

Turning

Chapter 11

"Was I wrong?"

In the past, he had said something similar yet different to Yuder, who had come to this place earlier than anyone else and simply declared his intention to join the Sul Division.

"Your talent leans heavily towards the Jung Division. It's a good thing to recognize the direction of your own talents before anyone else."

How strange it was to hear different words in the same place from the same person. Indeed, the future he had already known was changing due to his choice.

"Actually, I came here to tell you that I've decided to choose the Shin Division instead."

At Yuder's words, Kishiar tilted his head as if trying to gauge his sincerity.

"Are you serious?"

"Yes."

"What's your reason for choosing the Shin Division?"

"I've thought that I want to move more towards the Shin Division rather than the Sul Division while undergoing training."

"Hmm. Even if your talent would blossom much faster and greater if you were to go the way of the Sul Division?"

It seemed like a question that could read the future. However, Yuder didn't panic this time and calmly answered as he had prepared in advance.

"Isn't it possible that the opposite result could happen as well?"

"That's true."

A smile appeared in Kishiar's red eyes.

"Usually, when people are challenged like this, they would hesitate and reconsider at least once, thinking they've come to a conclusion after careful thought. But it seems your opinion won't change, so it doesn't matter. Fine, I'll process your application to the Shin Division."

It was such a clean and straightforward response that it almost felt surreal. Yuder somehow felt a sense of emptiness.

He vividly remembered that Kishiar had made him the deputy commander responsible for the entire Sul Division for no apparent reason, almost simultaneously as he had entered the division. Because of that, he had thought that he would be suspicious and not accept him if he chose the Shin Division.

However, there was no such indication in Kishiar's attitude at this moment.

"Normally, you would have to sign the documents yourself, but that'll be after some other matters are settled."

Kishiar didn't say what those other matters were. However, Yuder knew what they were.

'The time to receive a family name is approaching.'

He had received a family name not long after joining the Cavalry in the past. It was unprecedented for hundreds of new family names to be created and bestowed within a few months.

Most of them were created without sincerity, taking names from their birthplaces or from the scriptures, but there still existed an insurmountable gap in status between those who had a family name and those who didn't.

Looking back now, it was remarkable that the emperor had allowed such a thing. The opposition from the nobles must have been fierce; how had he handled it?

Yuder didn't have many memories of the previous emperor, who had passed away just before he became the commander of the Cavalry, and who was now the current emperor.

All he could remember was that the previous emperor had been the half-brother of Kishiar La Orr, the only blood brother; that for several years before his death, he had been so ill that he hadn't even shown his face properly in front of his subjects; and that the crown prince who had inherited the throne after his death had been adopted rather than a biological son.

Having lived in the mountains, he hadn't even known the face of the lord governing the village he lived in, let alone the emperor's.

The only time he had seen the emperor's face was during the one and only initiation ceremony in the Cavalry.

"Is there something more you want to say?"

While Yuder was thinking, Kishiar seemed to sense that he had more to say and asked him. Yuder stared at him for a moment and impulsively opened his mouth.

"Your Highness, why..."

"Call me Commander."

He interrupted abruptly. His relaxed red eyes shone with mischief.

"According to Orr's law, status does not take precedence over position. Of course, there are many who ignore this, but as long as I am here, the title of Commander is enough."

"Ah, yes. Commander, may I ask why you created this place?"

"This place? Do you mean this building, or the Cavalry?"

He asked like that even though he knew exactly what Yuder was asking. Yuder had always disliked that sly aspect of him. Feeling an odd sense of déjà vu, Yuder opened his mouth.

"Of course, the latter."

"You're the first person to ask me that directly. Even the Emperor didn't ask about the reason."

There was no hint in his expression that he found Yuder's question audacious or presumptuous.

"The reason I created the Cavalry? It's simple. Power must flow in the right direction. If you try to forcefully block or eliminate it, you will inevitably pay the price for disrupting harmony. As someone with an ability like you all, I thought I needed to create a path for this power before it could harm the empire. And since I was the only Awakener among the imperial family member, I thought I was the most suitable. That's all there is to it."

It was a textbook answer that made it difficult to object.

Yuder hesitated for a moment before deciding to ask one more question.

"Then, will you be the only one leading the Cavalry in the future?"

"Why do you say that? Are you eyeing this position?"

"Of course not."

If anyone else had heard, they would have rebuked him for his response, telling him to answer properly, please.

As Yuder frowned and answered, Kishiar laughed even louder than before. It was an incredibly joyful laugh.

"Well, for now, that's the case. But once the divisions are established, I plan to select a deputy commander to assist me. With your abilities, you might be able to take that position."

"I would be unqualified."

Yuder answered immediately without a second thought.

"I'm not sociable, and I haven't built close relationships with my fellow members."

"Oh, I thought highly of you, but it seems you have a softer side than I expected."

Kishiar shook his head.

"Sociability and friendship are undoubtedly good qualities, but if I were to choose someone solely based on those traits, I might as well have brought in non-Awakeners. You must remember that the power you possess was not something you were born with. You may be used to your previous life and feel

inferior in front of higher-ranking imperial knights or nobles, but in a few years, the situation will likely reverse."

"..."

"Even if you don't understand the meaning of my words..."

"No, I understood."

Yuder couldn't immediately respond because Kishiar's seemingly lighthearted answer was eerily accurate about the future.

He was right. Just as he said, the Cavalry members might feel inferior in front of high-ranking imperial knights or nobles now, but in a few years, the situation changed.

Only the Cavalry could resolve the ever-growing catastrophes, and they broke free from the previous system, experiencing drastic increases in social status, promotions, and power.

No longer could traditional powerhouses like the Imperial Knights or the Pearl Tower mages casually deal with the Cavalry and the Awakeners. The only ones who could suppress them were those with even greater powers.

Take, for instance, the commander, Yuder.

Yuder would challenge any insubordinate member to a one-on-one practice duel. He would beat them down in front of everyone, ensuring they wouldn't dare to act rebellious again.

There were many complaints that it was like dealing with animals instead of humans, but it was the easiest solution, so it couldn't be helped.

But at that moment, those events were still in the past. Yuder thought Kishiar would have a different approach to dealing with the members. But perhaps...

"If you have no more questions, you may leave."

"Ah, yes."

"This room is always open, so if you have more questions, feel free to come by anytime. If I'm not here, leave a message with my adjutant."

Hearing Kishiar's words, Yuder thought to himself.

Yuder had been in this room a few times before when Kishiar was the commander, but there was one difference today: the presence of an adjutant.

Kishiar's famous adjutant, Nathan Zuckerman, who had been with him since he was a prince and not the Duke of Peletta, was absent. Had Nathan been there when Yuder had visited in the past?

As Yuder tried to recall his vague memories, Kishiar seemed to guess something and turned his head, saying, "Ah."

"Come to think of it, you might not know who my adjutant is. He's currently handling matters in Peletta Castle in my stead. Once he wraps up, he'll be coming over. He's not an Awakener, but he's quite skilled with a sword."

'Quite' skilled? Yuder nearly let out a sarcastic laugh but held it back.

Nathan Zuckerman was a Swordmaster. He hadn't been officially recognized, but Yuder had heard it directly in the past and was sure of it. Yuder had even sparred with him. Kishiar's casual comment about Nathan being 'quite' skilled with a sword made Yuder think of him as sly as a snake.

"Understood."

After replying, Yuder left Kishiar's quarters. Finally free from the subtle yet nerve-wracking aura of the divine sword he sensed behind him, he let out a long breath.

'Sigh.'

One thing was certain.

Kishiar hadn't created the Cavalry with the intention of handing them over to someone else from the beginning. In just two years since the Awakeners had appeared, he had an incredible understanding of their tendencies and the influence they would have on the future.

If someone as cunning as him had been in the Cavalry, Yuder wouldn't have failed as miserably as he had in the past. Because Kishiar had a noble lineage and connections from birth.

Why would someone like him suddenly step down from his position as commander and return to his hometown? That was a question Yuder would have to investigate.

Chapter 12

At last, all the members of the Cavalry had been assigned their divisions.

The commander, Kishiar La Orr, announced a one-month grace period, during which the members could actually live their lives and make any necessary adjustments. He also proclaimed that the treatment of the Cavalry members would be expanded to a level equivalent to the Imperial Knights. Furthermore, those without last names would soon be granted one, a declaration that surprised everyone.

The Cavalry members now belonged directly to the Imperial Palace, and they received a monthly salary equivalent to that of a third-class official. They were granted the right to reside anywhere within the Orr Empire and could use any state-operated facility without having to pay a fee.

If they were accused of committing a crime, the punishment would be decided upon and administered by the Cavalry commander and the Emperor, rather than the provincial lord. In essence, this granted them the same absolute immunity that the Imperial Knights possessed.

Consequently, their accommodations also changed. Those who had a house in the capital could now commute from their homes instead of staying in the barracks. Members who chose to remain in the barracks each received a room of their own. While there was a restriction that they could only live in the barracks for up to five years, excluding the commander, this was more than enough for those who did not yet have sufficient wealth to buy a house in the capital.

"It's incredible. We're really being treated just like the Imperial Knights. Of course, they each get a servant when they're assigned a room, but we don't need that much," one member said.

"That's right. We're all capable of dressing ourselves," another added.

Laughter erupted among the Cavalry members who had gathered for a meal after the shocking morning announcement.

Everyone's face was bright, filled with hope. Among those beaming faces, Yuder silently dipped his bread into the stew and chewed.

"Yuder, did you hear? We'll also get the same 30 days of vacation as the Imperial Knights. If our children are also awakeners, we can pass on this treatment to them too," Gakane said with a smile.

"When we share this news with our hometown, everyone will be delighted. The days of being looked down upon for not having any land to inherit will finally be over," Gakane continued.

"...Yes."

"Oh, don't you have to inform your family in your hometown as well?"

"I'm alone."

At Yuder's words, Gakane's eyes widened, and he quickly looked apologetic, like a dog with drooping ears.

"I see. I'm sorry. I just assumed you had family back home because of what Kanna said when she read your bracelet."

'My bracelet? ...Ah.'

Yuder recalled the day he went to register for the Cavalry examination. He had met Kanna for the first time that day, and in order to test her abilities, he had handed her the bracelet from his pocket to read.

The bracelet, made from small stones carved and strung together with thread, was the only keepsake he had from his grandfather. It was the single gift his grandfather had made for his young grandson, who would be left alone just before he passed away.

Although the bracelet was now too old and fragile to wear, fearing it might break, Yuder had kept it in his pocket as he had not yet fully settled into the capital.

After becoming the commander, Yuder had barely paid any attention to the bracelet, and when he returned to find it in his pocket, he felt a strange sense of unfamiliarity.

"It's okay."

Yuder briefly replied to Gakane and thought of the old cabin in his hometown's mountains. He hadn't properly tidied up the house before leaving in case he didn't pass the Cavalry's test, so he figured he should visit and take care of it if he got a vacation.

"Yuder! How about coming to my house during your vacation? I told my parents and siblings about you in a letter, and they're all very curious. There are plenty of delicious foods and fun activities in the south. We'll treat you well, so come and see."

"What about us, Gakane?"

A few other members who were dining nearby asked in a half-joking tone.

"Are we not your friends?"

"Of course you are. But I want to take Yuder first, so you guys can come next time. Don't you need to visit your homes first?"

'He's acting as if I've already taken a vacation.'

Although Gakane's shameless attitude was slightly off-putting, Yuder didn't say anything. The handsome man with the bright red hair like a rose never tried to leave Yuder's side.

Yuder didn't know what Gakane liked so much about him, but even after they were assigned individual quarters, Gakane visited him every day, urging him to hang out. Yuder had to chase him away several times.

Thanks to Gakane's persistence, the attitudes of other members who had treated Yuder harshly began to change. Yuder was extremely surprised by the fact that he was accepted among the members to this extent solely due to the presence of Kanna and Gakane.

"Yuder, you'll get a last name too. I'm envious that you'll receive a last name from His Majesty the Emperor. I'd like to get one too."

"Don't say that anywhere else."

As Yuder frowned and grumbled, Gakane hurriedly raised his hand.

"I don't mean I envy commoners or anything like that. It's just an amazing opportunity. There were only a few in the empire's history who received titles and names bestowed by His Majesty the Emperor. I'm just envious of the chance to be recorded there."

The last names and names bestowed by the Emperor were very special gifts given only to those who had made significant contributions. However, for Yuder, who had achieved the incredible record of receiving both, they didn't hold much meaning.

"Even if I receive them... it won't be that great."

"You sometimes talk as if you know everything. Receiving a last name changes your status completely. Of course, it's a good thing, as commoners are freed from the obligations of paying taxes and labor."

He was right. But could there be anything that was unconditionally good in this world? Those who held titles were given new duties and responsibilities unique to them.

The Cavalry members, who would receive many things because of their power, would have to fight another war from now on.

'Besides, the last name that will be given is hardly a last name at all.'

Ignoring Gakane, who seemed ready to recite a hundred good things that would come from receiving a last name, Yuder finished his meal and got up from his seat.

"I'm leaving first."

"Yuder, let's go together."

Gakane put down his unfinished stew and got up.

"Wouldn't it be better to finish your meal first?"

"We're going to the swordsmanship training ground anyway. If I eat too much, I'll just feel like throwing up."

Gakane lowered his head and playfully pretended to vomit.

The Sul Division, a group mainly composed of individuals capable of using magic-like powers, spent most of their training to enhance their individual attributes and to develop more accurate and powerful abilities.

As a result, there was rarely a need for them to gather and train together, but the Shin and the Sul Divisions often had many members with similar abilities. Most of them belonged to the category of physical enhancement or excelled in using various weapons. They had to learn various techniques for using different weapons and how to protect others while coordinating their breathing.

Among all the weapon techniques, it was the sword that Kishiar La Orr demanded the Shin and the Sul Divisions to put the most effort into learning. Yuder thought he could guess the intention behind this.

Swordsmen had traditionally been treated as superior to those who wielded other weapons. While Swordmasters who made a name for themselves in history were relatively common, Bowmasters or Lancemasters were not.

Swordsmanship had traditionally been the martial art of nobles, and the most commonly available weapon was the sword. The ease of access to the sword resulted in a large number of people learning and admiring it, proportionally increasing the chances of Swordmasters emerging.

When people thought of Swordmasters, they would envision a high-ranking general or a knight commander responsible for their country's military power. The most notable feature of a Swordmaster was the ability to freely use aura, which they infused into their swords and emitted.

Many of the Cavalry members who entered the Shin and the Sul Divisions were capable of this feat without any effort. Although their swordsmanship and proficiency were lower than that of true Swordmasters, the intensity and output of the aura they could produce were not inferior.

Kishiar La Orr intended to raise the status of the Cavalry and gain strength through this ability.

"Still, I wonder what the Commander was thinking when he designated the new training ground as the Imperial Knights' Training Ground No. 1. I heard that only high-ranking officials above deputy level use that place."

As the Cavalry members entered the grounds used by the Imperial Knights, the atmosphere around them became tense. It meant that the people around them were not pleased with their arrival.

For the past few months, the Cavalry members had trained at the rookie training ground set up in a corner of the premises. Even then, the passing Imperial Knights had openly displayed their discomfort.

Now, they had been notified that they would be using Training Ground No. 1, which was like the knights' pride. It was a wonder how Kishiar had managed to push for this.

'Maybe he used an imperial order signed by the Emperor himself.'

Yuder deliberately did not exert himself fully during the basic training of the past few months. Even without giving it his all, his abilities were beyond the level of ordinary members.

Instead, he frequently practiced becoming familiar with the flow of energy around his body based on his past memories and drawing it into his body momentarily.

Traditional mages and knights, who used conventional mana, would accumulate the energy flowing in nature within their bodies for a long time and could only use the amount they had stored. However, those who awakened to the new mana were different.

Through the power of the Red Stone, they were able to freely use the unfamiliar energy that filled the world without necessarily storing it in their bodies, simply through skill and practice.

This meant that it was more important who could draw and use a greater amount of energy stably in an instant and how familiar one was with using and applying their own abilities.

However, adaptation and practice were necessary for this as well. Therefore, it was helpful to spend a few hours every day meditating to become accustomed to the energy. It would be about three years from now before this fact was revealed, but it wouldn't hurt to start early.

Gakane seemed to mistake Yuder, who meditated every morning, for a devout follower of the Sun God, but Yuder found it too bothersome to correct him and simply let him remain under that impression.

Chapter 13

The Imperial Knights' Training Grounds No. 1 stood proudly in the very center of a vast area.

Right next to the training grounds was the Knights' core institution, the Hall of Orr's Glory, built to overlook the site. Most of the administrative tasks, mission assignments, important events, and various tasks performed by the knights of deputy level or higher took place there.

In other words, it was the heart of the military force that protected the capital and moved the entire empire.

It was an utter disgrace for the Imperial Knights that these individuals, who had been mere insects just a few months ago, were now setting foot in such a place.

"Look over there. A few more of them are coming."

A sharp voice rang out towards Gakane and Yuder as they entered the training grounds. A group of knights, not bothering to hide their anger, sneered at the Cavalry members.

"Look at those arms without a single muscle showing. And what about those hands without a hint of calluses? What on earth can we accomplish with them? Can they even read?"

"I can't believe such a disgraceful event is happening in the thousand-year history of the Imperial Knights. I wonder what His Majesty and the Commander are thinking."

"..."

Yuder glanced at them once and then ignored them. Gakane's face turned slightly red, but he didn't show any other reaction.

"Welcome, Gakane."

They met the newcomers and the other members already in the training grounds. Their expressions were not good either, having heard the knights' mockery earlier.

A woman with tightly bound long hair stepped forward and greeted Gakane first.

"Ever. You got here early."

'Once she receives her last name, she will become Ever Beck.'

Yuder had known her for some time. She was one of the first awakened individuals who gained fame in the empire after the Red Stone fell two years ago. Previously an ordinary country girl, her story garnered much attention.

A slender woman who single-handedly killed a horde of monsters that had come down from the mountains in search of food. There was no more shocking news in the world.

Her story spread like wildfire, fueled by eyewitness accounts. Nearly all of the members who had passed the Cavalry test and learned her true identity knew her story.

Her ability was to strengthen her muscles and skin, which allowed her to tear apart even formidable monsters barehanded, without the use of a weapon. Until Yuder's death, she had carried out several important missions in the Cavalry.

One should not underestimate her simply because she appeared ordinary. Though there were other individuals with greater strength or defensive power, hardly anyone could use their power as effectively as she could.

According to Yuder's memory, Ever had also been appointed as the Deputy Commander of the Shin Division.

"It's quite noisy for our first training session since the division. Well, there's nothing we can do about it."

"Have they been like that the whole time?"

"Yes. They've been at it non-stop. It was as if they had been doing it since dawn. Well, I suppose busy nobles wouldn't really do that."

As Ever spoke with a cool expression, a faint smile spread among the Shin Division members.

"I almost thought they wouldn't let us in at all."

The small boy standing next to Ever waved his hand with a brightened face and grumbled. He was one of the famous early Awakeners, just as famous as Ever. A commoner boy of only ten years old, Jimmy Ocker, who had split a rock with a single branch.

'Of course, before receiving his last name, he was just Jimmy.'

Two years had passed since the Red Stone fell, and now 12-year-old Jimmy had left his parents' side and confidently passed the Cavalry test.

It was said that his parents, although commoners, owned a decent store and could afford to support their son without hesitation.

Among the 330 Cavalry members, he was the youngest to pass, but everyone believed he had abilities similar to the legendary Swordmaster. His ability to imbue his weapon with energy and use it like the aura of a Swordmaster was more than enough to make enemies tremble in fear.

"I don't understand why I can't, because usually the children who join the Imperial Knights as a squire start at 10 years old, while I am already 12."

As Jimmy pointed out, most of the prestigious knights began their lives as squires of senior knights around the age of 10.

Since they usually became squires to knights with connections to their parents, they didn't have to struggle and mostly learned from experience by observing their mentors and occasionally receiving private lessons in swordsmanship.

When they grew older, they officially joined the knight order and were commissioned. It was no exaggeration to say that it was a world exclusive to them, one that those of lower status couldn't enter.

"Show your true strength during the training later. That's all you need to do."

As Gakane ruffled Jimmy's hair and offered advice, the Shin Division members nodded. There were many commoners among the Shin Division members, more than in Sul.

They were intimidated by the Imperial Knights' haughtiness but were trying their best to overcome it.

'Yes, it's still a difficult task for now.'

In a few years, this issue would be resolved, but not yet. To break free from the deeply rooted social class consciousness and gain confidence, time and experience were needed. And Kishiar La Orr was supposed to make that happen.

Yuder looked at their faces and nodded. It was then.

"I wondered what all the noise was about, turns out it's the newbies."

A young knight with a frown on his face appeared along with several junior knights. On the knight order uniform he wore, there were three additional lily patterns engraved above the golden eagle emblem on his chest, unlike the other knights.

"What does the lily mean?"

As Jimmy asked with a bewildered expression, Gakane spoke without taking his eyes off the knight.

"The golden eagle is the symbol of the Imperial Knights. And the lily is a symbol of nobility. If there are five lilies on the uniform, it means the knight commander, four means the deputy commander, and three means the rank just below."

"So, he's a very high-ranking person."

"Yeah. Well, most people don't even get a single lily before they retire."

Gakane had once mentioned that he had aimed to join a famous knight order and learned swordsmanship during his childhood. However, he had to give up because his family, despite its prestigious name, didn't have the power to afford the necessary funds to become a knight.

The reason there were no commoners in famous knight orders was that the shining uniforms, armor, swords, and horses were not all provided by the higher-ups.

The knights had spent a considerable amount of money to maintain their dignity, especially those of the Imperial Knights, where all members were nobles.

The blue uniforms they wore were made of the highest quality fabric, and their swords were as renowned as the family heirlooms of their respective houses.

The situation was entirely different from the Cavalry, where almost none of them owned a personal sword, except for the recently issued black uniforms.

"Who told you that you're allowed in here?"

The knight with three lily badges approached the Cavalry members. As most of them couldn't confidently stand up against such an arrogant nobleman, panic spread among them. Even the usually confident Gakane's face showed a hint of worry for a moment.

"We have gathered here under the command of our Commander for training."

"The Commander? Are you talking about the Duke of Peletta?"

"Yes."

Even though he knew the answer, he asked anyway. His arrogant expression said it all.

"I have seen him many times since we were young. He was always a man of many indulgences, but I never thought he would stoop so low as to gather the likes of you and act as a Commander. It must be his greatest whim yet. His knights in Peletta must be weeping."

"..."

As the knight mocked their relationship with Kishiar, anger spread across the faces of the Cavalry members. Someone clenched their fist, and the knights behind the one with the three lilies placed their hands on their swords with scowling faces, appearing ready to draw their weapons at any moment.

Yet, only Yuder maintained a calm, expressionless face amidst the tense atmosphere.

"Excuse me, but who are you?"

Yuder genuinely didn't know who the man was. It wasn't just because Yuder had few interactions with the imperial knights in the past due to his commoner background.

He thought he had a good grasp of the faces of the nobles he had met since becoming captain, but there were only a few reasons he could think of for not recognizing the man in front of him.

One, the man had died or retired before Yuder became captain. Two, the man had returned to his own territory.

Neither reason was honorable for a young knight in his prime, especially if he was from a noble family with enough influence to live comfortably in the capital.

The man in front of him must have disappeared from the scene before two years had passed. Knowing that, there was nothing to worry about.

'Even if he turns out to be alive in the future, it doesn't matter.'

"Who am I?"

The knight with the three lilies laughed incredulously, glancing around as if Yuder's question was absurd. His bright brown hair, almost golden, was neatly combed back, and his smooth face was handsome enough to be considered aristocratic anywhere. But in Yuder's eyes, the man was nothing more than a young fool without discernment.

"Kiolle da Diarca. Have you ever heard of the Duke of Diarca, commoner?"

Chapter 14

The Empire had a total of five ducal families. Most of these families were prestigious and had been around since the founding of the empire. The founders of these ducal families were mostly the children of the first emperor.

When Ivanar La Orr, the first emperor's eldest son, ascended to the throne, the remaining four siblings each received a duchy and became dukes.

Kishiar, who held the title of Duke of Peletta, was a very rare case. It was extremely uncommon for someone who inherited the title of duke within the Empire to bear the surname 'La Orr'.

There was only one reason this was possible: because Kishiar's father, the previous emperor, had personally granted him a new ducal title while he was still alive.

According to imperial law, a prince who received a ducal title would be stripped of their succession rights, and could never vie for the emperor's position again. This precedent had been followed since the first emperor, and it was a good system for preventing bloody power struggles among siblings.

However, such conferred ducal titles were often temporary, and the recipients did not receive proper territories. Most of these dukes had no power, and for various reasons, they remained unmarried until they died. They quietly bowed their heads and lived in the corners of their territories until they disappeared from history.

The nobles believed that there must have been a significant problem with Kishiar La Orr, even if they didn't know what it was. Rumors circulated that he was outwardly fine, but impotent and of low intelligence.

Kishiar did not deny these rumors and enjoyed playing along with them.

He was famous for his love affairs since his days as a prince, but there was not a single person who claimed to have had his child, so the rumor was treated almost as fact.

The emperor's leniency towards his younger brother Kishiar was also believed to be because of this. It was thought that he was simply indulgent towards his only full-blooded sibling, who had not caused any significant accidents.

So, when Kishiar first revealed his abilities and founded the Cavalry unit, and became its leader, some people believed he was just a playful duke who had awakened his powers and wanted to play as a commander for a while. It didn't take long for this misconception to be shattered.

Even if it appeared to be the first meaningful Awakener group founded by a duke from the imperial family, it wasn't as beautiful from the inside.

Nevertheless, the fact that Kishiar, bearing the surname 'La Orr', could take charge of a military group without causing any significant disruption, despite the image of challenging the emperor's authority, meant there was a hidden power structure that ordinary people could not see.

Yuder only learned of this fact after becoming the Commander. There might be even more circumstances he didn't know about, but those could not be known with both Kishiar and the previous emperor dead.

Thus, Yuder became even more curious about the real reason Kishiar had founded this organization. He knew that Kishiar was neither as foolish nor as impotent as some people claimed.

Was the noble reason Kishiar La Orr had mentioned really true? Was that all there was to it?

"...You seem to be so surprised upon hearing my name that you can't even speak?"

Yuder, who had been deep in thought, snapped back to reality at the sound of Kiolle da Diarca's chuckling.

The Diarca Ducal House was related by blood to the Crown Prince, who was to become the next Emperor. So, it was understandable that the young knight from that family would be quite arrogant upon hearing Kishiar's name.

However, the question was why someone with such a background had disappeared without a trace in the past.

It was evident that he wasn't a successor to the Ducal House since he had joined the Order of Knights. Among the four Ducal Houses, there wasn't a single one that focused on martial arts, so they preferred to make their children chancellors or priests rather than sending them to be knights.

Yet, despite this, he had become a knight, which meant he must not have been significant in his family. It seemed that his position had more to do with his family's name rather than any real skill since his inner power didn't appear to be exceptional.

'He probably lived like that, accumulating resentment, and was assassinated.'

Yuder thought this eerie notion quite casually as he opened his mouth.

"The Diarca Ducal House. Of course, I've heard of it."

"I thought so. Now, step back accordingly. This is not a place for people like you."

"That won't be possible."

"What?"

Kiolle's cold face contorted.

"Are you daring to defy my orders?"

"Should I drag him out right now?"

One of Kiolle's subordinates asked, unable to conceal his displeasure.

"Our Commander instructed us to come here for training. Do you think you could proceed with such a matter without consulting the Commander of the Imperial Knights?"

Yuder implied that if the commander of the Imperial Knights had already given permission, there was no reason for Kiolle to intervene.

Seemingly understanding the meaning, Kiolle's eyes reddened with anger. Yuder thought he would order his subordinates to chase him away, but Kiolle proved to be more immature than Yuder had anticipated.

The young knight immediately drew his sword and aimed it at Yuder's throat.

"Come out. If you're one of those bastards who are overconfident in their power, I'll make sure you know your place today."

"Yuder!"

From behind, Gakane rushed forward, trying to block Yuder's path.

"I've heard that the Imperial Knights don't draw their swords for no reason. Escalating this situation won't be good for you either."

"You're all so careless with your words."

Kiolle's aimed sword didn't waver. Yuder grabbed Gakane's shoulder as he tried to step forward in defense.

"Gakane, it's fine. Step back."

"Yuder? Surely you're not..."

"The Cavalry members are not much different from the Imperial Knights in terms of legal status. If both parties agree, a duel is acceptable."

A duel between a commoner and a noble was not normally possible. However, the situation was unique. As Yuder quietly pointed this out, the Cavalry members, who were standing behind him, opened their mouths in unison. Gakane's expression was the same.

"There's no way it's alright, Yuder. Even so..."

"It's alright."

Yuder spoke with certainty. Upon hearing his resolute voice, the strength momentarily drained from Gakane's green eyes. Yuder tilted his head as he stepped aside.

"It's perfect since we're in the training grounds. I accept your duel request. However, I don't have a weapon, so you'll need to provide me with a sword."

"...Ha!"

Flames sparked in Kiolle's eyes.

"I have truly never met such an insolent fellow in my life. Congratulations. You've made me curious about the name of a commoner. What is your name?"

Didn't he just hear it? Yuder subtly pitied his intelligence and opened his mouth.

"It's Yuder."

"Good. You, give your sword to that man."

"Eh? But my sword is a family treasure passed down from my father....."

As Kiolle gestured and spoke to one of the servants standing behind him, the servant made a grimace and lowered his head. The sight was so amusing that laughter broke out momentarily among the Cavalry, forgetting the serious situation they were in.

"Pfft! What on earth is he, he's not even a five-year-old kid. Even the kids in our village wouldn't play like that."

"Give me yours! No! Waaa!"

"Who is babbling nonsense now!"

At Kiolle's thunderous shout, the Cavalry members fell silent again. However, once the mood had changed, it could not be reversed, even with his shouting.

Even the Imperial Knights, who had surrounded them with the intention of watching the Cavalry take a hit, couldn't hide their smiles. They mostly saw Kiolle as someone who strutted around relying on the power of his family.

Kiolle, noticing this, turned redder. He turned around and slapped the servant's cheek.

"You who dared to tarnish the honor of your master, leave the group immediately. Go back and pack your things right away."

"Eh? No, no. I will give you my sword, Lord Kiolle!"

"I don't need it. Didn't you hear me tell you to leave? Or should I kill you right here?"

As Kiolle's sword pointed towards his throat, the servant fell to the ground, screaming.

"I made a mistake!"

Most of Kiolle's servants seemed to be in their mid-teens. They knew how to use a sword to some extent, but they were still young.

To wield a sword so recklessly against such a child. Yuder thought about such a personality and became more confident in his speculation that Kiolle had probably been assassinated by someone he had offended in the past.

'Annoying brat.'

Yuder raised his hand and swung it slightly. Then, as if caught by an invisible hand, the sword Kiolle was holding stopped and twisted towards Yuder.

"Ugh! Wha, what!"

"Lord Kiolle!"

Fortunately, Kiolle didn't lose his grip on the sword. However, he couldn't withstand the force of the sword moving on its own, and he fell forward.

"..."

Dust rose over the splendid training ground, where the eagle's pattern had been engraved with white powder on the tightly packed soil.

Everyone was in shock. Kiolle himself, his subordinate knights, and the others surrounding them were all so shocked that they couldn't say anything. The only one not surprised here was Yuder himself.

Chapter 15

"What magic have you used?"

"It's not magic. It's my power."

His handsome face was no longer attractive, covered in dirt. Yuder explained kindly to Kiolle, who was looking up at him without even considering fixing his disheveled hair.

"Everything pure that comes from nature follows me. This includes the sword of the knight, made by refining iron from nature with fire. It means it follows me, not you."

He moved his hand once again and Kiolle's sword seemed to rise into the air before settling back down. Kiolle's eyes widened as if he'd seen a ghost enter his sword.

"...That's impossible."

"There are more impossible things I can do."

Yuder flicked his finger again, and flames burst over the sword in Kiolle's grip.

"Lord Kiolle!"

Kiolle couldn't withstand the heat of the rising flame and dropped his sword. Beautiful flames flickered and danced over the fallen blade before quickly disappearing. However, since it hadn't actually burned or charred, there was no trace left on the blade or handle.

Kiolle, who had disgracefully discarded his sword, which was as precious as a knight's life, in front of everyone, and was covered in dust, was gasping for air in disbelief.

Yuder sighed softly, seeing him glaring at him with bloodshot eyes.

'If he attacks to kill, it might be a bit of a headache. I only meant to break his arrogance a bit.'

"Why didn't you go into Sul Division?"

One of the Cavalry members gathered behind him asked curiously. As Yuder turned his head to answer, someone else answered before him.

"There's no need to limit the options if one can do both."

"Commander!"

Kishiar had been standing behind the Cavalry members unnoticed. The knights, who hadn't realized he'd come because of the unprecedented surprising situation, alternated between surprised looks at the entrance and Kishiar.

Not noticing the tall Duke, who stood a head taller than the others with his remarkable appearance, walking in was almost a disgrace to the Imperial Knights.

Sensing a presence was part of the training all knights honed from childhood.

"I see you've been having quite some fun while I was talking to Theo."

Kishiar slowly walked forward in front of the Cavalry. His red eyes took in the fallen Kiolle da Diarca, his abandoned sword, and Yuder's face.

Yuder felt a slight unease looking at the smile on Kishiar's face as he looked at him.

"Yuder."

"Yes."

"Commander, Yuder only stepped in for us!"

When Kishiar called Yuder's name, Ever shouted from behind him. The other members, who had been holding their breath, also began to raise their voices one by one in agreement with her.

"That's right. They were the ones who disrespected us and told us to leave first."

"They refused to listen even when we said we needed to train!"

"...I didn't call Yuder to scold him. It's not bad to see camaraderie forming already, but let's avoid misunderstandings."

When Kishiar spoke with a chuckle, Ever, who had stepped forward, blushed.

"I'm sorry."

"Forgive generously. Now, Yuder. Why didn't you wait for me before you acted? You've already sapped your opponent's will, haven't you? There's nothing left for me to handle."

Kishiar, with an exaggerated wink, asked Yuder in a teasing tone. His question was not meant to chastise or reprimand him; rather, he was implying the opposite.

Shock spread through the knights like a shiver. Even Kiolle stared at Kishiar as though he had been struck on the head.

"Just as my unit has said. Why do others need to intervene in the matter I have concluded with Theo? Theo understood all circumstances generously. If you have any complaints, relay them directly to your commander."

Kishiar casually referred to the commander of the Imperial Knights, Theo, as if he were an acquaintance.

However, the knights could not believe that their respected commander had willingly conceded the crucial training ground.

"Why on earth would the commander allow such a thing? This place is reserved for knights. Why should our training time be reduced for those men? What kind of place is this..."

When one of the knights couldn't hold back his outcry, a gleam of amusement lit up Kishiar's eyes.

"Is that so? Then you can train here as well. There's no shortage of land, feel free to use any area you want."

Just then, his low voice, which continued, captured everyone's attention incredulously.

Kishiar gazed directly at the knight who had yelled at him, a smile playing on his lips.

"However, there will be no compensation for any potential catastrophes that may occur during training. They occur during official training hours. Whether the sword burns, the earth turns over, or trees shatter... A courageous member of the Imperial Knights should be able to handle it all. Right?"

"..."

The knight's face hardened with a mix of insult and terror.

"We're about to start training soon. Those who are confident, stay here. If not, you may leave."

After a moment of silence, the Imperial Knights retreated. Yuder saw Kiolle, who had been glaring at him, push off the support of a comrade and stand on his own.

"I'll remember you."

But as soon as Kiolle picked up his sword and disappeared, Yuder quickly forgot about him.

'What's the point of remembering someone who will soon be gone?'

"Yuder, are you okay?"

As the knights vanished, the Cavalry members who had retreated to the back all rushed to Yuder at once. They were as upset about what had happened to Yuder as if it had happened to them, cursing the knights and feeling a stronger camaraderie than before.

"Yuder... You were amazing. I should have stepped in more, I'm sorry."

Yuder patted the back of Gakane, who was holding his mouth shut like a beaten dog.

"It's okay."

"But still... I don't deserve to be your friend. I'm really ashamed."

"It's okay, really."

Even if Gakane had stepped in, it wouldn't have made much of a difference. But the fact that he had stepped in at all was a miracle in itself. It was the first time someone had stepped forward for Yuder.

"I always thought you were a bit of a downer because you never talk, but I see you in a new light."

When Gakane stepped back, another member who had been behind him gave a thumbs-up with a smile.

"I guess I'll have to change today's training content slightly. Learning to wield a sword is important, but understanding your own abilities is even more so. This is the only training ground in the area that's shielded by protective magic, so you don't have to hold back. The protective sigil etched here by the Archmage Est still breathes. Feel free to participate."

Only then did Yuder understand why Kishiar had chosen this place for training.

They followed Kishiar's instructions, revealing their true abilities to each other, and trained to regulate their powers by comparing their maximum and minimum outputs.

Yuder succeeded without much difficulty, but among the members, there were more who were awkward because the training was not as they had anticipated.

"Our power is unprecedented. In other words, the more you know about yourself, the more it becomes your asset. Keep that in mind."

When conducting the training, Kishiar replaced his usual languid smile with a clear and firm tone.

As someone swung a massively transformed hand onto the ground, the whole area shook with a thunderous noise. Yet, the fact that protective magic was cast proved true as the impact didn't reach the buildings outside the training ground.

"Yuder. Come to my quarters for a moment after all the training is over."

Before the training ended, Kishiar came closer, under the pretext of checking Yuder's progress, and left him instructions in a voice so soft that nobody else could hear. Yuder looked at him and slightly nodded his head.

'I wonder why he called me. Is it about that novice knight matter?'

After all the training was over and he had bathed, Yuder climbed the stairs alone. As much as he thought about it, the only reason he could guess for Kishiar to secretly call him was that.

'An unprecedented event... I can't guess.'

Yuder's reality had changed since he chose the Shin Division. Things that hadn't happened before were increasing, and occasionally, the future information he had become useless. It was the same now.

He knocked twice on the lion-headed door knocker in front of the top floor where Kishiar would be staying. The door opened immediately, and the person inside poked his head out.

"Welcome. Are you the one who was supposed to visit tonight?"

"..."

It was a familiar face because he had seen it before. But it was the first time he met him now. Yuder nodded his head toward the handsome man with an icy expression.

"The Duke has gone out on a brief errand. He will be back soon, so please have a seat in the meantime."

His body, accustomed to wielding a sword for a long time, was full of thin scars over strong muscles.

The man with the distinctive light red skin of the southern countries guided Yuder to a table with an emotionless expression and offered him a teacup that seemed to have been prepared in advance. The beautiful porcelain teacup looked ironic in his large hand.

"Please have some."

"..."

After finishing his tasks, he quietly retreated to the bookshelf and stood. It seemed like he was just standing, but it was a position where he could perceive everything in the room at a glance.

'Is this what they call a Swordmaster.'

Yuder felt a subtle admiration for him.

He was none other than Nathan Zuckerman, the hidden Swordmaster who served as an adjutant following Kishiar La Orr. He had heard that he was not from the Empire, but somewhere in the southern countries, but he had forgotten.

He blindly followed only Kishiar, and after Kishiar's death, he disappeared as if he had never existed and never reappeared.