

Turning 701

Chapter 701

"Well, that might be true for the accomplice, but you seem unfamiliar with Awakeners."

Yuder stepped closer to the body, lifting a hand marked with thin, black scars resembling burns from lightning. While the knights, more accustomed to dealing with corpses, frowned in unison, Kishiar, the Cavalry members, Sunz, and Emon remained comparatively composed.

"Awakeners with more than one ability are nearly nonexistent. Even if they do exist, escaping the notice of myself, our Commander, or our comrades in the Cavalry is almost impossible, especially with such a powerful and conspicuous ability."

"Hard to conceal, you say? Why? Can't they just choose not to use it?" a knight sharply questioned, his tone laced with incredulity.

Yuder calmly responded, "The nature of an Awakener's power makes it far more challenging to suppress than to use."

This was a truth difficult to grasp for those non-Awakeners. However, the Awakeners present all shared understanding looks.

Once awakened, their power often manifested involuntarily, even at unwanted times. This held true for those whose bodies had undergone transformation and those with minimal abilities, like moving a mere droplet of water.

Learning to control their power was crucial, often prioritized over mastering its use or application. It was a major focus of the Cavalry's continuous training.

Could a gushing spring, once breached, be entirely sealed with just a human hand? Certainly not.

Thus, an Awakener's prowess was often less about the raw strength of their power and more about the finesse in its control. This was why Yuder particularly esteemed the power control of Ever Beck.

"Completely concealing a power once possessed is an exceedingly difficult task. And the stronger the ability, the harder the control," he explained.

The numerous wounds marring the body of the Second Prince attested to this. The Awakener who inflicted them was clearly not skilled in controlling their power.

"The perpetrators didn't intentionally leave such severe wounds. They were incapable of using their power in any other way," Yuder surmised.

A display of power, uncontrolled and indiscriminate, likely instilled greater terror in onlookers. There seemed to be no perceived need for restraint. But there was a distinct difference between choosing to unleash such an attack and being limited to only that method.

And Yuder Aile was perhaps the best person to discern this difference.

"But I've heard rumors that there are those in the cavalry who can use multiple powers, even selectively choosing which to wield... If such a person exists, couldn't this scenario be possible?" inquired a knight who had been guarding the area where the corpse lay.

Unaware of Yuder's identity, he seemed to regard him as just another Cavalry member who had stepped forward first.

With Commander Kishiar standing guard in the background, the knight restrained from openly provoking conflict, instead choosing to express opposition to Yuder's statements, perhaps as a way to mask his disdain towards the Awakeners.

'When speaking such words, one might do well to consider that the person before them could be the very subject of the rumors they reference.'

Despite the news of Kishiar's appearance in Charloin presumably having reached them after that of Yuder, the way they were acting indicated a blatant disregard for the Cavalry. Yuder, gazing intently, was backed by Sunz, Emon, and the rest of his Cavalry comrades, all clenching their teeth and tensing their stomachs, making odd expressions. Their reason dictated that it was inappropriate to burst into laughter in the grave situation of inspecting a corpse.

Yuder spoke with an impassive face.

"It seems that I am the person you speak of, but to be honest, there's likely no one else quite like me."

"Really?"

The knight's retort sounded incredulous and arrogant. Yet, Yuder's cold eyes carried a peculiar commanding presence that brooked no contradiction.

In the brief silence that followed the knight's loss for words, Kishiar, chuckling softly, joined the conversation.

"That's true. My assistant, Baron Yuder Aile, can freely manipulate all powers of nature, and he is more knowledgeable than anyone about other Awakener powers. I won't deny the possibility that there might be another such person in the world... but well."

He tilted his head with a natural smile, genuinely pondering.

"If there were another such individual in the world, their shining talent would have stood out like the sun, immediately catching everyone's eye. What does everyone think?"

"Exactly as the Commander says. If there were even one more person like Yuder, how could ordinary people like us even dare to join, fearing their presence?"

"Not a single one of the 48 soldiers in our Awakener Brigade, all Awakeners, possess two powers. Even within the Cavalry, where over 300 of the empire's most capable Awakeners are gathered, those with more than two powers are exceedingly rare. Baron Aile can freely control four elements, not to mention his proficiency in weaponry and physical combat. Assuming such cases are common would hardly aid our investigation," added Kurga, the head of the southern branch, his heavy sarcasm followed by a serious comment from Sunz, who intentionally emphasized 'Baron Aile.' His friend Emon also casually added his opinion.

"To be honest, your words sound no different than comparing a Swordmaster to a regular knight. If you believe that someone in the Cavalry who possesses and can effortlessly conceal more than two immense powers is the culprit, then you might as well directly accuse Baron Aile."

"Oh, is that what you mean? So, you're suggesting that as his superior, I ordered my assistant to murder the Second Prince?"

"Absolutely not!"

The knight hastily protested as Kishiar responded as if the thought had never crossed his mind.

The situation was rapidly devolving, threatening to wrongfully accuse Duke Peletta without any evidence, based on a mere slip of the tongue. The knight's face turned ashen, prompting his comrades to step in.

"He's merely unfamiliar with Awakeners and made a mistake out of concern. It surely wasn't his intention. Please forgive him generously!"

Kishiar listened to the knights' sweaty, frantic excuses for a long while before bursting into laughter, as if he were a carefree, irresponsible young man.

"Alright, alright. If you say it's not the case, then it must be so."

"..."

However, before the knights could fully relax, Kishiar, still smiling, added,

"I almost thought the Herne family had concluded that I was responsible for the Second Prince's death. Be careful with your words. My body is very frail, you see. Especially my heart, so frail that too much shock could make me faint."

The knights of the Herne family shifted their gaze to Kishiar, who stood a head taller and with broader shoulders than them. Regardless of their scrutiny, Kishiar simply continued to smile.

That smile no longer felt light or insignificant to the knights.

'Just where does his sincerity end, and jest begin? It's impossible to tell...'

'Ever since he became the master of the divine sword, has he changed?'

'We mustn't underestimate the Cavalry. Speaking carelessly could lead to trouble...'

After Kishiar's words, the knights refrained from further unnecessary disputes or questioning Yuder's judgment. In the now more sober atmosphere, Yuder was able to comfortably and swiftly complete his examination of the body.

"The Second Prince was likely attacked by at least two Awakeners. One with lightning abilities, and the other possessing the power to greatly enhance physical strength. It appears all the wounds were inflicted before death. That's my observation. For the rest, I would like to request Captain Sunz here to take over."

"Understood."

Sunz, upon being nominated by Yuder, stepped forward with a tense expression. A faint, mirage-like power shimmered in his eyes.

"Hmm..."

"Do you see anything unusual?"

"There's something... in the Second Prince's stomach. Please, give me a moment."

Chapter 702

"Hmm..."

"Do you see anything unusual?"

"There's something... in the Second Prince's stomach. Please, give me a moment."

Sunz narrowed his eyes in extreme concentration, squinting then widening them repeatedly. Yuder noticed the faint mist rising from his eyes intensify. Sweat trickled down his forehead, and his muscles tensed to the point of stiffness; finally, Sunz seemed to discern what he was looking for and exhaled deeply.

"Phew..."

"Is it over now?"

"Yes. I've confirmed everything I needed to see."

Saying this, Sunz pointed lightly to the abdominal area of the Second Prince's body.

"Here. Inside the Second Prince's stomach, I saw several pieces of Seaweed and Charloa shrimp."

"Seaweed and Charloa shrimp?"

The knights murmured among themselves. Myra, who had been covering her mouth with a handkerchief, also changed her expression oddly.

"Those from the south might be familiar, but Charloa shrimp mainly come from Charloin, recognizable by their unique head and shell shapes. I could identify them only because of these features. They contain mild toxins, so they're not commonly used whole in cooking. Seaweed often consumed by commoners, but isn't quite fitting for someone of the Second Prince's status."

After this explanation, Sunz concluded with a sharp and careful expression.

"From what I see, the Second Prince's murder didn't occur near the Cavalry branch or its vicinity."

"Can you stand by that statement?"

"Couldn't the Second Prince have eaten those last night?"

"No, that's impossible. Ashrav didn't like seafood."

Myra's low, cold voice interjected among the murmuring knights. All eyes turned to the First Princess, who spoke for the first time since her arrival. She looked palely at the Second Prince's body and continued.

"Ashrav once fell severely ill from spoiled seafood as a child. Therefore, he never ate it in private, even if he might have in public. If he dined alone at his mansion, such food wouldn't have been served, especially something as dangerous as Charloa shrimp."

Then Myra commanded the knights.

"Summon the servants who attended to the Second Prince Ashrav last night. They should know what he ate. That will confirm everything."

"Understood. Bring the Second Prince's servants here."

The knights of the Herne family quickly brought in the Second Prince's servants. An elderly servant, who had been waiting for his master in the mansion, entered in deep sorrow and was startled to see Myra.

"Princess Myra? Why are you here? Could it be...?"

"Don't entertain unnecessary thoughts. Princess Myra is here only to assist in finding the murderer of the Second Prince. Do you remember what he ate last night?"

"Yes, of course."

"Was it a seafood dish containing Charloa shrimp and Seaweed?"

"What? No, certainly not."

The old servant shook his head quickly.

"Our Master Ashrav only had a light soup last night, feeling unwell. Even if he had a normal meal, he wouldn't have touched such food, as he disliked seafood."

Upon hearing the servant's words, which precisely matched those of Myra, a silence fell over everyone.

According to the servant, the Second Prince had been in poor condition, having rushed to Charloin and thus depleted his strength. He had a weak digestive system and had opted for a digestible soup instead of risky seafood, which meant there should have been no remnants of seafood in his stomach.

Seizing the moment to strengthen his argument, Sunz spoke up.

"In truth, I thought... perhaps the Second Prince fell into the sea and swallowed them. The shape of what I saw was too intact to have been eaten as a cooked dish. Knowing now that he didn't like seafood makes it even more certain."

"But when found, the Second Prince's body wasn't wet."

"Not being wet and not having been in the water are two different matters. Remember, it took some time to identify him after he was found. And consider the wounds on his body, seemingly caused by lightning-like abilities. Have you ever seen someone struck by lightning? They burn blacker than if set on fire."

That explained the numerous black marks on the Second Prince's body. Saying this, Sunz reached out and lightly touched the Second Prince's hair, his fingers coming away with a white powder.

"I don't know if they washed off the sea water after death, but I can still see traces. It looks like dirt, but it's dried sea water. Tasting it would confirm, but..."

"That's enough!"

The knights shook their heads with pale faces.

"If Captain Sunz's words are true, then our next step is clear. We must search the coast where one could swallow Charloa shrimp and Seaweed."

Kishiar spoke in a relaxed tone.

"To my knowledge, the nearest to the southern branch of the Cavalry is Sherpen Port. The fishermen of Charloin catch shrimp, clams, and Seaweed in their nets, don't they? We should

investigate if there were any signs of a person falling in or any suspicious activity. Kurga, and Sir Radel."

"Yes!"

"...Understood."

"Send five members each from the Cavalry unit and the Herne knights. Time is of the essence, do it now."

Kurga and Radel simultaneously acknowledged and left. Kishiar surveyed those remaining, his gaze fixing on the Second Prince's servant.

"Thanks to the loyal servant of Prince Ashrav, we've gained much insight. What's your name?"

"Me? I... I'm Mujo."

"Good, Mujo. Can you tell us more about the Second Prince? We might need your help further."

The old servant, well-seasoned in noble houses, was taken aback by Duke Peletta's direct approach. He was unaccustomed to such high-ranking individuals behaving in this manner.

As he hesitated, Myra stepped in to reassure him.

"It's for Ashrav's sake, it's alright. Follow them. If you're concerned, I'll assign knights of the Herne family to accompany you."

"..."

Until yesterday, she had been a rival to his master. But now, with the death of the Second Prince, it would be foolish to hold any grudge against her. The old servant nodded, his expression complex.

"I understand..."

"Thank you, Princess Myra. Then let's move to another location. We can't continue here."

Yuder followed Kishiar, casting a final glance at the Second Prince's body.

Clutched in his fist, unbeknownst to the others, were a piece of cloth and hair strands he had covertly cut from the corpse earlier.

‘This should be enough for Kanna to decipher. I must send it back as soon as possible.’

Kishiar's decision to send Radel ahead on the pretext of investigation had indeed been fortuitous. With the most vociferous among them gone, there was no one left to hinder their efforts.

After entering an empty room within the security force's station, Kishiar skillfully lit a fire in the magic stove. Nathan Zuckerman had disappeared momentarily, only to reappear with the curious sight of tea and a teapot.

As the air warmed, the atmosphere relaxed considerably. Kishiar began to converse with the tense, elderly servant, Mujo.

"What kind of person was the Second Prince?"

Asking first about the kind of person the Second Prince was, rather than his actions the day before, caught Mujo, Myra who had followed, and the knights of the Herne family off guard. Mujo struggled several times, his throat constricted, before slowly beginning to speak.

"Master Ashrav... he was a good man. My late wife was his wet nurse. He was somewhat frail, but had a strong spirit. Even when ill, he never showed it, always working diligently for the Herne family. That he would leave this world in such a way..."

Mujo bowed his head in sorrow, his shoulders trembling.

"I don't know who harmed the Second Prince, but this old man will never forgive them."

Silence followed for a moment. Kishiar gave him time to compose himself, then posed a few more questions. Each inquiry sought to understand the character and reputation of Ashrav, the Second Prince.

After softening the mood with these questions, Kishiar finally broached the main topic.

"I see. But actually... there's a crucial piece of information we haven't discussed yet. Who was the servant that accompanied the Second Prince yesterday?"

Chapter 703

According to the knights, there was a servant who had followed the Second Prince. This servant, similar to the horse ridden by the Second Prince, had not yet been found and was presumed dead with high probability.

Upon hearing Kishiar's question, Mujo's expression darkened further. However, this darkness differed slightly from the sorrow shown when speaking of the Second Prince, whom he had raised like his own child.

"Ah... yes. That damned wretch hasn't been found yet either."

He responded with a cold demeanor.

"That man's name was Panajen. He was a newcomer, having joined the Herne family less than half a year ago. He had served our Second Prince for about the same duration."

From the perspective of an old servant who had served the Second Prince since childhood, a young servant who failed to properly attend to his master deserved death. However, it seemed that he had disliked Panajen from the beginning.

"A man with less than half a year's experience went alone with the Second Prince? He must have been highly trusted."

"Trusted? What... He just took care of the horse very well, that's why he was taken along."

"The horse?"

"Yes. Prince Ashrav didn't particularly enjoy horseback riding and always traveled by carriage. When he had to ride, he always took that man with him. Yesterday was the same."

However, there was likely more to it than that.

It was improbable that someone would select a servant with such little experience to accompany them simply because they cared for horses well. To Yuder's observation, Mujo seemed displeased to admit that his master trusted Panajen more than himself. Whenever he spoke of Panajen, he wrinkled his nose, unable to hide his displeasure.

'Dislike him or not, he should at least speak the truth.'

Yuder glanced at Kishiar. Catching his eye, Kishiar silently smiled and lightly waved his finger, signaling to wait a moment.

"He cared for the horse well... Yes, that's a good trait. But isn't that something anyone can do? What about other tasks? Was he competent?"

"No! He seemed to have no intention of learning anything. Recommended by someone, he ignored us and refused to talk, wandering outside every day and only pretending to work hard in front of Prince Ashrav. D*mned rotten tomato!"

"Oh, I see. That must have been hard."

"Indeed, it was tough for everyone. Poor Prince Ashrav often believed him, but we thought that someday his true colors would be revealed."

"Who recommended him? That place seems unreliable as well."

"Well... I heard Young Master Milail of the Conche Barony wrote a letter of guarantee for his identity."

At the mention of the Conche Barony, Yuder's eyebrows twitched. Kishiar, noticing this, asked nonchalantly.

"Was the Second Prince close to them?"

"Baron Conche is a cousin of Duke Herne. Prince Ashrav and Young Master Milail weren't particularly close, but they became friendlier after Prince Ashrav's last year's birthday. Perhaps that's why someone like Panajen was introduced, to ensure comfortable horse riding."

Indeed, it was Kishiar's craft. With a cleverly probing statement, the old servant unwittingly revealed all about Panajen.

"That's interesting. I've learned many things I didn't know. Thank you for your help."

"Oh, it's nothing..."

The old servant, who had been speaking freely to the Cavalry and Duke Peletta, was suddenly startled, wondering if he had spoken too rashly. However, Kishiar, as if anticipating his concern, soothed him.

"The one who harmed the Second Prince is an Awakener, and thus it is our Cavalry's responsibility to capture him. I promise we will apprehend him to ensure the Second Prince's death was not in vain. If you recall anything unusual from last night, no matter how trivial, could you contact the Cavalry? I believe there's no one who knows the Second Prince as well as you do."

A servant who has lost his master is an entity no one cares about. Even if he had not served the Second Prince on the day of the incident, he would still be a sinner, not free from responsibility. In a situation where returning to the Herne family would only result in a severe reprimand and expulsion, Kishiar's words deeply resonated with the old servant.

Knowing he should maintain his guard, Mujo nearly let it down in that moment toward Kishiar. After a long silence, he nodded.

"Understood..."

Taking advantage of the moment Mujo left under the knights' escort, First Princess Myra, who had been sitting quietly, spoke up.

"Mujo is a stubborn man who follows only Ashrav, but you've managed to persuade him well."

"I only showed respect for the deceased, as the Princess did for her brother. And since you are in a situation of having lost a family member, there's no need to force yourself to stay strong."

Princess Myra, as if pierced by his words, closed her mouth. Yuder, observing her crumbling facade, realized she, too, had just lost a sibling.

Though they were competitors for the heir's position and guarded against each other, even to the extent of not sharing the same house in Charloin, Myra still acknowledged the Second Prince's abilities and remembered even the minutest details of what he disliked. It was uncommon among nobility.

She might not show it, but certainly, Princess Myra was also swallowing shock and sorrow internally.

However, she quickly composed herself, her demeanor even more upright and her gaze firmer as she spoke.

"Thank you for your words, but I will not rest. I must catch the culprit and show unwavering strength before Ashrav's funeral, so I don't get entangled in useless talk."

Her resolve could be seen as unbearably tough by some. Yet Kishiar withdrew gracefully with a smile.

"Strong and admirable. If that's your decision, then I understand."

"..."

"Anyway, given the situation, dealing with the troubles in the south must wait until after we find the one responsible for the Second Prince's death. It's unfortunate."

"But your offer to cooperate still stands, right?"

Princess Myra reiterated their cooperative relationship. Kishiar nodded, and she promptly stood up.

"Understood. I'll speak with the knights and return to learn more about Ashrav's death. I'll mention that my visit to the Cavalry yesterday and today was solely for Melvin's exoneration, so please align with that."

"Agreed."

"If the Cavalry learns anything more about this, please contact me immediately."

"Ah... Before you go, there is something I'd like to mention."

Princess Myra blinked in surprise.

"Yes?"

Kishiar had just mentioned a missing servant, referring to the one spoken of by the servant Mujo. "Investigate the Conche Barony first, which reportedly sent that servant. Also, continue the investigation we requested earlier about the southern merchant."

"...I was planning to investigate the Conche Barony myself upon my return, but the southern merchant as well?"

"There seems to be a connection that's piqued my interest."

Princess Myra could not understand the connection, as there appeared to be none.

However, Yuder was not in the dark. The moment Kishiar spoke, he met the latter's gaze and thought.

'So Kishiar also made the connection immediately upon hearing that word.'

Earlier, the old servant Mujo, while talking about the missing servant, had used the word 'rotten tomato.' The term 'rotten tomato' was known to be a derogatory term used by people in the Southern part of the Empire against people of Southern countries or heritage. Anyone aware of this would have guessed that the missing servant was of Southern descent.

Hiring a servant of Southern descent in a noble house was not unheard of, but it was certainly not common. If not recommended by another noble house, it would have been unlikely for him to be hired.

And who had given that recommendation?

'Conche...'

Upon hearing the name of the Conche Barony, Yuder, recalling his previous life, suddenly remembered the identity of the next Duke of Herne, which he had almost forgotten.

The previous Duke of Herne, not Princess Myra or her brother.

It was a person from the Conche Barony.

It was a family so insignificant and lacking presence that he had forgotten about them until now, but hearing it brought back the memories.

'And coincidentally, we are currently pursuing Southern merchants who might be hiding somewhere in the south. A murder involving a servant from the southern countries and Awakeners... It's worth pursuing any potential connection.'

Chapter 704

'And coincidentally, we are currently pursuing Southern merchants who might be hiding somewhere in the south. A murder involving a servant from the southern countries and Awakeners... It's worth pursuing any potential connection.'

After Myra left, Kishiar, rather than simply waiting for those who had departed for the investigation, chose to briefly return to the Cavalry branch.

"Nathan, I shall return with my assistant. You go ahead to the location I've instructed."

"Understood."

Indeed, the carriage, occupied by just the two of them, was the ideal place for discussing matters not to be shared with others. As soon as Yuder boarded and confirmed that no one was around, he immediately relayed newly recalled information and his own speculations.

"I remembered from the previous game that a member of Baron Conche's household had seized the title of Duke Herne. It seems right to suspect that they're behind the Second Prince's death, and it would be prudent to investigate considering the Southern merchants might be backing Baron Conche's family."

"That makes sense. I did notice an unusual reaction from you when Baron Conche's name came up earlier."

Kishiar rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"When you told me about First Princess Myra from the previous game, I thought we should investigate those who might covet the succession rights to prevent the same tragedy from repeating."

"Yes, you did say that."

"It's embarrassing that the Second Prince passed away before I could properly finish my investigation. I managed to gather a list and some basic information about the families with legitimate claims to the succession. The Conche family was among them."

It had only been a day since they had that conversation, so when had he found the time to conduct this investigation? Although it wasn't complete, the important part was that Kishiar noticed the Conche family's involvement.

Yuder listened intently, feeling a renewed sense of awe at Kishiar La Orr's efficiency.

"The Conche family doesn't have a significant presence within the Herne household. The current baron is the type to squander money, leaving them with little wealth, and they're only given cursory recognition because of their close blood ties and being a collateral branch."

Kishiar raised one corner of his mouth as if to ask if Yuder understood the implication.

"In other words, if First Princess Myra were to disappear and the succession passed to a collateral branch, the family would have no reason to support them. If they emerged victorious in the previous game, then the Second Prince's recent death might just reveal the 'reason' behind their success. And if that reason is indeed related to the Southern merchants and their surrounding forces..."

"Then keeping an eye on Baron Conche's family now would increase our chances of finding them or their traces."

"Exactly."

"In that case, I'll go and investigate."

Yuder immediately volunteered. He couldn't be complacent, having seen a man capable enough to dodge Kishiar's sword among those Southern merchants.

Given Kishiar's position, needing to safeguard the Cavalry branch and the suspicion surrounding the Second Prince's murder, he couldn't afford to be away for long. Yuder thought it best for him to move discreetly.

He was prepared to persuade Kishiar if necessary, but to his surprise, Kishiar merely glanced at his expression and nodded easily.

"I thought you'd say that. You have my permission."

"Thank you."

"But go with Nathan."

"..."

"That fellow has also seen the pinnacle of swordsmanship, so he won't be a hindrance."

Describing Nathan Zuckerman, a Swordmaster, as merely 'not being a hindrance' seemed insufficient, yet Kishiar did so with casual ease.

And then, Yuder finally guessed where Kishiar had sent Nathan Zuckerman just before their own departure.

'...He had seen through my intentions even before we set out.'

Yuder looked at him, astonished, but Kishiar merely smiled.

"It's still conjecture at this point, but I believe there's a high probability that the Southern merchants are involved in this affair. Considering their previous long preparations to win over the heart of Duke Tain, it's hard to be certain that they wouldn't have tried something with the master of the South, Herne."

"Yes."

"They are indeed dangerous. But that's not the only reason why I'm sending both you and Nathan."

"...Then what other reason might there be?"

Usually, Yuder could guess Kishiar's thoughts and intentions, but this time it was difficult.

As Yuder expressed his doubt, Kishiar's red eyes darkened.

"If we can confirm their schemes this time, we gain additional information – the certainty that they played the same hand in the previous game."

"..."

"You've told me much about the previous game, but there was scarcely any information about them. That means they are almost an unknown enemy to you as well."

Kishiar's voice echoed quietly and deeply within the carriage.

"Unlike in the West where we were confident in shifting situations to our advantage because we hold informational superiority, this time is different. We have little information, and their purpose

and intent are still not fully certain, so we can't afford to let our guard down even slightly. In such a situation, it's better to seek safety and find a way to securely protect the First Princess rather than take risks in scouting an unknown and cunning foe."

Yuder too had made considerable efforts with the intelligence unit to dig up information on these Southern merchants since their encounters in the West. However, he hadn't thought as Kishiar did.

'But certainly... he's right.'

Yuder now fully understood why Kishiar had resorted to such a drastic measure as sending Nathan after himself for something as trivial as surveilling Baron Conche's family. It meant he didn't want to leave even a single chance for carelessness.

Yuder had twisted many parts of the future, saving those destined to die and achieving results that were never meant to be. Despite such extensive changes, some events still repeated themselves in different conditions, like the death of the Second Prince of Herne.

If the Southern countries' involvement meant that outcome was inevitable, then it was hard to be certain that the First Princess Myra could entirely escape it. It was a time when swift and reliable verification was needed.

"Here. Take this."

As Kishiar gave directions to Baron Conche's house, he handed Yuder a ring he had worn on his finger. It was a new ring, replaced after some of the magic tools used in the recent fighting arena had lost their power. Yuder noticed the barely discernible magic inscriptions intricately intertwined with the design on the inside of what seemed to be a plain silver ring.

"It's a communication tool that can be used about three times. Nathan has something similar, but having an extra one can't hurt."

As he said this, he casually waved his other hand, revealing a ring on his finger. The ring was different in color but almost identical in design to the other.

"These two form a pair, and if you stroke the inside three times, they will react to each other. Use it when you need to request assistance."

"Understood."

"Just in case, I must say, you absolutely must not get hurt. And... this."

Kishiar then pulled something else out of his pocket. Before Yuder could reflexively take and examine it, Kishiar gently wrapped his fingers around Yuder's, forming his hand into a fist. Yuder felt something crinkling inside his hand, but he couldn't tell what it was.

"Check it after you get off. I'll see you later then."

"Please take care as well, Commander."

The man, having heard Yuder's parting words, smiled beautifully. Moments later, he pulled the carriage reins, signaling Yuder to disembark. The street was nearly deserted.

"Baron Conche's mansion is at the end of this street, with the blue roof and three stories. Nathan should be around there."

After watching the carriage depart for a moment, Yuder unfolded his fist.

Inside was a collection of candies wrapped in paper, similar to those he had seen before.

'...When did he even manage to pick these up?'

He was sure they hadn't been there when they left the capital, and it was a mystery where they had been kept.

Nevertheless, finding them unexpectedly pleasant, Yuder silently unwrapped one of the candies and popped it into his mouth. The sweet taste moistened his tongue.

"Sigh..."

Though it felt a bit different than usual, it was still the proper start of what was to come.

Chapter 705

"Sage, are you feeling alright?"

In a dilapidated house in the Seventh Wall District of the capital, young Awakeners, now reduced to three from five, knelt beside the Sage, worry etched on their faces. The Sage, with a wet cloth over his forehead and eyes, replied in a strained voice, "I am fine... it's just your well-being that concerns me."

"Do not worry about us. This is nothing!" another chimed in.

Their number had dwindled; Langbarton and Ella had stayed behind to fend off Nahan, aiding their escape. Thanks to their sacrifice, the Sage and the remaining Awakeners evaded the pursuing Cavalry and took refuge in a house provided by Baron Renbow.

But their relief was short-lived. Upon arrival, the Sage had collapsed, and the other three suffered burns from Devran's flame powers during their escape. Unable to contact Baron Renbow or return to the Crown Prince's palace, their only option was to hide.

Without Nezo's far-seeing ability and Juve's power to shield a specific area, they would have been captured by the Cavalry. Diemon, with the least injuries, tended to everyone as best he could.

"I'm sorry... My rash attempt to meet with Nahan has caused you harm," the Sage lamented, causing their hearts to ache. In their minds, Nahan was a traitor, in league with the Cavalry, jeopardizing the Sage's mission.

However, they couldn't dwell on that. Nezo, adjusting his broken glasses, spoke gravely, "Sage... Langbarton and Ella... they're dead, aren't they?"

The Sage sighed deeply, and with evident difficulty, replied, "No, they are not dead."

"Then..."

"But they would rather die than speak of us, as they swore to me. Do you not remember?"

Nezo blinked, realization dawning, "Yes, I remember. They made that oath to you right before leaving. And then you were so drained that you could hardly stand..."

They didn't question how the Sage was so certain of Langbarton and Ella's survival, nor did they realize that his collapse was more due to exhaustion akin to overusing his powers than the burns.

"So, we worry less about them now. It's painful, but inevitable. What should we do next?"

"Once the number of patrolling soldiers decreases, one of you should contact Baron Renbow. He can reach out to Duke Diarca and His Highness the Crown Prince for help."

Diemon, being the least injured, took on this task. Despite his fear, he couldn't hide his excitement at being the only one they could rely on. Nezo and Juve frowned at his pleased demeanor, but the Sage quietly encouraged him.

"Diemon, you are the only one we can trust now. You understand, don't you?"

"Of course, hehe. Just rely on me."

Not long after Diemon had left, disguised in the garb of a pilgrim to conceal his striking appearance, Baron Renbow arrived in a flurry. He was shocked to the point of nearly falling backward upon seeing the Sage lying down.

"Sage! What has happened here? His Highness the Crown Prince has been extremely worried, as you have not returned to the Bright Palace for days. A room there was nearly destroyed, and a servant was seriously injured by shards of a broken mirror!"

"There was a little incident," the Sage replied calmly, detachedly stating, "I was betrayed and injured by an old ally who joined forces with the Cavalry, preventing our return to the palace."

Baron Renbow's expression grew grave upon hearing this. "That explains it... There was an explosion in Fifth Wall District or somewhere, and His Majesty the Emperor has deployed the Cavalry everywhere, inspecting everyone entering the palace..."

After saying this, Baron Renbow glanced around with a slightly frightened look, lowering his voice, "Moreover, recently, I've felt like someone has been investigating me, which has been quite unsettling."

The Sage's expression changed at these words. After a long contemplation, he slowly spoke, "I intended to ask your help in entering the palace, Baron Renbow. But given these circumstances, it seems too dangerous to return."

After a pause, the Sage inquired, "Is there a way to meet Duke Diarca first?"

Baron Renbow shook his head with a troubled expression, "The Duke wouldn't meet anyone possibly involved in the explosion. I trust you, Sage, but he doesn't. We haven't yet succeeded in infiltrating our people into the Cavalry in the south, so how could he agree to meet..."

"Any method is fine, just once. Is it still too difficult?"

The Sage's eyes faintly glimmered as sweat trickled down his forehead. Baron Renbow, after a moment of silence, nodded like a puppet being pulled by strings.

"Actually, His Highness the Crown Prince recently reported to His Majesty about the Sun Palace intrusion, but all the suspects were released due to insufficient evidence, which greatly annoyed the Duke. I heard a rumor that he plans to take a brief tour with his youngest son to cool his head. The exact date is unknown, but it should be soon... Perhaps you could seize that opportunity."

"A tour..." The Sage appeared to ponder over Renbow's advice, considering it a good suggestion.

"Understood. Please inform me as soon as you have the exact date of this tour. And don't worry about the plan in the south; we will start that immediately. Inform Duke Diarca of this. Understanding his and your concerns about the expansion of the Cavalry, we will do our utmost."

"Sage, you always understand my heart. It's a difficult task, but it's worth undertaking together."

"And please deliver this letter to His Highness the Crown Prince. It will help ease his troubled mind."

The Sage produced a letter from within his clothes. The short letter, which did not reveal its author's identity, was heavily scented with the fragrance of the sachet the Sage always carried. Those familiar with the Sage could instantly recognize the owner of that scent.

Baron Renbow, overjoyed, accepted the letter from the Sage.

The following day, Baron Renbow brought good news to the Sage. "Duke Diarca is setting out on his excursion this very evening. He plans to cool off by the lake in Fourth Wall District, where the evening sunset is beautiful."

"Fourth Wall District, understood."

"Ah, and... this is not good news, but... two of the Awakeners, who were arrested by the Cavalry at the explosion site, bit off their tongues and died yesterday. From the descriptions released, they seemed to be your followers..."

At these words, the atmosphere turned chillingly cold. The young Awakeners bit their lips to cope with the shock.

After Baron Renbow left, the Sage sat in sad silence for a long time. The three young Awakeners following him also mourned and seethed with anger over the deaths of their comrades.

"It's all because of Nahan. If only we knew where he's gone..."

"We've sent messages to our southern and central bases with Baron Renbow's help. If he heads there, we'll hear of it."

"Don't be too saddened. We'll meet Langbarton and Ella in the sky one day. But Nahan... Yes. That's also why I'm taking the risk to meet with Duke Diarca."

The Sage quietly consoled them, revealing his inner thoughts.

Chapter 706

"Don't be too saddened. We'll meet Langbarton and Ella in the sky one day. But Nahan... Yes. That's also why I'm taking the risk to meet with Duke Diarca."

The Sage quietly consoled them, revealing his inner thoughts.

“As you all know, the person who actually has the power to protect us is not His Highness the Crown Prince, but Duke Diarca, who placed him in that position. The Duke is soon to become the one who holds everything in this Empire. He is renowned for his fairness, rewarding those with talent and loyalty regardless of their status.”

It was a known fact that Duke Diarca, a man of remarkable skill, had been taking in common-born knights with nowhere to go and impoverished nobles, improving the image of his house. Recently, he had been working to fill the private army of the Diarca family with Awakeners. Although his motives were not entirely noble, the young Awakeners listening to the Sage were not concerned with that.

“Even If everyone in this world turns away from our brethren and the Star of Nagran, as long as he believes in us, we can stand proudly and prove our innocence. Nahan will no longer be able to torment us.”

“Ah...”

“If he stands with us, believes in our words, we need not hide anymore. Can you imagine our brethren, who have lived in fear, hiding from the Cavalry without committing any crime, emerging boldly from their strongholds to display their powers? Living happily in a safe, warm place?”

“Yes, I can imagine it... very well indeed.”

Nezo’s eyes filled with tears, his expression overwhelmed.

“If we overcome this trial, you will all become new pillars of this Empire, alongside its master. To see that day, I would gladly sacrifice this aged body.”

“Sage...”

“For us, to go so far...”

Tearful voices surrounded the Sage, who smiled weakly, yet with a guardian’s kindness.

“Now, don't cry. It's tonight. We must hurry to Fourth Wall District by evening... for Langbarton and Ella.”

“For Langbarton and Ella...!”

As they cried out, the Sage lowered his eyes. His gaze was icy cold, contrasting the smile lingering on his lips.

Tap tap. Gakane peeked in through the open door, knocking softly.

“Kanna, are you still busy?”

“Huh? No, not busy. I was just about to return to the base.”

Kanna, who had been fervently writing, smiled broadly, putting a period at the end of her last sentence before standing up.

They were in a building gifted to the Cavalry by the Emperor during a party. Located near the base yet secluded, Kishiar had simply renovated it into a prison and investigation facility for Awakeners. However, it was quite different from a typical prison, having been converted from a mansion, it was exceedingly bright and warm. Each holding area had bars and locks, but the facilities were so well-equipped that at a glance, it did not feel like a prison at all.

But, in truth, the entire building and its surroundings were thoroughly sealed using magic circles and the abilities of the members. Soundproofing and powers that dulled the perception of passersby were applied, making it impossible for ordinary people to even be aware of such a place.

And in Kishiar's absence, the person granted the authority to manage and use this building was none other than Kanna Wand, the Jung Deputy Commander.

It was assumed that the doors of this building would not need to be opened until Kishiar and Yuder returned. However, the unexpected explosion caused by the Star of Nagran forced an influx of

individuals into the building, as the headquarters of the Cavalry lacked space. Kanna spent most of her time here, interrogating the captured awakeners.

Kanna asked her red-haired friend, who stood silently without stating his purpose, "What is it? Is there something you need?"

While she could easily discern Gakane's reasons with her abilities, Kanna chose not to use her powers for such trivial matters. After all, wasn't it for this purpose she had honed her ability to control her power?

"Just, I was nearby and thought it's about time for you to head back to the base... thought we could go together."

"Wow, you came to escort me? That's impressive, Gakane. Truly worthy of the praise you've received from His Majesty, Sir Bolunwald!"

"No, it's not about being impressive. It's right to prioritize your safety. The people here are still too dangerous... there's a chance you could be threatened... And you've received the same praise before too..."

As Kanna giggled teasingly, Gakane protested, his face flushing with embarrassment. Knowing he had truly come out of concern for her safety, Kanna decided to cease teasing her good-hearted friend.

"Ah, right. Only a fellow initiate would do this. Thank you."

'Fellow initiate' referred to the trio of Yuder, Gakane, and Kanna. While she was fond of all her colleagues, Kanna held a special affection for the other two, who had been with her since before the entrance test. Gakane felt the same.

"What were you writing there?"

Gakane glanced at the paper Kanna had been writing on, changing the subject.

"Names of dishes, places... There are some strange words here."

"Oh, this? It's the information I've gathered from the people here. There's so much, I can't keep it all in my head, so I write it down daily. When reporting, I extract only the important bits."

Gakane was startled, realizing just how valuable the casually scribbled information on the paper was.

"I've written down today's information, so now I just need to check on the people under Priest Lusan's care before leaving. Want to come with me?"

"Ah, those people who had caused an uproar because they bit their tongues."

"Yes, those people."

Though referred to simply as 'those people', both knew exactly who they were.

They were the most important and peculiar individuals among those captured in the explosion. The names Kanna had gleaned from them were Langbarton and Ella. Though unconscious, Kanna's exceptional abilities revealed that they were followers of the Sage.

That should have been enough, everyone thought. But not Kanna. She had sensed something odd in the information from Langbarton and Ella.

‘I keep being bothered by some strange information from these people. Before they lost consciousness... It seems like something crucial happened around the time of the incident.’

To uncover this, Kanna pushed her abilities to the limit, to the point of nosebleeds. Finally, she succeeded in discerning a piece of information that seemed to be the key.

‘These people definitely encountered some kind of mental ability that day. Not Nahan's illusions, but something earlier... a power that could influence something related to life.’

And it seemed highly likely that this was related to the Sage's brainwashing abilities. Having made this assessment, she summoned two members of the medical unit and then cautiously addressed the two who had just opened their eyes.

"You were followers of the Sage, weren't you? Do you remember anything about what happened that day?"

Upon hearing these words, they suddenly bit their tongues and collapsed. There had been no warning, nor did they show enough vitality to be aggressive.

These individuals, who had barely been able to open their eyes and had not even the strength to speak, shocked everyone with their simultaneous actions. Fortunately, Lusan, whose divine power was unmatched by anyone, and Enon, whose past career was unknown but whose skill was suspiciously exceptional, were right there.

Enon quickly administered a medicine he had prepared in advance, opening their blocked airways. Lusan poured out his healing power to stop the endless flow of blood. Thus, they managed to keep the two's breaths tethered to this world once again.

It was not an overstatement to call it a victory for Kanna, who had delved into even the slightest suspicions without missing a beat.

Kanna stepped out of the space she had been occupying with confident strides. The corridor created by a Cavalry member capable of attaching something through an empowered medium, using a month's worth of energy, had connecting and separating paths that seemed unlikely to meet, making it easy to lose one's way when first arriving. But Kanna walked out without hesitation, eyes fixed ahead.

Upon reaching her destination and opening the door, Lusan, who was tending to the two lying on the bed, turned his head.

"Ah, you've come."

Chapter 707

"Ah, you've come."

"Yes, Priest. And what about Pharmacist Enon?"

"He is at the headquarters."

Langbarton and Ella were still unconscious, their eyes closed. Gakane scrutinized their restrained forms, designed to prevent any self-harm, with a furrowed brow.

He had been investigating the whereabouts of the Sage outside when they had bitten their tongues, missing the horrific scene. Yet, the sight before him was enough to imagine the dreadfulness of that moment, sending a cold shiver down his spine.

Even in their unconscious state, the total absence of a certain vitality that should be inherent in any normal person was strikingly apparent, as if it had been completely drained away.

'It's evident that they were not in their right minds when they bit their tongues...'

Gakane, gazing down at them, opened his mouth to speak.

"...It must have been the Sage who brainwashed them into biting their tongues, right?"

"Probably."

"It's terrifying how just one ability can determine life and death. But why did they immediately attempt to kill themselves upon capture, unlike other Awakeners from the Star of Nagran?"

"Perhaps back then there was no need, and now there is. If someone recognizes them as frequent visitors to the Crow Prince's palace, it could be disadvantageous. It's about eliminating both the evidence and the witnesses."

Lusan, having learned about the Sage during the treatment process, interjected. Kanna, agreeing with Lusan's words, yet thinking like a true Awakener, offered a different perspective.

"Your words, Priest, are one reason, but I think differently. If killing them was more advantageous, the Sage would have already killed the other Awakeners from the Star of Nagran. But that hasn't happened yet. I suspect... it might be a matter of whether or not the victims met certain conditions to trigger the Sage's lethal ability."

"Conditions to trigger the ability?"

To Gakane's question, Kanna hummed, pondering.

"Gakane, you know I've been investigating those associated with the Star of Nagan, right?"

"Of course. Who else in the Cavalry knows more about them than you?"

"Right. After much scrutiny, I'm beginning to understand how the Sage's abilities are activated. The fact that followers of Nahan were also captured this time was greatly informative."

With that, Kanna made a request to Lusan and Gakane.

"Please keep what I'm about to say confidential. It's still speculative, but I'd rather it not be discussed elsewhere."

"Of course. I swear to god, I'll keep it secret."

"Same here. Um... Should I even refrain from mentioning it to the Commander or Yuder?"

Gakane, seeking something to compare to a divine oath, was met with Kanna's laughter.

"No, if the Commander or Yuder ask, you should tell them. I'll be reporting to them soon anyway!"

"Ha ha... Alright, everyone but the Commander and Yuder."

"Anyway, from what I've deduced through my readings of the conditions of the Awakeners from the Star of Nagan, the Sage's ability is definitely brainwashing. However, it's not like the Sage can command anything at any time."

"Oh... So there are limits to using the ability, just like us?"

"Yes. If the Sage could easily use brainwashing to the extent of causing death, people like Nahan wouldn't have emerged, right? No matter how much trust there is, it's rare for someone to die immediately upon being commanded to do so. An ability that overcomes the instinct to live requires immense power, and I believe it also necessitates certain preconditions."

Though not as terrifying as the abilities of the Sage or Nahan, the Cavalry had several mental ability users. Kanna, as their leader, had a significantly higher understanding of mental abilities compared to other members.

"Mental abilities vary in effectiveness depending on the subject. You've faced Nahan yourself, Gakane, so you know that strong-willed individuals are less susceptible. However, under certain conditions, the power can exceed its usual limits. You understand this far?"

"Yes. So, what are these preconditions? Loyalty?"

"That's part of it. But what comes next is more important."

Kanna lowered her voice.

"I've been asking the Awakeners from the Star of Nagran about their first encounter with the Sage. Surprisingly, I found a commonality in their experiences. My guess is that the Sage used his ability at the first meeting."

"Used his ability at the first meeting...? Openly brainwashing?"

"There was an unspoken rule that new Awakeners to the Star of Nagran must meet the Sage personally for their membership to be approved. After that, they received group norm training from the Sage, and only then were they assigned tasks according to their aptitudes."

This detail was consistently mentioned by all who were part of the Star of Nagran. However, Kanna read something more covert that the storytellers themselves had not realized.

This insight was a result of her abilities taking a significant leap forward after recently thwarting invaders at the Sun Palace. Initially, her power only allowed random access to information from touched objects. Now, she could selectively extract specific types of information and reconstruct memories or thoughts based on the past information of the subject.

If pushed further, she could even glean a little information about a third party who had interacted with her target. Essentially, the 'target' acted as a kind of intermediary. However, this method was

ineffective unless the third party had left a deep impression or a significant experience on the 'target'.

In this case, all Awakeners of the Star of Nagran had such profound impressions and unique experiences with the Sage, enabling her to gather considerable information even indirectly.

"For a secret organization formed for survival, such a rule makes sense. But think about it. The Sage personally meeting and training every new Awakener without anyone else's assistance... Considering his abilities, doesn't that seem like an ideal scenario?"

"Indeed. There's no better way to exert brainwashing than through teaching. It's natural to believe and follow the words of a teacher."

Gakane's eyes grew serious. Kanna flashed a sharp smile.

"Exactly. Trust. According to the information I gathered, the Sage would always start the training by revealing that he too was a power user who had left his homeland and lived a hard life. He always used the same phrase with the new Awakeners. It's the most famous quote about 'faith' from the Sun God scriptures."

"Light does not change direction, and darkness comes to all. Amidst all fears, believe in those who forge ahead... the 'Testament of Faith' from Scripture, Chapter 3, Verse 98."

Lusan, reacting to the mention of the scripture, promptly responded. Kanna declared it the correct answer.

"Yes."

"The last words left by the Messenger Orhe before he returned to the sun. It's a part particularly favored by priests leading groups because of its emphasis on believing in those who forge ahead."

"Ah... I didn't know that. But I do think that phrase started making people believe in the Sage."

Before joining the Star of Nagran, the Awakeners, filled with distrust and guardedness from all their experiences, began to open up and believe in the Sage after hearing those words. After the training, there wasn't a single person who resisted the idea that the Sage was benevolent and trustworthy.

Kanna continued, her face turning bitter.

"You see, brainwashing doesn't work if it's too complicated. What could be a simpler and more beneficial phrase for the Sage than 'trust me'?"

"That way, he could have brainwashed everyone in the Star of Nagran."

"Yes. Afterwards, those who seemed most affected by the brainwashing were filtered out during the training process and made into close aides, continuously strengthening the brainwashing."

According to what Kanna had read, apart from the phrase 'trust me', the Sage hadn't directly said anything universally common to the Awakeners.

"Thinking about it, the Sage probably had only one chance to brainwash each person. Strengthening an existing brainwash seems possible, but completely changing it seems not. For example... if someone was brainwashed to like roses, you could deepen it to make them swallow rose thorns, but suddenly making them like lilies instead seems impossible. Do you get what I mean?"

"I think so. It's like continuously strengthening the belief to the point of biting their own tongues, but not changing to believe in a different person... Maybe that's why the brainwashing didn't work properly on Nahan..."

Gakane's mind drifted to a previous argument he had heard between the Sage and Nahan.

"Maybe Nahan joined before the formation of the Star of Nagran and missed the training process, or perhaps he was brainwashed differently in the early days. That could explain why the Sage couldn't control him despite the chaos and didn't use his powers."

"Exactly, Gakane. You're thinking just like me. Thanks for understanding."

After saying this, Kanna looked down at Langbarton and Ella with a touch of regret.

"These people must have been brainwashed by the Sage repeatedly without their knowledge. Their faith, compounded over time, must have made them feel the Sage's affairs as their own, or maybe even more important. That's why they were used as shields by the Sage."

"..."

"I don't know how true my speculation is yet. But it's something I can never forgive."

Kanna clenched her fist.

Chapter 708

"I don't know how true my speculation is yet. But it's something I can never forgive."

Kanna clenched her fist.

"That's why I asked for these people to be declared dead. That must be what the one who ordered to bite the tongue wanted. If we do as they wished, won't they come out of hiding?"

"I see, so that was it."

After Langbarton and Ella barely survived biting their tongues, the Cavalry publicly announced the incident, but with a twist: they reported that the two had died. Gakane recalled hearing about several communications between the three Deputy Commanders and the Sun Palace before this announcement was made.

Gakane, one of Cavalry's most skilled members, was not a Deputy Commander. He lacked the authority to decide or even give an opinion on such major matters and didn't know why the announcement differed from the truth until now.

'Well, I had thought our Deputy Commanders had their reasons.'

Kanna, Ever, and Steiber had evolved into responsible leaders since their initial appointment. He believed they must have had a valid reason for their decision, one even the Emperor had approved.

With this confirmation, he felt reassured.

"It was troubling how well those people were hiding, making it hard to follow them. Thanks to you, Kanna, we might soon see results. Thank you."

"Don't mention it. Remember how I once used my abilities to read from the items you and Hinn brought from their lodging? Only those with abilities useful for hiding remain by the Sage's side now. It's naturally tough, but you, Gakane, have managed to track Nahan's whereabouts following His Majesty's command."

Emperor Keilusa had tasked Gakane and intelligence members with this critical mission. With the help of Kanna and other skilled members of the Cavalry, Gakane successfully guessed the direction Nahan had headed.

"Yes... He left the capital without looking back and went south."

Nahan had disappeared through the capital's southern gate. Though it was early to conclude, Gakane felt he must have headed to the southern region.

"Having fully broken with the Sage, Nahan must feel the need to gather his supporters and declare independence. With the western base gone, he likely headed to the central or southern base."

"If he went to the southern base, Yuder and the Commander might soon find him. That would be good."

"Exactly. Nahan won't escape if Yuder catches him, especially since he seemed unwell."

Kanna and Gakane both thought of the last of their fellow initiate, a friend whose whereabouts never worried them, bringing a slight smile to their faces.

"Let's head back now."

"Yes."

"Ah, you're leaving already? Take care on your way back, and I hope to see you again soon."

"Yes, Priest. Don't overdo it yourself and return to the base early!"

After exchanging farewells with Lusan, they returned to their base, only to encounter an unexpected message.

"Gakane! Kanna! Both of you are here! There's just been a message from the Sun Palace."

Ever, who usually had a calm demeanor, approached them with a rare intensity in her expression.

"A message? What about...?"

To Gakane's bewildered reply, Ever held up two fingers.

"There are two important pieces of news. The first is about an incident in Charloin, near the southern branch of the Cavalry, where the Second Prince of the Herne Duchy was murdered by an Awakener. Consequently, the Cavalry is now under significant suspicion."

"Could it be that Nahan has already reached there?"

Kanna asked with a grave expression, to which Ever shook her head.

"That's impossible. Hosanna, who can teleport, is right here with us."

"Still..."

"Regardless, we can't just sit back and trust that the Commander will handle everything. We must be ready to support the south at a moment's notice. That's an order."

"Ah... What's the second piece of news?"

Gakane inquired, prompting Ever to turn towards him.

"The second piece is that Baron Renbow, the noble under surveillance, is currently heading towards the outskirts of Fourth Wall District. His Majesty believes that the Sage might appear where this noble is. We have been ordered to select members skilled in stealth and disguise to follow him."

"Ah, then I shall leave immediately!"

Despite having just returned from work, Gakane turned to leave without a word of complaint.

"Hold on, Gakane. Haven't you forgotten that both the Sage and Nahan's sides have seen your face before?"

"...Ah."

Gakane halted abruptly. Watching his faltering steps, Ever smiled slightly.

"No, I don't mean you shouldn't go. Of course, we sought you out for a reason. Your Shadow Clone is an amazing ability, after all. But this time, you mustn't take the forefront. Support the others discreetly with your Shadow Clone. Can you do that?"

"Of course! But who else will be going...?"

"Hinn and Finn, who haven't been exposed yet, and those who recently passed the second recruitment and are about to become official members. Hinn and Finn are already waiting outside, and the others are..."

As she trailed off, her gaze shifted towards two figures who emerged.

"Hello..."

"It seems like it's been a while since we last met, both of you."

A slender, fair-faced young man with a delicate smile, Revlin Shand Apeto, stood beside his companion, a young man with intelligent eyes and golden-red hair, Pruelle Van Tain. These two, after staying with the Cavalry as temporary members following a series of events, were among the first to submit their official applications and pass the tests in the second recruitment. Though the recruitment process wasn't over, they were effectively official members now.

"We've heard the story. There are many leisure spots in the outskirts of Fourth Wall District frequented by nobles. Deputy Commander Ever suggested that we would be suitable for naturally blending in and identifying any suspicious individuals, so we immediately agreed."

Pruelle said with a smile, explaining their involvement.

"So... Are the five of us going?"

"No. We'll also take Nipollen, since we need to find the Awakener. Technically, I'm just going as Nipollen's guardian."

Pruelle joked, displaying a humility unexpected from the first son of the Tain family, known for his exceptional transformation ability.

"But will it be okay with so many of us? If there are too many people..."

Kanna, concerned for Nipollen, who spends most of his days as a cat due to his fear of people, questioned. Pruelle cheerfully reassured her.

"Oh, certainly. The lake and the forest walk are lush, so it shouldn't be too uncomfortable for Nipollen. And Priscilla... Hmm. With a bit of support from my sister, I plan to officially visit the private space of the Tain family, which is nearby. That's why I judged it to be fine."

Pruelle, after renouncing his rights as the heir to the family, had officially cut off ties to some extent and joined the Cavalry. However, he still kept in close contact with his siblings. A down-to-earth young man, who introduced himself to everyone simply as Elle, without any attachment to his lineage or surname, had decided to rely on his sister's help after a long time, a choice made to ensure the utmost safety of his youngest sibling, Nipollen.

"Ah... I see. I was worried over nothing."

"Not at all. You don't know how much both Nipollen and I are truly grateful for your constant concern, Deputy Commander Kanna. And to you as well, Deputy Commander Ever."

"Me?"

"Nippy really loved the cushion you made last time."

"Ah..."

Even in a serious situation, the mood suddenly became very warm. Pruelle, having expressed his gratitude to Ever, made a pleasantly happy face and gestured to Gakane.

"Shall we go then?"

Yuder soon found the mansion Kishiar had mentioned. It was nothing less than the embodiment of a traditional noble family's mansion, appearing quite ordinary.

The people passing by seemed utterly peaceful, making him wonder how he would ever locate Nathan Zuckerman amidst them. However, Yuder successfully found his counterpart without much difficulty.

It was because Nathan Zuckerman had stealthily approached him from behind in the blink of an eye.

"You've arrived."

Nathan Zuckerman, in his inconspicuous attire, gestured to Yuder.

"Follow me," he beckoned, leading the way to a tree near the back door of the mansion.

Chapter 709

"You've arrived."

Nathan Zuckerman, in his inconspicuous attire, gestured to Yuder.

"Please, follow me."

"Follow me," he beckoned, leading the way to a tree near the back door of the mansion. In a moment, exploiting a gap when no pedestrians were around, Nathan swiftly climbed the tree and leaped onto the roof of the adjacent building. It was a movement too quick to catch with the naked eye.

Yuder easily followed suit, using the power of the wind to mimic Nathan's movements. Upon reaching the rooftop, the reason for Nathan's choice of location became immediately clear to Yuder.

'A blind spot between the chimneys,' he realized, spotting a cleverly hidden area invisible from the ground below, perfect for concealment and offering a clear view of most of Baron Conche's estate.

'How did he find such a spot so quickly?' Yuder pondered. Merely having a keen eye seemed insufficient for discovering such a place; it required experience in stealth and surveillance. Yuder had his past life's experiences, but Nathan, an adjutant and knight of Kishiar, seemed unusually skilled in such clandestine activities, intriguing Yuder with his hidden talents.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Nathan asked, noticing Yuder's gaze.

"It's just... I'm impressed by how quickly you found this place," Yuder responded.

"It's nothing special. Working under a lord who enjoys exploring and observing his surroundings every night, you naturally develop these skills," Nathan replied nonchalantly, signaling Yuder to hide.

Without a word, Yuder laid down beside him, both men keeping their voices low as they focused their attention on Baron Conche's residence.

"Did you notice anything unusual while observing earlier?" Yuder inquired.

"A few things," Nathan began. "Earlier, a maid with her face covered came out and burned something in the corner of that garden. The trash she burned looked too large and heavy for one person. It seemed too rushed, even for a place short on staff. From this distance, it's hard to tell what was burned."

Yuder observed the charred remains piled up in the garden corner, noting the absence of anyone checking on the hastily burned debris.

"Also, over there seems to be the stables, which have been quite noisy inside. It's quieter now though..."

Yuder's gaze then shifted to a small stable near the burned trash. Although the roof obscured a full view, the hole-in-the-wall windows and large entrance revealed a few horses inside.

"We should investigate both," Yuder decided, subtly exerting his powers of wind and earth, focusing intently. The pile of trash in the garden suddenly spilled open, scattering its contents. Amongst the indistinguishable charred remnants, a partially burned object caught Yuder's sharp eyes.

'Is that... a horse saddle?' he thought, recognizing the basic structure despite its scorched and partially destroyed state. It was undoubtedly a luxury saddle, designed for a large horse, crafted from dyed top-quality leather with protective enchantments. 'Too intact to be discarded,' Yuder mused, sensing the gravity of their discovery.

It was clear at a glance that the saddle was of great value. Such expensive saddles were usually fitted for horses of noble bloodlines, and only the wealthiest of nobles could afford to ride such steeds.

Yuder surmised that the saddle had survived the fire due to the faint power of a protective enchantment embedded within it. It was rare for an item still imbued with magic energy to be discarded in such a manner. Only those with little regard for money would do such a thing.

'The current Baron Conche, however, would never treat such an expensive saddle so carelessly,' Yuder thought. He recalled Kishiar mentioning the Baron's penchant for squandering his wealth on pleasures.

Yuder's gaze shifted from the saddle to the stables in the distance. Although not visible to them, the horses there must have experienced a sudden chill and the ground shaking beneath them.

"----!!"

Moments later, a commotion arose from within the stables, a sound only perceptible to the two men, gifted with heightened senses and the power of the wind.

"What did you do?" Nathan asked.

"I examined the contents of the trash and gave the horses a slight disturbance. That should bring someone out to calm them down soon enough."

No sooner had Yuder finished speaking than a figure dashed out of the mansion. Even from this distance, the youth's Southern descent was evident. Shortly after he entered the stables, the horses quieted down.

'A Southerner, calming several agitated horses so effortlessly. There's much to ponder here.'

Following the youth, several other figures emerged from the mansion, their faces and skin covered with cloth.

'That attire...!' Yuder recognized it from his previous encounter in Tainu. It was similar to what the Southern merchants wore when they stayed at inns.

After a while, those at the stables emerged. They searched the surroundings, suspecting something amiss, scrutinizing walls and bushes. But they were unable to detect Yuder, who had skillfully used his powers from a distance that would be unimaginable for an ordinary Awakener.

Finding nothing, they returned to the mansion, and it fell silent once more.

"..."

Deciding there was nothing more to see, Yuder swiftly rose to his feet, and Nathan Zuckerman followed suit without a word.

"You've seen everything, I presume?"

"Yes," Nathan replied, his response heavy with unspoken implications.

"There are Southerners in the Baron Conche's estate. The ones with covered faces are surely those we've been pursuing from the West, and the first one who emerged is likely a servant of the

deceased Second Prince. If we retrieve and examine the partially burned saddle, we'll have more certainty."

"If retrieving the saddle is sufficient, I can go alone," Nathan offered. However, Yuder shook his head.

"No. Let's use this opportunity to capture them."

It was a bold statement that would have surprised his fellow Cavalry members, familiar with Yuder's temperament. But the loyal Southern knight showed no surprise. He studied Yuder's face, as if contemplating, then spoke.

"If we intrude, it could lead to complications. Perhaps we should retreat after retrieving the saddle and report back before taking further action."

"Hmm. I'd rather not lose a trail we've finally caught," Yuder disagreed.

Certainly, Nathan Zuckerman could proceed as he suggested. However, if those scoundrels caught wind and fled again in the meantime, it would only delay the Cavalry's return to normal operations. Yuder had no desire to take such a roundabout route when he was confident of success on a more direct path.

"Do you think just the two of us can manage it? I am aware of Sir Aile's exceptional skills, but..."

"You are being remarkably humble. It is certainly possible with just us two. You need not belittle yourself or worry about me."

"..."

Nathan Zuckerman fell silent, as if Yuder's words had struck a chord.

"The issue of unauthorized entry arises only if we fail to achieve any results. And in my opinion, there is no chance of that happening. If that saddle truly belongs to the Second Prince, the likelihood that his horse is still alive in the stables is quite high. Securing just these two things and capturing a few of the fellows we saw earlier will make our task much easier."

“...”

Yuder lifted the corners of his lips slightly, looking at the silent Nathan Zuckerman.

"Of course, I understand your concerns. If you are not confident, I can handle it alone. Just watch over the area to prevent any disruptions or escapes. Should any problems arise, I will take full responsibility."

"That won't be necessary."

Finally, Nathan Zuckerman withdrew his gaze from Yuder and nodded.

"I will accompany you."

"Then let's head down right away."

They leaped down from the rooftop and headed naturally towards Baron Conche's estate.

"This is certainly the first time I've teamed up with Sir Aile for such a task... It makes me wonder how much you actually know about me," Nathan Zuckerman murmured as they scaled a wall. Yuder remained silent.

Chapter 710

The garden of Baron Conche's mansion, which they had entered surreptitiously, was as quiet as it had appeared from above.

At first glance, it looked like a fairly decent noble's mansion, but upon entering, it was unmistakably eerie. The flowers and trees had been long neglected, overgrown with weeds, and not a single window was open. The curtains were tightly drawn, making it impossible to peer inside.

For Yuder and Nathan Zuckerman, this was a welcome circumstance.

'It's likely the southerners did this to hide, but it makes our inspection easier.'

Yuder approached a pile of rubbish in a corner of the garden, which he had observed from above, and found a burnt saddle.

"If this belongs to the Second Prince, there should be a coat of arms or a mark indicating its owner somewhere."

"I'll inspect it."

Nathan Zuckerman immediately began examining the partially destroyed saddle. After brushing off the ash and turning it inside out, he finally found what they were looking for.

"Here it is. Four waves and a spear. The coat of arms of House Herne."

On the less damaged inner side, there was the coat of arms of House Herne – four undulating waves and a winged spear in the center. Yuder, examining it, was confident his suspicion was correct.

Even if the Baron Conche family was related to the Ducal House of Herne, they could not use its coat of arms. This was more conclusive evidence than anything else.

'They must have planned to burn it immediately.'

Nathan Zuckerman lifted the large saddle effortlessly with one hand, slung it over his back, and secured it with a strap he had produced from somewhere. This was an excellent method, preventing the hands from being obstructed and reducing the risk of losing the item.

Having secured the saddle so it wouldn't fall, Nathan pointed to the pile of burnt rubbish.

"Should we not inspect the rest? There might be more items related to the Second Prince."

"If you think it will take time... but if you're confident, go ahead."

"Understood."

The knight immediately began sifting through the blackened lumps.

"Then I'll head to the stables."

"If there's any trouble, signal me right away."

Without looking back, Nathan quickly responded, and Yuder watched his retreating figure for a moment before moving on.

'Working with someone without needing to give further instructions feels oddly refreshing.'

It had been the same when he went to the fighting arena with Kishiar, but this time the feeling was slightly different. Yuder walked towards the stables, experiencing an unfamiliar yet pleasant sensation.

After confirming there was no one inside the stable, he cautiously entered. The white horse at the far end seemed a bit excited, stamping its hooves.

He had thought of sedating it if it caused any trouble, but thankfully, it wasn't that agitated. Yuder noted that there were a total of five horses in the stable and slowly walked deeper inside.

'Are these creatures asleep?'

Most of the horses had their eyes closed. Approaching the closest brown horse and tapping its sensitive ears and eyes elicited no reaction, which felt different from them being asleep.

Observing their abnormal state, Yuder recalled the southerner who had first entered. Despite the short time since his entry, the horses had quickly quieted down. The feed troughs were empty, indicating they hadn't been fed anything.

Then, there was only one conclusion to draw.

'The old servant of the Second Prince mentioned that the missing servant was particularly adept with horses. If that person I saw earlier is the same one, and if he's related to or an associate of the southern merchants we are pursuing... it's very likely that he is also an Awakener.'

In Yuder's previous life, in the Cavalry, there were quite a few Awakeners who excelled at handling animals. There were differences in the types of animals they could handle and the effects, but calming a distressed animal was relatively easy for them.

Yuder turned his head towards the horse at the very back, the only one with open eyes. Among the five horses, the white one in the furthest position rolled its hooves a few times in its spot, looking at Yuder with suspicious and uneasy eyes.

'Its breathing and all, it's quite agitated.'

The creature was a head taller than the other horses and had a glossy sheen to its fur as if it had just been groomed, quite different from the other horses whose fur appeared dry and brittle. It seemed like the perfect horse to fit the expensive saddle found outside.

Judging by its muscular legs and the condition of its mane, it was clearly a noble steed at first glance.

Yuder approached slowly, careful not to startle it, and examined its legs. The horse's leg fur showed signs of having been wet and then dried, particularly noticeable due to its white color.

'...But that's not all...'

Yuder's gaze then swept over the pile of hay on the floor. Among the several hoofprints left by the horse's excited pacing and rolling, there were faint red traces.

"..."

Yuder stared intently at the red marks and then slowly shifted his gaze to the horse's hooves.

'The blood started from its right hind hoof.'

It was definitely blood, but it didn't come from the horse.

Rather, the horse had stepped in the blood, leaving a stained imprint.

Yuder was certain this horse was the owner of the saddle burnt outside.

'So the horse was alive, too. We found it because they hadn't killed it yet.'

"Let's go."

Yuder opened the fence and grabbed the horse's bridle. However, the horse refused to follow even when he pulled on the bridle, shaking its head and stamping.

'Clearly, the servant had used a calming ability on this one, but its resistance and fear, being the only one awake, suggested a state of extreme agitation and possibly a weaker influence from the servant.'

From the horse's perspective, its owner had died, and it had been abruptly brought to a strange place, so its wariness was understandable. Even with a calming ability, it wasn't easy to soothe such agitation.

What to do? The horse was too large to be sedated and taken away.

As Yuder pondered, Nathan Zuckerman appeared behind him.

"Why haven't you come out yet?"

"Did you find anything useful in the pile of rubbish?"

"I found a somewhat intact handkerchief and a piece of cloth stained with blood. They don't seem to belong to the Second Prince, but they might be useful if they belong to the murderer."

"Good. I believe I've found the Second Prince's horse."

"This one?"

"Yes. But it's too scared and resistant to leave."

Yuder briefly explained his theory. Nathan Zuckerman's eyebrows slightly furrowed upon hearing that the missing servant of the Second Prince, who had disappeared, might have been an Awakener capable of handling horses.

"I've always thought since seeing the Cavalry members, there really are all sorts of abilities."

"Do you know how to calm or handle a horse in this state?"

"Can't the power of Sir Aile do it?"

"My abilities are primarily specialized in killing. I thought it better to seek the opinion of Sir Zuckerman, who has more experience with horses, than to knock it out from behind and carry it away."

Nathan Zuckerman looked at Yuder with an indiscernible gaze for a moment before letting out a short sigh.

"...That won't work. Please step outside for a moment."

As Yuder stepped aside, Nathan Zuckerman approached the horse. He gently stroked the horse's head and various spots, emitting a few short whistles near its ear. Surprisingly, the horse began to calm down gradually.

After petting the horse until it became somewhat accustomed to his touch, Nathan turned his back. The horse noticed the burnt saddle tied behind him. Extending its neck, it sniffed the charred saddle several times, then shook its body and stamped its hooves.

"Aren't you exciting the horse even more?"

"Horses are much smarter than you think. They recognize and remember their owners and the gear they use. This horse's excitement is probably because it recognized its saddle and recalled what happened to its owner."

Nathan faced the horse again.

"I'm trying to take you home. You're going with the saddle, so it's okay to relax."

Saying this, the knight slowly pulled the bridle. Like when Yuder had pulled it earlier, the horse stood still as if resisting, but then, as if it were a lie, it started walking and slowly moved outside the fence.

It was an unbelievably easy resolution.

"That's impressive."

Yuder sincerely praised him. Nathan seemed a bit embarrassed.

"...What will you do now?"

"Keep a firm hold on the bridle and don't let go. I'm going to wake up the other horses."

"Excuse me?"

Yuder immediately used his ability. The ground rumbled, and the previously quiet horses, as if asleep, all lifted their heads in unison.

"Hee-hee-hing!"

Simultaneously, the main building became noisy.

Hearing the footsteps of people running towards them, Yuder turned to Nathan.

"They'll assume the horses woke up like before and will come carelessly. A battle will ensue, so please stay back to ensure the horse doesn't get injured."