungeon, which she had uncovered with Pruelle the night before.

"Truth be told, I didn't think Prince Pruelle would take the initiative so aggressively at first, so I was thinking we should act after the Commander and Yuder arrived," Ever explained.

Though Ever had followed the secretly visiting Baron Willhem to discover that the basement's fourth floor truly existed, they needed to break through an ancient magic called 'Protection of Blood' to enter.

Only the blood relatives of the mage who had placed the enchantment could open the ancient magic entrance. The mechanism was hidden between the wall of the third-floor dungeon Yuder had discovered, and a place engraved with the Tain family's sigil.

Ever knew that blood, not completely wiped off near the sigil after Willhem's escape, was left behind. But asking Pruelle outright for his blood seemed awkward due to his sensitive status.

Even though he was a polite young man who was highly cooperative with her and dreamt of joining the Cavalry, Pruelle van Tain was still a natural nobleman, carrying the Tain family's bloodline. Therefore, Ever decided to proceed cautiously and waited for Kishiar to finish his warehouse work

and join them, but no matter how long she waited, he didn't show. Surprisingly, it was Pruelle who persuaded her as time was running out.

"I must show Deputy Commander Beck the extent of my determination," he said, cutting his palm with a dagger. Fearlessly smearing the flowing blood on the Tain family's sigil and sprinkling it around, it didn't take long for the ground before them to shift, revealing hidden stairs leading down to the fourth floor.

"The cells of dungeon floor four really did have people trapped inside. I initially thought the bodies were piled up since there was a magic circle that forced the imprisoned to sleep, but I was able to gather information from the one person who was awake," Ever continued.

He was a captive brought with his siblings, fortunate enough to be tied in an area where the magic circle was slightly damaged, so he could stay conscious. Ever and Pruelle obtained information about the secret dungeon from him. It was protected by magic so strong that even Ever's mightiest punch couldn't break it, and could only be opened and closed by special means.

"Those who slept in there were only able to wake briefly to eat food brought by Baron Willhem every few days. Oddly enough, it seemed like they felt no hunger or thirst in there," she recounted.

"Not needing to eat or drink, not acting noisy, and having no chance to escape, it must have been the perfect place to hide people," Pruelle remarked.

"Who on earth created such a dreadful and disgusting secret dungeon?" Yuder asked, unable to conceal his anger about the basement's fourth floor from Ever.

"Ever, is the person who gave you information the Awakener who kept shouting to announce the existence of the fourth floor?"

"Yes, he was indeed someone who could control sound."

Although it was an ability useless for escaping, Yuder had taken the call for rescue seriously and not dismissed it as mere ghostly noise. Because of Yuder, the captive was able to meet the Cavalry.

He had spared no effort in sharing with Ever and Pruelle the information he had gathered from Baron Willhem, not just regarding the prison but other matters as well, and he promised to fully cooperate with the Cavalry's plan for escape.

"And I made that man swallow the fruit that the Commander gave."

The fruit that Kishiar had handed over to Ever through Finn Eldore for this mission made it easier to track the person who consumed it. Originally intended for tracking dogs, a few members of the Cavalry within the security management team had a sense of smell even better than dogs.

'Baron Willhem will surely go to free those who are trapped there, with the auction ahead. That's when the Cavalry will make their move.'

Even after Pruelle and Ever finished the mission and returned, Baron Willhem had not yet discovered the truth. It was a flawless success.

"You managed well by assessing the situation properly, even without me. That's reassuring."

"It's all thanks to Prince Pruelle."

Ever seemed to be very pleased with Pruelle's impression of the matter. Had Pruelle heard it, he would have been delighted, but unfortunately, he was not present. He had momentarily left to finalize the information collection, now that they were nearing the end.

"But what happened yesterday that prevented you from coming to the security management team? I was really worried when I only heard something had come up."

"Haha. Quite a few unexpected things happened here."

Hearing from Kishiar about what had happened in the warehouse the night before, Ever was relieved that everyone had safely returned but reacted gravely to the information about the southern merchants.

"It's a relief that you finished everything in that situation, but... the fact that such a skilled Awakener is a close aide to Duke Tain concerns me. Prince Pruelle seemed completely unaware that there is an Awakener among them."

"I would bet not only Prince Pruelle but also Baron Willhem and Duke Tain don't know that there is an Awakener. If they knew, they would never have been able to build such a relationship of trust."

That thought had occurred to Yuder yesterday as well. The idea that such a highly skilled individual was a mere merchant was hardly believable.

"The fact that we don't know their purpose is troubling."

"Fortunately, through yesterday's fight, a clue has emerged."

Kishiar casually replied to Yuder's muttering.

"Did you notice when you poured water on the bag of Calanesa yesterday? That person tried to protect the bag."

"Yes."

How could he forget? It was the first time the Southerner, who had successively faced Nathan and Kishiar without caring about the items breaking around him, had tried to protect something. Of course, everything inside had already been replaced except for the shelf, but the southern merchant didn't know that.

"Everything inside was secretly brought by Duke Tain through the Great Sarain Forest. Then, where did they come from?"

"I've heard that most of the goods traded through the Great Sarain Forest come from the countries that border the forest."

"Yes. But that's just the last destination of those goods in the western countries, not the first place of origin."

Kishiar responded as if posing a riddle, then continued, looking into Yuder's eyes.

"The raw material for Calanesa is the Calain flower. And the climate where that flower thrives is hot and dry."

There was only one place on the continent with the hottest and driest climate. The vast and distant land south of the desert: the Southern Countries.

"The Empire, of course, and even in neighboring foreign countries, in order to bring in such a large quantity of a drug that has not even spread its name properly, there must naturally be those closely related to its origin, mustn't there?"

Kishiar let out a cold smile.

Yuder's mind raced as Yuder looked at Kishiar.

"Then... Baron Willhem and Duke Tain seemed unaware of the disturbance that happened last night, and the reaction of the tavern was quiet all along. It could be related to them as well."

"I think so," Kishiar responded, offering a look of praise.

"The power that can hide an incident that happened last night so that no one knows, and thereby seems to gain something, isn't there only one at present? Even though so many items were broken, it was deemed to be something that could be hidden. It also means that the swap for the fake items wasn't detected, but at the same time, it allowed us to guess the intentions of the southern merchants."

They had come here to move Duke Tain's goods, but in reality, the most important thing they likely cared about was Calanesa powder.

'They might have arranged for the profit gained by importing and distributing it to go more to their side than to Duke Tain, or perhaps they came with the intention of making a big gain without properly informing the Duke of the value of the drug. In that case, they wouldn't want to ruin the Duke's trust by unnecessarily creating a big fuss.'

"Truly despicable people. To bring such a drug so casually into the Empire and try to sell it off..."

Ever, who had heard from Kishiar what kind of potent drug Calanesa powder was, grimaced without mercy, imagining what might happen if it spread.

“Yes. There are a few more points to be caught, but the answer is not yet certain. Therefore, if possible, I would like to catch them all this time.”

“Excuse me for a moment.”

Then, a polite knock came from outside the door. The person who opened the door and entered was a Tain family servant, but his appearance soon changed to that of Pruelle van Tain. He smiled, apparently happy that Ever was still there, and then respectfully handed a small bundle of paper to Kishiar.

“Did you have a peaceful night, Your Highness? I have finally completed the list of those who came here during last year’s party.”

“You must have been busy visiting the security management team yesterday, and yet you completed this too?”

“The surrounding information was already collected, and it only needed final verification when Baron Willhem confirmed the party date and sent out invitations, so it was not too much trouble.”

Pruelle, who humbly responded, watched Kishiar's face as he began to read the paper, his eyes tense. The time had come for the final evaluation of the information and efforts he had brought.

“...Hmm.”

“How is it?”

“Excellent.”

Kishiar laid down the paper, filled from front to back, and praised it.

“To have organized so perfectly the list of those invited last year, those who sent out invitations this year, and even the southern merchants who visited at that time. It will not be difficult to detect any foul play just by reading this. You have had much trouble checking and recording everything individually.”

“Not at all. I'm glad if it was helpful.”

Pruelle's freckled nose reddened slightly.

“Then are you now planning to leave for the capital as is?”

“Yes. The work is all finished, and I cannot delay another day, so I will leave either this evening or tomorrow morning. My younger brother Nipollen, as I told you before...”

“Leave him to me.”

Ever stood up from her seat and confidently interjected. Pruelle, who met her gaze, lifted the corners of his mouth, his face expressing great relief.

"Yes. That will do."

"I heard you injured your hand yesterday, and I see you still have it wrapped."

As Kishiar said, Pruelle, who had bravely penetrated the "Protection of Blood" by cutting his palm in the security management team's dungeon the previous night, was still wrapping his hand with a handkerchief instead of a bandage.

"Meet Priest Lusan before you leave."

"No, no. It's not that bad. I'm fine."

"It might be hard to ride a horse if your hand is uncomfortable."

At Kishiar's suggestion, the red-haired youth furrowed his eyebrows as if he were troubled, but soon cautiously opened his mouth.

"I'm really fine. The wound itself has almost completely healed using the holy water I brought, and this is just... um, something I continue to do because protection is needed until it's fully healed."

Pruelle, having answered, bowed politely towards Ever, who was staring at him with wide-open eyes.

"Can I return this to you the next time I see you, Deputy Commander Beck?"

"Oh, yes. Of course, that's fine. You have a long journey, so you can throw it away without any burden if you like..."

"Throw it away?"

Pruelle responded forcefully.

"How could I throw away the symbol of warm compassion you bestowed upon me yesterday? I will surely return it to you, so please wait."

Ever blinked, not noticing the strange passion in his voice, and nodded.

"Yes..."

"Now, everyone will be busy, so let's get on with our respective duties."

Kishiar, who had been watching them, waved his hand with a peculiar smile.

"Contact me anytime through the predetermined route if there are any changes."

That Baron Willhem had set the date for the party meant that the date for the secret auction had also been determined.

'Nahan is surely watching from somewhere.'

Those who wanted to take revenge on Duke Tain would surely appear somewhere, inflict significant damage, and attempt to find and take away the Awakeners among those who were victimized and trafficked.

However, there was no worry or fear. Kishiar and those following him had already finished all possible preparations and felt confident.

'...Whichever side it is, come prepared for things not to go your way.'

Strengthening his resolve, Yuder clenched his gloved hand tightly.

And a week later, finally, numerous carriages began to line up and enter the widely-opened mansion of the Willhem family and within the gates of Tainu.

Chapter 406

"Finally, the day has come."

Baron Willhem looked out of the window with a stern face. The doors of the mansion that had remained closed due to all sorts of ghastly events were open as they once were, after a very long time. A rare emotion of being moved seemed to seep into his withered heart at the sight.

The Tainu knights, standing majestically in front of the grand entrance, were checking the invitations of the incoming guests while dressed in beautiful armor, polished especially for that day. Carriages of distinguished guests that had rushed from various parts of the west were as splendid as the magnificent mansion itself.

There were no signs to be found of the aftermath of the horrible events that had occurred.

On such a day, a shabby carriage that seemed to be there for official business foolishly mingled with the party guests, only to be driven away. Watching the scene, the Baron turned his back to the window. His butler was waiting, head politely bowed, for his master's orders.

"Has all the communication from the auction been received?"

"Yes. The inspection and transportation preparations of the goods are all in progress. The security management team has prepared for your visit at any time, and the warehouse reports no problems, according to the Southerners."

"Eh? Those brutes themselves? What is Jacob doing?"

Baron Willhem mentioned the name of the old proprietor who ran the tavern where the secret warehouse was located. Normally, communication related to the warehouse was his responsibility.

"The Southerners have been contacting us these last few days. Jacob recently insolently requested more warehouse management fees because of his old age and poor health. I suspect he's neglecting his duties since we ignored that."

"He did such a careless thing at such a critical time? An ungrateful wretch, even after receiving undue favor for so long. Once this matter is over, deal with him first."

"Yes. Understood."

Baron Willhem briefly felt annoyance at the news that the old owner had not contacted him directly, but he couldn't even imagine that anything had happened there without his knowledge.

'Southerner brutes are at least competent compared to a stupid commoner. Unpleasant fellows, but they've certainly carried out the orders of the Duke Tain.'

"Then proceed to move the items from the warehouse as planned. I'll visit the security management team at midnight today. Everything must be perfectly timed."

"Of course. You've endured so much hardship. In two days, just like last year, everything will conclude as you have prepared, my lord!"

Baron Willhem smiled at his smooth-talking butler's words.

'Yes... just endure today and tomorrow, only two days.'

He had suffered so much because of the contemptible Awakeners who had troubled various parts of Tainu and Duke Peletta, whose only remarkable ability was to infuriate people. Despite the constant reproaches from Duke Tain, he was proud and bitter to have successfully protected the precious goods until today.

Though, there had been the regrettable accident of losing his younger sibling and sister-in-law in the process, what could be done? Once this was over, the Baron planned to demand compensation for his sibling as well, further securing his wealth and glory through Duke Tain.

'Duke Tain...'

Baron Willhem opened his mouth, thinking of the face that came to mind from his memories.

"It's a bit regrettable that the First Son Pruelle went away without seeing the conclusion of this matter. It was an opportunity to demonstrate the relationship between House Willhem and the future Duke Tain."

"Do not worry too much. Have you forgotten that before Pruelle left, he knew we were short of hands for the party preparation and recommended those who could be of use? There's no doubt that Pruelle must have helped ardently, considering Tainu as his second homeland, and treating you, my lord, as his family."

"Indeed, that's true."

The Baron secretly wore a pleased smile.

"It was unexpected. After all, Tainu is the place where Pruelle stayed the longest during his young days, and who else would have seen him more frequently than my wife and me, even more than the Duke himself? The mere news of his visit would lead everyone to guess our relationship."

The Baron had been more than generous to the young children of the ducal family who had stayed in Tainu for several years long ago. He presumed that, like him, Pruelle must have cherished that time as a 'good memory', and he was satisfied with this thought.

"Now I must go out and greet our guests. Oh, by the way, what's the situation over there?"

"The Duke of Peletta will also be coming here soon," was the reply.

"I see... Thinking that all the nuisances will soon disappear, even seeing that hideous man again seems less repulsive. Hahaha."

The Baron laughed heartily, his face moving animatedly, having become more gaunt from the stress he had been under. A clear bell sounded in the distance, signaling an hour before the party began.

“Let's go then.”

Yuder slowly reached out and took the elegantly extended hand of Kishiar. Dressed in a black and white formal suit, Kishiar exuded the air of a duke who was more playful than ever.

His broad shoulders and slender waist, clearly visible without a cloak, the brilliant flower and handkerchief tucked into his breast pocket, all made it evident that whoever saw him was meant to feel he was not here for a conventional or formal occasion. His slightly disheveled forelock and twinkling, mischievous red eyes sparkled through.

“I never thought I would wear this formal attire again.”

“Still, isn't it more comfortable this time?”

Yuder's clothing was similar to Kishiar's formal attire. The only difference was that Yuder's was accompanied by a long black cloak that nicely concealed the inner outfit.

As they stepped outside, those waiting for them greeted them all at once. Among them were Nathan Zuckerman, who commanded the Peletta Knights, and Finn Eldore, who had stayed in place of the absent Ever.

Yuder saw Finn blink twice and slightly nod his head, a gesture that might appear to be a simple greeting to others, but was actually a kind of promise and signal between them.

‘Did he finally find something?’

Finn had been wandering near the bars and inns where the southern merchants were, at Yuder's request, without the other members noticing. Even Yuder couldn't entirely understand how Finn managed to evade attention.

‘I must investigate this when there's time.’

The Cavalry had split into two groups that day, as previously agreed. Most were with Ever in the security management team, and the rest remained to guard Baron Willhem's mansion, where the party was being held.

However, since attendance at the party was strictly limited to invitees, the only ones who could enter the mansion were Kishiar and Yuder Aile, whom he had designated as his partner. Of course, no one in the Cavalry was unhappy about this fact.

“Duke of Peletta... Welcome.”

As they made their way into the main mansion, the servants who had been waiting for them bowed in unison, their bodies bent in polite deference. Yuder, while holding Kishiar's arm, felt the eyes of those stealthily appraising him flicker over his recently healed left eye, sensing their surprise turn into disdain and fear. Yet, Yuder's facial expression did not change as he continued to walk.

If those casting their gaze upon Yuder knew that he found their stares almost refreshingly satisfying, as if they were a long-awaited reward, they would have likely been even more taken aback.

The main mansion of the Willhem family was more splendid and dazzling than ever, filled with the majority of the guests. Nobles who hadn't seen each other since last year exchanged warm smiles, and the beautiful sound of music filled the hall with warmth.

Of course, not all the conversations they were having were beautiful, but no one paid any attention to that.

They were waiting for the rumored Duke of Peletta, and for the mysterious events that were to occur in Tainu.

"The Duke of Peletta has arrived," announced a servant, drawing the attention of everyone present.

Chapter 407

At last, the name that had piqued the curiosity of many resounded through the hall. A man with shining golden hair revealed himself, walking confidently amid curious gazes that failed to conceal their intrigue.

Those present at the gathering had heard rumors of Kishiar La Orr's remarkable appearance, yet for the majority, this was their first glimpse of him. Most who had thought rumors were as unbelievable as the ever-growing whirlwind in the wilderness were momentarily taken aback upon actually seeing Duke Kishiar La Orr.

The appearance of Duke Kishiar La Orr did not align with any imagination or expectation that had preceded seeing him.

For one, he was so exceptionally tall that it was hard to associate him with the information that he was frail. Under his firm chin, which appeared almost arrogant at first glance, was a flame-embroidered pin that shone vividly on the vest embracing his straight chest, asserting he needn't bow to anyone. It hung from a silver chain.

The clothes that wrapped his tall and perfect body, seemingly bursting with life, were so captivating that they set hearts pounding regardless of age or gender.

Beside him was a man with black hair, dressed in a similar outfit. The name Yuder Aile was also announced when the Duke entered with his arm, but Kishiar had attracted so many eyes that not many heard his name.

However, when the Duke turned his head, rested it slightly on the side, and embraced the waist of the man holding his arm, the eyes of the people suddenly shifted to the black-haired man. Had he not been holding the Duke's arm, his calm and cold expression would not have been thought to belong to the provocative subject of the rumor.

Though neither as gorgeous as Duke Kishiar nor adorned with noticeable jewelry or clothing, the shadowy coolness that the black-haired man possessed had mysteriously drawn attention since the moment it was recognized.

‘Is that the commoner lover who always follows Duke Kishiar?’

‘The one who even shares the bedroom with him...?’

Contrary to the rumors, the black-haired man did not feel like a commoner at all. As people began to murmur at the unexpected appearance, the Duke's eyes moved as if he had heard them.

Then, Baron Willhem, who had just regained his composure, stepped forward to greet him.

“Welcome, Your Grace, Duke Kishiar. It is an infinite honor that one blessed by the Sun God is attending this meaningful charity party.”

“Baron Willhem. I have been worried seeing you so busy since we witnessed the divine sword together. I'm pleased to see you in good health.”

The moment the word "divine sword" was mentioned, the atmosphere changed. It was the first time that Duke Kishiar had mentioned anything related to the divine sword Orr in public.

‘Was it true that all the priests of the Western Sun God Temple saw the miracle of the divine sword?’

‘Seeing Baron Willhem not saying anything...’

Baron Willhem, who had tried as much as possible to conceal the truth of that rumor, trembled his eyebrows but soon forced a smile.

“That is... I have been so preoccupied with party preparations... I apologize.”

“I still think about your face filled with emotion when you saw the divine sword. God will never doubt your faith. I think it would be fine to have a time like that again before I leave, don't you?”

No longer wanting to look at Kishiar, who was calmly smiling as if to say, 'Tell me whenever you want,' Baron Willhem turned his head to Yuder. Yuder, feeling the eyes meet, quickly bowed his head in greeting.

“Good to see you, Baron.”

“Hmm. Hmm.”

Due to the recent events, the opinion about Yuder Aile within Baron Willhem's circles had changed. It shifted from 'a commoner with talent but unlucky enough to catch the eye of the Duke of Peletta and become his prey,' to 'a foolish commoner who seems to take being the Duke of Peletta's plaything as an honor.'

The Baron, who was about to turn away after ignoring the greeting and clearing his throat, suddenly stopped as he realized that something was different in Yuder's eyes.

"Your eye...?"

"Ah, the Baron indeed has a keen observation. The traces of an injury that lingered in my assistant's left eye have finally healed completely, I suppose. Being the hero of the Great Sarain Forest, even God has been merciful. It's something we should all celebrate."

Kishiar interjected with a loud response, so Yuder did not need to say anything. Instantly, a different sort of murmur spread among those who were standing around them. They all knew what it meant to be the hero of the Great Sarain Forest.

The atmosphere among those who had not known that the man beside the Duke of Peletta was not merely a lucky kept man who caught his eye, but the hero rumored to have defeated a colossal monster of the Great Sarain Forest, changed. Strange looks were exchanged, and a different kind of attention was focused on Yuder.

Yuder ignored those glances, swallowing a cold laugh within himself.

'They all follow the same pattern.'

The reaction of those who found out that Yuder was the hero of the Great Sarain Forest was all the same. At first, they acted as if they had seen something undesirable, but after learning the fact, their eyes changed as if they had discovered an interesting and useful toy. One could bet money that the next step would follow the same pattern as Baron Willhem, who had come to him asking if he had any intention of siding with the Duke of Tain.

'And the result would end up like Baron Willhem in the end.'

"Ah, is that... so? I'm truly relieved. You must be... happy."

"Yes, indeed."

Behind Kishiar, who was smiling without any apparent worry, a hurried servant approached and whispered something in Baron Willhem's ear. Yuder didn't miss the soundless change in the Baron's eyes.

"I must leave to greet other guests now. Those present here are all members of distinguished families that support the West, filled with loyalty towards the Empire and compassion for those in need. You will find no shortage of delightful conversation here."

Baron Willhem offered insincere congratulations and then hurried away.

"He looks quite busy, managing two matters at once."

Kishiar mumbled, eyeing the Baron's retreating figure with a bone-chilling tone.

The spot vacated by Baron Willhem was filled by nobles, unable to hide their hyena-like glares. Their words sounded like polite inquiries at first glance, but if you stripped away the beautifully wrapped social pleasantries, they were nothing more than rude blades, pricking to extract information.

Despite the smirking onslaught of those seemingly desperate to uncover the holes in the rumors surrounding Kishiar and Yuder, Kishiar remained calm. He was skilled at seemingly giving his opponents what they sought before smoothly changing the subject at a crucial moment, revealing their base intentions in a laughable manner.

'There's no one in this place who can beat Kishiar with words.'

Even Yuder, who had once died and returned, had no confidence in besting Kishiar in speech, let alone those who knew nothing about him.

At first, those who were astonished by Kishiar's appearance soon undervalued him, looking at him with a male lover, smiling prettily. However, they did not realize that they would be the ones left in a ludicrous state when they actually engaged in conversation.

Kishiar possessed the extraordinary skill to belatedly realize what spectacle he had made of himself, and to be enraged, yet also to restrain from direct complaint due to an attitude that seemed entirely without malice.

‘It's as if this entire place has become a massive tactical game board.’

Observing him up close, this feeling was further confirmed. His tactics of employing outlandish words, striking, and retreating at unexpected moments were the same as ever.

He used to really hate such occasions in the past. It felt like a waste of precious time when there was so much to do, and he was considerably fatigued just from ignoring the malicious words.

But now it was different. Watching Kishiar, standing in the same place, amusing the nobles with a smiling face, was quite an entertaining task.

‘Come to think of it, I've never seen Kishiar from my previous life participate in a party like this.’

The same was true in this life. At the small gatherings that had been held so far, or at the parties held at harvest festivals, there was no need for Kishiar to act in this way.

But this time was different. It was a difficult occasion where Kishiar La Orr needed to affirm all the rumors that had been circulating about him in front of everyone in the west, and yet maintain the perception that he was a mere duke, to easily carry out this matter.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for waiting."

At that moment, Baron Willhem's wife appeared. She skillfully stepped in front of the guests, greeted them, and explained the purpose of the charity party that was to be held today. Applause erupted from all over the place as she elegantly finished her short speech asking for money to be raised for the development of the western region after enjoying a fine meal and meaningful music.

As the dance began, Yuder noticed that Baron Willhem had vacated his seat at some point and twisted the corners of his lips.

‘...He's gone.’

Then it was time for them to take action.

Chapter 408

Unlike other heavy and formal parties, a party held for the sole purpose of charity fundraising or interaction between relatives, like the one opened today, was traditionally the responsibility of the wives. Therefore, nobody particularly minded the fact that Baron Willhem, having merely greeted the guests, had disappeared, as long as the Baroness maintained her place; dancing wasn't even considered an essential part of the event.

In reality, as soon as the first song began, those who rushed out to dance were mostly vibrant young people. The older ones were more engrossed in polite conversation or admiring the beautiful pieces of art placed throughout the hall.

But what about Duke Peletta, who was rumored to enjoy playing more than eating?

"Good music makes the body itch."

As Kishiar listened to the music and opened his mouth, the eyes of those around him were drawn to Yuder. There were piercing glances of curiosity, wondering if a commoner who knew nothing about dancing could possibly cling to the Duke even here.

Yuder responded to their expectations by deliberately showing discomfort.

"Then may I ... be over there for a while?"

"Go ahead."

As Kishiar promptly permitted, a knowing smile mixed in the eyes of the aristocrats. Yuder saw Kishiar, who had been glancing around, approach the Baroness, who was alone, and extend his hand, then turned his back. Immediately, a few of those who had been with Kishiar approached and began to speak as if they had been waiting.

"Hey, look at this. Yuder ...did you say Al? I want to hear a bit about what happened in Great Sarain Forest...."

‘You fool, it’s Yuder Aile.’

Yuder left only the words, "I'm sorry, but it's difficult now," while coldly cursing under his expressionless face, and quickly moved on. His appearance as he shook off the other requests and escaped to an area where the hall could not be seen looked like a commoner's flight filled with shame to anyone who saw it.

"Just as I thought, that's his limit," came a voice filled with scorn and pleasure. Yuder headed toward the table filled with small and beautiful foods prepared for the party guests to eat, leaving those voices behind.

Despite the great care taken to prepare the foods, almost none of the aristocrats attending the party had come this far. Only servants scurrying to carry uneaten food were seen around.

Yuder stood in front of a three-tiered plate containing a bite-sized food made of thinly baked square crackers topped with whipped cream and fruit and puckered his lips around a bright golden wine glass. A maid who had come to add new food to the plate stood beside Yuder, her head bowed.

"I don't recognize any of the food."

The maid's hand paused for a moment at Yuder's mumbled words, spoken as though to himself, his lips hidden behind the glass. She had her long hair coiled up under her hat and possessed ash-colored hair, rarely seen in the Empire.

This maid was none other than Marty, the non-nobleborn from the village of the Star of Nagran, who had lost her memory and was rescued by the Cavalry.

"That's the case for everyone."

Marty almost imperceptibly whispered. Yuder continued to fix his gaze on the table, taking small steps along the side.

"Where might the person who commanded the making of these pitiful dishes be now?"

"Before coming up here, I saw a butler politely escorting someone wrapped in a cloak toward the back."

While coldly answering, Marty continued to put down food and repeatedly arranged it to make it look beautiful. From a distance, it would have been impossible to tell that they were having a conversation.

"I wonder which will happen first: the plates on this table emptying, or the carriages outside disappearing."

"Regrettably, three have already vanished, so there's no point in betting."

"Three?"

"A bird with four wings, a sword with a split end, a sprout with red leaves."

As the words finished, a new maid appeared carrying another plate. Marty gave a nod to Yuder and then calmly turned to go back the way she came. No one paid any attention to the ordinary-looking maid.

Yuder continued to walk, holding the glass. As he returned to where the dancers were gathered, eager eyes pounced on him again as if expecting some amusing diversion.

Soon a song ended, and Kishiar was lightly kissing the back of the lady's hand in greeting.

"To leave such a wonderful dancer, where has the Baron gone? Shouldn't the next dance be with the Baron?"

"No... My husband has left for a moment to see our daughters..."

As her husband was mentioned, a faint unease and caution surfaced in the Baroness's eyes, which had been half-dazed while dancing.

"Is that so? When he returns, I must apologize for stealing the opportunity to enjoy our first dance."

Kishiar laughed cheerfully and retreated. Yuder watched this and then turned to head to a nearby empty lounge. The eyes of those finding the situation intriguing followed him.

Upon entering, the dim lounge, with a large window, gave a strong impression of a small bedroom with a curtain-able bed and unusually soft sofa. The room was dimly lit, not for the guests' comfort, but actually to help those enjoying secret liaisons during the party to conceal their identities - a fact known to all.

Yuder sat on the sofa, looking out at the brightly moonlit window, sipping the liquor in his hand. To him, it was no different from water, but it was, in fact, quite strong.

One sip, two sips, three sips.

Slowly, but at a regular pace, just as he swallowed the third sip, the door opened, and a familiar fragrance wafted in. A shadow engulfed Yuder, the sofa sinking as lips met, and the door closed with a harsh noise. Finally, all the astonished gasps and familiar murmurs that had been seeping through the tiny crack disappeared.

"...Haa."

The intense intruder, after intertwining and sucking the alcohol-soaked tongue, pulled away. It had been just a few seconds, but the heat that was ignited in the darkness and their breathing was hotter than ever before.

Yuder slowly blinked, staring intently at Kishiar's eyes as he pulled away. Suddenly, between the two pairs of eyes where flames of passion were burning, a soft laugh broke out.

"How is it outside?"

"So far, there are no signs of the Star of Nagran infiltrating here. As expected, Baron Willhem has headed to the security management team, and among the attendees, the families of Cheers, Belfrant, and Ketel have already taken their carriages and left."

"They're the ones from last year's list, escaping well."

"Yes."

A cold smile danced on Kishiar's moist lips before it vanished.

“I was a little concerned that they might suddenly suspect the identities of those working on the day, but it seems there's no need.”

“If they doubt Marty and the others, it would be tantamount to doubting Prince Pruelle himself, so that's not possible.”

At the party hosted by the Willhem family today, many amnesiacs, including Marty, had come in as temporary workers. Having lost and then recovered their memories, they willingly volunteered to keep watch, identifying any covert infiltration by Nahan or the Star of Nagran, and silently observing the movements of those departing for the auction and the people of the Willhem family.

Neither Baron Willhem nor anyone else doubted the true identities of Pruelle and his information providers who had been taken under his wing. Even Yuder, who had expected increased vigilance due to Robel's previous attempts to infiltrate as a servant to find those who had lost their memories, was astonishingly unchallenged.

‘It was fortunate that Marty has such a good memory.’

Whether it was due to her strong willpower or not, having lost and then quickly regained her memory, Marty learned the crests of the visiting families to the Willhem house faster than anyone and thoroughly memorized her duties. She had already sold her face, so she couldn't infiltrate the mansion and was assigned to the auction area instead, which greatly worried Robel. But from what Yuder saw when they spoke earlier, it had evidently been needless concern.

“Now then... it's time for the support.”

Kishiar, taking the glass Yuder had been holding, smiled regretfully as he removed his cloak from his shoulders. It was a special cloak that changed its material and appearance when turned inside out.

Chapter 409

Having thrown off the cumbersome formal top and donned a cape made of a material that didn't reflect light, the part that had previously appeared to be pinned like fabric caught as an ornament unfurled, revealing a hood.

Enveloped from head to toe in black clothing and with a hood covering Yuder, he had become an entirely different person from just moments before.

“Good. Perfectly like a night guest. No one will think you were a person at the party,” Kishiar joked, straightening the hood that obscured Yuder’s face, with a playful smile. Yuder opened the window, confirmed that no one was patrolling the area, and then leaped, gripping the upper frame.

“I shall be back.”

“Be careful. The rumors of how long I’ve been playing around here all depend on when you return. Don’t forget that.”

Kishiar, who had draped Yuder’s discarded formal top over his arm, gracefully waved his finger and blew a kiss.

The sensation that had been heightened almost faltered at the princess-like gesture. Yuder merely nodded once in silence, then bounded up to the roof, stepping on the wind.

Today’s plan basically involved those in the security management team handling the auction house, while those left in the mansion took care of the party, surveilling those involved with the secret trade of Duke Tain as well as the Star of Nagran. But the auction house, defended only by the Cavalry and the Knights of Peletta, was far riskier than the secure party.

Considering this, more personnel were sent to the security management team, but now with the variable of the southern merchants, all agreed, including Kishiar, that this alone was not enough for assurance.

Therefore, one person, possessing both the quickest mobility and reliable skills, was given a special mission: to move freely between the two groups, distract the attention of others, and provide support in an ever-changing situation.

This role went to Yuder Aile, who had regained his great strength.

Everything that day was like a perfectly orchestrated play, started a week ago when Pruelle completed the list and handed over the party schedule.

Yuder first became Kishiar's partner at the party, feigned inability to dance, and made contact with Marty to gather information. Meanwhile, Kishiar danced with the Baroness, captivated the nobles' attention.

The nobles, ignoring Kishiar dancing with the Baroness, only felt a base excitement towards the gossip of Yuder and the following Duke of Peletta heading for the lounge, without questioning what they were doing there.

Perhaps by now, they were all gathered and chattering about what lascivious act might be occurring in the small lounge. Unfortunately for them, Yuder was not there.

The next goal was to quickly retrieve his sword from the mansion while Kishiar stalled in the lounge and swiftly move to the security management team.

Yuder recalled Kishiar's voice, instructing him perfectly on everything from his steps to the speed of his drinking. From the disappearance of Baron Willhem, Kishiar dancing with the Baroness, drawing everyone's focus, and finally both of them conspicuously heading to the lounge, leaving an impression that no one could doubt his absence – nothing had differed from what Kishiar La Orr had anticipated.

All was as if pieces on a board that he had arranged.

If everyone at the party knew that the instruction had gone so far as to make Yuder Aile move in a direction of speaking as little as possible, they would have been astounded. Yuder faintly twisted the corners of his lips into a smile.

Yuder realized anew that Kishiar had considered even such things, and he felt as if he had glimpsed a trace of the man's path through life.

"To deceive others perfectly, one must first look where no one would think to look."

Yuder, who had hidden in the shadows and quickly traversed to where the annex was located, landed lightly on a tree, a good hiding spot. It had been easy to get this far, as most of the guards were focused around the main building and entrance.

When he reached out his hand and exerted his power, a sharp whistling wind swept through the entire garden, shaking the grass.

"Yuder?"

A moment later, someone who had received the signal appeared. A blue-haired boy with small, mischievous, yet lovable eyes, Finn Eldore.

Finn looked up at Yuder standing on the tree, grinned, and waved the long sword he was holding. It was Yuder's sword, taken from his lodging. As Yuder was about to jump down from the tree, Finn lowered his head and spoke softly.

"No, stay there for a moment. I'll give it to you with my ability!"

As he said this, a mist-like energy flowed from Finn's hand, and in the blink of an eye, the sword disappeared and reappeared in Yuder's hand.

Holding it for the first time since the sheath had broken in the Great Sarain Forest, and it had been lying dormant in an ordinary temporary sheath, Yuder felt his blood run hot. He attached the sword to his waist with practiced ease and spoke.

"It seems the speed is similar even when using the teleportation ability alone rather than with two. You've practiced a lot."

"I knew Yuder would understand! You have no idea how hard I've worked. Doesn't your faith soar?"

Finn laughed brightly and joyfully.

"But... what was the signal you sent earlier?"

"Ah, I wanted to tell you about the stories I heard while observing the targets. Nothing special, but I thought it would be best to let you know before we start today. We have to move right away, so I thought it would be better to write it down and slip it into the sheath. Look at it on your way."

At those words, Yuder looked down at the sheath and saw an additional small piece of cloth tied to the red string attached to the handle.

"Thank you."

"Thank you? Huh? So don't cancel the recruitment offer if the information in there is nothing special? They're Awakeners, but I barely saw them move."

A faint smile emerged at Finn's innocent and nonchalant appearance, who seemed to have been most worried about that part.

"...Ah! And there's one more thing I have to tell you."

"What is it?"

Finn made a humming sound and scratched his head.

"Kanna is back finally... but not here right now."

"What do you mean Kanna's not here?"

"There was a carriage earlier that tried to come in with the party attendees but was chased away. Turns out that carriage had come from the Great Sarain Forest."

Kanna should have come here sooner from the Great Sarain Forest, but the discovery of a magic ore vein beneath the Magic Spring Ruins changed the situation, delaying the schedule. Yuder had heard that she was really going to depart as soon as that job was finished, but given the time involved, he thought the chances of her not arriving until after this job were higher. That she had arrived today was a surprising event.

"Although I went out late, all I heard was that the carriage had already gone to the security management team, so I came back. It seems that the messenger pigeon's path was a little twisted, causing the communications to cross."

"This is... a welcome variable."

"Thank you for telling me."

"Are you going now?"

"Yes."

"I wish I could go too. Waiting here for those who may or may not come is less appealing than going to the security management team's place."

"But you will help me with an ability that only you can perform, won't you?"

Finn, who had been openly envious, closed his mouth as he looked at Yuder, who had jumped down in front of him. A moment later, a mischievous expression, shy yet unable to hide excitement, appeared on the boy's face.

"Yes, that's right."

Finn Eldore coming out to hand Yuder the sword was not just because of simple friendship, but part of a plan that had been included since he learned that Finn had become able to use teleportation ability by himself.

Finn, arms outstretched towards Yuder, closed his eyes and exerted his energy.

"Just trust me. No one will notice, and I'll get you perfectly outside the mansion!"

A vapor-like energy began to flow greatly over his small face, drenched in sweat. As that energy grew stronger, covering Yuder, there was an unseen pull, and a sensation as though something was sucking him in.

Yuder, who had closed his eyes with dizziness, realized that he had truly come outside of Willhem's mansion. Not far off, the knights and soldiers crowding around the mansion's back door were busy moving around, unable to even imagine that someone had suddenly escaped from within.

Yuder turned his back to them and crept into the darkness. There was not a hint of hesitation in his movement as he flew onto the rooftop.

“The weather is quite nice today. I heard you trained late into the night yesterday. Did you rest well?”

Theorado Van Tain, the commander of the Imperial Knights, had looked indifferently at Pruelle, who sat before him, smiling faintly. He had let Pruelle into his office without a second thought, as it was rest time, and there was no particular reason for his sudden visit.

“We were never the kind to meet and exchange pleasantries. I will have to go out to observe training soon, so could you please get to the point?”

“You know that I was in Tainu until recently. Why do you think I went there?”

“I told you to get to the point. I don't like riddles.”

“I went there to find a way to stop my father. And I found it.”

Theorado's eyes had narrowed slightly at Pruelle's response.

“...I thought you went to meet Baron Willhem, but was it Duke Peletta?”

“I think you know that the distrust towards my father within the family is growing. I won't deny that I considered it a problem unrelated to me until now, but not anymore.”

After finishing his words, Pruelle had maintained silence just long enough to let out a breath. Creating the right atmosphere was essential when conveying something important.

“Do you know about my father's ongoing investment in the Western trade business?”

“...”

“You seem to know to some extent. Then did you also know about the charity party and ‘auction’ that will soon be held in Tainu under Baron Willhem's leadership?”

“...”

“Do you know that those in the Sun Palace have already grasped this fact?”

Theorado's eyes, which had been narrowing little by little, had hesitated for the first time.

As Pruelle's eyes softened, Theorado, who had been looking at him like a pebble on the roadside, had changed his posture and sat up straight.

“What do you think is the reason why the Cavalry and Duke Peletta are still there? I saw too much in Tainu, and I'm convinced that my father has crossed the line.”

There was a lot implied in the phrase “crossed the line.” And Theorado had understood all of it.

“Don't forget that the tragedy of the Apeto family was just a few months ago. If you try to bury it or leave my father alone knowing this, the result will be no different from Apeto... No, a storm greater than that will engulf everyone.”

His voice had sounded calm but all the more chilling like a warning.

Theorado had kept silent and then quietly asked.

“...If what you say is true and His Majesty knows everything, you don't think I would report this to the Duke?”

“It would already be too late when you report. And I also know that you won't.”

“How?”

To the sharply uttered question, Pruelle had twisted the corner of his lips without a sound.

“Because you know that for you, the sword is more important than family or father, and the Imperial Knights are more important than anything.”

Theorado Van Tain had closed his mouth. He had felt a slight surprise at the fact that the young prince, who he had never shown interest in, had suddenly stood before him with such a face.

"I met many people in the family after returning to the capital. Meeting with you today was, in fact, the last in line after all other meetings were done."

Pruelle slowly recited the names of those he had met over time.

Among them were names of those who had suddenly been robbed of the rights they had originally possessed due to the order of the Duke of Tain, but most of them were people who, like Theorado, had taken a relatively indifferent attitude to the affairs of their family. Even though they knew the Duke of Tain was overly involved in trade investments, they were also people who thought it didn't matter as long as their own business was not affected, even if the southern merchants were outraged that their rights were being encroached upon.

"Did everyone agree with your opinion?"

"Most agree that the family must be maintained well in order for us to enjoy and protect what is precious to us. Isn't it the best time to think again whether a leader who misuses the family's power without fulfilling their responsibilities is really needed by us?"

Theorado, who had inherited the blood of the Tain family more deeply than anyone else, could not argue with that statement.

The reason he had somewhat reluctantly followed the Duke of Tain's requests or complied with them thus far was because he recognized that he needed to fulfill at least a minimal duty and responsibility to help the head of the family to maintain it.

However, if the Duke of Tain had crossed the line without his knowledge, it had turned into a problem that could not be ignored as before. According to Pruelle, it was because of the things he wanted to protect.

What was the reason the once-proud Apeto Ducal House had closed its doors in disgrace and entered financial rehabilitation in the blink of an eye? It was because they could no longer hide the unforgivable sins that had been committed within the family for a long time.

So how had those sins been exposed to the world?

It was undoubtedly deeply involved with the silent will of the Emperor and the hand of the Duke of Peletta, who had carried it out.

They, who had seemed to have no power left after the crown prince's appointment, had moved a character within the Apeto family who had never been considered important, the 3rd son, and finished everything in the blink of an eye. The corrected Duke Apeto was lying down waiting for death, and his lost position had passed to the ailing 1st son.

As if he knew exactly what Theorado was thinking, Pruelle smiled cunningly beyond his blood-red eyes.

"Even if it's not me, His Majesty the Emperor will soon put you at the crossroads of choice. Ignorance won't be an excuse. But if you take my hand now, I will tell you everything I have seen and heard there."

Theorado recalled the conversation he had with the Duke of Tain. The Duke had shown no particular reaction to the news that his son Pruelle had suddenly gone to Tainu, considering it less important than his trade business.

But perhaps Pruelle had calculated even that, making contact with Duke Peletta, who was like the Emperor's aide, collecting all the evidence against the Duke of Tain, and returning. Victory's confidence, never seen before, was read in his confident attitude.

Since when had that child started making contact with the Emperor's side? Many thoughts flowed through Theorado's head in an instant. He guessed that the meeting in Tainu was not the first time.

'When did His Majesty the Emperor and Duke Peletta start watching the Tain family and the Duke?'

Foolishly thinking that the Emperor, through this western monster subjugation, was merely trying to empower the Cavalry, Pruelle clearly told Theorado that his father, too, could follow the path of Duke Apeto.

Unlike the Imperial Knights of long ago, who moved like the Emperor's limbs and devoted their lives to serving the imperial family, the current Imperial Knights were a distortion, with their average ability degraded. They no longer wholeheartedly devoted their bodies and minds to the Emperor and the imperial family. That role had long been handed over to other groups.

But Theorado had experience helping and learning the sword under the same master as the imperial princes in his childhood.

He was one of those who knew best how sharp the Emperor's teeth and claws truly were, residing in the Sun Palace, how talented his brother, Duke Peletta, was with the sword, and that he was someone never to be taken lightly.

And he knew well that it was precisely for that reason he had been appointed as the Commander of the Imperial Knights.

'Even though I thought I knew... I didn't realize until the sword's tip was right before my eyes.'

Who could have foreseen that a slight annoyance caused by the greed of Duke Tain in the trading business would come back like this, snowballing into something more significant? Theorado stared quietly at Pruelle, who was looking at him with a sharp smile like a sword, and opened his mouth.

"...Fine. Let's cooperate."

"You've made a wise decision."

"So, what are you going to do after you get me? Will you become the next Duke of Tain?"

"No."

Pruelle's face was unflappably calm as he answered shortly.

"The next Duke of Tain will be Priscilla. I will not take that position."

"Then?"

At that question, strangely, Pruelle's tension-filled smile softened slightly for the first time.

"I will go somewhere else. To a place where I can safely protect what I want to protect."

It was an incomprehensible statement, but Theorado decided not to think too deeply about it. After all, what mattered now was what had to be done next.

He rose from his seat and looked down at Pruelle with indifferent eyes.

"Alright. Tell me what I need to do from now on."

...

Yuder spotted the security forces not far away and put more strength into his wind-stepping movement.

"Yuder!"

Ever, who was standing by the open window, called his name and beckoned him.