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Chapter 101. The Winds of Change (3)

It was a day in my previous life when the Ushif Empire stood on the brink of full-scale war with the Kingdom of Garam. As usual, in a deserted place, polishing my sword, Boris came to find me.

“You were here. I’ve been looking for you for a while, Lord Sian.”

“What brings you here, Boris?”

His visit was somewhat unexpected.

Boris Lehelm, head of the Ushif Empire’s Magic Council.

Sian thought it was unlikely that Boris, who should have been extremely busy preparing for the war, would come to see him for no reason.

“It is not for any particular matter. I just wanted to have a conversation with Lord Sian before embarking on a significant endeavor.”

He approached Sian slowly, with an innocent smile, free of malice.

Sian’s gaze was calm, but not friendly. If only the fact that this man was an aide to Aschel didn’t exist, Sian would’ve considered assassinating him anytime, hence he had no desire for a friendly chat.

“If you have something to say, then say it.”

Despite the blunt response, Boris did not lose his smile.

“Would it be too much to ask to see your mana sphere, Lord Sian?”

“...You mean my magic sphere?”

That was a moment when even the low-simmering suspicion grew heavier.

“You need not have any misconceptions. Isn’t Lord Sian’s magic rank about six stars? You haven’t advanced in rank for quite a while, and I wanted to see if there was an issue with your mana.”

Sian felt incredibly odd.

Here was a magical prodigy who had reached the remarkable state of nine stars mage by his thirties and now, out of the blue, wanted to check his mana.

Was it a pure-hearted act of goodwill or just unnecessary meddling? Sian had no particular desire to show it, anyway.

Despite how he felt, Sian conjured his mana sphere and handed it over to Boris.

Of course, it was not a full sphere of magical power.

Boris showed a very intrigued reaction upon receiving the sphere.

“The attributes are truly outstanding. You are indeed as remarkable as I’ve heard!”

“...You can tell all that just from the mana sphere?”

“I merely analyze the magic emanating from the sphere itself. An insignificant skill, really.”

Sian’s officially recorded magic rank was six stars at the academy.

But that was just a record, no more, no less.

In reality, Sian was capable of freely using beyond seventh and eighth ranks, reaching the highest rank of nine stars magic with dark attributes.

Of course, most of those who saw it no longer existed in this world.

“What shall I say? Though the magic power is minimal, the latent potential within is tremendous. I see infinite possibilities!”

It was something one might expect to hear addressed to a genius freshman newly admitted to the academy.

If it was intended as an insult rather than praise, Sian gave a somewhat bitter expression.

“If I may have displeased you with my words, I apologize. Infinite potential seems unfitting for the greatest knight of the empire.”

“It’s fine. If there is a hint of further development, instead of settling for the present, that’s only for the better. It could be more helpful to Brother Aschel. Don’t worry about it, Boris.”

Unexpectedly, Aschel's name slipped from Sian's lips, and Boris's mouth twitched slightly at the mention.

"I always find you intriguing when I see you, Lord Sian."

"What do you mean by that?"

"While I have also sworn loyalty to Lord Aschel out of gratitude, to be honest, I feel I cannot match Lord Sian's devotion. Your sentiment for Lord Aschel seems to transcend brotherly affection and loyalty, doesn't it?"

Sian spoke nonchalantly.

"It's nothing. I'm merely where I believe I ought to be. It's the same for you, isn't it, Boris? Whether it's you or me, our true worth shines the brightest at our lord's side."

As he mentioned Aschel, Boris's lips quivered ever so slightly.

"You're absolutely right. However, it appears Lord Sian might be a bit too far from the light..."

For a moment, a sharp glint flashed in Sian's eyes.

He felt a great internal annoyance, yet he did not show it outwardly.

Sooner or later, he knew that Boris would die by his hand, and the fact would not change,

He only hoped that moment would come sooner rather than later.

time passed

It smelled bad.

Not a pleasant scent.

The odor was like unattended garbage that suddenly surfaced, left aside to be dealt with later.

So, I went outside.

And then I encountered it.

A face that wouldn't even cool off if torn apart immediately and thrown to the beasts as food.

Boris Lehelm.

Head of the Ushif Empire's Magic Council and the emperor's right-hand man.

The very man who had betrayed me by colluding with the devil.

Although it wasn't as intense as when I was confronted by Aschel, I barely managed to suppress the angry surge.

But that constraint didn't last long.

The moment I spotted some clueless princess about to pass her mana over to him, the suppressed anger burst out, edged with murderous intent.

-clench-

I couldn't leave my post readily, even as the initial excitement had faded, and my attention started drifting to the other bystanders.

"..."

Why are they all still lingering?

"It seems I've been quite secluded in the academy, but as expected, mentor, you are quite the formidable man," Lunev remarked, her eyes carrying a peculiar glint.

"Uh, it's been a while, Sian?"

Princess Arin spoke up awkwardly amid the tension. I did not return a verbal greeting but instead bowed my head to her.

"My rudeness earlier—I must formally apologize. It appears I misunderstood the situation."

However, the princess waved off my apology.

"No, it's fine! As long as the misunderstanding is cleared up, all is well. You were merely looking out for me, right?"

For a moment, I felt at a loss.

It wasn't as though I had that specific intention.....Or was it correct to think so?

Would I have stepped up and intervened if it were not the princess but some unrelated person attempting to hand over their mana sphere to Boris?

Considering the situation, it seemed proper to agree with her interpretation.

“A bit unexpected, isn’t it? It’s been a while since I’ve seen Sian get so flustered.”

Well, I don’t quite remember ever getting worked up in front of this lady before, but it’s true that she’s managed to defuse what could have been a problematic situation quite smoothly.

But still.

“Do not do that again.”

“Huh?”

“Do not show or give your mana sphere to others so freely. Will it be befitting for the empire’s princess to expose her possessions so carelessly? Even small things should come with a price.”

The princess looked frustrated and wronged.

It was indeed unfair.

And I knew it was forced.

But I still wanted to warn her: keep your distance from that man if you don’t want to complicate your life.

I doubted my words would be fully heeded; she’d likely scoff at them as preposterous.

“Okay, I get it...”

Her resigned tone caught me off guard.

“As a student, I should’ve considered my position as a princess first... Seems I was a bit foolish...”

Huh?

She’s giving in just like that?

She should’ve refuted at least once, then I could...

“...!”

For some reason, my train of thought fizzled out.

What was that expression?

Though she was trying desperately to hold back her emotions, I could see it clearly.

I'll bet that if I added one more word,

She'd undoubtedly burst into tears.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 102

Chapter 102: Winds of Change (4)

When the sun sets, the moon rises.

This is an unchanging law of nature.

And so, with the rise of the moon, I go out for my nightly activities.

This has been my unwavering routine for the last two years, without a single day's exception.

But today, for some reason, my mood is unsettled.

I know why.

It's because of what happened during the day; it's been weighing on my mind.

Though why exactly, I cannot say.

Of course, it's only natural that I have seen more faces contorted in horror and disgust than those alight with smiles.

I mean the most ghastly faces humans make when drenched in despair, facing death.

However, the princess's face I saw today wasn't like that.

It was one of sorrow, not despair.

A face infinitely saddened by her own powerless foolishness.

It was an expression I found incredibly unfamiliar.

["You look particularly downcast. Well, there's nothing worse than a man who leaves a woman crying and still sports a smile!"]

"I didn't make her cry."

This needs to be clarified.

I almost made her cry, but I didn't.

["That's even worse! If you're going to upset someone, at least do it thoroughly. Why keep it all bottled up inside, causing more pain? Ah, really, even though you're my master, I can't even punch you for this!"]

As usual, taking Ceyram's words in one ear and out the other is the norm, but strangely, this time feels different.

Is it my fault?

I don't think I did anything terribly wrong, yet I can't shake the feeling of having committed a sin.

Normally, I wouldn't care in the slightest, but for some reason, the pained expression on the princess's face keeps haunting me.

["So, that scrawny guy we saw today, he's your enemy's henchman?"]

"That's one way to put it. But honestly, compared to that demon, he's even more inscrutable."

Why can't we solve difficult math problems?

The answer is simple.

Because we don't know how.

The same goes for people.

Those who are transparent are much easier to deal with.

On the other hand, those who are hard to read and difficult to figure out are more challenging to confront.

Boris is exactly that type of case.

Although I know there's something dark and rotten about him, I can't pinpoint what, making him a tough, almost impossible entity to comprehend.

Technically, I could kill him right now if I wanted to.

It might even aid in my vengeance.

But I won't.

Just like I wouldn't enjoy meat that hasn't been properly cooked, I plan to slowly tenderize him until the perfect moment to take my vengeance with my own hands.

For that, I first need to understand why he has come to the academy.

Yes, that must be the right course of action.

But then, why am I here now?

"Haap!"

With a vigorous shout piercing the night sky, here I am at the training ground.

A place where Brian, diligent in his training efforts, practically clocks in every day.

And now, another person striving to match him is here.

Muscles tightly coiled on the arms and legs, movements precise, posture controlled.

Comparing now to just two years before, it's fair to say that the improvement has been remarkable.

They say that when a person has a goal, their latent potential shines through.

Now that the ultimate goal of protecting the sorrowful princess has been established, the training will undoubtedly continue unceasingly.

Indeed, I'm confident that this achievement might surpass even that of the continent's greatest swordsman in my past life.

".....!" Resmus halted in her tracks upon noticing me.

"Do not mind me. Please, continue with what you were doing."

Unable to do as suggested, she quickly approached me and bowed her head respectfully.

“I apologize for the rudeness I showed towards you earlier today.”

“It wasn’t your fault. Why are you apologizing?”

Having laid hands on the princess, honestly, I would have no grounds for complaint even if I were to be cut down on the spot. She took the best course of action available to her.

“Do you always come out at this time?”

“Yes. After Her Highness falls asleep, I always come out to continue my personal training.”

Well, I already knew that, so it didn’t particularly concern me.

My reason for being here wasn’t to see Resmus.

I had come to ask her something.

“Do you have something you wish to say?”

As if she had seen right through me, she asked first.

Without any delay, I asked straight away,

“Princess Arin, what happened at the Imperial Palace?”

Her eyes widened in surprise for a moment.

“May I ask why you think something happened?”

“Well, you just seemed paler than usual... somewhat gloomy, anyway.”

It’s really something, the kind of questions I find myself asking.

But I’d rather ask and clear the air than let the unease fester.

After a moment of hesitation, Resmus carefully began to speak.

“Why did you come to the imperial banquet, Sir Sian?”

Her question came seemingly out of nowhere.

“Well, the princess sent an invitation...”

“But why did you not meet with the princess?”

I found myself at a loss for words.

It's been a while since I've felt this way.

"I owe my life to both the princess and you. If not for the two of you, I wouldn't be alive today, let alone studying at the Academy."

Her gaze then hardened with determination.

"I am ready to dedicate my life saved by you two at any time. Although Sir Sian may not need it, I at least want to protect the princess with all I have, even if it costs me my life. That's why I'm by her side."

"Aren't you doing enough?"

"However hard I try, I can't untie all the knots in the princess's heart. And if they cannot be untied, they will only rot, causing her pain."

"So, what are you saying?"

She spoke without an ounce of hesitation.

"Can't you, Sir Sian, untangle those knots?"

I tilted my head, not fully understanding at first.

"That night of the banquet incident. Prince Luinel came to Princess Arin's room."

"The First Prince?"

Resmus recounted all the derogatory things Prince Luinel had said to Princess Arin, without omitting a single detail.

It wasn't surprising.

It was typical of the First Prince, always finding a way out, never doing anything that would disadvantage himself.

Regardless of what Prince Luinel and Aschel had planned, Princess Arin was doomed to encounter undesired misfortune.

It was too much for a thirteen-year-old girl to bear.

Now, I understood why her face had looked so gloomy.

“I’ve heard about what happened at the frontlines with you and Princess Arin. Before dreaming of becoming an empress, the princess aspires to grow every day, fighting a battle she cannot share with anyone else.”

I know.

The growth Princess Arin has shown in nearly two years has surprised even me.

Since her enrollment, she has never missed achieving an ‘S’ grade in any subject, a truly outstanding student.

Some even compared her to Ellis, my sister, known as the Child of God, for her high standing in the academy.

The difference, however, lies in the foundation of their achievements – effort for Princess Arin.

It’s not that Ellis didn’t exert effort.

She always did her best in every situation and worked hard to maximize her potential.

It’s just that her innate talent was so extraordinary that her efforts seemed overshadowed.

But Princess Arin is different. She did not possess the overwhelming talent that her sister, Ellis, did. To compensate for her lacking talent, she embarked on a grueling journey of effort.

Thus, while she might be unknown in the Capital, here in the Academy, she has garnered recognition from many. But so what? What more do I have to do?

Should I praise her by saying, ‘You’re doing a great job’? As I’ve said time and again, I can only show the way; I do not lead anyone down it. Even if they stumble over a rock on that path, I have no reason to offer a hand.

At most, I might urge them to stand up on their own, but I will never help them up. Why? Because I’m not a savior. Whatever I do, the essence of who I am will not change.

I said to Resmus, “The role of a princess is so burdensome that saying it’s heavy is an understatement. No one can bear it, and neither can I...”

Princess Arin will have to continue fighting a lonely battle in the future. The frustrations she has accumulated until now will only become heavier. It’s a burden she must carry alone, without relying on anyone else.

However, “I can still lighten the load a bit, just not right now.”

Those were the best words I could offer at the moment. Resmus tilted his head, not quite understanding, but soon smiled faintly.

“Sian, you are truly an enigma...” I couldn’t help but chuckle. If I don’t understand myself, who will? With that conversation, I left the training ground.

* * *

The research hall, where the personal labs of the instructors, including the Silica family head, are located, as well as the accommodations for all the faculty members, is in the eastern part of the Academy.

It’s past midnight, approaching dawn, yet there are still quite a few rooms with their lights on. We might have to wait at least a couple of hours for a chance to infiltrate without trouble.

[What are they, a bunch of owls? Don’t they ever sleep?]

Today, I find myself agreeing with her. There might even be some rooms where the lights don’t go out until the morning sun rises. The many lit rooms mean a higher chance of getting caught if someone infiltrates now. But still, given that not all instructors have gathered yet, this is arguably the best time to sneak into the research hall. Yes, that must be it...but...

“...?”

What’s that?

[Looks like a squirrel hiding there.]

Just 10 meters from the research hall’s main entrance, I saw a girl clinging to a tree like a squirrel hiding from its natural predators. Her sky-blue pigtail fluttered gently in the chilling night breeze.

Even from behind, I knew immediately who it was. She was always an unwelcome sight, the bold little imp, Lunev. Without a moment’s hesitation, I strode towards her. Despite the closing distance, she kept her gaze fixed solely on the research hall’s main entrance.

“What are you doing?” My indifferent question was met with a bland answer.

“You’re here, senior?” As if she had known I would come. I couldn’t help but let out a scoffing laugh at her reaction. Her eyes were unfazed, almost nonchalantly optimistic, which felt even more audacious compared to last time.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 103

Chapter 103: The Light and the Mist(1)

“How can you not even show a hint of surprise when some unknown person appears behind you in the dead of night?”

There was a slight furrow in her brows as they had been tracing a straight line.

“I’m not sure if this is because you’ve been kidnapped before, but you’re treating me as if I’m some thoughtless fool,” she remarked.

I couldn’t deny it, so I chose to remain silent.

“If you think I reacted without any thought, then you’re gravely mistaken. I knew you were approaching from 20 meters away.”

“Based upon what?”

“Smell.”

“Smell?”

“You have a distinctive scent about you. It’s not exactly pleasant enough to bury my nose in, but it’s like perfume made from human fatigue. It’s due to that odor that I knew you were coming.”

For a moment, I was so taken aback by her response that it almost seemed ridiculous. Had the experiments enhanced her sense of smell too?

“Besides, I don’t easily allow others to approach me. If it had been anyone with ill intent other than you, I would’ve created several mana spheres to shove into every orifice of their body, and let them explode from within.”

What a fierce little thing she was.

“Do your guardians know you’re here?”

“Of course not. They’d make a scene if they knew. Before I came out, I set up an illusion with my magic. They’ll see me wrapped in blankets, sound asleep in bed.”

Hm?

I found myself tilting my head without realizing.

Even a 6th or 7th-star magician from the Garam Magic Society couldn't have slipped through their surveillance, could they?

"There's no reason to be surprised. It's less strict here at the Academy, so I've even managed to escape to meet you before, haven't I?"

I held back my urge to ask why someone so meticulous had been kidnapped before. It seemed like a pointless extension of the conversation, so I decided it was better to simply acquiesce.

"So tell me, oh esteemed junior, what brings you to the research center in the dead of night?"

"Perhaps I have the same reason as you?"

"And what makes you think you know my reason?"

"Aren't you here to investigate the newly appointed Instructor Boris?"

A chill ran down my spine.

"Why would you think that?"

"I saw it, the rage on your face for the first time. It seemed less about protecting Arin and more about a deep hatred for this Boris character. So it seemed logical you'd be investigating him."

It felt as though she had read my intentions from the beginning, as if I'd walked into a trap without realizing.

"So you knew I was going to come here from the start?"

"Well, it was more of a guess. I wasn't certain, but hey, you're here, aren't you?"

She raised an eyebrow with a triumphant air.

It slowly dawned on me.

There was no point in further discussion with this kid. It only made my position more difficult.

Again, I seriously wondered whether rescuing her with a heart curve had been a mistake.

“Well, since it seems you have your own personal matters, I won’t pry. Anyway, it’s important now that we share a purpose and move together.”

What’s with this odd way of talking?

“Hey, junior. Let’s make one thing clear. I’ve never said we’re in this together.”

Her lips puckered up in an instant.

Her displeasure was briefly displayed before she narrowed her eyes as if lit by a double candle and said, “It seems you’re under a misconception, senior. You see, I have nothing to lose.”

Huh?

“In other words, I could interfere with your plans right now if I wanted to.”

It was more ridiculous than appalling.

“Are you threatening me?”

Without blinking an eye, she continued.

“It’s common sense to work together when goals align. But you, senior, seem reluctant to do so, as if you’ve always done everything on your own...”

The more we talked, the more I felt like I was being stripped layer by layer.

Maybe I shouldn’t have come in so carelessly in the first place.

“Then, I have one question for you.”

“Ask away.”

“Why do you want to investigate him?”

I knew there hadn’t been any special contact between Lunev and Boris.

Certainly, she hadn’t come with some naive desire to better know her teacher.

Knowing her character, there had to be an ulterior motive.

She immediately responded as if she had been waiting for the question.

“It’s my personal curiosity.”

“Curiosity?”

“Yes. I’ve never heard of this Boris person, yet his magical power is rumored to be 8 stars. I haven’t even heard of his surname, Lehelm. Nor had anyone else from the academies.”

It made sense they wouldn’t know.

The name Lehelm couldn’t be found in any historical record on the continent.

“But what made me most curious was this: despite having 8-star magic power, there was no trace of mana emanating from him.”

I could see doubt and curiosity in her eyes.

That’s right, she can detect others’ magic power, can’t she?

“To be certain, I would have to make physical contact, but still, it was interesting. He’s the first person who’s felt as inscrutable as you, senior.”

The end of her statement seemed a bit off.

I decided to let it go, feeling that I had understood her intentions anyway.

It looked like I’d have no choice but to work with this kid today.

As we conversed, the lights in the research center had nearly halved.

[Hey, master.]

As I was about to step forward, Ceyram, who had been silent, stopped me.

Without waiting for my reply, I simply turned my gaze towards her.

[If you’re going in, leave me here.]

“What are you talking about now?”

I whispered almost loudly without realizing.

[I don’t like the air inside. Just plug me into some place and fetch me later.]

She sat down on a rock.

It was unexpected and more so, something Ceyram had never done before.

“Now you’re being fickle, Ceyram. What are you suddenly...”

[Just leave me if I tell you to.]

In an instant, the chilling gaze of the demonic sword seized my sensations, reminiscent of the first time I encountered her in a previous life.

“What are you waiting for, senior? Aren’t we going in?”

Lunev urged me.

It didn’t look like there was much time to hesitate.

I discreetly pulled Ceyram out and stuck her between the trees.

[Take care, master~]

She smiled relaxedly, bidding me farewell.

“Don’t do anything rash...”

The only thing I could offer was a warning of uncertain efficacy.

* * *

-Wooong-

As I walked, I kept glancing down at my feet because it felt so strange.

The mana that surrounded my feet was a shining blue, designed to silence any footsteps. It seemed to work better than I’d expected.

It wasn’t me, but the little one beside me that had created it.

“How did you even think of this?”

“Just a small change in perspective. We can use mana not only in swords and artifacts, but in other ways too. It’s no big deal, really.”

Once again, I felt impressed by her intelligence.

She seemed to understand very well how magic could be harnessed by humans.

Very different from the pragmatic focus of traditional academies.

Though she acted as if it was all quite natural.

Finally, we arrived in front of a room with a sign that read, 'Boris Lehelm'.

No light made it seem as if no one was there.

As I was about to put my ear to the door,

"...!"

Lunev had already placed her ear against it.

She closed her eyes briefly to sense the energy beyond, and without hesitation, she opened the door.

-Creak-

"It looks like no one's here."

"How about giving a warning before opening doors?"

She pouted as if to say it didn't matter.

I wasn't expecting much, but the room appeared quite ordinary.

Like other research rooms, it was filled with various artifacts and books, and there was no sign of any peculiar mana movements.

"Has he not moved in his personal items yet? It looks suspiciously ordinary."

She was visibly disappointed by the normalcy.

Nonetheless, I turned my attention to a history book on the desk.

I glanced at its cover.

"A history book?"

Lunev, who unknowingly joined me, looked at the title.

It was a comprehensive history of the continent, familiar to me.

"He wasn't assigned as a history instructor, was he?"

The book was left open, implying that he had been reading it before leaving the room.

I examined the book for hidden clues, but it was simply a history book with nothing unusual secreted away.

Just as I was about to dismiss it for lack of evidence,

“...?”

I came across a bizarre drawing in its final pages.

It was less of a drawing and more of a crude doodle.

What could it be representing?

It featured a large sun with clouds or some kind of ambiguous shapes swirling around it.

To my unsophisticated eye, it was impossible to see what it was attempting to portray.

“Quite an interesting doodle.”

Lunev seemed intrigued by it.

“What’s so interesting about it?”

“It’s fascinating. Shapes of an unknown nature seem to be converging around the sun, as if they’re trying to devour it. There’s a sense of aggression, as if they’re intent on capturing the sun.”

She described the ambiguous shapes as if they were menacing the sun.

“So what do these shapes look like to you?”

She rubbed her lips thoughtfully for a moment before finally speaking.

“Mist.”

“...!”

It felt as if a stone had been dropped on my head.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 104

Chapter 104: The Light and the Mist(2)

Amidst the thick underbrush, Ceyram leaned casually against a tree, her gaze fixed indifferently on the research center. Unlike usual, her face was as cold and rigid as ice.

During the five minutes that had passed since Sian had entered the building with Lunev, she hadn't shown any sign of movement, as though determined to keep a promise to her master.

-Swoosh-

Soon after, Ceyram sensed an unfamiliar presence coming from behind. Without turning her body, she simply moved her eyes, and shortly, she heard someone's voice.

"I was quite surprised, Lady Ceyram. Never thought I'd see you at the academy."

The voice carried a slight echo.

[I could say the same. I never expected to see you here. It's not just unpleasant, it's downright irksome.]

No other figures that could belong to the voice were visible around Ceyram—only a small shaft of light leaked through the trees she leaned against.

Her eyes continued to be fixed on the entrance of the research center she had seen Sian enter.

"How is it? Waking up after hundreds of years?"

[As irksome as always. The world seems too peaceful for my taste nowadays.]

"Truly fitting for you. Are you satisfied with your new master?"

[Well, enough? He's a bit stiff and oblivious, but I suppose there's a cute charm to that.]

The owner of the voice let out a hearty laugh.

"Hahaha! Satisfying a demonic sword isn't easy. Was it Sian, you said? That boy is truly remarkable," they commented.

At the mention of Sian, Ceyram's brows furrowed slightly.

"How terrifying, Lady Ceyram! I can feel your murderous intent from here."

The owner of the voice seemed unconcerned.

[You know why I'm waiting here, don't you? As always, let's not bother each other with unnecessary matters, alright? Let's agree to not go around gossiping about whatever each of us does, understood?]

"Of course. I swear to Lumen Del that I will not reveal your existence to anyone else."

Despite receiving the response she wanted, Ceyram's cold expression did not ease.

"Still, there's one thing I'm curious about."

After a short pause, the voice spoke again.

"When do you plan to devour your current master?"

Only after those words were thrown did Ceyram finally turn around. Her gaze could have frozen the flow of even the hottest blood—cold, ruthless, and filled with murderous intent.

"There's no need for such a glare! It's just simple curiosity. Isn't it the nature of a demonic sword to swallow its owner and steal their power? I'm just wondering when that will happen."

At this, the corners of Ceyram's tightened lips momentarily curved into a half-circle.

[Curious when I'll devour my master, you say?]

Her expression briefly softened with a refreshing smile, but then she bore a gaze so vile and twisted that no mere human could withstand it as she said:

[Keep your nose out of it, brat...]

* * *

Early morning, as the dawn sunlight trickled through the windowpanes.

"Haaaah..."

Yawning sleepily, Emily emerged from her room. She began stretching here and there to loosen up her stiff body when, suddenly—

"Eeek!"

She was startled to find me sitting on the sofa.

"What, what's the matter, young master? When did you get up?"

Fact is, I hadn't slept at all... to be more accurate, couldn't sleep.

"Sleep is so important especially at your age, young master. If you keep staying up like this, it will affect your growth and health..."

While she seemed to be nagging, none of it reached my ears. The doodle I had seen just a few hours ago was still vividly etched in my mind.

'Bright sun trying to maintain its light amidst the pitch-black mist and the mist, biding its time to engulf that sun... Wouldn't you see it that way?'

Lunev's words echoed as an afterthought.

Thinking like some pure-hearted literary girl, her expression really was something. It could be just a meaningless doodle, but somehow that didn't seem likely.

Why did Boris draw such a doodle in his book? If it indeed symbolized the sun and the mist as Lunev suggested, what should I do with it?

The sun.

Always shining high in the sky, a bright sphere.

It's also the essence of the God of Light, Lumen Del.

No matter how you interpret it, there doesn't seem to be a reason to take it negatively.

What about the mist?

It could be interpreted in multiple ways.

But my mind keeps drifting in one direction.

Just like Lumen Del, if the mist is connected to another god associated with him, what then?

The god of black mist, Aer.

He is the only being that comes to my mind.

Light and mist,

Lumen Del and Aer,

Why must I, who am neither a theologian nor a scholar, ponder over deities? Suddenly, I'm overwhelmed by self-doubt.

My gaze naturally drifted to Ceyram lying next to me.

[.....]

She was sleeping. Ever since we left the research center, she's been like this. I'd thought about waking her several times, but ultimately I let her be. She seemed to be fine without causing trouble, yet I couldn't fathom why she insisted on being left alone.

Sigh...

No point in grappling with a troubled mind.

Not feeling like it's the right time to sleep now, I stepped outside for some fresh air. Dawn had passed, and a bright sun had risen. Not a trace of mist in sight, just a clear, brilliant sun that could practically scorch my eyes with its intensity.

"Si, Sian?"

At the familiar voice, I swiftly turned my head. With most of the students not yet returned to the academy, the people I could possibly encounter at this hour were very few.

Princess Arin and Resmus. Judging by their attire, they seemed to be heading out for a morning exercise.

"Are you going for your workout?"

"Uh, yes..."

Princess Arin responded shyly, avoiding my gaze. There wasn't much to say next, but perhaps because of yesterday's events, I found it difficult to simply walk away.

"Si, Sian? Are you heading out to exercise too?"

"Just thought I'd get some fresh air this morning."

An awkward silence ensued. Either of us could have simply greeted the other and moved on, but neither I nor the princess could utter a word, as if we had both bitten into honeycomb.

Ultimately, unable to bear it any longer, I broke the silence.

"Would you like to... join me?"

* * *

There was nothing particularly special about the princess's morning exercise. It was a perfectly normal morning run. However, the span of her run slightly exceeded my expectations. If I had to estimate the distance, perhaps around 10 km?

We must have circled the entire academy at least twice, so that seemed about right. Only when we returned to the starting point, the training ground, did she finally come to a stop.

"Huff, huff..."

She gasped for breath, having held it during the run, and then looked at me, saying.

"Wow, Sian, you're really fit! Not tired at all, I see?"

"It seems you've greatly improved your stamina, Princess."

To be honest, for me, it was practically no more than a breathing exercise, but that's just my personal standard. Considering this delicate young girl completed a run that even knights from minor domains would find challenging without a single rest, it was definitely something extraordinary.

"I'm still lacking. I just strive to improve each and every day."

The princess waved off the compliment with a hand. Having witnessed her growth in person after only hearing about it, I felt rather peculiar. It was a different feeling than when I had personally mentored Brian.

Is this why she's the academy's top student?

As our conversation fizzled, the discomforting silence we were in resumed.

"...!"

Suddenly, my eyes met with Resmus's, who had been following. Given the events of yesterday, it seemed he was wary of me.

I then turned back to the princess again and bowed my head.

"I apologize for yesterday."

"Hmm?"

She was taken aback by the unexpected apology.

“I have no excuses. Upon reflection, I realized my behavior and words towards you, Princess, were quite unjustified. If you were offended, I would like to apologize here and now...”

“Right, you were very presumptuous yesterday.”

Her unexpectedly candid response caused me to involuntarily lift my head.

What did I just hear?

After a brief silence lasting five seconds, her stiff lips formed into a small smile, and she could not help but laugh.

“Isn’t this the response you were looking for?”

Unbowed in any situation, the princess had presented a steadfast and confident demeanor essential for royalty. By catching on to her intent, I too couldn’t help but let out a laugh.

“That’s right.”

It was as if I had just been successfully hit by her in one move.

“Surprised you, didn’t it? I think this is the first time I’ve seen you look so flustered, Sian.”

“You’re unexpectedly mischievous, it seems.”

She displayed a lovely smile, pleased to have caught me off guard.

“I don’t know exactly what you think of me, Sian, but know that I am always grateful.”

“Are you referring to me?”

Even I was surprised, tilting my head quizzically.

“Regardless of how we met and what happened, you ultimately showed me a way to live. Thanks to you, I feel myself growing day by day, evolving from the person I was yesterday into a renewed me for tomorrow...”

Unsure how to respond, I awkwardly scratched my face as I gazed into space.

While I did show her the way, ultimately, it’s entirely up to her to walk it. It’s certainly great if my advice can change someone’s life. However, I wonder if it’s right to accept gratitude when, in truth, I consider the princess simply a means to an end.

“My feelings haven’t changed, Sian. I will continue striving to make you mine. So I hope you’ll continue to give me advice like yesterday, which I can take to heart.”

A rueful grin crossed my mind.

That’s why I can’t help but call you naïve.

But instead of negation, an inevitable smile spread across my face.

“Will you continue to do so?”

The only answer I could offer was neither an affirmation nor a denial, but something ambiguously in-between.

“I’ll try...”

The princess’s laughter beamed as if that response was enough.

She might still be naive, but perhaps she’s become a bit tougher.

“You’re both rather diligent this morning.”

In an instant, the smile shattered. My fists clenched and every hair on my body stood alert—a feeling of apprehension washed over me.

Suppressing the turmoil within me, I slowly turned around.

“Good morning, Princess Arin, and... Student Sian.”

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 105

Chapter 105: The Light and the Mist(3)

Her heart throbbing violently and her blood coursing rapidly, Arin was feeling an awkward emotion for reasons unknown to her. One thing was certain, though: this was not an emotion that originated from within herself. Her gaze was drawn to her trembling right hand.

Silence.

Indomitable rage and hatred.

It was the same feeling she had experienced the day before when her hand was taken by Sian. It was as if those emotions still lingered in her hand, showing that they had not yet faded away. From this, Arin realized that Sian was indeed very angry right now.

“I seem to have come sooner than expected in my haste. I hope I wasn’t interrupting your training,” said Instructor Boris with his easygoing smile, much like the one he had worn the day before.

Not sure how to reply, Arin hesitated, which is when Sian, who sat beside her, spoke up.

“It’s fine. We just finished.”

Sian’s expression was calm, as if he had put on a different mask.

“I see. If it’s not too much trouble, could you spare me some time now? There’s a conversation I’d really like to have with Student Sian.”

At first glance, it seemed to be a typical teacher-student interaction, but Arin had her suspicions.

“Let’s do that.”

Unexpectedly, Sian agreed without objection.

“Thank you. Shall we go to my study then? And if it’s alright with you, could Student Arin join us?”

“Me? But I…”

Startled, Arin was unsure of what to say, but Sian answered for her.

“The Princess has yet to complete her prescribed amount of exercise.”

It was not a lie. Arin had indeed been planning to begin strength training after her warm-up runs. Whether Sian knew this or simply preferred she did not accompany them was unclear to her.

“Is that so? Then it’s regrettable, but I suppose we must postpone to another time.”

“Yes… I will make sure to have time for the next opportunity.”

Arin’s gaze returned to Sian. He nodded at her with his typically stoic expression.

“I must take my leave now, Your Highness.”

“Okay, Sian! See you later...”

Before she finished her farewell, Sian briefly grasped her hand and whispered into her ear.

“Go straight to your room...”

Before she could ask what he meant, Sian had already left with Instructor Boris.

* * *

Sian and Boris were alone in the latter’s study, a room that Sian had visited just half a day ago. Nothing had changed. The warmth of the room, the position of the research materials, and even the history book spread open on the desk were all the same. To avoid rousing any suspicion, Sian sat down without looking around too much.

Boris, like the other instructors, was brewing tea for his guest.

“We have nothing to offer but this simple tea, unfortunately.”

It appeared to be a common kind of tea without any hint of adulteration.

“Before we start our conversation, there’s something else I need to address first,” Boris began as he settled into the seat opposite Sian.

The past that Sian had tried to bury surged back to him, but he made no outward sign of it. Regardless of Boris’s reasons for being here, Sian was determined to reveal nothing.

“Lunev came to see me at dawn.”

The statement caught Sian off guard.

“She came by my research building in the middle of the night to see me. Alone...”

Alone? Did she leave me out on purpose?

Sian understood the potential motive. Perhaps she had preemptively confessed to her own wrongdoings in anticipation of leaving any incriminating traces behind.

“A futile effort indeed.”

“But since I was not present, she could not find me, and so, she allegedly trespassed. And she claimed to have looked at this history book on my desk.”

It was the same history book that Sian and Lunev had perused together.

“What truly mattered was not the book itself, but the scribbles on the last page...”

Boris showed Sian the doodle on the back page, which was exactly as Sian had seen it the day before.

“Do you happen to know what this scribble means, Student Sian?”

Sian answered after four seconds.

“I don’t have a clue.”

“I’ll give you a hint, then. This large shape at the center represents the sun. But what about these things surrounding it?”

They appeared to be trivial elements like clouds or wind, but Sian withheld his real thoughts.

“To me, they seem like clouds or perhaps the wind.”

Boris smiled enigmatically.

“This represents mist.”

It was the same answer Lunev had given.

“The sun and mist don’t typically coexist. Where there is mist, the sun isn’t visible, and you won’t find mist where the sun is shining. The sun is always there, wherever we go. But what about the mist? It’s a truly mysterious presence, emerging unpredictably.”

Boris began sketching over the drawing with a pen.

“To the eternal sun, mist seems trivial, but it cannot be ignored. If this tiny mist clouded our vision, what would happen?”

“The light of the sun would be obscured,” Sian concurred, stating the obvious.

“Exactly. And so, to the sun, mist may be unnecessary.”

Sian barely restrained the laugh that threatened to escape him.

“Do you have a reason for regarding me with suspicion from the moment we met?”

Boris asked again, his smile in place.

“I’m wary of everyone I meet for the first time. It wasn’t anything personal.”

Of course, he wasn’t being entirely truthful.

“I serve a master who recognizes my worth and has saved me. To me, they are like the bright light emerging from the sun.”

It was clear whom Sian was referring to.

“Upon my arrival at the Royal Academy, I reviewed every student’s record. Why, you may ask? To better understand them? Partly, yes. But my ultimate reason for being here is something else.”

Despite Boris’s curious gaze, Sian remained disinterested, whilst secretly eager to understand why Boris had come to this place at such a time.

“I’m here to search for the presence of mist.”

Again, silence followed, but Sian did not respond or react. It was the best approach he could take.

“...Do you fancy writing fiction?”

After a brief pause during which Sian dismissed Boris’s words, the instructor laughed heartily.

“Haha! I tried to be serious, but it seems it didn’t work on you, Student Sian.”

Sian went on without change.

“I understand your intentions. You’ve come to look for someone here at the academy, haven’t you?”

“You’re quick to understand as always, Student Sian.”

Although Boris clapped as if in praise, Sian found it revolting.

Did he know what Sian was really thinking?

His actions were detestable.

His supposed master?

An unworthy devil.

The mist Boris sought?

It was none other than Sian himself.

But for now, he remained elusive and Boris's true intentions, while clear, were yet to be distinguished.

"If you allow me to mention, I'm not particularly well-acquainted with anyone at the academy. I don't have many friends, nor do I have much interest in people."

"That seems like an unfortunate way to live. I hear you rarely attend classes too..."

"I don't need any trivial advice. If you have nothing more to say, I'll take my leave."

Boris did not try to stop him.

"Thank you for your time, Student Sian. Perhaps we'll meet another time, in class."

Without a backward glance, Sian left the room.

* * *

Left alone in the office, Boris's expression was hard to decipher, but the faint smile on his lips suggested he wasn't displeased.

"I thought he'd be hard as a rock, but he's surprisingly smiling, isn't he?"

A voice, the origin of which was not immediately apparent, spoke near Boris's ear.

"I always find myself smiling when I encounter a challenging puzzle. It's the anticipation of the joy I'll feel when it's solved."

Remember, there was only Boris in the room.

"And your impression after speaking directly? Do you think that child is the mist threatening the light?"

"It's quite ambiguous. There's definitely something there, but it's hidden as if ensconced in mist. A most interesting student indeed."

Boris looked contentedly at the scribbles he had shown to Sian.

"Still, I can't believe it. That the embodiment of such ugly malice, the demonic sword, could be hiding in a place like this academy. What exactly did Lord Aschel see?"

Laughter echoed through the empty space.

“Kekeke! The owner of a demonic sword always stands out because they always thirst for more. But this time might prove difficult.”

“Do you know something about the demonic sword?”

“The nature of the demonic sword is such that it eventually consumes the body and soul of its owner, driven by the power it absorbs from them. It’s the demonic sword that becomes truly terrifying. But...”

The owner of the voice seemed amused by some entertaining thought and laughed for a while.

“This current demonic sword might not be the one I’m familiar with. It’s showing a totally unexpected side...”

Boris, of course, had no way to understand what that meant. The continual laughter only served to pique his curious interest.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 106

Chapter 106: The Light and the Mist(4)

Clack, clack.

The sound of footsteps echoed with fury down the corridor.

Swish, swish.

As if welcoming his anger, a mist rose from the altar.

Shortly after, as the owner of the space took form, Ceyram, having already reached the altar, stood with her arms crossed, glaring at him.

She seemed so overwhelmed with rage that she looked like she might burst into curses at any moment.

(Keep frowning like that, Ceyram, and you’ll get wrinkles.)

[Cut the crap! You! Why didn’t you tell me from the start!]

Aer chuckled and asked, shrugging his shoulders.

(What are you talking about?)

[That scum from Lumen Del was here! You knew, didn't you!]

Her outcry so fierce it could have extinguished blazing flames caused the surrounding mist to dissipate in an instant.

(Ceyram, I don't understand why you're so angry. What harm does their presence do to you?)

[Are you serious? When have they ever done anything good for us? Their mere existence denies us!]

(...You're worried about Sian?)

For a moment, as if honey clogged her throat, Ceyram couldn't continue her sentence.

(How curious. Ceyram, none other than you, feels compassion towards the owner. Did you experience a change of heart while you were dormant?)

At a loss for words due to the absurdity, Ceyram could only force a laugh.

Even so, the fact that she wasn't denying it was utterly astonishing to her.

[That's not why I came here. This could affect your safety as well as mine! So, out with it! Are you going to do something about them?]

Aer just shook his head as his answer.

[Then keep your ass planted just like that! If you mess with my plans out of some whim, know that you will cease to exist by my hand!]

(That might not be so bad.)

Despite the heavy threat, the god of the black mist didn't seem to care.

(But listen, Ceyram...)

Aer's tone shifted subtly.

(I've never thought of my whims as meaningless, not for myself. Regardless of whether they were good or bad for you, I want you to know they were always for you.)

[I wouldn't believe that even if a dog said it...]

Her eyes were still full of distrust.

Having finished her business, Ceyram turned and left.

Aer watched her retreating figure, shrouded in mist, with a gentle smile on his face.

* * *

“Boris Lehelm. Hailing from the slums in the north of the Empire, he was taken in by the First Prince, who recognized his potential. He didn’t use a pseudonym, insisting on being introduced by his own name from the start.”

The remark from the head didn’t surprise me at all.

After all, I already knew everything.

As she was about to add something, I opened my mouth.

“The one who summoned the marionettes and beasts at the Imperial Court was also that same fellow.”

The head’s brow furrowed slightly.

“...Did you sense an aura of dark magic?”

I shook my head.

“There isn’t anything specific enough to call just a ‘dark magic aura’ in this world, is there?”

“Well, that is true.”

The head nodded, agreeing that it was true.

The previously mentioned magics weren’t anything special requiring some sort of extra power; they were just types of summoning magic.

Then why add the term ‘dark’?

Simple.

Because no one among all the mana-wielding, spell-casting humankind used them.

Even magics of the darkness attribute, which would be most fitting of the dark moniker, never use the term.

Why? Because any fairly capable person who uses magic can perform a single-star level elemental magic like 'Dark Adaptation'.

, where lifeless corpses are manipulated by infusing them with magical energy., where creatures soaked in murderous intent from the demon world are brought forth before your eyes., which resurrects the very dead using vast magical power, without any complex magical energy infusions.

These spells that defy the natural laws of life are thus given the dark prefix.

"The dark magician who seeks the mist of light... it seems more dangerous than I anticipated."

Even as he said this, the head's expression was contemplative.

"The First Prince must have also recognized something exceptional in him. It's only logical that he sent this man, assuming those who obstructed their plans would be here."

Not quite.

The First Prince is no more than a figurehead, not the same master as the light he spoke of.

The Prince couldn't discern such things, lacking the capacity.

"No matter what, he wouldn't try to wield his power here."

"Yet, he remains a bothersome presence. You mean to say he can keep watching over you while he's here, but you won't be able to bear it?"

The glint in the head's eyes sharpened for an instant.

"What are you planning to do?"

"Get rid of him."

The response was simple and decisive.

"I've always said, I'm the head of the Mist family. I won't stand to see you, the successor, fall into danger. So, whatever your preference, I don't care about that."

"I'm aware. Should any threat come to you, I would without hesitation sacrifice everything, irrespective of your wishes, head."

"Ho ho, that reassures me beyond measure."

The head smiled, a rare expression of contentment.

“It’s quite quiet today, isn’t it?”

My gaze naturally drifted to Ceyram beside me.

Completely indifferent, showing no reaction.

She wasn’t sleeping.

The moment we arrived in the void, she vanished to the altar, saying she had words for Aer.

The funny thing is, she begged me to stay away, no matter what.

“It’s quite remarkable. A demonic sword’s owner is typically just prey to be devoured, nothing more, nothing less. Yet, I don’t sense such hostilities between you and Lady Ceyram.”

“I’m working hard on controlling her, to be honest.”

Anyone else might think I’m handling the situation quite comfortably.

“Well, you’ll take care of that. But remember this. A creature’s nature is always like a desire waiting to be fulfilled. She may be quiet for now, but her demonic sword’s nature could still become a blade threatening you at any moment.”

I know that.

I’ve felt it first-hand, devouring my body and gnawing my mind. It’s implausible to think I’ve overlooked it.

However...

“Well, I hardly think that blade will actually manage to strike me.”

You think I’m complacent?

Two years ago, when I recovered her at the Temple of Light, I clearly stated that the only being in this land capable of handling you would be me...

Considering that we both know it, I don’t foresee any peculiar issues arising.

At least for now.

“Anyway, I won’t call upon you for any duties for a while. And don’t do anything suspicious yourself. Better you don’t stray from the Academy.”

“Ah, on that matter, I’d like to ask a favor of you, head.”

The words ‘favor’ from my mouth made her eyebrows shoot up in surprise.

“It’ll be between a fortnight and a month, sometime in that range.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’ll need to leave the Academy for about ten days.”

“ ... ”

Unable to meet the head’s eyes, I averted my gaze.

* * *

In this place, encompassed by sculptures of brilliant white light.

A pure altar untouched by darkness and the dozens of knights surrounding it, each with a hand upon their heart in a devout posture.

In the midst, Ellis knelt alone.

Then, from the central staircase, a woman shrouded in a white hood appeared.

“In the name of the almighty god of light, Lumen Del, I bring to you the exceptional grace due to those who have earned salvation.”

The woman placed her hands upon her chest, cradling the pure white light that emanated from within her.

Though the form resembled the light of typical mana, the magic contained within was beyond reach.

“Ellis Vert, I ask you. Do you truly wish to become a beacon of light, to deliver salvation to this perilous and shadowed world?”

Ellis answered without a moment’s hesitation.

“I, Ellis Vert, accept the will of the supreme god of light, Lumen Del. I swear here to dedicate this humble body entirely to maintaining peace in this world.”

As she completed her vow, holy water shimmered with transparent light cascading down upon Ellis's head.

Opening her eyes gently, she saw before her a pure white longsword.

* * *

"Congratulations, Lady Ellis."

Cecilia greeted Ellis as she stepped out into the corridor after the ceremony.

"Please, drop the formalities! Cecilia... knight. Now that you're above me..."

She might have been a maidservant and a subordinate before, but here she was undoubtedly a senior knight of the Order of Light.

With a smile, Cecilia replied,

"I am Ellis's sword before a Knight of Light. So please, in private, treat me as you used to. I will do the same..."

Ellis scratched her face, unsure of how to respond.

"How do you feel?"

"It's surreal. Honestly, I'm not sure I'm worthy of this honor..."

"There was nothing wrong with the path you've walked, Lady Ellis. Had there been, you wouldn't be here today."

Only a month had passed.

That's all the time it took for Ellis to be initiated into the Order of Light.

Considering the usual screening period of three months to a year, her timeline was drastically shortened.

It wasn't any special treatment.

She was extraordinary.

Outstanding abilities necessary to maintain the world's balance, supported by the knight's mindset—none were lacking in her, rendering a long probationary period unnecessary.

“All I can think about is how I must do my best. I will become a knight worthy of the name of the Order of Light and not bring shame to my family...”

Ellis gazed upon her newly acquired sword.

From her hand clasping the hilt, her firm resolve was palpable.

“Will you return to the frontlines, Cecilia?”

“Yes. I came in place of Duke Vert to see you, so it’s time to head back.”

With her smile unwavering, Cecilia handed her a letter.

“Together with you, Lady Ellis.”

“...!”

Ellis immediately grasped the nature of the letter.

“Mission orders?”

It was her first official assignment as a knight of the light.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 107

Chapter 107: The Imperial Inspection (1)

A letter arrived from my sister Ellis, who had been at the Imperial Palace.

It was a lengthy letter filled with her complex feelings, but to put it simply, the gist was this:

She had received the Saint’s baptism and become an official Knight of Light.

It wasn’t just a simple initiation; right after the baptism, she had been given her first mission.

The details were confidential, but I could sense her resolve to do her best, as always, in her words.

“I will be a sister you will not be ashamed of.”

Somehow, this final sentence in her letter made me feel constricted in my heart.

Is it finally happening?

A flow that's no different from my previous life.

Although my sister mentioned she couldn't tell me the details due to confidentiality, I already knew what her mission was.

Escort for the Emperor's circuit visit to the front lines.

What's important here is that the Emperor himself will not be attending.

To be more precise, it should be called the escort for the Imperial Family's visit to the front lines.

I had learned this fact inadvertently from Princess Arin.

“The Emperor seems to be troubled by his chronic illness again. It's nothing serious, but he has given up on this tour, and it seems that sister Violet is going to go instead.”

“Are you referring to the Second Imperial Princess?”

“Yes. I thought it was unexpected too. Usually, my brother Luinel would go in such cases. But this time, it appears my brother got sick too, and he asked my sister to take over the tour instead. And it seems my brothers Fabian and Nerobian are also planning to go.”

A group formed not around the eldest son, but the eldest daughter.

In other words, all but the first and the youngest are going.

This, too, was no different from my previous life.

Like a tributary slightly diverted, the main flow does not change,

and if this continues, my sister will undoubtedly accept the same fate as she did in her previous life.

Suddenly, this thought came to me.

I have lived one life, and I am a 'returner' living a second life that others do not have.

What advantage does a returner have?

Knowing the future and being able to change it.

Over the last two years, I've changed the futures of many, including myself.

But one of the most important futures has not changed yet.

My sister's death.

The first moment in my life that I must change without fail.

If I don't change this future,

I will once again experience a regret that will never come again in a lifetime.

"Papa! Why do you look so concerned? Is something wrong?"

Our little one approached me with a worried expression on her face as I sat with a gloomy look.

"People say when you're sad, you should eat something sweet to cheer up! Papa, you should have one too!"

Nana offered me a large eyeball candy she was holding in her hand.

Without thinking, I accepted it and smiled faintly as I stroked her head.

"Both Papa and Ceyram have been acting weird lately! You both just sigh without talking to each other! It's not good to see that!"

What?

Am I being scolded by this little one right now?

Ceyram asked with a displeased face, as if not only me but also he felt uncomfortable.

[Look at this sassy little thing. Hey, kiddo! What do you know to talk like that?]

Nana answered without a flicker in her eyes.

"Ceyram always frowns and mutters to himself when Papa is not around, right? Nana heard everything!"

"What? What did he say?"

My curiosity was piqued, so I asked.

“Just mostly curses. If I had to pick something I remember, it would be ‘when will I deal with these damned...’.”

[This little one has quite a mouth on her!]

Surprised, Ceyram quickly covered Nana’s mouth.

Huh?

What did I just hear?

I had not expected such foul language from that gentle and pure mouth.

Is this why people say we should be careful with our words around kids?

“I’m not sure what’s going on but don’t worry too much! Papa and Ceyram have me! If there’s any danger, I’ll come flying to the rescue!”

Ceyram laughed and replied as if he found the idea amusing.

[Oh, you naive little one. If you don’t want to be annihilated by going out without knowing anything...]

Neither I nor Ceyram may have remembered at that moment just how tricky the dragon race could be.

Nor how, when combined with the innocence of a young human, a whole different situation could ensue,

something we had no way of knowing at present.

* * *

“Sigh...”

With a sigh that was a mix of admiration and grief, Ellis took in the sights of her homeland, Belias, that unfolded before her eyes.

Her hometown, always the same as she had encountered countless times.

But today her mood was different.

“Look! It’s Lady Ellis!”

“That delicate and slender girl has already grown so much! Just look at her imposing figure!”

“I want to become a knight like Lady Ellis when I grow up!”

Her appearance resembled that of a divine goddess from the heavens, donning armor to eradicate evil.

The praises of the territorial citizens spread across the streets.

For Ellis, it was not unwelcome.

Yet it was not entirely pleasurable either.

She was here not as a daughter of a lord but as one knight among many.

It was no longer about being protected; she now had to protect everyone in this territory with her own hands.

With renewed resolve, she headed toward the boundary gate.

Upon arriving at the rear camp’s tent,

as always, the solemn and intense atmosphere persisted. A familiar knight appeared before the slightly tense her.

“It’s been a while, Lady Ellis.”

It was Yulken, the guardian knight of the Duke Vert Household.

He was a fellow member of the Knights of Light and a superior officer positioned as a senior knight.

“Please watch your words, Knight Yulken. I am not here as a lady of the Duke Vert Household.”

Ellis, who wished to be treated as a single knight, was clearly discomforted.

Yulken gave a faint smile and said,

“The Duke is waiting. Shall we go together?”

The summons from her father, the ultimate authority, was an invitation that Ellis could not refuse.

Accompanied by unfamiliar yet familiar guards, she entered the central tent occupied by the Duke.

“Lady Ellis Vert, a mid-ranking knight of the Knights of Light, greets the Duke, the guardian of the continent.”

Before she could even lift her eyes to see the Duke’s face, Ellis bowed her head in respect.

“It fills me with joy to be able to see you like this. Ellis.”

A satisfied smile played on the Duke’s face.

“Before we begin our discussion, there is something I would like to ask of you.”

Sitting down, Ellis spoke with a restrained expression.

“What is it?”

“I would ask that you refrain from providing me with any further favors. I am here to stand as a knight on the battlefield.”

“Every knight here believes you to be a perfect knight.”

“Before they see me as a knight, they regard me as the lady of the duke’s household. That’s why I am bringing this to your attention.”

The Duke’s expression changed subtly.

“You are indeed a knight. But before that, you are my precious daughter, sharing my blood. What do you think that means?”

Ellis was unable to answer immediately.

“If I were to pass, you would take over the leadership here, and further on, you would inherit the duty to protect the continent. Surely, every knight here has no doubt that this is right. I have never once ordered them to give you preferential treatment. They are treating you as such on their own accord.”

The guardianship of the continent.

A family duty drilled into her from childhood, Ellis now felt the weight of that responsibility bearing down on her.

“Don’t burden yourself too much. And I don’t intend to burden you with everything. You also have Aschel, don’t you?”

A strong resonance reverberated within Ellis’s heart.

Then a trace of sweat slid down her neck as words she had long kept bottled up began to itch at her throat.

After a brief moment of contemplation,

Ellis realized that if not now, the opportunity might never come again.

“Father... may I ask you a question?”

That address, rarely used and now distant, Ellis called the Duke not as a noble but as her undeniable father, wanting to ask something of him.

“What is it?”

The Duke replied with a calm tone.

“If it happens, just if, the duty that my brother and I intend to carry is taken over by someone else... what do you think?”

The Duke did not respond immediately.

Ellis did not expect an answer right away either.

As the heavy atmosphere began to stiffen the space around them, the Duke finally spoke.

“... Are you talking about Sian?”

It seemed he had caught on to her implication.

“You once told me that my brother might be far greater than I had thought...”

“Yes, I said that. I do not doubt that the child will grow up to be a fine knight, just like you.”

The Duke spoke positively of Sian, but Ellis’s question wasn’t answered.

“He is capable enough to replace us?”

“...”

“Even if the youngest, who’s neither the eldest son nor the eldest daughter, were to grow beyond me and Aschel, would you be able to pass the mantle to Sian?”

During the time it took for Ellis to take her next breath,

the sound of over a hundred heartbeats echoed throughout her body.

Unable to meet the gaze of the Duke, Ellis could only stare at his lips.

Finally, the words that slipped out were met with,

“Ha ha...”

It was laughter.

“You think very highly of your youngest sibling.”

“The potential of the youngest is indeed vast, to an extent that even I cannot measure. If, as you say, they grow enough to surpass both of you, I do not think that is entirely impossible...”

The Duke’s acknowledgment of the youngest.

Ellis was dumbfounded by the unexpected response.

“But, Ellis...”

“...?”

“That doesn’t mean they can replace Aschel.”

Ellis’s pupils shook violently for a moment.

“Isn’t the assumption itself meaningless? Talking about a replacement for your brother? Aschel, above all, is the one who will lead our family, a trustworthy sibling upon whom you can truly rely. Why even ask such a question?”

Ellis remained silent, unable to respond to the Duke’s question.

But internally she kept asking,

‘Why? Why is it? What could it be?’

It was not that she doubted Aschel’s abilities.

Her question arose from something that she had always taken for granted up to now.

‘Why is Father so fixated on Aschel?’

Knowing that her father desired only capable offspring to continue the family lineage, whether it be the eldest or the youngest, Ellis had believed that as long as the conditions were met, everything would surely be handed over.

But the Duke's current demeanor suggested otherwise.

A consistent fixation that only Aschel would do.

Ellis could not understand this.

Rather, she questioned herself why she was only realizing this now.

"Time is nearing. The Imperial family's carriage will soon arrive at the territory. Go ahead and welcome them..."

"... Yes, I understand."

Ellis swiftly stood up and bowed to the Duke.

As she was about to exit the tent,

"Incidentally, among the attendants accompanying the Imperial family..."

The Duke began to speak again.

"Aschel is there."

"...!"

Ellis could not bring herself to turn her head.

Her left hand holding onto the sword hilt was trembling uncontrollably with emotion.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 108

Chapter 108: The Imperial Inspection (2)

As the Royal Academy welcomed the new school term, most students who had declared their postponement of school attendance eventually showed up, enabling the academy to operate at a manageable level. Thus far, about two-thirds of the students

had completed their return compared to the previous semester, and it seemed that normalcy would be restored with time.

However, there was one seat that remained unoccupied, steadfastly empty regardless of the situation—a place that belonged to a particular student who, while loving to spend time at the academy so much that they would barely budge throughout the holidays, ironically never showed up for class. Arin found the sight of the empty seat rather curious.

As soon as the day's scheduled lessons were over, Arin immediately rose and headed toward the Royal Hall, where her dormitory and the seat's owner resided.

"...!" Upon arrival at the main gate of the Royal Hall, Arin encountered a familiar face.

"senior Arin?"

It was Lunev. The unexpected meeting left Arin momentarily hesitant.

"It seems you've finished class?"

"Ye-Yeah, but what brings you to the Royal Hall?"

Despite not yet asking the reason, she felt she could roughly guess why the girl was present.

"I came to see senior Sian."

"You did? And the reason is...?"

"No particular reason. Just wanted to see senior's face, you know?"

Arin was at a loss for words as Lunev's eyebrows quirked in a questioning manner as if asking if something was amiss. What was even more amusing was that none of Lunev's guardians were in sight.

"Did you really come alone?"

"Yes. I dodged everyone to meet with senior. I didn't think there was a need to bring along my society members for that."

The more she observed, the more incredible the girl seemed to Arin.

"Did senior also come to see Senior Sian?"

"Uh? Wh-Yeah, I did! Since Sian wasn't in class again today, I just thought I'd go see him..."

“I’m envious. I wish I lived close to Senior Sian like you, senior...”

Lunev appeared genuinely envious. Arin replied, somewhat resentful herself.

“It’s not all it’s cracked up to be. Seeing his face is as hard as trying to pluck stars from the sky...”

Eventually, the two girls synchronized their steps and reached the front of Sian’s room.

-Knock Knock

Despite the clear sound, there was no response from inside.

“It’s strange. Usually, Brian would at least come out to greet me.”

Nine out of ten times Brian welcomed them when they visited, but this time, there seemed to be nobody in the room at all. Just as Arin was about to knock again, thinking this unusual,

“There’s nobody in there right now. It’s empty.”

A thick masculine voice reached her from behind.

“Eek!”

Startled, Arin turned her head and let out a scream.

“What’s with the screaming? Did I nearly scare you off a window ledge or something?”

He shouted, just as surprised.

“Why, why are you hanging there?!”

“Why not? I was just doing some perfectly normal ab exercises!”

“Who in the world does ab exercises while hanging off a window railing?”

“...?”

Lunev was puzzled, doubting if this scene before her was anywhere near normal.

A large man hung upside down from beyond the window of the corridor, much like a bat, looking at them.

“Wh-Who are you? That man?”

At first glance, the figure did not seem to be a student.

“You might have heard the name? Seth Shahar Khan...”

“The Sand Prince?”

The First Prince of the Kingdom of Spania. Although judged to have the highest potential at the time of enrollment, he was now, alongside Sian, one of the notorious students most likely to skip classes.

“Anyway, that room is empty right now. That guy, Sian, applied for a temporary leave of absence.”

This was unexpected news to both Arin and Lunev.

“A temporary leave of absence? Just like that? But why?”

“How should I know that?”

He seemed disappointed by Sian’s absence, letting out a deep sigh.

“Oh, dear. I came all the way here hoping for a sparring match, but he’s off enjoying himself. Maybe I should take a break myself?”

However, unlike Sian, any further absences would mean severe disciplinary action for him.

“It’s so sudden...”

Although they were worried about the abrupt news, they also couldn’t help feeling a little hurt.

What on earth could have happened to make him disappear with his whole household?

The fact that their feelings for each other weren’t fully shared yet was truly unfortunate to Arin.

“It’s a bit saddening.”

Lunev felt the same way.

* * *

Emperor Dione did not usually bring a large entourage of guards on his inspection tours. Truth be told, not many among those guards could actually stand a chance against the

emperor himself in a confrontation. The emperor's strength was so formidable that it would be no exaggeration to say he alone could protect all his guards.

Yet, it was different with his children. Despite being heirs to the emperor's blood, they were still lacking in many ways. Therefore, in the absence of the emperor, his children's tours were accompanied by a significantly larger security contingent.

As the carriage arrived at the border station, the figures of the Third and Fourth Princes of the imperial family emerged.

"Ah, to breathe this foul air of the front lines again. Brings back memories."

"Maintain your decorum, Nerobian. We're not here for leisure."

"Yeah yeah, I know."

While the carefree Fourth Prince Nerobian and the Third Prince Fabian, whose face was filled with determination, had both accompanied the emperor on a front-line tour before, they were clearly unimpressed with the grim atmosphere that hadn't changed since.

Behind them, another member of the royal family made her presence known.

"How do you feel, sister? Your first steps in the front-line region?"

It was Violet Severus, the Second Princess, entrusted with the overall responsibility of this tour.

"..."

In the stark, lifeless space so foreign and intriguing to her, she seemed unable to take her eyes off the surroundings.

"I can't understand why. Why would our eldest brother entrust this tour to Violet? With these demons around, we'd be lucky if she doesn't faint."

Despite Nerobian's rather distasteful remarks, Fabian did not bother to stop him. Instead, he seemed to agree, eyeing Violet with a look of disbelief.

"Why is it that only sister has so many guards with her?"

Unlike themselves, who were also part of the royal family, the Second Princess was surrounded by a noticeably larger retinue of knights.

"I heard that the Quizzel family sent additional guards for Violet. It seems our eldest brother is extra cautious with a bloodline that may perish so easily."

Not all the knights in this expedition were from the imperial military, and not all were from the same lineage. Most of Violet Princess's guards were Quizzel family knights, called up from her maternal side.

When it was decided that the Second Princess would tour, they were dispatched suddenly by the Quizzels, and it was rumored that it was Condor, the head of the family and current chancellor of the Royal Academy, who sent them.

"Is the atmosphere too uncomfortable for you?"

Approaching the princess, a golden-haired man with a mature voice arrived by her side.

"A bit. This is such an unfamiliar place I have never experienced before."

To her, a flower nurtured within a greenhouse, the red sky above was an unfamiliar sight. Yet, Violet accepted the lonely air of the front without any sign of discomfort or fear.

"This makes me all the more aware of my position. I must fulfill this tour with the trust of father and brother without fail."

Determination could be seen in the princess's expression.

The man bowed slightly and said,

"As you wish, Princess. I will do my utmost to ensure your smooth journey."

Violet responded with a gentle smile.

"Thank you, Sir Aschel."

* * *

Ellis's first mission from the Knights of Light was as follows:

To guard the royal family during the imperial inspection.

She was to work alongside the imperial knights in anticipation of any untoward incidents—a support mission, in essence. While it was an honorable duty, Ellis was baffled.

With so many troops already stationed at the frontier and a large number of imperial guardians, why then was extra support needed?

In case of emergency, sure, but one question lingered.

'Why is brother Aschel here?'

Aschel, who had accompanied the Second Princess as part of her entourage, was an unexpected pairing, as they had no prior connections.

Could it be a favor asked by the First Prince, whom he was friendly with?

Unlike the perplexed Ellis, Duke Vert greeted the royal family with a face full of joy.

"It is truly a pleasure to see you all after so long. Seeing you all so grown up must be quite reassuring for His Majesty."

"We are simply grateful to be allowed these inspections."

Despite their high rank, the princess and princes paid their respects to the duke, a guardian of the continent and a friend to the emperor.

To Ellis, the duke's permissive stance toward a tour conducted by the young royals without the emperor was also perplexing, given that he usually barred even his own children from the front line.

"Ellis?"

Cecilia approached her at that moment.

"Could you spare a moment?"

It seemed she had something to discuss. Ellis cast a cautious glance toward where Aschel was and then followed Cecilia.

In the dusty back of the tent, and after ensuring they were alone, Cecilia whispered something into Ellis's ear. The news was so shocking that Ellis could not help but leap in surprise.

"Brother Aschel personally requested this task from father?!"

Her voice was too loud, prompting Cecilia to gesture with her finger for her to quiet down.

"Yes. Since he would be taking care of the princess's entourage, it was he who asked Duke Vert and Prince Luinel for the permission for the tour. Fearing this, the empress's camp sent Princes Fabian and Nerobian."

"What's the reason he volunteered?"

Cecilia shook her head without saying a word, indicating she did not know the reason.

“There must be a reason he did this...”

Ellis sighed desperately, holding her head.

“I suggest you don’t take too much to heart,” said Cecilia. “Perhaps Prince Luinel, who is friends with Aschel, asked him to do it on his behalf?”

“I wish that were the case. I hope I’m wrong...”

Despite Cecilia’s concerns, Ellis shook her head, saying,

“But I think that’s not the case...”

After the incident at the royal banquet, Ellis had not shaken off her suspicions about Aschel, and now his inexplicable behavior only heightened her existing fears.

“It feels like something is wrong...”

But without knowing where it started or how it went awry, Ellis was at a loss.

‘Do you know something about this, Sian?’

She recalled the youngest sibling’s face, full of murderous intent.

“Ellis, there you are...”

“...!”

Ellis’s heart sank suddenly, and she hastily looked up.

Sweat trickled from beneath her armor and skin without pause.

“Ah, brother Aschel?”

Just now, Aschel had been by the princess’s side.

Ellis forcibly managed her expression and desperately suppressed her rising anxiety.

Contrary to her tension, Aschel appeared quite serene.

“May I have a word with you for a moment?”

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 109

Chapter 109: The Imperial Inspection (3)

Naturally, the inspection of the royal family did not proceed in the same way as the emperor's. Unlike the emperor who had traveled freely to the front lines of the Limia Valley, the princess and princesses were only allowed to inspection within restricted areas. As this was for their safety, no one objected, nor did the royal family members ask for additional inspections.

As the first day of the inspection came to an end and night fell, the royal family's villa, located outside the city gates, became the scene of another encounter. Guided by a royal knight, Ellis arrived shortly before a door.

-Knock, knock-

Though not visibly nervous, she was also not entirely at ease, and a small sigh escaped her as she knocked.

"Please come in."

Upon receiving permission from the room's occupant, Ellis entered without hesitation.

"Welcome, Ellis!"

Delighted by the arrival of her awaited guest, the room's owner greeted her with a smile of joy. It was Violet Severus, the second princess of the Ushif Empire, who had invited Ellis to this place.

"It has been some time, but you've become even more handsome and noble, haven't you? I can hardly look directly at you because you're so dazzling."

"I appreciate your kind words."

Their interaction resembled that of old friends, although in truth, they weren't close enough to share personal stories. More precisely, the second princess herself did not seek close relationships with anyone.

Unlike the first prince, she was introverted to the point of disliking even showing her face in public, leading to reluctance in participating in external activities. However, she was by no means an incompetent princess. Known to have inherited the emperor's

magical abilities the best among his five children, she and Ellis were the only ones who achieved the 6-star rank at their graduation from the Royal Academy.

“I’m sorry for imposing on you, Ellis. I feel greatly reassured with you by my side...”

She had specifically requested Ellis to serve as her personal guard. Given that Ellis’s mission from the Knights of Light also involved guarding members of the royal family, she had no particular reason to refuse.

“It is an honor for a person like me to be of assistance to you, Your Highness.”

Ellis responded in a perfectly standard tone.

“I’m truly grateful to be protected by someone from the Vert Ducal family...”

Despite the good intentions behind Ellis’s words, he could not bring himself to smile genuinely; his lips curled only slightly at best.

After concluding the conversation, Ellis immediately left the villa and headed to where the knights had made camp. Under the night sky, where the full moon shone brighter than the sun, Aschel waited, having anticipated her exit.

“Thank you for accepting the request, Ellis.”

Aschel offered his thanks with a smile.

“You needn’t mention it. My mission from the Knights of Light involved escorting members of the royal family, and I am grateful for the opportunity to fulfill that duty.”

“It eases my mind to know that it’s you who’s protecting the princess.”

From a distance, Aschel and Princess Violet seemed to have a very close relationship, but Ellis, who knew otherwise, couldn’t help but inquire.

“Why did you volunteer to accompany the princess, if I may ask?”

With a gentle smile and a spark in her eyes, Ellis probed for an answer.

“...You finally ask.”

As if he had been anticipating the question, Aschel responded with a mischievous smile.

“It was a request from the prince.”

“Prince Luinel?”

“Yes. He asked me to ensure the princess’s safety during her inspection in his stead, as he is unwell. It was something the princess wanted as well.”

“Were you already acquainted with Princess Violet?”

Aschel shook his head.

“Truthfully, this inspection was the first time I met her. I thought you might have been closer to her, having been academically peers. But that wasn’t the case?”

“Yes. Being quite introverted, I had fewer opportunities to interact with her.”

Nodding in understanding, a momentary silence followed their conversation. It seemed as though there was still more Ellis wished to know.

“Do you have more to say?”

“Is that it?”

Aschel’s pupils slightly quivered at the unexpected question.

“What do you mean?”

“Are you saying that’s the only reason you’ve taken up the duty of accompanying the princess? Is there truly nothing more to it?”

There was utter seriousness in Ellis’s eyes.

“I’m not sure what you’re implying. Do you believe I have some other ulterior motive?”

Aschel’s teasing tone shifted to something more somber. The tension between them escalated, invisible yet palpable.

“Just wondering.”

Ellis smiled nonchalantly, as if it were of no consequence.

“I thought there might be more behind it... That, as my brother, you might have some grand plans or considerations.”

Her tone was light, but the implication was not lost on Aschel.

“Grand plans? What exactly are you implying?”

“I can’t say. Whatever you deem grand in your eyes, I don’t know...”

Suddenly, Aschel's gaze turned icy. Although he maintained a smiling exterior, it was clear from his expression that his heart was not in it. Trying not to dwell on it, Ellis averted her gaze.

"Then, goodnight, brother."

Ellis disappeared from Aschel's view, never once looking back, maintaining a tense but careful gaze that held a multitude of unsaid emotions.

* * *

The second day of the inspection.

Today's scheduled area was the desolate, western forests. Even if they couldn't venture into areas where demonic beasts were directly emerging, the unique bleakness of the forest was palpable.

"The desolate and eerie atmosphere stimulates my senses. We mustn't let down our guard even for a moment while we are here."

Prince Fabian expressed his sentiments about the forest, and his sibling Nerobian concurred.

"I share the same feeling. I want to applaud the efforts of the front-line knights who labor daily to defend such a place."

As with the day before, Princes three and four took the lead in the inspection, with second Princess Violet, the overall in charge of the inspection, leisurely taking in the surrounding scenery amidst the procession.

Behind the princess, Ellis, appointed as her personal guard, followed closely.

"Our younger siblings are indeed remarkable. They're just like passionate and inquisitive students."

However, contrary to the princess's words, the appearance presented by the princes was merely superficial, something that none of the attendants were oblivious to, and surely not the princess herself.

"You have siblings too, don't you, Ms. Ellis?"

"Yes. They attend the Royal Academy."

"And? How is that?"

The question could have been a simple inquiry about their relationship, but Ellis found the query very meaningful.

“As their sister, they always appear precious to me. That’s why I believe it’s important to always show them a good example.”

“Always showing a good example... A nice thing to say.”

Princess Violet’s pace slowed abruptly. Ellis matched her pace without thought, clearly aware of the change.

“As a representative of the empire and a sister who must set an example for her siblings, we must always present ourselves well. Sometimes, we even have to thoroughly conceal our true nature...”

Their royal blood bore the inherent duty of wearing a mask, concealing themselves for life, as she remarked.

Ellis fully understood this burden.

“But, Ms. Ellis, you seem different.”

“Pardon?”

“Your current appearance seems genuinely without pretense. How I envy you...”

Before Ellis could grasp the comment’s full significance,

-Boom!-

A yellow radiance suddenly surged into the sky from the east. It was the signal of a demonic beast’s emergence.

Fortunately, the distance was great enough that they wouldn’t come into direct contact with the beast.

“Secure the princess and princes!”

Duke Vert promptly issued an evacuation order. The confident leading princes immediately took cover behind their knights.

Ellis, intent on protecting Princess Violet, was interrupted as she was about to act.

“Your Highness, we must evacuate at once...!”

Ellis saw it. Right beneath the feet of the princess, a transparent magic circle replete with rainbow colors was formed, and at the same time, a blue light of mana emanated from her fingertips.

In that instant, Ellis thought, if she wasn't witnessing it incorrectly, that must be a 'spatial transference magic'.

In the fraction of a second, where one could not even maintain normal thought, Ellis desperately wished her observation had been wrong.

But contrary to her hopes,

-Whoosh!-

Princess Violet vanished before everyone's eyes.

"The princess has disappeared!!"

The knights were thrown into a frenzy. Whether seasoned veterans of the frontlines or members of the imperial army, everyone was stunned by the abrupt disappearance without any forewarning.

Ellis was likewise struck dumb.

"Snap out of it, Ellis!"

Approaching her was none other than Aschel.

"Calm down and tell me what you saw. How did the princess disappear so abruptly?"

Ellis stammered her reply amid her daze.

"She... she seemed to use magic."

"Magic?"

Aschel's brow deeply furrowed.

"Yes! Right before she vanished, there was a magic circle at her feet, and though I'm not certain, it appeared she was manifesting mana from her hand..."

Ellis grappled with understanding her own words. This situation suggested that the princess had orchestrated her disappearance from this location.

"...!"

In a split second, Ellis noticed something.

As Aschel's lips parted slightly, his teeth were visible, grinding intensely—as if showing a clenched jaw.

“All forces, scatter and search for the princess! Ransack the entire Limia Valley if you must, but we have to find her!”

Upon the duke's orders, the momentarily petrified knights snapped into action. They hastily organized into search parties and moved deeper into the valley.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 110

Chapter 110: The Imperial Inspection (4)

While searching the valley for the missing second princess, Ellis was suddenly reminded of a past event.

When she was thirteen.

At that time, a large-scale swordsmanship tournament was held at the Royal Academy.

It was open to all grades and was so significant that the results were reflected in the academic records—it was an event that everyone had to participate in without exception.

This was also true for Princess Violet, who was Ellis's contemporary.

Known for her proficiency in magic, she was less enthusiastic about physical activities like sword fighting, and many were curious to see how she would perform in this tournament.

As the tournament began,

And as time passed, it finally came to be Princess Violet's turn, but the princess did not show up at the arena.

People assumed that she abstained from the event due to her dislike of physical exertion, and their reaction was somewhat anticipated.

But the real problem came after.

The princess could not be found anywhere in the academy, not just at the arena.

It caused quite a stir among the princess's knights and the academy, and the sword fighting event was even temporarily suspended to search for the missing princess.

Despite a thorough search of the dormitories and the use of detection magic to sense any presence of magic throughout the city, no trace of her could be found.

But amidst the panic,

Princess Violet finally showed herself in her room at dusk.

Her appearance was nothing short of confident and composed.

The reason for her disappearance was simple:

She had hidden until the end of the swordsmanship tournament because she did not want to participate.

Even if someone could overlook the fact that she had hidden, the fact that she could not be found when the entire academy mobilized was a profound shock at that time.

An unprecedented situation where an imperial princess disappeared from the base of demons.

For some reason, Ellis remembered that day vividly.

"Miss Ellis?"

Cecilia awoke her from her reverie.

"Sorry, Cecilia! I was just deep in thought..."

Startled, Ellis shook her head to regain her composure.

"I feel a magical presence over here."

Cecilia pointed to one side of the desolate valley where a wind was blowing.

There was a palpable artificial magical presence that could not naturally occur.

"Is that where the Blood River is?"

Even the sound of the gently flowing river seemed distant.

“Yes. But Miss Ellis, you look terribly pale...”

Cecilia asked, worried by her visibly troubled face.

Ellis could not deny it.

There were many reasons for her pallor,

Having seen Princess Violet manifest her mana, Ellis could not help but suspect that the princess could be staging the current situation herself.

However, the most pressing concern for Ellis was,

‘Does brother Aschel also know about it?’

His reaction, which seemed stirred by emotion.

He definitely did not seem to be feigning his response.

He too appeared quite flustered by the princess’s unexpected behavior.

“Don’t feel too down, Miss Ellis. The princess will be alright.”

Cecilia consoled her by patting her on the shoulder.

“Thank you, Cecilia.”

Finding the princess was their top priority, so they quickly made their way to the Blood River, where they felt the magical presence.

“Princess!”

At the mouth of the Blood River, which ran with the color of blood, they saw Princess Violet lying unconscious.

Her eyes were closed, but she was breathing normally, and she did not seem to be severely injured.

“Thank goodness, she seems to be safe.”

Unlike the relieved Cecilia, Ellis’s face remained fraught with anxiety.

Why was she lying so peacefully here, in the stronghold where demons could attack at any moment?

The very fact that she was unconscious raised many questions.

Quietly, Ellis said,

“Please wake up, Princess.”

Her tone was serious yet heavy.

“Eh, Miss Ellis?”

The startled Cecilia called out, but Ellis remained firm.

“I know you’re awake. Stop pretending to be unconscious and get up.”

The brief silence was soon interrupted as

The second princess slowly opened her eyes and sat up as if nothing was wrong.

“Was my acting that obvious?”

Her smile seemed to imply that the situation was not too serious, a stark contrast to Ellis’s stern expression.

“It’s scary, Ellis. If you don’t explain the situation quickly, I feel like you won’t let me go.”

This was their natural habitat—full of demons.

Just as the princess said, it was clear that Ellis had no intention of leaving until she understood the situation.

“You don’t need to make excuses. You saw it, right? That I disappeared on my own using magic?”

Ellis responded with silence.

“You must have a lot of questions, Ellis. Before wondering why I disappeared, consider why I came here in the first place and why I came with your brother, of all people. It’s all very suspicious.”

The princess’s words pierced directly to Ellis’s suspicions.

“You might laugh when I say this, but in fact, you should be thankful that it wasn’t my brother who came on this inspection but me.”

“What do you mean?”

“If my brother had come, this valley would surely be a battlefield full of demons right now. But after receiving a reprimand from father, my brother is now in reflection, and the

key person for our original plan is currently elsewhere. Hence, I have ended up leading this inspection.”

“A battle with demons? What are you talking about!”

The agitated Ellis raised her voice as she looked directly at the princess.

The princess continued speaking, undisturbed.

“Our brother is quite cunning. I, who share his blood, know that best. Although we couldn’t carry out the original plan, that doesn’t mean he would simply stay quiet. Just like this inspection...”

Ellis still couldn’t comprehend the princess’s words.

“Obviously, nobody wants to die. Not just people, but all living beings feel the same. I’m no different. So...”

-Kung!

Suddenly, the heavy footsteps of a living creature echoed around them.

Feeling threatened, Ellis immediately turned around.

“Grrr...”

Several hellhounds were drooling and staring at them with bloodlust.

Ellis unsheathed her sword and faced off against the demons.

Luckily, they were only lower-ranking ones.

“We’ll talk more later. For now, please follow me quietly so I can escort you to safety, Your Highness.”

However, as time dragged on, higher-ranking dangers could emerge, so they needed to evacuate to a safe zone quickly.

But...

“That’s right. We should leave. But you can’t go, Ellis...”

-Giiing

An ethereal sound suddenly rose from somewhere as a transparent light swiftly engulfed the surroundings.

Panicking, Ellis turned around, and at that moment...

-Poof

She felt the cold sensation of a blade piercing her and a searing pain from her abdomen made her mind go blank.

Ellis slowly looked down, trembling like a poplar tree.

She saw the sword hilt connected to a cold, steel blade,

And the familiar hand holding it.

Following that hand upward, her gaze finally met the perpetrator who had stabbed her.

“Ce-Cecilia...?”

There was no emotion in the steadfast pine-like eyes that stared back at Ellis.

The knight who had always been told to protect the Vert family,

The person she once trusted and relied on more than family,

Cecilia had stabbed her.

“Why? Cecilia, why...?”

-Swish

“Argh!”

Ignoring her heartfelt question, Cecilia just drew the sword out coldly.

Without any need for excuses or explanations, the mocking Princess Violet spoke instead.

“Don’t think too badly of me, Ellis. You are a Knight of Light who swore to sacrifice yourself for the peace of the continent, aren’t you? You will become a noble knight who died fighting a demon for me.”

As she spoke, the princess pulled out a bottle and sprinkled its contents around.

The reddish color suggested blood, but it wasn’t human blood.

“I hope you don’t struggle too much. I wish you could accept your death serenely. Although things turned out this way, I didn’t want Ellis to suffer...”

However, Ellis was already experiencing immense pain like never before.

Not just the physical pain from the stab wound, but the agony of betrayal by someone she trusted made it even more excruciating.

-Thump

Ellis's leg gave way, and she finally knelt down.

"Well, take care, Ellis..."

With those merciless final words, the princess turned her back and left.

Cecilia, Ellis's knight, followed her.

"Ce-Cecilia..."

Her unanswered calls were met with silence.

Sorrow, despair, futility.

In a situation bound by such negative emotions, Ellis wanted to know only one thing.

'Why did Cecilia betray me?'

But Cecilia never answered that question until the end.

And just before she completely disappeared from view,

"..."

She turned back.

Pity.

A look of pity as if to say it was fated to be this way, as if feeling sorry for herself.

There was no self-loathing or guilt.

With that, Ellis realized.

From the beginning,

She had never been one of her own.

"Grr..."

Ellis didn't have time to mourn.

Alone and injured, she had become prey for the hungry demons lurking nearby.

Beyond her, she could sense the energy of other demons rushing in, drawn by the smell of blood.

-Gnash

A surge of rage washes over her, and she gritted her teeth.

She rose to her feet once more and quickly took stock of what had to be done.

She was bleeding, but the wound wasn't as deep as she thought.

She could still wield her sword and use magic without issue, and the demons before her were still manageable lower-ranked ones.

First, she needed to dispatch the demons swiftly and regroup with any remaining knights in the area.

Then, return to the front lines and report exactly what happened to her...

Report everything...

To whom should she report?

To the Knights of Light? The Imperial Army?

The two culprits who had brought her to this state, where she was likely to be outmaneuvered already?

To the Duke?

Her family, more important than anything in the world, especially the Duke, valued her not simply as a daughter, but as the successor to the family lineage.

Nobody would want her to stay alive more than him.

But now, at the Duke's side was,

Aschel, was he not?

A brother she couldn't trust,

The same one who even tried to kill her when she was just a child.

Was there a chance he was laughing at her current predicament?

Her trembling sword, the embodiment of her turmoil, revealed her inner chaos.

Could she really return as if nothing had happened, after overcoming this situation?

Ellis's focus began to fade from her eyes.

Alone, with nowhere to turn.

What point would there be to return in such a state?

“Growl!”

As the ferocious roar rang out, the hellhounds pounced, but Ellis didn't move.

It was as if she had given up on life and was ready to let everything go.

She closed her eyes.

-Shrrk!

The vivid sound of a blade swiping through the air snapped her out of it.

Her eyes flickered open.

“...!”

A black cape fluttering in the crimson mist.

A black mask concealing the face.

And the sinister, blood-colored dagger emanating a ruthless aura.

Ellis immediately knew who this mysterious figure was.

Somehow he had appeared out of nowhere.

She remembered seeing him before.

(To be continued)