

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin

chapter 10

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Episode 10: Trials of the Duke (2)

– Clang –

The iron bars opened, revealing the full figure of the Hellhound.

Chains bound its neck, a multitude of them.

Should those chains be released, it would charge at me without hesitation.

“Now, the beast before you is called a Hellhound, a creature of the demon world. It’s incredibly ferocious, driven only by its instinct to kill. However, there are even worse monsters overflowing on the front lines.”

I know this. Moreover, the Hellhound is the lowest class among the magical beasts that inhabit the Limia Valley.

“So prove yourself here and now by defeating this Hellhound! If you do so, I shall grant you permission to accompany us to the front lines.”

To think he personally captured a creature of the demon world for this brash child.

To be honest, I’m quite touched.

Yulken’s judgement is indeed precise.

My father bears the title of the Continent’s Protector with no less discernment than the name suggests.

He wants to clearly determine through this trial what qualities one must possess to venture to the front lines as a member of the Vert family.

Creatures from another world that don’t exist anywhere on our continent.

Humans feel the greatest fear when faced with the unknown.

An ordinary person might lose strength in their legs or even wet themselves just by seeing a magical beast.

I, too, was like that at first, and it took me a considerable time to adapt.

But what about now?

It's just a rabid mutt.

A little larger, a bit more agile, and with teeth that are somewhat tougher and sharper?

Even the high-ranking knights defending the front lines can sweep away dozens of these puppies with one stroke of a sword.

Yet, if we assume I'm facing this beast for the first time, this would be a challenge more difficult than facing ten high-ranking knights.

It's a way to confirm how hard it is to overcome the fear of such unknown creatures, and that only by doing so can one be truly qualified.

– Swoosh –

Without hesitation, I drew my sword.

The knights maintained a safe distance just in case.

Probably as a last line of defense to prevent an irreparable situation.

My safety would be guaranteed, but should these knights intervene, my journey to the front lines would be for naught.

Of course, that would never happen...

– Clank –

At the signal, the chains restraining the Hellhound were released.

“Kyaong!”

The beast charged at me with a howl as if to affirm it was indeed a dog.

– Clang!

I tilted my sword upward and struck hard against its fangs.

Even with the physical training I've been doing these past few days, I still couldn't withstand the Hellhound's strength.

Slightly twisting my body to dodge, the beast toppled forward.

“Grrr...”

Despite the presence of other knights nearby, its gaze was fixated on me.

It instinctively recognized me as the weakest link.

Such is the limitation of its inferior nature...

But I have no desire to show a struggling appearance.

What does age or being a magical beast matter?

The purpose of this trial is to prove myself by drawing out my utmost capabilities within the limits of what I can show.

With the next strike, I will cut off its breath.

“Kyaong!”

I moved faster than the Hellhound.

Sprinting with my sword drawn back, its mouth opened wider as I approached.

At the moment when I closed within 1 meter of it, I stepped aside, changing direction.

Simultaneously, I swung my sword diagonally upward, slicing through the Hellhound's face.

– Slash –

A deep gash ran from its jaw to nose.

“Queek!”

It fell to the ground and shrieked as if its throat would tear.

It must be in pain, but it would only be for a moment.

– Thud –

I plunged my sword into the throat of the beast as it tried to rise again.

After a solitary groan, it thrashed wildly, but not for long.

Blood flowed in large quantities from between its neck and mouth, and soon its body went limp.

As soon as I confirmed it had stopped breathing, I withdrew my sword.

I wiped the blood on my face and inadvertently tasted it.

It's fresh, probably because it was just killed...

* * *

Yulken, a Guardian Knight of the Order of Light.

Witnessing Sian's trial, he couldn't hide his genuine astonishment.

'He defeated the Hellhound?'

Over the past month, he had been ordered by the Duke to protect Sian and had been faithfully carrying out his duties.

There was also the additional task of reporting any significant activity, but in reality, there wasn't much to report to the Duke about his observations of Sian.

The most noteworthy event was perhaps a duel with Ellis who had visited the manor.

Not that he didn't have anything to report, but there simply wasn't much to report.

As far as his observations went, Sian had been focusing solely on consistent physical training and sword practice.

If there had been anything to report, it would have been a brief sparring session he had offered three days prior.

Yet, he had refrained from disclosing that as well, at the behest of Sian.

When Yulken learned that Sian's trial entailed facing a Hellhound, he thought he would pass without much trouble.

Sian had demonstrated extraordinary swordsmanship in their sparring, along with a confident demeanor.

To face the monsters of the demon world, one must possess unwavering confidence, unafraid of anything.

Even if he could struggle, as long as he did not cower and persistently faced the battle, he would surely triumph.

But wasn't this a bit too quick?

It had taken Sian less than a minute to cut off the Hellhound's breath.

During that time, there was no sign of fear or dread in Sian's eyes.

He simply recognized the entity before him as an enemy and killed it.

In common terms, he truly played with it like a dog.

Yulken quietly observed Sian drawing his sword, musing to himself.

A child has emerged who can match, no, surpass, both the eldest and the second...

* * *

Looking at the blood-soaked ground filled me with a sense of waste.

It was a loss of at least five liters that could have been savored...

I might be the only person who relishes blood while a magical beast's corpse lies before me.

As the knights cleaned up the carcass, the Duke approached me.

“Excellent, Sian!”

The Duke, who rarely applauded, praised me with a deep exclamation.

“Weren’t you afraid of the Hellhound?”

“I simply thought of it as an enemy that needed to be defeated; I did not entertain the thought of fear.”

It would be strange to fear a mongrel so commonplace in the demon world.

“Good, then as promised, I will allow you to join the front lines. I have no doubt that it will be a valuable experience for you!”

“Thank you, Father.”

“Is there anything else you desire? If you wish, I will grant you new armaments for your use.”

“I still don’t know much about armaments. If Father would tailor something for me, I would be grateful to accept.”

“Very well, I will prepare something that will surely meet your satisfaction.”

Now what use would I have for other armaments?

The Divine Demon Sword is comfortably nestled within my possession...

I might not use it, but accepting it certainly wouldn’t hurt.

With the trial concluded, there was no reason for me to linger on this barren land.

I returned to the manor via the carriage I arrived in, while the Duke returned to the front lines with the other knights.

Once preparations at the manor were complete, I would also head to the front lines.

It was certainly not a place I pined for, but one might consider it a site of memories.

For some reason, I felt a pang of nostalgia.

[Didn't quite an interesting event occur while I was asleep?]

Suddenly materializing, Ceyram, newly awakened, appeared before me.

[Judging from the scent of blood, you've taken down a Hellhound, but it seems you had a harder time than expected?]

"Well, I had to somewhat conceal my strength as I fought, so yes, it was a bit of a struggle."

[Putting on quite a show. So, it's settled that you're going to the front lines or something? Can I now frolic about freely?]

"Hmm... I suppose so?"

I replied, only half certain, but Ceyram was already brimming with anticipation.

The truth was, I had to assess the situation there, so I couldn't be sure if it would be as carefree as she hoped.

[Hey, Master. I was pondering while I slept...]

"What?"

[What was I doing when you died in your past life?]

"What do you mean? You were firmly clutched in my hand."

Well, in the end, that hand had been violently severed, but...

[So what was I doing in your past life? Moreover, wasn't the one who killed you the bearer of the holy sword? If that's the case, I find it inconceivable that I wouldn't have detected their malice.]

Hmm, where do I even begin to explain?

Indeed, if Ceyram's identity had been present at the time, I wouldn't have died so easily.

She would have slapped me to my senses and made me fight.

"First and foremost, you and I had a savage battle in my past life."

[Why?]

“Why? Because, without notice, you were constantly trying to devour me. That was your attempt to clash with me. I almost considered tossing you into a volcano dozens of times.”

[You think it's easy to wield someone as charming as me? So, what then?]

“When I found you, it was during the height of the war with the demon race. On the edge of life and death, I tamed you. Thanks to your frisky behavior, I was able to adapt more quickly, although...”

In truth, if I were to count the number of demons Ceyram slew, it would easily reach hundreds of thousands.

In a sense, their sacrifice was to prevent me from being consumed by her.

“Now, you should know, it was you and me that drove the Demon King to his death. Though in the end, it was the holy sword that took his head...”

[Why did you let it be taken away? That doesn't make sense! Why didn't you?]

“It wasn't taken; I just simply handed it over. At that time, I thought that was the right thing to do.”

Looking back, it was a foolish move that made me wonder why I had done it.

[Impossible! The one thing I hate the most is being deprived of my prey! And you allowed that? Me?]

“Allowed or otherwise, there was nothing to it. As you vanished along with the Demon King's Death Sword in an act of mutual destruction.”

[What?!]

The outcry made me naturally cover my ears, though it was completely inaudible to the knights outside.

[What kind of nonsense is that? Why would I disappear?]

At the time, the Demon King was dubbed the Death Sword, a vile weapon.

Drawing souls and remnants of consciousness from humans and demons killed in war, he augmented his own power. And since Aschel had yet to fully unlock the power of the holy sword, he could not match him.

In the end, I was the one who fought against him from start to finish.

Ceyram insisted that she would take him with her, even at the cost of her life, directly confronting the souls of the Death Sword. Ultimately, she succeeded in halving the power of the Death Sword.

The resolute will to kill him, even sacrificing her own identity, achieved this result.

Though we successfully killed the Demon King, I had lost the best companion one could encounter in life, so I could not call it a victory.

Hearing the full story, Ceyram made a complicated and subtle expression.

[Well, it's not like I lost, right?]

"That's correct. In the end, the Demon King died, and the Death Sword was destroyed."

[Then it's settled. Knowing my nature, a loss would be unacceptable. But remember! If a similar situation arises, never sacrifice me again. I too cannot allow my prey to be taken by another.]

There was genuine anger in her eyes.

"Oh? I wouldn't have expected such a sentiment from someone so eager to devour me."

[Don't be mistaken. I simply dislike seeing my prey taken by others.]

As if she needed assurance.

Well, I didn't wish for her to be sacrificed again either.

"Even if the Demon King himself stood before me now, that wouldn't happen again."

[Careful with your words. What would you do if that so-called Demon King actually appeared?]

“Guess what? Wouldn’t that be interesting in its own right?”

Seeing my carelessly smiling face, Ceyram shook her head.

But as it goes, one must be careful with their words, as an uttered thought can take root and bear fruit.

Unfortunately, at that moment, I had briefly forgotten that important tenet.

(To be continued)