

Turning 45

Chapter 45

The Peletta Knight, who had served as a guide on their journey, had given Kishiar the special magic stone that indicated he could handle all the horses.

When their lord, whom they should protect, decided to lead in the most dangerous situation, the Knights should have naturally tried to dissuade him, but they remained relatively calm. Yuder read an absolute trust and belief in Kishiar from them.

"We're setting off!"

Leaving General Gino behind, they departed from the Southern Army base. The mood was extremely heavy and solemn due to their sudden departure under unfavorable circumstances.

Eleven Misty Wind Horses ran unimpeded across the fields blanketed by the darkness of night. These horses faced no difficulty seeing in the dark, easily avoiding any obstacles in their path.

The bodies of the horses, glowing as if sprinkled with powdered pearls, were the only sources of light in the place. Yuder gripped the reins more tightly, enduring the chilling and hair-raising sensation.

No matter how convenient and fast a mode of transportation, an entity not born from nature was diametrically opposed to it.

Kishiar rode his horse in a completely different manner than when they had arrived. Thanks to the incredibly fast pace, harsh even, by the time day broke, they had already traveled far beyond the mountain range.

"Yuder. We need to talk."

Gakane, who had dismounted the horse to rest, approached Yuder and spoke in a lowered voice.

"What exactly happened yesterday? You took down those guys with the Commander, so you must know something more?"

"I'm not really sure."

In truth, Yuder had taken them down alone, but he didn't bother correcting Gakane. There was no benefit in flaunting his abilities.

"I was about to leave the box when they showed up. I just took them down to defend myself."

"How could so many of them have been here in advance? They figured out that we had recovered the Red Stone so quickly...."

"Kanna Wand. Come over here."

Just then, Kishiar called Kanna. Everyone's gaze instantly focused on Kanna. Surprised, Kanna, who was opening a water bottle, turned her head.

"Yes?"

"Can you read these items while we rest?"

Kishiar took out several items from his pocket. A torn glove, a broken dagger handle, and a shattered piece of dice. Yuder recognized them as belonging to the dead intruders.

It seemed he had taken them when he briefly entered the mansion before their departure.

"Of course. I'll give it a try."

Kanna's expression turned serious. She had been unable to shake off her worry, believing that she had been of no help in this mission. She took a deep breath at the opportunity that had come once again.

First, Kanna held the glove. As she closed her eyes and focused, a faint energy rippled within her palm.

"...I can only read personal information about the owner. This is the toughest material the owner possessed, so he often wore this glove during battles. And... he also used it when shaking hands with someone. It seems like a very strong memory. He placed a large bag of money on top of the glove. After counting the money, he removed the glove and marked the count with his finger...."

After saying this, Kanna opened her eyes. She had made a lot of progress over the months, training and using her ability countless times.

Before she joined the Cavalry, there were many things she couldn't read, and most of the information she could decipher amounted to fragments of words. But now, she knew she could always decipher something. The information she could read had become much more detailed. Mostly, it consisted of the most potent memories related to the object.

"The one who gave the money is likely connected to the one I'm seeking."

Kishiar nodded and handed her the next object. It was a broken dagger handle. Kanna gripped it and focused once again.

"Fear. I can read the immense fear and regret the last person who held this felt. And resentment towards someone. The person who commissioned them... a stranger they'd never met... a noble from the Empire."

"A noble from the Empire?"

Gakane, who had been silently listening, asked in surprise. Kanna opened her eyes. Her blue irises were filled with a serious look.

"It's a word the person holding the dagger thought strongly of. They seem to have speculated among themselves that the identity of the person behind the commission might be a noble from the Empire."

The atmosphere turned cold in an instant at Kanna's words. The one to break it was Kishiar, who still bore a look of interest.

"Well... considering what they've done, it's not an impossibility."

"But why would a noble from our nation dare to act against our commander, a member of the imperial family? Isn't the commander's retrieval of the Red Stone for the peace of this nation? Why on earth would..."

As Gakane mumbled in confusion, Kishiar responded with a slightly deeper smile instead of an answer.

"Nobles have their own ways, Gakane Bolunwald. If everyone had the same loyalty as you, we would be quite comfortable by now."

It was a loaded statement. Gakane seemed taken aback, as if he'd said something inappropriate, but Yuder recalled memories from a past life.

In his previous life, Yuder had gained some insight into the power structure of the Empire by attending many parties and gatherings at the Emperor's command.

The people believed that the Emperor held the greatest power in the world and that those serving him were filled with genuine loyalty. But that wasn't the reality. The four Duke families, long-standing throughout the Empire's history, were as arrogant as if the nation had four additional kings.

Remembering the audacious faces of those even the imperial family had to tread lightly around, Yuder could understand what Kishiar meant. Indeed, nobles had their own ways.

"Now, the last object."

Kanna held the last object, a broken dice, in her hand. From her concentrated face with closed eyes, a deep focus unlike anything seen before emanated.

"The owner of this object... was addicted to gambling. They needed a lot of money. They had awakened their power, but seemed dissatisfied with their unchanged life. Besides, fear and regret... similar to the previous objects I read."

Kanna opened her eyes and looked at the commander's face. He was nodding with a satisfied look.

"Good. Thanks to you, we've obtained some interesting information. But can you read the stone inside the box?"

Kanna, who had just been smiling brightly at having her ability acknowledged, became serious again.

"I can only read the history of the box. I'm sorry."

"What a pity for such a good ability."

Kishiar expressed his regret sincerely. Yuder agreed as well.

How wonderful it would be if Kanna's ability had advanced enough to read stones without direct contact. Judging by the current rate of progress, it wouldn't take long.

However, if things went as they had in the past, Kishiar would head to the palace with the Red Stone as soon as he arrived in the capital. By then, even if Kanna's ability had developed, the stone would have already become the World Sphere.

'If only I could prevent or delay that.'

Previously, he had thought that the ignorant mages of the Pearl Tower had recklessly chipped away at the power of the Red Stone and damaged the original. But having participated in this mission and realizing the extraordinary power within the Red Stone, his thoughts had changed.

Several ways to protect the Red Stone whirled confusingly in Yuder's mind and then disappeared.

The easiest way, of course, was to make Kishiar himself realize the value of the stone. Then, he could persuade the emperor not to send the stone to the Pearl Tower.

Yuder's gaze stealthily turned toward Kishiar.

At the same time, in the imperial palace in the northern part of the Orr Empire's capital.

A man with grizzled hair and a young boy were sitting across from each other, setting up several intricately shaped pieces for a strategic game. At a glance, it seemed like an old man playing with his young grandson, but a closer look revealed that their relationship was not so close.

The old man's eyes were well-collected, cruel, and cunning, and the boy sitting in front of him had a fierce beauty that did not match his young age.

"The Duke of Peletta seems to have succeeded in his retrieval. He said he would be back soon," the old man muttered as he moved a piece on the board. His voice was nonchalant.

"Is that so?"

"Were you already aware?"

"I had to know naturally when the excitement in the Sun Palace reached the Bright Palace."

The Bright Palace was a palace built for the crown prince. And the boy, with the golden hair and red eyes characteristic of the Orr Empire's imperial family, was none other than Prince Katchian La Orr, who was to be the next emperor.

"Did you also hear about the incident of those who coveted it appearing in the middle?"

The old man added another piece to his offensive. Despite the aggressive move, the Crown Prince was not flustered. He skillfully moved his piece to dodge and opened his mouth.

"Yes, I heard about that too. They say the subordinates of the Duke of Peletta resolved it adeptly. They say the monsters came from somewhere."

"Unfortunately, it seems that has not been revealed."

"Indeed. Quite a pity. They could have been on good terms with us."

The words carried a ruthless intent, but the Crown Prince's expression was utterly calm.

"The Duke of Peletta is not the fool others make him out to be. He cunningly managed to establish that organization. He must never be underestimated."

"I thought he was a man too busy looking after himself to hide such a claw. It turns out those who scored this time were not Peletta Knights but members of a strange group the Duke established."

At that, the Crown Prince stopped moving his piece for the first time and lifted his head.

"Was its name the Cavalry?"