

Chapter 2 Part 3

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Riding on the back of a dragon mount, we are heading towards the Valugan Empire— at least that was how it was progressing, but the journey by means of dragon mounts was rather abrupt. That was why a problem arose.

"Captain Dorthos, we don't have enough dragon mounts!"

A shortage of dragon mounts had occurred.

"Haa, if we had Linos... No, even that wouldn't be enough."

Combining the number of dragon mount soldiers and us, it results in a slight overage in the count.

Dorthos clutched his head and scratched it vigorously, while the other soldiers wore equally pained expressions.

"While it's possible for three people to ride on a single dragon mount, it increases the risk of falling."

"Considering the stamina of the dragon mounts, it's best not to push them too hard."

"The Imperial capital is a distance away, so traveling back and forth will take time..."

Each dragon mount can carry about two people, with a slight possibility of overloading. However, the dragon mounts have traveled extensively before reaching this place, so it is best to avoid putting a heavy burden on them.

"What shall we do, Your Imperial Highness?"

"That means two of us won't be able to ride, right?"

"That's how it will be."

There are five dragon mount soldiers and seven of us, including Princess Valtrune, but there are only five dragon mounts.

If the dragon mount soldiers, who can control the dragon mounts, are riding on it, two of us must give up riding to the Empire on a dragon mount.

"I apologize. The dragon mounts are in high demand everywhere. Therefore, only we were able to come here..."

Dorthos lowered his head, looking apologetic.

Mia, who had been silently watching, interrupted.

"Can I say something? Actually, I have my own dragon mounts. So, if you leave me and one other person behind, the problem will be solved!"

Dorthos reacted to Mia's voice and quickly looked up. Then, after observing her closely, his face turned to surprise.

"C-Could it be that... you are the daughter of the Crimea Trading Company's President... Miss Mia?"

"Yes, that's why we own quite a few dragon mounts ourselves~"

"I see... So, that's how it is."



—Mia is the daughter of a trading company?

I had always sensed that she was from a wealthy family due to the occasional graceful demeanor she exhibited within her carefree attitude. However, I didn't know she was the daughter of a trading company.

"Heehh, Mia is the daughter of the Crimea Trading Company... I never knew."

"That's right. I'm as rich as a noble~!"

"I'm surprised, but stop with that smug look..."

I can understand why Steano was astonished. Petra, Ambros, and Flegel also appeared unaware of her background.

The Crimea Trading Company is one of the continent's renowned trading companies, with an influence comparable to a small country. It wouldn't be unusual for the daughter of such a company to possess numerous dragon mounts.

"So, problem solved... right?"

With this, the shortage of dragon mounts was resolved. Moreover, if she owned dragon mounts, arrangements for riders could also likely be made.

Everything was set to head to the Empire without delay... or so I thought, but someone objected. It was Princess Valtrune, standing beside me.

"There's no need for that. Aldia and I will stay in Philnotes."

For some reason, she outright rejected Mia's proposal.

"...Um, what are you saying, Valtrune-sama? Since Mia suggested it, I think we should accept her kindness?"

Petra snapped at those words. It wasn't clear what had upset her, but she glared at Princess Valtrune with an uncharacteristically confident attitude for a commoner. Despite Petra's reaction, the Princess responded with unwavering resolve.

"I'm sorry, but I cannot agree to that."

"Why not!?"

"As a princess of the Empire, I cannot head to my homeland, leaving behind my guests. Please understand."

We were treated strictly as guests. Her words implied that prioritizing us was natural. However, one point remained unexplained, and that was the matter of why the Princess and I should stay behind. If we were to head to the Empire on dragon mounts, only one person would not be able to ride. Therefore, there was no reason for both of us to stay behind. So, I had a strong feeling that she must have had some other purpose in mind.

"Your Imperial Highness, is there something going on, perhaps?"

Whispering softly in her ear, Princess Valtrune quietly nodded.

"There's something I want to discuss with you about the future. Do you have time?"

"Of course."

I don't know what it is about, but it's undoubtedly related to the upcoming battle against the Kingdom. Whenever she uses that cold, chilling tone, it usually involves matters concerning the Kingdom.

"Hey, what are you two whispering about?"

Petra casts a suspicious glance in our direction again. Thinking quickly, Princess Valtrune smiles brightly.

"It's nothing. I was asking if it would be alright to let our friends here ride the dragon mounts."

"As Her Imperial Highness mentioned, I'll head to the Empire later."

I went along with her story. Petra still had a look as if she wanted to say something, but Flegel, placing his hand on her shoulder, spoke,

"That's how it is. We shouldn't keep the dragon mount soldiers waiting too long. Let's go."

".....Alright."

He seemed to have sensed something and calmed Petra down. To be doubly sure, Ambros also stood beside Petra.

"Aldia, we're going ahead."

He looked right at me and told me so. Feigning calmness, I nodded at Ambros and waved my hand.

"Yeah, I'll be a little late, but I won't keep you all waiting too long. See you all in the Empire."

"We'll be waiting."

With various emotions, my friends took off into the sky. Princess Valtrune and I watched them soar.

"...Did you bring your friends into the fold so you wouldn't have to fight them if war breaks out?"

"Yes, that's right. I don't want to lose what's precious to me anymore. If they're within my reach, I thought I might be able to protect them using my past memories."

"I know you'll be able to protect them."

"I hope so..."

My friends, soaring high in the sky, were far beyond earshot of our conversation. Steano appeared tense from riding a dragon mount, Petra gazed downward at us, Ambros kept his thoughts inscrutable with his eyes closed, and Flegel stared intently at the distant Empire. As for Mia... eh?

—She is not on the dragon mounts!?

"Hey, hey. What's that conversation about?"

I turned around and found Mia standing there. I was totally caught off guard, as I had thought she was already on the dragon mounts. It occurred to me that she might have overheard my conversation with Princess Valtrune.

Wiping away the cold sweat, I exhaled deeply.

"...Mia? Um, how much did you listen to our conversation?"

"Mm? I didn't hear much, but words like '*war*' and '*protect*' came through. So, uh, what? Is there going to be a war!?"

—Oh, thank goodness.

If it were known that we are living our lives for the second time, it would have caused quite an uproar. I must choose my words carefully.

"Hey, Al? Is it war? Are we going to war? Hey~ answer me~"

I left Mia alone and got lost in thought because I was flustered. Now that she had heard the disturbing words in our conversation, it became clear that completely hiding the truth was impossible.

"Al, if you're going to keep secrets from me... I'll tell Petra-chan that you're keeping secrets from her!"

"No, please... anything but that..."

"Come on, come on, just spit it out~"

Leaking the conversation to Petra would be a problem, but it's different if she personally heard me reveal our regression.

I turned my gaze to Princess Valtrune. She appeared to understand what I wanted to convey and cleared her throat lightly to redirect Mia's attention to herself.

"Mia-san, allow me to briefly explain about our conversation."

".....Alright."

"First, concerning the possibility of a war..."

"Yes."

"It's likely that a full-scale war between the Empire and the Kingdom will break out within the next few years... But this is merely speculation."

We who know of the future war have absolutely no room for 'speculation' or optimism. However, stating it as a fact would raise suspicion.

"I see... So, the reason Al and Your Imperial Highness stayed back and didn't ride the dragon mounts was to discuss this?"

"Yes. Since he and I had shared this information, we were considering our next steps."

"I see, so that's what it was~"

Nothing false was said. I believe that Princess Valtrune had been preplanning various strategies for the war with the Kingdom. As we are both living our lives a second time, it's easier for us who are aware of past failures to devise countermeasures.

"I see. Then, may I ask why the Empire and the Kingdom will go to war?"

Mia approached the Princess with a more severe expression than before. For Mia, who hails from the Empire, the content of this conversation was not irrelevant.

Princess Valtrune did not attempt to hide anything and spoke honestly.

"It's because... I will break off my engagement with Prince Yuri. With the annulment of the engagement, relations between the Kingdom and the Empire will likely deteriorate."

She pointed out the crumbling relationship.

"From the way you say it, the engagement is still..."

"Yes, it continues. Formally, but that too is only just a matter of time. I'm sure I won't be able to come to an understanding with him."

I did not miss the change in Mia's complexion as she heard this.

—Many have their own thoughts regarding Prince Yuri.

While observing Mia's complexion, she continues to speak.

"Whether it will lead to war from there... I don't know either, but mending a relationship once it has broken down is a difficult thing."

Broken things cannot be easily fixed. Lost trust and the consequences of foolish actions will all return to haunt those who have invited disaster.

"I see..."

"So, Mia-san, you may also want to consider what you're going to do."

"Alright. Thank you very much for explaining the situation."

The deterioration of relations between the two countries has already begun. As a result, people are being compelled to choose what to believe in and which path to move forward on—*a decision that must be made.*