

Turning 35

Chapter 35

"How is everyone holding up?"

Kishiar, who had halted his steps to scrutinize the stone, turned to the others as though he had made some kind of assessment.

"We previously stopped a little further from here. Roughly, that's the limit we can endure while the gods protect our bodies."

General Gino answered first. He appeared calm on the surface, but as he drew closer to the stone, his movements gradually slowed. This signified that he was experiencing a pressure strong enough to restrict the movements of a Swordmaster.

"I, well, my skin hurts a bit, but I think I can go a bit further."

"Same here. It feels like something is pricking my face, but I can endure it."

"I'm in the same boat."

After Kanna's response, Hinn and Gakane also chimed in. Since Hinn would obviously share the same opinion as her brother, the only one left was Yuder.

"Me too."

"I'm the same as you lot. It's rather unpleasant but bearable. If all five of us are experiencing the same thing, it's likely due to us being Awakeners."

Kishiar grinned, seemingly amused. Before moving forward, he glanced towards the Red Stone and then gave a brief order to General Gino.

"General, there's no need for you to follow us to the limit. Just stay there. The Cavalry and I will be back."

"...Understood."

They began to move cautiously. Now, the stone was so close that they could touch it if they fell.

As they got closer to the stone, the prickling pressure on their skin increased, and every step became incomparably heavier. It was like forcefully traversing the depths of a turbulent sea.

However, it was not so painful that they'd collapse, spilling blood. It was surprisingly bearable, to a startling degree.

"Everyone, halt."

Finally, when Kishiar declared it was okay not to proceed any further, they were only about ten steps away from the stone.

'That's the Red Stone.'

He hadn't expected to see it this close, in this way. Yuder quietly gazed down at the half-buried Red Stone and took a deep breath.

'It's just a stone... But let's not let our guards down.'

"It looks surprisingly ordinary."

Kishiar, while looking at the red stone, verbalized what everyone was thinking.

"Now then... Kanna Wand."

"Yes? Uh, yes."

Kanna, startled by her name being called out of the blue, responded. Kishiar gave her a gentle smile.

"Do you think you can read that stone using your ability?"

At Kishiar's words, the same thought occurred to everyone, except Yuder.

'So that's why she was brought along.'

The others possessed abilities useful in combat, but not Kanna. If the reason she was chosen was to read the information from the Red Stone, it made sense. It might be impossible, but if possible, they might learn something truly astonishing.

'That's right. There was hardly any known information about the Red Stone even before.'

Yuder had suspected that Kishiar might ask this of Kanna ever since he chose her. Even if he had been the leader, he would have certainly tried if there had been someone with Kanna's ability.

From the very beginning, the reason Yuder had insisted on Kanna's successful admission into the Cavalry was precisely in anticipation of situations like this.

'Back then, I was desperately lacking information. In all respects.'

By the time the past Yuder had realized something was off, it was already too late. The people and the information that had vanished with the passage of time couldn't be retrieved, no matter what he did.

However, with Kanna, the story was different. Of course, provided that she could touch and read it.

"I'm not sure. If I can touch it... I think I could at least try. But whether I'll be successful..."

Kanna's ability required her to physically touch the object to read its information. Could she really touch that stone, which radiated such a tremendous pressure that it stung the skin even from a distance, for an extended period of time? Could she guarantee she wouldn't get hurt? It was something no one could tell.

And as if he had been waiting for her to say that, Kishiar's red eyes turned towards Gakane.

"You're right. So, you might need some help. Gakane Volunbolt?"

"Yes!"

Gakane responded loudly, his face startled.

"Use your shadow to touch the stone first."

'...Indeed. I hadn't thought of that.'

Yuder sincerely admired it. Gakane's ability was to summon shadows, primarily used for communication or to aid in combat.

But to use it to first touch something as dangerous as the Red Stone... That was an inventive yet promising directive.

Gakane, seemingly not expecting such an order, had an astonished look on his face. However, he soon used his ability without a word.

The black shadow at his feet squirmed and distorted, then rose up and took on a black, doll-like form that mirrored Gakane's.

'This is the first time I'm seeing it properly, even though he rarely uses it in practice.'

Despite its apparent usefulness in daily life, Gakane rarely used this ability. When asked why, he said it was because the ability could become a sharp or a blunt knife depending on the user's capacity.

'Such sound judgment indeed.'

Gakane's shadow clone moved according to Gakane's will. That meant it couldn't exert more power than the main body was capable of.

Would a sword wielded by a commoner and a swordmaster exhibit the same power? Of course not. A sword swung by a competent person could obliterate mountains and divide seas.

Gakane's ability was similar. The higher the combat sense and skill of the main body, the brighter his ability shone. Recognizing this early and striving to enhance his own ability first, Gakane was already exemplary. There was a reason he shouldn't die young.

"I'll give it a try."

After giving a terse response, Gakane directed his shadow clone, which cautiously began to walk towards the Red Stone. It didn't take many steps for the clone to reach the stone. It slowly knelt down and extended its hand.

The shadow clone had effortlessly approached the stone that even the Swordmaster couldn't touch. Everyone held their breath as the shadow's fingertips were about to make contact with the stone.

Sizzle!

"Ah!"

However, when the hand touched the stone, a blindingly white light burst forth.

For the first time in his life, Yuder felt a strange energy trying to pierce his body. He quickly exerted his power, creating a barrier of water and air around everyone.

A fierce gust of wind blew, and gasps of surprise echoed around, but there was no time to react.

The energy, an enormous energy that felt as if it could engulf the entire world, was spreading out radially!

'This is.....!'

Maintaining the barrier was challenging, but it was better than nothing.

Yuder gritted his teeth, closed his eyes, and maintained his strength. He felt as if the energy moving around him and the new energy emanating from the stone were interlocking, pushing and trying to erode each other.

Despite his efforts to block the external energy, maintaining multiple barriers while focusing was a difficult task.

How long did he keep that up?

After a while, the pressure he felt through his skin suddenly decreased. Only then did Yuder withdraw the barrier and turn his gaze forward.

Gakane's shadow clone was still sitting in its place. However, starting from the hand that had tried to touch the red stone, half of its upper body seemed to have exploded, leaving it in a ragged state.

'Did the shadow clone explode?'

If the one there had been a real person, if it had been Kanna, what would have happened?

No, what would have been the outcome if the invisible force he had desperately blocked just now had pierced his body?

A horrifying imagination suddenly dried his lips. Yuder, seeing everyone with similar expressions, turned his gaze to Gakane.

"Gakane. Are you okay?"

"...I think, I'm okay."

Gakane's face was pale, but he didn't seem to have suffered from the damage his shadow had taken. With a slight wave of his hand, the half-disappeared shadow returned to the ground and came back to his side.

"... It's a good thing we tried touching it first. We almost had a person injured. But what was that barrier that blocked the front just now?"

Kishiar, who seemed to have seen the barrier even amid the bright light, turned his gaze towards Yuder. There was no point in hiding it if he already suspected who had done it.

"I did it. I thought it would be better than nothing."

"Wasn't your ability to apply attributes to weapons only?"

"... It's a utilization method I've recently realized. I haven't used it properly yet, but I exerted my strength desperately as it felt dangerous."

"What? Did Yuder do something?"

Yuder's answer was a bit forced, but it wasn't nonsensical. Indeed, there had been many instances in the past when he suddenly realized a new way to use his abilities.

'It was a good idea to think ahead in case something like this happened.'