

Turning

Chapter 3

"Airic? Do you mean the place near the Rik Mountains?"

Gakane, who had no idea what Yuder was thinking, was merely surprised at the mention of his hometown's name.

"You know it?"

"How could I not? The Rik Mountains is where the Red Stone fell!"

'That's right,' Yuder chuckled. Although he hadn't seen the scene where the Red Stone fell, as it was quite far from where he had lived, he had heard the sky turn completely red and the deafening sound that seemed to shake the heavens and the earth.

Back then, he didn't know that the world wasn't really coming to an end and was shocked by the event. In fact, the small village where Yuder used to sell timber was severely affected by the aftermath of the falling Red Stone.

"Did you, by any chance... see the Red Stone?"

Since he had only heard rumors about it, Gakane asked, unable to hide his curious expression. Yuder unknowingly nodded while recalling the past events.

"Really? You saw it?"

Gakane jumped excitedly, gasping for breath. His face turned red with excitement. Yuder realized he should have said that he hadn't seen it 11 years ago, but he had already nodded his head.

"I heard that the Emperor's knights have set up a camp to prevent anyone from entering the area, so how did you see it? Did it fall near where you lived? What did the stone look like? How big was it?"

"Wait a moment. I..."

Yuder hesitated for a moment, unsure of how to respond. Had he seen the Red Stone? Of course, he had. However, that was after he joined the Cavalry, which at this point was a future event.

That stone was collected personally by the then Cavalry leader after the establishment of the Cavalry, and afterward, the archmages of the Pearl Tower refined it, removing impurities for a year.

Since then, the stone had been called the "World Sphere," a name given to it because it was said to possess the power to support the world.

His mood darkened as he thought about the stone, which had provided the crucial reason for his death.

"I didn't get a good look at it. As you said... the knights were guarding it."

"But you must have seen something, or you wouldn't have said you saw it, right?"

Gakane was persistent, and his determination to hear the story was evident.

"If it has to be a secret, I promise I won't tell anyone else. I swear on my sword, on the Holy War, on my mother's name, whatever you want me to do."

Had Gakane Bolunwald been such a person? Yuder felt his faint impression of Gakane crumble significantly.

No matter how dignified his appearance, he was still a young man unable to contain his curiosity. Yuder sighed softly and opened his mouth quietly.

"It's not something worth hearing with such an oath."

"If it's not that great, you can tell me."

'You're so persistent. You'll learn about it after passing the Cavalry test anyway.'

After thinking that, Yuder recalled the fact that Gakane was already dead by the time the Red Stone had been collected and returned as the World Sphere.

Suddenly, he felt a faint sympathy for the young man before him, finding him a little pitiable. Hesitating, Yuder opened his mouth.

“It’s an ordinary stone. On the outside, it’s no different from any other stone in color or size, being only about the size of a fist.”

This much could be said without any problem. Gakane’s eyes widened at Yuder’s words.

“It’s that small? Then how can you tell it’s the Red Stone? I thought it was called the Red Stone because of its red color.”

Yuder faintly smiled without letting him notice. Everyone made the same mistake. Eleven years ago, Yuder had thought the same.

The Red Stone was named so because the whole sky turned red when it fell. And, since anyone could feel an extraordinary energy when they faced the stone, everyone knew its true nature immediately.

It was a stone that ordinary people couldn’t even approach due to being overwhelmed by its energy.

“I don’t know that.”

“Well, okay. I’m really curious. We’ll find out when we join the Cavalry, right?”

“ ... ”

Yuder said nothing and ate his stew. Fortunately, Gakane seemed to not expect an answer to that question, and closed his mouth.

“Oh, right. Did you register for the test? You need to register to take the entrance test for the Cavalry. Do you know how?”

As the meal was ending, Gakane lifted his head as if he had just remembered. Yuder nodded.

“I know.”

He didn’t know back then. There had been no one to tell a poor country bumpkin with a gloomy expression about such details.

As a result, he only found out that the test required separate registration the day before it ended. The memory of getting lost in the vast capital while trying to find the registration place was still vivid.

"You need to go to the Blue Crown. It's quite far from here when I went to register. It's much more convenient to have me guide you than to get lost on the way. What do you think?"

Gakane's expression was full of goodwill, perhaps because Yuder had informed him about the Red Stone. When had he last received such unconditional, pure goodwill? It felt incredibly awkward, but trying not to show it, Yuder stared at him.

"...Fine."

"You made a good decision."

Gakane smiled broadly. The dazzlingly handsome man even shone when he smiled. Yuder thought, after a long time, that the world was unfair.

The Blue Crown was not far from the Imperial Palace. It was mainly a place where administrators responsible for public affairs worked.

In truth, the building had a long official name, Parklamannuteia Hall, but there were several theories as to why it had acquired the somewhat peculiar nickname of Blue Crown.

One theory was that part of the roof was blue, while another suggested that the nickname came from the blue rose pattern drawn on the ground leading to the main entrance.

However, the most widely accepted explanation was that the ink used by the bureaucrats for their official seals was a distinctive shade of blue.

Standing in front of the grand building constructed in an old-fashioned style, Yuder was filled with mixed emotions. It was inside those doors that his life had changed for the first time.

"Fortunately, the line isn't too long today. We should be able to get in quickly."

Gakane, who had been looking at the people waiting in line, nodded and took the lead.

Those who had come to take the Cavalry test had to line up for registration. This was because, despite the large number of applicants, there were only a few registration officials.

Yuder had been fortunate enough to enter just before registration closed in the past, but this time was different. As they approached the end of the line, the woman standing right in front of them turned her head.

"Hello. Are you also applicants?"

With a seemingly angry, plump expression, her tone was as confrontational as her looks. Yuder didn't recognize her from his memories. She was likely one of the many people who either had a weak ability that would be useless in real combat or had mistakenly come believing they had awakened an ability.

As this was the first Cavalry recruitment, there were countless such individuals. While Yuder would have ignored her question, Gakane kindly answered.

"Yes. Although I've already registered."

"Really? Did you come to help the person next to you?"

"In a way."

The woman's gaze briefly shifted to Yuder standing next to Gakane before re to Gakane.

"Then do you know what we should answer when we register? I'm so nervous that I haven't been able to eat anything since this morning."

Only then did Gakane realize that her tense expression was due to anxiety, and his gaze softened.

"It's not a big deal. You just need to provide your name, age, place of origin, your secondary gender if you have one, and most importantly, a description of your ability. That's it."

The term "secondary gender" referred to a gender other than the visible male or female.

It was a trait that had emerged after the Red Stone had fallen, and since it manifested arbitrarily regardless of one's primary gender, it was initially considered a divine curse.

However, as it was later revealed that this trait only appeared in those who had awakened their abilities, public perception changed.

The Emperor of the Orr Empire and the Pope officially declared it the "second gender bestowed by the gods," and the general populace, who had been terrified that their own bodies might change at any moment, were greatly relieved.

Individuals with the alpha secondary gender, regardless of their primary gender, could impregnate those with the omega secondary gender. Although they could also form relationships with others and have offspring, those with secondary genders mostly felt sexual attraction only towards each other.

At first glance, this concise story seemed to involve little else. However, as time passed and more information came to light, new discrimination began to grow within these distinctions.

Those identified as alphas generally had exceptionally good physiques and tended to awaken strong abilities, earning the admiration of all. However, those identified as omegas had weaker abilities than even the average awakened individuals without a secondary gender.

Although both alphas and omegas experienced periodic mating cycles, the alphas' cycles were relatively quiet compared to the omegas'. The omegas' cycles were marked by the release of a powerful scent that even non-awakened individuals could detect, and they were often scorned for being unable to control their desires, as if they were beasts.

Many omegas, due to their scent, struggled to work effectively as ability users, and some were even kidnapped and used as sexual playthings by aristocrats who coveted rare and peculiar possessions.

By the time Yuder died, most ability users identified as omegas were unable to join the Cavalry. The reason for this was the discriminatory perception that, even if they were admitted, they would only end up being useless burdens on the organization.