

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin

chapter 12

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Chapter 12: Limia Valley (2)

As I plummeted, I spread my arms and legs into a large cross shape.

“Dark Mist 3rd Form: Mist Gliding!”

At the chant, black mist erupted from within my body.

The mist swiftly enveloped me, and soon enough, the speed of my fall began to decrease.

My descending figure resembled a gliding flying squirrel.

Below the cliff was a dense thicket, crowded with large trees.

When I carefully set my feet on the ground, the mist around me dissipated almost instantly.

“Grrrrr...”

Despite not even making it into the valley yet, the howling of hounds echoed from the depths of the forest.

As I casually looked up, I found myself facing several drooling hellhounds.

Well, if I think of them as mere appetizers, it's not so bad.

-Swish

Seamlessly, I drew my sword.

When the hellhounds saw it, they stepped back.

Just sensing the aura of the sword, they felt pressured.

But reasoning was momentarily lost on these mindless creatures.

The previously ferocious barking beasts eventually charged at me all at once.

“Grr!”

-Screech

My sword traced a semicircle, like drawing a parabola.

The head of a hellhound tumbled to the ground, and dark red blood gushed from the severed neck.

I dispassionately selected one suitable head from amongst the torn bodies and picked it up.

-Gulp, gulp

The demon’s blood flowed down my throat.

Huff...

The taste aside, the rising stench was revolting.

However, I was long since accustomed to it and didn’t mind much.

Still, were anyone to witness me now, they’d hardly think of me as a human.

This was a spectacle where being mistaken for a demon and slain would hardly be surprising.

-Thump

After a sufficient meal, I cast aside the creature’s head without a second thought.

No need to wring out every last drop.

After all, these creatures wouldn’t run out of seed just because I took one bite.

“Huff...”

Heat surged throughout my body, and my blood seemed to boil.

This was proof the demon's blood was properly absorbed.

With each passing day, I could feel changes occurring in my body.

Still, it was necessary to thoroughly dispose of the garbage.

One by one, after ensuring their use, I gathered the hellhound corpses into one place.

-Whoosh!

A small spark fell from my fingertip, and soon the bodies were ablaze.

It is a must to incinerate the bodies of demons if one isn't planning to revisit the area.

Otherwise, as they decay, they release an unbearable stench, contaminating the surroundings.

That putrid smell was incomparably worse than any normal rotting animal, so much so that even the imperial army would always burn the bodies after battling the demons.

“.....”

I stared blankly at the burning corpses.

This has been a monthly routine now.

Every night, unknown to everyone else, I hunted demons alone.

Since the knights on the front didn't stick together openly, it was relatively simple to act if I wasn't caught.

But since they checked on my well-being periodically, I used Emily as a precaution.

I left covertly under the guise of nighttime exercises, while she would create a ruse such as 'Young Master Sian is currently sleeping~'.

The knights' encampment on the hill overlooked Limia Valley, so a slight change in direction and a jump down would lead straight to the demons' territory.

Of course, no idiots would actually jump down there.

But ironically, through this method, I've been training my body day after day.

“Hey, master. Isn't it about time you graduate from these mongrels?”

Out of the smoke, Ceyram materialized, looking as though the concept fascinated her.

“Just looking at the blood you've consumed, you could fill a bathtub by now, right? Surely, you won't keep hunting such trivial creatures?”

Indeed, during the past month, the demons I hunted included hellhounds, ogres, and harpies—none but mid to low-tier creatures.

Honestly, it's absurd to think I could regain the power of my prime in just 30 days.

If I recklessly went after higher-tier demons and got into trouble, who would I blame?

It's never bad to be careful.

But, I couldn't just keep squabbling with minnows forever.

My body had changed considerably since arriving at the front lines.

I should be able to wield high-level magic and secret techniques that had gone unused until now.

“Yeah, it's about time to move deeper inside.”

“Right? Then let's hurry and hunt some proper prey...”

“But not today.”

“Why not?!”

She countered my abrupt rejection with a shriek.

“It's just not a good day today. Tomorrow, the imperial family is making their rounds.”

“Making their rounds?”

As I'd mentioned several times, Belias is the only front-line battlefield across the continent.

The state wouldn't leave such a volatile and unpredictable place unattended.

At least once every six months, the Emperor himself visits to inspect the overall situation.

Although, even these visits had significantly decreased since Duke Vert took command.

The obtuse central nobility had long since voiced the ridiculous opinion that support for the front lines should be cut back. Still, the current Emperor is a wise ruler.

He deems minimising future damages more important than chasing immediate benefits.

That's why a balanced symbiosis between the front lines and the central government is maintained.

Of course, that's only until the living Emperor remains.

In a few years, when the current Emperor passes away, the Empire is likely to descend into chaos.

Anyway, considering the big event of the Emperor's visit, it's best not to act rashly.

At least for today, I plan to proceed as usual.

“Oh come on! Usually, you act so confident, as if you could even strike down a Demon King, but you're afraid to move because of the Emperor?”

“Think of it as avoiding a headache. I do want to live this life comfortably, after all.”

“Why would you bother seeking me out if you want to live comfortably?”

Hmm, she does have a point.

I contradicted myself, but... well, it is what it is.

Pacifying Ceyram, I moved into Limia Valley.

A wasteland where not a single ray of moonlight reached.

So dark, you couldn't see anything around you.

-Ting

Activating mana at my fingertips, I touched my eyes with it.

As I gently closed and opened my eyes, the once pitch-blackness gave way to clarity.

A first-class magic 'Dark Adaptation'.

It shortened the time needed for the eyes to adjust to the dark, securing visibility briefly in darkness.

Although a very basic spell for first-tier, without the corresponding attribute, even eighth-tier mages would struggle to perform it due to its innate nature.

Naturally, with compatible attributes, I could use it freely, but compared to other elemental magic, it's nothing to boast about.

In any case, darkness is regarded pejoratively by the Imperial Magic Council; we're often treated shoddily.

But power depends on how it's wielded, and here I am, making impressive use of it in such a situation.

How amusing.

"Kikikik!"

The moment my view cleared, I was face to face with dozens of glowing red eyes.

Normally, I would wander to find them myself, but today they came to greet me in groups.

While relieving the effort is welcome, encountering different demons at the valley's entrance this way is extremely unusual.

Something feels off.

"Hmm..."

Ceyram, watching the demons closely, rested her chin on her hand, seemingly puzzled.

[They seem frightened.]

"Frightened, you say?"

What I saw were hellhounds, the giant praying mantis-esque demon Canyon Mantis, and underdeveloped small ogres.

Normally, they would attack upon sight, but unusually, they seemed hesitant.

It didn't seem likely to be because of Ceyram, their trepidation was seriously visible.

It felt as if they were fleeing from something and happened upon me unexpectedly...

".....!"

Suddenly, a potent killing intent emerged from the silent earth.

Sensing danger, I swiftly launched myself into the air.

-CRASH!

As I rose, giant teeth sprouted from the ground.

The demons that were too slow to escape were swallowed up without a chance to react.

If I'd been a moment later, I could have been among them.

"Kuaaak!"

Screams echoed from within the gnashing teeth.

If what I'm seeing is correct, I know the identity of these horrendous teeth.

[Worm, isn't it?]

Ceyram, who had also leaped up, gazed down at the creature with interest.

Meanwhile, a cold sweat trickled down my cheek.

The 'Death Worm'.

A high-ranking predator ruling Limia Valley.

Why was a creature that should dwell in the valley's deep shadows here?

A long spine emerged from the ground, pointed sharply at me.

As if to say it was a shame it missed catching me...

* * *

Under the full moon, a vast plain unfolded across the field. Despite the late hour, carriages moved diligently along the landscape.

Dozens of guards armed with various weapons formed a tight perimeter around the carriage, making penetration nearly impossible.

"....."

A young lady sat demurely inside the carriage and suddenly looked out the window.

Nothing but silence was visible beyond their convoy, like looking into a mirror.

"Your Highness, perhaps you should rest?"

A lady-in-waiting seated across asked with concern.

"I'm fine. I didn't come here to idly sleep away the time...."

The response was brisk, causing the woman to apologize silently.

Pinned to the girl's body was a red brooch, emblematic of the imperial family.

“Mi, might it not be better to reconsider? Maybe going as far as Belias, but is it really necessary to approach the dangerous front lines...”

“I am the imperial princess of this empire! Just like His Majesty, my father, I go to fulfill my duties as a member of the imperial family! If you speak such nonsense again, I shall truly become angry, do you understand?”

Her eyes blazed with conviction, and the lady-in-waiting bowed deeply in apology.

“Ha...”

The princess sighed and gazed out the window once more.

The carriage’s atmosphere became especially tense. Desperate for a change of subject, the lady-in-waiting pondered and then spoke up.

“Oh! By the way, I overheard from the royal guards that there’s another young man of your age present at the battlefield!”

“A young man...?”

Interest sparked in the princess as she shifted her focus.

“Yes! The son of Duke Vert, I believe. Intriguingly, like you, he expressed a wish to go to the front and volunteered himself!”

Hearing this, the princess appeared puzzled.

“The, Duke Vert allowed this?”

“Initially, he opposed it. But they say a parent can’t defeat a child’s will, so the Duke gave him a trial after realizing he couldn’t dissuade him. Having passed the trial and earned acceptance, his wish for front-line service was granted!”

“A trial...?”

The dry tone in her eyes was now replaced by curiosity.

“It’s irrelevant to me! I don’t mean to compare. Besides, I’m sure that youngster has his own reasons for wanting to go.”

“Still, isn’t he remarkable? It’s almost as if he’s like you, Your Highness. You directly approached His Majesty and....”

“That’s enough; let’s stop this conversation. I’m tired now. Wake me when we arrive.”

“Of course, Your Highness.”

The princess promptly fell asleep, closing off the dialogue.

Though the lady-in-waiting meant to stay quiet, a question followed from the princess.

“The boy... what’s his name?”

Surprised, the lady-in-waiting hesitated before replying.

“Ah, that is...well. Si, Sian! Sian Vert, I think that was his name!”

“Sian Vert...”

Could it be a sense of empathy she felt for him?

His name was strangely easy to remember, echoing repeatedly in her mind.

Realizing it was futile, she closed her eyes once more.

Not long after, the princess drifted into a deep sleep.

(To be continued)