

69: Tough decisions

This was too early. Far too early.

Scarlett never imagined Fynn's premature development would mean he awakened *this* soon.

She recognized this scene from the game, but seeing it like this gave a whole new weightiness to the situation. The powerful winds stemming from Fynn almost forced her off her feet as they tore at her clothes and hair. She had already activated her [Lifeblood's Eternal Circuit], but it didn't do much against the wind itself, only helping against the small pieces of wood and scrap that sometimes flew into her.

"What is he *doing*?" Allyssa's voice cried out beside Scarlett, barely audible over the raging tempest.

"He doesn't look conscious," Shin shouted. The young Shielder was pushing forward through the storm ahead of them but suddenly had to raise his shield in defense when the lower half of one of the training dummies came soaring at him. The wooden doll bounced off the shield but Shin almost lost his footing in the progress, and Allyssa came running with all she had to support him.

Scarlett's eyes focused on the hunched-together figure of Fynn, sitting at the center of all this chaos, and the dim light that came off of him. If this kept on, there was no telling how much destruction could be caused around here. This scene occurred in the middle of a field in the game, so she didn't have much to go on.

Maybe if Kat was here, the woman would have been able to fashion some kind of temporary shelter out of stone around Fynn, but that wasn't an option now. Nor did Scarlett know of a way to interrupt what was happening herself.

Was waiting it out her only option? He was a decent distance from the mansion, so the building itself *might* be fine.

Shin continued trying to push forward, having pushed Allyssa back to where Scarlett was as he moved on. But the winds surrounding Fynn were still growing stronger. Even Shin didn't seem able to completely fight against them as he came closer to the center while having to dodge and defend against flying debris at the same time.

Scarlett considered whether she could knock Fynn out of what was happening with an Aqua Mine or two when she heard a distinct tune carry across the winds, and a flow of energy and calmness rose up from inside her.

Turning around, she saw Rosa come running, klerl in hand, curled brown hair mangled in several directions as the woman stopped before them. "A bit early for a party, isn't it?" Rosa shouted. "What's got sourpuss over there all worked up?"

Scarlett narrowed her eyes at the bard. "Rosa. Are you able to calm him down?"

"Depends," Rosa said, stepping up next to them. "Although pretty-boy might want to get away first."

Scarlett turned to look at Shin, who was still trying to push forward even with the wind as strong as it was. He was too far away for their voices to reach him over all of the chaos right now, though.

"He will be fine," Scarlett said after a moment. If Rosa was going to use what Scarlett thought she was, then it wouldn't have any lasting effect on Shin as long as he kept being pummeled by the winds surrounding Fynn.

Rosa threw a short glance in her direction, but soon turned forward with a focused look. "Well, all right. Let's hope little wolf-boy likes lullabies."

She cranked her instrument and several more notes rang out, each of them bearing a peaceful, mellow feel that belied their current surroundings.

From Scarlett's position, it looked like the air in front of them shimmered with a faint white light that moved as a wave. When it reached Shin he tottered and fell down to one knee, but seemed to manage to regain his wits just enough to get pulled away with the gale around him.

When the rippling through the air continued and reached Fynn, the white-haired young man had a much less pronounced reaction. Already hunched together, Fynn didn't fall to the ground or anything like that, remaining as he was. But the air around him, and the vague glow that had surrounded him, grew calmer and noticeably less distinct.

Soon, the same went for the winds that had been raging about, which suddenly flurried around as if they had lost their direction, soon petering out into a still nothingness.

"Shin!" Allyssa immediately ran up to her companion to check that he was okay. Shin himself unsteadily got up to his feet, but didn't look any worse for wear.

Scarlett's eyes passed over their surroundings. They were covered in small debris, dirt, and broken branches and leaves from the trees outside the stone walls. She then turned her eyes to Fynn, and started walking up to him.

"What *was* that?" Allyssa asked after having checked up on Shin, walking up beside Scarlett. "All of that was Fynn, right?"

Scarlett bent down next to him, reaching out with her hand to push away some white locks that covered his face. His eyes were still closed. "It was," she said absentmindedly. "Although he was not entirely in control."

"You could say that again," Rosa called out a short distance away from them, where the bard seemed busy trying to untangle her hair.

"But at least we managed to stop whatever was happening, didn't we?" Allyssa said. "That's good."

Scarlett slowly shook her head. "No. There is nothing good regarding this situation."



Fynn seemed to be completely out, not having woken up no matter what they did, so Shin had ended up carrying him inside and putting him inside his room for the moment. Scarlett had also quickly set Garside to organize the staff to clean up the mess that had been the training ground and its surroundings, which the old butler had promptly gotten to work on after receiving a brief—and probably somewhat lacking—explanation of what happened.

As for Scarlett, she had locked herself inside her office not long after the incident, almost definitely leaving everybody else thoroughly confused over the events. But she had bigger fish to fry right now.

Not only had Fynn completely lost control and was out for the count for the time being, but now they were on a countdown. In the game, you only had a certain amount of time to continue Fynn's questline at this point.

Scarlett flipped through her game notes, along with all of the plans she had written down for this premature future. She pressed her lips together as the reality of the current situation loomed over her.

Fynn growing stronger had always been a double-edged sword to her. On one end, having him grow stronger was incredibly advantageous considering how capable he was. But because of his lineage, the stronger and more connected to his powers he grew, the more he would lose control of them if it wasn't handled correctly.

The real problem here was that Fynn's first awakening wasn't supposed to happen until he reached level 50. And while Scarlett might have picked him up earlier in this world than in the game, he definitely shouldn't have grown to *that* level already. At least, she didn't think so. It was hard to tell when things like strength and HP weren't clearly quantifiable.

Nonetheless, Scarlett still never would have expected Fynn to awaken this early. It's not like she had actually done anything to *make* him stronger yet, other than giving him the [Mark of the Gale]. But that wasn't much different from how you did it in the game.

At the earliest, she had been anticipating Fynn to awaken a couple of months from now. The fact that he did it this early was probably the largest disparity between this world and the game that she had encountered yet, and it put her in a difficult position. Right now she didn't even care about *why* it happened. She was just trying to figure out how to deal with it.

After opening a certain page in her notebook containing the plans she'd written down, and crosschecking it with the notes she had of game-related knowledge, she opened up one of the desk's drawers and picked up the gold bell that lay inside. She didn't use it that often nowadays.

After ringing it, a short knock soon echoed out from the door.

"Enter."

Molly, the black-haired servant that had been the first person Scarlett met in this world, opened the door and stepped inside the office. "My Lady called," the woman said with a curtsy.

"Inform Garside that my schedule for the coming week has to be cleared. In addition, I will be requiring passage through the Kilnstones as soon as you can arrange it. Cost is not an issue, providing it is settled with haste."

"Where to, my Lady? I will have Madame Marlon look into it immediately."

"Angersong Post," Scarlett said.

"Angersong?" Molly grew a confused expression.

"Yes. It is a small outpost located on the west bank of the Three Streams, south of Dimfrost. I have urgent business there."

Molly lowered her head. "Of course, my Lady. I'll inform Master Garside and Madame Marlon immediately." The servant gave another short curtsy before leaving the room.

Scarlett leaned forward over her desk, palms pressed against her forehead. She didn't know how long it would take to book a passage through the Kilnstones this time, but was really hoping it would go quickly. Kat had once said you had to book months in advance, but as a noble, Scarlett held priority in things like that. Still, they had booked over two weeks in advance when traveling to Elystead, and the same went now that she had arranged for Gaven's passage to Bridgespell. She wasn't actually sure if they could get free spots even earlier than that.

Hopefully, it varied depending on where you were going. Angersong Post wasn't even a town, so there shouldn't be much traffic to the place at the very least. It was just a small trading station situated on a thin strip of land between where the Whitdown Mountains ended and the Three Streams river began. She imagined it might be used to restock some of the ships that passed by and things like that, but the main reason the trading station was there to begin with was only that there was a Kilnstone.

Unfortunately for Scarlett, it was the only Kilnstone situated next to the Whitdown mountains. Or at least the only one in the empire's Kilnstone network, from what she'd seen. It wasn't the closest one to where she needed to go, but it was her best alternative. And, as long as they didn't have to wait too long to get there, they should be able to trek the rest of the way on foot.

The question was what to do when they reached their destination. Even supposing that they got there before any further issues arose with Fynn, all of this was still a lot earlier than she had planned for. Her current party was too *weak*. Even if Fynn was somehow roughly equivalent to a level 50 in the game—which Scarlett doubted that he was—the remaining members of her party weren't.

Kat had left Freybrook already, so hiring her for this wasn't an option. And there weren't any other Shielders above rank C at the Freybrook branch at the moment.

Maybe she could just hire a bunch of C-rankers to help her instead? They'd still be too weak for this, but with enough numbers, they would be able to make up for that.

...But the Shields Guild might not even accept her hiring more people for a job like that. Not unless she lied about how dangerous it was.

She frowned.

There was also the issue of secrecy. There was no clause in the Shielder's contracts that said they *had* to keep what they saw during their assignments secret. They weren't mercenaries. Kat had seemed relatively lax in that regard, but Scarlett doubted that was the rule among Shielders.

Hiring Shielders for this was bound to risk revealing things about this location that she didn't want to reveal. Honestly, it was uncertain whether she should even bring Shin and Allyssa.

Letting out a deep sigh, she tapped her finger on the wooden desk.

There wasn't *any* organization she wanted to find out about this place. So there was basically nobody she could get help from. Bit without more help, it was really doubtful whether she could clear this place.

...Should she just ignore it? Considering how dangerous it was, not even bothering would be a lot safer.

But that would essentially mean abandoning Fynn. Now that he'd had his first awakening, he would leave for the Whitdown Mountains no matter what she did. And he would probably never return. Unless he got help.

She...*could* just let him go.

It wasn't as if he was a necessity for her to keep on living in this world.

She leaned back slowly in her chair, looking up towards the dark oak ceiling.

Could she do that?

She closed her eyes.

No, she probably couldn't.

Not only would it mean she had to sacrifice a large number of her plans for the future, along with several important items she needed...It also didn't sit well with her to abandon Fynn like that. While she wouldn't say that what she felt for the young man was quite to the level of fondness—not in the sense of how she knew him as a real person, at least—he wasn't a stranger to her either.

No, she would help him deal with his awakening. That much was sure.

The only question was *how*.

How would they clear the first section of the Howling Gale's Haunt?