



# 魔王と戦姫の戦い

14

ヴァナディース

川口士

片桐雛太

キャラクター原案 よし☆ラ

MF文庫 J





c o n t e n t s

1.

戦雲迫る

010

2.

大切な者

075

3.

王都攻防

127

4.

セヴェラックの戦い

186

5.

矢、飛ぶ

252

6.

エピローグ

304

口絵イラスト●片桐雛太

## Disclaimer

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## Content

Disclaimer.....	5
Chapter 1 – Imminent Clouds of War.....	6
Chapter 2 – Dear People.....	38
Chapter 3 – Strife over the Capital.....	63
Chapter 4 – Battle of Severac.....	91
Chapter 5 - Arrow, fly.....	123
Epilogue.....	149

## ***Chapter 1 – Imminent Clouds of War***

It was an encounter. Both sides met unexpectedly and recognized each other.

It was a region slightly southerly from the heart of the Brune Kingdom. This area was dotted with hills, with pockets of forests in between; there were also thickets, and a gently meandering river also spread over there.

All of these obstructed the field of vision of both parties. Thus, they noticed the other party too late.

Under the first blue sky of summer, the reconnaissance teams of the Moonlight Knight Army and the Muozinel Army glared at one another from halfway-up a small hill. The distance separating both parties was about 300 Alsins (about 300 meters).

Both parties were composed only of cavalry, with about 200 on each side.

Incidentally, the so-called Moonlight Knight Army was the common name for the mixed army of Brune and Zhcted. This reconnaissance team had only a handful of Zhcted soldiers.

The fact that they had almost the same number of soldiers as the enemy seemed to have ignited their fighting spirit. Illuminated by the midday sun, the Muozinel Army was the first to make a move.

“This is a great opportunity to earn achievements! Let crush those bastards Brune men!”

The cry of the steel helmet-adorned Muozinel leader drove the soldiers out onto the battle. They let out a battle cry, and spurred their horses to rush on the Moonlight Knight Army.

“Attack! Show them that we are stronger!”

The leader of the Moonlight Knight Army shouted encouragement to his troops. He was a young man with darkish red hair and black eyes. He held neither a sword nor a spear in his hands, but a jet black bow.

The young man was none other than Tigrevurmud Vorn. He was called by the nickname Tigre by those close to him. He would be 18 this year, but looking at his age and appearance, it was hard to imagine that he has accumulated many distinguished military feats until today.

At Tigre’s cry, the soldiers responded with a cry of their own. This was Brune territory, and the Muozinel Army was the invader. The angry roars of the enemy only further fanned their fighting spirit.

Tigre breathed a sigh of relief at the fact that the soldiers, who were confused at the unexpected incident, finally recovered. He wanted to avoid a melee combat, but it could not be helped. If they were to retreat in order to reorganize their ranks, it would only the enemy’s morale.

Running across the hill’s slope, the two armies clashed. It has turned into a melee in the blink of an eye.

Horses and horses collided with each another, while humans and humans crossed weapons. Swords and spears, rather than just killing and maiming their enemy, were used in order to topple them from their horses. Those who fell to the ground either rolled down the slope, or were crushed under the hooves of enemies and allies’ mounts.

The blades of the Moonlight Knight Army and the Muozinel Army met with the resounding clash of steel and steel. Brune soldiers lost their balance, and were toppled from their horses. A Muozinel soldier tried to spur his horse to deliver the final blow, but he get clubbed from the back by another Brune soldier and lost

consciousness as his head dyed with blood.

The frightening thing about a melee was that you never knew when an enemy would attack you from the flank or from the back. Both Brune and Muozinel soldiers fell to the ground as they were slashed at from the flank and stabbed from the back. The smell of blood and soil mixed into the hot breeze of early summer, making one choke.

A single arrow suddenly flew over their heads.

That arrow was headed straight towards forehead of the Muozinel Army's leader who has taken down a Brune soldier boldly brandishing his spear. "Gah!" The Muozinel Army leader toppled from his horse with a small cry, never to get up again.

The Muozinel soldiers fell into disarray at the sight of losing their leader right before their very eyes. In contrast, the Brune soldiers became even more ferocious.

"Don't leave a single soldier go back!"

Tigre's merciless orders flew across the battlefield. The one, who has taken down the Muozinel Army's leader in the midst of friends and foes with but a single arrow, was this young man.

The Brune soldiers charged in. The Muozinel soldiers were dressed with only light leather armor, with their heads wrapped with a black cloth. Their heads were cracked with a club, their shoulders cut off with swords, and they were stabbed in the abdomen with spears. The ground that was already stained a dark red from the rivers of blood was stained even more with the new blood, adding to the ghastliness of the scene.

Shortly thereafter, the Muozinel soldiers turned their horses around one by one and began to flee. A few valiantly fought against the Brune soldiers, but were quickly surrounded and cut down.

On top of that, 20 or so arrows were shot from the ranks of the Moonlight Knight Army. They came not from the Brune soldiers, but from the Zhcted ones. Being pierced by arrows to the heads and backs, several Muozinel soldiers were toppled off their horses. They were then ambushed by the Brune soldiers, and dealt a final blow.

Tigre nocked an arrow to his black bow as he gazed upon the soldiers' way of fighting.

Although cruel, he could not let the enemy gather even the slightest bit of Intel. Moreover, he had to strike when he was able to strike. This battle aside, considering the whole picture, the Muozinel Army was indeed a large army of 150,000, twice as many as the Moonlight Knight Army's number after all.

A single arrow drew a magnificent curve through the air. It flew as if chasing after the man at the vanguard of the retreating Muozinel soldiers, and shot through his head. Tigre let out a sigh of amazement. It was probably shot by one of the Zhcted soldiers, but it had such a marvelously fascinating trajectory.

Before long, the pursuit battle ended, and two men appeared before Tigre to give their report. One of them was a splendidly bald-headed Zhcted knight that left a lasting impression, known as Rurick. The other was a young Brune noble with black hair tinged with gray, Gaspar.

"We are still making confirmations, but I think we were able to wipe out nearly half of the enemy."

Gaspar opened his mouth with a rigid expression. He was the second son of Mashas Rodant relied upon by Tigre. He was like an older brother to Tigre, and was in charged of keeping the Brune soldiers in this reconnaissance team.

"We (Brune side) count 12 dead. There are about 30 to 40 injured. I have about 10 cavalrymen that have not

sustained any injury head onto the hill to make sure that there are not enemy reinforcements nearby.”

Gaspar was usually more outspoken, but he spoke like this to Tigre in presence of the soldiers.

Rurick then made his report. He served as the mediator of the Zhcted soldiers.

“There are no Zhcted casualties. We have 4 injured, but they are all minor injuries.”

Rurick then glanced at Gaspar.

“We will help you bury the dead.”

“Thank you. By the way, what do we do with the Muozinel soldiers’ corpses?”

Tigre shook his head at Gaspar who asked as such.

“There is no need to bury their corpses. Take their weapons, but otherwise just pile them up in one spot, so that it is easy for their comrades to collect the bodies.”

There was the possibility that their bodies would be eaten by wild beasts before the Muozinel soldiers, who have escaped, come to collect them. However, Tigre decided not to think about it. There was no way they could bury nearly 100 corpses. Besides, they were enemies. There was a limit to what they could do for them.

Gaspar and Rurick turned their horses towards the soldiers in order to issued commands. Despite their victory, the expression of Tigre, who saw off their retreating figures, did not brighten.

*—Who would have thought that their reconnaissance team would have come this far.*

This place was a distance of about a day and a half on foot from the Brune Kingdom’s Capital city of Nice.

The 150,000 Muozinel Army should have still been in the port town of the south. Considering that it took about 20 days on foot from the port town of the south to the Capital, this encounter itself made him shudder.

Though, since a Muozinel Army’s reconnaissance team had once been sighted at Montour, which was north of the Capital, this should have been expected.

Tigre, who was in charge of the whole Moonlight Knight Army, took just 200 cavalrymen and came to this area because he has judged that he wanted to confirm the topography with his own eyes instead of just using maps.

After a quarter koku passed, Rurick and Gaspar appeared once again before Tigre. They reported that all operations were complete, and that there were no enemy reinforcements nearby. Tigre nodded, and after giving the order to return to the Capital, suddenly asked about what have been bothering him.

“Speaking of which, when the Muozinel Army escaped, are you the one that took down the soldier at the vanguard, Rurick?”

“You could tell only after seeing the arrow? As expected of you, Lord Tigrevurmud.”

Rurick shyly smacked his hand on his gleaming head. He was good with a bow, and was fiercely proud of his own great skill. He also deeply respected Tigre, who was even better with a bow than he was. Tigre laughed as he replied.

“In this squad, you and I are the only ones that can let fly an arrow like that, Rurick. That arrow might just have been your best shot yet.”

“I think so, too. Recently, I was finally able to shoot an arrow over 280 Alsins during practice, but couldn’t do it in battle, so I kept it secret...”

In the continent, the record distance in archery was 250 Alsins, but it would be next to impossible for even those people called experts or masters to make a shot like that.

Rurick had long surpassed that record as he was able to shoot an arrow over 270 Alsins, but now he has further exceeded these 270 Alsins.

“Just you wait and see. I’ll eventually shoot an arrow over 300 Alsins, so that I can be on par with Lord Tigrevurmud.”

“Look like I can’t idle about with you around.”

Then, Gaspar, who has been quietly listening to their conversation up to that point, cut in.

“Rurick-dono. Tigre.... I mean, the Supreme Commander’s archery skills, I wonder how they compare to his sword and spear skills. I don’t dislike archery, but I’m a little out of the loop there...”

“Let’s see. If I’ve to say it in a single sentence, he’s probably the best on the continent.”

“You’re giving me way too much credit.”

As expected, Tigre looked shocked, but Rurick shook his head with a serious expression.

“What are you saying? We would be in trouble if there was another archer as good as you. Lord Tigrevurmud, you should be more self-aware of how preposterous and frightening the act of shooting enemies with a bow and arrow while standing at the army’s vanguard is.”

“No, even I have someone watching over me, so I couldn’t possibly...”

Tigre tried to deny it, but because not only Rurick, but also Gaspar looked at him with suspicious eyes, he turned his back to both and ended the conversation.

“Let’s pull back.”

Behind the youth, the bald-headed knight and the young nobles both smiled bitterly.



It was at the end of spring that the large army of 150,000 of the Muozinel Kingdom invaded the Brune Kingdom. The Supreme Commander was Kureys Shahim Balamir. As the younger brother of the Muozinel King, he was an outstanding great General known as “Red Beard” and feared by neighboring countries.

Under the command of Kureys, the Muozinel Army immediately rushed through Agnes, which became a territory of Zhcted, and stepped into Brune’s territory. For many Brune people, who thought that Agnes would hinder their invasion, it was truly a surprise attack.

The Muozinel Army that achieved their invasion to Brune did not immediately aim for the Capital, but instead proceeded to the south. They headed for the port towns which dotted the coast of Brune southern part.

Their March speed was by no means slow; the port towns, which were overwhelmed by their large army of 150,000, surrendered one after the other and showed intentions of allegiance. It was because bravado was pointless and they knew very well the cruelty of the Muozinel Army against those who opposed them.

Other than very rare exceptions, the Muozinel never forgave those who opposed them. They turn cities to rubble with thorough destruction and pillaging. Residents are either killed, or taken away as slaves.

At the moment, the Muozinel Army could be found in a port town called Massilia.

If one followed the large road that stretched from this port town to the north, they could reach the Capital Nice in about 20 days. Though they have not begun to move, it was a matter of time for the Muozinel soldiers and flags to fill the road leading north.

The current ruler of the Brune Kingdom was Princess Regin Ester Loire Bastien do Charles. She has resolved herself to fight the Muozinel Army, and has gathered soldiers from all over Brune.

The one chosen to lead these soldiers was Tigrevurmud Vorn. The people hoped that the youth, who had suppressed the civil war and kept repelling foreign invaders, would win against the Muozinel Army as well. Of course, Tigre himself shared the sentiment.



Tigre led the reconnaissance team back to Nice the day after their encounter with the Muozinel's scout occurred. The morning sky was fantastically cloudless and blue, and the early summer's sunlight poured down brightly, making the castle walls shimmer in white.

The Capital stood within a storm of nervousness, energy, and franticness. No large army has attacked the Capital for decades. The civil war that greatly shook Brune, and the large number of casualties that came with it, had stimulated the ambition of the surrounding countries.

The several gates opened all around the castle walls were jammed day after day with people going in and out. After hearing that the Capital would soon become a battlefield, there were some people, who tried to escape north or east, and others, who evacuated from neighboring towns and villages thinking that they would feel safer if there were inside the castle walls.

Furthermore, there were also merchants, mercenaries and prostitutes who sniffed out the smell of business, and troops of feudal lords and knights, who came running from all over Brune. This situation was expected to continue for the next while.

Outside of the castle walls, the militia labored on to dig trenches deeper and wider. These were people who answered the call of Tigre and Regin to join the fight.

Gazing out at the militia in the distance, Tigre remembered the day before he left for reconnaissance.

That morning, the youth, along with Regin, headed to the plaza that was the largest and closest to the royal palace. They had already proclaimed beforehand that they would explain the current state of the kingdom.

The plaza, which hosts statues of the gods in its four corners, had long been filled to the brim with residents of the Capital, and people, who could not possibly fit inside, also crowded the outside of the plaza. Everyone whispered with faces filled with nervousness as they waited for Regin to appear.

Once Regin and Tigre arrived at the Plaza, the murmuring stopped.

Besides them were Claude and Serena, Regin's guards, but the blond-haired princess, accompanied only by Tigre, stood on the platform set in the middle of the plaza.

“—Thank you for assembling here today.”

The number of the people gathered here would easily exceed 10,000. If we included those standing outside, it might be the double of the number. Even with over twenty thousand eyes directed right at her, Regin did not bat an eye, and without hesitation, met her people's gaze. Tigre did the same.

With a calm voice, Regin notified the people of the Muozinel Army's raid. Her voice was by no means loud, but it rang with determination, and reached the ears of the many people gathered here.

“The Muozinel Army is extremely large, and the various forts and cities will most likely not be able to stop their advance along the way. We will meet them in battle, here, at the Capital.”

The silent plaza was swept with terror and renewed tension. Before the people's fear erupted, Regin glanced to Tigre, standing next to her.

“The one, who will lead the soldiers, is Tigrevurmud Vorn. I am sure I don't need to introduce you our “Knight of the Moonlight”. I strongly believe that if it's him, he'll bring us victory.”

Knight of the Moonlight. That was the title bestowed upon Tigre by King Faron, Regin's father, after Tigre suppressed the civil war two years ago.

Taking a small breath, Tigre, so as to appeal to all the people in the plaza, said.

“I promise that I will certainly drive our enemies out of our border!”

As soon as those words left him, the plaza erupted in cheer. Their welling emotions resonated and amplified, creating a storm of craze.

The people shouted the names of Brune, Regin, Tigre, and Knight of the Moonlight, over and over.

The volume of their voice expressed the size of their hope, and the weight of responsibility placed upon the youth.

If he lost this battle, and the country called Brune may disappear along with horrendous amounts of bloodshed and deaths. It would have been no surprise even if he had been flattened by the heavy pressure and ended up going insane, or fleeing in secret.

Tigre did not end up that way because not only were there many people who supported him, but also he also knew that there was a limit to how much he could do.

Until a mere two to three years ago, Tigre was, in all regards, a no-name youth. While he was a feudal lord with the peerage of earl, from the fact that the territory he governed was Alsace, far in the frontier, and that he had no other redeeming features aside of his archery skill, he could not visit the Capital very often.

Even after diving into the turmoil of civil war, he could not have fought nor won those battles with his ability alone. Therefore, when he was put in charge of the entire army by Regin, he was able to say “well, I'll do what I can” without feeling much pressure, just as he did when he inherited the rule of Alsace from his father.

Some time has passed. As the storm of emotions was starting to calm, Tigre raised his hand. Feeling the heat

swirling within and around their bodies, the people waited for the young hero's next words.

"I will not break that promise. However, the difficulty we are facing this time is larger than ever. I need those who will fight together with me. Those who are willing to defend their own livelihoods, families, and friends with their own hands, those who want to share this victory with me, come to the front of the royal palace."

Without missing a beat, Regin spoke.

"The Muozinel Army is headed to this Capital from the south. It's not too late to run away north or east. It is not shameful to run away. On my honor, I'll allow it."

And so, Tigre and company left the plaza.

After this call, the Capital residents' actions were greatly divided in three.

There were those, who tried to escape from the Capital, those, who remained in the Capital even after some hesitation and continued their daily routine, and those, ran to the royal palace to become the militia.

According to the preliminary calculation of the civil officials working in the royal palace, they estimated that 40,000 volunteer soldiers would gather after this call; but nearly 60,000 people of all age and gender gathered in front of the palace. There were even people among them that were armed with kitchen knives and pot lids, thinking that they would immediately head to the battlefield.

Although the civil officials cried in joy, it was only for a moment.

After all, there were also elderly, women and children. Next to a hungry hobo stood a housewife, who had never even stepped out of the Capital, and next to her was an elderly man leaning on his cane. Sorting out as such, the civil officials, with massive headaches, cut down the 60,000 volunteers to less than 30,000 by the end of the day.

Though it was less than previously calculated, it was a number that they did not expect to gather on the first day. Besides, the fact, that people were willing to follow Regin's decision to remain in the Capital and fight, was great news on its own.

—The militia that gathered as such either worked onto digging trenches like those Tigre was watching now, carried weapons inside the castle walls, or gathered sandbags near the castle gates.

After dismissing the reconnaissance team and leaving Rurick and Gasper to paperwork, Tigre was about to enter through a gate reserved for army members. In preparation for things like urgent reports, some gates were reserved only for the staff of the army.

It was at that time when the militia, who noticed Tigre, raised their voices. Tigre waved his hand with a wry smile. He has done at least this much even back in Alsace, his hometown. A volunteer soldier, clearly excited, began talking loudly to his comrades around him.

Watching them with the corner of his eye, Tigre went through the gate.

The royal palace was located halfway up Mount Luberon, which towered in the middle of the Capital.

While Tigre, who entered the palace, has not yet walked halfway through the wide hallway, he was called out to by the princess with light blonde hair and blue eyes.

"—Earl Tigrevurmud Vorn"

Regin addressed him as such, most likely to conceal the fact that she almost called him by his nickname

Tigre, in public. Tigre smiled, and bowed to her.

Regin, who turned 17 this year, had a delicate and beautiful appearance with a slender body, and at first glance, she gave off a kind and somewhat unreliable impression.

Yet, she has survived the civil war even though her life had been jeopardized by characters such as Duke Thenardier and Duke Ganelon, and has splendidly ruled the kingdom after succeeding her late father King Faron.

Even though there were capable retainers commencing with Badouin, if Regin was really the girl as she appeared to be, Brune would not have survived from the swamp of chaos.

Right now, there were only two knights who served as the princess' guards by her side. Regin stopped, and continued her conversation with Tigre.

"I heard you battled with the Muozinel Army's reconnaissance team. Are you hurt at all?"

"As you see, I'm all right. Please rest assured, your Highness."

"It's good above all that you, the Supreme Commander, is safe."

After saying so with a smile that would calm people's heart, Regin changed the subject.

"I just received report that the number of volunteer soldiers has reached 40,000. I intend to stop the recruiting for a moment, register those who came after this and made them as reserve forces."

"Have we already reached the quota? That saves a lot of trouble."

Looking at the youth, who was frankly pleased, Regin's expression became clouded, and she looked down at the floor.

"I feel as though I became a coward who has deceived them. Without any logical discourse, we got them excited, and pushed and enveloped them in their wild enthusiasm....."

Regin's voice was small, audible only to Tigre and her two guards.

"Your Highness. You should not see things like that."

With clumsy gestures, Tigre took her hands and consoled her.

"There are people, who need such atmosphere to squeeze their courage. Not everyone can be brave without relying on anything."

It was something that the youth had also experienced. Many of Tigre's battles had started from a disadvantage, and many times he had to encourage his soldiers with his words or actions to boost their morale.

Regin did not answer immediately, but gently squeezed back Tigre's hands. A gentle warmth enveloped Tigre's hands. The blond-haired princess looked up, and grinned.

"Thank you. You saying so made me feel a little better."

Then, Tigre, although vaguely, felt like he understood how she felt.

The words she spoke earlier were the princess' true feelings and indubitably a serious distress. But, the usual

Regin would by no means have uttered such a complaint.

By deliberately voicing it out, she wanted to be spoiled by Tigre. And, as far as he could tell from her reaction, Tigre seemed to have somehow been able to respond to Regin's wish.

When Regin was about to speak further, one official was trotting from the other side of the hallway. The official was holding several letters in both hands and respectfully stood in front of Regin.

Regin returned her expression to that of a Princess, and nodded towards the official, then turned to face Tigre.

"Well then, Earl Vorn. I will see you later."

"Yes. Your Highness, too, please, do not push yourself too much."

With a bow, Tigre was about to walk away, but Regin stopped him as he took his first step. The blond-haired princess fixedly peered into the face of the youth, who turned back with a quizzical look.

"Is there something on my face...?"

Regin did not immediately answer Tigre, who had a perplexed look. After staring at his face for five counts or so, she finally loosened her expression.

"I am sorry for having surprised you. You seemed to have somehow changed. It's hard for me to put into words, but you seem more grounded, even more so than before....."

Hearing those words, Tigre's lips nearly twitched. In the youth's mind, there appeared a girl with silver hair and ruby-colored eyes. If Tigre was acting any different now, it was surely because of her.

Either because she thought it was not something worth inquiring deeply, or because she thought that that his change was brought about by their current situation, Regin walked away with the civil official, along with her two guards. Tigre placed his hand on his chest, and saw off the retreating figure of the princess with sharp intuition.



Tigre, who parted with Regin, headed to the boardroom. There were two soldiers standing guard on either side of the boardroom door, but after recognizing Tigre, they pushed the door open.

"Everyone is already here; they are waiting for you, Supreme Commander."

After thanking the guards, Tigre stepped into the boardroom.

The boardroom was quite large. The candles of the bronze chandelier hung from the ceiling were all lit, illuminating the room brightly.

On the table, there were maps, numerous pieces, piles of documents and scrolls, and seven silver cups filled with water.

Six men and women were sitting around the table. The men were all Brune people: Mashas Rodant, Earl Bouroullec, and the vice-leader of the Navarre Knight Squadron, Olivier.

Mashas, who has wrapped his stout and short body in silk clothes, turned 57 this year. It was Tigre's late father's best friend, and an old Earl that Tigre trusted above anyone else.

Bouroullec was a noble with land in Brune's southern part, and has been working under Tigre since the battle against the Sachstein Army. He had the ability to bring together neighboring feudal lords, and was a competent man as a commander.

Olivier was the vice-leader of the Navarre Knight Squadron that guarded the western border of Brune, and also the acting commander at the moment. Tigre had left him charge of managing the western feudal lords' armies, and knight squadrons.

All the three women were Zhcted people. They were two of the seven proud Vanadis of the Zhcted kingdom, Eleonora Viltaria and Lyudmila Lourie, along with Eleonora's adjutant Limalisha. Those close to them called Eleonora as Elen, Lyudmila as Mila, and Limalisha as Lim.

Elen, who has silver-white hair that reached to her waist and ruby-colored eyes filled with aspiration, wore a blue-based military outfit. Upon making eye contact with Tigre, she smiled softly.

Lim, who has her matte blonde hair tied to the left side of her head, wore the outfit similar to Elen's, and was sitting next to her. At times, she would serve as Tigre's teacher.

Mila, who was sometimes called by her alias, the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave, had off her blue hair gathered around her shoulders, and blue eyes that exuded her strong will. She wore a silver armor above her blue outfit.

"Were there results of the reconnaissance that the Supreme Commander himself performed?"

Mila asked with a teasing expression and a casual tone. Tigre, slightly relieved by her attitude, nodded.

"Yes. I don't know if it'll be useful, but I think that I'm glad I saw it for myself."

"It's all right then."

Ever since a certain incident, Tigre and Mila's relationship was a bit awkward, but for the moment, it seemed that she kept those feelings under the surface. It was entirely Tigre's fault, so all he could do was be thankful of her thoughtfulness.

".....Tigre. Though abrupt, there's bad news."

No sooner than Tigre took his seat, Mashas cut to the chase with a stern expression.

"We might be short on soldiers earlier than expected."

Tigre widened his eyes. Although he was psychologically prepared when he heard Mashas' tone, his surprise was still a notch above.

"What happened?"

Hearing this obvious question, Mashas looked at a map on the table. It was a large map depicting the zone from the Capital Nice to the south.

"Currently, the Muozinel Army is at the port town of Massilia... There are three forts along the road from Massilia to this Capital Nice."

"There are Severac, Gergovia and Vierzon, right?"

Tigre said as to confirm. There were 3000 knights stationed in each of Severac and Gergovia, and 2000 in Vierzon to keep the order around the highway.

The other day, Regin had ordered them to abandon their forts and gather at the Capital. Against the Muozinel Army of 150,000, there was no way that 2000 or 3000 troops, no matter how they held their fort, would be a match. Regin and Mashas thought they would rush to the Capital immediately.

But, they were wrong. With a bitter face Mashas told Tigre.

“The knight squadrons protecting those three forts said that they will remain in their forts.”

Tigre was astonished, and could not find words to say for a moment. What were they thinking?

But, the youth soon shook his head and regained his cool. First, he had to know their reason.

“What did the Knight leaders say?”

“They said they will defend their fort with their lives to give the Capital time to prepare for the enemy attack. That’s about it in summary. Each leader used their own words, but the meaning the same.”

Looking at letters on the table, Mashas sighed. Even Tigre appeared dumbfounded. He looked at Bouroullec.

“Earl Bouroullec, do you know about these knight leaders’ temperament?”

Bouroullec, who owned a land on the southern part of Brune, has interacted with these knight squadrons before. Twirling the tips of his light-brown hair, he answered carefully.

“If we’re speaking about Sir Cauvin, leader of Severac’s knight squadron, he’ll certainly do it. He can get very emotional at times. Usually, that works for the better, and the knights admire him, but.....”

In a somewhat sympathetic tone, Bouroullec added.

When the Sachstein Army had attacked, the Severac knight squadron could not move from their post, since the enemy could have suddenly changed their course, or deployed a detached force.

“I think that they wanted to vent their frustration of having been unable to fight at that time.”

“What a troublesome thing to do.”

Olivier snarled. As one who led a knight squadron, it seemed like he could not suppress his irritation. Though Elen, Lim, and Mila would not say it out loud, it was clear they shared his opinion from their expressions. Tigre felt the same, too.

Then, Bouroullec talked about Gastaldi, who protected Fort Gergovia. He said that the man believed it was his duty to protect the fort and its surroundings.

“He’s indubitably excellent as both a warrior and a commander. Just, he doesn’t care about the happenings outside his fort.”

Tigre and Mashas looked at each other. Mashas sighed.

“Fort Vierzon is four days away from this Capital Nice. We do have time to try to convince them before the Muozinel Army arrives, but.....”

There was not enough time to change the minds of the leaders of the Severac and Gergovia knight squadrons.

And, if they could not convince the commander of Vierzon, as Mashas said, they would lose 8,000 soldiers before the battle had even begun. The Supreme Commander Tigre could feel his head and stomach starting to ache.

The problem was that none of them have any resentment or malice against Regin or Brune itself. They had simply convinced themselves that it was their duty to hold their forts to buy time.

The current Moonlight Knight Army counted about 60,000 soldiers. The combined army of Brune soldiers and Zhcted soldiers, which has fought the Sachstein Army and Greast Army under Tigre's command, counted a little less than 20,000 soldiers. This meant that the soldiers that Regin had gathered from literally all over of the country added a little over 40,000.

This did not include the 15,000 soldiers stationed in the Capital, and the 40,000 militia. This was because they would only be accountable as supporting manpower, considering their lack of equipment and skill.

*—Even though we're already short on soldiers as it is.....*

After a silent complaint, Tigre took the silver cup from the table as he wanted to drink in order to change his mood. He took a sip expecting it was only water, but it was nicely cooled and a fresh sweetness reminiscent of citrus spread in his mouth.

"It's something Titta has prepared, right before you came in."

Mashas said in a casual tone. After thanking the chestnut-haired maid in his mind, Tigre looked around at all the people present with a renewed expression.

"What do you think the Muozinel Army will do with these three forts?"

"The enemy's target is the Capital. I don't think they want to spend unnecessary time anywhere else. I believe they would use a part of their troops to siege the forts, and keep their main forces moving."

Lim was the one who answered. Elen, sitting next to her, nodded with her arms crossed.

"I would do the same as well. The distance from Massilia to the Capital is about 500 Belsta. Leaving some soldiers behind at strategic locations will also guarantee the safety of their rear."

"I agree. For the Muozinel Army, the worst case scenario isn't Brune's resistance, but having their supply line and retreat path being cut off."

Mila agreed, calmly. Mashas and company did not say anything probably because they felt the same. After nodding to their opinions, Tigre spoke.

"Concerning how to defeat the Muozinel Army..... We will first split our forces in two."

Tigre's words spoken in a calm tone were met with quiet shock from the others. He was speaking about dividing an army that was already less than half in number than the enemy.

"Can you tell us in detail? Since you, Lord Tigrevurmud, says so, you must have a good reason for it. In order to defeat the enemy"

Elen said so as to clear away the tense atmosphere. She did not call him Tigre, to avoid being too candid with him in the presence of Bouroullec and Olivier.

As the youth secretly thanked his lover as he nodded slightly, he took two small pieces. And he placed them on the Capital drawn on the map.

“We will call one piece the garrison (defending unit), and the other one, the detached force. We will have the garrison defend the Capital from the Muozinel Army. Meanwhile, the detached force will take a roundabout path to attack the enemy from behind.”

Tigre moved a piece away from the Capital and, while depicting a curve, placed it on Fort Severac.

“As Limalisha-dono said, the Muozinel Army will most likely siege the three forts along the road and neutralize them, and at the same time, they will establish a supply line. While the Capital has their main forces occupied, our detached force will attack their forces left to the forts to establish their supply line.”

“Hmm. Cutting off the enemy’s path of retreat and supply line is the usual strategy in a siege. This will be especially effective against the Muozinel Army that had a large army of 150,000. There will be a limit of food and materials they can make the surrendered towns deliver, and if they engage in pillage, they will weaken their attack on the Capital. Losing communication with their country won’t be a small impairment, either.....”

Mashas mumbled while stroking his grey beard. Although his words affirmed Tigre’s strategy, his voice sounded somewhat nervous.

There was no one in the Brune army who did not know that the Muozinel Army’s Supreme Commander was Red Beard Kureys. And Mashas believed that Kureys, hailed as a great commander, might have long taken measures for something like that.

Mashas was not the only one to think so; Elen, Mila, Lim, and even Bouroullec did not look ready to completely get behind this strategy.

Olivier seemed calmer than the others, simply because he had not moved from the western border for a long time, and did not know much about Kureys. Moreover, no matter how rigorous the command was, he intended to obey.

Without lifting his hand from the piece that represented the detached force, Tigre continued.

“After that, the detached force will pretend to head down to the port town of Massilia, but instead go north so as not to be detected by the enemy. And like that, they will attack the enemy’s main troops from the rear..... and kill Kureys.”

When Tigre finished explaining and lifted his hand from the piece, the atmosphere in the room completely changed. Everyone stared at the map with dumbfounded expressions. The six people’s gazes were tinged with an intense heat enough to burn a hole in the map.

“I see. After defeating the enemy at Severac, if we head to Massilia afterwards, even the Muozinel Army will seriously believe that we are trying to cut off their supply lines.”

Elen was the first to raise her head from the map. She clapped her hands, which spread an energizing soundwave through the room. Understanding and burning fighting spirit flickered in her ruby-colored pupils.

But, the silver-haired Vanadis soon regained her composure, stared at Tigre and asked shortly.

“How many soldiers for the detached force?”

“20,000.”

Tigre’s answer was also short, shocking the six people again.

“Are you telling us to kill Red Beard protected by 150,000 soldiers with a mere 20,000 soldiers?”

Bouroullec shook his light-brown hair, his cheeks flushing from excitement and nervousness. The brave Earl, who had fought hard against the Sachstein Army and the Greast Army, had beads of sweat trickling on his forehead.

Tigre shrugged his shoulders and answered in a calm tone.

“If we add more soldiers in the detached force, the Capital’s defense won’t last.”

To besiege a city or a fort, it was common belief that the attacker required three to five times the manpower of the defender. To put it another way, the defending side had to prepare at least a third to a fifth of the manpower of the attacking side.

In the Continent’s vast history, there were stories where a siege was prevented with the defenders having a small army force not even reaching a tenth of the enemy’s, let alone a fifth. But, no one should expect the same miracle to happen to them.

“We can’t use the main road, and we need to make a detour so as not to be detected by the enemy. From here to Fort Severac, it would take twenty days. Even if we defeat the enemy there and cut off their supply line without a hitch, I think it will take five to six days until that report reaches Kureys.”

Thinking along that line, the Capital would have to withstand the enemy’s attack for a quite a long time. Tigre explained as such.

“What if we go to Fort Gergovia that’s closer to the Capital, rather than Severac? I think that should reduce the number of days to some extent.”

Lim suggested in an indifferent tone. Though her expression remained unsociable as usual, the youth caught the slight change in her expression. Lim intentionally threw this question at Tigre for his own good.

“That way, the news will reach them sooner, and so they will react quicker. Above all, we will not be able to catch Kureys off guard.”

The intent of attacking Severac and faking an attack to Massilia was to draw Kureys’s attention in that direction. Attacking Gergovia or even Vierzon would imply to Kureys the possibility of going north from there, and thus putting him on alert.

They had to make the enemy believe that their true intention was to cut off their supply line.

“On top of splitting up our army that is already outnumbered, we will be travelling far from the Capital to fight our enemies. I’ve to say that it’s reckless, but if we don’t do at this much, it’ll be impossible to trick that Red Beard.”

Although Mila revealed a sarcastic smile, she agreed to Tigre’s plan. Tigre could not argue at all when she said that it was reckless. There was a very real possibility that the detached force would fail, and the Capital would become besieged.

But, concentrating all of their forces in the Capital did not guarantee a victory, either. They could not expect any back up, and they were unsure if they could withstand the siege until the Muozinel Army ran out of food.

Facing the Muozinel Army head-on in front of the Capital was out of the question, too. After all, the field would turn into a contest of which side held the most material resources, and the Muozinel Army was more than double the size of the Brune Army. Once the Brune Army was defeated, the Capital would be left defenseless.

Then, a storm of destruction and pillaging would blow through the Capital.

Those who resisted, and those who were worthless as slaves, like elders and children, would be slaughtered. Others would be taken as slaves, anything with value would be taken, and anything they deem worthless would be destroyed. It was doubtful that Regin would be killed, but a fate more tragic than death would await her.

Mashas looked at Tigre with a face filled with admiration. He sent him a silent praise for having considered so far regarding the vast battlefield from the Capital Nice to Massilia and made such a decision.

“Who will lead the detached force?”

Olivier asked briefly. The question implied that he too agreed with the strategy. As if to state the obvious, Tigre pointed at himself, Elen and Bouroullec.

“Myself, Eleonora-dono and Earl Bouroullec”

In order to make a round trip to Brune’s southern path, Bouroullec, who knew the land very well, was indispensable.

If Tigre joined the detached force, all they would have to do was to get within a distance of 300 Alsins from Kureys. Since they would attack an army that far outnumbered them, there was no way that he would not make use of this advantage of his.

Elen’s role was to protect Tigre from the enemy. She was the most suitable for it as she boasted the most excellent skill in close range combat.

“What? Are you leaving this old man behind?”

Mashas was the one who complained first. Tigre was dumbfounded.

“Lord Mashas, you need to lead the main troops. Besides if I had to say it, our side will be the one facing a very big risk. After all, we will be diving into the enemy camp with a force of 20,000 or less.”

“But, the detached force will be the one crowned with the ultimate achievement – the head of Kureys Shahim Balamir.”

A chilly light flashed across Olivier’s eyes. Tigre replied so as to deny it.

“Lord Olivier, I want you to keep the western feudal lords’ armies and the knight squadron organized. Also, I don’t believe the achievement of defending Princess Regin and the Capital could be considered any lower than taking the enemy General’s head. And I intend to report this to Her Highness as well.”

Elen and Bouroullec sat in their seats satisfied, looking like they did not have any objection.

“As her adjutant, I think that I should be by Eleonora-sama’s side.”

Lim demanded, matter-of-factly. While surprised by her objection, Tigre spun words to persuade her.

“We can’t incorporate all of the Zhcted soldiers into the detached force. Someone needs to command those who remain at the Capital.”

“Can’t we leave them to Rurick?”

“I will also have Lyudmila-dono remain, so I don’t think Rurick can handle her.”

The concerned Mila, although revealing a displeased expression, did not say anything as she suppressed her

feelings. This was because the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave understood that her abilities were better suited for a siege than a battle on an open field, and she also knew that she was expected to play an active role on that direction (siege).

“Are there any other suggestions?”

When Tigre asked to all present, Olivier raised his hand.

“Will the enemy fall apart once we kill Kureys? Is there any possibility for someone else to take the helm and continue the attack on the Capital?”

“I doubt it.”

Tigre’s answer was not calculated by any results from the reconnaissance team, but those were words derived from the experience he accumulated until today.

“To lead 150,000 soldiers from Muozinel through Zhcted, and invade Brune. Then establish a supply line through the sea. It may sound easy when saying it like this, but it’s not something anyone can pull off. Actually, I believe that Kureys is the only who can do it.”

Tigre had fought all over Brune, leading various teams of soldiers. He had even fought in Zhcted and Asvarre. That was why he could tell. That only Kureys Shahim Balamir was the Supreme Commander who could possibly take charge of this grand campaign.

“Got it. I will trust the Supreme Commander.”

Olivier ended with that, as he was convinced. The next one to raise a hand was Mila.

“Can’t we request reinforcements?”

“We have no one to turn to.”

While finding it strange that she asked such a thing, Tigre shook his head.

Many feudal lords’ and Knight Squadrons suffered greatly from the civil war two years ago, and the invasion of the Sachstein Army, which happened this spring, has gouged their wounds, which were gradually recovering, and forced them to bleed heavily.

Anyone with the will and strength to fight has already gathered at the Capital, and should have been enlisted under Mashas or Olivier. Those without the strength to do so had remained in their own territories, and were focusing on defending their land.

“According to the reports, Asvarre is in combat with Sachstein as we speak. Zhcted helped us more than they needed to in our war against Sachstein. I don’t think we can count on any more reinforcements.”

Elen agreed to Tigre’s explanation.

“The King may want to, but the noble feudal lords would be opposed to the idea. ‘We’re not mercenaries; why should our soldiers shed their blood for Brune?’ That’s what I would say if I was in their place.”

Soldiers, for the most part, fought for their own country. Even the soldiers of LeitMeritz, who were friendly to Brune, were only fighting because of Elen’s orders, and did not consider it their mission to defend Brune. This was different from their friendship towards Tigre himself.

While nodding at Elen’s words, Mila said.

“You’re right. I also think the feudal lords will say so. But, our country must show our stance against Muozinel even if merely for form’s sake.”

Elen noticed something.

“Are you talking about the Muozinel Army crossing the land of Agnes without our permission?”

“Oh, so you properly remember it. Since it’s you, I thought you had completely forgotten it.”

“I admit it took me some time. Unlike a certain someone, I haven’t experienced the humiliation of being duped by the enemy in front of me.”

At first, in order to take Brune by surprise, the Muozinel Army had faked an attack against Olmutz, a land ruled by Mila. Then they dashed through Agnes, and invaded Brune. Mila had only noticed the true intentions of the Muozinel Army after they have entered Agnes.

Mila was about to verbally strike back against Elen, but she barely pulled herself together and turned to Tigre.

“On top of what I said just now, you also remember that His Majesty had warned Sofya Obertas and Olga Tamm against Muozinel at the Sun Festival, right? Those two may move some soldiers.”

Sofya, called by her nickname Sofy, and Olga were, like Elen and Mila, Vanadises of Zhcted. Tigre was also close to them, and knew them well.

“If we send messengers to the Zhcted King and the two Vanadises respectively, at least one of them may take action. And that may, to some extent, keep the Muozinel Army in check. Is what you mean?”

As Tigre asked, Mila nodded.

“Both Polesia and Brest are too far, but it’s better to do it than nothing.”

To get to Polesia, which Sofy governed, from Nice, one would have to traverse Brune’s eastern part, enter Zhcted across the Vosyes Mountains, and cross Olmutz, which Mila governed. A one way journey alone would take twenty days or more.

Brest, which Olga governed, was farther to the east after overtaking Polesia. There was the possibility that everything would be over by the time the messenger reached there.

“Got it. I’ll send messengers.”

Tigre said, despite those facts. As Mila had said, they had to do everything they could.

Mila secretly thought that Sofy might even already be on the move.

When Mila decided to head to Brune after sensing the presence of a demon, she had sent messengers to the Capital and Sofy respectively. She had told Sofy of the Muozinel Army, the demon, and about what she planned to do.

If Sofy took her message seriously, she might have sent her soldiers already.

But, Mila did not inform them of such arrangements of hers. Even she did not know for sure if Sofy would come. Nothing would be more devastating than not receiving reinforcements that were expected. She, who was appraised as the Vanadis who excelled at defense tactics, understood that very well.

At this time, neither Tigre nor Elen nor Mila knew that a new Vanadis named Figneria Alshavin appeared in the Legnica Dukedom.

If Tigre had known of the existence of Figneria, he might have requested back up to her as well. At least, Mila would have recommended him to.

Legnica was not too far from Brune, and unlike Valentina Glinka Estes who has refused to fight the Muozinel Army, and Elizavetta Fomina, who had been ordered to pay attention to Asvarre, Figneria was in a relatively easy position to support Brune.

“When will the detached force leave the Capital?”

Mashas asked. Tigre answered while looking at the map.

“Once we receive the report on how the Muozinel Army deals with Fort Severac. If that report reached us, that is. However, moving 20,000 soldiers all at once will draw attention, so I plan to start sending soldiers out in small numbers starting today.”

Afterwards, they decided on small details like the structure of each battalion, and concluded the war council.



After the meeting, Tigre was resting in his room at the top floor of the palace.

Mashas took over the report to Regin. The old Earl had volunteered, so Tigre could take the short time until dinner and get some rest in.

The decorations were simple, and there were little furniture, but the room had been cleaned well. Regin was the one who had prepared the room, and Titta was the one who cleaned it so thoroughly.

Being thankful to the two of them inwardly, Tigre threw himself down on the bed. But, as he vacantly gazed at the ceiling, he could not suppress his welling up anxiety. For the past few days, whenever Tigre had any free time, his thoughts kept rolling back to the battle ahead.

Tigre had never before fought an enemy of with over 100,000 troops. Nor had he fought on a battleground this large. To top it off, Brune’s fate depended on this battle.

After the meeting, Lim said with a smile, “we could not have done better”. The woman who taught Tigre everything to know about war had said so, and meant it, so he should have confidence in himself.

Even Elen gave him a push on the back while saying “If this doesn’t work, nothing will.”

—*But the enemy is Kureys.*

Two years ago, Tigre had defeated the Muozinel Army led by Kureys that invaded Brune. Back then, Kureys had given Tigre the title of “Star Shooter”.

However, when he remembered his experience back then, cold sweat ran down his back. The events would more likely be described as Kureys falling back, rather than Tigre forcing their retreat.

If Kureys had resolutions to defeat the enemy in front of him at any cost, Tigre would have been defeated. If

that had happened, Regin, Mila, and Mashas and company would not have been there today.

Tilting his neck, Tigre looked at the black bow leaned against the wall. The arch and bowstring were both so black, as if they had been extracted from darkness itself; the Vorn House's heirloom. If Tigre released its powers, could he kill Kureys?

*—I might be able to kill him, but.....*

How many in this world could witness a power which surpassed human knowledge, and remain unfazed? Chaos would be unavoidable. In the worst case scenario, Brune would be split in two between those who would stand with Tigre, and those would stand against him. That disaster had to be avoided at all cost.

“We've been fighting together for a long time, but you don't get easier to wield.”

He grinned at the black arrow. Of course, the black bow did not move at all, but Tigre felt as if it replied “It's not all my fault”. Perhaps he hallucinated, but perhaps something that resided in the black arrow might have spoken to Tigre silently.

At that moment, a knock rang through the door. Before Tigre could speak, Elen spoke with a slightly formal tone.

“Earl Vorn. It's me.”

Tigre sat up, walked to the door and opened the lock. From the crack of the opened door, he could see silver hair and ruby-colored eyes.

“I want to talk with you a little. May I come in?”

They were inside of Brune's palace, which explained why she was acted out her position as a Vanadis. Tigre nodded, and invited her in.

Once the door closed, Elen smiled, and her face returned to the one Tigre had become accustomed to.

Tigre gestured her to sit on the chair, but she shook her head and sat on the bed. She looked up at the youth, and tapped the space next to herself, encouraging him to sit there. Tigre, chuckling at his lack of delicacy, sat next to the silver-haired Vanadis.

“First, let's talk business.”

Said Elen, and looked at Tigre with eyes mixed with some sarcasm.

“I understand why you included Earl Bouroullec in the detached force's formation. After all, he knows the Southern geography well, and is also an excellent commander. But why did you include me?”

“Is it that strange?”

As Tigre asked, Elen answered with a solemn face.

“I ask just to be sure. There's no guarantee that someone may not harbor suspicion. At the very least, you and I need to be on the same page.”

Elen was right. A good number of those, who had hailed from the western border, were wary of the Zhcted Army. That was precisely why Tigre had left Olivier in charge of them.

“This is because you are very skilled as both a warrior and a commander. Through the battle against

Sachstein, Earl Bouroullec also acknowledged you. Even if some of the soldiers are unhappy with the decision, not only I, but he'll also intercede in your favor."

On this point, Mila, who had joined the army after the battle against Sachstein, left a little to be desired. That was another reason to keep Mila out of the detached force, in addition to wanting her strength best used in the siege. He had explained all of his reasons for Lim and Mashas' assignment during the meeting.

"That's why, no matter how I think about it, you're the only one suitable for this."

Once Tigre finished his explanation, Elen smiled contentedly.

"Is that so? You need my strength that much, huh."

Seeing her expression, Tigre finally understood why she asked. Like she had said "just to be sure", Elen probably knew already the reasons to some extent. And she just wanted to hear Tigre give the obvious explanation with his own words.

"I've always relied on you, haven't I?"

"I'm glad you say that, but it's a bit lonely to only be able to hear you say it in such a place."

Since Elen was not even a long-time subordinate to Tigre, if anyone else has heard Tigre say that, they could have taken it as favoritism. The higher his rank became, the more careful Tigre had to be with his words.

Elen wiped off her smile, and stared straight at the youth with her ruby-colored eyes filled with determination.

"Got it. No matter which enemy comes, I won't absolutely let get close to you. I'll pulverize all the arrows aimed at you."

"I'm counting on you."

There was no room for bravado; it was an open exchange. Their target was Kureys. With the Vanadis who could cut down any number of enemies, and the archer who could shoot an arrow in the far distance of over 300 Alsins working together, they finally stood a sliver of a chance.

With that conversation settled, Elen loosened her expression, and leaned on Tigre. Tigre, who felt embarrassed, unintentionally blurted out something unnecessary.

"T-That's right. Should I have Titta prepare us something to drink?"

Elen suddenly frowned and lightly tapped the youth's head.

"If you're really going to call Titta, I'll immediately return to my room."

"...My bad."

Tigre apologized honestly. Elen loosened her frown, and leaned on Tigre again. With a teasing smile, she stared at the youth from distance close enough where he could feel her breath.

"Well, it's just like you."

Elen gently placed her hand above Tigre's hand that was put on the bed.

Despite having wielded a sword for a long time, Elen's palm was tender and soft. Her body temperature felt

good as well.

Tigre tried looking for words to say, but he immediately erased such a thought. This was because he understood that he did not need to do that. The silence this time was one that relieved one's heart.

For a short while, both of them were feeling each other's warmth like that.

As one wondered how much time passed, Elen suddenly tightened slightly the grip of her hand above Tigre's. Tigre turned his head to look at Elen.

The cheeks of Elen, who felt his gaze, flushed and her ruby-colored eyes shimmered. Even the dense Tigre guessed what she wanted, and leaned his face closer. They pressed their lips together.

They had not made love again since that night, but they had kissed as often as they could create a situation where they would be alone.

Sometimes they pressed either their foreheads or cheeks against each other, sometimes they entangled their tongues, and there were also times where they engaged in a kiss so intense that they got drunk at the act and the sensation.

But this time, they did not go that far, just stopping at a gentle kiss, as if to ascertain the sensation of each other's lips.

They both earnestly suppress their urge to outstretch their arms and hold the other close to their chest. This place was the palace after all. So, they should display some self-control.

They separated their bodies. Elen's cheeks were flushed; she looked up at Tigre with upturned eyes, and then leaned her head on his shoulder. The weight of her head and the sensation of her silver hair somewhat calmed Tigre.

"This is a strange feeling."

Said Elen, with a warm breath and a tone weaved with happiness.

"I never imagined that the day I'd fall in love with someone like this would come."

"Me neither. I thought I would one day marry someone, like my father did....."

Hearing that, Elen regained some seriousness.

"By someone, do you mean Titta?"

Tigre supposed that he was allowed to speak of other girls, as long as Elen had initiated the conversation. He answered "no" while smiling wryly. If Elen did not have her head on his shoulder, he would have simply shaken his head.

"It was back when I was small and didn't even understand what marriage or husband and wife meant. I didn't picture anyone in particular."

"How about now?"

With an undertone, Elen asked him. While feeling his face becoming hot, Tigre looked away without answering. Elen let out a deep chuckle.



“After the situation has stabilized, I’d have to learn how to be a good wife. Even though I don’t know how long that will be, I can’t embarrass the one who will become my husband.”

Hearing her words, Tigre imagined Elen wearing an apron and standing in the kitchen. It was not that it did not suit her; it just seemed that her cooking would be very bold both in presentation and in taste.

“What are you thinking about?”

Elen leaned in, her eyes squinting sharply as she glared at him. One could understand from her gentle and kind gaze that she was not genuinely angry. After gently pressing his lips against her cheek, Tigre answered.

“Only that I never ate your cooking, come to think of it.”

“Well, let’s leave it at that.”

Elen kissed him back on his cheek, and continued proudly.

“I’ll have you know I have no problem cooking something simple. Before becoming a Vanadis, I took turns cooking with Lim, you know?”

“Back when you were both mercenaries? If it’s fine with you, I’d like to hear about stories about those times of yours.”

When Tigre said so, Elen tilted her head wonderingly.

“I’ve told you about them several times up until now, haven’t I?”

“I want know more about your past. Of course, if you say you want to hear about my past, I’ll tell you as much as you like.”

Until now, they both kept from asking personal questions to each other, considering their positions and the inevitable distance that would stand between them in the future. But now, their relationship had changed.

Because Tigre said so in such a straightforward way, Elen, for some reason, felt her cheeks flush and she looked away from the youth.

“It’s so sudden; I don’t know what to say. I’m sure I could tell you anything, but well, um…… it’s a little embarrassing.”

That last word of her sentence was so faint that if Tigre had not been sitting so close to her, he would not have heard it. Tigre found Elen, squirming slightly with a shy smile, so adorable that he had an impulse to hug her, but he somewhat restrained himself.

“I also just say it like that. Maybe soon, when we have more time to spare.”

“Okay. I’m looking forward to hearing stories about your childhood.”

Elen looked up at Tigre and quietly closed her eyes.

They kissed once more.

A month or so had passed since Figneria Alshavin had become ruler of Legnica. She was already garnering recognition as a Vanadis.

What was surprising for both Figneria and her advisors was that the duties of a Vanadis actually seemed to suit Figneria well. No matter what decision she was forced to make, the black-haired Vanadis did not falter or lose herself in indecision, but made her decision swiftly and stoically.

At times she made the wrong call, but Figneria never hesitated to admit to her wrongdoing, and correct the mistake. She also listened to her advisors sincerely.

And so, some of the projects left behind by the late Vanadis Sasha — Alexandra Alshavin, were taken care of with astonishing speed, and the public offices of Legnica were energized in a snap.

Figneria's politics remained similar to that of Sasha's rule. It helped that Sasha was a good ruler, and she kept the majority of her policies, and only adjusted ones that had become outdated for her society.

In the meantime, she surely proved to her soldiers and knights her powers as a warrior. The first instance of which was when she gathered confident knights and soldiers for a sparring session.

Each session was performed one on one with a judge to call the match, and Figneria had defeated ten fighters in a row without any breaks between matches. While she has sweated a little by the end of it, her breath remained calm.

Another instance was when they defeated some bandits on the way to inspecting the territory.

Against a gang of bandits of about twenty, she led four soldiers and three volunteers from the neighboring village, and fought on the vanguard.

Once again, she secured a complete victory. Two soldiers were injured, but both of them had recovered in about ten days. She did not kill all of the bandits, but saved the lives of a few of them, in exchange for their servitude in the village.

"Following Alexandra-sama, we've her. We are truly blessed with great Vanadis." "

"You said it. Legnica's got nothing to worry about." "

People began to have conversations like that inside and outside of the public offices.

This day, per usual, Figneria had finished her morning training, and was looking through paperwork after finishing her meal. At this time, she was 25 years old. She wrapped her proportionately tall figure in black clothes that had a falcon embroidered on it. Her clothes were in the same design as the ones she wore during her time as a mercenary.

As it could be seen in her long black hair that covered her left eye, Figneria has always been somewhat unconcerned about her appearance; she believed that as long as it did not leave a strange impression on the other party, there was no need for her to bother to take care or change.

When one maid had suggested tailoring a dress for her to wear during banquets, she had simply replied "maybe next time" with a troubled face, leaving the maids in dismay.

Shortly before noon, a civil official announced a visitor.

"Elizavetta Fomina-sama has come." "

"Please let her through to the reception, as planned. Have her attendants relax in a guest room." "

Figneria stood up from her chair while ordering as such.

Elizavetta was the Vanadis who ruled Lebus Dukedom, located north of Legnica. Those close to her called her Liza, and she was also known to have special eyes known as Rainbow Eyes.

Soon after Figneria has begun living in Legnica, Liza sent a messenger to congratulate the arrival of a new Vanadis. She had said that since Figneria must be busy becoming accustomed to her life as a Vanadis for a while, she would paid her a visit after some time. Figneria had thanked her, and set up a date for her to visit. And today was that day.

The black-haired Vanadis took the twins swords she hung by her desk, and sheathed them on her waist. Always keeping her weapons within reach was a habit she picked up during her time as a mercenary.

She left her office and headed to the reception room.

The reception room was decently large, and the early summer sunlight came in through the square window on a part of the wall. A bear fur was laid at the center of the room, and a round table stood above it with three leather chairs surrounding it.

Instead of sitting down on a chair, Figneria stood by the window and gazed the outside scenery.

From the window, she could see the townscape below the castle. The residents, all about a size of a bean, moved around either briskly or leisurely.

Suddenly, Figneria took notice of a scene. In the corner of a certain plaza, people, who looked like a mercenary group, were recruiting new members. It was probably due to her line of work that she recognized it from this distance at first glance.

*—I'd love to ask you what you think after seeing the current me.*

Figneria muttered inwardly. Those words were meant for a soul that had passed. There was a mercenary group called the "Silver Gale" that was no longer. She thought of the man named Vissarion who was their leader. Any talent in politics that Figneria had was undoubtedly nurtured by her interactions with him.

Figneria was brought back to reality by a knock on the door from the outside. She swept away her emotions. She turned around with a call, to welcome a girl who opened the door.

Even more than her bright red hair that reached down to her waist and her extravagant purple dress, her eyes of different colors would give off a strong impression to those who saw them. And Figneria was no exception as well.

*—A gold right eye and a blue left eye... So those are her Rainbow Eyes.*

"Nice to meet you, Vanadis of Legnica. I am Elizavetta Fomina, the Vanadis chosen by Thunder Swirl and granted the land of Lebus by His Majesty Victor. I am honored to make your acquaintance."

Liza pinched the hem of her dress with her left hand, and performed a gracious curtsy. The black whip curled on her right waist shook a little. It was Valitsaif, her Dragonic Tool.

Figneria walked over to the Vanadis six years younger than her, and extended her left hand.

"Thank you for coming. I'm Figneria Alshavin. I gratefully welcome you."

Liza shook Figneria's hand, and congratulated her for becoming a Vanadis. While her words were not creative, they were perfectly polite.

“I’ll have drinks prepared, so please make yourself at home until my other guest arrives.”

As soon as Figneria said so, the door was knocked again. After Figneria called the guest in, she entered.

It was a girl, wearing a white dress and carrying a strangely shaped scythe with ease. While Figneria and Liza were beautiful enough, this girl possessed a beauty different from either of them. Her glossy black hair was long, and multicolored roses adorned her dress.

“Nice to meet you, Vanadis of the Luminous Flame. I am Valentina Glinka Estes, the Vanadis chosen by Hollow Shadow and granted the land of Osterode by His Majesty Victor. Pleased to make your acquaintance.”

The Vanadis who introduced herself as Valentina then looked at Liza.

“Long time no see, Elizavetta. It must have been at the Sun Festival where I saw you last.”

“Yes. I didn’t expect to see you again so soon, Valentina.”

Liza is wearing a smile, but only out of respect for their host, Figneria. There was slight tinge of caution in her voice towards Valentina.

It was due to some circumstances that the two Vanadises visited Figneria at the same time.

When Valentina, who returned to Zhcted by ship from Brune, and entered the port town of Prepus located in the territory of Legnica, she found out about the birth of the new Vanadis.

Valentina had planned to head directly to the Capital Silesia from Prepus, but she changed her mind and instead sent a messenger to Figneria. The messenger was to tell that she congratulated the birth of the new Vanadis and by all means wanted to pay her a visit.

Osterode, which Valentina ruled, was far from Legnica. If she were to miss this opportunity, it would take a long time for her before being able to visit Legnica next time.

Though Figneria did not turn down her offer, she did ask Valentina to move the date, while letting her know that she had already planned for Liza to visit.

Figneria mentioned Liza’s name on purpose as her way of explaining to Valentina that she would not ask her to change the date without a good reason. Figneria thought that if Valentina were to know that she already had a previous engagement with another Vanadis, Valentina would also understand and moved her day of visit on a different day.

Valentina’s messenger returned that message, but then came back to Figneria once more with a suggestion from Valentina.

“If you and Elizavetta do not mind, I would love to join you both.”

In summary, that was the contents. Figneria sent a messenger to Liza to explain the situation. Liza sent back a message of acquiescence.

And so, three Vanadises were gathered in the same room.

Figneria offered them each a chair. After putting their Dragonic Tools at their feet respectively, the two Vanadises took a seat. Figneria followed suit.

A maid entered holding a silver tray with silver cups, wine and pastry.

She lay down on the table: small biscuits that contain small-cut figs, chilled apricot and peach in a glass bowl, and wine diluted and sweetened with honey. Liza and Valentina loosened their expressions at the smell of the baked sweets.

“Though a little abrupt, could you tell me your impressions?”

While picking up a silver cup filled with wine, Figneria calmly asked.

“Impressions about what?”

“You came to see how I look like, didn’t you?”

In response to Valentina, who asked wonderingly, the Vanadis of the twin blades answered indifferently. Not only Valentina, but also Elizavetta could not conceal her confusion at this.

Even Figneria herself considered how ridiculous it must sound. After all, they had just met. But she wanted to know their character. She wanted to see how they would response to such a question.

“You’re quite a bold one.”

It was Liza, who responded provocatively as such while puffing up her chest. An entertained look flickered in her gold right eye and blue left eye.

“Despite you asking such a question, I can already understand that you don’t care about how others perceive you. I don’t dislike such attitude. Are you satisfied with such an answer?”

“Yes. That’s good enough.”

Said Figneria, and thanked Liza. Figneria could somewhat guess the girl’s capability, just from the fact that she almost accurately saw through her intentions.

Figneria then looked at Valentina. She wondered how this one would answer.

“Let’s see. What I can say now, is that you give off a completely different impression than the previous Vanadis of Luminous Flame.”

While smiling with a silver cup in her hand, Valentina continued.

“Alexandra Alshavin was a gentle person. If I were to compare her to a flame, she was like a bonfire, or a flame in a fireplace around where people gathered, and abated their minds. On the other hand, she fought like a roaring flame that burned everything around it to a crisp.”

“What kind of flame would you compare me to?”

“I don’t know yet. But, now that I’ve seen your countenance, I think you are far from gentle. By the way——”

Valentina smiled and asked.

“May ask you what you think, now that you’ve seen my face?”

“You’ve got thick skin.”

At this short and immediate reply, Valentina revealed a bewildered expression for the first time. While giving a sidelong glance at Liza, who could not contain her laughter, the Illusory Princess of the Hollow Shadow asked Figneria, bamboozled.

“Um..... Is that how I look like to you?”

“I apologize if I hurt your feelings, but it was a compliment.”

Those were Figneria’s true feelings. Giving a firm reply to one’s question and then returning the same question immediately to the other party showed that Valentina was not quite the innocent girl she appeared to be.

—*She’s got some guts, too.*

“I heard you were in Brune until recently.”

Figneria willingly changed the subject. Valentina nodded as she put some pastries into her mouth.

“Yes. Brune was invaded by Sachstein from the west, and LeitMeritz’s Vanadis Eleonora, along with me, proceeded there as reinforcements.”

Figneria twitched her eyebrow a tad at the mention of Elen. Although, her reaction was small enough that neither Valentina nor Liza noticed.

“Could you please tell me more? All I know is that you have won.”

“I’m also interested in Brune’s current state, Valentina.”

Swallowing the fruit she was elegantly chewing on, Liza looked at Valentina with a serious expression. Valentina said she understood, and began narrating.

The Illusory Princess of the Hollow Shadow explained that Sachstein attacked Brune from the west and the south, but on both fronts, Tigrevurmud Vorn was the one who fought them. And she and Elen fought while leading soldiers under his command.

Valentina’s story included no embellishments, and organized the war so well, that Figneria and Liza listened in, impressed.

Her story continued beyond the fight against Sachstein, and explained that there was an insurrection in Brune’s royal palace, and that Marquis Greast had had the Moonlight Knights’ army cornered, at least for a short while, and concluded by noting, then Mila had joined the war on her lonesome, and the Muozinel Army had invaded.

Liza frowned after hearing that Elen and Mila remained in Brune.

“So, you left Eleonora and company behind, and came running home?”

“It’s not like I left anyone behind, Elizavetta. They remained in Brune out of their own volition.”

Valentina answered with a smile.

“You were there at the Sun Festival. What His Highness ordered Eleonora and me to do was to help Brune in their fight against Sachstein. I did not prepare for any battles beyond that.”

While Liza glared at Valentina in a very unfriendly manner, she did admit the logic in her claim, and reluctantly remained quiet. As she drank her umpteenth glass of wine, Figneria asked.

“I agree with your reasoning, but then, why did the Vanadis of LeitMeritz remain in Brune? According to your telling, the fact that Earl Vorn had saved her after she was captured by the Greast Army would not be

the reason. I don't see much need for her to check Muozinel's movement and strength, like the Vanadis of Olmutz does."

"She has always been close to Tigrevurmud Vorn. I think she remained for him, rather than Brune."

"But, wouldn't that go against His Highness' orders?"

"No," Valentina shook her head slowly.

"The only reason His Highness deployed Eleonora and I to a war between foreign nations was to prevent Brune from weakening. If Muozinel strengthened its might, it will definitely be bad for Zhcted."

"You understand that much, and yet you....."

Liza cursed in indignation. Though, she did not verbally attack Valentina any further. She knew there was a difference in geography between Elen and Valentina as well as in character.

LeitMeritz, which Elen governed, shared a border with the Brune Kingdom, but Osterode, which Valentina governed, was very far from Brune. A longer battle would have no doubt exhausted the Osterode soldiers' mind and body.

Even Liza, if she were in Valentina's shoes, would have a hard time making the decision. Lebus, which Liza governed, was also far from Brune, although connected by sea.

Figneria silently stared at Valentina. To think that she would tell something she knew would be criticized about before someone she met for the first time. And moreover, she did so without speaking at all of a word for her own defense.

*—This woman does have thick skin as expected.*

Without showing any of her inner thoughts on her expression, Figneria asked Liza.

"Are you close with the Vanadis of LeitMeritz?"

Through the exchange just now, Liza was clearly worried about Elen. The red-haired Vanadis frowned, and answered matter-of-factly.

"No, I wouldn't say close. Of course, we're both Vanadis. I've spoken with her, and have seen her on the battlefield a few times."

"No need to be embarrassed, Elizavetta. Watching you talk to Earl Vorn and Eleonora at the Sun Festival reminded me of a child who finally got the opportunity to talk to someone she desperately wanted to for years. It was adorable."

"C-Could you not say such strange things!?"

With a bright-red face, Liza glared at Valentina, who poked fun at her, from the side. While putting some more fruit into her mouth, Figneria thought that Valentina's assessment, judging from Liza's face, was not too far from the truth.

"Even you kept sending flirtatious glances at Earl Vorn, right, Valentina?"

"Oh my, so you noticed. As expected, is it because you were also watching Earl Vorn very closely?"

".....Even without doing it, anyone would have noticed it. You were so obvious."

To Valentina, who retorted with a leisurely smile, Elizavetta responded with a snort. But, that the Vanadis of Thunder Swirl was speechless for a moment unveiled her agitation.

“Are the other Vanadis fond of that Earl Vorn as well?”

At Figneria’s words, Valentina and Liza interrupted their war of words and turned to her. It was Liza, having regained her composure, who answered.

“Yes, I would say so. Lyudmila who rules Olmutz, Sofya who rules Polesia, and Olga who rules Brest, you could say, have a fondness towards him. Earl Vorn has very well earned their trust and favor.”

That’s almost all of the Vanadis, Figneria thought. There’s Elen, and Liza before her eyes who also thought of Tigre dearly. As for how Valentina thought of him, Figneria was still unsure.

“I would love to meet him one day.”

“Once the war with Muozinel is over, I’m sure there will be an opportunity to do so.”

“If Brune wins, that is.”

Valentina added nonchalantly. Liza glared at her with disapproval.

“Why do you always have to stir the pot?”

“Because the way you always display your emotions through words and attitude is really amusing, Elizavetta.”

“I am not your toy.”

“Oh, don’t get yourself so worked up. Here, have a candy.”

“Do not treat me like a child. And you are not the one that prepared those.”

Figneria thought it might have been a mistake to meet with these two together.

Sure, Valentina requested and Liza agreed, but regardless of the fact that Figneria had only met both of them for the first time today, she could not get accustomed to two young girls in vibrant discourse. She felt like she could watch them in silence while sipping on beer or vodka. Though, it did not change the fact that Valentina was 23, only two years younger than Figneria.



*—That said, I would have never heard the things they have said today, if they were not in the same room.*

Figneria was not that talkative. Even when she was a mercenary, she was always a better listener than a talker. If she had met Liza and Valentina individually, she was sure their conversations would have been almost exclusively business related.

At a break in the conversation between the two Vanadis, Figneria changed the subject again.

“Why do you both think you were chosen as Vanadis?”

Although it was somewhat abrupt, this question must have been quite unexpected for both of them. Both Valentina and Liza looked at Figneria, dumbfounded. Figneria continued, looking down at her twin blades placed at her feet.

“It’s been a little more than a month since this guy chose me. As to why it chose me, I have come up with an answer on my own, but I have no clue even now if that answer is accurate.”

Liza did not answer right away, but fixedly stared at Figneria’s face. As if trying to guess her real intention. Valentina spoke first.

“I have a dream that I want to fulfill.”

The Illusory Princess of the Hollow Shadow looked so serious, when saying so, that even Liza was taken aback.

“I believe that my Dragonic Tool — Ezendeis appeared before me to make that dream come true.”

“A dream, huh.....”

“Childish, isn’t it? I don’t mind even if you laugh at me.”

Seeing Figneria’s indifferent attitude, Valentina soon cracked a smile, jokingly. However, the Vanadis of the Twin Blade shook her head.

Then, Liza also replied.

“My answer is similar to Valentina’s. There is something I want to accomplish with my own hands. I believe that my Valitsaif have given me the chance to try whether or not I can do it.”

“You don’t need to copy me just so you have a decent answer...”

Valentina teased her again, but this time Liza did not respond to her provocation. She straightened herself, puffed up her chest and looked back at Valentina.

“Say what you want. I’m the only one who needs to know my wish.”

Some surprise flickered in Valentina’s violet pupils, but she did not say anything further to Liza. Figneria, who started the whole conversation, was staring at the two Vanadis in front of her, impressed.

*—A dream. And something one wants to accomplish.*

In their conversations so far, Figneria thought she had mostly understood the difference between the two women in front of her. It was interesting to her that they had given a near identical answer to this specific question, while she was sure that any other question would have drawn out very contrasting answers from them.

And Figneria herself had a wish akin to that. While it had grown in her heart slowly, only by the influence of Vissarion, who even though was a mere mercenary, had a grand dream of creating a nation where everyone could be happy.

Perhaps her Dragonic Tool had sensed their secret dream, and appeared in front of her.

Within Figneria’s mind, the figure of the fourteen year old Elen appeared.

*—Has Eleonora carried on Vissarion’s dream?*

But, Figneria soon denied her guess. Sooner or later, Elen would show up before her. It should not be too late to think about it when that time came.

While not showing the slightest bit of such thoughts on her face, she spoke to Liza and Valentina.

“Thank you to both of you. I think those answers will aid me, who just became a Vanadis.”

Afterwards, Figneria invited Valentina and Liza for supper, and they agreed with gratitude. The meeting of three Vanadis had concluded without a hitch.

## **Chapter 2 – Dear People**

Rumor had it, that anyone who saw Kureys Shahim Balamir for the first time could not help but be taken aback. While his body was of average height and weight (although fit) his large sunken eyes, long nose and ears, combined with his red beard that draped down to his chest, made him look extremely peculiar.

Of course, no one had said a word about the shaping of his visage to his face. He was the King's brother, after all. Even though Kureys himself even joked that "no woman has fallen for him because of his face."

He was 39 this year, but had defeated countless enemies, besieged countless forts, which made the owner of ability and achievements worthy for him to be called Great General. Precisely because it was this man, he was able to lead an army of 150,000 soldiers to invade Brune.

That Muozinel Army, led by Kureys, had just stationed 10,000 soldiers in the port town of Massilia, and began marching. This was the day after Tigrevurmud Vorn held the war council in the Capital Nice.

The Muozinel Army narrowed down their supply line to the sea route. It was because not only would a supply line through land route be too long, but it would also have to go through Agnes, which was a territory of Zhcted, and they would inevitably be obstructed. It was rather a matter of fact for them to station 10,000 soldiers to defend Massilia that connected the supply line of the sea route.

Brune's terrain was, for the most part, very flat, and one could easily command a good view. Due to the fact that the current season was early summer, it was rather a comfortable environment for the Muozinel soldiers who had become accustomed to the oppressive heat of their country.

20,000 cavalymen led by Ekrem and Avshall moved at the vanguard. They had black clothes wrapped on their heads, wore leather armor, held a spear each and hung a curved blade peculiar to Muozinel to their waists. The Muozinel horses' skin was slightly darker. 20,000 cavalymen moving forward in an orderly manner with resounding horses' hooves appeared like a moving steel forest. The scarlet and gold adornments fluttering everywhere were their flag which symbolized the war god Vahram.

Ekrem and Avshall were both handpicked by Kureys for this expedition and both of them were very young, not having yet reached 30. But, they definitely possessed quite a good commanding ability.

Behind the 20,000 cavalymen, 70,000 war slaves followed. Their equipment was rather random: some of them only held a sword, and some of them only held a spear. Some did not even wear armor, and were only clad in dirty clothes. Their march was also far from organized.

Behind them marched 25,000 infantrymen, led by Yargash and Murat. These two were also, like Ekrem and Avshall, Generals handpicked by Kureys. Only, Yargash and Murat were not as young as the other two, being in their mid-thirties.

The infantrymen carried a bow in addition to their spears and swords. A group of 25,000 archers marching would cause beholder an optical illusion as if countless whitecaps appeared in the grasslands.

It was by Kureys' command that the war slaves were made to march in between the cavalymen and infantrymen. Red Beard had instructed his soldiers that, if the war slaves were to try to flee, even if the Capital was before their very eyes, they executed them without mercy.

Their footsteps, horns, and drums echoed through the land, carried by the winds of early summer.

The highway connecting Massilia and the Capital Nice was well maintained, and did not impede the march

of a large army, but their army was so massive that over half of them overflowed from the highway.

Colorful poppies, chrysanthemums, and Roger's bronze-leaves were in full bloom on the sides of the highway, but the soldiers trampled them all without a second thought, and marched on trailing a cloud of dust.

The tail end of the march was a group of 20,000 infantrymen and 5,000 cavalrymen led by Kureys. Kureys, as he did before, rode on a palanquin, his close aides were riding horses around it.

He had over ten close aides. This could not be helped since he had 140,000 soldiers under his command. Kureys had left his Generals in charge of each battalion, but there would be times when he would have to make a personal appearance to take command. For that reason, he had to increase the number of his close aides.

Along with those close aides, Damad remained beside Kureys.

After seeing with his own eyes the battle where the Moonlight Knight Army defeated the Greast Army, he returned the main army again as planned. Then, once he had reported what he had saw to Kureys, along with words of thanks, he was ordered by the King's younger brother to remain by his side.

He was not sure if this was a promotion as his salary, along with his position and rank remained the same. However, there were more instances where Kureys would call him over, and speak with him.

"In any case, we would have to thank that Sachstein."

"True, they have worn Brune down for us after all. Moreover, since the beginning of their fight with Asvarre, it seems like they are too busy to impede us."

"I hear that Zhcted has barely sent any reinforcement. Brune alone won't stand a chance against us."

Damad gazed coldly as the close aides talked lightheartedly.

They were right, of course, but Muozinel was not the one that pitted Sachstein and Asvarre against each other. It was Brune, or more specifically, Tigrevurmud Vorn who had done so. If they continued to overlook that fact, it may come back to bite them.

While there was just a little reinforcement from Zhcted, it was nothing to scoff at.

Whenever Damad remembered the silver-haired female knight, who charged into the enemy lines like a raging lion, it would make his palms sweat.

It was only after he had rejoined the main army that he had learned that the female knight he saw must have been Eleonora Viltaria, a Vanadis of Zhcted. At the same time, he learned that she had been helping Tigre on every occasion for about two years. No doubt, she would be involved in this war as well.

*—I did report it to His Excellency, so everything should be fine, but.....*

Kureys, riding a palanquin and surrounded by them, was wearing a green silk outfit with gold embroidery, and letting his five-layered mantle flutter in the wind.

The coloring of the mantle was red, light blue, yellow, purple, and white from top layer to bottom; each layer was made of a thin silk, so the mantle was neither heavy nor hot. The way the five-layered mantle fluttered in the wind was quite a sight to behold.

One time, Damad was summoned by Kureys.

“How do you think Brune will move?”

Without beating around the bush, Kureys asked directly. Damad answered cautiously.

“If Brune was ever able to muster a military force comparable to ours, they would be headed down here already. They would have looked for a piece of land where both armies, totaling about 300,000 soldiers, can be deployed and fight us head-on.”

The Brune soldiers were by no means weak. When Brune knights lined up, and charged with their spears poised, not only Muozinel, even Sachstein and Asvarre, would have difficult times defending against them. Even Kureys had been careful not to take on Brune knights head-on.

“But from what I investigated, the Brune Army hosts less than 100,000 soldiers. I doubt they would last even a single battle should they proceed as such. Therefore, I think they will divide their army in two.”

They would use one half to lure Muozinel deep into the country while protecting the Capital, and send the other half to attack the Muozinel Army from behind, severing their supply line and escape route. Damad was confident in his prediction.

But, Kureys, resting his chin on hand, looked at him like a master looking at his failing pupil.

“Is that it?”

Though Damad was perplexed, he could only nod. He knew that if he were to add any half-minded explanation, he would only anger the King’s brother further. Kureys spoke then.

“The others also said the same thing. But, you all think too lightly. You’re a swordsman, too; so you should understand that an uncommitted blow would only leave a shallow wound.”

*In other words, we’ve to come up with a mean of stepping deep into enemy territory, huh.....* This was how Damad interpreted it, but before he could think of something, Red Beard spoke.

“They’ll be targeting me.”

“That can’t be.”

Damad unintentionally voiced words of denial. It was something quite hard to imagine. *Targeting Kureys guarded by more than 100,000 soldiers?*

However, the King’s young brother explained calmly.

“Our enemy’s Supreme Commander is the young man whom I have titled Star Shooter before. He has unbelievable talent in archery as he can take down anyone from within 300 Alsins. In fact, in the battle two years ago, Kashim and so many others were shot down by that young man.”

Damad wrinkled his face as Tigre’s name was mentioned. While Damad himself did not really understand why, he still held onto an emotion that was akin to friendship towards Tigre.

He believed he could leave that behind once he confronted Tigre on the battlefield, but it looked like he would have to hold on to that emotion leaving it pending as is until that time.

Fiddling with his mantle fluttering in the wind, Kureys laughed.

“Hahaha. None can see the future. The reason I have given that young man the title of Star Shooter was to stir up some beef between him and Dukes Thenardier and Ganelon. And it was also used as an excuse for us

to retreat. But——”

Kureys stopped laughing, and his sunken eyes shone keenly.

“I would have never expected him to, not only take down Duke Thenardier, but even come to the point of leading the entire Brune Army by piling up victory after victory both inside and outside of Brune. This is why I find life worth living.”

“Do your Excellency think that their Supreme Commander, for the sake of targeting you, will come charging in?”

Though he hesitated, Damad ended up asking. He thought an attack like that to be far too reckless, bordering a suicide attempt even. If his arrow failed to reach Kureys, his army would not escape from a total destruction.

Kureys, instead of blaming Damad, simply laughed at his straightforwardness.

“I just said it now, right? None of us can foresee the future. All we can do is guessing and taking countermeasures. Afterwards, we’ll just have to wait and see how the Star Shooter will move.”

Kureys waved his hand, so Damad withdrew from his presence. He straddled his horse, and looked forward.

The green of the grasslands illuminated by the sunlight were filled with the steely grey and dark brown. A sea of weapons and armor covered the earth, roaring with immeasurable sounds. The scarlet and gold battle flags were like small ships floating within that sea. The drums and horns kept shaking the air as they roared without stop.

*—He’ll break through this?*

Damad found it hard to believe that Tigre could even break through this sea of humans, a sea so vast that even a battalion of well-trained soldiers was sure to drown halfway through.

“But, His Excellency is convinced that he’ll definitely come. Then I have to think about what I can do……”

Perhaps Damad’s duty at this moment was to search for what he could do.

Three days after they departed from Massilia. The Muozinel Army, who had advanced to the highway without encountering much resistance so far, faced their first obstacle.

It was Fort Severac. A rare sight for Brune, which hosted a lot of flat lands, there were some hills to be seen in this area, and Fort Severac stood there, sandwiched in between two hills to the east and west.

There were about 3,000 Brune knights inside the fort who, while having locked the fort gates tightly, were ready to defend it with their lives as they raised thunderous battle cries from the fort walls. Although, judging from the 140,000 Muozinel soldiers, they just looked like puppies barking eagerly.

Kureys called over one of the Generals, Avshall.

“What do you think they are trying to accomplish?”

“I believe their intent is to buy time. They have locked themselves into the fort, and are looking to delay our march while taking down as many of our men as they can with them. A heroic determination, but we have no reason to play along with those Brune asses.”

Kureys sighed in satisfaction to Avshall’s accurate answer. Though Avshall did have a tendency to

underestimate his opponents by calling them “asses” for example, he had accomplished enough on the battlefield to overshadow that. This time again, his discernment was accurate.

“Very well. I’ll leave this fort to you.”

Avshall, who was given 9,000 infantrymen and 1,000 cavalrymen, surrounded Fort Severac in a large parameter. He planned to take down any who would dare come out of the fort. His side’s number was 10,000. The enemy’s was 3,000. Brune side had no chance out on a field.

The remaining 130,000 of the Muozinel Army swiftly resumed their march. They temporarily got off the highway, went across hills, and then returned to the highway. The time they stopped for was about one and a half koku, so it was as good as having taken a long break.

According to Muozinel’s original style, they should have proceeded to a complete destruction of the enemy, not leaving even a single Brune soldier alive; but Kureys avoided clashing instead. This was because he thought that if his men were to shed blood, it should be in the battle when they attacked the Capital Nice.

The knights of Fort Severac, without even being able to fight, could only helplessly watch as the Muozinel Army marched to the north, their faces filled with rage and humiliation.

The report of Fort Severac being sieged reached Nice five days later.



When the Muozinel Army was passing Fort Severac, Tigre was patrolling the Capital along with five soldiers. He intended to brighten the spirits of the citizens and the soldiers of the Capital by showing himself. The youth had made this patrol his routine, every other day.

Tigre wore his leather armor over hemp clothes, and hung a blue coat over that. A white half-moon and a meteor, which symbolized the Vorn House, were embroidered largely on the coat.

Regin had gifted this coat to Tigre, saying that he needed to look more like a Supreme Commander. A coat like this may ordinarily have been an odd match for hemp clothes and leather armor, but perhaps because Tigre himself acted natural in it, it was oddly fitting.

The soldiers were surrounding him, so no one ran up to or talked to Tigre.

But, the piercing stares of expectation from all directions, and the occasional cheers of adoration wore Tigre down. He was struggling just to not show his emotions on his face.

*—At any rate, I feel like there are more people here every day.*

Even by walking by the gates, he had noticed more people fleeing to the Capital than from. There were many more small stalls on the streets, and girls that were obviously prostitutes, and people who just looked suspicious, could be spotted among the crowd of people coming and going.

When he passed by the castle wall, Tigre saw a familiar face at the end of the road. He ordered the soldiers to standby since they were due for a break anyway, and approached that person.

“Viscount Augre! Gerard!”

When Tigre called, a short, old noble wearing a thin coat turned to look towards him. His kind, wrinkled face revealed a smile.

Standing next to the old man, the dark brown-haired young man, who had been reading through some papers with a sullen face, also turned around. He smiled also, but quite sarcastically.

“Oh, you’re still in the Capital. I haven’t seen you in a while, so I thought you were long gone.”

“I’ll be leaving in a few days. Unless our enemy suddenly decides to turn right around and go home, that is.”

Tigre smiled at the young man — Gerard. The old man next to him was Gerard’s father, Hugues Augre. Both of them knew Tigre for a long time, and Tigre trusted them as much as he did Mashas and Rurick.

An aromatic smell floated over from Gerard. Tigre saw that he was holding a small hemp bag, where the smell must have been originating from.

Gerard noticed Tigre’s stare, and held out the bag with his empty hand.

“Lately, I barely have time to sit down and eat. Would you care for one?”

There were a few skewers in the bag. Tigre thanked him, and took one. The skewer that had several small pieces of meat on it, was still slightly warm, and was joyfully chewy. As the salt and fat and meat flavors spread through his mouth, Tigre let out a broad smile.

“It’s quite delicious. Is it lamb?”

“Fresh from the farm, it seems.”

Tigre tilted his head in confusion at Gerard’s comment. It should be very difficult to eat fresh lamb currently in the Capital, let alone find such a rare meat on a skewer. While eating a skewer himself, Gerard explained in a tone as if disclosing a magic trick.

Some of the people who had fled to the Capital were farmers, and many of them brought their livestock. Those were their valuable assets after all. However, it was extremely difficult to take care of said livestock in the Capital. Not only finding enough space alone was difficult, renting any kind of facility also cost money.

As a result, farmers who decided to sell off all of their livestock for cash began to emerge.

“It’s not every day we get to eat fresh meat. It’s the same for you, right, Lord Tigrevurmud?”

“Whenever you have time, why don’t you go hunting with me? You’ll get all the fresh meat you want.”

When Tigre smiled and made a motion as if to set up his bow, Gerard was rendered speechless; then he shrugged his shoulders. Beside him, Augre who was also eating the meat on a skewer smiled wryly.

“Right, before you were a commander and even a lord, you were a born hunter, huh. I almost forgot, thanks to that coat of yours.”

While his tone was sarcastic, he was complimenting Tigre in his own way. Once he finished his skewer, Tigre asked Gerard and Augre.

“What are both of you doing here?”

“Simply put, managing and distributing resources.”

Augre answered. Gerard flicked the edge of the pages he held.

“We’re placing rocks, oil, and water for the catapults under the walls, so we can refill the stations on the walls as quickly as possible. But, some of them are less or more than our orders; and other stations that have the right amount have been set up too far from the walls.....”

After saying that much, Gerard lowered his voice.

“There’s been another issue lately. I can’t be too brazen about it, but people that have fled here with no one to go to and no money to shell for an inn have been living in hammocks below the castle walls. Getting them out of there is also part of our job.”

“We’ve been getting some complaints from those who live nearby, and they’re in the way of us setting up the resources. We’ve been trying to get those to go to the temple, but..... It’s not too easy. Even the temple can’t take in everyone.”

Augre formed all of his wrinkles into a frown. Tigre asked:

“Is there anything I can do?”

“No.”

Gerard answered matter-of-factly. Even Tigre was taken aback.

“Quite the cold shoulder.”

“Of course. We’re working on it so we don’t have to bother you with things like this. If you really want to help, win the war as soon as you can.”

Infallible logic. Both Tigre and Augre, who tightened his face to protest his son’s attitude, could only agree with a dry laugh.

“I’ll do what I can.”

That was all Tigre could utter. Back when he tried to come up with a strategy against the Muozinel Army, using every bit of his brain, he could not recall how many times he had almost given up.

“By the way, what are your plans after you win, Lord Tigrevurmud?”

Gerard asked with an entertained smile, and Tigre crooked his neck.

“You’re already thinking about what happens after we win?”

“Thinking about reality, or about what happens when we lose just depresses me. Besides, we’re all being watched by many people. If we keep showing them our depressed faces, that’s all they will feel.”

“Then, you should be showing your serious side to the people.”

Augre threw in a jab, but his son masterfully ignored the comment.

Tigre scratched his darkish red hair, and cracked a complicated smile. Idle conversation like this heard between these two, or between Mashas and Gasper, was something that Tigre could no longer hope for, since he lost his father, Urz, four years ago.

“I still can’t think of anything. What about you, Gerard?”

“Climbing the ladder, of course. Up and up. Mister Badouin has been putting me in charge of a few tasks.”

With no coyness, Gerard answered immediately. Badouin has been the prime minister since the reign of the previous king Faron; he was well-trusted by Regin, too. Being trusted with the prime minister with tasks meant that Gerard was on course to growing his reputation as the palace clerk.

“What about Territoire?”

Tigre asked. The Augre worked at the palace because of Badouin’s strong request, but they are both lords with lands, just like Tigre. Gerard was supposed to rule Territoire after his father. Yet, Gerard shook his head.

“Especially because of Territoire. While I can, I want to create a strong pipe between the Capital and Territoire. Just so I can help anyone who jumps out of Territoire looking for success here. Of course, I want to be the success story myself.”

“When I was young, I learned much by visiting the Capital along with Urz and Mashas. Mashas spent most of his time fooling around, but..... Gaining some perspective at the Capital will lead to a rich Territoire as well.”

That seemed to be how the father agreed with his son. Gerard continued:

“And that’s why I want you to keep climbing the ladder too. Lord Tigrevurmud. I like to think that you have my back, and I will do most anything for you. Now, this is just a rumor, but.....”

He lowered his voice there, and whispered somewhat dramatically. No one other than Tigre and his father could have heard him.

“After this war, I’ve heard that people want to make you king.”

Tigre was lost for words. All he could do was to blankly stare at Gerard. The brown-haired clerk was smiling, but his hazel-blue eyes shone through with serious intent. His father did not react, but he did not disagree with Gerard.

“.....I’m not surprised, with all the hot air they’re blowing into me.”

Tigre shrugged and laughed in order to laugh it off as a joke. While Gerard did laugh along with the young man, his words that followed spoke of his insistence on the matter.

“I personally think it’s an interesting idea. An archer becomes the king of Brune, where archery is looked down upon. Imagine the irony. Ever since I have taken this position, I have had more opportunities to learn the history of neighboring nations. A nameless lord gaining victory after victory and finally becoming king..... It’s not a phenomenon so rare that they could only be found in mythology and poetry.”

“A king should not be decided based on irony or satisfaction.”

Said Tigre, his smile gone. Still, Gerard’s determination prevailed.

“You don’t think that everyone who follows you do so simply out of respect? There are many people who are looking to get a piece of your glory. In the civil war, Her Highness Regin took that role.”

“It’s fine to daydream.....”

Tigre sighed, and glared at Gerard.

“That rumor can play as an excuse to get rid of me for treason after the war. I’ve been force-fed some history before. I believe that’s happened before a few times.”

Tigre had learned said history in a room in the palace of the LeitMeritz Dukedom, located southwest of the Zhcted Kingdom. A stoic teacher, with her matte-blond hair tied off to the left had patiently taught this less-than-sublime student, one-on-one.

Once Tigre showed his disdain so clearly, Gerard backed off a little.

“.....All right. Perhaps we should stop talking about the taste of the meat of an un hunted beast for now. I don’t mean to take much of your time, either. Just remember that the rumor exists, and my opinion on it.”

Gerard bowed to Tigre and turned right back around to work. The father watched his son leave, took a respectful bow to Tigre.

“I apologize for my son’s disrespectful rant, Earl Vorn. I know you’re busy. Gerard seems intoxicated in the atmosphere of the Capital, and I suppose he couldn’t keep his opinion to himself any longer. Please forgive him.”

Now, Tigre understood. Augre purposefully did not stop his son. He thought it would be better for him to speak his thoughts while he was there with him.

“Please, that’s enough, Viscount Augre. I didn’t mind it at all.”

Tigre smiled, and placed his hand on Augre’s shoulder.

Tigre was definitely a culprit to have created what the old viscount described as ‘the atmosphere of the Capital.’ It was as though he got burnt in a fire that he himself had started. So, the youth could not blame Gerard for it.

After leaving Augre, Tigre rejoined the soldiers and continued his patrol.

—*After the war.....*

Tigre repeated the conversation he had with Gerard to himself, as the people cheered for him and he occasionally waved back in response. He didn’t know how the war would end, but he felt that he needed to think about the future past it. But of course, becoming king was unthinkable.

That evening, Tigre visited Mashas’ room in the palace.

Mashas had some bags under his eyes, and a few white hairs poking out of his grey hair, but invited the youth in with a genuine smile. He ordered his assistant to bring in wine and cheese.

Mashas’ room, unlike Tigre’s, was not a guest’s quarters. Mashas had been working at the palace longer than expected, so Badouin prepared him a room along with the title of Palace Advisor. Mashas turned down the title with the reasons that he was a lord of a land and that he was quite old, but accepted the room.

The room was slightly larger than Tigre’s room, and a Muozinel carpet of good quality was laid on the floor. A line of bookshelves stood at the end of the room, and an old desk stood in front of them. From the window, they could see the red sun setting beyond the horizon.

They placed a table and leather chairs by the window, and sat facing each other.

“Sorry to bother you. I know you have a lot on your plate.”

“Ah, today’s been pretty quiet. Preparations are on course for defeating the Muozinel Army, and until the war’s over, Badouin won’t bring up any stupid tasks. How about you? I figured you’d be on your way in the next few days.”

“Yes. Before I go, I have a favor to ask of you.”

He clenched his fists on his lap, and looked at Mashas seriously. Seeing that, the old earl sat up straight. He nodded, giving the youth permission to go on.

“It’s about Titta.”

*If something happens to me, please take care of her.*

Tigre said quietly, and bowed.

He was about to charge into 100,000 soldiers with a force of merely 20,000. Even if he did kill Kureys, he had no guarantee of returning back alive.

Of course, Mashas would have attended to Titta if something had happened to Tigre regardless, but Tigre wanted to say so himself.

“Hmm.....”

Mashas did not say anything right away, but stroked his grey beard and went into deep thought. Not expecting this reaction, Tigre frowned as if to ask what he thought.

“Tigre, I want to ask you something.”

Said Mashas, with a serious face he rarely showed.

“What does Titta say about it?”

The youth was startled, and couldn’t answer. When the Mashas asked him again, Tigre confessed that he hadn’t asked her. The old earl growled.

“Then, take care of that first. If Titta wishes it, I’ll do my best to help her. But it’s unacceptable for you not to know what she wants.”

“I’m sorry.....”

Tigre bowed again, embarrassed. Mashas was right.

If Tigre or Mashas asked Titta to do something, she would do it. But, that wasn’t because of her lack of desires. Even if what Tigre suggested was the best way for her, he could not ignore Titta’s thoughts in doing so.

“Tigre, I might as well ask you now. What do you think of Titta?”

“Well, uh.....”

Tigre struggled to answer once again.

She was the girl who has always been by his side since they were little, and he heavily relied on her when times were tough. However, Tigre knew that so much was missing from that explanation, and thus dared not say it out loud.

Mashas took a bite of cheese, and drank wine from his silver chalice.

“This year, you turned eighteen and Titta turned seventeen. Both of you need to be looking for a marriage by now. I was planning to discuss it with you over time after you returned, but there came up the incidents with Sachstein, Melisande and Greast.....”

With frustration, Mashas downed his chalice and poured himself more wine. He soon finished his second cup, and sighed, still frustrated.

“And now the Muozinel Army’s barging in, and it’s already summer.”

“After this war, I’m sure things will calm down.”

Tigre tried to console him, but Mashas replied coolly.

“When Melisande died, and the Sachstein Army retreated, that’s what I thought too.”

Tigre scratched his darkish red hair, and shrugged. Mashas continued, back on track.

“I already know that you think of Titta dearly. But, having fondness towards her, and taking actions in the future with her, are two different stories. You just said that ‘if something were to happen to you’..... So let me ask you.....”

Mashas leaned forward and stared at Tigre sharply, as if to corner him.

“When the war is over, and you’ve survived, what are you going to do with Titta? You’ll keep her around as your maid again? Like I’ve said, both she and you need to be thinking about marriage soon.”

“I.....”

Tigre thought of Titta’s smile, and looked down at the table, struggling. The crimson light coming in from the window formed a dark shadow on the youth’s face.

He remembered when he visited Alsace earlier that year. The town representatives and the officer Elvin had asked him to think about his heir.

Gasper said something similar in jest, but back then, Tigre clearly answered that he did not plan to make Titta his concubine.

But now, he was in a different situation. Tigre had told Elen how he felt. And Elen reciprocated.

The crystallization of the love that was born between both of them did not allow for Tigre to keep muddling any thoughts or emotions surrounding their relationship. The time had come for him to make a clear answer.

Tigre stared at the table in silence. Mashas didn’t rush the youth, but waited quietly, sipping from his chalice. From the distance, a crow could be heard.

A silence that must have lasted at least thirty seconds was broken by a shaken voice.

“I want Titta to be by my side.”

Mashas frowned, looking at the youth’s face and hearing his answer. He expected Tigre to say something like this. He should not have had to hesitate to say so.

Tigre continued, forcing the words from his throat.

“But..... There is someone else who I love.”

“Oh?”

Mashas unintentionally uttered, impressed.

He was surprised, but not in disbelief. Mashas remembered that when he was at Tigre’s age, he got along quite nicely with several girls. He didn’t plan to give the youth a hard time about that. If he was being honest, all he wanted was enough peace to not tarnish the household.

“Who are you going to choose, Titta or this other girl?”

Mashas asked, calmly. Tigre put his hand on his head and shook it. He tried to say that he couldn’t choose, but those words were stuck in his throat, unable to escape.

*I can’t choose.* That was supposed to be the right answer, but something inside of Tigre screamed that it wasn’t.

So, as Tigre sat there unable to answer, Mashas crossed his arms and said:

“You just need to tell this girl or Titta how you feel. If you hear what they say, you might be able to move forward a little.”

“.....Okay.”

Staring back at Mashas, Tigre sighed.

“Um, this may sound weird, but..... You’re not going to be mad at me?”

“Is it something I should be mad for?”

Mashas chuckled, shaking his grey beard.

“If both you and Titta were commoners, and if I was the neighborhood matchmaker, I might have. But, you’re a lord and you own a land. You’re allowed to have a concubine in addition to your wife and, depending on the circumstances, there might be cases where you would have to have a concubine.”

For example, if the wife could not bear a child. If the bloodline of the ruling family were to end, the land would become unstable. The entire family may fight over who becomes the next lord, or a money-thirsty officer may be sent for the post. All in all, it will be a worst-case scenario for those who live in the land.

It was natural that people around their lord would want him to secure an heir, even if it took a concubine. In reality, Mashas had seen territories that have gone downhill after bloodlines have gone extinct, and the extended families warred over the rule of the territory. He felt like he had lost some hope in the world when he saw such turn of events.

Another example, quite common with lords, was when the marriage was political.

In addition to a case where the man would marry a woman that would benefit both houses and keeping the woman he loved by his side as a concubine, it wasn’t uncommon that aristocrats who missed out on marrying off their daughter or niece would push them out as a concubine for some political gain. Reject an offer for a concubine, and there would be a divide between them in that house, which made it difficult for both the husband and wife not to agree to such an arrangement.

There were other times when a lord would be taken in as a concubine as a woman who had lost her entire

family to war. While that would be an act of pity, it was possible that love would bloom. There were many stories when said woman would carry the lord's heir.

"What's important is what you want and whether Titta and the other girl can accept it. You have to make up your mind, and take action. I can't help you with this."

Tigre looked troubled by this. Because he was so unsure, he really wanted to hear from someone who had lived their years.

"I've heard that when you were young, you've had more girls than my father or Earl Augre would even care to envy....."

The Old Earl showed a teasing smile that he rarely showed.

"I won't deny it. And what I've learned from it is that someone else's experience won't help you as much as a baby hair."

Leaving Tigre dumbfounded, Mashas continued, sipping on his chalice.

"It's natural if you think about it. A relationship between a man and a woman is like no other. Even if it seems similar, they're completely different under the surface. If you take the easy way out and copy someone else..... You might get hurt from that big difference under the surface."

"..... I've learned a lot today."

Tigre could only say that and back off. Mashas stopped giggling, and with some nostalgia, mentioned:

"I'll tell you one story. Do you remember my nanny Matilda?"

Tigre, regaining himself, searched his memory and nodded.

"I do, she took good care of me when I went to Aude."

Aude was Mashas' territory, and Tigre had visited it a few times with his father when he was young. Matilda was an old woman of over seventy, and she worked as a maid in Mashas' mansion. She was very nice to Tigre.

"Matilda had been working at the mansion since before I was born. She always looked after me since I was a lad. She was funny, and I could count on her."

Mashas looked away from Tigre and to somewhere in the distance.

"When I was 23, I took Liliane to be my wife."

Liliane, Mashas wife, was a thin but intimidating lady of the territory. That was Tigre's impression of her. Gasper had once told him that he had finally past her in height, but will never be able to hold his ground against her.

"You may think I'm just bragging, but Liliane was not even 20 at the time, and she was beautiful and smart. Everyone was envious, and I was happy. However....."

Sipping the wine in his chalice, Mashas continued, reminiscing.

"The first few years of our marriage were incredibly strenuous. Liliane was jealous of Matilda."

“Jealous.....?” Tigre looked at the Old Earl feeling somewhat confused. Mashas chuckled.

“I didn’t understand at first, either. The 19 year-old beautiful lady of the land was jealous of a nanny who was over fifty and..... not as beautiful, to say the least..... Do you understand why?”

Tigre shook his head. As far as he knew, Liliane and Matilda never had any beef between them in the first place. He supposed that meant that they had already made friends by the time he first met them.

“I consoled, calmed down, and convinced my wife to finally tell me. It seemed that she didn’t like how I counted on Matilda for things, and that Matilda knew exactly what I needed and made it happen.”

*That’s it?* Tigre almost blurted out, but kept his tongue.

For Liliane, it wasn’t that simple. Even after acknowledging every little aspect at which she was better than Matilda, she was not satisfied.

“Some of it was my fault. I had a habit of asking Matilda to take care of things around the house. She had been working for us for decades, so everything that needed to be done and when was all muscle memory for her. It was three or four years before the two finally became friendly.”

“How did it get to that point?”

“My wife became accustomed to things. I tried my best to ask her to do things. But I suppose the biggest cause was that Matilda and Liliane worked hard to get along.”

Reminiscing about his past, with a tired face, Mashas stared at the youth.

“It’s hard to see where jealousy comes from. It’s not a quick fix either. I know there are some miracles of men who are close to multiple women, and none of them is jealous of another. But, what are the chances that you’re one of them? That’s all I can say to you.”

Mashas concluded and Tigre bowed with deep respect once again.

Tigre struggled to imagine Elen jealous of Titta or vice versa, but he also knew that he could be misunderstanding it. If they were to be put in such a situation, who knows if some new emotions wouldn’t arise?

*—In any case, I just have to try.*

Tigre felt some knots in his stomach as he thought about discussing this with Titta, but he was already one foot out of the door. He had no intention of turning around.

“So, you just wanted to talk about Titta?”

Mashas asked, pouring wine into the two chalices that were now empty.

Come to think of it, Tigre had not sat down to chat with Mashas for a long time. Same with Gerard and his father, but everyone had been so busy that no one had time for idle chat.

“Can I ask for just a little more of your time?”

Mashas was also someone he could talk to about anything, no matter how trivial.

He told him about the speech he made with Regin, the things he noticed during his patrols, enemy movements..... Mashas would laugh or tease at times, and put a smile on Tigre’s face.

And Tigre remembered what Gerard had said and mentioned it jokingly, that there was a rumor in the palace to make Tigre king.

“Damn Badouin.....”

Mashas looked away from Tigre to the corner of the room, and quietly cursed. So quiet that Tigre could not really hear his words.

“Is there really such a rumor?”

Seeing Mashas reaction, Tigre asked, confused.

“There is.”

The old earl admitted reluctantly. He could have denied it, but he figured that sooner or later someone would confirm to him like Gerard did.

“While that is only a rumor, it’s true that no one has more victories under their belt than you do. And to top it off, if you were to win this war, your status will become unshakable.”

“There’s no way one can’t be a king just by winning battles.”

“Of course. But the next king of this nation will be one who can show strength on the battlefield. You understand that, don’t you?”

Tigre nodded. After the civil wars, foreign invasions followed one after another; people were tired of war.

“The thing is, I think the candidate’s own will is the most important thing here. Tigre, do you want to be king?”

To the direct question, Tigre was dumbfounded. He shook his head hastily.

“Lord Mashas, please stop joking. I’ve never thought of such a thing.”

“Then, don’t be.”

Said Mashas, very matter-of-factly.

“Even if you were the perfect candidate in terms of ability, it means nothing without the willpower. Those who take the throne because of a stupid reason like everyone forced him to tend to give up the throne for stupid reasons. ....Do you remember our civil war two years ago?”

Tigre frowned at the sudden question, but nodded matter-of-factly. How could he forget? That war changed his life forever. Mashas continued.

“There was no battle that was easy. It would have been natural for anyone’s will to be broken along the way. But your will was strong and undeterred. Isn’t that right?”

Protecting Alsace. For the youth, he fought in the civil war two years ago for that reason. That determination led through the fights against Duke Thenardier, the Black Knight Roland, and the Muozinel Army. Mashas understood that well.

“To want to take the throne, you’ll need at least willpower comparable to that. If you don’t have it, don’t worry about any rumors.”

Tigre bowed with great respect, but also to hide his blushing face.

While he listened to Mashas, the youth had realized that there was a part of him that may want to sit on that throne. And that emotion was akin to that of a child wanting sweets he had never tried before.

The conversation had stopped. Tigre thought it was appropriate now and stood to take his leave. He did want to calm down for a bit and wanted to sort out his thoughts on his own.

“Lord Mashas, thank you.”

Tigre bowed once more then turned to leave. When he got his hand on the door, the Old Earl who hadn't moved from his chair called his name.

“If it's something you've set your mind on your own, I will do anything in my power to help you.”

Tigre thanked Mashas again and left the room quietly.

Finishing supper and returning to his room, Tigre had been sitting his chair, contemplating.

Not about war. About Titta. To Tigre, the girl with the light-brown hair perhaps required more of his thought than the war did. He stared at the floor, stared at the wall, and stared at the ceiling for about a quarter of an hour, Tigre sighed softly.

*I want her by my side.* He had confirmed again that his emotions were not dishonest in any way.

And it wasn't because she was good at her job. Tigre could not imagine Titta not excelling at housework, but even if she did, Tigre's love for her would not have changed one bit.

However, if he accepted this feeling as true, he also had to accept something else.

“I'm a lustful man without integrity, huh.”

Tigre concluded that since he wanted both Titta and Elen by his side.

*I can't choose.* A fact he couldn't say out loud in front of Mashas after all. Tigre finally realized why he couldn't say it. In the deepest part of his heart, he had no intention of choosing one or the other. Of course, the thought of choosing one seemed wrong.

Tigre placed his face in his palm. He was mostly dumbfounded by the revelation of his own selfishness, but that wasn't all.

*—If I explain all this to Titta, will she understand?*

Thick and slimy sweat trickled in Tigre's heart. He felt like he was the villain of a fairy tale. He thought that this proposition might even be easier to accept if there was a political motive.

Something whispered in his ear to keep things the way they are. Titta would understand without being told a thing. There were plenty of things in this world that are better left unsaid.

*—No, I have to tell her.*

Tigre had no idea how Titta would react, but he knew that he could not move forward without first telling her.

The youth decided to tell her immediately. He felt that his determination would waver if he pushed it back.

But most of all, there was no guarantee that he would have a time like this tomorrow. As soon as they found out about the movement of the Muozinel Army, Tigre would leave the Capital.

Just as Tigre stood up to call Titta in, the door was knocked and Tigre's shoulders shook. When Titta's voice rang through the door, Tigre was startled.

Titta poked her head in and nodded with her innocent smile that Tigre had grown accustomed to.

"Tigre-sama, I thought I would bring you something cold to drink....."

Summer was in full force, and nights were growing as hot as days. Tigre thanked Titta and seized the opportunity to add:

"Titta, could you bring two cups please?"

"Do you have a visitor scheduled?"

The little girl asked curiously and Tigre shook his head.

"It's for you. There's something I want to talk to you about."

Tigre said, nonchalantly. A light shone in Titta's hazel eyes as she energetically answered yes! Her light-brown ponytail shook a little bit.

Titta soon returned with two silver chalices and a plate on her tray. Wine inside the chalice, and diced peaches and strawberries on the plate. Titta placed those on the table, and politely sat down.

"It feels like we haven't sat down to talk like this in ages, Tigre-sama."

"We've both been busy. How are you doing?"

"I may be a little busy, but everyone's so nice, I don't mind it at all. How about you, Tigre-sama? You must rest while you can."

"You used to scold me for not working enough."

Tigre chuckled, and Titta frowned a little bit.

"I'm serious. I'm happy that the people adore you, Tigre-sama and I have no idea about the warfare, but you need to take care of yourself."

"You're right. I'll do that once this war is over."

"You promise? I'm ready to tie you to your bed."

The idle conversation soaked Tigre's heart with joy. "That'll be a problem", Tigre chuckled and sipped on his wine. An unexpected surprise captures the youth's heart.

"Is this wine from Alsace.....?"

"Yes. The other day, I asked for one bottle from the palace cellar through the head cook. I was planning to serve it to you one day, and I thought today would be perfect."

It wasn't unusual that the palace had wines from various lands around the nation. It was rarer when lords paid their taxes in full. Tigre himself had sent wine or fur as part of his taxes before. He had heard from Mashas and Augre that they had sent things like silk and honey.

“I didn’t think it would taste something like this here.”

The fragrance was rather strong and sweet. It didn’t taste especially better than other wine, but it was yet a special wine for the youth. The last time he had tasted it must have been when he stopped by Alsace at the beginning of the year.

Drinking that wine alone with Titta made Tigre feel like he was back home in Alsace.

Back in those days, Tigre only had to worry about troubles inside Alsace. All he had to do, while accumulating moments of small happiness day to day, was to make Alsace a little bit better one at a time, and like his father did to him one day, pass on the land to his child. Those were all of his worries.

But, those days were in the past. Tigre was now asked to worry about Brune as a country, and to act in order to benefit it as a whole. He understood that his peaceful days at a small land like Alsace would have been impossible without the peace of Brune as a nation.

When he drank about half of his wine, Tigre put the chalice down on the table.

“—Titta”

He stared at the girl with light-brown hair with a serious face. From his expression, Titta must have understood that she should listen earnestly. She also put down her chalice, sat up, and stared back at the young man. In one breath, Tigre discharged his words.

“There are two girls that I love. One of them is you.”

Now that he had said it, he felt beyond immoral.

Hearing this unexpected confession, Titta blinked a few times, looking confused for a beat, then finally realizing that the youth had confessed his love to her, she blushed to the tips of her ears. She fidgeted with her hands on her lap, aimlessly.

Tigre did not move a muscle nor say a word until she calmed down. While he did, nerves and anxiety were crushing him in the inside.

With Elen, the fact that they were both emotional worked for their benefit. If either one of them was calm, it would not have went down the same way.

Tigre was gripping his knees until they hurt, holding back the rest of the words he wants to say and waiting.

If he wasn’t careful, he felt like he would rant on and on about how precious Titta was to him. Which, after what he had just said, would only come across as an excuse.

“W-What do you..... mean.....?”

Unable to conceal her confusion, Titta asked, shaking.

“I want you by my side, forever. Not only as a maid.”

Tigre felt Titta’s heart skip. The light-brown haired girl had waited to hear those words and had almost given up for a long time.

Just as Tigre’s father Urz had taken a woman from the Capital as his wife, since that was something expected of a lord and ruler of Alsace. Titta had heard some people in Alsace saying so as well.

That's why she had given up on her dream. She kept telling herself that she would be happy to just remain by Tigre's side as his maid. But now, Tigre had finally said the words of her wildest dream.

Titta felt her entire body heat up and her head was foggy. She couldn't keep the tears from pouring out of her eyes. Before she knew it, droplets fell out of her eyes and formed streaks down her face. Some sigh-like half words escaped her mouth.

".....Titta?"

Tigre's face and tone turned blue. He had never shown so much fear in his face when facing off tens of thousands of enemies.

The youth thought back to the words he had said to see if he had said something that would make her cry and Titta, while wiping her tears with her right sleeve, waved her left hand in a flutter.

"N-No, that's not it. It's not..... I don't know why, but I can't stop crying....."

She seemed to be struggling to find the right words, so she kept repeating not it and waving her hand. Tigre waited again, patiently.

After some time passed, Titta, who had finally stopped crying but still blushing, asked Tigre:

"Um, I'm sorry to ask such a thing, but..... Has anyone from Alsace told you anything?"

"They did tell me to think about an heir. Lord Mashas told me to think about marriage."

Tigre answered with a gentle tone as to not make Titta nervous.

"But I'm not saying this because someone told me to. I have always thought that I want you by my side. I was just too much of a coward to say it any sooner."



“Always.....?”

“Yes. For years.”

Tigre nodded with conviction. Titta blushed again and looked down. She played with her fingers aimlessly. She must have gotten excited again as she sniffed her nose. Her head still down, she looked at Tigre.

“Tigre-sama, may I ask you for one favor?”

“What is it?”

Tigre gently encouraged her and Titta, shrinking in shyness, said:

“Please hold me. Let me know that this is real, that it’s not a dream or something.”

Titta lifted her chin and with a timid smile continued.

“I know that when you say you have one more person you love..... That you’ve thought it through and through. But still, when you said that you want me by your side.....”

She couldn’t continue. The girl looked down again. Tigre stood up and went around the table to stand next to Titta. Then he gently placed his hand on her shoulder.

Titta looked up. Their eyes met.

She stood up, supported by the young man, and slowly closed her eyes.

Tigre held Titta in his arms and kissed her forehead and cheek.

Limalisha was standing in a garden shone by the light of the half moon. She did not wear her military uniform but plain hemp clothes and a coat over it. Just in case, she had her sword on her waist.

This day, her work had ended unusually early, so she went straight to bed but could not fall asleep. She had come outside for some fresh air.

Summer in Brune was longer than that in Zhcted but did not come with unpleasant heat. It was perfect weather for her to cool down.

The town that could be seen from the hills of Mount Luberon was ghastly in contrast to the commotion that took place there during the day. She had heard that the reason there were many lights lit were because many people lived there without a house, and lived in a hammock or so.

Lim couldn’t imagine an army of 150,000, either. But, when she thought about the thick castle walls that she saw every day, as well as the deep trench below it, she would begin to think that they would be all right. Even when she did, however, her spirits were still down.

“Why the long face?”

A bright voice called from the shadows and Lim jolted her head up. Then she relaxed and answered.

“Just patrolling to get some fresh air. Don’t mind me.”

“You can’t sleep? You’re the one who’s telling Tigre and I lately to get some rest while we can.”

The one who appeared from the shadows was Lim’s lord and best friend, the silver-haired Vanadis. Lim chuckled and replied to Elen.

“I went to bed a quarter of an hour ago, however, I couldn’t keep my eyes closed.”

“You look like a warrior who will welcome her first campaign. That’s unusual from you.”

Elen laughed then stood next to Lim. They both looked towards the distance without much thought. They could see the black outline of the walls that surround the Capital as well as the torches placed evenly along it.

“How is the detached unit?”

Lim asked quietly. While she was worried about Elen, it was also a protest for being left out. Elen understood that.

“Don’t worry. We have Tigre. With him fighting alongside, no one will stand a chance against us. I’m sorry to leave you behind, but you’re the only one I can trust to look after Lyudmila. Please understand.”

While Lim knew that Elen was being honest, she also knew that she was trying to console her. If she was asked which unit, the garrison defending the Capital or the detached unit, was more dangerous, Lim would say it was the detached unit. If the detached unit were to be surrounded, they would be done for.

That was precisely why Lim was unhappy with Elen’s decision to leave her behind.

But Lim kept that to herself and respectfully replied.

“I’ll humbly try my best to not embarrass the name of LeitMeritz.”

Elen answered “Good”, and continued:

“I still can’t imagine an enemy of 150,000, but once we charge in, I won’t be able to worry about anything else. I don’t think I could even worry about Tigre.”

Her job was to charge forward at all costs and take down anyone that came her way. She could not even be bothered with Kureys. This was because it was Tigre’s duty to take care of Kureys. She knew that the only thing she could do was to believe that Tigre would stay next to or behind her, and charge.

“I don’t want to stop. No matter what happens.”

She knew that if something happened to Lim on the battlefield, Elen would definitely stop in her tracks. In fact, two years ago when she faced the assassins called the Seven Chains, Elen lost herself seeing Lim fall.

Elen did not underestimate Lim’s ability as a warrior or commander. They both learned the hard way that anything can happen out in the field. Elen tried to remember how many times, counting since they were mercenaries, that she was dumbfounded by an unexpected situation and was forced to do something she never thought she would.

“You have to drag Lord Tigrevurmud, at least, along if necessary.”

Lim replied with her usual matter-of-fact tone. “I’ll try my best”, Elen laughed.

“Anything you want to say to me while you can? I won’t see you for a while.”

Elen asked nonchalantly and Lim asked something that came to her mind. She didn’t come up with the thought at the spot but had been meaning to ask it for some time.

“Did something happen between you and Lord Tigrevurmud?”

“.....What do you mean by something?”

Elen tried to laugh it off, but the unnatural pause before her words made Lim even more suspicious. There were two reasons why Lim thought to ask such a thing:

First, she thought that Elen and Tigre had been communicating with their eyes, silently, more often than before. She also thought that they seemed to be bonded by something more than trust when they did so.

The second reason was Lyudmila Lourie’s attitude. Now that they were defending the castle walls together, Lim had more opportunity to speak with Mila one-on-one, but whenever she mentioned Tigre or Elen, the blue-haired Vanadis got a strange look on her face and tried to change the subject.

Lim, of course, knew that Elen and Mila were far from friendly, but the look she saw on Mila’s face was not that of disdain. Then what was it about? Lim didn’t know. In any case, the reaction was enough to make Lim wonder.

“If you don’t want to tell me, Eleonora-sama, I won’t ask you again.”

Lim said as if to push those thoughts away. But, some afterthought made her continue:

“I still haven’t heard what Lord Tigrevurmud has told you to bring your spirits up.”

Lim was unable to cheer up Elen, who had been down in the mud since the fight against Greast. As a last resort, she had told Tigre about it and Tigre soon went to remedy the situation.

After that, Elen regained her usual candidness, however Lim had not been told any details on why or how Tigre was able to do so. Both Tigre and Elen would only ever say that they “talked through the night.”

Lim had been trying her best not to imagine too much about that. They were both very dear to Lim, though she couldn’t stop thinking that she was left out.

“I’m sorry.”

After taking a few breathes, Elen said with sincerity.

“Did something happen between me and him? I’d have to say yes. I can’t say much about it, but, it was, for me..... And for him, I think, a good thing.”

“That’s good to hear.”

Lim meant it when she said so. If it made Elen happy, she would never oppose it.

“I feel bad about keeping it a secret until you asked me. Though, right now, this is all I can say about it. I will tell you all about it someday; will you wait a while longer?”

Lim couldn’t answer right away. Silence brooded between them.

After ten counts or so, Elen called out Lim’s name nervously. Shaking her blond hair tied to her left, Lim giggled.

“Okay. I’ll be waiting for the day you can tell me about it, Eleonora-sama.”

From Lim’s tone, Elen understood that Lim was teasing her, but she didn’t retaliate but instead crossed her arms in silence. She did make Lim worry about it. She thought that she was lucky that she got off that easy.

“Then, Eleonora-sama, if you’ll excuse me.....”

“Hmm? Are you tired now?”

“Yes, we have to rest while we can.”

“Right. I suppose I’ll return to my room, as well.”

They turned around and started walking. The summer-night breeze gently lifted their hair.

Around dawn, the news that Fort Severac was surrounded by 10,000 Muozinel soldiers reached the Capital. Along with it, the news that the rest of the Muozinel Army passed on by the side of the fort and were continuing their march.

Tigrevurmud Vorn and Eleonora Viltaria, along with a small army, left the Capital before the sun was high. Then, they joined the detached unit led by Bouroullec and headed to Fort Severac.



After watching Tigre leave the Capital, Olivier was walking the palace’s corridor when he was stopped by a few men.

Each of them was a lord who owned a land in western Brune and had rushed to the Capital with an army of a thousand or two. Currently, they worked under Olivier.

“Lord Olivier, there’s something we want to talk to you about.”

Said one of the lords who looked around to make sure no one was watching.

“Then, will you join me in my room?”

Olivier, like others, was quite busy, but he knew from experience that he should not keep men who approached him like this waiting. Besides although temporary, they were his men for now.

The lords agreed, so Olivier took them to his room. As soon they sat in their chairs as Olivier offered, they rapidly spewed their distrust and disdain for Tigre.

“How can we allow such a kid to be our Supreme Commander in such a vital war?”

“Rumors have it that he has connections with Zhcted. If he were to call in Zhcted after defeating Sachstein and Muozinel, we’ll be the laughingstock of the surrounding nations.”

“They say he has proven himself in battle several times, which is hard to believe. His land, Alsace, was it? It’s small, and he must barely have an army of a hundred. He is not of an old family and neither are any of his relatives. How could he possibly have the opportunity to prove himself?”

Olivier had sat silently as the lord’s rambled on but finally spoke when they caught their breath.

“Do you know of Roland, who was our Navarre Knight Squadron’s commander?”

The lords all looked confused. Not that they did not understand the question, but because it seemed so absurd to ask.

“How absurd. Of course, every lord who resides in the west of the Capital knows Lord Roland.”

“Clad in black armor and wielding the “Invincible Sword” given to him by His Majesty, the knight with incomparable loyalty and courage. Oh, how we were all given courage by him. How tragic indeed that he was slain by that fowl Ganelon.”

“You said it. If Lord Roland were alive, those Muozinelians would flee back to their country in fear.”

Olivier stayed quiet again as they praised Lord Roland with all their might. Then, once the room had quieted down, he asked in a cold tone.

“The man who Roland himself left his Invincible Sword to, acknowledging his great character and strength, is Tigrevurmud Vorn. Did you know that?”

The lords dared not utter a word. Olivier, restraining his tone, continued.

“Earl Vorn is not a master of sword or spear. To be accurate, his only skill is archery. However, with that archery alone, he has the courage to stand in front of Roland in the battlefield, and the skill to draw against him. No one in the Navarre Knight Squadron is unaware of that.”

Olivier’s glare sharpened and pierced the Lord’s.

“‘If Roland were alive.’ You say so, but if Roland were alive, he would trust Earl Vorn entirely and follow his command. Because we are sure of that, we follow Earl Vorn.”

In between the lines, Olivier was telling them that if they had a problem with Tigre, they would have to go through the Navarre Knight Squadron.

“I will add this: In order to win this war at all costs, we are willing to fight in ways that go against the knights’ code. What about you guys?”

The lords were silent before Olivier’s pressure. They looked at each other, bowed to Olivier and left.

Once he was alone in the room, Olivier stared at the void despondently, and muttered.

“I’m sure you’re not happy about your name being used after your death, but forgive me. I know that it is what you would have done if you were alive.”

He said those words not to himself, but to his friend, buried near the Temple on the top of Mount Luberon.

As he immersed himself in his emotions for a short while, Olivier then pulled himself together and stood up from the chair.

“Defending the Capital from an enemy of over 100,000 with an army of 40,000..... It sounds absurd, but compared to facing off the Black Knight with just a bow and arrow, it doesn’t seem that big a deal.”

Olivier left his room and walked down the corridor with a dignified expression. As the leader of the western feudal lords and Knight Squadrons, there were countless things he had to do.

### **Chapter 3 – Strife over the Capital**

The Muozinel army, which passed through Fort Severac, went north along the highway without even making an effort to maneuver the fort. Three days later they forced the city of Veecus situated along the highway to surrender; several days after, they besieged the Gelgovia Fort with 10,000 soldiers just as they did with Severac before.

The commander of the unit besieging the fort was Murat.

His hair was short and he wore a deep black beard under his nose. Since he was reserved and reticent by nature, he was teased as a bad gambling opponent by his peers. However, as commander he is superb, having earned him Kureys' deep trust.

The Muozinel army, which had become 120,000 man strong, marched on. Not only was the fort of Wilzon unmanned, it also wasn't fit for use as it had turned into a complete ruin after having been set on fire from within, and thus the army simply went past it.

"Contrary to Severac and Gelgovia, the master of this fort apparently was a smart man", Kureys commented while appraising the Wilzon Fort from atop his palanquin.

Two days after that, Kureys left 10,000 soldiers behind in the city of Laferte which had capitulated, and requisitioned food and material. As Laferte is a mere two days on foot from Nice, the main force of the Muozinel army could come rushing right away if contingency demanded. Once he confirmed to have enough food stored to maintain the troops for an extended period of time if the supply line were to be severed, Kureys ordered the departure.

At this time, one of his aides advised him that it was certainly important to protect the supply line, but deploying 40,000 men at four different places with 10,000 per location would very likely turn them into good targets for annihilation.

"Individual annihilation, eh? Isn't that great?" (Kureys)

The aide looked dumbfounded due to Kureys' assertion while smiling happily. The red-bearded younger brother of the crown prince detained the aid on the spot and summoned Damad. He then made the black-haired warrior listen to the aide's advice.

"Try telling me what you think," Kureys queried.

Damad thought that he might be tested here, but as it was Kureys' order, he had to respond to it.

"If Brune possesses enough military forces, it might be possible for them to aim at crushing the units individually. However, if you exclude the militia from the enemy forces, they have at most 70,000 soldiers. By all rights, that's a number where they have to struggle to just protect their capital." (Damad)

Based on the information they had obtained from the scout reports and the cities that had surrendered, Kureys had mostly grasped the precise amount of troops left in the Moonlight Knight Army. Damad too had been informed about the numbers by Kureys.

"For the enemy to sever our supply lines, they have no other option but to recapture the port city Massilia or Laferte, where we are gathering our food and goods. But both Laferte and Massilia are cities with sturdy walls. They should be able to hold out against a siege for a few days." (Damad)

The main force of the Muozinel army was close to Laferte, and Avshall's unit was close to Massilia. Murat's unit could maneuver either way. As long as they could resist for several days, reinforcements would definitely arrive.

"That's how it is." (Kureys)

Obviously bringing the matter to a close, Kureys laughed.

"If Brune aims at crushing the units individually, they can go for it. If the capital's defense wanes because of that, it will be the best result we could ask for. To the bitter end it's the capital we're targeting." (Kureys)

Damad thought, *what a frightening man*, while bowing his head at Kureys. *This royal prince even uses the very long supply line as provocation towards the enemy.*

Even if their supply line were to be cut off, the Muozinel army always had the option to pillage. Kureys hadn't permitted the soldiers to pillage after leaving Massilia at all. That's not only owed to him trying to keep up a reputation of being generous in the cities that surrendered.

Once the aide and Damad stepped back, Kureys looked out over the soldiers marching in front in satisfaction. The distance from Massilia to Nice amounts to 500 belsta (approximately 500 km). The generals had calculated that it would likely take 20 days in total to arrive at Nice, and that has proven to be correct.

*—However, the soldiers' fighting spirit has risen plentifully during the long march with not a single battle. I will have them throw this eagerness against the capital's walls.*

"Now then, Star Shooter, Princess Regin, how are you going to move?" (Kureys)

Red Beard revealed a daring smile while the feeling of exaltation before a battle overflowed his body.



The one who discovered their presence in the morning of that day was a soldier manning the capital's southern wall.

No sooner than the morning mist which was about to fade beyond the horizon swayed unnaturally, black dots became visible as if black ink had been spilled within the fog.

The black dots gradually filled the highway while resolving into contorted shapes.

The soldier, who had thought that he had been seeing things until then, hailed his nearby comrade in panic. Mashas, Lim, and Mila, who received the report shortly thereafter, appeared on the southern wall. All three of them were fully armored.

They understood that these shapes, which had by now turned into an uninterrupted, muddy, black stream, were clearly heading their way.

"I heard about the enemy having 110,000 soldiers, but good gracious..."

Mashas's face cramped up and he leaked a low groan. Lim and Mila barely managed to suppress a tremble. The soldiers and knights protecting the other sections of the wall also rushed over in succession. All of them stood stock still with blank faces.

"That's the Muozinel army, huh?"

Fearful whispers were exchanged atop the wall which had become full of soldiers.

It was apparently a big shock even for soldiers who had served as lookouts for a long time. At the time when figures become visible in the distance, they can estimate the number of people and the distance to those people based on their prior experience. However, even they couldn't say anything in the present situation besides it being an outrageous number.

“There's no point in being anxious about it. The enemy surely has a big army, but it's not like they can fly through the air,” Mashas grinned at the soldiers while deliberately using a jovial tone. “You guys appear to be surprised by that big army, but once they arrive here, they will likely be surprised by this wall. The moat is wide and deep, too. Let's teach them that they cannot overcome this wall even with a hundred thousand soldiers.”

The moat, which had been drastically widened below the wall by the militia, has a width of 17 alsin and a depth of 40 chet (four meter) in the south and east. The western and northern moats weren't as deep and wide, but when one left through the wall on the capital's northern side, the terrain immediately turned into a slope, and a river is flowing in the vicinity of the western side. Neither side was really suited for the deployment of a large army.

Even just the attempt to bury those moats will likely earn them a considerable number of days.

The soldiers somewhat rally under Mashas's encouragement. Even after witnessing the same sight as them, the elderly Earl's composure of being able to smile calmly, and his short and stout stature hidden behind armor and helmet possessed an odd dignity.

Once someone raised a loud yell in order to rouse himself, the others also shouted from their diaphragms in response to that.

Lim and Mila looked and then nodded at each other. If one's overpowered before a battle, they could not hope to triumph.

Lim returned to her usual, unsociable expression, and called out to Mashas.

“The enemy being visible from here means that they will likely arrive in around two hours. I think that we should check every place once more in advance.” (Lim)

“Very true. This is exactly the time when one must stick to the basics.” (Mashas)

There were plenty of places that ought to be checked such as the water and sewer systems connecting the capital to the river flowing in the west; whether there was room to move around below the wall; whether there were any problems with the weapons and goods stored on the wall, and whether they had forgotten to close the gates.

And then, when the sun climbed the zenith, Muozinel's army arrived in front of the Capital Nice.

They stopped their march around 500 alsin away from the wall and set up their camp. The one who had been appointed to this duty was one of the generals, Ekrem.

Under his command, close to 15,000 white tents, shared by six or seven soldiers, were spread out. Once it came to such numbers disorder would manifest by tents clashing with each other or there being no gaps for the soldiers to pass through. But Ekrem made them finish the job in a short time by dealing with it skillfully.

The tents of the generals like Ekrem and Yargash were luxurious, lavish red and blue silk constructions with violet and silver embroideries and were more than double the size of the tents of the soldiers.

Kureys' tents was close to ten times the size of the soldiers' tents. It was a combination of several dozen tents, had a total of 20 rooms provided within, and was supported by ten pillars as thick as an adult's torso. The tent's color was snow white, but it was obvious to anyone that it had been set up like that to emphasize

the golden embroidery. It featured a big motif of the God of War Vahram holding a golden sword and wearing a horned, golden helmet. And at last the ground was completely covered by tents of Muozinel's soldiers as far as the eyes could see.

For the soldiers standing on the wall it was (not such<sup>1</sup>) an oppressive view. Of course there were also some who somehow managed to avoid falling on their knees by propping themselves up with their spears after losing their cool.

It took two hours to finish the camp's establishment. Evening was already approaching, but the strong summer sun was still flooding the land.

4,000 soldiers advanced out of the Muozinel's army camp while basking in the intense sunlight. Kureys Shahim Balamir was at their front riding his palanquin.

Once they proceeded up to a position just out of range of arrows and stones, they dispersed to the left and right, forming up in horizontal lines.

"Ruler of Brune, Your Highness Princess Regin!"

The 4,000 soldiers repeated Kureys's shout in a chorus. Their shouts drowned out all other sound and made the air rumble, reaching even the ears of Nice's residents across the wall.

The children running across the streets, the housewives chattering near the street stalls, the militia men engaging in various tasks near the wall, and the elderly burdened by the summer sun, all of them stood still with startled expressions and looked up the wall. Kureys' words were spoken in such fluent Brunish that even children comprehended their meaning.

"I shall allow you to surrender!" (Kureys)

There was no doubt that all soldiers atop the wall were dumbfounded by that appeal. Kureys and the Muozinel army continued.

"You may choose whether to leave Brune's soil for eternity or become slaves of Muozinel. Your lives shall be guaranteed, unnecessary pillaging will be avoided, and you will be able to prevent the destruction of this beautiful capital. —But!" (Kureys)

The Muozinel soldiers raise their voices all at once. "If you hear these words and still turn your blades against us, this capital will literally vanish from the surface. We will carry it away without leaving even a single piece of the wall behind, and all living beings will be taken away as slaves. The only thing remaining will be a desolated Luberon Mountain! If it's now, you can still avoid such a tragic future!" Kureys concluded.

Kureys' words were powerful and full of a confidence that overwhelmed those listening to them. One soldier after the other appeared who could vividly picture the tragic future depicted by him. Even once they tried to return words of objections, a huge camp and more than 100,000 soldiers filled their vision as soon as they looked down at Kureys.

"...What a preposterous lot." (Lyudmila)

Mila spat out with a grim expression while looking down at the Muozinel army from atop the wall together with the soldiers of Brune and Zhcted. Her irritation wasn't pointed only at Muozinel's army, but also at the soldiers around her. *The fear of a single person easily infects many. Especially in a situation like this. Since we're talking about Kureys here, I'm sure he's actually aiming for that too, but it's going to be hard if they end up getting cold feet this easily,* Mila thought.

Lim, who was standing next to Mila, asked carefully even while worrying about the soldiers' state,

“Are they really going to follow up on what he said?” (Limalisha)

“The troublesome aspect of those guys is that you can’t laugh it off as mere threatening.” (Lyudmila)

Mila laughed and answered, but her expression is lacking its typical frankness and indifference.

*If they are going to rule all of Brune, Nice turns into an important location. But, if it’s them, they wouldn’t hesitate to destroy Nice and build a Muozinel-styled city on top of the remains.*

*—If only Tigre was here, he could at least shoot arrows at those guys...*

*Even if they wouldn’t reach, they still would clearly declare their will to the opponents, and it would also be possible to restore the soldiers’ morale.*

*Possibly Mashas may be fine as well. His act today morning, which gave the soldiers a peace of mind, was something only he can do. At the moment he should be in the royal palace to put the entire army in order, though.*

It happened when Mila was thinking about such things. A commotion welled up behind her. Mila and Lim, who turned around wondering what was going on, widened their eyes in surprise.

Regin had shown up with two guards on either side. She wore an armor atop her silken clothes, and had put on a mantle. The armor could be called lightweight as it didn’t cover her entire body, but she possessed such gallantry, nobility and beauty that it made those seeing her swallow their breath.

While her pale golden hair fluttered in the summer wind, Regin harbored an unbreakable, resolute attitude even towards Kureys’s terrifying threats.

The soldiers opened a path for her. Once Regin walked to the center of the wall, she stepped forward so that the Muozinel soldiers could see her properly. Her blue eyes coldly looked down upon Kureys on the ground.

A female guard held a sword, which she carried under her left arm, with both arms and presented it to Regin.

“Please, Your Majesty.” (Selena)

“Thanks, Selena” (Regin)

Regin took that sword and drew it out of its scabbard. Once she hoisted it up as far as she could, the hilt and guard made out of gold, and the steel-colored blade dazzlingly reflected the sunlight.

The soldiers raised voices full of astonishment. It was because the sword held by Regin had the same shape as the invincible sword extolled as the Kingdom’s treasured sword.

What’s different was its size. The original Durandal was a barely balanced great-sword wielded by the huge warrior Roland who was called Black Knight. There were records left that stated that the founder Charles, who wielded Durandal, had been a giant, as well.

However, the sword held by her was two sizes smaller.

Regin swung that sword straight down without saying anything. Mila and Lim could faintly hear how the air was slashed.

Regin sheathed the longsword and handed it back to Selena. Then she turned around and silently surveyed the soldiers with her eyes which had determination dwell within them. She put her hand on her chest, inhaled a bit, and spoke,

“—They are the enemies we must defeat.”

No trembling could be felt from Regin’s voice. It was tinged with a fighting spirit, inspiring everybody.

“We have prepared means for the sake of winning. However, to make those succeed, everyone’s power is necessary. Please lend me your strength for the sake of protecting what I want to protect.” (Regin)

Those words reached the soldiers’ ears riding upon a cool breeze. One person yelled out loud. Several followed after him. And in the blink of an eye, all soldiers at the southern wall raised battle cries. Their enthusiasm carried over to the other sections of the wall, resulting in all soldiers manning the wall roaring at last.

—*Holy cow, I’ve really got to hand it to you.*

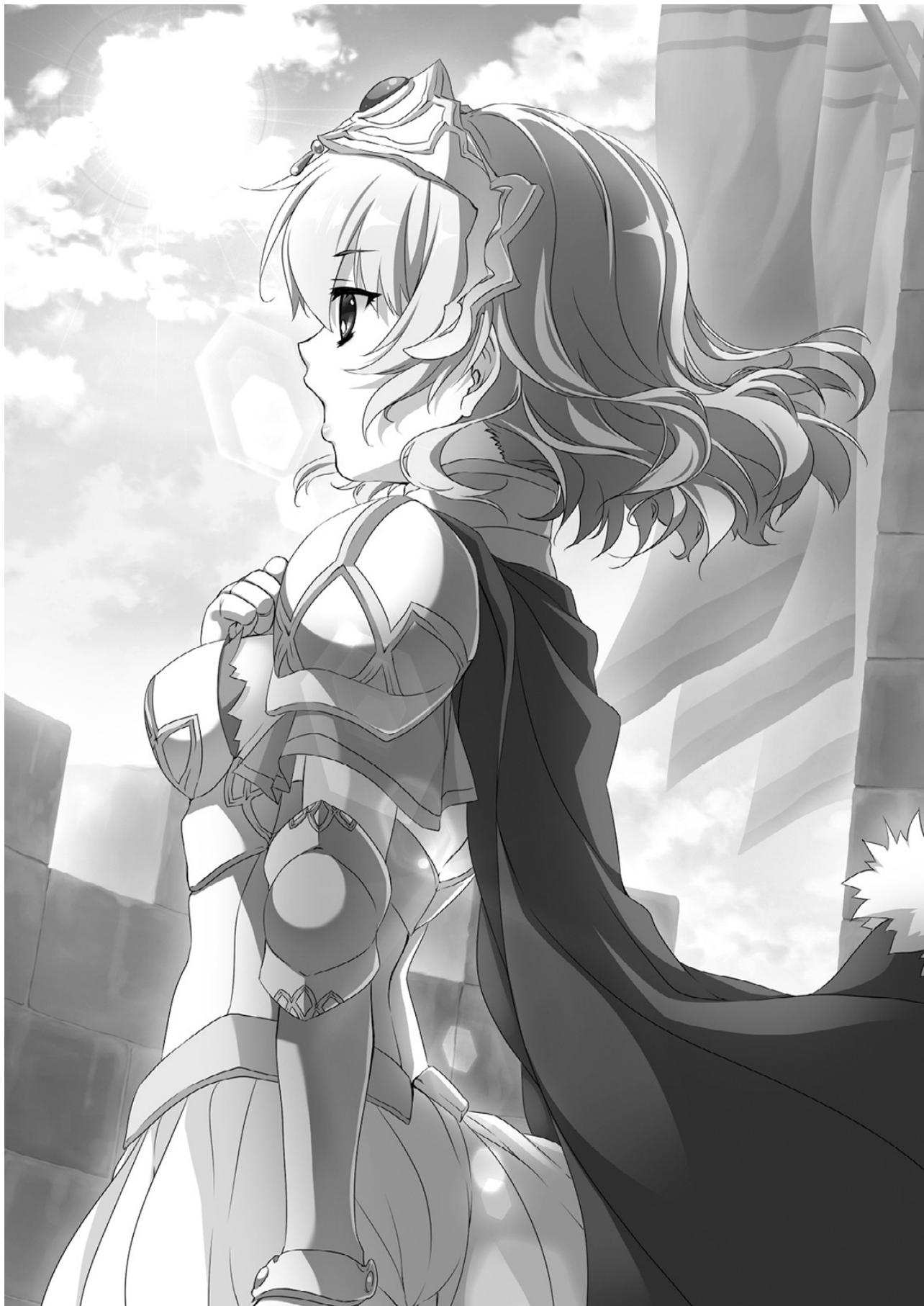
Mila sent forth her heartfelt admiration to Regin without voicing it out. *I wonder how many people can adopt such a bold attitude while in front of a hundred thousand enemies?*

The Regin in Mila’s memory was a girl with a far more unreliable impression. At the very least, the Regin back during the civil war in this country two years ago apparently couldn’t do much more than rely on Tigre after being rescued by him. Back then Mila had clearly regarded Regin as “hindrance.” However, she had splendidly grown up unbeknown to Mila to the extent of appearing trustworthy.

Regin noticed Mila and Lim, and walked over to them. She held out her hand with a smile.

“Lady Lyudmila. I cannot find enough words to express my gratitude for you honoring us with your participation as Zhcted’s War Princess. At the same time of being a guest of honor, I consider you to be a comrade-in-arms. We shall repay your brave fighting as much as it is possible for our country.” (Regin)

Being called a comrade-in-arms by the ruler of a country might be called the biggest compliment. Mila respectfully grasped Regin’s hand and bowed courteously. The princess’ blue eyes and the war maiden’s blue eyes meet for an instant.



“—Your Majesty, I’m greatly obliged for your generous, high evaluation. For the sake of Your Majesty, who kindly refers to someone like me as comrade-in-arms, I shall vow here and now that I will display a fighting style that doesn’t put shame to my name as War Princess. Besides, there exists a deep, fateful connection between me and Muozinel.” (Lyudmila)

For Mila as well as for Regin this was an important scene. Regin demonstrated to her soldiers the value of Zhcted’s troops as comrades-in-arms for Brune and the firmness of the bond between Brune and Zhcted. Mila responded to that while observing decorum.

—*The atmosphere has clearly changed...*

Mila sensitively perceived that the looks towards her are now different.

Until this morning there were still many soldiers of Brune that regarded her as an outsider, but that has stopped now. Of course it’s possible that it’s a temporary phenomenon, but she was still grateful.

Next Regin calls out to Lim who’s standing next to Mila.

“Limalisha-dono. Eleonora-dono has been relying on you, her representative. As I believe there are many hardships in staying on foreign soil, please frankly tell me if there’s anything worrying you. I consider you a comrade-in-arms as well, after all.” (Regin)

As one would expect, Lim tried to go down on her knees, but that was prevented by Regin. Lim took Regin’s hand while reluctantly standing, and lowered her head deeply.

“Those words are wasted on someone like me. Your Majesty, I shall devote my meager abilities to meet Your Majesty’s expectations and to not damage the name of my mistress.” (Limalisha)

Lim’s tone was one that didn’t feel as dispassionate as usual. It was actually tinged with a faint nervousness. Regin responded to the soldiers by raising her hand slightly, and walked away with a slow stride after showing herself to those behind the wall — inside the castle town. Her departure was accompanied by a cheering filled with the soldiers’ zeal, ruling the area atop the walls.

“I cannot lose to this.” (Lyudmila)

Mila sighs in admiration while pressing her hands against her waist. Once she sees the exaltation of the soldiers, she ends up believing that this capital won’t fall, no matter how much the Muozinel army might attack it. It’s not just Brune’s soldiers whose morale had been boosted. Same can be said for Zhcted’s soldiers, too.

“I’m truly astonished. I certainly can’t believe that all of it had been premeditated, though.” (Limalisha)

Lim absentmindedly stares in the direction Regin had left. Same as Mila, the impression she harbored about Regin was based on the one from two years ago. It seems that she had to greatly revise her perception. By the way, their conversation can only be heard by the two, seeing as any quiet sounds were drowned out by the soldiers’ frenzy. Mila shrugs her shoulders, and calmly answers,

“It probably amounts to half-half. There’s no doubt that we will need every single soldier. If I had been in her position, I would be dancing in joy if I had heard that two war princesses are going to participate in the war.” (Mila)

“Lyudmila-sama dancing in joy....?” (Limalisha)

Lim knitted her eyebrows, apparently unable to imagine such a scene. Mila smiles wryly and say, “It’s just a figurative speech.”

“Anyway, seeing that I have put up such a scene, I can’t act unsightly. I have to display great efforts befitting someone who’s called War Princess, don’t I?” (Lyudmila)

“I will also assist you. For the sake of Eleonora-sama and also Lord Tigrevurmud.” (Limalisha)

Mila looked at Lim with a puzzled expression upon her words. *Just now Lim had lined up the names of Elen and Tigre in a very natural manner, but I wonder whether she knows about their relationship.*

“Lyudmila-sama, is there something on my face...?” (Limalisha)

Lim looks bewildered when suddenly being intently stared at. Mila hesitated, but in the end asked with a teasing expression and tone,

“Limalisha. I wonder, what do you think of Tigre?” (Lyudmila)

Mila has promised Tigre and Elen that she won't disclose to anyone that they were a couple. That's why this question, but Lim's reaction was easy to understand for Mila.

“Lord Tigrevurmud, you ask?” (Limalisha)

Lim fails at trying to create her usual unsocial expression. Her blue eyes are shifting left and right, as if looking for an answer, and she needed a span of around two breaths to give a passable response.

“He's an important person in a meaning that's different from Eleonora-sama.” (Limalisha)

“That means, you like him?” (Lyudmila)

Even she herself thought that she asked questions like a town girl, but since she isn't used talking about such topics, Mila calms herself by persuading herself that it should be alright. After pondering about it for a little bit, Lim smiled tenderly and answered,

“You're right. I'm aware that I'm holding good will towards him.” (Limalisha)

*I guess, Lim's cheeks appearing to have become red is owed to the crimson sunlight illuminating the western sky.*

“It's been two years since I met him for the first time, and during all this time that man's situation changed many times. Yet, he's always treating me with the same attitude. I'm sure he will continue doing so from now on as well.” (Limalisha)

That's something Mila could relate to very well. Tigre is no one that can be called conceited. No matter whether the other party's status is lower or higher than his own, he never changes his attitude towards them while keeping a politeness befitting the circumstances at that time.

“Not through his words but his behavior, he shows that sticking to one's principles is definitely not arrogant. I want to help him as much as I can. I want to honor his intent. That's what I believe.” (Limalisha)

—*If you feel about him this strongly, you might as well just confess to him. After all your position is a lot more flexible than mine or Eleonora's.*

Despite those being her thoughts, Mila didn't voice them out. It would likely be mean to instigate something like that while being aware of the relationship between Tigre and Elen.

—*Besides, if that's the situation, I don't think that it's necessary for me to say anything.*

Lim regularly looks at Elen closely. If she possesses this much affection towards Tigre, she will likely notice the relationship between the two sooner or later. The reason why she hasn't realized yet is because she often acts separately and misses them due to being busy.

“Tigre is really a lucky fellow. For having you think so highly of him.” (Lyudmila)

Mila shrugs her shoulders in an exaggerated manner while having ambitions dwell in her blue eyes.

“I guess I will do my best and protect this place to the end, so that Tigre has a place to come back to.”  
(Lyudmila)

Lim first slightly and then strongly nodded at the words of the Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave.



The sun is about to finish its work for that day while dying the sky and ground crimson. The moon, clad in indigo blue like a gown, stood firm in the eastern sky while making its silhouette stand out. On the ground, the preparations for the night have begun in the camp of Muozinel’s army. Smoked lamb meat, dried root crops, chickpea soup, and wheat had been provided to the soldiers. This wheat can be kneaded into something like bread, and likewise it can be put into the soup to turn it into gruel. However, drinking alcohol has been prohibited. In addition, various types of spices and medicinal herbs have been distributed. The spices for the sake of bringing the taste of the soup and smoked lamb close to one resembling their own country, and the medicinal plants to avoid their physical condition to deteriorate. As those herbs are bitter and excessively hard to chew, their reputation among the soldiers is fairly low, however. Even an order to cook water until it boils was enforced. Given that this went as far as the leaders of each unit going on patrols in shifts, the soldiers had no choice but to obey. These things had been also repeated during the march. Not one of these rules were something you could fail to observe, if it comes to a campaign in a distant, foreign country. The supreme commander Kureys is in a good mood inside his tent. He didn’t intend to take Regin lightly, but not only did she show up atop the wall, she also declared her intentions with actions rather than words. That’s something he certainly hadn’t expected. Red Beard enjoyed a refreshed feeling as if having gotten something off his chest.

“It was an unexpectedly good response for a seventeen years old lass. It sure is a waste to kill her.” (Kureys)

Kureys says while eating with his close aides. By the way, their meal is almost no different from that of the soldiers. The only addition is a native wine from Muozinel. There are also some seasonal goods provided by the cities that had capitulated lining up in front of Kureys, but right now it’s summer. He had to be careful about what he can eat. One of the aides, who was chewing lamb, leaned forward.

“Then let’s revise our plan and give a strict order to seize Princess Regin alive.”

Kureys shook his head while drinking wine from a silver cup heavily decorated with gems.

“Unnecessary. Going by their state, it doesn’t seem as if they’re going to capitulate in around ten days. Let’s consider it anew after we’ve driven them into a corner and slowly tired them out by attacking viciously.”  
(Kureys)

“I wonder how long it’s going to take for Nice to surrender?”

Another aide asks while sipping wheat gruel. Kureys dons a deeply serious expression, and looks at his own face reflected by the wine inside the cup.

“Let’s see. If nothing happens, 40...no, 45 days, I’d say?” (Kureys)

Half the aides are surprised. Kureys looks at them and laughs.

“That’s only natural. That’s no mountain castle, but the capital of a country blessed with abundant land.”  
(Kureys)

After the meal, Kureys summoned Ekrem, and ordered him to take the vanguard in the battle starting on the next day.  
Ekrem humbly accepted his official appointment.



Ekrem is a commoner by birth and will turn 26 years old this year. He has the smallest build among the generals following Kureys and he’s regarded as being far too young age-wise, which is a cause of annoyance for him.

He even let a beard grow out, but when he was seriously asked by his colleague Yargash whether it’s a false mustache after around three months had passed, he shaved it off since he thought that it doesn’t suit him anyway.

Before accompanying Kureys, he served as attendant of the royal palace’s guard commander.

But then again, he became an attendant after his predecessor recommended Ekrem, a distant relative of his, when he was about to retire due to old age. It’s not like he was picked for having some outstanding talent, rather, his abilities were evaluated to be average.

The moment when Kureys learned of his existence was when he visited the room of the guard commander. That room, which was always the very definition of chaos, had been completely tidied up and put in order to a surprising degree.

“Were you able to find a woman that likes cleanliness?” (Kureys)

The guard commander introduced Ekrem to Kureys who asked in admiration. Upon inquiring further, Kureys learned that he’s a young man who likes miscellaneous, plain tasks.

Later Kureys borrowed Ekrem from the guard commander, and took him along to the battlefield. Once he ordered him to set up a tent, Ekrem showed that he could finish it then and there with no wasted movements and precisely as ordered.

“No matter what you do, there’s a predetermined sequence. I’m just following that.” (Ekrem)

Ekrem, who had been praised by Kureys, answered while averting his face in embarrassment. This was the moment when he decided to obey Red Beard.

Afterwards, Ekrem went on many battlefields, continuing to refine his abilities as commanding officer. His abilities as soldier were truly average, but that’s not what Kureys was expecting of him. Both, Red Beard and Ekrem, knew that a battlefield required people other than soldiers.



Ekrem, who had been ordered to lead the attack on the capital, woke up when the eastern sky started to become bright.

He leaves the camp together with several subordinates, and rides once around the capital while spending close to one koku, surveying the moat.

The Brune and Zhcted soldiers atop the wall noticed their existence, but with Ekrem's group being less than ten people and the sky still being dim, they didn't attack even though they were vigilant. They judged that throwing stones would be mostly pointless in this situation.

Having returned to the camp, Ekrem hurriedly finished his breakfast, assembled his main commanding officers, and curtly announced,

"We will bury the southern and eastern moats." (Ekrem)

They are going to attack the capital that had firmly closed its gates and was surrounded by a sturdy wall with wide moats. Even Kureys would have likely limited it to this one order for the day.

Ekrem had been given 10,000 infantry soldiers and 30,000 battle slaves by Kureys, but he left 4,000 infantry soldiers nearby, and assigned the work to the remaining 36,000 soldiers by splitting them in three groups.

One group carried the soil over from a distant place, and another group tossed that soil into the moat.

Meanwhile the remaining group took a rest. Ekrem ordered them to alternate the tasks at fixed intervals to have them constantly bring in soil for burying the moats.

There was no way for the soldiers of the Moonlight to silently ignore them going at it. They vigorously threw stones at the Muozinel soldiers that got close to the moat.

However, there were always soldiers carrying big shields at the side of the soldiers tossing soil into the moat.

As the shields' size was just big enough to cover for two people, the thrown stones were mostly repelled.

Even so, the circumstance of stones continuously dropping down from above was terrifying for the Muozinel soldiers, and clearly made their movements dull. However, Ekrem didn't hurry the work.

"If it's an obstruction at this level, there's no need to pay any attention to it. In Brune that looks down on archery, even stones are precious weapons, I'm sure. Have them waste those pointlessly as much as possible." (Ekrem)

However, the soldiers of the Moonlight Knights apparently noticed that as well. At the time when around half a toki had passed, they ceased throwing further stones.

The first day of the battle over the capital greeted its end in the shape of the Muozinel soldiers steadily burying the moat, and the Moonlight Knights soldiers looking down on that in irritation.

After the Muozinel army had pulled back into its camp once the sun sank beyond the horizon, Mashas and Mila stared at the bottom of the moat while standing on the wall next to each other. Mashas had put on helmet and armor. Mila was wearing a silver breastplate while shouldering her dragonic tool. As he made his armor clatter, the elderly Earl asked,

"What do you think, Lyudmila-dono?" (Mashas)

"Well... Won't they reach a point where the moat will be filled enough to allow walking atop of it in seven or eight days, if they keep filling the moat at today's pace?" (Lyudmila)

"True, I guess it will take them around that much time." (Mashas)

A sigh escapes Mashas' mouth. There's no need to bury the moat all over. It will be fine as long as they can secure a path for the soldiers to take hold of the wall.

He knows how precious those seven days will be, but he, as the one commanding all soldiers in the capital, wanted to delay the battle even further. Mila smiles at him in consolation.

"If you consider that we will be able to gain seven days in such a battle, it's a good performance. Besides, even if we say that they will create a path, something like rushing with a large army still won't be possible for several days. With a moat of this width, it probably won't be possible to use siege ladders as substitutes for bridges either." (Lyudmila)

"Yeah. I suppose that's how one must consider this. Sorry, I showed you something shameful." (Mashas)

Mashas forced a smile while stroking his gray beard roughly.

“I certainly knew about you excelling in defensive battles from before, but you’re truly admirable for your age. I just wonder how we shall compensate you for your cooperation.” (Mashas)

“Don’t worry about it. I will have Tigre pay it all back in one go.” (Lyudmila)

Mila says in a tone as if it’s of no concern and laughs. Due to the reply that was beyond expectation, Mashas stared at the war princess with a dumbfounded expression.

“Ti...Tigre?” (Mashas)

“Yes. It was different before, but now Tigre is controlling Brune’s entire army. Even His Majesty the King of our country values him highly. I have been thinking that it might be fine to have him soon pay back all the current debts while adding a little extra. Is there anything wrong with that?” (Lyudmila)

Mila closes one eye while explaining with an expression full of charm. The white ribbon bound at the back of her head fluttered in the wind.

“T-That makes sense. You have helped out Tigre many times, after all.” (Mashas)

Once he recovers from his surprise after taking a short pause, Mashas nods seriously. In his mind he felt relieved. What the old Earl remembered is his exchange with Tigre more than ten days ago. The young man confessed that there’s another girl he loves besides Titta.

—*Another one very likely means that it’s Eleonora-dono. That damn Badouin has said that Princess Regin likes Tigre, too. I certainly don’t think so, but if the numbers increase any further, he won’t be able to hold his own anymore.*

Because he was distracted by Mila’s joke, Mashas didn’t notice the feelings harbored by the blue-eyed war princess. But then again, even if he had noticed them, he would have likely pretended not to. The problems of young people should be resolved by young people.



The second day of the battle over the capital began and ended in the same way as the first day. It was a scene of the Muozinel army filling the moat, and the Moonlight Knights hindering that at the bare minimum. Not just the soldiers, but even the commanding officers at each section began to believe that this situation might go on for several days. In reality, even if one considers it from the attacking side’s point of view, there would be no other conclusion but to first bury the moat. Just as Mashas had said several days ago, soldiers can’t fly through the air.

“I wonder whether we can’t open the gate just a bit and go outside after the sun has sunk. Then we could dig out the earth those guys have thrown into the moat.”

“Stop it. If you mistake the direction when leaving the moat, you will end up wandering towards the enemy.”

Even the soldiers had the composure to exchange such jokes. They hospitably received the militia men, who came bringing the meals, too.

Among them, only Mila was glaring at the Muozinel army’s camp with a sullen expression.

—There are no movements that could be called as such inside the camp. It looks like everyone besides the soldiers filling the moat and those transporting the soil is taking a rest. But...

Aren't they going to start something? That suspicion didn't disappear. It's not like she had any basis for it. It's rather something like intuition. Her hunch as warrior, which had been thoroughly tempered on many battlefields until now, was appealing to Mila to be cautious.

Mila made her way to Mashas together with Lim, and informed him of her thoughts. The elderly Earl, who listened to her, looks at the blond-haired knight standing next to Mila while looking curious.

"Limalisha-dono, you share her opinion?" (Mashas)

"My intuition isn't as sharp as Lyudmila-sama's." (Limalisha)

Lim silently shook her head, but continued while staring directly into Mashas's eyes.

"However, Lyudmila-sama has experienced far more such battle than I did. I think there's value in lending her an ear." (Limalisha)

"Even I have never been surrounded by 100,000 soldiers." (Lyudmila)

Once Mila said so while adding a bitter smile, Mashas nodded with a serious expression after fixing his eyes on Lim.

"No, I'm also relying on Lyudmila-dono. Besides, a battlefield's intuition is nothing to be taken lightly. I will have the group led by Lord Olivier standby at the western wall, and ask him to immediately come running if something happens." (Mashas)

"That's a big help. Thank you, Lord Mashas." (Lyudmila)

Mila has heard from Lim and Mashas about the strength of the Navarre Knight Squadron. 'Above all, they are controlling the western feudal armies and knight squadrons. It should be alright to look forward to their performance.

"What, after all it's better to laugh about having worried needlessly than lamenting when something happened." (Mashas)

Thus the two thousand knights led by Olivier, who had been protecting the northern side of the wall until then, were ordered to move to the wall's west side.

The knights and soldiers, who defended the western side, were delighted about the addition of such reassuring allies, but once they caught sight of Olivier's group, they couldn't hide their surprise. The armors, which shone in silver, and the swords hanging at their waists were still fine. But what drew their attention in wonderment were the crossbows Olivier and the other knights were shouldering.

"Lord Olivier, those are...?"

Once of the commanding officers boldly asked. The Navarre Knight Squadron's leader deputy, who had a handsome face, answered calmly why they were carrying such abominable projectile weapons such as crossbows,

"Of course we brought them along for use. We had the ones sold in the castle town, the ones we received from the Calvados Knight Squadron, and the ones we collected from the enemy in the battle against Sachstein repaired."

It was a knight from Alsace called Auguste who paid attention to crossbows in the Calvados Knight Squadron. After he lost his life during Melisande's rebellion, the crossbows prepared in the royal palace by Auguste were left as they are.

That doesn't mean that Olivier was that close to Auguste. But, he remembered that Roland had evaluated him as honest, reliable man, and that Auguste had sent a letter, where he described in a very long text how

much of a trustworthy person Tigre is, at the time when Roland gathered information about Tigre two years ago.

When he had been informed of Auguste's death by Prime Minister Badouin, Olivier decided to get all the crossbows prepared by him.

"For the Navarre Knight Squadron to rely on such weapons..."

Feelings of disgust quickly spread on the commanding officer's face who had thrown that question at him. But, without faltering, Olivier indifferently replied,

"The enemy's numbers amount to more than 100,000. To say nothing of Brune's very existence depending on the outcome of this battle, but as long as it invites danger by obsessing over foolish honor such as the choice of one's weapons, the knights of Navarre will give their undivided attention to defeating as many enemies as possible, even while bearing any sort of stigma." (Olivier)

Several soldiers including the commanding officer drew back in silence. It's not just Olivier. They were overpowered by the sharp glints in the eyes of all the knights standing behind him. Without concerning himself any further with those people, Olivier's group took up position at a place close to the southern wall. One of the knights asked Olivier while tampering with the crossbow in his hands,

"Deputy, we haven't had any training with crossbows. Is that going to be alright?"

Olivier's reply to that question was clear-cut.

"The arrows of a crossbow are exclusive arrows called bolts. We don't have the flexibility to waste them." (Olivier)

"So you're saying, learn it during actual combat, right? That's quite unreasonable, isn't it?"

"If you point it towards an enemy that might climb the wall, you won't hit an ally, no matter how much you miss your shot." (Olivier)

Olivier had also seen the battles at the southern and eastern wall on the first and second day. He understood that just stone throwing would be insufficient.

"Don't worry. It's just a stopgap measure until the battle of swords and spears starts." (Olivier)

Those words – if pushed to say – were for the sake of giving the knights a peace of mind. Olivier had to first get the knights accustomed to crossbows on the mental level.



Third day. Just as Mila had worried, there was a bad development for the Moonlight Knights.

The Muozinel soldiers emerged from their camp while pushing several huge objects with several people. Mila, who looked down on those things from the southern wall, had thought that Muozinel's army might have prepared some kind of siege weapon.

Those things, which probably have a length and height of 40 chet (approximately 4 meters), were pitch black and had been smeared with mud all over. Two wheels each, on the left and right side, had been attached. Moreover, ten-odd, thick ropes had been tied to several places. The Muozinel soldiers tightly grasped the ends of those ropes.

All of these Muozinel soldiers were battle slaves. What they had been granted by the army were only big

shields for the sake of blocking stones. Their equipment was all over the place, lacking any uniformity. The soldiers of the Moonlight Knight Army were turning looks filled with bewilderment and vigilance at those objects. Even Lim, who was standing next to Mila, was puzzled about what orders she should give. Even if it's a siege weapon, it's one she has never seen before.

In total six of these things had emerged from the camp. While being pushed by Muozinel soldiers, who had been divided into three per object, they slowly advanced towards the southern moat.

“Lyudmila-sama, have you ever seen something like this?” (Limalisha)

Mila didn't answer Lim's question which was tinged with anxiety and wariness. While widening her eyes, she glared at the siege weapons and observed them closely.

When she had realized the true identity of these things, the Muozinel soldiers had already come close to the moat.

“No way...!” (Lyudmila)

Groaning with a shocked expression, Mila looked up to Lim with all blood drained from her face.

“Have those destroyed at once! Be it stones, fire or whatever, throw anything at those!” (Lyudmila)

“Please calm down, Lyudmila-sama” (Limalisha)

Although Lim was surprised by Mila's unusually threatening attitude, she soothed her calmly.

“Just what the heck are those?” (Limalisha)

“You will know right away.” (Lyudmila)

Mila took her eyes off Lim and scowled at the siege weapons on the ground.

The Muozinel soldiers had pushed them ahead of the moat. It seemed as if they were about drop them inside the moat. Those with good eyes could probably see that the expressions of all Muozinel soldiers were colored with nervousness and desperation.

At the moment when they had pushed the objects around 30% across the moat's edge, the objects inclined heavily. The Muozinel soldiers tightly grasped the bound, thick ropes without a moment's delay. Even though they were dragged along by the tremendous weight, they eagerly withstood.

The things were carefully lowered to the bottom while scraping along the moat's edge. At that time everyone atop the wall had realized the true identity of these things.

“Stairs...?”

Someone muttered while looking dumbfounded.

The objects, which the Muozinel soldiers had transported over from the camp and were now lowering towards the moat's bottom, were wooden stairs with a height of 40 chet, a width of 25 chet, and 25 steps. Although they might be called stairs, they were a simple construct of evergreen oak boards having been affixed to a framework's surface, but even so they had a weight that wasn't inferior to any other common siege weapon.

The stairs sank into the moat. A terrifying rumble, which gave one the impression that a giant had stamped, shook the ground, made the atmosphere tremble, and caused goosebumps on the skins of those standing atop the wall. Fine dirt scattered even outside the moat while flashily engulfing the area in a cloud of dust.

The rumbling didn't end at one time. Another two rumbles reverberated as if overlapping with each other.

“They sure turned up with something foolish...” (Lyudmila)

Sweat is running down on the forehead of Mila who spat that out.

‘It's probably because I couldn't sense that the enemy had such an intention after them having thrown soil

into the moats yesterday and the day before yesterday. Having said that, I wonder whether there's really anyone who could have predicted for the enemy to do something like this.

"I'm very sorry. I should have noticed much earlier." (Limalisha)

After she ordered her soldiers to attack, Lim apologized to Mila with a pale face. But, Mila shook her head.

"It can't be helped. Those are nothing you'd identify immediately." (Lyudmila)

At the point when three of the six stairs had been placed at the moat's bottom, even the soldiers finally grasped the situation. In addition to stones, they threw jute bags filled with plenty of oil and lit torches towards the Muozinel army on the ground in order to reduce the stairs to ashes.

The Zhcted soldiers under Lim's command shot fire arrows in succession. This surprised the Muozinel soldier who had made light of them, thinking that they likely have no ranged weapons except for stones. There were soldiers holding big shields around the ones who pushed the stairs. They tried to block the rain of stones, oil, and fire by holding up the big shields over their heads, but leaving the stones aside, they didn't get away with the other two.

The big shields of the Muozinel army are made out of wood and have a layer of animal pelts on their surface. If sparks of torches or fire arrows hit places drenched in the oil of the jute bags, they will catch fire all too quickly.

The flames spread to the clothes and hair of the Muozinel soldiers. The soldiers, who had their bodies wrapped up in flames, screamed and thrashed around on the ground. There were some who died after falling into the moat, and others who increased the casualties by grabbing at their comrades with their bodies aflame, looking for help.

Oil puddles were created all over, and flames danced on top of those. The rising, black smoke was scattered by the wind, causing it to hover above the ground like a fog.

The Muozinel soldiers, who didn't get burned by the fires, barely stopped at the last moment, only a few steps away from the moat. That's not because of bravery or a sense of duty. It's because they were told that those, who distanced themselves too far from the moat will be considered as having run away. If they ran away, they would be mercilessly shot by their allies' arrows as battle slaves.

Due to the severe attacks of the Moonlight Knights, the soldiers, who had been pushing the three stairs in the back, stopped advancing. They informed Ekrem, who was giving commands in the rear, that the shields wouldn't be of any use.

Having listened to the report, Ekrem coldly ordered,

"Smear mud and dirt on the shields' surface. There's as much water and soil as you need, right? Don't you stupid battle slaves understand for what reason you have covered the stairs with mud?" (Ekrem)

This order displayed quite a bit of an effect. The big shields became less burnable even when basked in flames, and the number of Muozinel soldiers getting injured by burns visibly decreased as well.

It's not like they lost their fear of fire, but for them it was probably welcome for the obstruction that impeded their work to be gone. For the sake of escaping this situation, where stones, arrows, fire, and oil incessantly poured down on them, they had no option but to finish their task as quickly as possible.

On the other hand, the Moonlight Knight's soldiers, who received their orders from Lim and the commanding officers, seemed to overwhelm the enemy with their ceaseless attacks, but none of them could wipe the impatience and irritation out of their faces.

No matter how many Muozinel soldiers they defeated with stones and fire, new soldiers were deployed right away. Of course all of the replacements were likewise battle slaves.

Probably because they have smeared the crucial stairs with mud once more, it was at most only the stairs' surface that got burned. The Muozinel soldiers poured soil on the stairs as soon as they caught even the slightest bit of fire.

The three rear stairs, which had been stopped, resumed their advance. They had covered the surfaces of the big shields with mud as well, causing the fire arrows, torches, and oil bags to not show as much of an effect as before.

The frantic attacks of the Moonlight Knights were limited to only slowing down their feet, but unable to stop them completely. Without even glancing at their comrades, who were laying at their feet after having their heads smashed by stones or having burned to death, the Muozinel soldiers continue to push the stairs. Accompanied by new rumbles, the remaining three stairs were lowered to the bottom of the moat. These have been placed in the reverse direction of the other three which had been put down first. The Muozinel soldiers ran down the stairs, descending to the bottom of the moat. They jumped at the stairs facing the opposite direction, and started to push them with all their might. There were also soldier who tightly grasped the ropes tied to the stairs and pulled them towards the other side of the moat. The soil at the moat's bottom was so soft that the wheels at the sides of the stairs sank into the ground. However, while being pushed and pulled by close to one hundred soldiers, the stairs gradually started to move. The stairs traversed the short distance of 17 alsin at a snail's pace. While increasing the count of corpses by one or two for each step, they finally reached the moat's opposite side.

"How could this happen...?"

On top of the wall Mila leaks a groan, barely accounting as comment. The moat, which she had estimated to hold for seven or eight days, had been turned almost ineffective on the third day of the battle. By stairs that are merely big and can't be called siege weapons, and thousands of battle slaves whose death hasn't been taken into account. The sun has almost reached the zenith. The third day's battles isn't over yet.



Having received the report about the completion of the stairs' placement, Ekrem indifferently gave further orders without showing any particular delight over this achievement.

"We're moving to the next step. —Set the ladders up."

Even while affirming that instruction, the subordinate was confused and asked the general who was younger than him, "Your Excellency, we brought the moat which would have likely taken many days to be buried into a state similar to that. Yet you don't seem overly happy about it..."

Ekrem lifted his face slightly, looked at his subordinate, and asked with a dispassionate voice, "Would you consider a cleaning to be done as soon you swept the dust away on the top spots?"

The subordinate, who didn't clean his own room often, had no words to reply with. Battle was equal to cleaning for Ekrem. It was something he could finish by taking the necessary steps. Anyway, having received their orders, the second unit that had been on standby started to move. The 40,000 soldiers led by Ekrem were still divided into three units. It was the first unit that set up the stairs.

The second unit began by pushing wheeled scaffolds. These were built out of wood with their upper parts being at a height of 50 chet. They also possessed ladders, allowing the soldiers to climb them. Those were truly constructions that couldn't be described as anything but scaffolds. And even the commander, Ekrem, himself called them just like that. They lined up a great number of those scaffolds close to the moat, and Muozinel soldiers holding bows took up position on the platform at top.

"—Shoot!"

They all fired their arrows simultaneously towards the top of the wall. The sound of arrows cutting through the air could be heard as several hundreds of arrows drew a black rainbow in the sky between the scaffolds and the wall. The storm of arrows was so dense that it blocked the sunlight, and cast a shadow.

Although they had reduced the height by 50 chet, it was still difficult to shoot arrows up from a lower place to a higher place. Most of the arrows hit the wall, broke, and fell down. Even those arrows that reached the wall's top were altogether blocked by the shields of the Moonlight Knights soldiers. In the case of the Moonlight Knights Army, they had plenty of leeway to take countermeasures as the Muozinel army showed that they would be shooting arrows soon and took their time in doing so.

The Muozinel soldiers continued to fire their arrows without minding that. It was as if the shields lining up in a row on top of the wall were their targets. And, while the sounds of their bowstrings were filling the area, the rest of the second unit started to take action.

Ten-odd Muozinel soldiers carried a ladder with a length of close to ten alsin while holding it sideways. Soldiers with mud-plastered, big shields followed next to them. More than 20 such teams ran towards the wall as a single group. They passed in-between the scaffolds, and ran down the stairs set up in the moat one after the other.

The Moonlight Knights Army that noticed their existence were forced to shower them with stones, arrows, oil, and fire while blocking the rain of arrows with their shields.

The Muozinel army's archers ceaselessly continued to shoot, and once they used up their arrows, they got off the scaffold, and others replaced them. Their role was to cover their allies who closed in on the wall while carrying ladders. But, even if those allies were hit by arrows, they shot their arrows without any care.

“—Is this the way the Muozinel army operates?” Lim asked Mila while holding up a shield atop the wall. Each time she heard the sounds of an arrow bouncing off the shield, she felt as though her back had been scratched by the nail called tension.

Next to her, Mila nodded with an annoyed look, and replied, “That's how these guys are. The ones heading over to the wall while holding the ladders are likely battle slaves. They are treated as consumable goods rather than soldiers.”

Hearing that explanation, Lim's expression twisted no less than Mila's. She even felt rage towards the Muozinel army's way of thinking, but she had no choice but to approve of its validity as one battle tactic.

As a matter of fact, their side's attacks were losing in force because of the arrows pouring down on them. The stones, oil, and burning torches were unable to stop the Muozinel soldiers pushing their way through while transporting the ladders.

“We won't be able to hold them back unless we increase our attacks,” said Lim after surveying the state of her own army's soldiers.

In response she had a part of the soldier fall back to the rear to rest up. And by thoroughly adjusting the location of the soldiers that came forward as relief, she arranged the file of the troops so as to allow for a higher attack frequency through the gaps between the shields.

After finishing her instructions, she breathed out lightly and turned around. Wooden boxes full of stones and large jars filled with oil had been lined up in a corner of the wall. Many soldiers were hectically running around to carry boiling oil in pots or to replenish the weapons.

“I suppose this is a war of attrition between the attacking and the defending side.” Lim surmised while looking up to the sky.

The summer sun had passed its zenith, yet the sunlight was still hurting her eyes. The occasionally blowing wind carried up the stench of blood and smoke from the surface.

—Today it'll be fine...

Lim believed. Her accumulated battlefield experience told her so. Besides, the battles until yesterday weren't accompanied by a heavy degree of exhaustion. Even when looking at her soldiers, she could still feel some composure. They would likely be able to hold out tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, too.

—But, what about the time afterwards?

Lim possessed a stout-hearted character. It was rare for her to make complaints. Still, the enemy's aggression was so fierce that someone like her ended up feeling anxious.

Once she turned her eyes towards the surface, she saw the ladder-carrying Muozinel soldiers sprinting through the moat, running up the stairway on the wall's side, and arriving in front of the wall. The soldiers of the Moonlight Knight Army mercilessly poured down the boiling oil on them.

Some of the Muozinel soldiers died without having had the time to even realize what had happened. Others crouched down on the spot while bearing terrible burns. It was a sight that was hard to look at. Immediately the soldiers of the Moonlight Knights Army threw one burning torch after the other down. The Muozinel soldiers, who had been bathed in oil, went up in flames alongside the ladders they had carried.

However, after waiting for the fire to abate, the next set of teams ran through the moat. Shoving aside what had been their comrades as their corpses were a bother, they leaned their ladders against the wall.

And, there were still several dozen groups waiting for their turn between the Muozinel army's camp and the moat.

—Not having the time to catch one's breath. This must be what it means.

"It really makes me want to blow away all the ladders with my draconic skill." Mila cursed so quietly that only Lim could hear her.

Lim shook her head while smiling wryly, confessing, "I'm at a point where I'd like to say it would be a big help, but..."

"Yeah, it's just me venting my anger." Fully grasping the meaning behind Lim's wry smile, Mila revealed a smile as if mocking herself.

There existed several reasons why she didn't use her draconic skills. Her damaging the wall no matter how much she adjusted the power and the enemy being able to take measures against it even if they were to falter temporarily were two of those reasons, but this being a drawn-out battle was the biggest one.

Mila was a warrior who very likely surpassed anyone present in this place, but it wasn't as if she had an eternal supply of stamina like those legendary heroes. She had to plan her fights while keeping that fact in mind. Even more so against such a huge army as an opponent.

And then, once half a toki had passed, even Lim and Mila started to feel exhausted. While confronting the Muozinel army that had remained in this place since morning and defending against rains of arrows with their shields, they had been paying attention to the state of their allies and the movements of the enemy below the wall. It was impossible to not get tired from that.

Lim sent a message to Olivier, who was watching the western wall, asking him to take over for her. Olivier immediately sent a single knight to convey his positive answer.

“Throw all the stones, oil, and hot water that can be prepared right now at the enemy! Aim the stones at the enemies in front of the moat, and the oil and hot water at the enemies climbing the wall. You don’t have to think about making them hit!” Boosted by Lim’s sharp voice, Zhcted’s and Brune’s soldiers boldly went on the offensive. They tossed their shields on the ground and hurled a rain of stones at the Muozinel archers standing on the scaffolds.

Close to half the stones reached their targets, and archers falling off their scaffold and archers dropping their bows appeared one after the other. Even the soldiers that tried to pin their ladders against the wall retreated inside the moat, seemingly surprised by the sudden change.

A little number of blank spaces that didn’t even amount to ten in total opened up on the battlefield. Using that opportunity, Lim and the soldiers led by her withdrew. And in their stead the Navarre Knights under the command of Olivier made a stand on the southern wall. They moved smoothly on this wall as if it was that of their own fortress, lining up at fixed intervals.

“Aim for their bellies and shoot.” Olivier curtly ordered while also readying his own crossbow. He told the knights under him to target the archers on the scaffolds with their first volley.

Olivier actually wanted to target the enemy soldiers climbing the ladders in order for his knights to get accustomed with the crossbows, but it couldn’t be helped in this situation.

A sound completely different from the projectiles giving birth to the rain of arrows made the atmosphere tremble. The distance and power of the bolts that were released from the crossbows were naturally nowhere near equal to stones.

Almost half the bolts flew off into the air, missing their targets or hit the scaffolds, but the rest relentlessly killed the Muozinel soldiers standing on the platforms. Muozinel soldiers fell down in succession. There were also some that tumbled down to the ground, dragging their comrades into it.

The knights placed the crossbows on the ground. The soldiers behind them picked those up, and passed the knights new crossbows with drawn strings. It was a move Olivier had come up with in order to shorten the reuse time. The knights received those and loaded bolts into them.

“This time, below.” Olivier, who had received a new crossbow just like them, decided to target the Muozinel soldiers at the bottom of the wall. As the archers on the scaffolds were still in disorder, they had plenty of leeway to do so.

The bolts, which were released all at once, pierced the bodies of the Muozinel soldiers. The ones already climbing the ladders had no way to avoid the bolts, and fell down just like that. Even those, who were at the bottom of the ladders, had no place to hide and thus collapsed after having their heads and arms stabbed by bolts.

“As I expected, just pulling a trigger is quite different from wielding a sword or a spear,” one of his subordinates said to Olivier with a frown.

Without looking at him, Olivier glared at the enemy while responding, “But, they are not at a range where our spears or swords would reach. Above all, there are too many of them.”

“Certainly...I wouldn’t know how many swords would be necessary if we were to take them on with swords,” said the subordinate.

“After all, these are weapons that won’t be put to use by anyone. We don’t have the freedom to leave them unused.” Olivier stated matter of factly.

The third volley was fired at the new Muozinel soldiers on the scaffolds. Seemingly having already gotten used to the crossbows, it appeared that far more bolts than before had hit their targets.

The Navarre Knight Squadron shot Muozinel soldiers to death by continuously pulling the triggers of their crossbows with such verve that it seemed as if they wouldn't mind using up the bolts before the day was over.

The Muozinel army attacked the wall many times over, but the Moonlight Knights Army forced them back entirely.

And at the time when the sun was going down, the Muozinel army finally stopped its offense. They pulled back the scaffolds and the soldiers returned to their camp while carrying the intact ladders. All that was left were the six stairs and a mountain of corpses.

The Moonlight Knights Army glared at the Muozinel army's camp without loosening its wariness at once. They couldn't breathe out in relief until the sun had completely sunken.

"They won't come today anymore...?"

The traces of sweat on the faces of the soldiers made apparent how difficult it had been. There was almost no one who had had the time to wipe it away. Some whose eyes had become bloodshot because of the tension and excitement. Others who were breathing heavily.

The moment when they judged today's battle to be over was when enough time to count to 1,000 had passed after the Muozinel soldiers had returned to their camp. The Moonlight Knights Army that had obtained a victory for the time being raised shouts of joy atop the wall. Everyone's face had exhaustion carved into it, but their delight was strong enough to overcoat that.

Their cheers reaching the castle town gave the citizens of the capital, who had watched the wall with bated breath, a peace of mind. If there were people who offered prayers of gratitude to the gods, there were also some who left their homes and started to dance. The castle town, which had been in a state of tension since the threats of Kureys several days ago, was wrapped up by wild enthusiasm.

The report of the victory was immediately delivered to Regin in the royal palace. She nodded slightly while smiling, and said, "Please tell everybody that they did a fine job."

The casualties in the strife of this day reached close to 2,000 on the Muozinel army's side, and 22 on the Moonlight Knights Army's side. Even in regards to the wounded, the Moonlight Knights Army had less than a hundred while the Muozinel army counted 3,000. And the number of wounded in the Muozinel army was increased by yet another hundred people.

After this day's battle finished, Ekrem had hundred soldiers line up outside the camp, and sentenced them to whiplashing. Their crime was "they didn't take a dump in the designated area." (T/N: Omg I automatically wrote lol behind this line....rofl)

After the punishment of 50 lashes per person came to an end, Ekrem walked up to a soldier, whose back was bloodstained, and spit out with a murderous voice, "Try to do the same again and I will have you pieces of shit tossed into those moats together with the shit that came out of your ass."

For the Muozinel people this was a soil in a distant, foreign country. It wasn't rare for troops, which were famed as powerful, to completely die away without even a single battle after suffering from an endemic disease as result of a campaign.

Not to mention that it was a camp where 110,000 soldiers stayed together for many days. If an epidemic were to break out, it would likely infect the soldiers at a terrifying rate. "One must pay particular attention to excreta." At the very least among the generals there wasn't a single person who ridiculed those words of Ekrem.

Afterwards Ekrem visited Kureys' tent, and reported the outcome of today's battle. The red-bearded prince nodded in satisfaction. After all was said and done, disabling the moat was a big achievement.

"Ekrem, it looks like the enemy used bows and crossbows, but there were no reports about there being a mastery archer among them?" Kureys asked to confirm.

"You're talking about Tigrevurmud Vorn?" Ekrem made sure, despite being convinced of being correct. Ekrem had never seen Tigre, but he heard that an enemy general, Kureys was very interested in, and an owner of abnormal archery skills. He immediately added, "At least today he didn't show up, it seems."

If there had been such an archer among the enemy, the 50 chet high scaffolds prepared by Ekrem should have become useless in no time. If they were to be sniped one by one, it would have been impossible to keep up the soldiers' morale.

Kureys changed the topic, "By the way, do you plan to deploy those stairs at all four wall sections?"

"It would be probably difficult to even transport them to the northern or western wall," Ekrem answered while shaking his head.

When he had surveyed the moat surrounding the capital, he also examined the surrounding terrain.

"Understood. Let's stop deploying soldiers to the north, east, and west to focus our attacks on the south. Oh and—" Kureys beckoned Ekrem over, and once Ekrem had come right next to him, he whispered a certain idea into Ekrem's ear. Then he waited for Ekrem to return to his former position, and asked with a smile, "Can you do that for me?"

"Please allow me to," Ekrem answered after prostrating in front of Kureys.



Mila, Lim, Olivier, and Mashas had gathered in a council room of the royal palace. It was the room where they had previously held a war council, and the place they had agreed on to be used in times when they needed to talk with each other.

All the candles of the bronze chandelier hanging from the ceiling were lit on this day's evening, illuminating the whole room. Silver cups filled with cold tea had been placed on the table.

First, Lim reported about the outcome of today's battle. If one were to compare the casualties on this side and the enemy side, anyone would likely judge it as a huge achievement. However, the atmosphere enveloping the room was grave and gloomy.

Mashas looked at Mila and asked, "What are your thoughts on this, Lyudmila-dono?"

"It will be harsh." The blue-eyed war princess replied with a frown on her face. "Let me first apologize for my judgment having been naive. I certainly didn't expect for the moat to not last three days."

"Even I hadn't thought that they would bring out such things, although I saw it after the battle finished." Mashas comforted Mila by saying so, and Olivier nodded to show his agreement.

Lim felt just like those two, but in order to avoid looking as though she was covering for her fellow countryman, she decided to proceed with the talks, saying, "Isn't it possible to destroy those stairs? For example, if we wait until the dead of the night, open the front gate, get close with a few soldiers, and set them on fire or something along those lines..."

As long as the stairs were gone, the enemy would have to build new ones or bury the moat. Either way, it should take them time. However, Mila was against that plan.

“That’s dangerous. If I was Kureys, I would have soldiers hide next to the stairs. Then they could quickly slip inside the city at the moment when our side opened the gate. Later they would just need to open the gate from inside at a suitable time while acting in concert with the movements outside, and the city would fall right away.” Lyudmila explained her worry.

Hiding next to the stairs in this situation would be extremely dangerous, but there were battle slaves in the Muozinel army. It was possible for them to be entrusted with such a role on the condition of being freed from their status as slaves afterwards.

“You mean to say that’s the reason why the enemy left behind those ridiculously large stairs?” Mashas inquired.

In response Mila shrugged her shoulders, and replied, “I just think that it’s at the level of them having that option available as well. If I consider the situation at the time when they brought those in and placed them in the moat, I think dragging those out of the moat is beyond difficult.”

The four of them discussed things further, but they had no choice but to give up on dealing with the stairs for the moment.

After having a short break to drink tea, Lim looked at the other three, wondering, “I wonder what kind of battle awaits us tomorrow?”

“If we assume that it’s something like them having buried the moat, they will next try to take the wall. It will probably be no different from what was going on this afternoon,” answered Olivier.

While nodding, Mila didn’t forget to add, “As other moves I could think of, there would be the option of digging a tunnel. Drawing our attention by attacking the wall, they could meanwhile dig a long underground tunnel from their camp until right below the gate.”

“I heard that tunnels are mostly used as means to destroy walls, though.” Mashas said, obviously recalling some information.

Mila shook her head, “Of course, such a move exists as well. But, in case of walls like the one here in the capital, they are often built with their foundation reaching deep into the ground. There aren’t many earthquakes in Brune, but it would be a great disaster if a wall were to slant or break apart by some chance.”

“I see. So you’re saying the enemy has foreseen that and will dig so that they come out below the front gate?” Olivier groaned in admiration, and Lim also nodded while amazed.

“Understood. I think we should deploy soldiers close to the rampart and have them be on guard.” Mashas concluded, but Mila inclined her head to the side, wavering to make that judgment.

“Well, yes. There are several methods to find out whether the enemy is digging a tunnel deep underground. If it’s something simple, you just have to place a plate with water on the ground, and observe whether it sways or not. We just have to leave something like that to the militia, but…” Mila said.

“Is there any problems with entrusting it to the militia?” Considering it odd, Lim asked. As far as she had heard, it didn’t seem that dangerous to her. *Doesn’t the militia exist exactly for doing such assorted tasks instead of the soldiers?*

Mila frowned, something that was rare and atypical for her.

“The militia tires out easier than we think. Even if it’s simple tasks, they will overlook things if the war becomes drawn-out, I think.” Mila supplemented.

“I will pay attention to that part. But for the present we will rely on the militia.” Mashas said. It would be necessary to keep the soldiers’ stamina consumption as low as possible, if the war dragged on. Since Mila understood that aspect as well, she limited it to nodding her head.

As they had no particular topics besides those, the war council came to an end after checking the resupply of weapons. Mashas, Lim, and Mila took a rest in their own rooms within the royal castle. Olivier returned to the wall.

It was in the dead of the night, several hours after the council, that they were woken up by abnormal events taking place outside the wall.

Olivier had been sleeping on top of the wall after spreading out a blanket. As it was summer, the nights were warm, making it pleasant to sleep outside. Naturally he had taken off his armor, but he made sure to place his sword next to him so that he could react whenever something happened. What made the sleeping Olivier wake up were the sounds of drums. Opening his eyes, he quickly raised his body, and drew the sword to himself.

Countless stars were twinkling in the sky, but his eyes hadn’t gotten used to the darkness yet. He couldn’t see anything besides the torches flickering in intervals, and the soldiers and wall which had turned into pitch black shadows.

“A night attack...? No, it’s too quiet for that.” Olivier judged.

Even when straining his ears, he couldn’t hear anything besides the noise of the soldiers standing guard atop the wall and the sounds of drums. If it had been a night attack, tension should dominate the atmosphere in the surroundings in addition to hectic footsteps, angry voices and battle cries of the enemy.

—*But, just the sound of the enemy’s drums is quite loud.*

“What’s going on!?” Olivier loudly called out to the soldiers. One of the soldiers walked over while holding a burning torch aloft. However, that soldier donned a troubled expression.

“I shall report, sir. A large army of the enemy seems to be wandering around the wall,” informed the soldier.

“Wandering? These drum sounds are owed to this?” As if enticed by the other party, bewilderment spread on Olivier’s shapely face.

Olivier walked across the wall while being guided by the soldier. Exiting the southern wall, they arrived at the eastern wall. The drum sounds, which continued without break in the meanwhile, became louder.

“Ooh, just when I wondered who it might be, isn’t that you, Lord Olivier? It appears you played an active role today.” The one calling out to Olivier in a friendly manner from within the darkness was Scheie of the Lutece Knight Squadron. His age could be approximated to thirty years, and as a man with a grim face on top of his large physique, he had a deep voice. He had accepted the duty of protecting this eastern wall. Olivier saluted and asked about the situation.

“I think it was around half a toki ago. A group that appears to be a cavalry unit appeared from within the Muozinel army’s camp while holding up a large number of burning torches. —That’s them.” Scheie pointed at the bottom of the wall while walking through the passage on the wall.

Within the night’s darkness that wrapped up all of the surface, only that place was bright like daytime. Thousands of fires were advancing slowly while swaying. The drum sounds, which had been ceaselessly

echoing since a while ago, seemed to originate from there.

“That’s quite a lot... I guess three or four thousand are down there.” Olivier groaned lowly, unable to hide his surprise.

“There’s no reason for them to not show how big their numbers are at this point in time. I think it’s fine to consider the number of torches to be equal to the number of enemies.” Scheie also turned a grim look towards the crowd of torches. One was apt to perceive the number of lights to be bigger than the actual numbers within the darkness, but the two veterans didn’t make that mistake.

“Have those guys been advancing along the moat all the time? Then it doesn’t seem to be a night attack.”

“That’s a decoy. The real one is lurking in the darkness...I also considered that possibility, but so far there hadn’t been any reports about Muozinel soldiers appearing close to the wall. Honestly, it’s already upsetting by them forcing us to listen to those drum sounds.” Looking at Scheie who spat that out while snorting, Olivier smiled bitterly. *Him not showing any faltering or fear in this incomprehensible situation is truly reliable.*

“However, what’s the meaning of those drums? What do you think, Scheie-dono?” Olivier asked while looking down on the Muozinel army proceeding within the darkness.

“At any rate, the Muozinel people have a really nasty nature. I’d like to even say that it’s some ominous incantation, but...” Scheie continued his words after shaking his huge body, causing the armor to rattle, “... going by what I have heard, the supreme commander, the red-bearded Kureys seems to own a disposition of not liking such things.”

“You know Kureys, Scheie-dono?” Olivier asked.

“I fought against him two years ago. I got acquainted with Earl Vorn at that battle.” Scheie answered.

Olivier understood with that answer. The fact that Tigre repelled the Muozinel army that attacked two years ago was known by many people.

“Scheie-dono, what do you think of Earl Vorn?” Olivier inquired about something that suddenly interested him.

After laughing and saying, “That’s sudden,” Scheie replied with a joyful tone, “Honestly said, when I met him for the first time, he gave me the impression of a young, reckless noble. I wondered why a youngster, who was still 16 years old, would fight against that Duke Thernadier.”

Duke Thernadier possessed enough power to be called a major noble. He was someone known by anyone in Brune. There wasn’t a single person denying that it would be Duke Ganelon, who was likewise called a major noble, if it came to the ability of facing Duke Thernadier from the front.

Olivier nodded slightly. It’s because he also harbored the same impression as Scheie two years ago.

“But,” Scheie continued proudly with his deep voice, “Earl Vorn boldly defeated Duke Thernadier. The Earl borrowed the power of many people. Not only in Brune, but even in Zhcted. But, if we talk about borrowing the power of many people, it was even the same for Duke Thernadier. Not to mention that the Duke was accompanied by dragons.”

“So you’re saying you highly evaluate Earl Vorn as a general now?” Olivier probed further.

“Yeah.” Scheie nodded deeply, and said, “I also wielded my blade under the Earl in the battle against Sachstein’s army. At that time I once again thought that it would be great to even obey as long as it’s Earl Vorn.”

“A knight obeying to a noble somewhat lacks common sense, doesn’t it?”

In Brune knights ought to serve the royal family in addition to the kingdom. Thus, knights were equal to nobles in that sense. Neither of them had a relationship of obeying the other.

Olivier’s words were somewhat said in jest, but they were also somewhat serious. Scheie withstood bursting into laughter with his body trembling repeatedly.

“In that case it’s fine to limit it to the battlefield. Then it won’t be a problem, right?” Scheie said.

“I have no objection.” Olivier answered.

The two knights returned to the topic of the Muozinel army on the ground.

“Isn’t it the enemy’s objective to not let us sleep?” Scheie asked with an annoyed look. Olivier nodded slightly. It’s a move characteristic of the Muozinel army that overwhelmingly exceeds them in the amount of resources. They had the leeway to spare soldiers for something like this.

“It will become a harsh battle.” Once Olivier said so, Scheie relaxed his stern expression and laughed.

“That’s something I knew beforehand. We have no other option but to hold out. And, we can win if we do so.” Scheie declared.

Olivier was about to nod at those words, but at that moment the Muozinel army, which had advanced along the moat, suddenly stopped. After a little pause, a song of angry roars that resembled thunder pierced through the darkness.

Olivier and Scheie reflexively widened their eyes and stared at the ground.

The very loud Muozinel language crossed the capital’s wall, and reverberated even in the castle town. It woke and shook up the people, who fell asleep in relief after today’s victory, with force. Bit by bit small lights popped up inside the castle town which had been mostly wrapped up in darkness. The citizens likely came outside while holding lights of some sort.

While looking down on that situation from above the wall, Olivier suddenly recalled the war council after the sun went down. ‘If I remember correctly, Lyudmila Lourie said that the militia would tire out easily.

“If they keep doing this every night, the citizens might not hold out.” Scheie stated while sighing. He had probably realized what Olivier was thinking from his look.

Olivier nodded, but a fearless smile surfaced on his lips. His fighting spirit towards the Muozinel army had been stirred up instead.

—*I will protect the capital no matter what it takes.*

Olivier swore, not to the gods or even his close friend, the black knight, but to himself.



The faces of the knights, who appeared in front of Olivier as he stood on top of the southern wall at dawn, were terrible. All of them eagerly held their temper, unable to hide their fatigue and drowsiness. Olivier wanted to tell them to not do the unreasonable, but not being able to say so was one of the tough parts of

being a commander.

Looking at the Zhcted soldiers led by Lim, they were in a similar state. However, Lim greeted him without any tiredness, donning the unsociable expression he already got used to, “Good morning.”

“You could sleep well last night?” Olivier asked somewhat sarcastically. Hostility dwelt in Lim’s blue eyes. Not pointed at the knight in front of her, but at the Muozinel army.

“I heard from Earl Rodant about what happened last night. That noise didn’t cease even once.” Lim replied sullenly.

Entrusting the watch of the wall to Scheie last night, Olivier immediately went to the royal palace, and reported the circumstances to Mashas. “Did Earl Rodant come up with some kind of countermeasure?” He asked.

“At the moment nothing. But, Her Highness Princess Regin went around the wall and the castle town to encourage the people.” Olivier widened his eyes upon Lim’s words.

Genuine words of delight in the form of “That’s appreciated,” came out of his mouth. With Tigre currently not being in the capital, the only one capable of doing that was Regin.

Once he shifted his attention to the outside of the capital — the moat, the Muozinel army swiftly appeared from their camp.

On this day the Muozinel army deployed 10,000 soldiers to the north, east, and west, completely surrounding the capital. On top of isolating the capital from the outside world, it was an expression of Kureys’s intention to definitely take the city by storm.

## **Chapter 4 – Battle of Severac**

The summer sun whitely glittered in the cloudless morning sky. A pleasant wind carrying some heat blew, and various types of greenery vividly covered the ground which was overflowing with vitality.

It's been twenty five days since General Avshall started besieging Fort Severac with 10,000 soldiers. Since this place was located three days from Massilia by foot, they never ran out of food and water. But, as expected, even Avshall was beyond bored. He had just finished breakfast moments ago, but found himself with nothing to do until lunch already.

"I know that His Excellency has appointed me to this task because he trusts me, but... I never expected for absolutely nothing to happen." Avshall grumbled with a sigh while uninterestedly looking up to the fort towering between two hills in the east and west. He sunk his teeth into the bunch of grapes in his hand, chewing through them with skin and all.

Avshall was currently twenty five years old. One year younger than Ekrem who was participating in the capital's siege. With his tall and trained figure, even the plainly colored leather armor looked splendid if worn by this man. His reddish, short hair was stuffed into a white cloth, and a radiance filled with confidence and liveliness dwelt inside his amber eyes.

As second son of an upstart noble, Avshall departed to the battlefield for the sake of getting something to eat at first. That was when he had been fifteen years old. He had started from being a simple soldier, but was entrusted with a small number of soldiers in no time. The number of soldiers he led grew each time he returned from the battlefield.

It was three years ago that he led soldiers for the first under the command of Kureys. At that moment Avshall decided that he would follow this red-bearded prince. Kureys had the ability to draw out more than the full power of each and every soldier. If led by him, even people that had been scorned as weak soldiers were able to achieve military results to a surprising degree. Avshall himself also experienced that.

He had the pride of completely managing the soldiers under his command. That was definitely no conceit as he had proven it with many deeds of arms. The fighting spirit of his soldiers was always high, they were never in disorder during a march, and their attacks against the enemies were powerful.

But, when they entered under Kureys's command, Avshall's soldiers exhibited abilities going beyond those of before. Their movements became fast and yet nimble, and they fought cleverly. Even when simply advancing or retreating, Avshall couldn't suppress being deeply moved.

Three years have passed since then. Avshall piled up plenty of war merits under Kureys. He thought that this was the very reason why he had been called for this campaign as well. Because he had planned to obtain even more deeds of arms while showing his usefulness to Kureys, he now smoldered in discontent over the current state of merely besieging a single fort.

"Your Excellency. Our task is not just besieging the fort, but also to control the highway, and maintain the supply line for our army. I sympathize with your feelings, but..." His elderly adjutant called out as if to console him.

Avshall responded while pouting like a child, "I know that. The ones at fault are these donkeys to begin with."

The ones he called donkeys were the 3000 Brune knights that had barricaded themselves inside the fort.

“What if they have taken some measures so that they won’t run out of food inside the fort? Does Brune have such a shortage of talented personnel that they would entrust a single fort to such people?” The elderly adjutant asked.

“A shortfall in human resources in our neighboring country is a welcome occurrence, isn’t it?” Avshall countered.

“Doesn’t that depend on the situation? Even if we took back these guys as slaves, it’s not very likely that they would have much of a value.” The elderly adjutant said.

“What, they are knights. Unless they are quite old, it will be alright.” Avshall guaranteed.

Male slaves with trained bodies could be steadily sold because they would be used as miners or rowers on galley ships. Avshall’s mood having recovered somewhat was owed to his adjutant being considerate of him rather than him agreeing with his adjutant’s words.

“I wonder how things are going over at the capital. Did it already fall?” Avshall pondered.

Assuming the Muozinel’s main army advanced along the highway at a good rate, they should have arrived at the capital Nice eight days ago.

“I’m jealous of Ekrem and Yargash. And even that Damad.” As Avshall was thinking about the far distant capital while envying his colleagues, a single soldier turned up to give a report.

“The unit standing by atop the hill passed on a message that they caught sight of something that seems to be enemy forces.” The soldiers said crisply.

“Hoh.” The voice of Avshall was overflowing with delight surpassing his faint surprise.

He had split the 10,000 soldiers into four units, and deployed them so that they surrounded the fort. 2,000 infantrymen on each of the hills flanking the fort, 3,000 infantrymen on the northern side of the fort, and 1,000 cavalrymen and 2,000 infantrymen on the fort’s southern side. He had ordered the soldiers stationed on the hills to watch the fort and at the same time be cautious of the vicinity.

“I had expected that a relief army might show up sooner or later, but they finally came, huh?” Avshall’s amber eyes sparkled as he imagined the battle, and the victory that would likely follow. He urged the soldier, demanding detailed information.

The unit on the western hill reported that they discovered a group advancing through the plains in the southwestern direction while flying red horse flags. According to them they appeared to number approximately 8,000 soldiers.

Avshall chose 300 from among the 1,000 cavalrymen, forming a scouting party, and sent them out from the west to the south. And then, the scouting party, which returned a bit before noon, reported that they had found the enemy forces.

“They number roughly 8,000. All of them are cavalry. They are flying Brune’s red horse flag.” A soldier reported.

“Well done. All things considered, I would have wanted every single soldier for the defense of the capital, and yet they did quite well to spare 8,000 soldiers of their troops.” Avshall muttered as if admiring them, but his eyes were filled with energy as he contemplated the enemy’s objective.

Needless to say, the enemy's aim is to defeat us, rescue the soldiers in the fort, and sever the supply line of the Muozinel army. Seeing as they are confronted with an overwhelming difference in military forces, they have no other option after all.

"The enemy is probably planning to cut off our supply line, but why are they aiming for that in this place? I think it would have been fine even if they had headed for northern Fort Gergovia or southern Massilia." The adjutant cocked his head in puzzlement.

Avshall laughed and replied, "The final objective of Brune's army is likely Massilia and not this fort."

Massilia had a defense of 10,000 Muozinel soldiers, and there was a strong wall surrounding the entire city. Recapturing it wouldn't be simple.

If they were to unskillfully need time for that, it was also possible Avshall's army to dispatch soldiers after noticing that movement, forcing the Brune army, which would try to take Massilia, into a pincer attack.

"Accordingly I have no doubt that they intend to scatter us on the open field, which is the strong point of Brune's cavalry, before attacking Massilia." Avshall suspected.

Avshall knew that his enemies were apparently calling themselves Moonlight Knights Army, but since it was a bother to voice it out, he simply called them Brune's army.

The adjutant nodded deeply as the explanation of the young general possessed persuasiveness, and then said, "What are you going to do? There are 8,000 enemy soldiers. If we add the soldiers of the fort, they will have 11,000. Our army will be at a slight disadvantage. There's also the alternative option to stop the fort's siege and fall back to Massilia..."

"That's far too prudent. You might as well call that cowardice." Avshall snorted while looking discontent.

It's certainly a sound view. However, withdrawing here will result in the supply line being cut off, albeit temporarily. Besides, if we abandoned the besieged fort without having fought even once, it would likely affect the soldiers' morale.

"Have all soldiers gather south of the fort." Avshall ordered.

He had decided to meet the 8,000 enemy soldiers which had appeared as reinforcements. If he could repel them, he would be able to smash the morale of Brune's knights who had barricaded themselves inside Fort Severac. Besides, there was no doubt that it would be good news to Kureys who was probably attacking the capital by now.

Avshall's army took up formation in the open area south of the fort. 8,000 infantrymen were deployed in long, horizontal lines on the grass-covered plain with its soft undulations. The 1,000 cavalrymen were positioned in their rear, and behind them waited the last 1,000 infantrymen. Avshall himself took command close to the cavalry unit. Their battle flag depicting a golden helmet and sword on scarlet ground fluttered in the summer wind.



Once he received the report that Avshall's army had undone the siege of Fort Severac and gathered on the

southern side from the scouts, Tigrevurmud Vorn breathed out in relief. The one commanding the 8,000 cavalymen was this young man.

“Looks like he’s inclined to fight.” Tigre said.

For Tigre that part was essential. If Avshall had prioritized joining up with his allies and headed to either Massilia or Gergovia, Tigre would have been compelled to forcibly drag him into a battle. In order for it to not turn out like that, Tigre deliberately showed up while only leading 8,000 soldiers. Tigre informed the soldiers that they would cross swords with the enemy, and ordered them to advance. The soldiers thrust their spears in the air, cheering ferociously. It was the twentieth day after departing the capital. Their fighting spirit was filled to the brim.

“It will be fine as long as they don’t go on a rampage, but I really wonder whether they will be able to hold back.” Gaspar, who had been standing next to Tigre as his adjutant, frowned.

The youth smiled at him as if to give him a peace of mind, “Around this much liveliness is welcome. It’s enough that I’d like them to continue in this state until the end, if possible.”

The end mentioned by Tigre was the time of their attack against Muozinel’s main army which was likely attacking the capital around now.

Gaspar shook his head and lightly tapped Tigre’s shoulder, saying quietly enough so that only the youth could hear it, “It’s not necessary for you to continue bearing the burden all by yourself, okay Tigre? I can give you some advice also.”

“Thanks, brother.”

For a mere instant, both returned to being a young nobleman and his older friend, and not commandant and adjutant. However, that was truly just for an instant. Both tightened their faces immediately.

Soon after that, the 8,000 soldiers of the Moonlight Knights Army showed up directly in front of Avshall’s army. Tigre split his army in center, right wing, and left wing. He deployed 4,000 to the center, and 2,000 cavalymen to each wing. And, he had the center unit protrude out further in front than the wings.

The red horse flag flapping in the wind looked as if a ferocious horse was impatiently struggling to jump out of the flag.

Both armies gradually closed their distance while glaring at each other under the sun which had passed the zenith. Feeling the scorching heat on their exposed skin burned, their respective armors and weapons glittered as they reflected the sunlight.

The infantrymen lining up at the front of Avshall’s army readied their bow, nocked their arrows, and drew the bowstrings to the limit all at once.

Horns and drums reverberated across the plain. The moment when the Moonlight Knights Army charged and the Avshall army released their arrows was almost identical. The rumbling of the hooves of 8,000 horses and sound of thousands of arrows cutting through the wind caused the atmosphere to tremble violently.

The Moonlight Knights Army spurred on their horses while holding their shield aloft, but a thousand riders couldn’t block the arrows, and between two and three hundred among them fell off their horses. However, the momentum of the charge didn’t wane. They, who swung their swords and readied their spears, closed in upon Avshall’s army.

Avshall’s army’s reaction was swift. Throwing away their bows, they tightly grasped long spears which they had placed on the ground. Countless spearheads formed a dark gray wall welcoming the Moonlight Knights.

Both armies clashed. The noise of flesh striking flesh and iron being squashed overlapped manifold within an instant, causing an unpleasant sound of destruction.

Several Muozinel soldiers were blown away altogether by the severe ramming attack of the Moonlight Knights Army's soldiers, or were mercilessly crushed beneath the hooves. There were also some who pierced through an enemy soldier, including their leather armor, with their spears.

Others were skewered by countless spears or fell off their horses that got stabbed, just to be ganged up on and chopped apart, but looking at the whole, it seemed as if the Moonlight Knights Army might overwhelm the enemy.

Avshall revealed a fearless smile as he commanded his soldiers, "Ain't they quite good for a bunch of donkeys?"

He knew that the Moonlight Knights Army would charge from the front. After all he had deployed his soldiers so as to induce just that.

"Their lot probably plans to charge, break through our army, and call out to the fort. If the fort's group comes out in response, the enemy's forces will exceed ours." Avshall stated confidently.

However, Avshall had no intention to allow the enemy to break through. He made the soldiers on the left and right advance while having the soldiers in the center retreat. Pulling that off while enduring the Moonlight Knights Army's attack might be called a prodigious ability. It resulted in the Moonlight Knights Army being enclosed from three sides.

At that moment, a new report reached Avshall.

"The Brune soldiers in the fort opened the gate and rushed out!" The face of the reporting soldier had gone pale and he was sweating.

At this rate they would be stabbed in the back by the enemy. Avshall had stationed one thousand infantrymen close to the fort in order to restrain the fort's soldiers, but they likely wouldn't be able to withstand them.

"Inform the infantrymen in the rear. There's no need to hold the enemy back. Allow the enemy soldiers to pass through." Avshall ordered.

The runner, who had received the order, swallowed his breath in surprise, but the commander's orders were absolute. Leaving behind a short reply of "Certainly!", he straddled his horse and galloped away.

The 3,000 knights that had sortied from Fort Severac passed the short distance and ferociously swooped down on the rear of Avshall's army. Having been surrounded by Avshall's army for twenty odd days, they couldn't leave the fort. They relentlessly slapped their humiliation and rage onto the Muozinel soldiers.

With them being attacked from the front and the back, the center of Avshall's army collapsed. The Muozinel soldiers dispersed, escaping to either the right or left side while enduring the intense pressure. It seemed as if the Moonlight Knights Army and the Severac Knight Squadron might manage to merge, but that was exactly Avshall's aim.

His army, which should have been divided into parts by them, promptly rallied according to his orders, and launched a pincer attack against the enemy from the left and right.

The Moonlight Knights Army and the Severac Knight Squadron succumbed into chaos all too quickly.

Retreat was difficult, and even when they tried to break through by advancing, they ended up hindering each other. Being slashed by swords and stabbed by spears from both sides, both had their numbers decreased.

“Tighten the defense! Huddle together with your comrades, and line up the shields without any gaps! Wield your swords and spears to protect yourselves!” Tigre dished out instructions in a loud voice while being protected by soldiers, commencing with Gaspar.

While shouting, the youth nocked an arrow on his black bow, targeted a distant enemy soldier, and shot. The Muozinel soldiers had black cloths coiled around their heads as a characteristic trait of the Muozinel army. Their commanding officers wore iron helmets.

Tigre targeted a commanding officer wearing an iron helmet, and killed him with his shot, but even though the Avshall army showed some confusion, it didn’t reach the point of them becoming majorly disordered. Avshall had quickly taken measures to that end.

That Avshall shouted in joy while watching the battle progress from his troop headquarter, “Did you see, you damn Brune donkeys!?”

If it’s at this rate, I might pulverize the Moonlight Knights Army reinforcement and the Severac Knight Squadron with 8,000 infantrymen, Avshall thought. It’s about the right time to make the next move.

Avshall ordered the one thousand infantrymen, which he had standby in the rear, to march on Fort Severac. Seeing that there were almost no knights left in the fort right now as their allies had sallied out, there was no way that they closed the gate. Assaulting the fort with a thousand infantrymen wasn’t all that difficult.

However, his exaltation didn’t last for long.

A single soldier rushed up to report while gasping, “New enemies appeared on the western hill! Roughly 5,000!”

Avshall looked dumbfounded atop his horse. He immediately came back to his senses, but in the instant he understood the situation, he tightly grasped his fists. The numbers of the Moonlight Knights Army hadn’t been 8,000.

“The one who lured out was me!?” He yelled.

Blood dribbled down from his clenched fists. Had the Moonlight Knights Army shown up with 13,000 soldiers from the start, Avshall would have likely dissolved the fort siege without hesitation, and headed for Massilia. In order for that to not happen, they had lured Avshall into battle by showing him 8,000 soldiers.

— Moreover, in this situation I can’t move most of my soldiers.

If he were to stop attacking now, the Moonlight Knights Army and the Severac Knight Squadron would come around, and put their ranks in order. He had no choice but to recall the one thousand infantrymen headed for the fort, have them join up with the one thousand cavalrymen, whom he left behind as reserve force, and have both meet the new enemy.

“Your Excellency, please escape at once.” His adjutant said while tightly grasping his spear. “I will command the soldiers. We will be able to at least buy enough time for you to escape.”

“Don’t be absurd.” Avshall curtly shot down his adjutant’s words. “If it’s about gaining time either way, think how to buy time until we annihilate the enemies under the attack of our soldiers. It’s not like our side is at complete disadvantage. We will capitalize on our advantages.”

His fighting spirit and his ambitions hadn’t left his amber eyes yet.

“We have fought many times over against a lot more enemies than allies. This time it’s just the same.” Avshall stated.

The 5,000 enemies on the hill rushed down while causing thundering hooves sounds. The red horse flags fluttered in the strong wind. Avshall didn’t know, but the one spurring on her horse at the head of the troops was a Zhcted girl possessing crimson eyes and silver hair.

“Cut through them!” Elen made her horse gallop while brandishing Silver Flash.

The 5,000 Moonlight Knights spearheaded by her fiercely leaped into Avshall’s forces that had somehow managed to muster 2,000 soldiers after calling back the infantrymen.

Her silver hair fluttered in the wind and Silver Flash glistened in the sunlight. Each time Elen swung her sword, a Muozinel soldier fell while spurting out a spray of blood. The swords thrust out at her were repelled with shrill sounds, the spears had their spearheads sent flying.

The Muozinel soldiers, who witnessed that sight, got trapped in an optical illusion, which had a tinge of superstitious belief, that it might be impossible to injure Elen.

Even the cavalrymen following her resolutely unleashed reckless attacks as if not seeing the enemy blades. While being cut by swords and stabbed by spears, they brandished their swords and thrust out their spears with a force going beyond that of their attackers.

The blood of allies and enemies mutually poured down on the ground gouged out by horse hooves and military boots. The plants were dyed so crimson that it gave one the impression they had been like that from the beginning.

Avshall eagerly prevented the collapse of his army by moving soldiers around. He bought time by repeatedly retreating a bit, but at long last he reached his limit. In front of him had the silver-haired war princess appeared.

“A woman...?” Avshall muttered.

"Zhcted's Vanadis, Eleonora Viltaria. You are the commander, right?" Elen's words were a confirmation.

The Muozinel soldiers, which she had cut down until just now, had been obviously rushing at her to protect Avshall. Avshall unsheathed his sword in response to Elen. The clash of the two swords caused white sparks to scatter into the air. Even as a warrior, Avshall wasn't weak by any means, but he was no match for Elen.

With each exchange, Avshall was forced to retreat, his hands became increasingly numb, and the sword gradually felt heavier. While frantically swinging his sword, Avshall suddenly thought about something completely different. This might be more of a proof of him being the commandant than a warrior.

—If it's just for the sake of severing the supply line, more than 10,000 soldiers are too much...

Avshall’s line of thinking that it was the entire enemy army after first seeing the 8,000 soldiers was owed to him being aware of Brune's side having no leeway to wastefully deploy soldiers. 'Is the enemy's aim really nothing more than severing the supply line?

At that moment the point of Elen's longsword seized Avshall's nape. Blood sprayed into the air, and dyed half of his body red. Avshall's body tilted over with a violent shaking, and he fell off his horse. At the moment his body hit the ground, his eyes had already lost their light.

Elen breathed out lightly, and hoisted her bloodstained Silver Flash into the air, "I defeated the commandant!"

It was a yell in the language of Zhcted, but because the Moonlight Knight Army raised battle cries after hearing it, the Muozinel soldiers grasped what had happened. When the battle flag that had been fluttering in the wind at Avshall's side fell next, the situation also became clear to the soldiers fighting further away.

Turmoil and panic spread among the Muozinel soldiers. Even the infantrymen, who had been performing a pincer attack against the Moonlight Knight Army and the Severac Knight Squadron, slowly became disorganized starting with the edges, and finally broke down completely.

Tigre didn't miss the opportunity of the enemy's offensive having weakened. While lifting up his black bow, he shouted, "Shift to a counter-offensive!"

The Moonlight Knight Army roared. They had been caught by enemy soldiers from the eastern and western direction, but they started to slash and stab at the enemies in the west.

The Muozinel soldiers, who still hadn't lost their fighting spirit, tried to withstand the onslaught, but their allies behind them had slowly started to escape. There was no commandant to correct the collapsing ranks anymore either.

The breakdown produced by the Moonlight Knight Army's attacks expanded in the twinkling of an eye.

The Muozinel soldiers on the eastern side slashed at the Moonlight Knight Army from behind, but it didn't amount to damage that would make the Moonlight Knight Army falter. Moreover, the Severac Knight Squadron, which had regained its freedom of movement as well, started to press on them.

Once it took such a turn, it was nothing that could be handled with the individual strength of each and every soldier any longer. Before they realized, situations where they were surrounded by soldiers of the Moonlight Knight Army weren't rare anymore. Units of twenty soldiers were divided into ten soldiers each, and the units of ten people were isolated in the midst of the enemy and annihilated.

At the time when the 5,000 soldiers led by Elen managed to join up with Tigre, the battle was mostly over. The casualties on the Moonlight Knight Army's side didn't amount to 500, those of the Avshall army exceeded 5,000. The survivors had scattered and escaped to the north and south, with the number of those having surrendered being negligible.

At last Brune's side managed to stage a first retaliation since the invasion by the Muozinel army.

©

The first thing Cauvin, the leader of the Severac Knight Squadron, did after meeting Tigre was shouting, "What the hell are you doing in this crisis!?"

Cauvin was in the middle of his forties. His face was round and his physique bulky, allowing obstinacy and attractiveness to coexist. He was somewhat plump, but if you regarded that he was stylishly wearing his armor and helmet without any issues, it was probably no stretch to say that he hadn't been negligent on training himself.

Tigre was surprised to be yelled at by the man he had supposedly rescued, but that question was resolved with his next words.

"I saw the terrifyingly huge army of the Muozinel with my very own eyes. That monstrosity, that

monstrosity will attack the capital, right!? Right now the capital must be lacking men, no matter how much they have! Why do you spare soldiers for a fort like this!? As long as we can protect the capital, Her Highness, and the country, we have resolved ourselves to become sacrifices!" Cauvin rattled on while making his saliva fly.

Tigre recalled Earl Bouroullec's words while watching him. He had heard that Cauvin had a tendency to become emotional, and it was just as he was told. The one who should complain in this situation was rather Tigre. After all it was a fact that Cauvin had disobeyed Regin's decree.

But, Tigre didn't feel like saying anything to Cauvin. It was because he had the feelings of having discreetly used him who had stayed back in the fort.

"You're sure running your mouth as you please, bastard." The one who reprimanded Cauvin instead of the supreme commander was the silver-haired Vanadis.

Cauvin, who didn't know Elen, clearly faltered after being exposed to her menacing look.

"Girl, I don't know who you are, but right now I'm having an important discussion..." Cauvin tried to rebuke her.

"My name is Eleonora Viltaria. I guess you will understand if I tell you that I'm a Vanadis of Zhcted." Elen declared and mercilessly pressed the Knight Leader of Fort Severac, who was at a loss for words, for an answer, "Before you criticize the supreme commander, reflect about your own actions of not having listened to Princess Regin's decree and being helpless after having your fort surrounded by the enemy."

"No, I'm of course thankful about that, but..." Cauvin started to rebut.

"Then you'd express your gratitude first, right? Because the supreme commander is a soft-hearted person, he has tried to ignore your abusive remarks, but don't think that his subordinates share the same sentiments. Would your subordinates quietly take it if you were to be shouted at irrationally!?" Elen reprimanded him further.

Cauvin became flustered and looked at Tigre with an expression that could be described as utterly embarrassed.

Tigre smiled wryly and lightly tapped Elen's shoulder, "Please leave it at that, Elen. It looks like he properly understood."

Looking at Cauvin, his shoulders were huddled and he had completely withered away.

"I'm sorry, Earl Vorn..." He said with a voice that seemed to vanish any time soon.

Tigre took his hand and said to him, "Lord Cauvin, there's no time for feeling depressed. There's something I'd like you to do for me from now on. —It's something extremely difficult."

Cauvin vigorously lifted his face upon Tigre's words. The word 'difficult' has apparently fired up his fighting spirit which was about to turn into smoke.

"I am to head for the capital and fight against the Muozinel army?" Cauvin asked confidently.

However, Tigre shook his head, and said, "It's true that I will have you fight against the Muozinel army, but not at the capital."

Cauvin cocked his head in puzzlement at the youth's words.



The sun was about to sink at the western horizon when the 7,000 soldiers of the Moonlight Knight Army led by Bouroullec showed up at Fort Severac. At this time most of the after-battle processing had finished, and there were no Muozinel soldiers visible around the fort.

"By no means did I expected to be ordered to stay away from the main battle, although I had served as guide up to this point." Bouroullec, who met with Tigre, complained while smiling.

It wasn't said seriously, but that probably didn't mean that it was all joking either. While exchanging a handshake with him, Tigre apologized with, "On the next opportunity."

As a matter of fact, without the guidance of Bouroullec who knew the geography of Brune's southern areas well, the Moonlight Knight Army's arrival at Fort Severac would have been doubtlessly delayed much more. After all they had marched cautiously without taking the highway so as to not be found out by the Muozinel army's scouts.

However, Tigre couldn't afford to show his 20,000 soldiers to the enemy. Any smart person would harbor doubts if they were to see a detached force of such a scale. And there was no one else but Bouroullec who could command several thousand soldiers besides Tigre and Elen.

Bouroullec finished his greetings towards Elen as well, and faced Cauvin. "It's been a long time, Lord Cauvin. It's wonderful to see you in good health," said Bouroullec.

"Earl Bouroullec, you came here as well? We were saved thanks to you." Cauvin's expression loosened after meeting an old friend. Bouroullec grasped his hand, and intimately tapped his shoulder.

Being led by Cauvin, Tigre, Elen, and Bouroullec were guided to the council room of Fort Severac. Because they had been under siege for a long time, the council room was slightly dirty, but no one of them minded it. The lamp hanging down from the ceiling was turned on as illumination.

The four surrounded the table, and Tigre explained the current situation to Cauvin. He hadn't talked about it yet because he prioritized dealing with the clean-up and the after-battle procedures. Hearing the details, shock dyed Cauvin's face, and he swallowed his breath.

"Fort Gelgovia was surrounded, and Laferte was occupied? And even the capital..." Cauvin muttered.

"According to the newest information we obtained, the capital has held out until the fifth day after being surrounded." Tigre's tone had become very grave.

If the capital had been able to withstand the Muozinel army's offensive, today should be the eighth day of the siege. Even if it was their newest information, it was still no more than something from three days ago.

"Shouldn't we quickly head to the capital then?" Cauvin appealed to Tigre while leaning forward with a grim look.

An astonished voice cut in from the side, chiding the leader of the Severac Knight Squadron, "Calm down. The capital won't fall so easily from being surrounded by 100,000 soldiers."

It was Elen. The silver-haired Vanadis folded her arms and adopted a confident attitude.

Cauvin answered in agitation, "Zhcted's Vanadis-dono, why can you say something like that? Currently there's no more than 40,000 soldiers in the capital, right?"

"Unlike you, I have taken a close look at the capital with my own eyes." Elen retorted.

Cauvin was disappointed by Elen's sarcasm, but didn't object.

Tigre spoke up, "Lord Cauvin, I believe in the people at the capital."

"...Is that about Her Highness Regin?" Cauvin asked.

"It's not just Her Highness. Earl Rodant, Viscount Augre, the lords who rushed over from various places, the knights, the soldiers of Zhcted, the people working in the capital, the people who answered Her Highness' call; because I was able to depart while being trusted by all of them, I'm here right now." Tigre's voice was quiet, but that was because he forcefully suppressed the strong emotions welling up within him as he spun word for word.

For the youth, there were many precious people in the capital. Something like leaving while knowing that this place will be attacked by a huge enemy army was nothing he could have done if he didn't believe in them and if he wasn't trusted by them.

"Right now I have no means to know what's happening in the capital. All I can do is answer their trust and fulfill my objective." Unintentionally he returned to his usual tone, but sincerity and fighting spirit were visible on the youth's face. Not only Cauvin, but also Elen and Bouroullec silently stared at Tigre.

Cauvin, the target of Tigre's look, cast his eyes down, obviously feeling ashamed. It's not that he was overpowered. He was forced to realize. What kind of feelings this young man was currently shouldering.

Cauvin stood up from his chair, straightened his back, and deeply bowed his head towards Tigre, "I'm terribly sorry. It looks like I didn't sufficiently think it through."

Bouroullec looked at him with feelings of relief and faith, and Tigre urged Cauvin to sit down.

And once he sat down again, the war council resumed.

Cauvin called for one of his men and had him bring several maps of the vicinity. He spread those out on top of the table. Tigre pulled out one of them and put it atop.

"Our plans from now on will be to split into two groups. First, Earl Bouroullec, Lord Cauvin, I will have you pretend to attack Massilia." Tigre stated.

"Pretend to attack? I guess that means we won't actually attack it." Cauvin asked while alternately looking at the map and Tigre.

The youth nodded, "I think you know the details about Massilia better than I do, Lord Cauvin, but it's not a city that would fall so easily, is it?"

"Yeah. Massilia is surrounded by thick walls on three sides. The remaining side is facing the sea. Also, the east of the city is mostly a rocky area which would make a deployment of soldiers difficult. If we were to attack it seriously, it would likely take time. Besides, right now there's another troublesome issue." Cauvin explained.

"What troublesome issue are you talking about?" Bouroullec inquired.

Cauvin frowned while looking sullen, "The current Massilia is directly ruled by the Muozinel army. Its previous mayor was arrested together with his relatives, and they were apparently turned into battle slaves or regular slaves. Leaving aside his family, it could be called the appropriate end for a low-life who first changed sides to Sachstein and then to Muozinel, but..."

"What you want to say is that we probably won't be able to gain the cooperation of the Brune people living in Massilia, correct Lord Cauvin?" Elen asked to confirm.

The Knight Squadron leader nodded, "Indeed. The Bruno people are completely scared of the Muozinel army. That means they will likely lend quite a bit of their strength to the foreigners. Besides Massilia, Lameille and Argdeau seem to be directly governed by the Muozinel army, too."

"To make an example, huh?" Bouroullec sighed.

Lameille and Argdeau were also port towns that had betrayed Brune, and supported Sachstein, and once Sachstein was gone, Muozinel. For Muozinel there was no reason to treat them cordially.

Tigre, who had been listening to Cauvin's words, suddenly felt something pulling at his mind.

—I wonder what it is. I feel like we're completely mistaken about something. I will check the strategy once more. Basically, this course of events should be correct. Mashas and Lim also told me that there's no problem. Elen, Mila, and Bouroullec also approved. And yet, why do I suddenly have an uncomfortable feeling?

"For that reason it will be extremely difficult to attack Massilia. Earl Vorn, you said pretend attacking and not actually attacking, but..." Cauvin implicitly asked.

Cauvin's eyes fixed upon Tigre. Tigre didn't know the uncomfortable feeling's true identity, neither could he amend his strategy at this point in time. He had no choice but to proceed.

"If we could regain Massilia, the enemy's supply line would be completely cut off. In order to definitely prevent this, the Muozinel army besieging Fort Gergovia will likely head south. That's our aim." Tigre said.

"It doesn't sound as if you're going to attack that Muozinel army."

"That's correct. We will head north, going past them, and attack the Muozinel army from behind." Once Tigre explained while letting his finger run across the map, Cauvin groaned lowly.

"I thought you did well to move 20,000 soldiers, but...even 20,000 will be nowhere near enough." Cauvin's face had become slightly pale. He apparently recalled the spectacle of the Muozinel army with its more than 100,000 soldiers passing this fort. He pulled himself together by deeply exhaling, and gazed at Tigre with a serious look, "Understood, then let's burn down this fort. For the sake of making the enemy believe that we are attacking Massilia."

Tigre widened his eyes upon Cauvin's words that lacked any hesitation. It wasn't as if he hadn't thought of this move, but as expected, he had hesitated to voice it out.

Cauvin laughed, "Rather than it being stolen by the Muozinel army that will move south, it's better to abandon it on our own accord. Besides, it might be best for you to have as many soldiers at hand as possible, Earl Vorn."

"Thank you...!" Tigre bowed deeply towards Cauvin, expressing his gratitude.



Tigre and the others spent the night of that day at Fort Severac. Because the Knight Leader announced that the fort would be burned down at dawn, things were busy inside the fort.

It was hard to call the dinner luxurious by all means, but given that they had decided to use up everything they wouldn't be able to take with them, tables were lined up, and plenty of bread and pickled meat were dished out.

"One day. Hey, if we had one more day, we would be able wrap up the preparations after eating everything." The knights who were eating the food heartily said, lamenting that there wasn't any time.

In reality there were many other things they had to prioritize over food. Most of them were forced to finish eating in the breaks between their jobs.

On the other hand, the Moonlight Knight Army was taking a slow rest, allowing them to finish eating calmly. Tigre and Bouroullec had offered their help to Cauvin, but they were politely refused with the very logical reason that it would instead take more time to have people, who weren't accustomed to the fort, help out. Tigre was assigned a guest room, allowing him to lie down on a bed for the first time in a while. Because it had been cleaned up by the Severac Knight Squadron in advance, this room had nothing besides a bed, a blanket, and a lamp. It was plenty for just sleeping, however.

The sounds of knights running around could be heard from the corridor. It probably wasn't owed to just that, but Tigre couldn't readily fall asleep.

It was around half a koku after the youth had lied down when someone knocked on the door. Tigre got up and walked up to the door. Once he opened it, he found Elen standing there.

"If it's as noisy as this, I can't really sleep. I came for some recreation." Elen laughed without any concern.

Tigre invited her in while smiling wryly. Inside the room that was only illuminated by the lamp, the two sat down on the bed next to each other.

"—Which reminds me, there's something I should tell you." Tigre intended to broach the topic with a casual tone, but since he spoke up after some time had already passed, Elen squinted and threw a short question at him.

"Is it a woman?"

Tigre held his tongue and stared at the silver-haired Vanadis.

Elen laughed sarcastically, "At this point, that's probably the only time when you would hesitate to speak to me."

However, Elen immediately put on a serious expression, and turned her face and body towards Tigre.

"So, who is it?" Elen asked.

"It's Titta." Seemingly having resigned himself after being cornered, the name left Tigre's mouth very

naturally. Tigre told her that he had called Titta to his room the night before their departure from the capital. "I told Titta that there are two girls who I like."

"That's a rather brave thing to say." Elen stared at her lover with an amazed expression.

Tigre scratched his head while embarrassed, "I couldn't come up with another way to say it back then. But, I think it was the right decision."

Saying that he wanted both of them were Tigre's true feelings. He had no intention to make any differences in the levels of affection devoted to Elen and Titta. Neither did he think that he could.

"Seeing your face, I guess it means Titta accepted your confession. It's really good for it to not have developed into a scene of carnage." Elen commented.

Even while feelings of relief showed through on Tigre's face in response to Elen's words, he also looked surprised. "To be frank, I had resolved myself for at least some sarcasm, though."

"Are you, umm, fine with that?" Tigre asked cautiously.

"Back then I told that you can have a concubine, didn't I?" Elen replied with an expression as if asking him what he was talking about this late in the game. "I won't mind even if I'm the concubine and Titta the legal wife. I also think that Titta is cute. If we can keep her at our side, she will be a big help in various ways. However, why did you feel like answering Titta's feelings at this point in time?"

Elen's question was reasonable. Tigre had noticed a good while back that Titta harbored feelings towards him not as a maid but as a woman. Tigre didn't answer those feelings since he knew that Titta wouldn't be able to become any more than a concubine.

Being questioned about something that was difficult to answer, Tigre groaned a bit. However, he had decided to talk about that as well. After sorting the words in his head, the young man spoke up resolutely, "Elen, I seem to be quite the lustful man. No, I believe that I am."

As the silver-haired Vanadis knitted her eyebrows, Tigre continued, "Until around two years ago I couldn't give Titta an answer because I was immature. After all, I had known that I would just make Titta experience painful feelings."

For example, there was the move to go through the proper steps of having Titta become Mashas' adopted daughter, and then turn her into the lord's wife.

However, that wouldn't mean that her past of being a born commoner would disappear. In addition, unless she learned the proper etiquette once she became a noble's wife, she would be coldly looked down upon by other nobles when visiting the royal palace and similar.

Until only two years ago, even Tigre himself was scornfully laughed at by the noble lords, being ridiculed as a small noble who couldn't use anything but the bow. If he had taken Titta as his wife in such a situation, it would have been impossible for him to make her happy. Even if he took her as concubine, depending on her relation to the legal wife, something like what Mashas experienced in the past might have occurred. It was inevitable that he couldn't answer her feelings.

"After I fell in love with you, I was also troubled about why I couldn't clearly decide on one woman, even though I should do so." Tigre said.

"In other words, you're saying you couldn't answer Titta because you couldn't have endured desiring me and

Titta at the same time as a hopelessly, lustful man?" Something chilly was mixed into Elen's voice, and Tigre sensed a choking pressure. He felt like the atmosphere inside the room had significantly cooled down despite it being summer right now.

However, Tigre didn't avert his eyes from her, strained his muscles to move, and nodded. 'It has taken time to simply accept that, but that was the answer I was able to reach by just facing my own feelings after clearing away all that's related to my own position as best as I could.'

Elen smiled wryly, "I guess it can't be helped. I think your liking of me and your liking of Titta is slightly different within you, though."

Tigre stared in astonishment. He wondered how she knew from his face and not his words.

In regards to that point, he still hadn't completely sorted his own feelings. However, the only possible explanation he could come up with was him being a lustful man.

Elen looked at the young man's face, laughed slightly, and said, "Titta and I have different temperaments. I can't do what Titta can, and Titta can't do what I can. There's no way that the shape of loving us will be exactly the same in spite of that, right? If you had said that we are the same, I would have hit you."

Elen clenched her fist and showed it to him by lightly swinging it. Tigre nodded vaguely. He couldn't clearly voice out that she had skillfully expressed and moreover forgiven him for what had been worrying him.

"As long as you properly look at me and give me your love as the human I am, I won't complain. That doesn't mean that I won't feel anything about it at all, but that's inevitable. After all people are envious of the things they don't possess." Elen said.

Tigre extended his hand, and hugged Elen gently. He put his right hand on her back, and his left on her head, overlapping her cheek with his.

"I like you. Your straightforwardness and your cheerfulness. Your silver hair and your red eyes. Your expression when you laugh and when you are angry. Your happy expression when you listen to the songs of a minstrel and when you eat something you seem to like." Tigre told Elen.

"...Being told that you're liked isn't bad, but I'd really like you to use a slightly stronger word here." Elen lightly complained.

"I love you." He immediately knew which word Elen wanted to hear, and smoothly formed it with his mouth. Tigre didn't consider it strange.

Elen extended her hand, and lightly tapped the youth's back. The two stayed like that for some time.



Most of Brune Kingdom's land, be it plains, hills or mountains, were covered by lush greenery, but the southeastern area was different. If one advanced along the highway stretching out towards the south east from Nice, it was possible to actually experience how the vegetation became less and the wind more dry from a certain point onwards.

Before long the highway entered an area called Agnes.

In the past it had been Brune's territory, but now it belonged to Zhcted. Agnes was a deserted and desolate

land with little amounts of water, and was plastered with sandstone cliffs all over. Once summer came, the sunlight blazed down fiercely, and the wind that carried sand became rough. So strong that even caravans accustomed to traveling wavered how to pass through it.

A group of cavalry was hurrying along that highway towards Brune early in the morning. Going by their characteristic skin colors and armaments, it was obvious to anyone that they were Muozinel soldiers. They numbered a hundred riders.

They had departed their home country, rushing towards the location of Kureys who was attacking Brune's capital. If one considered the distance, it could be called very natural to mobilize hundred riders for the sake of safety.

However, they couldn't enter Brune. That's because a group of up to five times their number stood in their way as they were galloping across the highway.

The flags hoisted by that group were of two kinds. One depicted a golden bishop's staff, which bore the impression of a bird spreading its wings, on a green tract of land. The other was the black dragon flag symbolizing the Zhcted Kingdom.

They were Zhcted's army. The flag with the green tract of land belonged to Sofya Obertas, nicknamed 『Brilliant Princess of the Light Flower (Breathwaite)』.

That Sofya spurred her horse on at the head of the soldiers, in her hand the golden bishop's staff, her own 'draconic tool' (Viralt). Her golden hair, shining in the summer sunshine, flowed down all the way to her hips. She wore silken clothes that used green as base, and had put on a thin mantle. Her skirt was long, reaching her feet. While each and every single of the embroideries decorating her clothes, the jasper hair ornament, and the golden bracelets were beautiful, all of them seemed to only exist for the sake of promoting her beauty.

Even after the Muozinel cavalry unit recognized her, they didn't stop their horses. They knew that this was Zhcted's territory and that they were trespassing without permission. Even if they were to negotiate, they would only be returned the way they urgently came from. In that case, they had to break through, even while using force. Just one among them had to reach Kureys. If it was that, it might be possible.

However, they soon realized that this had been naive thinking.

It was difficult to imagine from her lovely, gentle appearance, but Sofya was a Vanadis, too. Even if she didn't match up to Elen or Mila, average soldiers posed no threat to her, even if they challenged her in a group. Sofya made her horse gallop, plunging into the enemy ranks. Each time her golden bishop's staff sparkled as it made the wind buzz, a Muozinel soldier was forced off his horse, slapping onto the ground. The draconic tool mercilessly crushed the heads and shoulders of the Muozinel soldiers alongside their bones.

The Polesia soldiers led by her stood in front of those trying to run away, thwarting their path of escape. Not a single of the Muozinel soldiers was able to break through, resulting in their corpses littering the ground.

"Good grief, Muozinel is sure acting boldly." Sofya muttered with a serious look while looking down on the Muozinel soldiers that had stopped moving.

It was merely a few days ago that she had arrived in Agnes.

Having read the letter Ludmila Lourie had sent just before departing Olmutz, She had left Polesia while taking a mere 500 soldiers with her, believing that she ought to be close to Brune which would likely turn into a battlefield.

The reason for her having chosen that number of soldiers was because she couldn't neglect Polesia's defense and because she had prioritized speed. It had been only once, but Muozinel's army had shown up in Polesia as well.

Upon Sofy's order, Polesia's soldiers investigated the personal effects of the Muozinel soldiers. Seeing as they had deliberately used this road, there was no mistake that they must have carried some important information.

Before long, one of the soldiers presented Sofy a single letter. The blond Vanadis thanked him with a smile, and accepted the letter. It was stained with blood and mud, but she didn't pay any heed to that.

Sofy opened the letter on the spot, and scanned its contents. Naturally it was written in the Muozinel language, but she was capable of reading the language to some extent. She had been several times dispatched to Muozinel as diplomatic emissary.

Tension ran along on her face, but it only lasted for an instant. She took a short breath, and closed the letter. Then she turned around to her soldiers, "I'm very sorry everyone, but it looks like this journey will continue for a bit longer."

The soldiers nodded silently. It was impossible for them to deny the decision of their lord, their Vanadis. One of them simply asked what they would do from now on.

Sofy pressed a finger against her lips, continuing to ponder for a bit, but soon lifted her head, and stated, "We will remain on this road for a few more days. Afterwards we will head to Brune."

Along the way, until they came to Agnes, Sofy had regularly collected information by sending out the soldiers on reconnaissance or dropping by at big cities. When she put together those pieces of information and considered them, there was no mistake that the capital Nice was under attack by an overwhelming military force of the Muozinel army.

Sofy felt anxious about the safety of Elen, Mila, and Tigre, but she was a Vanadis, and thus was responsible for Polesia, her governed territory, and the soldiers with her right now. She couldn't move carelessly, and had no choice but to pray to the gods which was unlike her.



Due to a report stating that Gaspar had been seriously wounded, all blood drained from Tigre's face and he stood up. He started to walk with the rest of the report not entering his ears, trying to go outside the tent.

"—Where do you plan to go, Tigre?" The cutting voice from behind stopped Tigre just before he left the tent.

The youth finally came to his senses, and turned around with an awkward expression that failed to hide his anxiety and impatience. At the end of the line of his sight were Elen, Bouroullec, Cauvin, and Gaspar's scout.

The face of that soldier was deeply colored by fatigue, his clothes were disheveled, and his leather armor was stained with mud.

The location was inside the supreme commander's tent located in the center of the Moonlight Knight Army's camp. Tigre exhaled lightly, and ransacked his darkened, red hair.

He needed a little time to calm down. Afterwards, he returned to the spot where he should sit with a pace that felt slow, and then looked at the scout with a stern expression.

"Sorry, my bad. Can I have you tell me the rest?" Tigre requested.

The scout nodded slightly, and bowed his head towards the supreme commander.

Currently the army of approximately 20,000 soldiers after including the Severac Knight Squadron with the Moonlight Knight Army were halfway between Fort Severac, which had changed into a ruin, and Massilia. Tigre's army moved up until here after Fort Severac had burned down, set up camp, and pretended to actually prepare for attacking Massilia.

Moreover, Tigre had entrusted 200 cavalymen to Gaspar and asked him to go have a look at the state of Fort Gergovia. That was five days ago.

The ones besieging Fort Gergovia were 10,000 soldiers led by General Murat, but if they were to head south, the Moonlight Knight army would obtain two advantages.

First, it would improve the success of heading to the capital in the north if they wouldn't need to worry about their rear. And even when Murat realized Tigre's intention, Tigre's group would already be far apart from them at that time.

Second, if Murat's army moved, it would also change the range of what they could watch. Because of that, Tigre's group could hurry towards the capital while taking a different road.

By the way, besides Murat's army there was also the unit guarding Laferte between the capital and the Moonlight Knight Army's current location, but Tigre didn't worry about them. It's because he knew that they wouldn't be able to move much because they were defending the city.

Gaspar willingly accepted the task, headed for Gelgovia, and then returned around half a koku ago. The result was more than half of the 200 cavalymen lost, 43 knights of the Gelgovia Knight Squadron rescued, and Gaspar himself having suffered serious wounds.

"It was just past noon two days ago when we arrived in the vicinity of Fort Gelgovia..." The voice of the scout, who couldn't suppress his resentment, resounded within the tent. Tigre, Elen, Bouroullec, and Cauvin listened attentively with tense expressions.

After reaching a place allowing them to see Fort Gelgovia, Gaspar's cavalry moved cautiously so as to not be found out by the enemy. Hiding in the forest close to the fort, they observed the situation at Murat's army.

The movements of Murat's army were weird. Suddenly they canceled the fort's siege in a hurry, and started to tidy up their camp.

"This is something I heard from a member of the Gelgovia Knight Squadron who understands the Muozinel language, but he said they were talking about 『going to help their allies in the south since they had been done in』."

'Allies in the south' likely referred to Avshall's army which was defeated by Tigre's army. Anyway, since they dissolved the siege, the Gelgovia Knight Squadron shouted in delight.

Murat's army rushed south without even keeping any proper ranks. The Gelgovia Knight Squadron perceived this as a good opportunity. After all, they had been surrounded for more than twenty days, which had caused

their hostility and fighting spirit to go up through the roof.

With Knight Leader Gastaldi in the lead, all knights sallied out of the fort. The 3,000 of Gelgovia Knight Squadron versus the 10,000 of Murat's army. Thinking that they wouldn't be able to deliver a devastating blow unless they dispatched all knights despite attacking the rear of a rushing enemy was natural.

However, when the Gelgovia Knight Squadron got close to Murat's army, they orderly turned around as if they had been waiting for this.

Gastaldi comprehended that they had been led into a trap. At the time he tried to make an escape, it was already too late. Murat cleverly moved the soldiers, fencing in the Gelgovia Knight Squadron. They were mercilessly annihilated. Gastaldi was also defeated after a long struggle.

Murat noticed Gaspar's reconnaissance unit at this time. But even here Murat kept his composure. While pretending to not have noticed them, he secretly formed a detached force, had them take a detour so that they could plunge into the back of Gaspar's unit.

The assaulted Gaspar unit just barely got away without even thinking of scouting or fighting at this point. Somehow managing to shake off the enemy's pursuit, they luckily escaped. At the time when they met the knights of the Gelgovia Knight Squadron, Gaspar's unit had already decreased by half and more.

Afterwards, Murat returned to in front of Fort Gelgovia, set up camp outside without occupying the fort itself.



Tigre and the others, who finished listening to the report, were speechless.

—To use the unexpected twist that their allies had been defeated for planting a trap... That means formidable enemies exist anywhere. Even Avshall, who I defeated the other day, was such a splendid commander that it was no surprise for him having been entrusted with a part of the Muozinel army.

Once he pulled himself together, Tigre gave his thanks to the scout, and had him withdraw after telling him to get some medical treatment and take a rest.

"I'm going out for a bit." He said to Elen and the others, leaving his own tent.

It had been close to evening when Gaspar's unit returned, but more than half of the sky had taken on a shade of indigo blue. The soldiers had already started to prepare dinner, and fires had been lit all around.

Tigre passed between the soldiers with a calm gait as if nothing had happened, heading towards Gaspar's tent. A guard stood in front of the tent, but once he saw Tigre's face, he immediately called out to Gaspar, who was inside, confirming that it was okay for Tigre to enter. Tigre thanked the guard, and stepped inside the tent.

"Yo, sorry for making you expressly come all the way here, Sir Supreme Commander."

Inside the slightly bright tent illuminated by a lamp, Gaspar was lying face-down on a carpet with his upper body naked. His right shoulder and half of his back were plastered with bandages. Same for his left leg. His face was pale and drenched in sweat.

There was no one besides Gaspar inside the tent. Tigre sat down next to him, and wondered what he should say, but nothing smart came to his mind right away.

"What's most important is you returning alive." What he managed to say after around five seconds were those words.

Gaspar laughed and said, "You're right," but then grimaced, seemingly having affected his wounds by laughing. However, he immediately adopted a serious and sorrowful expression, "I'm terribly sorry. I allowed many of the soldiers you entrusted to me to die, Sir Supreme Commander."

"...I have no intention to blame you for it. You accomplished your duty. Just take it easy and rest." Understanding his own duty, Tigre replied to Gaspar as supreme commander.

"I'm sorry to be in this sorry state even though I told you that I would give you advice... I cannot help regretting that I won't be ready in time for the coming battles." Gaspar's voice trembled.

The wounds he suffered, especially the ones on his back and left leg, were deep, but looking at his state, that much was obvious. There was no doubt that he would have raised his body when Tigre had entered the tent as long as it was no problem, even if he had to strain himself a bit.

However, the youth shook his head, "I will say it once more, but take it easy and rest up for now. After all, the job of being scolded by your father awaits you once we return to the capital."

"That person never changes, does he?" Gaspar laughed once more and grimaced again.

The youth stood up and left the tent with the words, "I will visit again later."

He was flurried, but as long as he knew that Gaspar's life wasn't in a serious situation, it was plenty for the meantime. Besides, if he were to continue talking like that, it would be harmful to his wounds.

Afterwards Tigre visited the tents of the Gelgovia knights and the scouts who had returned, consoling each and every one of them. He was worried about their condition, but there was also something he wanted to hear.

When the sun had completely sunk and the sky had become pitch black, Tigre stopped by Bouroullec's tent, requested a certain thing from him, and returned to his own tent. Only Elen was inside his tent which was illuminated by a lamp's light. She was sitting on a carpet that had been spread out on the ground.

Once she saw the youth's face, she revealed a gentle smile and said, "I went to have a look at Gaspar as well. It's great that he looks lively."

Tigre nodded. More than half of the scout unit lost its life. It might be serious wounds, but he should be happy that Gaspar would be able to come back with no physical defects.

Elen brought in some food from outside, and both of them had dinner together. It consisted of bread, cheese, pickled meat, cooked soup, and wine.

Soon after they started to eat, Tigre asked Elen, "What do you think about the enemy?"

The enemy he meant on this occasion was Murat's army. He had listened to the recounts of the scouts and the Gelgovia knights, but it was said that Murat's army wasn't moving away from Fort Gelgovia's vicinity. Even though they should know that Avshall's army had been defeated.

"Did they read our aim?" Elen asked back.

"I think it's not like we have been read completely," Tigre replied carefully. "If the enemy had seen through my plans, they would have taken a different action."

Murat should have heard the story about Avshall's army from the survivors, and know that the Moonlight Knight Army had bigger numbers than his own army. If he were to try fighting against the Moonlight Knight Army, he had no choice but to head north to join up with his allies, or wait for reinforcements while gaining time by barricading themselves inside the fort.

"I'm pretty sure the enemy is waiting and watching how we're going to move."

"However, doesn't not moving at this point result in forsaking Massilia? The supply line will be completely cut off." Elen said.

Tigre nodded at her words. The youth couldn't understand that part either. 'Considering that the Gelgovia Knight Squadron had been annihilated, the enemy was a considerably excellent commander. I think it's impossible for him to not have noticed this fact.

"Isn't he thinking that they will be able to hold out? Lord Cauvin said so as well, didn't he?"

The two continued talking afterwards as well, but the dinner was gone before they could resolve the riddle. They called Bouroullec and Cauving, and held out with just wine and water until late at night, but in the end they couldn't find a conclusive answer.

"Let's watch the situation for one more day...no, two more days." Tigre reluctantly brought their discussion to a close with those words.



Tigre spent most of the next day inside his tent. He sent out reconnaissance teams in all directions, eagerly gazed on the maps, and speculated about Murat's aim.

Occasionally he walked around the camp as recreation while worried about the capital which might be under heavy attack by the Muozinel's big army. The returning scouts didn't bring any special news with them.

—That's bad, isn't it...?

Impatience weighed down on his heart like cotton that had become heavy after soaking up water. He couldn't wipe away the feeling that he was wasting precious days despite having to return to the capital as fast as possible.

He pondered whether he should boldly challenge Murat's army to a battle. 'Our side has 20,000, his side has 10,000 soldiers. I can't imagine that we will lose.

—No, that's no good.

He wanted to avoid losing any more soldiers. Tigre's target was Kureys. Even if his current forces were nowhere near enough.

He went to sleep after the sun went down, and woke up at dawn. Tigre spent this day in the same way as the day before. He sent out reconnaissance teams and gazed on the maps. He also talked with Elen and the

others, but no one among them could provide a persuasive reason why Murat didn't make any moves.

—Does the enemy think nothing of their supply line...?

Even as he was worrying, time passed on fruitlessly. The sun that had risen in the east crossed its zenith, and slowly descended into the west.

'Considering that it will take several days to reach the capital from here, I should reach a decision how we're going to move by the end of the day.' However, Tigre lacked a reasoning backing a decision. If he couldn't come up with anything, he would likely have no choice but to travel north while ignoring the danger in their rear.

The scouts, which he had sent out early in the morning, trickled back in one after the other, and reported to Tigre. The majority of the reports were no different from yesterday, but there was just one that piqued Tigre's interest.

"Muozinel cavalry was galloping across the highway connected to Argdeau at a considerably high pace. It was a unit of around 10 riders."

Argdeau was one of port towns located in Brune's south. Just like Massilia, it was ruled by the Muozinel army. It wasn't odd for a unit of the Muozinel army to head for Argdeau.

Once Tigre thanked the scout and had him withdraw, he shifted his focus on a map close at hand.

"Argdeau, huh...?"

He looked at the city mentioned in the report just now. A single possibility surfaced inside his mind, and he leaked an "Ah!"

"I see," muttered Tigre with a trembling voice. Tigre recalled the uncomfortable feeling he had about his own strategy when he had listened to Cauvin at Fort Severac. He finally understood the reason. He groaned while ruffling up his hair, "I was wrong about the supply line..."

Tigre ordered a soldier outside his tent to immediately call for Elen and the other leaders. Elen, Bouroullec, and Cauvin showed up at Tigre's tent within less than a quarter koku.

"Did you grasp something?" It was Bouroullec who asked this as if having waited for a long time while sitting down on top of the carpet.

Tigre nodded while restraining his excitement and tension, "I'm pretty sure that the enemy doesn't have any intention to head to Massilia as reinforcement."

"But, in that case the supply line would be cut off, no? Not to mention food and materials, they would also lose contact with their home country." Elen objected.

Tigre shook his head in response and let his finger wander across the map all four of them were surrounding, "The supply line will be alright if you let it run through a different port town. There's no need to fuss over Massilia. That was likely the very reason why Muozinel had seized control over the southern port towns."

Elen, Bouroullec, and Cauvin raised their voices in admiration at Tigre's explanation.

"I see. I guess what matters is the sea and the ships traveling it," Elen concluded.

"I thought that we just needed to cut off the supply line running along the highway, but it looks like that wasn't it..." Bouroullec groaned repeatedly while staring at the sea drawn on the lower part of the map.

It was inevitable that no one had noticed this point when Tigre explained his strategy at the royal palace. After all, no one of them, be it Tigre, Elen, Mashas, Mila, or Bouroullec, possessed a territory facing the sea. Even the area under Olivier's protection was far from the sea.

"So the Muozinel army just has to send its ships, which are used to transport the food, to another city, even if we blockade Massilia from the land side, huh? In that case there's really no point in going to Massilia to reinforce it." Cauvin raised his eyes from the map and looked at Tigre. "Earl Vorn, no, Sir Supreme Commander, what are we going to do from now on?"

Tigre looked at the three with a serious look, "If we do something about the ships, the enemy at Gelgovia will very likely move south. If it's just a modification in the city connected to the supply line, it might be possible for them to stay at Gelgovia, but anything going beyond that would force them to actually head on-site. They will likely believe that they can't leave it to just the soldiers stationed in Massilia."

The problem was how to deal with the ships. When Tigre asked whether they didn't have some kind of means at hand, Cauvin thoughtfully asked, "Sir Supreme Commander, can you give me a chance to redeem myself?"

Although Tigre raised his eyebrow quizzically, he nodded at the round-faced Knight Leader, "Please tell us the details."



After waiting for dawnbreak of the next day, the Moonlight Knight Army vacated its camp.

"Well then, may the fortunes of war be with you." Tigre exchanged a handshake with Cauvin. However, unable to finish with just these words, he asked against his better judgment despite knowing that it was uncalled-for, "Will it be really alright with just the Severac Knight Squadron?"

"Of course. There are many among our knights who grew up in places close to the sea. People, who don't know about ships and the ocean, would instead become hindrances. Rather, it's your side that needs as many soldiers as possible, don't you think? I think I will show you by just putting 300 cavalymen to use." Cauvin laughed, full of confidence.

Tigre was pulled into laughing as well. "This Knight Leader is truly attractive if he laughs. If you add his abundant emotions to that, he's likely to gather the trust of many knights."

Cauvin's proposal was for him to attack the port town Massilia with his Severac Knight Squadron of little less than 3,000 cavalymen. Tigre was surprised, but he agreed because they didn't have the leeway to continue staying here any longer, and because there was something in Cauvin's explanation that made him consider that it might be possible.

Elen said, "Isn't it fine to let him do it?" and Bouroullec supported it as well by stating, "If we're going to do something about this within a few days, there might be no option but to go with his idea."

Cauvin, who had finished bidding farewell from Tigre, next exchanged a handshake with Elen, "I'd like you to tell me one thing, are all of Zhcted's Vanadis tomboys like you?"

"Tomboy is a rather interesting way to phrase it, but compared to the other Vanadis, I'm a reasonable person." Elen answered.

"Is that so? It looks like it might really be better to not meet with the other Vanadis as much as possible." Cauvin laughed and grasped Elen's hand with both of his. "I didn't expect to be scolded by a woman who could be my daughter after becoming this old, but I thank you, Vanadis-dono. If you hadn't scolded me back then, I would have piled shame on top of shame."

At the end Cauvin bid farewell from Bouroullec, "Earl Bouroullec, please beat up my share of Muozinel soldiers."

"Gladly. If we had time, I'd like to say that I will leave some for you. Let's have a toast in the capital once this war comes to an end." Bouroullec replied.

"The capital is far from Severac, so I haven't been there overly often. But, I suppose I will make an exception just this one time." Cauvin said.

"While it may be presumptuous, allow me to accompany when Her Highness Regin calls upon you." Bouroullec said in a joking manner.

Cauvin responded to the smiling Bouroullec with an artificial sigh.

The air and ground were rapidly heated up beneath the summer sun with its strengthened brightness. The Moonlight Knight Army cautiously moved northwards while the Severac Knight Squadron headed southwards. A little while later neither could see the other anymore even when turning around.



Morning of that day, when she left for a sunny place after getting up, Limalisha perceived the sun's light as something heavy. After exchanging a greeting with Rurick at the base of the wall and finishing a simple briefing with him, she suddenly asked something that had been bothering her for a while now, "It might sound as if I'm asking something weird, but...are you shaving your hair every morning?"

"That's one of the things that I cannot miss doing by all means. I do it quickly before taking a nap." Faint shadows were visible beneath Rurick's eyes as he replied to her, and his smile had become strained. His lips were developing cracks because of the excessive dryness. He couldn't hide his fatigue any longer.

"I respect your mettle, but I think you should now spend some time sleeping, even if only for a short time." Lim commented.

"This is also something to provide me tranquility during my meager sleeping hours. What, compared to the fight against the folks from Muozinel two years ago, this much isn't anything significant." Rurick stroked his smooth head, and laughed brightly. As it wasn't anything unpleasant, Lim was drawn into smiling as well.

"If you go this far, I will leave it up to your own judgment. However, make sure to be careful." Lim said.

Leaving the bald knight, she climbed the stairs leading to atop the wall. She could assume that Rurick would likely be alright for a while going by his tone.

—Today's the 20th day, huh...?

Lim muttered in her mind while loosening her body by stretching it, and silently putting on an armor. As of yet, the capital Nice had been withstanding the Muozinel's offensive. Many soldiers and knights passionately said, "We will show them that we can hold out another 30 or 40 days."

Even now Regin was devotedly going around the walls and the castle town, calling out to the soldiers and citizens.

In reality the situation wasn't all that bad. The Muozinel army had focused its soldiers on the southern wall, and although there had been many times where soldiers, who had climbed siege ladders, got atop the wall, they had been completely repelled by the Moonlight Knight Army.

What worried Lim was that she couldn't see any impatience in the Muozinel army's camp when looking down at it from the wall.

— How many days does the enemy calculate for this capital to fall?

Of course she didn't know that Kureys, the supreme commander of the Muozinel army, had answered 45 days when asked so by one of his aides. However, she had vaguely been perceiving that the Muozinel army seemed to hold a composure going beyond their side's.

Eight stairways had been set up in the moat below. After the offense and defense of the third day, four more had been added, but they succeeded in burning down two of them. They were lucky as the earth that covered the stairways had peeled and fallen off due to the prolonged battle.

The corpses of Muozinel soldiers had reached numbers that made it impossible to count. After the fourth day, the Muozinel army had started to wait until sunset to collect the corpses. They had probably become a hindrance and a sanitary issue. Right now it was summer, meaning corpses decayed in no time. The wall's surface was riddled with cracks and dirt from soot, blood and oil.

Lim shifted her eyes towards the inside of the wall. The traces of medical treatment and filth stood out on the soldiers standing guard. Most of them had bandages coiled around their arms and legs while wearing their armor on top. And it wasn't just them. Most of the soldiers, who had been fighting in this battle from the start were the same.

Suddenly Lim noticed a single crossbow lying in a corner of the wall. After they had exhausted their bolts in the battles of the fourth and fifth day, the bows had become useless. The Navarl Knight Squadron should have cleaned up all of them, but they apparently missed one.

"You're sure pulling a long face there." A voice from Lim's side.

Once she looked sideways, she saw Mila standing there. She was shouldering Lavias, her draconic tool. She didn't show any exhaustion worthy to be called one. Her garments, which used blue as basic color, weren't disheveled, and her silver breastplate dazzlingly reflected the sunlight. Her white ribbon, which looked bright to one's eyes, was fluttering in the wind, too.

Up until today Mila had exhibited great efforts on countless occasions. She had knocked down enemy soldiers who stepped atop the wall after having climbed siege ladders, she had buried the tunnel which the enemy had dug up to below the gate, and she had many times given precise instructions in regards to the alternation and deployment of the knights and soldiers to Lim. Nowadays, everyone approved of her presence. The Snow Princess of the Frozen Wave (Michelia) had proven her value through her actions.

Lim bowed lightly and gave a greeting, and then voiced out what had been bothering her, "Lyudmila-sama, how are Eleonora-sama and Lord Tigrevurmud doing?"

"Considering it's you, that's a rather abstract question, isn't it?" Mila revealed a somewhat mean smile, and after taking her eyes off Lim, looked into the far distance. Beyond the horizon where Tigre and the others might appear someday.

Lim turned her blue eyes in the same direction, murmuring, "More than thirty days have passed since the detached force led by those two and Earl Bouroullec departed this capital. Will they be able to return within another ten days?"

"It's not that simple, is it?" Mila looked up to Lim with an astonished face. "I wonder whether it won't be around fifteen more days if things go smoothly? If something happens, forcing them into a harsh battle, it will take longer. Take a good look in around twenty to twenty-five days."

Being told about another twenty-five days although twenty days had already passed, Lim felt dizzy, albeit only for an instant. It seemed like a number of days that seemed far too absurd.

"The most troublesome point of a siege battle begins from here on out." Mila continued with a grave expression while looking in the far distance once more. "If you are surrounded in such a way, absolutely no information enters from the outside. Even if reinforcements are heading this way right now, you don't know who and in what state. Only the food and weapons, which used to exist in abundance, keep decreasing. The enemy is as boisterous as usual, showing no fatigue."

"Just going by the dead and injured, it seems our side has overwhelmingly less, though." Searching for something bright to counter with, Lim states this dispassionately. Mila didn't deny it.

"I agree. Our side's losses are still below 500, the losses of the Muozinel army should exceed 10,000. However, such numbers are irrelevant. You know the reason, don't you?" Mila said.

Lim was reluctant, but then nodded her head. It might be coming from the daily effects of the soldiers' exhaustion and the weapon consumption.

Even limited to what she knew, they had been talking among the Zhcted soldiers about the remaining number of arrows. Arrows were produced in the castle town, but in Brune, which slighted archery, they hadn't been produced in any significant amount. That meant they would probably run out of arrows very soon. Even the stones for throwing of which they had so many that they could have built a mountain were now down to less than a half.

Once they were to use up the ranged weapons, the enemy's momentum would increase.

Besides, there was also the matter with the militia. The militia, which had counted 40,000 when the battle began, had decreased to close to 30,000. Not because they lost their lives. It was the result of people dropping out because of overwork.

The battle cries of the Muozinel army, which resounded every night, had caused them to exhaust their minds and bodies. Regin didn't try to detain them. She knew that it would just turn into a seed of quarrels if she were to force them. Once that happened, they would be stuck diverting manpower towards unnecessary things. Rather, she visited the houses of the people who had collapsed from overwork, and even expressed her sympathy.

Looking up to Lim whose expression had turned grave, Mila said as if to console her, "If you are so anxious, just go to pray at the temple. Although it's an odd talk, fortunately Zhcted and Brune believe in the same gods."

"A temple...?" Lim asked.

"I met Titta before coming here, and it looks like that girl has been going every day to the temple to pray since Tigre left the capital."

As she was easily capable of imagining that scene, Lim's expression softened. She shook her head with a calm look, "Let's drop that matter. I'm not overly religious. Calling the names of the gods during battle is more than enough for me."

Perceiving that will-power had returned into Lim's voice, Mila nodded while looking satisfied. Exchanging a silly chitchat was necessary in order to survive today.

Suddenly Mila shifted her eyes, donning a grim expression. Groups of soldiers were appearing in succession from the Muozinel army's camp.

"Come on, the real deal starts from today onwards." Mila showed a fearless smile

Lim nodded powerfully, and the soldiers and knights atop the wall tightly grasped their shields and weapons after noticing the enemy's movements.



Currently the general of the Muozinel army, which was attacking the southern wall, was Yargash. Ekrem and him alternated every few days, continuing the attacks. The generals besides those two were each standing by in the east, west and north of the capital while commanding 3,000 cavalymen and 7,000 battle slaves.

Ekrem's evaluation of Yargash was "vulgar and ostentatious," and there was no one, including the person himself, denying that assessment.

Yargash was 33 years old. Flashy, red clothes covered his thick body, and balm had been thickly smeared into his black hair. Even the subordinates who respected him were wholly rumored to avoid standing leeway of him. He had golden rings on all fingers of his hands, and even wore gilded daggers at his waist.

As he was a man who would reply, "Money in my right hand, and women in my left," when asked about what he desired, he had beautiful Muozinel, Brune, Zhcted, and Asvarre female slaves wait upon him in his extravagant mansion in the capital of his home country. His treatment of slaves appeared to be deeply compassionate.

On this day as well, he summoned his chief subordinates to his tent before starting the attack. And then turned a bag, which looked very heavy as he was holding it with both hands, upside down. This caused sounds of metals clinking against each other to reverberate, and a great amount of gold coins spilled over on the ground. Those standing in front had their eyes light up while staring at the small mountain of gold coins.

Yargash told them to inform all soldiers of this sight, "No matter how many ladders you set up, it bears no meaning if you don't get atop the wall. I will give all of this to the one who climbed the wall first and those who prepared the ladder put to use at that time."

Yargash deliberately scooped up the gold coins with his hands, intentionally causing the coins to clink. The morale of the Muozinel soldiers visibly skyrocketed.

Yargash had been doing this every day. And, once the battle of that day came to an end, he handed the coins to those who had achieved the goal in front of many soldiers. There was no way that this wouldn't boost the Muozinel soldiers' morale.

As the soldier left the tent in high spirits while dreaming of holding that gold in their hands, they crossed paths with a single youth entering. It was Damad.

Yargash stared at him in wonder and curiosity, "Yo, youngster. What's up?"

Yargash generally called all those younger than him like that. Damad had already grown accustomed to it, but he still couldn't let it pass without giving a short comment, "Aren't you hated by General Ekrem because you're using such a way of calling him?"

"I don't recall having called him in any way that contained spite or hostility. So, what's your business with me?" Yargash easily brushed the objection off.

"It looks like General Avshall was defeated. The news reached us today morning." Damad reported.

Yargash stopped moving for a moment. It's not that he had been overly close with Avshall, rather, he considered him to be a man with a disgusting attitude. However, he was a comrade who departed on this expedition together with him. It was impossible for him to not feel anything after being informed about the death of such a man.

"Assuming we learned about it today morning, I guess it means he was actually done in ten days ago. I don't know from where he popped up, but there must be an outrageous guy in Brune, too." Yargash commented.

"According to the report of the soldier who was General Avshall's subordinate, it was apparently a woman who finished him off. A girl with long, silver hair, red eyes and around seventeen to eighteen years old. I have an idea about a woman with such an outward appearance." Damad explained.

"Is she a beauty?" That was Yargash's first question.

Damad sighed with a disappointed expression.

While knocking the rings on both hands together, Yargash laughed and said, "If she's your prey, I will refrain from making a move on her. So, is that all?"

"There's one more thing. Did you finish what I had requested of you some time ago?" Damad asked.

"Ah, that, huh?" Yargash nodded, called a soldier, and gave him some order. That soldier withdrew from in front of Yargash and Damad for a moment, and returned before long. In his hands, a leather bag with a golden bordering. The soldier respectfully passed the bag to Damad.

Having received the bag, Damad turned it upside down. Round, old nuts the size of a grape's grain fell on his palm. Damad brought them close to his nose and sniffed. The scent of earth was dense.

He thought that these might be alright, but even if he doubted Yargash, it would be of no use. He returned the nuts into the bag, and thanked Yargash.

"Is there anything to pay attention to when using these?" Damad asked.

"Don't use them when having sex with a woman. You will die." Yargash answered.

Damad glared at Yargash with his eyes half-closed. Even though he knew that Yargash was joking, he felt angry.

Yargash warded it off the black-haired warrior's look by laughing, "When using them, chew them with your molars alongside their shells. Count to hundred afterwards. However, do you think there will come a time for you, who's next to His Excellency, to use something like that? Or did you receive permission to depart to the front line?"

Without answering Yargash's questions, Damad grabbed the leather bag, and turned his back on Yargash, saying, "I will have you let me take good care of it."

Then he left Yargash's tent.

The offense and defense of the twentieth day had started.



The attack methods of the Muozinel army hadn't changed from before. They ran while carrying siege ladders in groups of ten-odd people, passed through the moat, and clung to the wall. The archers lined up atop the scaffoldings supported them.

The Moonlight Knight Army blocked the arrows by lining up shields atop the wall, hurling boiling oil as well as stones and torches at the Muozinel soldiers climbing the siege ladders through the gaps between the shields.

However, the Moonlight Knight Army's counterattack abruptly paused. Soldiers, whose movements had grown dull from fatigue and injuries, and soldiers, who made mistakes at procedures they should be used to by now, started to appear, producing gaps in their defense.

The Muozinel soldiers, who had been climbing the ladders, leaped upon that chance. They continued to jump atop the wall by pushing their own bodies, and wielded their curved swords. A second, then a third followed after. And while they were drawing the attention towards them, a fourth and fifth jumped on top of the wall while holding spears.

The arrows of the Muozinel army fired from the scaffoldings poured down without paying any heed to friend and foe. However, the ones suffering the most damage were crowded formations, and it was the Moonlight Knight Army's side that ended up having its ranks thrown into disorder.

The Muozinel soldiers came slashing at them at the moments when they faltered after being hit by arrows. The Muozinel soldiers actively targeted their arms and legs. And then they delivered the finishing blow after the Moonlight knights dropped their weapons or went down on their knees.

Once they pushed onto the wall, it wasn't simple to push them back. The more the numbers of Muozinel soldiers atop the wall increased, the less the Moonlight Knight Army had the ability to take care of the siege ladders. As a result, the enemies kept endlessly appearing even after cutting down countless of them.

Lim, who had taken command of the southern wall, immediately rushed over to that place.

"Use your shields rather than your spears and swords! Force them back while lining up your shields and blocking the arrows!"

Several soldiers abode those instructions within the chaos and bloodshed, starting to literally knock the Muozinel soldiers off the wall. Those soldiers, who were thrown into the air, fell from a height of ten alsin and crashed into the bottom of the moat. Almost all of their bones were broken, and their bodies were strangely twisted, making them look like broken puppets.

Even Lim herself stood at the front and cut down two Muozinel soldiers. Arrows that came flying grazed her helmet and shoulder reinforcements. However, Lim held her ground, commanding the soldiers from there.

The Brune and Zhcted soldiers staged a fierce counterattack. The Muozinel soldiers were forced to retreat by being bashed rather than forced back with the shields. Retreat in this case directly connected to death. They slipped on the blood and were thrown off balance after stepping on corpses. At the moment when both sides had paid a toll of five, six more soldiers, the Moonlight Knight Army began to drive the Muozinel forces off the wall.

"Commander, we ran out of stones to throw!" A single soldier reported while breathing heavily.

Lim frowned, "There should be spares at the bottom of the wall."

"Those spares are completely gone as well."

"Tell them that it's my order and have the other stations yield some to us."

She knew that it was an irrational order, but she had no other option. That soldier yelled, "Roger!", while starting to run at the same time.

—As long as not all wall sections besides this one here are hit, I think we will be somehow able to get a supply, but...

Cheers were audible from a distant place. The Muozinel soldiers had climbed the wall at another place after cutting through. This time the Muozinel army actually set up twenty siege ladders against the southern wall.

Lim tried to rush over there in a hurry, but it was unnecessary. Mila, who was nearby, brandished Lavias, dealing with the Muozinel soldiers with thrusts.

Each time she wielded her spear that looked as if it had been shaved out of ice and crystal, trails of white chill danced atop the wall. With each flash the enemies' faces or abdomens were stabbed, and they collapsed. Its skillfulness and dreadfulness were at such a high level that the following Muozinel soldiers hesitated to go up on the wall.

Soon afterwards Lim's group withdrew from the wall in order to take a rest. In exchange a group composed of the western lords and knight squadrons took over the southern wall.

While they blocked the arrows with their shields, they successively pushed the Muozinel soldiers off the ladders by using long-handled weapons including spears. Cutting many times at the ladders with hatchets, they destroyed several of them.

Morning turned into noon, noon turned into evening. And then the Muozinel army stopped attacking and pulled back.

The Moonlight Knight Army celebrated that day's victory by raising loud cheers, but tiredness was blended into the soldiers's voices.

Receiving the report that flames were rising at the southern Massilia, the approximately 20,000 soldiers of the Moonlight Knight Army led by Tigre shouted in joy. Five days had passed since they parted with the Severac Knight Squadron led by Cauvin. During these five days, Tigre's army had been at a place located twenty belsta from Fort Gelgovia. While splitting into several smaller units and hiding inside forest and in the shadows of rocks, they had awaited good news from Massilia. Moreover, for Tigre this conduct also served as training.

"They really did it!"

Tigre smiled and looked at Elen and Bouroullec who had lined up their horses next to him under the sky that had started to darken. The three immediately split the work, called together their commanding officers, and informed them of the departure.

"The day will very soon come to an end, but for several days we will march on at night. I don't mind even if we drop the speed a bit. We will prioritize routes staying away from the enemy as much as possible." The commanding officers nodded at Tigre's words, saluted, and ran off.

Next to Tigre, who saw them off, Elen folded her arms and sighed in admiration, "To be honest, when I heard about the method from Lord Cauvin, I was worried, but I guess he skilfully pulled it off."

Not just Tigre, but even Bouroullec nodded, obviously sharing her opinion.

When Tigre and the others asked how he was going to burn down the sips lined up in Massilia's port, he replied that they would use rafts.

"If it comes to most of the port town being under the control of the Muozinel army, obtaining ships might be impossible to begin with. Even small boats allowing five or six people to board should be difficult to obtain. Accordingly, we will link together rafts at a beach distant from Massilia and depart to the sea. Afterwards we will head to Massilia's port by riding the tidal current. Once we make a round while setting the ships on fire, we will escape by riding the tidal current once more." Cauvin explained.

Seeing as the port town had been seized, and accordingly the ships and boats as well, it was Cauvin's idea that the enemy wouldn't likely expect an attack from the sea, and that splendidly proved to be right.

Before long the commanding officers came to report that the troops had been put in order. The Moonlight Knight Army advanced while causing thundering roars with the hooves of their horses on the ground that had become dark.

The thin, silver moon floating in the sky looked as if it was quietly watching over the humans.



The information that many of the ships in Massilia's port were ablaze also reached the place of Murat's army, which had been staying near Fort Gelgovia.

After Murat fervently cursed at his unreliable allies under his breath, he vacated his camp while sending a messenger to Kureys at the same time. He started moving south.

"Isn't this a trap by the enemy who is trying to fight us by luring us away from this place?" One of Murat's subordinates asked, but Murat didn't lend an ear to him. He possessed enough confidence in his own

commanding abilities that he could consider it convenient if that was really the case.

Just as Tigre had guessed, Murat ignored Massilia, intending to rebuild the supply line in Argdeau. Seeing as it was conceivable that the numbers of the Moonlight Knight Army exceeded those of his own army now that Avshall was dead, that was an urgent task for him.

But, above that, he was able to do something he had to do.

As a result, Murat allowed the Moonlight Knight Army to head north.

## **Chapter 5 - Arrow, fly**

The darkness faded at the horizon of the eastern sky, and the sun was in the process of blessing this day with her presence.

Kureys Shahim Balamir witnessed that moment for the first time in a long while. It might actually be his first time after stepping into Brune. Many were sleeping at this time of the day, and even those who woke up were still in their tents.

Kureys walked outside the camp while having his cheeks tickled by a refreshing wind that wasn't laden with heat yet. He was clad in a comfortable attire with wide sleeves. The one accompanying him was no one else but Damad.

Suddenly Kureys stopped his feet, and looked up to the distant wall of the royal capital Nice. It was as if a skilled artisan was scrutinizing the progress of his own work.

"Yesterday was the 30th day, huh?" That murmur sounded like a monologue, but Damad still confirmed it.

Different from his lord, he wore leather armor and had a sword hanging at his waist.

"Have you heard what I said about how many days it would take to conquer the capital?" Kureys inquired.

"I heard you mentioned 45 days." Damad replied.

The reason why he could immediately recall that number was because Damad couldn't hide his surprise when he heard about it through a close aide of Kureys. He had wondered about it taking this many days, even if it might be a country's capital.

However, right now Damad couldn't hide his surprise in a different sense. It's because he could believe that conquering the capital might really need another fifteen days when looking up to the wall like this. Once again Damad felt a deep respect toward his lord's discernment.

His lord further said, "Let me correct myself a bit. It will take another ten days. Ekrem has reduced the number of days with his interesting ideas." Turning on his heels, Kureys headed back to the camp, saying, "Double the number of scouting parties starting with today," as if it was something insignificant.

Damad narrowed his eyes, looking puzzled and asking, "With all due respect, for what reason?"

"Obviously to find the enemy, no?" Kureys replied in a dither.

Murat's report that the ships had been burned down in the port of Massilia was delivered yesterday late at night. Murat also reported that he would go south to put the situation in order.

Kureys considered the possibility of the enemy, who set the ships ablaze, coming here. 'Going by my forecast, our side should be slightly faster with the conquest of the capital, but in a war you never knew what might happen. One should be prepared in advance.'



The soldiers of the Moonlight Knight Army, who had endured the siege battle of the thirtieth day, were all exhausted with no one being unhurt. There were many who were sleeping while standing with the support of their spears and who were laying down while still wearing their armors atop the wall.

The current number of soldiers was approximately 35,000. The casualties, which were below 500 in the first

ten days, had now exceeded 5,000. In the last days, the number of casualties and injured people had been increasing rapidly.

Lim, who had finished her short greeting with Rurick in the morning of that day, noticed that he was walking while limping. It wasn't an injury, but fatigue. There were also faint stubbles left on his head.

—I have also reached a level where I can't get rid of my fatigue any longer with a little bit of rest.

Lim sighed while climbing the stairs towards the top of the wall with her helmet under her arm. Her body was so drained that she felt like flinging off her armor. Same with her spear and sword.

They had long run out of arrows and stones. Likewise there was no oil and firewood left that could be used for the battle. If they used any more, the number of torches illuminating the nights would diminish. Not only would it inform the enemy of their dire situation, but it would also make them consider night attacks. That was something they had to avoid.

—Only defending with shields and fighting with spears and swords puts us at a big disadvantage against the enemy's overwhelming numbers. The Muozinel army had likely aimed for that and attacked without sparing any sacrifices from the very start. Our side knew that as well, but we had no other choice for the sake of defending the wall.

She reached the wall's top. The sunlight felt depressing to her.

Lim caught sight of Mashas who had put on his helmet, and called out to him, "Good morning, Lord Mashas."

"Ooh, Lady Limalisha, huh? A good morning to you as well." Turning her way, Mashas' face was deeply steeped with fatigue. His armor and helmet were full of cuts and dents.

Up until the twentieth day, he had watched the movements across all wall sections without leaving the royal palace as much as possible. But, since a few days ago, he had taken command on-site. He also brandished his own sword several times.

Lim and Mashas lined up next to each other, looking down on the ground. Both of them were tired out, lacking even the leeway to exchange a light chat.

"How's the situation in the castle town?" Lim muttered eventually.

Mashas rubbed his starchy, gray beard, "As of yesterday their numbers dropped below 20,000. It's a salvation that their dissatisfaction hasn't erupted yet."

The residents of the capital were also exhausted from the long battle.

What kept their discontent at bay was the still-existing leeway on food and water, Regin still showing herself and listening to the people's worries, and the fact that the casualties were buried on Mount Ruberion, the center of the capital, regardless of their positions and social standings.

The burial was something Regin had ordered, but being entombed on Mount Ruberion was originally something only permitted to those who had achieved quite the meritorious deeds. It was an incredible honor. But then again, this wasn't just Regin's little gratitude towards the soldiers, but also a pragmatic decision based on the lack of another burying ground. Until now the dead of the capital had been buried along the road outside the walls.

"Her Highness Regin is even now bestowing us with her presence on the wall. The soldiers and knights not breaking down as of yet is probably thanks to her." Lim said.

"Yeah, it's very appreciated." Mashas confirmed.

So far Regin had visited various places in the castle town or showed up on the wall during the day, but nowadays that had been limited to morning and evening. She was wearing make-up to hide her own fatigue, but during the day's heat the make-up came off as she was sweating.

How many days longer do we have to endure? How far have Tigre and the others come? Such questions popped up in Mashas' and Lim's minds, but in the end neither of them touched on that topic.

"Today as well. Right, let's fight today as well." Lim encouraged Mashas and herself.

"Aye, let's protect these walls to the end." Mashas replied.

At the end of their lines of sight, soldiers carrying siege ladders appeared out of the Muozinel army's camp. In the last few days, they had started to attack the other three wall sections as well. Leaning the siege ladders against the walls inside the moats, they slowly descended the ladders so as to not break them, and then climbed them on the other side of the moat again. Having no weapons at hand also meant that they were allowed to do as they pleased.



With each passing day, the casualties and injured people among the Moonlight Knight Army continued to grow. Even if more than 30,000 soldiers were still alive, less than 60% of them could still move.

Because the Muozinel army continued to attack the wall from all four directions, the number of those, who couldn't move anymore out of fatigue, was steadily increasing.

And yet, the Moonlight Knight Army continued to desperately defend the walls.

On one occasion, Muozinel soldiers, who climbed the wall, proudly hoisted their battle flag. However, they were repelled by Lyudmila Lourie, and their flag was tossed away alongside them.

They had used up their stamina long ago and were now moving on willpower alone, but even the limit to that came into sight.

When the battle of the 35th day ended, the number of the Moonlight Knight Army's soldiers had fallen below 30,000. More than half of them were injured. If there were some who fell asleep in the middle of the battle, there were also others who were overrun by the enemy when their body became unable to move, even though they had the will to continue fighting, and crumbled on the spot.

There was still some leeway with the food provisions, but the number of those having the flexibility to eat that food plummeted. Because they would fall asleep after eating too much, the number of those, who only ate the bare minimum, had grown.

It had reached the point that Kureys visited the tents of the soldiers in the Muozinel camp while accompanied by his aides to convey his personal encouragement to them. That gave the soldiers the hunch that the fall of the wall was imminent.

On the day when the 38th battle over the wall came to an end, Kureys gave all soldiers a break of one day. Because of that, there was no battle on the 39th day, but that didn't mean that the Moonlight Knight Army could rest up sufficiently. Being afraid of the enemy's surprise attacks, Lim, Mila, Mashas, and Olivier kept their naps down to the utmost limit, and even the other soldiers' sleep was shallow because of their fatigue and nervousness.

Succumbing to the anxiety that the calmness around the walls was a harbinger of something bad, the capital's residents secluded themselves in their homes, praying to the gods.

On the evening of the 39th day, Kureys summoned his generals into his tent. Facing the kneeling generals, Kureys, who wore an emerald attire and had a violet cloth coiled around his head, calmly announced, "We will start the attack one koku before dawn breaks."

The generals starting with Ekrem and Yargash bowed their heads in reverence. During the time from the beginning of this battle until today they had never been ordered to attack before dawn.

The number of Muozinel soldiers surrounding the capital was approximately 90,000. At the start the death toll had been high, but as the Moonlight Knight Army tired out and used up their weapons, the number of casualties dropped. And, among these 90,000 soldiers there wasn't a single one who couldn't move out of fatigue.

"Attack the north, west, and east with 10,000 soldiers as up until now. As for the south, I shall give each of you, Ekrem, Yargash, 25,000 soldiers. I will be on standby together with 10,000 soldiers behind you. Go at it with the intention to use up all of them." Kureys ordered.

The generals gave their supreme commander short confirmations.



Mila, who had taken a nap in a corner of the wall, woke up from a cold wind blowing against her cheeks.

"Lavias...?" She mumbled dozily.

Her draconic tool, which she had embraced at the time of falling asleep, was now warning its owner by faintly shining at its spearhead that seemed to be made out of ice. Mila sobered up in an instant. Her surroundings were still dim. Night hadn't come to an end yet. However, she could hear noise from a distant place.

"So you're saying they've come already!?" Mila stood up as she spit out in irritation. At that moment she felt giddy, forcing her to be aware of her own fatigue, whether she liked it or not.

"Tigre, when are you going to arrive? The capital and Regin are already at their limit." Mila griped.

And yet, her trying to insist on herself not being at her limit yet might be a manifestation of her pride. The sounds of drums and horns reverberated. The Muozinel soldiers had already shown up atop the wall, completely taking the Moonlight Knight Army by surprise.

Brandishing Lavias, Mila stabbed a Muozinel soldier alongside his leather armor, or ripped him apart. However, Muozinel soldiers appeared from other places in succession, swooping down on Mila.

Without faltering, she mowed down her ice spear, defeating two enemy soldiers at once. Furthermore, she tripped up another enemy with a sweep, and frightened the Muozinel soldiers by scattering freezing air from the spearhead's top, causing them to flinch.

Cheers were audible in a corner of the wall. Looking in that direction, wondering what might have happened, Mila stared in wonder.

Regin was standing there. She didn't hold a sword herself, but her two guards were wielding their swords, not allowing the Muozinel soldiers to get close to her.

"Everyone! Now! Now is the critical moment! Stand up! The battle still hasn't ended!" Regin shouted.

Seeing Regin, and hearing her yelling, the soldiers came back to life.

The princess had visited the wall almost every day. There existed many soldiers who were deeply moved after being greeted by her. It was impossible for them to mishear her voice or mistake her face.

Raising angry roars with slightly strange voices, the Brune soldiers desperately slashed, pummeled, and stabbed away at the Muozinel soldiers. Above all else, their vigor caused the Muozinel soldiers to falter.

However, beating the Muozinel soldiers off the wall bought no more than little time. A fresh supply of troops appeared in no time, rushing at the Brune soldiers while swinging their swords and spears.

Once again the Brune soldiers started to be pushed back. Although they frantically wielded their swords, the number of Muozinel soldiers gradually grew and they drew near Regin.

Claude and Selena, who served as Regin's guards, had been slaying one approaching Muozinel soldier after the other, but contributed to their fatigue of helping out every day, both quickly started to gasp, and it became obvious that they wouldn't be able to hold out long. And yet, Regin didn't move from the spot. She stood firmly and gazed ahead.

The struggle between the Muozinel soldiers, who tried to crush them with their overwhelming numbers, and the Brune soldiers, who tried to force them back at the peak of their morale, continued, creating countless puddles of blood at their feet. The pools of blood were stirred up by their feet and the fallen corpses, leaving a great number of crooked stains behind.

Before long Lim, Mashas, and Olivier rushed atop the wall while leading their own troops, but they couldn't even get close to Regin who was stopped back by the Muozinel soldiers. Just like them, Mila had her hands full just dealing with the enemies in front of her. Even if she wanted to use her draconic skills, she hadn't the leeway to do so anymore.

And, at the time when dawn was about to break, surprise dyed Regin's blue eyes.

What she was looking at weren't the Muozinel soldiers swarming the wall, neither her own soldiers, but something several hundred alsin behind the Muozinel army on the ground.

Over there, close to 20,000 cavalymen were lining up, flying the red horse and the black dragon flags.

Switching to a smile as delight welled up within her, Regin spontaneously shouted, "Tigre...!"



"Brune's army appeared in our rear!"

At the time when a soldier came reporting, unable to hide his surprise and fretfulness, Kureys had been observing the battle progress on his palanquin as usual, but it was no wonder that he looked down with a dumbfounded expression at the soldier.

The enemy appearing was no surprise. However, having expected as much, Kureys had doubled the amount of scouts and sent them out in the vicinity ten days ago. The Brune army having splendidly slipped through this net was unforeseen.

But, when he expressed his admiration with a "Hoh," Kureys had already regained his usual calm. Him being dumbfounded probably didn't last even the span of a single breath.

Once he heard that the enemy had around 20,000 soldiers after asking about it, Red Beard's sunken-in eyes lit up, and he coolly said, "Call back Yargash. The others are to continue."

The soldier hurriedly ran off in order to pass on that order. A smile surfaced on Kureys' lips which were hidden by his red beard. A fighting spirit that welled up within him and a feeling of exaltation rapidly filled Kureys.

He ordered his subordinates to turn about. Once he made his soldiers turn around in the short time of a quarter toki, despite the sky still being gloomy, Kureys boldly grinned towards the enemy army that was approaching his own.

"Now then, what's going to take place first. My death, Star Shooter's (Silvash) death, or the capital's death?" Kureys was convinced to find Tigre within those 20,000 soldiers.

Now a battle broke out even on the surface.



The 20,000 of the Moonlight Knight Army led by Tigrevurmud Vorn took two measures after hearing about the success of the Severac Knight Squadron and heading north: First, splitting the 20,000 soldiers into units of 100 and 200 soldiers while allowing them to only carry enough food for a few days with them. And second, having decided on their way points, they adopted the method of hurrying onwards if a certain number of people arrived at the destination without waiting for the straddlers.

After shortening the distance to the capital by repeating this process many times over, Tigre informed his soldiers of their last destination. It was the ground, where he had encountered Muozinel soldiers right before the beginning of this war, when he headed out for reconnaissance while leading the scouting party by himself.

Tigre split the 20,000 soldiers in subdivisions and had them stay hidden at that place, which had a bad visibility as it was dotted with hills, lush forests and rivers. And until the trailing soldiers arrived, he carefully dispatched reconnaissance units to scout out the Muozinel army's state.

It's not that Kureys didn't know about that area having a complicated terrain. However, his goal was the capital to the bitter end. For the time being he limited his interest to checking the maps and trusting the reports of the scout parties. Tigre, who had checked it with his own eyes, slightly exceeded Red Beard in his knowledge of the region.

Tigre wore leather armor atop his linen clothes, and grasped his black bow in the left hand and the reins in his right. His clothes and the armor were stained at several places with dirt and mud. He had equipped a quiver each on the left and right side of his saddle. A soldier behind him had additional quivers at hand.

Elen wore her usual lightweight equipment consisting of shoulder and leg armors being attached atop her battle attire that used blue as basic color. Her armor and clothes were also stained. However, she didn't look as if she minded it. She held a longsword in her right hand, and grasped the reins with her left.

Bouroullec commanded 5,000 soldiers at the left rear flank of the army. His duty was to support the attack, and eliminate all those interfering.

Tigre and Elen, who were spearheading the army, lifted their respective weapons high up in the air. The Brune soldier and the Zhcted soldier riding next to them each brandished the battle flags of the two countries. This was the signal for the charge.

The Muozinel army in front of them had likely spotted Tigre's army by now. However, there was no reason for them to announce their presence to the entire enemy army by blowing the horns.

"Attack!" Tigre yelled and spurred his horse.

Elen galloped next to the youth. And 20,000 cavalymen followed those two. 80,000 horse hooves kicked up a cloud of dust and caused the ground to shake.

The distance to the enemy was approximately 500 alsin. That's why they didn't let their horses gallop at full strength at first. Quickening the gallop would shorten the distance to the enemy a lot faster.

Elen went slightly ahead of Tigre. At that time 10,000 soldiers of the Muozinel army had already finished turning about to meet the enemy in battle. The countless spears lining up without any gaps had their sharp spearheads point at the Moonlight Knight Army.

However, far from slowing down her horse after seeing that, Elen actually spurred it on even further. Her ruby eyes were tinged with a vivid hue, and the wind swelling with a desire for battle made her silver hair flutter. Mowing down the swarm of pushed-out spears with Arifar, Elen made her horse jump over the

enemy line.

The cool morning air was quickly pregnant with the heat of the hot blood surging out of the bodies. The Muozinel soldiers wore leather armor. Such armor cleverly combined flexibility and sturdiness, but in front of longswords that easily cut through iron armor, it didn't bear much of a meaning. Three Muozinel soldiers had their heads separated from their shoulders in succession, dying on the spot. Before the commanding officer directing the soldiers lining up there could even form the order to crush the Vanadis to death with his mouth, a single arrow pierced his forehead, reaping his life. It was the first arrow Tigre shot in this battle.

Following Elen and Tigre, the Moonlight Knight Army's cavalry flooded in. The Muozinel soldiers got ready and met the swords and spears coming at them from atop the horses with their own spears. But, it wasn't simple for them to hold back the mass of cavalry riding the momentum of its charge.

Elen halved the speed of her horse, but that was for the sake of protecting Tigre who had been firing one arrow after the other next to her. The sound of his bowstring was drowned out by the commotion of the other weapons clashing against each other, and only reached Tigre's ears, but each time an arrow left the string, the Muozinel soldiers lost a commanding officer, resulting in an intensification of their disorder.

It's not that there were no Muozinel soldiers, who changed their weapons from spear to bow and aimed at Elen and Tigre, in this situation. However, not a single of their arrows hit one of the two. The wind surrounding the two of them blew away all approaching arrows.

"Not being able to assist the arrows shot by Tigre with the wind of Arifar is certainly a bitter aspect." Elen muttered.

Adding too much power to the arrows would instead make them veer off course. Elen didn't possess the ability to make an arrow hit a target 300 alsin away, which might be the reason for the aim to be off-point.

At any rate, Tigre had to make his arrows hit solely based on his own ability, but there wasn't any problem with that. Tigre shot down enemies at places where swords didn't reach at a frightening level of speed and precision while being protected by Elen.

The units that had lost their commanding officers turned into a bunch of blindfolded wanderers. Unable to grasp their own position within the large army, they could only follow the tide while jostling against their allies all around them, just to be defeated after popping out in front of the enemy.

Tigre and Elen deeply cut through the enemy line with great vigor, but they still didn't reach Kureys. On the contrary, receiving a fierce attack at their flank, their advance came to a halt.

The ones that snapped at the left side of the Moonlight Knight Army were the 25,000 soldiers under Yargash. It was Ekrem's unit that had been attacking the southern wall section, and Yargash's unit had been on standby, waiting for their turn. That's why they had been able to answer Kureys' call at once. By merging with Yargash's unit, the number of the Muozinel army surpassed the Moonlight Knight Army's by far, growing to 35,000 soldiers in total.

"Cut all their heads off and bring them in front of me! I will give you one gold coin per head! No matter what head it is!" Yargash boosted the Muozinel soldiers' morale. They had to stop these 20,000 enemies at any cost, not allowing even a single enemy soldier to get close to Kureys.

Yargash's army began to devour the Moonlight Knight Army's flank with the force of starved beasts. Piercing the horses with their spears, slashing at the cavalymen's legs with their swords, and jumping as well as clinging to their enemies, they tried to drag down each cavalryman with many of their own.

Tigre and Elen were at the head of the army. There was no way for them to fall back. They had their hands full with cutting and shooting down the Muozinel soldiers swooping down on them as if it was the crucial moment.

But, the time for Yargash's army to act as they pleased was all too short. The 5,000 soldiers led by Bouroullec determinedly thrust into their right flank, causing them to falter.

"To the front! Victory is in front of our eyes!" Bouroullec brandished his hatchet-like sword, defeating a Muozinel soldier.

Also, by cleverly striking at the leading group of Yargash's army, he succeeded in stopping the movement of the whole army while, albeit only temporarily.

While Yargash's army had been thrown into confusion, Tigre and Elen resumed their advance. But, Kureys had fallen back even further while reorganizing the ranks of his troops that had become disordered once again.

"Damad, I will give you 2,000 cavalymen." Kureys calmly called out to the black-haired warrior standing at his side.

After giving a short reply, Damad left his lord while leading the soldiers assigned to him. He tightly grasped the small leather bag hanging at his waist.

Due to Kureys' retreat, Tigre's group had been pushed aside much wider than at the time when they charged, but there was no way for them to give up on their advance because of something of this level. Encouraged by them, the soldiers following them had their fighting spirits ignited. Many of the soldiers were already bleeding and wounded, but all of them charged forward as if in a delirium.

"That's the way to go!" Elen spurred on her horse ahead of them while brandishing Silver Flash. Each of her blows caused a crimson whirlwind to arise, and the Muozinel soldiers fell like old rags flapping in the wind.

Next to her, Tigre shot two, then three arrows at once. Targeting the commanding officers was a matter of course, but now that it had come to this, it was indispensable to decrease the number of as many soldiers as possible. The quivers hanging at his saddle were removed from behind, and new quivers full of arrows were tied to the saddle.

"Thanks." While pulling an arrow, he expressed his thanks. He didn't have any spare time to look back. And, the one being told so didn't listen since he had to prepare new quivers.

Drawn blades leaped through the air, fresh blood danced. Screams and angry roars drowned out each other, joining the cacophony of weapons clashing against each other. Heads rolled, arms were cut off. Being trampled down by infantry, being scattered by cavalry. The collision between the two armies seemed to strive at creating a sea of blood and flesh on the grass-covered plain.

Yargash allotted 3,000 soldiers to three trusted subordinates, and had them try to wedge themselves in-between Kureys' army and the Moonlight Knight Army. Kureys' army retreated, the Moonlight Knight Army charged. The three army corps splendidly surged into the resulting empty space between the two armies.

However, the Moonlight Knight Army's momentum and power exceeded their imagination by leaps and bounds.

Elen swung Silver Flash as if she didn't know the concept of depleting one's stamina, cutting apart the Muozinel soldiers that tried to challenge her. Tigre accurately shot his arrows, killing one commanding

officer in the rear after the other, and thus inducing the Muozinel army to split apart and fall into chaos.

Even when attacking Elen with five or ten at once, they were mowed down with merciless slashes, and once they looked over their shoulders, their fellow comrades, who should be following after them, were aimlessly wandering about in confusion. At that point, the soldiers of the Moonlight Knight Army accompanying Tigre and Elen swooped down on them.

The first army corps that stood in the way of Tigre's group at the beginning was crushed without being able to mount so much as a resistance. They fell apart like a sand tower scattered by the wind.

Tigre and Elen swiftly exchanged looks, confirming their respective thinking. The two started to assault the confused Muozinel soldiers while herding them towards the second and third army corps.

It didn't take much time to bring the two army corps close to collapse as they had to endure the fierce onslaught of the Moonlight Knight Army while having their preparations to stage a counterattack disturbed by their allies who ran about in an attempt to escape.

The reality that 9,000 soldiers in total were easily broken through made not only Yargash, who had deployed the soldiers, but even Kureys groan.

At last it looked as if the Moonlight Knight Army had shortened the distance to Kureys.

At that moment, a single cavalryman brushed aside the Muozinel soldiers with a force as if sending them flying, and approached Elen. He raised the sword in his hands overhead, and brought it down on the silver-haired Vanadis. Elen stopped the sharp slash by turning over her wrist, but the abnormal impact jolted her whole body, and her posture atop her horse fell apart.

She somehow managed to avoid falling off the horse by firmly stepping onto the stirrup and tightly grasping the reins, but at that point the second attack lunged at her. Silver sparks colored the air between both alongside a grating, metallic clank, and Elen was forced back alongside her horse, unable to resist. If not for her draconic tool, Arifar, the blade would have been broken and sent flying. She felt a light numbness in her right hand.

—Not only fast, but a strength going beyond that of Roland...?

Elen turned her eyes at the man who slashed at her. It was a tall, young man with the characteristic dark brown skin color of Muozinel people. It was unclear whether he had already reached the age of twenty. His nose and chin were slender, and his eyes bloodshot while emitting a maniac light. He wore leather armor and tightly grasped a Muozinel-made sword.

Tigre, who had noticed Elen's struggle, looked in her direction. Seeing the Muozinel soldier confronting the Wind Princess of the Silver Flash (Silvfrahl), his eyes widened, and words of surprise passed his lips, "Damad..."

It was the youth with whom Tigre had acted together for a short period at the time when he had lost his memory. However, even if Tigre was surprised, and even if he harbored feelings of hesitation, all of that lasted only for an instant. What he should prioritize above all else was helping Elen.

He nocked a new arrow on his black bow, but he didn't come as far as releasing the arrow. The fierce clash between Elen and Damad kept them tied to each other at close proximity as they switched positions, and their two swords performed a furious dance, making it impossible for even Tigre to get a proper aim.

Rather, Tigre had to distance himself against his will so as to not get dragged into the storm of blades.

The 2,000 Muozinel cavalymen following Damad were also encouraged by his ferociousness. They challenged the Moonlight Knight Army with a momentum of clashing alongside their horses into them. Throwing their spears, and slashing their hatchets, they had started to break through the ranks of the Moonlight Knight Army. Even the horses of both sides got excited, kicking as well as biting each other.

The Muozinel soldiers attacked Tigre who had lost Elen as his protection. Arrows came flying his way as well. That's because the wind barrier by Silver Flash was temporarily gone. While dodging the swords and spears approaching him, Tigre reluctantly shot his arrows at the enemy soldiers in front of him.

Several blades and spearheads grazed his cheeks, arms, and legs, carving cuts that were accompanied by burning pain into them. One arrow pierced him above his leather armor, but fortunately it was a shallow wound. He immediately pulled it out and tossed it away.

"Supreme Commander!"

The Brune soldiers, who had noticed Tigre's crisis, savagely launched themselves at the Muozinel soldiers while tightly grasping their swords and battleaxes. They cut through the Muozinel soldiers alongside their leather armors with violent slashes, or alternatively blew them away. But the dead were immediately replaced by new Muozinel soldiers, who then attacked the Brune soldiers. Being simultaneously stabbed by four and five Muozinel soldiers, two Brune soldiers, who had the gaps in their armors gorged out by spears, slowly slid off their horses while suppressing the wounds with their hands as blood gushed out. The space created by their death was immediately filled by the Brune soldiers who had been behind them.

This place, where Elen and Tigre were to be found, was the very frontline of the Moonlight Knight Army. They had to advance forward. Every step counted. And during the time they couldn't, they had to protect their position to the last, no matter how many sacrifices they would need to pay for it.

While gasping roughly, Tigre glared into the far distance, across the ground overflowing with Muozinel soldiers. At Kureys who was giving out commands atop his palanquin.

—I had known, but he's a dreadful man.

No matter how much they shortened the distance, that red-bearded prince cleverly moved his soldiers, allowing him to open the distance again.

Their side didn't have a single soldier to spare anymore. If they didn't manage to advance with the people here right now, it would spell their end. No reinforcements would show up like at the time when he fought at Agnes in the past.

—But...

Once he looked at the capital's walls, he saw the red horse flag fluttering there. His allies were still holding out. While several siege ladders had been set up against the wall. His head was still working. His eyes could still see. His ears could still hear. His hands and fingers moved as well. He was able to pull the bowstring. It was impossible for him to give up here.

Tigre took out three arrows at once. A Brune soldier, who saw that, ran off to obtain new arrows while harboring feelings of admiration.

The battle between Elen and Damad still raged on. Elen pulled through by evading and warding the violent slashes, which were unleashed with no time in-between, off with Silver Flash while counterattacking. If she

were to continue receiving those heavy blows from the front, her arms and hands wouldn't last, even if Silver Flash were to remain safe. Of course it wasn't as if she was unhurt either. Her battle attire and armor parts were riddled with cuts, and even her cheeks and arms were plastered with wounds.

And then Elen, who had observed her opponent's state while swinging her sword, finally understood the real reason behind Damad's aberrant strength.

—A drug, huh?

Elen had heard during her time as a mercenary that some drugs lifted the mood remarkably, allowing one to pull out power several times higher than usual. Anything else was unthinkable if it came to unleashing such blows with his physique and his muscle build.

Besides, even though Damad's sword techniques were magnificent, they were simple to a bizarre degree. If he were this much of a sword master, he would definitely use feints and lures which should always be mixed in-between normal attacks. But there wasn't a single one of those to be found in his sword play. It was a fighting style as if telling her that his aim was to make Elen surrender by shaving off her stamina.

Sparks scattered. The wind howled. Strands of both hairs were cut off and danced in the air. The next blade ringing resounded before the previous had faded. Damad raised a scream that somewhat sounded like that of a beast, and swung down his sword at the crown of Elen's head. Elen met the slash by wielding Silver Flash while twisting her body. An odd metallic sound assailed the ears of both, and then Damad's sword broke off in the middle.

"You did well to exchange blows with Silver Flash for so long." Those were Elen's words of praise towards the black-haired warrior.

If they had wielded the same weapons, Elen might have lost. He was a formidable enemy that made her think so.

Damad raised his broken sword, showing his will to further challenge her. Elen matched his movement, and mowed down Silver Flash. The broken sword flew out of Damad's hand, his posture crumbled, and he fell off his horse. The black-haired warrior's body vanished out of sight as it was swallowed by the maelstrom of the battle between both sides.

Elen took a short breath. Her face was smeared by many lines of sweat, and several hair strands clung to her forehead. She bent her shoulders forward out of exhaustion. However, she had eliminated the enemy. She fixed her hold on Silver Flash, and brought her horse next to Tigre.

They looked at each other, and all they needed was to nod at each other. Once more they cut through the enemy line with the one shooting his arrows and the other wielding her sword. Yargash couldn't pull away from Bouroullec's unit as he had planned. The most he could do was to form detached units and have them sally forth. It should be fine to consider that there were no more than 10,000 soldiers in front of Tigre's group.

However, no matter how many soldiers they slew, Tigre and his army couldn't get close to Kureys. Using the precious time created by Damad and Yargash's detached units, Red Beard finished reforming the ranks of his soldiers once more. No matter how much Tigre's group advanced, and even if they gouged a deep hole into the center of the Muozinel army, the soldiers commanded by Kureys retreated with flexible movements, and were able to recover the thickness of their line in mere moments.

—We're not reaching him...!

Tigre ground his molars out of impatience, irritation, and weariness. Even though Kureys was right in front

of his eyes, the distance didn't shorten at all.

Red Beard always maintained a space of approximately 400 alsin between them. While thinking, 'a little bit more, just a little bit more,' Tigre made his horse advance as he shot his arrows, but Kureys kept staying at the same distance. It was as if he was running towards an illusion he couldn't ever reach.

Even Elen, who was swinging her sword next to him, had started to pant heavily since a good while ago. Spurts of blood stained her battle attire all over.

—100 alsin more...! No, 50...even 30 alsin...!

He would likely scream out his thoughts as if spitting blood if he had the time to speak up. A hopeless number of Muozinel soldiers did their utmost to fill that small distance. 'Advancing any further won't be possible unless we defeat all of them, will it?' Tigre started to harbor even such a hallucination.

"Wait, Tigre." Elen said without stopping her hands as she wielded her sword. Right now she didn't even have the leeway to look at the youth standing next to her. "I will wrench open a path right away. What, it will take just a little longer."

"Elen..." Tigre uttered with a voice that seemed to gasp for air. Elen probably didn't intend to act brave.

Tigre pulled out a new arrow from his quiver with his fingers that had started to go numb, and nocked it on his black bow. Suddenly he turned his eyes towards the distant Kureys.

'Why? My arrow won't be able to reach this far. Reach an enemy whom I can see so clearly—' It was at the time when that question welled up in a corner of Tigre's mind. 'Why won't it reach? Is that really so? Will it truly be unable to reach him?'

The range of his arrows had grown compared to the time when he met Rurick for the first time. Several of his other acquaintances had said so as well.

But, what about Tigre himself?

Being able to hit a target 300 alsin away with an arrow was something he had accomplished 3 or 4 years ago. Because the range didn't grow no matter how much he trained himself, he had started to believe that it was his limit before he noticed it. Above all, there didn't exist any people, who could shoot arrows this far, as far as Tigre knew.

He never parted with his bow, but the thought of making an arrow reach an even further distance had at some point vanished within himself.

'Is this really my limit? Can't I make the arrow fly by another ten, no, even five alsin?'

He had traversed battlefields countless times. By now he didn't know how many arrows he shot, or how many enemies he had killed. However, it shouldn't be wrong to say that this had forged Tigre's skill.

"—Elen." While nocking an arrow to the bowstring of his black bow, he called out to the silver-haired Vanadis. "Buy me some time."

He drew the bowstring to its limit. His aim wasn't the enemy commanding officers within 300 alsin. His black eyes were fixed at the red-bearded man sitting on top of his palanquin, which had been decorated with gems and gold, 400 alsin ahead of him. It was only natural, but the enemy looked a lot smaller than the ones he was usually targeting. For no particular reason, Tigre recalled the legend of a hunter who continued to

shoot his arrows at a speck in the far distance.

He raised his arm holding the black bow somewhat higher than normal. The bowstring vibrated as his arrow left his fingers. Immediately after the arrow drew a parabola in the sky, it vanished within the enemy army. It might have hit someone, or it might have simply fallen to the ground.

"...Tigre?" At this moment Elen finally noticed that Tigre's state was different from usual. While restraining the enemies by swinging Silver Flash sideways, she peeked at the youth's expression with a sidelong glance.

Without answering her, Tigre nocked a new arrow into his black bow. His target didn't change. And the released arrow dropped down among the Muozinel soldier far in front of him, not to mention reaching Kureys.



"You, don't tell me..." Having said this much, Elen swallowed her breath. (Format: green text) She had realized that Tigre wouldn't hear anything she said right now.

Tigre exhibited an abnormal level of concentration on a battlefield where drawn blades clashed next to him and where bellows and screams filled the air. Even the wind's rustling as it caressed his dull red hair and the bloodstained sleeves of his clothes didn't cause Tigre to even blink once. His black eyes never veered from their target.

He fired his third arrow. This one didn't reach Kureys either.



Kureys Shahim Balamir stared at Tigre, who was readying his black bow in the distance, with great interest. Just like Tigre had decided to precisely aim at Kureys, who was sitting on his palanquin, the red-bearded prince was completely perceiving Tigre's figure as he sat on his horse.

However, Kureys couldn't grasp Tigre's intention right away. Even though the battle had transitioned towards a direct clash between soldiers, countless arrows were still flying across the battlefield. The arrows shot by Tigre were of course among those as well, but there was no way for Kureys to trace each and every single of them.

The moment when Kureys started to feel uncomfortable was when Tigre's fourth arrow aimed towards Kureys missed. As if having a blade thrust at his throat, Kureys experienced a strange feeling of oppression.

—Is it because that youngster is looking at me?

Kureys had noticed Tigre's stare long ago. It was exactly because he had noticed it that he himself was now observing Tigre as well. Otherwise it would have been impossible for Kureys to pay any attention to him, even if the enemy supreme commander might have approached up to a distance of merely 400 alsin. Kureys was a supreme commander as well. He had to continuously move the soldiers while incessantly speculating about the next enemy moves.

—I understand from his scanty movements that he has been firing arrows without time to take a break...

It was that moment when Kureys wondered whether Tigre might actually be targeting himself. Him not having thought of this possibility until now was probably what you'd call a human's boundedness.

'Even though just making an arrow fly to a point 300 alsin away isn't a human feat anymore; does that mean someone can make it fly even further? I have no doubt, a person, who can achieve such a feat, isn't human.

Even as he logically believed so, Kureys couldn't scoff at what Tigre was doing.

'Why am I feeling an indescribable uneasiness if it won't reach me anyway? Isn't it maybe because I'm pondering about it like this? I thought that I would definitely be safe at this distance. But, is that really the case? Aren't the arrows fired by that youngster getting closer and closer with each shot?

At this moment Kureys hesitated which was atypical for him. The biggest reason was that retreating any further would make giving commands somewhat difficult, but above that, even he needed two seconds to abandon his prejudices about the reach of an arrow. Compared to an ordinary person, it was an extremely quick process of concluding and deciding, but if restricted to now and here, it was too slow. That short moment was plenty for Tigre nock and shoot a new arrow.

That arrow flew through the air while drawing a trajectory different from the ones before. To Kureys it looked as if it was flying over slowly, but if one considered that a body wouldn't respond at the speed of thought, it had to be a suitable flight speed. Kureys slanted his body in unusual desperation.

The arrow grazed his temple. It felt hot. Blood flew through the air. The violet cloth coiled around his head was torn, came apart, and slid off his shoulders to his knees. Kureys placed both his hands on the palanquin's ground, propping up his own body. His whole face started to get drenched in sweat. If he had been a second too late with dodging, the arrow would have doubtlessly penetrated his forehead.

"What a..." A hoarse groan escaped his red beard.

Just when was the last time he had released such a voice on the battlefield? And even during that time, the blood flowing from his temple was dyeing his left cheek crimson. It was at this moment that Kureys' aides finally reacted.

"Your Excellency...!" One of them brought his horse close to the palanquin, and another two stood in front of Kureys, serving as shields.

In the next instant, an arrow stabbed the forehead of one of them, and he slid off his horse. It wasn't a stray arrow, but one that had been precisely aimed.

"Retreat! Quickly fall back! Didn't you hear, hurry!?" Regardless of appearance, an aide waved his hands, shouting at the men shouldering the palanquin.

Even while being bewildered, the men followed that order. In the meanwhile another aide had his nape stabbed by an arrow.

"A 'fiendish demon' (Martikhal)...!" A single aide screamed with his voice trembling.

It was a monster's name which had been handed down since ancient times in Muozinel. Whether the target might be an elephant or a lion, that monster was said to bring about death by just breathing at them, as if being stabbed by a scorpion, while never actually being witnessed.

While Kureys stopped his bleeding by pressing the violet cloth against his temple, he watched his panicking aides as if it didn't concern him at all. His thinking hadn't stopped. However, because he had to reconsider his tactics from scratch, he was preoccupied with that matter.

'A man capable of hitting a target 400 alsin away with an arrow. I have to set up my tactics under the premise that someone like that is among the enemies.

Another arrow flew. That arrow made its way through the gaps between the aides, and pierced Kureys' chest. The greatest of all commanders on the continent with the alias Red Beard collapsed on the palanquin after fainting.

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When Kureys woke up, he was inside his own tent.

"What about the battle?" Those were his first words as he abruptly raised his body.

His small, thin physician, and two aides stood next to Kureys's resting place.

Suddenly he felt a sharp pain at his temple. Once he touched the place, he noticed that it had been bandaged. When he looked down on his body, he saw that he was wearing a loose, white robe. Bandages likewise covered the area from his shoulders to his chest.

At this point, Kureys remembered what happened right before he fainted.

"What about the battle?" He asked once more while gazing at his aides. His voice was calm and didn't seem to contain any emotions.

Still, it likely wasn't a question that would require this much courage to answer. The two aides looked at each other, and one of them timidly replied, "The royal capital didn't fall."

"I see."

There was no anger in Kureys' voice.

"Very likely someone has given the order to stop the attack because I lost consciousness. It must have been a call to station more soldiers at my side for the sake of protection.

"Is it still daytime, or has the sun gone down already?"

"It's evening, Your Excellency. Umm..." Although the aide hesitated, he continued his report after making up his mind. He knew that Kureys' anger would erupt if he remained silent. "Your Excellency, you have slept for a whole day. The battle took place yesterday."

"Yesterday?" Kureys widened his hollow eyes.

He couldn't believe it so suddenly. Even he himself knew that the wounds at his temple and chest weren't grave. However, he also knew that it was impossible for those two aides to feed him such a lie.

When he told them to bring some alcohol, his physician entreated him to keep it to water at least for today while prostrating. Therefore Kureys reluctantly had them bring him some water.

"Come to think of it, was there poison at the wound's opening?" Kureys asked his physician while accepting a silver cup filled with water. Upon being told that there was nothing like that, he laughed, making his red beard tremble. "It was a remarkable hit. Tigre...right, it was Tigrevurmud Vorn, wasn't it? I guess it means I was saved by that man's immaturity."

At this time Kureys clearly voiced out Tigre's name. It was also the moment he distinctly identified Tigre as an enemy he must defeat. Of course Kureys had been highly evaluating Tigre's archery skills, but if he were pushed to comment, the title of Star Shooter (Silvash) was something he had bestowed upon Tigre with the intention to add prestige to an opponent who managed to repel him.

But just now Kureys had said Tigre's name with a feeling of admiration from the bottom of his heart. Tigre had exceeded Kureys' imagination a second time.

"Haahaha. It looks like I had been unwittingly stuck in common sense, too. So humans can shoot arrows over a distance going beyond 300 alsin." The aides secretly glanced at each other upon those words. They wanted him to stick to common sense by all means here. Otherwise it would be quite likely that he would start ordering promising archers to shoot their arrows beyond 300 alsin.

While drinking his water, Kureys urged the aides to continue with their recount.

"We managed to escape from the Brune army that came assaulting us."

With Kureys fainted, the Muozinel army succumbed to chaos. By then they had become unable to stop Tigre's and Elen's charge.

After the Moonlight Knight Army broke through the Muozinel army as if bisecting it, their flank was attacked by Ekrem's unit which had been attacking the southern wall, but the Moonlight Knight Army repelled them. Because more than half of Ekrem's unit was still attacking the wall, they couldn't deliver a powerful blow.

Moreover, the Moonlight Knight Army timed their withdrawal from the battlefield, and headed eastwards. The 10,000 Muozinel soldiers, who had been attacking the eastern wall, tried to stop them, but this was prevented by another force which suddenly showed up.

"Another force...?"

"It was Zhcted's army. They numbered around 500." The aide's voice was overflowing with rage, which he couldn't subdue, as he answered Kureys' question.

"Many people said that they saw a flag with a golden wand and a green tract of land, in addition to the Black Dragon flag. It's the flag of the Principality of Polesia, I think."

It was the army led by Sofya Obertas. The Moonlight Knight Army was approaching its limit after having repelled Ekrem's unit. If not for her reinforcement, they would have certainly suffered heavy losses even if they managed to escape.

Kureys was listening to these reports with an expression as if it was somebody else's problem. As it had already happened, nothing could be done about it anyway.

"You're saying the enemy escaped to the east just like that then?"

Once Kureys asked to make sure, tears of frustration welled up at the corners of the aide's eyes. "It is as you say. I'm terribly sorry."

While silently looking down on the aide as he was deeply bowing his head, Kureys touched the wound at his temple. He felt pain and itching at the same time.

"You don't know where they went after escaping east?"

"Sir General sent out scouting parties, but at present they haven't reported anything..."

Next Kureys had them report the losses of the army. The army, which Kureys had commanded himself, lost 4,000 soldiers. This was largely owed to the chaos triggered by Kureys fainting. The confused soldiers, who didn't receive any orders, were overrun by the Moonlight Knight Army as it broke through. At the same time he was informed that Damad had been apparently taken prisoner.

Yargash's unit lost 5,000 battle slaves and 2,000 cavalrymen. Ekrem's unit lost 5,000 battle slaves. The losses of the units deployed in the north and west amounted to 1,000 battle slaves. The unit deployed in the east lost 2,000 cavalrymen and 3,000 battle slaves as well as soldiers. Of course there were many wounded on top of that.

The majority of their losses occurred when they withdrew from the wall. After all, they had to pull out while under enemy attack.

Furthermore, the Moonlight Knight Army atop the wall temporarily recovered its energy after watching the hard struggle of Tigre's army. As if identifying this as the crucial moment, they mustered their remaining strength and threw themselves at the attackers.

After Kureys fainted, the Muozinel army transported Kureys to his tent, and spread out so as to defend the camp. Ekrem and Yargash were excellent generals, but they couldn't replace Kureys. Thus, they had no choice but to act like this.

—We have lost more than 20% of the army stationed here, huh?

As one would expect, even Kureys could only sigh at that. 'However, I'm happy that Ekrem and Yargash are still in good shape. Having lost Damad hurts, but it's no fatal loss.

—It won't change the situation that the capital needs just one more little push. We have plenty of food and materials, too.

'Although they managed to run away, Tigrevurmud Vorn's army should have suffered considerable losses. Even if they stage yet another offensive, I'm confident that we can deal with it. There's also 500 cavalymen of Zhcted army, which seem to be new reinforcements. We will reorganize the army, and launch another general offensive on the capital. It's possible to surmise just how exhausted in body and mind the enemies atop the wall are, going by the losses of the units that attacked the western and northern walls. They were only able to defeat 1,000 enemies, who turned their backs on them after suddenly abandoning the offensive, because it was daytime.

It was just when Kureys decided this course of action. Suddenly it became busy outside his room. Given that the partitions of each room were tent planes, speaking voices and footsteps easily reached his ears.

One of his aides frowned and stood up. After bowing to Kureys, he left the room in a jog. Then he harshly scolded the people who had been talking outside for some reason.

However, before Kureys could count to ten, that aide rushed back into the room with a changed expression. He was tightly grasping a letter in his hands. All blood had drained from his face, it was obvious from the movements of his attire's cuffs that his knees were trembling.

"What happened?" Kureys tried to calm him down by asking indifferently.

After he pushed out his silver cup to his physician, ordering him to bring him another cup of water, he looked back at the aide.

The aide pressed his hand against his chest as if putting up with intense pain, and then held out the letter after falling on both knees in front of Kureys.

He squeezed out a frantic voice, "It's an urgent message...from our home country...His Majesty the King has passed away."

Even a man of Kureys' level needed a short moment to understand the meaning of those words.

The king of Muozinel, in other words, his older brother. At the time when Kureys departed while leading 150,000 soldiers, he was the very picture of health. Other than the serious illness during his youth, he was sure to not have suffered from illness.

Receiving the letter with mechanical movements, he opened and read through it. Only the facts were

dispassionately recorded in the handwriting of Muozinel's prime minister. It said that the illness from his past relapsed, and after laying in sickbed for a month, he died. And, the prime minister requested Kureys' return for the sake of avoiding chaos within the national politics.

There were four children fathered by the Muozinel king. Two princes and two princesses, or nephews and nieces in Kureys' eyes. Problematic was that even the first prince, the oldest among them, was merely twelve years old. The king of Muozinel turned 45 years this year.

"His Majesty has..." Kureys closed his eyes. His face looked as if he was praying to the gods.

Of course, he did that as well. His relationship with his brother was quite good. Otherwise it would be unimaginable for him to go on an expedition while leading 150,000 soldiers in his position as royal prince. And then, once he offered his prayers to the gods for a peaceful rest of his brother's soul, Kureys pragmatically sorted his thoughts with eyes still shut.

—Going by this letter, my brother died around thirty days ago. Considering the distance from Muozinel to here, the prime minister has likely dispatched messengers right away. The secret feuds must have begun already.

The princes, the guardians of the princesses, and the nobles, who saw this situation as a perfect opportunity, were sure to move around in order to crown a person advantageous to them. And, it was only natural that those people regarded Kureys as an enemy.

Kureys was 39 years old. It was an age that couldn't be considered neither young nor old. He was someone who had achieved glorious deeds of arms, enjoying a deep trust among the soldiers. Moreover, he had the experience of participating in national politics. He was fairly suitable as next king.

Kureys put strength into the hand caressing the red beard. He should have been able to conquer the royal capital Niece during the course of yesterday. If Kureys hadn't fainted, he would have resumed the attack on the wall after destroying the detached army led by Tigre, capturing the capital.

—Once more...

"No good," Kureys muttered soundlessly.

Even if he were to force Niece to surrender, there was still Tigre. After the greater part of the Muozinel army pulled out, he would likely show up to recapture the capital. Even if he were to tell him to come out while using Princess Regin as a hostage, there was no guarantee that he would show himself. If things went wrong and got prolonged, the situation would become troublesome for Kureys.

'Should I assign the army to one of the generals and leave this land to them after taking the capital then? I think that's impossible as well.' Putting aside if it's some town, but if it came to ruling the capital, there was no one besides Kureys who had enough ability to pull that off.

'Should I thoroughly plunder the capital after capturing it, and then go home while taking the loot with me? This seems to be the most realistic option, but it will naturally lower our marching speed. Also, I don't know how Tigre, who ran away and is hiding now somewhere, is going to move.

—The soldiers will probably fall into a state of panic...

Once they were to hear about the king's death, the soldiers could be expected to succumb to anxiety altogether. It wasn't an issue of loyalty towards Kureys. This was the soil of a foreign country, far away from Muozinel. Several dozen days passed since they left their hometowns. Leave alone battle, they were going to

worry about their hometowns.

—Just one day...

He touched the place where the arrow stabbed his chest. 'Just one day. For everything to come to nothing just because I fainted.

He felt the urge to loudly scream out that absurdity. Kureys had respected his brother, but he wanted to vent his complaints at his brother with all his heart. 'Why did you die? And moreover, at such a time.

'No, if the message had arrived much earlier, I wouldn't be tormented by such an intense rage.

However, no matter what he thought, he knew better than anyone else that it was meaningless. He had no choice but to deal with reality as it came to pass.

After his long silence, Kureys started with a heavy sigh, and then he calmly announced, "We're going to withdraw. Once we gain some distance from the capital, we will shift into a forced march."

However, he had no intention to return empty-handed. Kureys switched to words full of anger, and said with ambition burning in his hollow eyes, "Send a messenger to Murat. Tell him to completely plunder the three port towns, Massilia, Rameille, and Agdeau. He is to enslave all residents, and carry away even the houses' building stones in thirteen...no, less than twelve days. Tell him to leave nothing behind except for the wharf."

This wasn't an order for revenge or whatsoever. It was his duty to pay the soldiers, who he brought along to this place, their salary. If he were to be negligent on that part, he would immediately lose the soldiers' trust which he had built up so far.

If it was pillaging in the port towns, they could immediately transport the loot to their home country as long as they could provide ships. It wouldn't slow down the march either. Kureys would also be able to keep up the morale of the soldiers by telling them that they would be paid their salaries as soon as they arrived at a port town.

Once he returned to Muozinel, internal discord awaited him next. To move freely around, Kureys, who had fallen behind by several dozen days compared to the lords and other royals, had to preserve the loyalty of the soldiers following him now to lead them even after their return.



The Muozinel army had finished its preparations to withdraw in the time between dusk and dawn. After forming orderly ranks while showered by the early morning's sunlight, they were about to depart from the capital. It was at that time that Kureys informed all soldiers about the death of Muozinel's king. And on top of that, he gave them a promise as royal prince.

"I will pay your rewards from my own fortune. For now, just think about returning home alive. For those desiring war, I will prepare an opportunity to gain riches and honor as well as to obtain merits of war — on the next battlefield."

Telling the soldiers about the king's death was a measure to prevent the possibility that Brune would get its hands on this information in some way and officially announce it first. Such news had less of an impact when communicated by an ally rather than the enemy.

The generals following him all equally anticipated that the next battlefield might be one where fellow Muozinel people would fight each other. And, as if it was very natural, they intended to accompany Kureys, Ekrem, Yargash, and the others as well. Their mortification over having to give up the capital after coming this far was no inferior to their lord in any way.

—Twelve days later the Muozinel army left Brune's soil. What they gained were merely meager deeds of arms, and the loot and slaves they pillaged in three port towns.



Tigre, Elen, Mila, Sofy reunited three days after the Muozinel army had retreated from Nice.

After they had rescued Tigre's forces from the Muozinel army's attacks on the fortieth day of the battle over the capital, the 500 cavalymen of Polesia's army led by Sofy acted separately from the Moonlight Knight Army. It was for the sake of misleading the Muozinel army by splitting into two. Also, Sofy made them investigate the surrounding areas before returning to the capital, discovering several places where 500 cavalymen could hide if the need arose.

There were a few reasons why it took this much time for the four of them to meet, but probably the biggest one among them was their inability to completely abandon the possibility that the Muozinel army's retreat might be some kind of trap. The Moonlight Knight Army had no spare energy left to fight any longer and thus they couldn't afford to not tread carefully.

Only after receiving a report that the Muozinel army had reintegrated the garrison in the city of Laferte, which was two days away from the capital, into its own army, just had requisitioned provisions, and left without even pillaging, they judged that the Muozinel army was apparently retreating for real.

It was just past noon of that day when the more than 14,000 soldiers of the Moonlight Knight Army led by Tigre and Elen showed up on the east side of Nice. They first set up camp because it was likely that they would live there for several days, seeing as it was impossible for such a number of soldiers to enter the capital.

At the time when they had finished building the camp, the 500 cavalymen of Polesia's army came into sight in the far distance. And then Mila came over from the capital as well. Having the front gate opened a tiny bit for herself, she had used a ladder - but not one that had been abandoned by the Muozinel army - crossed the moat, and arrived in front of Tigre and the others.

"We both look quite terrible, don't we?" The blue-haired Vanadis grinned as she looked up to Tigre.

Even though they had rested a bit after the Muozinel army withdrew, the hair of both was disheveled, traces of fatigue were carved into their faces, and their clothes as well as armors were dirty. As for Tigre, he didn't wear his leather armor since it had been damaged in the battle.

However, the youth extended his hand towards Mila with a smile, saying, "It's wonderful that both of us are safe and sound."

Mila nodded, and grasped his hand. This might have been the moment when she finally felt relieved from the bottom of her heart. Next, Mila also exchanged a handshake with Elen.

"I suppose, you didn't hold back at all, did you? Aren't you quite composed?"

"I will return those words right back to you. Watching from above, it did look very grave."

It wasn't clear who of them had put strength into their grip first, but both immediately glared at each other while cladding themselves in threatening auras. Tigre pulled their hands apart with a fed-up expression.

"Oh my, are you two fighting again?"

Elen and Mila had their shoulders jump in surprise due to the calm and gentle voice. Tigre turned around into the direction of that voice. Seeing the woman standing there, a smile naturally formed on his lips.

"Long time no see, everyone."

A loosely waving, golden hair, and eyes with the color of beryl. She was wearing thin, silken clothes, which covered her body while tracing her abundant curves, and an overcoat which was beautifully colored in green and white. What she was grasping in her slender fingers was a golden bishop's staff which combined an assembly of rings, her draconic tool, Zaht.

"The first time in half a year, I think. Thanks for your timely help before, Sofy."

Although Sofy was on the verge of smiling broadly upon Tigre's words, she immediately tightened her expression, giving precedence to her official position, and then bowed elegantly with a smile.

"The last time we have seen each other in person was the Solar Festival, wasn't it Your Excellency Earl Vorn. I have come to this territory after receiving a precious letter from a colleague. Allow me to congratulate you as Vanadis and friend for winning the war and staying in good health, Your Excellency."

Tigre also straightened his back and formally expressed his gratitude towards Sofy, "It is I who should say so. You have my deepest gratitude for helping us at a critical moment. This victory was only possible through the cooperation of Zhcted. I'd like you to inform His Majesty Viktor as such."

"I shall definitely pass your words on without a single alteration."

Once they had finished their official greetings in such a manner, Sofy changed her smile into a carefree one, and continued, "I certainly didn't expect in the least that I would be able to meet you again so quickly."

When she smiled broadly, her sweetness, which seemed to be more that of a common town girl than that of a Vanadis, was standing out.

Tigre embarrassingly scratched his darkish red hair, laughing softly, "Me neither. It's our reunion after a long time, and yet it had to be under such circumstances. I'm sorry."

However, Sofy slowly shook her head without grimacing, "Don't worry about something like that. It's obvious at a single glance how eagerly you struggled. Considering that fact, you're very cool."

The golden-haired Vanadis extended her hand. Tigre followed her lead, and both of them shook their hands.

Sofy thanked the youth with a soft voice full of affection, "Well done, Tigre."

Afterwards, Sofy exchanged greetings with Elen and Mila as well. The states of the two Vanadis weren't all that different from Tigre. After praising her friends for fighting so hard once more, Sofy didn't forget to give them a warning, "But, you mustn't fight."

"Come to my tent for the time being. There I can at least serve you some wine."

There were plenty of things he wanted to talk about and listen to. Also, there was no concern about someone listening in when it came to the supreme commander's tent.

The four went inside the Moonlight Knight Army's camp, and entered Tigre's tent while being showered by the soldiers' surprised looks.

"By the way, do you..."

Tigre turned around towards Sofy, about to open his mouth in order to ask her whether there was something she would like to eat. However, before he could even finish that question, he was tightly hugged by Sofy.

She put her right hand, which still held the bishop's staff, and left hand around his back. Her golden hair lightly tickled his cheek, and her breathing grazed his shoulder. Her rich, soft breasts were pushed against Tigre's body. Naturally, this also caused Tigre to be surprised and flustered.

Elen and Mila were staring at the two, dumbstruck.

"S-Sofy...?"

Sofy didn't answer, only holding onto Tigre tightly. An unnatural silence ruled the tent. It was only after ten seconds had passed that this silence dissipated. Sofy breathed out slightly, and released her embrace. Then she faintly tilted her face, and laughed.

"That now was a little congratulation. You have really held out well out there, Tigre," she said with a genuine smile.

Tigre couldn't say anything in reply. Above all because he understood that her calling it a congratulation was no lie at all. But then again, Elen and Mila seemed to have difficulties to agree with this. Elen folded her arms, and Mila pressed her hands against her waist, both glaring at Sofy while feeling angry.

"Sofy, I might be ill-informed, but I have never heard anything about such a congratulation method."

"Me neither. Besides, I feel like it was overly long for a congratulation."

Sofy didn't flinch away at all from those two who didn't even try to hide their irritation. She turned towards the two while making the hem of her long skirt wave, and stepped forward in a very natural manner, hugging Elen.

"Of course you two will receive my congratulations as well. First up is Elen."

Sofy caught Elen by surprise. She stood stock still on the spot with her face bright red while raising a quiet voice. However, without showing any further resistance than that, Elen silently accepted her fate.

"Not just the battle against Sachstein, but even against Muozinel... I think you really did your best, Elen."

Next, Sofy hugged Mila in the same way. Even while donning a slightly awkward expression, Mila submissively let Sofy hug her. For one thing, she had a reason. After all she felt obliged as she came to Brune while entrusting the defense of Zhcted's south to Sofy and Olga. On top of that, Sofy's manner as she hugged her told Mila that it wasn't just a perfunctory action, but an expression of Sofy's genuine joy over her safety. Mila couldn't treat her rudely.

Once the hugging rally came to an end, the four immediately exchanged information. Beginning with the war against Sachstein, Tigre, Elen, and Mila talked about the rebellion in Brune, the battle against Greast, up to the fights against the Muozinel army in alternation.

"We still don't know why the Muozinel army pulled back. However I think something might have happened to Kureys, or some events took place in their home country." Tigre said with a conflicted expression.

In response, Sofy nodded lightly, "I do have an idea about that."

The golden-haired Vanadis then spoke about the letter she obtained from the Muozinel army in Agnes several dozen days ago.

"According to that letter, Muozinel's king seems to have come down with an illness."

"King as in Kureys' brother?"

"Yes. Their brotherly relationship appears to be very good. However, since Muozinel's king should have been healthy in the last few years, it's difficult to imagine that Kureys would decide to retreat just because of an illness."

Elen groaned with a frown at Sofy's words.

"In other words, something going beyond an illness took place, I suppose."

The four looked at each other, understanding that all of them were thinking the same.

Mila shrugged her shoulders, "To be honest, I think the city would have fallen if it had been attacked a day longer. Considering that..."

"I guess that means, all we can do is to ascertain whether they are really going to withdraw."

Tigre looked up to the lamp hanging from the tent's canopy with a weary expression.

—I couldn't win.

Even though he accomplished the feat of extending his archery range, allowing him to succeed in his reckless, last-moment plan. In the battle two years ago and also in this one Kureys withdrew while abandoning victory on the very last stretch. It wasn't Tigre who made Kureys give up on the battle with his own abilities.

"—Tigre." Elen lightly tapped the back of the youth, and said with a bright smile, "You protected this country to the end. That's what it means to win."

Tigre blankly stared at his lover, and then blushed within a moment. He roughly churned his hair which had become a weird habit of his by now.

"Your right, yep."

Mila gazed at the two, who laughed and looked at each other, with mixed feelings.

Evening of that day, Tigre and the others passed through the capital's gate, and had an audience with Regin in the royal palace.

Tigre honestly reported that he managed to hit Kureys with an arrow but didn't know whether he shot him down, and Sofy explained her thoughts about the health condition of Muozinel's king.

"Understood. We will start an investigation from our side as well." Regin said as she sat on the throne, and then thanked Tigre's group.

"Earl Vorn, what do you think, when will the Muozinel army leave this country?"

"I believe they will hasten their pace once they distance themselves from the capital far enough that they won't be pursued any longer. That probably means they will be gone in twelve to fourteen days."

And then the youth had to voice out an ill-omened prediction with a bitter expression. This was nothing he had come up by himself, but something that had been pointed out by Mila.

"They might possibly leave only after pillaging the port towns."

"...That's quite likely."

After staying silent for a short moment first, Regin nodded with a serious expression. She couldn't come up with an idea why they, who wouldn't hesitate to plunder, would hold back in this case.

"But, Earl Vorn, even if what you've said comes true, it is my task to resolve it. Make sure to not forget that."

Regin told Tigre that there was no need for him to feel responsible. The youth formally expressed his thanks to the blonde-haired princess.

Afterwards Regin told Prime Minister Badouin, who was standing next to her, to loosen the vigilance across the entire capital. Of course they couldn't completely relax their attention yet. Albeit hurrying back home, the Muozinel army was still on Brune's soil, and their total number amounted to more than 100,000 soldiers. On the other hand, Brune's side had less than half of that.

'However, they at least won't be able to stage such a large-scaled siege like the one several days ago right away, I think,' Regin had judged. It was not just her, but even Mashas, Lim, Mila, Olivier, and all those experienced in war were strongly convinced of that.

Several tens of days later, several reports were delivered to the capital. About the Muozinel army's retreat, and their looting in Massilia, Rameille, and Agdeau. After receiving those reports, Regin announced Brune's victory.

The curtain of the war against Muozinel had fallen for the time being.

## **Epilogue**

"My, oh my."

Those were the first words of Sofy at the time when she heard about Tigre and Elen having become lovers from Mila in Mila's room in the royal palace.

Just as she had been asked by Tigre to not tell anyone, Mila had intended to keep it a secret from Sofy, but when the two were having a light chat, Sofy suddenly asked her whether there was something going on between Tigre and Elen.

When Mila played dumb, asking, "What do you mean in particular?", she got an unexpected reply.

"Looking at you recently, it seems to me as if you're looking at the two enviously. Besides, I feel like the distance between Tigre and Elen has visibly shrunken."

Mila reflexively hung her head in shame with her cheeks dyeing red. She was certainly aware of it herself that her eyes had recently often been chasing Tigre, but for that to have been observed by someone else was a shock to her.

It was the night when many reports were delivered to Nice, including the one about the Muozinel army's retreat. Many of those serving in the royal palace were still busy handling postwar matters. There was also the word going around that a celebratory banquet would be held in several days.

While the lords, knight squad leaders, as well as their subordinate soldiers and knights went back to their fortresses and territories, Mila and the others were still remaining in the capital.

Furthermore, there were also some like knight squads which visited the capital to make their reports. When Cauvin, the leader of the Severac Knight Squad, showed up in the capital, Tigre and Earl Bouroullec postponed their various preparations, rushed over to his place, and celebrated his safe return.

Currently it was Mila and the other Zhcted people who were under no stress in the royal palace, but you couldn't say that Elen and Lim had overly much free time because they had to manage the soldiers and draw up written reports about the chain of events, starting with the Sachstein war. By the way, Sofy had Polesian cavalrymen return to Zhcted to deliver a report she had written herself.

For such a reason, it came to be that Mila and Sofy were talking with each other a lot. Today evening Mila had expected that they would enjoy yet another silly chat. Until she was asked about this by Sofy, that is.

— Hiding it is also pointless, isn't it?

Mila quickly gave up on cheating her way out of this. Mila didn't think that she would be able to hide it from Sofy. Besides, there was also something she wanted to consult Sofy about.

After complaining about Tigre and Elen for a bit, Mila shyly asked, "Tigre and Elen marrying...you think something like that would be possible?"

"Well, you can't say with finality that it's impossible, can you?" Pressing a finger against her well-shaped chin as if pondering about it, Sofy replied. "I was sure you might have known, Mila. About Foumar."

"...About the 『Northern Sea Baron』 (Nordmabal)?"

Foumar was a man who had lived approximately a hundred years ago. His origins were unclear.

Back then the Asvarre Kingdom was plagued by pirates. The pirates repeatedly devastated the coastal cities. They attacked convoys of trade ships, stealing their load, and sinking the ships. They instilled a lot of fear among the people. The king of Asvarre ordered his retainers to subjugate the pirates many times, but the results were unsatisfactory. The one who appeared in front of Asvarre's king, whose irritation was growing by the day, was Foumar. At the audience with the king who asked him for his business, he boasted that he would completely eradicate the pirates by himself.

"Humph, at best you will just ask me to provide you with a large fleet and countless soldiers, am I right?"  
The king rejected his claim bitterly.

In response, Foumar said, "With all due respect, I don't need a single ship or soldier. I will prepare the rest by myself."

And then Foumar continued that he would like to have a reward if he managed to purge the pirates. "I would like to be granted peerage by you. Though I don't need a territory."

Asvarre's king didn't believe Foumar, but thinking that he wouldn't suffer any losses even if he were to fail, the king complied with his request, and officially ordered him to subjugate the pirates. Afterwards, Foumar boarded a single galley with his friends and mercenaries, and left the port. And then he really managed to drive away the pirates. Foumar had been endowed with ample abilities as sailor, warrior, and army commander.

Following their agreement, the king appointed Foumar to baron after his triumphal return. However, Foumar didn't stay in Asvarre, but headed to Brune instead. Brune was troubled by pirates who had suddenly shown up in the northern seas. Those pirates were the ones who had been thoroughly defeated by Foumar at Asvarre's coast, but back then Brune didn't know about that.

Foumar had an audience with Brune's king, and the conversation between him and the king was the same as the one he had held with Asvarre's king. Foumar stated that he would exterminate the pirates wrecking Brune's coasts, and Brune's king gave him the order to do so.

Fouma gained victory here as well, and was appointed to baron by Brune's king. At that time Brune's king had learned of Fouma being a baron of Asvarre, but he deliberately granted him the title in Brune, making Fouma a man serving two countries.

Hereafter, Fouma headed to Zhcted. Even there he subjugated pirates, and was conferred the title of baron by Zhcted's king. Zhcted's king could have ordered the Vanadis to subjugate the pirates, but he chose to go with Fouma because he didn't want to give the Vanadis an opportunity to gain deeds of arms. Like this Fouma became a man serving three countries.

Then Fouma began to do business, a trade of freely going back and forth between the three countries. He had two points putting him ahead of other merchants: first, his exemption from taxes, and second, him loading the trade goods on his own ship, a warship, while boldly using military ports as a noble. Those two advantages were powerful, allowing Fouma to pile up a tremendous fortune in little time. It was apparently around that time that he was given the nickname of Northern Sea Baron.

It's said that even later on he cleverly sailed between the three countries, working as triple spy and offering his services as warrior whenever there was a war between the countries like the one between Brune and Asvarre, for example.

And then, at some point, when he had lived up to an age of sixty, he boarded his own ship, departed to the sea, and vanished. There existed prominent theories stating that he sank together with his ship after encountering an unseasonable storm, but no one knew the truth.

As expected, there were no other cases such as Fouma, but if you searched the continent's history for people serving two countries, you would be able to find several.

"For a noble of Zhcted it's not unusual to marry a Vanadis. In reality, there exist several examples for that."

Mila felt a strange urge to refuse Sofy's remark, "You think that Tigre will be able to do something as skillful as serving Brune and Zhcted at the same time?"

"I think it's not impossible. It was the same when I was saved by him, but Tigre is highly evaluated in Zhcted, too. Even if a territory would be out of reach, a peerage would be another matter."

"I'm pretty sure that there would be strong opposition by the surrounding people."

"Indeed. That's why I only said that it's not impossible. But, I wonder whether it won't become an indicator for Tigre." Sofy smiled sweetly.

Mila pouted in discontent. Not because she was displeased with Sofy's suggestion, but because of her own emotions. If she were to tell him about this, Tigre would very likely consider it seriously. And if it went well, Tigre would be able to marry Elen officially. For that reason she felt like not wanting to tell him, or to put it simply, she was ashamed of her own lingering affections towards Tigre.

Guessing Mila's feelings, Sofy teasingly said, "Elen also said that he could have concubines, didn't she? What if you seized that position for yourself?"

"What stupid things are you blurting out there? As a Vanadis—" Mila refused bluntly.

"You can't be a Vanadis for eternity." Sofy gently responded as if to admonish her. "Someday we will stop being Vanadis. We don't know when it will happen, but this is no more than a temporary state. If you consider it like that, I think it's proper to think about and prepare for the time after in advance."

"Yes, but something like being a concubine is ridiculous."

"Isn't it fine if you get Elen to be the concubine while marrying him officially yourself then?" Perceiving that Sofy was asking this on purpose, Mila knitted her eyebrows.

"That's not it...getting married has love as prerequisite, right?"

"I wonder about that." Sofy tilted her head to the side in confusion.

Going by her attitude, it was obvious that her jesting air had faded away. As such, Mila refrained from objecting, and waited for her friend's words.

"My parents got married upon the introduction by a person at their workplace. I heard that they hadn't even known each other until right before marrying."

It wasn't unusual. Men and women at marriageable age didn't remain single unnoticed. People eager to poke their noses in the business of others existed everywhere. They would locate partners that seemed to be a good match after checking their age and income.

"In other words, my parents didn't marry on the prerequisite of being in love. And yet, they are so intimate with each other that it amazes me, their daughter, whenever I see them now. In spite of being old enough to know better."



Mila silently looked downwards as Sofy continued, "I think it's a joyful matter if there's love before the marriage. But, don't you think that it's dreamy to nurture the love between both parties after getting married? Going by your words, Tigre said that he would also foster the love with women that became his concubines, didn't he?"

Mila nodded reluctantly.

"I think that Tigre might unconsciously understand that love is something you nurture with your partner — or together with the people surrounding both. I believe that's why he said it in such a way. On the other hand, I think it's bad to be negligent in the effort of nurturing love just because there was a strong love between both beforehand."

"...So that means you have feelings for him, Sofy?"

"Yes. But at this rate, it looks like I will tell Tigre about my feelings before you do."

Mila donned a dumbfounded expression upon hearing Sofy's words.

Sofy continued, "Mila. Only once I will give you, who's doing her best, a chance."

"Chance?"

"A chance to confess your feelings to Tigre. If you dally around too much, I will have you let me go ahead first."

Mila was overcome with surprise and then became flustered. Based on the previous story about Foumar, she even felt that she had been led into a trap. For the time being, she rejected it while averting her eyes, "F-First, you say...it's not like there has been an order put in place, so you're free to do as you like, aren't you?"

"You're really fine with it?" Sofy tenderly peeked at the side of Mila's face. "Mila, it's important to have pride about being a Vanadis, but you have the bad habit of being tied down by that too much. Though it can't be helped in your case, I guess."

Mila's situation was somewhat different from those of the other Vanadis. Her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother had all been Vanadis. There likely didn't exist another Vanadis like her.

Mila remained silent. She wanted to answer that it wouldn't be so easy, but she herself knew that this would be no more than her reflexively opposing the idea, and not her real feelings. Besides, contrary to her, who had partly given up on it, Sofy could clearly voice out her affection towards Tigre. Once she took that into consideration as well, she even believed that she had no qualification to say anything.



Around that time the youth, who had already two lovers and was loved by another two Vanadis, was meeting with a single man in another room of the royal palace. It was the Muozinel soldier Damad.

The two sat on chairs with a table between them while drinking Brune's native wine together.

Damad fainted and fell off his horse after being defeated by Elen, but afterwards he clung to a Brune cavalryman, though he himself apparently didn't know how he did it.

That Brune cavalryman tried to shake off Damad, but the black-haired warrior didn't let go of the horse despite being unconscious. Moreover, since the Moonlight Knight Army broke through the enemy line in one go after Tigre made the Muozinel army falter by hitting Kureys with an arrow, he was helplessly dragged along. After the Moonlight Knight Army managed to completely break away from the Muozinel army, he naturally turned into a problem. Many held the opinion that a hateful Muozinel soldier should be killed on the spot, but Tigre didn't agree with that. Elen settled it with the conclusion, "I defeated this man, and that makes him my prisoner," with the intention to help her lover.

Afterwards Elen, who had heard about the circumstances from Tigre, happily transferred the prisoner, and Damad was confined in a room of the royal palace while being treated as Tigre's prisoner.

"—I see."

Damad, who had listened to the youth's story while tilting his wine cup, nodded, obviously understanding his situation, and then sighed after lowering his eyes on the table.

He was only wearing the linen clothes he wore on the battlefield. His armor and weapons had naturally been confiscated by Brune. He was fed and given water to wipe his body, but nothing else.

"So, why haven't you killed me?" Damad lifted his face, staring directly into Tigre's eyes.

Tigre ransacked his reddish hair with a troubled expression, "I could have done it on the battlefield, I think. But, if it's outside the battlefield..."

"...Well, I for sure feel thankful for being allowed to stay alive rather than being killed."

Those were Damad's true feelings. Typical for a Muozinel man, he had the dream of living in a mansion decorated by gold and jewels while using slaves and being waited upon by beautiful women. And Damad had steadily accumulated achievements towards that end. This time he had been exposed to the disgrace of becoming the enemy's prisoner of war, but it wasn't impossible to recover from that.

"What do I have to do so that I can get you to release me?" He bent himself forward, asking with a serious look.

Tigre didn't hate this directness and blunt attitude of his.

Smiling wryly, he answered, "Personally I wouldn't mind releasing you just like that, but I was told by the person, who took you prisoner first, to demand ransom at any cost."

Hearing the ransom's sum, Damad grimaced and glared at Tigre, "You don't really have any intention to let me go, do you? There's no way that I can prepare such a sum of money as a prisoner, is there? Also, it might be just my imagination, but you look like you're enjoying this."

"No, sorry. Well, to tell you the truth, I do enjoy it." Tigre replied with a smile despite knowing that it was an ill-natured enjoyment. After all he had fallen in a very similar situation two years ago.

"You're a guy with an unexpectedly nasty streak." Damad spit out while placing his emptied wine cup on the table, but he didn't seem to be truly angry.

At the very least he acknowledged that it was a situation caused by his own ineptitude.

"Alright, I got it. Introduce me to some kind of work then. Let it be one where I'll be able to earn the money quickly." Easily changing his mood, Damad said with an attitude that could be called brazen.

Even Tigre was dumbfounded by this. He looked at Damad's face, and started to chuckle.

"A work which a prisoner is allowed to do; that won't be anything decent. Above all, the wages will be low."

"No helping it. I'm a prisoner after all."

Damad laughed while looking quite unperturbed by this. Apparently he wasn't saying it as a joke, but meant it seriously.

"I will think it over." Tigre replied.



Several dozen days passed since Valentina Glinka Estes had visited Silesia, the capital of the Zhcted Kingdom. After she had finished reporting to the royal palace about the outcome of the war between Brune and Sachstein, she secretly stayed in the capital while pretending to have returned to her territory, Osterode.

Valentina had been spending more than half a day in a room of an inn said to never pry into its guests' identity in exchange for a large lodging fee. By the way, she adopted the means of having someone totally unrelated to her rent the room and then use that room for herself. It was a measure so that no one would ever find out about Valentina's presence, even if they were to investigate the identity of the guests.

Given that she didn't know whether she would be seen by someone, she never stepped outside the room while the sun was still up. Her activities only started after the sun went down.

On that day Valentina also left the inn after waiting for evening to come. She wore such a long cloak that it covered her whole body, and her face was hidden by the hood she had pulled down deeply, as she walked down the road wrapped up in darkness.

Her destination was a temple located in a corner of the capital. The temple's building was big, it had a garden, and its vicinity was surrounded by a thicket at waist-height. The necessary facilities had been mostly prepared as well. However, it was far from the main streets, and didn't stand out as more imposing temples could be found nearby. Even among the capital's citizens only very few visited this temple.

Valentina called out to a priest, getting his permission to enter. Even here she used the same method as she had when booking the inn room. The priest, who was guiding Valentina, believed that she was someone related to the royal family. To be precise, he wasn't wrong, but either way, he didn't know who she was, and probably didn't even imagine that he was dealing with a Vanadis.

There was a single man in the room to where Valentina had been shown through. He was in the later half of his thirties. His pale golden hair was tied up around his shoulders, extending towards his back. He had no beard, and regular, clear-cut facial features, but his eyes were somehow empty. His partly-opened mouth was similar to that of a child which was at a loss after having lost its way.

The man was sitting in the middle of the room while slovenly and messily wearing high-class, silken clothes. That room's floor was covered by a carpet, and high-quality blankets and cushions had been laid out, but nothing else. Not to mention a bed, it didn't even possess a table or chairs.

Valentina had come here to meet this man.

"How are you, Your Highness?" The black-haired Vanadis addressed the man with an affectionate smile.

Looking up to her, a voice similar to groaning escaped his mouth, "Valen...tina."

"Yes, it's me, Valentina. Please call me Tina, if you feel that Valentina is too long."

Him having become able to hold this conversation was something dating back to around ten days ago. Before that, he couldn't even blurt out meaningless words.

Valentina went down on her knees in front of the man, sat down, and held out the bronze cup in her hand. It was filled with water mixed with a certain medicine.

"Please drink this tonight again. It's a medicine that will cure your body, Your Highness."

The man extended his hand, took the bronze cup, and brought it to his mouth. Valentina carefully supported him so that he wouldn't spill any of the water. A small line ran down from the corner of his mouth, but the man drained all the water. After around ten seconds, it looked as if the man's face, which had been vacant, was shaken by faint waves of emotions.

— I guess today his physical condition is good.

One month had passed as she continued to make him drink this medicine every night. She wondered whether it wasn't about time for effects to start showing. However, the man shook his head as if troubled, and laid down on the carpet.

"Tina, somehow sleepy."

"Please take your time and sleep in that case." Valentina said gently while picking up the bronze cup that had rolled over on the carpet.

The man stared with a blank face at the Vanadis, but before long he closed his eyes and fell asleep.

The man's name was Ruslan. He was the son of Zhcted's king, and should have become heir to the crown if nothing had happened. However, a few years ago his mind afflicted an illness. Ever since then he had been confined in this temple under the pretext of recuperation from illness.

Valentina affectionately looked down on the man's sleeping face, "Your Highness, sweet dreams. —Let's dream together at some point in the future."

'A dream of obtaining this country.' When Valentina whispered those words, the light of ambition dwelt in her eyes, and a bewitching smile had formed on her lips. The black-haired Vanadis' dream was about to gain wings and take flight soon.



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