

# Turning

## Chapter 21

"Did everyone have a good rest after the celebrations yesterday?"

"Yes."

The next day, Kishiar summoned all the members, who were visibly suffering from hangovers. Yuder was fine, but both Kanna and Gakane on either side of him looked terrible.

"Yuder, you seemed to have drunk quite a bit too, but you look fine. Why?"

"Could that be your ability?"

"...Maybe it can be considered as such."

Yuder, who could manipulate all elements of nature at will, was immune to the effects of alcohol made from water and grains.

Only things that were artificially created, not naturally occurring in this world, could harm his body.

'I could get drunk on alcohol made by mixing monster's blood.'

However, that alcohol was originally made to poison someone. The fact that Yuder could not only survive but also get drunk on it was something only he could manage.

'I remember being surprised to learn I could get drunk when someone apparently tried to kill me with it.'

"I'm really envious. I wish I had such an ability."

As Kanna muttered, Kishiar, from afar, raised his voice and gently began to speak.

"I apologize to those who are still not feeling well from yesterday's revelry, but our first task has been assigned to the Cavalry. Five of you gathered here will pack up and leave with me today."

"A task? What could it be?"

"Five of us?"

At Kishiar's words, whispers immediately spread among the members. Everyone, forgetting their hangovers, was excited. How could they not be?

This would be the first time since the formation of the Cavalry that they would officially reveal their presence. Regardless of the task, everyone wanted to be among the five chosen.

And today, Yuder was one of them.

'Could it be that the Red Stone retrieval operation was announced today? This soon?'

He vaguely remembered that they had retrieved the Red Stone after receiving the last name before, but he didn't remember it happening this quickly. Yuder hadn't been interested in such things back then.

'The ones selected before were two from Shin, two from Sul, and one from Jung.'

He painstakingly recalled the vague memories of the past. At that time, Kishiar had chosen those with somewhat unique abilities rather than those known for powerful ones.

Those chosen had all signed a contract stating they wouldn't discuss what happened during the operation until they died. There had been a minor accident during the operation, but they had successfully retrieved the Red Stone and returned.

'The accident that occurred back then made it known to the world that Kishiar was chosen by the Divine Sword.'

Yuder was secretly disappointed that he wasn't selected at the time, and afterward, he focused more on his training. When it was revealed that Kishiar was the owner of the Divine Sword, it was merely someone else's business to Yuder.

Later, he was constantly busy after being chosen again as the deputy commander of the Sul Division. Suddenly, he had to take over the leadership and saw Kishiar retire and return to the Duchy of Peletta.

He had been so caught up in the whirlwind of events that he had no time to pay attention to the World Sphere he thought was safely dormant in the sanctuary.

However, following many subsequent events and the realization of impending disasters, Yuder felt the need to investigate the affairs related to the World Sphere again, especially when he realized that he was the only one who knew about the heavy aura of destruction pressing upon the world.

The reason was simple. To protect the world, power was required, and Yuder believed that there was nothing in this world as powerful as the World Sphere, which was refined from the Red Stone.

The problem was that the original power of the World Sphere had been severely damaged and nearly sealed due to the rough refining process in the Pearl Tower.

The mages of the Pearl Tower had claimed they had merely carved impurities from the Red Stone, but the result was quite the opposite.

Even if he wanted to demand they restore it, the Pearl Tower had long since fallen. Yuder thought he needed to investigate the situation when the World Sphere was simply a Red Stone and restore its original power himself.

'So, I had belatedly investigated the situation from the discovery of the Red Stone to its recovery...'

But so much time had passed that it was impossible to know exactly what had happened.

The only certainty was that all the Cavalry who had been chosen by Kishiar at the time had either retired and disappeared or died during their missions.

He needed power, but he could find neither the means to obtain it nor those who had had it. To make matters worse, Yuder, who began to dig into the past to find the source of that power, was exposed to many suspicions and vigilance.

Perhaps it had started then. The world Yuder had built began to crumble.

'I'm not sure what criteria Kishiar used to pick the members back then, but if it's the same this time, there's a high chance it won't be me.'

If he wasn't chosen this time either, what should he do? Should he find Kishiar and give him some sort of warning? While he was thinking about this, Kishiar slowly began to call the names of those who would depart with him.

"Finn Eldore and Hinn Eldore from Sul Division."

"Wow!"

Everyone was enthralled, but Yuder was in shock.

'No, the names weren't those back then. It was definitely...'

Was it Isis and Edin? He seemed to remember those two being selected. They were nothing like the noticeable Finn and Hinn siblings.

Yuder turned his gaze to Finn and Hinn, who were sharing their surprise not far away. The blue-haired siblings, with their elf-like faces, had chosen Sul instead of Shin Division, even though they had the ability to strengthen their bodies, which puzzled everyone.

In fact, the reason they chose Sul Division was simple. It was to develop another ability to move, which they could only use when together.

Despite this revelation, many people thought their talent should have bloomed in Shin Division.

Yuder had thought the same, often assigning them to missions that required physical abilities.

'The mobility ability is useful but not necessary. They haven't had their abilities awakened for very long, and the preconditions are tricky. Did he choose them knowing that? He didn't choose them before, so why now?'

"Next, Kanna Wand of Jung Division."

"Me? Really?"

Kanna looked around with a stunned expression. She was also someone who hadn't been singled out before.

'That's three people now who weren't selected in the past. If that's the case...'

The people to be called next might be completely different from before. Yuder ignored the members causing a stir around Kanna, focusing solely on Kishiar on the stage.

His lips slowly opened.

"Next, from the Shin Division, Gakane Bolunwald, and Yuder Aile. The five of you, pack light and come to me as soon as this ends."

Yuder Aile. His voice reverberated deep within Yuder's ears.

"It can't be.... We both got picked, Yuder. Is this real?"

Gakane's voice sounded distant. Yuder glanced at him briefly, then blankly envisioned Kishiar's face that had disappeared, feeling the reality that the future he knew was changing.

'All five of us chosen are different from before, even me.'

It was fortunate that he no longer needed to seek a private meeting with Kishiar.

After Kishiar's announcement and disappearance, the square where the members had gathered became a mix of those unable to hide their excitement and those disappearing with disappointment.

Yuder found himself caught among those rushing over to speak to him, Gakane, and Kanna.

"What's the standard? Congratulations, really. Make sure you complete the mission and return!"

"You have to tell us what happened when you come back!"

They probably couldn't reveal what had happened due to a confidentiality agreement. But Kanna and Gakane, who wouldn't know that, talked nervously yet excitedly.

'...What are you thinking, Kishiar La Orr.'

Yuder watched them, lost in thought. It wasn't easy to guess at Kishiarr's changed intentions.

It didn't take long to pack. He didn't have much to begin with, and the only clothes he had were the Cavalry uniform.

When Yuder arrived on the floor where Kishiarr's quarters were located with just one small bag, he saw the rest of his companions who had arrived earlier. The luggage they carried was strikingly simple.

Kanna greeted him with a tense look, and just as Gakane was about to say something with a radiant smile, as if he had found light in the darkness, two small figures popped out from beside him and spoke first.

"Hello. You're Yuder?"

"You're the Yuder who stood alone in front of the Imperial Knights?"

Hinn Eldore and Finn Eldore. Yuder saw the siblings again for the first time since his return. Their manner of speaking was as straightforward as ever, almost to the point of rudeness.

In the past, they were among the few comrades who would talk to Yuder, whom no one else approached. Seeing their attitude unchanged from his memories brought a faint smile to his face.

"Yeah."

As Yuder looked down at them and nodded, the sister, Hinn stepped forward and introduced herself.

"I'm Hinn. This one here is my brother Finn."

"If it's hard to distinguish because we look alike, just call us Eldore."

## **Chapter 22**

"If it's difficult to tell us apart because we look so alike, just call us Eldore."

"I can tell you apart, it's okay."

"Really? How?"

"Even our parents occasionally struggle to tell us apart."

How to tell them apart? It came down to the subtle difference in inherent energy between them.

The explanation seemed unlikely to be understood, so Yuder fell into brief contemplation. Thankfully, at that moment, the door adorned with a golden lion head opened, revealing the figure of Kishiar's adjutant, Nathan Zuckerman.

"Has everyone arrived?"

"..."

"I am Nathan Zuckerman, the adjutant to the commander. I will brief you on the mission before the commander arrives. Please save your questions until after I have finished."

Faced with Nathan Zuckerman's exotic appearance and icy demeanor, everyone found it difficult to speak up, even the blunt Eldore siblings.

Nathan, seemingly accustomed to such gazes, continued unperturbed.

"This mission is a direct command from His Majesty the Emperor and is thus of utmost importance. It may seem like a simple task of retrieving the Red Stone and re to the capital, but we are not fully aware of the power concealed within the stone. We must prepare meticulously in case of any unforeseen circumstances. There is a low possibility, but there may be interference from a third party eyeing the Red Stone. Therefore, five knights from the House of Pelleta, renowned for handling such missions, will accompany you and the commander. If you come across any issues beyond your capabilities, you are expected to cooperate with these knights."

"Are you coming with us, adjutant?"

As Hinn raised his hand to ask, Nathan shook his head.

"No. I will be handling the commander's tasks here."

"How long will this mission take?"

"The commander anticipates it will take about a week."

A week? Yuder's face hardened at the surprisingly short schedule.

'He must be excluding the time it will take to travel.'

Yuder remembered that it had taken almost a fortnight just to get to the capital to take the entrance test for the Cavalry, living near where the Red Stone fell.

Of course, he was young back then and did not know the way well, which could have slowed him down. But even so, he wondered if it was possible to complete the mission and return within a week.

'How long did it take Kishiar to finish everything last time? It seemed to take longer than a week. Am I underestimating the Red Stone retrieval mission? Or is that the only time the Emperor gave?'

Yuder did not know how the current Emperor, who preceded the one he had served with, conducted his affairs. However, the Emperor Yuder had worked for always expected tasks to be completed within the specified time frame.

If the current Emperor shared this trait, it might explain why they were moving so quickly.

"Oh dear, it seems I am the last one here."

At last, Kishiar made his appearance from within. He was dressed in a white commander's uniform, covered with a black cape that was less conspicuous. A large hood was attached to the cloak, enough to cover his face if needed.

While the others seemed overwhelmed by his extraordinary aura and elegant beauty they were witnessing up close, Yuder's attention was first drawn to the spectacular sword Kishiar was wielding.

'He brought it, as expected.'

The divine sword, Orr.

Yet, except for Nathan and Yuder, no one could even imagine that it was the legendary divine sword. It was a given.



"We won't be using a carriage for quick movement. Is there anyone here who can't ride a horse?"

Horses were the most common means of land transportation. There were even jokes on this continent that there were more horses than cats or dogs.

In particular, the Orr Empire, mostly made up of plains, was famous for having well-maintained roads for carriages since ancient times.

Therefore, every citizen of the Orr Empire learned to ride a horse from a young age. Even Yuder, who had grown up with his grandfather in a mountain valley, learned how to ride a horse and guide a cart around the time he could walk.

It was necessary for him to be able to take the diligently chopped wood down to the village to sell.

"We can ride."

After everyone nodded, Kishiar signaled to Nathan. Nathan, who had greeted everyone formally, went downstairs first.

"The horses we'll be riding are not ordinary. You've probably heard of them at least once. We'll be riding the Misty Wind Horses brought by the mages of the Pearl Tower."

"Misty Wind Horse is...."

Kanna muttered with a puzzled face. Of course, Yuder knew what it was.

'A hybrid created by magic.'

Long ago, the mages of the Pearl Tower conducted far more outrageous experiments than now. The creation of the Misty Wind Horse, a crossbreed of an ancient monster that only lived in the mist and storms with a horse, was the most useful result of those experiments.

'I can't believe we'll be riding that. Considering the period, they must have been widely used. I forgot.'

Misty Wind Horses were living creatures, but unlike real horses, they never got tired no matter how much they ran and left no footprints. These creatures, which ran with a cold wind mixed with mist instead of a mane, were designed

to obey only the commands of the mages who controlled them through the magic stones embedded in their bodies.

Since they didn't get tired, they could move much faster than real horses, but their numbers were small, so mostly only the mages of the Pearl Tower used them.

Of course, only the mages of the Pearl Tower knew how to create a Misty Wind Horse.

'I'm glad we extracted the secret of their creation before it fell. Thanks to that, even after those dreadful hybrids disappeared, the technology could be used elsewhere...'

The old mages who had been locked in the tower for a long time stubbornly followed their own rules. Until the advent of the Cavalry, they were the only ones in the world who could perform miracles.

They were also the ones who most strongly resisted feeling the fate that the Cavalry would replace them, and they went beyond the limit to interfere and launch cunning attacks. Ultimately, their greed ignited their downfall.

The Misty Wind Horse, which naturally disappeared after the tower fell, Yuder recalled the tower that might collapse again in a few years and its symbolic monster, and followed Kishiar down to the lower floor.

"Your Grace, these are the Misty Wind Horse you requested we prepare."

Four mages, wearing robes with pearl buttons – a sign of their affiliation with the Pearl Tower – stood at the entrance, which was intentionally left clear. They held the reins of several Misty Wind Horses. The sight was truly magnificent.

"Wow..."

Most people would never see a Misty Wind Horse in their lifetime.

These creatures seemed as though they were made visible by sprinkling a handful of silver powder where a whirlwind had coalesced. They were enormous, appearing to be twice the size of an average horse.

In order to restrain these formless creatures, a bridle and a magical stone, both made of special materials, were necessary.

When the Misty Wind Horse, tethered to the red bridles held by the mages, let out a cool neigh and trod the shadowless ground, only the soft sound of the wind spread.

Yuder looked into the creatures' eyes, which resembled the holes of a sieve, and thought to himself how unpleasant their appearance was, even upon second glance.

"It's strangely fascinating. It shines silver. I wonder if it will sparkle like this at night?"

"Yes. But it's not enough to attract the attention of beasts or monsters."

Those creatures would rather avoid the Misty Wind Horse. It was only natural for a being that was not born naturally to be shunned everywhere.

Only humans sought to distort and exploit these creatures.

At Kanna's murmur, Yuder unconsciously replied, blinking when he felt eyes towards him moments later.

"How did you know that? Have you seen one before?"

"I've... heard about them. From a passing mage."

"I see."

Fortunately, his companions didn't doubt the truth of his answer. After all, they had all left the places they had lived in for their entire lives only a few months ago, traveled for a long time, and came to the capital.

"Your Grace. It's been a long time."

After a bit more waiting, knights wearing light armor appeared not far away and kneeled in front of Kishiar.

Compared to the dazzling armor of the Imperial Knights, their attire was modest, almost mercenary-like. But the emblem embossed on their shoulder guards was the same flame pattern used by the Duke of Peletta.

These were the knights under the Duchy of Peletta, whom Kishiar had gathered.

"We had a hard time bringing eleven Misty Wind Horses. They tend to fight when grouped together, so when tied up, they must always be separated. Saddles aren't necessary, but to control their speed, a specific sound signal is used."

After confirming that all the personnel to retrieve the Red Stone had gathered, the highest-ranking mage from the Pearl Tower briefly explained how to handle the horses.

"When you need to slow down and stop, blow a long whistle once. When you need to speed up, keep blowing short whistles, and they will gradually speed up. The whistle doesn't have to be loud. These creatures are made to understand the sound of the humans riding them. Also, be careful not to place them near a fire. They are weak to heat. They might melt or disappear."

Those riding the Misty Wind Horse for the first time listened attentively to the instructions. Of course, Yuder already knew this, so he paid more attention to observing the faces of the gathered people.

## Chapter 23

'Five from the Peletta Knight Order, five from the Cavalry. And one Kishiar to lead them...'

The Peletta Knight Order seemed to have gathered their own elites, and discipline was maintained, but their strength did not seem outstanding. Of course, this was in comparison to the members of the Cavalry.

'It seems they've chosen people based more on experience than raw power.'

Even if the Peletta Knight Order was somewhat weak, it didn't matter. The strength of the remaining personnel was enough to ward off any ordinary threat.

'With this group, there won't be a need for Kishiar to draw his sword, even if something happens.'

In the past, a similar number of troops must have been deployed, and the combat power of the Cavalry members selected then would not have been low. Yet, why did Kishiar need to draw the divine sword?

What was the minor incident that occurred back then? Would the same problem arise this time?

It was still an unknown, but Yuder decided to prioritize the safety of Kishiar and the Red Stone above all else.

'If either of those two were damaged, it could lead to significant issues in the future.'

He had another goal. To change the fate of the Red Stone, which was to be sent to the Pearl Tower after being retrieved.

This time, Yuder planned to prevent the Red Stone from reaching the Pearl Tower.

'First focus on the retrieval, then confront Kishiar.'

While Yuder didn't particularly like Kishiar, at least the man was someone he could communicate with. Before Yuder's death, no one had understood or listened to his words, but he wanted to believe that Kishiar would be different.

Even if he didn't disclose everything, if he could convince Kishiar that the 'purification' happening at the Pearl Tower was not the true purification, couldn't he prevent the same future?

'If even Kishiar can't understand my words, perhaps it would be best to secretly investigate.'

If he couldn't prevent the purification, he would at least need to understand the original form and properties of the stone. If necessary, he was prepared to steal it.

They mounted their horses under the guidance of the Pearl Tower's mages. At first glance, the horses looked like mere clumps of wind, raising doubts about how they could be ridden, but touching the Misty Wind Horse revealed a tangible sensation, unseen yet felt by the hand. Judging that sensation correctly, they could sit atop the kneeling horse.

"Be careful not to let go of the reins. Even if you feel like you're about to fall, you'll be fine as long as you hold onto the reins."

"This feels so strange."

"Me too. It feels like I'm sitting on a squishy, invisible slime."

Hinn and Finn, the siblings, scrunched up their faces as they pressed down on their seats. The body of the invisible horse sank and rose under their palms.

"What would happen if we used our abilities on this horse?"

"It's quite disrespectful to consider using our powers on a horse said to be worth more than a cart full of gold."

At that moment, Kishiar, riding the largest horse, spoke from behind them. His voice held a hint of amusement, but it was enough to startle the siblings.

"Commander!"

"Did you hear us?"

"We weren't really going to do it."

"Curiosity is a virtue. To answer your question, if a force beyond its limit is applied, the Misty Wind Horse will be destroyed and scattered."

The words sounded like a joke, but they were delivered in a voice that felt strangely genuine. Eldore siblings, who had been looking at each other, hesitated for a moment before speaking up.

"Have you tried it?"

"Did you see it happen?"

"Of course. I think I was eleven at the time. My father the previous emperor had to pay for the horse because I had angered the tower master. As for me, I received the punishment of copying the scripture a hundred times."

"..."

Everyone fell silent at the nonchalantly uttered title. Despite the casual attitude, they were reminded afresh that the person before them was of

imperial blood, a descendant of the Sun God, who had been a prince until a few years ago.

And Yuder was slightly surprised for a different reason.

'A story from his childhood..... Come to think of it, I've never asked or heard about it.'

Yuder was one of the people who had spent the most time with Kishiar before his death.

Whether willingly or unwillingly, he had to meet him, but he suddenly remembered that they had never shared a conversation like this before.

Even then, he thought it was a rather bleak relationship.

It was so bleak that even he himself did not expect Kishiar's face to remain in his heart for such a long time.

"Who among those departing will lead the way?"

The mages of the Pearl Tower, having confirmed that everyone had mounted their horses, asked who would lead the way.

"These Misty Wind Horses have been trained to follow the path of the one holding a specific magic stone. Normally, we mages, who are accustomed to using the horses, don't need this, but as many of you are riding for the first time, we prepared it. We'll give this stone to the one leading the way."

The magic stone they produced was a black stone the size of a finger. A knight from Peletta Duchy, holding up his hand, approached with his horse after they raised the stone, fashioned into a bracelet to prevent easy dropping.

"I accept. I will guide from the front throughout."

"Good. Take this and remember not to remove it while you're riding."

The Peletta knight received the bracelet from the wizard, tried it on, and examined it a few times, assessing its comfort.

Nodding, seemingly satisfied, he caught the attention of Nathan, who had been watching everything from a distance. Nathan approached the horse Kishiar was on.

"Return safely, Duke."

"When you say it with such a stern face, it feels like I won't be able to return safely."

"..."

Nathan's face was expressionless. While there was no sign of laughter, Kishiar laughed with joy, his red eyes twinkling. Yuder watched as Kishiar, still holding the reins, leaned over to pat his adjutant's shoulder.

"I know you will do well with the tasks given until I return."

"...Yes."

'What does he know?' Yuder's mind was grazed by a fleeting question just as Kishiar straightened up and turned his head. His gaze swept over the ten people riding the Misty Wind Horses, pausing on Yuder's face.

"Let's depart, then."

"Yes!"

Two Peletta knights took up the lead as guides, with Kishiar and the cavalry in the middle. The rear was once again secured by three Peletta knights.

'In fact, if we go by the power they hold, it should be the knights who need protection...'

Yuder felt a peculiar irony as he pulled at the reins. He gave a short whistle, and the Misty Wind Horse he rode started to sway slowly before moving.

Since the west exit of the Imperial Knights' camp led directly outside the city walls without any checks, the party headed in that direction, then set a proper course towards the south.

Golden sunlight cast long shadows over the plain as eleven Misty Wind Horses galloped freely. The journey to the Airic Mountains to retrieve the Red Stone had begun.

The Misty Wind Horses could run more than three times faster than a living horse, but they were less taxing on the body due to their unique feel, even after a long ride.



The Cavalry who were riding the Misty Wind Horses for the first time were all surprised by this fact, and during a break for dinner, they shared their thoughts.

"It's really strange. I've been riding a horse, but why doesn't my butt hurt?"

"My back doesn't hurt either."

As the Eldore siblings marveled while patting their backs, Gakane joined in their conversation.

"That's because these horses are primarily used by mages. mages are known for their weak physical strength and discomfort with transportation. So, when creating the Misty Wind Horses, they were modified with the aim of compensating for these disadvantages as much as possible."

"How did you find that out?"

"I asked the Pearl Tower mage who came to help when I first rode the horse. Actually, I've always wanted to ride this horse."

Hearing that, Yuder recalled the mages who had only avoided him when he was riding the horse instead of helping him.

In that short time, Gakane had managed to have a detailed conversation with the mage from the Pearl Tower, known for their reclusive nature. If it was true, it wasn't an ordinary conversation.

Perhaps Gakane's talent lay in conversation, and Yuder thought it was a shame that such a person would disappear easily due to an accident in a few months.

'I must save that guy, after all.'

"Excuse me, your meals are ready."

Far away, the Peletta knights, who had skillfully cooked with a portable stove, waved at the Cavalry. Unlike the soldiers who brought little besides their clothes, the Peletta knights had two bags each, filled with supplies, hanging on either side of their horses.

It turned out all of it was necessary for living and eating.

The knights skillfully started a fire in the field and hung a pot on an improvised pot hanger made from broken branches to make soup, all without the help of the Cavalry.

As they continually took out seasonings, dried meat, and dehydrated bread from their bags, Yuder was repeatedly impressed by their survival skills.

"Um, the Duke said he would go to the nearby stream for a while, but he hasn't returned yet. Could one of you fetch him?"

## Chapter 24

"Could one of you fetch the Duke?"

When the knight, who had taken the lead in guiding and cooking, said so, a slight sense of guilt grew in people's hearts. As if expecting this, Yuder heaved a small sigh under their gazes and rose from his seat.

'Yes, I suppose it would be burdensome for anyone to meet with a high-ranking individual alone. I understand.'

Even Yuder, who had been the deputy commander assisting Kishiar and later lived for years in a high-ranking position, was not eager for such a situation. How much more burdensome would it be for the others?

Nevertheless, he decided it was better for him, who had returned after living about ten more years, to act for these younger ones with promising futures.

"...Commander."

As the knights said, Kishiar was standing next to the horse, which was tied to a tree near the creek, not far from the dining area.

Even though he was standing in a dark place, he looked strangely bright, as if surrounded by light.

'I remember that was some sort of lineage effect... but I can't remember.'

"It's time for you to eat."

"Ah, has it come to that already?"

Kishiar turned around.

"You came all the way here alone. It seems you are the most trusted among the ten."

"That's not quite the case."

They all must have quickly noticed that there was no better person to put off troublesome tasks than someone who wouldn't be scared no matter where he was placed.

People quickly recognized those who provided an opportunity to hide behind them.

Yuder walked ahead without looking back, a few steps in front of Kishiar. It was proper etiquette to either walk ahead of or behind a superior, so Yuder thought it would be better to walk where Kishiar couldn't see him.

"When your name was called out earlier..."

However, if words came from behind, it was ultimately futile. Yuder stopped his silent walk.

"You looked incredibly surprised. Did you really not anticipate it? That I would call your name."

"...My ability is not to read the future."

He simply remembered what had happened in the future. But this time, everything that had happened then had changed. How could he not be surprised?

Even so, he hadn't expected Kishiar to notice and bring it up when they were alone.

"Right, of course. But it was quite refreshing to see such an expression. It was interesting."

"...Is that so? Should I say I'm glad to have entertained you, Commander?"

Yuder's voice was icily calm. His tone was polite, but the meaning behind his words was the exact opposite. There was no one here who did not understand that.

"Hahaha."

Kishiar laughed.

"So, are you discontented with following me? If you want to go back, you can go back right now."

"I will fulfill my duty."

Yuder answered as succinctly as possible. Whether he liked Kishiar or not, back from here was absolutely not an option. He had a goal to protect Kishiar, and the Red Stone, with his own hands.

"You're really fearless. That's why you're interesting."

"..."

Without responding, Yuder turned his body and began walking again.

"Yuder Aile."

"..."

"I like you. Would you consider opening up to me and getting closer?"

Yuder halted for the second time. He turned around to face an inscrutable smile.

'Why is he doing this?'

Had this happened before? No, they had never engaged in a mission together before, making any comparison impossible. Yuder, in a state of slight confusion, looked at him and opened his mouth.

"...I have been trying to respect you, Commander, with all my heart. If that was not enough..."

"I know. That's not what I'm talking about."

"I apologize, but my social skills are a bit lacking since I have lived alone in the mountains for so long. If I have misunderstood something..."

Inwardly, Yuder tried to understand Kishiar's intentions while outwardly making excuses. Kishiar raised a corner of his mouth in a grin.

"So you're saying no."

"..."

"Alright, I understand."

"Commander! Over here!"

Before Yuder could respond, a knight not far from them shouted in their direction. Yuder had to move towards the group, missing his opportunity to speak to Kishiar.

Two days later, Kishiar maintained his usual demeanor until they reached the location of the Airic mountain range where the Red Stone had fallen.

He didn't engage in personal conversation, only opening his mouth to manage the interactions between the knights from Peletta and the Cavalry members.

Unlike the Imperial Knights, the knights from Peletta showed no hostility towards the Cavalry members. It was impossible to know what they were thinking internally, but outwardly their behavior was impeccable.

The Cavalry members assumed this was because their master Kishiar La Orr was an Awakener, but Yuder thought differently.

'If it was just because of that, they wouldn't behave so impeccably.'

The Peletta Knights were the first group Kishiar La Orr created after receiving his title. Consequently, they were also the first to be disbanded after his death.

'They are very blindly loyal to their master.'

Even after only three days together, it was clear how they felt about Kishiar. To them, Duke Kishiar La Orr was not just a master but a true 'Lord' deserving of all respect.

How could such blindly loyal men have agreed to disband without any action when Kishiar died in the past?

'Well, I can't know what happened during those two years, even though they are showing loyalty now.'

Regardless, there would be no disbandment due to their master's death this time.

"Over there! I see the flag of the stationed army."

At that moment, one of the Peletta knights at the front shouted loudly. As he said, not far away, a flag was tied high on a tree, fluttering in the wind. It was a red background with a golden lion, the imperial flag used by the Orr Empire's army.

"We will be arriving soon, please slow down."

Whistles were heard here and there. Yuder too blew his whistle, signaling his Misty Wind Horse to slow down.

The Misty Wind Horse was indeed an extraordinary mode of transportation. Its speed was incomparable to that of a living horse and its tireless endurance was impressive. But its most astounding ability was its capacity to bound forth at great strides, without making a sound, and without causing much strain to its rider.

Despite having ridden almost nonstop for three days, minus time for meals and sleep, fatigue was barely visible on the faces of the travelers, a testament to the horse's exceptional ability.

Had they traveled on real horses or in carriages, they would not only have not arrived yet, but exhaustion would have been visibly etched on their faces.

The group followed the guide knight, slowly approaching the entrance to the temporary imperial army base set up at the foot of the mountain range. Before long, a barricade constructed from large logs and soldiers standing guard with spears in hand came into view.

"Identify yourselves. State your affiliation and purpose!"

"We come under the Emperor's command. In our company is the brother of His Imperial Majesty Duke Kishiar La Orr, the commander of the Cavalry and the master of the Peletta Knights."

At the knight's booming voice, the soldiers immediately straightened their stances.

"Please wait a moment. We have relayed the message and someone will soon come to greet you!"

Yuder felt his Misty Wind Horse snorting out a cold breath with a purr. Each time the horse's mist-like mane, which disappeared like smoke, touched his skin, he felt a chill as if touched by ice.

As a life form not born naturally, his body instinctively rejected it. Because of this, he had avoided riding these horses unless absolutely necessary in the past.

'I can tolerate it, but it certainly doesn't feel good.'

Yuder hoped for the arrival of those who were supposed to greet them so he could dismount from the horse.

"Your Grace, welcome. We have been awaiting your arrival since we received the order."

Finally, people appeared from within. Leading several armored soldiers was a middle-aged man with a sharp demeanor who immediately saluted upon seeing Kishiar.

'...Isn't that man the Southern Army's General, Count Gino Bordelli?'

For a moment, Yuder doubted his eyes. It was a familiar face. Everyone knew that after the Red Stone fell, the army sent by the Emperor was guarding the area thoroughly, but he had never thought that a man of the general's rank would be here in person. Even the Yuder of the past would not have known this fact.

Gino Bordelli was not wearing armor like the other soldiers. He only wore a military uniform with a gold lion brooch, bestowed by the Emperor, on his shoulder and a blue cape over it. But the aura he exuded was heavier and more intense than anyone else present.

At first glance, he appeared to be in his forties, but Yuder knew that in reality, he was at least twenty years older than he looked.

## Chapter 25

'Gino Bordelli... He was in charge here at this time.'

The Imperial Army divided the vast empire into two major regions: the North and the South. The Southern Army and the Northern Army had traditionally been rivals, and while they varied in many ways such as discipline and atmosphere, they had one thing in common.

Whether in the North or the South, the Generals in command were invariably Swordmasters. This was a component that allowed the empire to demonstrate its powerful military strength among other nations, and those who occupied the position of general became a core force of the empire, becoming the closest servants and blades of the Emperor.

And General Gino Bordelli of the Southern Army was a man of unblemished integrity, known for performing his general duties for nearly 40 years with almost no controversy.

Born into a Count's family and holding a sword even before he could walk, he did not join the Imperial Knights or any other renowned knight orders like other nobles. Instead, he traveled the world, dedicating himself to swordsmanship, and became a Swordmaster at the mere age of thirty.

Usually, after becoming a general, one would not stop there but pursue more power, but Gino Bordelli desired nothing more, focusing solely on protecting the empire as a general. He was the idol of all sword-wielders, and this did not change even after the emergence of those who awakened with the power of the Red Stone.

A general who obeyed only the Emperor's commands and exerted himself solely in protecting the empire as steadfastly as a massive rock. However, he retired a few years after Yuder became a Commander, and his subordinate succeeded him to the position of general.

'I kept thinking he might have helped me back then.'

After recognizing the signs of a disaster, Yuder sought out several people to ask for advice and assistance. Gino Bordelli was also one of those he had



intended to seek. However, after his retirement, he had disappeared somewhere, making it impossible to locate him.

'We weren't particularly close before. It would be nice if this could be an opportunity to establish some connection.'

Even if he were to retire in a few years, Gino Bordelli's stature would not change. He was still the most respected Swordmaster on the continent. If he spoke, his words would be valued more than a hundred words from Yuder.

'Had he been here for two years? Or did he also come here in preparation for the retrieval operation? Either way, he must have moved because of the Emperor's command.'

The Emperor had sent his only brother and the commander of the Cavalry, Kishiar, here to retrieve the Red Stone, and in addition, he had sent General Gino. The implication was clear.

'The Emperor must consider that stone very important.'

If true, it would be a significantly different direction from the speculations Yuder had made so far.

Because all that the current Emperor had done with the Red Stone was to entrust it to the Pearl Tower—which was questionable as to how much it knew about the stone—messed it up, and then just slapped a plausible name 'World Sphere' on it and shoved it into the sanctuary.

He had even heard that after storing it, he did not go to check on it even once until he died.

Hence, Yuder had speculated that the current Emperor was merely curious about the stone.

But if that wasn't the case...

"It's been a while, Gino. I'm glad to see you looking well."

Kishiar, who had been wearing a hood, removed it to reveal his face. The soldiers inhaled sharply at the sight of his distinctive golden hair and red eyes, hallmarks of the royal lineage. It was astonishing to confirm the arrival of a man they may only get to see once in their lifetime.

Yuder disembarked from the Misty Wind Horse, along with his entourage. Kishiar parted them and went ahead to exchange a light handshake with General Gino Bordelli.

"You must have had a hard time guarding this place."

"Not at all. I've merely been doing my duty."

"Any problems?"

"Nothing significant, aside from a few local villagers who tried to sneak in out of curiosity."

As the two conversed and naturally stepped into the entrance of the barrier, the soldiers smoothly widened the path so the rest of the party could enter.

Holding the reins of his Misty Wind Horse, Yuder followed behind, straining his ears to catch the conversation between Kishiar and General Gino.

"How many people do we have here in total?"

"Approximately 300."

"More than I expected."

"We needed a large number to monitor the whole mountain. It was more about having enough eyes than raw ability."

"More eyes than ability, huh."

Kishiar chuckled lightly. Although General Gino was a towering figure, much taller than an average man, Kishiar was noticeably even taller.

The sight of the two walking together was like a glimpse into another world. Just as the soldiers were fascinated by the sight of the duke and the general together, Yuder noticed that the members of the Peletta Knight and the Cavalry were also showing interest.

The existence of the Cavalry hadn't been officially announced to the world yet, so only a handful of people knew about them. They wore uniforms but were not Knights, and they gave off a different energy from the mages of the Pearl Tower, which seemed strange given the mix of men and women.

But unless something unusual happened here, the soldiers would likely pass by them without knowing who they were.

"Come in."

General Gino led them to a building in the center of the base. The small building, which originally seemed like a hunter's lodge, had been renovated and expanded to look somewhat decent.

"I receive all reports and conduct commands from here. You must be tired from your journey, but we've been ordered to finish the work as quickly as possible. As soon as you're ready, I'll give you a situation report here. Is that okay?"

Upon hearing General Gino's words, Kishiar's gaze turned to the Peletta Knights and the Cavalry.

"Is there anyone among you who is tired?"

"We're fine."

"We're the same."

The Peletta Knights shouted in unison, and Gakane responded resolutely. Kishiar nodded and turned his eyes back to General Gino.

"Then let's start right away."

"Understood. Would you prefer to hear the report and the matters related to the Red Stone alone? Or...."

"I'll listen with the Cavalry. And Sir Brugg."

"Yes!"

The knight who had been leading the way so far stepped forward.

"Sir, you too."

"Understood."

Leaving four of the Peletta knights behind, the rest followed General Gino into a room located deeper within. Inside, an enormous map that nearly covered

one wall was affixed, and several old chairs of mismatched design were scattered haphazardly.

"My apologies for not having suitable accommodations for someone of your stature. However, they should hold up fine, so please, take a seat," Gino said.

"Isn't the purpose of a chair merely to be sat upon?"

Kishiar, with no hint of displeasure, pulled a nearby chair and seated himself.

"Everyone, please sit down."

At his words, the Eldore siblings were the first to quickly take their seats, followed by the others who awkwardly and cautiously lowered themselves into the chairs. Yuder was the last to sit, choosing the farthest chair from which he could observe everyone.

Once everyone was seated, General Gino approached the map, pointing to a black dot at its center.

"This is our current location. It's in the Airic mountain range, known as the Spine, that runs through the central part of the Empire. More precisely, we are located in the northwest."

The military map he showed was far more precise than the common ones used by the nobles. It depicted part of the Airic mountains, painted in green to denote the mountainous terrain, with contour lines indicating altitude. Even a first-time viewer could quickly grasp the local geography, as everything was meticulously marked.

Furthermore, simple pictograms indicated the distribution and numbers of soldiers stationed throughout the mountains. The members of the Cavalry who were seeing a military map for the first time widened their eyes in surprise.

"The Red Stone fell here, two years ago. It's a valley a few hours' climb from where we are."

The general moved his finger slightly downward from the spot he'd previously indicated. A red dot was marked there.

"However, as you know, since the stone fell, the surrounding area has been scorched and it has become a place where no one can approach carelessly."

A place where no one could approach carelessly. Yuder inferred a double meaning from these words. Not only was the area guarded by the military, preventing anyone from approaching, but the power of the Red Stone made it difficult for even the guarding forces to approach.

Yuder recalled a brief memory related to the Red Stone. Before his time reversal, he had watched from a distance as Kishiar returned from a mission to retrieve the Red Stone, along with the other members.

He couldn't remember the exact condition of the Cavalry members Kishiar had taken with him at the time, but he remembered that there had been no visibly injured, meaning they had managed to walk back on their own.

Kishiar, at that time, unusually looked extremely fatigued, holding the Red Stone. More precisely, he was holding a bundle wrapped in several thick layers of cloth, presumably containing the stone.