**Chapter 1148**

"I'm sorry, Nathan. I knew you were worried about troubling our guest, but even knowing that, I couldn't hold back. I thought I'd just make one request and withdraw..."

"You don't need to apologize. It's partly my fault for not speaking more strongly even though I knew your nature, Sir Welliven."

"That's why I'm saying I'm sorry..."

The conversation between the two men, who were talking like father and son, was interrupted by another boom from the training ground.

Turning his head, Welliven let out a sigh mixed with awe and regret as he saw knights falling in all directions and Yuder who had swiftly retreated from his original position.

"Ah... I missed it while talking."

"What a shame, it was a splendid scene."

Kishiar, who had been watching the sparring with his gaze on the training ground, added mischievously.

"The knights almost succeeded in attempting 8-person joint tactic number 13, but Yuder broke through it with just a dagger and one fire explosion, then gracefully slipped away using wind power."

"Joint tactic number 13... wasn't that formation created based on facing giant monsters?"

Nathan Zuckerman muttered with his brow slightly furrowed. Though his face appeared almost the same as usual on the surface, Kishiar and Welliven who knew him well could tell this was quite an astonished attitude.

"That's right. It was indeed a formation created to prepare for giant monsters, selected based on the standard of 'being able to destroy a house with just ordinary movements.'"

Kishiar answered with a grin, then asked Welliven.

"Has the sparring been proceeding like this the whole time?"

"Like this, you mean...?"

"This situation where they use joint tactics and Yuder breaks through them."

"Ah, no."

Welliven shook his head.

"It's true that we started with many-against-one melee from the beginning at Baron Aile's suggestion, but at first the knights were quite hesitant, unable to adapt to the fact that they had to face an esteemed guest. At that time, many just charged in as if it were one-on-one."

Welliven said that most of the knights who had now fallen and gone outside the boundary were those who had been dealt with then.

"It was truly amazing. He subdued and knocked out those who charged in so easily."

After several were dealt with that way, the knights felt a sense of crisis. From then on, though they were still in a surrounding position, they stopped attacking one by one in order and instead many rushed in simultaneously from various directions. An ordinary person would either be overwhelmed by such a situation itself, or have difficulty properly grasping those targeting their back or blind spots, but Yuder was not like that at all.

He handled the knights even more easily than before, as if he had eyes on his back. When they charged in thinking it was a blind spot, a dust wind suddenly rose and struck their faces, and taking advantage of that opening, a sword and fist carrying hot flames flew in accurately targeting dangerous vital points. Anyone who hesitated even for a very brief moment there was finished. Yuder very effectively used those who lost their balance or fell from his attacks to entangle the feet of other knights. With his seemingly insignificant light movements, the knights instantly became tangled with each other and rolled on the ground, or had to be careful not to accidentally attack their allies. It was truly utter chaos.

* "It seemed like having many trying to catch one was a weakness rather than an advantage. He seemed like someone for whom blind spots don't exist. He toyed with our people as if dancing - if I weren't the captain, I would have thought this was a pre-arranged performance. Hoho."

Even when catching monsters they hadn't experienced this - against a single human who hadn't even revealed all his abilities, Peletta's elite knights were helplessly rolling around. Unlike the disheveled knights, Yuder was utterly relaxed as if he had done this thousands of times, and didn't hesitate to provoke their pride, saying 'I expected more from the knightly order the Commander created before the Cavalry, is this all?'

His provocations strangely had a way of touching deep inside people's hearts. Even though there were many knights who wouldn't bat an eye at ordinary insults due to accumulated experience, the moment they heard Yuder's provocations they gritted their teeth and rose with burning fighting spirit. It was amazing how he could make people so indignant without using a single dirty word.

"Around that time, the atmosphere of the remaining knights began to change completely from the beginning. How should I put it..."

"Only rage remained and they began treating their opponent no longer as a 'noble person' but as a 'real enemy that must be dealt with.'"

Kishiar accurately mentioned the part that Welliven had been unable to find polite words for, while wearing a fresh smile.

"Ah, yes. That's right."

"Is that when it became like the current atmosphere?"

"Yes."

Through Yuder's provocations, the knights re-awakened to who they were. What kind of people were the Peletta Knights? What was familiar to them wasn't the random fighting they had been doing until now. They began to recall one by one the tactics they had thoroughly learned and practiced since joining.

Most of those were tactics created for facing monsters rather than people, but what did that matter?

The being the knights were currently facing was more fearsome and powerful than any monster. Then there was no reason they couldn't use tactics meant for monsters.

Several knights stepped forward and gathered the remaining members. From then on, it became a repetition of monster tactics created by Kishiar and superhuman breaking through by Yuder Aile, like now.

"...So in other words, it was intentionally led to this."

Nathan Zuckerman, who had heard the whole story, muttered lowly. Kishiar nodded with an extremely pleased face.

"Yes. Pushing the knights to their limits to make them instinctively realize their lacking and strong points, and naturally distribute roles accordingly. It happened in the Cavalry too."

When facing an opponent they cannot defeat through individual combat, people naturally learn cooperation. In the case of Cavalry members, this process took a very long time because they had such diverse abilities, but the Peletta Knights were already naturally deploying joint tactics with just one sparring session because they had years of experience working together.

The roles had somehow become divided between knights who chose and commanded tactics, knights who charged at the front according to those choices, and knights who supported them, with everyone doing their best in their assigned roles. Everyone was trying hard enough to surpass their limits with just one goal - to land even a single hit on the enemy called Yuder Aile.

They were so focused that none of them even noticed their lord had arrived.

"Aaaagh!"

Several more knights flew through the air with screams. Still, looking carefully, none of them had serious injuries. Though they knew they could be comfortable just by going outside the drawn line, the knights unhesitatingly rejoined their allies even crawling and gripped their swords again.

Meanwhile, Yuder showed the leisure to discard his broken dagger, instantly spin several times in the air to grab some throwing knives, and return to his original position. Nathan Zuckerman, who had been quietly watching that sight, gave his evaluation.

"From what I can see, it seems Sir Aile is waiting until just before the tactics would properly take effect before breaking through."

"Right. He seems quite satisfied."

"...Pardon?"

Welliven blinked as if he had heard something unbelievable.

"Satisfied... you say? Looking at his expression, I thought rather the opposite..."

"Haha. What are you saying, Welliven, when his enjoyment is so visible even from here."

The old knight heard his lord's words and looked at the sparring ground again. Yuder was dealing with knights charging in according to tactic number 15. He accurately threw two throwing knives to meet the sword blades of two knights charging at him, and taking advantage of the gap when the swords' directions were deflected, he launched his body into the air. His figure mercilessly trampling the knights' crowns and jumping far to create distance made the remaining knights shudder and shout. It would be no exaggeration to say he looked like a demon of torment.

Anyone could clearly see that Yuder Aile was not smiling through all this. Rather, just looking at the aura he was emitting, he was utterly cold as if the Peletta Knights were his mortal enemies, yet they spoke of enjoyment.

'...Is it really... enjoyment? That?'

"Look carefully. Just now when he launched his body, the bottom part of his outer clothes was torn."

Kishiar happily explained to the old knight who found it completely difficult to understand. Only then did Welliven notice that part of the fluttering hem behind the jumping Yuder was torn in several places.

"Ah, yes. That's right."

"It was torn while breaking through and escaping from formation number 13 just now. Having clothes torn is almost the same as an injury in real combat."

"...Is that how it is?"

"For Yuder."

Kishiar replied with conviction.

"So it's worth being happy about. He must have realized the opponents' skills are gradually rising."

At this moment, Welliven somehow felt that only his lord fully understood this incomprehensible strong one called Yuder Aile. It was truly a strange feeling.

**Chapter 1149**

"Following joint 17, number 1! Without formation, just like before!"

At the same time, Yuder was thinking exactly the same thing as Kishiar had said while watching the knights quickly changing their formation in rage.

'This is more fun than I expected.'

Peletta's knights showed reactions different from any knightly order Yuder had faced before. At first they seemed the same as the countless knights he had met in his previous life, but as the sparring progressed, their changing momentum was extraordinary.

The tenacity to never give up no matter how hard it got. The judgment to quickly grasp the enemy's movements and reasons for defeat even while rolling around. The tactics that gradually became more refined as they used all that to challenge again and again.

What had clearly been very easy to escape from at first was now beginning to feel threatening enough that he couldn't let his guard down even a little. The situation where his clothes were torn was truly unexpected for Yuder, making it even enjoyable.

'Indeed worthy of tactics created by Kishiar.'

Though their individual skills were ordinary, the power of the tactics they created when gathered together was not ordinary at all. Their tactics were tailored completely to them. Probably even if others who weren't Peletta Knights learned and used the same tactics, they couldn't produce the same power as now. This was an attack that would shine more the longer it was practiced and used. That point was what made Yuder admire it.

These were tactics that could only come from dividing numerous types of enemies by category, considering an enormous number of cases, and then understanding their own forces' capabilities even more thoroughly than themselves. Though they looked simple, the principles were not simple at all. They had just been polished with tremendous effort to make them easy to learn.

'How long must he have thought and researched to create something like this?'

Everything was surprisingly precise, and even beautiful. It was hard to believe that Kishiar had created these tactics when he was much younger than now.

'And that without directly facing enemies or fighting together with allies.'

How many things can only be known through direct experience? Yet these tactics unfolding before his eyes now felt lacking nothing despite being created using only indirectly obtained information without such experience.

Yuder threw the throwing knife in his hand while avoiding attacks trying to entangle his feet. However, it was blocked and shattered without being able to penetrate the formation created by the knights' cooperation.

'How many weapons is this now?'

Though the knights didn't seem to have noticed yet, there weren't many weapons left now. The fact that Yuder's weapons broke faster and more often than the same practice weapons meant the knights' tactics were that powerful.

'Even in my previous life I broke several weapons whenever I fought... but I've never destroyed this many at once before.'

Going through the knights to get replacement weapons was also much more difficult than expected. Though weapons weren't strictly necessary, Yuder wanted to pressure them with even more diverse means to squeeze out their limits as much as possible.

Because he wanted to feel longer this special enjoyment of directly experiencing the moves made by a younger Kishiar on the board he had created.

Yuder glanced aside. He had already noticed that Kishiar and Nathan Zuckerman had arrived in the middle. Just in case, he was also controlling his power more to prevent fragments from flying in their direction.

Though outwardly it looked like he was leisurely watching while sitting in a chair, deep in those red eyes flickered an ecstasy similar to Yuder's. Just as Yuder was thoroughly examining aspects of Kishiar he didn't know through this sparring, Kishiar too was watching every single one of Yuder's movements without missing any, as if recording them.

Though he hadn't stepped forward directly, this was already similar to another tactical game.

'If Kishiar were directly commanding the knights, it would have been difficult for me to toy with them this leisurely.'

Yuder's eyes shone darkly. Meeting those predator-like eyes full of anticipation, the knights felt both chills running through their whole bodies and conversely burning fighting spirit, gripping their weapons even tighter.

Time passed intensely but briefly as everything burned like that. As the screams began to subside, Nathan Zuckerman came down from the platform and blocked between Yuder and the knights.

"It would be good to end it here for today."

Unlike Yuder who lowered the staff in his hand, having known this would come around now, the exhausted knights looked around in surprise.

"S-Sir Nathan?"

"When did you arrive...?"

"Good heavens. Even the Duke...!"

Towards the shocked knights, Kishiar rose from his seat and clapped while smiling like a fully bloomed flower.

"It was a wonderful sparring. I'm glad to confirm that everyone hasn't neglected training even while I was away. I spent an unforgettable wonderful time before leaving Peletta."

The knights all knelt on one knee towards Kishiar. Yuder too lightly placed his hand on his chest and bowed his head in the Cavalry style greeting towards him. Kishiar smiled.

"I ordered Nathan to stop you because I judged that continuing the sparring further could result in truly serious injuries. While tenacity to not give up is good, knowing when to withdraw is also one of the tactics needed by the Peletta Knights. Isn't that right?"

"Yes! That's right!"

Though they were so tired they could barely maintain their posture without leaning on their weapons stuck in the ground, their voices were loud. They were truly people whose tenacity didn't lose to the Cavalry.

Seeing that sight, Welliven too let slip a slight smile.

"Good. Then everyone disperse and go receive treatment. I trust there will be no one who acts recklessly by not checking their condition just because they seem fine right now. Also, if there are things you learned from today's sparring, I hope you'll remember them whatever they may be and use them as cornerstones for development."

The knights got up awkwardly. Yuder thought they would turn around and leave right away, but where the knights headed was the opposite direction. It was right beside Yuder.

"Baron Aile! I learned so much today."

The one who had been thrown around the most by Yuder bowed his head with a rough laugh.

When Yuder blinked, other knights also added their words one by one.

"Ha...... It really felt like seeing an insurmountable mountain. I haven't felt like that since seeing Sir Nathan train when I first joined the knightly order."

"Did the Cavalry train like this with Baron Aile every day? I wondered where their extraordinary stamina came from, but now I know the answer."

"L-last time I was really surprised seeing you shoot arrows, Baron... I thought you might use something like that again today but instead we just got beaten up thoroughly with that. Though I was a bit disappointed... may we look forward to next time?"

"Yes. Please come here again next time you visit Peletta! We'll do better then!"

"..."

Though they all still seemed not quite over their fear of Yuder, they didn't appear to hold grudges or malice. Some even made life-risking statements about wanting to see stronger abilities. It was questionable whether they really understood that if Yuder had used abilities beyond what he used now, they might not be in this world anymore.

It felt awkward, but on the other hand, he felt comfortable like when dealing with the Cavalry.

Yuder stared at the knights who had withdrawn after chattering about the sparring for a while, then turned his head. Kishiar grinned while pretending to wipe his eyes as if he had seen a very moving scene.

As he tried to let out a small sigh seeing that shameless appearance, Nathan Zuckerman approached and took the staff from Yuder's hand.

"I'll collect this now."

"Ah, yes."

"It's a bit regrettable. If only all the weapons hadn't run out, it was sparring that made even me want to join in."

It was a truly sincere statement of regret. Yuder grinned and answered.

"I could still do one more round now. Would you like to?"

"Regardless of my feelings, I'll decline as continuing further would likely make this training ground unusable ever again."

Nathan Zuckerman's gaze swept over the broken weapon fragments and the training ground floor riddled with holes everywhere. Yuder nodded and lightly loosened his shoulders.

"I understand. Since I'll see Sir Zuckerman again in the capital later anyway, there will always be opportunities. Don't worry, I'll help with the cleanup before I go."

Yuder released his remaining power throughout the training ground while heading towards Kishiar. Everyone's mouths fell open watching the ground undulate and fill itself in, and the wind sweep all the broken fragments into one place at once.

"Baron Aile."

Welliven, who had rushed out as soon as Yuder climbed onto the platform, grabbed Yuder's hand and shook it with a moved face.

"Thank you for accepting such a sudden request like this. It was truly a great experience both as captain of the Peletta Knights and as an individual knight. How can I ever thank you enough..."

"Please don't say such things, as it was a good experience for me too."

**Chapter 1150**

Where else could he have such a grateful and enjoyable experience of many-against-one sparring? Yuder spoke sincerely to Welliven.

"I've fought with many people in my own way until now, but this was my first battle like today. I don't think I have anything more to add about the Peletta Knights' training methods. Rather, I think I should apply what I learned from the Peletta Knights to the Cavalry."

"Aren't you being too kind to those who barely grazed your clothes?"

"Usually those who face me for the first time end without even grazing my clothes."

This wasn't boasting or pretense, just stating the facts as they were. Welliven, who had a blank expression for a moment, soon burst out laughing.

"Well! If they hear those words, our good-for-nothings' shoulders might soar to the heavens and forget their place, so I suppose this conversation should remain secret."

Though he said that, Welliven looked extremely proud.

After he withdrew, Yuder headed towards Kishiar. The man who had been waiting in his seat for Yuder to approach smiled and held out his hand.

"Let me see your wrist that was hit during the number 17 encirclement formation earlier."

"..."

That had happened near the very end of the sparring. While dealing with close-combat tactics that had poor compatibility with the staff that should have been used from some distance, he had been grazed in a moment of carelessness.

No one had noticed that fact. Even the knight who had attacked Yuder's wrist didn't know he had landed an effective hit, but it seemed they couldn't deceive Kishiar's eyes.

Yuder slowly extended his right hand. Kishiar grabbed that hand and unhesitatingly rolled up the sleeve. A red bruise had risen on the skin of the inner wrist above the black glove.

"As you know, this much doesn't need treatment."

"Yes. I'm glad it's not a serious injury."

However, after saying that, the man very naturally used divine power on Yuder's wrist while moving as if just rolling the sleeve back down. Light flowed from within the black clothes, and the slightly stinging skin became perfectly fine.

"But since my heart hurts very much, this much small indulgence should be fine."

As if to keep the brief healing that just occurred as their secret, Kishiar winked one eye.

"Now you just do it without even getting permission."

"What I just healed was my heart's pain. And since someone here has permitted me to do what I want without holding back, I'm trying things like this behind my adjutant's back."

Yuder suddenly recalled the moment when Kishiar had first used divine power on him. Then too, he had made a request that wasn't quite a request to keep it secret, saying things like if it was discovered he had used that power, his adjutant might get angry.

The playful face that had winked and unhesitatingly healed him overlapped exactly with his face now.

Yuder let out a laugh like a sigh and opened his mouth.

"This time too... is it pure contact without impure intentions?"

When the man realized what those words were referring to, his eyes widened slightly, then he soon showed his teeth in a big laugh.

"No. Now it's pure contact with many impure intentions."

"I don't understand what it means to be pure while being impure."

"It means that though I always harbor impure thoughts, right now it was done with pure concern just wanting you not to be in pain. The two can coexist."

Kishiar tapped Yuder's hand lightly with a joyful face and stood up. A very warm warmth rose in his eyes as he swallowed his smile.

"Shall we return to the castle?"

"Yes."

They walked together on the path heading to the inner castle. To be honest, that path was so modest it was hard to believe it was where a duke stayed. While places where nobles lived usually had beautifully decorated gardens surrounding the paths, all the paths in Peletta Castle had nothing but some naturally grown grass and trees without any deliberately created structures.

But looking carefully, that path was well maintained without a single element that could trip feet. The person who had packed it flat enough for anyone to walk comfortably was probably Shusainer.

With nothing blocking the sky and surrounding scenery, one could focus only on the breathing and footsteps of the person walking together, and the sound of waves crashing below the castle. Yuder liked this moment's quiet tranquility.

Perhaps that was why. Suddenly, his inner thoughts flowed out without him knowing.

"I hope I can come again."

"Hmm?"

"To Peletta, I mean."

Kishiar was silent for a moment. However, that those words had made him indescribably surprised and happy was sufficiently felt thanks to the scent that suddenly burst explosively from his body.

Before crossing the door upon reaching the inner castle, Kishiar stopped walking. When Yuder looked back, he whispered a confession that no one else could hear.

"Come whenever you want. Peletta will always accept you the same as me."

If Yuder Aile wished it, forever.

Under the fluttering golden hair, a smile like the light that made the sea blue sparkled dazzlingly.

Yuder closed his eyes tightly as if swallowing that light, then opened them. From somewhere came the sound of the cold north wind being pushed away.

Even in this cold north, it seemed winter would now fade.

\*\*\*

"Sir Yuder!"

On the morning of their departure from Peletta. Yuder was buried in a flood of farewells while surrounded by people from Peletta Castle who had come out at dawn.

"I feel like I might cry having to send off someone who ate my cooking better than anyone. I don't know what joy I'll have in preparing ingredients now. Please take this with you."

Shusainer let out a sincere sigh and hung another pouch containing jerky and bread he had made personally on Yuder's hand, and

"Are you really alright taking just that much? I had prepared the best horses..."

"Hey, foolish friend. They're people who would rather be at a disadvantage taking horses with them."

Denny and Mick saw off their lord and his precious guest who were leaving empty-handed while arm in arm.

"Yuder. Now you look almost like someone without holes at a glance. It's really amazing. I want to ask what you did here... but I'll just bury that for my own sake. Hahah. Let's meet again in the capital."

Mick leaned slightly against Yuder and added one secret word in a voice so small no one else could hear.

"Baron Aile. Please leave the rest to us and go."

Behind Welliven saying that, Nathan Zuckerman stood silently with his usual appearance. After the others' noisy greetings passed, he approached, gave a polite salute, and opened his mouth to say just one thing.

"Have a safe journey."

That brief greeting containing everything was truly like him.

Attendant Enk maintained her straight posture until the end, but showed a rarely softened smile in front of Yuder.

"It was an honor to serve Baron Aile. If you visit Peletta again next time, as the castle's attendant, I would like to serve you even more completely."

Yuder now knew that even she, who seemed to have no room for even a needle to anyone looking, was actually someone who could curse more enthusiastically than anyone. He bent slightly to receive the embrace Enk offered.

"Yuder! We won't forget anything you taught us!"

"We'll surprise you next time we meet!"

The Northern Branch members also came and shook hands with Yuder. Isias burned with strange enthusiasm, saying she had heard somewhere that 'You clearly showed the Cavalry spirit while having group sparring with the Peletta Knights before leaving yesterday. We won't lose either.'

Edin, who had declared he would choose silence for Yuder, had an expression difficult to put into words for a moment seeing Yuder standing beside Kishiar, but soon gave a strong embrace and patted his back.

"I'm really glad I met you here, Yuder."

Yuder raised the corners of his lips while looking at everyone waving to him. Though no one here would know, it was a smile that had finally flowed out after traveling through a very long time.

"...Thanks to you all, I rested comfortably in Peletta. I'll see you again. Thank you."

People who saw his smile for the first time unconsciously became dazed for a moment. Kishiar, who had been waiting until Yuder finished his greetings, held out his hand to him.

"Well, shall we go now?"

Yuder took his hand without hesitation.

"Yes."

**Chapter 1151**

The moment the two joined hands, before there was time to be surprised at the contact, their bodies gently rose as if something was pushing them up from below.

"Gasp..."

"Did our Commander originally have such an ability...?"

Those seeing this for the first time swallowed their breath in disbelief, but the two themselves seemed completely natural as if they had done this several times before.

Kishiar, looking back one last time, smiled with a face like a fox keeping a secret and waved his hand.

"I'm going to truly enjoy my vacation now, so please everyone give your best performance so no one knows we're not here."

"Yes, yes! Don't worry!"

"Have a safe journey, Duke."

Amidst the send-off from vassals and Cavalry members, the two departed walking through the air. Though it was called 'walking', the speed was so fast they instantly became dots in the distance. Those who had been staring as if entranced at the place where they had disappeared without time to feel the aftereffects only came to their senses much later at Enk's sharp words.

"Didn't you hear just now? Officially, the Duke and Baron have not yet left Peletta. Get your minds straight and do your jobs!"

"Ah... right. The Duke is just under confinement."

The fact itself that Kishiar had received confinement was not a secret. However, if where he was going became known, unnecessary people who might block his path could appear, so officially they had agreed with the vassals to pretend he was still in Peletta.

Since Kishiar had always been mysteriously coming and going even when in Peletta, there were hardly any who would question if he wasn't seen for a while. Still, all the people of Peletta were ready to act as if the Duke was present even in his absence for the happiness of the one they served.

While everyone was dispersing in a hurry, Mick Shuden lamented while tapping his glasses.

"If I had an ability to move quickly like that whether on water or in the air, it would have been better for business."

"What? The Duke can walk on water too?"

Towards the surprised Denny, Mick giggled.

"Didn't I tell you? The Duke took me walking on the sea in the South. Compared to that, walking in the sky isn't even surprising!"

Though both were equally amazing, Mick insisted with exaggeration that what he had experienced was more mysterious. Those who heard his story either wondered exactly what abilities the one they served had, or moved to their tasks while letting out small laughs. Among them were Cavalry members having passionate discussions about their Commander's ability they had just seen.

"But that ability of the Commander... does it only activate when holding hands like that?"

"Could be. The Eldore kids also had to hold hands to use their transfer ability for long distances. Isn't it like that?"

"Oh! Is that it. Well, if contact is a condition, who would dare hold a member of the imperial family's hand except in special situations like this. No wonder we didn't know until now."

"Yuder is really amazing. I don't think I'd dare grab the Commander's hand even if offered double pay."

"Me neither..."

"By the way, where was the destination Yuder and the Commander were going to travel to celebrate the confinement? Does anyone remember?"

"Uh... come to think of it, I don't think we heard that? Where was it? Edin, do you remember?"

"..."

Edin just kept his mouth shut quietly. Because he knew well that if he just waited, his colleagues who were becoming simpler by the day with their obsession with training would soon forget such questions.

"I... actually got hungry suddenly seeing Shusainer give Yuder snacks earlier."

"Gasp... me too. Let's quickly go eat snacks and train."

"Then want to bet who can arrive at our branch first running? No using abilities, just pure physical ability. The prize is the winner gets double snacks."

"Huh. You're trying to trick your way into eating more? Fine. I'll take you on."

"Double snacks? That's mine. Get lost everyone."

Another peaceful day in Peletta was flowing by like that.

\*\*\*

Though he had already experienced walking through the sky with Kishiar several times, this was the first time traveling such a long distance.

'I decided to trust him since he said it doesn't use much ability... but I didn't expect this much.'

Whatever development he had made, the force pushing their bodies had become tremendously fast and natural. Though it looked like nothing special on the surface, considering that what Kishiar was using now was actually the result of overlapping pushing force about three times, it was unbelievable as human power.

'First pushing up from below to float in the air, while simultaneously pushing from behind to maintain constant speed. It seems he's also pushing away the wind resistance that comes rushing in different directions to prevent aftereffects... It's reached the point where even asking how he can do this so easily feels meaningless now.'

Ordinary people would have reached their limits just implementing the concept of pushing their body to float. However, the face of the man happily walking while holding Yuder's hand was as refreshed as if he had just come out for a stroll.

"Why are you looking like that? Is something uncomfortable?"

"No. Just... I was thinking it's meaningless to try to guess the speed of your ability development, Commander."

"Such high praise from the Cavalry spirit. It makes me want to put in more effort from happiness."

Though he had gotten used to the members using it, it felt strange when even Kishiar called him by that title. Seeing Yuder press his lips together, Kishiar laughed like a boy and opened his mouth while fiddling with their joined hands.

"I thought the ability that had risen as a precursor symptom would settle back to normal after the heat passed, but it wasn't so. Though the amount of ability I can use has returned to previous levels... how should I put it, it feels like I can move it better. My body condition is extremely light."

"That's... fortunate, but."

"But don't worry too much, I won't get carried away by that lightness now."

After speaking lightly, Kishiar made the speed a bit faster.

Looking down at the world passing below at a speed much faster than horseback, Yuder thought about how surprised someone would be if they looked up and discovered them.

'With the speed of movement, it would be difficult to recognize us as people... but maybe rumors about seeing ghosts might spread.'

The journey with nothing to block their way proceeded quickly and comfortably. Kishiar enjoyed stopping to eat the food Shusainer had packed whenever he saw beautiful scenery while leading Yuder on their walk.

Like that, in just ten days, they succeeded in landing near Yuder's hometown, cutting several days' time with gasps of amazement.

"If my memory is correct, it should definitely be around here. Is it right?"

Yuder looked at the signpost standing before him. That signpost, erected in various places to prevent getting lost in the vast mountains, was very familiar to his eyes.

The Airic Mountain Range that vertically crosses the Central Region of the empire is long and large enough to have the nickname "Empire's Spine." People don't really grasp how big it is, but actually looking at the whole, it's a form of several mountain ranges combined that stretch like blood vessels diagonally, and when referring to all these mountain ranges together, it was also called the Rik Mountains.

'Unless you're a resident, almost everyone just lumps it all together as Airic.'

Among residents, the part accurately called Airic referred to the largest and longest section forming the very center of the mountain range.

And Yuder's hometown was right there.

**Chapter 1152**

Yuder quietly scanned the several symbols and town names drawn on the old signpost. They were all familiar names. Though it was about a year ago, but actually about 12 years ago, he thought this might have been the signpost he had last seen when leaving home.

'It feels a bit strange.'

He turned and nodded to the man who had an expectant face.

"It seems we've found the right place. It looks familiar."

"I relied only on the map in my memory since this is my first time here, so I'm glad. It was worth searching while looking from above."

"You found it well, considering even residents find it difficult to find their way here."

"I guess my earnestness came through."

Even if he had trouble finding the way, it wouldn't have been a problem since Yuder was there, yet he was that earnest to say such things. Though it was a bit hard to understand, Yuder decided to think that perhaps this matter approached Kishiar with a feeling similar to how Yuder had savored the tactics he had created in the past.

'If it's that... I can understand.'

Anyway, seeing Kishiar's appearance that didn't hide his expectations made Yuder's heart soften. Feeling the strange sentiment he had just felt disappear at once, he turned his body.

"We should go this way. Shall we?"

If winter in the northern regions was an endless battle with blizzards, winter in the central mountain valleys was a succession of days where everything was chilling to the bone. Though the weather had improved quite a bit, that chilling sensation still remained without fading.

'It feels like it's been a very long time since I felt this sensation too.'

Yuder moved his feet while recalling faint old memories in the sensation of his cheeks and ears growing cold. Walking the narrow mountain path that barely allowed one person to pass, the sound of old fallen leaves being stepped on underfoot - it had all been such a long time.

Everything was so exactly the same as before that he almost felt as if he had really returned to his boyhood days, but thanks to Kishiar's voice, he was able to maintain his sense of reality.

"Which town are we heading to now?"

"Hmm... it's not a town. Where I lived was in an isolated area somewhat separated from where people lived. We're going there directly."

"It must be quite a long time since you've actually come here, won't the way be long?"

The question about whether the way would be long implied concern about getting lost. Though it was a playful-sounding voice, it was also a kind question that could be asked because he accurately understood Yuder's circumstances.

Besides Yuder himself, there was someone beside him who knew how long it had been since he came here. That somehow felt newly strange.

"Actually, I was a bit worried about that part..."

Yuder stretched out his hand into the air. Then a gust of wind that had risen from somewhere gently wrapped around his hand before disappearing, brushing past tree branches towards somewhere up there.

"Seeing things like this, I think we'll be fine just going where our feet take us, so don't worry."

"What was that just now? Did you find the way using wind?"

"Something like that."

Yuder Aile's ability was handling natural attributes. However, apart from when he wanted to use power and did so, there were quite often times when nature felt kind to him even when he wasn't particularly trying to use it.

For example, there were times when even if he fell from a cliff and fainted in water, he would be carried to shore on his own, or branches and grass that seemed about to hit his face would avoid him on their own. Though it didn't happen all the time, it had been that way since he first awakened his ability.

The current wind was also one of the things he had experienced since awakening. Quite often when going home, the wind would blow in the same direction as if pushing his back. Following that wind, he could easily arrive home even on the darkest night.

When he briefly explained this, Kishiar found it very mysterious.

"It's like the spirits from old legends and those beloved by them."

"It's not to that extent."

"To think my love rival was mother nature herself. What can I do when I'm just a mere human..."

Is he thinking of competing with nature, not even a person? Yuder almost let out a laugh from the absurdity but swallowed it.

While this was happening, as they moved their feet diligently, gradually familiar scenery began to appear.

'That big tree. The peak visible beyond the path... the sound of water should be heard soon too.'

He had thought he had forgotten everything, but that wasn't the case. As they got closer to home, memories that had been submerged were gradually reviving. Yuder continued forward, feeling his way through awkward yet familiar sensations.

After climbing like that for some time, finally a small house appeared before their eyes.

An old, shabby house made by stacking wood. The cover on top of the chimney that showed the owner was away, the boxes carelessly piled in the yard overgrown with grass - everything was exactly as in Yuder's memories.

He slowly advanced while caught in a feeling as if he had left just yesterday and returned. When he put his hand in the gap hidden by the piled boxes, he grabbed the handle of a hidden hatchet. That axe used whenever chopping firewood was something that had been used since his grandfather was alive. As he lifted and quietly examined it, with years of use evident in the wear on its handle, Kishiar approached and grasped it together, caressing it.

"My. Grabbing a weapon as soon as we arrive. What a unique way of welcoming."

"...Ah. I'm sorry. I was just trying to find the closest thing I used to keep to confirm if this is the place I remember."

"Haha. No, it's fine. It seems like a very old axe, did you use this often?"

"Yes. My grandfather carved and made the handle himself. It was very convenient when chopping firewood because it was sturdy."

"For something that must have been abandoned for so long, it has no rotted parts and the blade isn't very dull either. It's a good item. Still, it must have been quite heavy to handle when you were young."

"Now that you mention it, I suppose it was."

After his grandfather passed away, Yuder had to handle this axe alone, so he had quite a struggle for a while. After learning that handling an axe was about technique rather than strength it was fine, but suddenly he recalled memories of failing several times chopping firewood before knowing that.

Yuder put the axe back in its original place. Following behind him as he headed for the house door, Kishiar asked.

"Since when did you live here?"

"Well... Since I was born, I've lived here continuously from when I first started having memories."

"Goodness. It's truly your hometown. If you lived in one place for so long, it must not have been easy to decide to leave."

"Well, I was younger than now so I was naturally curious about the outside world too. Still... if the Cavalry hadn't been created, I might still be living here."

It might sound strange for him to say such things when he still looks so young on the outside. However, Kishiar didn't laugh at those words at all. Yuder was silent for a moment before adding one thing.

"Of course, I'm glad that didn't happen."

The man who had been lowering his long eyelashes raised his head as if hearing unexpected words. Blinking very slowly, he opened his lips and asked.

"Do you really think so? If it were me, I think I would have missed this place very much."

"If you had lived here, I don't think you would think that way. It's awkward to say as the one who invited you, but this is really a place with nothing interesting. And if I had continued living here..."

He would never have met Kishiar La Orr.

He would have lived his whole life not knowing who he was, without even feeling the warmth of those red eyes.

Just imagining it was really not interesting at all.

Yuder continued speaking, containing all those meanings.

"You wouldn't have had occasion to come here like this either."

"..."

For Yuder, this was a place he had lived long and grown quite attached to, but not a place he missed. That didn't mean he disliked it. It was just that this wasn't the place he wanted to return to.

"The place I return to isn't here, but the Cavalry in the capital. That was true before, and it's true now."

Even when he thought there was no need to go back to the Cavalry again after dying and returning, Yuder ultimately headed there again. Though he had the excuse of seeking practical benefits then, he felt he would have gone to the Cavalry for whatever reason even if that hadn't been the case.

Thinking of the Cavalry naturally brings to mind the Commander's office on the top floor of the building in the capital's Seventh District. The light flowing in through the windows there. The very familiar smell. The strange urge to want to stand there right now, close his eyes and breathe deeply.

Perhaps such emotions that arose whenever thinking of those things were closer to 'longing.'

When he pulled out the long iron pin inserted in the door handle instead of a lock, the small door opened very easily. Fortunately, it seemed no thieves had entered during that time.

'Well, they would all know there's nothing to take even if they came.'

Along with the smell of old dust, the dark interior was revealed. Yuder turned his head, feeling a very rare embarrassment.

"As you can see from the outside, the inside isn't very clean. But if you're alright with that..."

"Of course I'm alright with it."

"...Let's go in then."

The conversation became slightly amusing thanks to the man who quickly cut in before he could finish speaking. Yuder stepped aside inside the door to let him enter. Kishiar ducked his head and slowly entered through the door that was shorter than his height.

He somehow looked more trembling and nervous than ever before. The man who had entered with steps that looked almost reverent finally raised his head and looked around the dark house.

"Am I becoming your first guest invited to this place?"

"Hmm, yes. That's right. Indeed."

He hadn't particularly thought about the meaning, but hearing it, that was true. He was the first guest that Yuder had personally 'invited' and let into this house.

'I suppose it's the opposite of Peletta.'

This place couldn't even compare to his large and spacious castle. Here there were no soldiers to welcome them like when entering Peletta, no kind vassals and delicious food prepared in advance.

However, the moment he heard Yuder's answer, Kishiar lowered his eyes and smiled with an indescribably happy face.

"It's an honor."

**Chapter 1153**

Yuder moved around the house familiarly even in the darkness. Every time he gave a glance with his golden-glowing eye, light caught in the dented lamps, and the hazily accumulated dust was instantly wrapped in wind and chased outside the house in ball-like clumps. When he opened the lid of a small box placed on the shelf and threw a handful of magic stones carelessly, they went into the small magic stone stove on their own and began to emit light.

Yuder finished tidying up roughly and looked around. Kishiar, who had been watching with sparkling eyes as if not wanting to miss any of his actions, quickly approached.

"For a guest to sit... there's only the dining table. I'm sorry. If this is alright with you, please sit."

"Why are you apologizing? I would have gratefully sat even if you told me to sit on the floor."

Kishiar promptly sat in the dining chair. The table and chair that had never felt particularly small when used alone looked quite dainty with Kishiar sitting there.

'...I hope the legs don't break.'

What should one do when inviting a guest? It hadn't been like this when Kishiar entered his quarters in the Cavalry, but perhaps because this house was somewhere he was returning to after such a long time, his head wasn't working as well as usual.

'Since it took a long time to get here... eating and drinking should come first, I suppose.'

Yuder asked awkwardly.

"Are you perhaps thirsty?"

"A little?"

Kishiar answered cheerfully with his chin propped on the table like a flower vase.

Though cold water could be served right away, Kishiar liked tea. He was someone who enjoyed tea even outside if he had just a little leisure.

Yuder first took out a travel cup from the luggage containing the provisions Shusainer had given, filled it with water, then placed it in front of Kishiar.

"Please wait a moment before drinking."

"Hmm?"

Yuder searched his memory and opened the cupboard door. A bottle containing brownish powder was placed in the corner. When he opened the lid, the smell of dried grass and a slightly sour scent rose up. Yuder took a little and sprinkled it into the cup. As one of his eyes changed to golden again, the water heated up and emitted steam. The dried leaves sprinkled inside steeped instantly and became a strange red color.

"What's this?"

"People here drink this like this when they want to warm their bodies in winter. It's made by mixing and drying herbs and fruits that grow in autumn, then grinding them into powder."

"I've never heard of it. What goes into it?"

The herbs and fruits that go in vary slightly each time. But what's important was that an herb called 'Abka' was always included. When Yuder said that, Kishiar made an interested expression.

"I know that one. I think it was an ingredient that goes into some alcohols."

"It's usually used to help with fermentation. Anyway, it's a grass that grows abundantly here in autumn, and it seems it was added because it has the property of generating heat when eaten. It's hard to call it proper tea."

"To me it feels like a wonderful tea containing the wisdom of life. Did you perhaps gather the contents yourself?"

"Ah, yes."

Where would one buy something like this? Of course, like others living here, Yuder had gathered, dried, and made it himself.

"Come to think of it, I remember using my ability to dry and grind it. That's probably why I made it more easily than other years."

"I take back what I said earlier."

Kishiar solemnly declared.

"This will be the best tea of my life."

It seemed Kishiar was in the mood to say everything was good no matter what Yuder brought out. Yuder shook his head and pushed the steeped cup towards him. Then he quickly filled his own cup with the same water and mixed in the powder.

"...Just drink it."

"Let me prepare my heart a little."

Though he couldn't understand why one would do such a thing, anyway, Kishiar lifted the cup and deeply inhaled and exhaled while smelling the aroma. His appearance savoring it with closed eyes was almost reminiscent of a priest before an altar.

Finally after taking a sip of the tea, Kishiar let out another long "whoo" breath. The eyes revealed under the eyelashes that had closed and opened rippled enchantingly enough to mesmerize the beholder.

"This, could you perhaps share some with me?"

"...Are you serious? It's not that delicious..."

"That's not true. It's really delicious. If you don't want to it's fine..."

How could one say no when he made such an expression?

Though feeling perplexed and dumbfounded, Yuder ended up nodding.

"No. If you want it, I'll just give you the whole thing. Take it."

"Really? All of it? Is that alright?"

"Yes. It's so common here that we throw away what's left in spring. Drink as much as you like and take it when you leave."

Thanks to including grass that helps with preservation, it could probably be drunk for up to 2-3 years at most, but usually people make new batches every year. It was something easy to make and not worth selling.

"Thank you."

However, Kishiar held such a common powder that Yuder had never once attached meaning to with great joy. The moment he saw the man smiling with a flushed face, Yuder momentarily forgot even what he should do. He only remembered again around when Kishiar had almost finished his tea.

'Ah, meals.'

They had eaten almost all the provisions Shusainer had given during their journey. To have a meal, they would need to procure new provisions.

'Hunting would be difficult in winter... going down to the village briefly would be faster.'

While he was calculating, the man who had finished his last sip let out a satisfied breath and lightly tapped the table with his finger.

"This table and chairs all seem to have been made directly too. Right?"

"All the furniture in this house was made by my grandfather."

"He must have been very skilled."

"Yes. I remember when the surrounding villages needed house repairs or new buildings built, they would always contact my grandfather."

Then his grandfather would take Yuder along when he went to work. Yuder found it more fun to watch and imitate his working grandfather than to meet children his age there. Anyway, those children also had little interest in a strange child who would appear and disappear briefly.

'No. They might have been a bit scared even.'

Though some occasionally spoke to him, none could run as fast or climb trees as high as Yuder. So there was no way it could be fun.

His grandfather sometimes asked if playing with friends wouldn't be more fun, but Yuder shook his head. When a day would quickly disappear just running around the mountains alone, observing the surroundings, climbing trees or swimming, what was there to regret? That was just enough.

He had thought it was enough.

"That's wonderful. I was also someone who wouldn't lose to anyone when it came to tree climbing or swimming."

Until seeing that face smiling while saying such things.

Yuder recalled the childhood portrait of Kishiar he had seen in the imperial palace. If that boy with an angelic face had held out his hand and asked to play together, could he really have refused?

'Though I don't know... I might have realized then that there was definitely something more fun than playing alone.'

It's something that never happened and never will happen, but making one imagine such impossible things was one of Kishiar La Orr's many abilities. Yuder stood from his seat.

"I should go get food for today's meal."

"Where to?"

"If we go down a bit from here, there's a village where I used to go sell wood and herbs. It doesn't seem late enough for the shops to close yet, so I was thinking of going to buy some meat or eggs. Though it might not be enough for you..."

"I'd love to."

Kishiar jumped up.

"You'll let me come along too, of course?"

Before he could say anything, Kishiar's face changed with a rippling light. His hair turned dark gray similar to Yuder's, his eyes dyed a bright brown close to golden, and his elegant features also became somewhat hazier.

It was a new disguise magic tool different from the brown hair disguise he usually used before.

"With this, no one will know I came here."

There was only one answer Yuder could give.

"...Yes. Let's go."

While going down the mountain, Kishiar questioned Yuder about everything noticeable. Yuder had to tell him everything about since when and how he had sold wood, what herbs he mainly gathered. He continued the questions and answers so naturally that by the time they reached the village, he had told everything down to which villages he had traded with whom from what age.

**Chapter 1154**

"Is that the village?"

"Yes."

Finally, their destination appeared. Though called a village, it was actually so small that all its residents combined wouldn't equal even one division of the Cavalry. How much more so when it didn't even have the simple boundary fence usually seen when entering ordinary villages.

Yuder advanced unhesitatingly towards the village entrance that had suddenly appeared in the forest. As they entered, the gazes of people doing their own work all focused on them at once.

"Hmm. They seem quite wary."

"It's because we don't look like common gatherers or hunters, but we don't have much luggage like travelers either. No need to worry about it."

Though only about a year had actually passed, naturally, the village's appearance hadn't changed much from what Yuder remembered.

'Is it because it's 12 years ago in my memory... Like the house, it feels rather awkward that this place is unchanged too.'

Still, thanks to that, finding the shop was easy. Yuder naturally found a building piled with various odds and ends and entered. The old woman who had been half-dozing while sitting opened her eyes with a start at the cold wind rushing in.

Though she seemed to feel intimidated seeing Kishiar's tall stature at first, soon she saw Yuder and frowned while sticking out her head.

"Hmm? You look familiar..."

"..."

"Perhaps... are you the boy from the Rest Tree house who used to come sell wood...?"

Yuder quietly nodded. The old woman jumped up from her seat.

"My goodness. You disappeared suddenly leaving your house empty, and I wondered where you'd gone, but now you're back. Where on earth have you been?"

Yuder was a bit perplexed. He remembered them being just acquaintances who exchanged only necessary conversation and a few casual questions added on, but she welcomed him much more warmly than expected.

Though he hesitated slightly about how much to say, Yuder decided to just be honest.

"I went to the capital."

"What, to the capital alone? Wasn't it dangerous?"

"It was fine. I passed the Cavalry entrance exam there, and now I'm in the Cavalry."

"Hmm? The Cavalry? What's that?"

News from outside reaches very slowly to those living isolated in the mountains. Though word about the Cavalry entrance exam had somehow reached them after the Red Stone fell, there was hardly anyone who considered it a matter relevant to themselves.

'This place wasn't where the army was stationed like the villages near where the Red Stone fell... and I remember there were no other awakeners here besides me until I left, so it's natural they don't know much about the Cavalry.'

Though it could be considered close to where the Red Stone fell compared to other regions, it was also in a way the most isolated place.

While Yuder was wondering where to start explaining, Kishiar suddenly cut in while wrapping an arm around Yuder's shoulders.

"Kind lady. If I may interrupt to explain, the Cavalry is a place His Majesty the Emperor created gathering only special people."

"Hmm?"

The old woman blinked her eyes widely several times after looking back and forth between Kishiar and Yuder.

"Did he have... relatives?"

"Hahaha. Not relatives. Though I am in the same Cavalry. Being very close to Yuder, I received a special invitation to visit."

Kishiar laughed very happily as if he had been waiting for just that question.

'Come to think of it, there's not a single lie...'

It's true that the Commander is also in the Cavalry, and lovers sharing their hearts are indeed much closer than relatives one has never met. But listeners wouldn't think of it that way. It was quite an amazing skill to twist the truth so cleverly.

"Oh my. I see. You two looked similar in hair color so this old woman made a mistake..."

"Please speak comfortably. It makes me uncomfortable if you're too formal."

"But is that alright? Since you said His Majesty the Emperor selected you..."

"Of course. The Cavalry is a place His Majesty created to protect all the people of the Orr Empire. There's no need to be formal at all."

"Really?"

Kishiar instantly captured the old woman's heart with his gentle attitude. After highly praising how the Cavalry was a good place and Yuder was doing great things there, he managed to extract information about the village's history and stories about young Yuder who used to visit. To Yuder, it seemed the brief conversation Kishiar was having with her now contained far more than all the conversations he had had at this shop over the past 20-plus years.

"I was very much looking forward to it since hearing it was a place Yuder often visited, and coming together, I indeed think it's a truly beautiful place."

"I was worried since that child rarely came down to the village after his grandfather passed away, but I'm glad he's succeeded in the capital and come with such a good friend. Anyway, come ask anytime if there's something you don't know."

"Thank you."

After conversation that made it seem like Kishiar rather than Yuder was from this village, finally Yuder could achieve his real purpose for coming to this shop.

"...Um, could I buy some vegetables and eggs?"

The old woman, with a very pleased face, added far more extra than the original amount she should have given. Getting this much extra was something that had never happened in all the many years of buying food here.

"You don't need to give so much extra..."

"No. Today is a happy day so just take it. I owed your grandfather many favors in the past, so I should naturally give this much."

"..."

"Earlier I thought you might be someone else who looked similar because your eyes seemed so different from before. But looking now, that's not the case. If your grandfather could have seen you grown up like this, he would have been so pleased."

How could one refuse after hearing those words? Yuder just answered that he understood.

Surprisingly, when they left the shop, the sun had already tilted significantly in that time.

'Just how much did we chat?'

While he was dumbfounded, Kishiar stood beside Yuder with a face full of happiness. Despite Yuder's protests, he had lightly gathered numerous food items in a box and was holding it a

"It was really a rewarding time. The shop owner is such a kind and good person."

"This is my first time spending such a long time buying eggs."

"Hahaha."

"I hope the meat shop hasn't closed."

Fortunately, the butcher shop owner had not yet closed. The well-built owner who had similar taciturn nature to Yuder and hardly ever conversed showed rare surprise upon seeing them. After another very similar process to what happened at the grocery shop passed, Yuder came out feeling like he had aged several more years.

Kishiar, who came out with about three times the ordered amount of meat added to the box he was holding, followed with a grin.

"Is that all we need to buy now?"

"For today at least, yes."

"Good. Shall we head back?"

"Isn't it heavy? Perhaps I should help carry..."

"No way. This is my pleasure. It's a guest's right to do what they want."

Hard labor of carrying heavy luggage up the mountain, he means?

Seeing him even humming while walking, he really didn't seem to find it heavy at all, so in the end Yuder couldn't say anything more.

The path back home was very dark without a single light. But walking the mountain path with Kishiar somehow gave a special feeling. And it seemed Kishiar felt the same way.

"The moon is bright here but there are really so many stars too. They feel particularly like they might pour down."

"Yes. Perhaps because it's high ground and clouds don't gather much, I've heard many times from before that it's a place where stars are particularly visible."

"If you lived in such a beautiful place, no other night sky would have impressed you."

"It's not to that extent. If we're comparing, isn't the night at the imperial palace far more splendid?"

The imperial palace never becomes completely dark even at night. Luminous stones light the corridors, and various beautiful lamps line up even outdoors to illuminate everywhere gorgeously and beautifully. During festivals, they even connect special lamps with magically changed colors in strings between the tops of some high palace buildings, which had captured even Yuder's attention when he first saw it.

Though they say the reason for such lighting is to help those working at night and prevent assassins, anyway the appearance is a beautiful sight that can't be seen anywhere else. It felt awkward to hear someone who must have grown up seeing such scenery every day suddenly say this place's night sky was beautiful.

"That's not true. No matter what, man-made light can never match light made by nature. This is far more beautiful. However..."

Kishiar paused briefly then laughed softly and turned his head.

"I can't deny it feels more beautiful and impressive because I'm with you."

"..."

"And truthfully, I think no other night sky will give me more impression than tonight."

**Chapter 1155**

"That's not true."

Yuder calmly denied.

"Because I was thinking the same thing."

Their gazes met. Yuder saw stars spread fully in the darkened eyes changed by the disguise magic tool. The stars he had seen to the point of boredom until now, things that had held no interest, seemed truly special in this moment because Kishiar was here.

That's why they were special and beautiful.

With a feeling similar yet different to when he first properly faced Peletta's sea again.

He had a feeling that he would always recall this moment somewhere in his heart, whenever it might be...

Hearing Yuder's words, Kishiar smiled brightly.

"Yes. Then shall we say we both felt the same?"

[*'We both felt the same thing. Right?'*]

Yuder smiled, recalling a moment when he had said something similar before.

"Yes."

After returning home, Yuder prepared a meal for his guest. Though it felt very awkward preparing portions for others in a place where he had always been alone, even that sensation now felt welcome.

"What should I do?"

"I'd like the guest to just sit and wait. Serving is the host's right."

"When you counter with the same words, I have nothing to say."

Who did he learn it from - isn't it natural?

Yuder placed pots and pans on top of the lit hearth according to his habitual movements. In the pot he boiled a stew with roughly chopped meat and vegetables, and in the pan he fried six eggs at once and then grilled sausages given as extra from the butcher.

While the stew reduced and the ingredients absorbed the flavors, he broke up the hard preservation bread given at the grocery store and filled a bowl. The house was full of cooking sounds and smells.

Kishiar sat at the table with his chin propped up, watching this scene. His gaze was one that would bring to mind the word 'appreciating' rather than 'waiting' from any angle.

"I'm sorry the hospitality is lacking, but please eat."

The quickly completed food didn't look particularly neat from any angle. Naturally, as it was cooking by someone used to roughly filling his own stomach alone.

Not special dishes, but common food that could be seen anywhere.

Kishiar ate this with a joyful and happy face. It was the first time seeing the man who never lost his habitual elegance while eating show such emotion.

'Come to think of it, even when we briefly ate together after spending my heat in the cabin before, did he eat this well...'

The fact that he looked happier now than then meant Kishiar had put down all his burdens and was purely savoring this moment. Anyway, seeing him eat well made Yuder feel at ease too.

'I didn't know there would come a day when I would eat with someone again in this house after grandfather passed away.'

And alone with a member of the imperial family at that.

Recreating and sharing his old daily life with someone without any formality gave a very strange and mysterious feeling. Though they had just bought groceries and eaten together, it felt like Kishiar had become part of his life. It was strange yet also... enjoyable how he had naturally entered and embedded himself even in childhood memories that Yuder thought would never be shared with anyone.

'Though it was like that originally too, this is... how should I put it.'

Isn't it like family?

After the meal, Kishiar insisted that he would wash and organize the dishes.

"Having been served the meal, it's only right that I do the cleaning."

"I think even cleaning for the guest is the host's job..."

"That's not true. It's nonsense to just sit still after receiving the best hospitality of my life."

"You didn't let me do anything in Peletta. If we're comparing, this would be repaying the hospitality I received."

"I didn't do anything then either. It wasn't me who did the work but others. Don't tell me you've already forgotten that during my heat, I literally 'did nothing' and lived receiving help from you and Nathan?"

"..."

It was a bit absurd, but looking at it that way, it seemed right. While Yuder hesitated, Kishiar instantly covered his face and pretended to be pitiful for show.

"How could this be? I dreamed of a fun vacation doing everything together, but my beloved was planning to make me into a cruel Cavalry Commander who comes all the way here just to work his aide to death..."

"How did it become like that?"

"Someone like me would be pleasant just to look at, convenient with good strength and quick wit, able to do any task well. I definitely wouldn't be a hindrance. Everything would be fun. Though they say I'm just a Commander whose only merit is being handsome, this could have been a chance to show that's not all..."

His acting of pretending to be truly sad while fluttering his eyelashes was really detestable, but his eyes sparkled unnecessarily bright enough to feel poisonous. Yuder finally let out a short laugh and raised both hands in surrender.

"Please stop. Can't we just do it together?"

"Together? Do what?"

"Clean up together, and cooking or whatever... Yes. Anyway, just do whatever you want freely. I'll stop saying I'll do it now."

"I'm happy."

Maintaining his detestable posture, the man smiled like a flower.

The fact that this appearance no longer felt absurd meant Yuder Aile had clearly gone as far as he could go.

They cleaned the dishes together. As he had claimed, Kishiar showed movements unlike someone doing this for the first time and quickly finished all tasks. Though he hadn't expected to be the one teaching household chores to that duke of imperial birth, it really was convenient.

"For washing, there's a separate space beside this storehouse. There's a wooden tub made into a bath, so you can fill it with water and use it. Though it might be a bit small for you..."

"It's fine. That much is nothing."

Of course Yuder filled the water with his ability. Kishiar stood before the round bathtub instantly filled with steaming warm water and smiled slightly.

"In the past, when you didn't have your ability, where did you get water from?"

"If you go around behind the house and down a bit more, there's a stream where I would fetch it. You can see those empty water containers there. Those are spare containers from when I used them then."

"I thought it strange there were so many identical water containers."

They were items that had been relegated to storage after losing their usefulness when his ability awakened, though previously he had diligently filled and stored water in them.

"In summer you could just wash directly in that stream, but now it's winter... it's become a bit more inconvenient. If you need more water, please let me know..."

That was when it happened. Kishiar unhesitatingly removed his top in front of Yuder. The winter cloak he had worn comfortably from Peletta to here fell away and the chest that had been sleeping under the thick shirt was revealed. Because he undressed so naturally, Yuder momentarily missed his chance to finish speaking and leave.

Though he could just leave, somehow his feet wouldn't move. He couldn't take his eyes away.

The man who had been intensely entangled with him just days ago revealed his body and turned to look at Yuder with a smile.

"The water, I think it might be quite insufficient."

"..."

"Rather than constantly going back and forth, wouldn't it be more comfortable for both of us to bathe together while checking?"

The water droplet he playfully wet his hand with and flicked left a round mark staining Yuder's collar. It was an action that suddenly made him feel strangely vividly aware of the fact that someone's shamelessly proud naked body was standing in front of the barn-like bathtub he used every day.

"Right?"

Yuder let out a long breath in silence before removing his cloak like Kishiar.

"...Yes. That makes sense too."

Kishiar welcomed Yuder with a low laugh. For the first time since he was ten years old, Yuder experienced bathing together with someone other than his grandfather in the house bathtub.

**Chapter 1156**

Having two men enter a bathtub that was barely enough for just Yuder was indeed quite a challenging task. Kishiar couldn't submerge his whole body, and water overflowed countless times whenever someone moved. Because of this, Yuder had to replenish the water several times. Indeed, Kishiar's words that "the water would be quite insufficient" had not been wrong.

Nevertheless, the process didn't feel unnecessary at all because the time spent sharing idle conversation while pressed together overlapping was enjoyable. Yuder smiled slightly seeing Kishiar laugh like a child while embracing him with his long legs sticking out beyond the tub. Just quietly listening to Kishiar's voice eagerly talking about what he had seen and heard today made him think it was good they had come here. Listening to him speak revealed aspects that even Yuder, who had lived here his whole life, hadn't known. Things he already knew felt newer, and the old, quiet village transformed into a mysterious place full of adventure.

'What would have happened if we hadn't come.'

He felt genuinely grateful to the Emperor who had given additional vacation disguised as confinement.

After bathing came time to reorganize the bed.

"It looks like only one person can sleep in this bed. Since I don't really need sleep, I'll rest in the chair."

"There's no need for that. There are ways."

How good could a commoner's bed be? Usually, they would stack several storage boxes and place boards on top to smooth the surface. Yuder dismantled the covering boards with one gesture, and added extra boxes from the storehouse to increase the bed size. After covering the top again with boards kept in storage and putting on bedding, a bed incomparably larger than before was completed.

'Still, might be a bit... small for both of us to lie down.'

Kishiar, who had helped move the boxes, clapped seeing the completed bed.

"Goodness. To recreate a bed so quickly like this. It's almost regrettable that I'm the only one seeing this versatile side."

"It won't be soft, but it should be enough to sleep on."

"Hmm? Haven't you seen before? I can sleep well anywhere, even on the floor."

That was true. From what had been seen while traveling here and there, Kishiar slept well anywhere. He ate and slept well without being picky to the point it was hard to believe he was raised as someone most precious, so Cavalry members experiencing this for the first time with him were routinely shocked.

'Well, even I felt surprised before just seeing Kishiar change clothes by himself.'

Moreover, not all swordmasters ate and slept well without being picky to that degree. Among the swordmasters Yuder had met in his previous life, many were more particular than ordinary people, perhaps due to sensitive senses. So according to Kishiar's words, it wasn't that he "didn't need sleep so it was fine to sleep anywhere."

Towards the one who was joking pretending to be fine just to put Yuder's mind at ease, Yuder reached out his hand.

"How could I let a guest sleep in a chair? You can sleep on the floor all you want later, but here let's sleep like this."

Though it didn't seem like he had said anything particularly unusual, Kishiar strangely fell silent the moment he heard those words. After a while, he nodded with a subtly flushed face.

"...Yes. Right. Let's do that."

They lay down together and closed their eyes. In the quiet silence, Yuder unfamiliarly heard the sound of someone else's breathing echoing in the small house.

"...Earlier, the lady at the grocery store said this."

Kishiar, who had seemed to fall asleep as soon as he lay down because it was so quiet, whispered softly.

"The child from the Rest Tree house was quiet and blunt from young, but never handled requests carelessly. When the shop roof had problems after his grandfather passed away, he was the first to come fix it, she said."

'Did she say such things?'

It seemed to have been in conversation that occurred while he was momentarily distracted selecting groceries.

Searching through faint old memories, something did come back. Since he had seen how his grandfather fixed things, he seemed to have roughly repaired it and left, but he hadn't known she would remember that even now.

"She said he was brave, good at doing everything alone, and so capable that she would have wanted to arrange marriage if she had a granddaughter."

"It seems she was just being overly complimentary because she was in a good mood."

"The butcher said similar things too. That you had good manners since childhood. That you naturally took care of everything alone during the period when your grandfather was sick. He thought it would be a waste for someone who worked so well to live here forever, but it seems His Majesty the Emperor has an eye for people, he said. He even asked me to put in a good word as your colleague."

This was surprisingly unexpected to the point of being shocking. To think that taciturn butcher said such things.

"When did you have such conversations?"

"It was right after sharing the cute story about how you really loved climbing trees when young, and would stay up in the highest tree all day. When you stepped away saying you needed to select meat."

"...You mean you heard such stories when I was momentarily distracted elsewhere."

Yuder let out a short sigh. Kishiar laughed softly.

"It was really enjoyable. Just from the stories I heard today, I feel I could live contentedly for about a month."

He reached out under the blanket to caress and grasp Yuder's bare hand. When he turned his head, their gazes met in the darkness.

"The fact that they still remembered such trivial stories means you were someone with enough kindness and gentleness to be memorable to them. And that's no different from the you I've seen."

"..."

The urge to deny something welled up. But at that moment Kishiar gripped his hand even tighter, so those words couldn't emerge and instantly faded. While gently caressing fingers full of calluses, a low, settled voice echoed in the darkness.

"Whenever you mention your past self, you speak so negatively as if it's something that shouldn't be remembered, but I don't think that's necessary."

"...But."

How could one place the Yuder Aile who lived in this quiet mountain village and the Yudrain Aile who left his home village and was stained with blood and political strife for over 10 years on the same level?

However, those words too eventually scattered and disappeared like a mirage in Kishiar's embrace.

"Didn't the lady say so earlier too? That up close, you were the same person."

"..."

Perhaps the old woman who had lived a long time saw the 31-year-old Yudrain in Yuder's eyes. Though his body had become younger, the years accumulated in his eyes and soul couldn't be erased.

Even Yuder himself could no longer remember what his young self was like, yet it was quite strange that those who remembered him from then said he hadn't changed much from that time.

However, Kishiar said that strange thing wasn't so strange.

That some things Yuder possessed were still unchanged and remained within him.

So it was alright.

Perhaps the reason he had been eager to collect stories about Yuder's childhood all day was because he wanted to say these words now.

'I thought he was just curious.'

Why was it that those words brought a feeling like ice melting somewhere in his heart that he hadn't even known existed?

It was similar to the feeling of rediscovering and taking out an item that had been left abandoned covered in hazy dust in storage.

Yuder remained silent then wrapped his arms around the man holding him. Two heartbeats were pounding rapidly with similar echoes.

Yuder closed his eyes, deeply engraving that echo. And entrusting his body to the warmth gently embracing him, he opened his lips.

"...Tomorrow I'm going to see grandfather. Please come with me."

"Yes. Of course."

Smiling lips came down in the darkness and secretly stole Yuder's lips. The reason this kiss in a place no one could see felt so trembling was probably because Yuder had come to want that man even more again.

'...I like you.'

Yuder embraced him fully while repeatedly writing just those words in his mind.

'I like you.'

**Chapter 1157**

Yuder saw the old man lying asleep in bed.

'Grandfather.'

White hair like fallen snow and bony hands protruding from age.

Someone who had seemed like the biggest and most reliable tree in the world when young, when had he become so weak?

As he was slowly putting down the basket he had brought, trying not to disturb the sleeping person, a low voice came from behind.

'You came.'

Yuder turned his head. The old man smiled with narrowed eyes and gestured.

'My little puppy. Come here.'

The old man took the hand of Yuder who approached slightly hesitantly. Though aged, his hand was still much larger than Yuder's. The old man who had been silently patting the back of Yuder's hand took a deep breath and opened his mouth.

'Did you finish well going down to the lower village?'

'Yes. It was nothing.'

'Right. You must have handled it well. Still, I should have been there.'

'I'm fine. Just rest.'

Grandfather had suddenly collapsed a few days ago. Though he had no cough, fever, or particular injury, he couldn't easily get up from bed after that. The doctor called from the neighboring village diagnosed it as the infirmity of old age. He said treatment and medicine would be useless, just to try eating lots of food that could boost energy. Grandfather didn't get angry but just laughed loudly.

'Your hands are a mess. What did you do to get them like this again?'

'Nothing much.'

'But there's a basket that wasn't there when you left?'

Yuder was silent then answered honestly.

'I gathered some medicinal herbs.'

While coming up home, he had found medicinal herbs that don't usually bloom in this season. Since blooming despite the season meant they had particularly strong vitality, he dug them up with bare hands thinking they might help boost grandfather's energy. After that, he thought it would be good to look around more. As he dug and gathered one by one like that, a basket became full. The mess of his hands was just extra.

'It was because of me.'

As if guessing everything without being told, grandfather clicked his tongue. Yuder made a small excuse.

'It doesn't hurt. I'm fine.'

'Still, don't do that next time.'

The old man who patted the small hand a few more times quietly sighed.

'I've said this before. Grandfather could leave anytime so don't be too surprised or...'

'You said not to be sad.'

'Right.'

It was something grandfather had said often. Since he could suddenly leave anytime now that he was old, when that time came, don't be too surprised or sad.

He had repeatedly told him many times that dying was natural once a person was born. Often enough for young Yuder to understand.

After grandfather collapsed, he knew that perhaps now was that time. That he should act calmly as he had learned and prepared for a long time.

That he could do everything alone now even without grandfather.

But still...

'At least try the herbs. At least the Untam.'

'Untam? You did well to spot and gather something not usually seen this season.'

That's why he gathered it. Grandfather who would have known without being told smiled.

'Yes. I should eat that. Since my sharp-eyed puppy brought it.'

Yuder immediately got up to wash and cut the herbs and brought them. And he watched without taking his eyes off while grandfather ate them.

'It's bitter, bitter.'

'I brought honey water too.'

When he held out water mixed with some honey gathered in spring, grandfather laughed.

'My my. You've really grown up.'

He felt the urge to both say that was true and say not yet at the same time. While he was staying silent without saying anything, the old man who had put down his empty cup reached out to pat Yuder's head.

'...Thank you.'

'...'

In the warm silence, the old man who had been repeatedly stroking the black hair suddenly opened his mouth.

'Have you ever thought about why grass and flowers bloom on time?'

Yuder shook his head.

'It's because they know they can't survive if they greedily bloom too early or too late. Even those little things already know that blooming at the right time gives the highest chance of survival. Those that don't can end up standing out and getting eaten like this.'

After saying that, the old man tapped his stomach and laughed heartily.

'I too was once very greedy like these medicinal herbs. But now I know that's useless. So... now whenever I feel greedy, I always think this must be exactly the right time. No matter how sad and regretful... that it's right.'

It was difficult and hard to understand what he meant. Looking at the silent Yuder, the old man slowly explained once more in an easier way to understand, as he always did.

'So don't be greedy for my sake, Yuder. Of course, not for your sake either.'

So as not to be sad and suffering because of it.

Two days after that conversation ended. Grandfather passed away as if sleeping.

After placing a bracelet he had made himself at his pillow while lying down...

"..."

Yuder slowly blinked awake from the dream.

The unfamiliar yet familiar ceiling of his home village house came into view.

'That dream just now... seems to have been what happened right before grandfather passed away.'

To think he would dream again so freshly about something that had become hazy with the passage of time. It had never happened even once until now.

'Is it because I came back home?'

Most things that had happened with grandfather had become dusty past and sunk deep. But only the last words telling him not to be greedy still remained in one corner of his mind.

'Back then I only remembered those words without understanding the context...'

After having the dream, he felt he might somewhat understand why he had said those words.

It felt somewhat strange to have such a dream on the day he was visiting his grandfather. Still, it wasn't a bad sensation.

Blinking his eyes and looking beside him, the spot was empty. The place was so used to lying alone that he hadn't realized, but now he suddenly remembered there had definitely been someone beside him before falling asleep and became wide awake.

'Kishiar'

Yuder got up. Looking around, there was no human presence in the entire small house.

'Did he already go to wash?'

When he opened the door and went out, the rising sunlight shone down beyond the brightening sky. As he closed and opened his eyes frowning at the sunlight incomparably stronger than in the capital or Peletta, someone's back figure appeared beyond his dazzled vision.

Kishiar was standing quietly watching the sunrise, wearing only a simple shirt and pants without an outer coat. Though that was all, somehow Yuder couldn't take his eyes off that back figure.

Then, as if sensing Yuder's presence, the man turned his head.

With a face dyed white in the light, he smiled with crinkled eyes.

"Already awake?"

It felt like time that had stopped finally started moving again. Only then did Yuder take a breath and approach his side.

"What were you doing?"

"Light dawn training combined with breakfast preparation."

"What?"

"...Well, I was doing that, but the sunrise was so beautiful I found myself watching without realizing."

He laughed softly looking at the blinking Yuder.

"Who knew the sun rising beyond the distant mountain range would be this magnificent. It felt like I was becoming one with nature."

Though it was an amusing thing to say, it actually looked that way too. Yuder swallowed those words and opened his mouth.

"What do you mean by breakfast preparation?"

"Since I received such great hospitality last evening, I thought I'd try imitating it a bit today. It's cold, so shall we continue inside?"

They returned to the house. Only then did Yuder discover the ingredients spread around the hearth. However, unlike when Yuder had roughly chopped them yesterday, they were trimmed beautifully to an almost mystical degree.

"How did this..."

"It's thanks to growing up with people like Shusainer below me. Though I've never done it before, I've seen a lot."

Kishiar casually put the trimmed ingredients into the pan placed on the hearth. His movements were slow but had a certain regularity, as if recalling and following something.

Grilling, shaking, sprinkling something found in the cupboard, sliding onto plates.

Though just that, suddenly grilled vegetables and egg dishes similar to what they had eaten in Peletta appeared before his eyes.

"I wonder if this is alright."

Yuder could hardly believe the sight he was seeing.

"..."

**Chapter 1158**

"..."

After staring at the food for a long time, he picked up a fork and stabbed it. When he put it in his mouth and chewed slowly, he tasted exactly the same as Shusainer's cooking he had eaten in Peletta.

It was a result no one would imagine was made by someone cooking for the first time in their life.

"How is it?"

"...I think it's unfair."

"Hmm?"

Kishiar, who had been propping his chin with an expectant face, opened his eyes wide. Yuder sighed towards that handsome face.

"Though I'm not sensitive to taste, I can tell this is almost indistinguishable from Shusainer's cooking."

"Does that mean it's delicious?"

Isn't that obvious?

Yuder continued chewing without answering. As if knowing that was the answer, Kishiar grinned.

They sat facing each other and ate breakfast. Though it was a space so cramped their knees and legs touched and tangled, that touching body heat was not uncomfortable at all. While looking down at the traces of food that had disappeared instantly despite eating more slowly than usual, Kishiar opened his mouth with a pleased face.

"So this is how it feels when someone eats well what I made. Now I somewhat understand Shusainer's feelings. I think I might develop a hobby in cooking too."

Someone who already lives about three times busier than others each day wants to learn cooking too? No matter how good the mood, that joke goes too far. Yuder thought this while cleaning up the dishes.

"Then are we going to where grandfather is now?"

"Yes. It's not far since it's nearby."

"Is there anything we need to prepare separately?"

"No. We can just go."

Orr's funeral customs vary slightly by status and region. In the case of nobles or those with some money, they hold funerals at temples and bury in nearby cemeteries, but most commoners were cremated. The place for scattering the remaining ashes after cremation differed by region, but in this central mountain village where Yuder lived, they were usually scattered on trees or in valleys.

Yuder's grandfather too was cremated according to such customs and scattered in the water near the house he loved most. Yuder explained these circumstances while moving forward unhesitatingly.

"It's a place he designated while still alive, and though it's not somewhere people frequently pass by, the scenery is good."

The destination soon appeared. It was a really close place that appeared after walking about 10 minutes from the house.

A gentle waterside continuing from the valley. That place that looked like a small stream because it was quite wide and deep was where grandfather's bones were scattered.

Yuder approached after staring blankly at that place he was visiting after a very long time. A clear and cold energy could be felt from the swift water flow below his feet.

Though grandfather had designated where his ashes would be scattered while alive, he wished not to leave any marker there. So to those who didn't know, this was just an ordinary stream.

"This is it."

Kishiar who stood right beside Yuder whispered in a gentle voice.

"It's a place where sunlight reaches well. As you said, the surrounding scenery is beautiful too. It must have been good for swimming in summer."

"Yes. As you say... when I was young, I spent almost all my time here every summer."

Of course, it wasn't only in summer. In other seasons too, this place was Yuder's good playground and the most comfortable place to spend time.

"Here, this rock is good for sitting."

"Oh. It really is. There's even a place to lean your back."

Yuder raised the corners of his mouth looking at the man speaking playfully. It felt newly strange to bring someone and sit together in a place that now only Yuder knew about since grandfather was gone.

'I wonder if this was how Kishiar felt when introducing Peletta.'

Yuder stared at the flowing water while sitting with shoulders aligned with Kishiar. Though he had often come here even after grandfather passed away, a warm sensation he hadn't felt then wrapped around his whole body.

He took a breath and exhaled as if engraving that sensation within himself, then opened his mouth.

"Actually, I had a dream about grandfather earlier."

"What kind of dream was it?"

"In life, that is... it was a dream of the day he left his last words almost right before passing away."

The word 'last words' tends to make the atmosphere quite dark. After telling in detail what dream he had as he remembered it to let him know it wasn't actually such a dark dream, Yuder lowered his gaze.

"Though I wasn't particularly sad or anything now after all this time, it felt a bit strange. I had never dreamed about grandfather even once after leaving home in my previous life... I suppose memories revived since I came home."

"...That might be so."

After saying that, Kishiar placed his hand on top of Yuder's hand resting on the rock. Body heat transmitted through a single layer of glove slowly warmed his body.

"Hearing the story, I can clearly tell how much he loved and worried about his grandson. He was a wonderful person with both preparation and love."

"Yes. He even made several chairs of different sizes in preparation for my growth. I think it's all thanks to him that I was able to live comfortably alone."

さ

"Chairs?"

"Yes. The chairs we're using now are adult-sized, right? There are children's chairs in the storage. The ones I used when I was young. Though they're too small to use now..."

"That's amazing. I want to learn from that."

Yuder smiled slightly.

"When I was young, I didn't know why grandfather kept making chairs of different sizes again... but as I grew up, I found it was extremely useful."

"It's definitely good to have things made to fit your body perfectly."

"Yes."

Chairs are furniture found everywhere. However, there weren't many homes that prepared separate chairs for children. They didn't have money or leisure to use for such things.

Therefore, ordinary commoner children grew up eating with difficulty at tables too high for their height, sitting awkwardly in adult chairs. Using custom-made chairs with different heights and sizes according to growth stages was a privilege only nobles enjoyed. However, Yuder was able to always use chairs that fit his body because he had a grandfather with excellent carpentry skills. Even after grandfather passed away, there were several pre-made chairs so he could comfortably change them whenever needed.

'Back then I didn't know that was such an amazing thing.'

When grandfather was alive, he also regularly bought new clothes and shoes to match his growth state. Thinking about it now, that too was really amazing dedication. It felt even more so when recalling how after grandfather was gone, he just bought large adult clothes and wore them loosely because getting new clothes and shoes every time was troublesome.

'Thinking back, he really was meticulous in such detailed aspects.'

"I heard that when grandfather was young, he traveled around doing various work, so perhaps because of that, he seemed to have some different aspects from others. He was also good with writing so he handled all writing-related work in the village. Um... he also kept detailed account books, but once I spilled water on them..."

As he talked, memories related to grandfather kept popping up and his words grew longer. When he closed his mouth feeling awkward about continuing his disorganized speech, the man who had been quietly listening urged him on with a smile.

"Since we came to meet him, talking about him is a good thing. I'd like you to tell me more if anything comes to mind, whatever it may be."

"Aren't you bored?"

"Not at all."

He tilted his head to rest it against the side of Yuder's forehead.

"How could I be bored when I've wanted and wished so much to know more about you? Even very trivial

things are fine. Tell me everything."

It was a voice where sincerity could be deeply felt.

Yuder let out a long breath while adding his own weight to the head leaning against him.

"Grandfather often spoke to me about after he passed away. He said death was natural, and wished that even if grandfather disappeared, I would never fall deeply into sadness. He also said not to worry because he would always think of me even if he went on a long journey. I heard those words so many times that when he really passed away, no tears came at all."

Surprisingly, no tears came. It was the same while cremating and scattering the ashes with people from the lower village whom grandfather had asked in advance to help with the funeral if something happened.

The villagers seemed to pity Yuder more for not crying. Since they too had known grandfather for a long time, perhaps they had also heard the words Yuder had heard.

Even when returning to the house where he would live alone and seeing the bed where the old man had been lying until just the day before, still no tears came. Yuder was able to continue his peaceful daily life exactly as before, as grandfather wished.

Sometimes visiting this stream, and continuing the work grandfather had done. Like that for a long time.

As if he had been alone from the beginning.

**Chapter 1159**

Yuder silently watched the continuously flowing water then lowered his gaze to the large hand resting on his own. Though he hesitated whether to say these words, seeing the fingers resting on his hand without a single tremor gave him certainty that he would willingly accept whatever Yuder Aile said.

His mind settled calmly.

"I, since grandfather's funeral, have never shed tears or felt sad no matter who died. Even at your funeral... it wasn't particularly different."

As the deceased was the Cavalry's first Commander, Yuder as the second Commander naturally had to attend the funeral. Emperor Katchian said with a smiling face that 'since I regrettably cannot go due to being busy with public affairs, I hope you go well in my stead.' In that face was joyful curiosity about what attitude and expression Yudrain Aile would show at the funeral of someone he had killed. And on the other hand, there was also a beast-like vigilance ready to question and tear apart if he showed even slightly sad or mourning attitude there.

The funeral of the last imperial descendant was gloomy but not quiet. Those who had followed him were hardly seen except for Cavalry members who came to mourn, because more nobles with faces similar to Katchian came instead. They seemed like people who came not to mourn the deceased but to appreciate how beautiful the corpse in the coffin was.

The moment Yuder appeared, all attention focused on him at once. Even the nobles who had been chatting happily fell silent unconsciously, intimidated before the appearance of the commoner-born 'monster' rumored to have assassinated Duke Peletta.

But that was only for a moment. When Yuder advanced with an unbothered face, placed flowers before the coffin containing the corpse lying as if sleeping, and turned away, people began opening their mouths as if they had never frozen.

The few Cavalry members and brave former imperial faction followers with hateful gazes, the nobles and aristocratic faction figures who had curried favor with Emperor Katchian with gazes like cooks busy examining ingredients placed on a cutting board.

Everyone pointed fingers, chatted, cursed and laughed in their own way.

Regardless, Yuder returned and did his work as if nothing had happened.

That same thing repeated no matter who died afterward.

Yuder raised his head after recalling those countless funerals he had attended.

"...Though it may sound ridiculous, I think if I were to go there again now, I couldn't walk as indifferently as then."

If he had to see Kishiar in a coffin once more.

Just thinking about it brought heart-shattering agony. That was clearly pain based in sadness. Though it would be a completely opposite emotion from what grandfather had taught, now he wasn't afraid or scared of it. Yuder calmly endured that pain and continued speaking.

"I... realize anew while telling this story how much I've really changed. Yes. I've changed a lot. However, I newly learned yesterday that there are also parts unchanged from my childhood self."

When with Kishiar, Yuder keeps learning about himself that he didn't know.

The names of emotions he had no interest in.

His previous life self that he had passed over with cold gazes.

His childhood that he had forgotten and left like a dust-covered object.

All of that was Yuder Aile, and there was someone before him who loved that Yuder Aile just as he was.

"..."

"So, I'm glad I came here with you. If grandfather were here... I think he would have thought the same."

"...Yuder."

Kishiar breathed out Yuder's name like a groan. Seeing those trembling lips as if not knowing at all what else to say, Yuder smiled silently and raised his head first to kiss him.

At this moment, those lips were not those of a noble member of the imperial family, nor of the man he had killed, nor of the Commander whose orders he must follow.

They were simply those of a lover whom Yuder wanted to kiss first for the first time in his life...

\*\*\*

They threw themselves back on the bed as soon as they returned holding hands. Though it was laughable considering how little time had passed since waking up, the desire to kiss the flushed one was stronger than that.

Even in that situation, Kishiar uttered words like 'but still here...', 'it hasn't been long since the heat passed...', but to Yuder's ears they were just nonsense.

"What does it matter when there's only us two. Don't tell me that's why you kept trying to sleep in the chair yesterday too?"

"It wasn't just because of that..."

A snort naturally came out at this man who was unbelievably shameless yet showed hard-to-understand delicacy at times like this. Instead of answering, Yuder removed his clothes.

"I want it, and you want it too. Isn't that enough, what more is needed?"

"I think I need a heart strong enough not to stop from shock even seeing Yuder Aile's excessively wonderful and lovely appearance right now..."

Yuder devoured the lips speaking nonsense as if eating them. Though he kept trying to back away, the pressed lips were smiling in an arc.

Kishiar pretended to take deep breaths while clutching his chest, then soon rubbed his hair against Yuder's nape and lightly bit the pulsing skin. At the same time, hands that had burrowed under clothes stroked the spine that reflexively trembled in surprise at the coolness, giving stimulation.

Yuder raised his waist following his touch, and soon raised his hips high too. Fingers that had entered his pants stroked between his legs that were already wet and sticky, and trembled finely as if in joy at that. Kishiar whispered with heated eyes.

"Goodness. This is already..."

"Yes. It was like that from outside."

Yuder unhesitatingly acknowledged his state. Since kissing him outside, his insides had already been melting like water and growing hot. It was an immediate reaction caused by his body that had learned what was best to get closer, deeper with the being before him even a little faster.

Under the pants being removed, wet fluid flowed stickily. His body ready to accept immediately wanted Kishiar.

'And that...'

"Isn't it the same for you too?"

Yuder grinned and looked at the man's lower body. His body too was already no different from Yuder's, swollen and unbearably hot. When he reached out to touch over the clothes, moisture no less than Yuder's, if not more, clearly stained his fingertips. The man who bent his waist in response to Yuder's touch trembled his eyelashes while exhaling sweet breaths.

"...It can't be helped. When you're here, always..."

"Yes. I know."

They caressed each other's skin like flowing water until their hands became the same temperature, and rolled around on the not-so-large bed removing clothes and tangling together. When what they wanted finally pierced through his stomach, Yuder threw back his head biting his lips on the tangled clothes and sheets.

"Ugh... u-ugh...!"

The sensation of overwhelming fullness instantly transforming into pleasure that made his whole body tremble.

A world becoming one while being shaken in sensations of distorting and flashing vision.

Every time he clung with all his strength, the other also embraced Yuder and kissed him with equal force. Looking at him as if he was so precious, as if he couldn't bear it at all.

In satisfaction different yet similar to Peletta, Yuder breathed heavily with contentment.

**Chapter 1160**

The days spent in his home were slow and peaceful.

Since there was no need to earn money selling wood anymore, he only chopped firewood for their own use, and spent the rest of the time resting comfortably, walking around with Kishiar, or repairing the old house.

About once every 2-3 days they went down to the village to buy groceries, and after the first day, perhaps because rumors had spread that Yuder had returned, many people welcomed him quite warmly and asked after him. As it turned out, the reason they had been wary of visitors at first wasn't just because of Kishiar being a stranger. Like the old woman at the grocery store, there were quite a few who said they thought he was someone else when they saw Yuder again. They apologized saying his appearance seemed to have changed quite a bit in a year so they didn't recognize him at first, and Yuder replied there was no need for that.

And Kishiar, fully displaying his shameless nature, instantly became famous within the village as 'Yuder's guest.' After going down several times, people began having more conversations with Kishiar than with Yuder. Watching Kishiar surrounded by people, Yuder quietly thought.

'Since they would probably all faint if they knew the person they're talking to now is Duke Peletta, I must make sure they never find out, even later.'

The village that seemed unchanged had its own changes over the year. He heard some had gotten married, some had found new work and left the village. What he found most unexpected was when he heard stories related to awakeners.

"A while ago, the lord issued orders to all surrounding villages. He said to bring anyone who suddenly changes appearance or starts showing strange magic-like abilities."

"Why?"

"I'm not sure exactly, but it seems the lord's side wants to give them work. They say quite a lot of such people have been appearing lately, and apparently they've done some amazing things in some regions."

"I think I heard about that too. Was it the story about someone being called a hero for removing mountains and turning over seas...?"

"Yes, yes. That's it. I heard rumors from the lower village that the lord seems to really like those... hero stories or whatever, so that must be the influence."

"..."

Kishiar, who had been sitting leisurely, secretly turned to look at Yuder and winked. Yuder slightly turned his head with an expressionless face, pretending not to have seen anything.

"Don't lords sponsor the costs of magic assessment and tuition to send children born with magic power to the Pearl Tower? It seems to be something like that."

The lord who managed this village stayed in another village about half a day's walk from here. Due to the mountainous characteristics, the territory size was so vast compared to the number of subjects that even travel between villages belonging to the same territory wasn't easy. Therefore, the lord rarely issued direct orders except for significant mこatters. It was to the point that even Yuder had never seen the lord's face despite this being his home village.

'From what I heard, they seemed like a lower noble family living without particular greed. No will to develop the territory, but not completely lacking responsibility either... just that level.'

The fact that such a person had issued orders to identify the number of awakeners and bring them to give work meant that information about awakeners had somehow spread widely even to such people.

'As beings valued as much as mages at that.'

Nobles considered it great fortune when a mage was born in their territory. Whether one could employ a mage who could make magic tools directly or not made a really big difference in quality of life. As mages became rare, this phenomenon intensified, and these days most nobles would personally sponsor and send children to the Pearl Tower if they showed signs of being a mage among the commoners they ruled.

Considering that awakeners in the previous life hadn't gained this level of recognition despite struggling so hard fighting disasters and protecting people, this was truly an unbelievable change.

While Yuder was lost in reflection, people's topic shifted in a somewhat strange direction.

"Come to think of it, wouldn't Yuder who worked in the capital and his guest know better about those kinds of rumors? Don't you know anything?"

"Yes. The stories about heroes or whatever. Tell us if you've heard anything, whatever it is."

Yuder thought this was where they should get up and leave.

What he hadn't anticipated was that Kishiar had no such intention at all.

"Hmm! If you're curious about those rumors, you've come to the right place. I've even met the protagonist of those rumors in person!"

"Ohhh!"

"Indeed. People from the capital are different after all!"

Perhaps sensing an interesting story was coming, people's eyes instantly sparkled. Yuder slightly shook his head watching people crowding around Kishiar.

'Just how much are you planning to say? You shouldn't.'

He already knew countless times that Kishiar liked boasting about Yuder. But he didn't want that here. Meeting Yuder's concerned gaze, Kishiar grinned. Naturally placing his interlocked hands behind his head and leaning back leisurely, his lips moved silently.

'Don't worry.'

"..."

A moment later, Yuder came to somewhat understand Nathan Zuckerman's feelings for the first time.

"-It was truly amazing. Neither monsters as huge as mountain ranges nor waves large enough to cover the world were a match for him! You probably can't imagine how much damage the world would have suffered without his accurate judgments in those situations, and without the Cavalry who bravely stepped forward with him."

"Was that really something that happened?"

"His Majesty the Emperor and his younger brother Duke Peletta both acknowledged it. Then it must be true!"

Kishiar nodded and placed his hand on his chest with a solemn face.

"Indeed. Duke Peletta who leads the Cavalry even... was so impressed by his ability and beauty that he ended up falling for him."

"Huh? Wasn't the hero a man?"

"Was the Duke a woman?"

Those who had been listening completely absorbed in the story suddenly came to their senses and questioned. Kishiar tilted his head looking at the questioners as if wondering what was wrong with that.

"Awakeners have something called second gender. It's a new gender acknowledged by the Sun God and the Pope. Therefore, such things aren't a problem at all. But some people say that even if he wasn't second gender, that rogue Duke might have been fallen for the hero from the beginning."

"Is that so... I didn't know because I haven't been to the temple much."

"The hero must be an incredible beauty. And to have such abilities and a heart that doesn't spare even his life to protect people... My! I understand why His Majesty gave him a noble title, I do."

'They accept this so easily?'

Yuder who was listening was dumbfounded, but others didn't mind. People were either nodding with serious faces or making moved expressions completely absorbed in the story.

"It's said His Majesty was very pleased and surprised that his troublemaking younger brother started walking the right path, abandoning his past wrong ways of life thanks to the hero."

"Amazing. The future looks bright!"

"That must be why the lord is trying to find awakeners too. When you all see such people, I hope you'll rejoice together rather than being surprised by their changed appearance. Or contact me."

"We had no idea the world had changed like this. We'll certainly do that!"

For the boring mountain village life, Kishiar's hero eyewitness account full of colorful descriptions was more than enough to excite the residents. He completely captivated people's souls and made them fully absorbed with a story that, if you thought about it carefully, had no proper subjects or information at all while being full of entertainment, then finished the story receiving applause.

"I spoke earnestly after a long time. Everyone listened so earnestly that I ended up talking longer without realizing."

"It didn't seem like you didn't realize it got longer at all."

"Haha."

Kishiar laughed with a face full of mischief.

"Still, at least the people here won't know who you are."

"You really managed to avoid outright lies while adding plenty of exaggeration."

None of those who heard Kishiar's description of the hero would match it to Yuder being that person.

'What did he say again? Eyes shining like the night sky, hair black like a beauty in a painting, tall and straight-postured... let's stop thinking about it.'

Anyway, anyone with proper imagination definitely wouldn't think that was Yuder Aile. Absolutely not.

"What exaggeration? I only spoke the truth as I saw it. Originally, even seeing the same thing, how people feel about it differs for each person."

"..."

Yuder let out a small sigh.

'Well... the village people won't know. But I'm not sure about the lord.'

He thought that if rumors spread there about the interesting hero tales that people who worked at the Cavalry shared, the lord might rush here.

'Just thinking about it is troublesome.'

Yuder firmly decided he should rest well and return quickly before the lord tried to meet him.

In peaceful days that made him wonder if he had ever left this place, except for such small incidents.

That peaceful feeling changed on the afternoon of the fifth day.

"Yuder. Are you reading Luma's diary?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"I was wondering if I could look around the storage."

Kishiar smiled with a face full of expectation. Yuder slowly closed the diary he had been reading and stood up.

"...Were you that eager to see the chairs I used?"

"I could look by myself."

"It's too complicated so it would be hard for you to find. Let's just go together."

**Chapter 1161**

The storage was in the same building as the bathroom, but since the space was divided by walls, the entrance was on the opposite side. Yuder led Kishiar behind him and opened the door to the storage.

In a musty dust smell stronger than when they had returned home, only the lantern Yuder had brought lit up the surroundings like a solitary sun. Kishiar looked around the interior and smiled.

"I thought something like chairs would be easy to find... but there really are quite a lot of things."

"Originally this was a place where woodcutters came to rest briefly, so all the things used since then are here too."

"Is that why this is called the Rest Tree house?"

"That's part of it, but not all. Do you remember the big elm tree that looks like a signpost when coming up to the house?"

"The tree you enjoyed climbing and resting on top of since before. The one where there was chaos once because people thought a child had disappeared when you forgot to come down and fell asleep."

The man with good memory happily added unnecessary details that didn't need to be added.

"...Yes. If you go close, there's actually another cut tree stump beside it. I heard the woodcutters used to rest on that stump, or use it as a temporary stand when processing wood they were carrying. So the opinion came up to make a proper rest area near that stump, and that was the beginning of this building."

"I see. So that side came first rather than this house."

"Yes. Um, watch your step."

Among the luggage piled and tangled here and there were long farming tools sticking out as if their purpose was to trip ankles. Though Yuder could naturally avoid them even with his eyes closed since he had played here since childhood, you never know with Kishiar.

No matter how amazing a swordmaster he was, it wouldn't be strange if he tripped in his current state where he seemed half distracted from being too happy to be here.

"How kind of you to worry. I think I could avoid them better if you held my hand."

What kind of trick was this now? When Yuder stared at him directly, Kishiar covered his mouth with his hand and laughed as if embarrassed while turning his body.

"Though I do have good night vision... still, the owner would know this place better..."

"..."

A moment later, Yuder started moving again with the lantern in one hand and Kishiar's hand in the other. Looking around while answering the curious one's barrage of questions about every object they brushed past, he finally found where the items they were looking for might be.

"In my memory... I think I stuffed them around here somewhere."

"I only see books though?"

Kishiar said while glancing at the items in boxes stacked about as high as Yuder.

"Yes. There are books grandfather read, but there should be more things like account books he wrote. I roughly piled them up here before leaving this place. So... they should be behind if we clear these away. Please wait there for a moment."

"Not doing it together? It would be quick if I used my ability."

"Well, is there really any need for that even here? Since you wanted to look at the items here, look at the things around you. It would be better if you could watch to make sure nothing collapses."

"Hmm."

Kishiar agreed. Yuder pulled several boxes forward and cleared them away at once, then put his hand into the hole created. Feeling inside, something like chair legs seemed to catch his hand, but it was still a bit difficult to be certain.

'I'll need to clear away a few more and check.'

This time he moved items one by one with strength like in the old days without using his ability. Among the odds and ends that seemed to be just boxes of books were quite a few other items like a roof gutter that Yuder had broken while climbing and playing long ago, a wooden horse with a broken head, and more.

Only after carefully moving things several more times did the chairs he was looking for finally come into view. Wooden chairs with different leg heights and sizes of boards where the hips and back would touch. A faint smile flowed out the moment he brushed the legs that had been rubbed smooth to prevent rough grain and coated with shining oil.

'Right. These are them.'

"I found them. Now I just need to clear everything and take them out... What are you doing?"

When he turned around feeling refreshed, only two long legs sticking out were visible, hidden between boxes containing books. Yuder approached and discovered Kishiar sitting on the floor absorbed in reading something.

'Grandfather's books?'

"What are you looking at so intently? There shouldn't be anything interesting."

"...Ah."

Only then did the man raise his head. Unlike his face that had been full of smiles until just now, he was making some strange expression.

"Yuder. Have you ever read the books here?"

"No."

It was natural since he had lived a life not particularly connected to things like letters and thirst for knowledge until leaving this place. He had barely remembered enough letters to understand the Cavalry recruitment notice without forgetting them, if he had forgotten even that, his joining probably would have been delayed several more years.

Kishiar asked again.

"Then about what exactly your grandfather did before coming here..."

"I don't know that well either. Well, since he was good with his hands, he might have come after working as a carpenter or gardener at some noble house."

Then Kishiar said something Yuder had never imagined.

"Have you never thought he might have been someone related to magic?"

"...What?"

He thought it was a joke but it wasn't. Kishiar closed the book he had been reading until just now and showed the front cover with an unsmiling face.

There was written an academic title difficult to properly guess the contents of: 'Contemplating the Blessings Dwelling in All Things in Great Nature - Focusing on Trees, Flowers, Grass and Earth-'

"Though I'm familiar with seeing the cover several times, this is the first time I've properly read the title. Is it a gardening book published by somewhere like a temple?"

"Though I guessed the contents might be similar, it's not. This is a collection of research papers published by a mage guild."

"..."

"Reading it, it seems it was even from a guild in the Kingdom of Aeril, not the Orr Empire. Published about 83 years ago."

Yuder blinked several times then looked at the book cover again. Though the written title hadn't changed, the book suddenly became very unfamiliar.

"Well... I never heard anything magic-related from grandfather. I didn't know it was that kind of book either. Is it really a magic book?"

"Not a magic book but a collection of research papers."

Though he wondered what the difference was, Kishiar said there was surprisingly a difference.

"Books that write how to use magic are called magic books. But mages don't only publish such books. This could be seen as a collection of writings where mages dedicated to researching specific fields, like Thais Yulman or the Western Mage Union, gathered to discuss their research and wrote about it."

When he thought of it as a book published by somewhere like the Western Mage Union, he immediately understood what it meant.

"Usually they publish such books once every few years. Naturally, such books not only have little demand from ordinary people, but are even difficult to obtain."

"The contents... what are the contents?"

Though it was a brief time that ordinary people would find difficult to even skim through, the man who had even surprised Enon answered calmly as if he had already grasped an entire volume.

"First, you already know that Aeril is a small country in the west."

"Yes."

"Though it's not a powerful country, from a magical studies perspective, that's not necessarily true. Aeril has many unique plants and developed toxicology. Its mages are also famous for poison-related magic and magic tool creation using poisons. Naturally, there are also many mages who research plants along those lines."

"I see."

"This book was also published by such people. As I said earlier, the content itself isn't particularly surprising. It's writings researching native plants from various regions compared with soil characteristics. But it doesn't contain particularly great achievements either. You could say it feels like it was left as an observation record or documentation since there weren't any major new discoveries."

Kishiar said that unless one was a mage obsessed with plant research, probably only gardeners or priests growing sacred flowers would be interested in this writing's information. In other words, it really had no particular value.

Yuder was lost in thought for a moment then opened his mouth.

"Then couldn't it just be one of the books that flowed in from somewhere while passing by in his youth? Among commoners who can read, there are those who don't consider information when buying books but just get whatever they can if they can buy it."

"I thought that might be possible too. But look at the other books underneath."

Kishiar pointed to other books around. Yuder scanned their titles.

'Reflecting on 100 Years of Mineral Changes Mined from the Molihan Mines'

'On Methods for Humans to Efficiently Use Tools...'

'What Does the Simplest Creation Require'

They all seemed like books with no consistency just looking at the titles.

"They're all books published by various mage research guilds, similar to this one."

**Chapter 1162**

Would it be possible for an ordinary commoner to obtain several volumes of obscure mage research papers? And not all from one country, but published in different countries, and even without consistency in topics?

Even Yuder, who had no interest in mages, knew that was almost impossible.

"Perhaps there could be strange people in the world who collect anything published by mages just because mages published it. But such people would be satisfied with the act of collecting itself, so they wouldn't leave traces of reading repeatedly like this."

"Yes. I think so too, but... no matter how much I try to recall, I still don't know."

In Yuder's memories, grandfather was a completely ordinary person with no interest in things like magic. It was perplexing and awkward to think that aspects of grandfather he hadn't known might be hidden in these books he suddenly encountered. As if reading that emotion, Kishiar got up with a slight smile.

"Well, the category of 'people related to magic' I mentioned earlier includes quite many occupations. Besides mages, those employed to work for them can also be considered related people, and the number of people connected to organizations under the Court Mage Department or Pearl Tower cooperative institutions is truly uncountable."

"..."

"Though it's surprising to encounter something unexpected, I actually find it rather thrilling."

The eyes of the man who loved adventure stories sparkled.

"If we look carefully, we might find some connection between these books that we can't guess yet. And even if we don't find any, what does it matter? That wouldn't change the fact that he was family who loved you."

Hearing those words, his mind finally became at ease. Yuder nodded and let out a long breath.

"Yes. You're right."

Yes. Kishiar's words were right.

What did it matter who grandfather originally was? Even before, he hadn't particularly wondered and just lived remembering the grandfather he knew, so learning more about that wouldn't change anything.

Nothing could be more important than the fact that he had carefully raised young Yuder and loved him like his own grandson.

That was enough.

Kishiar, who was organizing the scattered books into boxes, asked politely.

"Would it be alright if I looked at other paper bundles including account books besides the books here?"

Yuder answered that he could look at whatever he wanted without permission. He thought it would be good to count this as something nice for Kishiar to do during their remaining days here.

Afterward, Kishiar discovered the children's chairs Yuder had taken out and greatly rejoiced while covering his mouth. While confusedly listening to words about how they were so cute he might faint, and asking if he wouldn't sit in them again, the surprise that had welled up inside Yuder was pushed back and disappeared without a trace.

\*\*\*

Late at night. After dinner, the two began their respective tasks sitting back to back by the light of soft lamps and the magic stone stove.

Yuder spread out the bundle of letters brought from Peletta. Since bringing them here, he had been reading and writing replies a little each day, but just handling the official ones had been so busy that he was only now starting to read the personal letters.

Most of the personal letters he received were greetings sent by Cavalry colleagues during their vacation. Writing separate greeting letters to someone during vacation. Since he had never even received vacation in his previous life, it felt completely unfamiliar.

- To Yuder. You've probably heard already, but my family all made it through the recent anomalous crack incident without anyone getting hurt! But my siblings keep talking about the Commander and it's a big problem... they even ask how to become awakeners. I didn't know these kids would be so weak to looks. I'm at a loss about what to teach them from where. Could you give me some advice? When I asked others, they just gave nonsense jokes like I should take better care of my appearance...

The letter sent by Gakane from the South seemed to show his characteristic troubled smile just from reading it, and

- Yuder. I'm having fun in the capital with sister Ever. We're staying at Steiber's house, and it's so fun inviting others to play and eat together. Of course I'm also working after receiving His Majesty's special summons, but the enjoyment is definitely greater than that. Actually I'm eating so much bread my stomach feels like it'll burst every day. If you were here there would have been no problem... Come play next time too!

Kanna sent a letter showing her bright personality as usual even though she seemed to be working without feeling the vacation much since she was in the capital.

- To Yuder. These days I'm following and protecting a Diarca family knight on His Majesty's orders. But this person... I felt it before too, but he’s strange beyond understanding. He looks around saying he’s searching for assassins every few minutes, but he’d never noticed us even once. It feels like he’s doing it on purpose, but Kanna and Steiber say it's fine. I'm worried so please give me your opinion on whether it's alright to leave it like this.

Ever too, who had started doubting whether it might be a fabricated strategy because she couldn't trust Kiolle da Diarca's stupidity.

- To Senior Yuder! Other seniors said I could write letters so I'm writing. This is my first letter. I'm happy to have learned writing. I'm sorry for writing a letter. But I'll write again next time. Please allow it. Thank you. From Elpkins

After Elpkins' crooked letter with no real content, there were several more letters from other new members that weren't much different.

The Eldore siblings sent a letter in much calmer handwriting than before, but without losing their characteristic playfulness. Members at each branch also wrote about their recent situations and questions for Yuder mixed with stories about anomalous cracks. Among them, Jimmy's letter made Yuder troubled as it asked to please include detailed stories about what Peletta was like going with the Commander in the reply because he was so curious.

'A long reply... I don't even know how to write it.'

Still, he could read and write replies to the Cavalry members' letters relatively comfortably. The most difficult were the letters from Duchess Myra Herne, who had somehow sent contact to the Northern Branch though he didn't know how she knew, and from the Empress who sent a letter to Yuder despite not sending one to Kishiar. Yuder thought there would surely be more than half of messages that should be delivered to Kishiar in the Empress's letter, but reading it, everything was purely words for him.

After reading letters and writing replies in time that was surprising but not unpleasant, he started reading.

Yuder had resumed reading Luma's diary that he hadn't properly examined for a while since coming here. The content read so far wasn't much different from before.

Rather than writing about himself or people around him, Luma would write scattered short thoughts, mostly stories about the situation of mages in the early founding period. Among them, today's reading portion contained this:

- Parents who are priests or excellent knights never try to let others know when their child appears to be born with magic power. A young mage who said dying would be better than excessive oppression. I wonder how many more such people there are.

- Is magic dangerous and shameful?

- Change is difficult, and human time is fast. We must do anything.

In fact, if you just removed the subject, it was similar enough to believe it was writing about things awakeners were experiencing now.

Being cursed as monsters outright outside, being driven from hometowns, those who feared their own power. Conversely, it felt even more identical to the point of getting goosebumps seeing there seemed to have been those who lost their humanity desiring power or died intoxicated by that power.

Are awakeners dangerous and shameful? How many times had Yuder Aile had similar thoughts?

The thought that they must do anything for change in perception too. He could understand the feeling when having that thought better than anyone. No mage who came would understand those words better than Yuder.

'To think there would come a day when I would feel such empathy with a great mage from a thousand years ago...'

Though the feeling was quite strange, it helped with immersion.

'I can't even tell if this is after the founding or not... but maybe I'll know as I read.'

Kishiar might have been able to quickly figure out around when it was even with this much information. But since he was now absorbed in reading grandfather's books brought from storage, Yuder planned to ask questions if it was still difficult to clearly know the period even after reading more of the diary.

Yuder continued reading while slowly tracing the letters with his finger. Then suddenly he noticed there was no writing on the next page.

'Why is this empty?'

He turned to the next page but it was the same. After turning about ten more pages like that, new writing finally appeared.

Since he hadn't read it with his eye of magic yet he couldn't know what it meant, but just looking with his normal eyes it was somehow different from the previous writing. It looked larger and more roughly scrawled, and above all, it wasn't fragments of sentences like scribbles written randomly here and there briefly. The moment he saw writing filling an entire page, certainty came that this was somehow different from before.

After looking down at that writing for a moment, when he carefully placed his finger on it, his eye of magic shone and the content began flowing into his mind. The first sentence he read in tension was this:

- There is no paper left. Fortunately I found an old notebook I had written in and lost.

"..."

Yuder glared at the writing after removing his finger. The great mage Luma probably hadn't written like this to tease Yuder, but from the reader's perspective it was absurd. Why was writing done with some great cipher that only he could read like this? A feeling came that he wanted to say something regardless of great mage or whatever if he had been in front of him.

'If I did that, Enon probably wouldn't have left me alone though.'

He calmed down and focused on the content again putting his finger back.

**Chapter 1163**

- It took a long time before I came to sit here and write this again. Many things happened. I thought I never wanted to leave records again. But in the end, the reason I picked up the pen and searched for paper again was because, if my guess is right, someday these writings might help someone. No, perhaps it would be more accurate to say I hope they will.

The absurd feeling felt when reading the first sentence instantly disappeared. Yuder continued reading the following text.

- First, there is a story I want to write. Perhaps whoever reads this writing later might dismiss this story as fantasy or delusion. Perhaps it really might be. But what's important is that when I first learned of this story, I believed those words to be truth without a single lie.

Yuder was seized by a strange premonition that he seemed to know what story would come next. And the following text proved that premonition was not wrong.

- It took a very long time from being born as an abandoned child under a lemon tree, awakening power different from others, giving it the name magic, and becoming a mage standing at the new Emperor's right hand. Though it wasn't an easy journey, I couldn't feel it as particularly difficult because there was always one friend by my side.

- Yes. The only friend who recognized and guided me. The first person who told me I didn't need to be ashamed of my power. A mysterious being who never showed surprise no matter what we faced, and supported the path forward for me and the mages. My lord who gave soul-connected children to me who could not have descendants.

- I thought his calmness as if knowing everything in the world, his generous yet sad smile whenever he looked at me, even his amazing abilities were all innate. Until that day death approached, when I heard his confession that it was not so.

Yes. As expected, it seemed the story related to the First Emperor's last words would come.

How different would that day seen from Luma's perspective be from what his son, First Duke Tain, Blake Van Tain had seen? His heart pounded greatly at the thought that he could finally know some proper information.

- He spoke about how reckless and foolish he actually was. Bringing up several incidents we had already overcome without difficulty, he talked about how terribly ruined all those matters had been. He even spoke clearly of matters we had never experienced as if we had really experienced them together. According to those words, far from saving many people and creating a new center like now, he was merely an unfortunate swordsman who had lost everything and couldn't even properly handle his proud sword. At first I thought those words were delusions of someone approaching death.

- When I told him those things either hadn't happened or had been well resolved long ago, he laughed.

- "No, that's not so, my friend. All those things had happened. They've just become things that never were now. Simply because I didn't repeat the same mistakes."

- He spoke again of what happened when facing the final disaster that struck the empire. That matter which remained in my memory as the final battle we overcame together, remained in his memory as meeting a miserable death. Most people alive now weren't there then, and he said what magic 'I' had used when he was fatally wounded in that final battlefield.

- "It was magic I had never seen before or since. You, with exactly the same face as now, made your final request to me. To please make sure all this would not repeat..."

- Thus my friend said he had returned to the past again. To before meeting me, to the brilliant time when he still had all opportunities, to the miraculous time when those who had died had not died.

He had pressed so hard he almost made a hole in the book. Yuder felt cold and hot shivers running down his spine.

Finally.

Finally he had definitely encountered it.

Someone who had experienced exactly the same thing he had experienced!

Though he had already guessed it would be so before, the feeling when receiving confirmation it was really true was completely different from when he had just guessed.

'It really... was true.'

"Yuder?"

Perhaps sensing his violently heaving breaths, Kishiar who had been reading turned around. Yuder opened his mouth as calmly as possible while seeing his flushed face reflected in the other's eyes.

"I think I've finally found the information we most wanted to find."

"...Could it be?"

"It's written that the First Emperor was indeed someone who returned to the past like me through Great Mage Luma's magic."

"Indeed... it was so. Can you show me?"

Yuder opened to that section and showed him. Of course Kishiar couldn't decode the part written in Luma's cipher at a glance, but still he nodded with shining eyes.

"So, did you find out about the 'choice' that Blake Van Tai wrote about?"

"No. Not that part yet."

"If any new parts you want to talk about come up while continuing to read, tell me right away. I definitely want to hear."

"Yes."

Though he knew he should continue reading, it was difficult to easily calm his excitement. Yuder laid Luma's diary open on his knees and leaned his head against Kishiar's back. Emotions and thoughts that had been pushed back until now since it wasn't completely certain information poured out like a flood.

The First Emperor whom everyone thought was a divine being had actually been someone who came back in time like him. To think it was true that he said he had met miserable failure and originally hadn't even been emperor.

What would have happened if he had failed and everything had ended just like that? First of all the Orr Empire wouldn't have existed, and mages couldn't have lived receiving treatment like now. His descendants couldn't have continued like now either.

So... naturally someone like Kishiar La Orr might not have been born.

The fact that everything had changed as a result of just one person returning to the past and changing the future felt chillingly real through the warmth at his back.

Yuder placed his hand on top of the hand of the man sitting quietly like a pillar with the book he had been reading on his knees like Yuder. While the sensation of skin touched under the bare hand dyed dark red was so vivid, to think it might not have existed at all in some game.

"...Suddenly I feel grateful to Great Mage Luma and the First Emperor."

"Is that... because I was born thanks to them successfully completing the second game?"

"Yes."

Kishiar laughed with slightly shaking shoulders hearing the unhesitating answer. Yuder frowned and pressed down on the overlapped hands, squeezing the man's hand.

"I'm serious."

"I know. I wasn't laughing to mock, but because I too found it fascinating and was happy."

When he remained silent wondering if that was true, Kishiar stopped laughing and explained gently while leaning his head back.

"Think about it. How many times do you think I've heard people say they're glad I was born?"

"I don't know but... you must have heard it a lot."

"Yes. I was called the empire's fortune from the moment I was born. But that was all because of these looks."

Kishiar, who had shamelessly uttered those words as if natural, said playfully while firmly pressing and leaning his head.

"In other words. This is really the first time I've heard someone say they're glad I was born for a reason like just now."

"..."

"Until now I sometimes thought what's so great about being born? Isn't it enough to just thank mother... but it seems I too have been having such thoughts more often since this year's birthday."

**Chapter 1164**

Yuder almost couldn't continue reading the book as Kishiar kept trying to kiss him, saying he 'wanted to repay making him happy all day,' but he barely managed to gather his thoughts again.

'After his heat, it seems like... he's shed another layer of hesitation.'

Of course, he didn't dislike that. He was just worried about becoming a fool who couldn't do what needed to be done because of getting too carried away.

Yuder reopened the diary he had been reading earlier.

'The First Emperor's choice... Yes. I need to clearly understand that part too.'

The writing by Blake Van Tain that he had read before recorded that the First Emperor had said this:

*'-However, I failed to properly live up to the expectations you placed on me. Someday this brief peace will disappear, and the results of the choice will come again. But this time I want to place my expectations on you, would it be alright to make such a request? All that I couldn't discover. The choice that was originally yours.'*

Just recalling the last part, since it said it was 'originally Great Mage Luma's,' it felt like it was referring to the part about turning back time.

'If that's natural then it would be natural... because if Luma could send another person to the past, he should have been able to use it on himself too. It might have even been easier that way.'

However, only one person returned to the past. So how much guilt must the First Emperor who returned alone have felt?

'But... the middle part is still difficult to completely understand just with that.'

Someday this brief peace will disappear and the results of the choice will come again.

Reading that in the same context as below made it impossible to properly interpret. What on earth had he chosen? What had he wanted to prepare for when making his final request to his friend? Even Blake Van Tain couldn't guess that part until the end.

Yuder roughly estimated the part he had read earlier and placed his hand on it. Soon the continuing sentences began appearing in his mind.

*'-My friend was certain that what he had achieved by surviving would also disappear someday. Perhaps he wanted to say it would have been different if I had returned. Was that the reason for the heavy faith whose reason I couldn't understand that he had been placing on me all this time.'*

The certainty that what he had achieved after returning would disappear someday.

Why did he think that way? Even though he had also returned to the past, Yuder Aile had never had such thoughts yet.

'Was his guilt too great?'

Yuder stared at that part then slowly read down further.

*'I wanted to tell him it wasn't so. Even if not me but anyone else had experienced the same thing, they couldn't have achieved accomplishments like what he had achieved. His efforts and painful endurance, the lonely secret he had to keep until the moment of death, had meaning because it was him and no one else.'*

*'Everyone still needs you'*

*'Yes, even I do.'*

*'However, he had already departed for eternal rest.'*

After sentences where calm yet heavy sadness could be felt, Luma seemed to have hesitated for a moment. Below an ink mark made when leaving the pen in one place for a long time, new sentences whispered the great mage's human voice in Yuder's mind.

*'I thought. Yes. If it could be done once, couldn't it be done twice? What reason was there that my current self couldn't do magic that my previous self had done?'*

*'From then on, I constantly tried to chase after the me I didn't know. I searched for ways to turn back time, and examined anything that seemed related. I even searched again through things we had decided to leave behind in the past together.'*

*'The clue came by chance. It was in a conversation with a spirit I met while trying to find means to protect the legacy my friend left behind. After hearing what I was doing, it said this:'*

*'-A human who claimed to have returned from the past. I had seen such a human before too.'*

What?

The moment Yuder thought that, Luma in the text said exactly the same thing.

*'When I asked what it meant, the spirit immediately closed its mouth. What cunning behavior of long-lived beings! Others speak as if conversing with fairies who have long closed their mouths is amazing, but I cannot sympathize with such talk at all. The spirit users of ancient times must have surely disappeared tired of this cunning too. Finally, only after swearing to grant one request from the spirit could I hear the next story.'*

"...Spirit users?"

"Hmm?"

Kishiar turned his head as if hearing the words softly spoken aloud.

"Ah, no. In the great mage's writing there's mention of spirit users from ancient times who existed then disappeared, and since it was my first time seeing those words, I spoke aloud briefly wondering if I had read it correctly."

"Hmm... Since legends of humans beloved by fairies and spirits exist enough for even us now to know about them, perhaps it's not strange that in that era there was a separate term for calling such people."

"That could be."

Though he had some doubts about whether there were enough people beloved by transcendent beings to be grouped separately and called like an occupation, Kishiar's speculation felt somewhat reasonable.

Anyway, that amazing spirit who pushed and pulled the great mage around was said to have spoken like this:

*'-Among your human countries, there was one established by someone who said the same thing. Though I don't know where, you might find the answer if you search well.'*

*'Since I couldn't know where that was, time was needed. While buying that time, I granted the fairy's request. Fortunately it wasn't an impossible task. No, rather there were some aspects somewhat related to what I was doing at the time. Yes, that was the day I returned here holding a small golden apple to my chest.'*

This time he felt he knew very clearly who this story was referring to.

A small golden apple.

The spirit and the great mage.

'It's Enon.'

He had heard the story related to the apple tree spirit that was said to have been the root when creating Enon's soul. But hearing that story again through Luma's writing, it felt completely different from then.

'To think that spirit who received such cursing from Luma was that being who could be called Enon's parent.'

Would Great Mage Luma have ever imagined this story would be distorted and passed down to later generations as an amazing love drama?

A different kind of emotion from when Blake Van Tain wrote different impressions about the First Emperor's last words raised its head.

'I wonder how Enon would react reading this part...'

When he recalled the face of the one who would still be earnestly searching through materials in that place where he had lived with Luma, laughter unconsciously flowed out slightly. Was it because he imagined him frowning at reading the text and making an expression that couldn't be explained while getting angry? Yuder decided that after finishing reading this book, he should definitely write to Enon first to share the information.

**Chapter 1165**

After that, stories directly related to Enon didn't appear in Luma's writing. However, from simple mentions without subjects, Yuder could somewhat guess the process of how the great mage created his guardian, taught him, and lived together.

*['A task begun to achieve a purpose. Just transplanting a single small fruit to new soil, a means that could help my friend when I met him again after achieving my purpose if successful. I thought it was nothing more or less than that, but I soon came to realize the true meaning of the trick the spirit had played on me.']*

*['It was different in every aspect from when watching over and teaching soul-connected children. More difficult than magic and more incomprehensible than disasters, something that could never be measured by success and failure.']*

*['Nevertheless, I found that task quite enjoyable. The first time I burst out laughing without realizing it was after my friend's departure.']*

*['Then, for the first time, I had thoughts I had never had before.']*

*['If I achieve my purpose and succeed, what will happen to this small apple fruit before my eyes now?']*

*['Can I be certain that a fruit gained again would achieve exactly the same result as now?']*

While reading that part, Yuder tried considering a 'what if.'

What if he could return to the past again? Could he come back here again going through exactly the same process as the experiences he had gone through? Could he be confident in feeling the same emotions as when first meeting those he met again? When thinking about it that way, the answer came easily.

No.

*['No. It couldn't be done.']*

The great mage seemed to have reached the same conclusion as Yuder.

*['When I had such thoughts about just one small fruit, how must my friend have felt?']*

*['My friend's request wasn't to come meet him again. He worried only about the future, not the vanished past. I had forgotten his request at some point and was chasing only my own desires. Even though he had devoted his whole life to keeping "my" request.']*

*['I finally realized that the path I was heading towards was not the path for my friend. In terrible shame, I decided to search for the true answer again. The reason he had to make that request to me. Not to meet him again, but to find out what things he had experienced.']*

Yes. This seemed to be why Luma left Gyllandr Hill.

'And... this might have been the decisive trigger for parting ways with Blake Van Tain, who was both his disciple and the First Emperor's son.'

Blake Van Tain wished to bring back his respected father by turning back time. His intention to put the fallen king's piece back on the board never changed from beginning to end. Meanwhile, Luma had initially wanted to find and use again the magic his past self had supposedly used to meet his friend, but later his direction changed. Once he changed to moving to properly understand what the First Emperor had experienced and keep his last words themselves, those two people could never have stayed together.

'Anyway, so... was it really true that there was another person besides the First Emperor and me who had returned to the past?'

Yuder continued turning to the next pages.

*['I kept searching for someone who had experienced the same thing as my friend. Everything had long since become ashes, and I don't particularly want to write more about how difficult that task was in circumstances where we believed they were things to be discarded and moved on from.']*

Kishiar had once speculated that those who survived the Great Destruction seemed to have deliberately erased the history from before it. Looking at this part, that appeared to have been true.

*['To continue that task required resolve to abandon my previous self. I left alone turning my back on everything. Holding the scripture that contained the most traces of the old world like a map, I first traced the remnants of power holders who had survived and fled south. According to what I found out, their ancient ancestors had the highest possibility of being that country the spirit spoke of.']*

The remnants of power holders who had survived and fled south. It was a part that brought to mind the current southern tribes who were mainly composed of those who had come down from the north.

Luma said he headed south holding scripture. It was also said that the book passed down through generations to the Wolf's Eye tribe chief in the South contained stories of an empire that had existed before the Orr Empire.

Scripture, and the empire of the previous era.

Both had the commonality of having existed before the Great Destruction.

'So putting aside the south... holding scripture like a map... I guess it wasn't that he carried it because a new faith had emerged after all.'

There were no parts in Luma's writing where religious faith could be felt. Even in the current world a thousand years later, it would be rare to see someone express scripture as a map.

'Since it doesn't seem to be a metaphor, it might really mean he just went around thinking the place names and contents appearing in the scripture were somewhat reliable historical evidence.'

*['-Somewhat disappointingly, what I found out in the south wasn't much different from the founding legend of the old country that many people remember. That very old legend where a slain hero obtained knowledge of the future and sacred weapons from the afterlife, then was resurrected under the wolf's protection and defeated enemies together with companions.']*

It was natural for Yuder to recall in sequence the southern legend story he had heard from Nathan Zuckerman before, Aton who was from the Wolf's Eye tribe, and the faint voice he had heard in the final battle with Nahan who had a mother from the South.

'The wolf that bit death to death and returned... The prophet leading the stars.'

Was it that those stories were not just southern legends, but had actually been passed down since Great Mage Luma's era as the founding legend of a country from before the Great Destruction?

Thinking about it after learning that southerners were actually descendants of a country that existed before the Great Destruction, it didn't seem strange.

Though not exactly the same as the words Yuder had heard, there would be parts that changed as time passed.

*['However, if that was indeed the country the spirit mentioned, it means that fantastical story actually happened in truth. While searching for more information with such belief, I heard a certain story from an old priest I met in the south.’]*

*['They say there was a sect that believed the Scripture of the Sun and Scripture of the Moon were actually originally one book. The reason was that the words and actions of the first priest mentioned in those two scriptures were actually very similar.']*

The Scripture of the Sun and Scripture of the Moon.

Did that refer to the Scripture of the Sun God and Scripture of the Black Moon?

The Black Moon faith that now exists only in the South clearly has priests too, and seems to have its own system, so there must be something similar to the scripture seen here. Though it seemed natural thinking about it, it felt strangely awkward and surprising.

'If even I who had no particular interest feel this way... this seems like content Kishiar would enjoy more than me.'

When he glanced aside, he saw the side profile of the man deeply absorbed in the account books his grandfather had diligently written. Since it wasn't the atmosphere to break his concentration by speaking to him, Yuder turned back to the next page of Luma's diary.

*['A certain person who was a great hero and first priest. He took many disciples to widely leave his experiences and foresight to later generations, but unlike the great teacher, the disciples couldn't trust each other and split into two factions fighting, resulting in them dividing as if serving different gods - at first I couldn't easily believe this story.']*

*['However, after difficultly obtaining and comparing all surviving scripture versions that had survived the disaster, I began to think that those words might not have been completely groundless. Because surprisingly, when examining with magic, the two scriptures really matched very closely. Besides different place names and names, there were many parts that seemed like exactly the same events written from slightly different perspectives.']*

*['How much had those who believed in the Moon God persecuted those who believed in the Sun God? The history of severe persecution was truly old, and my friend who grew up under believers of the Sun God faced death crises several times for that reason alone.']*

*['Perhaps knowing they could never overcome that ancient history of hatred even while knowing the truth, the priests had been living from the start with eyes and ears covered as if they were completely different beings.']*

*['Even I didn't want to reveal this fact to the outside.']*

"..."

Yuder who was reading this writing now felt the same way.

**Chapter 1166**

[*'Afterward I wandered aimlessly searching for other legacies of the past. To where the last dragon's descendant lived, to the site of the lake library that melted along with tens of thousands of books when the fire disaster struck, even to the island under the sea where they said the world's oldest spirit dwelled.'*]

Not a single familiar name. They were probably traces of the era before the Great Destruction that existed in Luma's time but now no one knows about.

*['After going around all those places, I came to realize.']*

*['Those who had endlessly rotted and sickened this continent. Even those stinking things I didn't want to look back on had the most brilliant beginnings. When removing the fabricated parts from magnificent legends, surprisingly simple truths are revealed.']*

*['They say even the ancestors of the power holders who now fled and hide in the south were originally heroes who overcame even death and saved this world. The one who became the origin of priests who engaged in rotten deeds was a savior who was more honest than anyone and served the world through god's voice. The traces of spirit users that now only aged spirits remember remain only in hazy stories that they too tried to save the world from danger, and the dragons said to have been powerful enough to block falling stars by supporting the sky disappeared forever leaving only a few bone fragments and weak human descendants.']*

*['They all saved the world, and saved it again they say, so why does the world repeatedly fall into danger again and again?']*

*['Then what they saved.']*

*['What were the things my friend and I tried to save?']*

Since returning to the past, Yuder had run ceaselessly to save the world from the disaster that only he remembered. Yet these were the final words left by the great mage who had walked a similar path before him.

"..."

He frowned and turned to the next page. Seeing the adjacent page was empty, this seemed to be Luma's last writing.

[*'To me holding deep and empty doubts, a certain spirit I met at my final destination told a new story.'*]

*['That spirit who had lived for an unknown length of time was, like other spirits, one who only awaited becoming hazy and disappearing.']*

*['It asked if I had ever felt how human-like a thought it was to speak of saving the world. I could not answer.']*

*['-We hear the world's breath every moment. If one knows it too is a living being, one would realize things like now have no meaning at all. What meaning is there in repeatedly cutting off limbs and making blood flow unceasingly from the ground one lives on while saying one wishes for salvation.']*

*['I asked what that meant. The spirit did not answer. It only left one last arbitrary word.']*

*['-It will continue repeating. Those like you born from blood the world shed will likely continue appearing as long as the world's breath does not cease...']*

After saying he could never converse with that spirit again, Luma wrote this:

*['There is one conclusion gained from the long journey. This world keeps repeating times of destruction. Those who overcame it must have remained in history becoming names like the first priest or hero. Though that process seems to not have always been the same, if my thinking is right, the great disaster we prevented will also come again someday. If the day comes when the world is shaken by evil as the first priest warned, and the balance barely maintained collapses again as the prophet who returned from death prophesied.']*

*['That they all left warnings to later generations feels quite significant in meaning. Didn't my friend also leave the same last words? Even I who supposedly sent him back to the past cannot know clearly, but the friend who directly returned from death might have glimpsed and felt some secret hidden in this world.']*

Is that so? Though Yuder too had returned from death, he still felt no such amazing secret at all.

But who knows what might happen as time passes. For now, Yuder engraved that part most clearly in his mind.

*['Now what I must do has become clear. The modest celebration night my friend and I shared alone after preventing the greatest disaster. The path of continuing again the oath we shared.']*

*['At that time, completely drunk, I was confessing that I didn't know what to do if this wasn't the end. I even made weak sounds saying I would feel assured only if we put up some wall. My friend did not mock my weak appearance. Instead he told me a legend that the country which once had the most people living in it, and which had now collapsed and disappeared, had built high castle walls to prepare against enormous monsters that might appear someday.']*

*['So we decided to build new castle walls, reassuring walls, in the place where the most people had been sacrificed. Simply because we were afraid of the future that had not yet come.']*

*['To me then it was just fear of an uncertain future, but thinking now, my friend had some certainty even then. A certainty beyond comprehension that was difficult to guess']*

*['Now I feel the same certainty as my friend then. With the power he protected, I wish to continue his will and prevent another great disaster that might repeat in the future.']*

*['However, human lifespan is short and finite. No matter how great a human, they cannot even maintain their will and pass it on for over 100 years. Perhaps that is the reason new heroes appear each time, and the reason warnings left by other heroes of previous generations become diluted. After I die I won't even be able to confirm whether this thinking is right or wrong, and even if another hero appears I won't be able to meet them.']*

*['But I have no intention of giving up. As soon as I leave this writing, I will depart on a new journey to find ways to solve this.']*

*['For the things my friend and I wanted to protect. For my small fruit.']*

*['Towards an unknown future...']*

After that was only blank pages. Yuder checked all the way to the last part just in case then closed the cover.

His head became dizzy from content he hadn't expected at all. When he sighed feeling more tired than after a day of intense training, the shoulders of the man supporting his back responded.

"Was there bad content? Your expression darkened."

The man who had turned his head asked gently. Yuder stared at his clear face then sighed.

"Did you gain some results?"

It meant his head hurt too much to talk about what he had just read right now. Kishiar amazingly noticed that signal and played along with a smile.

"Hmm. I gained amazing results. I learned that my beloved greatly liked milk made with flowers that bloom in spring when young. He liked it so much it had to be bought again going down to the city outside the mountains three times."

In Yuder's faint memories, some drink he often had when young came to mind.

"Ah... yes. Grandfather would buy lembo and often make lemprit."

"So it's called lemprit. How does it taste?"

"You can think of it as milk that tastes like sour fruit. But in my memory, I think grandfather liked it more than I did."

"There's also a record of buying charcoal pens and paper to teach writing. But seeing they disappeared after a few months..."

"Um, yes. I wasn't a child who studied very hard."

When he answered honestly, Kishiar burst out laughing.

"I wasn't a child who studied hard either. We must have matched very well since childhood."

"Don't you like books?"

"Reading many books and studying are different. I always skipped lessons and got punished, but His Majesty my brother never skipped once. Once we both fell sick after falling into a winter lake, but I used that as an excuse to go play in the Second District while His Majesty somehow dragged piles of books and sat at his desk before the teacher, then collapsed from fever making even the servants who saw it faint..."

The stories of Kishiar's troublemaking prince days felt far more valuable than his own boring childhood stories. Yuder forgot his headache-inducing thoughts and became completely absorbed in his stories. When he came to his senses, Kishiar's red eyes with a mischievous smile were before him.

'Ah.'

"Has your mood improved a bit now?"

"...Yes."

"Good. Then will you tell me now? What made you make such a face."

**Chapter 1167**

Yuder explained about the information gained from Luma's diary. Though there were many hard-to-believe things written and it was difficult to summarize, requiring many pauses while speaking, Kishiar never rushed him. Thanks to him firmly supporting Yuder's body from behind and helping him stay calm, sometimes throwing out topics just enough to help organize thoughts, Yuder was finally able to safely finish telling everything.

"...Roughly, I think I've told you everything."

As always, Yuder could never predict what he would say first whenever hearing such serious information.

Surprise, concern, interest, gratitude. While gauging in silence which of those it would be this time, what Kishiar finally opened his mouth to say was this:

"Thanks to you, I've been able to know both Great Mage Luma's human side and special side. I think the pharmacist will be really happy."

"..."

Indeed, trying to predict Kishiar's reactions was quite meaningless. After being silent for a moment, Yuder unconsciously grinned.

"Yes. That's right. Enon would certainly be like that."

What did he care about shocking news like the world repeating times of destruction? If it was Enon, he would surely first rejoice at the traces of the precious person glimpsed in this content. How surprised and happy would he be to clearly know how much Luma had cherished Enon too.

'Though he'll pretend otherwise on the outside.'

He was glad that Kishiar had the same thoughts he had. Yuder opened his mouth with a more comfortable mind.

"While reading this diary, I didn't get the feeling it was telling lies. You would surely be able to deduce something more through the information here."

"Rather than deduction... first I have thoughts of wanting to check various things. Parts like the Black Moon sect's scripture, or legends about spirits."

Kishiar answered slowly.

"In the case of currently used Black Moon sect scripture, obtaining it shouldn't be too difficult. We can request it through Mick. Of course, properly managing it to avoid others discovering it after bringing it in would be rather more difficult... but that much is nothing. For old scripture, we can obtain and compare them by stealing from the storage in the Grand Temple and imperial palace restricted section."

"Though the imperial palace side might be alright, the Grand Temple restricted section doesn't seem easy."

"It's fine. Among the Grand Temple priests, there are almost none who work hard like our Priest Lusan. We just need to borrow briefly without being caught then return it."

Probably only Kishiar La Orr could speak so easily and boldly about stealing from both the imperial palace and Grand Temple restricted sections. Having actually seen him bring and examine all sorts of strange forbidden books before, those words didn't feel like boasting at all to Yuder.

Kishiar, who had let out a low laugh, continued speaking unhesitatingly.

"The Peletta Knights dispatched to various regions have been working on identifying traces of anomalous cracks while simultaneously gathering books containing old legends, or finding people who remember such stories. Some results should have come out by now, so reports should be up in the capital when we return. While looking for traces of the spirits and other beings mentioned by Luma in those, we should put more effort into trade with the South."

"That's..."

"Yes. Because there's one thing among the information Luma wrote that we can still confirm now."

The records from before the Great Destruction that the Wolf's Eye tribe chief would have.

Kishiar spoke as if nothing would be difficult.

"The cards we hold are more than enough. No matter how amazing the information in that book they hold is, the result won't be like the end of the previous game."

"..."

"We can even make a bet. They'll contact us first."

Yuder shook his head and answered towards him.

"What bet between people who would bet on the same side? The opponent seems wrong."

"Hmm. Indeed?"

Kishiar burst out laughing. Afterward, they began sharing their thoughts leaning against each other in an even deeper and more comfortable position than before. Unlike earlier, it was just free exchange of opinions rather than being based on realistic situations and evidence.

"It was good to definitely confirm that I wasn't the only one who escaped death and returned to the past, but there seemed to be no overlap at all between His Majesty the First Emperor's case and mine which was a bit... disappointing."

"He seemed to clearly remember by what cause and how he returned to the past."

"Yes. That's exactly the part."

According to Luma's diary, though there were several who had returned to the past, their methods and processes seemed not at all the same. In other words, it meant they still couldn't know who had sent Yuder here or what method might have been used.

"Just when I thought I'd found an answer, it feels like going back to square one. Well, I'm not feeling great frustration because of that but..."

"You can feel sufficiently disappointed even if not."

Kishiar, who had answered nodding his head, spoke while leaning his head on Yuder's shoulder.

"I keep thinking most about the words of the spirit Luma said he met at the end."

"You mean that one who spoke as if saying why struggle when it's natural to die when born? What part bothered you?"

"To summarize those words like that. I'm a bit curious how that spirit would have reacted if it heard."

Though that wasn't all of course, anyway that part was most absurd to Yuder.

"Isn't it natural to think like a human when born human, and everyone just does what they want while alive? What's so great about spirits? Looking at it, that one too just thought like a spirit since it was born as a spirit. In my view, Great Mage Luma seems to have been less capable at fighting than expected."

When he answered like that, Kishiar blinked then shook his shoulders laughing for a while.

"Thinking like a human since born human... Yes. That's right. If you had been there instead of the great mage, something might have been different."

Afterward, Kishiar finally stopped laughing and explained which part had occupied his mind.

"That spirit said they hear the world's breath. It spoke of the world as if it were a living being. That part felt very unique to me. Nowhere... not even in scripture had I encountered such a perspective."

"Hmm... That's really a part I hadn't paid any attention to at all."

"You who are loved by nature and can handle nature's power, what do you think about that part?"

"I haven't particularly thought about what connection my ability has with the world but..."

"Since everything in this world would be nature in a way, if thinking from that perspective?"

This too was a perspective he had never particularly considered. Yuder carefully reviewed Kishiar's words in silence.

'Nature is alive... huh.'

Unlike in Great Mage Luma's era, Yuder had never directly seen fairies or spirits. However, nature had always been with him since awakening, and Yuder had sometimes felt it independently exerting power that transcended his will.

Just looking at the part about 'nature's love' Kishiar had just mentioned showed that. Nature was on Yuder's side and moved for him even when he didn't particularly try to move it.

Yuder slowly moved his lips.

"Looking from that perspective... yes. I do feel it's alive."

"Yes. Some will that guides and pushes your back even when not particularly using ability. If great nature and this world is some being that breathes and lives like us, how can we understand cracks and monsters in what meaning?"

"..."

"Cracks tear the world and appear very briefly. Monsters push in through those gaps. We've thought of it dividing walls between outside and inside until now but... what if cracks are wounds on the body called the world?"

The man who had been lost in thought for a moment trailing off suddenly muttered.

"...Blake Van Tain's bizarre research might not have been useless research. I think we should examine that again too when we return. Would it be alright to discuss this part again after that?"

Though he couldn't know what thoughts were passing through his mind, the temperature of emotion he was feeling was clearly transmitted.

The intense and hot will of one trying to surpass limits to discover and protect something.

Yuder buried his body in the arms embracing him from behind and tasted satisfaction beyond compare. A certainty like shivers flowed through his whole body.

'We are running towards the same place.'

Having someone who would be on his side in any situation, and that being none other than Kishiar La Orr was truly wonderful.

Thus another night flowed by.

**Chapter 1168**

"Once we finish repairing the roof today, I don't think there will be anything else to fix."

"Looking at the good weather, it should be done quickly."

Yuder stood side by side with Kishiar looking at his home village house. During this time, they had thoroughly cleaned all the places where dust had accumulated over a year, and completely replaced parts that had worn out and crumbled or developed holes. They had also properly turned over the weeds covering the yard, so it should maintain its current state for a while.

'That means it's time to return now.'

As if waiting for this moment, when they went down to buy food, they heard news that the lord was planning to make a tour of the villages in his territory. For someone who had never done such a thing before to suddenly change attitude and try something they hadn't done before. Yuder's animal instinct rang irritating warning bells that this wasn't good news.

'As expected, it seems rumors have gone in so we should leave quickly before it becomes troublesome.'

"Since we've finished organizing, I think it would be good to depart for the capital around dawn tomorrow."

"Already... In my feeling it seems like only about three days have passed, how regrettable."

Kishiar sighed with an obviously pitiful face. Since it felt so clearly obvious what kind of answer he wanted to hear, Yuder slightly raised the corners of his lips.

"Don't feel regretful since you can come again next time."

"You were thinking of coming again next time?"

Beyond the pitifully bent head, his gaze subtly returned. Red eyes sparkled between fingers cupping one cheek. Looking at those sly yet joy-filled eyes, Yuder slowly nodded his head up and down.

"Before coming, I honestly had no particular thoughts of visiting again after just organizing... but not now. Later, if such an opportunity comes again, it seems alright to come and spend time."

"Really?"

"Yes. If not, I wouldn't have cleaned and repaired so thoroughly like this. So you too can come here whenever you want."

For a moment, Kishiar's joy clearly flowed to Yuder through their connection. The warmth rising and covering his whole body was overwhelming enough to instantly push away the fierce winter cold.

When he had told Yuder to freely visit Peletta then, had he read similar emotions from him too? The feeling of giving another key that opened unrestricted to the other person felt similar yet different to when opening body and heart one by one. Perhaps this felt more so because unlike invisible hearts, this was a definite physical space called 'home' and a place filled with Yuder's childhood.

"Good. Then shall we work harder to finish repairing the roof?"

"You don't need to work that hard."

"It's fine. I was just wanting to definitely apply some useful knowledge gained from the books and account books I saw yesterday."

Kishiar, who had adapted to mountain life with faster adaptability than anyone, now looked like an excellent mountain person comparable to Yuder after several days had passed. Though his gorgeous appearance made him seem unconnected to such a place, now he was even making new attempts bringing information from somewhere that even Yuder didn't know well.

Neither the silence that could have been boring with nothing interesting, nor the household chores that had to be handled personally, nor nature itself far from cleanliness could make anything difficult for him.

Yuder, who had secretly worried before coming, felt rather embarrassed.

'Though they say he went around a lot hiding his identity, he probably hadn't experienced living alone truly doing everything himself for this long.'

Perhaps this was actually another calling? Such doubt even arose.

"Just what did you see again?"

"In the account book I read yesterday, there was jicon grass that was said to be purchased to help houses with broken roofs. I didn't know, but it seems it helps with adhesion and insulation."

"If you crush jicon and mix it with various things, it does become quite good insulation material."

It was one of the pieces of knowledge learned watching grandfather work in childhood. Kishiar smiled.

"But thinking about it, I remembered that was also coincidentally in the collection of Aeril mages' plant research papers. It was research saying that if you breathe magic power into cheap jicon, it can become an excellent high-grade material by itself."

Nobles would use more expensive materials rather than use such things, and commoners couldn't easily use magic power like mages. In other words, it was research with absolutely no value for actual use.

However, who was Kishiar La Orr? Though he didn't use magic well, he was a mage capable of using sufficiently excellent magic.

"Since jicon is already here, all we need is magic power. I really want to test it. If we get good results, I want to research more and try using it in Peletta or other places too. They don't use jicon there."

In front of that face shining with interest and determination, there was only one thing Yuder could say.

"...It's fine if you do it within limits that aren't too much."

"Good."

Yuder watched with Kishiar as they ground and crushed the jicon bought yesterday for roof repairs, and he delicately poured magic power into the tub. When golden magic power mixed with the jicon, the jicon lump that had been just sticky brown powder gradually began to take on a soft white glow. It was a color that somehow looked too luxurious to use on such an old wooden house.

'...Living life, I really end up seeing all sorts of things.'

After a while, Kishiar who had been dropping golden magic power like water wiped the sweat from his forehead and stood up.

"It's done. The result is... hmm. It looks quite good for a first try."

"Can we use it right away?"

"No. We need to wait a bit more until the color completely changes."

While waiting for the color to change, Yuder stared at the jicon lump lost in thought.

'Wasn't the method of repairing with jicon grass unexpectedly well-known?'

Though it could be excused since he was a noble body, Kishiar was a lord who had raised the life itself of the poor Peletta people from the bottom. Winter being particularly cold and difficult wouldn't have been much different here or there, and one of the most important things in such regions was insulation management. When winter comes, lords of regions with harsh winters usually provide support to their subjects to prepare for snow and cold, so Kishiar must have encountered much related knowledge too.

Nevertheless, the fact that he hadn't known until now about the method of supplementing insulation using jicon meant it wasn't a common method.

'Then did grandfather also start using jicon after reading that book?'

As far as Yuder knew, his grandfather was the first person in this mountain village to use jicon for roof repairs. The villagers were very grateful saying he seemed to know many good pieces of knowledge as someone with much outside experience.

The information grandfather taught others wasn't just the method of roof repair using jicon grass. He often easily helped others' difficulties with materials that could be easily obtained nearby. Young Yuder had thought that was just natural.

'Those strange magic books that I thought had no connection... might actually have had some connection.'

"What are you thinking about so much?"

"Hmm... I was thinking that those magic-related records grandfather collected might have been for obtaining useful knowledge needed for living... that kind of thing."

"Actually, I've been having similar thoughts bit by bit."

The man who had really earnestly read all those books and account books nodded and said.

"At first I thought there might be some hidden meaning, but comparing with the account books, quite a lot of items derived from knowledge in the research papers were visible. Not just jicon, but there are quite a few overlapping parts elsewhere too. For example..."

Kishiar mentioned things like the special stand used to prevent injury when sawing, and the stone used as a standard when sorting magic stones to put in the magic stone stove. They were items commonly used for a long time in Yuder's house, but when Kishiar said that, suddenly it felt strange.

"I... see."

"Though it's unusual, I thought it could be possible if it was someone who had been in a position where it was easy to access such materials."

Yuder slowly agreed.

"Yes. Perhaps grandfather really might have been someone who worked in places related to mages."

Chapter 1169

Since grandfather had passed away long ago, unless he had left records like Luma, there would be almost no way to know exactly what kind of person he had been.

He had thought that, but clues always appeared unexpectedly in the closest places.

"You're leaving tomorrow? You haven't been back for long."

When they went to tell the lower village people that they planned to leave tomorrow, many expressed regret. Among them was the old woman from the grocery store they had visited first after returning.

Always half-dozing while keeping her place alone, she regretted Yuder's farewell but soon smiled with a sigh.

"I want to tell you to stay longer but... looking at your eyes, it seems better not to."

"..."

"Now there rather than here is home for you. Right?"

Not everyone who lives long gains amazing insight. However, the grocery store old woman's eyes were truly accurate.

Yuder quietly nodded.

"Yes."

"Then you should hurry home. Your grandfather would want that too. He was someone who said he wanted to let his grandson fly well towards his path when the time came."

"Grandfather said such things?"

"Of course. He also said once that when you grew up, you would become someone who would do very great things no matter what you did. At the time I thought he was just bragging about his grandson because he was in a good mood from drinking... but now looking back, that person wasn't wrong. How happy he would be. He must regret not seeing after raising you so hard."

Though at first glance it sounded just like bragging about a grandson, somehow something felt strange.

'Grandfather never forced me to study, nor clearly told me what to do when I grew up. But he told others I would become someone who would do great things?'

Grandfather had endlessly talked about his death being a natural phenomenon since Yuder was young, and taught him how to live well alone. However, there was no forced element at all in all those teachings. Rather than forcing Yuder to learn writing, he helped him freely roam the mountains, and when he caused trouble, he would first ask why rather than scolding. Though he would often burst out laughing when told the reason, that was all. Even his final words telling him "not to be greedy" were ultimately advice to reduce a child's sadness before his death, as he had newly realized.

With what heart had someone who would have known better than anyone that Yuder had never gone down below the mountain since birth said such words, with such great certainty?

'Usually there are... no people who say such things about a commoner child who would live chopping wood in the mountains their whole life.'

No matter how much they love their children, commoners have limits. When children grew up, it was considered natural for them to inherit their parents' or relatives' occupations. At least as far as Yuder knew, he had never seen any commoner parents say their child would become someone who would do great things when they grew up.

Even if it was drunken talk.

Was Yuder really the only one who found these words strange? When he turned his gaze, he saw Kishiar narrowing his eyes slightly and tilting his head. It was quite different from just before when he had been watching with a pleased face one step behind. It meant he too had felt something strange.

'Hmm.'

If he had no curiosity about grandfather like before it would be one thing, but not now after seeing the magic research papers he had collected. Thinking about it, the old woman before him was also currently the oldest person in this village. As she had been older than Yuder's grandfather if he remembered correctly, she might know something about grandfather's past.

'Since I don't know when I'll come here again... should I try asking?'

Yuder hesitated then opened his mouth.

"Grandmother. Perhaps... do you remember what it was like when grandfather and I first came to this village?"

"When you first came to the village?"

"I haven't heard many stories from grandfather."

The old woman didn't ask why he was asking such things.

"Yes. You're an adult now so you must be curious. If my few memories are alright, would you like to sit and have some warm tea and steamed sweet potatoes?"

She led them to a table set up in the corner of the grocery store. It was a place where people who came to have long conversations occasionally would sit. After unexpectedly generous food was set out, she opened her mouth with a face searching memories.

"So... it was a time when everyone was busy in the height of spring. The weather was really nice, and someone came into the village holding something wrapped in cloth. The injuries were quite severe but not properly treated so it was completely terrible. At first everyone even misunderstood him for a bandit or robber."

"..."

This was really the first time hearing this story.

'I had thought there would have been some time difference since he said he happened to make contact and brought me from a village that had suffered great damage from monster occurrences and lost my parents... injuries?'

"Everyone was too scared to approach, but that person said this. He asked if there might be a place to stay briefly because there was a baby. So when we looked, there really was a baby in the cloth he was holding. It was so small and made no crying sound that we couldn't even think it was a child. How surprised we were..."

The old woman covered her mouth and laughed.

"As it happened, my eldest daughter had married and a room was empty, so I said they could come rest in the upper floor of our store if that was alright."

The old woman asked if she should call a doctor, but Yuder's grandfather refused. He seemed to have all his attention focused on the child rather than tending his own injuries. Having no choice, the old woman gave out ointment for wounds and food good for recovery, and taught various ways to care for a baby.

"While staying here for several days asking about this and that... I learned a surprising fact."

"What was it?"

"Shortly before your grandfather appeared holding you, quite a terrible thing had happened in the neighboring territory. Though it wasn't the season, suddenly unknown monsters appeared and turned over the entire village. Many high-ranking people who had come to investigate something in the mountain range died from that incident, and the lord changed taking responsibility..."

The old woman closed her mouth for a moment and sighed.

"Anyway such a thing happened, and that person said he had passed through there. He said he had come to work and encountered monsters, and while fleeing alive he found you in a village full of dead people. Your parents were already gone and it seemed only that person and you had survived."

"..."

So, those words now... did she mean grandfather wasn't actually Yuder's relative?

His heart pounded. But it was just slight surprise at learning facts he hadn't known until now, not shock in a negative sense.

It was already too late to be shocked by such stories now when Kishiar's words were well engraved in his mind.

'Because nothing matters except that grandfather's affection shown to me was real.'

Yuder swallowed his surprise and continued listening to the old woman's words.

"Seeing how it seemed he had walked for several days to come here, everyone's misunderstanding about the bandit-like appearance was cleared up."

Baby Yuder was fortunately healthy. While his body healed, Yuder's grandfather helped with various work in the village. Though very clumsy at first, he must have had good work sense as he soon became a useful worker, improving public opinion in the village considerably.

He overturned everyone's expectation that he would return to where he originally lived when his body fully healed, and asked if there might be a place to stay longer in this village. He also said the more remote the better. The grocery store old woman recommended the woodcutters' rest house above the village without asking anything.

That's how Yuder and grandfather became true members of the village.

"When that person first came here, we didn't notice because he looked so much like a beggar, but looking back he was wearing clothes that mages wear. Since I heard the high-ranking people who died in the neighboring village were mages, he might have been someone who survived alone and fled from there. Surviving alone means having to take responsibility for others' deaths, you see."

**Chapter 1170**

Though the old woman's words were just speculation, they were quite logical.

'By clothes that mages wear, she probably means robe-style cloaks. Even commoners would have been able to recognize those.'

Not all mages wore mage robes, and not all who wore robes were mages. However, historically traditional and famous mage groups wore mage robes instead of uniforms in places where they needed to show their affiliation. It was attire that everyone knew since it originated from clothes Great Mage Luma often wore.

'If someone wearing such clothes happened to be in a village where mages were staying... naturally they would think they were a mage.'

The speculation that someone who alone survived an accident from monster occurrence wanted to hide their identity and flee to avoid taking responsibility also sounded reasonable. Even if not mages, there are people everywhere who want to flee rather than take responsibility alone. It was a story Yuder was also very familiar with to the point of being tired of encountering it so much.

'However...'

Was the person who raised Yuder someone who would try to avoid even things they should take responsibility for?

Yuder didn't think so. Though grandfather hadn't particularly taught tremendous morality while raising him, there were still things he had learned watching over his shoulder. Grandfather was not someone who made empty words. When talking with villagers, if he once mentioned he would help with something or made a promise, he never broke it. This was true even for the most trivial matters.

Could someone who fled avoiding important responsibility devote their whole life to raising a child of no blood relation and taking responsibility for what followed? Though he hadn't experienced it so he didn't know, the weight of raising an unrelated child alone for over ten years didn't seem light.

If someone who remembered and kept every small promise of help made with others had avoided just one thing that way, rather than simply fleeing, might there not have been some circumstances?

'Though maybe it's just my selfish desire not wanting to think badly of grandfather.'

While Yuder was silent, Kishiar, who had been quietly listening to the story, suddenly opened his mouth to ask.

"Perhaps when you first saw him, was he wearing something like a jeweled pin badge?"

"Hmm? A jeweled pin?"

"When mages go to investigate and research something, they tend to always wear pin badges to distinguish their affiliations. Though ordinary people working for mages can wear robes too, badges are given only to mages. They usually wear them on their chest, and since they're often made of gold good for selling even if not jeweled, you would probably remember if you saw one."

'Ah...!'

Yuder suddenly turned his head to look at Kishiar.

'Right, that's right. Mages almost always distinguish their affiliations with those.'

Priests all wear holy emblems, and knights engrave marks on their armor, uniforms, or weapons. However, mages have no uniforms and unless it's something like the Court Mage Department, it's difficult to know affiliations exactly just from robes that can be bought anywhere.

Therefore, most traditionally established and famous mage groups made and wore their own pin badges. The Pearl Tower's pearl badge was representative of this. Fitting for unruly mages, it received quite practical reviews since affiliations could be distinguished by wearing badges even if wearing any clothes.

If not for Kishiar, he would have missed an important part. When he slightly nodded conveying 'thank you for pointing that out well,' Kishiar smiled very softly in a way the old woman couldn't see.

"A jeweled or gold pin badge... hmm. I don't think I've seen one..."

The old woman who had been tilting her head trying hard to recall memories for a while suddenly clapped saying "Ah!"

"Right. That person left some luggage behind when leaving our house!"

"What? Really?"

According to the old woman, on the day grandfather temporarily stayed on the upper floor of the grocery store with baby Yuder before leaving for their current house, he had discarded the clothes he was originally wearing and his bag.

"He put them in the incineration trash bin as if planning to burn them, which we discovered after he left."

In mountain villages, usually all trash is collected in one bin and periodically burned or buried for disposal. If the old woman hadn't immediately cleaned the room after the guest left and gone to throw away trash, she probably wouldn't have discovered it.

"Though it was dirty, I thought something might happen. Thinking he might change his mind and ask for it back, I kept it in storage. But then I completely forgot about it. Only now do I suddenly remember after hearing those words."

This was incredible. This time Yuder was truly greatly surprised.

"Then..."

"Since I've never organized the items in there even once until now, they should definitely be there if we look."

The old woman said she would personally get up and find it. Though he said it was fine, her intention was firm.

"No one but me can find it. It's just clothes and a bag, what's the problem. Though I'm old my memory is still sound so it won't take long."

They followed the old woman to the attic storage above the store. It was a place he was seeing for the first time despite living in this village for so long.

"Let's see... not this, not this either... Oh! Yes. This is it. It was still here."

The old woman proved personally that her memory was still sound as she had said. Moving much faster than Yuder who had been searching for chairs, she pulled something out from among the odds and ends inside and held it out with a smile.

"Though dust has accumulated, it seems it hasn't rotted more than when first put in. That's fortunate."

Yuder stared down at the extremely old bundle of cloth placed in his hands. The touch of the mass of clothes whose original color couldn't even be known and small cloth bag felt strange.

"You are truly amazing, madam. See how much your wise judgment and courage have helped us now. I sincerely want to express my respect and gratitude."

Kishiar solemnly bowed his head, then elegantly took the old woman's hand and kissed the back of it. Not knowing she had received a hand kiss from a member of the imperial family, the old woman laughed heartily and waved her hand.

"Are all capital people like this? Every word makes me ticklish!"

"But you must like it? Right?"

Kishiar smiled softly and pretended to be pretty. Though he was definitely using a disguise magic tool to transform his appearance, he demonstrated the ability to make people feel like it was his original appearance just with overflowing confidence and sly smiles.

"Yuder has really made an amazing friend. Really amazing."

After exclaiming in admiration and laughing for a while, the old woman secretly whispered to Yuder as he was about to leave the store.

"Will you come again with that friend next time perhaps?"

Yuder slowly nodded while watching Kishiar's back as he went outside first holding the bag of sweet potatoes the old woman had prepared.

"Yes."

Then the old woman smiled brightly and patted his back.

"Good. Stay longer next time. I'll prepare more delicious things."

The moment he heard her voice treating him like her own grandson, grandfather's voice he thought he had completely forgotten suddenly came to mind. Yuder stared at her hand for a while then gave a small smile.

"...Please stay healthy until we meet again, grandmother."

"That stiff capital way of speaking just won't go away until the end."

Yuder slipped out of the store hearing the old woman's nagging to speak more comfortably next time. Kishiar's eyes who had been waiting curved brightly.

"She was really a wonderful person. Thanks to her we got sweet potatoes and items that could be old clues, so shall we go examine them together?"

"Yes."

As soon as they arrived home, Yuder delicately washed away the lumps of ash and dust accumulated on the cloth using wind power. When he slowly spread it out after placing it on what served as both dining table and the only desk, the forms of the clothes and bag were finally clearly revealed.

A heavily stained robe with an attached hood. And a bag meant to be worn hanging at the waist. A cloth like a tablecloth of unknown use.

'As I felt earlier too... they're so extremely old and dirty that I can't guess any of their original colors.'

Seeing how black ash had poured out profusely when blowing wind earlier, it might have been because they were taken out after going into an incineration bin once. The smell of old mold was truly tremendous too.

"There are very many torn parts in the clothes. Not worn out and crumbled, but parts that were already torn when intact."

Kishiar examined the clothes walking around the table with sharp eyes. The part he reached out to point to was the chest area of the clothes. A large vertically torn piece of cloth lifted under his fingernail revealed a black hole.

Even Yuder, who had seen clothes torn from injuries as naturally as breathing, agreed that those traces were different from ordinary worn fabric.

"Yes. That's how it looks to me too. The fact that the largest torn part happens to be around the chest... doesn't look very good."

"If someone took an attack this large to such an area, they would normally die."

**Chapter 1171**

As Kishiar said. Though other areas torn irregularly here and there looked dangerous too, when overlaying the hole in the chest area on a human body, it seemed impossible for it not to graze the heart.

'Yet grandfather survived and walked the mountains to come here.'

And with a baby too.

"This is probably all we can tell from the clothes. Without an ability like Kanna Wand's, it wouldn't be easy to figure out what kind of attack he suffered."

"Yes. Let's set aside the clothes and look at the others."

Yuder left aside the tablecloth-like cloth and carefully opened the bag first. As the cover that felt like it would crumble at a touch spread open, several items remaining inside came into view.

A small blackened wooden box. A bundle of paper folded and crumpled several times. And broken quill pen fragments... and a small palm-sized notebook they were inserted in.

"These will definitely tell us something more."

"I hope so."

Kishiar silently picked up the small wooden box and twisted open the lid. Inside were several small round lumps that smelled rotten, and something about the size of a thumbnail that was as blackened as the box.

Kishiar closed his eyes and smelled it then opened his mouth carefully.

"These rotted lumps were probably medicine. Well, travelers usually carry basic medicines in places like this. And this blackened object here..."

Kishiar picked it up between two fingers and held it high. After turning it around several times, his characteristic smile of discovering something appeared at the corners of his mouth.

"Yuder. Could you apply some heat here?"

"How much heat would be good?"

"Just enough to make water slightly hot. Continue until I say it's done."

Yuder did as he wished. As one of his eyes changed to golden color, a small flame that rose from empty air burrowed in like a worm, instantly wrapping around the black lump placed on the palm. Though it looked hot on the outside, it wouldn't actually be hot since the temperature was low.

In the flames burning with a whooshing sound, the black lump seemed to show no change at first. However, how long had passed continuing to apply fire without saying anything?

Very slowly, the color of the black lump began to change.

Like rust falling off a metal surface, the black color disappeared, and transparent green and silver colors gradually emerged from inside. Watching the lump that was slowly but surely becoming clean, Yuder didn't even blink.

"That's enough now."

Finally Kishiar said it was good to stop. The flame disappeared without delay.

The object now placed on Kishiar's hand was no longer an unidentifiable black lump. Though the black grime hadn't been completely removed, its form could be clearly identified. It was an object where smaller silver metal pieces wrapped around a round light green jewel like flower petals.

Kishiar who held it up opened his mouth as if pronouncing judgment.

"Though the pin in back is gone, it's certain. This is the front part of a pin badge that mages carry."

"..."

On the back of the metal that Kishiar turned over to show, faint traces remained where a pin had been attached and broken. After turning it around once and grasping it again in his hand, the man lowered his eyes while putting the object that had been a badge back down on the table.

"And I know which mage group uses pin badges exactly like this. No, actually I had been thinking this might come out even before finding it."

Yuder blinked and moved his lips.

"...How?"

Kishiar frowned slightly and gave a faint smile. He led Yuder by the hand to sit in a chair, and straddled the seat directly in front to face him. Through their joined hands, warmth and pulse were transmitted, and only then could he realize his own heart had been beating quite fast.

Only after Yuder realized this fact and calmed down did Kishiar calmly open his mouth.

"It was from when we heard the story of the neighboring territory's tragedy from the lady earlier."

"The incident twenty-some years ago where many mages dispatched to the Airic Mountains for investigation died due to monsters. There aren't many incidents in the empire with such clearly specified timing and subjects. If there's someone related to the incident around me, I would remember even more."

Related person? Who did he mean? The moment he thought that, Kishiar gave the answer.

"Someone you know too. Hellem. The very person who was once called Chief Mage Hellem Caspirl of the Court Mage Department."

Though the number of mage-related people they knew together wasn't many, still this name was quite surprising. Looking into Yuder's eyes, the man continued speaking.

"This pin badge is an item made by magically mixing and processing four types of magic stones. Though the visible colors look like two types, it's just made to look that way. It discolors easily but in exchange boasts hardness comparable to Eucalractium. It has the characteristic of quickly regaining its original color when a little heat is applied."

"Just hearing that... it doesn't sound like a badge from just anywhere."

"Right. Only mages belonging to the Imperial Magic Research Institute could have this badge. It was an institution included under the Court Mage Department, and mainly worked examining magic power distribution and natural changes throughout the empire. Though its name has changed now due to an unfortunate incident twenty-some years ago."

Kishiar's eyes were saying it. That the 'unfortunate incident twenty-some years ago' was the same incident they had just heard about from the grocery store old woman.

"Hellem had been Chief Mage since before I was born. Her husband and children were all mages too. Her daughter became the current Deputy Chief Mage, and her son is making quite a name for himself as a research mage at the Pearl Tower following his parents. Even over half her grandchildren are mages, so she could truly be called a great family among mages."

It was long ago when Hellem who led such a family suddenly retired. It was after some tragic incident occurred.

"Hellem originally had one daughter and two sons. Besides the son researching at the Pearl Tower, there was another son. He too was a mage, and having talent for research like his mother and brother, he had entered the Imperial Magic Research Institute."

"Then..."

"Yes. He went on long-term business trip to some mountain for several years of research, taking his wife who worked at the same Magic Research Institute and their newborn child, then died there in an unexpected accident. It was an accident from monsters that suddenly appeared though it wasn't time for them to appear. I heard it was quite noisy among mages as an incident where the entire mage research team dispatched at the time, and the village where they were staying, were all killed."

Hellem stepped down from her position as Chief several years after that. It was after completing the investigation of that incident, compensation for the victims, and reorganization of the Imperial Magic Research Institute.

"His Majesty my brother and I tried to hold onto Hellem. Even retired, Hellem had sufficient ability, and was too great a talent to just disappear. Thanks to Hellem taking pity on me and changing her mind to decide on Peletta as her retirement place, we were able to have our current relationship."

So that was the detailed reason why Hellem abandoned her castle and retired to live in Peletta as just an elderly mage grandmother.

A difficult-to-describe feeling came as he recalled Hellem's face that always smiled peacefully without revealing anything of the past.

"Then you... how much do you remember about that incident?"

"I didn't really know what was what when the incident occurred. I was still young then, and those around me didn't particularly tell me about such things in detail. Even afterward I only remembered from stories heard from Hellem and roughly grasped information, so I didn't know exactly where that incident occurred."

Until today that is.

Kishiar's gaze turned to the badge without its pin placed on the table.

"If you go to Hellem's house in Peletta, there are two badges that look exactly like that. She put them in a magic tool bottle with preservation magic placed in front of portraits."

That was why Kishiar could know as soon as he saw the badge's identity.

Chapter 1172

"If we search through the Court Mage Department, we can find information about those who were sacrificed or went missing in that accident. Though asking Hellem might be faster about things like whether there were any mages who went missing without bodies..."

Kishiar trailed off uncharacteristically. He seemed concerned about not yet knowing how Yuder thought about this matter.

Yuder quietly stared at their still-touching hands.

'This means... in other words, beyond information about grandfather, this is an opportunity where I might be able to learn about my parents too if lucky.'

If he had been someone who had ever longed for his parents, he might have been quite shaken at this moment. But the emotion arising in the current Yuder was just calm acceptance thinking 'I see.'

Looking at the face of the man waiting for his answer, Yuder opened his mouth.

"Something occurs to me now, but when I was young, grandfather once asked if I didn't miss my parents. It was probably after returning from going down to the village and seeing children with their parents. I said I didn't miss them."

"..."

"Then and now, I've never particularly felt I wanted to know where and to whom I was born. That's still the same now but... I do want to know for certain now if grandfather really was a mage who was there."

Yuder let out a short sigh and continued speaking.

"But at the same time, if Lady Hellem chose retirement and seclusion wanting to forget that incident, I also feel I don't want to forcibly drag out memories by stirring things up. So I think it would be better to first search for information from the Court Mage Department side, putting off asking Lady Hellem about this matter until a bit later."

"Yes. Let's do that."

Kishiar slowly nodded.

"Still, thank you. Thanks to you remembering old matters well until now, we're getting clues."

"I haven't done anything."

Ignoring the words of the one speaking modestly, Yuder turned his head towards the remaining items. The two things predicted to contain the most information: the bundle of papers and the notebook.

Though the notebook was relatively intact, the bundle of papers had been stuck together for a long time in their folded state, so it seemed they might crumble if handled carelessly. However, who were these two people here?

"I think it would be better to cut this into pieces, spread them out, then put them back together."

"Let's use my dagger."

"Ah. The one Sunz and Emon gave you as a gift."

"Yes. It's quite useful."

Kishiar delicately cut the paper into pieces with a slight coating of aura on the dagger Yuder handed over. Yuder covered the pieces with subtle wind power to protect them from crumbling. The two began putting the paper pieces together like assembling a puzzle. Though ordinary people would find it difficult to even distinguish one piece, they were ones who could find the correct positions just from tiny stains and paper texture.

After completing the puzzle at an amazing speed as if by agreement without saying anything, three sheets of paper were completed.

'Is it handwritten? It's already full of stains and being in cursive makes it even harder to identify.'

Still, it wasn't to the level of being completely unable to grasp the content. For now, on the second page Yuder was trying to read, roughly these kinds of things were written:

- If the theory that more magic stones are found in places where many mages lived is correct, there must be at least one magic stone mine here...

- Measured today's magic power concentration.

- Weather not good so decided to rest briefly today...

It looked like writing by a mage to anyone who saw it, and there were some trivial personal remarks too. And that was all.

'Is the rest all content like this too?'

It was the moment Yuder raised his head thinking that. He discovered Kishiar making a subtle expression.

"What's wrong?"

"No. Something... hmm."

The man who tilted his head and scanned the paper before him once more reached for the notebook. The pages turned so quickly it seemed questionable if he was actually reading the content. After a moment, he opened and placed the very first page of the notebook in front of Yuder.

There it was written:

[*'-Behold the red sun dyeing that blue sky. Rising again and again no matter how many times it sets. As long as that sun does not set, we advance forever.'*]

"It's the representative words of the Orr Court Mage Department. They say these were words left by Great Mage Luma who followed the Emperor before the final battle. All court mages write this sentence at the front of reports or personal records to indicate their identity, but in reality it serves the role of handwriting distinction to show who wrote the record."

"So... it roughly serves the role of proving it's really their writing."

"Yes. For researchers, knowing who left what records is important."

"But why..."

"Look carefully. The handwriting is the same."

Kishiar alternately pointed to the cut and reassembled papers and the sentence on the notebook's front page. Though one was too faint and scrawled while the other was written with force using a thick pen making it somewhat difficult to distinguish, some parts were exactly the same.

Like writing certain letters with strokes extending long to the right, or parts where letters were simplified and written half-overlapping with adjacent letters.

"Hmm... yes. That's right. Wouldn't that be natural since they're belongings of the same person?"

"Then would you look at this next?"

Kishiar reached out his hand. One of the objects piled far away flew and was caught. What he newly opened and placed in front was none other than grandfather's account book. Everyday words like one bottle of milk, two bags of wheat and Mrs. Bosen's bread came into view.

While looking at grandfather's account book that he was properly reading for the first time and thinking 'what could be in this content?', Kishiar spoke lowly.

"The handwriting is different."

"What?"

"No matter how much time has passed since writing, people have habits. It's not easy to change habits formed when first learning writing too. This means it's extremely difficult for cases to exist where everything is different like the writing in this account book and in the papers brought from the grocery store storage."

For a moment, shock struck his head.

Looking back and forth again, it was indeed as Kishiar said.

'It really is. The handwriting... is different.'

Several parts he had thought characteristic earlier were not in grandfather's account book. Where strokes were drawn long in the notebook, grandfather wrote them short, and there were no parts where letters were written to appear overlapping.

"The handwriting of this bag's owner could be called typical scholar's writing. Most of them enjoyed copying the writing of Pantendier Dulaite, who was famous as a renowned scholar and master calligrapher 200 years ago, and there tend to be common characteristics that arise because of that. I know well since I too learned writing sentences by copying Pantendier's books when young."

"I see."

"This account book's writing has no such traces. None at all. Not a single one."

"..."

In their meeting gazes, Kishiar moved his lips with furrowed brows.

"Perhaps the owner of this bag might not be your grandfather."

"But then why would he have brought it?"

"There could be any number of reasons if we think about it. Like he was holding someone else's bag but had to move without returning it to its owner when an urgent accident occurred, or he hurriedly took records of another that needed protecting. Many possibilities could exist."

As Kishiar said. They could imagine any number of reasons.

Yuder looked down at the account book and notebook and let out a short breath.

"It feels like we've gone back to square one. Still... finding out the handwriting was different is good information."

As he said that and tried to grasp the notebook to examine its contents, what stopped Yuder's hand was an unexpected remark Kishiar made.

"That would be true if you think the notebook's owner and your grandfather are different people."

"...What do you mean by that?"

Chapter 1173

Having just shown evidence that grandfather's writing and the notebook owner's writing were different, how could one still think the two people might be the same? The answer to this question was concise.

"Would you examine that notebook like I did earlier?"

Yuder lifted the notebook he was holding and flipped through it like Kishiar had earlier. A foul smell arose as the old pages fluttered by one by one, and the words written inside roughly came into view.

'Collection. Assessment. Magic power. Contact...'

Though it was difficult to clearly grasp the content since he didn't possess amazing speed reading ability like Kishiar, most seemed identical to the work-related content from the papers earlier.

'What's catching... ah.'

Yuder suddenly stopped his turning hand and examined grandfather's writing in the account book again. Though the writing in the notebook and grandfather's writing clearly had no similar parts, looking again now, there seemed to be one point that was identical.

"...They were both written with the left hand."

"That's right."

A small smile appeared at Kishiar's lips.

"As you know, when writing imperial language, we use the standard imperial characters designated about 800 years ago. One of the big disadvantages of continental characters is that they're very inconvenient to write with the left hand. That was because of the prejudice against left-handed people that linguists had at the time, and though many modifications have been made now, it's still not writing that's comfortable for everyone."

Though Yuder could use both hands, he wrote with his right hand. Kishiar was the same. That was simply because it was more comfortable for writing that way.

"Though the handwriting is clearly different, both the account book and notebook writings were done by a left-handed person. As evidence, certain characters are broken off on the left side in the same direction in both. Moreover, if you look at this page..."

Kishiar instantly opened a certain part of the notebook and grandfather's account book simultaneously. Faint strange stains remained on both papers.

"These are parts stained from continuously brushing against the lower palm while writing with the left hand before drying completely. It's one of the unavoidable things for left-handed people writing imperial characters."

"Ah..."

Only then did the identity of those stains become clearly visible.

In Yuder's mind, a faint image arose of grandfather sitting at the table writing in the account book when he was young.

'Right. Though he used his right hand for other things normally, at those times it was his left hand...'

Thinking about it, after entering the Cavalry and properly learning writing, and then living as a noble for over ten years after, he had hardly seen anyone who wrote with their left hand. Now he seemed to understand why Kishiar had spoken as if he couldn't completely be certain the notebook's owner and grandfather were different people.

"Indeed... they do seem to be palm stains. The sizes of the stains look quite similar too."

"Yes. Of course that alone makes it difficult to be certain they're the same person. Just as it's difficult to be certain they're different people."

The handwriting is different. However, peculiarly both were written by a left-handed person.

"I understand. Let's set aside certainty about whether they're the same person or not and freely keep possibilities open."

Saying that, Yuder continued flipping through the notebook.

Then suddenly, he felt the sensation of some part protruding and flipping over his thumb all at once, and stopped there.

'What's this?'

Though he thought there might be parts where pages were stuck together, when he turned back forward, rather the opposite sight came into view.

'Several pages were torn out.'

Due to being torn messily, that part spread open creating a gap in the spine section where the notebook was bound. After the torn pages, everything was blank.

"They stopped writing about halfway through the notebook, tore out some pages, and left the rest blank."

"Yes. That's what I saw while flipping through earlier. The written content itself didn't seem particularly remarkable. It's regrettable since we can't know anything that could be called personal information except that the writer was a mage."

Indeed, Kishiar seemed to have grasped all the notebook's contents in that brief time.

'Then is there nothing we can find out here except the handwriting...'

Yuder thought this while feeling the torn part. Then he suddenly raised his head.

"...I think we might be able to find out what was written on the torn pages."

"Hmm?"

"Feel this page right after the torn out part. You can feel pen marks."

He hadn't noticed while flipping quickly, but touching the paper he could feel very subtle and faint indentations. Those were undoubtedly marks left on the back when writing with force.

"You're right."

Kishiar who touched the paper following Yuder expressed admiration.

"I hadn't checked that far being focused on confirming the handwriting. Amazing."

"Don't say embarrassing things, let's try reading by feeling with fingertips."

"No. There's an even better method."

Kishiar found the charcoal pen used for writing letters to others and separated the charcoal part. When he gently rubbed it over the entire paper, after a moment faint white marks began appearing between the darkly shaded paper.

They were several numbers and letters.

'The numbers... probably date notations. And the letters...'

The moment he saw that writing that looked clumsy like someone who had just learned to write, Yuder felt a shock like being struck in the head.

'Is this... grandfather's writing?'

After glaring at it, he asked to gain certainty.

"It's not just my eyes seeing it like grandfather's writing, right?"

"Don't worry. It looks that way to my eyes too."

Kishiar confirmed. The words written in grandfather's writing were as follows:

'Airic, Current 38th Emperor, Mage, Melach Kantinto'

Airic and 38th Emperor, along with the date notation, seemed to have been written repeatedly several times. However, what captured Yuder's attention was the word written last.

Melach. That was definitely grandfather's name.

'People used to call him Mr. Mel. Is Kantinto attached at the end... a surname?'

He had never heard mention of grandfather having a surname. However, if he had been a mage, he surely would have had one.

He stared at the name that was both familiar and strange for a while then opened his mouth.

"Melach is grandfather's name. But I can't understand why the rest was written and torn out in this way."

"Well. Since I'm not the person involved, I can't know the answer but..."

Kishiar too spoke while staring at the revealed writing.

"Roughly grasping what those words signify, they become date, current location, and writer's name respectively. It feels like it was written as if someone who had no idea where this was or when it was trying to grasp the situation."

The grocery store old woman said Yuder's grandfather came to this village after wandering for several days following the accident in the neighboring village. If someone wandered covered in injuries after experiencing a major accident, anyone might become numb to their sense of dates. So they might have wanted to grasp and write down where they had arrived and how much time had passed, but...

'Could a mage belonging to the Court Mage Department not know even which Emperor's era it currently was?'

The date and Emperor written in clumsy writing.

Even the fact that it was deliberately torn out and discarded bothered him greatly.

The two remained silent for a long while looking at the notebook and account book. The one who broke that silence was Kishiar.

"We should probably go find the grocery store lady once more to hear more stories. Right?"

"Yes."

"And then shall we visit Duloeti while going down the mountain?"

"Duloeti... isn't that the town below the mountain? Why there..."

"According to the account book, your grandfather definitely stopped by Duloeti about once every few months. Though he went to buy drink ingredients for his grandson, he also bought books there."

Those strange magic research books that grandfather had possessed came to mind in Yuder's head.

"I see. If we visit where he purchased books, we might find someone who remembers grandfather."

Though much time had passed since grandfather died so who knew if the place where he bought books would still remain as it was, it would be better than not going to look.

"The journey back to the capital won't be boring."

To conclude, they didn't end up having to find the grocery store old woman again. Because the old woman came to Yuder's house first.

When he went out at the sound of knocking on the door, the old woman standing with a cane suddenly held out a small box with a smiling face.

Chapter 1174

"After you left, I looked around the house and found this."

Yuder immediately opened the box the old woman handed over. Inside was a very old wooden doll for warding off bad luck. Like the one in Duke Peletta's bedroom that held the same meaning, but a much more clumsily and roughly carved doll with some pattern faintly engraved in the center.

"This is..."

"When your grandfather came to this house with you, he gave this to us as a sign of gratitude. I kept it well in my room for a long time, and strangely, after receiving it I never had any injuries or illnesses."

After saying that, the old woman whispered with kind eyes.

"I brought it thinking it would have more meaning for you to have it than me who doesn't have many days left. Would you accept it?"

Yuder fiddled with the doll then slightly nodded his head.

"...Yes. Thank you."

"My goodness, we were just thinking of finding you again, it seems our hearts connected! Please come in instead of staying in the cold."

While caught in emotions difficult to put into words, Kishiar who suddenly wrapped Yuder's shoulders and stuck his head out called out in a bright voice. In that brief time, he had already neatly organized the items on the table and even used the appearance-transforming magic tool.

"Hmm? You were thinking of finding me again? Why?"

It would seem strange to abruptly say they wanted to hear more details about when Yuder's grandfather first came to this village, but Kishiar was a man who had a tongue that could accomplish such things very naturally.

"While examining the items you gave us and talking about old stories with Yuder, I thought what a good person his grandfather whom I never met must have been. When I think about how much difficulty he must have overcome to bring a child here..."

"Mmm, yes that's right. He was really a good person."

"There must have been many things we can't even imagine after coming here too. Without your help madam, perhaps a day like today might never have come. It must have been very hard then?"

"Oh my, you were like this earlier too, are you trying to say ticklish things again? I'm telling you I didn't help much at all then."

"How could that be? Even with severe injuries, how could deciding to help a stranger be such an easy decision? Your family members must have had great concerns too."

"No. That..."

Just a few minutes after starting the conversation while serving warm tea after bringing the old woman into the house, he succeeded in drawing out the information he wanted.

"When he first came to the village, the one who first discovered that person wasn't me but my son. Earlier I only spoke briefly because it wasn't a very good story but..."

The old woman's son who was coming up from below the mountain with goods was startled to discover a man wandering the forest covered in blood looking like a bandit. Though he thought he was a bandit at first, there were no weapons in his hands.

The man desperately held a small cloth pouch and asked where this place was, what the date was, and who ruled this place.

"At first we tried to avoid him thinking he wasn't in his right mind, but after realizing what was wrapped in the cloth pouch was a baby, we guided him to the village."

"..."

Yuder and Kishiar's gazes met simultaneously. Without saying anything, they could understand each other's feelings.

Soon Kishiar matched her tone while smiling as if nothing had happened.

"I see. Many people who experience major accidents temporarily lose their cognitive abilities from shock. It's a common thing. Your son must have been very surprised... so, did he tell him where this was?"

"Well what else could we do. We told him. At first he was extremely surprised, but after sleeping one night he seemed to come to his senses a bit. Still, for a while people were scared because he kept asking strange questions."

"Strange questions?"

"Well, he kept asking as if he didn't know anything that anyone would know. Who the lord was, where His Majesty the Emperor currently lived, who the dukes were, whether monsters appeared here... things like that. Hoho."

The old woman laughed saying that was all she remembered. However, Yuder couldn't laugh along. After finishing her tea, the old woman turned her gaze towards grandfather's belongings that Kishiar had folded and put aside.

"Have you examined all those now?"

"We've examined everything except the cloth that looks like a tablecloth."

"Tablecloth?"

The old woman laughed heartily seeing the folded cloth.

"No. I may not know about the other things, but I know what that is. That's the cloth that was wrapped around you."

Yuder was momentarily lost for words. Though he had heard that baby him was brought wrapped in cloth, he hadn't thought that would be it. But when he turned to look at Kishiar, he seemed calm as if he had already guessed that fact.

"So, did you find what you wanted to find inside the bag?"

Since she was curious about what had been in the bag, Yuder told her about the existence of the notebook, papers, and badge.

"My goodness. There really was a badge. It would have been terrible if it had been thrown away."

The old woman clapped her hands in wonder.

"I should go now. My son will worry if I'm late."

"I'll escort you."

"No. Though I'm old, I can walk this much just fine. I didn't come here to burden young people who must leave soon."

The old woman firmly refused the escort and stood up.

"I heard the lord might come here tomorrow, so you should leave quickly if you don't want to meet him. Go down the third path on the opposite side from the village. And... don't worry, I absolutely won't tell others what I saw and heard today."

She looked back at Yuder and Kishiar then left the house. Yuder watched her figure disappearing into the darkness for a while then bowed his head in farewell.

After returning to the house, they sat again with the wooden doll between them.

"Indeed grandfather... seems to have been in a state of considerable memory loss when he came here."

"I think so too."

Kishiar picked up the wooden doll placed on the table. His red gaze carefully examined the pattern engraved in the center of the wooden doll.

"It's not the usual pattern drawn to wish for longevity, prosperity, or health. Perhaps it's a pattern specially used in this region?"

"No. It's a pattern I'm seeing for the first time too."

"Then it might be part of a magic circle used by mages."

"Do mages engrave things that way too?"

"The doll in Hellem's house had part of a monster defense circle that Hellem made in her youth engraved on it. There might be quite a few cases among mages of engraving magic circles that have meaning to them like that."

"I see."

"We should remember this well and ask mages about it."

"I'll ask Enon too."

Though not a mage, he who was more knowledgeable about magic than anyone might be able to know the identity of this strange pattern.

Yuder put the doll away in his chest. Looking around the interior of the house they would soon leave, a quite different feeling came compared to when he first returned.

The house that had seemed would always be here. A place full of memories with grandfather whom he had thought was an ordinary person.

But now it felt like some secret he hadn't known was hidden inside.

'Why did grandfather raise me?'

A baby of no blood relation. Was it just human sympathy and responsibility that made him try to protect a baby even while in a state of lost cognitive ability with injuries severe enough to endanger his life?

It was unknowable. Yuder could never guess the weight of that heart.

'Now I should go to a place where I might be able to solve some of those questions.'

Yuder stood up. And he held out his hand towards the red eyes that were watching him unchangingly.

"Our work here is finished now. Let's prepare to leave."

Unlike when they came, they had quite a lot of luggage when leaving. This was because Kishiar wanted to take everything including grandfather's books and account books, the chair Yuder had sat in, and various items he had agreed to give him.

Naturally they couldn't take all the chairs so they agreed to move them later, and there were too many books and account books to take at once so they selected just a few. Kishiar who had filled the box used to bring food from Peletta with items from Yuder's house had an expression crossing between regret and satisfaction.

"Having to reduce luggage because of people's eyes even though I could carry it all... my heart hurts too much."

"That expression won't make impossible things possible."

The man who had been lowering his eyelashes with a face like a pitiful flower let out a laugh-mixed sigh.

"I really should have brought the magic tool pouch."

"You mean the one you used when stealing from the warehouse in the west?"

"No. There's an even bigger one separate from that. An item that can hold even large furniture. Though my constitution isn't good, if it's me..."

Just what and how much was he planning to bring? Yuder decided not to ask further.

Chapter 1175

Duloeti. It was the first town that could be visited when coming down from Yuder's home village towards the capital. Though not a large city, being located at the entrance to the mountain range, it was also a place with quite many people passing through.

Yuder had visited this place several times.

"Though I never came with grandfather, after he passed away I sometimes came to help carry villagers' luggage or when I needed to buy things that couldn't be obtained in the village. I think I also passed through here first when going to take the Cavalry entrance exam."

It was a very long time since coming then for the first time. Of course that was just how it felt, as actually only about a year had passed.

"It's regrettable that you never came with your grandfather."

"Before age ten I was too young to come along, and after that we just talked about going together sometime until he passed away. The timing just didn't work out in various ways."

"Perhaps did you ever throw tantrums wanting to come along?"

Kishiar who was holding the food box handle in one hand asked with a slight smile. Though it looked like just an empty box since he was holding it so lightly, the weight of the luggage inside was actually tremendously heavy.

"Hmm... since he always returned quickly, I don't think I had thoughts of wanting to come along badly enough to be stubborn about it."

Grandfather didn't stay long when going down the mountain. Even including travel time, he would return before sunset. Since he would buy food that was only sold below the mountain when returning, memories suddenly came to mind of waiting sitting in a high tree.

"Indeed you were a good child."

Kishiar moved forward happily. They showed the old entry permit brought from Yuder's house to the guard watching the town entrance, and passed through the gate without any particular hindrance. The main street appearing after passing the entrance was quite busy from morning with people wanting to climb the mountain range mixed with those who had come down wanting to sell goods.

'Before I thought this was too many people just seeing this level of crowd. But it's nothing compared to the capital...'

They advanced, naturally blending into the crowd. Kishiar made an expression full of emotion seeing the store where Yuder occasionally stopped by to buy food items not sold in the mountain village and the inn where he first stayed when going to the capital.

"Yes... truly a historic starting point."

"That seems too grand a way to put it."

"If we end up staying here more than a day, we must definitely stay there."

"..."

Yuder let out a laugh mixed with a sigh seeing the solemn face that seemed to have already made a decision.

"Please just tell me where grandfather's book purchase location written in the account book is."

"It was written as Salandin. I'm not sure if that's the seller's name or the bookstore name."

'Salandin...'

Since he had just taken care of business and returned when coming to Duloeti, he couldn't remember well what was there besides the alley with the grocery store.

'Even though it's a town I visited several times, even if my last visit was more than 10 years ago... I really did live without interest in my surroundings.'

Seeing Yuder's expression, Kishiar turned direction with a quick grin.

"Since the shopping district looks quite large, just walking around would be a waste of time, shall we ask the residents first?"

Saying that, where he headed was a small shop selling simple food that could be eaten for breakfast. After ordering ten 'jets' - food where vegetables and meat marinated in spicy seasoning were mixed and wrapped palm-sized in thinly spread grilled bread - Kishiar very naturally struck up conversation with the owner and asked.

"The weather has gotten much better. Is business going well these days?"

"Well, hmm. Certainly better than winter. It's about time for new items gathered from above the mountain to be released. Quite a few merchant groups from the west and south are coming to mark those in advance."

"Oh. We're trying to find some books, do you perhaps know Ms. Salandin?"

"Salandin?"

The merchant's hand that had been spreading and grilling thin batter at a speed almost invisible briefly stopped.

"Hmm. You need to go that way rather than this way for Ms. Salandin's shop. There's no sign, but since the roof was repaired after collapsing from last year's snow it's mixed gray and blue so it shouldn't be hard to find."

"I see. Thank you."

"But did that person sell books too?"

The owner who had been tilting his head soon started focusing on cooking again. Kishiar returned grinning with the ten jets.

"Since it's over there we can go look after eating."

"Was there really need to ask while ordering as many as ten? There's no place to sit here so we'll have to eat standing."

"Well, won't people answer in a better mood if we boost their sales generously? If you think you can't eat it all..."

Since it wasn't an amount he couldn't eat, Yuder just started chewing the jets while standing leaning against the stairs right next to the shop. Kishiar ate food alongside Yuder with very joyful eyes. The way he would immediately take out a new jet to give without interruption whenever Yuder finished one made him look like someone who had ordered ten wanting to do this.

Yuder brushed off his hands after swallowing all of the eighth jet then took the lead.

"Let's go."

When they turned direction as the owner had said and went the opposite way, after not long a house with a peculiar roof color appeared somewhere inside an alley. Though it seemed to have originally been a gray roof, perhaps blue boards had been added during repairs after collapsing, as the colors were mixed in a mottled way.

Heading there, somewhat unique items fully lined up inside the slightly open door and below the windows came into view. Seeing items that looked old at a glance, the inside of Enon's pharmacy full of similar items naturally came to mind.

'Come to think of it now, Enon had many old items because he had really lived long... but this seems to be an antique shop from the start.'

Now he seemed to understand the meaning of the jet shop owner muttering "did that person sell books too."

"Hmm. Looking at the condition of the displayed items, there seem to be many magic-related antiques. Indeed if it's a place like this, they might have been able to obtain hard-to-get mage research papers from somewhere."

Kishiar showed interest and entered the shop.

"Is anyone here?"

"Who is it?"

Unlike the impression that made one vaguely expect a stooped elderly person to appear, the one who revealed themselves from inside was a woman who looked quite young.

Yuder stepped forward and opened his mouth.

"I am Mr. Melach's grandson. I know that when grandfather was alive he visited Salandin and purchased several volumes of mage research-related books, and I'm wondering if you remember."

"Mr. Melach? Hmm. Just a moment."

The woman who was tilting her head took out an old ledger from under the desk. After flipping through papers for quite a long time, she soon made an "ah" sound.

"Yes. Mr. Mel. He's in mother's customer ledger."

"Mother?"

"Mother was the one who originally ran this shop. Now I'm running it instead since her health isn't good."

"I see."

"If you mean Mr. Mel who occasionally came to buy only books, I saw him several times too. But what's the matter?"

What should one answer when asked what's the matter? While Yuder was briefly silent, naturally it was Kishiar who stepped forward again.

"Actually after he passed away we were away from our hometown for a long time, but this time while organizing belongings after returning, we learned from the account book that he had long done business with this place. He purchased several rather unique books that seem difficult for ordinary people to buy, and wouldn't anyone be quite curious why someone who wasn't a mage steadily bought such things? We stopped by on the way home since it's also a natural wish as family to trace and remember even a little of the deceased person's footsteps."

"Ah..."

"Along with that, we thought it would be good to belatedly convey news to a place where he was a regular customer for so long."

Though he was only stating facts, being able to package them so well like this was truly an extraordinary talent.

The owner made quite a moved expression, then soon nodded and opened her mouth.

"Mother also sometimes wondered about news of him. Alright. I'll tell you what I remember."

**Chapter 1176**

According to the antique shop owner, ‘Salandin’ was her mother’s name.

“Mother used to be an apprentice mage for a time in her youth. The shop we inherited from my late father was originally a pawnshop, but thanks to Mother’s connections, mages would occasionally visit and sell off their magic-related items here.”

‘A pawnshop? Not an antique shop?’

Items from mages were often quite dangerous, and from the buyer’s perspective, it was not easy to assess their true value. For that reason, it was usually more difficult to pawn them than ordinary goods. However, as this shop’s owner had once been an apprentice mage, there were no issues with that part. On top of that, there was less risk of misunderstandings during transactions, and the convenience of using an unofficial route was a big draw. It had reportedly become quite popular for those reasons.

“Because of that, our original pawnshop business now accounts for about half of what we do, while the other half is selling off items we receive in lieu of money. Most ordinary customers don’t even know exactly what kind of shop we run. Still, we have many regular mage customers and trading companies seeking magical relics, so we never worry about making a living.”

It seemed that the absence of a sign or any particular interest in attracting customers was due to these circumstances.

After briefly explaining the nature of the shop, the owner finally began talking about what she remembered of Yuder’s grandfather.

“I recall that Mr. Mel started visiting our shop regularly at some point. I’m not sure if someone introduced him, or if he simply wandered in on his own. I could ask Mother, but she’s not here at the moment.”

“...”

“What I remember is a man with hair and beard turned white from age, his face tanned by the sun. Whenever new books arrived, he would come in and ask to see them. When Mother stacked up all the new arrivals, he would carefully examine them and usually buy one or two volumes. Sometimes he would even come back later and resell them. That’s all.”

He had no specific requests, wasn’t looking for anything in particular. The owner thought it rather unusual that a person who did not appear to be a mage would be buying books like that.

And that was it.

“I hardly ever spoke to him personally, so I don’t know where he lived or anything about his family. Still, there was one time, long ago... He came in carrying a bottle full of flower petals. When I asked what it was, he said he was going to make a snack for his grandson. I had forgotten all about it until I saw you today, and it suddenly came back to me.”

A faint memory surfaced in Yuder’s mind. He recalled his grandfather climbing the slope below the mountain, a bottle tucked under his arm. He remembered how his grandfather spotted him waiting up in a tree and grinned broadly, waving his hand.

“I’m sorry I don’t have more to tell you.”

“No, not at all. This is more than enough... It helped a great deal.”

Yuder answered sincerely. Just recalling a long-forgotten snippet of his childhood felt meaningful enough.

As Kishiar looked gently at Yuder, he suddenly interjected with a smile, as if something had come to mind.

“By the way, those types of academic compilations and scholarly books he used to buy—do they actually sell well?”

“To be honest, hardly at all. Such books are basically items that people offload while taking care of other business, treating them almost like junk. Aside from Mr. Mel, I rarely saw anyone who specifically sought out that kind of book. I just assumed he was someone who liked unusual books. I imagine Mother thought the same.”

The answer came from near the door.

“My child, why are you still standing there without tidying up the front of the shop?”

“Mother!”

An elderly woman who looked about the same age as Hellem Caspirl appeared at the doorway. Judging by how she immediately began scolding the owner, anyone could see that this must be Ms. Salandin.

“Ms. Salandin?”

When Yuder asked for confirmation, she turned her head.

“Who are you? I’ve never seen you here before.”

“Mother, do you remember Mr. Mel? He was the gentleman who sometimes came by to buy books. These people say they’re his family members.”

“Mr. Mel?”

Ms. Salandin recognized the name instantly and her expression changed.

“He hasn’t visited for years, and now his family has come... So it’s what I feared, is it?”

“My grandfather passed away long ago. While sorting out his possessions belatedly, we discovered that he often purchased books from here. We came to let you know and also out of curiosity.”

This time, Yuder answered right away without hesitation. Kishiar had provided him with a model answer earlier. As their eyes met briefly, Kishiar winked both eyes dramatically, as if to say, “Well done,” and smiled.

“I suspected as much... In any case, please accept my condolences, even if it’s late. But... I doubt you came all the way here only for that reason. Is something the matter?”

“Well, since Mr. Mel frequently bought unusual books, it seems they were wondering why he did so. I didn’t know anything myself, so I couldn’t say much.”

The shop owner chimed in to explain the situation.

“Is that so? He never said anything to his own family?”

“It seems that way. Mother, do you remember how he first came to our shop?”

“Hm. My principle is not to disclose client information to others…”

Without waiting any longer, Yuder bowed his head in front of Ms. Salandin.

“If you remember my grandfather, please, I beg of you.”

Anyone who knew Yuder would be astonished to see him bowing his head like this—he never bowed so easily, not even before nobles or Emperors. However, he felt a far greater need to do so now than in front of any of them.

“When my grandfather was alive, I had no desire to learn how to read the way he tried to teach me, so I never knew what kind of books he read. Now that I’ve returned, I finally discovered this. I... truly wish to know, even now, what kind of person he really was, a man I thought had no ties to something like magic. That is why I came here.”

“...”

“Please.”

In the silence, someone beside Yuder also bowed his head in unison.

“I ask of you as well.”

It was Kishiar. Though Yuder signaled silently that Kishiar need not bow, Kishiar, fully aware of Yuder’s glance, did not lift his head.

Ms. Salandin let out a dry chuckle.

“Well now. I was suspicious this morning when unfamiliar folk showed up at the shop without warning, but with you two bowing your heads like this…”

“...”

“First, both of you raise your heads. I may have long since abandoned my magical studies, but I can guess that a person who must hide their entire face wouldn’t bow their head to just anyone.”

“Mother? What are you talking about?”

Yuder raised his eyebrows as he lifted his head.

‘...Did she recognize Kishiar’s disguise artifact?’

Nothing like this had ever happened before. Kishiar, apparently thinking the same thing, asked with an intriguing expression.

“You have sharp eyes. How did you know I’m hiding my face?”

“That bracelet you’re wearing passed through our shop once. Starting some ten-odd years ago, there’s been word going around shops like this that some high-ranking individual was trying to buy up every disguise magic tool they could find. Does that answer your question?”

The place that had seemed like just a small, nameless shop suddenly felt more imposing. But since the shop owner’s daughter was staring with her mouth half-open in shock, it seemed this was all due to Ms. Salandin herself. Kishiar’s lips curved upward in a smile.

“Not only are your eyes sharp, but you have a remarkable memory as well.”

“Let’s not exaggerate. So, you truly have nothing else you want but this information?”

“Yes. It may be hard to believe, but that is really all we came for.”

“Hm... Very well.”

Ms. Salandin took a seat.

“Mr. Mel didn’t come here on anyone’s recommendation. At first, I honestly thought he was just a woodcutter who wandered in because he saw something placed at our doorstep. I even thought he might have gotten lost.”

“...”

“That was until he took an interest in a very old history book.”

**Chapter 1177**

Salandin stretched out her hand and pointed somewhere.

"Child. Bring down that book up there. Next to the green cover."

Salandin's daughter hurriedly climbed up a ladder.

"Mother. This book?"

"Yes. The one next to 'Theory of Magical Changes According to Weather.'"

The book she brought was extremely old and thick. The black leather cover was more than half worn away, making the title impossible to read.

"This is the book he recognized then. As you can see, you can't even read the title, and the contents are even harder to decipher. It's estimated to be from around Emperor Selcima's era in the early empire."

When statements that were difficult to understand immediately came up, Yuder quietly turned his gaze. Then Kishiar, meeting his eyes, would naturally explain and continue the conversation.

"Hmm. Emperor Selcima's era was a dark age for scholars in many ways. If this is a history book recorded then that still survives, it must be covered in tremendous codes and metaphors."

"That's right. To someone without any knowledge, it would look like just an ordinary, or rather contentless, landscape observation essay."

“Do I recall correctly that it might be the ‘Leaf Veins of the White-Branch Tree’ from the continent?”

"Correct. You know it."

"I've only read the convenient versions interpreted by ancient scholars. I've never seen the original."

According to Kishiar, during the early founding period when those who had established the empire after surviving the Great Destruction and their immediate descendants were still alive and influential, they were extremely cautious about recording anything, especially history. However, from the Third Emperor's time when such people had mostly passed away, voices opposing excessive anti-recording sentiment and constantly changing censorship standards began to rise, culminating during the reign of the Sixth Emperor, Selcima.

Emperor Selcima was a safety-first ruler who viewed those wanting free recording as dangerous elements and severely oppressed them. In response, those oppressed wrote books disguised as ordinary prose or landscape observations to avoid the censor’s watchful eyes. Finally under the Seventh Emperor, the record censorship system was completely abolished.

"Then the reason for the title 'Leaf Veins of the White-Branch Tree' must be because that book also pretended to be observing the veins of the white-branch tree."

"Right. Using the white branch tree, known for having particularly many branches, as a metaphor, it recorded the names and histories of all countries and cities that existed on the continent at that time. Though it lacks precision, unlike other records limited to just the Orr Empire, it has value in showing a broad view of other countries."

Kishiar answered smoothly to Yuder's words.

"That's exactly right. While it's good for reading about the countries that existed in the early empire, it's not a very famous history book since it has little value otherwise. Plus, this being the original makes it even harder to read."

"It interests me. May I purchase it?"

"Do as you please after our conversation is finished. Anyway, what's important is that this man who seemed like an ordinary woodcutter immediately recognized it was a history book as soon as he saw its contents."

Saying this, Salandin opened the book. As she and Kishiar had said, the book's contents were difficult to grasp at first glance. Not only was the writing deliberately in a hard-to-read style, but it used archaic grammar almost like ancient language, poetic metaphors, and even drawings that looked like real tree observation records, making it difficult to understand what was what.

Salandin continued speaking while handling the book.

"'When was this book written?' That was his first question. I answered it was from Emperor Selcima's time. Then he asked which Emperor Selcima was. I thought he was joking with me and didn't answer, but after turning a few pages, he accurately read that it was the sixth."

Naturally, this immediately brought to mind what the grocery store old woman had said about grandfather asking who the current Emperor was when he first appeared in the village.

"I thought he had just gotten lucky with his guess, but that wasn't it. He said the book seemed like it would be helpful to him and requested to buy it. When I asked if he knew what he was buying, he asked me right back, ‘Isn’t it a book of history?’”

"..."

"According to my memory, he brought that book back about two weeks later. He said he had finished reading it and wanted to sell it back and buy another book. I couldn't believe it so I tested him on the contents I knew, but he really had read it all. I asked if he was perhaps a mage or scholar. I usually never ask about customers' personal information, but I was quite surprised then."

"And what did grandfather answer?"

"Nothing."

Salandin answered quietly.

"I couldn't get any answer. He just bought a new book and left. I never asked again after that."

"..."

Yuder's grandfather continued to buy history-related books for some time after that, repeatedly reading them and selling them back.

"When almost all the history books that had come into our shop were gone, I told him this wasn't a place that only got history books, so if he liked such books he should go to a proper bookstore. Or try the temple. But instead of going to such places, he just changed to buying other types of books."

Salandin said Yuder's grandfather read absolutely everything without discriminating by genre, from theology, magic, weapons techniques, education, administration, prose, poetry, to daily records.

“In the first few years, he would read and immediately resell them. But over time, he bought books less frequently and stopped reselling as many. Most of the ones he kept seemed to be useless research records, at least to my eyes, but... well, if that was his preference, that was his preference.”

Salandin clicked her tongue while shaking her head.

"That's all I remember. I enjoyed the medicinal herbs and preserved meat jerky he would sometimes give as thanks, but at some point he stopped coming and I wondered if something had happened. He seemed quite weakened around that time... Did he pass from illness?"

"No. After suddenly collapsing, he couldn't regain his strength and passed away a few days later."

"It's fortunate he didn't suffer long then. Now that I'm getting old and my body's failing, I know there's nothing more uncomfortable than living long while sick. It's quite embarrassing to face my children too."

"Mother."

Salandin's daughter was upset hearing her mother's words mixed with laughter. But to Yuder it seemed closer to a polite dismissal saying 'Now that you've heard I'm sick too, if you have any conscience you should leave soon.'

'Was someone with that kind of spirit really an apprentice mage?'

Yuder looked at Salandin whose eyes remained sharp despite her claimed weakness and asked.

"I'm sorry, but may I ask one more thing? Did grandfather often continue to ask those kinds of questions later... like asking which Emperor it was, as you mentioned he did at first?"

"Questions?"

Salandin's gaze turned back to the opened history book.

"He did ask many things. Though mostly related to book contents, after about a year he never said anything useless. By my standards."

"Didn't you think he was a strange person?"

Hearing Yuder's words, Salandin gave an intriguing smile.

"As you know, though I'm not anymore, I was still a mage. There's no shortage of strange ones among the mages who come here. When there are mad ones who devote their whole lives to finding ways to turn tears and snot into wine, not recognizing Emperor names is just slightly surprising."

"..."

"That's all. If you have no more questions, I'd appreciate if you'd buy what you want and leave now."

Kishiar bought the book grandfather had first recognized and several other small items before leaving. The items he chose must have been quite valuable magic tools, as Salandin's daughter was very surprised when he paid the full amount at once. Though she hadn't been convinced just hearing her mother's words, seeing him

easily spend large sums seemed to make her think Kishiar really must be a noble hiding his identity.

"What do you think about Ms. Salandin's final words?"

Yuder quietly asked when they had moved some distance from the shop.

"You mean about not considering him a strange person?"

"Yes."

"In the language of mages, that's closer to saying she treated your grandfather as though he too was a mage."

"Indeed that's what I thought."

Chapter 1178

Though mages seemed not to band together, in some ways they endlessly looked after only their own. Most of them did not treat those ignorant of magic by the same standards as themselves, and took for granted all sorts of privileges received from the moment of becoming a mage. In his previous life, Yuder had sometimes suspected that in mages' eyes, only fellow mages appeared human.

'So... saying what's so surprising about not knowing Emperor names when there are plenty of mages doing crazy things, that's a comparison that couldn't come up if thinking about an ordinary person.'

If an ordinary person doesn't know basic common sense, that becomes surprising. However, among those who know magic, it becomes something that 'could happen,' something that 'can be dismissed as unremarkable because they're a mage.' It was a subtle way of speaking that, without knowing mages' characteristic tone and gaze, might seem at first glance like just saying it was fine because they'd been through everything.

'It was really irritating in a different way from nobles.'

"Anyway... though Ms. Salandin was wary of us, it's fortunate she told us information relatively without hiding things."

The grandfather in her memory matched almost exactly with the grocery store old woman's description. Even the point that he seemed severely lacking in common sense when he first appeared, and though he seemed like a mage, he never directly revealed his identity.

'However...'

"When just hearing the grocery store grandmother's words, I was leaning more heavily toward the possibility that he had temporarily lost his memory and cognitive ability due to an accident, but after hearing this new information, I think it wasn't simple memory loss."

"I think so too."

Could someone who had forgotten even simple common sense easily read difficult books? And not just difficult books, but books full of sentences close to ancient language requiring interpretation.

"Perhaps if they were a historian well-versed in ancient language from before losing their memories, it might be possible. But looking at the evidence items we found, that possibility is infinitely low."

The items discovered in the luggage grandfather had tried to incinerate indicated that its owner was a mage conducting research related to magic power. However, that certainly didn't mean they were someone well-versed in ancient language and history.

"Even among mages, not many are proficient in ancient language. Especially those who devote their lives to hands-on research tend to be even less so."

"I don't think fields like researching magic power spread through nature would have particularly required ancient language either."

"Right. Yet if they were someone who knew ancient language and transitional language between early emperors very well besides their research field..."

After a moment of silence, Kishiar spoke carefully while relaxing his eyebrows.

"Though it might be too harsh to say, rather than remaining an unnamed mage until an age to be called grandfather, it seems they should have already become a famous mage on Hellem's level."

"That's not too harsh but simply the truth, isn't it?"

Regardless of affection for grandfather, this was just how things were.

Yuder asked the man who burst out laughing with a deflating sound at his answer.

"But I wonder if it's true that Ms. Salandin was formerly an apprentice mage. Personally, I find it hard to believe."

"I also don't think the claim of being a former apprentice mage seems very true. Particularly given that someone of just that level would find it very difficult to handle magic tools of my bracelet's caliber, besides her extraordinary memory."

"Come to think of it, what's that about the bracelet? When did you collect disguise magic tools enough for such rumors to spread?"

"It's a very old story. Around when I first started making money in Peletta."

The young duke who began earning money by handling monsters for northern lords. What the boy Kishiar first tried to buy with some accumulated spare money was none other than freedom of movement.

"Well, I needed to be able to move freely to properly do work, but as you can see, I stand out too much."

So he began secretly acquiring disguise magic tools. Since tools of the level he wanted had to be very old ones, finding them wasn't easy.

"Now I would use the Peletta Knights to obtain items, but I couldn't do that then so I had to rely on outside help. But as is usual with mercenaries and information guilds..."

"You also have to be prepared for our information to leak. Because they lack loyalty."

"Right. Though I could obtain the needed items to some extent, information that someone was acquiring such items inevitably leaked in exchange. I didn't expect to encounter those results here like this though. Haha."

"Are you alright with that? She might have even guessed somewhat who you are."

"Well, it worked out well. Thanks to her recognizing this bracelet, she gave information honestly on her own? I'm actually in quite a good mood since it helped."

Kishiar showed no sign of concern at all. Rather, seeing his bold smile as if he didn't mind being recognized made Yuder feel much lighter.

"Anyway, that kind of attitude from Salandin might have had the biggest influence on your grandfather deciding to become a regular at this shop. It's not easy to find a merchant who seems like they'll keep customers' secrets no matter what they buy or ask. In that sense, a mage living in a rural corner while handling lots of dangerous and rare magic tools and antiques would have been a great contact."

"I wonder if grandfather really knew the value of the items Ms. Salandin sold."

"It doesn't matter if he didn't know well. If he wasn't going to buy anything besides books there."

Kishiar smiled and shook the envelope in his hand. Inside were the magic tools just bought from Salandin's shop. The total value of those items would be enough to pay for repairing the shop's roof a hundred times over.

"This is just speculation, but looking at the books your grandfather read and his subsequent actions, it seems like someone lacking information about reality was trying to learn and fill in those gaps."

"To fill in information gaps...?"

Yuder murmured following the puzzling words.

"Yes. Though it might look similar to memory loss, it could be different. How should I put it. It feels like someone who had been imprisoned for a very long time came out to the world and tried to find out what had happened meanwhile. Such people tend to show that kind of attitude."

"..."

"The fact that after obtaining some desired information, he lived ordinarily enough not to catch anyone's eye while only occasionally getting information needed for daily life also feels that way. But even this speculation is hard to say fits completely. The more we learn, the more mysterious it becomes in various ways."

Kishiar smiled with curved eyes and an untired face. Then he suddenly stopped walking.

"Well then, shall we stop and wait here?"

"What?"

"Actually, I used a bit of trickery when paying at the shop just now. If I'm right, they should be coming to find us soon."

"What do you-"

Just as he was becoming bewildered by the unexpected words, a shout came from behind.

"There! Customers. Please wait a moment!"

As Kishiar had said, Salandin's daughter was running over while frantically waving her hands. Kishiar smiled and whistled softly.

"Wasn't I right?"

Salandin's daughter stopped with a flushed face, panting. Only after catching her breath for a while did she finally grab Yuder's sleeve.

"I'm so glad you hadn't gone far! Mother told me to quickly, huff, bring the customers back."

"...Why?"

"I gave you too little change... she said you must have paid incorrectly."

Salandin's daughter who had finally calmed down raised her head.

"Mother has never done this before... would you please come back for now?"

Chapter 1179

Visiting the shop again. Salandin was waiting for them with the money Kishiar had just paid still placed on the table.

"I apologize for the inconvenience of having you return. My daughter is still learning the work and made a mistake due to her inexperience."

Though she said it was a mistake, looking at her eyes, far from appearing sorry, she seemed dumbfounded and incredulous. Yuder alternately scanned the money placed on the table and Kishiar's face.

'Just what did he do?'

There seemed to be no problem with the money piled on the table. It was exactly the amount requested earlier.

The answer to his question was soon provided by Salandin.

"You paid entirely in Aspail silver coins, but a small shop like ours finds it difficult to dare assess and handle the value of Aspail silver coins. I'll either have you exchange them for regular silver coins, or we can cancel the transaction and proceed with a refund."

Yuder's eyebrows twitched upward.

'Aspail silver coins?'

Only then did the piled money look new again. Specifically, it was the pattern engraved on the silver coins that seemed unremarkable buried among them, rather than the gold coins.

'The pattern is subtly different from currently used silver coins. I remember hearing about this in my previous life. Some silver coins can be more expensive than gold coins... is this that?'

The Orr Empire had changed the patterns engraved on money several times during its thousand-year history. The reasons for changing varied, and because of that, some coins instantly transformed from their original monetary value into rare collectibles.

Those silver coins seemed to be among such money.

'If people who don't know about these well receive gold coins and those silver coins together, they would just pass over the silver while only checking if the gold is real. Salandin must have recognized this belatedly and called us back.'

It was truly an ingenious trick.

'He said a bit of trickery. What does he mean a bit.'

Judging by the reaction, those silver coins seemed to be no ordinary precious items. What if Salandin had

pretended not to notice and not called them back? When he turned his head in disbelief, the one who had committed such a bold act was just smiling naturally with an innocent face.

Kishiar sat down in front of Salandin with his smiling face and opened his mouth gently.

"First of all, a completed transaction cannot be undone no matter what happens. That's common sense among those who deal in precious items. Isn't that right?"

His somewhat ordinary-seeming appearance from before had completely vanished. This was the voice and intonation of Kishiar La Orr that was most familiar to Yuder - relaxed, composed, and making one feel a strange power.

Salandin frowned and blinked. Her seemingly stubborn eyes soon changed to a gaze carrying more tension and courtesy.

"...You know that rule?"

"As you said earlier, after how much trouble I went through gathering all the notable disguise magic tools from across the continent, how could I not know?"

"..."

"Even if your daughter didn't recognize the Aspail silver coins, and even if I deliberately did this, all of that is already a completed transaction. Not recognizing the value of the paid currency is the seller's responsibility. And I have no intention of making this transaction as if it never happened."

Kishiar crossed his arms and leaned deeply back in his chair. Salandin muttered while carefully examining Kishiar with eyes containing more tension.

"Then what do you want?"

"Naturally, I should receive compensation worth what I paid according to the rules."

"Even if we gave you every item in our shop, it would be worth less than the value of these Aspail silver coins here."

Just what was the value of those few unremarkable-looking silver coins to provoke such a response? While doubting whether they were real or not, Kishiar opened his mouth with a smiling face.

"That would be true if counting in items. I want people and information, not items."

For a moment, Salandin closed her mouth as if holding her breath.

"I'm just an old person who withdrew from the front lines due to poor health. What..."

Kishiar continued speaking melodiously without listening to her answer to the end.

"The value of a single word, and the value of one who can tell that word varies tremendously depending on who's listening. You can certainly pay compensation worth what I desire."

"How can you be so sure of that?"

"Shall we properly write up a transaction confirmation this time? Then you can feel at ease."

After a long silence, Salandin nodded with a sigh.

"Child. Go bring the confirmation form and pen."

Salandin's daughter, who still seemed not to properly understand what was happening with her pale face, disappeared into the back of the shop. Taking advantage of that gap, Salandin clutched her head and whispered softly.

"Though I don't know who you are or where you're from, you're really tormenting this old woman properly. My daughter truly believes this shop is just an ordinary antique pawnshop. I have no intention of passing on my work to her, so please don't frighten her anymore."

"I apologize. But this side was quite desperate in its own way. You clearly seemed to know something more but weren't willing to tell, so I had no choice but to use my head."

"..."

Seemed to know something more but wasn't willing to tell?

Though Yuder hadn't particularly felt anything, it seemed Kishiar had some unknown suspicious point.

'If it's a difference that I couldn't feel but Kishiar could... is it again related to mages this time too?'

"Mother. I brought them."

"Yes. Well done. You go in and rest."

"But if I made a mistake, shouldn't I be here too? You're not well, Mother."

"It's fine. This will end soon. What are you doing not going in already?"

Salandin's daughter returned to the room inside the shop with drooping shoulders. Left alone, Salandin straightened her back even more and spread out the confirmation form.

"You say you want people and information, so let's do as you wish. But that will be limited to the conversation taking place right now in this seat, and I won't listen to any demands beyond that. Also, similar tricks are declined as well. If you do something like this again, then..."

"It's fine if you don't call again of course. What I paid is yours, and I'll take all the responsibility."

Salandin wrinkled her nose.

"You certainly speak as smoothly as if you've swallowed oil."

"I do hear that kind of thing often."

"I've written everything, so please dip your hand in ink and sign."

The two pressed their fingerprints on the transaction confirmation. Light shone from the pressed fingerprints and a glow similar to an oath document arose.

Only then did Salandin turn to look at them with a much more relaxed attitude.

"Well then, tell me. What more do you want me to answer?"

"I felt there were no lies in your answers to this person's requests earlier. But those were just explanations about memories you saw and experienced. Some parts that should naturally have been included were cleverly omitted."

"What did you feel that was?"

"You've lived here for a long time. Running a pawnshop and antique sales for mages means, in other words, you must have known well about the mages who visited here."

The corners of Kishiar's lips rose coolly.

"Then you must have also known about some group of mages who had visited the mountains for investigation before Mr. Mel came as a customer here. Though there's distance between there and here, it seems it would have been harder not to know. The society of mages is small, and those mages didn't stay there just for a day or two, plus most villages up in the mountains seemed to have close exchanges with this town."

Ah. Yuder almost unconsciously made a sound.

"The unfortunate accident that happened to the mage group who came here for investigation twenty-some years ago. And the customer who visited here after that. Were there really never any times when that customer encountered other mage customers while frequenting here? Did you really not know any connection between all those events, was it really just coincidence? I'd like you to answer that."

Salandin closed her eyes.

After letting out a very long sigh, she slowly opened her eyes and spoke.

"Indeed. These are questions worth asking after paying in Aspail silver coins."

"..."

**Chapter 1180**

Salandin's gaze changed from that of a stubborn old woman fitting the old shop. Both her official tone that had changed since their return visit and her more upright posture now carried unprecedented caution and an inexplicable weight.

"First, to answer you, yes. I have seen the mages who came to investigate the magic power distribution situation in the Airic Mountains long ago. During the roughly one year period they stayed here, I met with several members of their party a few times for transactions. They came to sell gathered magic stones or magic tools made as side work... it was literally simple business."

A shiver ran down his spine. Yuder kept his eyes fixed on Salandin's mouth and listened carefully not to miss a single word.

"Of course I also heard the news that monsters suddenly appeared in the village where those people were staying and caused great damage. It was truly an unfortunate accident, as that village was completely closed off due to the aftermath. I heard people came and went from the capital conducting investigations for quite a long time afterward. Several investigators dispatched from the Court Mage Department also visited this shop. Similarly for simple transactions."

"..."

"Mr. Mel visited our shop about a year after the accident. I had never seen him before. But, yes. From when I first met him, I thought he might be a mage connected to that unfortunate accident."

This was unexpected. She had heard news of the mages who died in the accident and had met some of them but had never met grandfather, yet she had definitely suspected he might be a mage as soon as she saw him.

Kishiar seemed to have the same thought and asked.

"How could you make such a guess when you'd never met him before?"

At those words, Salandin slowly lowered the shawl draped over her shoulders. After unhesitatingly rolling up her thick sleeve that covered the back of her hand, she pointed to one spot.

A little below the elbow. A small pattern about the size of a thumbnail was engraved in an inconspicuous place.

"This. Can you see it?"

The pattern engraved in black was very simple. Two triangles joined together up and down inside a circle. It somewhat resembled a pattern symbolizing a butterfly or hourglass.

And Yuder somehow thought that shape looked slightly familiar.

'That's definitely, from somewhere...'

While he was wracking his brain, Salandin looked at Yuder and spoke.

"If you're really Mr. Mel's family, you should have seen it. Because he had the same thing. Though it was half gone due to scars, I was certain."

The moment he heard those words, memory finally flashed and came back.

'...Right. Grandfather's mark.'

In his childhood, when bathing with grandfather, he had seen a strangely shaped mark near his arm. A faint black mark half buried among scars that grandfather said came from work long ago. When he would unconsciously rub it because it looked strange and painful, grandfather would laugh heartily saying it was fine.

After he grew old enough that grandfather didn't need to wash him anymore, that mark became an unremarkable existence. It had just become a familiar part of a family member's body like a scar mark.

'Could that be...?'

Seeing Yuder's eyes slightly narrow, Kishiar whispered.

"You seem to have seen it."

"Yes. Though I just thought it was a mole..."

"It's not a mole. It's a symbol."

Salandin said calmly.

"It's called the 'Ring of the Future.' I got it engraved when walking the path of a mage. It was the mark of the magic school I belonged to."

Just as there are sects within religions and martial arts schools among knights, there are magic schools among mages based on certain academic or ideological commonalities. Their types and rules were very diverse, and even between master and disciple, they could belong to different magic schools.

"Which magic school?"

"It has no name. It wasn't officially operated, and no particular visible activities were required either. But as far as I know, it was a magic school that had existed since very ancient times. In that magic school, there were only rules that affirmed Luma's magic revolution and that we should not harm people with our magic power but use it to help the world."

At the name Luma, Yuder's heart briefly skipped a beat. Kishiar tilted his head with a composed face.

"That sounds like very good words."

"Well, yes. But it was also harder to keep than expected, and since it had so little presence, hardly anyone wanted to specifically belong to this school. Even I only got it engraved after being inspired by a senior mage studying together, and I didn't know exactly who else belonged besides us."

Salandin's gaze turned to her arm.

"After quitting the path of a mage, I lived completely forgetting about it. No, I thought I had. Until that day, when I saw this mark again on Mr. Mel's arm."

"To summarize, you were certain he was a mage after seeing an arm engraved with the same symbol. Did you not ask the person himself about this?"

"I didn't ask directly. Because I hadn't quit being a mage for good reasons. But as I answered earlier, I did ask whether he was a mage or scholar."

However, Yuder's grandfather gave no answer.

"Afterward I made inquiries and investigated in my own way. If he was indeed a mage, I thought perhaps he had lost his memories at that accident site and ended up in that state."

Up to here was very similar to the speculations Kishiar and Yuder had made. However, what Salandin did was slightly different from expectations.

"When I casually asked the Court Mage Department mages who were coming and going for investigation at the time, there was a mage presumed to be Mr. Mel on the list. When I said he was someone who had come to the shop several times before, they sympathetically told me the story."

According to what Salandin heard, most of the village where the accident occurred had burned, making it meaningless to distinguish between the dead and missing. The investigators didn't even think there might be survivors and only focused on tallying the damage.

"However, the appearance of that mage I heard about from them was very difficult to think of as the same person I met."

"Difficult, you say. In what way?"

"It seems he did research activities quite diligently, but he had no family, was very stubborn, and was someone with no interest in ancient language or history. He was exactly like a typical noble mage who was very proud of being a Court Mage Department mage, talked a lot and was noisy. Though his reputation among mages was fine, anyway he wasn't the type of person who could mix with commoners even if he died."

"Indeed. I understand."

"But the physical description matched exactly. They said there was no one similar among the missing."

"So. What conclusion did you reach?"

A strange smile appeared at Salandin's lips.

"At that time, I suddenly recalled a certain story I had heard long ago. It was a story I heard from the senior mage on the day I got this symbol engraved."

Salandin continued speaking while tracing over the pattern engraved on her arm.

"They say there was a great mage at the beginning of this magic school. The great mage promised to someday bestow their power like a blessing to those who kept the school's principles. In fact, hundreds of years ago, a certain mage who risked their life to protect people in danger experienced the miracle of coming back to life through mysterious power. It was recorded in history as an unexplained healing magic manifestation incident, but it wasn't known that that mage belonged to this school."

Though it seemed like quite an absurd story that might be a lie, Kishiar didn't laugh.

"I know that story. About 480 years ago, an incident where a Pearl Tower mage nearly died from severe injuries after saving people who were about to die from monsters, then survived. In a situation where they should have died without a priest, their wounds suddenly healed, and since no one could determine the cause and the same miracle didn't happen twice, it was finally recorded that they received god's love. I heard the Pearl Tower found it very insulting at the time."

'It was real?'

"Well, I don't know such detailed stories. What's important is that person belonged to this magic school."

Salandin raised one corner of her lips in a smile.

"According to the school's story, that mage's personality changed due to the effects of receiving the great mage's blessing and they babbled knowledge they had never known before. They claimed to be an incarnation of the great mage, were treated as insane and died in confinement."

"That wasn't such a good ending. That part wasn't recorded in history."

"A mage who came back to life receiving god's love. What mages would accept such a being? I thought the claim that they declared themselves the great mage was probably just an excuse made to confine them and then cut open their belly for research."

"..."

"However, if something happened once, perhaps it could happen twice? I hope you don't think it too nonsensical that I had such thoughts upon seeing a mage who belonged to the same magic school and was walking around perfectly fine with only their core changed after experiencing an event comparable to death."

The great mage's blessing.

Yuder repeated those unfamiliar words in his mouth.

"Was the identity of the great mage who bestowed blessings passed down in the story?"

"I don't know that far. Some say it was Great Mage Est, and some say it was an unnamed great mage from another country. The senior who told me about the magic school believed that great mage was Luma. That was probably because Luma's magic revolution story was included in this school's rules."

"..."

"Anyway, that's how it is. I wanted to know if Mr. Mel was truly a mage who had received the great mage's blessing. So... I secretly worked to prevent him from encountering other mages visiting this shop or village, and watched him for a long time."

Chapter 1181

"So, did you find out the answer?"

At Kishiar's question, Salandin slowly shook her head.

"I couldn't tell."

'Mr. Mel' seemed to be just someone unusual only in that he read all kinds of books without discrimination, nothing more or less special than that. It remained the same even after watching for several years.

"Even after watching for over 10 years, I never once heard any mention of magic from his mouth. Sometimes he seemed quite knowledgeable about things like old traditions and seemed to know everything, making me wonder, but then seeing him live like an ordinary woodcutter made it seem like nothing again... I really couldn't figure him out."

The time grandfather spent with Yuder was 13 years. For an ordinary person, it would have been enough time to conclude he wasn't one and have time to spare. Yet Salandin only answered that she 'couldn't tell.' That was practically the same as saying she was still reserving judgment.

'Since it wasn't certain, she's still suspicious? What incredible persistence. Even though she quit partway, once a mage always a mage, I suppose.'

"Then let me change the question a bit. I'd like to hear what kind of person Mr. Mel seemed like to you."

"What kind of person. I'm not sure where to set the standard."

"Not from the heart of a mage captured by the desire to investigate, but as a shop owner who watched a long-time regular customer. I mean I want to hear what you felt he lived for, what he liked and disliked."

"That..."

Salandin's eyebrows relaxed with a twitch. Her cool, official attitude maintained throughout dealing with Kishiar who had revealed his original manner of speaking crumbled as if caught off guard. After being lost in thought staring into space for a while, she slowly opened her wrinkled lips and spoke.

"...He was a good neighbor. He had no reservations dealing with anyone, didn't seem like someone of noble birth at all, and seemed very satisfied with life helping villagers while raising his grandson in the mountains. Though he didn't talk much, he was someone curious about many things, but he didn't seem to enjoy discussing what was happening up above."

"What was happening up above."

"Well, what commoners call upper matters are all the same aren't they? What the upper people in which town did, what gloomy news comes from the imperial family in the capital, what taxes need to be paid this time... just those kinds of frustrating stories."

"I see."

Though he knew what was meant by gloomy news about the imperial family, Kishiar didn't bat an eye.

"And, personally... I also think he was someone very tight-lipped."

"Tight-lipped? Why's that?"

Yuder didn't miss how Salandin's gaze briefly turned toward the inside of the shop where her daughter had gone before returning.

"Once before, when I had briefly left the shop, a mad mage who visited tried to do something wicked to my daughter and grandchild."

"..."

"Fortunately I discovered it before anything happened, and I gave that person a 'somewhat appropriate response.'"

When she said the words 'somewhat appropriate response,' cold killing intent swirled in Salandin's eyes. One could guess what happened to that mage without hearing it.

'They probably couldn't leave this town in one piece.'

"While I was cleaning up afterward trying to hide that incident, I happened to run into Mr. Mel who had come to the shop. I was prepared to accept it even if he reported me, but he didn't do that."

"Then?"

"He asked if I needed help. When I said no, he just left, but later I found out he had secretly given some help. Afterward we never mentioned that incident."

It was truly an unexpected story. Salandin smiled faintly and continued speaking.

"To be honest, after that incident I think I put more effort into hiding Mr. Mel from other mage customers' eyes. Though I'm not sure if he knew what I was doing... it was a kind of repayment in my own way."

So, though she had said at first that she hid grandfather from other mage customers' eyes just wanting to watch him alone out of curiosity, that wasn't the only reason.

Looking at Salandin who was smiling as if in disbelief, Yuder thought of grandfather.

'If it's the grandfather I knew... Yes. He might well have done that.'

Though this was his first time meeting Salandin, he could definitely feel she was someone who kept her own rules and faith while doing business. Just seeing how she tried to immediately return the silver coins received wrongly from Kishiar showed that clearly.

Grandfather was strangely good at figuring out who was lying and who needed help. So if he thought Salandin needed help then, even if refused he would have helped first before leaving. And then he would have kept the secret forever without saying a word even to his grandson Yuder.

Just like when he quietly read books to help villagers and found more convenient ways to fix their houses, grandfather did not turn away from those who needed help.

Yuder's chest stirred faintly.

"Thank you for telling everything including stories kept secret for so long."

"I only did so because you wanted to hear what I experienced and felt. Anyway, no one could find out what I did then even if they investigated now."

Salandin answered coldly then sniffed.

"This is all that remains in my head. Do you have anything else you're curious about?"

Kishiar nodded.

"Just one last thing. I'd like to hear about what Mr. Mel's last visit to this shop was like."

"The last day... there wasn't much."

Salandin answered briefly.

"He stopped by after a while and asked if there were any new books. But there weren't any new books in at that time. Before leaving, since he looked tired I asked if he was sick, and I remember him saying he wasn't sick but it seemed he couldn't deceive time."

He wasn't sick but couldn't deceive time...

It was the kind of conversation ordinary aging people might have, but somehow those words strangely weighed on his mind.

"This really is the end."

"Thank you. I've now gotten all the answers I needed."

"How fortunate that you'd offset the value of Aspail silver coins with just this much talk."

"Yes. It's enough."

After saying that, Kishiar stood up. Yuder silently followed him but briefly looked back at the end. He stared for a moment at Salandin who had the same mark as grandfather before leaving through the door.

"You haven't secretly done anything else without telling me, have you?"

"There's really nothing more now. Earlier was just me taking a bit of a gamble in my own way."

Kishiar laughed softly.

"Just what kind of value do those Aspail silver coins have to provoke such a reaction?"

"Ah, it's nothing special. They're just the first silver coins made by Finance Minister Aspail of the 26th Emperor who created the current silver coins. Though the silver coins he originally planned were supposed to have five types of flower patterns stamped like what we use now, when first minting them there was an accident where leaf patterns were included due to the maker's mistake."

When the minister learned of this, he immediately ordered the minting of those coins stopped and changed to the original design. Most of the already minted coins were recalled, but a small number remained uncollected.

"Collectors really love them for their symbolism as the first form of currently used silver coins, plus the special element that they're hard to distinguish at a glance. They're also most frequently used when making high-value transactions through unofficial channels."

"Is that why you had them?"

"Yes. Since you never know how things will turn out, I always keep a few. Though I didn't expect to use them here."

Yuder let out a short sigh.

"...Anyway, though it's fortunate we learned information we might have missed thanks to your quick thinking, I'd like to pay about half the amount used."

"Hm? What are you saying?"

Kishiar questioned back with shameless eyes as if he hadn't heard anything.

Chapter 1182

"So I want to pay half the amount..."

"Hmm?"

"I said I'll bear..."

"Hmmmm?"

"..."

Looking at eyes shining more clearly than ever before, Yuder thought.

'He absolutely has no intention of accepting this.'

Though Yuder's wealth was less than Kishiar's, if you added up his accumulated unused salary and rewards, he could be called far richer than most lower nobles. Moreover, he had the calm certainty that even if he spent all that wealth at once now, it would quickly pile up again.

'Whether I have money or not, I wouldn't regret it at all...'

But if he said this to Kishiar, he would surely return the exact same words to him. In this state, Kishiar would just slip away like a loach no matter what was said, never getting caught. After making a quick judgment born from experience, Yuder let out a long breath.

"I can't help it. Alright. But I'll remember this."

There was plenty of time. Wouldn't there come a day when Yuder could spend money like today's Kishiar?

'Surely at least once.'

Only then did Kishiar stop his shameless face and smile brightly.

"Good. Your remembering is the best compensation for me."

Yuder didn't reply. The smiling man changed the topic with a satisfied voice.

"Anyway, the information wasn't wasteful for taking a gamble. Don't you think?"

"Yes. I never thought the mark on grandfather's arm wasn't just a simple spot."

"I would have thought the same. A magic school where stories were passed down that you could receive a great mage's blessing by doing good deeds. It seemed just like scripture-level stories."

"How did you know about that story of the mage who experienced healing magic?"

"Because I was once in a position desperately craving such miracles. I gathered every bit of information related to healing, whether credible or not."

Though it wasn't something to answer so casually about, Kishiar just looked peaceful. He ruffled Yuder's hair and gently wrapped an arm around his shoulders.

"Don't make that face. I'm thinking right now that I did very well to do so."

"...Yes."

"So, what do you think about the information we just obtained?"

Yuder organized his thoughts while half-leaning on Kishiar's shoulder.

"...If I had heard Salandin's story first, I would have half-dismissed it thinking it too fantastical and typical of mages. But... we first saw grandfather's old possessions and the different handwriting."

"That's right."

The handwriting changed from before the accident. Behaviors different from simple memory loss. And the old story passed down in the magic school.

"Looking at everything together, I think Salandin's story about the great mage's blessing wasn't completely nonsense. Currently, rather than grandfather experiencing simple memory loss, him being someone who changed after experiencing the great mage's blessing... strangely feels like it makes more sense."

"Yes. I think the same. The problem is we still can't know for what purpose and by whose power this happened. Earlier Salandin..."

Kishiar listed various great mages he knew and told various stories. While listening to those words, all the information Yuder had seen and heard so far mixed and flowed freely in his mind.

The long-continuing magic school. The great mage's blessing. The magic school's rules. Grandfather who devoted his remaining life to saving and raising baby Yuder. Actions preparing for separation early as if his death could come anytime. His final words to Salandin. Cannot deceive time. Time. Time...

Though nothing was falling clearly into place yet, while watching the spinning memories without restraining them, there was suddenly one thought that popped up.

Yuder caught the end of that thought and unconsciously opened his mouth.

"What if..."

"Hmm?"

Kishiar immediately stopped speaking and met his gaze.

A 'what if' that arose in the mind of Yuder Aile who didn't have rich imagination like Kishiar.

Perhaps he was about to say something too nonsensical.

Yuder hesitated briefly. However, seeing the warm gaze waiting as if anything could be said, that hesitation soon melted away like snow. He continued speaking again.

"If the great mage who became the origin of that magic school really was Luma, I tried imagining when and for what reason he would have created and done such a thing. Wasn't he someone who lived too busy a life to create a magic school just to tell later generation mages to live kindly?"

Kishiar made an expression of swallowing laughter then nodded.

"That's right. And?"

"In the last part of Luma's diary I read, it clearly showed what purpose he had when leaving Gyllandr Hill again."

"He said he wanted to prevent another great disaster that might repeat in the future."

The man who never forgot anything immediately recited the diary's sentences that Yuder had interpreted and read that day.

"-No matter how great a human, they cannot even maintain their will and pass it on for over 100 years. Perhaps that is the reason new heroes appear each time, and the reason warnings left by other heroes of previous generations become diluted. After I die I won't even be able to confirm whether this thinking is right or wrong, and even if another hero appears I won't be able to meet them..."

"Yes. But he said he would depart to find ways to solve that without giving up."

Though he had never met Luma directly like Enon, someone like him would surely have done his best to keep his words. That much was certain.

"Since Luma was a mage, he would have looked for ways to achieve his will through magic. The diary left at Gyllandr Hill, and Enon's existence itself could be seen as part of warnings and help left for later generations. However, we still don't know what method he left after writing the diary, right? So what if..."

Yuder put strength into the corners of his lips and clearly stated his meaning.

"Is it too nonsensical to imagine that perhaps the existence of that magic school might have been 'one of Luma's methods' found after writing the diary?"

"..."

"Couldn't the great mage's promise itself have not been just a simple legend from the start, but rather mentioning the contents of magic that would be realized in the future?"

Kishiar who had been slowly blinking stroked his chin lost in thought. Yuder continued speaking while watching his reaction.

"Enon said old mages each had their own unique magic too. In Luma's case..."

"Connecting magic. That's what he said?"

"That's right."

The magic of Luma seen when going to Gyllandr Hill was truly marvelous. Being able to freely hide things by connecting both visible and invisible things. If he hadn't directly seen that such magic existed and had been maintained until now, it would have been hard to believe.

A great mage who could easily hide his hideout for a thousand years and create a being called a guardian by connecting a spirit's soul with a human body might have been able to create more miracle-like magic that continues until now.

"The magic school too, in a way, isn't it a gathering of people who 'connect' will? I just had such thoughts."

Chapter 1183

"People who connect will."

Kishiar repeated Yuder's words.

"There's a point there. Yes. It could be seen that way too. An interesting... no, perhaps it might be close to the real answer."

He didn't dismiss Yuder's imagination as nonsense. Rather, he seemed to take it more seriously than Yuder.

"Though the awakener power we use seems to be greatly influenced by will, in the case of magic, the current established theory is that the conditions and environment for it to be realized could have greater influence than the user's will. The most representative magic supporting that theory is precisely magic circles and magic tools."

After the early magic era when magic could only be used with individual magic power passed, and the period of mining magic stones began. Mages realized they could use magic utilizing the latent magic power in magic stones without taking the risk of gathering much magic power in their bodies. Though it was single-use, in some ways it was a much safer method than before.

They went further from there to analyze great mages' magic circles and find ways to trap and move magic power in specific forms, leading to the creation of magic tools. Magic tools were truly revolutionary as even non-mages could use them.

"Current researchers say that theoretically magic could be sustained forever if conditions and environment support it. Though there actually aren't many magics that have lasted that long... but we're talking about Great Mage Luma who accomplished that."

"That's right."

"Let's think about this as constructing conditions and environment for manifesting magic named 'great mage's blessing' through Luma's power."

Kishiar explained while counting on his fingers one by one.

"Since the great mage would have wanted magic that would definitely be maintained for a long time, he must have constructed an environment where magic could continue while not becoming distorted. A magic school with engraved marks is quite a good foundation in that respect. As you said, as long as there are mages who engrave marks symbolizing it while continuing will, the environment itself for magic to manifest could be created anytime."

Yuder nodded to convey he understood.

"And when those mages fulfill certain specific conditions, the 'great mage's blessing' manifests using their magic power. Magic containing his will to achieve the great mage's purpose."

"I was worried my words might be too absurd imagination, but anyway you're saying it's magically possible."

"Rather, I think it might have been words that could come out because you're not familiar with magic and only thought about Luma as an individual. I hadn't thought to connect his ability in that direction."

Kishiar smiled.

"Actually in some ways his magic has similarities with my ability too. The point that what's important isn't the power itself but how you use that power is like that."

The ability to push and pull and connecting magic.

They are powers that can become endlessly narrow if thought of narrowly, but conversely can exert limitlessly powerful force the more you change perspective. Kishiar seemed to have had such thoughts while seeing Luma's magic.

"So I think there's not much meaning in arguing whether it was possible or not in the current situation. Since if the great mage thought this far he surely would have made it possible with room to spare, what remains for us is finding 'evidence.'"

Yuder nodded.

"Yes. That's right. We have more to look for when we return."

While Yuder was organizing in his mind the things to look for after returning - grandfather's original name, the old accident, the magic school, Luma's activities after writing the diary - Kishiar suddenly smiled slightly differently from before.

"From a family perspective it might feel a bit strange that grandfather might have been a mage who received the great mage's blessing. Are you alright with that part?"

"That's just... I already concluded and sorted that out when hearing grandfather might have been someone related to magic. The rest is just an extension of that so it's fine."

Anyway, the grandfather who raised Yuder wasn't an illusion. Grandfather raised Yuder with love and was his only family until the day he died. What did it matter whether he was actually a mage, someone who lost memories and changed personality, or a being whose inner self changed after receiving something called the great mage's blessing or whatever? Even if something more was added to his identity here, that one fact was enough for Yuder.

The man who heard the answer smiled with curved eyes.

"I think he would have been very happy to hear that."

Would he? That couldn't be certain since he wasn't grandfather himself, but it didn't feel too bad.

They walked with shoulders side by side. Yuder thought while feeling the warmth touching his hand.

'If the great mage's blessing really was Luma's magic.'

It was said the mage presumed to have received the great mage's blessing in the past claimed to be an incarnation of the great mage. If that was true, was grandfather perhaps such a being too? That ordinary and kind old man being an incarnation of Great Mage Luma? It felt strange as it didn't seem to fit at all.

'Actually asking Enon would be fastest about this part.'

No one knows better about Luma as one individual person than Enon. So naturally he planned to tell him about this matter and ask when they returned.

'But separately from that... if the one who cast the great mage's blessing was Luma, what did Luma intend to do after the magic succeeded?'

Actually he already knew that answer. Luma would naturally have tried to prevent disaster coming to the world again as written in the diary.

But grandfather did nothing except raise Yuder.

'No, it's not that he did absolutely nothing, he did read some books.'

And that was all.

Great Mage Luma didn't just want to prevent calamity coming to later generations. According to the diary, he also wanted to meet if a hero like him appeared again in later generations.

Though Yuder couldn't be called a hero like Luma, he is at least a being who died and returned again like the First Emperor. His goal was unchangingly preventing the world's destruction both before death and now. Thinking about that point, doesn't this situation roughly match the conditions of the being Great Mage Luma wanted to meet?

Was the meeting between grandfather who received the great mage's blessing and baby Yuder really coincidence?

'Though it seems like too deep a thought... coming this far, such doubts arise.'

Grandfather wouldn't have known the fact that the Red Stone would fall long after his death. He wouldn't have known Yuder would become an awakener and join the Cavalry, and finally become Commander and kill many people while rampaging to prevent destruction. He would have known even less that he would die and return here again and only then think to visit his hometown.

Surely that must be so...

'...Did he really not know?'

It was unknowable. He became curious enough to think he wanted to meet grandfather again and ask if he could turn back time once more.

"What are you thinking about so much?"

Kishiar whispered softly. Yuder looked at his face and opened his mouth containing the thoughts he had just had.

"I was thinking it would have been nice if grandfather had written something like a diary too like Luma. The account books aren't any help at all."

There was belief that just with these words, Kishiar would know all the thoughts that led Yuder to say this. Seeing his face smiling comfortingly with relaxed eyebrows, that belief seemed right.

"But I was really happy to discover the account books though."

"That and this are separate matters."

When he answered coldly, Kishiar let out a low laugh. He tapped to show the part containing the selected account books inside the bag slung on his back.

"You never know. Actually these here are ones I brought because I wanted to examine them a bit more carefully while reading."

"Didn't you just pick out the volumes recording costs from when I caused trouble as a child?"

"Though I really wanted to bring those too, actually it's the opposite. Because these are the volumes written at the very end."

Because he liked the parts recording young Yuder so much, Yuder had naturally thought he had selected and brought volumes containing those. But that wasn't it.

When he turned his head, he saw the face of the man who had removed the appearance-transforming magic tool. The one revealing clear red eyes opened his lips.

"Though I can't be certain yet, I feel parts of these volumes were written according to some specific rule. We might discover something more when examining them together with reference books after returning."

Chapter 1184

'A specific rule...?'

Yuder's gaze turned to the bag Kishiar was carrying.

"Do you mean there's something like... a code hidden in the account books?"

"You could say that."

Kishiar agreed.

"But I can't be completely certain yet. It might end up being just my feeling."

Though Kishiar said that, knowing how capable he was in all sorts of miscellaneous knowledge, those words didn't sound casual at all.

'If someone proficient in all kinds of codes felt something was there, the possibility of it being nothing is rather low.'

Did grandfather really leave something behind? A stirring arose deep in his chest. Yuder suppressed that emotion and nodded.

"I understand. Please tell me if there's anything I can help with."

"Of course. First I'll examine them, then plan to look together so we'll talk again then."

Kishiar smiled. One step before reaching the main road, he used the appearance-transforming magic tool's power on his face again.

"Well then, before leaving this town, I'd like to enjoy a meal together. Are there any places you'd recommend?"

Looking at the sky, the sun had already reached its zenith meanwhile. It was indeed about time for lunch.

"I only know the restaurant below the inn where I stopped when leaving for the Cavalry entrance exam, but if we look more there might be better places than there..."

"No. I've suddenly become very hungry so let's go there right away."

Kishiar answered with shining eyes. Though it strongly felt like he had asked knowing this answer would come, Yuder decided not to question it.

\*\*\*

"Is this it?"

"Yes."

An ordinary inn and restaurant named White Maple. If Yuder's memory wasn't wrong, this was where he first stayed when going to take the Cavalry entrance exam.

"It looks nice."

"Are you serious?"

Though it wasn't as old as the Giant's Sleep Inn where they had stayed in the capital, this place wasn't very clean either. Though there were signs of cleaning efforts, things like holes formed from age or traces of repairs patched onto broken walls and furniture, and old smells were unavoidable.

However, Kishiar looked genuinely excited like a boy.

"Of course I'm serious. Just thinking that your first steps began here makes even me tremble."

But Yuder himself hadn't felt any trembling at the time.

'Though I think I felt somewhat strange that first night deciding to stay here and sleeping somewhere other than home for the first time...'

Too much time had passed to recall that feeling like it was yesterday now.

Yuder smiled faintly watching the expectant Kishiar and looked around. Seeing the inn's scenery after such a long time, old memories seemed to come back a bit. An employee taking orders from other customers approached and asked them.

"Are you here for a meal?"

"Yes."

"Today's meal is boiled chicken with vegetables, bread and potatoes."

There weren't many cases where freedom of menu choice was given at such a tiny rural inn. Even more so for lunch, if not dinner. Yuder nodded to indicate it was fine, then additionally ordered two glasses of beer.

'Since I remember drinking it before too...'

Since Kishiar seemed to want to experience everything Yuder had done before, it seemed better to order this too while remembering.

However, the employee who was expected to go to the kitchen after taking the order strangely didn't leave. Looking at how they tilted their head while looking at Yuder's face, they seemed to have something to say.

"Do you have something to say?"

"No... perhaps sir, haven't you been to our inn before? Your face looks somewhat familiar."

Yuder blinked then affirmed.

"...Yes. I probably came about a year ago."

"I knew it!"

The employee finally clapped as if feeling relieved.

"Young people going to the capital alone for the first time are rare so I remembered somewhat. I think you said you were going to take some exam... have you returned now?"

For a moment, a feeling similar to when meeting the villagers again after returning home came. Who would have thought there would be someone here too who remembered the real twenty-year-old Yuder he had forgotten about.

'I really was young. Since it was my first time leaving home, I must have talked quite a lot.'

Yuder answered the genuinely pleased-looking employee that he was on his way back after briefly coming home. The employee patted Yuder's shoulder, threw a few words of blessing, and disappeared.

Turning his head, Yuder's eyes met Kishiar who was smiling with his chin propped up.

"You look happy."

"Was I? I just couldn't help it because imagining you when you weren't used to the world was too cute."

"I think you're expressing 'were naive' too nicely."

Whether a kind inn employee or anyone else, answering personal information honestly to someone you're meeting for the first time is dangerous. Yuder quickly realized this fact while traveling from here to the capital. Though he probably wouldn't have been greatly taken advantage of even if someone deliberately tried since he had awakener power, the view of the world he encountered heading to his destination was very different from what he had seen looking down from the mountain.

A cold world that was noisy, dirty, where everyone seemed to eye others like prey. He vaguely recalled the time when he ignored Gakane's greeting thinking he just wanted to go back after taking the Cavalry exam.

Then, Kishiar spoke gently while placing the food brought by the employee on the table.

"No child walks well from birth. Rather than being embarrassed calling immature times naive, you should use that experience as a foundation to try walking better. And you're already walking better than anyone so even these words aren't needed."

"..."

"You will continue to do so."

Yuder's eyebrows relaxed imperceptibly to others.

A thought that had welled up like overflowing water while seeing Kishiar at his hometown home pounded painfully in his chest again.

'Every time you speak to me like that.'

He feels how deeply Kishiar loves Yuder Aile.

That in turn made him feel how much he himself loves him.

And how much he had yearned for that soft yet firm faith and conviction...

Unable to overcome his heavily beating heart following the surge of emotion, Yuder impulsively opened his mouth.

But right then.

"What? Duke Diarca has fallen critically ill? Is that true?"

As someone sitting at the next table suddenly spoke loudly, everyone's attention turned that way.

Of course that included Yuder too.

'Who's fallen critically ill?'

While doubting if he had heard the name just now correctly, an even louder voice immediately provided confirmation.

"That's what I'm saying! It's a real story I heard from a merchant who came from the capital!"

"Good heavens, how did this happen?"

"They say it was an assassination attempt. But do you know what's even more shocking? The assassin was none other than the Duke's child! They say it was his youngest son who's notorious as a good-for-nothing!"

"What? A son to his father?"

"That's what they're saying!"

"It gives me chills. My goodness!"

All other thoughts instantly vanished completely from his mind. Yuder turned to look at Kishiar. The man too had stopped his hands that had been moving happily to eat and was quietly listening.

"...I wonder if it's true. If it's the youngest son, isn't that the foolish Kiolle?"

Though other children might be different, Kiolle assassinating Duke Diarca? To Yuder's thinking, it was impossible.

"I also think he's not someone with the ability to do that, but since we really cut off outside contact for two weeks, we can't know. We'll have to return and check."

Chapter 1185

The vacation ended instantly at that moment. Yuder put down his spoon and stood up.

"We should return right away."

"Yes."

Watching the man who stood up without hesitation, Yuder was briefly silent then asked.

"Come to think of it, you wanted to stay here... aren't you disappointed?"

"Hmm? Are you worried about me? How sweet."

Kishiar burst out laughing.

"I'm fine. From the start it was just saying 'I'd like to if there's a chance,' and you told me this won't be the only chance."

Though he had been concerned about making a man too accustomed to giving things up without showing it add another resignation, Kishiar's eyes looked genuinely cheerful.

"We'll have to come back anyway to get the chairs and remaining items from your house. No one will say anything if we stay here a day or so then."

"...Yes. That will work."

Yuder nodded with a lighter heart.

"Ah. Though there is just one thing I regret."

"What is it?"

"That after the vacation ends, it seems it will be hard to hear you call me 'you' for a while."

The answer was so unexpected that Yuder reacted a bit slower than usual.

"...That's what you regret?"

"Very much so. Sincerely."

Kishiar who answered with a voice full of sincerity smiled at Yuder who was looking troubled with an expressionless face.

"But it's alright. Everything has its time. I really like when you call me 'Commander' too. When you called my name it was shockingly thrilling but... hmm. No. Come to think of it, actually I might just be a greedy person who likes everything."

Watching the face of the man seriously contemplating which form of address he liked better, Yuder opened his mouth.

"Though I'll distinguish between public and private... I understand since I too was glad both when you called me comfortably and when you called me an aide you could trust and rely on. So I'll remember well what you've told me."

This time it was Kishiar's turn to react slowly. The man who had been blinking smiled with curved eyes after a moment like the first sprout raising its head in the spring breeze.

"The best answer."

They quickly returned to the capital using the same method as when coming to the Airic Mountains from Peletta. The Cavalry they returned to looked unchanged from when they left for vacation.

"Welcome back, Commander. I'm very glad to see you seem to have properly rested this time."

"It's been a while, Steiber. You look better than before too."

"Haha. After resting for a month, my body that had been aching since returning from the south seems completely healed and even stronger than before."

Steiber, who had come first as soon as he heard news of their return, showed a good-natured smile and playfully struck a pose showing off his arm muscles. It was just like him to deliberately wave toward Yuder the arm that had secretly suffered for a while not moving well due to ability side effects.

"Let's stop with greetings here, I'd like to hear a report on the current situation within the unit first."

"After the Cavalry's reward vacation officially ended two weeks ago, all members returned to their positions as you had ordered in advance, Commander."

Two weeks after leaving Peletta. During that time, no anomalous cracks had appeared again, they said. Though it was during vacation, members who had entered emergency alert status and were examining their stationed regions returned to their positions with the end of vacation. However, that didn't mean loosening the anomalous crack surveillance system.

"Currently each branch is taking the lead in organizing management and communication systems with lords, and discussing methods to strengthen security and cooperate in case of emergencies. According to reports, most are cooperative."

"'Most' means there were uncooperative regions too."

"I heard several lords in the east were quite uncooperative. It's a region that doesn't like awakeners."

It wasn't very surprising. Since it was a region where House Diarca's influence was strong, and unlike other regions they rarely directly encountered the Cavalry's achievements, he had thought there would be the most people who couldn't feel the sense of crisis.

'But at this level, they should be able to suppress and handle it themselves without this side particularly needing to intervene now.'

As if proving Yuder's thoughts correct, Steiber continued speaking with a relaxed smile.

"But it seems there's no need for concern. I hear the new lord of Hartan where the eastern branch is located is providing much help."

Zakail Hartan. Once a promising knight of noble birth but now lord of Hartan, he didn't hide from anyone the fact that he loved Dermilla Hartude, sister of Cavalry member Devran Hartude.

Not only that - though he could have ignored Devran who was an awakener separately from love, he didn't do so, and also expressed intent to respect Dermilla's family like his own family. After allowing a Cavalry branch to be built in his territory and using that as a foundation to rapidly grow his territory greatly, it seemed the eastern people were deeply impressed seeing him.

"According to reports, after rumors spread about what happened in the south, the number of people trying to contact our Cavalry through him, a non-awakener, has greatly increased. No matter how much followers of House Diarca dislike and slander us, when something happens ordinary people immediately come to Hartan to request help and deliver news, so it didn't seem we would be greatly hindered even if something happened."

"That is fortunate indeed."

A gentle smile appeared on Kishiar's face too. Steiber then briefly explained what the Cavalry headquarters had been doing.

"Meanwhile we have been continuing to carry out His Majesty the Emperor's mission while simultaneously continuing adaptation training for new members from each branch. Ever and Kanna were also out for that work, but they should return soon having heard news that you've returned, Commander."

"About that mission."

Kishiar began while examining Steiber's face.

"As far as I know, I understood you were keeping close watch on Diarca by His Majesty's order. But news comes that something not good suddenly happened there meanwhile. Could I hear in detail what happened?"

"Ah. Perhaps..."

Just as Steiber was about to explain, familiar voices of Kanna and Ever were heard along with knocking on the door.

"Commander. Kanna Wand and Ever Beck here. We have returned upon receiving news of your arrival!"

"Come in."

Ever and Kanna who entered with disciplined steps quickly blinked their eyes simultaneously in silent greeting seeing Yuder standing behind Kishiar. In the time they hadn't met, Ever had braided her long hair and twisted it up to avoid interfering with movement, and Kanna had it half-tied, looking different from usual. Yuder too subtly nodded in response to their greeting.

"Welcome back. We were just talking about parts related to the mission assigned to you."

Kishiar briefly exchanged greetings with them like with Steiber, then got to the main point.

"I'd like you to tell me about the progress of the mission His Majesty assigned to you. Especially focusing on the past two weeks."

Of the two people, Kanna stepped forward first.

"I will report first."

She opened her mouth with a calm face.

"During this time, His Majesty the Emperor ordered us to prevent an assassination attempt on the Knight Kiolle da Diarca of House Diarca and monitor and protect him."

The Emperor had already known through special channels that Kiolle da Diarca might be killed that day. He made a somewhat bold attempt to prevent Kiolle's assassination and use that incident to his advantage instead.

That was making the Empress 'coincidentally' go out to encounter Kiolle.

**Chapter 1186**

Without trust in both the Cavalry's abilities protecting the Empress and Kiolle from behind and the Empress's boldness, they couldn't have even attempted it, but they carried it out perfectly. Because of this, people believed without doubt that the assassins caught that day had naturally targeted the Emperor and Empress. They couldn't even suspect that Kiolle, who was involved in the process, might have actually been the real assassination target. It was natural. When assassins from where Diarca's private soldiers stayed appeared at a place the Empress had gone hiding her identity, how could anyone think they might have targeted someone other than the Empress?

"Since His Majesty ordered a thorough investigation of the assassins' identity and intentions without leaving a single question mark, we also took turns or moved together watching him during this time. There were no problems until about a week ago."

A week ago. It was really quite recent, more so than expected.

"What happened then?"

"That day I was in charge of protecting Sir Kiolle da Diarca."

Ever raised her hand and spoke.

"That day he went to meet Duke Diarca for investigation. However, he hadn't contacted Duke Diarca in advance."

"..."

There was no change in Kishiar's expression. Ever continued telling the story of that day.

\*\*\*

"If I wait just a bit more... Father will surely come here."

Near the lake in the capital's Fourth District where Kiolle had gone walking with Duke Diarca before.

Kiolle was tightly gripping a cloak hiding his face to avoid catching nobles' eyes, breathing tensely while hiding behind a tree.

"He might go to the Third District but with weather like this now he'll surely likely come this way..."

Though he seemed to be muttering quietly to lower his tension in his own way, it was heard very clearly by Ever's ears as she hid her body nearby.

'He really looks like a strange person... though hiding like that doesn't help concealment at all, do they not teach that part in the Imperial Knights?'

Ever roughly knew the atmosphere of this district since she had come then too. A quiet rest area formed around the lake. In a place full of pretty villas and old luxury shops, it wasn't easy to meet someone looking so gloomy like that.

Actually, people could be seen whispering to each other and taking detours far away after glimpsing Kiolle who was crouching stuck to a tree muttering something then punching the air startled by leaves falling on his head. In this place where people would at least exchange pleasant eye greetings with anyone they met, only Kiolle da Diarca seemed like an isolated being.

In other words...

"Hello."

"Yes, hello."

This was completely different from Ever who sat naturally quite far from Kiolle exchanging greetings with passersby. People guessed Ever was some leisurely young noble lady, and Kiolle was just a commoner who had wandered in by mistake. No one thought Kiolle was that Kiolle da Diarca.

Though quite different from what Kiolle intended, precisely that point allowed him to hide perfectly from nobles' eyes. Being noticeable yet no one knowing who he was. It was truly absurd.

'Well since no one approaches there's no need for unnecessary conversation... how many people could think he's a knight of high noble birth seeing him act like such a fool.'

While watching until now, she had seen Kiolle escape people's attention in such ways several times. Seeing him eating well, resting well and sleeping well at the external lodgings designated by the Emperor, it was absurdly peaceful to the point of making her wonder about her thoughts that he might be attacked again.

Of course Kiolle himself was shivering at the smaller lodgings than his room and trembling in fear every night, but that's how it looked to Ever.

Actually Kiolle himself thought he was hiding perfectly right now. After the attempted assassination incident, he always had a grave expression and would startle terribly at even small sounds while being wary of his surroundings. Though for all that he had never once discovered the Cavalry members watching him, there was no shame in not noticing.

'Really... I don't know. Whether he's doing this deliberately or if it's really luck.'

She had been so puzzled that she even wrote a letter to Yuder containing those concerns last time.

Anyway though Kiolle was afraid worrying assassins might come for him again, he did try what he called investigation little by little. Suddenly coming here today to find Duke Diarca was also part of that. To Ever it seemed better to just visit and investigate his own home, but he hadn't attempted that yet, perhaps being scared. Though it was a bit frustrating, she could only watch since she couldn't reveal her presence before his eyes.

"Ah!"

That's when it happened. Kiolle straightened his crouched back with a start. At first she thought he had found an insect because of his fluttering movements, but then she saw someone's procession with parasols in the distance. It was Duke Diarca with his private soldiers and servants.

'He really came. So he is still Diarca's son after all?'

Meanwhile Duke Diarca had only made a formal statement saying "regrettable" at news that Kiolle had become a special investigator, without showing any particular reaction. The eldest son Kironne who had tried to kill Kiolle also secluded himself citing illness. Though Kiolle himself was angry guessing his brother was pretending not to know after failing to kill him, the watching Cavalry members didn't think that was really Kironne's intention.

'To anyone looking it seemed like Duke Diarca's intention.'

Duke Diarca acted as if he had absolutely no interest whether his youngest son who had become the Emperor's investigator came home or not. Ever didn't know, but this was a big reason why Kiolle still hadn't dared to visit his family home.

Though Kiolle acted impatiently as if about to run out any moment, for some reason he calmed down looking around. Then he waited for the right time.

'Oh...'

At this point Ever also activated the magic tool she was wearing.

It was an item received from the Emperor, a single-use magic tool that transmitted signals to those carrying the same item when lightly twisted.

'They said a report goes straight to His Majesty as soon as this is used... and Kanna should come soon too.'

Since Kanna could read information, she could quickly find where Ever was no matter where. There was no need to worry since she had left traces by touching specific objects they had arranged in advance while coming here so she could come faster.

She prepared to be able to run out anytime while focusing all her attention on Kiolle. He was checking whether there were other children or nobles around Duke Diarca.

Duke Diarca was wearing a thick coat covering his body due to the still chilly weather. Though he was hard to see being blocked by private soldiers, his figure giving some instructions to a servant could roughly be seen.

The servants who received his instructions ran off somewhere.

'Where are they going?'

Just as Ever wondered this, Kiolle's gloomy muttering was heard.

"When Father comes out alone for a walk, he first orders servants to bring a cup of tea or coffee he chose according to his mood that day to the villa in advance, then walks about one round separated from the soldiers..."

Ever noticed the running servants were carrying something in their hands. She had little interest in tea, but lately, she had grown a bit more perceptive thanks to touring popular dessert shops with Kanna and receiving occasional surprise gifts from Pruelle.

'It looks like the tea Elle gave last time? I think it was some leaf tea from the east...'

"Malgenin tea. Father is indeed troubled... today he'll probably use the third walking path for about two rounds."

'Ah, right. Malgenin.'

Ever knew the answer thanks to Kiolle. After reading his father's state of mind through the tea, Kiolle hurriedly moved to the opposite side around when he would properly start his walk.

Since he would stand out following Duke Diarca, he used his head somewhat to head the opposite way. Since there was a circular walking path around the lake, if he walked from the opposite side he could naturally encounter him just by waiting a bit.

If Kiolle had looked a bit less gloomy, perhaps he could have done as he wished. However, he was currently noticeable in a negative sense.

Therefore naturally...

"You there, identify yourself!”

He could not even get close enough for Duke Diarca to see his face before one of the private soldiers, from a distance too far for Kiolle’s face to be recognized, grabbed the back of his collar.

'Oh dear.'

While Ever who hadn't even moved expecting this let out a sigh, Kiolle struggled.

"I-I... Do you know who I..."

"An assassin!"

At that moment, someone shouted from far away. From various directions, figures appeared, their entire bodies covered so no skin was visible.

Chapter 1187

'What's this?'

Even Ever was surprised for a moment. One of the revealed assassins shouted with a hoarse voice while making hand signals.

"They've already noticed. Strike!"

The assassins launched themselves toward where Duke Diarca was. People who had been walking started screaming and fleeing. While the soldier holding Kiolle was startled, one assassin approached and swung their weapon. As the soldier moved to block the attack, Kiolle was released and rolled ungracefully across the ground.

"Ugh!"

A moment when the assassin could have easily stabbed Kiolle if they had wanted to kill him.

However, the assassin passed by Kiolle as if he didn't exist and quickly moved on.

Ever's eyebrows rose high seeing that scene.

'Wait... could it be?'

Looking again, the clothes Kiolle wore and those the assassins wore were surprisingly similar. The only difference was that the assassins had wrapped their face-covering hoods above their noses, while Kiolle had drawn the hood attached to his cloak tight to cover a similar area.

It seemed the assassins considered the captured Kiolle to be an accomplice with the same purpose as them, and judging that they too had been discovered when he was caught, moved urgently.

'My goodness.'

The fact that they had hidden well enough that even Ever hadn't noticed meant these assassins were not ordinary individuals. There was a very high possibility they had at least concealment magic tools.

How could things go according to plan when people who had hidden so carefully with such caution moved much faster and more urgently than their intended timing because of Kiolle?

Ever recalled the response guidelines for encountering professional assassins that Yuder had taught to the entire Cavalry before.

'-Assassins are different from mercenaries. While mercenaries are good at improvising, assassins show openings the moment their established plans are disrupted. That's because they prioritize achieving their goals with minimal movement and escaping. So if you have to deal with them...'

It's best to strike first and shake them up no matter what.

Those dark, deep eyes speaking in a slow and cold voice.

At the time of hearing those words, the Cavalry members had cried out saying 'only you could so easily tell us to notice assassins in advance and strike first,' but now his words proved not wrong at all.

Ever let out an exasperated breath watching the movements of the assassins openly showing confusion. They were shaken believing they had already been figured out because of Kiolle, and taking advantage of that gap, Diarca's soldiers succeeded in forming a protective formation around the Duke.

But there was another unexpected point here, and that was the actions of Kiolle who had been lying fallen after rolling on the ground.

"Father!"

He suddenly got up and ran toward Duke Diarca. When Duke Diarca who had been trying to move away paused in surprise at the familiar voice, one of the soldiers protecting him turned and thrust their weapon toward their master.

"Die!"

The appearance of a new assassin who had been hiding pretending to be a soldier.

However, because the Duke had paused very briefly at hearing Kiolle's voice, the traitor soldier's weapon failed to pierce its target's heart and only managed to slash his shoulder diagonally.

"Your Grace!"

Blood spurted as Duke Diarca staggered and fell. The traitor soldier immediately tried to stab his neck again, but the soldiers moved right away and cut down the traitor. Taking advantage of that gap, Kiolle started running through the fighting people to reach his father. Though it was crazy, no one attacked him.

This was possible thanks to a fantastic combination of the assassins briefly glimpsing Kiolle passing by during combat and mistaking him for an ally, and someone's lightning-fast slingshots striking the heads of soldiers trying to attack him from somewhere.

Naturally, it was Ever Beck who threw stones to prevent Kiolle from being attacked. Though her specialty was originally close combat, since facing the sage in the south she had also been training in throwing daggers following Yuder's advice.

Yuder had said that training would raise her ability to fight while delicately distributing power another level, and could increase her options in critical moments.

'Though I didn't expect to use it like this here...'

Emperor Keilusa had ordered them to stop all attempts to attack or kill Kiolle, no matter who made them. The additional instruction was to proceed while keeping their bodies hidden as much as possible unless absolutely necessary. This method was the best way to follow that order.

Ever's stone throwing demonstrated power almost no different from arrows thanks to her ability to concentrate power in her fingers and delicate control. As she quickly moved between trees throwing stones, both soldiers and assassins fell into confusion.

"Attacks from afar! There might be more assassins, be careful!"

"Diarca's side has surrounded us and is making ranged attacks!"

While they were thrown into chaos each misunderstanding the unexpected third party's attacks as they pleased, Kiolle finally reached where his father was. He removed his cloak revealing his face before the soldiers who were guarding warily with raised weapons.

"Move aside! I said move!"

"Young Master Kiolle...?!"

In an instant, everyone present was greatly shocked.

'Young Master Kiolle appearing with the assassins... does this mean he already knew about the plan to attack Duke Diarca?!'

The soldiers thought this, and,

'We thought one of us was caught but it was a Diarca person? Just when had the plan been playing in the palm of the opponent's hand! We should withdraw while we still...'

The assassins thought this.

And speaking of the nobles watching this incident from afar,

'Good heavens. Diarca's youngest son was mixed among the assassins. He really did become the Emperor's faction and stab his own father!'

They all covered their mouths thinking such thoughts.

In the shock hitting like a huge wave, only Kiolle failed to notice any of this and did his best to grasp his fallen father's hand.

And Ever, who alone besides Kiolle roughly grasped how this situation was developing,

"I'm here! What should I do?"

"Oh, um. You came, Kanna. But we might not need your support anymore..."

"What?"

Ever was wearing an awkward smile after joining up with Kanna who had come running after receiving contact...

\*\*\*

"-After that, the situation concluded with the assassins immediately withdrawing and fleeing. We secured several fleeing assassins, confirmed the locations of the rest with Kanna's ability, and those secured are currently detained by the Cavalry."

Ever let out a small breath after telling everything about that day. Kishiar asked with a strange smile on his expressionless face.

"How did House Diarca move right after the incident?"

"Duke Diarca was immediately moved to his main residence. Though Kiolle da Diarca wanted to follow, he was blocked by the soldiers and couldn't achieve his wish. Duke Diarca has remained in seclusion until now, and besides saying he is receiving treatment, there has been no other announcement from the family."

"Then what about Kironne da Diarca's movements?"

"It's said he returned to the capital from the villa where he had been in seclusion right after the incident occurred."

That meant the Duke hadn't properly regained consciousness yet.

'Additionally, the culprit is... likely to be him after all.'

According to what followed, after being prevented from following his father, Kiolle returned to his lodgings and was staying there dejectedly. Seeing there was no external activity, it didn't seem he was doing any more investigation either.

'He really does have good luck at least.'

In the end, it was a misunderstanding that Kiolle had attacked Duke Diarca. Though they had guessed that would be the case, hearing it made it truly even more absurd.

"His Majesty the Emperor said that when Commander returns, we need not continue monitoring Kiolle da Diarca. That is all."

"Good work. Now I fully understand why the rumors spread that way."

Kishiar nodded.

Chapter 1188

For those who had worked hard throughout the vacation period, Kishiar issued them free vacation certificates they could use whenever they wanted. At first he had tried to give additional vacation right away, but since all the deputy commanders refused, this was the method he proposed.

"Proper rest is also absolutely necessary to continue working. Even if it feels useless right now, there may come times when you feel you need this vacation certificate. Use it comfortably then. That will do, right?"

"Hmm... yes. Thank you."

After finishing the discussion about Diarca, they had a brief meeting about the winds of change coming newly to the Cavalry.

"Until now we mainly focused on training and adaptation, occasionally assembling members separately for temporary external dispatches when needed, but from now on everyone will formally share external duties according to new standards."

"Yes. You had briefly forewarned us before the vacation."

The Cavalry's achievements during its first year were truly brilliant. Having achieved internal stability and established branches in each region faster than expected, it was now time to move beyond the daily routine of training and studying to the next stage.

"From now on, the Cavalry headquarters and branches will receive formal dispatch requests from outside, and examine whether those requests are appropriate. If we judge it appropriate for us to move, we will first grade according to the work's risk level, and dispatch teams selected according to that grade's regulations."

This was also the Cavalry's main work in the previous life. Of course, there were almost no times when Cavalry Commander Yuder went on external dispatches except when directly ordered by the Emperor, but regular members would take on dispatch or support duties according to their specialties.

Sometimes multiple branches needed to cooperate, and since headquarters also had to manage and command the branches, everyone would have quite a hard time until experience accumulated. It was also a moment when the work of deputy commanders managing members under them became much more important than before.

'In my previous life, I only felt things were running somewhat properly around the 2nd-3rd year after becoming Commander but...'

This time he was surprisingly not worried. Because the growth of the members he had seen so far, and the changed heart of Yuder Aile, held calm conviction rather than concern.

The conviction that though earlier than before, everyone could do well enough.

'Now it will become easier than before for the Cavalry to monitor and handle anomalous cracks across the country or continent.'

When the Cavalry formally started work and officially announced taking charge of handling anomalous cracks, they could work without receiving interference from anyone.

Now anomalous cracks were no longer beings that had to be handled 'since we happened to encounter them.'

"Now we'll also create medical divisions in each branch, and expand the size of headquarters' medical division as well. The same goes for administration, training, and education."

"Yes."

"Your burdens will increase greatly but I believe you'll do well cooperating together as you have until now. If there are difficult things to do alone, talk to your colleagues, and to me and my aide anytime."

"Understood."

Firm determination passed over the faces of the three deputy commanders. However, from the fact that there was no burden or tension contained in it, Yuder felt again that they had achieved growth.

'It's not that they have no burden at all, but it probably means they've developed enough self-confidence and sense of responsibility to not show it outwardly now.'

Knowing the weight of their duties while not losing composure.

That was also what Commander Kishiar did better than anyone.

Since he could tell who the deputy commanders had learned such attitudes from, Yuder held a very small smile while standing behind Kishiar.

"Ah, and Steiber was the one who examined and compiled the training situation of the second batch new members during vacation."

"Yes, Commander."

"How was it?"

Kishiar's question was brief. Though he didn't specify exactly what was how, none of the people here were confused by such manner of speech anymore.

Steiber opened his mouth to answer with a warm smile.

"Everyone generally showed very overflowing enthusiasm. They endured training quite well too, and no one has deserted yet. Though there's an atmosphere of competition between branches, the southern new recruits' ability to harmonize is particularly good so it feels like it's passing as friendly competition."

The faces of the southern branch new recruits including the awakeners from Star of Nagran and Elpkins passed through Yuder's mind. It was quite surprising and admirable that they were playing the role of good-natured people among the new recruits.

'The previous Elpkins would never have received such words.'

"How about the north? I'm curious since those new recruits are complete strangers unlike other branches."

"The north?"

Steiber let out a humming sound as if recalling something.

"There's one person with quite a unique ability, and personally I was quite concerned they might be ostracized because of that ability. Though there haven't been any problems so far, I'm watching carefully with some caution."

It was Fay. Yuder was certain. Looking at Kishiar's eyes, he too clearly felt the same certainty.

"Ostracism due to ability. Why?"

"It's an ability to create duplicates, but unlike Gakane who just makes shadow duplicates of himself, this ability can make exact duplicates of other people using their hair."

Indeed the person Steiber mentioned was Fay.

"Though the maintenance time is just a few seconds at most, I thought there was plenty of potential for it to feel uncomfortable since they can borrow others' appearances."

"Yes. I understand. From your evaluation it seems similar to combining half of Gakane Bolunwald's ability with Pruelle van Tain's ability."

"Hmm. Yes. Now that you mention it, that's right."

Gakane creates shadow duplicates different from real people's appearances. As Steiber said, the duplicates he could create were limited only to himself. There was also the characteristic that as he grew stronger, his duplicates also grew stronger.

Pruelle can transform into people he has met, but only the outer appearance changes. If he didn't know much about the target, the transformation duration was endlessly short, and he couldn't use the target's special powers. Therefore, he found it easier to transform into ordinary people and blend into crowds rather than transform into awakeners or mages.

Fay can create duplicates of others while their own power doesn't change at all. Though it becomes harder to create and move them the more powerful the original person is, if successful they could truly do anything. Since they could make them speak as that person and use abilities too, it was possible to exist in multiple places simultaneously.

Though their abilities might seem similar, this is precisely why Fay was overwhelmingly easier to be ostracized by others.

Steiber seemed to have been concerned because he had thought that far too. However, his expression wasn't that dark.

"Though somewhat quiet, I felt they were a friend who seemed fine in personality itself. So I think it will be alright if we teach them well and show them how to work together."

"Thank you for your opinion."

Kishiar was silent for a moment then opened his mouth.

"Actually I first heard evaluations about the northern new recruits in the north. And by chance I also learned that someone among their origins was related to certain matters currently being handled in the Peletta duchy. That person is likely the one Steiber just mentioned."

Kishiar briefly informed the deputy commanders about the incident of imposters infiltrating the north pretending to be the Shuden Trading Company. After hearing explanations about the imposters' true identity and Fay's origins, the three deputy commanders' expressions became serious.

"According to what you're saying Commander, that friend may or may not already have connections with somewhat impure tribal forces from the south."

"That's right. But if Steiber didn't feel any particular strangeness, there's likely a greater possibility there isn't much connection yet."

"Then I will watch more carefully."

"I'll help too."

Kanna raised her hand and declared firmly.

"I should be able to figure it out sufficiently in about a week at most."

"That’s reassuring."

After saying that, Kishiar briefly glanced at Yuder. After an unknowable gaze passed, he quietly opened his mouth.

"Steiber gave good words. Ability is something that depends on how you develop it. Since they can advance in any new direction depending on what thoughts they hold and what direction they train in, I hope you'll continue watching without prejudice while keeping in mind what was told today."

"Understood."

Chapter 1189

After the deputy commanders withdrew, Yuder remained with Kishiar.

"What do you think about the situation with Diarca?"

"His Majesty ordering that Kiolle's protection and surveillance can be stopped for now means he judged there's no immediate risk of him dying."

So that meant regardless of whether Duke Diarca recovered well or not, conflict within House Diarca would soon properly surface. When they start fighting among themselves, the attempted assassination of Kiolle that became the first cause of this incident would be pushed back in relative importance. Neither Kironne nor Duke Diarca would be able to pay attention to Kiolle, so naturally there would be no need for close protection from this side either.

"Between a distant enemy and an enemy holding a knife to your neck right before your eyes. It's natural for anyone to want to strike the latter first."

"That's right. Then Kiolle..."

"Given Duke Diarca's personality... originally he probably planned to prepare some 'substitute assassins who tried to harm the Empress' to send to him at an appropriate time."

Just as he had done when Crown Prince Katchian was investigating the intruder in the Sun Palace.

"But that will be difficult now because of this incident. If it were me I would take this opportunity to provoke Diarca and stir things up more, but His Majesty might think differently from me."

A smile both mischievous and chilling appeared at Kishiar's lips.

"Well, actually I want to investigate around Kironne da Diarca more than Kiolle or Duke Diarca."

"Are you suspecting something is 'attached' to him?"

Kishiar curved his eyes. It meant the answer was correct without needing to say so.

Kironne da Diarca who was practically driven out by his father though citing illness as the reason. According to Ever, he returned to the main residence at the perfect timing as soon as Duke Diarca collapsed. But since when had House Diarca been such a humane family that they would let in a child the Duke personally sent away without permission?

'When they wouldn't even let Kiolle follow.'

This was a clear declaration. A proclamation that his power had grown strong enough to strike his father's back and he would no longer comply obediently. And it was also a bold assassination attempt showing anger and confidence.

'Anyone can see Kironne is the culprit in this situation. Moving with that in mind means he was confident he could definitely break the Duke with this opportunity.'

Kironne was also the one who became the final victor by seizing the position of Duke Diarca in the previous life. To do so he probably killed Kiolle, and Kishiar had already speculated that he must have struck his father well from behind then too.

But then he had Katchian to support him.

The current Katchian had no power, so where did Kironne get the courage and power to think of boldly striking his father?

Kishiar expressed that answer with two fingers.

"In my opinion there are two candidates. Either those flowing out from the Wolf's Eye tribal alliance like Aton, or..."

After briefly trailing off, he grinned.

"-my dear brother His Majesty."

"...Ah."

Though he was momentarily surprised since the name Wolf's Eye tribe came first, he soon realized even that order of mention was Kishiar's intention. Yuder recalled Emperor Keilusa's bold declaration when they met before receiving vacation.

'We shall obtain for ourselves the opportunity we have only thought about until now. An opportunity to place a move to confuse the enemy and completely grasp them in our hands. An opportunity to fully test what we have prepared, an opportunity to test our own ability. And an opportunity for revenge. There will be no better timing than now to do all of that.'

House Diarca, strongest and most arrogant among the four ducal houses.

Their pillar that seemed would never fall was now fallen and lying down, and internally they were scattered and confused rather than united. Their appearance of only having to fight each other unable to trust one another was exactly as Emperor Keilusa had mentioned.

'He said everything would be different when we return and report...'

A chilling thrill arose.

Seeing Yuder's expression, Kishiar spoke playfully.

"Of course we can't be certain of the answer yet. Though we'll know when we see His Majesty tomorrow."

Though he said that, his red eyes were already certain of the answer.

"I'm just a bit regretful that Nathan's return is delayed so we can't hear interesting stories together."

\*\*\*

Yuder slowly walked through the Cavalry interior examining his surroundings.

Usually many people take rest to recover from travel fatigue when returning from vacation, but that didn't apply to Yuder.

"Sir Yuder. You're back!"

In the medical division he was visiting after 6 weeks, Lusan was alone grinding medicinal herbs. Seeing Yuder, he smiled openly showing very pleased signs.

"You're alone, Priest. Has Enon not returned yet?"

"Ah, yes. You haven't heard the news yet I see. Enon sent a letter saying urgent business wasn't quite finished yet, so he would be a few days later than the original planned return date. But he should return around the day after tomorrow."

"I see. It must be hard working alone."

"Haha. It would be a lie to say it's not difficult, but it's fine. New people will be coming here from tomorrow too."

While others rested, Lusan had stayed here the whole time healing injuries of training new members and helping interview those applying to the medical division. Naturally, most of those he interviewed had experience working in temples.

"We selected five people in the first round. For the second round we plan to make final confirmations and decisions together when Enon returns. I heard there are quite a few priests from the Grand Temple who requested dispatch wanting to join the Cavalry like me, so we'll have to interview them too..."

The interview process must have been quite exhausting, as some shadow fell over Lusan's smiling face. Though he roughly guessed the reason, Yuder pretended not to know and asked.

"Like when recruiting new Cavalry members, there must have been quite a few strange people among medical division applicants too, was that part alright?"

"Well... there were some people who seemed to come just hearing rumors about being able to advance without any understanding of what work needs to be done here. But they all understood and left after good explanations. The Cavalry members who joined the interviews helped a lot too."

Lusan's eyes briefly turned toward empty space.

"So much help that I had to heal some applicants afterward... but yes. It was fine after that. Let's hope it's better next time."

Though nicely called 'people who just heard rumors,' they were actually crazy people who would throw abuse and curses at interviewers for not accepting them. Wasn't that why they had attached Cavalry members to handle it mercilessly instead of the kind priest?

'Indeed the rod is medicine for nonsense. I should find out who those guys were that helped Priest Lusan then and hear what kind of guys did such things.'

The reason for wanting to hear was simple. What other purpose could there be besides finding their information and quietly sending a gift of secondary punishment if they still seemed to be dreaming vain dreams? Not knowing the ominous thoughts passing under Yuder's expressionless face, Lusan was just grateful.

"Thank you for stopping by here worrying about me."

"Not at all. Then I'll..."

As he was about to leave, Lusan who had been hesitating caught him saying "Just a moment" shyly.

"Here, this is the first vitality medicine I tried making by myself. I added a bit of my divine power like holy water in Enon's method, and I wanted to give it to you and the Commander first so I prepared it, would you accept it?"

Yuder accepted the bottle he held out. Inside the glass bottle were pills that looked a bit more uneven in shape than those Enon made.

"Actually when I heard rumors that you hunted monsters even while on vacation I was worried... but seeing your complexion today I'm glad thinking Sir Yuder seems to have rested well during vacation. Take these when you need them."

Complexion? Had there been any changes in his face?

Though he thought that, Yuder first bowed his head expressing thanks.

"...Thank you."

Lusan waved goodbye with an unburdened face. Yuder came out of the medical division holding the bottle. And immediately encountered a group of members approaching with excited faces.

Stiff fabric that was clearly new clothes. Several unfamiliar faces.

They were new Cavalry members.

"Ah...!"

The new members all stopped walking upon discovering Yuder. Several among them who were familiar approached not knowing what to do, as if they had met some amazing person.

"Yu-Yuder Aile... Se-se-senior!"

Among them were Elpkins who was a head taller than others, Jack who had belonged to Star of Nagran in the past, and Gloe who had a leather pouch containing cards tied at her waist.

But Yuder's gaze went to the face of someone mixed in the group behind them, unable to approach.

'Fay. He’s here.'

Chapter 1190

Fay, meeting again, naturally looked much younger than in Yuder's memories.

With hair cut short like a boy's and a blank expression, he might have looked even more so as he trembled his lips about to faint with almost the same face as Elpkins.

'Before... I think I felt he had a somewhat dark impression.'

Yuder recalled when he first met Fay in his previous life. By then he had already been a member for several years. Meaning he was older than now.

A gloomy face well aware that though his ability's potential was recognized at the northern branch and he was moved to central headquarters, it was still just pending since it was only 'potential.' If he wasn't acknowledged at headquarters he would have to return north within 2 years, perhaps because of that he used to try harder than others more desperately.

'That was a big part of why we decided to keep him at headquarters too. There weren't many guys who worked that hard.'

"Um, um, now, has your vacation ended, Se-senior?"

Jack who was beside Elpkins asked with a face frozen not insignificantly.

Why was that guy acting like that too? Though he seemed to have become somewhat scared since learning who Yuder was after being helped to escape from the southern fighting ring, he hadn't acted this stupefied... Had he caught it from Elpkins? Yuder stopped recalling Fay's old appearance and nodded.

"I returned from today. Where were you all heading?"

"Uh..."

Though it wasn't meant as interrogation and was just a question, all the new members froze up at once. After a moment, their gazes went back and forth intensely as if discussing who should answer. Though it seemed like anyone could speak, coming out like this made the atmosphere quite strange.

'Is talking with me that difficult?'

It wasn't that there were absolutely no new members with personalities that wouldn't be intimidated by anyone. But the problem was that coincidentally none of those people were here.

'It would have been better if Marin was mixed in.'

Yuder let out a short sigh and just designated someone to answer it.

"Gloe. I'd like you to answer."

Choosing her was a selection stemming from previous life experience and habit.

"Ah!"

Gloe's face who was designated turned red.

'Though she looks like that, she's a personality that will say what needs to be said so it should be a bit better.'

"That... we were going to take the second retake math test..."

"Second?"

"Yes... because we didn't pass the previous retake test again... I'm sorry!"

Among the subjects taught to new members in the Cavalry, there was also mathematics. However, it wasn't formal mathematics, but focused on calculation methods needed for daily life and writing reports. In other words, these new members here were going to take the test for the third time after failing that subject test twice.

After Gloe's answer, all the new members hung their heads deeply with gloomy faces. Some even covered their eyes with their hands in embarrassment. It seemed they had hesitated to answer because they were embarrassed to say they had failed the test twice right in front of Yuder.

Yuder glanced at where Fay was. That guy had completely flipped over the hood attached to his uniform to cover his face.

'...Come to think of it, were both Gloe and Fay not good at calculating too?'

Though Fay and Gloe's entry times to the Cavalry were not the same in the previous life, their times as deputy commanders overlapped quite a bit. Though of course Gloe disappeared earlier than Fay, he remembered they had quite a good relationship.

He vaguely recalled Ever, who was the longest-serving member besides Yuder and had maintained the deputy commander position like a pillar of the gods, sighing after seeing those two's reports.

'-Why are both of them so weak with numbers while doing other things well? When numbers are needed they get half wrong so I advised them to switch and check each other's first, but now the wrong parts doubled. Yes. Meaning everything is wrong...?'

Both then and now, they were equally weak at calculations. Thinking that, Yuder opened his mouth.

"It's not something to apologize to me about."

"What?"

"It's not a mortal sin to be bad at calculations, and calculations aren't absolutely necessary for Cavalry work either. There are plenty of things you can do without knowing them."

"Ah..."

"So if you can't do it, just pass at an adequate level and study other subjects harder. I didn't take advanced literature or historical understanding that could be taken after reading and writing either."

Actually rather than not taking them because he couldn't do them, it was closer to not taking them to use time as efficiently as possible. However, since the new members didn't know the truth hidden behind those words, they were greatly moved.

"Th-thank you for the advice!"

Yuder quietly looked over the new members' faces then asked naturally.

"Though there are some familiar faces, there are also faces I'm seeing for the first time. What are your names?"

"Ah. I'm...!"

The new members who hadn't exchanged greetings with Yuder stepped forward to give greetings and introduce themselves. Now there didn't seem to be anyone trembling or nervous as much as before.

And finally it was Fay's turn.

"I...I am! Fay! Who was recruited to the northern branch!"

It was the loudest voice among the new members who had opened their mouths so far.

"I'm twenty years old! And my ability...! I call it 'Moving Scale Mirror' myself...!"

"Gasp. This is the first time I'm hearing that guy speak."

"Moving Scale Mirror? What's that?"

The sounds of several new members nearby whispering with surprised faces dug into Yuder's ears. Though he pretended not to hear, Yuder's impression was somewhat similar to theirs.

'...Wasn't the tension supposed to have eased a bit now? Why is his way of speaking like that? And what's with that ability name?'

When Yuder first received a report about what Fay's ability was in his previous life, he had just answered with a dark face saying 'I can create and move duplicates of others. Though a price is needed.'

He was truly hearing this strange name Moving Scale Mirror for the first time now.

"What exactly is the ability?"

"There's a scale only I can see! When I offer a price on that scale, a mirror appears! My target is reflected in the mirror, and I can summon that here!"

It was a truly strange explanation. Others seemed to think so too as they made blank expressions.

"Summon the target reflected in the mirror...?"

"So then what happens? How?"

In the early days after joining the Cavalry, they first teach theory-focused studies like physical training, writing, and calculations rather than training to develop abilities. This was because Kishiar judged it was better in many ways to have them adapt first before starting training.

Therefore, the new members hadn't properly seen each other's abilities yet.

But even Yuder who already knew and had experienced this fact didn't have a very different reaction.

'...Scale and mirror? What's that?'

When fingernails or hair or such parts of a person are offered, a duplicate appears. That was Fay's ability as Yuder and others knew it. But did that mean there were additional complicated processes of his own like scales and mirrors existing within that seemingly simple explanation?

As Yuder quietly blinked his eyes, Fay, whatever he thought, continued speaking hurriedly while waving his hands.

"Of-of course it must sound strange. Usually, so, I simply reflect people with things like hair... then a person appears...! Though just for a very brief moment."

"..."

"Um, my friends said it would be better to just call this 'ability to create duplicates'! So if you just know it that way... it's, it's fine too."

"Friends?"

When Yuder questioned softly, Fay brightened and shouted.

"Ah, yes! Friends I met in my hometown! They gave me a lot of advice that let me come here!"

He seemed to know who those so-called friends were.

They would be those Shuden Trading Company imposters belonging to the Wolf's Eye tribe who had encouraged Fay to leave his hometown and tried to ruin the entire north by burrowing in like poison.

"..."

"Though my friends said not to explain the ability unnecessarily complicatedly, I, I personally really respect the heroic tales of Sir Yuder Aile and Duke Kishiar La Orr... no, Commander... I thought if it was Sir Aile you would surely understand all about my ability too...!"

Chapter 1191

After the booming shout, silence fell. Yuder thought while looking at the surrounding new members with their mouths open.

'That guy. One thing's certain now - he's terribly clumsy at dealing with people.'

Well, Fay wasn't the only one like that. Elpkins right in front had a very similar personality, and hadn't Yuder himself lived more uncooperatively than anyone in his previous life? All three also had the commonality of coming from isolated rural areas.

The current Fay seemed close to a personality that was 'usually quiet like Yuder but noisy like Elpkins once he opens his mouth.'

'So he was originally this kind of guy...'

Probably the Fay he met in the previous life was after being ostracized and worn down by others for several years. While Yuder was recalling his changes, Fay became intimidated by the silence that came because of him.

"...I'm sorry. I seem to have said too many unnecessary things. You must have thought it absurd... This is why I usually keep my mouth shut..."

Though Yuder tried to answer that, unexpectedly someone else stepped forward before him.

"If you want to say something then say it... what's wrong with that. No one here would think it's unnecessary when you just introduced your ability. At least the sen...ior Yuder I've seen is definitely not that kind of person."

Gloe spoke quite firmly while fidgeting with both hands clasped together. Then Elpkins chimed in too.

"That's right! Sir Yuder is someone who advised and helped even an awakener like me to enter the Cavalry! Didn't other seniors do that too! Someone who fairly guides any awakener who works hard!"

What was this atmosphere? While Yuder blinked at the excessively embarrassing words, other awakeners also opened their mouths one by one.

"Well, I was a bit surprised too, but that wasn't because it was absurd... I just thought you didn't speak because you disliked mixing with us until now..."

"I'm a bit stupid so I don't understand the ability well... but anyway it must be an amazing ability to pass the Cavalry entrance."

"Hey, talk with us from now on too. It's fine even if you talk a lot."

Fay raised his deeply lowered head. Inside the hood he was still covering, his revealed eyes were full of moist tears.

'...He's crying?'

Before he could shed tears, Yuder quickly said what he had been trying to say earlier.

"Everyone, I heard your introductions well."

"..."

"Understanding and honestly speaking about your ability is natural as a Cavalry member. There's no reason to judge that unnecessary. Rather, I'd like to have a chance to hear about each of your abilities in more detail next time."

"Ah...!"

The new members' faces all brightened as if feeling his sincerity.

"Are you going to create customized training methods for us too from the famous Commander's aide...?!"

"Goodness! That's wonderful!"

Though it was questionable whether Yuder's peers would agree with those words, Yuder promised them next time and turned around. From behind his back came the sound of Fay speaking while sniffling.

"People telling me it's okay to speak if I want to... that it's not unnecessary... since my mother passed away this is the first time... I was the most useless person in our village..."

"Um... you seem to worry quite a lot... would you like me to read your cards after the test? I look at cards too when I'm worried..."

Like until now, some things would be the same as the previous life and some things would be different.

Though Yuder had no thoughts about Fay until now, after directly seeing his appearance quite different from memory, the thought newly came that he seemed to have known nothing about him.

'The most surprising thing is probably... his ability.'

Offering a price through scales and mirrors, and through that summoning the target reflected in the mirror...

It wasn't that there weren't awakeners who could use abilities through some medium only visible to themselves. In the previous life, some Cavalry members could read colors only visible to their eyes to grasp an enemy's danger level, and some fought wielding weapons only visible to themselves. But Fay's case was more unique while seeming similar to such abilities.

'The ones who advised him to explain his ability briefly must have been those Wolf's Eye tribe guys.'

Like how Yuder had advised to pass Kanna, he thought they must have told him to make his ability look as strong as possible and explain it simply. Since they would have judged it faster to just show results than make the interviewer understand a complicated ability.

'Fay himself didn't seem to know well the potential his ability held either. Creating only duplicates of others with that power was probably because he thought that was all that was possible.'

Rather than trying various tests, he would have considered it much more memorable and powerful to summon someone who already had verified abilities. So he would have trained hard only in that direction. Actually that method had somewhat bloomed in the previous life, even earning him the honorable nickname of One-Man Cavalry.

'But what if he could create duplicates by offering parts of useful weapons or items on that scale? Could he duplicate means of transportation too? Or magic tools, or...?'

As various items came to mind, another idea suddenly arose in Yuder's head.

'Perhaps there might be ways to use what's reflected in the mirror differently without summoning it?'

According to Yuder's memory, the duplicates Fay summoned were always healthy and clean looking unlike the originals. Probably because that was how Fay wished them to be.

What reaction would appear if he made the original face their clean reflected image in the mirror without taking it out?

At that moment, what first came to Yuder's mind was the ability of a certain healing specialist awakener who existed in the previous life. That awakener was from a medical background, and could easily identify even injuries not visible externally by reflecting injured people in a small mirror he possessed. However, he pretended not to know the power his ability held, and died from overload while trying to develop his ability in a different direction insisting it was a mirror that reflected truth.

'Was that when I seriously started thinking about the directional problem of ability development...?'

The previous life's Fay was someone whose ability development was seriously delayed. It wasn't common for it to take several years to refine his ability to a usable level despite working several times harder than others.

'Come to think of it... such things often happen when trying to forcibly develop abilities in directions that don't match aptitude.'

Now that he properly knew how he used his ability, the previous life Fay's struggles started to appear from a different angle.

Perhaps rather than being specialized for pulling out duplicates to fight, Fay's ability might have been a power that could be applied differently to the original target using those duplicates.

Though he didn't know what that was yet, he should be able to find out by watching more from now on.

'If rather than being limited to summoning duplicates for a few seconds while coughing blood, it could be developed much more easily and usefully.'

It was when he thought that far.

Someone approached and strongly patted Yuder's shoulder.

"Yuder! You're back!"

"Gakane."

Gakane, whom he hadn't seen in a long time, smiled with a face about twice as radiant as before.

"I'm really glad to see you again. Looking at your face, it seems you really enjoyed your vacation this time, I'm relieved!"

That seemed like something Yuder Aile should return to him instead.

'But that aside... after Priest Lusan, even Gakane is talking about my face.'

"I don't think anything's changed particularly about me. You look good."

"What are you saying. Your eyes and complexion are much more lively than before vacation! This is the first time you've looked this healthy since I met you."

"I was always healthy."

"Of course I know! But the feeling..."

Gakane smiled as if looking at a younger sibling, then looked around broadly. Then he lowered his head and whispered quietly.

"Hmm, well. You look good enough to make me feel grateful to the Commander."

"..."

Once Kishiar's name came up, Yuder could no longer argue with him.

"Anyway, I was looking for Sir Zuckerman but haven't found him yet. Do you know where he might be?"

"He hasn't returned yet. It will take a few days."

When he conveyed the news that Nathan Zuckerman would return after finishing remaining work in Peletta, Gakane's bright face changed slightly gloomy.

"I see... I trained hard in swordsmanship during vacation and had some improvement. I wanted to show him but I guess I'll have to do it later. I wanted to congratulate him on the glorious master recognition he received from His Majesty the Emperor this time too..."

Usually this would be something to pass over thinking Gakane had become quite close with Nathan Zuckerman. However, Yuder suddenly recalled how Nathan had hidden the nickname attached to him in Peletta while only conveying embarrassing rumors to this side.

This seemed like a good moment to take revenge for then.

"If you're going to congratulate him, why not add one more while you're at it."

"Huh? What is it?"

Yuder told him that Nathan Zuckerman had single-handedly handled numerous flying monsters in Peletta this time, and because of that gained the new title of Sword Emperor of the North Wind.

"Wow... such a title was created? He didn't mention that in the letters he sent me...!"

Though Gakane was very disappointed at not being able to see such an amazing scene, he promised to definitely include that title in his congratulations too.

"Ah, but Yuder. It might be good to go outside the Cavalry now."

"Why?"

"I'm not sure if it's just my feeling. But someone who looks like Kiolle da Diarca seems to be lingering outside. When I approached he quickly ran away so I didn't particularly chase him... but if it's really him, wouldn't he have come to meet you?"

Chapter 1192

He had been thinking of going to check on Kiolle's condition at some point anyway.

'I need to hear information too while I'm at it.'

But he hadn't known that guy would come looking for him like this on his own. Should he consider this convenient and good? Yuder thanked Gakane for the information then headed to the main gate.

At first no one was visible, but when he crossed his arms and quietly closed his eyes, soon he felt small signs of presence not far away. Though it seemed like they were trying to approach quietly in their own way, they couldn't completely hide their excited breathing from being gripped by fear.

Listening to the sound of taking a few steps then panting, then a few more steps and panting again, it seemed like he might die of old age waiting for that guy to come all the way here.

Without opening his eyes and still in that pose, Yuder opened his mouth.

"Stop the useless act and just run out."

"..."

For a moment the panting breath stopped completely.

Thinking Kiolle's mind might be confused whether this was directed at him or not, Yuder kindly called his name.

"Kiolle da Diarca."

"Heuck!"

With a choking sound, Kiolle tried to dash out from behind the bushes... but tripped and fell hard.

"Ack!"

Yuder slowly approached Kiolle who was rolling around holding his nose. Kiolle was wearing different clothes than his usual Imperial Knights uniform.

"Ugh... uuu..."

"Is your nose broken?"

"No!"

Though he had planned to take him to Priest Lusan for treatment if he was badly hurt, Kiolle immediately jumped up as if misunderstanding that he was going to scold him. Right then, two streams of blood flowed down under his reddened nose.

Though others might not be able to hold back laughter at this farce, Yuder's face was just cold.

"How is it not broken when your nose is bleeding?"

"This just happened! It will stop soon!"

Though Kiolle insisted while roughly wiping under his nose, far from stopping, the bleeding started twice as much.

"Ack! Why, why is this happening?"

'What an annoying guy...'

Without any response, Yuder lightly waved his hand. Though Kiolle flinched, closing his eyes, all Yuder did was pluck some leaves from a nearby tree using wind power. He roughly rolled them up and held them out to Kiolle.

"Block it."

"How can I use something so filthy...! If you're going to give something, shouldn't it be a handkerchief?!"

"You must be well-fed. Commoners who can't afford to carry handkerchiefs all do this. It has hemostatic properties so nosebleeds stop quickly, and it's not dirty. If you don't like it, block it with your own handkerchief."

"If I had a handkerchief I wouldn't...!"

Kiolle who was about to shout bit his lips tightly then went quiet. After a moment he accepted the leaves Yuder held out with a gloomy expression and put them in his nostrils. After fiddling with the leaves protruding under both nostrils, he frowned and spoke in a nasal voice.

"...My dose feels weird. It's burding."

"I told you it has hemostatic properties."

"..."

"So, why did you come here?"

When he conveyed the intent to get to the main point, Kiolle finally came to his senses. After busily looking around to confirm no one was there, he cried out with a thoroughly wronged expression.

"Be-because you didn't come! That's why I came!"

"What are you talking about?"

"They say the Cavalry's vacation ended and everyone returned... but you didn't even show your nose for nearly 2 weeks...!"

He roughly interpreted the shouting sounds.

It seemed Kiolle had thought Yuder would know about what happened to him, and expected him to come find him and extort information as usual. But when Yuder didn't come even after nearly 2 weeks since the Cavalry's official vacation ended, it seemed he couldn't stand waiting anymore and came looking for him himself.

'Feeling wronged because I didn't come to extract information. Duke Diarca would weep tears of blood if he knew.'

While Yuder quietly stared thinking that, Kiolle's complaints continued without stopping.

"Do you even know how anxious and dangerous my situation was?! No one helped me, and Father abandoned me! You must know something but didn't even appear...! Wouldn't it help you too who made an oath with me if I'm safe!"

Surprisingly, those words themselves were correct.

Anyway, from Kiolle's perspective it seemed the key point was that he felt anxious when Yuder didn't show himself for a long time without any reason in a situation where he should have appeared based on experience, so Yuder kindly explained.

"After vacation ended, His Majesty the Emperor separately ordered me to reflect."

"What?!"

"Two weeks. So I returned today."

"..."

"Do you understand now?"

Kiolle who had his mouth open chewed on Yuder's words for a moment.

After a while, his wronged attitude relaxed halfway.

"...If that was the case you should have said so as soon as we met!"

"Since when were we close enough to kindly exchange each other's schedules?"

Unable to argue since it was correct, Kiolle who had been trembling and biting his lips soon raised his head and asked slyly.

"But why... why did you receive reflection? Aren't you doing well in the Cavalry?"

"What good would knowing do you. Mind your own business."

"I wasn't curious at all and just asked! Since I've received quite a bit of reflection too, I might be able to kindly give advice after hearing your circumstances!"

It seemed in that guy's mind, reflection was engraved as punishment only received when doing something terribly wrong. Instead of teaching him that reflection could sometimes be used with various meanings, Yuder just let out one short sigh and nodded his head.

"Follow me."

"What?"

"We can't keep standing here talking. Since there's a space in the Cavalry where visitors can talk quietly, I said follow me."

"Ah..."

Only then did Yuder stride forward with Kiolle following hesitantly behind him.

"Kiolle."

"I wasn't looking!"

He had just called his name because something to say came to mind while going, but the guilty guy shouted loudly. Since he didn't even feel like reacting to this level of foolishness anymore, Yuder ignored it and opened his mouth.

"I'm not curious at all about what you look at so do as you please. Anyway, you wouldn't have known I was returning today so how did you manage to come looking on the right day? What were you planning to do if I wasn't here?"

"Ah, that..."

Kiolle who had been hesitating muttered gravely in a lowered voice.

"Actually, for a while I had been feeling like someone was watching me surveillantly from somewhere but I didn't feel that feeling today!"

"..."

"It must surely be my elder brother Kironne's doing. So I thought I should come here taking advantage of the gap when the surveillance gaze loosened..."

Wasn't that the Cavalry?

Earlier Ever had said there was an order from the Emperor that 'when Kishiar returns, the mission to monitor and protect Kiolle da Diarca can be stopped.' Since they returned to the Cavalry after hearing news of the Commander's return today, naturally the gaze watching Kiolle disappeared too.

'...I see. In the end it's true he came after sensing I had returned.'

Should this be called sensitive, or foolish?

He had enough sense to feel gazes but the part where he completely misidentified who they were from was very Kiolle-like. Since he couldn't tell him the truth without the Emperor's order, Yuder just quietly looked at Kiolle's serious face.

"If I hadn't met you I would have waited until the surveillance gaze disappeared and come again! Though I may not look it, I'm quite persistent... why, why are you looking at me like that?!"

"Never mind. Let's just say you were lucky."

"What? Why are you talking ominously like that!"

He opened the door to one of the Cavalry's rest areas prepared for conversations with outsiders. Yuder entered and immediately closed the door, locking all the locks. Though it was natural to prevent anyone from suddenly opening and entering or eavesdropping, Kiolle misunderstanding that he was trying to confine him was unexpected. Though they went through a slightly annoying process, they were able to have a conversation anyway.

"I... really don't know what to do."

Kiolle who had sat down muttered, clutching his head.

"Since meeting you my peaceful life has become completely ruined! Father was injured, my eldest brother tried to kill me... it feels like it's been months since I could go to the Knights, and there's no contact from His Highness the Crown Prince then suddenly getting caught up in an accusation case...!"

Yuder's eyebrows that had been about to ask coldly if that was because of him twitched at the last part.

"Accusation?"

"Yes! What was it? They say an accusation letter was submitted asking to find and punish someone who sent hired bandits to some unknown small village in the west! But when they looked into it, that employer was His Highness the Crown Prince's attendant!"

Yuder's eyes shone darkly.

"When was this?"

"Just yesterday! Even though I was in my room I couldn't help hearing how noisily the commoners were talking outside!"

"Aha."

The corners of Yuder's lips rose ominously.

'The gift His Majesty the Emperor prepared... wasn't just one.'

Kiolle reflexively swallowed hard, unconsciously becoming scared for a moment.

Chapter 1193

It was just before leaving for Airic that he had received news about Katchian La Orr in Peletta. But listening to Kiolle's story, he didn't sense anything that seemed to have progressed from that story then.

'That's true even considering that Kiolle probably couldn't properly access or pay attention to any external news besides Diarca during that time.'

That enables one speculation.

Emperor Keilusa had only 'confirmed receipt of the accusation letter' meanwhile and merely spread rumors around the capital without doing anything until now.

There were probably several reasons for that.

To make Katchian feel pressure while slowly tightening the noose around his neck.

Or needing time to sufficiently win over surroundings before responding.

If not that, then considering watching Diarca and Kiolle more important.

But to Yuder this looked closest to the behavior of a hunter waiting for the right time.

More precisely, a hunter who has pinned down prey under his claws so it can be caught anytime, waiting for his companion to return.

The companion the Emperor was waiting for would be his brother Kishiar who had shared his intentions until now.

'Kishiar plans to see the Emperor tomorrow.'

A day to clearly prove what he had accomplished while his younger brother was away, that he was fine without a hair harmed.

A day to share the joy of revenge together.

That was all tomorrow.

'Is this the elder brother's gift for his younger brother finally returning after completing his first true rest in a harsh life?'

He started feeling somewhat expectant about going to the palace tomorrow.

Yuder erased his smile and opened his mouth toward Kiolle.

"So, what do you plan to do now?"

"What?"

"What do you mean what? You just talked about it yourself plenty."

When he looked at him with meaning that he had already forgotten, Kiolle made an indignant expression.

"I don't know either! That's why I came! Because I wanted to find out something from you!"

He nearly got assassinated by his eldest brother, and his father was injured and bedridden. Since the Emperor ordered Kiolle to 'investigate the assassins' identity,' all that remained was choice.

Either acknowledge that the identity of the assassins announced externally as 'those who attempted to assassinate the Empress' really came from Diarca and become an undeniable family traitor.

Or do his best to protect his brother who tried to kill him and his family by reporting lies and covering up.

'But... the Kiolle da Diarca I originally knew would naturally have chosen the latter without even needing to worry.'

Even without a father to help with the second method, he would have tried somehow to protect the family. Because Kiolle was stupid enough not to know he could die anytime if the breakwater of Duke Diarca disappeared and the Emperor's temporary protection was gone too.

What did it matter whether those who tried to kill him were disguised as the Empress's would-be assassins or not? He was the kind of guy who would openly lie down and throw a huge fit if people misunderstood asking if Diarca's youngest son had become the Emperor's faction.

But surprisingly, he wasn't moving like the previous Kiolle. Rather, though passive, he spent time following the Emperor's orders. Not only that? Now he was even coming to find Yuder directly requesting a kind of protection and advice.

It was something the Kiolle da Diarca from when they first met would absolutely never have done.

'I felt it when meeting him in the south too but...'

Kiolle da Diarca had changed.

This definitely didn't mean the person had completely changed or become smart. Of course it wasn't that he had gained non-existent perception either. But something in that guy's heart had definitely changed from before. Just looking at how he wasn't making the superiority complex-filled remarks he used to make daily today showed that, and successfully sending support personnel keeping his word from the south showed that too.

'Ah, right. That was definitely surprising.'

Thinking of then made him feel it would be fine to give some help.

Yuder quietly asked while watching the groaning Kiolle.

"Why do you think your brother tried to kill you?"

"...You're asking me that in this situation?"

Kiolle questioned back with eyes like looking at a devil without blood or tears.

"Then who should I ask?"

"You just find it amusing that I nearly died!"

"Amusing or whatever, shut up and answer since I have no interest in you."

He only listened when threatened. Kiolle who was intimidated by the fierce killing intent finally made an expression of trying to think.

"I don't know well either. But eldest brother... originally had no interest in me! Though other brothers and sisters were the same..."

Yuder suddenly recalled the information that only Kiolle had a different mother.

"Then do they get along well among themselves?"

"Generally there's an atmosphere of everyone respecting eldest brother. Hmph, though not groveling like third brother acting as if he's eldest brother's servant. Usually everyone just lives without much interest in each other. It's natural since Diarca members all live without interest in worldly matters!"

What nonsense about living without interest in worldly matters. Would such people go crazy fighting for imperial power like this? What about the guy who struck his father's back aiming for a title and tried to kill his brother?

"If eldest brother wanted something from me I would have just done it without difficulty. When he kindly came to my room to make a request for once I wondered what it was, but I never dreamed such a thing would happen... Actually even now I somewhat think it might have been a misunderstanding that I just don't understand..."

"Misunderstanding?"

"The investigation did show the assassins were sent by eldest brother! But there's nothing for brother to gain by harming me. Looking into it, it might not have been eldest brother but someone else around plotting to harm me, a loyal knight...! Like, stories that appear in books! Huh? It could be that!"

Though Kiolle himself shouted with veins bulging in his neck, to Yuder listening it was absurd.

'Though I heard talk about Kiolle's reputation rising lately, as expected he himself knows nothing.'

Of course he had known it would be like this. Still, directly confirming it made it even more absurd.

"There's nothing for Kironne da Diarca to gain by killing you. Do you really think that?"

"...What? Are you thinking there is?!"

"He tried to kill you by hiring assassins because there is."

Yuder stated coldly.

"Sometimes results become the clearest evidence. If that side tried to kill you, it means there was definitely a benefit they could only obtain through your death. Moreover, they didn't even take much care while sending assassins to catch you. It means they either thought you were extremely easy prey, or were as stupid as you."

"Wh-what?!"

Before Kiolle could properly understand those words and get angry, Yuder relentlessly continued asking.

"What was your eldest brother doing while you were dawdling saying you were investigating?"

"...They say he went down to his villa after suddenly falling ill..."

"Even you wouldn't believe that's true."

"Father must have told him to! I can guess that much! Because he must have done that to protect brother!"

"Protection, is it. Would Kironne da Diarca think that too?"

"..."

Kiolle severely wrinkled his brow and closed his mouth.

"If I were you, I would first find out what your brother tried to gain by killing you. Then make a choice."

"What do you mean by choice..."

"Why do you think His Majesty the Emperor specifically appointed you as investigator?"

"...Because I was there! If I say something bad about Diarca... it would become Diarca's humiliation...! That's why I'm saying I don't know what to do!"

"Humiliation? You're the one who nearly died, why would revealing that become the family's humiliation?"

"...Huh, huh?"

Kiolle made a dumbfounded expression.

"When you sent Imperial Knights support to the south before, did you do it thinking it would be a humiliation to the family?"

"This and that are different! That, that was something I did thinking it was what I should do as a knight no matter what Father said...! Father didn't even scold me much later...!"

But while saying that, Yuder didn't miss how Kiolle's expression changed strangely.

It was confusion and disappointment, and shame. Fragments of emotions Kiolle must have felt then when meeting his father to find support to send to the south.

"Your eldest brother trying to kill you is right for the family, and you revealing the truth is wrong? Does it become wrong just because His Majesty gave you the opportunity? Weren't you an Imperial Knight serving His Majesty the Emperor?"

"Uh, um, that..."

Kiolle repeatedly opened and closed his mouth in confusion. Seeing his eyes rolling wildly, he didn't seem to be properly understanding this conversation.

Well, that was fine too. If he couldn't understand even after being told this much then that would be the limit. If he was desperate enough, he would review today's conversation on his own and do something called thinking.

Chapter 1194

"Let me say one last thing, Kiolle da Diarca."

Yuder spoke while looking straight into Kiolle's eyes.

"A time will come when you must decide whether you're a knight or a member of Diarca. If you don't mind dying that's one thing, but if you don't want to die then look around you and do something called thinking with that head. Don't stop. Keep going."

Kiolle who had been listening blankly to Yuder's words suddenly came to his senses.

"Wait. Wh-why do I have to decide that. Whether I'm a knight or not doesn't change that I'm from House Diarca!"

"Right. If you want to die just keep babbling like that."

"What are you saying!"

Instead of answering, Yuder stood up. Then Kiolle cried out urgently.

"No. Explain more, speak more simply! Your words are too difficult!"

This is difficult?

Yuder turned his head and looked at Kiolle pathetically. Though Kiolle's face turned bright red with shame, surprisingly he tried to suppress his emotions while opening his mouth.

"...If you're going to keep telling me to think or calling me stupid, at least tell me what to think about! You saw before! I, I can do it if I judge it's what I should do as a knight! But if I don't know then I can't do anything from the start!"

Yuder swallowed a short sigh.

'Know that the support sent to the south saved you.'

To think a situation would arise where he had to try explaining so kindly to that guy. If Cavalry members saw this they would have been shocked.

After briefly organizing his thoughts, Yuder opened his mouth.

"A knight follows their lord. If thinking is difficult, see directly and decide who you should follow. That seems like it would be best for you anyway."

"..."

Kiolle's expression changed strangely. He could only hope these words at least would remain in that guy's mind later.

"Now go. I have many things to do."

As Yuder was about to drive Kiolle out, he suddenly recalled something and let out a small "ah."

"And the gaze you felt during that time wasn't Kironne's surveillance network, but the Cavalry that His Majesty the Emperor attached hoping you wouldn't die."

"...What?!"

"Since you know properly even now, greet my colleagues with thanks if you meet them later. And don't forget this is already the third time the Cavalry has saved your life."

The first was Yuder in the east. The second was the people who discovered him and Katchian during the hail day in the south. And the third was this assassin incident.

Yuder finally kicked out Kiolle who had a shocked face on his bottom. Afterward, time quickly disappeared just going around the Cavalry examining here and there, and hearing about what had happened meanwhile from those he encountered.

'I couldn't go around everywhere due to lack of time. I'll only be able to see the mages after tomorrow.'

When he returned to the Commander's office gauging what needed to be done, a mountain-like pile of documents on the desk greeted him.

"...Commander?"

When he called out the title that felt like it had been a long time, a familiar voice came from beyond the documents.

"Yes. I'm here."

Kishiar was still sitting in his place as before. Just the documents were too many and completely hid him.

Yuder saw a hand waving beyond the documents. As he slowly approached the fingertips beckoning enticingly, soon another hand suddenly came out to the side and embraced his waist. Yuder let himself be led by that hand without any resistance to half-sit on his knee.

Red eyes smiling playfully were right in front.

"What is all this?"

"Records from the past 6 weeks. Things I should have seen but couldn't."

As Yuder had explored going around the surroundings, he too seemed to have grasped the situation in his way.

"Don't worry. I've seen them all. They're just still here because I haven't cleaned up yet."

"...I wasn't worried. What concern would I have for someone who said they could read all volumes of the Imperial Law in about dinner time."

"Then that's fortunate."

After laughing lowly, Kishiar placed his hand overlapping on top of Yuder's hand.

"Who did my aide meet and come back from? Were there any interesting stories?"

"Just, well..."

Yuder slowly mentioned one by one the people he had met.

"I went to the medical division looking for Enon, but he wasn't back yet. He sent a letter to Priest Lusan saying he would come late because he had more work to do. Ah. Priest Lusan gave me this medicine saying it was the first he made directly this time. He said it would help with vitality since he mixed in divine power."

Kishiar genuinely admired seeing the medicine bottle Yuder took out.

"Usually priests aren't very interested in pharmacy. It's amazing that he's quickly learning and developing pharmacy while having such great divine power."

"I think so too. Hmm, and then I encountered passing new members and Fay was among them."

It wasn't imagination that strength subtly entered their intertwined hands for a moment. Yuder lightly patted that hand meaning it was fine while continuing to speak.

"Though I didn't expect to encounter him right after coming... thanks to that, I learned quite interesting facts. I'd really like to hear your opinion too since I'm curious what you... no, what Commander would think."

Calling him 'you' was truly a mistake. Though it was just a title he had called for barely over a month, it seemed to have stuck too much to his mouth.

Kishiar opened his eyes slightly wider then soon curved them gently.

"Really? It's rare for you to speak like that. What is it?"

Yuder explained about Fay's ability. While he first mentioned the difference between the information he knew from his previous life and the information just heard, then talked about speculation going from there, Kishiar listened attentively nodding his head without saying anything.

"...There's a point. If it's as you think, it could become an opportunity to develop his ability in a completely different direction."

"To be honest, I think that might be better for Fay himself too. Because forcibly developing an ability that's hard to develop properly is also very mentally difficult."

Kishiar was silent for a moment. When he turned his head to meet his gaze, he let out a smile like a sigh while relaxing his eyebrows.

"Why are you like that?"

"...No. I was just hoping he would sufficiently notice and be grateful for this effort of yours. Very sufficiently grateful."

After saying that, Kishiar suddenly let out a "hmm" sound as if something occurred to him.

"Speaking of that... talk of mirrors and scales reminds me of an old story I heard in Peletta. To be precise, it's closer to a tradition spread throughout the entire northern region rather than just Peletta's legend."

"What is it?"

"The basin near Peletta. You remember?"

"You mean where Sir Zuckerman beat up monsters."

"Yes. It's called the Sleeping Water Fairy's Tomb, and they say several more such places exist in the north."

According to the legend that followed, that place was originally a pond full of clear rippling water. It was said to be so clear you could see reflections like in a mirror, and when sick people went there and reflected themselves and dropped offerings weighed on scales to match, if the fairy was satisfied they would appear and cure illnesses.

"Though there are traditions saying they granted wishes besides curing illnesses, most end with stories of curing illness. They say heavier amounts of offerings were given the deeper the illness, but exactly what was offered can't be known. Still, I remembered it being quite interesting that they could cure even those about to die if they could just match the offering's weight exactly."

He probably remembered it since it was also a story related to healing.

"Offerings that must be weighed and given exactly and water reflecting like a mirror... perhaps Fay remembered that story too and that's why he came to have such an ability. Thank you for telling me."

"Of course."

Next came talk of Gakane. When Yuder honestly told about his small attempt at revenge, Kishiar was quite pleased.

"As you know, the reason I'm telling you this in advance is because I hope Commander won't interfere with this plan."

"Of course I know. Don't worry. I won't say a word until the Sword Emperor of the North Wind returns. But wouldn't it be fine to put up a large paper saying 'Welcome Back to the Capital Sword Emperor of the North Wind' in front of the Cavalry main gate at the right time?"

After thinking briefly, Yuder approved that that much would be fine.

"And after that... I met Kiolle da Diarca."

"Kiolle?"

"Though I didn't call him, he boldly came looking here in person."

While talking about meeting Kiolle, Yuder recalled again that guy's unexpected words that had given him considerable surprise.

"...To be honest, I think the advice I gave that guy might cause trouble for His Majesty the Emperor or Commander. However."

"No. That's not so."

Kishiar shook his head and cut off his words.

Chapter 1195

"His Majesty has already chosen the path of trying to save Kiolle from the crisis of death. What you did is no different from being part of that path. If it helps in a positive direction that's enough, I don't think it will have negative effects."

"If you think he would judge it that way then that's fortunate but..."

"And as for me, I don't mind since whatever you do is fine from the start."

Kishiar fiddled with Yuder's gloved hand while giving a small smile.

"Though you probably already knew I would say this, you're worried it might be words I'm forcing out while suppressing my long-held desire for revenge."

He was reading straight through even the inner thoughts Yuder hadn't clearly mentioned.

"But it's really fine. Lately my desire to watch how far the Kiolle da Diarca you changed can go has grown quite large."

"...Is that so?"

"Yes. Moreover, after learning recently that there might be more hidden secrets about him, and now hearing he came looking for you himself, naturally interest can only arise."

Should this really be called fortunate? He thought if Kiolle heard these words of Kishiar's he would probably scream and run away.

'But well, whatever.'

"Some old swordmaster once said. The most difficult and terrible revenge is making them taste the crime they committed."

Yuder had never heard this saying. It didn't seem to be a very famous maxim.

"Rather than killing or returning the same to those who haven't repented, making them truly realize the weight of the crime they committed is the best revenge. Of course since most criminals do not turn away from their crimes, such things happening are very difficult and rare. In some ways it's an unrealistic saying but..."

The red eyes rippled like the sea.

"Since first seeing those words, I've always thought I'd like to see that maxim realized just once."

"..."

"The choice of Kiolle da Diarca who will remember your advice and look around him... I'm looking forward to it too."

\*\*\*

The palace Yuder visited after a long time was unchangingly beautiful.

However, he felt the subtle tension underlying that beauty. More people moving around than usual, knights on high alert. Mixed in the faces of passing attendants too were dark concerns, or unknowable excitement.

And that existed in the face of the chief attendant who came out to receive them too.

"Your Grace Duke, Baron. Welcome. How was your first proper vacation?"

"I spent a truly enjoyable time thanks to His Majesty's grace. Can't you tell just by looking at my face? Others were saying I seem to have become more handsome."

When Kishiar brought his face close impudently so it could be seen well, the chief attendant answered smiling with an unchanged expression.

"Perhaps I've grown too old, but I can't tell well."

"Yuliver. You always say that. Try revealing your true thoughts just once."

No matter what Kishiar said, the chief attendant ignored it and showed the opposite kindness toward Yuder.

"But I can tell Baron Aile's health looks better than when I last saw you. I was worried since I heard you showed great activity when monsters appeared even while resting in the north, but I'm very glad you seem to have returned after resting well. I must thank the gods."

"You think I'll stop making a fuss and be happy if you praise Yuder."

That's right. Kishiar grumbled playfully beside him. How should one deal with the Emperor's chief attendant who was kinder to him than the Duke from a prince's lineage he served? Though Yuder rather felt some burden, the chief attendant just smiled faintly.

"His Majesty the Emperor and Her Majesty the Empress are waiting for Your Grace Duke and Baron in the Gate of Truth. Shall we go?"

The Gate of Truth. Yuder's eyes narrowed slightly.

The Gate of Truth in the First Palace of the Sun Palace. Most facilities in the First Palace were used for official business and that place was too, but the Gate of Truth was specialized for certain aspects among them.

It was a place the Emperor used when wanting to have 'truthful conversations' with people he called there. Those could be conversations about crimes, private scandals, or questions about matters concerning all imperial citizens.

However, it wasn't just the Emperor and guest alone in that room during those conversations. There were also seats prepared for many visitors who came to hear their conversation. More precisely, seats that should be called spectator seats.

In other words, it was a kind of small court just for the Emperor.

'It's not a real court. But conversations held there qualify to be proclaimed under the names of god and Emperor, and any punishment or reward can be given immediately within the Emperor's authority.'

Emperors mainly used the Gate of Truth 'when needing to distinguish right from wrong in advance before imperial family members were formally brought to trial.' It was for the imperial family's honor.

However, the Gate of Truth Yuder remembered was mainly opened when Katchian publicly called those he disliked to trample them with words and humiliate them. Using the fact that it wasn't exactly specified by law that only imperial family members could be called, he used it like his own private court.

Though few, there were those who criticized this which is why Yuder remembered such matters too.

'But today it will truly be opened for its proper use.'

He glanced to the side. Kishiar walking beside him was smiling as usual. Since he too had acquired information about what happened while he was away yesterday, he must have guessed that the Emperor was deliberately controlling the speed of handling Crown Prince Katchian.

Was he looking forward to what his reunited brother would show? Or was he too feeling slight excitement like others?

While thinking, Kishiar seemed to notice Yuder's gaze and lowered his head. When their eyes met, unlike just before when he had only been smiling habitually, he spread a sweet cream-like smile containing sincerity.

"..."

Seeing that smile somehow made him know the answer.

The fact that Kishiar was facing today more calmly than anyone, yet also peacefully.

Also the fact that in any sense, only Yuder Aile, himself, could break the mask he wore.

"We've arrived. Please wait a moment."

The chief attendant who had entered the First Palace knocked on the white-painted door without hesitation. When he respectfully announced that Duke Peletta and Baron Aile had come, the door soon opened.

The Gate of Truth was built in a teardrop shape. In the round part were tiered seats prepared for spectators, and right below was a hard wooden chair where the person to be interrogated by the Emperor sat.

Now all those many chairs were empty.

But not all chairs were empty. Emperor Keilusa and the Empress were sitting opposite the interrogation seat, that is, in the position corresponding to the very top of the teardrop.

A seat where all gazes gathered. The golden chair designed appropriately to display majesty shone solemnly in the sunlight.

"You've come."

The Emperor discovered them and smiled faintly. The Empress called Yuder and gave a welcoming hand wave.

After Yuder and Kishiar gave greetings according to etiquette, they advanced to where the Emperor and Empress were. The one who opened his mouth first was Kishiar.

"When Yuliver guided me to the Gate of Truth, I was briefly nervous wondering if Your Majesty was finally trying to drive me out of the family. Seeing there are no people yet, it seems that's not the case."

"Don't joke around. You would have already known it wasn't that when you came."

Emperor Keilusa responded coldly without even snorting. Kishiar laughed loudly.

"I'll just say I had very small expectations that Your Majesty might have prepared something to match today."

"Yes. I prepared."

After saying that, Emperor Keilusa silently pointed below his high seat. There, two chairs that hadn't originally been there were prepared.

Seats closest to the Emperor and Empress while also able to see all statements well.

"Sit with the Baron. The time of truth will begin soon."

Chapter 1196

Katchian La Orr sat in a dark bedroom.

At his feet lay scattered broken pieces of dishes, and feathers spilled from torn pillows and blankets covered them unsightly. Though servants should have come to clean up the trash normally, no one was by his side. Even the presence of those waiting outside pretending to serve had disappeared quite a while ago.

Since when had it been? Was it from when the new attendant who hired mercenaries and handled outside work instead of Katchian was taken away in knights' arms? Or even before that?

He didn't know. Katchian irritably gave up trying to gauge the dates. He buried his face in his knees. Thanks to the comfortable darkness, his nerves that had become maddeningly sharp seemed to stabilize a little. He muttered while biting his nails.

"Those stupid Diarca ones..."

Katchian had clearly warned them. That Emperor and Duke Peletta planned to make Katchian La Orr's fall into Diarca's fall. That they must surely be planning to dig up Katchian's past and set false traps, so they must respond!

Though he even went to the trouble of deliberately escaping this place for that, Duke Diarca took no action even after hearing the blood-filled warning. Really no action at all!

Actually Duke Diarca had ordered his own response then, but since Katchian didn't know those orders had been blocked by someone's subtle hand in the middle and none were carried out, he just thought Duke Diarca had ignored him.

What could he do when Duke Diarca wouldn't move no matter how long he waited? He had no choice but to move directly to protect himself.

The new attendant who appeared just then seemed like he could become a decent enough limb. Like fallen nobles usually were, he was desperate wanting to gamble on Katchian and wasn't someone who gave complete loyalty to Duke Diarca.

But that stupid guy didn't properly handle the work due to some mistake. The attempt to completely erase from the map the blood relative of an old friend he had killed and their village to erase traces of the past failed spectacularly, and the attendant who had handled that work instead of Katchian was caught just like that.

By the accusation of one who had protected the hometown Katchian wanted to eliminate.

After the attendant was caught, Katchian kept waiting for Duke Diarca. Though he thought he would soon be released or hear news that it had been handled, that wasn't the case. Even until now when the knights and attendants guarding outside had disappeared at some point, Duke Diarca was still doing nothing.

"Aaargh!"

Unable to contain his rising anger, Katchian screamed.

"Just what are you doing! Are you saying it's fine if I really disappear!"

The look in Duke Diarca's eyes when he met him last came to mind.

Eyes that seemed merciful at first glance but looked with contempt like seeing filthy commoners.

It had always been that way since the first meeting. Katchian recalled Duke Diarca who had appeared bearing light before him when he was younger than now.

'So you're that little Kichi. Katchian... though it's a common commoner-like name, it suits you quite well.'

He had hated everything surrounding him since childhood. He couldn't understand why he who was more beautiful and excellent than any human had to live hiding dying his hair black in such a filthy countryside. He hated both the people who clicked their tongues looking at him, and his father who annoyingly hugged and cherished him while crying uglily calling his mother's name.

It was all because of that stupidity that his father was abandoned by his mother. If he had been handsome enough for a noble lady from a high noble family to play with, he should have properly captured her enough to be recognized as a concubine, but he didn't act smartly and was abandoned just being left with a child.

Days of only imagining killing those detestable things every day. Change came like a summer breeze blowing in an unexpected moment.

Those famous House Diarca people appeared looking for Katchian. Though he followed at first thinking his mother was looking for him, there was someone else looking for him. It was Duke Diarca, the head standing at the peak of the huge family called Diarca.

'We need a child who will inherit Diarca's blood and become Crown Prince. We've spent quite some effort looking for an appropriate child, but who would have thought Belji's child would be hidden in such a place.'

Like recognizes like. Just as Duke Diarca saw in young Katchian the cunning to do anything for success, Katchian too smelled the arrogant and vicious scent of success from Duke Diarca. Everything he wanted to have was in that old man's hands. Then what was there to hesitate about?

When Katchian took his hand, everything flowed rapidly.

He left the detestable village. He saw his mother whom he met for the first time since birth appear and kneel respectfully before the Duke saying 'I have finished all the document records and silencing of surroundings as ordered, so I will leave far away and live quietly.' Though once he felt he could do anything if only he could find her, seeing her looking endlessly small before Duke Diarca just made her seem ridiculous.

Afterward he learned one by one how to act like a noble, what he should do.

What Duke Diarca demanded of Katchian wasn't such difficult things.

An Emperor of the empire who couldn't have children and wanted to adopt. He would participate in the Crown Prince selection test that Emperor opened and grasp victory to become Crown Prince.

He said other families would also find and bring children like Katchian. Plus one more strong candidate the Emperor was pushing.

'The Emperor is desperate, wanting to put that stupid and vulgar girl found from a branch line on the successor's seat. But that child will never grasp that glory. Because that seat will be yours.'

Duke Diarca's smile containing absolute confidence that they would make it so.

To the question asking if he understood, Katchian answered with a smile practiced watching him.

'You learn quickly. It's unbelievable that commoner blood is mixed in. Give thanks to the gods that both your hair and eye color are exactly those of our Diarca blessed by god.'

The hair his father painfully dyed trying to hide regained their freedom. The forcibly hidden eye color made everyone who saw it exclaim that he had properly received god's blessing. However, whenever Duke Diarca saw Katchian he ordered to make his appearance shine more, to cultivate it properly.

'Still far to go. If Duke Peletta appears this level would only earn mockery. Since you're a child I'm sending out bearing Diarca's name you must be decorated more.'

Even those who praised Katchian as beautiful nodded hearing those words. Just who was Duke Peletta? Though he learned and came to know the fact that he was the Emperor's brother, it didn't feel real since he had never seen him.

Wouldn't becoming Crown Prince mean becoming Emperor?

Though always saying in words he would be the next generation's Emperor, why did Duke Diarca not teach other things deeply to Katchian and only demand to decorate more beautifully?

Once while learning how to hold a sword he made a mistake and got a small wound on his face. Duke Diarca became greatly angry and cut off the hands of the one who had him hold swords and rebuked Katchian.

'I chose you for your appearance, yet you let that appearance be damaged. I thought you were smart but now I see you weren't. Is a commoner still just a commoner after all.'

After that Katchian could never go near 'dangerous' things again.

Lessons were the same. All activities that moved the body even slightly vigorously were forbidden. Both running and climbing hills were all forbidden.

Standing before the large mirror Duke Diarca gave him, he practiced every day to become a more beautiful and dignified 'imperial family member.' Though Duke Diarca never nodded no matter how much he practiced, he increased the time standing before the mirror more because of that.

'Now you've learned to act somewhat plausibly. Not much time remains until departing for the test, so from now on be careful with words and titles to others too. You are my cousin's daughter Belji’s son. That is, the son of Belsiure da Diarca. Belji raised you from the start, but you stayed recovering because your body was weak.'

Katchian nodded.

Then someone ran up and whispered to Duke Diarca. Duke Diarca frowned and briefly looked back at Katchian then smiled like usual.

'How annoying. There's no need to leave bothersome dregs when doing important things. Handle it quietly.'

The Duke's servant bowed his head and withdrew. Katchian returned to his room.

Actually he knew what the servant had said earlier. He had just pretended not to hear.

'...The child's father came again. He says he doesn't need money, just wants to meet once...'

His father was like mud trying to grab his ankle until the end!

The boy in the mirror perfectly raised the corners of his lips smiling like a doll. Having acquired a bewitching smile and elegant manner of speech, he was now a completely different person from the 'little Kichi' of the mountain village.

Since he would soon change his name too, he thought he would live forever without having to remember that time again.

'Is there really a need to change it? The custom of giving vulgar names to weak-bodied children is common. Rather this seems more natural and fitting so I'd like to recommend keeping it.'

The night before the day of departure. Katchian's expectations were completely shattered by Duke Diarca's words.

He had no intention of giving Katchian a new noble-like name.

What was contained in the old raccoon's cold smile was mockery that 'that cute and common name suits you perfectly.'

Because it was bothersome, or because he was concerned he might not know his place if he got a new name.

For such reasons he was forever trapped in his name.

The curse of his father who gave that name also did not disappear.

Chapter 1197

"..."

Katchian's bloodshot eyes turned far away, toward the mirror broken more than half. His face reflected in the mirror fragments remaining cracked looked like an equally cracked doll.

How long would he have to endure this nauseating situation? How long would he have to live relying on the stupid Duke Diarca's hand? While thinking such thoughts, a sweet voice he had heard sometime came to mind.

'I feel the great pain and anguish Your Highness the Crown Prince holds. How much you must have suffered while everyone around envied and jealously tried to suppress Your Highness's excellence.'

The healer called sage. The old man with a benevolent face always looked up at Katchian with pity and conveyed sincere comfort. While listening to his words, Katchian would feel his head clear and anger subside for a moment.

Though he now knew that old man had tried to betray and use him, nevertheless Katchian kept and cherished certain words he had said without forgetting.

'Your Highness's pain all stems from the destiny of one born with an imperial fate. They say His Majesty the First Emperor had just such a fate.'

'Who could possibly guess the anguish of one who will create a new world? Oh, great one...'

'The one who wins in the end is the person with imperial fate. Not just me, but everyone in this empire knows that fact. So advance without stopping. Though it may be mortifying now, if you endure and wait your time will come.'

One with imperial fate.

Yes. How else could all this suffering be explained? Both becoming Crown Prince and ultimately reaching here were all because of that sweet and damned fate.

No matter how Duke Diarca oppressed him, and the Emperor and Duke Peletta tormented him, he was the person who would become the next generation's emperor. A future they could never grasp was in his hands.

Whenever he had this thought, Katchian would become peaceful for a moment. He tidied his disheveled hair and took a deep breath.

He wanted to drink Ponegri tea. After steeping it strong and drinking, this headache would get a bit better too. Then he’d go find Duke Diarca directly once more.

He’d say that he did what he had to do instead of him. However there was a very small disturbance because the stupid attendant made a mistake. He’d demand again that his hometown village, the old friend that he had killed, and that friend's annoying Cavalry sister must all be taken care of right now.

Handling this much was an easy matter for House Diarca. Yet doing nothing still was just because Duke Diarca was trying to tame him. Nothing more or less than that. Though it hurt his pride, he’d bow and ask. That should work.

After reaching that conclusion, Katchian shouted toward outside.

"Bring tea. My head hurts and I want to drink tea."

The magic lock that had been locked according to the master's will opened.

Whether their ears were blocked lately, the response of attendants who usually only came after shouting several times was strangely quick. Katchian opened his mouth without even looking back at those entering through the opened door.

"Clean the room and take out clothes. I'll change clothes after drinking tea."

"That will be difficult, Your Highness."

"What...?"

An unfamiliar voice. Katchian who turned around surprised belatedly realized the fact that those who entered were wearing knights' armor rather than attendants' clothes.

"His Majesty the Emperor has called Your Highness to the Gate of Truth."

Gate of Truth?

It was a name he was hearing for the first time. But from the point that the atmosphere surrounding them was not ordinary, he could feel something was different from usual.

"Why should I go to a place I wasn't invited to in advance? Don't you know it's against etiquette?"

"The invitation was already made two days ago according to imperial etiquette. Your Highness did not express intention to refuse. Many people are already waiting for Your Highness. Let us go."

"Wh-what?"

Three days ago? Just when did they invite saying such things?

It was useless even rebelling saying he had no intention of accepting that invitation. Katchian was forcibly taken from the room held in the knights' hands. The attendants and guard knights who should protect him were nowhere to be seen, not a single one appearing.

"Let go! Let go! Is no one there? Quickly catch and drive out these rude ones!"

"Please at least wear shoes since your feet are bleeding."

The knights acted frighteningly calm.

"You're the ones who made my feet bleed! Are you not afraid of dying for the crimes of insulting royalty and attempted assassination?!"

"Your Highness's hands and feet were already stained red before we visited. Do you not remember?"

Katchian looked at his hands and feet held by the knights. Though the skin had seemed clean until just now, when he blinked once countless wounds appeared. Traces of being stabbed and grazed by sharp fragments. Their conditions varied as they hadn't received proper treatment.

"What is this...! What sorcery have you cast on me?"

Just like when meeting Duke Peletta, that person had cast sorcery humiliating Katchian by pressing him down with invisible force, this must surely be the same. Though he ordered them to take their hands off his body and resisted, how could he avoid the hands of sturdy knights with a body that had never even properly run?

The knights shook their heads and forcibly put shoes on Katchian's feet then put him in a carriage. While heading toward the Sun Palace in the carriage that wouldn't open even when knocking on the door, he felt the gazes of palace people falling on the carriage.

Cold eyes. People daring to point fingers at a carriage carrying the Crown Prince. Mockery like Duke Diarca's!

Beyond the shaking view, someone was running following the carriage. Had someone who would save him, a guard knight with proper sense finally appeared?

'Kichi! Kichi! Wait!'

No. No. That voice was of someone who couldn't exist here now.

An old friend long dead. Why was Mikey here? Moreover while spitting out the same call as the day he was leaving the detestable hometown village.

He must have surely ordered that guy killed and handled!

When he shook his head and blinked again now there was no one there. Of course. Because that vulgar thing couldn't be here.

"Ah..."

Katchian clutched his head that hurt like it would split. If not for his remaining pride, he would have screamed and rolled around here. However that pain rather awakened his instincts and let him judge the situation momentarily forgetting his anger.

'Yes. Yes... this is a trap. All of it aimed at me...'

Though he didn't know the reason, it was certain at least that the Emperor had called Katchian. If he went there would be people from Duke Diarca's side too, so he had nothing to worry about. What the Emperor probably wanted was to give Katchian a great shock to shake his already aching head. He must be hoping Katchian would make mistakes in front of others and show an appearance unfit for Crown Prince.

'Yes. Ever since those Apeto house bastards dared attack me, hallucinations would keep appearing whenever my head hurt like this! After hearing about that somewhere they're trying to shake me!'

Katchian still remembered that night clearly.

That night when he was gagged and received terrible wounds from an assassin who infiltrated pretending to be an attendant while sleeping. Even that terror of having his face slashed in front of the mirror with a dagger coated in poison that would make skin ugly.

Since that humiliating night he couldn't tell anyone about until now, Katchian had never properly slept once. No matter what treatment or methods were used, he got goosebumps feeling like his face would become hideous the moment he relaxed his mind. He could sleep somewhat when the sage was there, but after he disappeared it got even worse than before.

If there had been even an idiot like Kiolle da Diarca who acted like a guard knight, he could have sent news to Diarca right away.

Though he recalled Kiolle's face after a very long time belatedly, the regret quickly disappeared.

Fine. Since he was alone from the start anyway, what would it change now being alone? He had not the slightest intention of letting things go as the Emperor wished.

How had he come this far.

No matter where this Gate of Truth was, or what they tried to do to him there, he would never submit easily!

"Please disembark."

The carriage stopped in front of the Sun Palace and the door opened. Katchian ground his teeth and arranged his clothes, then got off proudly alone without others' help. Walking elegantly with head held high was clearly an expression of will.

A declaration that no one could touch him and he was prouder than anyone.

He entered the First Palace interior and stood before an unfamiliar room. It was a room he had never entered even once since becoming Crown Prince. If he had received proper education he might have known what kind of place it was even without entering, but Katchian actually hadn't received proper imperial family education.

It was because Duke Diarca had blocked contact with the imperial family as much as possible, suspecting the Emperor's hidden intention in saying 'still since he became Crown Prince he should receive basic education.'

Yes. The Emperor.

Katchian glared at Emperor Keilusa sitting in the high seat beyond the opening door and the Empress beside him.

Beyond glasses, the Emperor's utterly expressionless face that seemed not to see people as people. The Empress's timid gaze.

They were Katchian's adoptive parents and those he had to overthrow.

Chapter 1198

"..."

Katchian took his gaze from the Emperor and Empress who gave no greeting and looked around with his chin raised. Though called a room, it was large enough to be properly called a hall. Chairs like spectator seats were arranged in three tiers following stairs surrounding the room, making it feel more like a court holding trials than an imperial palace.

And those chairs were currently all completely filled without a single empty seat.

Imperial faction figures who hadn't even been able to properly attend noble gatherings until now. Elder priests dispatched from the Grand Temple residing in the palace temple. The hard-to-see Chief Court Mage. The emblems of the two generals leading the empire, Gerald Mucker and Gino Bordelli, were clearly emblazoned on the chests of the imperial soldiers sitting behind.

'They came quite evenly.'

Of course it wasn't only detestable people there.

Quite a few familiar noble faction figures could be seen among the spectator seats too. There were people from the four ducal houses leading the empire - Apeto, Tain, and Herne, and above all... someone wearing a tie with Diarca's emblem existed.

The moment he saw the face of the man who had pushed back dark greenish blonde hair, Katchian's eyes shone darkly.

'Kironne da Diarca!'

Though Duke Diarca hadn't come, his eldest son had come here. If the one who would become the next duke had come, there was nothing more to see.

Though he hated to admit it, Katchian felt relief and straightened his shoulders more. As composure and confidence filled him, only then did he notice the gaze of someone else sitting in a corner further away from Kironne.

Some man sitting with his face covered by a hood like someone who had something to be guilty about. Though only a bit of hair and bridge of nose were visible, Katchian could tell who he was.

'Kiolle da Diarca came too.'

Since returning from the south, Kiolle had not shown himself before Katchian. He thought he must have had at least minimal sense since he would have been driven out personally by Katchian if he had appeared.

But though he didn't know what had happened meanwhile, Kiolle's appearance was completely unlike usual. Seeing him wearing clothes looking no different from commoners and sitting with lowered head in a place separate from noble faction figures or Kironne made him seem so worthless it was almost laughable.

'I guess he's being punished again by his father for what he did in the south. How obvious. That's why he can't even sit near his brother.'

There had been several occasions to meet the Duke's children while preparing to become Crown Prince at the Diarca main residence. Though they were formal meetings, that alone was enough for Katchian to grasp the relationships between them and Diarca's atmosphere.

The House Diarca people Katchian saw despised acting busy and doing work like ordinary people. None of them did any work at all. They mocked Duke Tain who was squandering wealth obsessing over trade investments, and constantly looked down on Theorado van Tain who became Imperial Knight Commander obsessed with swords. Apeto who sent more than one person per generation to the Grand Temple to become priests was also good mockery material. In the case of Herne, it was Diarca's internal established theory that they were no different from beasts obsessed with sowing seeds and not worth discussing.

Kiolle da Diarca was quite an alien existence among such Diarca siblings. Among noble-like people who absolutely never did 'vulgar work,' only he was always noisy enjoying playing at being a knight. Only after learning the fact that though he was legally Duke Diarca's proper son he was called a bastard behind his back could that strange peculiarity finally be understood.

A fool who would have disappeared dead long ago if not for his father's shallow protection.

That thought about Kiolle da Diarca hadn't changed at all even now. Whenever Duke Diarca would say half-jokingly, half-seriously "It would have been good if Kiolle was at least like Your Highness" while watching Katchian quickly learn tactical games, that thought grew stronger by the day.

A fool who was just lucky to be born in Diarca has now been completely abandoned even by his father who had protected him.

Katchian took his eyes off Kiolle who now seemed not even worth killing and proudly looked forward. There were people sitting proudly right below the Emperor as if they were the protagonists of today.

Duke Peletta sitting leisurely as if unconcerned with the tense atmosphere.

And beside him, completely opposite to the Duke, the Cavalry monster sitting with straight back.

The moment he saw their faces, sparks of hatred and anger flew in Katchian's eyes.

'How dare they'

That Duke Peletta whose appearance even Duke Diarca acknowledged.

Katchian still couldn't forget the day he first met him. Some day quite a while after becoming Crown Prince. After the Red Stone fell from the sky, when he suddenly appeared in the palace without a sound, Katchian received an indescribably great shock seeing him.

He could tell even without hearing the name Duke Peletta. This was Duke Peletta, Kishiar La Orr, whom he had only heard about. How else could a human look so unrealistically beautiful?

The endpoint of all elements Duke Diarca had ordered to decorate and cultivate was there. Tall stature with dreamlike appearance making one doubt their eyes at first sight. His hair and eye color had perfectly inherited the First Emperor's bloodline as if they couldn't be matched even covering with magic, and even his way of walking and moving was endlessly elegant without room for criticism.

He was the living ideal Orr Empire royal family member itself.

When seeing childhood portraits remaining in the palace he had thought the exaggeration was severe, but seeing in person made the portraits rather seem like exaggerated fakes. Katchian who had never once thought his appearance was inferior to anyone's received a deep shock for the first time, but that shock didn't last long.

That was because he soon realized that Duke Peletta was someone with an inside completely different from his perfect outer shell.

A libertine who attended parties every day saying he was tired of countryside like Peletta, and didn't even properly meet the Emperor and Empress. He always gave strange answers when asked questions, played with obviously dangerous people, and couldn't distinguish between words that should and shouldn't be said.

Duke Diarca explained about Duke Peletta saying "He was quite clever when young but became stupid after returning from recovery when sick. Fortunate for him." The smile suggesting Duke Diarca's hand must have been involved in the reason Duke Peletta had to recover from illness was a bonus.

Whenever Duke Diarca sarcastically pretended to be kind to Duke Peletta, that man would wave his hand smiling as if he had heard sincere concern. He had never refused any of the beautiful spies Duke Diarca sent, or the poisoned food those spies brought.

Though he acted like he was filtering dangerous people in his own way, actually no one was filtered and he only let noble faction's people into his bedroom so what use was that? The bedroom rumors about Duke Peletta that spread daily throughout Orr society through the spies who entered his bedroom and Duke Diarca's hands were truly the best entertainment.

People talked about how pitiful a sexual cripple that beautiful royal family member actually was. The story of Duke Peletta who couldn't do anything once he got in bed and just cried drunkenly was one of the funniest jokes among the noble faction. Though he seemed to want to hide the fact that he was an inadequate sexual cripple, it would have been harder to find someone who didn't know since even Katchian knew.

Everyone's laughingstock. A man like a clown living only for pleasure and entertainment.

It was unbelievable that such a man was an Orr Empire royal family member. Just slightly better looking, he was no different from Kiolle da Diarca... no. He was even worse than that fool.

Even such a beautiful man resembling the First Emperor drawn in sacred paintings was nothing before Duke Diarca.

The Emperor who had been sick almost in seclusion since Katchian became Crown Prince, and the Empress who somehow tried to fulfill her duties in place of that Emperor but couldn't exert power alone were all the same.

Katchian thought he had done very well joining hands with Duke Diarca. But he had no intention of being used by him for life. What Katchian wanted to become was someone like Duke Diarca, not a swaying doll like Duke Peletta.

'It must have surely been that...'

Just what was this situation now? From where had that person started looking down at him with such an overbearing face?

'That was probably...'

Katchian recalled the moment when Kishiar said he would 'gather awakeners and create an organization.' That moment when he said so like a dissolute drunkard wanting to play at being leader at a party where nobles had gathered.

No one took his will seriously.

Except for one person. Except for Katchian who had seen a strange light beyond that face flushed with drunkenness.

Chapter 1199

Despite opposition from noble faction figures including Duke Diarca, Duke Peletta strangely advanced toward his goal avoiding each and every interference one by one. Sometimes like a child throwing tantrums, sometimes like a royal family member stubbornly pushing ahead regardless.

Though he acted like someone not worth being wary of, and it felt true, when coming to his senses something was continuously progressing before he knew it. Though Duke Diarca said Duke Peletta couldn't do anything alone anyway, Katchian thought something was not right.

Could someone truly stupid handle matters so persistently?

Was that smiling face just like the smile Katchian himself had crafted, actually hiding a cunning mind behind it?

Perhaps that was a sense of discomfort Katchian could feel because he too always gave fake smiles before Duke Diarca.

He hadn't noticed when not suspicious, but once he started being suspicious, Duke Peletta's smile began feeling increasingly unsettling. Though he tried subtly setting traps to make him reveal his true colors, seeing him fall into all of Katchian's traps yet ridiculously avoiding the actual crisis made him seem even more suspicious.

Too weak. Suspicious for not being too suspicious. It was truly something he couldn't explain in words except intuition.

Duke Diarca said Katchian's sensitivity was excessive. However, Katchian was always tormented by the unsettling feeling that that creepy beauty that never dulled no matter how dully he acted would someday become a real knife and stab him.

'And in the end... I was right. This time too.'

After Katchian became Crown Prince, Duke Diarca and his people outwardly maintained courtesy and praised him as clever, but that was all. To them, Katchian was someone who needed to be smart enough not to interfere with work but not cunning enough to climb up.

What they wanted was an eternal boy good for holding in and using their hands.

Even discussion of a fiancée that would normally come up for a Crown Prince of this age was not even considered for Katchian with the reason that he was "still young." Everything he did was dismissed as things not worth listening to under the pretext of being an "ignorant young boy." Though he made every effort to break that perception and at least become an equal standing position, it wasn't much use. Nothing helped. Even Katchian's own body was like that.

Katchian felt a disgustingly horrible feeling every time he saw his body that hadn't changed much since becoming Crown Prince in the mirror. No matter how much he aged, he was being forced to forever be a young boy. If he had grown obviously undeniably large like Duke Peletta those words would have lost some persuasiveness, but even looking at himself Katchian's merely pretty face didn't look like a man approaching adulthood.

But look. Wasn't that arrogant appearance before his eyes the result of not listening to any of Katchian's warnings they had ignored?

Duke Diarca was wrong. Katchian La Orr was right.

Even in this irritating situation, that fact alone gave Katchian considerable and gloomy pleasure.

"Katchian La Orr."

Emperor Keilusa opened his mouth toward Katchian.

"How long do you plan to stand? If you cannot tell where your seat is, request guidance from a knight."

Katchian saw the one wooden chair empty in this room. Though it was too insignificant to be the Crown Prince's seat, he understood at least that getting angry here would rather be disadvantageous to himself. He made a gesture of refusal toward the knight approaching as if to really guide him.

"Don't dare touch me! I will go with my own feet."

Katchian walked royally and proudly as he had practiced thousands, tens of thousands of times. The gaze glaring at the Emperor and Empress sitting in the high seat and Duke Peletta while sitting elegantly in the chair was also an expression thoroughly practiced and calculated. However, he didn't even give a glance to the Cavalry monster sitting beside him.

'Putting that guy sitting there must be to protect themselves and insult me. So obvious.'

Though he hated to admit it, it was true that the monster called Yuder Aile seemed the most useful among the swords the imperial family had found. So the Emperor gave him special treatment, and Duke Peletta too pretended to acknowledge something neither man nor woman by rolling his rag-like body for once and keeping him close.

Having a monster everyone would fear by one's side is excellent for the effect of frightening surroundings just by itself. If Katchian were in the Emperor's position, he would have kept that monster by his side the same way in a place like today.

'But I'm not scared. Because I already know the scheme.'

He smiled thinking he had penetrated Emperor Keilusa's intentions. And while scanning around again with a more relaxed face, he suddenly recalled something.

'Come to think of it... isn't having all these people gathered in one place rather the best opportunity to show that I'm still going strong?'

After the period when he had been practically confined receiving "treatment" in Duke Diarca's hands, no one had come to see Katchian La Orr personally. Even when moving saying he was investigating those who invaded the Sun Palace, until the moment before today came Katchian had been continuously alone.

That was truly a maddening time.

If there were people who would pay attention even negatively he could grasp an opportunity to turn the situation around, but since no one looked at him there was nothing he could do. What use was there in talking no matter how much to stupid Kiolle and the powerless sage? When those who truly had power, authority and right to speak wouldn't look at Katchian!

But here was different.

Diarca's people were behind him, and those who had sufficient power though they hadn't taken anyone's side until now were sitting here.

If the Emperor made this place to humiliate Katchian, he had completely made a mistake.

'Yes... I'll make you regret calling me here looking down on me.'

Katchian's eyes shone darkly.

Without noticing the fact that the curve drawn by Kishiar's lips watching him had become deeper and darker than before.

\*\*\*

Emperor Keilusa raised his hand and opened the first page of the Scripture of the Sun God placed on the table. The Emperor's action of opening the page symbolized the meaning of 'opening the door of the Gate of Truth.'

Simultaneously, the knights guarding the entrance door uniformly turned their bodies to face outward. It meant that from now on, not even god could interfere with anything happening inside this room.

'It's beginning.'

Yuder indifferently stared at Katchian sitting with his head held stiffly high. Looking at him, he seemed not to even know why he had come here. It seemed he had been thoroughly isolated from the outside world meanwhile, trapped in his own world.

'Though Duke Diarca seemed to have given up on Katchian more than half, being able to isolate him this perfectly must have been because the Emperor used his hand.'

Emperor Keilusa was using his ability even at this moment now. Though no one else would know, to Yuder with sharpened senses the traces of power like heat haze extending from the Emperor were visible.

Though at first he had struggled just maintaining his ability, now he could use power without his expression changing even while holding meetings. His development was so fast it was hard to believe he had awakened his ability not long ago.

Just in terms of development speed, it felt like he was even more excellent than his younger brother Kishiar in some sense.

'It's natural since his will about how he wanted to use his ability was tremendously firm.'

Though they had only exchanged greetings, he could definitely tell Emperor Keilusa had perfectly kept to the training menu Yuder had written and sent. His complexion that had been poor from staying up working almost every night had become healthy, and the arm and leg muscles slightly revealed through his clothes had escaped their skinny state. It meant he had eaten well, slept well and diligently done physical training.

'If everyone followed training this well, there wouldn't be worries about skills not improving.'

Yuder turned his gaze while swallowing a satisfaction that might be called somewhat irreverent for dealing with an Emperor leading a country.

"Can you explain yourself why you have come to the Gate of Truth?"

"Why should I do that? I am currently quite heartbroken having been suddenly brought here without even receiving a direct invitation. Though I may not be your birth child, I am the Crown Prince who will succeed Your Majesty. Don't you think such rude treatment is too much?"

The corners of Katchian's lips twisted. Raising suspicions about the Emperor tormenting his adopted Crown Prince was always a well-received element.

However, Emperor Keilusa answered expressionlessly without his expression changing at all.

"Royal family members have a duty to check news that comes to their quarters daily. Invitations are among those too. Though the Crown Prince says he didn't know because he couldn't directly check the letter We sent, the attendant clearly confirmed receiving the letter. That is, from then on it becomes the responsibility of the master who did not check news daily."

**Chapter 1200**

Katchian's eye twitched once finely. Though it was a minute change that others wouldn't notice, Yuder easily perceived his inner thoughts.

'He's flustered.'

Even Yuder hadn't known royal family members had such a duty. Because Katchian in his time as Emperor had never consistently checked news. Though he had only thought Emperors could apparently do as they pleased, thinking back now, Kishiar had never been like that.

'Except for this period of reflection, Kishiar checked information every morning...'

Though he had thought it was just because Kishiar himself was diligent, it seemed closer to a habit deeply engraved from learning during his time as prince. He thought it wasn't for nothing that the Emperor had blocked all information when ordering reflection.

"You say the attendant received the letter? Then my failure to check news is the fault of attendants who should report to me daily not properly serving me. Rather than dragging me here, questioning them would be reasonable."

Instead of admitting he "didn't know," Katchian quickly turned direction to blame the attendants. It was a 'face befitting a young Crown Prince trying to maintain dignity while fearing this situation.'

Usually it would have worked well on people. That is, usually.

"Of course We heard from them first. According to the attendants' common testimony, the Crown Prince has never once properly performed the daily duty of checking news that came to Bright Palace until now."

"..."

"Not just this time but continuously until now."

It was a heavy statement like striking with a hammer.

Katchian asked while firmly grinding his teeth.

"Who... gave such testimony?"

"The witness's identity is protected under the Emperor's name."

"How can you be certain the one who said that was truly my attendant? Are you saying Your Majesty believes only the words of those trying to slander me without evidence and claims I did not fulfill the Crown Prince's duties?"

"Is the Crown Prince now stating he cannot believe a matter the Empire's Emperor personally confirmed?"

If it were Kishiar he would have smiled incredulously at least once while saying such words. However, Emperor Keilusa asked without even a trace of humor, just as if stating calm facts.

To be honest, that made the weight of those words feel even heavier.

"..."

Katchian flinched and closed his mouth. His mind seemed to work enough to know that saying 'the Emperor cannot be trusted' here could immediately be branded as treasonous speech. However, the Emperor didn't just pass over that silence and relentlessly caught the tail to open his mouth.

"May We understand your silence to mean you still want to check the evidence?"

"..."

"Very well. Though We hesitated thinking revealing this might rather become shameful for the Crown Prince, it cannot be helped. Bring it."

The chief attendant brought a tray with dignified movements. Holding the stack of papers on it, he spoke loudly raising them high for all to see.

"This is the Bright Palace's reply transmission journal recording the dates when His Highness the Crown Prince checked and signed with his seal the letters that came to Bright Palace. To make it easy to compare the dates letters were received and checked, we have only compiled records regarding official letters sent by His Majesty the Emperor and Her Majesty the Empress."

Katchian's fingertips trembled as if wanting to clench into fists.

Letters from the Emperor and Empress were critical matters that should be checked faster than anything else. However, the reply transmission journal from Bright Palace where Katchian stayed showed dates several days later than when the Emperor and Empress were recorded as sending letters.

Since there were consistently no records of replying within a day for several years, it was to the extent he couldn't even insist it had only been like that recently.

"As those present know, each palace must have attendants keep records of dates official letters are exchanged in case of need. Since this was cross-checked between the journals of three places - Sun Palace, Dawn Palace, and Bright Palace - from the year His Highness the Crown Prince entered Bright Palace until now, records cannot be altered by the intention of just one side."

Though only records of checking official letters exchanged between the Emperor, Empress and Crown Prince were brought for convenience, naturally that wasn't all. When there were numerous records of checking even important letters several days late, wouldn't other matters naturally have been handled even more messily? So this was practically undeniable evidence that no matter how much Katchian insisted, he couldn't blame attendants or others for not checking that he had been invited to the Gate of Truth.

Katchian's face turned pale.

"Crown Prince. Do you need further explanation?"

"..."

"It seems you mean you need explanation. Chief Attendant. Continue..."

"It's not needed!"

Katchian barely responded in a choked voice. He seemed to have finally physically realized that silence before Emperor Keilusa would not be interpreted as he pleased.

Looking down at the trembling Katchian, the Emperor quietly nodded.

"Good. Then We shall ask again. Can the Crown Prince explain why he has come here?"

It returned to the very first question. However, Katchian had already lost the justification to rebel saying "why should I" like before.

If this were a fight, he had already been brilliantly overwhelmed by the Emperor in taking the initiative. Perhaps because he knew that fact better than anyone, Katchian glanced around with a more haggard face than before. His gaze looking at Kironne da Diarca behind seemed almost like requesting help.

But Kironne was just expressionless, with no reaction at all. The noble faction people sitting around him were the same. Having no choice, Katchian opened his dry lips and spoke enduring the humiliation.

"...I don't know."

"Any guesses?"

"Perhaps you are doing this because of the attendant who was caught a few days ago?"

"Do you know why that attendant was caught?"

"I do not know."

A bright red lie. However, looking just at his expression he seemed like a truly innocent boy.

"Recently, there was a group of bandits who attacked a small village near Mount Guanamar in the southwest. Fortunately since a Cavalry member from that village was visiting for vacation, it could be quickly suppressed without innocent people being harmed. However, looking into it revealed those bandits were not simple bandits but a group who came to eliminate the village after receiving money from someone."

Emperor Keilusa explained monotonously and smoothly.

"An accusation letter was submitted requesting to find and punish the one who hired that group, and tracking revealed the employer was the Crown Prince's attendant Osem Nulli. Osem Nulli was a new attendant who had entered the palace 2 years ago and Bright Palace 3 months ago, with no connection to that village."

"..."

"Nulli confessed that he hired mercenaries on the Crown Prince's orders, and all he did was deliver letters and arrange and pay money on behalf. Do you have anything to say about this?"

Katchian opened his mouth wearing a smile on his pale face.

"According to Your Majesty's words, it seems I used an attendant to harm innocent imperial citizens. But why would I do such a thing? As Your Majesty said, Osem Nulli had not been my attendant for long. That person must surely be a spy sent from somewhere to slander me."

"A spy, you say. Do you know that Osem Nulli is a descendant of House Nulli, relatives of House Maltan which is a branch of House Diarca?"

"I do not know such small details."

Katchian feigned ignorance with a composed face.

"The captured bandits remembered very detailed instructions about what they were ordered. Their employer knew and ordered exactly which village to attack, at what time and where to enter from. Do you think Osem Nulli from the east could do such things on his own?"

"What would prevent him from doing so? Are you saying I should have known the spy's intentions in advance?"

So it seemed Katchian would dismiss everything saying he didn't know anything anyway.

"I shall ask once more. Did the Crown Prince truly not know the targeted village? Did you really not give such orders to Osem Nulli?"

Across Katchian's brazen face, contemplation flashed very briefly.

However, that wasn't contemplation coming from a heart wanting to speak the truth. It was merely the appearance of gauging what cards the Emperor held while choosing his words.

After a moment, Katchian frowned and let out a sigh as if for show.

"Would you not tell me exactly which village was attacked? I cannot know when you only say near Mount Guanamar."

"The administrative name is 'Guanaman.' The villagers also called it 'Guan' village, I hear."

The one who answered was not the Emperor but the chief attendant.

Chapter 1201

An expression of 'shock' appeared on Katchian's face.

"Guan village... I do know that place. If my memory is correct, it was somewhere I briefly visited for recovery when I was young. Ah, then perhaps..."

Thoroughly calculated contemplation. Tilting his head and covering his mouth, Katchian asked in a hesitant voice after a slight delay.

"The name of the Cavalry member who dealt with those who attacked the village... wasn't it 'Marin'?"

The moment he mentioned the name Marin, Katchian's eyes briefly turned toward Kishiar's face. Yuder recalled the day when he, Kishiar, and Katchian had secretly encountered each other in the palace.

'Come to think of it, there was one member who very much wanted to see His Highness the Crown Prince.'

'The name was... Marin, wasn't it.'

Kishiar had deliberately brought up Marin's name then to provoke Katchian. Learning the shocking information that the family of the friend he had killed was alive and had even become a Cavalry member, Katchian received a great shock and returned almost like fleeing.

As Kishiar predicted, that day's provocation clearly made Katchian's behavior more confused and blind than before. Just looking at how he moved recklessly to erase the village showed that.

Of course Katchian's plot failed spectacularly. But that cunning one seemed to have been planning to strike first beyond simply pretending not to know.

*That name you told me. I'll make good use of that information.*

Katchian's gleaming eyes seemed to say that.

"Your Majesty. Please answer. Am I correct? What is the name of the Cavalry member who was in that village?"

Emperor Keilusa who had been listening to Katchian's dramatic cry with an inscrutable face slowly opened his lips to answer.

"The name of that Cavalry member who prevented that incident without damage is indeed Marin."

'And they must be the one who accused me too.'

Katchian sharply added with eyes filled with ecstasy.

"This is truly surprising. I remembered that name for a different reason. Because recently, I heard that someone with that name had become a member of the Cavalry and was slandering me. I heard they were... going around speaking as if they knew me very well from before. Though until then I didn't even know who that commoner was."

"..."

"At the time, as the empire's Crown Prince who should care for imperial citizens, I generously questioned that matter. But thinking now it's really strange."

Katchian's voice subtly rose.

"How could someone who remembers me from before I became Crown Prince luckily become a Cavalry member? And how could such a person stay in that village at exactly such a timing, and immediately follow accusation procedures that even ordinary people don't know well?"

Anger filled the voice that strangely felt like a young boy despite having passed puberty due to its high tone.

"Am I the only one who finds all these circumstances strange? This is clearly a trace of organized slander! How can you be certain someone in the Cavalry wasn't targeting me and encouraging malicious activities? You question me despite such circumstances, Your Majesty?"

It was a truly incredibly smooth reversal of subject. His skill at instantly weaving conspiracy theories while flipping his own deeds to cover Duke Peletta and Marin was amazing. To the extent it made one think Duke Diarca might have applauded if he saw it.

Actually this time some among those sitting in the spectator seats showed reactions. They were some from the noble faction and moderate faction. However, before that wave-like disturbance could grow, a heavily pressing voice echoed throughout the Gate of Truth.

"Is that all you have to say."

Emperor Keilusa asked.

Katchian's eyes wavered for a moment.

Though he had clearly successfully reversed the subject, he showed an anxious look unable to understand why the Emperor remained so composed.

"Answer the question."

"...Y-yes. Since I have no connection, isn't this all I can speculate?"

"Crown Prince. The reason We opened the Gate of Truth today was to give you a chance to clear misunderstandings yourself by making a place before formal trial referral. It means this is your last chance to freely speak your mind. Even so, do you truly have nothing more to say?"

"Why... do you say such things? And what do you mean by formal trial referral?"

Katchian made a strange expression at words he was hearing for the first time.

"I have never heard such words."

"That is because the referral has not yet been confirmed. Currently the grand judges are debating for and against referral."

"What...! This is unfair. There is no reason I should suffer this because of an attendant's crime I didn't even order!"

"A crime you didn't order... is that really so? We shall confirm from now."

The Emperor raised his hand. Then the door opened and people holding trays respectfully like the chief attendant entered in a line. Different items were placed on each of their trays.

The first person spoke in a loud voice.

"This letter I hold is the original request document received by the mercenaries who were caught after attacking the civilian village disguised as bandits."

Originally request documents were supposed to be destroyed immediately upon receipt. However, for some reason this time the original remained.

"Though originally everything should be paid in advance, due to Osem Nulli who had to pay the request fee's financial circumstances, part of the remaining payment was changed to payment afterward. Thus the knights obtained the remaining original."

When ordering this matter, Crown Prince Katchian passed all financial burden to others. Since public funds were under strong surveillance they couldn't be used for such things, and it was natural since he had to move without receiving Diarca's help.

However, the attendant who moved receiving his orders was from a fallen noble family so didn't have much wealth that could be used at once. Therefore swallowing his pride he negotiated to pay part of the remaining request fee after everything was finished, and didn't bother telling the Crown Prince about that fact.

As a result, the original request document written in the Crown Prince's own hand remained without disappearing.

'Though it's laughable... it can't be coincidence.'

Yuder scanned Emperor Keilusa's face. With his ability he could surely have known and adjusted such circumstances in advance.

Next the second person stepped forward.

"Upon inspection, we confirmed that the type of paper and ink color all match those used in Bright Palace."

What he held up and showed were official letters the Crown Prince had sent before, and paper used in the request document. Beside them was also placed a special ink bottle used only in the palace including Bright Palace.

Handwriting can be easily changed if conscious of it. However, how many people would be meticulous enough to show the effort of finding and using low-grade paper and cheap charcoal for a request document that would soon be burned and disappear? Especially Katchian who would have tried to move urgently.

Though such cheap things might be abundant outside, in the palace it was rather harder to obtain such cheap items. Here was the price of using immediately available items trying to handle matters quickly.

People began murmuring. Now the third person stepped forward.

"These are records of questions and answers about the relationship between that village's residents and the accuser, and connection with His Highness the Crown Prince, during the process of investigating Osem Nulli's charges. Peculiarly, most residents gave the same answer upon seeing His Highness the Crown Prince's portrait..."

"Enough."

Katchian suddenly stood up from his seat. His face was much paler than before.

"Enough! These are all fabricated evidence!"

"The Crown Prince's speaking time is over. Sit back down."

"Are you telling me to just sit and watch while you brand someone a liar with fake evidence and testimony! This is serious violence against me!"

"...Your Majesty. Doesn't His Highness the Crown Prince need some more consideration?"

Behind Katchian who had cold sweat beading, someone spoke in sympathy with a frowning face. It was one of the noble officials sitting near Kironne.

Chapter 1202

'According to my memory... he was from the noble faction pretending to be moderate.'

When he spoke up though hesitating, one by one others like him began stepping forward and muttering something. To summarize, it was nonsense like saying they should understand the Crown Prince's intentions more since he was still young, or that the Emperor and Empress were going too far.

Actually Kironne da Diarca and other people from the four ducal houses were still quiet, but these nobodies becoming noisy was because they were riffraff not very close to House Diarca. Having lived sucking sweet honey attached to the noble faction until now, they habitually protected Katchian out of inertia.

'But...'

What if even calling such fools was Emperor Keilusa's calculation?

While Yuder was watching the nobles with cold eyes, Emperor Keilusa calmly opened his mouth.

"We and the Empress are going too far. Does everyone think so?"

Since this place was not an official court, attendees could express opinions relatively freely. Being able to give direct words to the Emperor or agree was the privilege of Gate of Truth attendees.

Silence flowed for a moment. Among those just watching each other's reactions, someone raised their hand and spoke.

"Your Majesty the Emperor has not made any personal remarks about His Highness the Crown Prince, so how would this be going too far? I want to hear the investigation results to the end."

Cool and calm words despite the young face. That person was none other than Revlin Shand Apeto.

'I was a bit surprised seeing him earlier.'

Revlin had proudly entered the spectator seats mixed among other nobles earlier. Around the neck of the boy wearing a long coat over his Cavalry uniform hung a necklace clearly stamped with House Apeto's emblem.

That meant Revlin had visited as House Apeto's representative receiving the Emperor's invitation. Though they couldn't exchange greetings like usual given the situation, the weight of determination that boy must have had while coming to sit here was clearly felt.

'He's grown quite tall meanwhile.'

In the moment the atmosphere froze at Revlin's words. Following that someone else opened their mouth again.

"The investigation process... must proceed in order... His Highness the Crown Prince's speaking time has already ended... and in my view since all evidence presented so far is legitimate there is no reason to stop statements midway..."

The person speaking this time was the Chief Court Mage. Though it was hard to see their face deeply covered by the Court Mage Department robe, one could tell they were quite advanced in age.

The current Chief Court Mage is in some sense one of the closest people to the imperial family but famous for never expressing political opinions. In the previous life they retired to Pearl Tower after Emperor Keilusa died, and died in the process of the tower's collapse afterward. When this person with a strongly neutral public image opened their heavy mouth to add weight to Revlin's words, the moderate faction was greatly shaken.

What drove in the final nail was the Grand Temple's dispatched elder priest sent by the Pope.

"Ahem... if His Highness the Crown Prince's feelings are truly hurt, wouldn't it be more proper to hear all following statements first then newly present evidence for rebuttal?"

Yuder thought while hearing that pretentious voice.

'It's over.'

The Grand Temple is moderate in name only, a place that hasn't properly moved once while the imperial family was collapsing until now. When even such people added their words and Kironne da Diarca kept his mouth shut, no one dared express opinions anymore. Even those who had protected the Crown Prince earlier closed their mouths, half with bewildered faces and half with faces that seemed to have properly detected something was not right.

Emperor Keilusa nodded without even giving a glance to the frozen Katchian.

"Having gathered opinions We shall continue. Continue the statement that was interrupted earlier."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

The person who had been interrupted while speaking earlier bowed their head in greeting. Katchian stood blankly with a face that had turned ashen beyond pale. The Emperor didn't even tell him to sit anymore.

The interrupted statement finally began flowing again.

"The residents of the affected Guanaman village said upon seeing His Highness the Crown Prince's portrait that the person in the picture was a certain boy who used to live in the village. Not just one or two said this but since most gave the same statement, the investigating knights found this peculiar and recorded their testimony then made follow-up reports."

"Isn't that because the Crown Prince recovered there when young?"

The Empress who had been quietly listening until now opened her mouth to speak for the first time. Then the fourth person stepped forward. When he raised up the paper that had been placed face down on the tray until now, those sitting in the spectator seats all let out strange sounds at once.

"Huh..."

"Hmm..."

It was an old picture. In the picture painted with charcoal pen and cheap paint was a young boy with black-dyed hair, and an adult man embracing and smiling at that boy.

Though the hair color was black, the boy in the picture resembled Katchian La Orr to anyone's eyes. It was so identical that to insist otherwise one would have to claim there was a twin.

The man holding the boy also had features that looked exactly like they were copied from Katchian. Love and affection for the boy was deeply embedded in his smiling face. Completely opposite to the sullen expression of the boy being held. The two people in the picture were dressed like ordinary commoners.

"They say there exists a lake in Guanaman village that is quite famous as a tourist spot. Therefore there were also painters living there who worked for tourists. This is a picture drawn by one of them, said to be a family portrait commissioned by a boy who lived in that village long ago and his father."

"Why did the painter have the picture?"

"They say after the family left the village for unknown reasons one after another, the house was left abandoned as is. The painter confessed that since this was uniquely appealing among pictures he had drawn, he secretly took it out not wanting to see it abandoned."

As evidence that he had drawn that picture, the painter also submitted several sketches that remained from when drawing it. Pictures that showed they were of the same person though the composition and poses were different were raised high next for all to see.

Everyone's gaze focused on the picture. Katchian's face sank pitch black.

The attendant holding the picture slowly reported in an emotionless voice.

"The villagers testified that the name of this boy in the picture was 'Katchian.'"

"..."

The noble faction people looked at the back of Katchian's head as if unable to believe. Even Kironne raised his eyebrows as if somewhat surprised at this.

The statement continued.

"Tax payment records were found from the lord and officials in charge of the village where the family in the picture lived. Strangely the birth records and resident management register cannot be found, but it is under investigation as it is believed someone intentionally damaged them several years ago."

"Damaging and losing imperial citizen management registers must be a most serious crime above all else."

The Emperor muttered slowly.

"Yes, Your Majesty. However since we have also requested investigator dispatch from the Cavalry, we should soon be able to catch the culprit and determine the full story."

"Though I haven't yet heard about this matter having just returned to the capital yesterday, I shall approve the dispatch as soon as we return."

It wouldn't be Kishiar if he didn't interject here. Yuder saw Kishiar who immediately indicated approval while grinning, and Katchian who glared at his face with hatred above anything in the world.

Katchian's earth-colored face. Breath gasping unable to continue speaking. Thoughts that must be spinning round and round in his bloodshot eyes. None of it gave Yuder any emotion.

Rather, Kiolle da Diarca who was standing behind with mouth gaping in shock felt more interesting.

The noble faction people began murmuring. The name Duke Diarca flowed countless times among the passing whispers. The Emperor raised his hand to calm that disturbance.

"Be quiet."

"..."

"This must be somewhat shocking news. But... yes. As the Crown Prince says, this too could be fabricated evidence."

Katchian's breathing instantly became rougher.

"So next I plan to directly hear from the accuser who protected Guanaman village and requested catching the one who hired mercenaries."

"Your Majesty!"

Katchian cried out in a hoarse voice. Emperor Keilusa raised his hand once more.

The back door opened and a person appeared.

Proudly wearing the Cavalry uniform like Revlin, she who appeared was none other than Marin. Marin slowly walked forward and stood before the Emperor and Empress with her back to Katchian La Orr. A calm voice flowed from her lips after giving a flawless Cavalry salute.

"I greet the Empire's Sun and Dawn."

After briefly glancing at Yuder and Kishiar afterward, Marin smiled very faintly. Yuder read the emotions rippling in her eyes. Joy about to explode overflowing was visible first and largest.

It was a completely different look in her eyes from when she commanded the Red Field Riot long ago.

**Chapter 1203**

"First introduce yourself."

"Yes."

Following the order, Marin bowed her head then turned toward the audience.

"My name is Marin. I was born in Guanaman village and lived there my whole life until becoming a Cavalry member this time. Originally I lived together with my parents and younger brother but now I am alone having sent them all ahead first."

Though containing just a slight tremor, it was a calm voice.

Marin briefly told the story of receiving vacation and returning to her hometown, and how she repelled the bandits encountered there. Yuder felt considerable emotion at her explanation of creating traps to bind enemies' feet by growing grass that cleverly hid under trees or underground, and subduing them by binding with thorn bushes containing paralyzing poison.

'Though she was quite dissatisfied with her ability saying what good was growing grass bits, she fought quite well...'

When dispatched to the south, Marin had taken the role of protecting people by growing giant trees. But that was only a support mission far from attack. Mastering an attack method that hadn't been taught alone meant she had continuously researched her ability without rest meanwhile.

'But not everyone can fight that well in actual combat just because they researched. It was possible because her combat sense was excellent from the start.'

It wasn't surprising. She was someone who became an amazing awakener through her power alone in the previous life too. It's no exaggeration to say to meMarin was the only assassin who survived after attempting to assassinate Emperor Katchian. Even in the Red Field Riot that ended her short life, she fought so terribly well alone that even Yuder internally regretted her ability.

Seeing that innate talent finally properly shining in this life made him feel quite good.

"After repelling them, those bandits had many suspicious points that made them seem not like ordinary bandits. Anyone could see they were more like a mercenary group and letters clearly targeting our village and me were found on their persons. I judged I absolutely couldn't just let those letters go and wrote an accusation letter requesting to find the client. The knights who came dispatched for investigation gave much help. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them."

"Wait. You said they targeted not just the village, but you together?"

The Empress raised her hand and asked.

"Yes. That's right. In the bandits' letters were exactly written the village name and shortcut leading there, and the location of the house where I live. Since currently only I stay in that house, naturally weren't they aiming to kill me?"

"Then the client who wrote the letters must have been someone who knew you were a Cavalry member and headed to your hometown on vacation."

"I judged so as well."

"That wasn't written in the accusation letter, why did you leave it out?"

"My one life alone isn't really precious. Because I finished preparing to die anytime when becoming a Cavalry member. But the villagers are different. Innocent good imperial citizens nearly died without knowing why, so isn't resolving that naturally more important? I just did what I should do first as a Cavalry member."

Marin's answer was logical. Someone among the nobles who was greatly impressed even let out an "hmm" sound.

'But actually the order must be reversed.'

From Katchian's perspective, his hometown village and Marin. Though both were existences he wanted to remove, if prioritizing between the two naturally Marin came first. Probably Crown Prince Katchian had tried to cleverly erase Marin while pretending to attack the village.

And the Emperor and Empress, and Marin herself knew that fact too.

They were just pretending not to know while showing cards to the nobles.

Because that was much more effective for revealing Katchian's crimes.

"They say there were residents who recognized Crown Prince Katchian's face during the investigation, then do you as well?"

At the Emperor's quiet question, the atmosphere instantly sank cold. Everyone waited for Marin's answer without even breathing.

Marin's gaze turned toward Katchian standing frozen. At last her lips parted.

"Yes."

"How dare you- where----"

"He was someone I knew very well. Because I lived next door sharing a wall for a long time."

Katchian's choked voice meaninglessly scattered and disappeared before Marin's clear voice.

"I know that picture. It's a picture of Mr. Johin who lived next door to our family and his son, little Kichi. The memory of Mr. Johin proudly saying he had drawn a family portrait with great determination is still clear. Because he really loved his son."

"Little Kichi?"

"Everyone in the village called that child that. That child was the same age as my brother Mikey, and they were very close. So how could I not recognize him even though time has passed?"

"You dare give false testimony!"

Katchian cried out. Emperor Keilusa opened his mouth with a face as if not hearing those words.

"So the accuser means she thinks 'little Kichi' and Crown Prince Katchian are the same person. I understand the opinion. That part will become more certain when we track down the whereabouts of the missing birth register."

"Yes. I will also volunteer to help find the whereabouts of that register."

"Since your intention is so admirable, I would like to hear one more opinion."

"Please tell me anything."

"There exists a reason for everything in the world. If the Crown Prince hired mercenaries to harm the village and you, what would have been that reason-"

"Your Majesty!"

As if unable to watch the Emperor finish speaking, Katchian tried to run forward crying out like spitting blood. However, before he could take even one step leaving his seat, invisible force burst out pushing him back and a wall of fire blocked the front.

"Aack!"

Katchian fell ungracefully still pushed sitting in his chair. Those watching were startled and covered their mouths or stood from their seats.

"What is this...!"

After a moment the wall of fire covering where the Emperor and Empress were disappeared. What was revealed beyond was two people who had been sitting below the Emperor's seat. The figures of Duke Peletta and Yuder Aile who had risen like lightning at some point and taken guard positions as if protecting the Emperor and Empress.

"Oh dear. Regrettable, Your Highness Crown Prince. It seems that control was slightly lacking due to surprise."

Duke Peletta gently waved the sword held in his hand. Blue aura rippled at the sword tip. Before evidence of an undeniable swordmaster, the noble faction people's eyebrows trembled finely. Someone among them muttered almost crying out.

"Didn't we surrender weapons when entering here? How did Duke Peletta..."

"Ah. Thinking His Majesty might be in danger I couldn't care about propriety and briefly borrowed from beside. I shall return it to its owner."

Duke Peletta smiled and passed the sword to another knight standing nearby.

"Thank you. Used it well."

The one who belatedly realized his weapon had disappeared received the sword with trembling hands.

"..."

No one could say anything.

Snatching a sword in an instant so fast even its owner couldn't notice wasn't easy even dealing with a child who had just grasped a sword. To perform that against a knight guarding the palace and then smile so shamelessly.

The swordmaster they had only heard rumors of and looked down on mockingly was really here. The moment they realized that fact everyone couldn't help feeling a cold chill.

Because they realized that if he wanted, he was already someone who could very easily target the necks of everyone here in such a way.

"..."

"By the way, though we hadn't made any promise, I was really surprised when the wall of fire appeared too. Creating a wall of fire so quickly to protect Their Majesties. The hero who saved the empire is indeed different, isn't he? Though I was worried my power might be insufficient, there was no need at all."

Kishiar brightly smiled while theatrically extending his hand toward Yuder Aile standing beside him. Before the crazy appearance of not just firmly establishing who had made the wall of fire but even boasting about it, only silence like a deep sea flowed.

**Chapter 1204**

"Elder Priest Mualeng. I would like to request you check if the Crown Prince's condition is alright."

"Understood. A-ahem."

While everyone was dazed by Kishiar's attitude, the Emperor gave an order to the Grand Temple's dispatched priest. The elder priest rose from his seat watching reactions, and went down toward where Katchian had fallen. Crown Prince Katchian was barely raising his body with the knights' help.

"Would you lie down on the floor briefly with arms and legs straight so I can examine Your Highness's condition?"

"Don't! I said don't!"

When the knights tried to lay Katchian back down, he violently twisted his body and resisted.

"Ahem... Your Highness. Though it will be uncomfortable, you must straighten your body briefly so I can check if there are any injuries. Or perhaps..."

"Did you not hear me say don't touch my body!"

Katchian swung his hand and violently struck away the elder priest's arm. Surprised by the resistance strong enough to make a slapping sound, the elder priest stepped back hesitantly unable to hide his dumbfounded look.

Yuder watched Katchian gleaming as if half out of his mind. His lips quickly moving while breathing sss-sss were repeating words like 'How dare...', 'Even the Grand Temple is all the same...' etc.

He had seen similar appearances many times in the previous life too. Because Katchian looked exactly like that when his eyes went wild thinking his vassals had betrayed or deceived him. At such times he wouldn't allow anyone's approach. Even if someone who angered him came with unavoidable reasons or good intentions, to Katchian that was a serious crime no different from assassination attempts.

How much trouble had Yuder and the Cavalry also gone through trying to guard without touching Katchian in such states.

'Probably because the elder priest broke neutrality and took the Emperor's side earlier, he categorized him as an enemy.'

The Katchian of the previous life was a power holder with no one to stop him even acting so unreasonable. However, the current him was just someone losing everything.

The nobles sitting in their seats murmured in surprise at Katchian's violent appearance. Kironne da Diarca turned his head pretending not to see, and the elder priest ground his teeth in displeasure like someone who had received great insult. Watching that scene, the Emperor quietly opened his mouth and spoke.

"Since the Crown Prince seems not to want examination, the elder priest may withdraw. We trusted and requested the noble faith of Elder Priest Mualeng who has served longest in the palace among the twelve elder priests, but the situation is awkward."

Those were words subtly restoring face to the embarrassed elder priest. Only then did a small smirk finally appear on the face of the elder priest who had been irritated. Usually he would have kept some distance considering relations with House Diarca, but now he was in a state of being very hurt by Katchian.

"...I apologize, Your Majesty. Though I could not examine closely with divine power, His Highness the Crown Prince appears quite healthy currently. Since he says my weak divine power or holy water are not needed, I shall withdraw now."

The elder priest's steps withdrawing from beside Katchian were utterly cold. Before Katchian could open his mouth, the Emperor continued speaking with an indifferent face.

"Since the elder priest says so, it seems we need not close the Gate of Truth yet. Though Duke Peletta and Baron Aile were somewhat excessive dealing with one without weapons just now, how could we deny that their deep loyalty is like wings embracing the empire's fortune and Us and the Empress. Since the Crown Prince himself says he needs no treatment, We shall let this pass without mention."

With one statement he casually dismissed Katchian's fall as nothing, and smoothly passed over Kishiar and Yuder without leaving room for punishment even later. At that political manner of speech flowing like water, the noble faction people's expressions repeatedly changed back and forth. They were faces confused about what to do, wanting to refute right away but unable to.

What set fire to their hearts was Kishiar's greeting with a slight smile.

"I seem to have caused you concern, Your Majesty. However, if those threatening both Your Majesties' safety appear in future, would blocking with bare body be fearful? Please measure this loyalty higher than heaven and deeper than the sea!"

Though his words said he was sorry, the target was by no means Katchian who nearly got hurt but only the Emperor and Empress. Plus his outrageously arrogant attitude subtly saying that after arbitrarily stealing and drawing a sword without repentance, this side could do the same thing again plenty if Katchian tried such actions again.

While several people could only exhale "huh" breaths dumbfounded, the Emperor nodded with a cold face.

"Of course We measure it so Duke may sit now. And consider more what was meant by saying excessive."

After answering thus, the Emperor turned his head toward Yuder who was just quietly bowing his head beside Duke Peletta. People thought the Emperor would superficially say something to Baron Aile, but that expectation was completely wrong.

"Baron. Your ability is too precious to be used carelessly. Though your loyalty is good, consider time and place more from next time."

It was a voice overflowing with about twice the warmth that had been directed at his younger brother Kishiar.

Moreover, saying the ability was too precious to be used in such a place. That meant...

'That Crown Prince Katchian isn't even worth using that precious power against.'

Though just hearing the words seemed like worrying about and scolding Yuder, it was rather the opposite. Yuder alternately looked at the Emperor watching him with a softer face, and Katchian finally sitting back in his seat far away trembling with anger.

"...I apologize. From now on I shall engrave Your Majesty's words in my heart and move more carefully."

"A good resolution."

The Empress encouraged with a smiling face. When Yuder sat down, Kishiar who had been slightly pouting with lips subtly protruding smiled faintly with his eyes.

Emotion that this situation was truly pleasing and too entertaining to bear was wafting from his whole body like fragrance. Since only Yuder among those here could read fragrances, naturally only Yuder felt such emotion from him.

When Yuder too sat down, the Emperor turned his head toward Marin who was still standing without wavering.

"Then let us continue the previous question. Since We cannot guess what the reason would be if the Crown Prince really instigated such a thing, We want to hear the reason you think."

"This... haven't I said this is all false...! That it's all fabricated to bring me down...!"

Breath almost like a scream flowed between Katchian's lips. However, his body remembering the shame of falling just now and the terror of fire appearing before his eyes could no longer step forward like before. The spectator seat atmosphere that had become much colder toward Katchian than before also became shackles constraining him from moving.

Marin stood with straight back wearing a face as if not hearing the terrible voice coming from behind. And opened her mouth.

"His Highness the Crown Prince said he doesn't know a commoner like me. He said he only briefly stayed in Guanaman village for recovery. But all that is not true. So the reason Your Highness instigated harming us must have been to erase your true origins, and those who remember them."

"Who would believe the words of that commoner following Duke Peletta!"

Katchian screamed.

"Actually while investigating this matter, I came to suspect that my brother Mikey who passed away several months ago might have been the first victim."

"What do you mean by that?"

The Empress asked. Marin raised her head even more proudly than before. Yuder saw tears shimmering over her eyes. However, Marin did not let those tears fall, and answered without wavering in an even louder voice.

**Chapter 1205**

"Mikey was a herbalist. He was a child who truly loved plants, and discovered several unknown ways of consumption and effects on the body. But because he didn't consider his knowledge that remarkable, he only shared it with family and a few close friends."

After briefly explaining about Mikey, Marin entered into the main story.

"The reason I first spoke about my brother's occupation and what he loved is to convey that 'little Kichi' was included among the few people with whom he shared knowledge."

"Why must we keep listening to this nonsense? Kironne da Diarca! Aren't you the one who should protect me above all others!"

Finally Kironne's name came from Katchian's mouth. Diarca's eldest son Kironne still did not react to that cry. Instead he only briefly glanced at the Emperor sitting in the high seat far beyond Katchian. Those sitting around Kironne da Diarca also likewise did not react.

"Why is everyone keeping their mouths shut! Duke Diarca! Where is Duke Diarca!"

"..."

Only Kiolle reacted whenever Katchian screamed desperately. Yuder inwardly clicked his tongue watching Kiolle flinch like someone pricked with a needle in his bottom whenever loud voices came out.

'What's the use of just trying to maintain a solemn expression. Just scream out that you're scared to death.'

The funny point was that whenever Kiolle flinched and showed signs of discomfort, the eyes of the moderate faction nobles sitting around him became slightly more confused.

'Until now we clearly thought Kiolle had turned to the imperial faction... just what is this situation? Why is Kironne turning his back on the Crown Prince, and why is Kiolle's side uncomfortable with this situation? Perhaps... were we misunderstanding something?'

'I really can't tell. Just which side should we take here?'

How laughable were those faces so obviously showing they were having such thoughts.

No wonder Kishiar was spreading pleased fragrance. If even Yuder found their antics this amusing, he must find it several times more entertaining. It was amazing he wasn't laughing out loud.

Stupid ones who couldn't even see and judge for themselves. Though they called themselves neutral in words, such people who actually wanted to just look after their own safety without doing anything probably wouldn't last long under Emperor Keilusa.

But until now even such fools had their own kind of power. If after witnessing the Emperor and Kishiar's power at this place they distanced themselves from the noble faction, just that alone would make House Diarca unable to act as outrageously as before.

"Continuously blocking others' statements despite one's own speaking time being over violates the Gate of Truth's internal rules. Having repeatedly violated rules beyond the set number of times, We now temporarily prohibit Crown Prince Katchian's speech until Marin's statement ends."

"What—!"

As soon as the Emperor's order fell, one of the knights guarding Katchian's chair pressed the magic circle behind the chair. Then as the magic engraved in the chair activated, the voice of Katchian sitting there became inaudible to anyone as if blocked by an invisible screen.

"---!...---!"

While leaving Katchian who kept screaming something with a bright red face though unable to stand, Marin continued her story.

"My brother Mikey's death happened around the Harvest Festival time several months ago. At that time he was happy saying he might be able to meet an old friend after a long time, and even dried some plants he usually didn't collect."

But not long after that Mikey was murdered by someone in the mountains. In a truly terrible state without properly leaving behind even one possession.

"The lord said Mikey died from a beast attack and closed the case without investigation. I who had been away at the time and belatedly learned of the incident couldn't possibly believe that announcement, so I searched for the culprit alone."

Though the village where Marin lived was in the mountains countryside, there existed a lake that even nobles sometimes visited for tourism. That was the clearest evidence above all that the place was not dangerous at all.

Let alone monsters, in a place where not even one dangerous beast had been properly sighted, a herbalist dying covered in wounds so unnaturally.

Neither before nor after Mikey had anyone else died from being attacked like that.

"I learned then that before dying, Mikey had met an unfamiliar merchant at the foot of the mountain. I thought for certain he had died trying to sell the plants he had collected and dried to that merchant. But I couldn't find the merchant. I only thought that incident would be unfairly buried forever like that."

"A tragic incident. But just hearing up to here, it seems we still cannot tell why you came to think that incident is connected to this village attack incident."

"After learning that the one who hired mercenaries to attack the village was His Highness the Crown Prince's attendant, I came to hear about a certain incident His Highness was involved in around last year's harvest time."

Katchian screamed inaudibly.

Marin opened her mouth and spoke with clear pronunciation that anyone could hear.

"The poisoning incident involving Dudureli mushroom. The moment I heard that, even the gods couldn't have guessed how chilled I was."

Because.

"The mushroom itself called Dudureli in our region and Puto in pharmacies is not poison. But when dried and powdered in a specific way and consumed, it has the effect of causing intense thirst in a short time. The method of taking advantage of that moment of carelessness to make them drink something bad mixed in water secondarily... that was discovered by my brother Mikey. In childhood, he used that method with little Kichi to play mischievous pranks on villagers."

Information Yuder already knew was reconstructed through Marin's mouth.

"And... that mushroom was exactly what Mikey had collected and dried last before dying."

Everyone sitting in the spectator seats temporarily held their breath.

Everyone here knew what that incident was. Wasn't it the incident that caused an uproar when Apeto's second son Lenore died during a harvest party? Though House Diarca claimed it was something the Crown Prince's attendant did arbitrarily and the culprit quickly disappeared after leaving a confession letter, those who should know knew that wasn't the truth.

Even those who hadn't attended Lenore's funeral all knew by hearing about how that Duke Peletta appeared at the funeral and claimed together with third son Revlin sitting in these spectator seats that 'the real culprit who killed Lenore was the Crown Prince.'

Just because House Diarca said it wasn't so, it was only buried like 'something that didn't happen.' As always until now.

After that the Crown Prince was attacked by assassins, and with Duke Apeto falling ill and disappearing the political world was turned upside down, so that incident became less important. Because too many greater things happened to keep paying attention to such a small matter.

But now that incident was showing its face again?

Moreover this time in a state where even Duke Diarca who would protect the Crown Prince was absent?

People's gazes naturally turned toward Revlin Shand Apeto's face sitting in the spectator seats. Revlin was watching Marin with an unreadable expression.

"The timing when Mikey died and when the murder happened here were both identical around harvest time. The method of using Dudureli mushroom that Mikey discovered was used exactly the same way here, and little Kichi who knows that method is here. Then would it be too much for me to suspect that Mikey's death actually happened just earlier through the same process as this time."

"..."

"I think this incident is worth investigating together in extension of this village attack incident. Though it's the death of one commoner, please take pity Your Majesty."

After finishing speaking Marin deeply bowed her waist. Though until now she had been prouder than anyone, only then did the burning heart and desperate sorrow she had tried hard to hide finally reveal themselves.

**Chapter 1206**

Emperor Keilusa who had been looking down at Marin with her head bowed so low her face couldn't be seen met eyes with the Empress. The couple who stared at each other as if conversing through just eye contact both slightly nodded their heads simultaneously after a moment.

"We have heard well. Though you wrote an accusation letter, speaking in this place must have been difficult. Nevertheless, We express Our gratitude to you, Marin, who bravely and honestly revealed all opinions."

"Not at all. Because I thought it was something I absolutely had to do, it wasn't difficult at all."

"We also understand your feelings about your brother who sadly passed away. Since We think all the questions raised and circumstantial evidence are logical and reasonable, We shall expand the scope of the ongoing investigation."

Marin raised her head sharply. Emperor Keilusa placed his hand on the scripture and continued speaking without hesitation.

"The death of herbalist Mikey. And the death of Second Prince Lenore Shand Apeto. We shall restart investigation of both cases from the beginning. We declare before god that this is an imperial order proclaimed in the Gate of Truth with the scripture."

Then the Empress placed her hand the same way and made the same declaration. Yuder thought while watching the two overflowing with dignity.

'The day when Mikey's bloodstained mushroom sack I discovered will proudly appear is not far off.'

The bloodstained Dudureli mushroom sack Yuder had found at the herbalists' rest stop when first meeting Marin. The only and decisive evidence left by dead Mikey was still being kept by Kishiar. Though the Emperor must know that too, they didn't immediately reveal that card today. Marin too showed an appearance thoroughly faithful only to the role of accuser.

Their movements teaching the stupid nobles one by one what this situation was and what would be done next made one feel the Emperor's intentions.

'Thoroughly to the point of breathtaking.'

The moments when cards will exert their greatest effect when presented are each different. People who exactly know when to submit their cards are rare, and those who can wait until that timing even while knowing are even rarer.

But Emperor Keilusa was precisely that rare fighter with patience.

In truth, if the physical evidence were submitted now, Katchian would likely protest, “How was it obtained?” and the whole matter might veer off course. However, now that the investigation into Mikey’s death was to begin anew by imperial decree, with Marin officially serving as witness and accuser, that sack could be submitted as legitimately discovered evidence at any time—without sparking anyone’s suspicion.

The Emperor obtained all that just by delaying the moment to present the card of physical evidence once.

Now Katchian would clearly realize one by one in the courtroom that today's humiliation in the Gate of Truth was not all.

'Indeed, his way of fighting is quite different from his younger brother's.'

He seemed to understand why Kishiar often spoke saying 'though this is what I would do, the Emperor's thoughts might be different.' Though he couldn't judge which was better or worse, Yuder was quite pleased with the Emperor's method too.

This was who Emperor Keilusa was, now that he had regained time.

Katchian screamed inaudibly.

Marin's shoulders trembled finely. She bowed her waist once more before the Emperor and Empress.

"...Thank you. Thank you, Your Majesty!"

Marin withdrew. The Emperor raised his hand ordering the magic applied to the Crown Prince's chair to be released. Simultaneously with the knight pressing to release the formation, a scream that seemed it would tear burst out.

"...am innocent! I say I am innocent!"

Katchian's face shouting that he was innocent looked laughable but truly sincere. In those eyes full of anger and indignation, not a trace could be found of being troubled or afraid at having his crimes discovered.

Realizing his voice had returned, Katchian looked around with gleaming eyes and shouted.

"It's all fabricated. I don't know that commoner or the picture at all! Are you not afraid of the moment when everyone learns of this violent act Your Majesty has committed against the Crown Prince today? Though I may not be your birth child how can you hate and torment me this much!"

"..."

"Did you dislike me that much? When Your Majesty abandoned the empire using illness as excuse, who looked after state affairs in Your Majesty's place and held imperial citizens' hands? Though you slighted me without even giving proper teaching, I never once expressed resentment! The reason you insult me like this must surely be to steal my position by putting forward that Duke Peletta as Crown Prince!"

Katchian who spewed out a voice mixed with hatred toward the Emperor, Empress, and Kishiar trembled and shouted.

"Do not think I will stay quiet! I will disobey! I shall prove my qualification as this empire's rightful Crown Prince! Please allow me to meet Duke Diarca!"

Emperor Keilusa who had been looking down indifferently as if not hearing any sound finally turned his head slightly. Where his gaze turned was toward where Kironne da Diarca was.

"The Crown Prince's request is such. Young Duke Diarca. What is the Duke's current condition?"

First Prince Kironne who until now had been unofficially called Young Duke, but actually had never received official confirmation as successor from his father.

The moment the Emperor addressed him as Young Duke, everyone received a great shock in a different sense than before.

'Could it be that the Diarca First Prince of all people has joined hands with the Emperor...?'

'No. Then Duke Diarca...!'

Kironne who had thoroughly ignored Katchian's cries until now finally opened his mouth wearing a gentle yet somewhat regretful-looking smile.

"His Grace the Duke... has yet to awaken. The wound was dire, and because he lost much blood, ten healing priests are attending to his condition at present. We do not know when he will open his eyes."

"...What?"

Katchian's eyes went wide. He seemed to finally realize that the reason Duke Diarca hadn't come here was somewhat different from his expectations.

"Duke Diarca... was injured? When, how...! Why hasn't that fact been conveyed to me until now?"

Behind Katchian crying out with a trembling voice in shock. Yuder was watching Kiolle gloomily lowering his head. The nobles who saw Kiolle biting his lips and looking dejected seemed twice as confused as before.

“How unfortunate,” said the Emperor calmly. “Should you require any aid, do not hesitate to ask.”

"I am honored. I am only sorry I cannot fulfill His Highness the Crown Prince's request due to His Grace the Duke's health issue."

Their exchange sounded as though there had never been any hostility between them.

The Emperor opened his mouth and asked with an utterly calm face.

"By the way you too must have heard the accuser's statement just now. Did Young Duke Diarca know where and how the Crown Prince lived before ascending to his position?"

Depending on the answer to this question, the entire atmosphere of House Diarca would change. Everyone watched only Kironne's mouth unable to even breathe properly.

Kironne slowly breathed lowering his eyes as if savoring those gazes. Though he was managing his expression nobly, Yuder saw deep and nauseating satisfaction from him.

He was currently feeling ecstatic joy at the taste of power cast upon him in this moment.

After a moment, he shook his head without even giving a glance to the Crown Prince.

"I swear before god this was the first I heard of it. To speak honestly, I too was greatly shocked and disappointed by His Highness the Crown Prince's appearance shown in this place today. There is likely no one in this place feeling more shame than I, the Young Duke Diarca."

Chapter 1207

Kironne da Diarca's choice was to abandon Crown Prince Katchian.

People shocked, people quickly overcoming that shock and watching for which side to attach themselves to, people gripped by confusion and fear... besides these, various other reactions swept through the Gate of Truth like a silent storm.

And among them, naturally the one who received the greatest shock was Katchian himself. He was blankly staring at Kironne while barely taking rapid breaths like someone being strangled. It seemed like a lie that until just now he had been shouting wildly without restraint at the Emperor and Empress.

The Emperor was composed, and the Empress quietly nodded.

Kishiar was silently smiling while taking in all those people in his view.

And Yuder, who was almost unique among those gathered in this room in maintaining a cold expressionless face from start to finish, showed no reaction this time either.

It was natural. Kironne's answer was already expected. And probably...

'Actually even if Duke Diarca himself were here, wouldn't he have said the same thing?'

Because he had a very strong conviction that even if Duke Diarca had come to this place without being injured, he would have given the same answer as his son.

'Of course though if he chose to abandon Katchian, his reasons themselves might have been somewhat different from the current Kironne's.'

Katchian had already crossed a line he couldn't return from.

Though until now Duke Diarca had countless times covered up his scandals and crimes, that was all done seeing future value in Katchian becoming a useful puppet. But look. Did Katchian still seem to have such value now?

'No.'

On the other hand, Kironne hadn't deeply thought about and decided about Katchian himself like his father. His choice was clearly just the result of the Young Duke title mentioned by the Emperor.

'Of course he's probably making calculations similar to his father in his own way. First stepping back and completely grasping power, then replacing the Crown Prince with a new card he wants. Something like that.'

But things wouldn't go according to those thoughts.

How many people in this place would know what it meant that the same result of abandoning Katchian would have come out whether Duke Diarca or Kironne was here?

It meant that Duke Diarca, Kironne, and Katchian had all become no different from puppet dolls just dancing toward conclusions someone desired. And that someone was Emperor Keilusa.

How chilling would it have been if they knew that what they chose thinking they had used their heads hard and judged beneficial was just the path Emperor Keilusa wanted? Fortunate they didn't know.

Even if Kiolle had been there instead of Kironne, it didn't seem the result would have been different. Because Emperor Keilusa would surely have made Kiolle give the same answer too.

In Yuder's cold observations, Kironne's elegant manner of speech that was almost unpleasantly so continued echoing.

"Though His Grace the Duke is in no state to convey his intentions, I think if he were here today he would surely be the same as me. As House Diarca's First Prince and Young Duke with deep history, I shall follow Your Majesty's imperial order. I pray the newly beginning case investigation will be right steps advancing toward truth."

These words meant that whether Katchian was formally referred to trial or not, Kironne and House Diarca would no longer care. Everyone in this place knew the fact that Diarca couldn't possibly not know Katchian's past. Nevertheless, his father Duke Diarca seemed to overlap in that arrogant face backed by confidence that if they just denied it they would never be involved.

"Well heard. Our mind is much more at ease now that House Diarca, who must have been pained more than anyone, has thus expressed intention of support."

"Since Your Majesty's will is the empire's will, it is natural that our Diarca's will is the same."

"We hear the grand judges' deliberation meeting regarding the Crown Prince's trial is scheduled to end tomorrow. Though you said disappointment is great, We request House Diarca please take charge of the Crown Prince's defense."

"That too is naturally something we must follow. Please do not worry."

He certainly spoke well. The corners of Emperor Keilusa's lips rose strangely.

"Having confirmed everyone's intentions are the same, and since the Crown Prince looks very tired, We shall close the Gate of Truth here. Ah. However, one thing before that."

Those trying hard to hide their excitement shocked by today's events all looked at the Emperor at once.

Beyond his glasses, the Emperor's eyes scanned their faces.

"Though Duke Diarca falling ill is unfortunate, we cannot delay the 'Council of Light' held every three years. Young Duke Kironne da Diarca will participate in place of Duke Diarca in this Council of Light. Coordination for this has already finished so We will not hear other opinions."

"..."

New shock spread like ripples through the room that was already full of shock.

'The Council of Light.'

That was a state affairs council the Emperor held every three years calling 100 key figures leading the empire for several days. However, Yuder hadn't seen that council directly. Because when Katchian ascended to Emperor's position he branded the Council of Light as a relic of the old era and abolished it.

Anyway looking at how he said he would have Kironne participate as House Diarca's representative, it seemed usually only one representative from ducal houses attended, and having Kironne take that role must make him feel good. Kironne slightly bowed his head while wearing a smile as if he had already become duke.

"Though insufficient, I shall do my best in place of His Grace the Duke."

The Gate of Truth that had been a series of shocking situations finally disbanded.

Katchian who had been blankly glaring at Kironne with bloodshot eyes was led out by knights' hands. Those who had wondered what the Emperor could possibly do calling the Crown Prince when the room first opened now carefully disappeared unable to even look up at where the Emperor sat. Important neutral faction figures like the Chief Court Mage, Grand Temple elder priest, and people sent by Grand General Mucker hurried their steps with expressions of having obtained some answer.

Those favorable to the Emperor and Cavalry like Revlin Shand Apeto disappeared after giving resolute-eyed respectful greetings. They too would be thinking much about how to act from now on.

Kiolle da Diarca rose with a half-dazed face, then suddenly disappeared almost being dragged away half-buried by nobles who crowded around him.

"Lord Diarca! Let's talk with us!"

"Huh? Ugh? What...!"

Kironne and Diarca's forces watched such Kiolle with meaningful gazes then followed out. Since they would know what those guys would do outside later when they punished Kiolle, Yuder decided not to be too curious.

'That aside...'

Among those leaving the room, Yuder firmly stared at the backs of several nobles who had shown particularly disrespectful gazes toward Kishiar when entering earlier. Though they were currently fleeing with faces covered as if afraid Kishiar might draw his sword again, Yuder had long since well memorized their appearances and features.

"Who are you watching with such hot eyes? It makes me jealous."

Someone deeply embraced Yuder's shoulders as he quietly stared until the door completely closed. Naturally the only one who would do such a thing was Kishiar La Orr.

"Though you must already know what and why I'm watching, is there a reason you make such jokes?"

"Hmm. Because having you look at me even a little more is better than looking at such people?"

"You're direct."

"It's going to become my new good point. Following my aide I plan to become a more honest person from now on."

Kishiar solemnly declared.

"Your nonsense can be heard all the way here. Stop chattering and follow."

Just then, Emperor Keilusa called out with a frowning face from the platform. Since everyone except them had already left, the Emperor's manner of speech had returned to being relatively light like usual.

**Chapter 1208**

The place where the Emperor and Empress moved to welcome their returned younger brother was the Room of the Little Dandelion that they had visited before. The only differences from when they came before leaving for vacation were that the type of plants in the flower vase had changed, and Nathan Zuckerman's absence.

The Emperor who sat before the meal already prepared for them let out a long breath and comfortably undid one button of his formal attire fastened up to his neck.

"So. How was it?"

A question thrown out without context.

Kishiar who received the question opened his mouth with a grinning smile without even one counter-question like 'What do you mean?'

"The world really has changed."

"Is that all?"

"I sincerely and humbly admit that my worries from 6 weeks ago were too excessive."

"Anything else?"

Just what kind of reaction did he want?

The answer to that question was obtained through Kishiar who burst out laughing as if realizing something.

"Well... it finally feels like my mind might be a bit refreshed. It was fun."

Only then did a small smile form at the Emperor's lips as if a satisfactory answer had come.

"Yes. I'm glad to hear that."

What the Emperor wanted wasn't praise toward himself. He just wanted to know how happily his younger brother had enjoyed the events like a one-act play that happened in the Gate of Truth today.

The Empress who had been watching the brothers' conversation with a smiling face sent a kind gaze toward Yuder.

"Yuder. I'm glad you seem to have rested well during vacation. You look much more energetic than before."

He didn't know how many times he had already heard similar words since returning. Though Yuder himself was doubtful whether it was enough to say so, he couldn't dare say such words to the Empress. Yuder just quietly bowed his head.

"It is thanks to Her Majesty the Empress's concern."

"When issuing the reflection order I sent several gifts together, were those alright?"

"You sent tea, scented candles, and spices. I used them all well. Thank you."

To be precise, it was closer to the Peletta people using them well for them rather than Yuder using them directly.

When news of additional reflection came was when Kishiar was in the middle of his heat period. Instead of their lord who couldn't leave the bedroom, Nathan Zuckerman and Peletta's butler Enk who received the news chose to immediately open and use the enclosed gifts for Kishiar and Yuder rather than just storing them.

When gaps appeared during the heat period to go out and resupply food and daily necessities, in the baskets Nathan Zuckerman gave out as if prepared in advance. How flustered he was later learning that dishes and tea made using the Empress's gifts, and towels with calming effects from being fumigated with scented candle smoke etc. were mixed in.

'Well... anyway it's fine since they were used well.'

Actually the only one who felt even slight embarrassment knowing this was Yuder alone.

Both the Peletta people and Kishiar himself thought nothing of the fact that the Empress's gifts were used without any way to confirm their original form. They were truly remarkable and unique lord and retainers in many ways.

Though someone like Kiolle who only knew reflection as just punishment would never understand even if he died and came back to life.

While Yuder was thinking that, the Empress tilted her head puzzled.

"Spices? I don't think I sent those..."

"I heard salt and pepper were enclosed..."

"Ah."

Only then did the Empress seem to realize something and covered her mouth, biting her lips to swallow laughter.

"That was sent by the Emperor. When I said I wanted to enclose gifts, he said not to be surprised if scented candles turned into pepper... but it seems they weren't."

"What?"

"Still fortunate he didn't skip the scented candles. If they had been items just for the Duke alone, they might really have only been pepper."

To think that the calm and solemn Emperor Keilusa would play such pranks.

As he just blinked his eyes since it was quite different from the impression he had seen and felt of him until now, the Empress who had been shaking her shoulders laughing for a while calmed down and opened her mouth.

"Anyway, I heard well about Yuder's activities even during vacation. You became Peletta's guardian?"

"Rather than me... Sir Zuckerman's activities were greater."

"Yes. I heard that news too. That the Sword Emperor of the North Wind appeared."

Befitting the Emperor's closest aide who could quickly access news, the Empress already knew even Nathan Zuckerman's new title very well. Yuder felt some satisfaction.

"Though regrettable he couldn't be together today, it's fine since there will be chances to see him again."

After saying that, the Empress suddenly showed a slightly different smile than before as if thinking something.

"It feels newly strange and thankful. That I can comfortably promise next like this."

"..."

Yuder was silent knowing the weight of old pain contained in that bright and calm voice. The Empress opened her mouth gently curving her eyes.

"I always remember well that it's all thanks to you, Yuder. So... today too, eat as much as you like."

When she gestured, the chief attendant who approached silently placed several more food plates in front of Yuder while wearing a benevolent smile. What was placed on them were dishes he had eaten several times while staying at the palace. Uniquely though, the portions were about twice as much as then.

"I don't know if you noticed, but today I had them bring out a mix of dishes that both the Duke and Yuder enjoyed most here, Peletta-style dishes, and Central Region dishes. If it's not enough, the palace chef will immediately bring more so don't worry."

Actually, since entering this room he had thought somehow the number and amount of dishes seemed more than before. He just thought it was because the Emperor and Empress wanted to greatly welcome Kishiar... but apparently that wasn't all.

'Seems like I've caused some really big misunderstanding...'

Yuder was somewhat different in nature from ordinary big eaters. He didn't enjoy fine dining, and rather than eating a lot due to gluttony, he just ate up all food that was served. From experience, even eating less didn't particularly hinder his activities and using power.

However, seeing Yuder eat up everything no matter how much was served, the Emperor and Empress seemed to have developed thoughts of wanting to serve meals that would surely satisfy him.

'Surely they're not planning to feed me until I say I'm full.'

"While I was having nutritionally deficient conversation with Your Majesty, Her Majesty the Empress has monopolized my aide."

Just then, Kishiar stuck his head out and spoke.

"My. You've brought out two more plates each of just foods Yuder ate well. But Yuder also eats the Gilin leaf-wrapped duck roast over there very well. Yuliver, would you bring one more plate of that too?"

"Yes, understood."

"The nutritionally deficient one is you, Kishiar. Since leaf-wrapped duck roast loses flavor when cold, bring a heated stone plate together to make it easy to eat."

Emperor Keilusa who clicked his tongue not only didn't stop Kishiar but made statements adding fuel to the fire. When Yuder quietly stared at Kishiar in silence, the man who would know everything relaxed his eyebrows and whispered with a regretful face.

"We heard too much nonsense in the Gate of Truth today. I just recommended it thinking eating slightly oily food would be good to wash our defiled ears and internal organs. Perhaps you dislike it?"

What could he say to that?

"...No. Please eat a lot too, Commander."

Kishiar grinned with a face like a beast that had achieved what it wanted.

"Of course. How could I not keep someone's words?"

"...This really. Though I already knew you had introduced the Baron in quite a remarkable way before your Peletta retainers, seeing and hearing the results directly makes my mind truly troubled."

Emperor Keilusa muttered in a low voice. Unlike his expression showing he was quite displeased, he kindly added one word as soon as his eyes met Yuder's.

"Baron need not worry. This trouble is solely because of that fellow."

"That fellow? Your words go too far."

When the Empress gently scolded, the wrinkles between the Emperor's brows wriggled then smoothed again.

"Understood. I take it back."

"Thank you, Your Majesty the Empress. The Dawn's grace is like a summer breeze. Only dawn can extinguish the trial of heat the sun brings down."

Kishiar impudently retorted with a very annoying face.

The Emperor let out a deep sigh. Yuder thought Emperor Keilusa looked a bit more tired than just before.

"Anyway. Let's get to the main point."

**Chapter 1209**

"Anyway. Let's get to the main point."

Though the topic changed from warm family chat to important matters, the meal didn't stop. The Emperor, Empress, and Kishiar all continued eating at a regular pace while naturally changing the subject.

"As you probably already guess, while you were away on vacation Kironne da Diarca decided to betray his father."

"Was the bait offered to him indeed the title?"

"More precisely, We promised to give him the opportunity to be fully recognized as Young Duke. And to turn a blind eye to everything happening within House Diarca."

Saying that, the Emperor drew his knife straight through the dish before him. Red juice overflowed from within the precisely bisected dish.

"He still thinks We don't know anything. He believes We're completely focused only on resolving the incident where the Empress was nearly attacked and establishing imperial dignity. When really he's the one who knows nothing."

Since awakening, the Emperor had been meticulously disrupting House Diarca's internal information network. Just using information obtained through his ability in the right places and times showed effects before long. The direct children including Duke Diarca and the noble faction following them gradually began suspecting their surroundings and were gripped by anxiety that something was different from before.

Without even thinking the Emperor was the cause, at some point they came to consider finding internal enemies and establishing their own dignity as most important.

Kiolle da Diarca's changed reputation and the incident of sending support troops to the south were like oil-soaked sparks thrown onto that.

Kironne who had been internally anxious not receiving confirmation as successor from his father decided to kill his youngest brother Kiolle disguising it as an accident. Since many including the manager of the military office Kiolle was heading toward followed him, originally it should have been quite easy, but unfortunately it became entangled with the Empress and the assassination attempt completely failed. Moreover, Duke Diarca learned of this fact and became greatly enraged.

Driven out by his father's hand and heading to a remote villa, Kironne was gripped by bewilderment, anxiety, worry and anger he had never experienced before. For some unknown reason, necessities and food that should have been properly supplied to the villa where he stayed were not, and the siblings and subordinates following him also had their words diverge individually, swept up in 'strange information and rumors constantly coming from somewhere.' It must have been a truly frightening and confusing time for him who had lived comfortably under his father's halo without making big decisions himself.

The Emperor's secret contact arrived precisely then.

"I had the messenger who met Kironne avoiding others' eyes tell him thus - 'It is no coincidence that Kiolle da Diarca happened to avoid assassination appearing to save the Empress by chance.'"

Mixed in that was Duke Diarca's scheme to make his youngest son achieve merit and become an undeniable ducal successor, and the Emperor had also learned this fact. If Kironne stayed quiet like this, he would never be able to enter the main residence again without becoming successor.

"When We conveyed that, he contacted back immediately without even a day's consideration."

Actually those were all completely nonsensical stories. However, to Kironne those words must have felt like an amazing opportunity. Wasn't it a perfect moment to strike his father's back while being able to hide the fact that he was truly the culprit who tried to kill Kiolle?

"People often believe only what they want to hear rather than the truth."

"Yes. He then was exactly like that. Even now."

Kironne whose anxiety was amplified and whose distrust and anger toward his father grew while receiving the information the Emperor had mixed up.

The Emperor gave him a gap where he could rampage as he wished, and promised an opportunity to be recognized in the name of the next power holder. What he wanted in return was brief cooperation during the time of striking down both the Duke, and Crown Prince Katchian whom he had established.

Though it might seem suspicious that the Emperor who had been hostile to Diarca suddenly made such a proposal, historically it wasn't so strange.

Haven't the Emperors of the Orr Empire repeated countless times cooperating after being hostile with ducal houses for a thousand years? The history of House Diarca who received the privilege of keeping more private soldiers near the capital than anyone after saving the imperial family from crisis, yet currently sends assassins to the Emperor more frequently than anyone, was the greatest evidence proving that fact.

However, even if the Emperor was currently in a terribly hostile relationship with Duke Diarca, Kironne himself had never been directly entangled with the imperial family. That point was important. Kironne thought the Emperor probably chose and reached out to him because of that.

Actually without noticing that even thinking that way had the Emperor's subtle hand extended to it, he decided to express the greed he had been suppressing meanwhile.

"Though We thought he might get scared when actually proceeding with matters and fail, that wasn't the case. He handled sending assassins to his father without a moment's hesitation in a much rougher way than expected."

"That part certainly makes him feel like Duke Diarca's child."

"Yes. Though We hadn't expected Kiolle to appear there."

No one had expected that Kiolle would happen to decide to go meet his father that day. However thanks to that the Duke fell into critical condition, and hearing news that Kiolle had come to meet his father, Kironne became even more certain his choice was right.

"Kironne is in a situation where he doesn't care about anything else as long as there's a guarantee he'll become Duke. He tells his close associates that neither the current Duke, nor Kiolle, nor the Crown Prince position is more important than that. He thinks he can easily resolve everything after becoming Duke."

"That's how he seemed just from his attitude in the Gate of Truth."

"Yes. Now he's acting unhesitatingly to take leadership within the family while returning to the Diarca main residence and watching to prevent the Duke from regaining consciousness."

Kishiar wore a gentle smile.

"Well. Though I hope things go well, I wonder if he can really grasp House Diarca's leadership as well as he thinks. It won't be easy trying to do that without knowing why his father recently became more suspicious and sensitive, why Diarca's proud private soldiers are creaking like misaligned parts, why his youngest brother's reputation suddenly improved and keeps luckily surviving."

The Emperor also smiled similarly to his younger brother.

"Yes. It won't be easy. Because House Diarca isn't so simple to grasp with just one Young Duke title and Council of Light attendance. Perhaps the postponed youngest brother might pop up again from somewhere..."

"And perhaps the old raccoon who seems to be just waiting to die while forcibly sleeping might suddenly wake up."

"Yes. That's what will happen if Kironne doesn't act properly."

That was essentially the same as declaring that all means to stop Kironne no matter what he did were in the Emperor's hands.

The Emperor who lowered his eyes as if savoring the food's taste whispered lowly.

"Among those who attended the Gate of Truth today, there were those who had conversations with Us in advance. The elder priest, Chief Court Mage, Mucker's subordinate and such. They are all now returning and talking about having heard quite interesting news."

Chapter 1210

"Hmm. You mentioning that now... naturally means good results came out?"

When Kishiar asked subtly while curving his eyes, the Emperor chuckled.

"You're too quick to catch on so there's no fun in telling."

"My. Isn't having a smart younger brother something to be congratulated for?"

"Do you say such things about yourself?"

"I only spoke the truth... but since my beloved Your Majesty finds it no fun, I shall try pretending not to know better."

"Not necessary."

While listening to the deflating conversation between siblings, Yuder recalled in his mind the faces of those the Emperor had mentioned.

The elder priest who was insulted by Katchian. The Chief Court Mage who remained quiet to the end after agreeing with Revlin once. Grand General Mucker's subordinate.

Actually looking carefully, they weren't alone. Beside the Chief Court Mage, there were several mages wearing various affiliation badges including Pearl Tower, and beside the elder priest sat a Pope's direct attendant priest silently. Beside Grand General Mucker, high-ranking officials who came instead of the Chancellor sat together guiding those who came as foreign ambassadors.

'In other words, neutral forces encompassing not just within the empire but the entire continent.'

When meeting before departing for vacation, the Emperor had declared he would gain new faith and cooperation from those who had maintained neutrality while doing nothing until now. Today's Gate of Truth seemed to be both the result of those efforts and final testing ground.

He newly realized just how important today had been.

The corners of Emperor Keilusa's lips rose a bit higher.

"Anyway, as you say. They were scheduled to directly see and judge how We deal with the Crown Prince and noble faction today, and make their final decision about future cooperation. And all conclusions have just come in."

The Emperor declared while warmly looking at the Empress, Kishiar, and Yuder all together.

"Matching the timing of tomorrow's Crown Prince trial establishment announcement, various forces will each publicly express intention to support the Crown Prince's deposition. They will continue sharing intentions with this side afterward too. In the case of the Grand Temple, additionally the Pope's retirement scheduled for several years later might be moved up."

That was a declaration to overturn history.

The Emperor who had seemed to have no future, pushed back by the noble faction just a year ago.

No trace could now be found of his appearance dying powerlessly then.

"Congratulations!"

Kishiar raised golden fruit wine high with the happiest face. The Empress and Yuder also raised their cups following him.

"It's not yet time for toasts."

"Don't be so harsh and quickly raise your cup too, Your Majesty. It strains Her Majesty the Empress's wrist."

Emperor Keilusa gave a hollow laugh, then finally raised his cup. Kishiar turned to look at the chief attendant with a cheerful smile.

"Yuliver, you join too."

"I am fine but."

"Such modesty. How can we celebrate without you?"

"Just do as Kishiar says. It seems it will get noisier if you don't."

At the Emperor's order, finally the chief attendant too raised his cup. Five cups made clear sounds lightly clinking together.

Yuder quietly opened his mouth and swallowed a sip while watching their smiling faces reflected in the rippling golden wine. The taste of wine going down his throat felt uniquely sweet and refreshing.

Though he had drunk countless celebration toasts after succeeding in missions, this was the first time it tasted like this. Probably that was not simply a difference in taste but in atmosphere.

Because they were all alive and smiling happily.

Because Kishiar was sincerely joyful.

The corners of Yuder's lips unconsciously softened. The moment the Emperor and Empress saw that appearance and opened their eyes round, Kishiar sitting beside Yuder gently swayed his cup with the same smiling face to steal their gaze and made a secret eye signal.

It was a polite request not to point out and startle that precious smile from that young man who extremely rarely smiled.

The Emperor and Empress looked at each other, then burst into brief laughter with no one being first.

"Anyway, though all is good the Pope retirement related matter is somewhat unexpected. I thought someone like him wouldn't particularly give up a lifetime position."

"He probably reached the conclusion judging that this side could definitely protect the successor candidate he desires. Though externally secret, it seems his old age illness has been gradually deepening lately and he can only move around for a short time each day. He seemed to want to return to his hometown and spend his remaining life while he could still walk."

The Pope in the previous life ended his life in the Grand Temple. But it seemed changes would occur there too this time.

'The Pope had a separate desired candidate... A story I didn't know before. Looking at Emperor Keilusa not saying much, it seems not a noble faction candidate.'

"Indeed, he didn't look very healthy even when I last saw him. Still fortunate that he seems to have made a decision in his heart before going to meet god."

"Indeed seeing the new divine sword's owner before dying seems to have definitely given some impression to that unmotivated one."

"Is that so? He only told me it was truly difficult to know god's will."

"I clearly remember exactly the protest letter saying Duke Peletta wielded his tongue more threateningly than the divine sword when he went to the papal office to prove the divine sword, but that should be called a mild reaction for such a thing."

Kishiar smiled shamelessly as if he had never done such a thing. Emperor Keilusa now didn't even bother pointing out such expressions.

"Additionally around tomorrow, an envoy from Nelarn will come too."

"Oh. That's the first I'm hearing of this. Deliberately matching the timing to after tomorrow means...?"

"Yes. They are coming timed with when the Crown Prince's trial begins. But that's not for tomorrow's trial."

"For the next stage?"

"Yes."

The content of the Crown Prince's trial beginning from tomorrow would focus on proving whether he really was behind the Guanaman village attack incident, and whether he was also the one who killed Mikey and Lenore or not.

While Katchian struggled to resolve that, Emperor Keilusa was already planning to unhesitatingly prepare the next stage.

"Since the most difficult trial against a royal family member has passed review and been established for now, next is just expansion. We shall continuously reveal evidence of various negligence and injustice the Crown Prince has committed meanwhile. It's time for the criminals held by the Cavalry side to come out too. Additionally the Nelarn envoy will bring evidence that Diarca and noble faction forces supported the group that tried to kill Prince Ejain."

It was truly blocking all paths without a single escape route. Before bombs that would continue exploding with time differences, just how long could Katchian endure?

'Though I'm not that curious about the answer...'

Since those driven into corners sometimes make unexpected desperate struggles, Yuder too thought to never loosen his tension until everything was over.

'That's enough.'

While quietly recalling ways to protect the people before his eyes, the conversation topic now moved from Katchian to what Kishiar experienced during vacation.

Kishiar talked about what happened in Peletta and Airic with eyes shining more than ever before. Though to Yuder's hearing they were really unremarkable stories, the Emperor and Empress found them so entertaining he really couldn't say to stop in the middle.

The Emperor lightly applauded while hearing the story of the moment Yuder stood firm atop the tower and planted arrows in flying monsters' mouths without blinking, and showed particular great interest and regret at news of Yuder's sparring matches against several Peletta elite knights alone.

"Someday We would like to see such sparring too."

"Don't regret it. The Cavalry will welcome Your Majesty's visit anytime."

The Empress showed interest in descriptions of the food they cooked and ate and surrounding scenery in Yuder's hometown.

"The place where Yuder grew up feels quite similar to where I grew up. Could you give us a chance to taste the tea the Duke brought here too?"

"Actually I already divided and brought it right after returning. Would you accept it?"

Kishiar solemnly took out a small bottle from his breast. It contained the finely ground tea powder Yuder had made.

'Just when...'

Since he had given it to use freely anyway because Kishiar wanted it, it was fine to share with whoever. But it was such an ordinary thing incomparable to the high-grade tea drunk here, would it really be alright?

Unlike Yuder's bewilderment, the Emperor and Empress were sincerely pleased.

"There was worth in issuing reflection after all."

"I want to try drinking it right now."

"I shall prepare it."

The chief attendant immediately brought new teapot and cups that could brew tea. Kishiar then skillfully mixed the powder in warm water set cups before the Emperor and Empress. The two drank the tea without hesitation, then smiled and nodded simultaneously.

"It tastes good."

"To be able to make something like this yourself, your skill is really good. Could you teach me how to make it too?"

They were truly sincere.

**Chapter 1211**

Yuder suddenly ended up giving an impromptu lesson on 'Yuder Aile-style Airic Winter Tea Making' at the Empress's request.

"...The ingredients vary each time. Mix and dry about 5-6 kinds of herbs and fruits that come out in autumn, then grind them into powder..."

"Hmm, hmm."

"The important thing is that Abka must be included. Only with that herb do the ingredients mix properly and have similar flavor profiles, and exert the effect of generating heat in the body."

The Empress who had been nodding and writing down what Yuder said while listening muttered with shining eyes.

"Though I've heard of Abka, this is the first time seeing it used this way. Do you think it could be grown in the palace greenhouse?"

"Around where I lived it was a grass that grew well anywhere without particularly needing careful cultivation. It shouldn't be too difficult to obtain even without growing it in a greenhouse."

"I see."

After the highly satisfying teatime for the Emperor and Empress passed, the meal officially ended.

"Though I want to hear more stories, we must rise now for tomorrow."

"Yes. Since we now have plenty of time, please call us whenever you wish."

The most comfortable smile of the day appeared on the Emperor's face hearing Kishiar's greeting.

"...Yes. Your words are right. Now we have plenty of time."

While the brothers exchanged silent smiles with faces containing many emotions, the Empress held Yuder's hand and expressed regret.

"But everyone is so busy and will be even more so for a while, so it seems creating occasions like this will become more distant until this matter is concluded. It would be nice if we could sometimes have occasions to drink tea together with Yuder and tend the vegetable garden in the greenhouse... though that would be difficult?"

If someone else had said such words he would have thought them half empty talk. However the sincerity contained in the Empress's face was too evident. Though expressing passively in words saying 'it would be nice if we could,' her eyes were so regretfully and anxiously downcast that he really couldn't just answer casually like usual.

'...I even feel pressure like I must answer positively.'

According to what he had seen so far, the Empress had a much braver personality than was known externally. However that was mainly displayed when acting for family including her husband the Emperor, and usually she was quiet and introverted, almost opposite to the strong-willed socialite noble ladies.

Such a person showing goodwill this actively toward Yuder was probably because she considered there was a debt for saving the Emperor but...

'Though I'm grateful for the excessive goodwill... to be honest it's concerning.'

Meetings between the Empress and Yuder always happened with Kishiar between them. Therefore until now there hadn't been particular need to speak much before her, but things would be different if occasions arose to meet just the two of them.

Yuder knew himself well.

His true personality was too rough to fit among elegant royal family members. How many noble ladies had there been in the previous life who ran away crying scared by some trivial words while unavoidably conversing?

Though he hadn't particularly cared about such things one by one, if something happened where the Empress thought too well of Yuder then got hurt being surprised like that, that would seem quite very awkward.

Because the Empress was truly a good person, and Kishiar's precious family.

Not wanting to particularly hurt the other person made it harder to respond to goodwill. This was another kind of awkwardness he was experiencing for the first time.

While worrying about how to answer, his eyes met Emperor Keilusa's. The Emperor's eyes beyond his glasses blinked wisely. He felt reassured seeing the appearance as if already having read completely why Yuder was hesitating.

'Right. Since he's someone who cherishes his wife, he'll surely filter out such proposals that might create gossip.'

However Yuder's expectations were soon shattered to pieces.

"Empress. I am truly disappointed."

"Why is that?"

"We too want to spend personal time meeting with the Baron. Hearing from Kishiar that he plays tactical games well, We wanted to see that skill directly once, and also wanted to try the sparring We've only heard about in words. Though We were going to pass this time considering the busy schedule, to strike first without warning, this is not fair."

"..."

Just now, what?

While Yuder was doubting his ears, the Empress shook her head with a cold face.

"If you have desires you should speak quickly. Since I made the proposal first, my answer comes first."

"Are you really going to be like this?"

"Yes."

Where had the couple who were so close and affectionate until just now gone?

Though it was half like a joke, he couldn't adapt since it was a situation he was seeing for the first time.

While Yuder was bewildered, Kishiar burst out laughing and cut in.

"Both of you please stop. Though this is a nostalgic and familiar sight to me, isn't Yuder surprised?"

"The Baron's expression doesn't look surprised at all."

"That's because you lack affection and attention. I can see it all."

Kishiar who boldly made ridiculous statements in front of the person himself continued speaking without giving room to refute.

"Anyway, I've thought of a very good method so you two don't need to be like this."

"What is it?"

"What is it?"

"Until now haven't Yuder's awakener lessons for Your Majesty only proceeded through letters since you were far apart? But from now on you can do them meeting directly again. Since Your Majesty won't have leisure to visit the Cavalry like before, change to conducting lessons in the palace."

"In the palace?"

"Before you had to mind others' gazes and security, but isn't that unnecessary now?"

Kishiar winked.

"Who would dare figure out what's happening inside Sun Palace getting through the current Your Majesty? Unless Your Majesty intended for them to."

Those words were right. Before it would have been almost impossible to visit the palace and conduct lessons because noble faction eyes were spread everywhere. But with the Emperor's ability seen today, that much seemed no problem now.

Emperor Keilusa rubbed his chin.

"You overestimate Our ability too much. However... yes. Now We have confidence to that extent."

"Yes. And when conducting lessons, Her Majesty the Empress should attend together too."

"...Me too?"

Kishiar grinned looking at the surprised Empress.

"Until now Yuder's lessons must have primarily focused on making Your Majesty able to use your ability properly and for long periods. Placing greatest weight on physical training, proceeding in the direction of enduring and grasping the limits of power possessed."

Kishiar had neither greatly interfered with nor shown interest in the Emperor's training meanwhile. That was because he worried that interfering too much in that area might rather have negative effects on training.

Nevertheless the words coming now were accurate as if having continuously watched the training before his eyes to the point of being chilling.

"It seems you not I were the one who newly gained eyes and ears."

"Your words are too kind. Though Yuder did so considering Your Majesty's situation needing to use power immediately, originally when teaching members in the Cavalry they also learn to understand themselves and methods of dealing with other awakeners together. Probably he had planned to include that in lessons from now too. Am I wrong?"

The final question was directed at Yuder.

'I did... have such thoughts. Just now in the Gate of Truth.'

Though he hadn't said it aloud, while feeling pleased seeing Emperor Keilusa's development he had thought about moving to the next stage, and it was amazing and surprising that he had read even that.

Yuder quietly nodded.

"Yes. That was the plan."

"So he says. Though physical training or training actually using abilities might be dangerous making Her Majesty the Empress's observation difficult, wouldn't lessons like what I just mentioned rather be better done together? What do you think?"

The Empress clasped her hands showing overwhelming joy.

"What a wonderful opinion, Duke! That's exactly what I hoped for."

**Chapter 1212**

"I thought you would. Since His Majesty became an awakener, naturally you must have been very curious meanwhile. But you had nowhere to comfortably learn or ask questions. Isn't that right?"

"Though embarrassing, that's so."

'Ah.'

Since her husband became an awakener, naturally as family she would have been curious about what changed and how to deal with it. But in a situation where even awakeners themselves didn't know well what awakening was, from whom could she get satisfying answers?

"Not just His Majesty, but the awakeners gradually increasing in this country are also Orr Empire citizens. Since they are people we must be together with going forward, wanting to know more about them is a natural feeling. Among that, it would seem nothing could be better than hearing directly from Orr's hero."

The Emperor too nodded wearing a gentle smile hearing the Empress's confession.

"Both Kishiar's words and the Empress's words are right. Then let's do that."

"You've thought well. Externally we'll set it as sending once a week for management supervision of guard personnel dispatched from the Cavalry to the palace. Lessons can proceed during that time. Watch the surrounding reactions for several months."

"You mean don't thoughtlessly call and trouble the Baron who feels burdened, but try getting closer slowly while receiving lessons?"

"I didn't say it like that."

"Fine. We understand so go now."

"Yes."

Kishiar who turned around without any lingering attachment secretly smiled toward Yuder.

'Really...'

He knew everything. The fact that deep in his heart Yuder didn't want to refuse the Emperor and Empress. Nevertheless he had hesitated to build personal friendships in a state without Kishiar present.

Following his proposed method, Yuder could continue meeting the Emperor and Empress personally without particularly having to feel uncomfortable like sitting on thorns, so he could spend time much more comfortably.

'Since teaching about awakeners is something I always do, there's nothing difficult about it'

Why did such feelings arise over such a small matter.

Yuder laughed lowly. And opened his mouth with a mind incomparably clearer than before.

"...Your Majesty Emperor, Your Majesty Empress. Let me say in advance that my lessons won't be very interesting."

"Hmm?"

"But I can promise I can teach better than anyone regarding awakener-related parts. I will prepare my best."

The Emperor and Empress looked at each other simultaneously. After a moment, the Emperor gently curved his eyes beyond his glasses.

"That's a more reassuring answer than anything. We like it. Words befitting a hero who doesn't lose spirit in any situation."

"..."

"Though it makes Us more regretful too..."

The moment he said that, somehow the Emperor who had briefly looked at Kishiar again with a strange gaze let out a short sigh and changed the atmosphere.

"We sincerely look forward to the teacher's next lesson."

\*\*\*

On the way back.

Yuder did not immediately board the carriage returning to the Cavalry, but walked inside the palace together with Kishiar. That was to finally do something he had been planning to do before coming here.

"Fortunate His Majesty didn't ask why we're not taking the carriage right away."

"It wouldn't matter even if we just answered if he asked."

A secret archive hidden in the deepest part of the palace library. All sorts of forbidden books including materials prohibited from viewing by most people were piled there. They planned to find the old scripture of the Black Moon Order there.

"Not yet. Since even the information we have isn't certain."

Kishiar smiled saying that.

"Though I respect and love my brother His Majesty, he has a nature of not easily believing things that are unrealistic or have too low possibility. You should understand what I mean since you suffered together trying to persuade him before?"

'Hmm...'

The memory of persuading Emperor Keilusa being most difficult when trying to attempt awakening came to mind.

'He did have an inflexible side.'

"Have you been to the palace library before?"

Kishiar asked almost singing while turning a corner. Yuder nodded after briefly gauging old memories.

"Several times."

"Oh. To look at what?"

"It wasn't just to look at books. I visited thinking the information I was looking for might be there. Though there wasn't much gain..."

Naturally that information was related to destruction.

He wanted to find the cause of disasters that occurred repeatedly while growing larger. He wanted to discover methods to respond, evidence that could persuade others.

But in the end he couldn't find it.

"Did you go into the secret forbidden book section?"

"No. Not only was that not permitted to me..."

Yuder briefly paused speaking then answered honestly.

"...I couldn't find how to enter. There was no one who knew."

Yes. If he was going to not enter just because it wasn't permitted, why would he have started crazy things? He just couldn't find the entrance.

The palace library's secret section was said to be hidden by magic, and only direct royal family members, the Chief Court Mage, and the librarian who had managed the library for generations knew how to enter.

Naturally among these, the only ones Yuder could try approaching was the librarian but here a problem arose.

Because the librarian who had managed the library for generations was considered a loyalist of the old imperial family, he was driven out without proper handover. The secret section that the new person who came to manage the library revealed while wetting himself at Yuder's threats wasn't the real secret section.

Even Yudrain Aile who had never been interested in forbidden books could tell it wasn't real since there were only unremarkable books, and when questioned again the guy insisted with tears streaming that 'Actually I don't know how to enter either.'

'Really I don't know! It seems you need a magic key to know the section you can enter... I didn't receive it! How could I when His Majesty and the Chief Court Mage never bestowed a new key to me! Is this my fault?!'

Was this possible for a historic library of an empire?

It was frustrating but what could he do? It was an era when such things were commonplace everywhere due to trying to erase traces of the old imperial family too quickly. It wasn't surprising.

Anyway, for that reason the books Yudrain Aile could find in the palace were just relatively common materials.

While swallowing the absurdity newly welling up recalling then, Kishiar smiled curving his eyes.

"I see. Then this is your first time really going to the secret section?"

"Yes. Well."

"Good. I should live up to expectations."

Though he thought what expectations, after entering the library Yuder decided to withdraw that thought.

"Welcome... no, Second Prince. What have you come to steal this time?"

The quiet and massive palace library. Unlike ordinary libraries, it was a mysterious place where green plants grew thickly between bookshelves and countless magically created fireflies flew around.

In that place where it seemed difficult to even confirm if people were present or not, an old man who appeared as if having waited immediately opened his eyes sharply upon seeing Kishiar.

"Steal? How hurtful. Anyone who hears would think I'm someone who always steals books."

"Am I wrong? Just recently too you took away a bunch of dangerous books prohibited from removal and yet what are you saying..."

"It wasn't removal but borrowing. Borrowing that no one knows about if just you and I keep quiet."

"No! How can you say that now. If His Majesty knew, I would...!"

Before the old man could get angrier at Kishiar who spoke shamelessly, he quickly pulled Yuder in front and set him up like a shield. Only then discovering Yuder, the old man opened his eyes wide going "Eh?"

The old man wearing a monocle above his nose had an appearance where age couldn't be gauged. Though his white beard was very long making him seem extremely aged, looking at his almost unwrinkled face or appearance honestly revealing emotions he also seemed much younger than Thais Yulman or the chief attendant.

A golden cloth with 'Librarian Eusten' written on it was attached to his chest.

'I see. Is this that librarian who was quickly cut and disappeared in the previous life?'

"...Who is this?"

"Baron Yuder Aile, hero of the empire. Even you who's buried in the library must have heard the name?"

Kishiar replied while deeply bending his knees hiding behind Yuder, sticking out just his eyes between shoulders. Though he couldn't hide anyway being so large, Yuder didn't particularly push him away.

**Chapter 1213**

"If it's the empire's hero, could it be..."

Eusten who frowned examined Yuder closely. Then suddenly he inhaled sharply with wide eyes.

"Are you that Cavalry awakener who alone killed a monster as large as the palace in one go, changed the southern terrain with one gesture, and handled the Second Prince like a kitten making him dance a lady's dance!"

"...The rumors seem quite exaggerated."

Yuder answered coldly.

"Though I am a Cavalry awakener and did similar things, many details differ from what you said."

"Oh my goodness!"

But Eusten seemed not to hear those words. He couldn't hide his excitement while looking Yuder over this way and that as if seeing the most mysterious being in the world and quickly muttered.

"You look quite different from what I imagined just hearing rumors. I thought you would have fists bigger than the Second Prince. But being different from imagination isn't bad at all. Many books also say that heroes naturally exceed ordinary people's imagination! If a day came when I could do something besides library work, I wanted to see you directly even from afar at least once, but to think such an opportunity would come already. It's a day that recalls scholar Doichin's phrase that opportunities come and go like dawn dew."

"..."

"Perhaps you came to find some book? Or old materials or lost records? Whatever it is, tell me and I'll find it right away. No matter how much of a hero you are it would be difficult to find the ten million volumes of materials here alone."

"..."

There were ten million books here?

Though he knew it was said to be the continent's greatest existing library, was it because of the environment overgrown with plants like a forest? Somehow it didn't feel like there were that many books so it was quite surprising.

"Hmm? Oh my. I was too inconsiderate. Being buried in the library every day makes me like this. Though I unintentionally showed a somewhat rough appearance getting angry just now, that is not my true self. First would you like some drinks? There are about 7 types of drinks here known to be best to have together while reading books. You'll be satisfied with whatever you choose since they were carefully selected by librarians during the palace library's long history. For reference I most prefer coffee pressed with black Tuti seeds..."

Eusten talked a lot. He also had the talent of moving his mouth at a speed difficult to grasp what he was saying.

When Yuder firmly looked back, Kishiar finally straightened his hidden body and burst out laughing.

"Haha. That's enough Eusten. Because I'm the one who has grasped the fortune of guiding Yuder through the library interior today. Others must wait for next time."

"What? You mean you, Second Prince?"

"Yes. Do you think I'm unqualified?"

"..."

Eusten closed his mouth. Deep disappointment settled on his face.

"...Second Prince has memorized the locations of all sections and books in detail enough to make this librarian angry."

"Yes. I also have the proud record of being the only one who didn't lose when playing the game of matching locations just hearing book titles with you before."

"And with that memory you entered and left the forbidden book section like your home every day tormenting this librarian."

"That's an exaggeration when I just read quietly and came out."

"That's because you kept reading books that shouldn't be read! The dignified First Prince, no, His Majesty who never touched books that shouldn't be read... if you had taken after him even half..."

"Hmm. But I was curious."

Kishiar replied like a child. Eusten let out an amazing sigh while frowning. But Yuder noticed that he was looking at Kishiar like an adorable troublemaking grandchild.

Kishiar seemed to be deliberately acting more unreasonably like a young prince because he knew that too.

"Sigh... Anyway, it's an honor to meet someone I was curious about just hearing stories. Since the one called the empire's hero came together it's somewhat hard to stay angry. Go ahead."

Eusten waved his hand.

"Yes. Always thankful Eusten. Hmm, and lastly there's one thing I'd like to request."

"What is it."

"Consider us as not having come here today. Even if His Majesty asks."

"What? Didn't you just come to guide? Just what are you trying to..."

Kishiar grabbed Yuder's wrist and quickly moved. Slipping through between giant trees and bookshelves no less tall, turning corners, Eusten's figure instantly became distant.

"Second Prince!"

Eusten's anxious shout echoed behind then quickly disappeared.

"Though he says that he'll grant the request. He always has. Librarians are weak to people who love books. Even more so if they're children."

After quickly turning several more bookshelves and trees to enter deep inside, Kishiar said with a smiling face.

"Though you are not a child anymore Commander, he seems to see you like a young prince. The title too..." Yuder replied.

Though it had been long since he became Duke Peletta, what was the reason for calling him Second Prince? Was it simply because he had known him since his prince days so the title stuck? When Yuder wondered, Kishiar answered readily.

"Eusten was one of the people most heartbroken when I became duke. Though others called me with changed titles while feeling sad, he didn't even want to acknowledge that title. He said he must call me Second Prince even if he died."

Actually though there was external pressure, it was still the Emperor who appointed Kishiar as Duke Peletta. So continuing to call him prince could be seen as going against the imperial order, but none in the imperial family particularly punished the librarian.

So even after Kishiar returned after spending long time in Peletta, the librarian's title for him was still Second Prince.

"Well, Eusten is famous for not going anywhere besides this library and home and had no occasion to meet me except here. Fortunately there was no chance for others to hear him calling me that. Until now."

In other words, it meant Yuder was the first to witness this appearance.

Though it was quite a heartbreaking story in some ways, Kishiar's face telling such stories was fresh and bright as always. Yuder blankly watched his smiling face then nodded.

"Thank you for telling me."

"Of course. If you have more questions ask anything."

Even while speaking Kishiar's steps were unhesitatingly heading somewhere. Following him who kept turning between bookshelves, Yuder observed the surroundings.

"Hmm... where exactly is the secret archive?"

"That's what we have to find from now."

"What?"

"Rather than saying the space itself is in a fixed place, it would be more correct to say the path to enter changes each time."

"Though I heard it was hidden by magic... I just thought naturally the entrance would be hidden. It's the first time hearing the path changes."

"Really? Well. Usually one would think that."

While speaking Kishiar again turned right past one bookshelf.

"Then how should we find the path to head there?"

"By finding marks left by the librarian. That's also Eusten's main duty. Ah, found it."

Kishiar finally stopped walking. He lightly tapped a book inserted slightly higher than eye level.

"Here. Can you see anything? When looking with the Eye of Magic."

To the naked eye it just looked like an ordinary book. However the moment Yuder lightly raised wind power, gold light flickered in one eye and something strange that wasn't visible before revealed its form.

'On the spine... there's a firefly attached.'

The green magic fireflies flying inside the library. As far as Yuder knew they usually just flew through the air without attaching to books or other places, but now that light was attached like powder even on the book spine.

When he released the power and the insight disappeared, the book spine Kishiar pointed to again looked like just an ordinary book.

"So it seems you could see it with the Eye of Magic."

"What's the difference between magic fireflies visible to the naked eye and those visible with the Eye of Magic?"

"Actually there isn't much difference. They're the same fireflies. Just they have the habit of turning off lights visible to naked eyes when attached to places marked with certain scents."

Kishiar continued speaking while lightly stroking the book spine.

"But since their very existence is created by magic, 'qualified' people's eyes can see the original light magic fireflies possess. I heard some mages born with extremely sensitive talent for magic power could see this even without qualification, so they spread many fireflies visible to naked eyes to deceive such people. Seeing you I understand that was true."

"...Somehow it's a simple yet difficult method."

Wasn't the key to the secret section I searched for so long actually spread throughout the library?

The thought definitely occurred that if that librarian who made noise saying he hadn't received the key in the previous life heard this, he would have fainted from indignation.

"I think so too. And actually even if you can see the fireflies attached to book spines, knowing how to follow them is another issue."

Kishiar who smiled started moving again.

"Well. Shall we keep going this direction?"

**Chapter 1214**

Though the library was large, it shouldn't be this empty, but during their walk together they didn't see even one person's shadow.

"It's comfortable being quiet, but there are too few people."

"Because it's a day when the Gate of Truth opened after a long time."

Kishiar answered while stroking his fingertips along book spines inserted in the adjacent bookshelf.

"During today there will be almost no one with leisure to come here."

"Did you suggest coming now aiming for that?"

"Right. Though I'm confident we wouldn't encounter people even if there were many, still fewer watching eyes is better when possible."

After turning another corner, Kishiar who again stroked book spines hidden behind a large tree made a "hmm" sound while rubbing his fingers.

"We're almost there."

Coming this far, Yuder had perfectly learned from him the method of finding the secret section using magic fireflies attached to book spines.

The palace library was a massive circular building with 5 underground floors and 3 above ground floors. Since the roof was high like a dome and magically grown plants were harmoniously integrated, it was often mistaken for a greenhouse rather than a library. Due to such structure it was difficult for first-time visitors to immediately grasp where they were walking, but looking up at the patterns and attached sculptures inside the dome roof revealed the answer.

Kishiar said this about that:

'The roof means sky, the windows and lights embedded here and there mean stars. The patterns and sculptures carved below are all made different so their meaning can be grasped immediately even without knowing letters. For example, the literature section has pen patterns and sculptures of birds biting thread balls meaning story angels.'

When discovering magic fireflies attached in response to special scents Librarian Eusten had embedded in book spines, Kishiar always felt and stroked the spines with his hand. He said then magical reactions occurred temporarily and the light of ordinary fireflies originally visible to naked eyes briefly dimmed.

Then only special fireflies visible just to qualified people's eyes could be seen, and looking at the ceiling then one could confirm patterns or sculptures drawn on the roof reacting. They could continue advancing following the correct path by going to bookshelves that it represented and checking the next path again.

The number of books that had to be touched on the path toward the secret section was twelve.

Kishiar had touched eleven so far. So the next would be the last.

"Found it."

Kishiar advanced toward the twelfth and final book. The moment he unhesitatingly stroked the spine and raised his eyes to gaze at the ceiling,

'The tree...'

The trunk of one of the thickly growing nearby trees suddenly opened its mouth silently. What was revealed was a passage even Kishiar could enter easily without lowering his head.

Kishiar smiled and pulled out the last book he had touched, grasping it in one hand.

"Why did you pull that out?"

"We'll need it when leaving. Well then, shall we go?"

Yuder entered the passage together with him. The entrance closed very naturally behind them, leaving just an empty path. As they advanced following that path the passage gradually widened, and somehow despite going straight ahead it felt like continuously descending.

'This, I feel like I've felt something similar somewhere before... ah.'

"It feels... somewhat similar to going to Gyllandr Hill."

Enon's home and where Archmage Luma had stayed, Gyllandr Hill.

The method of hiding an entire existing area from people's gazes and connecting it so it could only be reached following specific paths, and the strange feeling when going there somehow felt quite similar to now.

"Though there was no mention of Archmage Luma participating in construction, it wouldn't be strange if he had."

The moment Kishiar answered gently, the passage ended and a new space appeared.

At first glance, it was a massive library that didn't look different from where they had just been.

However looking up at the ceiling completely different patterns and sculptures were in place, and the sunlight visible through pierced windows had disappeared leaving just pitch black darkness.

'And...'

Yuder moved his gaze following the light of magic fireflies flying around.

The magic fireflies that emitted ordinary light green color in the general archive emitted red light here. Though just the color was different, it seemed like timid people would have turned and fled immediately upon seeing it.

Though Yuder Aile wouldn't get scared by something like this, if it was changed as a warning meaning it seemed an excellent choice.

"How do you feel finally entering the secret archive?"

Kishiar greeted demonstratively while using a polite tone like a librarian.

"It seems there would absolutely be no confusion whether this is the secret archive or not even entering by mistake. It does look perfect for spreading rumors about ghosts appearing."

Then Kishiar burst out laughing as if having heard the answer he expected.

"Right. It's quite chilling. I liked it since childhood as a rare place in this palace."

He raised his hand toward the fireflies. As if led by the gentle movement, fireflies that landed on his fingers flickered spreading red light.

"From what I know, if there are intruders who haven't entered properly, these red fireflies all attack together. Interesting right?"

"You mean they don't just change for warning and section division meaning but even attack?"

"Though I haven't seen directly. Are you curious how they attack?"

"Yes."

"Shall we test it?"

It was a nonchalant voice like he would do it right away if desired. Yuder shook his head.

"That's fine. The librarian probably wouldn't like it much. And we have other matters first now."

"That's true."

Kishiar twisted his hand sending the fireflies flying away.

"Not all books here are forbidden books. There are more books judged as needing not to be revealed to the world for various reasons. The forbidden book section is under the bone pattern symbolizing death and danger."

Even the pattern marking the section was terrifying. However Kishiar lightly moved his steps.

"And even among forbidden books the classification differs by bookshelf. What we're looking for... should be here."

The place where Kishiar finally stopped his steps was before a bookshelf with something written in ancient language.

"Translating the written words would be 'Great Sky'. That is, god. So everything related to theology should be here. If it's related to the Black Moon Order then among those... yes. This way."

Though he quickly found the bookshelf, because too many books were densely inserted it seemed very difficult to accurately pick out the desired book from there.

Yuder carefully asked toward Kishiar who was slowly scanning the books with a serious face.

"Commander."

"Yes?"

"How about I search together? Though I can't read ancient language... if you teach me I should be able to memorize it like pictures. Wouldn't it be faster if we divide and search?"

Though he thought he might refuse for safety reasons, Kishiar didn't.

"Would you? Of course I'm grateful."

He wrote some ancient language word on Yuder's palm.

"This is the ancient word for 'word'. With the meaning of god's word, it's written in most old scriptures. Since the book we're looking for is likely inserted together with the Scripture of the Sun God, if you find books with this word written please take them out and call me."

"Understood."

Yuder immediately headed opposite from Kishiar and began searching for books. Though some places were higher than his height, checking wasn't difficult as there were ladders.

'...Could this be it?'

It was after some time had passed since starting the search that he discovered books with the ancient word for 'promise' written. After redrawing the ancient word Kishiar taught several times to definitely confirm that several books before his eyes contained the same letters, Yuder reached out his hand.

A corner of the bookshelf slightly higher than his height. Old leather books wedged in a shaded place.

After taking out three of four total books, he reached for the last one.

However perhaps because it had been inserted for too long? It wouldn't pull out well with its cover stuck to the book inserted right beside it.

'I should just take out two books at once.'

But that was when it happened. Another book that had been tilted due to the gap almost slipped and fell toward his head. The moment Yuder quietly tried to reflexively exert wind power, a hand extending from behind quickly caught the book and pushed it back in.

"Are you alright?"

Chapter 1215

The bookshelf facing him like a wall. The hand blocking above his head. The shadow of the person standing behind.

Somehow strangely it made him recall that day long ago when they first kissed.

"Yuder?"

Perhaps finding the delayed response strange, Kishiar lowered his head slightly and asked.

"...I'm fine."

Yuder finally opened his mouth while turning around. Through the small red fireflies flying around, Kishiar's face faintly came into view.

"Though I hadn't called yet... you came very quickly."

"Because I heard the sound of several books being taken out."

"Thanks to you I avoided getting my crown hit."

Though he was sincere, it seemed to have been half heard as a reproach saying 'It would have been fine without that so why did you block it?' Kishiar slightly relaxed his eyebrows and smiled.

"Though I know it would have been fine without this... when it comes to you my body moves without me knowing."

"I wasn't raising a complaint."

"I know. I was just thinking anew that I'm quite a terrible person."

The word 'terrible' he mentioned seemed somehow different from the word meaning Yuder was thinking of. Instead of mentioning that difference, Yuder just blurted out the thought he was having now.

"Thanks to you I suddenly recalled the past."

"The past?"

Instead of answering in words, Yuder's gaze turned upward. His black eyes slowly traced down from the hand pressed against the bookshelf above, to the face that had come close toward him and the bent back, then lazily raised the corners of his lips. Simultaneously Kishiar's eyes changed.

He immediately realized what time was being spoken of.

"...Ah."

"Though the situation is a bit different... since I wouldn't face anyone else in this position. That's probably why I remembered."

Who would dare reach from behind Yuder Aile and block his front? If not Kishiar La Orr it would be unspeakable even having limbs separated immediately upon trying.

Yuder quietly looked up at Kishiar's face and impulsively reached out his hand. As he stroked the cheek touched through his glove, Kishiar gently lowered his eyes and smiled. This was an action that was difficult to do easily in the past even wanting to. There was also a time when he just fearfully suppressed the thirsts that rose whenever seeing Kishiar without even knowing he wanted to do such things.

Because he thought it was something that shouldn't be done.

That it was strange and crazy to feel fascination from a man he had killed with his own hands...

That this shouldn't be done.

But not now. He touches whenever he wants to touch without holding back, and makes contact whenever he wants to make contact. That difference made him newly realize how many changes there had been from their first kiss until now.

"Back then... you said different people need different times to reach certainty. Do you remember?"

"I remember."

With eyes lowered, Kishiar whispered.

"Until then I didn't want to acknowledge the emotions I was feeling, but you were already more certain than anyone."

"Thinking now it was somewhat embarrassing words."

The man laughed lowly.

"Without really knowing any of the true answers for why you were suppressing and fearing emotions, just like a moth blinded by first seeing light I was burning up... acting like a child wanting to quickly get answers by preventing escape."

"That... does that mean if you had known my secret then you wouldn't have said such words?"

After being silent for a moment, Kishiar buried his head deeper into Yuder's hand and shook it horizontally.

"...No. I would have still said them."

Because he was drawn to an extent he couldn't endure without doing so.

That small whisper and eyes still gazing no differently than then made Yuder satisfied. Because everywhere was red light, Kishiar's eyes trapped within it looked much deeper and darker than usual, almost like black eyes similar to Yuder's.

Looking at his own face reflected in those eyes, Yuder felt a secret fulfillment.

That they were ultimately the same.

Because he could feel through his pulsing heart and tremors why it felt like only the two of them in the world were the same beings, both then and now.

"I think so too."

That even if he had known then all the many pieces of information newly learned now, he would have ultimately had to look back at that door.

The moment he said that, the corners of Kishiar's lips under his palm drew an arc.

"...Yes. And now unlike then we're already facing each other without needing invitation."

That means, there's no need to wait for looking back to kiss.

The moment when the silence in their meeting gazes suddenly burned hot.

Their lips locked as he embraced Yuder.

"..."

A tingling sensation spread rippling throughout his whole body. As his back pressed against the bookshelf bearing the weight of two people, the inserted books were pushed back each with different weights. The books just pulled from the bookshelf and held against his chest were also being crushed between their bodies but he couldn't even think about them being hard or uncomfortable.

Yuder read the hot warmth given by the being before his eyes, the desire deepened more than their first kiss, with eyes open.

That gaze making it impossible to ever forget the fact that he was the being that man so greedily desired. It was unbelievably satisfying no matter how many times he saw it...

The kiss only ended after several more books finally fell between the bookshelves pressed against his back. Yuder tried to gauge how much time had passed while picking up and inserting the fallen books together with Kishiar.

'With no clock or light it's difficult to gauge how much time has passed. Was this also for preparing against intruders?'

"About an hour has probably passed since entering. Since devices are set up here deliberately to disturb sense of time, it's not easy to measure exact time even for someone familiar."

Kishiar suddenly opened his mouth while inserting books side by side.

"...How did you know I was gauging time?"

"Because you were making that kind of expression."

Though he wondered if there was a separate expression for being curious about time, what could he answer if that's what he said.

"...Anyway, please look at the books I found. I found books containing the word 'word' but I'm not sure if I found the right ones."

"Right. You found them properly."

Kishiar grinned.

"Three volumes seem to be editions of the Scripture of the Sun God, and the last one pulled out seems to be the Scripture of the Black Moon. But actually rather than that..."

His hand moved toward another book that had to be pulled out together since it was stuck to the Scripture of the Black Moon. The two books were still in a state with their covers stuck together.

"I was somewhat concerned about this one."

The book stuck to the scripture was wrapped in plain black leather. The spine was cleanly empty without any writing so the title wasn't visible.

"I can't tell what book it is. It seems we need to separate them to see the title..."

"It could tear if separated by force. May I have it for a moment?"

When Kishiar took it and exerted some power, the two books instantly separated as if pushing each other away. It was convenient having someone with exactly the needed ability together at this moment.

The corners of Kishiar's lips raised wearing an interesting smile as he looked down at the ancient writing on the front.

"'The third staff, the messenger of the word, speaks.' That's what's written."

"You said earlier the word 'word' is always written in scriptures. Then does the phrase 'messenger of the word' mean... perhaps, priest?"

"Probably."

Kishiar nodded.

"I think so too but we'll have to read it to know for certain. Looking at how it was inserted together long enough for the covers to stick to the Scripture of the Black Moon, there must surely be a connection. We should take this too."

Kishiar very easily put the two books in his breast. It seemed like the sound of Librarian Eusten screaming could be heard from somewhere.

"Well, we've now obtained the most difficult items we can get here. Then shall we quickly find the easy ones and return?"

Chapter 1216

There were two items Kishiar wanted to find when visiting the palace.

One was an old edition of the Scripture of the Black Moon sleeping in the palace library's forbidden book section, and the other was in the Court Mage Department in Section 2.

"Is it alright to just pass through here like this?"

"Of course. What's the problem when we just happened to come here while walking?"

Kishiar headed toward the Court Mage Department with Yuder, uncannily choosing only places without guards. Though it seemed there shouldn't be paths, there were so many unfamiliar passages it was surprising even while following.

Even after arriving his actions were unhesitating. They went around to the side rather than the Court Mage Department's main entrance, entering through a door that looked like an ordinary wall. When asked if such a door existed, the answer came that it was a cleaners' path used for disposing waste.

"Since it's where mages stay, a lot of dangerous waste that's difficult to show ordinary people comes out. So they say such passages are absolutely necessary."

"There really are all sorts of things. How did you know this place's location?"

"I used to be friends with Jims who was in charge of waste disposal here. Though he's left now due to age, he was a really good person."

Did that cleaner Jims actually know Kishiar's identity? Though briefly curious, Yuder just quietly listened to Kishiar's reminiscing stories of memories with Mr. Jims.

"Well. If we slip out this way..."

The place Kishiar boldly opened the door to was a laundry preparation room piled with many mage robes gathered for washing.

"Thorough disguise is essential for intruders. Shall we pick and wear one each?"

Seeing his movements very naturally selecting two purple robes and draping them on himself and Yuder, Yuder suddenly recalled past events.

"...Before when Kanna nearly got expelled after meeting an uninvited guest near here, you suddenly appeared wearing this robe."

That day they met Count Gallon who he didn't even want to call Kanna's father. While talking with Kanna who had fallen into despair after being discovered hiding her identity when joining, Kishiar had suddenly appeared wearing a court mage robe. Though it had been strange that someone who seemed like he would stay talking with the Emperor appeared in such an appearance, now he seemed to understand where those clothes might have come from.

"Perhaps you were doing something similar then too?"

"Hmm... I was."

Kishiar grinned and readily admitted.

"Since I came to the palace I needed to look around without being discovered for a moment. This clothing is best for that."

His explanation was that it was unmatched for disguise since it covered the whole body, and thanks to the eye-catching purple color everyone appropriately avoided thinking court mages even when seen from afar.

"My aide should remember well just in case. That the best disguise for moving around undetected within the palace is here."

"..."

Indeed, every single word had the power to make one imagine how much trouble he must have caused as a child.

Kishiar winked one eye and pulled the hood attached to Yuder's robe to press it down covering below his nose. Though it seemed nothing would be visible with the front covered, surprisingly that wasn't the case.

"Now me too."

Someone who could dress well alone very naturally bent his waist and brought his head toward Yuder. Yuder silently put on the hood pulling it exactly the same as had been done for him. Below the covering cloth, red lips revealed themselves smiling bewitchingly.

"Thanks."

Though this much covering should be fine without magic tools for disguise, why did that man's even lips draw gazes by being beautiful?

While Yuder was considering whether to tell him to use magic tools too, the man briefly kissed Yuder's lips with a smacking sound then straightened his waist again.

"...What is it?"

"With just lips exposed I kept thinking of earlier and wanted to do it again so that's all."

"..."

"Was I too rude?"

"No."

"Yes. I thought you'd answer like that."

Isn't this what they call an overconfident person? It was truly such an amazing move he almost laughed.

Just then, the door opened and someone grasping a cart handle full of laundry appeared.

"Huh? Who are you?"

"I came looking because I seem to have left paper with magic formations written on it in clothes that were put out as laundry."

Kishiar who had straightened as if never having kissed and whispered spoke in a solemn voice. Though he just changed his intonation slightly, strangely he felt like a completely different person than usual.

The person wearing cleaner's clothes sighed with an expression like 'Again...'

"You know personal items put in laundry are filtered out and sent back on their own."

"Can we wait until then? It was something I needed to test right now."

"Ah, yes..."

"I found it so we'll go now."

Kishiar very boldly passed by the cleaner. Yuder followed behind him too.

"Those mages really... none of them live keeping their right minds!"

With the cleaner's grumbling words as the end, the door closed behind them. They were now in the Court Mage Department's official corridor rather than the cleaners' passage.

"You act really well like a real mage."

"Skills acquired from years of observation."

Kishiar was proud.

"To enter the Court Mage Department's records storage officially requires waiting months. But there's no such restriction for fellow court mages. Well, let's quickly go get it."

Yes. The second item they were trying to get was old incident information records estimated to be in the Court Mage Department's records storage.

None other than the incident over 20 years ago where many mages belonging to the Imperial Magic Research Institute dispatched to the Airic Mountains died. It was also precisely that incident Yuder's grandfather was estimated to be involved in.

Though the Imperial Magic Research Institute was dissolved and even its name changed due to the aftermath of that incident, they must have surely left the records themselves. Kishiar headed toward the records storage with confidence.

'It's my first time entering here this way.'

Yuder looked around while naturally following behind Kishiar. In the previous life he had rarely visited here since relations between mages and awakeners were so poor. Even when visiting he just met the Chief and resolved business then left, so his remembered places were limited to just the Chief's office.

Though he saw several other mages passing in the distance, they too had purple robes pressed down to their heads like Yuder so their faces couldn't be seen. No one could be seen exchanging greetings or conversation either.

'Should I say it's an extremely individual atmosphere. Very mage-like.'

He understood why Kishiar had declared these clothes were best for disguise. Since everyone had no interest in others and went around covering themselves, it would be extremely difficult to identify who was an intruder.

Kishiar found the records storage with steps as familiar as someone who had worked here for 20 years, and entered without receiving any suspicion just by exchanging a few words with the person guarding the entrance. Naturally Yuder also didn't receive separate inspection.

"What did you just say to enter this easily?"

"I said a senior mage is writing a report that must be submitted to the Chief right now and materials here are absolutely necessary."

"Then how did you explain who I was?"

"A new mage who is slightly more pitiful and lovable than me, a poor junior mage who must accomplish impossible things under the senior's pressure."

"...Did you really say that?"

"Don't worry since they didn't doubt it."

Such things are common here. Kishiar smiled. Though it seemed unbelievable how such an explanation could be believed when saying whatever, there was nothing to say since they really did enter without any issue.

"We should make procedures thorough in the Cavalry so no one can approach places like the records storage with such lax methods."

"Good spirit."

Kishiar who had been smiling suddenly halted his steps.

"Hmm. It seems someone who should hardly ever come here at this time is here."

"What?"

"Don't say anything and stay behind me. They'll come out soon."

Simultaneously with those words, the door in the direction they were heading opened. Following that, the person who came out from inside was wearing a robe with much more luxurious gold decorations than what they wore.

Yuder's eyes slightly narrowed.

'That pattern engraved on the robe is surely... the Deputy Chief Court Mage's mark.'

Only the Chief visited the Gate of Truth today. The Deputy didn't come.

Along with that thought Yuder also recalled certain information heard recently.

*'Hellem had been Chief Court Mage continuously since before I was born. Her husband and children were all mages too. Her daughter became the current Deputy Chief Court Mage...'*

That meant that person was Hellem's daughter.

The Deputy Chief who had been walking quietly stopped upon seeing Kishiar and Yuder standing beyond the corridor. Not wearing a hood, her immediately visible face was indeed very similar to Hellem's.

"Were there mages this tall in our department? Where are you from?"

Chapter 1217

Kishiar calmly stepped forward and bowed his head in greeting.

"I belong to the dispatched Magic Power Investigation Unit. I've been outside continuously, and haven't been back to the capital long."

"Magic Power Investigation Unit."

Though it was Yuder's first time hearing of it, just from the name he could roughly guess what kind of place it was.

'They said the Imperial Magic Research Institute was originally a place investigating magic power distribution within the empire. This must be the place recreated after its dissolution.'

The Deputy Chief was silent as if gauging something. Yuder quietly looked only at the ground to avoid any chance of eye contact.

"It was about time for the investigation unit dispatched to the north to return. But why are you here? Your work shouldn't be related to the records storage."

"While writing a report, the senior said we should reference some old documents. Since they told us to find them quickly, the new person and I came. Since they said old documents we thought they would be here first... should we have gone somewhere else?"

It was truly a perfect answer like a clueless mage. The Deputy Chief too seemed to feel that way, frowning and letting out a sigh.

"It depends on when the documents you were told to find were written. Up to 5 years ago are not here but in the administrative storage upstairs. Only records over 5 years old judged worth keeping enter this records storage. You don't even know that?"

"I apologize."

"Fine."

The Deputy Chief shook her head and passed by them. Just as they were about to let go of tension thinking she would leave like this, whatever she thought, she suddenly stopped again and looked back.

"...No matter how I think about it, it bothers me."

'Hmm...?'

"Who is this senior of yours who didn't even teach the difference between administrative storage and records storage?"

"...What?"

Kishiar questioned back.

"Unlike those barbaric Pearl Tower people, our Court Mage Department doesn't use juniors who enter like servants. Everyone is equally in positions working for the imperial family. It hasn't been long since I warned we would severely punish those who forget that fact, yet seeing such a thing before my eyes is unpleasant. I'll hide your names so answer honestly. Who is that person?"

Kishiar's lips revealed below the robe parted very slightly for a moment.

Yuder felt both slight embarrassment from him, and simultaneously soft emotions far from unpleasantness despite that.

'...I was curious what personality Hellem's daughter would have, and indeed.'

Though it was a lie to avoid the situation, she was someone trying to stand up for real junior mages by taking it seriously. Looking at such a person, it seemed natural that despite coming from a prestigious mage family she hadn't risen to Chief position and caught Yuder's eye in the previous life.

Deceiving someone who sincerely cares to the end somehow felt too much. Kishiar who loved talent seemed to think so too.

Smiling while sighing as if it couldn't be helped, Kishiar slightly lifted the hood deeply pressed on his face. When their eyes met the Deputy Chief opened her mouth in surprise.

"...Your Grace Duke Peletta?"

"I'm sorry, Ennel."

Kishiar apologized honestly.

"Just what are you doing here?"

"I slipped in because there are records I really want to find here today. Though I didn't expect to encounter you."

"What were you thinking doing such things that could be discovered? Why didn't you request officially..."

"I'm looking for information related to how a certain old incident I learned about recently was handled. Since the possibility of being refused or having to wait a long time seemed too high if requesting officially."

Since that made sense even to the Deputy Chief, she couldn't refute. She looked around with a dumbfounded face then pressed her forehead.

"Good heavens. Fortunate there are no other mages around besides me, if you had been discovered there would have been an uproar!"

Looking at her attitude they seemed acquainted from before. Fortunately it wasn't the force to drive them out immediately upon seeing them.

'Though she seems quite exasperated... somewhat similar to Librarian Eusten.'

"I was confident I wouldn't be discovered. Didn't I come this far well? However seeing you worry so much about new mages I didn't want to deceive you further."

Though quite a shameless answer, it was still words impossible to hate despite that. The Deputy Chief sighed while brushing back her hair cut straight as if with a knife.

"Who is that behind you? It doesn't seem to be Sir Zuckerman."

"My aide. Came along for safety."

"If it's your aide..."

The Deputy Chief's gaze turned toward Yuder.

"...Ah. I think I know. This must be who I heard about through mother's letter. Though I've encountered much through rumors..."

"Oh. Hellem even mentioned my aide in letters? I'm really curious what she said."

"This isn't the time for such talk. Please tell me exactly what records you came looking for. It's troublesome if you just say old incidents and pass over it."

"Don't worry. It's nothing dangerous."

After saying that, Kishiar briefly looked back at Yuder then opened his mouth to answer nonchalantly.

"I'm looking for records related to the Imperial Magic Research Institute. More precisely, the last incident they handled before being dissolved."

As if it was a completely unexpected answer, the Deputy Chief's movements froze. After a moment she asked opening her mouth with a very complicated expression.

"...Perhaps, did something happen to my mother? Is that why you're looking?"

"No. I swear you have no need to worry about Hellem. As I said earlier, I was just trying to find it because of an old incident I happened to learn about recently."

"I don't understand."

"Naturally it's difficult to understand since I can't explain everything here. I'd like you to pretend you didn't see us meeting here. We'll just look at the records then leave without anyone knowing."

"But."

The moment the Deputy Chief tried to say something, someone shouted "Deputy Chief!" from far away. It seemed someone came looking since she hadn't come out for too long.

As Kishiar put his hood back on, the Deputy Chief regained a cool expression and opened her mouth.

"...Anyway I am one who swore loyalty to those who shouldered the sun succeeding my mother. If it's documents related to the Imperial Magic Research Institute, you should be able to find them in the first bookshelf of Closed Records Warehouse 3 inside."

"Thank you."

"Don't be discovered by anyone."

"Don't worry. When have you ever seen me return after being discovered on such outings?"

"...You shouldn't do such dangerous things just because you regained your health."

The Deputy Chief muttered with a somewhat tired face then strode away. After her presence completely disappeared, they headed to the place she had told them.

"Anyway fortunate she seems willing to pretend not to know."

"Ennel is a mage who has been making medicine matching my cycles."

Kishiar smiled slightly.

"Since we've been somewhat long acquainted since she entered the Court Mage Department succeeding Hellem, she would grant this level of request. It's not like we came to take out the department's secrets either."

Before long Kishiar found his target among old documents. The words 'Imperial Magic Research Institute' written on a dust-covered box were very clear.

"Good. Wait just a moment."

Yuder kept watch while Kishiar quickly scanned the documents in the box. There was no need to wait long. After the sound of fingers quickly flipping through stacks of documents several times, the man dusted off his hands and rose from his seat.

"Done."

"Did you see everything?"

"Yes. For now I've stuffed it in my head, I'll transcribe after returning."

Even with magic tools for copying it couldn't have been faster than this. Kishiar easily contained all documents related to the Imperial Magic Research Institute in his head and went outside.

Before leaving, they went into the cleaners' passage and covertly took off the robes they were wearing, becoming no different in appearance than when they entered.

"Shall we go?"

"Yes."

They left the palace behind and boarded the carriage. Through the window of the returning carriage, people looking more excited than usual came into view.

Though that was probably due to today's Gate of Truth incident, to Yuder that matter had long since become not so important.

'Still I should ask what happened to Kiolle though.'

When they returned to the Cavalry, someone awaited them with a welcome face.

“You. I heard you were looking for me.”

"Enon."

**Chapter 1218**

Enon, whom he hadn't seen in a long time, was naturally exactly the same as when they last parted. Nothing had changed, from his hair length to his sullen expression that seemed full of complaints. But Yuder felt something slightly different from before in his expression.

Though he couldn't explain it in words, subtly more comfortable and gentle energy was wrapped around Enon.

"When did you come?"

"A few hours ago."

“I heard from Priest Lusan that you wouldn’t be back until tomorrow, so I thought you might return even later.”

“Well, things turned out that way. You were also delayed because of your disciplinary action, so in the end, we arrived around the same time. That works out, doesn’t it?”

After saying that, Enon stared blankly at Yuder for a moment. Then suddenly frowning deeply he grabbed and stretched his cheeks.

"You... damn bastard."

"...Why suddenly again."

“Why the hell did you go and hunt monsters when you were supposed to be resting in Peletta? What was your Commander doing while you went off playing hero alone again?! Are you trying to collect every hero title across the entire continent or what, huh?!”

Apparently Enon's expression was bad from the start because he misunderstood that Yuder hadn't rested at all during vacation. While being shaken with his cheeks grabbed, Yuder calmly continued speaking to clear up the misunderstanding first.

“The one who did most of the work was Sir Zuckerman. I was only providing support from behind with the others. The rumors just… got exaggerated. And as for why the Commander… wasn’t there, there were unavoidable circu—”

"Ah! I don't want to know at all!"

Enon reached out his other hand too and grabbed both cheeks. Yuder was now in a position where he could only pronounce words awkwardly no matter what he said.

"So you did work properly but, why did you come back with your condition improved so much like you got oiled up! That makes me more annoyed! Just what did you...!"

"..."

So that was it. The fundamental reason for this anger wasn't just 'not resting during vacation.' Even to Enon's eyes Yuder's condition looked very good, so adding that point made him angry.

'Though I've heard countless times my complexion improved... now there's no room for doubt since even Enon certified it.'

Yuder quietly left his face to Enon's hands for now. From experience there was no use saying anything here. It was fine anyway since it didn't even hurt.

When Enon let go of his hands while breathing heavily, Yuder opened his mouth matching exactly the right timing.

"...Enon. I have dried herb powder and food brought from my hometown. Would you like to have some?”

Enon opened his eyes wide. That was a face he was seeing for the first time among the many expressions seen meeting him until now.

"What? You... were someone who even knew how to bring things like gifts?"

“…Commander asked if he could take all of it, and I told him he could. But then I thought that the herbs and tea could be useful for others as well.”

In truth, that thought had only occurred to him while returning from the imperial palace.

Since the Emperor and Empress liked the tea powder Yuder made so much, he realized such things could become gifts for someone too.

Originally Yuder had no thought at all of giving separate vacation commemoration gifts to others like Kishiar. There was a time before when they received full vacation right after the Cavalry was created, and though other members distributed gifts brought from their hometowns to commemorate the vacation, Yuder was an exception since he trained with Gakane and Kanna then.

Afterward too colleagues often gave things received from their hometowns as gifts to Yuder making all sorts of excuses, but Yuder had no family in his hometown and had never visited so couldn't make proper returns. Though they said the items weren't given expecting returns... wouldn't it have been fine to give powder like what was given to the Emperor and Empress? If there were people who would be happy with just such items.

'Should I have brought more other things from hometown too.'

'Hmm? Could that mean... you want to give gifts to other people like what you gave Their Majesties?'

Kishiar whose perception was too quick accurately saw through Yuder's inner thoughts as soon as he heard the words blurted out without order. He burst out laughing as if seeing something too lovely, then as if having waited, separately gave Yuder several bottles of divided tea powder.

'I brought more just in case, and that was good. Though the amount isn't much, couldn't you give it to close colleagues or the pharmacist? They seem like they would be plenty happy.'

"..."

'Ah. Come to think of it speaking of pharmacist, he might like the dried herb powder you separately brought from your hometown house too. How about giving both?'

Though he wondered if that would really be fine, Kishiar was clearly confident they would like it.

'Of course they'll like it. Rather we should be careful not to have people coming out disappointed they couldn't receive it as rumors spread.'

Yuder trusted Kishiar's judgment more than his own judgment at least in this aspect. So he had just been thinking about trying to suggest it when meeting Enon but...

'Who knew there would be a chance to use that so quickly.'

Enon looked at Yuder with a face mixed with various indecipherable emotions - very surprised, dumbfounded, sullen, and touching - then nodded.

"...Something to see living long. Fine. Give it to me."

"I'll say in advance... it's nothing special. Since I made it myself."

“What? You made it yourself?! You even know how to make stuff like this?”

Did he even remember that Yuder Aile was from the mountains? Though he became a bit curious just what level Yuder's image recognized in his mind was for him to say such words, Yuder first gave Enon one of the bottles received from Kishiar.

Enon grabbed it and looked very closely at it like it was some kind of poison. Then silently opening the bottle cap and smelling it, the same weight as when looking at a serious patient was felt from his appearance. After closing then opening his eyes as if savoring the faint fragrance, his first words were as follows:

"...You dried it well. It hasn't spoiled either."

"I won't give you something that would kill you eating it."

"But, is this all?"

"I need to bring the herb powder from the dormitory. I'll give it tomorrow."

"Huh, really."

Enon laughed as if dumbfounded.

"Your inexperience at giving gifts really shows."

"If you don't like it you can just return it."

“Who said I wouldn’t take it?”

Enon burst out.

"It’s just not enough! With this amount it'll be gone after drinking a few times! Is making this very difficult?"

"...No."

When he explained that they made and drank it every year in his hometown and threw away what was left, Enon made a regretful face.

"Then that's fine! Then next time bring more after making it!"

Though just hearing the words he seemed angry, Enon kept smiling. He roughly patted Yuder's head then put the received bottle in his pocket. Since giving the lemon, it was the first time seeing him so pleased.

Indeed Kishiar's words were right.

"Come with me. I need to properly hear what you did meanwhile."

Enon who regained his composure even showed the leisure of inviting Yuder to a room in the medical division. Once inside, he immediately pulled out two cups and asked Yuder to show him how to prepare the tea.

"You just mix it with water."

"Cold water? Warm water? How long should you wait for it to steep?"

"You can do everything as you like. Since it's mainly drunk in winter usually mix with warm water, and people who like strong taste wait a few minutes but I drank right away."

"Hmm. I see."

The wrinkles remaining between Enon's brows completely smoothed after drinking the tea.

"Hmm."

'...He seems to really like it.'

Yuder took that opportunity to talk about what had happened meanwhile. While speaking one by one about the kindness of people met in Peletta and Airic, realizations missed in the previous life, and surprising and interesting things, Enon quietly drank tea and listened.

When briefly explaining what happened during Kishiar's heat period he briefly frowned and clicked his tongue, but didn't spit out sharp words like before.

‘Now that I’ve covered everything less serious, what remains is…’

Yuder steadied his breath and firmly looked down at his hands placed on his knees.

"While in my hometown, I read all of Luma's diary. But before talking about that there's one thing that needs to be explained together first."

Enon who had opened his eyes slightly larger at the words about reading all of Luma's diary tilted his head at the following words.

"Something that needs to be explained together? What's that?"

"Though it will sound somewhat ridiculous... it's about my grandfather who raised me."

"Huh?"

**Chapter 1219**

Yuder steadied his breath and began his story.

"I grew up under my (paternal) great-uncle. Grandfather said he happened to get in contact after my parents passed away and took me in. He passed away when I was 13, and until now I only remembered him as an ordinary person. That is, until I returned to my hometown this time."

"What is it? You mean he turned out not to be an ordinary person?"

"Probably."

Enon's eyebrows rose.

"...You rarely answer with such uncertain words when saying something."

"..."

"Anyway, I understand for now. Continue."

Enon took his hands off the teacup and folded his arms. Though it looked somewhat relaxed, looking closely that meant he had started concentrating extremely.

"When Commander visited the house, looking at the belongings grandfather left and things in the house, he wondered if perhaps he had done work related to magic. At first I thought it was nonsense but... when I heard information from the villagers, it turned out to be true."

The old woman at the grocery store who remembered when grandfather first brought baby Yuder, and Salandin the owner of the antique shop in the town below the mountain found in grandfather's account book. Yuder organized and told Enon the information learned from them and information inferred by checking grandfather's belongings.

Until talking about how the person missing from the Imperial Magic Research Institute accident over 20 years ago that Kishiar remembered seemed to be grandfather, Enon's expression was almost no different than usual. However when the secret story of the magic school that Salandin told in exchange for expensive silver coins came up, his eyes changed to very serious.

"It seems that school had a legend that the Archmage's blessing came down to those who kept the school's will. Actually hundreds of years ago when a mage belonging to the school risked his life to save others, he was revived by unknown power, and Salandin confessed she watched suspecting my grandfather, estimated to belong to the same school, might have been a similar case."

"Was that really something that happened?"

"Commander said the incident Salandin mentioned was indeed something that actually happened. Though he said he didn't know if that mage belonged to that school... Salandin said that mage changed somewhat as a person before and after that incident too, so that seems why she suspected grandfather more."

"How exactly did he change?"

Yuder was silent for a moment then explained as he had heard.

"...He said he claimed to be an Archmage. Though Salandin seemed to think that might have been an excuse the mages added to capture and imprison that mage for research."

"Hmm."

Enon didn't smile.

"Let's organize what we've heard so far - a mage thought to have died in a monster occurrence incident raised you after bringing you for unknown reasons while acting like an ordinary commoner, is estimated to have completely changed as a person before and after that incident, and belonged to a magic school that has passed down what's called either the Archmage's blessing or curse. This is it. And he didn't tell you anything until his death."

"Right."

"If it wasn't you saying this I would have told you to stop talking nonsense and get out, but I can't do that with this... anyway the fact that you wanted to tell this story before Luma's diary must mean you think there's some connection. And in my opinion that's probably related to that Archmage's blessing thing."

Sharp lemon-colored eyes scanned Yuder's face.

"Right? Wrong?"

"That too, is right."

Yuder readily admitted. Enon let out a deep breath and raised his head high to stare at the ceiling for a moment.

"I can't even guess what more will come out here. Fine. I've got the information about your grandfather planted in my head now so continue."

"I'll now tell what I learned from Luma's diary. Since I'm just conveying what I read, you might see different parts if you read it..."

Yuder recalled the day he read all of Luma's diary.

The surprise from that time when he suddenly encountered completely different content after passing the early part with seemingly trivial words written was still vivid.

"First, the front and back parts of that diary were written at different times. The front part was probably around the time he was with you. And the back part... seemed written when he returned after leaving Gyllandr Hill."

Writing continued in an old notebook that happened to catch his eye since no proper new paper was visible to use. How dumbfounded he had been wondering if it was alright to write so carelessly while recording the secret of an Archmage who wanted to prevent possibly approaching destruction for the sake of his dead friend and the world. When he said that, Enon snickered.

"Luma was originally like that. He didn't think much about how others would take what he had done later. So, what did he write there?"

"The reason he left Gyllandr Hill, and what he did after leaving. Everything."

"..."

In the past Enon's gaze would have contained considerable tension at this point. However though current Enon erased his contained smile, he didn't look anxious or displeased. Since it was a much calmer face than when first discovering Luma's diary and holding it out to read first, Yuder could continue speaking more comfortably.

Archmage Luma left Gyllandr Hill because he truly realized what path was for his friend's sake. Until then Luma had wanted to meet his friend again by turning back time like the 'before' he couldn't remember, and was researching methods to turn back flesh and soul, and time for that.

However according to his expression, after being tricked by the apple tree spirit and meeting the 'little apple fruit' Luma's thoughts changed.

Looking into the eyes of that being who would have changed the Archmage's thoughts, Yuder opened his mouth to speak each word so it could be heard well.

"Archmage Luma had doubts about whether the 'fruit' regained when he achieved his goal and succeeded would really be exactly the same as now. He naturally reached the conclusion it couldn't be certain. He wrote that was the opportunity that made him think again about his friend's last words."

The First Emperor's last words were not about being revived or turning back time to meet again. Archmage Luma who realized his concern existed only in the future decided to leave to properly keep his friend's last words this time at last.

To find out what happened to the First Emperor, and find better ways to prevent future disasters.

"According to information Luma said he obtained while traveling afterward, it's certain there were others besides me and the First Emperor who returned through time. Though records and information are lost now so we can't know, it seems there was definitely at least one even in the era before the Great Destruction. It seems he went south carrying scripture to meet survivors of that era who fled to southern countries and obtain information related to that."

"..."

"Luma wrote as if certain that quite many people until now either turned back time or came back from death and became great beings preventing destruction similar to the First Emperor. However he seemed to note the fact that warnings they left became diluted and altered following the flow of time."

Even overcoming approaching destruction and disaster, someday that event happens again.

What should be done when warnings left by past heroes who foresaw disaster would come again in the future become faint and aren't properly conveyed to later people?

Before the great enemy called time, the Archmage decided to depart on a new journey to find ways to overcome limits with his power.

For the things he and his friend wanted to protect. And...

"'For my little fruit'. 'Toward an unknown future'. ...That's what was written. These are the diary's last sentences."

"..."

Enon stared at Yuder's mouth without even blinking. Yuder quietly kept silence waiting for him to open his mouth for a long while.

How much time passed?

Enon covered his face with his hands and let out a deep breath.

"...Ha."

Though slightly worried his emotions might have become intense, when he removed his hands again the face revealed was rather the opposite. Enon burst out laughing with an expression more refreshed than ever yet also full of annoyance.

"What's with 'my little fruit'. What embarrassing title is that when he never called me that before?"

"..."

"Anyway now I definitely know he didn't leave regretting creating me or with thoughts of never wanting to see me again. It's refreshing! Thanks for reading first and telling me."

Chapter 1220

Yuder hesitated briefly then asked.

"Did you, have such thoughts?"

When visiting Gyllandr Hill before, he had heard from Enon about the day Luma left. At that time Enon had said with an indifferent face, 'One day I woke up and he had replaced my hand saying it was his last cooperation for me then left.'

Though some disappointment toward the Archmage who left without conveying a single detailed message was felt, that was all, but had he actually harbored such negative thoughts?

Meeting Yuder's careful gaze, Enon chuckled and ruffled his hair again.

"I had various silly thoughts when I was young too. I thought he would return at least once before dying, but when he didn't come even after far exceeding human average lifespan, I had such foolish thoughts. Sometimes there are negative thoughts that arise even knowing they're not true. Don't you agree?"

Enon is quite honest with emotions unlike a being who has lived long. However that doesn't mean he's completely the same as ordinary humans. Thinking about it, he only showed emotions when acting for humans he cared for, never for himself.

Though he must have had no one to share his long lived time with, he never showed regret about that. There was also no memory of seeing signs of him particularly caring deeply about how others treated or thought of him.

A being who seemed more human than humans but stood one step away from that.

But the fact that even such an Enon wasn't like that from the beginning made feelings strange.

And also the thought, though not new, that Archmage Luma seemed to have been a truly important being to Enon.

"I just joked because childhood memories came to mind. Stop that serious expression."

"Alright."

When Yuder silently nodded, Enon drank the remaining tea again.

"Anyway... I understand why you told the story about your grandfather before the diary story. You were wondering if Luma who left again might have created that magic school, and wanted to talk about it to see what connection there might be with your grandfather's identity?"

"Right."

When encountering information about the magic school, Yuder and Kishiar who had read Luma's diary first reflexively thought of Luma first. Because it seemed like a method the Archmage who wanted to find ways to give warnings and help to later generations across time might try.

However what would Enon who first encountered information about grandfather and then heard the contents of Luma's diary think in reverse? Could he, Luma's guardian, have the same thoughts and conclusions?

The answer was simple.

"Though there's no precedent, if you ask whether it would be possible for Luma to create magic named the Archmage's blessing and create a magic school to fulfill conditions for it... hmm. It's not an impossible story. Luma could have done it."

"Really?"

"Of course I'm not saying it would have been easy. Even if he really created such magic and tried it, no one could guarantee it would be properly realized as originally intended."

"Perhaps could other Archmages have used such magic too?"

"I don't know. I can't guarantee they absolutely couldn't? Since I don't know all mages' abilities either. But..."

Enon briefly cut off his words and fell into thought.

"Let's think based on the results we've seen. A magic school with a legend passed down that you can receive the Archmage's blessing if you affirm the magic revolution and live well. It sounds extremely stupid but thinking carefully... doesn't it mean he was trying to filter and find people whose judgment was proper enough not to deny the magic revolution and who wouldn't ignore the world's dangers?"

Does it work that way?

When Yuder blinked at the unexpected perspective, Enon continued speaking.

"Though I haven't seen that magic school's mark yet, considering it could be thought of as playing the role of a magic formation. People of this era think it's something great because they put all sorts of things into one magic formation since they have too little magic power, but looking at the fundamentals it's nothing special. It's just like a key that determines when to activate power."

The key itself has no power at all. An unused key is just a small piece of metal. However when it opens a door the story changes as one can see and use what's inside. Enon explained like that while quietly gazing at some unknown empty space.

"There are two people estimated to have opened doors with that key so far. The mage who was miraculously healed after trying to save others from monsters. And the mage who miraculously survived at a monster occurrence accident site and raised you. The situations are quite similar to be coincidence. So that Salandin person must have tried suspecting too."

"..."

"A magic school that people who wouldn't ignore the world's dangers could join. Mages who saved others in monster-related incidents. Healing and changes that occurred because of that. If these are the conditions and results for magic named the Archmage's blessing to be realized..."

Enon moved the cup held to his mouth, drank it all, then put it down strongly making a clashing sound. He suddenly rose from his seat, brought a rolled paper bundle from the bag placed on the bed, and threw it to Yuder.

"Here."

"What's this?"

"Materials I saw at Gyllandr Hill and transcribed. I roughly filtered out what seemed useless and summarized. Look at the story written on the second page there."

Yuder turned one page. Sentences written in scrawled handwriting came into view.

'The Legend of the Evil Dragon Mezemeblen'

"It's one of the old stories Luma collected. To put it briefly, it's a story about an evil dragon named Mezemeblen who died but used his power to leave his soul behind and entered the body of another dragon who was living well to cause riots."

At first there was confusion because no one knew why a normal dragon was suddenly doing strange things, but the truth was revealed through the sacrifice of a good dragon. Thus the dragons combined sacred powers to drive out Mezemeblen's soul that had stolen another dragon's body, and succeeded in banishing him forever to where the dead go.

"In a word, it's like what's in your human scriptures too, demons possessing bodies... what is it. Like a possession phenomenon. Do you understand?"

He felt like he had heard somewhere about demons possessing human bodies and doing bad things.

"...I think I've heard of it."

"It seems Luma realized through such stories that soul and body could be sufficiently separated by individual power, and realized methods to make them enter other bodies. He probably created me based on such realizations. Anyway, yes."

Enon steadied his breath while looking at the paper in Yuder's hand. Hesitation never seen before appeared on his face.

Just as Yuder was wondering what he was trying to say, the moment he heard the following words his thoughts stopped.

"Hmm... what if. If the problem is being unable to move directly due to limits of lifespan and time, wouldn't it work to create magic that transfers his soul to another person's body?"

"...What?"

"I'm thinking it would make sense if the person who created the magic school had such thoughts. Though it's hard to assert it was Luma, honestly speaking, do you think there would have been another human who could have such thoughts and execute them besides Luma?"

Enon was making an expression of being dumbfounded and half-believing even while speaking himself. A shock like light flashing ran through Yuder's mind.

Archmage Luma had already proven that the combination of soul and body was artificially possible by creating the being called Enon. He had already collected tremendous materials about soul and body, and time, so he would have known more about them than others.

What was the possibility that such a person ultimately staked even his own soul for the future?

Of course this case now is quite different from when creating Enon. However... thinking from another perspective, it also didn't seem so tremendously different.

'If it were me.'

Yuder tried to gauge what thoughts he would have had if he were Luma.

'...Even if the success probability was low, I would have tried. Naturally.'

He might have thought he could do it twice since he succeeded once. No. He surely would have. Even if he thought he might fail... would there really be a better method than that?

He didn't know for now.

A chilling sensation flowed down his spine.

Chapter 1221

'But...'

Yuder stopped thinking and moved his gaze. Enon's face with lips firmly closed came into view. Seeing that face, the tremor felt until just now quietly scattered.

"If it happened as you said, wouldn't the Archmage have definitely visited Gyllandr Hill or you at least once when the magic succeeded? But he didn't."

If such magic as Enon mentioned was really possible and succeeded, shouldn't that have happened? But though the mage from hundreds of years ago who was captured after insisting he was the Archmage's incarnation was one thing, Yuder's grandfather had never moved from the area where he lived.

At Yuder's point, Enon made a long "hmm" sound.

"I don't know... it might be because it wasn't a complete success. As I said earlier, I meant it seemed possible for Luma but that doesn't mean it was an easy thing. Even with me, though he originally predicted I would have the apple tree spirit's memories or personality or racial characteristics, I was born completely blank."

This was the first time hearing this story. When Yuder raised his eyebrows, Enon explained a bit more in detail.

"Humans too are born inheriting their parents' characteristics. Luma said he guessed I would have the spirit's memories, or if not that at least characteristics half close to a spirit. But it was neither. He said except for facial appearance there was nothing similar. Even the hair color was the same as Luma's so it wasn't completely identical either."

Enon when just born was no different from an ordinary human child. He had no memories, and didn't know what he could do so had to find and learn everything one by one anew. Naturally communication methods spirits could naturally do among themselves were impossible too.

"Originally spirits are a race that can live completely independently as soon as they're born. Since they know who they are and what they can do, there's no need to learn anything. He thought I would be such a being and created me, but a fool-like being came out so how surprised must he have been? Luma searched tremendously for ways to deal with it thinking the magic had failed. In the end he gave up and chose to just teach me."

But though he might have been surprised at results beyond expectations, there's now no room for doubt that the time spent raising and teaching Enon ultimately became precious memories for the Archmage.

Perhaps because Enon now knew that too, he was just smiling with a frowning face.

"Do you understand? Magic related to souls is this difficult."

"I understand that part. Even if the magic succeeded, we can't know what side effects might have occurred."

They said grandfather seemed like he didn't even know who he was when he brought Yuder. Though he could read writing, it seemed to take a long time to regain common sense, and even his handwriting changed. Since there was no sight of him using magic until the moment of death, perhaps he had completely lost magic power before and after the accident. Yuder recalled memories of seeing a mage in the previous life who retired unable to feel magic power itself after being greatly injured by disasters or monsters.

That mage was a case of miraculously surviving after receiving injuries so severe it was said it would be better to die. But the hole in the chest part remaining on the robe among the belongings grandfather left behind... if thinking about receiving injuries according to that mark, wasn't it strange he didn't die? Especially since mages' magic power pooling in the heart was orthodox.

'Though I had guessed he wasn't injured according to that mark because of the story about wandering for days with a baby to the village...'

"Seems like something's on your mind."

"Rather than on my mind..."

Yuder readily told Enon what he had been thinking. After hearing the story, Enon rubbed his chin and made a similar expression to Yuder.

"Your grandfather is suspicious in many ways. Really suspicious. It would be better if there were words or records he left, were there none at all?"

"I don't know about words, but records..."

Yuder recalled the account books Kishiar had brought.

"There are several account books Commander brought wanting to examine more closely."

"...Account books?"

"He seemed to want to check if something like a code was hidden."

"Though it's funny... if your Commander did that there might really be something. Hmm. Come to think of it, when will you show that... what relic was it that you said you'd bring before?"

Before, at Gyllandr Hill, Kishiar had said he wanted to show Enon the 'Dream's Voice' received from Prince Ejain, no, he who had now become Crown Prince. It was to confirm whether the blind sage who made that relic was estimated to be Archmage Luma who left the Orr Empire or not.

And incidentally it would be better if they could find clues to the relic's usage method that no one had discovered.

At that time they just talked and parted since it was during vacation, but now that they had returned they could bring it anytime.

"I haven't heard separately but we should be able to bring it soon."

Currently the Court Mage Department is keeping that relic. Though they had to go secretly to see the Imperial Magic Research Institute related records since it would take too long if requesting officially, there was no need for that with the relic.

"Yes. Whether it's your grandfather's account books or the relic, come and tell me right away when something new comes up. I finished classifying all the materials at Gyllandr Hill this time too so request if there's anything you want to find."

"Already?"

"Though I hate to admit it, the initial classification your Commander did at a crazy speed perfectly before leaving helped."

Enon grumbled with a face that really didn't want to say it.

"Such a creepy guy. I thought he would naturally have made at least one mistake or missed something, but there was nothing like that even checking twice. The rest was just repetitive work of matching classification and reading and summarizing so there wasn't much headache. Though it took quite a while..."

That was very good news. When Yuder's eyes changed gratefully, Enon protruded his lips and leaned back relaxedly on the chair.

"Your expression brightens right away just from praising that guy."

"...It's not just because of that."

"If you know this hardship, pay it back a hundredfold later, okay? I'm going to extract thanks from you too separately from what I get from your Commander. One small bottle of tea like this is far from enough!"

"...Want more?"

"Huh? You had more?!"

When he tried saying it just in case, Enon immediately showed interest.

What Kishiar gave were five small bottles about three fingers in size. If he gave more to Enon the remaining amount would be less, but Yuder was having a completely new thought.

'It would be better to give it and just make one more batch.'

"I have a few more bottles. If you like it I'll give them, and I was thinking of making more."

"You can make this even now?"

Yuder nodded while recalling the list of herbs Enon grew, grasses growing naturally nearby, and ingredients obtainable from the market.

"It won't be completely the same, but it's possible."

"What? Then just give me one more bottle for now and quickly make new ones! I thought you couldn't make it here."

Though he had said he could take all of it, Enon said one bottle was enough. It seemed he had noticed the rest was an amount meant to be given to other people.

"To drink all this, if drinking sparingly... it would take about 2 weeks. Make new ones within that time."

Yuder silently nodded. Only after promising to definitely make tea powder about ten times the current amount did Enon allow him to leave with a satisfied expression.

"Go. Don't overdo it again just because your condition improved!"

A day passed and a new day dawned.

After morning training ended, Yuder called two colleagues among the dispersing members.

"Kanna, Gakane,"

"Yes?"

"Let's talk for a moment."

The two blinked their eyes simultaneously, then began whispering something while meeting each other's gazes.

"Did you do something to Yuder yesterday, Gakane? Nothing happened to me..."

"I just exchanged greetings too! Could it be because of the mission you handled this time?"

"If it's that there's no reason for you to be called too."

"Ah. Then perhaps, special training?!"

"It's nothing much so just come."

Only after sighing and speaking once more did the two follow with faces full of questions. After coming to a shaded place where others' gazes couldn't reach, Yuder took out two bottles from his breast. Naturally they were bottles containing tea powder.

"Take them."

"What is this?"

"Is it some kind of case evidence? Should I read it?"

The two couldn't even guess at all what kind of object it was. Yuder was silent for a moment then just placed one in each of their hands.

"It's something I brought from my hometown. It's herb powder you mix with water and drink like tea, and I made it. It's a gift, but tell me if you don't need it."

"...Huh? What water?"

"You... made this? This?"

The two who awkwardly held the bottles looked at each other's faces again, then after a moment simultaneously covered their mouths and screamed silent screams.

"Good heavens! Yuder!"

"I feel like I'll cry if you suddenly give something like this! What is this!"

1222

It was a much more intense reaction than expected. Before he could even open his mouth, Yuder was trapped in a barrage of questions the two began taking turns firing.

"Did you only give it to us? Is that why you waited until training ended to call us?"

"How should we drink it? Please explain a bit more in detail!"

"Don't others have any?!"

"No, but surely you gave it to Commander first?"

"Does it have effects that help with training or something like that? It's just normal tea, right?!"

"...Both of you calm down a bit."

Yuder barely calmed the two before his ears burst. He also sincerely answered their questions. Since he had already gone through similar questions and answers with Enon, it wasn't that difficult.

Yes, he only gave it to the two of them, and they could drink it however they wanted. He planned to make more later to give to other people, and naturally it had no magical effects that would help with training. Additionally, when he said he had of course given it to the Commander first, the two were relieved yet simultaneously regretful and happy.

"I'm really glad we didn't thoughtlessly take what Commander would drink... You really did well, Yuder. Such things should be given to Commander first and then to others in the future!"

"I can't believe this is really just ordinary tea... You never know. There might be amazing effects even you don't know about, Yuder. Who knows if this is the secret of your tremendous power?"

"There are no such effects."

Watching Kanna who not only sighed in relief while stroking her chest but even gave advice, followed by Gakane who unfolded a deliberately serious conspiracy theory, he couldn't help but laugh in disbelief. When Yuder firmly shook his head, Gakane held up the bottle like a trophy and burst into happy laughter.

"Haha! Everyone would be tremendously envious if they knew you gave us such a gift. But don't worry. We'll definitely keep it secret!"

"Yes Gakane. Be careful because if it's discovered you might seriously have to secure your dormitory door every night to block intruders. I might be a bit better since I can read information, but you can't."

"Hmm. Should I put it in a safe and set up a shadow trap in front of my bedroom?"

"Would that be enough? If it were me..."

"Since I'll make more anyway, just share it if discovered. It's not that great an item."

When he spoke seeing they seemed to be worrying too seriously, the two simultaneously shook their heads vigorously.

"We would have shared with colleagues in most cases. But you said this is all you made before joining!"

"Yes. Plus it's the first gift you've given! I want to cherish it preciously alone for a long time before tasting it!"

"...If you leave it too long the taste might change or spoil."

"We can use preservation magic tools!"

Even if he said it wasn't an item that needed to go that far, the two were adamant. In the end Yuder gave up persuading them.

'There would be an uproar if I said there's one bottle left.'

Since there were only three bottles of tea powder left, the worry had been great. Though deciding to give first to Gakane and Kanna who had formed the longest relationships since entering the Cavalry wasn't difficult, the remaining one bottle was a problem.

If giving to the deputy commanders one would miss out, and if giving to Nathan Zuckerman he remembered hearing when receiving the bottles that Kishiar had already set aside his share. In the end Yuder decided to keep the last bottle as a reference for when making new tea powder.

'Though I remember how to make it, it's been over 10 years since I last made it.'

From the previous life the period of closeness was 11 years, and now he had to add 1 more year spent after turning back time. When such time passes, even with good memory one couldn't be confident the body would follow.

At the time of deciding it seemed like a good idea... but now he felt he absolutely had to keep the existence of the last remaining bottle secret until the new tea making work was finished.

"Anyway Yuder, thank you so much. It's really touching that you thought of us after spending your first proper vacation. I'll cherish it and drink sparingly, and I'll definitely return the favor next time!"

"Ah! Thank you too. I said this last because I was too surprised and happy... I didn't bring anything separately this time, but if I had known I would receive such a precious thing I should have brought something."

"No need for returns. I didn't give it to receive such things."

This time Yuder said what they had said to him before. It felt a bit strange.

There was a time when he thought giving and receiving things was a bothersome and useless act. That those who said they didn't expect returns wanted even more suspicious things was almost common sense to Yudrain Aile in the previous life.

But now, in the heart of Yuder Aile saying no need for returns were fine, there wasn't even a bit of falsehood. Because just seeing Kanna and Gakane sincerely stomping their feet in joy and smiling was already as good as a return. Having already received an answer, why would he want anything more?

"But..."

"Just not refusing is enough. Consider that the return."

Then Kanna who had her lips firmly closed suddenly spread her arms wide and tightly embraced Yuder.

"Aish, really! Then at least take this! Gakane. You hug too, quickly!"

"Huh? O-okay!"

At her urging, Gakane also quickly spread his arms and joined the hug.

"It's a thank you hug! My mom said it's the happiest return in the world, I'll specially give it back to you! After hugging like this you shake three times."

"..."

Following Kanna's instructions, they shook their arms three times while hugging then separated. If someone had seen, they might have said what were three adults who had grown up enough doing like children, but Yuder didn't shake them off.

"This is, embarrassing but nice."

"It's my first time doing it since my mom passed away too."

Yuder looked at the two who were grinning despite being awkward. He newly thought it was good to have given the gifts.

"Ah. Yuder. The trial we're being dispatched to today for maintaining security, you're going too right?"

Gakane asked with a bright face. The trial he was talking about was naturally the trial Crown Prince Katchian had to attend.

Yesterday evening, the grand judges unanimously agreed that Crown Prince Katchian should attend the trial. It was after several hours had passed since the Gate of Truth closed.

Today was the day for the second trial of the attendant accused of hiring mercenaries to try to kill Guanaman village residents on behalf of Crown Prince Katchian. Since the grand judges had agreed to the Crown Prince's attendance and trial referral, the Crown Prince had to attend today's trial and actively answer the suspicions he was receiving.

In preparation for the chaos that would occur over this tremendous incident, the judges requested strengthened security around the courthouse. It was natural that the Cavalry, counted as the group with the highest ability in the empire currently, would step forward.

Gakane and Kanna were also included in the dispatch personnel befitting excellent Cavalry members.

Yuder nodded while looking at the faces of his reliable colleagues.

"I'll go. Since I'm going as Commander's aide I'll have to move together with Commander."

"So that's it. I heard you went to the Gate of Truth with Commander yesterday, the capital was buzzing... nothing happened, right?"

"Oh right. I heard Marin also attended there. I was a bit worried since she didn't return to the unit yesterday either. Was she okay?"

Kanna also seemed curious and asked, tilting her head.

In any case, in going to today's trial, they both knew they would see the same sight seen in the Gate of Truth yesterday. The fact that what they were curious about wasn't whether Crown Prince Katchian would be alright, but whether Cavalry member Marin wasn't insulted, or if Kishiar and Yuder were okay there, felt gratifying.

Yuder answered clearly so they could set their minds at ease.

"Nothing happened, and nothing will happen in the future either. The Crown Prince will pay the price for what he did."

"Yes. That's it indeed."

Gakane disappeared humming a tune saying he would see him later. Yuder caught Kanna who was about to leave saying "Then I too..."

"Wait, Kanna."

"Yes? Why?"

Chapter

"When today's work is over, if you have time could we meet privately once? There's something I want to ask."

Kanna perceptively lowered her voice and questioned back.

"Perhaps you need my ability?"

"Right. Though it's not related to Cavalry work, I'd like you to read the information of some objects I brought."

Chapter 1223

"If it's not related to work... personal belongings? Or, perhaps are you involved in some other dangerous matter?"

"They're my deceased grandfather's things."

Before Kanna's thoughts could stretch too far, Yuder honestly revealed the identity of the items he wanted to entrust.

"I didn't know, but it seems my deceased grandfather had secrets he didn't tell me. I've made some guesses myself but still lack information. So I want to borrow your power."

Though he also had items like Luma's diary, to entrust that would require sharing stories several times longer than now. Compared to that, since it didn't seem like more useful information than the diary's contents would come out, he wanted to start with grandfather's belongings.

'Of course it would only be possible if Kanna allows it.'

"Alright! That much is fine. Since it's your request I can naturally do it."

Kanna readily accepted without even considering.

"Your grandfather is the person who made that bracelet you told me to read when we first met, right?"

"Right."

That she still remembered that was a bit surprising. Kanna smiled proudly puffing out her chest.

"I remembered because it was an item I read on the day my life changed! I can do it even tonight, when should we start?"

It was a very enthusiastic attitude despite being busy. Yuder opened his mouth after gauging dates in his mind.

"Then... around tomorrow night."

"Hmm, good! Should I come to your room?"

"No. ...Come to Commander's office."

"Huh? Commander's office?"

Kanna was briefly bewildered, then immediately made an "ah" sound.

"Right. Since you brought it while visiting your hometown this time... Commander knows too. Ha, haha!"

"And I have one more request."

"What is it?"

"I'd like you to keep secret whatever information you read."

"That's natural! Even without saying I'll definitely keep secrets."

"And if you feel bad at all while using your ability, you must stop immediately."

"Huh?"

Yuder still vividly remembered when Kanna had tried to read the information of the red stone and fainted without even being able to properly try. Of course grandfather's belongings wouldn't be that dangerous, and Kanna had also become a much more excellent awakener than then, but still just in case. Warnings and caution couldn't hurt by being excessive.

Some tension settled on Kanna's face who had been grinning.

"Do I need to be that careful...? It seems quite different from the secret I'm guessing..."

"Just in case."

Whatever she thought, it would be completely different from Kanna's expectations. Instead of saying that, Yuder answered briefly.

"I'll tell you more details related to this when we start tomorrow."

"Hmm. Alright. Then let's talk again then!"

"Thank you."

"Wow. It's nice that my ability is useful. Getting secret requests from Yuder, and hearing thanks too!"

Kanna laughed refreshingly.

"But you don't need to thank me each time. Because I know if it’s you who were asked instead, you would have helped without saying anything!"

If he had received a request in reverse, and it was something he could do with his own ability... naturally he would have thought there was no need to receive thanks.

While Yuder was thinking that, noisy chattering sounds came from not far away. When he turned his head, new members were entering the training ground they had left.

"It's already time for the new members to train. I really need to go. Ah, but..."

Kanna suddenly turned her head as if remembering something while looking at the new members' backs.

"That person Commander specially asked us to keep an eye on yesterday."

"Fay?"

"Right. That was the name. I secretly touched his belongings a bit yesterday."

"Was there something entangled?"

Though it's hard to read important information from just belongings, still grasping from small things is the basics of understanding people. Kanna said while observing the new members' training, she secretly used her power touching Fay's belongings, and as a result read one very personal piece of information.

"It seems he's made plans to meet friends in the capital soon. He was holding such strong expectation that information could be read even from just belongings. I don't know when yet, but I'm trying to find out more related to it."

A guy from the far north having friends to meet in the capital.

He felt a very strong conviction that the identity of those friends would be related to the south.

Additionally, also a conviction that it wouldn't be a good purpose.

'Fay probably can't even think this way since he doesn't know the true identity of the merchants who came to his village.'

Yuder's eyes instantly sank sharply.

"Those so-called friends are surely not normal friends at all. Let me know right away when you find out when that appointment is scheduled."

"Okay. Got it. That person is quite wary of me, more than I expected, but I've become quite close with Gloe and plan to become even closer, so there won't be a problem finding out."

"Gloe?"

He wondered why talk of friendship with Gloe suddenly came up when trying to find out information from Fay.

"That person has tremendous goodwill toward Gloe. Almost to the extent of the heart that worships you or Commander."

"...What?"

"I heard from Steiber that on the first day when all new members gathered, that person made a mistake while introducing himself, but thanks to Gloe it was smoothed over and passed well. Probably because of that."

Yuder recalled Gloe and Fay whom he met this time.

"For that... when I encountered them passing by this time, they didn't seem that close to each other."

The two he saw then seemed like they had never even had a personal conversation yet. Yet Fay had such tremendous goodwill toward Gloe?

'Come to think of it, when Gloe comforted him he did thank her with tears...'

It seemed that wasn't just emotions welling up suddenly, but rather he was more moved because he received help again from someone he already had accumulated goodwill toward from receiving help once before. Thinking that way, that intense reaction suddenly became a bit understandable.

"Yuder. Extremely timid people often have tremendous goodwill while not saying anything to the other person. That person would absolutely not open his mouth if I asked, but he would surely answer if you or Commander or Gloe asked. He would open his heart's door more easily if approached through Gloe who is a fellow new member."

Kanna spoke with a confident attitude and smiled.

"Anyway, I'll tell you as soon as I find out about that part. See you later!"

Kanna turned her back and moved away. Even after she left, Yuder stood in that place for a while quietly watching the new members' training.

Today's training focused on physical strength and muscle power. Since it was famous for making even those with excellent physical abilities shed tears and snot from difficulty, naturally screams were breaking out. Gloe and Fay were mixed side by side among those struggling to follow at almost the very end.

Gloe who had been lying like dead beside Fay who was sprawled and sobbing barely raised her head and said something. Looking at her lip movements, it seemed to be a brief comfort. Fay stopped crying. Though Gloe soon got up again and moved away, Fay watched her back for a long time. Then suddenly he jumped up and ran hard again.

Actually that was quite a familiar sight to Yuder. The two people who were physically inferior to other members often fell behind together like that in the previous life too. Later it improved as Fay persistently trained and became stronger, but until then they took turns occupying last place like that.

Then they became deputy commanders side by side, so actually even then their friendship might have been deeper than Yuder thought.

Though many things changed between the previous life and this life, the part that changed least was relationships between people. In the case of Cavalry members, despite having completely different experiences from the previous life, they tended to form close friendships almost the same as before.

Yuder suddenly recalled the last conversation he had with Fay in the previous life. His words seemed to express extreme disappointment at the situation where the Commander wandered outside saying he would find traces of disaster, spreading bad rumors and saying unbelievable things.

However thinking about it, mixed in the cold remarks Fay poured out then was also someone's existence.

'Even though the Jung Division Deputy Commander died, Commander keeps clinging to that meaningless investigation...'

The Jung Division Deputy Commander he mentioned then was Gloe.

Chapter 1224

What greeted Yuder as he entered the Commander's office lost in thought was Kishiar holding a brush with a huge cloth spread across the entire floor. All the complicated thoughts he had until just now instantly flew away upon seeing 'Sword Emperor of the North Wind Returns to Capital' written in a majestic handwriting style that seemed about to fly off the white cloth.

"Is Sir Zuckerman returning today?"

"No. Tomorrow. I was making this now since it needs time to dry."

Kishiar began to carefully write the word 'Welcome' next to 'Returns'. After writing the last letter without a moment's hesitation while holding a brush as large as a human head, he stood back a few steps to appreciate the work he had created.

"How is it? Should be visible enough like this?"

"Yes. It seems it will be visible even from the Imperial Knights' main building."

If those Imperial Knights guys saw that, their reaction would probably be quite remarkable.

"I'm thinking of decorating it gorgeously like a curtain by hanging flowers. Since he might return through the back gate, I'll hang the same there too."

The thoroughness of making two in advance considering the possibility of the target fleeing through the back gate was truly like Kishiar. What kind of face would Nathan Zuckerman who had to pass through that make? It was unimaginable.

'If it were me I would immediately use my ability to jump over the wall as soon as I saw it from afar but...'

"By the way, did something happen outside? Your expression was serious when coming in."

Kishiar asked calmly while organizing the brush and cloth. Though he had clearly been concentrating on writing with his back turned, it was newly puzzling how he had grasped that.

"I feel it's becoming increasingly difficult to hide anything from you, Commander."

"Call it the ability of someone in love."

Kishiar winked one eye.

"So. What happened?"

"Hmm..."

Yuder decided to talk about the less serious part first.

"After morning training ended, I gave the tea powder bottles Commander distributed to Gakane and Kanna. They were both much happier than expected."

"Oh. Since you visited the pharmacist yesterday you must have given it to him yesterday. He must have liked it too?"

"Yes. He liked it to a truly surprising degree. ...Your words were right."

"I told you so."

Kishiar nodded as if not surprised and smiled happily.

"Then you've used three bottles now and have two left. Who are you thinking of giving those to?"

"No. I gave two bottles to Enon, and one each to Kanna and Gakane, so one remains. I'm thinking of keeping that last one as a comparison standard for when making the next powder."

"Next powder?"

Kishiar showed great interest.

"Since Enon and everyone else regretted that the amount was too small, I decided to just make new ones. Though the ingredients will be somewhat different, I can make them."

When he added the explanation that Enon had ordered new powder to be brought within 2 weeks, a blooming radiance spread across Kishiar's face.

"How wonderful. Sharing joy with others brings such good results. If there are ingredients you need, tell me anything. I'll help ensure there's no disruption in supply!"

Kishiar even fearlessly blurted out the terrifying words that it would be fine even if they were ingredients that only existed in the palace greenhouse. Along with a confident declaration that the Empress would permit without a second word if she heard the purpose.

"That much isn't necessary... but I understand for now."

Now it was time to talk about the more important part. Yuder opened his mouth while helping Kishiar spread the cloth in a sunny spot so it could dry well.

"While talking with Kanna, I saw the new members training. But Kanna said Fay has extremely great goodwill toward Gloe."

"..."

Kishiar's fingertips briefly paused.

"Until hearing that story I didn't know, but I thought perhaps the friendship between the two people was actually thicker than I thought in the previous game."

"For what reason?"

Yuder told what he remembered about Fay and Gloe from the previous life.

"Though they weren't colleagues with exactly the same entry timing like now, both were talents recruited to the capital headquarters recognizing their ability uniqueness. Later they each became Sul and Jung Division Deputy Commanders."

They weren't appointed simultaneously. Gloe who needed to be protected by being elevated to a high position was promoted first, and Fay becoming deputy commander was a bit later. Though they didn't seem to have private meetings outside deputy commander duties, now that's also unknown. Because now he understood that one could have deep bonds and more serious feelings even just remaining as colleagues.

Thinking about it, after Gloe died first, Fay volunteered for more missions than before. His appearance of showing courtesy to Ever, the Shin Deputy Commander as a senior, also disappeared. Whenever Yuder briefly returned to the Cavalry while wandering outside, he gave reports with an increasingly emotionless appearance, and didn't properly exchange even a word with the Jung Deputy Commander appointed after Gloe.

Those behaviors which he had thought weren't Fay's special changes since everyone changed like that in the previous life. Yuder let out a small breath after thinking that far.

"...Though I can't be certain whether the goodwill seen now was the same in the previous game, it seems highly likely."

It's a past matter so there's nothing that can be done now. But the thought of what if he had known briefly arose anew.

"Until now I couldn't completely guess why Fay suddenly betrayed me. I just thought it might have started with becoming entangled with southern forces. But if Gloe's death was at that beginning..."

"Yes. That's understandable."

Kishiar nodded.

"Some answers are so close that once you know them you wonder why you didn't know. But what's important is not focusing on why you didn't know, but what you can do with the answer you found out. Isn't that right?"

That was correct. Yuder slowly agreed.

"Yes."

"Though Fay still seems entangled with southern forces, if he comes to value the Cavalry more than those 'friends', the same thing won't happen."

"It will be that way this time."

"Yes. That's enough."

A smile appeared on Kishiar's lips.

"Hearing this, it no longer seems necessary to investigate whether he was a spy before he even joined. That’s one less thing to worry about—very good news. I should thank Kanna Wand. And I feel even more motivated to work harder to ensure my aide’s mind is at ease."

He was already working harder than anyone in the Cavalry. If he became even more active, it wouldn’t be surprising if he collapsed from overwork.

But knowing the reason he deliberately said that was to make Yuder's mind at ease, he didn't say anything. Instead of answering, Yuder quietly returned a small smile.

"There's also talk I shared with Enon about grandfather, but I'll tell you about that while going to the courthouse. Ah, this is the summary I received yesterday."

When he rolled up and handed over the paper bundle Enon gave yesterday, Kishiar gladly received it.

"Something to read while going."

"Additionally, he asked when we could show the relic 'Dream's Voice'."

"I was about to talk about that too. We should be able to receive it soon."

"I arranged to examine grandfather's relics with Kanna tomorrow night, and I was thinking if we could receive it by then, we could also have her read that information once."

"Hmm. An interesting thought. I'll try putting some subtle pressure on the Court Mage Department."

The Court Mage Department still hadn't figured out how to use that relic. According to Kishiar, while still not letting go of their research desire, they seemed to want to examine it more somehow making various excuses.

"Ah, a guest from Nelarn is scheduled to come to the courthouse today. I plan to meet briefly after it ends. According to news from Sun Palace, it seems quite a welcome face has come."

"Is that so?"

The person from Nelarn would surely be a close associate of Crown Prince Ejain, and among them there was only one person with enough acquaintance to express as welcome.

'The attendant Melbon. Is it him?'

Kishiar who had donned a blue coat over his white uniform before going out gestured to Yuder. Though he thought it meant to help fixing his collar, he wrapped an unfamiliar cloth around Yuder's neck who approached. It was a dark blue cloth similar to the outer garment Kishiar wore. With practiced hands, he tied it neatly, forming something like a cravat. Though it seemed it would look strange over the Cavalry uniform, looking in the mirror it wasn't.

"...What is this?"

"The wind was blowing quite a lot today. I hope your neck won't be cold."

Though it seems like pretending not to be an obvious move, actually the words about being worried because he looked cold must be sincere too.

‘This will certainly stir up more talk again…’

But what do others' words and gazes matter? Yuder decided not to remove the cloth after briefly fiddling with it around his neck.

Chapter 1225

With most Cavalry members already having left for the courthouse, the Cavalry interior was so deserted that not even a person's shadow could be seen. Boarding the carriage, Kishiar began reading Enon's summary document without hesitation.

"Has my aide already seen all of this?"

"I did read through it once before sleeping last night."

Most of the materials Enon had selected as seemingly important were old stories that no longer existed. Since not a single noun or expression was familiar to the eye, it wasn't easy to grasp what information to extract here even while reading with the eyes.

But Kishiar was a person more skilled than anyone at finding usable information from such stories.

"Amazing. If scholars researching non-human races saw this, they would have been astounded. Moreover, what's written in this chapter seems like part of some historical record... looking at the attached memo, it seems this was all the Archmage had preserved from the beginning. A historical record that might have existed before the Great Destruction. If published, it would be the first ever. It's regrettable not to see the whole thing."

Unlike the man expressing sincere admiration, Yuder's impression was utterly bleak.

"...I thought there was a chapter filled with excessively unfamiliar nouns in the middle, so that must have been it."

"Haha. Since not a single place name or person's name is the same as now, it's natural you felt it unfamiliar."

Of course. After saying that, Kishiar smiled happily.

"Befitting records collected by Archmage Luma, all have similar materials or themes, but for now I think I know one thing for certain."

"What is it?"

"That beings from the era before the Great Destruction also believed in gods and fought monsters just like us."

What's the problem with that? While Yuder was blinking, Kishiar smiled strangely. He stopped while turning through Enon's summary papers at one part and spread it out so it could be seen well.

"There's one answer here worth guessing why they fought so hard. Can you see it?"

It was a story about some sword hero.

A swordsman born with a dragon as father and human as mother who could use miraculous abilities by putting half his soul into a mysterious sword. After fighting 'anomalies' to the death and achieving a difficult victory, he approaches the king to receive a reward. What Kishiar pointed to was the final dialogue between the king and the swordsman.

*'—The king asked. Now that all anomalies have been removed, need we no longer worry about the unknown era's return?'*

*'—The swordsman answered. My king! Do not worry. Though the anomalies I eliminated were powerful, they cannot dare compare to the six-winged flame that burned half the sea in the unknown era...'*

The tip of Kishiar's long finger tapped on the words 'unknown era'.

"The unknown era. Though it's a word I'm hearing for the first time, all the people in this story seem to know about it naturally. Though not completely the same, words with similar feels exist throughout. Does it feel somehow familiar?"

"...That is..."

When Yuder frowned, Kishiar smiled and nodded.

"Yes. It's similar to the feeling when we today think about the era before the Great Destruction. Though most humans currently living don't seriously worry whether the Great Destruction will return again like those who appear here."

But Yuder who had seen the world rapidly collapsing and returned knew that feeling well.

"That there was another past Great Destruction in the era before the Great Destruction, and non-human races that no longer exist knew about that too. It's an interesting point."

Yuder slowly nodded in agreement. Things that hadn't entered his head when just reading certainly became more understandable with Kishiar's explanation.

"Archmage Luma also speculated there were several heroes who returned through time besides His Majesty the First Emperor or the founding hero of the era before the Great Destruction. It could be connected as evidence supporting that."

"Right. And words like 'anomaly' and 'six-winged flame' that appear in this story I've even seen elsewhere."

"Where else did you see them?"

"In the old Scripture of the Black Moon borrowed from the palace library's secret section."

Kishiar grinned.

"The part expressed as a demon who stabbed a spear into the Sun God's stomach in the Scripture of the Sun God we read today was written that way in that old scripture."

Yuder recalled the story of old antagonism between the Sun God sect and Moon God sect that briefly appeared in Luma's diary, and the speculation that the two religions might have originally been from one root.

"Then what about the Sun God scripture written in ancient times?"

"Up to the edition I currently have, the expression isn't different from now. But it might be different looking at the oldest edition in the Grand Temple."

In any case, Kishiar had already declared he planned to secretly examine even that edition said to be in the Grand Temple.

"Now there's no need to worry about where to look first when going to the Grand Temple to examine that edition."

"I suppose so."

The magically enchanted carriage quietly ran along the road. Kishiar muttered while gazing through the small window at the scenery rapidly passing by.

"According to the Scripture of the Black Moon, the god sacrificed themself to create the moon as a door so that all evil things driven out of the world to protect it could never enter again. Every time demons outside try to enter by breaking and gnawing at the door, the moon becomes increasingly thin and fragments tear the sky, but still the god's power ultimately protects humans so it eternally repeats restoration."

It was a story naturally never seen in the Scripture of the Sun God.

Though previously he would have just thought of it as such a myth, Kishiar now seemed to have decided to interpret it more boldly compared to information discovered so far.

"If the divine messenger was one of the heroes who left warnings toward the world, and the scripture contains his words... this story might perhaps provide a basis for understanding monster occurrences and cracks. That very thing the First Duke Tain, Blake Van Tain, devoted his lifetime to discovering."

Cracks and monsters beyond them.

Yuder had already seen them.

He recalled the hazy darkness seen in dreams, all the chaos that felt ominous just looking at it.

As an extension of that, it was a natural progression for the hand wearing a white glove to subsequently appear in his mind.

"..."

That hand which Kishiar had witnessed once at Peletta Castle but hadn't seen again since.

'All evil things.'

To Yuder too that hand had initially felt like an exceedingly ominous existence, but not anymore. He didn't want to call that hand an evil thing or say it was a monster-like existence.

Even if that hand itself said so...

Somehow his head started to hurt a bit. Yuder shook his head while firmly closing then opening his eyes.

"Does your head hurt?"

Kishiar asked with worried eyes.

"Should I turn the carriage around?"

"No. I'm fine. Since I like simple and clear things, my head sometimes throbs when thinking too difficult thoughts."

Kishiar stared blankly as if trying to confirm if it was true. Yuder showed a faint smile meaning he was really fine then changed the topic.

"Let's now hear about the part where Enon speculated about grandfather."

"...Fine."

Fortunately, Kishiar didn't ask more and moved on.

Yuder briefly explained the conversation he had with Enon.

"Enon also agreed grandfather probably wasn't an ordinary person. For our speculations related to the magic school and magic too... he said it seemed possible if it were Archmage Luma."

"Hmm."

To be more precise, it was closer to saying how many more mages would there be with the motivation and skill to do such a thing besides Luma, but still.

"If the magic named 'Archmage's blessing' passed down in that magic school really existed, he seemed to conjecture its essence might be close to the soul-related magic used when creating Enon. That is..."

Though the conditions would have been different from Enon where a spirit's soul was placed in an artificially created body.

Yuder slowly put into words that term Enon had explained using the dragon legend and scripture.

"Magic that realizes souls entering others' bodies, like demon possession."

"Indeed."

Kishiar nodded slightly.

"However, he said even if the magic succeeded, the result probably wasn't perfect. Unlike the expectation that spirit characteristics or memories would be born completely when creating Enon, the result was no memories at all, he said."

"Born without memories... Yes. That part too has room for understanding if thought of that way."

"Yes. Didn't you also say once that grandfather seemed to act like someone who had been imprisoned for a long time and then came out to the world?"

The carriage stopped in front of the courthouse. Their conversation was briefly concluded there.

Chapter 1226

– The carriage door will open so everyone step back! Keep order!

Even before alighting, the surroundings were already tremendously noisy and chaotic. Sweat covered the faces of soldiers trying to maintain order. Compared to the Apeto family trial and First Duke Tain's first trial, which were called the most shocking trials in imperial history, today was much more crowded.

Before the door opened, Yuder opened his mouth while examining the crowd visible through the window.

"The number of people gathered here seems to be several times the number of spectator seats."

"It's been hundreds of years since a member of the imperial family attended in the position of an offender. Even if they can't sit, they would want to at least watch from outside."

Kishiar silently contained a cool smile.

"We'll have to continue our postponed conversation later. Well, shall we go?"

"Yes."

"You may come down now."

The soldiers who had barely organized the crowd opened the carriage door. Yuder first stepped firmly down the stairs to the ground. Immediately an utterly unexpected shout was heard.

"The Cavalry's hero has arrived! Baron Yuder Aile!"

"Yuder Aile?"

"You mean Yuder Aile? Such a young man...?"

The gazes of those gathered all turned toward Yuder at once.

'Come to think of it, they said rumors that I was a seductress who seduced Duke Peletta or something were widely spread in the capital.'

Yuder reflexively prepared to guard the carriage behind him at any time, but there was no need for him to use his power. Because cheers erupted like thunder all at once among those who had been silent.

"Long live the empire's hero!"

"Long live the savior of the Great Forest!"

"Thanks to the Cavalry my relatives living in the south were saved!"

"You are our hope!"

Too many people shouted at once making it difficult even to grasp the content. While Yuder was blinking at the unexpected situation, the one who would save him appeared from behind.

"My. There were many here who said what I always want to say first."

If a season could change instantly, would it feel like this?

The presence of the man who stepped down with sunshine on his head and a refreshing face was truly overwhelming. Those who had been cheering toward Yuder unconsciously closed their mouths and blankly stared at Kishiar.

"Ah..."

Beauty that makes one lose their soul just by looking exists in the world. Whether they knew who he was or not, if they had eyes they could only stare.

Kishiar who scanned the gazes of those who had forgotten to speak, smiled calmly as if such reactions were very familiar. Only after he walked lightly and stood beside Yuder did the soldiers come to their senses and hurriedly approach.

"Your Grace Duke Peletta."

"Since I've come as Cavalry Commander now, I would be grateful if you called me Commander."

"Ah, yes! Commander. We will guide you."

Kishiar looked over the people who were still keeping their mouths closed once more. Everyone thought Duke Peletta and Yuder Aile would just disappear, but the duke moved differently from any of their expectations.

"Whoa!"

Suddenly the man who lightly embraced Yuder's shoulder raised his other hand high. Under his bright smile, a refreshing voice resonated far.

"The Cavalry's hero will remember the thanks you left today. Everyone proceed with caution not to get hurt!"

Those who had been stunned finally felt their blood boiling and cheered with all their hearts.

"Waaah!"

Yuder looked up at Kishiar while being embraced. Some people speculated that bewilderment and aversion would be hidden in his expressionless face.

However, the moment the black-haired man let out a small sigh and parted his pale lips, that thought was again reversed.

"...There's a leaf stuck in your hair. Let's go now."

The black-haired man who briefly spoke while respectfully arranging the leaf fragment stuck in Kishiar's bangs was faintly but definitely smiling. Though it was a smile that disappeared faster than snow melting in sunshine, many people had already seen it.

The empire's young hero. The Cavalry's best awakener who achieved the glory of becoming a hereditary noble from commoner origins. Completely unlike the strange rumor of being a seductress who bewitched royalty, he was a man who appeared dignified with a cool and neat face like a well-sharpened sword.

No anger or aversion toward the duke was glimpsed in his face. After the duke let go of the shoulder he had embraced while laughing loudly, he walked side by side with Yuder. Endless cheers continued behind their backs.

"Long live the Cavalry Commander!"

"Long live the empire's hero!"

After they had completely entered the building, people finally realized something they hadn't noticed because their attention was drawn to Kishiar's beauty and presence.

"Come to think of it... wasn't the scarf the empire's hero wore exactly the same color as the Cavalry Commander's outer garment...?"

Yuder followed Kishiar who was walking unhesitatingly through a VIP passage where people's gazes couldn't reach, and opened his mouth.

"Next time when you do that outside, please give a little warning."

"Did you dislike it?"

The problem was that it was rather the opposite, if anything.

"Since I was preparing to use my ability immediately in case any unfortunate incidents occurred, I almost used my power."

Though others wouldn't have known, wind power slightly blew out the moment Kishiar embraced his shoulder. The wind mixed with strong gale instantly lost its killing intent and scattered gently like a breeze in front of Kishiar, but it wasn't as if there wasn't a problem just because it didn't happen.

"Oh my. I'm sorry. Just because I was in too good a mood."

Kishiar smiled.

"If we keep going this way, we'll reach the grand judges' waiting room. Shall we go in together to exchange greetings once before going?"

"Would it be alright for me to go?"

Before, when coming together during the Apeto family trial, as soon as they entered this place they had separated with Kishiar heading to where the grand judges were, and Yuder toward where the deputy commanders were. It was natural since the grand judges' waiting room wasn't a place just anyone could enter.

"Actually this was first requested by their side. They said they wanted to meet Baron Yuder Aile who would be in charge of security today beforehand."

That meant even those at the level of grand judges now recognized Yuder Aile as someone who couldn't be ignored. They judged he wasn't just someone who would sparkle for a moment and disappear, so they decided it would be beneficial to see his face and exchange greetings on this opportunity.

On a day when an important trial was taking place, obtaining the qualification to exchange greetings in the grand judges' waiting room was a great help to Yuder Aile's individual stature. However, Kishiar seemed to plan to use this opportunity very well for other reasons too.

"If it's uncomfortable you don't have to do it. But just exchanging greetings briefly before going would make the Crown Prince angry, so it wouldn't be bad to do it."

Actually Yuder had no interest at all in whether Katchian got angry or not. But since Kishiar seemed to really want that, he decided to just exchange greetings and go.

"Alright."

The waiting room where the grand judges stayed was extremely splendid. Those who seemed to know the significance of today's trial and couldn't keep their usual dignity, gathering in small groups anxiously talking, quickly turned their heads as soon as the door opening sound was heard.

"Your Grace Duke Peletta!"

Four grand judges ran over like one body and exchanged greetings with them.

"Welcome."

"I wonder if His Majesty the Emperor said anything about today's trial..."

"Is the young man beside you Baron Aile from the rumors."

The three noble faction grand judges were sitting quietly with gloomy eyes, but they too greeted Kishiar with courtesy.

People who had no interest in who Yuder was when attending the trial before now kindly introduced their name as if having watched him for a long time. Even those who would have considered Kishiar a chaff royal couldn't dare show displeased expressions, a sight that gave considerable emotion even to Yuder who had no particular thoughts until entering.

'Indeed, many things have changed.'

The duke who was ignored even at parties held in the middle of the imperial palace was now gone.

Though not present here, he was a person fully qualified to deal with the grand judges on behalf of the Emperor who knew everything like looking at his palm, and a Cavalry Commander respected by imperial citizens.

After appreciatively viewing all those sights, Yuder came outside when he felt it was enough.

'Now I should go to the courtroom. Was the way... this direction?'

While walking along the corridor following his memory, someone called him.

"Are you Baron Yuder Aile?"

Yuder turned his head. A stranger who had half-covered his face with a cloak smiled welcomingly while removing his hat.

"It is you! I'm truly pleased to meet you here first. I am..."

"Melbon, Crown Prince Ejain's attendant. I remember."

"That you still remember me is a great honor."

Melbon politely bowed his waist in the Nelarn style to greet.

Chapter 1227

Melbon Clant.

Yuder reviewed the information he knew about him. Though he hadn't seen directly, he had heard that before leaving the empire in the previous life, Melbon had been in a severely injured state. However, the current him looked very healthy, and his expression also appeared infinitely bright and peaceful.

'Well, having remained by his lord's side without dying even though being revealed as a spy, it's understandable.'

He was originally a spy sent from Durban, Nelarn's enemy nation. Though he had decided to abandon everything from before and live just as an attendant, touched by the personality of Second Prince Ejain who was his surveillance target, his secret was revealed in the Great Sarain Forest.

In the previous life Melbon would have already become a dead person. However, in this life he survived intact and even came dispatched to the empire again while maintaining his position.

Though he was said to offer sincere loyalty, trusting someone of spy origin to this extent isn't an easy thing. But the current Ejain had become a person who could do that. That change newly approached as large and unfamiliar as the changes in those surrounding Kishiar just earlier.

"Ah, come to think of it, I was told to congratulate you on receiving a hereditary baron title as soon as I saw your face but I forgot! Congratulations truly!"

"No. Thank you."

Melbon continued speaking rapidly with sparkling eyes.

"Your tremendous achievements were daily topics in Nelarn too. When we heard the news that despite an unprecedentedly huge disaster occurring in the imperial southern sea, not even a single death occurred thanks to your activities, you can't imagine how much our Crown Prince admired and worried."

"You're too kind. It wasn't accomplished by my power alone."

Despite Yuder's response that would have intimidated ordinary people, Melbon wasn't deterred at all.

"Yes. I know. The Cavalry Commander who became the Master of the Dawn's legendary achievements alongside various great heroes of the Cavalry are naturally worthy of praise too! But since I just wanted to tell you first about the fact that His Highness the Crown Prince was more deeply concerned and impressed about his friend Baron Aile than anyone else..."

Melbon continued praising Yuder's activities afterward too. Actually more precisely, it was closer to explaining how much Ejain worried, admired, and wanted to emulate "the Crown Prince's friend" Yuder's achievements.

At first he quietly listened thinking some main point would come out, but no matter how long he waited, Melbon's story showed no signs of ending.

'I should cut it off now.'

"Since the trial seems about to start, let's talk about the rest next time."

Wasn't it originally arranged to meet after the trial anyway? When he signaled with his eyes containing that meaning, Melbon said "oh my" and grinned.

"In my joy I ended up keeping the Baron too long. I apologize."

"Not at all. Since our way is the same anyway, I'll guide you to the VIP seats."

"Ah, my seat is not in the VIP area, Baron."

It sounded strange, but looking into it, Melbon said his coming here to see the trial wasn't an official schedule.

"Officially I haven't yet entered the empire. Only because there was a request from His Highness the Crown Prince who really wished for me to observe today's trial, and His Majesty the Emperor of Orr generously accepted that, am I visiting briefly."

So Melbon was currently in a situation of having entered here with a disguised identity rather than as Nelarn's envoy. That seemed to be the reason he had been covering his face with a cloak at first too.

"I see."

"To be honest, I also felt it might be easier to attempt conversation with the Baron meeting here than visiting the Cavalry. I didn't want to disappoint His Highness the Crown Prince by making a misstep due to nervousness."

What relation was that. While thinking that and trying to pass it by, Yuder suddenly paused and looked at Melbon's face again.

'Hmm? Come to think of it...'

Since meeting again, there was one more change in Melbon that he hadn't felt before. Something strangely vague was hazily surrounding him, too much to be just attributed to someone who had recovered from a major injury.

Yuder concentrated on the source of that faint energy and found the answer. Rare surprise arose on his face.

"Perhaps... have you awakened?"

"That's right! That you know just by looking. Indeed the empire's greatest awakener!"

Melbon admitted refreshingly.

"After recovering from injuries and returning to Nelarn, I awakened. Besides me, several others who owed their lives to imperial awakeners at that time also awakened around similar times and miraculously gained power."

People who had disappeared without even appearing at the forefront of history in the previous life survived, and even awakened. It couldn't help but be truly amazing.

Melbon lowered his voice secretly and informed about the recent circumstances of those who had awakened.

"His Highness the Crown Prince began creating a new organization as soon as he ascended to the Crown Prince position. Though there's been no official announcement yet, all those who awakened at that time including me are planned to be included there."

"That is..."

"Yes. Something like the Cavalry will soon be born in Nelarn too."

Nelarn was one of the countries that created an organization modeled after the Cavalry fastest in the previous life too. Since Ejain the King himself was an awakener, no great resistance arose, but it was regretted that there were almost no excellent awakeners included that the king could trust and entrust work to.

'That's why Emperor Katchian was more sensitively wary in case I would go to Nelarn.'

This time it would be created much faster, centered around much more loyal people than then, so wouldn't many things be different from then?

While thinking that, Melbon continued speaking.

"The fact that we could serve His Highness the Crown Prince without falling into great confusion after awakening is all thanks to the Cavalry people, I think. His Highness the Crown Prince always says so too. That meeting you then was truly a once-in-a-lifetime fortune, he says."

Among everything so far, the most intense sincerity was felt in those words.

Yuder looked at the smiling Melbon and quietly shook his head.

"I gave no help. If things went well, that was because His Highness the Crown Prince was someone who listened attentively even to others' small words, not because of me. But anyway, congratulations."

Congratulating becoming an awakener. Even that felt strange since it was completely different from before.

"Thank you, Baron. When we meet again later I will show you my ability briefly."

"Would that be alright?"

"Ah. Before sending me, His Highness the Crown Prince concluded agreements with His Majesty the Imperial Emperor in advance notifying my ability and usage, and that it would be fine to use it briefly when meeting you."

What kind of ability could it be to have such agreements exchanged—he became very curious.

'Looking at Kishiar not mentioning it, it seems likely he doesn't know just like me.'

However, the grinning Melbon didn't seem to want to tell in advance.

"It's absolutely not a dangerous ability related to combat so don't worry. But I guarantee, I think even someone like you would be quite surprised!"

Just then, from afar the bell signaling the trial would soon begin echoed. Now it was truly time to move to the courthouse.

"...Understood. I'll see you later."

"Yes."

Melbon put on his cloak and silently disappeared. It was quick movement befitting a former spy.

Yuder entered the courtroom. There, numerous people were already sitting without a single gap. The deputy commanders standing behind the right high seat where royalty sat greeted him with welcoming eyes but then discovered something and tilted their heads.

"Yuder! You're a bit late... hmm?"

"What's that around your neck? Did you catch a cold?"

Chapter 1228

"..."

Unlike Ever and Steiber who worried about his health first while puzzled, Kanna quickly showed a look of realizing something.

"Yuder, could that..."

"–The seven grand judges who uphold imperial law, the Cavalry Commander, and the Master of the Dawn will now enter. Everyone rise and show respect."

Before the question could properly come out, a loud voice echoed. Since everyone began standing up facing the entrance, their conversation was cut off.

"It's not wrapped because I caught a cold. My health condition is fine so don't worry."

Yuder quickly whispered so only the deputy commanders could hear then turned his head.

The doors that were magnificently imposing without feeling worn despite being old opened, and the grand judges entered in a line one after another. The moment Kishiar's face appeared following them, sounds of people stopping breath or sighing were heard here and there without exception.

Though it was the same situation as during the Apeto family trial, many things were different then and now despite similarities.

Previously Kishiar was called Your Grace Duke Peletta even though he came as Cavalry Commander, but this time he was called by the name he had cultivated and won himself.

There were no longer people who appreciated his appearance like a decoration and said whatever they wanted. Though being entranced by the visible beauty was the same as then, now it was because they clearly recognized what power the other possessed. Since even the noble faction who had looked down on the Emperor didn't dare spout nonsense, the solemnity of the court wasn't broken, and Yuder's heart was also incomparably more comfortable than then.

From a chaff royal that anyone could ridicule, to a sword master who could command the heavens and earth with one sword and the head of the Cavalry that became the empire's greatest military force.

The man who had reversed everything surrounding him in a year stood proudly in his place. When the blue outer garment he wore and the cloth Yuder had tied around his neck became visible at a glance, the atmosphere briefly stirred, but this time too that disturbance subsided very quickly.

"..."

Yuder felt the gazes of the deputy commanders simultaneously scanning back and forth between his neck and Kishiar's outer coat. The first to speak was Steiber.

"Hmm... I thought it was a day to see Yuder's rare appearance of feeling cold, but it was a scarf bestowed by Commander?"

"When I opened the window this morning, the wind was blowing more than I thought."

Kishiar answered with a smile like a painting.

"I was worried about my aide who doesn't even wear thick coats on cold days, but the only appropriate thing I had was this fellow included with the outer coat."

"Aha... I see."

Steiber nodded with a face that seemed no different than usual. Yuder felt a certain conviction in Steiber's gaze slightly looking back at his face immediately after.

'Roughly... he seems to have noticed.'

But that was all. Steiber didn't ask beyond that and stood with a gentle face.

"I agree with Commander's words. Though Yuder doesn't feel cold or heat well thanks to his ability, it's still good to properly match clothing to the weather."

Ever too expressed agreement with the two people's remarks with an attitude not even slightly different from usual. To Yuder's eyes, Ever didn't seem to have sensed any strange signs in the conversation just now. She was completely opposite to Kanna beside her who was clenching her fist while repeatedly opening and closing her lips as if about to scream.

After sending a benevolent gaze toward the three deputy commanders, Kishiar finally turned to Yuder and grinned.

"Does your neck feel uncomfortable? Since we're indoors now, it would be fine to untie it if it's uncomfortable."

"No. It's fine."

"Alright. Then."

Kishiar sat down elegantly.

Previously the trial started the moment he sat, but this time there were still people who had to enter.

Yuder moved his gaze toward the criminal's area.

Former attendant Osem Nulli who was caught after hiring mercenaries on behalf of Crown Prince Katchian.

Near him who was sitting with a haggard face while tightly bound with magic tools and ropes, another high-class chair similar to what Kishiar sat on was placed. A red cloth with the Bright Palace's mark drawn was placed on the table in front of that chair, making it clear at a glance for everyone who would sit there.

"Is His Highness the Crown Prince not here yet?"

One of the grand judges asked a knight guarding the door. The knight who checked outside opening the door slightly with a troubled expression immediately nodded.

"...It's said there was some disturbance in the waiting room. He will enter soon."

As those words said, the door opened again not long after.

Katchian who entered with a face full of venom was wearing Crown Prince formal attire, holding his head up stiffly. He sharply shouted while shaking off the hands of knights who were supporting his arms as if helping him.

"Let go. Rude fellows!"

He was a beautiful boy who looked rather bewitching despite the somewhat disheveled formal attire. However the same stirring that occurred when Kishiar appeared didn't happen.

Katchian scanned the filled spectator seats while breathing heavily. The moment when he had to acknowledge that Diarca had truly abandoned him, that all here had come to see him.

When he confirmed those he was looking for weren't there, his eyes sank black with anger, hatred, and despair. Yuder saw the Crown Prince's wildly trembling eyes slowly turning toward them. The bloodshot eyes glared at Yuder then immediately moved toward Kishiar.

It was a gaze that seemed like he would have rushed at them immediately if only he could, if only he were holding a weapon.

"Your Highness the Crown Prince. Please be seated in the designated place."

A grand judge carefully requested toward the Crown Prince who didn't seem to move. Katchian exhaled as if mockingly laughing and glared at the requester.

"...Fine. I shall. After all, I must clearly remember the faces of those who dared bring the empire's future like a beast and place me in such a humiliating position."

He walked slowly toward his seat. When his eyes met Osem Nulli's in the middle, Katchian firmly clenched his teeth. Osem Nulli too must be one of the opponents he most wanted to kill now. Osem Nulli who would know that fact also glared back at Katchian without yielding to that gaze. After the resentful gazes crossed past, Katchian sat in the seat prepared for him.

The grand judges who each wiped sweat from their foreheads began introducing themselves. The trial that would remain in history started with declaring before god that they would make a fair judgment.

"The criminal, Osem Nulli, admitted in the last first trial that he hired mercenaries on someone's orders. Tell again yourself who gave the order."

Osem Nulli had already confessed in the first trial that it was done on the Crown Prince's orders and testified in detail about the process. When the interrogator standing below the grand judges confirmed that point again, Osem Nulli honestly answered with a face that had given up everything.

"I found mercenaries on His Highness the Crown Prince's orders."

"Did you know in advance what you would have the mercenaries do?"

"No. I just delivered a letter and money. I swear to god I didn't know what was written in that letter!"

Following him, a mercenary who appeared bound like Osem Nulli. Selected as the representative witness among the caught mercenaries for being most articulate, he didn't greatly cower even before people's gazes.

"Tell once more who delivered the money and letter to you."

"This person here."

"Why didn't you discard the letter immediately upon receiving it but kept it instead?"

"I kept the letter as evidence just because the commission fee wasn't properly given, there was no other reason or intention."

"Why didn't you think of refusing despite receiving orders to harm innocent specific villagers?"

"People like us do anything for money. If the money is properly paid, what does it matter?"

"Did you know in advance that the one who stopped and reported you was a Cavalry member?"

"I didn't know she was a Cavalry member. But I heard she was a very dangerous opponent, and it was written that she must definitely be killed first..."

Everything was exactly as heard in the Gate of Truth. Unlike Yuder who already knew this information, people hearing it for the first time were shocked and covered their mouths while sighing.

Katchian watched all of that with an expressionless face while grinding his teeth.

And finally the grand judges' gazes turned toward Katchian.

"Your Highness the Crown Prince. Do you acknowledge these testimonies?"

Chapter 1229

All eyes and ears turned to Katchian. Katchian La Orr, sitting with his back straight upright, broke into a small laugh.

"If I say I don't acknowledge. What changes?"

"...Please answer clearly. Do you acknowledge? Or do you not acknowledge?"

"I asked what changes."

"This is a sacred court. We apologize but since Your Highness the Crown Prince is here as the most deeply related person and witness to the incident, you cannot ask questions other than answering. Please answer the question."

"How ridiculous. Everyone here! Duke Peletta! His Majesty the Emperor! Are trying to kill me, what can I do! Even if I say I'm wronged, no one will believe it! Have you thought about what Duke Diarca would say to you if he knew about this?"

A cry wrung from the depths of his lungs resounded thunderously through the courtroom. Those whose eyes met Katchian's as he scanned the spectator seats all became frightened and avoided his gaze. Actually even the interrogator who asked the question was the same.

The fact that no one from House Diarca or any defense counsel appeared here today means they truly abandoned the Crown Prince. But who knows how the situation might change again? If Duke Diarca who was lying sick in bed with no news opened his eyes and raised his hand for Katchian, all those who had acted disrespectfully toward the Crown Prince in this place could all die.

Yuder thought while watching people trying hard to hide their anxious faces.

'It's completely transparent what they're thinking roughly.'

The old, injured Duke Diarca lying down is still more frightening than the healthy Kironne. Duke Diarca's long-standing influence was ruling throughout the Orr Empire whether he was present or not.

Just then, someone's gentle voice broke the frozen air.

"The witness has refused to answer three times, I see."

Only after hearing those words did people suddenly come to their senses. Kishiar La Orr asked the interrogator with a leisurely face not the least bit intimidated.

"As far as I know, in such cases it's judged as intentional delay, and the confessing person's statement is automatically applied in the direction of being positively recorded. Is that not right?"

"...T-that's correct."

The interrogator swallowed and nodded.

"Then you should declare it."

Go on. Kishiar elegantly made a hand gesture saying to speak so everyone could hear while kindly smiling. Meeting that face, Katchian froze pale blue.

The interrogator who looked up at the grand judges exchanged gazes as if having a silent conversation before opening his mouth.

"...Since proper answers weren't given despite three requests for answers, it is officially recorded that there is credibility in the criminals' confessions."

"W-what...? You mean you'll record words I haven't even said? Such law..."

"Laws and traditions are established to be so."

Katchian clenched his fist and protested strongly. However, it was impossible to change already recorded results.

'The rule of unfavorable application due to refusal to testify. A familiar sound to me too.'

Yuder recalled Yudrain Aile's trial in the previous life while watching Katchian protest. When he refused to answer at all because witnesses who came out all deliberately lied, officially all their words were recorded as correct. Until then he had thought he could get out soon since the Emperor and empire would still need the Cavalry, but that wasn't the case.

The power of those seemingly insignificant records was greater than expected, and Yudrain Aile headed to the torture chamber according to the trial results.

"..."

Though not exactly the same, somehow the way things were going was similar. Watching Katchian rampaging with not a single person to help him, Yuder was briefly captured by strange emotions.

The interrogator who ignored Katchian's screams raised his hand with a furrowed brow.

"Bring in the new witness."

The one who came out this time was Marin. She who hadn't returned to the Cavalry after leaving the Gate of Truth yesterday was also splendidly dressed in Cavalry uniform today.

'Considering the possibility of threats to her life, the Emperor's side must have separately protected her.'

The demeanor of the three deputy commanders and the Cavalry members scattered throughout to protect the inside of the court changed upon seeing Marin. Marin stood boldly at the witness stand, raised her hand, and testified similarly to yesterday.

The difference from the Gate of Truth yesterday was that in this place Osem Nulli and the mercenary who had invaded the village were present. The interrogator confirmed Marin was not acquainted with them, and heard about the incident that occurred in Guanaman village once more.

After that the truly crucial questions began.

"How did you come to know that those who came to harm the village were mercenaries rather than bandits?"

"After capturing them, we found their identity tags."

"What do you think was the reason they particularly tried to harm you?"

"It seems it was written so in the commission letter. I thought it was the doing of someone who knew me."

"Is that why you reported the commissioner?"

"The report wasn't because they tried to kill me, but to protect the innocent villagers."

"The one revealed as the commissioner is Osem Nulli. And Osem Nulli confessed that he only acted according to orders received from His Highness the Crown Prince. What connection does His Highness the Crown Prince have with the witness?"

"Though he will deny it, a clear connection exists."

Marin testified proudly in a clear and confident tone exactly the same as when she spoke before the Emperor and Empress.

"I know him. We grew up in the same village since childhood. We lived next door, and all the villagers remember that fact."

"Good heavens...!"

Someone among the spectators cried out very quietly. Katchian sat with a frozen face.

Would it feel like the Gate of Truth repeating? Would it feel like a new and different nightmare?

Though the answer was unknown, Marin saluted respectfully and sat down after saying all the words she wanted to say.

The seven grand judges used magic tools to have an inaudible conversation. Their decision was made so quickly there was no need to have a break.

"...In consideration of criminal Osem Nulli detailing what he did and honestly admitting his crimes, we order not execution but a fine of 10,000 gold coins or execution of punishment corresponding to that if unable to pay it, followed by 10 years in prison, and 10 years of labor on Merche Island. However, the execution of sentence will take place after all related trials are completed...?"

Both Osem Nulli and the testifying mercenary avoided execution. Though they were scheduled to receive severe punishment, it seemed the fact that no one had died directly because of this incident was taken into account.

The fact that Osem Nulli avoided execution meant the grand judges acknowledged he wasn't the true criminal. Amid the filled stirring, the grand judge sitting in the center opened his mouth with a solemn face.

"The accuser who became the start of this trial, Marin, wrote an accusation letter denouncing His Highness the Crown Prince's crimes before entering this place. Since His Highness the Crown Prince also indicated this morning that he would write an accusation letter meaning to protest this trial's result and claim innocence, the seven grand judges have unanimously agreed to approve both accusation letters and handle them in one trial."

"..."

Now the inside of the court became as quiet as the deep sea. Everyone had their nerves on edge without daring to open their mouths, wondering what the grand judge would say.

"Since the investigation for that trial has already begun from yesterday by imperial order, it will start accordingly through a legitimate process. Declaring the above results before god, we end the trial."

All the grand judges recited prayers as at the beginning then quickly left. Katchian La Orr continued glaring at Marin, Kishiar, and Yuder with bloodshot eyes. He refused the hand of a knight approaching to support him out, and muttered lowly.

"Those appearances drunk on victory are ugly. Don't think things will go as you wish."

Chapter 1230

After everyone had left the court like an ebbing tide, Kishiar gathered the Cavalry members who had worked hard for security.

"Thank you all for your hard work. Was there any trouble while the trial was proceeding?"

The members who had guarded the corridor outside the courtroom and other floors shook their heads. Those who had been guarding the outside where civilians gathered also answered there hadn't been much disturbance. Still, it wasn't as if there had been no problems at all.

"There were a few times when group fights almost broke out due to insane people's reckless words trying to insult His Majesty the Emperor, but we stopped them before blood was shed."

"When handsome Gakane appeared, everyone listened well."

Someone among the members raised their voice playfully. Gakane, who was a bit further away, shook his head with an embarrassed face.

"No. Most people were cooperative upon seeing the Cavalry uniforms we wore, so I hardly did anything. There were many people who shouted they respected Yuder and Commander, and such people also greatly helped stop those causing disturbances."

Though he said that, it was surely also true that Gakane's appearance and kind manner of speech which eased people's hearts helped.

Kishiar laughed loudly then praised the members' hard work. When he said the rest of the members except deputy commanders could return first, those who got to leave early had color in their faces. Yuder took advantage of the gap while everyone was noisily chattering in good spirits to casually speak to Gakane.

"Gakane."

"Yes?"

"According to Commander, Sir Zuckerman is scheduled to arrive tomorrow."

"Huh? Ah...!"

Gakane who had opened his mouth slightly immediately sparkled with joy.

"He'll probably come early in the morning. If you're going to give a welcome greeting as said before, go out matching the time appropriately."

"Great. Thanks for telling me!"

According to Gakane, quite a lot of members who used swords as their main weapons in the Cavalry had developed great interest in and respect for Nathan Zuckerman who was revealed as a sword master. Since he was considering gathering such people to go together, Yuder told him it seemed like a good idea with a very willing heart.

"Well, now only we remain. Shall we hear the truly important report?"

After all the regular members had withdrawn, now only the three deputy commanders and Yuder remained before Kishiar.

Actually the deputy commanders hadn't just guarded behind Kishiar during the trial.

Ever who uncannily knew how to discern people with suspicious movements and had prevented dangerous situations several times even during the Apeto family trial. And Steiber whose observation skills based on experience were extremely excellent in a different sense from Ever, and who could recognize figures from all walks of life throughout the capital thanks to connections built from operating a bakery for a long time.

When the two of them surveyed the spectator seats and selected those they considered even slightly suspicious, sending signals secretly, Cavalry members stationed throughout approached the suspiciously acting individuals and secretly cut off parts of their hair and returned.

And those were naturally delivered to Kanna through those patrolling.

Though one might wonder what information could be in those small parts of hair, Kanna's ability which had grown significantly again after the south had reached the point of accomplishing what seemed impossible.

"Among the owners of hair delivered to me, there were exactly six people who had received orders from places connected to the noble faction and entered hiding their identities. Among them four were from Diarca's side, and the rest were individuals not greatly concerning."

Kanna began reporting with a brilliant and calm face completely different from when looking at Yuder's scarf. Looking closely, sweat had formed on her forehead from continuously using her ability silently, but it was almost at a level where it didn't show.

"The four estimated to be Diarca's people all received the same order. It was to watch today's trial, remember it, and report."

"Was that all?"

"Yes. That's what I read."

"Good. Well done. Now go back, visit the medical division, then rest."

Kanna had to meet Yuder tonight to read important objects. Considering that point, Kishiar naturally sent her out so she could leave work like this and rest.

"Aren't you returning to the Cavalry, Commander?"

"My aide and I have guests to meet briefly here before returning."

"Then we shall wait."

"That's a grateful offer but it's fine. As long as my aide and I are together, there would never be anything to worry about. But if it's alright, I'd like you to check on Marin who should still be in the witness waiting room. Though she still can't return to the unit due to personal danger, if you look after her it would further help her relax and prepare for the future."

"Ah..."

"Understood."

"Leave it to us."

When Marin's name came up, the three deputy commanders saluted simultaneously with determined faces.

After even the deputy commanders had withdrawn, Yuder followed Kishiar out to the corridor. Since some time had passed since the trial ended, there was no one walking around.

Taking advantage of that gap, Yuder naturally exerted wind power to protect around himself and Kishiar and put up a barrier so sound couldn't be heard from outside, then opened his mouth.

"The one who sent people from Diarca would naturally be Kironne da Diarca, right?"

"That would be so."

"Despite deciding to abandon the Crown Prince, he sends as many as four people."

He didn't openly send people since he had given his word. However, it was truly a laughable matter that he sent four even though sending just one would have been enough to confirm the trial situation.

'It means they weren't sent just to check the trial.'

The information one person can see is limited. Probably Kironne likely tried to grasp information meticulously by subdividing those to watch into Kishiar's side, the judges' side, the Crown Prince's side, and other spectators' side.

The Emperor doesn't trust Kironne, but it was very evident that Kironne also intended to use the Emperor and stab him in the back anytime.

Additionally...

"Since he's a timid person. He would have wanted to prepare in case the situation changed toward the worst contrary to what he desires."

Kishiar smiled and penetrated Kironne's heart.

'Yes. Sending people like this also means Kironne still fears his father.'

Kironne was arrogant yet timid. He was very different from Aishes of House Apeto who poisoned his father and made him exit beyond history at once without anyone knowing. Actually in this situation he would also know the easiest way to get what he wants would be to just make his injured father die a mysterious death and clean up afterward. But the disadvantage of not yet having grasped internal family forces was stopping Kironne from doing that.

Even with Duke Diarca unconscious, followers who would protect and follow only him were spread here and there, so he must have sent people to create corners to escape through in case of unexpected situations.

"I truly look forward to seeing what kind of defense counsel he will support for the Crown Prince's formal trial."

Hearing Kishiar's words that seemed genuinely full of anticipation, Yuder recalled Katchian's face seen last.

As well as the words he had been muttering.

"By the way, did you hear what the Crown Prince was muttering at the end?"

Even Yuder could grasp what Katchian was saying, let alone a sword master who detected even distant sounds as if hearing them right in front. Kishiar nodded while letting out a gentle laugh.

"Of course I heard. He was giving very kind advice not to be drunk on victory."

"In this situation there shouldn't be any cards left, but he didn't seem to have given up at all."

"Well. There might not be absolutely none."

Kishiar replied calmly.

"Do you know something?"

"The Crown Prince has never taken imperial law lessons since ascending to that position. Someone who just vaguely said yesterday he would protest, today confidently said he would write an accusation letter. Now there shouldn't even be anyone by his side to properly tell him how to accuse."

Yuder quietly gazed at the face of the one speaking like singing.

"Then who do you think would help his accusation? For reference, it's not Their Majesties."

"...Surely Commander didn't set up something?"

To Yuder's question, the man narrowed his red eyes. It was a strange smile that felt infinitely cool despite warmly smiling.

"Correct."

Chapter 1231

"Correct."

Yuder quietly looked at the smiling face before him. He could ask more about what thoughts led to doing that, or what effect was being aimed for by making Katchian misunderstand, but...

'Is there really a need for that.'

Having reached that conclusion, he silently turned his head and Kishiar asked.

"You're not saying not to do it?"

"If you thought you want to do that, that's enough. If perhaps it would be more comfortable for me to step in, please tell me. I'll help."

At that, Kishiar became silent. After a moment, a somewhat different, subdued voice flowed from him.

"You've said you would move again for revenge facing that person who has long since become a meaningless nuisance to you, if I want it. Is that what you just said? Is my understanding of the meaning correct?"

"Yes."

If asked why, naturally there's only one thing to say.

Because Kishiar wants to do it.

As he said, Yuder Aile didn't care in what way Katchian was ruined. That also meant no matter how the end came, he wouldn't particularly receive meaningfully different impressions.

But if that difference was important to Kishiar.

Then Yuder could do anything too.

The red eyes facing him disappeared between closed eyelids. Kishiar who lowered his eyes exhaled long and sweetly.

"I thought you might say that... no, probably I thought you would. Hearing it directly is sweeter. Enough to make me want to overturn all plans."

"..."

"But I won't do that."

He opened his eyes again. It was an expression that couldn't even be thought of as belonging to someone not thoroughly soaked in love.

Enchanted by that expression, Yuder questioned back a beat late.

"...What?"

"I don't want you to do meaningless things for my sake, and to be more honest, I just want to do this alone. But... yes. I want to receive permission in advance, can you give it?"

Yuder blinked and slowly asked.

"...What permission. What is there for me to permit or not permit in the first place?"

Kishiar smiled.

"Receiving permission creates a difference in the heart when carrying out a task."

A difference in the heart? While wondering about the meaning of those words, kindly Kishiar added an explanation.

"At the root of the actions I'm about to take are extremely personal emotions about things that haven't happened yet, and things that won't happen in the future either. To express that a bit more honestly... it should be expressed as anger toward someone who still wants only to trample and covet others, showing no signs of change even in this game."

Though he referred to them collectively as 'others', the moment he said that, his red eyes were directly looking at Yuder's face.

"If handling it rationally, there's no particular need to reach out to him now. If he knew what I'm trying to do, His Majesty my brother would probably say why am I deliberately doing unnecessary things. ...But, I want to."

"..."

"For things that no longer exist."

For you.

"If you permit that it's alright, I can devote myself to this matter with a lighter and happier heart. Of course I'll continue even if I don't receive permission."

What could he possibly say to those words?

Yuder could only look at his face and nod.

"...I'm fine with it, so please do as you wish."

Kishiar would have known he would answer like that anyway.

But he smiled widely with a truly happy face. After grasping both of Yuder's hands together, the man willingly bent his back and kissed the back of his hand, and a small voice flowed between his lips.

"Thank you."

They went up to the floor above the courtroom and entered one of the waiting rooms prepared for involved parties. There, Melbon who had disappeared as soon as the trial ended had arrived first.

"I'm glad to see you again, Cavalry Commander and Baron. Though I already met with you earlier, Baron."

"Was that so?"

Kishiar looked back. Yuder briefly explained the circumstances of meeting Melbon.

"We briefly met and exchanged greetings while heading to the courtroom after visiting the grand judges' waiting room."

"I see."

"Thanks to His Majesty the Imperial Emperor's consideration, I was able to quietly watch the trial. I sincerely thank you. Though I will appear representing Nelarn tomorrow, for a while I will act befitting an envoy who has come ahead of His Highness the Crown Prince's accession."

Melbon smiled brightly.

'Ahead of accession?'

This was a story not heard earlier. Though it was something expected since the moment Ejain grasped the Crown Prince position after winning the fight among princes, he hadn't known it was already being prepared in earnest.

"Oh. Has the time already come to that?"

Kishiar asked with a composed face.

"Actually those around recommended seeking more stability before acceding, but since His Majesty's health condition has rapidly worsened, His Highness the Crown Prince made a decision."

If it's something that has to be done anyway, doing it quickly might be right to stabilize the country faster even if a bit more difficult. Actually in the previous life, Ejain awakened and ascended to the throne in a situation where the country had almost been ruined, and saying similar words, he personally handled both the war surrounding Nelarn and internal divisions simultaneously. And after about 2 years he succeeded in stabilizing Nelarn while achieving perfect victory.

The authority a king can handle and the authority a crown prince can handle are different. Ejain seemed to plan to go up first this time too to handle numerous matters simultaneously to quickly stabilize Nelarn.

"A choice befitting someone wise and brave. I convey my support."

"Thank you."

"So, you didn't ask to meet here just to convey that news. What did you come to talk about?"

"His Highness the Crown Prince is currently preparing to launch Nelarn's first awakener group, 'Neleriato', timed with his accession day. He hopes brave ones will come to help with various crises that have come to our Nelarn, like the empire's Cavalry. However since it's an organization with no precedent except the Cavalry... advice from those who have walked that path first is needed."

Though he had heard about the awakener group Nelarn was trying to create, he learned the name just now.

'Neleriato. Is it ancient language?'

The Nelarn awakener group that existed in the previous life used the name '7th Light'. It was clearly a name created in consideration of the light emitted from the 6 stones which were Ejain's ability, but this time it was a completely different name.

"Since 'ato' is the ancient word for wall... it seems to be a name created with the meaning of Nelarn's wall."

"That's right."

Even without Yuder asking, the man who was proficient in ancient language provided interpretation well on his own.

"So I first asked His Majesty the Imperial Emperor if advice and help could be received, but received the answer that since it's a matter related to the Cavalry, permission must be obtained from the Cavalry Commander."

Officially the Cavalry is a direct imperial organization. However, Emperor Keilusa didn't directly move the Cavalry except when absolutely necessary, and even when he had to, he mostly talked to Kishiar first and issued orders under agreement. That was to respect Kishiar as Commander and the one who created the Cavalry.

Kishiar who had been rubbing his chin as if lost in thought suddenly smiled slightly.

"I'm reminded of various voices of opposition I faced when creating the Cavalry. Back then they said no country would create anything like a second Cavalry, but now I'm hearing such words, how amazing it is."

"..."

"Good. By the Cavalry Commander's authority, I promise maximum support until Neleriato is launched and finds stability."

Melbon deeply bowed his waist.

"Thank you for your consideration, Commander."

"Detailed matters will need to be adjusted separately with His Highness the Crown Prince later... but that can be done while attending the accession ceremony, so it doesn't seem difficult."

Planning to attend directly? The moment Yuder opened his eyes a bit wider, Melbon grinned.

"Ah, that can be done even right now."

"Hmm?"

"I slightly mentioned it when meeting the Baron earlier, but before I came to the empire there were some agreed matters between His Majesty the Emperor and our Crown Prince. Because a process to get permission for me to use my ability here was needed."

Melbon politely stood with hands together and introduced himself again.

"After returning safely to Nelarn thanks to the help given before, I became an awakener. My ability is the 'Light Messenger' which allows me to meet His Highness the Crown Prince even from far away through the light I bloom!"

Chapter 1232

Being able to meet Crown Prince Ejain even from far away?

While Yuder was contemplating whether it was literal or metaphorical meaning, Melbon placed his hands together. As he slowly opened his hands which had been rounded as if holding a small bird, light suddenly bloomed from inside and rose into the air.

While the white light swelled and bubbled up, Melbon maintained his hand position and explained his ability in more detail.

"This light should have bloomed identically before His Highness the Crown Prince too. When His Highness touches the light, you can see him. Usually you have to wait a bit for the connection."

According to Melbon's description, it seemed that light would widen like paper and the other person's appearance would appear like reflected in a mirror. He proudly explained that one could see the face and converse easily as if right in front, and indeed this was an ability Yuder was seeing for the first time.

'Though it's not that there weren't people with abilities enabling communication from afar... there weren't abilities this amazing. Especially not at a time like now.'

Abilities like Emperor Keilusa's of placing eyes and ears in various places to unilaterally collect information, or like Revlin's of secretly conveying words to someone far away, might be considered similar powers broadly speaking. However, to use their powers for two-way communication required somewhat bothersome processes. That meant a level like Melbon's of easily being able to conference with the other person even from afar was impossible.

Even in the previous life when there were many more awakeners than now, he hadn't seen anyone with exactly the same ability as Melbon. Perhaps one appeared in another country without Yuder knowing, but if so wouldn't rumors have spread through some route?

Deep interest filled Yuder's eyes.

'Yes. I understand the reason he confidently said even I would be surprised. It's worth it.'

However in Yuder's case, the emotion felt at times like this was curiosity about wanting to quickly grasp that ability rather than surprise.

"With that power can you only see His Highness the Crown Prince? Or is contact with other people possible too? If other people are beside His Highness the Crown Prince, can those people also be met through that power? What's the maximum duration of the power so far? In my opinion, the duration of the power would probably shorten as distance increases."

"Ah... until now I've only been able to see His Highness the Crown Prince. Communication with other people wasn't possible. If other people are beside His Highness the Crown Prince... hmm. I haven't deliberately tried it, but since the surrounding scenery also appears, it seems possible...?"

Melbon who looked proud despite being flustered by the barrage of questions answered honestly.

"The duration... actually I didn't feel distance was a big problem. From testing, the time I could contact from within Nelarn's royal palace or from far away in another country was almost the same. Rather than distance, I felt the problem was actually the physical strength and my mental state that could endure after connection..."

That was when it happened.

The light that had been just white suddenly began turning an exquisite purple color reminiscent of Ejain's eye color. Simultaneously the light's size grew too, and within it someone's appearance really began to appear hazily.

"Connected!"

Melbon exclaimed while panting. Kishiar lightly pulled Yuder's arm and positioned him beside himself.

"Yuder. You need to be on this side for both of us to be seen well."

Without realizing it, he had approached much closer to Melbon at some point. Due to wanting to see the ability up close, he had almost completely blocked Kishiar who was the actual party to confer with Ejain. Yuder stood beside Kishiar feeling somewhat sorry.

Right then, the human form wavering within the light became clear like a mirror.

'-Connected. Good work, Melbon.'

Crown Prince Ejain, whom he hadn't seen for a long time, didn't look greatly different from the last time seen just looking at his outward appearance.

That was because everything remained exactly the same without change, from his appearance with long silver hair tied up high simply with one tie without any luxurious decorations, to his attire completely devoid of splendor unbefitting royalty.

But his gaze. And expression were completely different from then.

'He's become much gentler.'

Ejain who praised Melbon turned his head and looked at Yuder.

'...Hmm?'

He briefly made a surprised expression looking back and forth between Kishiar's outer garment and the cloth wrapped around Yuder's neck, then immediately composed his gaze as if it had never happened and resumed a refreshing smile.

'Commander. I'm sincerely glad to see you again. It's a bit late, but congratulations on becoming the Master of the Dawn too. I sent a congratulatory letter as soon as I heard the news, I wonder if you received it?'

"I'm glad to see you. Since Your Highness the Crown Prince also looks healthy, the heart exchanging greetings is happy and light beyond words. I confirmed your congratulatory words after returning from vacation. The part where you quoted the phrase of Martemun Chil, Nelarn's famous poet, was especially moving."

He didn't know they had exchanged such letters. It seemed Kishiar had exchanged correspondence with Ejain more steadily than expected.

'I'm beyond pleased that you recognized Martemun Chil's poetry. It's my favorite poem.'

After saying that, Ejain finally greeted Yuder too.

'My friend! I'm glad to see you looking healthy. Have you been well?'

A bright smile with a tone that seemed about twice as intimate as when dealing with Kishiar.

If someone who didn't know saw it, they would have easily mistaken him and Yuder for acquaintances from very long ago.

'I was truly worried hearing you were injured, but seeing you directly like this now is reassuring. Your complexion also looks much better than when I last saw you, and somehow you seem to have grown more. Did you perhaps even grow taller? Though you already had a heroic appearance before, now I think no one would doubt you're the empire's hero from the rumors seeing you. Ah, that cloth wrapped over your uniform suits you very well too. Is it perhaps a new addition to the uniform for the Commander's aide?'

When attendant Melbon kept mentioning Ejain at the end of every sentence earlier, he had thought the exaggeration was a bit severe, but seeing the person himself, what he had heard earlier seemed mild in comparison. Melbon had truly just accurately and politely conveyed the words of the one he served.

'Still...'

Though that bright smile was burdensome, it wasn't a bad feeling.

He looked relaxed as if having completely shaken off all previous troubles, and wrapped in firm will, appearing much better than in the previous life. His sparkling, shining eyes also played a big role in that.

'The change in eye expression is amazing.'

Even though it was a very small change, it could give a different feeling enough to seem like a different person. Was the reason people kept saying vitality filled Yuder whenever they saw him because of changes in feeling like this?

Such thoughts newly arose only after seeing Ejain.

To stop Ejain who seemed about to speak endlessly, Yuder decided to quickly open his mouth and return greetings.

"I greet Your Highness the Crown Prince. I too am happy that you look healthy. What's around my neck is just something Commander gave me because of today's weather, it's not part of the uniform."

'Ah. I see. Hmm! Indeed befitting an item bestowed by someone said to have the continent's best aesthetic sense, it suits you well.'

Ejain who praised Kishiar's aesthetic sense smiled.

'Though you might have already heard, I too am working quite hard creating something like the Cavalry now. I need to decide on uniforms, but this is giving me a much bigger headache than expected. It's difficult to choose since it's something I'm doing for the first time in my life. To be honest, it seems twice as difficult as ability training. I've been thinking it would be really nice if someone could advise...'

Behind Ejain who was speaking like that, six lights were spinning in a circle. In the previous life, King Ejain always made those lights orbit surrounding his body, but now seeing them pushed back to exist only in the background like scenery felt quite unfamiliar.

“To say training is difficult... it seems you've developed your ability tremendously meanwhile despite being busy.”

Perhaps knowing Yuder's gaze was directed there, Ejain in the light grinned.

'Ah. The form is different from when I first awakened. These days I'm testing how far I can drop this power away.'

"Testing the power you possess and finding out where your limits are is truly a good training method."

'It feels good to hear you say that. But I'm still very lacking. Sometimes I want to send letters to my friend seeking advice on the training process...'

"-Your Highness the Crown Prince. Sorry to interrupt, but the hand of the grateful envoy who enabled us to meet seems to have changed somewhat. Would that be alright?"

In the middle of Ejain's words, Kishiar gently interrupted.

Chapter 1233

Only then did Yuder notice that Melbon's hand, which had been hidden by Ejain, had strangely changed.

'The fingers...'

The fingers of both hands which had been cupped as if scooping water had swollen randomly as if losing their joints. Moreover, the nails that should have been at the fingertips had disappeared, and black calluses like fish scales covered them. Probably if ordinary people saw that appearance, they might have suspected a terrible curse or a monster. Additionally, Melbon's hands were still continuously squirming even at this moment. Each time, the range that darkened and swelled also grew slightly.

"Thank you for your concern, but it's fine."

Melbon answered with an embarrassed smile.

"This is precisely the reason related to the ability time limit I mentioned earlier. It doesn't hurt, but the larger the range of change becomes, I get more dizzy and spaced out..."

According to him, since he entered a state like being drugged, usually when the change reached his wrists it became difficult to maintain the ability and the connection was cut.

'I see. So that's why he explained it that way earlier.'

Earlier Melbon had said his ability was affected more by physical limits than the distance from the casting target. He had said the ability duration was similar whether close to or far from Ejain, and if he was experiencing such changes whenever using the ability, it all made sense.

"When using this ability, if my condition is stable and comfortable, the connection works well and the speed of change is somewhat slower. That's why despite my shamelessness I wanted to meet here and not elsewhere."

Melbon went ahead and kindly explained even the part he had briefly mentioned when they momentarily met before the trial began.

To Yuder's eye, Melbon didn't particularly seem to be in pain currently. Looking at Kishiar's face, he seemed to have judged the same as Yuder.

"How does the changed hand recover?"

"After the connection is broken, it returns to normal after a few hours. I've confirmed it certainly through multiple attempts, and I have gloves to cover my hands, so you two don't need to worry!"

"But since all your fingers have already changed, there isn't much time left."

Kishiar said while nodding. Ejain in the light also agreed with a regretful face.

'That's right. But His Majesty the Emperor said if the Cavalry Commander promised assistance, we could continue talking this way until our conversation is concluded.'

"Certainly. Nothing would be as certain and comfortable as talking face to face. Alright. It feels meaningful since we're putting our heads together to help awakeners with awakener power."

Ejain's smile brightened considerably at Kishiar's smoothly flowing permission.

'Thank you for understanding.'

Melbon's power was said to be usable about once a day currently. Since he came as Ejain's envoy, externally it would be announced he would stay near the imperial palace, but since things had turned out this way, he would actually be staying within the Cavalry.

The two men quickly began concretizing matters related to future Cavalry and Neleriato cooperation.

"According to the envoy, it seemed you plan to reveal Neleriato simultaneously with your accession."

'That's right. Those who will hold the key at the top are composed of my close associates, and general member recruitment hasn't begun yet. But I've already sent people to select some individuals under the surface. These are mostly commoners who awakened quickly right after the red stone fell and rumors spread that they saved people when monsters occurred or border disputes arose.'

Hearing him, it seemed Ejain planned to create Neleriato truly similar to the Cavalry. Especially the part about not limiting members' status and having full willingness to accept even commoners was like that.

The difference was that unlike Kishiar, Ejain was contacting talented individuals he had identified in advance.

'Kishiar didn't particularly contact talents like Jimmy or Ever in advance, who spread rumors by immediately causing noticeable incidents after the red stone fell.'

Contacting people for selection in advance without knowing well about the individuals could be dangerous in some ways. This was because those selected in advance might fall into arrogance and haze those who entered later, or try to create an invisible hierarchy by sticking firmly together.

'Ejain wouldn't be unaware of that. Yet he's trying to recruit as quickly as possible, which means...'

Though there might be an intention to calm the inside and outside of the country by revealing it to match his accession ceremony, could there perhaps be some other reason?

Ejain soon gave the answer.

'Recently there was an incident where a strange crack appeared then disappeared in a specific region of Nelarn.'

Yuder's eyebrows twitched and rose subtly.

'It would have been a small matter not normally perceived, but I heard similar things happened throughout the empire at the same time and the Cavalry responded during vacation.'

"Hearing your words, it seems they were incidents occurring at almost the same time."

Ejain nodded at Kishiar's words.

'That's right. I had previously encountered information that similar things occurred like precursor symptoms before a big incident in the imperial south, and I was concerned whether what happened in Nelarn might be similar to that. Though my retainers said it was excessive worry...'

The incident of abnormal cracks occurring throughout the empire that happened while they were staying in Peletta during vacation. Though it was said the cracks only appeared very briefly and disappeared without monsters appearing, Cavalry members who had gone on vacation had quite a hard time because of it.

Yuder knew that even now after the vacation ended, Kishiar and Emperor Keilusa were continuously monitoring and responding to that part without forgetting.

The reason is because, as Ejain said, they now know it could be a precursor leading to a greater disaster like in the south.

'The fact that abnormal cracks occurred in Nelarn means similar things occurred in all other countries too.'

However, no country has publicly mentioned that incident so far. Though it was unknown what was happening beneath the surface, Nelarn was the first to share information like this. Yuder expected that countries other than Nelarn, even if they knew about the abnormal cracks that occurred before and after the disaster in the Orr Empire, would consider it unrelated to themselves.

'Actually that's probably the more general case. Crown Prince Ejain is the unusual case.'

It wasn't an unexpected part.

It was exactly the same in the previous life too. Though at first it was said disasters occurred particularly frequently in the Orr Empire, all other countries eventually became covered in disasters too, but almost none properly responded besides Nelarn. It wasn't for nothing that Nelarn ruled by Ejain grew enough to be called a new empire.

Disasters don't have eyes and feet, so would they occur while considering borders? There were too many people in the world who couldn't think of this obvious idea.

And in this life too, Ejain was moving to protect Nelarn like in the previous life, no. Even faster and more nimbly than then. Though it was largely thanks to the close cooperative relationship with Emperor Keilusa and Kishiar in this life, even so, proceeding with work despite the concerns of his retainers wasn't an easy thing.

A gentle smile appeared on Kishiar's face.

"Indeed you are wise. As someone who has actually witnessed those strange cracks that appeared and disappeared immediately multiple times, and faced disasters, I tell you that Your Highness the Crown Prince's concerns are not excessive at all."

'So that is the case indeed.'

Ejain exhaled deeply as if finally having received confirmation.

'I feel confident that I must not neglect vigilance to avoid missing such occurrences in the future. I express gratitude for the advice. Additionally, I also feel determined to further accelerate preparations related to Neleriato.'

"Perhaps could we hear when the accession ceremony is planned for?"

'It's planned for after the moon waxes full three times.'

Kishiar was briefly lost in thought. He glanced at Melbon whose hands had now swelled to the palms, then opened his mouth.

"Then though it's still before the accession ceremony, it seems good to connect some people from here right away. They are all individuals who provided substantial help when establishing the Cavalry, so they can convey useful advice to those working for Neleriato."

After saying that, Kishiar turned to Yuder and smiled very briefly.

"...And at the accession ceremony, my aide and I will attend as imperial delegation to convey congratulations."

**Chapter 1234**

Beyond the light, Ejain's eyes grew larger.

'Would that be alright...? Of course if it could be so, it would be an immeasurable strength to me but...'

What meaning was implied in the faded end of his sentence could be sufficiently understood just from his expression. In a situation where abnormal cracks and disasters occurring continuously in the Orr Empire needed to be guarded against, he was likely wondering if it would really be alright for both main forces and decision makers to be absent simultaneously. Naturally it was a concern that if the Cavalry Commander and his aide attended the accession ceremony and changes arose in the empire, responsibility would become complicated.

Kishiar nodded calmly and refreshingly.

"It will be fine. I don't think I've raised the Cavalry so carelessly that problems would arise just because my aide and I are briefly absent. This opportunity will likely yield results."

'If you say so... I understand. I should tell them to prepare to welcome the highest state guests.'

Only then did a smile form on Ejain's face again. Though it was expected he would continue speaking after that, the young Crown Prince kept silence for a moment then suddenly made a nostalgic-looking expression.

'Hmm... I suddenly recalled the past. When we were trying to leave the vast Great Sarain Forest as quickly as possible, and I realized the assassins chasing me might go to my friend first.'

That was something that happened during the days when Yuder couldn't be with them.

When assassins chasing Crown Prince Ejain and tracking his route visited the Western Mage Union base the prince had already left.

Yuder, the only Cavalry member who remained at the base by Kishiar's order, easily knocked down and confined the assassins looking for the prince as soon as he encountered them, and Ejain was able to return to Nelarn without encountering them.

For Yuder it was an insignificant matter that was just that.

But it seemed not so for Ejain.

'As soon as I learned that fact, I insisted we should quickly send people to help. If necessary, I was even thinking of returning myself. However... Commander clearly said there was no need for that.'

Because.

'The one we left behind there is a being in whom we can definitely entrust our backs even when there's no way to do anything from here. So what we need to do is believe in him and move forward, not return for unnecessary reasons.... Yes. That's what you said. Do you remember?'

"Of course."

Kishiar answered in an unwavering voice.

"..."

Yuder turned his gaze and glanced at the face of the man saying so. He was just elegantly and calmly raising the corners of his lips slightly while directly looking at Ejain in the light.

A face no different than usual. Would he have had such a face then too as Ejain said?

Ejain muttered while looking at such a Kishiar's face as if envious, or like something shining.

'The Cavalry Commander then and now firmly believes in subordinates who will guard the rear more than anyone. Though it's not new, I feel respect for that fact.'

"That's excessive praise. It would have been words I couldn't refute even hearing resentment for being a heartless commander who escaped at the most difficult and important moment."

'No. To be honest, previously I couldn't completely understand that faith... no. More than faith, that bond and certainty. But now I know that such faith held by the Cavalry Commander is what I need most now.'

Ejain said that then laughed like a sigh.

'After returning to Nelarn, whenever I stood at difficult crossroads, I often recalled the words I heard then. I clearly felt how much power faith can exert. As a result, I now stand here.'

Confidence that hadn't been there before rose like light from Ejain's eyes that Kanna had called mysterious. He looked at Kishiar and Yuder then placed one hand on his chest and lightly bowed his head, showing royal courtesy toward distinguished guests.

'I will be looking forward to seeing you in Nelarn.'

"Since you say so, I sincerely look forward to it even more."

At that moment, the light illuminating Ejain shook greatly. Ejain who became blurred then flickered back let out an "hmm" sound and lowered his eyebrows.

'Since it seems Melbon's limit is approaching, I should conclude greetings here today. Actually I wanted to talk about a certain southern criminal caught here just yesterday to the Cavalry Commander and my friend... but let's postpone that until tomorrow.'

'Southern criminal?'

If caught just yesterday, it would be something even Melbon didn't know about. Though it seemed somewhat guessable, they promised to meet again next time and cut off communication. When the light disappeared, Melbon lowered his hands and collapsed sitting.

"Are you alright?"

"I'm fi... ne... Eh, ehhh...?"

Before Yuder could approach and support him, Kishiar used his ability first. Melbon's body instantly rose as if pushed from the ground, then gently settled onto the sofa. Though he was surprised, even that reaction was incomparably dull and slow compared to before.

"Thank you. Thanks to you, I was spared the effort."

"It's nothing."

Yuder approached Melbon's side and knelt on one knee. It was to examine him more closely. Melbon who didn't even flail and just stretched out and blankly closed his eyes as soon as he sat on the sofa looked exactly like someone who had fallen asleep drunk.

"Though he said he was fine, it seems we should examine him a bit."

"Have you seen abilities before where recoil comes immediately after using them like this?"

Kishiar asked lowering his voice.

Yuder nodded while grabbing Melbon's wrist to examine it.

"Yes. I have. But I hadn't seen it at a time as early as now."

"I see."

Shortly before Yuder's death. That is, around when he was 30 years old was a time when awakeners had explosively increased to the point where the saying that one out of every ten humans passing through the streets was an awakener didn't feel like a joke.

By then, many people experiencing side effects immediately after using abilities like this had emerged. Physical transformations like Melbon's were the most common among them, but the symptoms were so varied it was difficult even to classify them together.

Since it was such a time when awakeners had greatly increased it was overlooked, but if not, awakener hunts would have occurred in regions with high antipathy toward awakeners.

Yuder stroked the black scales covering up to Melbon's wrist with his fingertips. It was a cold and hard sensation, but nothing else was felt.

"Among the hair. It seems there are also some physical changes visible on the forehead."

Kishiar who was watching together said. As he said, when stroking and combing back Melbon's hair, some black scales were visible on the forehead and scalp parts that had been covered.

"Hmm... If it changes all the way to the face, it would be truly difficult to use the ability externally. While Melbon is here, we should try to find a way to slow down the ability's rebound speed as much as possible."

The best would be to greatly increase the time ability could be exerted through training.

When the body could endure one's power, recoil could be received that much less, making it verifiably optimal.

"You're going to train the envoy too?"

Kishiar burst into laughter.

"Yes. Since he'll be staying in the Cavalry anyway, wouldn't it be good for both of us?"

Within the Cavalry, no one would particularly care whether one went around with a face covered in black scales or not. This was a golden opportunity for Melbon.

"Still we'll need to get permission from the Crown Prince, so I should discuss it tomorrow."

"The Crown Prince will be very grateful and regretful."

Kishiar answered with confidence.

"Since he also wanted to seek ability development advice from you."

"...Ah. Come to think of it, he did say that."

It had been forgotten since he said so many things afterward.

'He seems to be doing well on his own now, would he really need my advice?'

Since Kishiar was also developing his ability well on his own, Yuder had never given him unnecessary advice. Considering the development Ejain had achieved in the previous life, even if Yuder added words, he might rather obtain bad results.

Though his condition had been completely examined, Melbon still hadn't come to his senses. After deciding to let him rest a bit more, Yuder brought up Ejain's last statement heard earlier.

"About the southern criminal His Highness the Crown Prince said he caught yesterday. What do you think?"

"Are you asking if I guess he's a radical figure of the same type as Aton or the Shuden Trading Company impersonators?"

Kishiar accurately read Yuder's inner thoughts.

"Yes."

"Though I can't assert it yet, that thought is probably right."

Kishiar muttered as if stating an obvious answer.

"Because they wouldn't have reached out only to Orr."

"Indeed that would be the case."

Radicals who had reached out here and there.

And moderates striving to stop them.

Yuder recalled then erased the faces of the Cat Whiskers Trading Company people who would have returned to the south by now. Melbon was just opening his eyes while letting out a low groan.

"Ah... Did I perhaps fall asleep...? Such rudeness... I apologize!"

"Not at all. Is your body alright?"

"Yes, yes! As I mentioned, it's not painful..."

Outside the window was red with sunset. By the time they returned to the Cavalry, the sun would have set.

That also meant it was soon time to meet Kanna again.

Kishiar smiled watching Melbon who was flustered putting on gloves.

"Well then. Shall we return now?"

Chapter 1235

Kishiar designated the room next to Yuder's as the lodging for Melbon. As many members had left their dormitories when branches were established in each region, that room was currently empty too. Though it might seem lacking in splendor for lodgings of an envoy sent by another country's crown prince, Melbon said it was actually good.

"Since one of my purposes in staying with the Cavalry is to tour the facilities. Moreover, this isn't really that different from where I live in Nelarn. The Cavalry members truly live in good places..."

Actually according to Yuder's future plans, it wouldn't end with just touring but he would directly roll and crawl here feeling everything with his whole body. However, Melbon, who didn't know that fact yet, just looked around with a bright face in wonder.

'Well. He'll find out tomorrow anyway.'

While guiding him to his room, Yuder decided to ask a few questions in advance.

"To what extent has your hand recovered now?"

"Ah... It seems about half has returned."

Looking at Melbon's hand who slightly removed his glove, indeed now up to the palm had properly recovered to a human hand.

'Quite fast.'

"Do you know that the ability rebound symptoms occur not just on your hands but also on your head?"

"Hmm. So you call this an ability rebound symptom?"

Melbon who was interested scratched his head with an embarrassed face immediately after.

"Actually since this is the first time I've tried to maintain it this long, I didn't know well. Head... come to think of it, I do think I felt my head itching at the end."

Of course the scales that had sprouted between his scalp had now recovered without a trace.

"Perhaps could I hear how you've trained your ability after awakening?"

"Since His Highness the Crown Prince said my ability shouldn't be revealed carelessly. Until now I've just ended with trying it once a day..."

"I see."

"It's not very pleasant to look at after all. I also think His Highness's words are right. But you were surprised as I said, right?"

Though he looked relatively calm, he seemed to know his ability wasn't the good kind to be seen externally. He appeared to think the current approach was best since it was an ability difficult to train openly, and he didn't know the method.

'I'll have to teach him well from tomorrow that it's not.'

The preliminary information was all obtained. All that remained was selecting the training menu to draw up for Melbon.

"If there's anything uncomfortable, please feel free to come next door and call me."

"Yes. Thank you. Haha! With the empire's hero in the next room, I couldn't feel more reassured. If the Crown Prince knew, how envious of me he would be..."

Yuder let Melbon's words flow in one ear and out the other as he closed the door. Far away, a group of Cavalry members gathered outside was visible through the open corridor window. Since rose-red hair was visible in the center, he could quickly grasp why so many people were there.

'Are those the followers of Nathan Zuckerman that Gakane mentioned?'

The place they were at was the training ground by the back gate. When Yuder slightly borrowed wind power to hear Gakane's remarks who was speaking enthusiastically, the window opened by itself and the sound carried by the wind echoed in his ears.

'So, when Sir Zuckerman arrives tomorrow, send the signal immediately. Don't forget that gathering at the designated place as quickly as possible is most important. For quick movement, first capture the ability activation timing well...!'

He was planning and reconfirming what to do as soon as Nathan Zuckerman appeared. The passion and tenacity to definitely congratulate him without fail even though the other was a sword master was truly like Gakane.

'No need to worry about failure.'

With that level of preparation, it seemed they could make it so no one in the capital would forget Nathan Zuckerman's new title.

Yuder watched their passion-filled appearances with satisfaction for a moment then moved his steps again.

What greeted him when he returned to his room with a relatively light heart was a letter that had arrived while he was away.

- Prompt confirmation requested!!

Written in an unnecessarily aristocratic handwriting, the name Kiolle da Diarca was clearly and vividly written without any fear.

The guy he was planning to visit soon had sent a letter first?

Yuder frowned and opened the letter.

- Many tremendous things have occurred. Want to talk in person. Since I can't go, you come here.

"..."

Though it was better than coming to the Cavalry without any appointment like before, writing his name clearly and sending a letter meant there was no sense of caution. It was so stupid there was nothing to say.

'He even used the imperial official correspondence bureau. During the time this letter came here, at least several people would have confirmed the names of the sender and receiver. Yet it arrived safely at my room which means...'

Most likely, Emperor Keilusa who was monitoring Kiolle had also approved this letter going to Yuder. That meant Kironne also already knew with high probability that Kiolle had sent a letter to the Cavalry.

The Cavalry and Kiolle who until now had appeared to have no connection at all.

It's impossible to guess what House Diarca would think.

'...No. Actually, if they think Kiolle has entrusted himself to the Emperor, they might view it as an extension of that.'

Such behavior of sending this right on the day the Crown Prince appeared in court had sufficient room to be interpreted as a political action.

Though Kiolle da Diarca would naturally not know that fact, would others also not?

\*\*\*

Early dawn while many were still asleep.

A tall man wearing Peletta Knight uniform was walking toward the Cavalry headquarters with the just-rising sunlight on his back.

His name was Nathan Zuckerman. He had just returned to the capital after leaving Peletta.

A return that would have been perfectly ordinary and quiet according to the original plan.

But today something was different.

'...'

Nathan Zuckerman unknowingly stopped his steps with the destination right ahead.

The Cavalry main gate, made large enough for three carriages to pass side by side under the ambitious intent of his lord that this place would become a location many people would come and go.

Something was attached and fluttering there.

The something that rustled like beaded curtains whenever the wind blew was, looking closely, small colorful flowers threaded on string. Above those flowers decorating the entire Cavalry gate like a curtain, gigantic writing on white cloth was boasting its magnificence.

Those words that entered the eye at a glance even if one didn't want to read were as follows:

- [Welcome] Sword Emperor of the North Wind Returns to Capital [Nathan Zuckerman]

A beautifully written style as if with full force about to fly away.

It was his lord's handwriting that Nathan Zuckerman knew very well.

While writing large letters is much more difficult than writing small ones, the writing on that cloth was as meticulous as if created by magic. Before the majestic appearance that seemed visible even from the gate entering the capital with a bit of exaggeration, Nathan Zuckerman maintained silence for a long time with an expressionless face. Only desolate breathing sounds quietly echoed in the silence.

"..."

It was just when Nathan Zuckerman who had finally detached his gaze was about to quietly turn his back.

"He's here!"

"Sir Zuckerman!"

As the door opened, boisterous voices echoed.

"We sincerely welcome the return of the Sword Emperor of the North Wind!"

"Wooah!"

Clearly according to the Cavalry's training schedule, over ten people who should still be in dreamland surged out and began shouting. Before Nathan Zuckerman could react in any way, they instantly surrounded him and clapped.

Beyond them, the red-haired handsome man Gakane Bolunwald who appeared last held out a beautifully tied bouquet with a shy smile.

"Sir Zuckerman... no, Sword Emperor of the North Wind!"

"..."

"I couldn't stay still hearing the news, and I'm truly happy to be able to congratulate you like this. This bouquet was made by gathering from all of us who owe much to Sir Zuckerman and have come to respect you. And congratulations once again!"

The members clapped and shouted once more. They surrounded Nathan Zuckerman and loudly expressed how surprised they were when they learned he was a sword master, and how deeply moved they were hearing of his activities from the north. It was quite a moving scene except for the fact that with over ten people each talking about what they wanted to say, it was impossible to grasp what was being said.

Nathan Zuckerman looked down at the flowers Gakane held out embarrassingly, then grasped them in his hand and raised his head to send his gaze far away. Beyond the gate where flowers and cloth were flying, the Commander's office at the top of the Cavalry seemed especially distant today...

Chapter 1236

"Since early dawn the Cavalry main gate area has been quite noisy, what happened?"

Yuder turned his head toward the person who said that. Thais Yulman with black shadows hanging from under his eyes to his cheeks was slowly pouring boiled tea into a cup. Since Alik, who would have naturally done that task for him, wasn't there, the old mage's actions looked very clumsy and sluggish.

Yuder opened his mouth while watching the cup that seemed about to slip from his hands at any moment.

"It was because Sir Zuckerman was returning from Peletta today. There were people who went to welcome him."

"You mean that Peletta knight who became a new sword master. The aide who was originally His Grace Duke Peletta's attendant."

"Yes."

"I also saw cloth with writing about Sword Emperor of the North Wind something, was that too?"

"It's a new nickname Sir Zuckerman received after his activities in the north this time."

The moment he said this, Yuder briefly felt a very rare emotion. A laugh derived from what could normally be called a pleasant emotion briefly spread in his chest then subsided.

The old mage, who hadn't noticed at all that Yuder felt such an emotion, muttered "I see" with a face steeped in fatigue.

"With two sword masters suddenly appearing, and the Emperor openly acknowledging them, the Pearl Tower was extremely noisy for a while. Well, it's not my business though."

It doesn't seem like something an elder of the Pearl Tower would say, but the one who said it was Thais Yulman. No one would be surprised that he said such a thing.

Since the cup trembling in the old mage's fingertips was about to finally slip and fall, Yuder calmly used wind power to support it.

"...Oops, thank you."

"Not at all."

"I've really missed being able to closely examine your ability since returning from the south. I'd like to see the change in your eye color in more detail too... But I have no leisure at all because of this cursed drug development. Tsk...!"

The old mage sighed deeply while looking at Yuder's eyes with a face full of regret and attachment. What could he do when he couldn't research even if he wanted to? Yuder calmly asked toward Thais who was regretful.

"Is the suppression drug development still going well?"

"So well it's troublesome!"

Deeper fatigue and irritation appeared on Thais's face.

"I agreed to cooperate first since the medicine I made for my disciple seemed like it would be a good money maker, but the work is increasingly becoming too much. What nonsense is it to tell me to develop a separate different type since the effects of the version I made initially are different from existing medicine and good!"

That was because of the early version prototype drug Alik had given when Pruelle manifested as an Omega. Since it didn't have the effect of suppressing scent but was phenomenally good at reducing pain, making that drug separately for those who had just manifested was decided, doubling Thais's workload.

The old mage seemed very distressed by the current situation where he had to devote himself to making medicine rather than research.

"Just discussing methods for mass production while improving the existing medicine feels like I'll die from overwork, and now I can't even divide the work since my disciple is being made to do other things...! Ah. At this rate I'll die from overwork due to my own genius."

Though it seemed like annoying self-praise, that old mage's skill at making medicine was certainly genius. The problem was that he didn't seem very interested since he viewed it just as an extension of plant research from his younger days.

'To think someone who could make such medicine disappeared without even being encountered in the previous life...'

Yuder silently took out two objects and placed them before Thais Yulman.

"What's this?"

"One is support funds for drug development sent by Commander, and one is a schedule."

"Huh?"

The old mage who blinked his eyes gently touched the objects Yuder had placed on the table. First, what came out of the deposit envelope sealed with Duke Peletta's crest was a check written in Kishiar's own handwriting.

The old mage's eyes trembled for a moment losing dignity as he scanned the check with an incredibly large number of zeroes attached. An amount large enough to surprise even him, an elder of a place like the Pearl Tower accustomed to adorning himself with luxurious clothes and accessories, was written there.

Uncharacteristically for the shameless Thais Yulman, he hesitated for a moment then carefully asked.

"...Could there have been some mistake? It seems too large an amount for support funds...?"

"No. He said that amount is correct."

Yuder answered indifferently.

"Since you have to continue immersing yourself in research alone without your disciple, he said that much support would be needed. I was told that the receipt method is written on the back, so you can do as you wish, Elder Yulman."

"Still, in cases where so much support funding is given, doesn't the sales revenue ratio usually decrease...?"

"No. He also clearly said that was separate. Since Peletta has now formally opened one through sales, part of the related contract money will also go to you separately soon, Elder Yulman."

Life finally returned to Thais Yulman's face who had been cautiously reading the atmosphere with a careful expression. Yuder continued speaking as if not noticing that face.

"Additionally, he plans to send people to help with your and Alik's research. Though they aren't mages, they are from Peletta and have helped Hellem before, so with their identity certain you should be able to devote yourself to research more comfortably."

"Hah, hahaha. Indeed the Cavalry Commander knows how to move people. Good. Since he recognizes my hard work like that, suddenly I feel a bit more like working hard making medicine!"

The old mage who had been growing weary of a life having to brew and drink tea alone without an obedient disciple suddenly felt better.

"Then let's see what this schedule is."

The schedule was literally someone's training schedule.

However, the date written was not today but tomorrow.

"There is a certain special awakener currently visiting the Cavalry. Though he possesses an uncommon ability, there are some problems whenever he uses his ability, so I plan to take charge of his training from tomorrow. If it's alright, I'd like you to visit with your disciple to observe his training and examine his ability."

Yuder briefly explained the identity of the schedule to the mage.

Naturally, the awakener in question was Melbon.

"Oh...!"

On the face of Thais, who had the greatest interest in Yuder's ability but was no less interested in other awakeners' special abilities, flaming joy arose.

Unlike boring drug development, this was what he truly wanted.

"Is that allowed?! This must be something the Cavalry Commander has permitted?"

"Yes. However, the condition is that you pretend not to know the awakener's status and identity."

"Keeping secrets is nothing. Haven't you seen how well I've kept my mouth shut all this time!"

That was true too. If not for the trust built from Thais Yulman's behavior shown so far, they wouldn't have thought of entrusting this task.

Yuder recalled the conversation he had with Kishiar before coming here.

'While going to Thais Yulman, it might be good to also ask if he's interested in observing Melbon's training later. What does my aide think?'

'...Do you think what he did for Alik might help Melbon too?'

'Though the process wasn't very kind, it's true that he found clues to solve heat symptoms that even we couldn't think of how to fix, and developed the ability of someone who became both a mage and an awakener.'

Melbon's ability is very rare and special. His rebound symptoms were also like that.

Since it wasn't necessary to see Crown Prince Ejain when training him, he judged it was worth trying to that extent.

'It seems fine if it's just observation within keeping the secret.'

'Yes. I'm curious whether the mage's perspective will be helpful this time too.'

Yuder ended his thoughts there then stood up before the old mage who couldn't contain his smile from joy.

"Then I'll go deliver the same news to Alik as well."

"Yes. Do that. That naughty fellow. Since returning from the south and getting his own research lab, he's so absorbed he doesn't come to see his master even once a day, go kick his butt a bit!"

Thais Yulman cheered Yuder on.

Yuder left the house where the old mage was staying with his send-off. Right behind that house, a bit separated from the Cavalry headquarters, a very small building had been newly built.

Though it looked like a warehouse from the outside, that was precisely the dedicated research lab given to Alik Pelgin after returning from the south.

'Though it's close enough to take just a few steps, they live without even seeing each other's faces. Mages are truly difficult to understand.'

Chapter 1237

When Yuder knocked on the door of Alik's research lab, the door soon opened. However, the one who poked their head through the opened door was not the lab owner Alik but someone else.

"...Yuder?"

"Hinn."

Hinn Eldore looked up at Yuder with round eyes. It was a face he hadn't even thought of meeting here.

'If Hinn is here...'

"Did you just say Yuder?"

Just as his gaze went inside the door crack, another identically looking face popped out from behind Hinn's back. Finn Eldore was also here.

'The Eldore siblings in Alik's research lab. A truly unexpected combination.'

"Why are you here?"

The Eldore siblings glanced at each other's faces.

"Umm. That is..."

"Yuder!"

Before hearing the answer, the real lab owner appeared in a hurry. Alik caught his breath while wiping sweat with a flushed face.

"Huff huff, I was in the middle of an experiment so I'm a bit late coming out. W-what brings you here...?"

"Partly to greet you after returning from vacation, and partly because I have something to convey. Are you in a very busy situation?"

"No, not at all. Let's talk inside. Haha."

Yuder first followed them inside. Unlike the front house where Thais Yulman stayed, Alik's research lab was neatly well-organized. Yuder's gaze, after scanning once around, turned toward the large and sturdy desk installed on a magic formation in the center of the lab.

Looking at various parts and materials pushed to one side as if just organized, it seemed the "experiment" he had been doing until just now had taken place there.

"Hinn and Finn are here because they're helping with my research."

Alik explained while hurriedly bringing tea and placing a cup before Yuder.

"As you know, after things ended in the south, these friends and I returned to the capital a bit earlier than others. Since there were few people in the unit, we ran into each other quite often... and then I happened to receive help and we became close."

The Eldore siblings were among the members who declined commendation for achievements during the Blue Wall of Despair and returned early to the capital. Many of those who had been disciplined for mistakes committed during Hosanna acted like the Eldore siblings, because they felt they didn't deserve praise.

Even after returning, the siblings remained quiet throughout. Far from their usual mischievous pranks, they didn't cause any trouble, making it difficult to even grasp whether they were in the unit or not.

As far as Yuder knew, he had heard they didn't return to their hometown even during reward leave, but now it seemed they hadn't just been cooped up in the training ground.

Yuder opened his mouth after watching the uncharacteristically quiet siblings.

"I see. What research exactly are you helping with?"

"Magic tool creation."

Alik scratched his head and answered honestly.

"To be precise, the magic tools usable even by awakeners that I made in the south... do you remember? I'm researching to try making them formally and more diversely."

Alik, who had become both a mage and an awakener, had succeeded in creating magic tools that could operate with awakener power rather than magic power. At first they were just prototype items he had secretly made, but their utility was confirmed when facing monsters and caught the eyes of Yuder and Kishiar.

This research lab given separately to Alik was the result.

"How did you come to meet each other?"

"Hmm... I hope Hinn and Finn helping me isn't something they shouldn't be doing...?"

Alik looked cautious. He seemed to want to know if Yuder was asking to scold them. Yuder glanced at the still silent siblings and shook his head.

"It would have been better to report first, but it's not something that shouldn't be done. If it had been dangerous human experimentation, that would be different."

"No, I'm not that kind of crazy mage!"

Alik jumped up and waved his hands.

"Though I understand you having such a misunderstanding since my master is a somewhat typical mage...! I'm not! Have you seen me as that kind of mage all this time?!"

Instead of answering, Yuder moved his gaze. The siblings whose eyes met his shook their heads exactly like Alik.

"He didn't do anything much. We just let Alik observe our movement ability sufficiently."

"Do you think powerless and weak Alik could force us to do anything?"

That would indeed be difficult. When Yuder acknowledged those words, Alik looked relieved yet sad.

"Powerless and weak... though it's true, it hurts a bit..."

"I understand the meaning. Now explain in more detail what you've been doing. In chronological order."

"Yes..."

Alik readily began the story.

"At first I was surprised that His Grace Duke Peletta valued that tool so highly. But now that I even got this research lab, I wanted to properly develop it once. What I took to the south was made just to confirm if the theory was actually possible, so it only had very simple functions..."

The tools Alik had used in the south were limited to just absorbing awakener power and shooting out a very small amount of invisible force. The durability was also terrible, to the extent that most broke after being used in combat.

Therefore, Alik set plans to make them more durable and able to output various abilities.

"Since I'd confirmed that awakener power could be used like magic power and output through tools, the next step was naturally to make them able to use abilities that actually exist. But things like my water creation ability are already sufficiently possible with magic tools mages use. So I wanted to set unusual and useful abilities that can't be done with magic... that don't exist in current magic tools as the goal of this research."

After returning to the capital, Alik kept wandering around inside the Cavalry pondering what ability to set as the research goal. Since most personnel had not yet returned from the south, the Cavalry headquarters was almost empty.

The ones who saved Alik, who had accidentally triggered a training trap and fallen deep into the ground while lost in thought, were none other than the Eldore siblings.

"With no people at the training ground, I thought I was dead since I had no way to get out alone, but Hinn and Finn saved me. The moment I saw them easily saving people with their movement ability, I thought 'this is it'!"

Humans have been striving for ways to move even a little faster for a long time. It's said there were mages with movement abilities in very ancient times, but that rare magic was so difficult that it became obsolete without finding proper disciples to learn it, so even the principles can't be known now.

The best the mages achieved was just creating experimental creatures, Misty Wind Horses, by mixing horses and monsters.

But awakeners are different. Among them, several with movement-related abilities had already emerged. Wasn't it truly a heaven-sent opportunity that two of those with such precious abilities were in the Cavalry?

Alik breathed heavily with excitement and revealed his thoughts to the Eldore siblings, asking for help. Until then, they had been in the same space but had never even exchanged greetings.

"Actually I thought they would naturally refuse, so I was just going to bring it up first... but the two accepted very readily."

Alik enthusiastically defended the Eldore siblings and praised them with spittle flying.

"Thanks to them, we've been steadily meeting and researching together since then. Though no notable results have emerged yet, thanks to these friends I'm also learning more about how awakeners exert their abilities. That's all for now! Really!"

Since it was none other than the Eldore siblings, it was an unbelievable story.

However, Yuder's intuition felt that story was the truth without an ounce of falsehood. He asked the siblings who had maintained silence while Alik was speaking.

"What were you thinking when you accepted?"

"..."

The siblings met each other's eyes. As they looked at each other seemingly not wanting to talk, the one who opened their mouth first among the siblings was Hinn.

"I... just thought this might help develop our ability as much as that man."

That man?

Before Yuder could ask more about those words, the siblings suddenly stood up.

"We'll go. If Commander says this kind of thing shouldn't be done, please let us know later!"

Since they went out in a hurry without giving time to speak to them, the small warehouse shook as the door slammed shut.

"..."

Yuder slowly turned his head back to look at Alik. It seemed Alik was also surprised by the siblings' unexpected behavior, as he had his mouth wide open.

"Alik. Do you have any idea who that man they mentioned is?"

"Uh... I also heard it for the first time just now so I don't know..."

"I see. I understand for now."

Chapter 1238

Actually it wasn't as if he had no clue at all about who that man the siblings mentioned might be.

Since it didn't seem likely there would be two individuals who could make such remarks related to movement ability.

'It's just that I didn't expect such words to come from those guys' mouths.'

Though he wanted to chase after the Eldore siblings, if they were determined to hide, even Yuder would find it quite troublesome to find them. Moreover, there were still things to say to Alik.

"Please receive this first."

"What is this now?"

"Research support funds sent by Commander."

"For me...? Just giving me a separate research lab was already sufficient support..."

Alik, who opened the envelope with a burdened yet happy face, confirmed the amount and froze like ice.

"...This, um... includes support funds for my master too... right?"

"I already gave those to Elder Yulman. That's all for you."

"My goodness...!"

Sweat began to seep from Alik's forehead. Yuder kindly opened his mouth toward the young mage who had started trembling.

"I believe you know it's not money being given just to show off. Commander thinks the awakener control devices and new magic tools you're making will become things absolutely needed in this world."

As well as Yuder Aile himself. But he hid that behind Kishiar's name.

"Soon he will also separately provide materials that will help with new research. Personnel to assist with the research will be sent additionally soon too, so if you need anything, request through them."

"I understand...!"

"And, though it seems you've already set movement ability as the target for awakener magic tool creation, I wanted to ask if you'd be interested in examining other unusual abilities too."

"Other abilities? Whose..."

"I can't tell you the details yet."

Yuder gave the same explanation he had given to Thais Yulman. When he said he would directly help train to strengthen an external noble visitor's special ability and alleviate ability rebound symptoms at the Cavalry, Alik immediately showed curiosity.

"Since Commander said the perspective of a mage looking at it could help that person, Elder Yulman will also be observing."

"Then of course I should go too!"

Alik clenched his fist.

"Good. Then I'll send another contact tonight. It will likely start around tomorrow, so please keep some time available."

"I'll make time even if there isn't any. Please definitely convey my thanks!"

Now all he had to say was said. When Yuder stood up, Alik stopped him.

"Just a moment, Yuder. Speaking of control devices reminded me, though I don't have anything to show you on the magic tool side yet... I actually made an improved control device as soon as I returned from the south. Since you're here, how about examining it before leaving?"

The amount of support funds certainly seemed to have greatly boosted the mage's motivation. Before Yuder could answer, Alik ran as if about to fly, took out a necklace-type control device from a drawer, and spread it to show it well by untying the string.

"Could you please extend your hand?"

Yuder silently extended his forearm as instructed. After Alik wrapped the necklace like a bracelet around his hand and attached the lock, suddenly with a small "whoom" sound the air trembled. Simultaneously, a pure white light barrier surrounded Yuder's body like a wall.

'This is...'

The hand he extended failed to pass through the light barrier and was blocked. When he pressed a bit harder, the barrier trembled as if about to break any moment.

"Aack, don't break it with force! Please, just very slightly use your ability, just your ability!"

Alik shouted. Yuder exhaled slightly and called forth wind power literally just a little bit. A single breeze swept through his hair, circled around his body, then hit the light barrier.

-Ping...

The wind failed to pass through the barrier.

"Great!"

Alik clenched his fist and rejoiced. Yuder observed the light barrier and opened his mouth.

"It's like a wall that isolates abilities. From activation conditions, it's different from existing control devices that focused on preventing power from coming out at all... perhaps did you get inspiration from Reneve's ability?"

"Haha. That's right. As expected, you can tell right away."

Alik let out an embarrassed laugh.

"I was inspired seeing her guarding the prison in the south. Existing control devices were designed like magic power control devices to prevent the power itself from circulating, but if I create a wall like this by applying the magic barrier formation method... it seemed possible to control the target more certainly with much less power. I thought this method might be better for prisoners who need to be confined, so I made it."

Reneve possesses nullification ability that prevents awakeners from exerting abilities within a specific area where her power reaches. Making a control device that exerts similarly to her ability was an unexpected idea, but if well-made, it certainly seemed useful.

"Is it much more difficult to make compared to existing control devices?"

"Not really. It's not a boast, but I have some proficiency with barrier formations. Hehe. Even my master acknowledged that there would be hardly anyone in the Pearl Tower who could match me in that one area."

Come to think of it, back when researching to create a medium for the red stone's power in the Cavalry basement, the one who personally laid several layers of complex barrier formations to confine power difficult for ordinary people to approach was also Alik.

'Well. Let's see how much it can withstand.'

Yuder called forth a stronger wind than before and radiated it in all directions.

"Ah, if you do that...!"

Crack crack. Crack.

The barrier that had endured for a few seconds finally couldn't withstand as Yuder applied increasingly stronger force, and it cracked and shattered into pieces before disappearing.

- Bang!

"Ahhh!"

Alik who got hit by the bursting wind screamed while covering his face, but neither he nor household items were harmed. That was because Yuder's wind soon lost strength and gently subsided according to its owner's intention.

"It's still quite weak."

"Of course! This was truly a prototype in the literal sense! Oh my, poor thing. Born only to die immediately."

Alik, who received the broken control device, stroked the string with a pained expression. Yuder thought while watching the mage with a round and docile-looking impression.

'My heart wants to formally affiliate him with the Cavalry, tie him down, and make him develop for life.'

The disciple was in some sense far more amazing than the master. Who would have thought such talent was hidden in that mage with no presence? It was regrettable that he hadn't known Alik Pelgin in the previous life.

'If I had known him then, I would have rescued him and stuck him in the Cavalry basement whether the Pearl Tower collapsed or not.'

Though he wouldn't know the thoughts hidden under an expressionless face, Alik suddenly trembled as if having felt something and looked around.

"Huh? Why do I feel so creepy..."

"If it's for prisoners in jail, a form that can be installed hidden would be better than this existing control device form. I'll suggest it to Commander, so please make about ten more and bring them."

Yuder casually changed the topic. Alik opened his eyes wide.

"What? As many as ten?"

"How many days do you think it will take?"

"Um... if I pause researching with Hinn and Finn and proceed, about a week...? Since I need to get materials too."

"Write that down now, please. I'll immediately have them procured and sent."

Alik looked dazed but was delighted like a child who had received great praise.

"If you do that, I'd be grateful..."

"If you make such things in the future, you can call me directly without needing to reveal it later."

"Haha. I will!"

Alik quickly wrote down the needed materials on paper and handed it to Yuder.

"There are also materials that can only be obtained from the Pearl Tower, but those can be easily obtained by contacting my friends who are currently in the capital. I received a letter that those guys would stay around here for a few days."

Mages dispatched to the capital from the Pearl Tower. He seemed to know their identity.

Yuder recalled the mages sitting with the Chief Court Mage when the Gate of Truth opened. Several among them were wearing pearl badges.

"...It wouldn't be common for the Pearl Tower to send many people to the capital, do you know what purpose they came for?"

"Hasn't Yuder already guessed? It's because of 'that trial' that's making the whole capital buzz these days, what else."

Unlike when happily talking about magic tool development, wrinkles slightly formed between Alik's brows.

"Originally they sent tons of cooperation request letters to my master, but my master just ignored them. So they sent other people. As far as I know, there was supposed to be a position announcement around today, has it already happened? Hmm. I'm not sure."

"..."

"Don't worry. Since coming to the Cavalry, my master and I have really cut off almost all contact with the outside as promised to the Cavalry Commander. Other mages with deep connections to high-ranking people seem to be in an uproar... but well, it's not our business!"

The young mage grinned.

"But if Yuder or the Cavalry Commander says it's necessary, I can extend good words to the dispatched guys (from the Pearl Tower), so just tell me. Many of the mages who came this time were deeply impressed by the presentations related to Yuder No. 1 and No. 2, so they'd be happy if contacted..."

"Rest."

Yuder left the research lab without listening to the end.

Chapter 1239

On the way back after completing the delivery of support funds to the two mages.

The Cavalry, bathed in morning sunlight, was noisy with a slightly different feel than usual.

"Good morning, Yuder! Did you hear the news? They say His Holiness the Pope came out to the prayer meeting at dawn today and said that regardless of status, sinners should rightfully receive punishment! They say it was referring to the Crown Prince who appeared in yesterday's trial and it's causing a huge commotion!"

"No, that's not even surprising. High-ranking people from the magical community visited the Court Mage Department and seriously expressed concern about the Crown Prince's mental state shown in the trial."

"Crazy. They say the two generals of the Imperial Army are planning to visit His Majesty the Emperor and formally request the Crown Prince's deposition?"

"I now understand why the Black Pigeon Agency is completely turned upside down. They say the Chancellor suddenly appeared and ordered a review of all five years' worth of Bright Palace documents!"

"Look at this. It's propaganda someone spread in the capital market at dawn. It says House Diarca abandoning the Crown Prince is real, and the owner of the Bright Palace is likely to change soon!"

"I was surprised earlier when I went out to see the welcome banner for the Sword Emperor of the North Wind's return and saw letters coming down stacked as tall as a person from the mail carriage entering the Cavalry! I heard they were all from nobles sent to Commander!"

The world was turning upside down as Emperor Keilusa had said.

Various sectors had begun gathering opinions as promised in accordance with Crown Prince Katchian's court appearance. Yuder swallowed his unexpressed satisfaction seeing the members who had now learned to read the political situation quite well, then passed by them heading toward the Commander's office.

In the air stirring with excitement, only the small cat lying on the central staircase railing was peaceful as usual. Cat Nipollen, who had been sunbathing on a new red cushion made by Ever, gently wrapped his tail around Yuder's wrist as he passed by.

"Yes, hello."

When Yuder returned the greeting, Nipollen meowed quietly then unwound his tail.

Yuder knocked on the Commander's office door with the same steps as usual. Unlike usual when he would wait a moment then open it himself, today someone opened the door from inside.

It was Nathan Zuckerman who had returned at dawn today.

"..."

"..."

Yuder directly met the gaze of Nathan Zuckerman who was looking at him with a face that seemed to have much to say. The knight was the first to withdraw his gaze as they faced each other as if in a staring contest. He opened his mouth with a quite dumbfounded yet strangely not angry expression.

"...It was a very impressive welcome. A first-time experience in my life."

"..."

"Next time, please give me some warning. I'd like to prepare mentally at least."

Yuder didn't answer that he would. Nathan also didn't seem to particularly expect an answer and politely guided him inside.

Kishiar, who was sitting on the sofa with literally mountains of letter boxes stacked in front, raised his hand smiling.

"Yuder. You came at just the right time. Nathan brought some snacks from Shusainer. Let's all eat together."

Looking around, indeed snacks seen at Peletta Castle were placed on a tray. Yuder sat down recalling the face of the chef who had been genuinely disappointed at the departure of the guest who had most deliciously eaten his cooking, on the day they left Peletta Castle.

Nathan Zuckerman soon returned with a teapot and sat in another seat.

When Yuder quietly put in his mouth a snack he had never thought he would eat in the capital, a familiar taste spread. Though it was just a single snack, eating it somehow made him feel like he had returned to that time spending vacation in Peletta.

"Actually he wanted to send only what you particularly liked, but was sad because you ate everything well so there wasn't such a thing. Instead he said he tried to send as many types as possible, can you feel his effort?"

Kishiar asked smiling. Yuder finally understood why there were as many as eight types of snacks piled before him.

"...It seems I should write a letter of thanks. Sir Zuckerman must have also had trouble bringing them."

"Not at all."

"What do you mean not at all? It's thanks to the Sword Emperor of the North Wind that we can eat all these many things intact. I'm also sincerely grateful."

"...Your Grace."

Nathan Zuckerman closed his eyes sighing. That expression somehow strongly reminded of Emperor Keilusa. Kishiar laughed loudly with a face full of mischief.

"I wondered what it was when ten letters came from the Imperial Knights, but five of them were from Theo wanting to duel with you. If you're willing to accept, tell me anytime."

It was truly like him to say so while knowing he wouldn't. Nathan Zuckerman sighed once more, then glanced at Yuder with some thought.

"I already know the Imperial Knight Commander's skill so I'm not interested. ...But I would be willing to duel with Baron Aile."

"Oh."

Kishiar put his hands together covering his mouth. His red eyes sparkled like a girl who had heard the most exciting words in the world.

"That's something I really want to see too."

Come to think of it, had he said they would do it when they had time after coming to the capital? It seemed Nathan Zuckerman's anticipation was much greater than Yuder had thought. Since he had already teased him well with the Sword Emperor of the North Wind, it was right to accept this promptly. Yuder quietly received the knight's gaze looking at him and gauged his physical condition.

If he took off his clothes, the dark red blood vessels that had spread after the south would be unsightly in various parts of his body, but it didn't matter since they weren't visible while dressed. Excluding external changes, he had long felt that the internal condition itself had now completely recovered.

It wasn't as if he would use lethal force while dueling, so it should be fine.

"Alright. Since I mentioned it before too, let's gradually set a date."

"This is wonderful."

Kishiar collapsed halfway onto the sofa with his face still covered. The corners of his eyes visible between his fingers were flushed red with joy.

"This is the most anticipated news of the day. I will definitely observe too, so wait until I set a good day and place. I should tell His Majesty and get permission."

Yuder and Nathan's gazes met. Yuder felt that he was experiencing similar feelings to himself.

"...Is all that really necessary?"

"I say this because there are two people speaking like that."

Kishiar answered firmly.

"If I left you two alone, you would surely find some uninhabited mountain-like place where no one knows, roughly do the job and return with reports like 'it's all over'."

What's strange about that?

But if Kishiar particularly wanted to watch the duel that way, there was no reason not to accommodate him. Yuder met Nathan Zuckerman's gaze once more then nodded.

"...I don't care about the place or time, do as Commander wishes."

"Good."

Kishiar was pleased.

After all the snacks had disappeared and Nathan Zuckerman had left, Yuder reported what he had done to Kishiar. Kishiar smiled upon hearing that Thais Yulman's complaints had subsided as soon as he saw the amount of support funds, and that Alik's new control device seemed very useful.

"Both are good news. I'll support Alik Pelgin as you wish, so do as you please. Since both said they would observe Melbon too, I look forward to the trends."

"Yes. Now we just need the Crown Prince's permission."

"I already called the Crown Prince's envoy earlier, so he'll be here soon."

Indeed a man of swift action. Yuder nodded while scanning around.

"Since we'll be using ability here, those stacked letter boxes should be removed now. Should we burn them?"

"Do you already know what those are?"

"I roughly heard from other members on the way."

The letter bomb nobles sent to Kishiar after yesterday's trial ended.

Even without reading, the contents were obvious. Diarca had abandoned the Crown Prince, the 'young Duke' Kironne who became great in Diarca had joined hands with the Emperor, and the Emperor awarded his younger brother with restored succession rights.

Everyone must have been desperate to know the inner thoughts of the man who was a sword master, the Cavalry Commander, and might now become the Imperial Crown Brother.

"It's probably nothing but useless nonsense. It would be better for those papers too to quickly be used as firewood."

"That's right."

Kishiar, who responded lightly, laughed quietly.

"I was already thinking of doing that, but I was worried because the amount was too much to put in the magic stone stove. Then shall I politely ask my aide?"

-Whoosh!

As soon as the words ended, a fireball appearing from thin air swallowed all the letter boxes at once. The fire, which began burning exactly only the paper and boxes without burning even a bit of the carpet laid on the floor or furniture, instantly turned everything to ash.

Kishiar's face, watching the flames as red as his own eyes, looked very unburdened. After everything disappeared, the man who turned his head kissed Yuder's cheek and whispered.

"Kind person. I give you a kiss of gratitude."

Chapter 1240

The one who could make even suddenly saying something like this feel not surprising but completely natural was Kishiar.

Yuder lightly rubbed his ticklish cheek and exhaled softly.

"...What is this suddenly?"

"Seeing you heroically and magnificently burn troublemakers at once was so impressive, I wanted to express gratitude with a line from a story I read yesterday."

Kishiar smiled like a flower.

"My aide must have read it too, don't you remember? It was one of the legends in the materials the pharmacist brought. About a knight who cut down the black darkness blocking the spring flower spirit with a sword of fire..."

A story hazily unfolded in Yuder's mind.

"...It was a knight legend presumed to be a sword master."

"That's right."

When the knight cut through the darkness with a sword of fire to open a gap and scorched it so it could never block the path again, the spring flower spirit thanked him and kissed the knight's cheek. That kiss held special power, and the knight became able to use the spirit's power too - it was that kind of story.

In the stories Enon had selected, there were quite a few such ancient knight legends with abilities quite different from current sword masters. Though they were referred to as knights and used swords, looking at their actions and abilities, they were diverse enough to be believed even if called mages or awakeners.

It was a story that had left just such an impression on Yuder, but Kishiar seemed to have seen a different aspect from it.

"As it's a story that most sweetly conveys the determination to give everything to the one who saved me... doesn't it fit the current me well?"

So, was he meaning that tremendous determination to give all of himself was contained in that kiss just now?

"...You don't need to give anything to me. I just burned a letter, that's all."

"Though I'd like to respect that intention too, unfortunately giving one's heart happens regardless of the other person's intention."

"What?"

While Yuder was dumbfounded, a knocking sound echoed from behind his back. Kishiar's smiling face instantly changed to a public smile.

"The Nelarn envoy has come."

Even for Yuder who was skilled at distinguishing presences, it was difficult to accurately identify who had come just from the sound of knocking at such a distance outside. However, Yuder didn't doubt Kishiar's words.

When he opened the door, indeed Melbon was standing there. After exchanging greetings, Kishiar asked Melbon if he had rested well last night. Melbon answered that he had spent a comfortable night thanks to Yuder who had guided him.

While they conversed, Yuder quietly checked Melbon's hands. No trace of black scales could be found on the clean skin.

'He's recovered well.'

"I felt it while washing and coming up too, but there's nothing uncomfortable about any element constituting the Cavalry. From basic living like washing, eating, and sleeping to uniforms and the interior of the building, everything was beautiful and comfortable. It's truly an honor to be able to see such a place with my own eyes."

Perhaps to make the atmosphere soft, the topic had already moved to Melbon's impressions of the Cavalry. Kishiar's eyes curved in a smile at the praise that seemed to have observed quite a lot in a short time.

"Hahaha. There's no one more grateful than a guest who appreciates the effort put in. Though it's not a boast, the view looking down from this Commander's office is also beautiful, so I'd like to recommend looking down once before leaving."

"I'll definitely do that."

"Then shall we contact the Crown Prince now?"

Melbon placed his hands together and called forth light. Though it was still early, Ejain received the contact quite quickly.

However, unlike yesterday, the one who appeared in the light was wearing protective gear and carrying a sword.

'Did something happen in the meantime?'

Ejain soon provided the answer to that question.

'I'm glad to see you again. Due to unexpected events occurring, I'm responding to your contact in this appearance.'

"What happened?"

At Kishiar's question, Ejain faintly frowned.

'You'll remember the southern criminal story I mentioned at the end yesterday. They all died at dawn today.'

At once the atmosphere sank coldly. Kishiar requested in a calm voice.

"...I'd like to hear more details."

'Of course. I was naturally planning to tell you.'

To save the limited contact time, Ejain quickly began explaining.

'The criminals who died were caught trying to instigate betrayal by seducing my subordinates. They were originally a trading company supporting the 3rd Prince's side, who was my enemy. I guessed they were directly targeting my surroundings since the 3rd Prince had completely fallen.'

When individuals appeared trying to seduce them, Ejain's subordinates pretended to comply with the temptation and then set a trap. Thus they caught several gang members two days ago.

'After capturing them, it was revealed they were all awakeners, but I couldn't quite guess why awakeners from the south would abandon trading work to so persistently target me. Then I remembered there had been a similar incident in the Orr Empire too.'

It was none other than the story of Duke Tain and Aton who deceived him.

Ejain had planned to ask Kishiar about that incident for reference yesterday, but due to insufficient time, he had postponed his intention.

'And this dawn. While being transferred from where they were originally confined to the royal prison for formal interrogation, those guys all caused explosions simultaneously.'

Ejain who briefly paused speaking sighed deeply.

'Unfortunately right after the explosion, before we could investigate in detail, monsters appeared nearby, so considerable time was spent evacuating nearby residents and handling it. It was only about an hour ago that we finally managed the situation and began formally investigating the explosion site.'

That was why Ejain responded to the contact without deactivating combat readiness, still wearing sword and protective gear.

'Given this situation, we still don't know exactly why those individuals could cause explosions, or what the conditions were before and after the explosion.'

"Your Highness the Crown Prince...! You weren't injured, were you!"

Melbon, who was sweating while using his ability, cried urgently. Only then did Ejain contain a softened smile and nod.

'I'm fine, Melbon. When those guys exploded, I was far away sleeping. Among those who were helping transfer the criminals, Ingelit was injured, but fortunately they say it won't affect his life. No need to worry.'

"Why would I worry about Ingelit? If he dies doing a task Your Highness entrusted, it should be considered happiness beyond compare! Anyway, it's really fortunate by God's grace that Your Highness is healthy, but at times like this I should have been by your side...!"

As Melbon's emotions intensified, the light illuminating Ejain flickered and shook as if influenced by it.

'At this... rate... the connection... will be cut.'

"No! I'll close my mouth again and concentrate!"

Melbon who was startled closed his eyes tightly and began exerting effort for his ability again. Thanks to his efforts, Ejain's image became much clearer than before, though not as clear as initially.

Yuder glanced at Melbon whose entire fingers had already turned black, then turned his gaze toward Kishiar. His eyes met the red eyes lost in thought.

"..."

Through those eyes, Yuder could tell Kishiar was thinking the same thoughts as himself.

The south. Trading company. Self-destruction. To the monsters occurring immediately after.

This series of events was too similar to a certain incident they had experienced in the south.

Kishiar opened his mouth toward Ejain beyond the light.

"When I was in the south, part of an awakener group within the empire came to attack the Cavalry. They were followers of a brainwashing ability user with wrong thoughts, and Your Highness the Crown Prince has seen some of them before."

'Could it be... those from the village in the Great Forest who saved my subordinates?'

Ejain perceptively questioned back. Kishiar nodded.

"That's right. They were the same group, but a much more radical faction. Though the individuals themselves could be suppressed quickly, the problem was those who had crept in between and instigated fighting. Those individuals were members of a southern trading company, were awakeners, and were subordinates of the person related to the Duke Tain incident Your Highness wanted to hear about."

'Such...'

Kishiar informed with a face devoid of laughter that it wasn't the end there.

"When the Cavalry's victory became certain, those individuals self-destructed using a medium while captured. Right after that, several monsters appeared there. That area was a safety zone where monsters had never appeared before."

Ejain's eyes soaked in light opened wide. Toward him who was too surprised to continue speaking, Kishiar contained a faint smile.

"Surprisingly... it's very similar to the incident happening to Your Highness the Crown Prince now."

Fortunately, Ejain wasn't someone who forgot what was important immediately just because he was surprised. The Crown Prince who quickly calmed his emotions asked with a cool face.

'The Cavalry must have already resolved that matter. Does the Cavalry Commander know something about their identity and purpose? If there's information, I ask that you please tell me.'

"I know to some extent, though not everything. I would like to tell you what I know right away, but before that, today's contact time seems about to end. Since you've already stopped the monsters that appeared, I'll say there probably won't be more immediate issues, so you can calm your heart somewhat."

'If that's the case, it's truly fortunate but...'

Kishiar promised to immediately send related information to Melbon's side as soon as the contact ended, and to also inform at tomorrow's continued contact. While Ejain was expressing sincere gratitude, Yuder who had been keeping his mouth shut and watching the situation until now interrupted.

"Your Highness. Please first investigate whether abnormal cracks appeared in the area where the monsters emerged."

Ejain's gaze looking at Yuder was imbued with welcome and caution.

'Abnormal cracks?'

"Yes. Those cracks you said were also discovered in Nelarn. Investigate whether there were witnesses before and after the explosion accident, and afterward also thoroughly examine mainly the areas around where Your Highness is staying. If those cracks appear again, you must always keep in mind the possibility that monsters could emerge anytime like today regardless of whether it's a safety zone."

'I will follow my friend's advice.'

Ejain listened to Yuder's advice without question.

"And though this isn't related to today's incident, there's one more point I'd like to request."

'What is it?'

Though an urgent matter had arisen on the other side, even so, Yuder absolutely had to make this request to Ejain today.

"Please allow me to train with this person."

Chapter 1241

The one referred to as 'this person' was naturally Melbon.

"What? Me...?"

Melbon asked dazedly even while sweating profusely from using his ability. Ejain also seemed equally surprised.

'Train with... Melbon?'

"Yes."

Yuder unhesitatingly continued speaking as he had thought in advance yesterday, yet clearly conveying his intention.

"Melbon's power possesses a special quality difficult to see before and likely in the future as well. However, it's still difficult to use freely, and the discomfort due to rebound symptoms is also considerable. Since he’d come to the Cavalry, I'd like to help him resolve those difficulties."

'Would that be possible through training alone?'

"Of course we won't proceed with just ordinary training. I plan to understand the ability while doing training I've devised together, and have mages within the Cavalry who have made secrecy declarations observe to receive magical advice too. Those mages are already in close relationship with the Cavalry, and one of them is simultaneously a mage and an awakener."

'A mage and simultaneously an awakener? It's surprising there's such a person.'

"That too is an uncommon case, so there were many difficulties. However, now they have resolved many of their difficulties through research and training based on magical knowledge, and other methods."

'If seen through the eyes of such people, Melbon's difficulties might be resolved in a different way too.'

Indeed it was Ejain. Even without being told, he immediately understood what this side expected and why they wanted to have mages observe.

"Yes. As you say, that's what we're hoping for. If Your Highness the Crown Prince permits, we will proceed as safely as possible without harming Melbon's health."

The main purpose had all been stated. However, since just saying good things for their side could make intentions suspicious, he also needed to talk about what Yuder and the Cavalry expected from this training.

"If we succeed in resolving Melbon's difficulties, it will greatly help awakeners in the future who experience similar or more difficult rebound symptoms than Melbon. In fact, I won't deny that personally I most want to gain experience in this area."

'...'

"Please grant permission so that the Cavalry and Neleriato, which will grow further, can move forward together."

Yuder bowed his head with sincerity.

Looking long-term, the realization of this training would benefit both countries. Neleriato could achieve rapid stability for their organization as Melbon personally learned the knowledge and systems the Cavalry had built up first, and the Cavalry could gain knowledge about special abilities while easily obtaining cooperation with those who were likely to become a powerful group as much as the Cavalry in the future.

Such cooperation was something that couldn't be achieved in the previous life. The awakeners then couldn't unite under the same identity beyond national affiliation like mages.

But it might be possible now.

Unlike before when he didn't think about the future, the current Yuder could think about awakeners further in the future. Melbon's training was the first step.

'...'

Ejain's face reflected in the light seemed deeply lost in thought. Perhaps due to Melbon's emotional changes growing larger, his image kept repeatedly flickering hazily, making it difficult to grasp the emotions contained within.

After some time passed, Ejain finally opened his mouth.

'Melbon.'

"...Yes?"

'What do you think?'

"Even if you ask me... I have nothing to say except that I will do as Your Highness commands..."

'Is that so? I heard the Cavalry hero's training method is so arduous and difficult that no one would dare follow it exactly. Are you confident you can keep up?'

Melbon's expression changed. What filled the place where his usual talkative and silly-looking face disappeared was calm sincerity.

"Since it's an opportunity to help Your Highness and Nelarn, what is there to fear about my body being hardened? Even if Baron Aile said he would half kill me, I could endure anything if I could only improve from now."

'Did you hear? That's his answer.'

Ejain smiled refreshingly toward Yuder.

'I accept the proposal. Since he says he can endure anything, please take good care of him just short of killing him. Roll him around as you wish.'

"Your Highness the Crown Prince! Though I said I could endure anything, requesting it first like that seems a slightly different matter...!"

Ejain ignored his subordinate's desperate cry.

'I hope you'll freely tell me if there are any matters related to training that I should cooperate with. I'll follow as much as possible.'

"Yes. If such matters arise, I will tell you. Thank you for granting permission."

'I'm the one who should be grateful. Here we couldn't know anything about how to handle abilities like Melbon's. I get help in such areas because I have a good friend.'

By this point, he couldn't help but feel that Ejain's infinite goodwill and friend treatment weren't just from a simple heart.

'I thought he would just temporarily call me friend and stop since he had no one to open his heart to... Could he possibly intend to keep that title even after ascending to the throne?'

What should he do if Ejain still called him that way even when he went to the accession ceremony? While worrying as images of shocked visitors from other countries already began forming in his head, Kishiar gently interjected.

"Since you've entrusted a loyal person with trust, I promise that the Cavalry will do its best to ensure this training is successfully completed."

'Yes. The promise given by the Cavalry Commander makes me feel even more reassured.'

Ejain gazed at them with a face showing neither distrust nor doubt. In his eyes looking at Yuder standing beside Kishiar, along with warm warmth, a strange regret was slightly laid.

'I know it's not something to say in this situation, but I'm a bit envious of Melbon. How nice it would have been if I too could receive special training directly made by the hero...'

Pik. With a small sound, the light containing Ejain went out. Simultaneously, Melbon collapsed as if reaching his limit.

Just as Yuder was about to catch Melbon, Kishiar who had gently pushed his body to the sofa using his ability smiled with lowered eyebrows.

"Hmm. Today we couldn't even properly say goodbye."

"It can't be helped. From now on, we just need to train him so he can say goodbye and end."

Collapsed Melbon shivered as if feeling a chill.

"It's fortunate that the Crown Prince readily granted permission, and now we can move according to plan."

"My aide looks happiest when planning training."

Kishiar whispered with a face looking even more pleased.

"Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if I hadn't assigned you as the Cavalry training director. Perhaps you might have run away from the Cavalry dissatisfied with the training planned by the Commander."

"You imagine strange things."

In the previous life and early in this life, Kishiar personally created all the Cavalry training plans. Though not as systematic as Yuder's training that had been completed after nearly 10 years of revisions, it was efficient befitting someone who had raised the Peletta Knights.

The current training method was completed based on that, so why would Yuder disparage his training? Moreover, even though Yuder was now almost entirely planning training alone, it wasn't as if Kishiar did absolutely nothing. The opinions he occasionally presented like striking blind spots always greatly helped even the current Yuder. To be honest, Yuder found such moments quite pleasing.

"It was also Commander who suggested having mages observe this time. Without those words, I wouldn't have even thought of involving them. If you want to add opinions to the training plan, please tell me anytime and I'll welcome it."

"Hmm. I'd like to say I'm not the kind of person who interferes with my aide's few pleasures out of my own greed, but."

The man who examined Yuder's face smiled with curved eyes.

"...Yes. If I think of something else that would please you, I'll tell you. That is also my pleasure after all."

Though I'm not sure if Nelarn's envoy will enjoy it too.

From the eyes saying that, Yuder realized he too was faintly smiling. It was a smile arising from pure joy.

"Ugh..."

If Melbon hadn't groaned clutching his head just then, they might have remained watching each other for a long time with gazes fixed.

"Melbon. Are you alright?"

"Urgh... I apologize. I must have briefly fainted again... I'm so ashamed..."

While managing the embarrassed Melbon, Kishiar slightly winked one eye in a way only Yuder could see. Yuder also nodded with softly relaxed eyes at the implicit unspoken sign that the conversation they just had should remain known only to the two of them.

Chapter 1242

Kiolle was sitting in his lodging's lobby cafe with a hat covering his face. His lodging arranged by the Emperor's side was a hotel in the 5th District, also a place mainly used by provincial officials or rural nobles of intermediate positions when visiting the capital.

Given its characteristics, with virtually no long-term residents and moderately luxurious facilities, it could be called a truly suitable place for hiding one's identity and collecting surrounding rumors, but Kiolle wasn't perceptive enough to realize that fact. Until now, for him this lodging was merely a place smaller and shabbier than his room even combining an entire floor.

He trembled his legs, fearing someone might recognize his face.

'The letter sent to the Cavalry... it should have arrived by now? It must have.'

He had sent a letter to Yuder Aile the day before yesterday. It certainly wasn't because he was afraid of being kicked in the butt again if he visited directly. Really.

In the past few days, too many things had happened to Kiolle da Diarca.

Through an invitation the Emperor quietly sent to his lodging, he observed the Gate of Truth and the Crown Prince's attendant's trial, and saw the face of his eldest brother who had tried to kill him. When his brother saw him but ignored him pretending not to see, it wasn't that surprising, but seeing him abandoning the raging Crown Prince indifferently was shocking. When the Emperor called his eldest brother 'Young Duke', he received an even greater shock there.

Just what exactly was going on? As he sat frozen with shock, nobles who recognized Kiolle swarmed over clamoring about where he had been all this time.

'Lord Diarca. Could it be that you really... have turned your back on the family... on His Grace the Duke? That's not true, right? It must be the Duke's will?'

'Why did Young Duke Kironne act like that? Could it be that you and the Young Duke have sincerely agreed to follow His Majesty the Emperor?'

'Please tell us about the Duke's current condition!'

'Where exactly does Diarca's will lie!'

He wanted to ask back how would I know that? Since almost dying due to assassins sent by his brother, he hadn't been able to go anywhere near the main house. He hadn't properly heard anything about the family's will or father's will or anything. Kiolle didn't even know whether his father was awake or not now.

What saved Kiolle who was about to scream was, surprisingly, the Apeto 3rd son Revlin. Though he was the family's heretic who left the family and formally became a Cavalry member, still he was currently the only healthy direct descendant of Apeto. Just from being stared at by the boy who was pretty like a porcelain doll, nobles whose names Kiolle couldn't even remember retreated like an ebbing tide in an instant.

Kiolle also tried to avoid him, but unexpectedly the boy spoke first.

'Diarca's first son resembles my eldest brother quite a lot.'

'What?'

'Don't voice out. I'm speaking through my ability.'

While conveying just his voice without opening his lips, the boy smiled.

'Your brother and my brother. They're exactly the same in their willingness to do anything for position. Watching them made me think a lot. Those who don't know might think he bowed his head to His Majesty the Emperor today... but well. You and I would know best that's not the case, right?'

What do I know? While Kiolle was blankly thinking, Revlin shrugged with a cool face.

'I'm thinking of going to the main house now, and I'm curious which path you'll choose. The situations surrounding us are coincidentally very similar right now, aren't they?'

'...'

'Hmm. You won't give even a hint despite me saying this. Alright. As brother Elle said, I'll find out by watching.'

So what's similar, and who is this brother Elle or whatever? Before he could ask, the boy turned around sharply.

Only after a long while did Kiolle understand at least partially what Revlin had been trying to say.

So... it meant Kironne brother's acting like a docile cat to the Emperor today wasn't sincere. The reason he was so confident was because Revlin and Kiolle's situations were very similar, and that similarity...

'-Young Master. I'm glad you're safe. The main house situation is dire now. The Duke hasn't awakened yet, and though the head butler and those following the Duke are trying somehow to send the 1st son out of the main house again, they say the situation is difficult. The main house butler and his close associates believe it as an established fact that the 1st son sent assassins to harm the Duke. Support requests have secretly been sent to the private soldier management office through them, so it's certain.'

There was someone who greatly helped when investigating whether it was true that Kironne had sent people to kill Kiolle. He was a private soldier of House Diarca and also someone Kiolle had encountered in the private soldier management office prison he had visited right before being attacked.

Having been imprisoned for protesting against unfair treatment toward awakener private soldiers, and freed thanks to Kiolle, he came forward at once to cooperate with the investigation when Kiolle contacted him after becoming a nominal 'investigator of attempted assassination of the Empress' by the Emperor's order.

If it weren't for him, Kiolle couldn't have confirmed so easily what his brother had done to him.

But, what? Following sending assassins to him, his brother also sent those who harmed his father?

Everyone thought so, but just because there was no evidence, and because his father couldn't come to his senses, they were just watching for now?

If one had a brain, anyone would have thought the person who harmed the Duke was Kironne, but as Kiolle didn't, he received a shock large enough to stagger. Only then did he understand what Revlin had meant.

Duke Apeto suddenly began secluding himself after falling seriously ill following the Crown Prince assassination attempt incident. People who initially thought he had shamefully withdrawn his body to avoid responsibility eventually realized something seeing the Duke who didn't appear even after months passed, and the 1st son Aishes who began to step forward as if he had already received the title.

The Duke hadn't stepped down from his title. Taking advantage of the gap where everyone thought he would do so, he had been backstabbed by someone and disappeared. And the identity of that someone could only be that 1st son who was acting like the Duke instead of the Duke. The Apeto dukedom's history tangled with blood proved it.

Though House Apeto had produced many high priests and popes, it had also given birth to many individuals with strong violence and greed. Their greed was so strong that there was almost no history of peacefully passing down titles even between parents and children. Even someone as uninterested in surroundings as Kiolle remembered that much.

After Duke Apeto disappeared, Duke Diarca had once said so at a dinner occasion.

'By now he's probably barely breathing in some corner. Actually I wouldn't be surprised if I heard he had already become animal food. Even that would be fitting for that barbaric family. Though they boast of being the most devout family, in reality they're just beasts worse than beasts.'

Everyone acted as if nothing was wrong even while thinking Duke Apeto was already dead or in a state worse than death. As if that was natural.

And Revlin knew that fact too.

Not just knew? Hadn't he even asserted that his situation and Kiolle's situation were the same?

Did his saying he was going to the main house mean... he was now leaving the Cavalry to fight 1st son Aishes?

He didn't know. His head was spinning.

There was only one question arising.

'Why in the world?'

Why on earth would Kironne want to kill Kiolle, and Duke Diarca? For what?

Everyone thought Kironne would succeed Duke Diarca. Kiolle thought so too. The Crown Prince was smart, Kironne's position was firm, and his father was healthy. Kiolle just had to swing his sword without caring about anything within that. But why on earth.

Kiolle clutched his head with the private soldier's letter in front of him. What arose in his blankly sitting mind was someone's voice.

'There's nothing for Kironne da Diarca to gain by killing you... Do you really think so?'

It was Yuder Aile's voice, so cold it could almost burn.

'Sometimes the result becomes the most certain evidence. If he tried to kill you, it means there was definitely a benefit that could only be gained if you died.'

Yes. That person had also said.

‘If I were you, I would first find out what your brother was trying to gain by killing you.’

But even coming to this situation, there was still... no part that could be guessed as the reason. Not at all.

While groaning with an aching head, a sharp question arose like a light being turned on in Yuder Aile's voice.

Then at least ask.

'To whom?'

Kiolle looked at the private soldier's letter he was holding again. According to the written words, the one fighting at the forefront against Kironne seemed to be the head butler known as his father's oldest loyal servant.

And Kiolle knew very well what kind of daily routine the head butler followed.

He visits Karl Lorwick Street in the 4th District almost daily to purchase special incense for Duke Diarca. It was a very close place just one district away from Kiolle’s lodging.

Chapter 1243

Let's go check just in case.

With that thought, Kiolle—who had been heading to the 4th District while calming his rapidly beating heart—spotted a discreet House Diarca carriage that had just stopped in front of an incense shop. Even with the family crest covered, how could he not recognize his own family’s property?

Kiolle stood in an alley near the carriage, hiding his body and waiting. Then he revealed himself before the person coming out carrying a package of goods.

'Who are you...!'

'Don't be surprised, butler! It's me! Me! Don't attack!'

'Young Master Kiolle...? How did you know I would be here...'

'You bought things for father here almost every day. Since I couldn't access news from the main house, I had to come here at least!'

Sincere surprise settled on the face of the butler who normally didn't show emotions.

'You... remembered that?'

He stared at Kiolle with a renewed face as if seeing him for the first time, then quietly opened the carriage door.

'Alright. For now, please come in.'

The carriage started. The butler sighed after instructing the carriage to go at the slowest possible speed, taking a detour.

'I only tried to listen to my eldest brother's request, but I really don't know why things turned out like this.'

'You don't need to speak so humbly. Thanks to you revealing the problems of the private soldier management office that the 1st son was secretly controlling and wielding, we were able to identify the rotten parts within the family. Though the Emperor's side stuck annoyingly, His Grace the Duke was privately so satisfied with gaining more, you wouldn't believe it.'

...Huh? What is he saying?

Kiolle was a bit bewildered, but the butler didn't see the youngest young master's expression as he was rubbing his forehead with a troubled face.

'If it weren't for this incident, how would we have known that the 1st son harbored such fearsome ambition? Looking back now, we should have sent him not to the villa in Marul but further away, out of the country entirely. Though we clearly monitored to ensure he couldn't communicate outside, how on earth did he hire assassins...!'

So, even in the butler's view, the culprit who harmed his father was indeed his eldest brother. Kiolle's face darkened.

'...Yes. What happened to the rest of the assassins who were caught after trying to harm father then?'

'After the 1st son came into the main residence as he pleased saying he would conduct an investigation, we couldn't see those individuals directly. By now they would have all been disposed of.'

'...Even though father told me not to enter the main residence, I should have spoken to him first in some way like this.'

Kiolle had merely lamented that he should have told his circumstances earlier, but the butler understood differently.

'The youngest young master is indeed...'

Indeed, Kiolle had been pretending to be uninterested in power and family situations while already grasping the disloyal movements within Diarca in advance. Just the fact that he had appeared at the relevant location in advance knowing everything on the day the Duke was stabbed was evidence enough. How much the servants present there had gossiped about how the Duke would have died without time to act if Kiolle hadn't appeared then.

Without a single subordinate attached to his side, how he knew all that information and moved alone, his information gathering and acting abilities were truly frighteningly impressive. Come to think of it, even the fact that Kiolle was currently appointed as an investigator by the Emperor and away from the family might actually have the effect of protecting his body. The 1st son who had joined hands with the Emperor to trample Duke Diarca might be grinding his teeth at Kiolle but couldn't reveal his fangs.

The butler felt a renewed deep shock at the sight of someone who sincerely cared for Duke Diarca even in this situation, and moved mysteriously while flawlessly grasping even the butler's daily routine.

Kiolle da Diarca. When did Diarca's famous immature brat grow up like this?

Perhaps the careless young master he had known never existed from the beginning?

'Indeed what? Why do you stop mid-sentence?'

Kiolle looked with a furrowed face at the butler who had stopped mid-sentence and fallen into thought. The butler shook his head and contained a smile.

'It's nothing. I was just thinking that if the Duke had seen the young master now, the Young Duke title would never have gone to the 1st son.'

Even Kiolle knew this was an excessively dangerous statement. What nonsense is this old man suddenly spouting? Kiolle looked around unnecessarily and shouted in a lowered voice.

'You're saying words that would startle anyone who heard. I have no interest in titles or being Young Duke! All I want to know is whether father can safely wake up, and what my eldest brother would gain by eliminating me!'

'Yes. Now I won't doubt those words.'

'...?'

'The Duke was so displeased about the 1st son trying to harm Young Master Kiolle. We were all preparing for you to escape from the Emperor's grip if you just waited a bit... I had been worried as things went awry, but now I see it was truly unnecessary concern.'

The butler subtly curved his eyes as if understanding Kiolle's heart completely. It was a moment when Duke Diarca's long-time loyal servant decided which line to hold in this chaotic crisis instead of his master, but Kiolle failed to realize that fact.

'The 1st son's attempt to strike at Lord Kiolle first was truly a foolish choice. He seems to have made an arrogant and easy choice with his heart urgent due to Lord Kiolle's advance, but if he was going to do that, he should have ascertained more certainly that you were no longer the old Kiolle and prepared meticulously. Since he couldn't, isn't he receiving a counterattack like this?'

Me? Advance? What?

While Kiolle slowly blinked his eyes not knowing why the form of address had suddenly changed to be respectful, the butler continued speaking with a sharp smile.

'The awakener private soldiers from the management office, who possess the most practically useful power, had just replied that they would no longer obey the 1st son's orders because they would follow Lord Kiolle. Since the 1st son cannot grasp Diarca's military power now, he's struggling, so we can likely buy more time for a while.'

'Is... that so?'

'Yes. And though it's a secret externally, actually the Duke... opened his eyes the day before yesterday.'

'What? Is that true?!'

'Yes. However, his injuries are still too severe, so he can barely be awake for any time. The incense I went to buy today was also special magic incense to help recovery in a sleeping state.'

If the magic incense wasn't burned even for a moment, the elderly Duke Diarca's body couldn't endure, he said. The butler explained they were cutting off information as much as possible to avoid assassination risks, but it was difficult.

'But it's fine now. I'll smuggle you into the main residence, so please talk with the Duke for a moment.'

'Will it be possible without being discovered?'

'Of course. Who do you think I am?'

When Kiolle nodded, the carriage began to move at a faster speed unlike before. Where they stopped was a small door among numerous entrances to the Diarca main residence, mainly used by servants. The butler unhesitatingly opened the door then handed Kiolle over to a maid waiting inside.

'Guide Lord Kiolle to the Duke's bedroom. I'll soon go through another entrance too.'

Kiolle entered the Duke's bedroom following a secret passage he didn't even know existed until now. Inside was filled with the bitter scent flowing from the smoke of burning magic incense, and it felt as if the heavy weight of death had been draped like a curtain.

When he turned his head hearing voices like someone shouting and banging noises somewhere outside, the old maid lowered her voice and informed him that 'nobles following the Duke and nobles following the 1st son are fighting like that every day.'

To think the House Diarca, which had been quiet and peaceful under the Duke, had become such a turbulent and gloomy battlefield.

Kiolle approached the bed where the Duke was lying, staggering. The old man lying on the large bed had become unrecognizably emaciated in the meantime, to the extent that even the blanket looked like a stone pressing down on him.

A strong smell of medicine emanated from the bandages wrapped all over his shoulders and chest.

Kiolle couldn't take his eyes off the unfamiliar appearance of his father who had been the most frightening person in the world. For the first time in his life, he looked not like a giant beast laughing while manipulating the world, but just an old and tired man.

How could a person change so much in an instant?

While blankly looking down, the butler who had entered the bedroom through another entrance brought a handkerchief soaked in a medicine with a nasty smell close to the Duke's nose.

'It's a scent that makes one come to their senses. Please wait a moment.'

As he said, the Duke opened his eyes not long after. The Duke who blankly looked at Kiolle seemed not to recognize his son.

'...Who.'

'It's me, father. Kiolle!'

'Ki...olle?'

After the butler respectfully supported the Duke to raise his upper body slightly to lean on the pillow, he whispered something in his ear to explain the situation.

Only then did the Duke recognize Kiolle.

'Yes, Kiolle... I remember now. You, came to save me.'

That's a misunderstanding. But Kiolle didn't interrupt the Duke's words. The Duke who coughed with difficulty stared at Kiolle with hollow eyes then grabbed his hand.

'...If it weren't for you, I would have died.'

'No, that's not...'

'There was a time when I truly doubted whether you were indeed a fellow who inherited my blood... Diarca's blood. But seeing you now... it was all unnecessary worry. Cough, cough!'

'You shouldn't force yourself to speak, Your Grace the Duke.'

The Duke irritably waved his hand at the concerned butler. When the butler stepped back, the Duke firmly grasped Kiolle's hand and pulled him close. After pulling him close enough that only Kiolle could hear, the old man opened his mouth while breathing heavily with the smell of bitter medicine.

'Now I will trust you. Kironne, that presumptuous fellow, do not leave him be. On my behalf, cut his, neck!'

Kiolle couldn't bear to face his father's gaze who unhesitatingly told him to kill his child.

'I will pass to you a few things needed for that. They will be things no one would think you have, so they will be, useful.'

Chapter 1244

Duke Diarca put his hand into the pillow and took something out. What he gave to Kiolle, hidden in his palm so it couldn't be seen, was a snuffbox smaller than a palm. There was a slight rattling sound as if something was inside.

'Father. I... such things...'

'Are you going to say you can't do it?'

The piercing eyes were frightening. Kiolle trembled his lips and barely squeezed out words like an excuse.

'I am now, His Majesty the Emperor's...'

'If it's bothersome, kill him.'

'What?'

'When it's annoying, just remove anyone around the imperial family and that's it. If it's someone from Dawn Palace, the effect will be better. The Emperor is, weak for that woman he crowned Empress with his own hands...'

Though it was a voice mixed between growling breaths, what he was saying could be clearly understood.

'They're people who will disappear soon anyway. No need to worry. What's important is, Diarca. Just don't forget that. You already know well but...'

'...'

It was the hand of an old man who was much weaker than himself. Yet Kiolle couldn't shake it off as if caught in a strong trap. And then he was shocked again at himself for thinking so.

The father he had been so worried about had awakened, yet he felt like shaking off his hand?

Why?

'By the way, how is the Crown Prince's side now? Surely... cough, cough cough!'

'Your Grace the Duke.'

Duke Diarca's coughing intensified. Only then did Kiolle's hand that had been caught regain its freedom. The butler quickly approached to lay Duke Diarca back down and attend to him. The Duke who had been coughing for a long while only barely calmed down after the butler exposed him to magic incense smoke below his nose for quite a while.

Kiolle saw darkish red bloodstains soaking through the bandages wrapped around the Duke's body.

Someone of Duke Diarca's stature would certainly have received healing from priests. Despite surely having used everything beneficial from holy water to purification stones, the fact that the wounds still hadn't properly healed meant only one thing.

That the injury Duke Diarca had received was not simply a wound cut by a weapon.

'Was there poison on the sword that cut father?'

'Indeed you know at once. That's right.'

The butler answered in a lowered voice.

'We were a bit late discovering the poison that had dug in while treating the injury first. Because of that, despite applying healing, the situation is that the flesh easily tears open again at the slightest shock.'

Though he hadn't done any notable work as a knight, he still had minimal knowledge. If a wound treated with a priest's healing doesn't heal well, it means there's a worse injury inside than what's visible. Usually that was poison.

The terrible aspect of poison is that even if "detoxified" with divine power, it doesn't truly completely disappear from the body. To put it nicely, one becomes a body that won't be affected by the same poison afterward; to put it badly, it remains like a scar, and Duke Diarca's condition seemed exactly like the latter.

If he were younger with overflowing vitality, or if his body were clean from living a frugal and austere life normally, healing might have worked better. But Duke Diarca was neither. From a young age, he enjoyed Ponegri and other strong analgesic drugs with water pipes, and like a noble, didn't like physical labor.

Priests' healing is not omnipotent. Even if forcibly applied continuously, there's a limit to how much the body can accept at once, and even after healing, aftereffects like reduced self-recovery or inability to accept healing well like before were common.

The sight of the butler going out personally to buy magic incense despite such a dangerous situation suddenly approached anew. He was mobilizing all available methods to somehow raise Duke Diarca's self-recovery.

While Kiolle was thinking he wanted to pound his about-to-burst head, a very hoarse whisper was heard.

'...Esi?'

Duke Diarca, who had seemed to lose consciousness again after inhaling the magic incense smoke, had his eyes slightly open. Kiolle was very bewildered. Because, if he hadn't misheard, that name was clearly...

'The madam isn't here. Please sleep, Your Grace the Duke.'

'Lies... she's right in front of me. That...'

Before Duke Diarca could mutter something again, the butler once more released dense incense smoke. The old man's cloudy eyes hazily followed toward Kiolle's direction, then closed as if unable to bear the weight.

'It's time for you to leave now, Lord Kiolle.'

'Just now, what was that? I thought I heard my deceased mother's name.'

'Yes. Perhaps because of the shock from this incident, he sometimes calls for the madam like that. Normally he goes right back to sleep, but this time it seems he had a misunderstanding because Lord Kiolle had come.'

He said not to pretend to know about this even if Kiolle came again, since the Duke wouldn't remember when he woke up. Kiolle unknowingly blankly voiced his inner thoughts.

'I only knew that father had immediately forgotten mother after I was born?'

Everyone said so, and Kiolle thought so too. She was a woman who left for recuperation after her body weakened upon giving birth to a child, and died without ever returning to the capital. How could there be affection when he had seen her only a few times? Even Kiolle, born between them, had hardly any memories or feelings about his mother.

The butler maintained an inexplicable silence then opened his mouth.

'...There may have been times when you resented the strict Duke, Lord Kiolle. However, the Duke always kept Lord Kiolle, who retained the spirit Diarca had lost, in a corner of his heart. As proof, he had planned to definitely make Lord Kiolle's blood precious when the day came for Diarca to achieve its great work. Please know at least that.'

Know what?

The words were too difficult, but the butler's expression was so serious it didn't seem right to ask more. Kiolle stood up with a truly dumbfounded face. Only after nearly dropping the snuffbox Duke Diarca had given did he finally remember he needed to examine that too.

'Wait a moment.'

Kiolle opened the snuffbox. In line with Duke Diarca's tastes, the inside of the splendid and elegant snuffbox was empty. But when he touched the secret mechanism at the bottom, the inside was revealed, displaying hidden objects.

A small key inlaid with jewels, and a seal ring.

Though he didn't know what the key was for, he couldn't fail to recognize the seal ring. Though different from the formal ring Duke Diarca was still wearing on his hand, it was an item typically given to a successor or deputy. The very item Kironne da Diarca had so desperately wanted but had never received from the Duke until now was right here.

If Kironne knew this fact, he would have immediately dropped everything to come cut Kiolle's neck.

His spine shivered. Kiolle left the ring alone for now and took out the key first.

'Butler. What is this key for?'

'That... is the key to the Duke's secret safe.'

'Secret safe?! There was such a thing? I've never seen it?'

'That's natural since it's hidden not in this main residence but elsewhere. It's no exaggeration to say that all the most dangerous information, contacts, and secret funds known only to the Duke are in there.'

'What?'

'Even if you go there and open the door, you need the seal together to use it.'

And that seal is now in Kiolle's hands, isn't it? Kiolle froze without being able to say anything.

Whatever he made of that reaction, the butler just smiled unintelligibly.

'Indeed you don't seem so surprised.'

No. He was tremendously surprised. It was just that his face, resembling Duke Diarca's, hid even the frozen expression plausibly.

After taking Kiolle back to the 4th District where he had originally been, the butler promised the next meeting before letting him out of the carriage.

'Though I'd like to assign people to you, considering Lord Kiolle's current situation, it would rather be inconvenient. I will arrange for me to be notified whenever you come here. Please call when you need me.'

Kiolle wanted to ask to please send some servants. The only reason he didn't was because an even greater shock had consumed Kiolle.

'...Alright.'

The butler bowed his head respectfully as if addressing the Duke.

Kiolle returned to his lodging in the 5th District and sat blankly for a long time. However, no matter how much time passed, the snuffbox received from Duke Diarca didn't disappear. Only after struggling to accept that this was real did he write a letter to Yuder Aile. That was all he could do right now.

And now.

- Ding...

The cafe door where Kiolle had been hiding and waiting with trembling legs opened. As the small bell attached to the door rang, cool wind lightly swept through the interior.

Kiolle raised his head sharply, feeling the cold wind smell was familiar.

A man with his face hidden by a coat with a black hat sat very naturally in front of Kiolle. Anyone who saw would have thought they had an appointment to meet here, given his unhesitating attitude.

From within the black hat appeared eyes so dark they were almost purple-tinged. A face pale as a corpse. An expressionless face so noble it seemed aristocratic from birth.

It was Yuder Aile.

Light entered Kiolle's eyes that had been half-dead.

"You...!"

"Be quiet."

"Oomph!"

A small ball of wind was firmly packed into Kiolle's mouth as he tried to shout with delight.

Chapter 1245

Though it was just wind blocking his throat, a mental shock akin to being hit in a vital spot followed.

"Gack! Cough! Cough!"

Kiolle who was coughing with tears in his eyes while grabbing his neck was quite noisy, but since Yuder had intricately set up a wind barrier around them, no one could hear that clamorous sound.

"It shouldn't even hurt but you're exaggerating."

"It's not all about pain!"

"Yes. It's certainly not all."

Yuder lightly acknowledged.

"Right now I just lightly touched your throat, but if done properly, I could even kill you by putting wind into your chest."

He must be joking. Though Kiolle thought so, there was no hint of trying to scare in Yuder's expression at all. That calm face as if stating obvious knowledge was more frightening than openly threatening with a weapon...

Kiolle hastily sat up properly while swallowing the fear flowing coldly down his spine. To think he had been briefly happy to see Yuder. He must have been crazy.

Yuder tilted his head watching the face of the fool whose regret at calling him was evident.

"So, what happened that made you call me?"

"Th-that is..."

He wrote the letter because Yuder was the only one he could think of. But now that he was directly seeing that frightening face again, he suddenly began to worry if he should talk about what he had experienced. Even if he did talk, just how much should he tell?

What moved Kiolle, who was struggling to turn his head that wouldn't turn, was appropriately Yuder's threat.

"If you don't start talking by the time I count to three, I'm leaving."

"Wh-what?! Don't you have even the minimal compassion and chivalry to display when someone in difficulty asks for help?!"

"Chivalry? Though I received the title of Sir, I'm not a knight. And compassion... did I seem to have such a thing?"

The dry voice asking as if genuinely curious greatly stimulated fear.

"One of the things I dislike is meaningless waste of time. I had important training to do starting today, but I came here taking some time because of the letter you sent. If you're not going to talk now, contact me again when you feel like talking."

Yuder really brushed himself off and stood up. Kiolle hastily opened his mouth and shouted.

"I'll talk! I'll talk!"

Kiolle closed his eyes tightly and began pouring out everything that had happened to him with his voice lowered as much as possible.

"After the trial people kept asking me what Diarca's will was but how would I know that! My eldest brother ominously showed no reaction! First I thought of how you told me to find out my brother's intention so I met the head butler but suddenly father had awakened! So I went to see him briefly but father of all things told me to kill my eldest brother! He gave me dan-dangerous things too, huh?! It seemed like he was still having trouble coming to his senses! He even called my mother's name to me! The butler also said difficult things and I don't know what to do so my head feels like it's about to burst...!"

A disorganized outcry. A flash of color momentarily swirled in Yuder's eyes that had seemed to be standing quietly.

Though others might have called it nonsensical shouting, Yuder could easily filter out the real information from within.

'So that's why a message suddenly flew from Sun Palace.'

What made Yuder, who was about to proceed with the first training as soon as Melbon recovered, come here was a carrier pigeon that secretly flew from Sun Palace to the Cavalry Commander's office.

Kishiar who unfolded the coded note tied to the pigeon's leg said it was a letter written by the Emperor himself. The content was very simple.

'Baron Aile is to meet the owner of the letter received yesterday immediately now'.

It seemed something had caught in the Emperor's information network, which had eyes and ears planted everywhere. Therefore, Yuder came to meet Kiolle today immediately, slightly modifying his original plan with lingering regret, though he had originally planned to visit only a few days later.

Still, listening to that fool who didn't even know how to speak secretly, he certainly understood why the Emperor had issued such an order.

'Duke Diarca has awakened and even passed something to Kiolle.'

The Emperor's ability isn't omnipotent either. With the security around Duke Diarca more stringent than ever before, it must have become more difficult to obtain information directly than before. Therefore, though he may have grasped where Kiolle had been, he might have sent Yuder because he couldn't find out the details of the conversation or inner thoughts.

And that choice was indeed right.

Kiolle, who had been alone in terror and confusion while waiting for Yuder, was now more honest than ever before.

Yuder sat back down. A look of relief appeared on Kiolle's face. It was an expression that Cavalry members might make upon seeing Yuder appear in a critical crisis situation.

'This guy... really believes I'll help somehow.'

If anything, according to their oath, Kiolle should help Yuder. But Yuder decided not to point that out specifically.

That was because in Kiolle's relieved face, fear and fatigue he had truly never seen before were deeply etched. Though still foolish-looking, they were eyes that seemed to have done some thinking in their own way.

That strangely made Yuder quite delighted.

'Even though I don't know... Duke Diarca surely never imagined a situation like now when entrusting matters to Kiolle. The guys around him too.'

From Yuder Aile's position, there was absolutely no reason for it, but the world was misunderstanding Kiolle da Diarca each in their own favorable way. The most amusing point was that Kiolle himself, who was being so misunderstood, had no idea what situation he was in.

'Come to think of it, even I didn't think things would roll out like this when I first met him, so. I guess that's similar in a way.'

Kiolle's existence makes one realize the truth that enemies who seemed so high and solid were actually fools barking while being swayed by illusions with no substance. The humor and tingling thrill that brings would likely be felt even more strongly by Kishiar and Emperor Keilusa.

He seemed to understand why the Emperor was being generous to Kiolle.

Yuder swallowed such impressions and slowly asked.

"...Yes. So, do you now know what your brother was trying to gain by killing you?"

Actually, an ordinary person might have asked first 'what did you receive from Duke Diarca' here. But that wasn't very important in Yuder's opinion.

'Since it seems he made Kiolle a card to strike Kironne, trusting him in a situation where he himself has difficulty moving, he would have given what was needed for that.'

Things like proof of being Young Duke, or items that could certify qualification to grasp and wield Diarca's power.

Rather than asking obvious things and driving Kiolle into fear again, he wanted to probe the sprouts of change he had shown a bit more. Since such things couldn't be seen except now.

Kiolle's eyes trembled wildly. He chewed his lips then barely opened his mouth.

"I don't, know well but... it seems father, excessively... believing in me well was the cause! By killing me... um... to get the position of Duke Diarca's successor... definitely... it seems like..."

If the one here wasn't Yuder Aile, it would have been an answer worthy of applause.

'Not just Duke Diarca but the overall evaluation around him changing would have been the cause... well, I can accept that as an answer too. But does that guy still lack confidence despite realizing that answer?'

Why is he trailing off, and why is he looking for cues?

Yuder asked again without revealing his inner thoughts.

"Alright. Then what do you want to do now?"

"...Huh?"

"Do you intend to kill your brother according to the Duke's order?"

Kiolle's shoulders jumped as if struck by lightning.

"How can you say such things so loudly here!"

You're worrying about that only now?

Yuder suppressed the urge to make the guy eat another ball of wind.

"I've already applied means so no one can hear our words, so shut up and just answer."

If he answered foolishly again asking how could I know that, this time he really intended to hit him once. But Kiolle buried his face in his hands and groaned for a while, then surprisingly, this time too he spewed out something like a proper answer.

"...It's not a matter of killing or not!"

"Then?"

"I, I, this situation itself... just, everything is strange. That father so easily ordered me to kill my brother, others... That he told me to prioritize Diarca yet it doesn't seem like that at all...!"

I'm afraid.

The final mutter was so thin and small that if it weren't for someone with Yuder's ability, it couldn't have been heard.

Chapter 1246

Kiolle had always lived feeling proud of being born in House Diarca.

Those around him envied him too, and since they taught him it was natural to do so, he never harbored a single doubt.

Though a high noble, his father was magnanimous and would place anyone under him if they had ability, even commoners or foreigners. His older siblings didn't like Kiolle much, but separate from that, they always knew how to behave like nobles and followed their father's orders well.

The numerous people who came and went through the Diarca main residence were individuals active in diverse fields, like Duke Diarca's collection items covering countless areas, and they all said Diarca was the largest pillar supporting the Orr Empire. Dozens, hundreds of people came to meet Duke Diarca daily to seek wisdom, and the Duke didn't refuse their requests but exchanged help.

He respected his father who didn't turn away the desperate pleas of people and moved for the country.

And how beautiful and smart was the Crown Prince whom his father had brought and placed in position?

A family that aimed to lead everyone while maintaining noble dignity rather than directly stepping forward.

A bloodline of true loyal subjects silently preparing for the future instead of the Orr imperial family that didn't know how to think about the country and was gradually declining with repeated misgovernance.

Descended from the second daughter of the First Emperor, who was famous for having the warmest and most inclusive disposition of all,

That was House Duke Diarca that Kiolle da Diarca had learned.

Though Kiolle, who became a knight, was a somewhat heterogeneous existence in such a household, even that was boldly embraced by his father. Though he occasionally got angry fiercely because of Kiolle, who caused trouble due to excessive confidence in his family and status, that was all. The punishment his father imposed on Kiolle was at most sending him away for training or putting him under house arrest, which could be said to overflow with love compared to that Apeto ducal family where killing each other was natural.

There was nothing to worry about except for his sword skills that didn't improve well.

His father was always right, his family was steadfast, so the country would remain peaceful in the future too. He believed that without doubt.

Until suddenly a stone fell from the sky one day, strange ability users never seen or heard of appeared, and they blocked Kiolle's path and even dared to occupy a part of the Imperial Knights.

"..."

Yuder briefly sighed audibly while looking at the top of Kiolle's head, who was still burying his face in his hands with his head lowered.

"Hah."

Kiolle's shoulders twitched.

"Your father. You don't know anything about what kind of person Duke Diarca is."

The Kiolle of before would have shouted what insulting words are these. How could it make sense that he, the son of Duke Diarca, didn't know his father?

But the current Kiolle couldn't say anything to those words from Yuder. That was because he recalled that moment when his father felt unfamiliar.

Was the father who grabbed Kiolle's wrist that day and casually spoke of death really that 'fair loyal subject' Duke Diarca that Kiolle knew? Without any particular great cause or justification, there wasn't even a hint of awkwardness in the expression of the old man saying just 'remove it if it's annoying'.

It was a natural attitude like someone who had said such words hundreds, thousands of times.

"...Maybe, that's true."

Kiolle muttered in a deeply sunken voice containing such thoughts.

"Father, and my eldest brother, don't seem like the people I knew. The Crown Prince too was like that. All of them..."

All suddenly became strange at some point and completely changed into different people.

Where did it go wrong? What should be looked for now, and how, to realize who they truly were? What was the problem?

Can that answer be known by entering the secret safe with the successor's seal given by Duke Diarca?

Even Kiolle knew that wasn't the answer. The truth he wanted didn't seem to come from blindly following father's orders as before. Only instinctive aversion and fear that he shouldn't enter the secret safe in this state filled his head red.

"Do you want to know the truth?"

As if reading Kiolle's inner thoughts, Yuder Aile asked. Kiolle was startlingly surprised and raised his head. The eyes so dark they wouldn't even reflect light were staring straight at him. Each time he met those eyes, he had been scared because it felt like all the thoughts inside him would be completely sucked in, but now somehow it felt a bit different.

"Looking at your current state, it doesn't seem like you're thinking of moving immediately to follow Duke Diarca's orders. Is that right?"

"..."

"If you need time to make up your mind, I'll help. So you can directly judge what kind of people your father, your brother, and Diarca truly are."

"...H-how?"

Even while thinking it was like a devil's temptation, his face that involuntarily responded was clearly visible. Yuder raised the corners of his lips very faintly.

"Wait quietly. I'll send a method soon."

"What?"

Leaving incomprehensible words, Yuder disappeared without giving time to hold him back.

"Just what are you telling me to do if you leave after saying something like that!"

He learned the answer the next day.

Boom boom boom! Startled by the sound of banging on the door as if it would break, Kiolle opened it and met eyes with a hotel staff member with a cold face.

"Guest. It's past the time to settle this month's lodging and food expenses, and since there was no contact, I came up."

"What? That's a matter for the person who sent me here to handle."

Though the staff might have been intimidated by Kiolle's attitude speaking as if it were obvious while looking down, they were steadfast.

"It was set to be paid monthly in arrears, but nothing has come in. So it's right for you to pay."

"What did you say?!"

It was a place provided by none other than the Emperor of the empire to stay, so what was this about not paying the lodging fee? It was utterly absurd.

"Perhaps... do you not have money?"

The staff member asked with furrowed brows. Kiolle reflexively burst out in anger.

"How dare you see me as what to say such a thing! Wait! I'll find it right away!"

Kiolle began rummaging through his clothes while fuming.

But, there was no money.

What fell from his wallet were just one gold coin and a few silver coins.

'Uh...'

Come to think of it, since the day he almost died and woke up in the imperial palace, he hadn't thought about preparing money or baggage due to constantly living outside. Because he hardly left the lodging anyway, there was no reason to think such things were needed.

Though he had one wallet he always carried, the money inside had been used to pay for a few temporary sets of clothes and carriage fares. It was far from enough to fill the lodging fee written on the bill the staff brought.

'Wait. My salary... how do I receive it?'

Though he had moved to be affiliated with the Bright Palace and was now nominal, still Kiolle was a knight of the Imperial Knight Brigade.

'No. Since I'm currently being processed as on sick leave, does it not come in at all...?'

Since he had never paid attention to where and how his salary came in, he didn't even know where his salaries were now.

For Kiolle, money was just something that was always in his wallet, not something he had to take care of himself.

The next thing that came to mind was Duke Diarca's secret safe, but that... was a place he couldn't go to right now.

He didn't know. His head was spinning.

'Should I have asked for money when I met the butler...?!'

While Kiolle was floundering in absurdity and confusion, the staff member urged in a frosty voice.

"Guest. It's exactly 23 gold coins."

"J-just a moment! I'll bring money from... somewhere else. Please wait a bit."

Until now, when Kiolle had said so, there were no individuals who dared to say no.

However, unlike then when everyone knew he was the youngest son of House Diarca, now he was just an anonymous, unknown problematic customer staying long-term.

The staff member looked at Kiolle with an incredibly cold face, then sighed "hah".

"I'll report this."

"What?!"

"How many times do you think we've heard such words until now?"

"What are you saying! It's not like I said I wouldn't pay, I said I would give it!"

"Those are the hotel's rules so we can't help it either. If you can't pay the money, there's only reporting. When you call someone else there to make payment, you'll be able to come out, so think well about where your money is."

How dare they treat me like a beggar?! Kiolle was greatly shocked. But when he came to his senses, he had already been kicked out and was in the security force's temporary detention place.

Chapter 1247

Security Force temporary detention. It was a place where people stayed briefly before trial, or those who had committed crimes too minor to require a trial. Though he knew it in his head, it was the first time he had set foot there directly.

And that place... was truly a gathering place of human samples one wouldn't want to touch.

"When I get out of here, I'll kill you all!"

Someone shaking the bars and shouting.

"I could make a mistake being a bit drunk, but to capture and lock people up like this!"

Someone cursing while emitting a rotten alcohol smell.

"Do you know who I am to lock me up here! Have you heard of the Rothschild Trading Company, you bastards!"

Someone gesturing with bound hands toward the security force soldiers who were busily moving outside the narrow detention cell, acting arrogantly.

Someone curled up like dead. Beside them, someone lying with their belly exposed, snoring. Someone crying as if the world had ended. People rolling around and punching each other after quarrels broke out while shouting.

With at least twenty grown men crammed into a space barely big enough to sit down in, it was utterly dizzying and bewildering. In some sense, this was worse than the eastern cave kidnapping experience where he nearly died. At least then it had been quiet enough to hear an ant crawl, and he had been rescued by Yuder Aile before several hours passed, so there was no occasion to feel like this.

Recalling Yuder, Kiolle's frozen mind finally began to turn slightly with a creak.

'T-that's right. The reason I suddenly got locked up here... Could it be because of that bastard's doing?!'

After asking if he wanted to know the truth and saying he'd send a method, suddenly he was kicked out of his lodging and locked in detention. It would be stranger to think there was no connection!

However, before Kiolle could think about it in more detail, a security force soldier pulled him out.

"Come out."

Wearing cheap magic tool handcuffs, he was forcibly led to an interrogation room.

"Let's see. The reason for the report is... eating without paying..."

A low-ranking official with a face steeped in fatigue muttered while scanning documents without properly looking at Kiolle.

"No means to prove identity either... has shown suspicious behavior throughout within the hotel making other guests fearful... tried to leave without paying with the total bill of 23 gold coins? Tsk..."

"Hey! I'm not a suspicious person! Why wouldn't I have means to prove my identity! I left my belongings at the hotel!"

"According to the reporter, there was nothing except a few clothes."

"What?! That can't be!"

Kiolle cried out asking for his belongings to be brought, but the official didn't budge. Irritation settled on his tired face.

"Do you think the security management team is your servant? You should have taken care of that yourself before being dragged here. That's not our job."

"Ack...! Then give me paper and a pen at least! If you let me send a letter, I can bring as much money as needed!"

Kiolle shouted with a voice full of anger. Then the official raised his gaze toward Kiolle for the first time.

"Do you have money to pay for paper and messenger fees?"

"...What? Such things don't need money to be paid! Of course you should provide them here! If you want money!"

Then the official silently looked at Kiolle for a moment, then burst into laughter with a "puhaha". It was clearly a sneer to anyone who saw.

'...Laughing? Why?'

"Ah. Now I see you must be some sort of grand young master?"

"Th-that's right! Now you're making sense."

Given the situation, it was difficult to immediately reveal the name of House Diarca, but it was true that Kiolle was a young master from a grand family. He answered while puffing out his chest, but somehow the official's gaze still carried an unpleasant smile.

"Alright. Then where do you intend to send a message?"

Kiolle quickly racked his brain. House Duke Diarca... was pushed to the back of the list since contacting them officially might lead to his eldest brother being contacted first. Then what remained was...

"The Imperial Knights, or the Cavalry!"

The names of two groups that shared grounds but had endlessly bad relations were called together. Not noticing that the official's gaze had become even more sleepy-looking than before, Kiolle continued to shout.

"If not that, then send a message to the Imperial Palace! Specifically, to Sun Palace!"

The official slowly nodded. Kiolle thought he had finally understood his intention. However, the words that flowed from the official's mouth completely shattered expectations.

"Completely insane."

"Wh...what?"

"There's always about one such lunatic a month who causes trouble believing they're nobility. No need to investigate further. Take him away."

Screech, bang.

The interrogation room door closed in front of him.

'Wh-what? Why exactly...?!'

Kiolle shouted while struggling wildly to shake off the soldier dragging him.

"Wait! Let me send a message! Do you know who I am! I am a direct descendant of House Diarca and a knight of the Imperial Knight Brigade!"

He gave up trying to hide his identity. Getting released was urgent for now.

"Didn't you understand?! My father is Duke Diarca! I am a 3rd class knight of the Order of Lily with the authority to have a private audience with Theorado Van Tain, Commander of the Imperial Knights, anytime! How dare you..."

"This one's disgustingly rebellious."

A soldier who almost lost his grip on the struggling Kiolle clicked his tongue and suddenly struck the back of Kiolle's head forcefully.

"Argh!"

"I don't know why you're so crazy at such a young age, but look at your face in water and come to your senses! What nobility. Look at yourself when you speak!"

Wh-what are you saying?

While half losing his mind amid a succession of incomprehensible words, the soldiers threw Kiolle back into the detention cell. Kiolle, who had been rolling around in disarray, barely raised his head with a groan.

At the waist of the soldier guarding in front of the bars. In the metal decoration wrapping the end of the scabbard, his own appearance was faintly reflected.

The man lying face down on the floor with handcuffs had dirty night-gray hair and ordinary brown eyes. His features, which had never been called ugly anywhere, had transformed into a vaguely indistinct impression, looking infinitely far from a noble youth to anyone who saw.

"Wha...t."

That's... me?

As he slowly opened his mouth, the man reflected in the decoration also opened his mouth. Kiolle screamed in terror.

"Uwaaaaah!"

"Shut up!"

Something thrown by someone hit him squarely on the forehead. The world spun. Kiolle fainted right there.

How much time had passed? He woke up again because a soldier kicked his body.

"How long are you going to lie around? Do you think this is your home?"

While Kiolle, who couldn't grasp the situation, looked around, several soldiers entered the detention cell.

"Everyone out!"

"Damn it."

Criminals wearing handcuffs like Kiolle stood in a line outside the detention cell, grumbling curses.

"You are definite petty criminals who won't even go to trial, so without wasting time, you'll be directly subjected to labor. You will work for a set period according to the weight of your respective crimes, and if you cause problems again before washing away your crimes, you will die by hanging."

Labor? While Kiolle blankly blinked his eyes, the soldiers divided the criminals into groups of several people and took them elsewhere. Kiolle also boarded a black cargo carriage with three other men. He wanted to shout something, but since everyone seemed to accept this situation and was utterly quiet, he couldn't bring himself to open his mouth.

After riding like cargo in a carriage where the outside couldn't be seen, the place where they got off.

"This is where you'll work."

Kiolle blankly looked around. It was a familiar landscape.

'This is...'

It was near the 4th District lake in the capital, which he had visited just recently. It was also where everything went wrong when assassins appeared when he came to meet his father who was taking a walk.

"There was an accident recently that destroyed the land, trees, and houses around the lake. You will help with restoration here day and night. If you are lazy or try to escape, you will receive a severe punishment. Behave accordingly."

After threatening like that, the soldier brought one person. He seemed to be the person in charge who would manage the criminals and teach them work. The young man who looked quite young to be entrusted with responsibility scanned the criminals' faces with indifferent eyes.

"My name is Bran. Let's all do well on our own."

Kiolle somehow felt like he had seen Bran's face somewhere before. But no matter how much he racked his brain, he couldn't remember well.

'Just where... have I seen him?'

"What are you looking at?"

Bran asked, flashing his eyes. Kiolle was startled and turned his head away. And he felt a deep sense of self-doubt and a feeling like he might cry toward himself.

'Damn it! Why on earth do I have to do this!'

It wasn't about believing the words of that monster from the Cavalry!

Yuder Aile!!!!...

Amid the desperate cry that couldn't come out as sound, Kiolle da Diarca's forced labor began.

Chapter 1248

One day before the moment when Kiolle quietly vented his curse of anger toward Yuder Aile.

Yuder entered the Commander's office while pulling off the hat attached to his outdoor coat.

"I met with Kiolle and returned."

"For returning faster than expected, your expression suggests you have a lot to say."

Kishiar, who was with Nathan Zuckerman, smiled knowingly as he read Yuder's inner thoughts.

"Did you hear some interesting story?"

"I understood why His Majesty the Emperor's order had to come down now. Duke Diarca had awakened. It seems he met Kiolle and made him a proxy to carry out his will."

"Oh."

Kishiar briefly uttered an exclamation filled with many emotions.

"That's a choice the previous Duke Diarca wouldn't have made even with a knife to his neck. Well, since he's misunderstanding that he owes his life to his youngest son twice now, I suppose it's natural. So, does Kiolle intend to follow his father's words?"

"No."

At Yuder's assertion, even Nathan Zuckerman, who had been quiet until now, raised his head and met his gaze. Toward two pairs of eyes curious about what followed, Yuder opened his mouth.

"That fellow still barely understands the situation surrounding him, and is just afraid of this situation itself. He truly showed no interest in titles. Since he's confused due to the shock of the world he had believed in being shaken, I decided to give him some help."

"What kind of help?"

"Since he wants to know the truth about his father and those around him, wouldn't it be good to let him know?"

Yuder said that and looked directly at Kishiar.

"I understand that the lodging where Kiolle is staying now was provided by His Majesty the Emperor. It seems he can't grasp his surroundings because it's too safe and comfortable, so I'm thinking of having him leave there and stay elsewhere for a few days."

"Elsewhere. Specifically?"

Kishiar didn't oppose by saying no. It was just a very interested gaze.

"I'll find a place where he can work while watching nobles. If I disguise him as a commoner and make him work hard, he'll see things even if he doesn't want to."

There are things that cannot be seen from Kiolle's position no matter what. Then, the solution is to make him become a different position in a different place and directly experience how ordinary commoners view Duke Diarca, Crown Prince Katchian, and nobles. It was a simple matter.

"So, you mean to use him like a sort of infiltration informant?"

"Yes. The method itself will be similar to that."

Kishiar's long eyelashes twitched. It seemed like an attempt to suppress laughter, but it had little effect. After a moment, he tilted his head back and laughed loudly.

"Goodness. Disguising the youngest son of Diarca as a commoner and making him work forcibly. Hahaha, I even want to infiltrate alongside and work together!"

If he weren't the Cavalry Commander or if he were a bit less busy, he might have really done so. Kishiar swallowed a bit of regret and wiped the tears gathered at the corners of his eyes, then tapped Yuder's shoulder with a sweet smile.

"That plan, I unconditionally approve."

"...You're approving it more easily than I expected."

Though he thought Kishiar would find it amusing, the decision was faster than expected. Actually, Yuder had been prepared to accept if he said that diverting Kiolle at such a time was a waste of human and material resources. That was true in fact. However, Kishiar shook his head as if there was no need to worry.

"Anyway, they had been saying Kironne had identified Kiolle's lodging location and was gradually starting to move again. In a situation where he has to be moved to a new shelter once more anyway, if your plan is realized, wouldn't it strike the enemy's blind spot while also reducing cumbersome effort?"

His red eyes sparkled happily.

"I could even bet that His Majesty My Brother would also be pleased to be spared the trouble of finding a new shelter for Kiolle. Finding a place that's safe while avoiding Diarca's eyes within this capital is quite a difficult task. Even more so because Kiolle da Diarca is not so skilled at hiding."

In other words, the timing had coincidentally lined up perfectly.

No matter how hard Kironne tried to find Kiolle, he couldn't imagine his brother would be working among commoners. Kishiar's shoulders lightly shrugged as if the thought made him want to laugh again.

"Wait a moment. I'll send a letter to Sun Palace."

The answer to the carrier pigeon Kishiar sent came back almost immediately. Emperor Keilusa concisely expressed that 'he approves the plan, and all necessary preparations are entrusted to the Cavalry Commander'.

"Good. As I thought."

"Now we just need to decide where to send Kiolle."

"Hmm. If it's alright, there's a place I'd like to recommend."

Kishiar smiled and pointed to the edge of the thick forest in the middle of the capital beyond the window.

"The assassins Kironne sent to kill his father fought so roughly that parts of the 4th District were destroyed and are undergoing restoration. From the lake promenade to nearby houses and commercial areas, there are so many places to repair that most criminals sentenced to labor are being deployed there... What do you think? Isn't it quite fitting for the conditions you want?"

The 4th District centered around a beautiful lake, lined with villas of wealthy and high-status individuals. It's an infinitely pleasant place for nobles to stay, but would it be the same for those working below for their leisure?

Yuder nodded while looking at Kishiar's fingertip.

"Close and appropriate. It looks good."

Originally, he had planned to just have Kiolle's hair color hidden and make him work at a restaurant or lodging establishment frequented by nobles. To send him to the place Kishiar recommended, Kiolle would suddenly have to become a prisoner sentenced to labor, but so what?

'It's not like he's becoming a prisoner with his real identity, and since he's a knight anyway he should be physically sturdy.'

Having obtained Yuder's agreement, Kishiar began issuing orders smoothly as if prepared in advance.

"Nathan. Contact the staff of the hotel where Kiolle da Diarca is staying. It would be quickly processed if reported as someone who ate without paying and didn't pay lodging fees."

First, a hotel staff member with connections to the Emperor's side reports Kiolle. Those who come to arrest him are also not real security forces but people from the Emperor's side who have been hovering around protecting Kiolle until now. The handcuffs to be placed on Kiolle's hands will not be cheap magic tool bracelets with escape prevention alarm functions commonly used, but a disguise magic tool Kishiar possesses.

"Aren't you giving him something too expensive? To that extent..."

"Let's just call it my excessive concern. This much needs to be used to conceal thoroughly."

Kishiar cleverly inserted his disguise magic tool bracelet into real handcuffs in disguise. Looking at the outside, no one would know its identity.

Since criminals had to continuously wear escape prevention handcuffs during labor with only the length of the chain changed, Kiolle's disguise was unlikely to be discovered.

"Though disguise alone would be sufficient to deceive others, there should be at least one person to manage and watch over. I'll dispatch Devran Hartude."

Devran had unrivaled infiltration capability among the Cavalry intelligence unit members. His ability to quickly blend in like part of any group he infiltrated had already been confirmed several times.

Yuder nodded, recalling the face of the man who was currently helping with the rehabilitation of those rescued from the Star of Nagran, according to Kishiar's orders and his own will.

"The most appropriate personnel selection."

"If necessary, I'll add others according to your opinion."

"For now, it seems fine to send just Devran alone. Moving many people unnecessarily would only make them stand out."

Thus, Kiolle's new lodging and dining place that he hadn't wished for was decided.

While Nathan Zuckerman temporarily left his seat to carry out the order, Yuder suddenly glanced at the documents he had put down and left. They seemed to be what Nathan Zuckerman had been holding when he was talking with Kishiar when Yuder entered the Commander's office.

Perhaps noticing the gaze fixed on the paper, Kishiar willingly revealed its identity.

"Nathan took quite a bit longer than usual to get here from Peletta. That's because he deliberately visited and examined several regions according to my order. This is a report detailing those results."

"May I take a look?"

"Of course."

Yuder unfolded the paper. The first page contained detailed information about the recent atmosphere in major cities in the north and the recent situations of influential nobles. It seemed the aim had been to check if there were changes after the abnormal crack occurrence incident.

Turning to the next page, the name of Fay's hometown village appeared. It seemed he had tried to directly meet and examine the villagers. Yuder, who was about to read that in more detail, caught a piece of paper that almost slipped from inside and meaninglessly glanced at it.

'Hmm? Diarca?'

There, the name of Kiolle da Diarca, who had just been the topic of conversation, was written.

More precisely, it was an investigation into Kiolle's mother.

According to what was written, her name was Rangrezi da Diarca.

*'-Since the area around the villa where she last stayed and died is owned personally by Duke Diarca, exploration wasn't easy, but I was able to access some information previously unknown.'*

Chapter 1249

Yuder quickly re-examined exactly where the villa was located. It wasn't a region generally considered to be in the north, but it was in a vague position somewhat close to that direction. Given that Nathan Zuckerman had toured the north and came down to the capital, it wouldn't have been too difficult to visit in between.

'Not in the east where Diarca's main territory is, but he had private land and a villa in such a nameless place?'

A noble like Duke Diarca would have countless lands and mansions. However, even such individuals didn't just randomly own any land.

The more powerful nobles owned more fertile and beautiful lands. Only places with abundant resources or beautiful landscapes worth owning could become their property.

But the region written in the report was not such a land at all. It was a remote domain whose name he was seeing for the first time. That point particularly stood out.

Yuder left the unanswerable parts in his mind for now and continued reading down. Information that Nathan Zuckerman had learned by asking around the surrounding domain residents was organized, and summarized as follows:

First. Nearby domain residents didn't know that the villa and land owner was Duke Diarca, and only knew it as a place where 'an illegitimate daughter of the Dilegian family' had lived.

Second. The Dilegian family was Rangrezi da Diarca's family affiliation before marriage, and currently, it has completely fallen and no members can be found.

Third. It seems people from Diarca occasionally came and went until the period when Rangrezi was alive. After her death, no one came or went, but the mansion and surrounding land have not been neglected and are continuously managed.

Fourth. During inquiries, from the family of a former servant of the Dilegian family, came the circumstantial speculation that Rangrezi Dilegian may not have been simply of illegitimate daughter origin, but could be a 'golden cuckoo'.

Golden cuckoo. Yuder narrowed his eyes seeing the unfamiliar term.

"What is a golden cuckoo?"

"Ah. Even before you returned, I was just reading a part I found quite interesting and coincidental."

Kishiar raised the corners of his lips while slightly furrowing his brow. Yuder knew this was the expression he made when feeling considerable disillusionment.

"Cuckoos lay eggs in other nests and make them raise them. Nobles often use that term when they send a child they've given birth to another family to be raised as that house's child."

That was a different meaning from simple adoption. Since bringing in a child from another house and raising them by mutual agreement in a family without an heir is relatively common, it doesn't become a blemish. However, cases referred to as 'cuckoos' usually meant not that the receiving side needed it, but that the sending side forcibly pushed them in.

"Usually it's expressed that way when nobles push a child born before marriage, or one born with physical and mental problems, as a child of rural commoners. Giving them a few coins and conveniently abandoning the child."

Just hearing it sounds like garbage that would rot one's ears. But...

"The Dilegian family, though now fallen, was a noble family, wasn't it? They wouldn't have been poor enough to have to take in a child in such a way."

"That's why it has 'golden' attached."

Kishiar's gaze sank coolly.

"Setting aside the 'easy method' of abandoning them in a commoner's house or just leaving them to die, if they pushed their child as a cuckoo into a noble family, they must have been someone who held enormous power and wealth."

How many such people could there be? Families that are grand enough to be called high nobles even among nobles. If not that, then...

'Royalty?'

While Yuder's mind became a bit complicated, Kishiar continued speaking slowly.

"According to the new investigation, the Dilegian family wasn't originally one that inherited significant assets, nor did they have sources of money or skills. Though Kiolle's mother was known to be an illegitimate daughter from a humble family, considering that most people remember that family as still quite wealthy, it's strange."

A family with no source of money yet was wealthy.

Where on earth did they get that money from?

The family of a former servant of the Dilegian family, who had told Nathan Zuckerman old stories for money, confessed it was thanks to Rangrezi.

According to what they heard, Rangrezi was actually not an illegitimate child of the Dilegian family but a child of someone else completely unrelated, and the Dilegian family received enormous wealth every year in exchange for taking and raising the child.

"Then Rangrezi died, and as the wealth they had easily obtained also disappeared, they fell into ruin, so the story goes. Since those who told this story aren't the servants themselves but their family, the truth still needs to be verified further, but I judged it to have considerable credibility."

The original servants of the Dilegian family had long since passed away due to age, it was said. Though it's possible those who provided the information might have lied to Nathan Zuckerman, if Kishiar judged so...

"Did you find evidence to support it?"

"It's thanks to Nathan skillfully investigating the rise and fall periods of the Dilegian family."

The period when the Dilegian family flourished and spent money well enough to frequent the capital, and the period when they fell into ruin. It almost coincided with the period from birth to death of Rangrezi da Diarca, who was once Rangrezi Dilegian.

It was a remarkably surprising coincidence.

It could only be explained as someone's influence being felt.

"After learning that Duke Diarca's second wife, previously thought to be just an illegitimate daughter from a common noble family that no one paid attention to, might actually have been a golden cuckoo, it became quite interesting. Especially since it doesn't seem likely that someone like Duke Diarca would have taken in his wife without knowing her birth."

"If he took her in knowing, it would be right to see there was value or meaning worth it."

"Yes. To think that the backside of that thorough deceiver was hidden here. I'm personally very surprised."

Yuder was equally surprised. To think that Kiolle, whom he had saved without much thought to take a different path from his previous life, might have had an enormous secret of birth?

It was all the more astonishing given that Kiolle himself didn't seem to have any notable memories or feelings about his mother.

Though absurd, it was certainly a new truth that couldn't have been imagined in the previous life. If this answer became known, would the Emperor and Kishiar be able to grasp the weakness and vulnerability of Duke Diarca, of House Diarca, who had been tormenting them for a long time?

"So I'm planning to find out from now who entrusted Rangrezi da Diarca to the Dilegian family."

Since it was a matter of decades ago, it wouldn't be easy to investigate. However, some things actually emerge to the surface precisely because time has passed.

The family of the former servants of the Dilegian house who had met Nathan Zuckerman and revealed the secret were a good example of that.

"Do you have any suspected candidates?"

People who could entrust a child as a cuckoo to a noble family. Even limiting by status, there weren't many, and tracing back Rangrezi da Diarca's age, the candidates would be even more limited.

"It's not certain yet. But if we investigate the circumstances of nobles or royals who were active around the time Rangrezi da Diarca was born, the answer will likely come soon."

Kishiar's eyes scanned the report in Yuder's hands. His darkly sunken eyes seemed to penetrate even the stories beyond the densely written letters.

"The traces of a human, and the flow of money. They share the commonality that they are extremely difficult to completely hide."

Kishiar promised to let Yuder know immediately once he found the answer.

Not long after, someone knocked on the Commander's office door again. Beyond the door Yuder opened stood Kanna, smiling with a slightly tense face.

"Yuder. I hope I haven't come too early?"

"It's fine. Come in."

Kanna had finally come to fulfill the request to read his grandfather's belongings.

Chapter 1250

Not long after, someone knocked on the Commander's office door again. Beyond the door Yuder opened stood Kanna, smiling with a slightly tense face.

"Yuder. I hope I haven't come too early?"

"It's fine. Come in."

Kanna had finally come to fulfill the request to read his grandfather's belongings.

"Excuse me..."

As Kanna carefully entered, Kishiar welcomed her with a smiling face.

"I'll get to directly see your ability being demonstrated after a long time. I'm very much looking forward to it."

"Ah, haha. Yes! I'll try my best to live up to your expectations!"

Her voice clearly showed signs of confusion about how to treat the Commander when meeting outside of work hours. Kishiar smiled refreshingly as if he had expected that and playfully winked one eye.

"There's no need to live up to my expectations. You're here now to help a friend, aren't you? I'm merely a person joining for observation, so you're addressing the wrong person."

"Ah..."

Kanna's tension gently eased. She swallowed with a gulp, then took a long breath out and closed her eyes before opening them again. As the strength relaxed from her tightly clenched fist, an expression characteristic of the usual Kanna returned.

"Hmm. That's right. That's correct. Yuder. I'll properly demonstrate my ability for you today!"

Yuder slowly nodded.

"Thank you. But as I said before..."

"Don't overdo it to the point of collapsing, right? I remember!"

Kanna grinned. Kishiar lightly clapped.

"The feeling from the start is very good. Then shall we go see the items?"

The grandfather's belongings were laid out not in the Commander's office where routine work was conducted, but in one of the guest bedrooms inside. This was because Kishiar had advised that it would be better to proceed in a more enclosed and secure space.

After they entered the room, Kishiar stopped and leaned against the door with his arms folded. It was like a declaration that his role was merely that of a sentry guarding this door, and he would not intrude further between the two people.

'He probably means he won't create anything else that might distract Kanna's focus.'

There is consideration felt even without being said. Yuder blinked toward him, conveying silent gratitude.

"Hmm... the types are more diverse than I thought?"

Kanna, examining the items laid out on the wide table, made a curious expression.

In truth, calling them diverse was an extremely polite expression. Here, items that seemed overflowing with stories wherever you looked were mixed with items whose inclusion was puzzling.

A few books collected by his grandfather and an account book. Up to here, they could be called typical mementos.

However, a notebook from an old woman's grocery store bag, a cloth for wrapping babies, a torn mage robe, a badge with a broken pin - these were strange no matter how one looked at them.

And finally, even a child-sized chair.

Still, Kanna didn't say anything else. Her gaze examining the items while slowly circling around the table once was quite serious.

"What should I read first?"

"This book first."

Yuder pointed to a book collected by his grandfather.

The start seemed better with something that didn't appear to have much to read.

"Hmm... the title is extraordinary. It doesn't seem like a book ordinary people would read... Alright. I'll start."

Kanna placed her hand on the book titled 'Contemplating the Blessings Dwelling in All Things in Great Nature - Focusing on Trees, Flowers, Grass and Earth'. It was precisely that magic research book Kishiar had first discovered in the warehouse.

"Hmmph."

As Kanna closed her eyes and inhaled, a faint haze began to swirl under her hand. After a moment, her closed eyelids gently opened, revealing blue eyes.

Eyes that seemed to be looking somewhere far away, as she was reading information rather than the scene before her.

"Hmm... it seems like a book that wandered for a very long time. After being made in Aeril, it crossed borders several times. Mages made it. It seems no one evaluated the content as special... no."

Her lips, which had been speaking disjointedly, paused momentarily.

"Hmm. Someone said this was useful. It seems to be the recent owner. Could that be Yuder's grandfather?..."

"That seems likely. Perhaps can you tell why he judged it useful?"

"That much... I can't tell."

"Then please read the other books underneath. They seem to be books grandfather collected for similar reasons."

Yuder pushed the other books stacked under that book a bit closer toward Kanna. After reading the information of three books in succession, Kanna removed her hand and exhaled deeply. Her focus became clear again and their gazes met.

"They are indeed all items that the same owner judged useful and purchased. The criterion for usefulness was 'whether it helps in real life or not'. I can read information saying that after reading the books completely, he spoke of going out and trying something using the knowledge within."

"..."

Though he had suspected as much, receiving confirmation through Kanna's ability suddenly made the approaching weight feel somewhat different.

His grandfather truly used those magic research records within to help the villagers. Knowledge that no one would have thought could actually be helpful in real life.

While Yuder was swallowing an indescribable emotion, Kanna asked with a smiling face.

"Well. What shall we do next?"

"...This."

Yuder pointed to the child's chair. Kanna approached and placed her hand on it, smiling.

"Well made. If this is a memento... Hmm. Perhaps... something Yuder used?"

"That's right."

"O-wow."

"Grandfather made it for me."

He told her the truth, thinking she might misunderstand that they were wealthy enough to use a child's chair, but Kanna shook her head.

"No! That's not why I'm surprised, it's just somehow I can't believe there was a time when you were small enough to sit in this chair..."

"..."

"I'm sorry if that offended you. I didn't mean it in a bad way! It's just, the you I know seems like you would have been an adult from the beginning."

"I don't know why you thought that, but if that's how you felt, then so be it. I'm fine."

"Huff."

Suddenly, a sound of suppressing laughter came from the door direction. Even without turning his head, he could clearly sense Kishiar covering his mouth and laughing.

"Anyway, to think your grandfather even made such a chair himself, he must have had incredible dexterity! With the information I read earlier too, he seems to have been quite an extraordinary person. Then I'll read it right away."

Kanna quickly placed her hand on the chair. After a moment, she opened her eyes again and smiled.

"...He put in a lot of effort and care while making it. I can read information about him being happy that the child had grown well enough to need a new chair. And also that the person who sat here... that is, you Yuder, liked it very much."

"..."

"Hmm. But I also read that he said something a bit sad."

After reading old memories with his grandfather that he no longer remembered, Kanna's expression darkened a little.

"When making this, it seems he said several times that he didn't know how many more chairs he could make in the future. Like someone who knew he would soon leave the world because his body wasn't well..."

Yuder quietly nodded. Kanna carefully asked.

"Did your grandfather pass away early?"

"When I was about thirteen. Since I was young, grandfather often told me not to be surprised if he left the world at any time, so it's not strange if he said such things."

"Ah... I see."

Kanna seemed to think that Yuder's grandfather might have been suffering from an incurable disease. Though the feeling was somewhat different from that, Yuder decided to just say that much for now.

'Now that I've read about two normal things, shall we move on to the main part?'

This was enough for the warm-up. Yuder pointed to a worn-out bag.

"I'd like to request this next."

"Alright."

"Be careful as what you read might be quite different from just now."

"Ah... Is this one of those items that might be dangerous? I'll try using my power little by little."

Kanna lightly placed her hand on the bag with a much more cautious attitude than before. A haze-like power gradually flowed out from between her closed eyes.

With furrowed brows and twitching eyelashes, Kanna eventually opened her mouth.

"...Fire."

"..."

"I feel fire. That's the most intense information tied to this bag. It seems to have been at an extremely burning fire scene. I can read the sense of crisis and... deep fear the bag's owner felt. Screams and death... And blood too."

As if Kanna had begun to use her power more strongly, the haze flowing from her hand intensified. Her half-lowered blue eyes moved confusedly here and there as if scanning a distant place.

"The bag's owner tried to take something out from inside it at the burning scene as a last resort, but it was useless. A deep premonition of death covers the bag..."

Kanna's lips trembled finely.

"End."

Chapter 1251

Silence descended with the heavy declaration. While Kanna took a deep breath to compose herself, Yuder compared the information just learned with what he already knew.

'Fire, screams, fear, death.'

He already knew what incident Kanna had read. The rest wasn't so strange, but the part mentioning fire and a fire scene was quite concerning.

It's not that there are no fire-breathing monsters among monsters. Though uncommon, they had been recorded in history several times, and since the Cavalry in his previous life had encountered them a few times, he didn't consider it particularly unusual.

The problem was that a fire-breathing monster appeared in the mountains. From what Yuder had heard, the extent of damage in that incident was limited to just one village disappearing.

Fire and wood are naturally opposing elements, so how did a fire monster occurring in a mountain filled with things to burn only destroy one village before disappearing?

The area, just like the village where Yuder lived, was a small mountain village, so those who could rescue them couldn't have arrived quickly, and fire monsters in particular are among the more difficult to deal with. Since there were no awakeners at that time, they could only be confronted with magic tools containing water attribute magic or mages of that attribute... would such resources have existed?

'It would have been good to know all the Imperial Magic Research Institute records in advance.'

It couldn't be helped. This was all a result of the original plans being delayed and changed as schedules were disrupted because of that Kiolle. But not knowing those records wasn't a big problem. There was someone who had put all those records in their head instead of Yuder.

When he slightly turned his gaze toward Kishiar, the man who was still leaning against the door with his arms folded smiled as if reading his inner thoughts. He nodded twice, very subtly but clearly enough for Yuder to recognize.

That meant Kishiar's known information matched what Kanna had read, and he knew everything Yuder might be questioning.

'Yes. That's fine then.'

He could just ask Kishiar after everything was finished. Yuder turned his gaze toward Kanna, who looked a bit tired.

"Are you alright?"

"Yes. Don't worry. I can still do much more. Though I would like to drink some water."

That's not a difficult matter. Yuder snatched an empty cup prepared for guests originally staying there with wind power, filled it with water, and handed it over. Color returned to Kanna's cheeks after she took a sip of water.

"This is the most luxurious water I've ever drunk."

Kanna emptied an entire cup in an instant.

"Shall I give you another cup?"

"No. I'm fine!"

After resolutely putting down the cup, wiping her lips, and exhaling briefly, her face was imbued with firm will.

"Rather, I'd like to continue reading right away, what's next? I'm adjusting my condition myself, so don't worry and give me the items you want to read first."

"..."

That gentle yet cold attitude gave Yuder a slightly unfamiliar feeling.

Perhaps that change was at the core of the transformation Kanna had encountered after the south. Yuder gazed at her face for a moment then reached out. It was the torn mage robe.

"...This one."

"Understood. I'm starting."

After examining the robe carefully, Kanna placed her hand on the hole near the torn chest area. This time, strong haze flowed through her hand from the beginning. Her lowered eyelids trembled as if hit by a strong wind, and her blue eyes aimlessly scanned the empty air.

"...Glory."

Kanna opened her mouth softly.

"Though it looks ordinary, it's not a garment anyone can wear. This was... a glorious garment. Yes. Though not noticeable, it's a garment given to a mage working for the imperial family. The owner of this garment seems to have been really proud of that fact. Someone said to the owner wearing this garment: It's a symbol that you, despite having unremarkable power, were recognized for your innate talent in magic sensing, Kantinto. Congratulations..."

The still incredibly unfamiliar name of his grandfather popped out. As Yuder's brow twitched in response, Kanna shook her head.

"Hmm... I want to read other information. The reason this garment has a hole..."

While muttering, her wildly moving eyes fixed on an unknown point.

"...Found it."

"..."

"Blood. It's blood again this time."

An even more intense haze than before arose under Kanna's palm.

"It's similar to before. The owner of this garment was in a place full of blood, screams, and death. He dodged attacks... killing intent, and fled and rolled many times but couldn't avoid it. The opponent is... yes. Not human. A monster."

Kanna's breathing gradually quickened. Her eyes moved even faster as if reading the atmosphere of the scene at that time.

"People wearing the same clothes... probably colleagues were there, but too many died. Ordinary people too... and even animals being raised... Someone among the colleagues... shouts to flee and report. Hoping that at least one person would survive to report... everyone risked their lives. You're still young! Think of the child...! But it seems the colleague who fled after hearing those words eventually couldn't escape far and died. Someone cries while shouting they couldn't even escape past the village entrance. And that person dies too."

"..."

"The owner of the garment says: I've survived until now because I'm a bit good at seeing magic power, but that's the end! Yes. There's no more way to escape... I can't get out of here to seek rescue. The owner of the garment tries to find ruins. Muttering that they might somehow survive if they find a place to hide. But..."

Kanna, who had been speaking almost without breathing, suddenly flinched and stopped her lips. Beads of sweat flowed down her forehead within the strong haze.

"...He discovered something."

And then Kanna remained silent for a long while. Yuder quietly opened his mouth and asked.

"What?"

"...Something very small. Pitiful, doubtful..."

Kanna muttered disjointedly while dripping with sweat. It seemed difficult to read properly as much as just now.

"Don't overdo it. This much reading seems sufficient."

"No, not yet... I still haven't read why the biggest hole in the garment was made. What I've read now is information about other torn parts. If I just do a bit more, I can read it! This much is definitely...! Just that something feels blocked... so...!"

Kanna muttered and shook her head. She clenched her fist then opened it, and began to exert even more power than before.

"Kanna!"

"...Ugh!"

With a sound of teeth grinding, blood vessels appeared in Kanna's eyes. The tremendously strengthened haze almost looked like a translucent wind enveloping the garment and her body.

-Whoosh!

'She'll get hurt at this rate.'

Just as Yuder was about to truly stop her by making her remove her hand, Kanna's ability demonstration abruptly halted.

She smiled with a cold face while grasping the holed robe.

"-Found it."

Did she read it?

"...What the owner of the garment discovered was a baby."

The hand that was about to stop Kanna hesitated in mid-air.

"..."

"For that small and pitiful child... the owner of the garment decides to come out from where they were hiding. They'll die soon, but they'd die even if they don't come out. Though it's been a life of always fleeing, he said it would be good to die wrapping a young life at the end. And they rush out."

To wrap around the baby.

And.

"As a huge hole is made in the garment... once again... end."

Clear focus finally returned to Kanna's blue eyes.

"Haa, haa..."

Kanna collapsed onto a chair. This time, seemingly completely exhausted, she sprawled out on the chair, panting without being able to say a word asking for water. Yuder slowly took water and handed it to her.

"...Thank you."

"It would really be better not to overdo it beyond this."

"This much isn't overdoing. It's not like I got a nosebleed or fainted."

Why is her standard like that? He frowned and was about to say something, but seeing her face grinning, he realized something.

"How does it feel, Yuder? When I say things you usually say, does it make your stomach burst?"

Yes. Kanna had exactly that expression as if she meant to say this.

Chapter 1252

While Yuder unusually lost words to reply, clear laughter erupted from the door. Kishiar was laughing with his eyes so curved that his pupils couldn't be seen. The serious atmosphere felt until just now completely shattered.

"You've accomplished something even I couldn't do."

"Hmm, that's a compliment...?"

Kanna asked while being a bit cautious.

"Of course it's a compliment. If I could, I'd even like to give you a reward."

"Ahaha. Indeed. Commander must have also had some... difficulties because of Yuder until now."

Though she couldn't express it too honestly to the Commander, her intention was well conveyed. Kishiar didn't deny it and just smiled slightly. Yuder watching was dumbfounded.

'If that's the case, then you too...'

Others might see only Yuder Aile as living without caring for his body, but from what he had observed so far, Kishiar La Orr was truly the problematic one. While pretending in words to be someone who greatly cherishes his body, when necessary, he never stepped back no matter what pain came.

It wasn't long ago that he nearly lost one eye by wrapping around Yuder and having his face ground against the floor in the south. Even now, thinking about that time made it feel like fire was rising inside.

From Yuder's perspective, the difference between him and Kishiar was just whether they could hide such thoughts well from others or not.

Though he felt it was somewhat unfair, he decided not to raise complaints. After all, he knew all those words and actions were out of concern for Yuder.

'And objectively I've seen blood more often...'

Meanwhile, Kanna had completely emptied a second cup of water. Her face, which had been drenched in sweat, had also regained some color.

"Whew, now I feel somewhat alive."

Kanna put down the cup and asked, turning to Yuder.

"Yuder. How is it? The information I've read so far. Is it helping you?"

More than just helping. Kanna's development was amazing enough to surprise even Yuder, who rarely felt thrilled watching someone else's ability demonstration.

She had instantly uncovered and confirmed deductions that Kishiar and Yuder had barely managed through long periods of going here and there. The way she clearly read the words and actions of those who had left the world, and penetrated hidden intentions, seemed almost beyond human.

He even had a premonition that perhaps no awakener might surpass Kanna Wand in terms of this similar ability in the future.

Yuder nodded with such thoughts.

"...More than enough, to the point of overflowing."

Joy and pride filled Kanna's face to the brim.

"If everyone knew how much Yuder acknowledged me to this extent, they'd collapse from jealousy. But since today's matter is a secret, I must keep it well to myself!"

"You were reading even words the owner of the item shared with others. Can you also read who the protagonists of the conversations you read are?"

Kanna shook her head.

"That would be a bit difficult. Actually, being able to read in such detail was not just due to the development of my ability, but also largely because items with deep connections to each other are gathered here."

"Does that also affect reading information?"

"Of course. These are items that the same owner had during some event, right? Moreover, they seem to have been stored together in one place for a long time, and such items... how should I express it. Hmm."

Kanna, who had been thinking deeply with her arms folded, eventually exclaimed "Ah!"

"If my goal was to find out about something that happened in a village, in this case it's like gathering neighbors or family members who lived in that village for a long time and questioning them. It would naturally be much easier than gathering people from different villages, and it would be easier to grasp related information, right?"

It seemed somewhat understandable.

"And you and Commander are here too. That might have had some influence."

"Why is that?"

"Because the people who found and brought these items are right beside me. Though it was certainly not my intention, when exerting my power, related information embedded in you or Commander might have been unconsciously read together. I should say it helped with interpretation."

Kanna said that was also similar to the interaction among things that are interconnected.

"Before I was dispatched to the south, I was working on obtaining information from the Star of Nagran awakeners detained here. I came to realize it while trying various tests then."

"I see."

"Actually, among the items I've read so far, the information contained here is among the very intense ones. Reading it, I can see why it would be... anyway, though it's true I've trained hard, please know that I don't read everything to this extent."

Kanna modestly scratched her head.

'She deliberately mentioned parts that might seem like underestimating her own ability, probably thinking even such small differences would be helpful to me.'

In other words, Kanna was trying to say that the 'incident' in the information she just read was that intense.

Blood and death deeply engraved enough to be read much more clearly than usual.

Slight concern for Yuder was read in those blue eyes wrapped in kindness.

Instead of saying there was no need to worry, Yuder casually pushed the next item.

"I think it will be more helpful because you explained in detail. Then this time with this."

"Okay."

What went over Kanna's hand this time was the mage badge. Thanks to the flames Yuder had previously summoned to remove the black stains and restore its color, the Imperial Magic Department badge looked quite decent except for missing its pin.

Kanna, with her eyes lowered, gripped the badge tightly while drawing out her power.

"...It's similar to before. Same owner, experienced the same event. The most intensely imbued information is almost similar, but the different part is..."

Her eyes, which had been moving as if searching for something in empty space, fixed on a point.

"...Must hide it."

"..."

"There are traces of intensely wishing that this item must either be hidden, or thrown away. But..."

Kanna, who had closed her mouth while furrowing her brow as if something was questionable, reached out and felt for another item nearby. It was the robe she had read earlier.

'Why again?'

Yuder silently watched Kanna's actions. After clutching the robe, she added the bag, holding three items together, and let out a long sigh while emitting as intense a haze as before.

"Hmm..."

"Is there a problem?"

Kanna answered slowly while still scanning the empty air.

"When using power, if there's one intense piece of information, others often get buried and are difficult to read. But... I think I felt those traces I just read from the badge... in other items that experienced the same event, so I thought if I read them all at once... it might become clearer... but it's not working well."

His grandfather had tried to throw away all those items entirely. The reason they could still remain was merely because the grocery store old woman had exercised kindness by retrieving the bag that had gone into the incineration bin and keeping it.

So it seems natural that information about trying to hide or throw away was read, but...

'If Kanna can read something beyond that.'

Then there was something that looked better than other items nearby.

"Kanna. Then please read with this instead of other items."

"...A notebook?"

"This was also found together with other items. I think this might be more... helpful in reading that part."

A notebook a mage would have written research in. However, through the handwriting inside and its contents, it was also what had first prompted the speculation that grandfather might have been a person who lost his memories.

Kanna nodded and pointed to the notebook. Yuder tensed his muscles so he could pull Kanna away from the item at any moment.

In an instant, her shoulders jerked as if struck by lightning.

"Ah...!"

Blood vessels appeared on her hand that was roughly trembling while pointing to the notebook. Kanna completely closed her eyes.

Within the swirling haze, Kanna's voice echoed.

"This is a research... research journal. No, it was a research journal. The purpose was to measure the change in magic concentration gradually becoming diluted throughout the continent. A necessary task for everyone but boring. An ordinary journal judged as such... but..."

Her voice, which had been gradually lowering, was briefly cut off.

*"...It was the most appropriate item for grasping the owner's character and information. Having grasped enough, it should now be discarded."*

Chapter 1253

Kanna gasped for breath. She opened her eyes again. Their gazes met. Yuder did not avoid the directly meeting gaze and asked.

"Who just said that?"

"...What I was trying to read was who wanted to throw away this item and the other items, and what the reason was. So... it would be the judgment and thoughts that rubbed off from the person who threw them away."

The person who tried to throw away those items was his grandfather.

Though he had guessed that he threw the items into the incineration bin to hide being a mage, the information Kanna read felt chillier than expected.

'The owner...'

Yuder remained silent then slowly asked another question.

"Can you perhaps also read information like the relationship between the person who threw them away and the original owner of these items?"

He already knew the correct answer. They were the same person.

But Kanna still didn't know that fact.

"That's unknowable. I also wanted to read most about how the person who threw away this item came to possess these items... But no matter how much power I use, that part only feels vague. Just complex emotions that are hard to describe keep being read..."

Kanna shook her head with an apologetic face.

But from her attitude alone, Yuder had already succeeded in getting an answer.

'Kanna judged that the one who threw away the items and the original owner are different people.'

She judged so naturally that she didn't even question Yuder's question.

The fact that Kanna Wand, who reads even hidden information, felt that way certainly had meaning. Now it was time to try again after telling her information she didn't know.

"Kanna. There's something I didn't tell you in advance."

"What is it?"

"These items you just read in succession are indeed grandfather's belongings, but they are not things grandfather left behind. Grandfather threw these items into an incineration bin. Because someone retrieved and kept them before they burned, I was able to bring them this time."

"Uh...? Then..."

"Yes. The original owner of the items and the person who tried to throw them away are actually the same person. I knew the answer but wanted to know how your ability grasps that part."

Because.

"The grandfather I remember was a very ordinary person. But now I'm speculating whether he might be someone who completely lost his memories due to some incident and changed like a different person. There are many suspicious aspects that make it seem more than just simply a person who lost memories."

Yuder pulled the notebook Kanna had her hand on and opened it. The tiny empty space remaining in the center due to torn pages. The next page was filled with charcoal.

It was what Kishiar and Yuder had filled to find traces of what might have been written on the torn pages.

Kanna's gaze fixed on the faint letters revealed above the charcoal.

Airic, Current 38th Emperor, Mage, Melach Kantinto.

Those words written clumsily, probably along with a date marking from the year the accident occurred, were certainly meaningful evidence, but they weren't the entirety of what might have been written on the page that was torn and disappeared. Marks typically remain strongest on the last page they were in contact with.

Because of these letters, they were able to get a clue to suspect that grandfather might have been someone who lost his memories, but now he was curious about beyond that.

"It's too long to explain in detail, so I'll summarize. They say there was an incident long ago where a mage miraculously survived after experiencing an accident, but afterward changed as if becoming a completely different person. Not just losing memories, but to the level of claiming to actually be someone entirely different."

"So... you think your grandfather... is such a case?"

Kanna asked carefully with furrowed brows.

"Yes. If there's already a precedent, there's no rule saying such a thing couldn't happen again."

"Umm... Were there any strange points while you lived with your grandfather?"

"None at all. I never thought he was a person related to magic."

"That's... certainly strange."

"I understand if you think I'm making a crazy speculation."

Since they would be words difficult to believe.

However, Kanna unexpectedly shook her head firmly.

"I don't think that. Though it feels like a story that would only appear in legends, the information I just read wasn't false."

"..."

"The accident in the information I read was something that really happened. The owner of the items was at a terrible accident scene and met his end while trying to save someone. Though I didn't clearly read death, it was certainly information sufficient to judge he must have died."

If the owner was Yuder's grandfather, it indeed made no sense.

She clearly read information saying he experienced something that should have killed him, yet they already knew the fact that he survived afterward and raised Yuder.

"At first I thought the original owner of the items that experienced the accident might not have been your grandfather. So I tried to read more about the person who threw them away... but hearing what you say, I now understand why you asked me. This certainly required secrecy."

Kanna smiled, brilliantly reading Yuder's intention.

"Yuder. I believe in your judgment asking for my help, Commander's choice, and my ability. Since becoming Deputy Commander, I decided not to doubt those three things, if nothing else. And I'm incredibly excited and happy to know that only my ability can help you now."

Kanna thumped the chest area where her heart was. Seeing her face full of certainty and trust, Yuder was engulfed by emotions difficult to express.

"Alright. Then since I know more information I didn't know before, I'll try again. That's why you had me read without information first, right?"

"...That's right."

"What should I do first? Should I try to read more information about the person who tried to throw away the items? Or something else?"

"Anything that could support my speculation would be good."

"Understood."

Kanna rolled up her sleeves. Firm will settled on her face as she took a deep breath.

"This time I'll use my ability without controlling the power. Since I need to accept literally everything instead of filtering the information that's read, it will take a long time, and I won't be able to tell you things right away like before."

"That sounds dangerous."

"So what? As part of the Cavalry, this level of risk should be acceptable."

After casually saying what sounded like terminal Cavalry disease, Kanna again placed both hands on the notebook Yuder had spread out.

"I won't collapse, but I might get a nosebleed or so. But don't be too surprised! Since ability might go awry with backlash if touched carelessly, just watch until I give a signal."

He was about to say not to do it to the extent of getting a nosebleed, but Kanna had already closed her eyes.

- Whoosh!

From the beginning, the amount and momentum of the haze she emitted was unusual. Kanna's hair fluttered as if caught in wind, and blood vessels appeared in her half-open eyes. Her hands, which were exerting so much force that bones protruded, trembled violently. Her lips moved slightly, and incomprehensible muttering rapidly flowed out.

"Hmm. No, not this. This isn't it either. That too... I already know that. Too early. Too late. Not that period. More after that... More before...!"

It was as if she were giving orders to an invisible someone.

As time passed, the haze became even thicker, making it seem as if space was distorted, and Kanna within it became even paler.

Countless pieces of information invisible to their eyes would be pounding her head.

But finally.

"...Found it..."

Tock.

Blood suddenly burst and flowed from Kanna's nose as she uttered a small whisper. Kanna collapsed sideways just like that. Yuder quickly supported her.

'Something to stop the bleeding.'

"Here."

As soon as he turned his head, Kishiar, who had somehow approached, took out a handkerchief.

"Kanna hasn't withdrawn her ability yet. If I use my ability, I think I can minimize backlash while making contact, so could you step aside for a moment?"

Kishiar reached out toward Kanna. The invisible power enveloping his hand pushed away the haze effortlessly. The touch that wiped away the blood flowing down her lips and chin began to stem the bleeding on her nose, and Kanna finally opened her eyes again.

She seemed startled to see the Commander covering her face and opened her eyes wide, but still didn't say anything. Her still vaguely unfocused eyes searched for Yuder.

"...I think I found the answer from the torn pages of the notebook."

She muttered faintly.

"As you said, Yuder, it's a different person. Definitely."

That is.

"I saw someone... who didn't properly remember who he was, enveloped in pain and confusion."

Chapter 1254

After Kanna finished everything and left the room, Yuder quietly gazed down at his grandfather’s belongings, reflecting on the information she had read.

Though her nose had bled when trying to read the notebook, and she had nearly collapsed, Kanna finally left only after stubbornly refusing to give up and reading all the remaining items.

Perhaps due to the strain of reading the notebook, she couldn't glean as clear information from the cloth that had wrapped the baby and the account book. According to her words, the cloth didn't originally wrap a baby but seemed to have been an item prepared by someone to store groceries. Since it was used to wrap a baby for only a very short time, it didn't seem to have much meaningful information imprinted on it.

The account book also only elicited comments that the writer seemed to have written it very consistently and diligently.

'Being an account book, that might be natural... but it's terribly mixed with many minor details. If I read it all, this time my head might really burst. Hmm... it doesn't feel like suspicious intentions were included when writing it.'

'Moving to external information... the most clearly readable information is that the writer was very concerned about his grandson... that is, you Yuder. It seems your grandfather worried about you throughout writing this account book. Your health, your meals...'

'Besides that... information about trying hard to teach you how to read this around the last part is readable, hmm. Were you perhaps lazy with your studies when young? If there's an occasion to write an account book, it might be good to take a look.'

Kanna's reading of the belongings ended there.

She expressed regret for not being able to read more information and said if there was an opportunity next time, she would like to help once more.

'You want to properly know about your grandfather's identity, right? I'm also regretful to end here. If you bring more items your grandfather had, will you call me next time?'

But Kanna had clearly been a great help to Yuder.

According to what she summarized, the feeling read from grandfather's belongings was so different between the time experiencing the 'accident', the period right after the 'accident' full of confusion, and the later period after regaining stability while raising Yuder, that they felt like three different people.

'But the difference in feeling from belongings after the accident is just whether there's confusion and pain or not, but it still feels like the same person. Maybe like the level of change in feeling when people under the Sage's brainwashing were released and regained peace of mind? But before the accident really... feels like a different person.'

If what Kanna read was correct, grandfather died during the monster occurrence accident or at least met a near-death 'end'. Yet it was certain he moved in a state recovered enough to walk across mountains by himself immediately afterward, so the speculation that grandfather was resurrected after receiving the Archmage's blessing now seemed almost factual.

Yuder continued to think about that mysterious being who was his grandfather but simultaneously not the 'real' Melach Kantinto.

When Kanna had read 'someone enveloped in pain and confusion who didn't properly remember who he was', it would have been good if she could have read more detailed parts, but that was impossible. Though regrettable, it was certainly a harvest to gain certainty that the person was indeed grandfather at the time he first appeared in the village holding baby Yuder.

Since he had already speculated that grandfather at that time would have had no memories, that wasn't very surprising, but pain and confusion. That part somewhat concerned him. Was it just pain from injuries and confusion from memory loss? Or did something else exist?

Part of a recent conversation with Enon came to mind.

*'-If it happened as you said, when the magic succeeded, wouldn't the Archmage have definitely visited Gyllandr Hill or you at least once? But he didn't.'*

*'Well... Perhaps because it wasn't a complete success.'*

According to Enon, magic related to souls was so difficult that even if successful, one couldn't know what side effects might occur. If there was another reason for the pain and confusion grandfather had felt, it might have originated from there.

After the Archmage's blessing occurred, did the nameless 'Archmage' who newly became 'Mr. Melach' never remember who he himself was? Is that why he couldn't use magic and lived in hiding while raising a child until his death?

The answer was still unknown, but before returning to her quarters, Kanna had finally said with her farewell:

'Yuder. When I touched the chair earlier, I felt the heart wishing for the child who would sit there to be more comfortable and happy than anyone else. That person must have truly cherished the time spent with you. No matter how the answer you're seeking is revealed, I really wanted to tell you this.'

Yuder already knew how preciously his grandfather had raised him. However, hearing such words from Kanna somehow made his heart newly softened in a strange way.

It was a feeling like something invisible was supporting beneath his feet.

Yuder resolved to look for more of grandfather's belongings.

'I should also talk more with Enon. If I tell him about today, he might recall some information that could be helpful.'

Seeking help from Kanna was truly a good choice.

Though it wasn't as if he discovered completely new information, it certainly helped in gaining conviction.

"Have you finished organizing your thoughts now?"

"...Ah."

The moment he raised his head, Kishiar spoke. Yuder felt slightly embarrassed.

"...Why didn't you speak up earlier?"

"It's polite not to disturb someone who's organizing their thoughts. Actually, there was also a reason closer to greed apart from politeness."

A reason closer to greed?

"What's that?"

"Seeing you lost in thought without even realizing I'm here is a rare occurrence. Since the opportunity came, I enjoyed watching diligently."

"..."

We see each other's face every day, so why deliberately watch again? If Yuder's face were beautiful like Kishiar's, feeling fresh each time one looks, that would be understandable, but that was certainly not the case.

Yuder let out a small sigh then took Kishiar's outstretched hand. The man who naturally led him approached and sat on a chair, then pulled Yuder to sit on his lap. By now, sitting like this felt as natural as if it had been decided that way from the beginning.

"So, what's your conclusion from your thoughts?"

"I was thinking that it was good to have received Kanna's help. Since the part about grandfather being someone who died then came back to life receiving the Archmage's blessing now seems clear without room for doubt."

Kishiar smiled gently.

"Kanna Wand would be pleased to hear that."

"Actually, I also thought a bit... that perhaps it might be fortunate that Kanna couldn't completely read grandfather's identity. If he really was someone deeply connected to Archmage Luma as we speculated, even if she had promised to keep it secret, she might have been quite shocked."

"That's true."

"I need to look for more of grandfather's belongings. I should also convey the news to Enon."

After telling all his conclusions, Yuder unusually felt fatigue. As he gazed at the face looking down warmly at him, memories of the time they spent alone in Peletta came to mind.

He hesitated briefly then relaxed the strength in his back that had been kept straight. As he completely leaned back and entrusted his weight, the man who had been still as if slightly surprised stretched his arms and embraced Yuder.

As he felt the sensation of the embrace against his cheek while they were stacked like one body, he felt Kishiar slowly releasing his scent too.

The scent permeating even other parts that arms couldn't fully wrap around, enveloping his entire physical body, gave a feeling like being in a cocoon.

As tension eased, his mind became much more comfortable. Scent gradually released from Yuder's body too, wrapping around Kishiar in return. While the mixed scents undulated, it seemed nothing from outside could invade this place.

"...Do you have any new thoughts?"

"There are, but... How about hearing after resting?"

Chapter 1255

If he was saying so because he was worried about his condition, Yuder wanted to say he was fine, that he just felt fatigue momentarily but otherwise had no problems. However, the man who gently rested his cheek against his forehead continued speaking with a look as if already knowing all those thoughts.

"You've been busy all day, and after being in a state of tension the whole time wondering what might happen to Kanna, you've kept your senses alert not to miss important information. No matter how fine your body is, your mind won't be the same. The same goes for me."

"..."

"How about sleeping together here, then looking at what I've personally investigated together? I think viewing with a refreshed mind would make the information sink in better, and wouldn't it feel better too?"

Though it was like a lullaby tone, somehow it also felt like a temptation.

Yuder was silent for a moment then nodded.

"It's a bit early to sleep... but alright."

"If you think you won't be able to fall asleep, I could give a little help with a blessing."

"What is it?"

"A kiss, quite effective for relaxing tension."

If someone else had said the same words, Yuder's fist would have flown, but the counterpart was Kishiar. Whether it really had an effect or not, if Kishiar wanted to kiss Yuder, naturally he wanted to receive it.

"Please do."

Kishiar smiled and firmly pressed his lips to Yuder's temple.

"Put aside complex thoughts for a moment."

As always, they were warm lips. As if drawn to that warmth, Yuder gently lowered his eyes.

Beyond the single layer of touching skin, Kishiar's breath could be felt. The slowly exhaled breath stimulated his skin, making his spine tremble slowly. That red heat starting from the temple passed through the inside of closed eyes, caressed the Adam's apple, gently scratched the chest hidden under clothes, and enveloped the lower abdomen.

And finally, after advancing to the most hidden intimate place underneath, it seemed to hold its breath quietly...

Knock. There was a knock at the door.

"..."

Yuder opened his eyes, feeling the sensation of his body hair standing on end without even realizing it. Simultaneously, leaving a small wet sound, the lips departed from his temple. Kishiar was still faintly smiling.

Though it must have been a very short time in reality, strangely, a curious feeling came as if he had been kissed for a very long time.

'Hmm...'

He had just wanted to receive a simple kiss, but the effect exceeded his expectations. The hot warmth transferred from Kishiar's lips seemed to stick to his own insides, making his body feverish. Meeting gazes that had become so close they could see nothing but each other, Yuder suddenly thought his throat was dry.

"..."

Though he moved his throat to swallow dry saliva, the thirst wasn't resolved.

Yuder looked down at his hand. This wasn't real thirst. Neither was it the fatigue felt until just now.

Yuder realized that what he wanted was not water but someone's breath wetting his mouth. He wanted to have moisture interwoven abundantly on his lips and tongue, not his forehead, to swallow it like a sweet drink until breathless.

He wanted more than just being patted on the back and embraced. The body already knewoverflowing the extremely quiet peace and happiness that could only be felt when lying entwined without even a small gap after exchanging overflowing heat with each other.

It was a moment when the desire pushed to the deep part of his heart due to more important matters suddenly opened its eyes.

After a moment of silence, Yuder exhaled deeply.

'If he aimed for this effect and talked about blessing... I'd have to say it's really amazing.'

If not, it was amazing in its own way. But what does it matter? Kishiar had given the pretext, and the night was still far from over. Then all that remained was resolution.

"...This seems insufficient."

"Really? Then once more."

Kishiar's lips, containing a smile, briefly touched Yuder's forehead and departed. Yuder expressionlessly shook his head.

"It's insufficient."

"More from here?"

A kiss touched his cheek. Yuder shook his head.

"It's insufficient."

Even when touching the bridge of his nose, even when touching his eyelids, he continuously shook his head in the same way.

By now, the man who should have read Yuder's intention sufficiently pretended not to know and whispered.

"It's troubling that it's still insufficient. Where should I add a blessing for you to feel like forgetting everything else and sleeping well? May I request guidance?"

Only then did Yuder, like a beast that had received permission, pull Kishiar's lapel. The kiss that met with lips fully opened was as rough and deep as Yuder wanted.

After intertwining freely and sucking fiercely exactly as imagined at the moment he felt thirst, when he finally detached his lips, he saw lips much redder than before. It was an appearance terribly arousing. The heat making his body feverish grew stronger.

"...Is that the answer? Or... should I speak more directly?"

Kishiar smiled with curved eyes.

"Sufficient."

He traced Yuder's mouth corner with his finger. After the fingertip traced all of the lip edge and detached, a second kiss completely withdrawn from the previous gentle movement swallowed Yuder.

"Ungh, hah."

Kishiar, while continuously entangling tongues, glanced down at his fingers burrowing between the legs of the one wrapped around his body. A sound of moisture-laden flesh colliding rapidly echoed from inside the body swallowing two fingers.

Yuder's body, resembling its owner, often embraced even Kishiar, who looked more like a weapon that would tear a body apart than a human sexual organ, without seeing blood even once, as if it were his own. Though looking cold but hot, seemingly hard but actually softer than anyone else once known, it was a body with broad tolerance and honest in affection.

But even with such a body, he didn't want to skip the process of softening the interior more. Kishiar didn't want to give him even a fragment of possible pain. From past experience, the best was to loosen him directly using lips and tongue until he reached climax once just from internal stimulation and became soaked with wetness, but today's Yuder was greedier than usual. Since he absolutely wouldn't let go, tightly embracing so that the attached lips couldn't separate, all Kishiar could do was just use his hands.

This is good in its own way, of course. Because it was truly rare for Yuder to be directly greedy for something.

Even before the start of this lovemaking, it was like that. Every time he sat on his lap, he would sit upright with feet lightly placed on the floor as if ready to stand up at any moment, but when he suddenly relaxed all strength on his own, Kishiar was truly surprised. The moment he embraced the weight of Yuder who was honestly leaning and nestling in his arms while exhaling tired breaths, he even forgot the situation, and his heart beat so fiercely that for a moment his head wouldn't work.

After spending the vacation together, Yuder had changed quite a bit in this aspect. More precisely, the correct expression would be that he had become much more honest in expressing what he wanted and could desire Kishiar.

When he acted as if Kishiar's embrace was the only place he could rest.

When he finally completely relaxed and gently released his scent only within Kishiar's insignificant body.

Each time he revealed emotions without a single impurity toward Kishiar within that scent, Kishiar was always captivated by a pain as if his heart would break and an overwhelming tenderness.

When emotions become excessive, they become pain. Even thinking he couldn't feel deeper emotions than this, when moments like this came, he newly realized again that it had been a vain judgment. Before Yuder, his convictions had no meaning at all.

The emotion transferred and read when entwined with Yuder's scent earlier was relief, and a slight greed hidden within it. Kishiar perceptively read that this greed originated from a body and instinct that knew a more comfortable way to rest than now.

He could have let it pass without touching it, but how could he just ignore such precious greed rarely revealed? With just a slight stimulation, Yuder quickly tore down all walls and embraced Kishiar.

When tired and weary, wanting comfort is a natural instinct.

If Yuder wanted comfort, Kishiar was prepared to do anything until he was filled.

As he moved his hand faster to fiercely dig into the interior, the body shook enough to misalign the interlocked lips. Though the inside tightened frantically as if wanting to reject the excessively rising internal stimulation, it wasn't enough to push back a sword master's strength. The thighs, having lost the means to reject, spread wider instead and trembled.

"Hngh!"

As if repeatedly swallowing and exhaling sharp pleasure, the waist curled inward then twisted and thrust out again repeatedly.

"Ahng, ngh, ah!"

In the past, he might have slowed down or adjusted his strength at this point, but Kishiar didn't do so and quietly gazed at that appearance.

Just as Yuder had changed, there were changes in him too. This current change came after the heat experienced in Peletta. After that long time when he could do as he pleased without any hindrance, Kishiar La Orr newly learned that Yuder sometimes unexpectedly preferred this over slow and persistent lovemaking.

The brave lover wasn't afraid of the moment of receiving a fierce force that seemed to tear and press his body with his bare body. He knew how to simply embrace the weight pressing down on him, the beastly act of indulging in greed while pinning him down so he couldn't move.

When wanting to rest with all energy depleted without thinking about anything, the pleasure derived from such acts is needed. It was reason enough to summon the beast again that Yuder had loved like a small flower petal.

Chapter 1256

Kishiar firmly wrapped his other arm around Yuder's waist, which was squirming as if trying to devour or escape the fingers rapidly thrusting in at high speed. While fixing him so he couldn't move in either direction, he inserted a third finger and shook his hand without any control of strength, causing desperate breaths to burst through clenched lips.

That short breath, not even enough to be called a moan or cry.

Yuder didn't know how captivating the soundless expression of pleasure created by the red tongue revealed between parted lips was.

The appearance shown by someone who normally seemed like he would never be disheveled had inadequacies even in being described by the word stimulating. His honest craving. The beauty drawn by a physical body with all defenses completely lowered. What language could possibly express the change like the blooming of a body focused on sensation?

Even with a mind that knew most languages and dialects of all existing countries and was proficient in ancient language and code decryption, it was impossible to fully explain the bright red sensations that the being before him made him feel.

Kishiar, as if capturing the breath bursting from Yuder's lips, swallowed it and finally struck upward fiercely inside.

"----!"

His head fell back as his chest, lacking breath, pulsated as if about to burst. Simultaneously, the interior holding Kishiar's fingers tightened without the slightest gap, then began to convulse and spew hot wetness. Yuder's member, standing upright and rubbing between their bodies, also twitched at the same moment and spurted white, thin liquid. It was the first climax.

Kishiar didn't even blink to avoid missing any of Yuder's climax. The line drawn by the twisted body unable to overcome the immense sensation, the hands pressing down on his forearm leaving marks, the hazily unfocused pupils in the eyes half-hidden by hair beyond the tilted head, and the ripples of finely trembling black eyelashes - he engraved everything completely in his mind without omission.

Yet his moving hand didn't stop at all, so the sound of squelching made by the liquid flowing from the body reaching climax and the hand striking inside mixing became incomparably louder than before. Yuder helplessly trembled at the stimulation that continued without stopping even at the moment of reaching, penetrating the interior that was tightening as if there was no more gap.

"Augh...!"

Heat reflexively rose to his eyes from stimulation beyond moderation. His once-pale cheeks reddened, and his eyes, holding moisture, rippled like jewels bathed in moonlight. The hand gripping his forearm could no longer control its strength and slipped while applying pressure to the fingernails, causing one glove to come off lifelessly.

Yuder's secret bare hand, which even Kishiar normally couldn't see, was revealed. Kishiar felt intense euphoria at the face indulging in the continuing climax, not even knowing his hand had been exposed.

Just looking felt like his entire head would burst.

Before Yuder's trembling completely subsided, he stole his lips again, which had been detached to allow breathing for a moment. When he touched the inside while deeply intertwining the stiffened tongue, the halted tongue began to respond as if reacting to stimulation, letting out short moans like "mmm, mmmm." Does he know that the trembling originating from that sound scratches and tickles the thin skin of the touching lips and gives enough stimulation to throb down to the lower waist? Even his breathing was lovely and lewd.

Kishiar abruptly pulled out the fingers that had been stroking the interior. The transparent mucus flowing down along his fingers flowed copiously, wetting Kishiar's thighs. At the moment the body twitched as if belatedly realizing the fingers filling the inside had been removed, he supported Yuder's buttocks and lifted them high. Taking out his own that had been ready for a long time, he stroked it a couple of times as if applying the mucus Yuder had flowed, and when he placed it against the space between the buttocks, the open hole twitched.

After aligning the tip and releasing strength from the arm supporting the buttocks, the hole opened its mouth surprisingly smoothly.

"Hnngh, ngh..."

Yuder, who had lowered his head while embracing the neck as if instinctively aware of what would follow when his body was raised, moaned at the sensation of the inside suddenly opening. The blunt tip, dyed red, entered somewhat tightly, but after that, there was nothing to obstruct.

The sexual organ that had pushed in beyond the blocked part in the blink of an eye immediately knocked once on the resistant wall beyond, then succeeded in entering completely past that point.

"Ugh... hnngh... hah...!"

While Yuder trembled and bit Kishiar's neck at the sensation of swallowing everything to the end in one breath, Kishiar held his breath at the sensation as if his everything was being sucked in and swallowed by the other.

A sensation that connected more certainly than anything.

A heat as if throwing one's body into boiling lava.

Even Yuder's short, panting breath is felt as one's own from the closest place, and all other sensations simultaneously recede and transform into things from a world that cannot be perceived.

Pain he didn't even know existed completely disappeared the moment it came to reside in Yuder, and the myriad of complex thoughts filling his head were erased cleanly like a blank sheet.

The man who once thought the act of thinking was the only means to prove life often felt the same surprise at how peaceful it could be to think nothing at all.

It was like a huge wave.

A pleasure like a huge wave rushing in, devouring and sweeping away the countless grains of sand that formed him.

From the smooth ground revealed where the wave receded, Kishiar would newly realize that he too had such clean earth.

How could one not love?

That great wave. The predator that sweeps away all of him.

The chair made a sound as if about to break, but there was no time to care. Due to his weight, the sensation entering deeper than usual was so fierce that Yuder reached climax again. Still, he continued to dig deeper and deeper inside without stopping.

Though it might be overwhelming, Yuder didn't give him a signal to stop. Far from it, he rather stroked Kishiar's eye area and brushed back his wet hair with more willing hands.

It was a small expression of affection tasted during the heat. The body, remembering the happiness given by that hand movement so pure and rough that it seemed unsuitable for such an obscene situation, trembled with joy.

"Wait, ha, hah, ah."

Yuder, who had been moaning while accepting the increasingly rough movements, wiped the liquid on Kishiar's cheek and caressed his lips. Between sweat-soaked hair, the darkly sunken eyes whispered.

"This too, please take it off too."

"...Yes."

What Yuder wanted wasn't using hands to remove it. Without hesitation, he opened his lips. As if it had been waiting, the tip of the black glove dug in, and when pulled with teeth, the bare hand was revealed without difficulty. Now both hands had returned to a state with nothing covered. Kishiar smiled, moving only the tip of his lips while holding the glove in his mouth.

Yuder likes when he acts like a docile beast in this way. Indeed, perhaps it pleased him quite well this time too, as Yuder also followed him in smiling.

That smile, visible only to Kishiar, once again burned his brain white.

Without being able to say who was first, their lips were attached again. Kishiar stood up from his seat while embracing the body fiercely pulsating.

"Ah...!"

Yuder momentarily moaned at the impact piercing his stomach as they rose while connected, but still didn't say to stop. While advancing toward the not-distant bed, Kishiar continuously caressed the straight and beautiful legs firmly wrapped around his waist and kissed the protruding shoulder blades.

The trembling body, as if approaching climax again, cried out that it wanted Kishiar. As if responding to that heat, he emitted all the heat within him together.

Chapter 1257

The two collapsed onto the bed, intertwined like one body. Though the pressing weight might have been heavy, Yuder rather applied more strength to his thighs and heels wrapped around the waist. Kishiar, responding to that call, willingly covered Yuder's entire body like a snake.

"Ngh, huk, hih, ahuk, ah...!"

Under the dim lamp, a shadow roughly shaking up and down as one mass is reflected. Due to the massive back and forearms, stiffly swollen with excitement, completely hiding the being within his embrace, the only part of Yuder Aile's body distinguishable in the shadow was a portion of his shaking toes.

No one.

Not even that flame can see what kind of face Yuder has, or how he moans. It had been long since he firmly blocked even a piece of sound he emitted from leaking beyond this room, utilizing a bit of magic power and ability.

No one can approach this place except Kishiar himself, who alone is permitted to comfort him.

'Having promised to let him rest comfortably... I should do it properly so he feels it was worth choosing.'

Fortunately, Kishiar was very confident he could do that well.

He smiled the whole time without hiding his emotions. Not his usual painted-like smile, but a beastly smile desperately wanting Yuder, but Yuder likes that smile too.

The more Kishiar didn't hide his greed, the more the black gaze watching him remained fixed as if enchanted, never falling away. It was a look as if Kishiar's honest desire for him like this was an amazing dream he had longed for all his life. A piece of satisfaction and happiness reflected in the hazily melted pitch-black eyes mixed with the panting filled with pleasure.

"Ah...!"

Again, his waist twisted and Yuder's stomach inside became soaking wet. The lower bodies stuck together like two beasts mating trembled convulsively up and down, then lost strength. Yuder's thighs that had been wrapping around his waist loosened and sprawled randomly. Looking at his panting appearance, he seemed to have lost some strength to some extent, but Kishiar had no intention of letting him rest.

Bodily response and mental satisfaction are separate. With his good stamina, Yuder didn't feel greatly tired from this much. His interior was still repeatedly tightening and loosening around Kishiar's member at will as if lacking, checking what was filling his inside.

Kishiar propped his arm beside the black hair disheveled on the sheets and licked Yuder's ear. He kissed under the ear, bit the earlobe, and then pushed his tongue into the small hole that was too secret and pretty to say it was pierced to hear sounds. When he licked up every detail as far as he could enter, the one with sensitive hearing twisted his body while swallowing his breath. Not letting it go, Kishiar persistently followed and lightly held up one of the randomly spread legs.

The body turned around and the position changed.

"Ungh!"

The incredible sensation of the sexual organ seated in the stomach smoothly changing position and stirring the mucous membrane. Kishiar's back muscles, holding one of Yuder's legs, suddenly swelled, and Yuder's head tilted. Kishiar exhaled a long breath through his nose while suppressing the strength that had entered his entire body to the point of bursting with an even greater will.

Complying with pleasure but not being powerlessly dragged by it is truly difficult. It was difficult enough that sweat that would barely emerge even with intense training wetted his forehead and flowed down his spine. Yuder was in the same predicament, with bones prominently standing out on the back of his hand gripping Kishiar's forearm as if scratching it with all his might.

From there, the bed began to shake again without restraint. With each push of the waist, a pleasure that felt like breath would stop surged from the connected place. In a sensation that seemed like it would destroy sanity in a way completely different from pain, Kishiar lowered his eyes narrowly and groped for an invisible connection.

The scent and imprint flowing from Yuder's body conveyed the pleasure and satisfaction he was feeling. He was happy.

The moment he saw the faintly raised lips, he couldn't help but kiss them, sliding his lips that had been sucking the ear. Though it was actually a difficult position for kissing, he couldn't stop the desire to do so.

He changed position by pulling the leg he was holding even more. The body bent and twisted randomly, and though lips slid against each other and teeth collided, he still somehow managed to bite and suck in the lower lip. When he intertwined the tip of his tongue, Yuder difficultly stretched his hand and thrust his fingers into Kishiar's hair. Even with that very small sensation, Kishiar reached his climax.

Yuder, who had been watching the hazily trembling red eyes, lowered his hand and felt the junction. Satisfaction like a satiated beast settled in his eyes as he confirmed that he had accepted everything without any gap. Fingers that came up after stroking the pubic hair intertwined between the skin amid short, panting breaths slowly felt Kishiar's stomach and chest, then came down to his own stomach. The fingertips wiping and pressing somewhere on the lower abdomen soaked with liquid were nothing more or less than an intention to check the current position of what had entered inside him. And Kishiar felt a brighter red stimulation than any temptation at that sight.

He pushed his fingers right between Yuder's fingers. Gripping the back of the hand pressed down while intertwining fingers, he raised his waist again with a moan. Yuder groaned in a submerged voice at the pleasure of penetrating the deepest place in one breath.

"Ahng, go...od."

When both intensely focus on pleasure to a frightening degree, they often communicate through connection or scent rather than words. It was because they had learned through various experiences that it was more certain and faster than language. But when Yuder reached a state where all locks were released to the extent that he could no longer think of anything, he sometimes unconsciously spewed out such short words.

Not words spoken through thinking with his head, but words that literally seemed to leak out as sensations escalated beyond measure.

For example,

Good, more, faster, deeper.

And...

"Kishiar...!"

That call, as if his head were burning right away.

Yuder shook his waist without even recognizing the fact that he had called someone, and what he had called. Those eyes filled with pleasure where nothing else existed. Legs spread without any shame for the sole purpose of reaching together, fingers that applied strength while interlocking with Kishiar's hand as if never to let go again, desperately calling for his lover.

It was like the appearance in the memory left from the heat.

Ah. Yuder.

As if the promise just now to offer the best comfort had been a lie, Kishiar helplessly trembled.

It feels like melting and exploding from head to toe.

Even if he doubted thousands, tens of thousands of times whether it was alright for him to feel such trembling, the call he had just heard does not change.

He wants him.

This surging feeling simply cannot be suppressed. But since Yuder would tell him not to suppress but spew it out, he decided to do so.

Yuder writhed at movements that drove down even more powerfully and quickly than before. Without letting go of that body, he became one with the most favorite place, inside, deeper, while embracing him as if stringing him in his arms.

"...!"

The position initially lying down repeatedly flipped and changed under the desire to touch each other more closely, more abundantly. The body trembled as if saying it was fine to push in anywhere, anyhow. Kishiar tasted everything without omission by putting in his mouth everything from the inside of Yuder's wrist to the small depression between the ribs, his eyelids, and even his toes that were slightly longer than others'.

Finally, when Yuder sprawled, unable to even open his eyes properly, exhausted from pleasure that seemed to burn his nerves, Kishiar exhaled a long breath, sensing the approach of the end.

"...Hah."

Though his gaze was captivated by Yuder's chest, which was still standing on end with the afterglow of pleasure, repeatedly swelling and deflating with his breathing, instead of placing his mouth there, he pulled out from the connected lower part.

To avoid excessive stimulation, trying to pull out slowly took quite a long time. The liquid pooled over a long time flowed copiously along the tip of the sexual organ.

"Mmmng...ngh."

"Does it hurt?"

He asked while brushing back the wet hair as Yuder moaned slightly. Yuder slowly shook his head with his eyes closed. It meant it wasn't because it hurt.

'Since the embers seem not fully extinguished yet... it would be better to take some time for him to calm down before cleaning up. Since wet sheets would feel unpleasant, I should hold him...'

The head of the man quietly calculating paused momentarily seeing the body squirming and moving beside. Yuder rolled over and climbed onto his body, lying face down.

Chapter 1258

Is he feeling it's still not enough? Or does he have something he wants to do while mounted? While watching to gauge his purpose, Yuder, comfortably settling in, moved his lips with eyes closed.

"...Stop thinking and rest."

"..."

"Not only do I need rest... you need it too."

Ah, such.

What Yuder wanted was neither. He knew Kishiar had been holding onto a strand of reason with the purpose of comforting him until the end. So climbing on now was, so to speak, for the purpose of pinning Kishiar down so he couldn't move after Yuder fell asleep. He had volunteered himself for the role of a human paperweight.

Knowing that his body was the best at making Kishiar La Orr unable to move, better than any control device.

Kishiar suppressed a laugh that seemed about to burst with loveliness and pretended to whisper nonchalantly.

"Mmm. I know. But here is too disheveled now to be appropriate for sleeping. I'll move us to my bedroom, so will you sleep there first? I'll return after just cleaning up."

Yuder didn't answer. A slightly unruly scent flowing from his body conveyed its owner's intention instead.

Refusal.

Having said he would rest together, he didn't like the idea of moving more with cleaning as an excuse. It was a judgment worthy of someone who knew how much Kishiar could secretly do in that short time. The unspoken demand was felt that wet sheets didn't matter, just sleep together right now.

Well, what can be done. He'd have to give up.

Kishiar quickly abandoned his intention. When he removed all strength from his entire body and patted the back of the one lying on his body, Yuder's scent, realizing the intention, became gently released again. Kishiar knew what more to do here to make Yuder feel more comfortable.

Though he had never said it directly, Yuder welcomed placing his ear against Kishiar's chest and listening to the sound of his heartbeat. In any situation, if he was held in the embrace and allowed to hear that, he could be seen calming down within a short time.

This time too, that action invariably exerted the expected effect, so when he slightly changed the position to pull together the sprawled body into an embrace and let his head comfortably rest on his chest, a very long breath flowed from within his arms shortly afterward.

The sound of one finishing a hard day.

The breathing of one falling comfortably into sleep.

An invisible fog-like scent finally brushed Kishiar's hair and face, then gently scattered. However, unlike usual, it didn't disappear after being stored in Yuder's body. It just swayed like a wave while dissolving in the air.

"..."

Kishiar finally withdrew the magic power and strength that had sealed the room. The sword master's sense detected that the area around the Cavalry was peaceful without a single intruder. Many thoughts that habitually rushed in appeared and disappeared repeatedly in his mind, but a sigh-like breath exhaled by Yuder instantly chased them away.

Kishiar smiled very slightly, then carefully kissed the sleeping one's hair.

Just as Yuder found peace in his pulse, Kishiar too could only erase all thoughts and rest within Yuder's breath and warmth.

\*\*\*

Yuder opened his eyes. Even without checking the clock, he could roughly estimate the time just by seeing the color outside the window. It was, very precisely, the time he needed to wake up to prepare for morning training.

His body felt surprisingly light. Though the area below his waist was somewhat languid, even that didn't feel bad. No, rather it was quite refreshing.

"Awake?"

As he was gauging his condition, Kishiar gently addressed him. He was still lying in a position spread like a bed under Yuder's body. Far from uncomfortable, he looked very comfortable, even natural. Yuder, whose gaze was momentarily captured by the face displaying new beauty despite having slept and woken up, nodded while leaning into the touch that slowly ruffled his hair.

A smile appeared on Kishiar's face.

"When you woke up, I was going to ask if you liked my efforts to let you rest, but looking at your face, I don't think I need to hear the answer."

"...Yes. Thanks to you, I rested well."

Kishiar laughed softly after hearing the honest answer. Due to being on top of his body, the vibration was felt directly through the touching skin. A sweet sensation tickled inside his body.

He hadn't even known he was tense, but the nerves that had been on edge completely relaxed. His mind became clear, and a warm warmth filled his body, making him feel full even without eating. The power of appropriately draining energy and sleeping so soundly as to not even dream was truly remarkable.

"Then as promised yesterday, I should tell you an interesting story now? Shall I tell you right away? Or after morning training?"

Yuder pondered for a moment.

"I'll come back after training is over."

Learning information related to his grandfather is important. But it wasn't something to do while distorting the daily routine. Now that his head was calm, he finally understood what Kishiar had said yesterday.

"Good. See you later then."

Kishiar lightly kissed Yuder's cheek.

Since returning to the capital, morning training with Ever had also resumed.

Ever, who had gained more refined ability operation based on insights from the south, greeted Yuder with a much clearer and calmer smile than before.

"Welcome."

Morning training with Ever is solely devoted to controlling the flow of power. In the past, she had found it quite difficult to see the flow of power that Yuder used, but now she often confidently expressed her thoughts well.

'Though she's not as strong as the Ever from my previous life yet, the direction of her ability development has changed, so who knows what effect that will have.'

The Ever from the previous life was someone who, like a pillar that never wavered in any situation, focused on maintaining all states consistently and using unchanging power. Thus, there was the advantage that she could be trusted and relied upon in more dangerous situations, but not wavering also meant there was no change.

The current Ever was researching methods to use her power split sometimes more slowly or more quickly, depending on the situation. She was also practicing fighting tactics using small terrain features or daggers, which she said surprisingly matched her very well. It was a sight never seen before.

There were more changes besides that. The two people who previously never made small talk outside of training now often shared various conversations during their time together. Though neither of them were particularly talkative individuals, there was no discomfort.

"Last night I discovered Hinn and Finn secretly opening the indoor training ground door and training again. Even though they had agreed not to do it outside set times... I'm worried they might fall ill from overexertion."

Hearing the deputy commander's troubles with Hinn and Finn reminded him of their appearance when he had encountered them at Alik's house. The siblings who had fled as soon as they met Yuder afterward had been ghostly good at avoiding his eyes, but it seemed they were still continuing to train.

Come to think of it, Ever was also someone who had experienced a failure and overcome it while chasing the Sage in the south. She might be able to view the siblings' behavior from another perspective.

"I think they might have gone to train at that time to avoid me."

"You? Why?"

"They were caught by me helping with Alik's magic research."

"Research...? What kind of research? How did that happen?"

"Alik's goal is to create an awakener magic tool containing movement ability, and they were cooperating for that, they said."

"My goodness! Can something like that really be made?"

Ever was greatly surprised.

"Since it's still in the research stage, I don't know whether it will succeed. Well, that itself isn't such a big deal actually. But their attitude... seems to have been bothering me somehow since the south."

"By attitude..."

"Though they didn't explicitly say so, it seems related to Hosanna."

Indeed, Ever understood the situation without much detailed explanation.

"I thought they had become quiet and subdued since then, but to think it was to that extent..."

"I'd like to know their inner thoughts more in detail to ensure they don't proceed in too reckless a direction, but they seem to dislike facing me. Could you help a bit?"

Ever, who had been lost in thought, readily nodded.

"I think I understand what feelings drove them to do such things. I'll try talking to them well."