

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 171

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Chapter 171: Dispelling the Mist of Light (5)

Aschel Vert, the eldest son of the Vert dukedom, guardians of the continent.

To Arin, his first impression was incredibly special.

To sum it up in a word, he felt like a deity descended from the heavens.

Compellingly attractive with an appearance impossible for any human to resist, and a gentle smile free from any malice.

He was a very meaningful person who first offered what one might call advice to Arin, who had been trapped in the royal well, unable to see the world.

Remain unshaken by others and continue as a dignified and confident princess.

To the ignorant, this might seem like sincere advice, but to those a bit more worldly, it would quickly become apparent.

It was but an empty fantasy—meaningless.

No concrete direction, no path to take, no method to progress, merely sowing the seeds of hopeless dreams.

At that time, Arin didn't realize this, believing his words were the truth, attempting to follow them forward.

But now, it was different.

She was no longer as frail as to be intoxicated by his dreamlike smile.

What was important to her was not the illusory light, but the reality of the darkness.

The existence of the darkness which showed her, a frog trapped in a well, the path forward.

-Swish!

Arin's gaze swiftly shifted from Aschel to something rapidly encroaching upon her.

-Click!

The cyan eyes that had been locking eyes with her a moment ago now belonged to Sian who, in an instant, ran forward and grabbed her hand.

However, Sian's gaze was not on Arin.

It was focused on Aschel, who with a face filled with exhilaration, was raising his holy sword, as if he had no intention of including Arin in his picture.

"Kyaaak!"

He shoved her back.

The moment the knights safely caught Arin's pushed-back form,

-Bang!

A golden holy sword and a black demonic sword clashed, creating a violent surge around them.

Locked in that exchange, the two men showed no emotion as if they had been destined to meet.

After a fierce confrontation of wills, Sian eventually withdrew his sword and stepped back.

Aschel, wearing an inscrutable smile, sheathed his holy sword.

Without any hesitation or second-guessing, he slowly started walking towards Sian.

A strange void wind arose to calm the agitated atmosphere around them.

The existence of despair which had plunged the world into chaos and the existence of salvation which had appeared before it.

As the overwhelming tension prevented anyone from daring to breathe freely, they all swallowed dryly, witnessing the confrontation.

The distance between the two had closed to just three steps.

There, Aschel was the first to break the silence.

"Do you remember the day we met outside the estate two years ago, Sian?"

Sian remained silent, lips tightly sealed, providing no answer.

“I still can’t forget the eyes I saw that day. So intense that they could not have been from a human, unlike anything I’d ever seen in my father or His Majesty the Emperor...”

The encounter at the Vert estate.

Aschel revealed his true feelings about that day to Sian.

“I admit, I didn’t pay much attention to you at first. You inherited the Vert blood but seemed to do nothing with it, so you were of little interest to me. But after hearing you beat Kranz and saved the imperial princess on the front lines, curiosity about you blossomed. The youngest I knew wasn’t supposed to have such a capacious vessel, what exactly changed you? There must have been some monumental event.”

Sian continued to listen, giving no response.

“So I took an interest and approached you. Yet the more I tried to know about you, the more questions piled up. You were like the mist covering the night sky, revealing nothing. It felt as if you knew I would approach and had blocked everything in advance.”

While saying this, Aschel caressed his own throat.

“Princess Violet said the same. The figure holding a sword against us in the manor was you. That was the one time I felt truly powerless. It wasn’t bad, it was... intriguing. The thought that there was someone in the world capable of making me feel this sensation was too interesting.”

The expression on Sian’s stoic face slightly distorted.

“World rejects the existence of the mist. That’s the very reason why you find yourself in this predicament now. But I do not wish to discard you, Sian.”

In response to the distortion, Aschel’s smile grew even brighter.

“I won’t ask about your past, where you’ve been or what you’ve been doing. The past is not important; what’s crucial is the future, and for that future, what you need to do is take my hand.”

Aschel extended his hand towards Sian in a very natural movement.

“Sian, surely your power can be used in many ways. For the empire, the continent, humanity, and for me too...”

Like the warm sunlight that clears away the dark dawn sky,

“I will lead you on the path of salvation.”

Behind the extended hand of Aschel, a mysterious golden hue shimmered subtly.

“.....”

Sian’s mouth remained closed, but his gaze was fixed on Aschel’s hand.

His eyes were indifferent and calm, showing no signs of serious contemplation.

Aschel, without pressuring or urging, quietly awaited Sian’s next action.

-Swift

After a rather prolonged silence,

Finally, Sian lifted his hand,

but instead of Aschel’s hand, Sian’s hand was heading toward his own pocket.

The moment something carefully hidden within was revealed to the world,

“.....!”

Aschel’s face contorted as if crushed by despair.

“It certainly was a roundabout way to request for this.”

In contrast, Sian’s face, grinning ear to ear, was filled with a mix of delight and triumph.

The jewel of the hallowed sword Durandal, faded from years of seclusion from the world, was barely sustaining its meager luster.

* * *

In the dark space filled with black mist, the subspace of the demonic sword where Ceyram lay comfortably atop a bed of mist,

A woman stepped into Ceyram’s space.

Noticing her arrival, Ceyram replied with a somewhat joyful smile,

[You slept quite a long time, didn’t you? Your skin’s all flushed. How about getting some treatment?]

Despite Ceyram’s taunting, the lady gave no answer.

She merely glared at Ceyram with a contemptuous gaze mixed with anger and murderous intent.

[Our savior seems to have lost quite a bit of her spirit, no? Why not even a peep from a plaster statue?]

“.....”

[Have you lost so much power that you can't even open your mouth anymore?]

Unable to contain her anger, the outraged woman yelled resoundingly like a wild beast's roar:

“What have you done, Ceyram!? Are you hell-bent on throwing this world into chaos? Where did this absurd successor come from!?”

Ceyram's subspace slightly trembled under her booming challenge.

[Your spirit is intact despite your powerlessness. Did you feel this way when you looked at me before? There's truth to that idiot deity's words after all; a good master does make life easier.]

“Answer me without toying around! It must be your doing or Aer's! There can't be such a perfect successor from the start unless you two have meddled with something...!”

[You're right. It's so perfect, even I can't touch it. That's why it's so annoying!]

The smile vanished as Ceyram's face suddenly distorted grotesquely.

[I am infuriated! Being perfectly trained by her to the brink of madness! Where did such a successor come from? I wish to know too! Where did this annoying brat who can't be devoured come from!]

Licking her lips slyly, Ceyram's smile reappeared.

[Don't overthink it. Let's just enjoy this slowly, as always. Watching the successor chosen by your master, destroyed by the successor who chose me...]

The space filled with dark mist, gradually engulfing the pitiful light of salvation.

Within it, the laughter of the demonic sword resounded with glee.

* * *

The jewel of Durandal, the source of the holy sword's power.

On the day I reclaimed Ceyram, I detached this jewel from the sword, reducing its power by more than half.

For a very interesting event to come.

“How can you make such a face, brother? Isn’t this what you wanted?”

I’m not sure how my face looks to others right now,

But I’m struggling not to burst into laughter.

It’s likely one of the first times ever in my life.

The dumbfounded face of my beloved, nay, loathed, brother!

“You might wish for this jewel to be placed in your hand instead of mine.....”

-Crunch

“Regrettably, I do not wish for that.”

His gaze was on my closed fist holding the jewel, not my eyes.

“There was a man.”

His questioning gaze shifted back to my face.

“He was born into a wealthy, high-status family but was so devoid of good lineage and inherently incompetent that no one sought him out.”

Suddenly, I thought about my final moments in my previous life, wondering if his last vision of me was exactly the one I had now.

“One day, the man gained power. He refined and grew that power to a maddening degree. Eventually, his efforts recognized, he gave his life to serve the very person he longed for. But all he received in return was a painful betrayal.”

If there were a mirror in my hand instead of a sword, I would have held it up to him instantly.

The way he’s repeatedly furrowing his brow without understanding the situation is truly laughable!

“In the end, the man died alone, regretting his entire life lived like an idiot.....”

“What are you trying to say?”

“No need to overthink this. You should easily understand if you consider what will become of me, now your servant, 30 years from this moment.....”

It shouldn't take long.

“My story ends here. Now, you must make a choice.”

“Choice?”

“If you truly wish to become the Savior of Light, you need the holy sword's power, and to possess that power, you'll need this jewel. So make your choice.”

I slowly bent down and leaned my face forward.

“Will you kneel before me in pursuit of a peaceful retrieval, or will you cross swords with me once more for a forcible seizure? Make your choice. O Savior of Light.....”

His trembling eyes and twitching lips were a spectacle money couldn't buy.

“Why do you hesitate? Do you not need this jewel?”

I gave him the choices kindly, yet he remained silent.

So, I counted silently to three.

“It just might happen that a Savior of Light like you has no need for such a pebble. I shall simply dispose of it then.”

-Swish!

If half a second had passed, it would have been too late.

I suppose the thought of the holy sword's power vanishing before him was too much to bear.

His response was incredibly fast, drawing his sword and slashing at my body with desperation. But with such a snail's pace, it wasn't even a close call.

“It seems you've chosen the latter.....”

“Must we go to such lengths?”

“Wouldn't it have been better to kneel and beg? Even if it seems cowardly, that might have held more possibility.”

“This will result in nothing but regret for you. Sian.....”

Regret?

My life's regret ended when you pierced my heart.

Since then, I have pledged never to allow such a horrific moment again.

So now, feel the same.

The belief that everything in the world you thought was right,

Crumbles in an instant.

“Aschel Vert, eldest son of the guardians of the continent, and the so-called Savior of Light, I will serve you with the utmost care to not taint your reputation...”

I lifted Ceyram and whispered lowly.

“Assassin's Art Ninth Form: Manifestation of the Magic Sword.”

(To be continued)

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Chapter 172: The Mist that Erases Light (6)

It was better than I thought.

There was no question about his sword skills since he was originally trained to wield a sword, his fundamentals were exceptional. And he managed the divine relic, which he had only recently acquired, quite well too.

-Clang!

Of course, when I say quite well, this does not mean he could even come close to challenging me.

In the best of times, it would be hard to say for sure, but now the faded holy sword before me is no more than a knife for cutting meat.

No, that's not right.

Considering the holy sword's power has been halved, the truth is that it's a wonder he can wield it at all...

"Ugh!"

After several forceful swings, he finally stepped back after not too long.

He had realized that no matter how much he tried, he couldn't overcome me.

Indeed, he's a smart man.

If he doesn't feel certain about success, he doesn't cling foolishly and gives up swiftly.

He is someone who doesn't waste energy on the impossible.

To put it nicely, he's quick to understand the situation; realistically speaking, he's quick to give up.

But what can be gained from retreating as soon as things seem impossible?

Not even crumbs of bread, let alone a gem.

"Why are you hesitating, Savior who should bring hope to everyone? People are watching. Shouldn't you strike down evil with that noble holy sword of yours?"

Aschel glared at me with stony eyes, not uttering a word.

I see it.

In those eyes steeped in denial,

Doubts and suspicions about me.

"Should someone who looks towards the highest place that humanity can pursue, be frightened by someone like me?"

Using that ridiculous mouth to claim humanity?

At least I don't try to deny my own existence, like you.

Even if everyone here sees me not as a human, but a vile demon, I can still proudly claim that I am a rightful human being.

"Power is honest. The more it is used, the stronger it grows, and when it isn't, it becomes infinitely dull. If you truly are the savior who will bring light to the world,

shouldn't you instead forge your own strength, rather than relying on power that has already been completed?"

"....."

"You're denying it. I can tell just by looking into your eyes. Do you see it as an inevitable circumstance? Do you think I'm merely borrowing the power of a demonic sword? If you think that regaining the power of the holy sword is all it takes to subdue the likes of me, please retract your thoughts now."

"Those words seem to imply that you are different."

"Indeed, I am."

Clearly different.

Unlike you, who merely tries to harvest given power.

I have built up everything on my own.

-Tuk

".....!"

I ostentatiously flicked the Ceyram sword held in my right hand forward.

To a swordsman, the act of throwing one's sword to an opponent can be interpreted in two ways.

Respect or mockery.

In my case, the latter, of course.

An immensely insulting mockery, saying that without such a divine relic, I could easily suppress someone like you even without it.

"How foolish, Sian...."

Aschel's eyes, catching on to this, blazed with fierce murderous intent.

"No matter how profound and vast the darkness may be, it cannot sweep away a small, shining brilliance."

He channeled all the mana slumbering within him into the holy sword.

"Your mist cannot erase my light, Sian. Because this world is made so that it cannot...."

Unlike my expectation for him to stand motionless like a statue, he seemed to be trying to do something after all.

-Eeeee

Wow.

An exclamation of admiration unexpectedly escaped my thoughts.

By infusing mana drawn from his body into the holy sword to compensate for the lack of power,

the holy sword's response lifted Aschel's body into the air.

Wings of light sprouted from both sides as if trying to embrace the sky.

The serene yet stunning dispersion of light scattered in all directions, reminiscent of a god descending from heaven.

"Where the light leads, there is truth..."

As prayers were spoken to someone who might be watching this spectacle from heaven, the dim holy sword radiated a golden brilliance akin to the sun.

'Judgment of Salvation.'

The holy sword's secret technique that once marked the end of the Demon King, the strongest being of the demon world, in a previous life.

A sacred sight so holy and noble that humans could not help but kneel before it, unable to dare even gaze at it.

Some around me were so overwhelmed with emotion that they shed tears.

True, it's a precious sight I've not seen in decades, but people learn from experience, and there's a clear difference between witnessing the same scene knowing and not knowing what it entails.

To me, now, this sacred and holy secret technique of the holy sword was...

"Keke!"

Following my amazement, laughter burst forth on its own.

It's needless to discuss its power's worth; it's simply bottom-tier.

Just a flashy move without any real power, perfect for showing off.

The poor Demon King who should have been killed by such an ineffective sword finds new sympathy in me.

The holy sword, having prepared its judgment, advanced towards me without a moment's hesitation.

-Swish

At the moment when the tip of the holy sword was about to touch my neck,

I lightly turned my head to dodge the strike of the holy sword.

-Click

“.....!”

I almost pretended to be hit, but it seemed like a pointless gesture.

The tip of the holy sword had already missed my neck by far, and my left hand gripped his right hand, which held the holy sword, tightly.

-Crunch!

“Kheuk!”

With a gentle squeeze of strength, he groaned in pain.

“Did you say that the mist cannot erase light?”

“.....!”

“To say that it's inevitable because this world is designed that way is just a cowardly excuse.”

-Clang

Unable to withstand my grip, he eventually let go, and the holy sword he held clattered to the ground.

At the same moment, the black mist's energy that had been dormant in my body spread out, completely covering all the scattered light energy around.

“If this world itself is so designed, then it's a simple matter of changing that designed world.”

-Kaboom!

Holding Aschel's neck, writhing in pain, I slammed him into the ground.

"That is the reason I exist now...."

Then, an unfamiliar artifact hidden within his clothes clattered powerlessly to the floor.

A marionette doll.

It's obvious who gave it to him without the need to see.

This trivial deception was an attempt to stage a situation to bring me down to the bottom.

I wasn't particularly angry about it.

Such pettiness was so typical of you that it didn't seem worth getting upset over!

I casually picked up Ceyram from the side and pressed its blade against Aschel's neck.

His complexion turned pale as he faced the blade of Ceyram right before his eyes.

"Are you afraid? Rest assured. This blade of hatred in my hand will not cut your throat. Why? Because the moment of pain you should feel has not yet arrived!"

"You, what exactly are...?"

Curiosity must be killing you.

Desperately wanting to know.

But you can't know.

So continue to ponder and suffer until, in the end, you struggle in vain.

"You may try to bury me as the most evil being in the world, or gather mercenaries from across the continent to create a group to assassinate me! Whatever it is, don't hold back and do everything you possibly can! I am ready to face whatever that might be!"

You should prepare yourself thoroughly, to the point that when there's nothing more you can do, you realize that a being like me can never be brought down.

"Then, despair! When you realize that despite all your efforts, I cannot be defeated, then the moment I wanted will have finally come to you!"

His eyes, now filled with fear and terror, shook like an earthquake.

To your eyes, I can't seem like a human anymore.

But before all else, there is a very important fact you need to engrave in your mind.

“Never forget! I am just a human being living on this earth! An utterly ordinary person who knows your true nature and despises you deeply!”

This is a point you must clearly remember.

If you cannot surpass me, your truth of reaching the highest place attainable by humans will never be realized.

“Until then, I wish you strength....”

With a heartfelt prayer for him,

I left the spot without any second thoughts.

* * *

People thought.

Hoping that the scene unfolding before their eyes was not reality but a dream.

Doubts about whether the creators who crafted this world had finally abandoned the human race were beginning to surface.

Who exactly is this boy named Sian Vert??

Not only did he incapacitate dozens of elite knights in an instant, but he also summoned unidentified assailants made of mist, throwing the surroundings into chaos. To add to that, he effortlessly demolished the entity of salvation that appeared to purify them.

To them, Sian no longer appeared to be a mere human.

A devil who had set foot on this land to bring about its ruin.

There was simply no other explanation.

-Swish

The being of mist, having concluded a deep conversation with his brother, finally rose from his seat.

The knights, having lost their will to fight, couldn't possibly block the path of the one who calmly continued to walk.

Luinel, blinded by pride and diving headlong without considering consequences, was as silent as if his tongue was stuck by honey, and Condor too looked at Sian with eyes steeped in tension, not daring to intercede.

Those standing in the passageway were busy making way, but

Just one person,

Just one person did not step aside and blocked the path Sian was walking.

“.....”

With determinedly clenched fists and a pitiful mix of complex emotions in her eyes,

Arin stood alone in the middle of the road, silently waiting for Sian to approach.

The distance, not more than a few steps, felt like an eternity to Arin.

Sian did not even look her in the eyes, as if she wasn't worth his attention, continuing his indifferent march without any semblance of guard or defense.

And when the distance between them closed completely,

At the moment they were about to pass by each other without meaning,

-Click

Sian's footsteps abruptly stopped.

Arin's right hand was steadfast, grabbing Sian's wrist that held the demonic sword.

The trembling of her hand, barely keeping her emotions from erupting, was felt on Sian's body.

“Do you have something to say?”

Sian opened the conversation with a low question.

“No. Nothing....”

Questions, accusations, confirmations.

Certainly, just a few minutes ago, she had had a lot to say, but now it all seemed meaningless.

At this point, where she couldn't even remember what she had wanted to say, meaningless words would be better left unspoken, and Arin knew this.

"Then let go. If you don't intend to stop me..."

Despite being able to let go himself, Sian asked her to let go of his hand.

There were no words to say, no power to stop him, but...

Arin couldn't easily release Sian's hand.

"I know it's pointless. I know that it's stupid..."

Arin's voice was shaky, as if on the verge of crying.

"I'm truly sorry and ashamed... but, Sian, may I ask you just one favor?"

Upon this, Sian scoffed as if it was pathetic.

However, he did not express dislike and his right hand was still caught in Arin's grip.

"Say anything... Anything is fine. Even advice, or even curses. Could you please just say one thing to me?"

Just one word.

The content didn't matter.

What mattered was that Sian would do it.

Arin desperately sought another sincere word from him, perhaps their last.

"Progress."

".....!"

As always, Sian spoke with a firm and unwavering tone.

"Never forget the feelings you hold in your heart now. Remember the result that such weakness of feeling powerless can bring, and march to the end of the path given to you. So...."

Sian closed his eyes gently.

“Please ensure that my existence never appears in this world again.”

“.....”

“This is the last thing I can say to you, Your Highness....”

With those words, Sian lightly shook off Arin’s hand.

His footsteps grew distant, but Arin couldn’t turn her head.

Even Brian and Emily, who had been cautiously following Sian, could not bear to meet her eyes.

Avoiding her gaze was the least they could do for her.

-Streaming tears

The tears she had struggled to hold back finally burst forth, scalding her cheeks.

Unable to show such a sight to Sian,

Arin simply gazed up at the indifferent sky and sobbed tragically.

That’s how Sian left,

like mist that appears and disappears without warning.

He silently left Arin’s side.

(To be continued)

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Chapter 173: Those Left Behind (1)

“Have you heard the story? After the incident in Aexilium, now there’s been an incredible event in Brenu too?”

“Are you just hearing about it now? You’re quite out of the loop, aren’t you?”

Residents who had finished their daily chores gathered at the tavern to relieve their fatigue. From the mouths of dozens of people, there was one story that they all had in common.

“Who would have thought? The youngest son of the Duke’s family, just out of the age of smelling of fish, turned out to be an assassin from the fearsome Mist...”

As is often the case with rumors, they are prone to distortion and exaggeration.

An assassin from Mist. A dark sorcerer who summoned the Devil Dragon in Aexilium. The owner of a cursed sword that reaps the souls of a hundred men with a single swing.

The rumors about Sian Vert, the Duke Vert’s youngest son, were spreading uncontrollably day after day, becoming the talk of the town.

“It’s a stroke of luck at least. To catch that guy, the owner of the legendary holy sword showed up himself. Running away with his tail between his legs, subdued by the power of the holy sword, perhaps?”

“My friend, how naïve can you be? Don’t you know that was a cover-up by the royal family?”

“What do you mean?”

“The incident happened right in the middle of the street, and not only the imperial troops, but also many bystanders witnessed it. They all said that the imperial forces were completely overpowered by just one boy... Even the owner of the holy sword...”

The eyes of the surrounding people listening to the conversation sparkled.

“Don’t joke about that! How could they all be overpowered by one person?”

“Do you want to bet? Do you know what the leading informants across the continent are saying right now? Oh, there’s no need for that. Just rush to Brenu and ask anyone, they’ll spill the beans!”

In the midst of this, the tavern owner began to post new wanted posters on one side of the bulletin board, including that of Sian Vert.

“Despite such a handsome face, he really did commit unbelievable acts.”

“Who would say otherwise? It must be quite a story, especially for his family. The Duke of Vert, of course, and there’s talk about the daughter of the house being an astonishing beauty. She had her heart impaled with a massive nail!”

“Just by looking at him, he seems like he would collapse with a touch?”

The tall man with the beard stroked his facial hair as he looked at Sian's wanted poster.

"Why? Who knows, if we catch that kid, maybe we'll get to marry that daughter?
Hahaha..."

As the three men engaged in their derisive discussion, a woman with indigo hair, who had been sitting at the bar, stood up.

"I've finished my meal."

She paid her bill normally and left the tavern. The three men looked on after her departing figure.

"Wow... did you see her face? It's been a long time since I've seen such an incredible beauty."

"Damn. Should I have spoken to her? It feels like a waste just to let her go..."

"Give it up. The fact that she didn't already run away from your face is a miracle..."

The men's chattering stopped in an instant as the indigo-haired woman, thought to have left, had already approached their table.

Completely baffled, they were merely blinking when the tall man with a sly smile spoke to her.

"What's up, miss? Not enough drink for you or..."

– Bang!

A loud sound rang out as the man's head hit the table with force.

"What... what on earth...?"

– Bang! Bang!

The other men, startled, rose quickly only to intimately meet the table one after the other.

Crushed by an unforeseen strength, they had no opportunity to resist and all fainted, foaming at the mouth.

"Phew..."

The woman let out a deep sigh, seemingly not quite appeased by her actions. When the owner, attracted by the noise, arrived, she handed him a substantial purse.

“I’m sorry for the disturbance. Let this cover the damages.”

For a woman capable of overpowering three burly men at once, her appearance seemed unbelievably gentle and beautiful.

The owner instinctively accepted the purse without being able to utter a word of protest.

As the woman was about to disappear, she stopped again in front of the wanted posters.

Then, suddenly, she tore down Sian Vert’s wanted poster from the most visible spot and left the tavern.

Like a tempest that had passed and the seas that quieted after, silence pervaded the establishment.

The woman, after stepping out of the tavern and turning a corner, leaned weakly against the wall before sitting down.

Amid ragged breaths, a faint sobbing could be heard.

Not wanting to give in to tears, she clutched the wanted poster in her hand.

“Sian...”

Once she gathered her emotions, she stood up and stepped back onto the road.

Her footsteps courageously moved northward, toward the icy winds and the uncharted lands unkind to humans.

Ellis Vert, the eldest daughter of the Duke’s family, began her journey with determination.

* * *

In the brilliantly shining office of the Garam Magic Society, adorned with multicolored magical gemstones, the busy work of addressing the Brenu incident, which had occurred two weeks earlier, was in full progress.

Foreigners from a different nation had caused a magical disturbance on the lands of the Ushif Empire, an act that could very well lead to war with the Garam Kingdom—a sensitive and grave matter.

“The damages requested by Prince Luinel are surprisingly high. It will be quite a strain to shoulder this solely on our part. The royal house seems to have no interest in providing support...”

“It doesn’t matter. We can cover everything with the funds collected by targeting Garam Magic Society this time. Just pay it off without objection and end it.”

Regens ordered the matter resolved as if the situation was of no consequence to him.

“How is Lunev?”

He immediately inquired about his granddaughter’s whereabouts.

“Well, she is currently in the academy’s laboratory...”

“The laboratory?”

Unexpectedly hearing the location, Regens furrowed his brow.

“Yes. She seems to spend almost all her time there after completely recovering from the internal injury she sustained in Brenu. She’s told us to not look for her unless it’s something important...”

Without waiting another second, Regens pushed his chair back and rose. He headed straight to the laboratory where Lunev was reported to be.

Ignoring all the greetings from the academy members, he flung open the firmly closed doors of the laboratory, and just then,

“Are you here, Grandfather?”

Lunev greeted him in her usual indifferent tone, not directing her gaze at Regens but at various tools in the laboratory.

“What have you been up to all this time?”

“As you can see, I’ve been examining the laboratory facilities and other research materials related to the future experiments to be performed on me.”

Regens was caught off-guard by her unusual behavior, but Lunev simply handed him a sheet of paper.

“This is the revised plan for my upcoming experiments. Please review it and proceed as written.”

Upon this, Regens could hardly believe his eyes.

“Why are you suddenly doing this?”

“I think we need to revise some of the materials we use, like the magic crystals and powders as well. Please check the supply sources I’ve listed for high-quality items.”

“Is it because of that boy?”

“...”

Lunev could not outright deny it.

“I checked your condition while you were unconscious. The Heart Curves are gone.”

“You noticed, I see.”

“It must have been removed by that boy...”

“I didn’t mean for it to happen. Honestly, I still don’t really understand why Senior Sian removed them.”

Breathing out a shrug, Lunev continued casually.

“I admit it. The power you displayed that day far exceeded my expectations.”

“...”

“I will not say it was all due to the academy’s experiments. I recognize the great influence that boy had on you. At the least, your magic grade is now at least 6 stars, and it’s almost equivalent to 7 stars...”

Lunev remained silent for a moment.

“True, I hit a wall that day. I think it might not be an overstatement to say it was the most reckless thing I’ve done in my entire life so far.”

That day, after sending Sian away from the academy members, Lunev had summoned all her strength to stop Regens. But for her to handle the magic of the head of Garam Magic Society—a grand sage of 9 stars—was from the start an impossibility.

If Regens, worried about her, had not withdrawn his strength at the last moment, she might have suffered severe internal injuries that would have made it impossible to manifest mana for quite a while.

“If it might sound strange to you, I believe that I saved you that day, Grandfather.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“If at that time you and Senior Sian had really clashed in earnest... you might not be in this world right now.”

Regens' pupils shook violently.

“Not just you, Grandfather. I think we could say that he saved the lives of all the academy members there that day.”

There was not a single falsehood in the still indifferent eyes of Lunev as she spoke seriously.

The true, original power she had felt at the very end while holding on to Sian.

It was so deep and vast that it was impossible for humans to possess, and its ends were beyond measure.

“I don't believe that power was based solely on the divine weapon called the cursed sword. Surely, Senior Sian had also made painstaking efforts to perfect that power.”

Her interest had now shifted beyond mere fondness for Sian Vert, a man, to the source and value of the power he possessed.

“Magic was the driving force that allowed us frail humans to become masters of this land, right? It was a tool for survival. But after feeling Senior Sian's power, I realized something. We humans have a long way to go before we can truly dominate this land.”

Sian's heavy silhouette, enveloped in fog, was vividly flickering in her eyes.

“Just as the academy used me under the pretext of 'the future of humanity,' I intend to use the academy for the same reason from now on.”

Although Regens felt greatly confused, he couldn't help but feel that it wasn't entirely negative.

What he saw in the eyes of his granddaughter was the truly human look of someone whose will was fiercely set on achieving a singular purpose.

“Let's take a look, Grandfather. It's going to be a very interesting journey.”

A faint smile played on Lunev's lips.

(To be continued)

**The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter
174**

Chapter 174: The Remnants (2)

“Is that all?”

“That’s it.”

At Condor’s stalwart response, an uncomfortable cough sprang from the lips of the investigator.

“It’s commendable that you have granted the boy a royal audience on His Majesty Emperor Dione’s orders. However, according to some instructors and students, beyond just regular meetings with you, Mr. Sian Vert seems to have been granted certain leniencies like being exempt from punishment despite not attending classes. Is there a reason for this? We would appreciate an explanation.”

The investigator referenced the relationship that had occurred within the academy, pressing for truth on the matter.

However,

“The boy was no ordinary lad; I simply did him some favors for that reason. There’s no more to it.”

“So, you’re saying, Chancellor, that you knew nothing about Sian?”

With a silent and mysterious smile, Condor gazed at the investigator.

“No matter how many days you hold me and question me, I won’t be able to give you the answers you seek. But I’ll tell you one thing.”

“...?”

“Don’t even think about approaching him with a half-hearted mindset. If you truly wish to capture him, perhaps the entire Empire—or even the whole continent—will need to work together...”

Seemingly overpowered by Condor’s relaxed demeanor, the investigator shrank in his seat.

The investigation concluded uneventfully, and once alone, Vice-Chancellor Satwell entered the chancellor’s office.

“About 30% of the students have declared a leave of absence or dropped out. It doesn’t seem like this will be resolved as quickly as the Banquet of Blood incident.”

“It can’t be helped. Let’s take this opportunity to check the facilities.”

Though he downplayed it, this was arguably the biggest crisis the academy had faced since its establishment.

The regular meetings and leniencies granted between the chancellor and the empire’s worst criminal had sparked significant backlash from students and nobles alike.

“In time, everything will come back to the way it was. However, when it does, things cannot remain as they were before.”

Casually, Condor took the brooch from his chest and set it down on the desk.

“From now on, you will be in charge of the academy, Satwell.”

“...!”

Startled, Satwell jumped up to remonstrate.

“Chancellor, sir! There’s no need for such a hasty decision! Even so, there is still...!”

“Those who do not know when to leave, clinging despite the knowledge, are held back by mere attachment, not love. My role here is over.”

Rejecting Satwell’s protests with ease, Condor rose from his seat.

“Where is Arin?”

“She’s at the academy’s training grounds, as far as I know...”

“Understood.”

He promptly advanced towards where Arin was located.

The normally bustling academy training grounds were quiet.

“Haap!”

At the center, Arin swung her wooden sword with a sense of urgency.

“...?”

Yet something about her seemed off.

Rather than normal training swings into the air, she was striking at a rock, heavy and solid to sight—a reckless action she repeated.

Despite the seemingly foolish endeavor, Arin's eyes burned with a resolute determination to shatter that rock.

Surrounding knights, including Resmus, watched her pitifully but dared not intervene.

Condor approached Arin and asked,

"What are you doing?"

"As you can see, I'm practicing sword strikes on a rock!"

-Crack!

Almost as if to answer Condor's unvoiced thought of recklessness, the wooden sword snapped in two.

Yet Arin didn't hesitate for a moment, immediately picking up another sword and repeating her actions.

Her hands were bleeding, gradually growing raw and firm.

"Why such foolishness?"

"To move forward."

"Did Sian tell you to do this?"

"....."

Unable to admit it, she just continued to swing her wooden sword.

"I know that just moving forward accomplishes nothing. If I progress without strength, I will falter sooner or later."

-Crack!

With every imprudent strike, she was met with meaningless pain.

Despite the oncoming sting, Arin never faltered, her expression twisting but never giving up.

"I need strength. The impossible power to shatter this rock even with a wooden sword."

"The world is not moved by strength alone."

“I know. But without at least that much strength, I can’t do anything. Even seeing Sian again would be out of reach.”

Reaching a level where the impossible becomes possible—without attaining such a level, she couldn’t stand proudly before Sian as a princess, nor as a woman.

“I don’t know when it will be. It might never come. But should the day arrive when I reunite with Sian...”

Her throat tightened mid-sentence.

“That day, I’ll be the one to capture Sian.”

Suppression of surging feelings, her grip on the wooden swords tightened.

“I’ll be the one to save him!”

Swallowing tears, she squeezed her eyes shut.

No more would she shed foolish tears.

Preparing herself for a potential future reunion, Arin once again began to swing her wooden sword.

* * *

At the support camp of the Belias front on the empire’s western border,

Yulken, a senior knight, kneeled before Duke Vert Sian, reporting to him.

“Is everything written here in this letter the unquestionable truth?”

“Well, we will need to investigate separately for details, but as for the royal notification sent to Belias and all domains, it’s identical to what you have received.”

Beside the letter held by Duke Vert was a bounty notice with Sian’s name prominently inked in red.

“Understood. Dismissed.”

Without another word, Yulken left the tent.

“Hah...”

A fretful sigh escaped the duke.

The thought that his gifted youngest child was in fact a follower of the dark mists was something he simply couldn't fathom.

What could have possibly made that young boy join such an unforgivable group?

It was beyond the duke's comprehension.

And it wasn't just the youngest.

The second son, who had left the Knights of the Light and then vanished into obscurity.

The third, whose life or death remained uncertain.

The eldest, who had been traumatized after searching for his younger brother in Brenu.

Where could it all have gone wrong?

Those children, whom he assumed would follow in the family's footsteps, were deviating one by one.

He felt as though his world was crumbling.

Distraught, he struggled with confusion.

".....!"

Instinctively sensing an ominous aura, the duke swiftly got up.

Quickly grabbing his sword, he exited the tent and surveyed his surroundings, soon detecting the source of the energy and heading that way.

"Don't follow me!"

With that command, the duke swiftly sprinted towards the ravine.

An eerie yet somewhat familiar aura coursed through the place.

Following the sensation, Duke Vert headed towards the unknown depths of the ravine.

The smell of fresh monster blood thickened the air around him as he approached.

Soon, he arrived at a certain part of the canyon, devoid of any signs of life.

With an honest expression neither too flustered nor too composed, he looked straight ahead.

Reflecting upon it, this place felt uncannily familiar.

Years ago, it was here that the carcass of a superior monster, a death worm rarely seen near the canyon's entrance, had been found.

It was said to have been slain by an entity shrouded in black mists...

-Ssshhh

Silently, the duke drew his sword and pointed it forward.

The quiet stillness of the dead ravine filled the space as the duke's sword targeted the slowly thickening mist, which began to take on a strange human form.

"Why have you summoned me here?"

The duke questioned the mist, his face barely concealing a sense of despair, as if he had just come to a realization about the entity before him.

"If you came to make excuses for yourself, abandon such thoughts. Even if you are flesh of my flesh, knowing the path you've taken..."

"I have always thought you rather foolish."

A familiar voice echoed through the misty silhouette.

"Wrapped in the sophisticated language of 'family ideals,' supposedly defending the continent, it's nothing but endless sacrifice for the sake of others. You cloaked these sacrifices in the guise of honor, passing them down even to your own children."

"What are you implying?"

"That was fine. Someone had to do it, especially those with power and capability. But what truly baffles me is something different."

As the gaze of the mist met the duke's eyes for the first time,

"Why so obsessed with the eldest?"

The duke's grip on the sword trembled with intensity.

"Why demand such sacrifice from your other children, as if he were everything? At the time, it seemed natural, but now I cannot comprehend it."

Sweat dripped fearfully from the duke's chin.

“But I shall cease to question now. Struggling to comprehend my own self, how could I understand your mind? However, please understand this one thing.”

As the mist dissipated fully, the true figure emerged.

“If you truly desire continental peace as you wish your children to achieve...”

A silenced moment stretched eternity.

The sound of his dry gulp echoed through his being.

“Please let us go.”

“...!”

“Concern yourself with your own responsibilities, as I will with mine. I need no assistance, nor even your trust.”

The word ‘trust’ carried a peculiar emphasis.

The duke could not even utter a word, let alone part his sealed lips.

“Farewell, Father...”

With those final words, mist enveloped the boy again.

And then, as though never there, vanished without a trace, leaving behind only melancholic winds in the desolate ravine.

(To be continued)



The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin Chapter 175: The Direction to Move Forward

Enshrouded in black mist, a sacred space seemed almost otherworldly. The unfamiliar sound of a woman's heels echoed through the expanse—clack, clack, clack. A tall woman with hair flowing like waves of light strode confidently into the domain of the gods. She too noticed the presence there and afforded a slight smile.

“Seems we have a rare guest from the divine realms,” thought Aer, perceiving the approaching figure as he sat upon the altar.

“What brings you here, Aquanis, to a place so ill-fitting for someone like you?” Aer mused silently.

“I wouldn't have come by choice. But you know, that man sent me, probably as a warning, a sign that he's still wary of you,” the woman replied with an easeful glint in her eye, approaching Aer.

“Looking rather well for an exile. Have you grown accustomed to the mortal realm?” she teased him.

“I doubt you came all this way just to exchange pleasantries,” Aer responded wryly.

“At times like these, you really can be too stiff. But let's get to the point and deliver this,” the woman said, producing a white envelope and handing it to Aer.

“They still use these archaic methods in the divine realms?”

“What can you do? Some prefer the old ways,” Aer remarked, opening the envelope to read its contents, a peculiar smile slowly forming upon his lips.

“So, they plan to assert their presence more boldly in the mortal realm?”

“In other words, they intend to erase any trace of their interference even more aggressively,” Aer noted silently.

“As an exile, I shouldn’t say this, but the other gods won’t exactly welcome such moves,” the woman said casually, seating herself on the altar and crossing her legs.

“Even so, trends are changing among the gods. Even stuffy ol’ Sabulrom has possessed a young mortal multiple times—goes to show the shifts in their interests. Seems you do have your fair share of concerns?” Aer observed.

The woman covered her mouth with her hand, laughing, “You still know your way around a woman’s heart, don’t you? In fact, I’m beginning to find my own attractions in the mortal realm—a particular individual has caught my intrigue.”

“A watcher like you getting involved is unexpected.”

“There’s only so long you can watch others play before joining in. It’s more fun to participate, isn’t it?”

Her eyes sparkled with newborn curiosity, like a child discovering a new game.

“Let me offer you a piece of advice,” Aer said, his voice heavy with a newfound gravity, capturing the woman’s full attention.

“Even if they are your chosen creations, do not assume they will heed your commands unequivocally.”

The woman’s eyebrows twitched slightly in response.

“These creations have been modeled after us, after all. You never know when or where they might act unexpectedly. So, keep a watchful eye, Goddess of the Blue Waters,” Aer warned.

As their tense conversation unfolded, footsteps echoed from the end of the corridor.

“Seems like it’s my cue to leave. No need to see my face for this, I’ll be on my way,” the woman said as she rose from the altar, and with a playful wink, vanished from the space without a trace.

Aer watched her leave, shaking his head as if to dispel a tiresome thought.

* * *

Elsewhere, feeling another presence by the altar, Aer approached curiously, finding nobody but Aer himself in what seemed like a wait.

“Why do you look at me so? Someone might think you’ve been with a woman,” Aer thought with a hint of amusement.

“Cavorting around, I see,” Ceyram muttered.

“You came with such bravado, yet you don’t look particularly cheerful. Disappointed with the outcome?”

“The results were quite satisfactory,” Aer assured, the process notwithstanding.

“I told you, didn’t I? The many you’ve touched might return to extend their hands. Regardless of whether you wanted it, you’ve received kindness from them.”

Ceyram’s words carried wisdom based on experience.

“So, what will you do now? Having stepped outside of your safeguard, into flames that could touch you at any moment, you must realize there is no land in which you can peacefully stand.”

“That applies to you as well,” Aer retorted.

“The ones like me aren’t going to hide away in an interspace, are they?”

They shared an understanding, communicated by a simple shrug.

“I can’t say if a past life of mine felt this way, but I would’ve made the same choices. I have no regrets, not for a moment. Even given the chance to do it all again, my choices would remain the same,” Aer declared.

He knew that he would make the same decisions, over and over, without hesitation.

“There will come a day when you face your life’s final moments once again. When that time arrives, I hope you do not regret the decisions you made today, regardless of the outcome. Whether it leads to a happy ending or a bad one, do not regret your chosen path.”

It was advice easier said than followed.

“Even if my path goes against the flow of this world, it doesn’t matter.”

After all, he was not one to be swayed.

“I believe the path I choose is the truth.”

* * *

Meanwhile, Violet confronted an irate royal, Luinel.

“How dare you do this, Violet!”

Like a volcano on the brink of eruption, Luinel’s anger seemed boundless. Yet, there stood Violet, responding to his rage with a smile as serene as the calm before a storm.

“Don’t be too angry, Big Brother. Didn’t I tell you? I’m here to help you let everything go and rest...”

Behind her, an assembly of high-ranking knights in immaculate white armor stood in solid formation.

Luinel struggled to recognize the situation. He had been awaiting funds to be transferred from the [Garam](#) Magic Society and had yet to return to the royal city when Violet suddenly appeared with an entourage of knights.

“With the compensation from Garam Magic Society being substantial, I wonder how much you would’ve taken for yourself, Brother. You’re quite capable, indeed.”

“What are you implying?”

“Embezzlement of the royal treasury is a grave offense, especially by a member of the royal family. Though, it seems you’ve been quite busy with similar exploits in the past. This time, Father won’t let it pass so easily.”

Violet challenged him with one hand on her hip and the other resting under her chin.

“I won’t harm you. You just need to go somewhere far from the royal lands, somewhere quiet where no one can disturb your peace...”

Luinel’s eyes, filled with disbelief, threatened to pop out of their sockets.

“You’ve crossed the line! Do you think you can get away with this? You may be able to hold me now, but my vassals will not let you off easily! Trust me, you won’t last three days!”

Despite the dire situation, Violet sighed, a pitying laugh escaping her lips.

“Just as Aschel said. To think you’d be so blind to the current situation. For a sister, this is a hard scene to witness.”

“Whose words are you using? Why is Aschel’s name coming from your mouth?”

As their less-than-harmonious exchange continued, a door creaked open, and Aschel himself entered.

“Aschel!”

Upon seeing the new arrival, Luinel’s demeanor instantly brightened.

“You’re just in time! These fools are trying to harm me! Show them our might...”

However, Luinel’s face rapidly paled as he realized that Aschel was at the center of Violet’s armed retinue.

“Aschel, what is this madness?”

The implications were not lost on Luinel.

“You need not look at me with such shock, Prince.”

“Explain yourself! Why are you standing with Violet instead of me!”

As Luinel, consumed by his emotions, demanded answers, Aschel spoke calmly.

“Do you know when true growth occurs?”

“What are you talking about?”

“It’s through experiencing the abyss of despair one calls rock bottom. If you aspire to reign at the pinnacle of light, you must personally traverse the shadows of the abyss.”

“So you suggest I should fall to rock bottom? I am Prince Luinel! I’ve always reigned supreme over all of you...”

“That’s precisely the point,” Aschel interjected smoothly.

“You negate the present by clinging to past glories... That is exactly the image of the prince I imagined.”

Overwhelmed by realizations and accusations, Luinel’s face contorted in agony.

“Feel fear and despair. Overcome them. If you truly are the prince, I have no doubt you’ll succeed.”

Thud.

No word or defense came forth.

The impossibly dark and icy depths of despair, which he'd never thought to reach, embraced him entirely.

Dragged away by the knights, Luinel was powerless, his face slack and his spirit broken.

"To grow through experiencing darkness... That's profound," Violet mused.

"Do you know what the first step to escaping the abyss is?" Aschel responded without missing a beat.

Violet shook her head.

"One must acknowledge and accept the situation they're in. Only then will they see what needs to be done."

Approaching a window, Aschel gazed serenely into the night sky. Stars shone brilliantly against the careless black mists.

"If the mists don't clear, even the brightest stars become mere illusions," Aschel pointed out.

"Sian advised me to try everything possible. So, I will."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm referring to tasks no one ever dared attempt or even conceive. Sian claims to know me well, but I wonder how much of myself is known to even me. There is an excitement brewing within me, along with anticipation for what lies ahead."

His smile filled with eager anticipation for the future.

In time, people would call the events that unfolded in Brenu 'The Day the Mist Unveiled the Light.' No one wished for it, nor predicted the arrival of the most dreadful day.

And from that dreadful day forward, seven years passed.

(To be continued)

**The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter
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Chapter 176. The Demon with Black Hair (1)

In the western territory of the Kingdom of Garam, Vito.

Though a somewhat remote and barren domain surrounded by harsh mountain ranges, this place is one of the cities with a sizable population within the kingdom.

The reason for this is the mine nearby.

The magic stones buried here contain an immense amount of mana, almost comparable to the mana possessed by an average person, which are considered some of the highest quality in the continent.

Hence, under the leadership of the Garam Magic Society, a royal institution, mining has been ongoing for several years, mainly for the purpose of research to advance the country's magic rather than exporting to other nations such as the Ushif Empire.

Of course, not all the mined magic stones were sent intact.

Where valuable treasures accumulate, there are always thieves looking to steal them.

This place was no different.

"The unprocessed magic stones weigh about 1.2 tons and the processed magic crystals are about 0.3 tons, which is a 10% increase in mining volume compared to last month."

"It was certainly worth increasing the workforce."

Lord Vince of Vito smiled with satisfaction as he read the mining report.

"80% of these are already prepared for transport. They will be sent to the Garam Magic Society afterwards, and the remaining 20% are in the warehouse..."

"In that case, it won't hurt to take out a bit more, prioritize the magic crystals that don't need processing and skim off an additional 3%."

"Excuse me? Won't this raise suspicions in various forms?"

"Are there reasons to suspect? Then just eliminate them! We still have time before the transport date, conduct additional overtime to match what is taken!"

"But there will be dissatisfaction among the workers..."

Vince pulled out a fist-sized magic crystal from his desk drawer.

"I'm not here to worry about that. That's for you to take care of, not me!"

“As Lord commands!”

The knight’s face turned abruptly pale as he received the magic crystal.

Vince stood up and headed towards the mining site.

Born into a merchant family, he was rich in trading experience from a young age and was a typical noble who had bought his title with money.

The reason the fake noble, who wasn’t of pure blood, was given charge of the Vito mines, a major industry of the royal family, was for one reason alone: capability.

He knew better than anyone how to manage the mine efficiently, and the continuously surging mining volume over the recent months was testament to his ability.

His motto was the proportionality of manpower and production.

In other words, the more you work, the more minerals you mine.

However, despite the excessive labor, he did not provide convenience to the workers implementing it.

Creating an oppressive atmosphere by employing mercenaries from all over the continent, he preemptively eliminated any potential dissatisfaction, strictly focusing on increasing mining output.

“Hmm...”

While surveying the site, Vince’s gaze settled on a certain man.

“Who is that?”

At first glance, he was a sturdy-framed, robust young man with black hair.

“He’s a new guy from another land, despite the intensity of the job, he manages quite effortlessly without any complaints. He’s handling the workload of two to three men on his own.”

“His sharp eyes seem more suited to holding a sword than a pickaxe.”

Seemingly intrigued, Vince stroked his chin as he observed him.

“Cough!”

Suddenly, a worker who was dragged in by Vince’s domain knights collapsed in front of them.

“Reporting to Lord! We caught this worker on the mining site trying to smuggle out a magic crystal.”

The knight bowed and handed Vince a magic crystal the size of a thumbnail.

“Smuggling a magic crystal?”

Vince’s penetrating gaze then turned to the worker who had attempted the theft.

“I’ve committed a crime worthy of death!”

The worker knelt onto the ground, pleading as if his hands and feet were his own.

Fiddling with the crystal like a marble, Vince soon squatted to make eye contact with the worker.

“What were you planning on doing with this?”

The worker, barely lifting his head, pleaded with tears in his eyes.

“Please forgive me! I did it because my daughter at home is sick from hunger! I couldn’t stand to watch her suffer in pain as a father...”

“You mean she got sick because she couldn’t eat? And you were planning to sell this crystal, earn some money, and provide nourishment for your daughter?”

“Yes...”

There was a brief silence after his answer.

The worker, puzzled by the lack of response, lifted his head and at that moment,

“Keek!”

Vince let out a mocking sneer.

“Even if I’m called a greedy lord who overworks you, I have my own pride too. I’ve never once thought that I’ve given you unjust compensation.”

Indeed, despite its notorious workload, the Vito mine never lacked workforce.

This was due to the generous compensation that more than covered the grueling labor.

“But what’s this? You got sick because you couldn’t eat? Do you realize how much this magic crystal is worth?”

Vince pushed the crystal held in his hand towards the worker.

“That, that is...”

“Of course, you wouldn’t know. If you knew the value of this crystal, you wouldn’t have even thought of stealing it. Why? Because you should naturally come to understand that it’s something utterly beyond your reach.”

The worker’s face gradually filled with despair.

“Now, say it yourself. What happens to someone who steals minerals from the mines according to the law of the domain?”

The worker, with no intention of speaking, only trembled his lips.

“I’ll ask one more time. What happens if you get caught stealing minerals from the mines?”

“Deprived of my work and, in addition, all of the property of my family will be confiscated and the male members will become slaves directly under the mine, while the female members will be...”

Unable to continue his sentence, the worker once again struck his head to the ground.

“Please, I’ll do anything you order! I’ll give my all and do whatever you ask, please, just spare my family!”

– Thump.

The response he got to his implausible plea was a cold kick.

Brushing off his hands, Vince stood and turned to leave without giving it another glance.

As the knights tried to remove the worker by grabbing his arms,

“Agh!”

Realizing he was pushed to the edge, the worker shook off the knights’ grasp and abruptly fled.

However, his escape efforts didn’t last long, and he was quickly recaptured.

– Thump! Thump!

The price of hopeless escape was met with merciless violence.

Vince watched this and shook his head.

“Greedy for one’s own benefit to the point of risking the safety of his family, he should fully receive his consequences...”

Just as he was about to leave the scene without a second thought,

– Snap!

Suddenly, a threatening aura behind him caused Vince to turn around swiftly.

“If they’re going to be used as slaves for the mine, is there any need for such beatings?”

Right in front of the worker who had stolen the magic crystal, a tall man had grabbed the wrists of the knights who were about to swing their clubs.

Some of the knights flinched, apparently intimidated by the savage aura emanating from the man’s sharp eyes.

“Will you not release this?”

The knight applied his full strength to pull away from the man’s grip, but couldn’t even budge his grasp.

The man had solidly trapped the knight’s hand as if in cuffs, with no sign of fear of what might follow as his expression didn’t change.

“Enough. That’s as far as you go.”

At this, Vince raised his hand to signal restraint.

“There’s no need for both of you to drain your strength over a futile matter. Return to your duties...”

With that, the man finally released the knight’s hand.

The knight gave the man a sharp look as if in warning, then, soon, took the worker away from the site.

The man also returned to his original position and resumed his task.

“No matter how much I see it. You don’t seem like someone who’s just meant to wield a pickaxe.”

Vince watched the man with a very interested look, as if he had found an uncut gemstone.

* * *

After the nighttime work that persisted until twilight ended,
just before dawn in the empty workplace.

During this time, when the morning shift was due to start and no one should have been present, a tall, black-haired man was seated in a corner of the workplace.

Though it might appear as if he was doing some extra overtime alone, the mine operated with teams of at least two, making solitary work impossible in Vito.

If any mine official were to witness this scene,
they would immediately realize that something illicit was afoot.

-Clap, clap, clap.

When unexpected applause rang from behind, the man turned his head.

“Aside from being the lord of this land, I was once a merchant. Traveling back and forth across the continent, I came across various people.”

There stood Vince, the lord of Vito, with several armed knights, appearing before the man.

“While meeting different people and conducting business, I would sometimes come across capable ones, whom people often call talents. Such encounters are commonly referred to as destiny, but I never saw it that way.”

The man’s impassive expression remained unchanged during Vince’s lengthy speech.

“Do you really believe that through sheer coincidence, we’ve come to meet one another? Maybe it’s because I’ve grown skeptical living the life of a merchant, but I never believed in destiny. I always thought that all encounters were calculated actions with intent. And you are no exception, Sion.”

Vince’s words culminated as the knights he commanded surrounded the man.

“Of course, the name you use now is likely a pseudonym. Upon investigation, I found that you’ve had a rather interesting mercenary career, not only in Garam Kingdom but also travelling through Ushif and Spania.”

“What’s your point?” he asked, frowning as if the continued conversation was bothersome.

“It’s quite unusual for a greenhorn who’s barely started to smell like a man to give up everything and come to this mine to work as a laborer... Anyone would find that odd, wouldn’t they?”

Vince’s gaze was directed towards the tightly concealed magic crystal in the man’s fist.

“Speak. Why did you come here?”

“...”

“What were your plans with that crystal? Or was the crystal just bait to lure me here?”

Despite Vince’s persistent questioning, the man remained silent.

“It seems you have no intention of talking. In that case, I have no choice but to forcefully open your mouth...”

At a signal, the knights surrounding the man lunged at him with lightning speed, but,

– Thump!

As if having predicted their movements, the man subdued all of them within seconds with just his fist.

“Indeed, your skills are commendable.”

The man’s eyes had transformed into a fiery, blood-red glare.

Responding as though expected, a sizable knight beside Vince stepped forward.

The sheer physical difference between them made any confrontation seemingly impossible.

Yet the man took the initiative, swinging his fist mightily,

– Snap!

But it was effortlessly caught by the wide span of the knight’s hand.

– Whoosh!

However, the man didn’t falter, instead immediately leaping into the air, spinning and striking the knight’s head with his right foot.

– Thump!

The crisp impact sound confirmed a successful hit.

A faint smile crossed the man's lips as the disoriented knight began to fall backward. At this critical moment,

"Did you expect this?"

Paired with cold words that chilled to the bone, the knight leaned forward with his face.

– Squeeze!

He then grabbed the man's leg and slammed it down fiercely, tossing him about mercilessly. The man couldn't even cry out in defiance, let alone resist.

"Cough!"

Blood rushed out of the man's mouth as he sprawled across the ground.

Vince watched with disdain, clicking his tongue.

"How disappointing. I expected at least a bit more of a show..."

An anticlimactic end to a situation for which Vince hadn't even used all his preparations.

The man lay trembling, absent of any strength to stand.

"I thought you might have come to capture that black-haired demon, so I even prepared light attribute mages to deal with you, and now it seems I've wasted a night for nothing."

With drowsiness suddenly overcoming him, Vince yawned.

As he thoughtlessly turned his head,

"What the-?"

Vince's eyes flew open in sheer surprise.

From the direction he was looking, roughly 30 meters away,

from the entrance of the workplace to right before him, ran an unidentified, flowing red stream.

To anyone's vision, it was clearly,

"Blood?"

Untraceable as to when or where it started, streams of blood ran long in all directions.

The sight conjured imagery not of this world, but of a demonic dominion belonging to a hellish realm.

“What in the world is happening here? Who’s pulling such a prank...?”

As Vince looked around in a panic, unaware of the situation,

“...!”

An unfamiliar black mist began to slowly envelop everything.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 177

Chapter 177: The Devil with Black Hair (2)

There’s a superstition that has been circulating on the continent for a few years now, known as ‘The Tale of a Demon who Disturbs the Order of Light’.

At first glance, it might sound like a nonsensical tale spun by a storyteller for entertainment, but in the past few years, anyone grounded in reality would recognize it, as it has spread widely across the continent.

It’s said that three phenomena occur before this demon shows up.

Firstly, a stream of red, like spilled red wine, spreads out in all directions like a river, and those who witness this sight naturally feel a chill down their spine and break into a cold sweat.

Secondly, an unknown black mist descends from nowhere, darkening the view, which is definitely not a natural occurrence but rather seems to swiftly envelop everything as if to trap its target.

Lastly, from the depths of this land of ignorance, strange footsteps can be heard and, when they draw close enough, you lock eyes with cruel, blood-red irises, as if stained with blood.

If one were to experience all three of these phenomena,

they are advised to kneel immediately and pray fervently to their god—not for salvation, but to plead for the least painful death possible.

Perhaps moved a tad by such actions, the demon might concede to lessen the pain...

“Is there, is there no one outside?”

(Vince, startled by the unforeseen events, yelled loudly towards the outside of the workshop.

Before entering, he had positioned a considerable force of fifty men outside, but for some reason, there was no response to his call, let alone anyone rushing over.

“Why is there no answer! If anyone can hear me, come running!”)

His voice, tinged with panic, once again rang out, and from the end of the bloody stream, a figure emerged.

-Thud, thud.

Relief washed over Vince as he wore a smile of reassurance.

The one who appeared was a knight of his domain, clad in a high-quality brown leather armor.

Vince believed he had come running in response to his call.

“Why have you come alone? Rather, what in the world is happening...?”)

It was a fleeting moment of relief,

as Vince’s body froze once more when a worrying thought abruptly crossed his mind.

Had his judgement been impaired by the unexpected situation?

In a crisis where even the entire force running over seemed insufficient, how could it be reassuring that a single man, walking as leisurely as if on a stroll, was approaching?

Even a three-year-old child would find it strange.

Overwhelmed by sudden fear and dread, Vince, as well as his knights, began to sweat profusely.

“Identify yourself!”

Although one knight mustered the courage to demand identification, there came no reply.

With distinctly bright red eyes, as if soaked in blood, the figure simply continued to approach, slowly amplifying the fear of those who faced him, as if he were emanating an eerie energy that couldn't possibly be of this world.

-Thump! Thump!

Then, a bulky knight by the name of Sion, whom he had previously subdued with one hand, stepped forward.

Without any hint of shrinking back, the knight gazed steadily at the advancing entity with crimson eyes.

This knight was special to Vince.

He had bought this knight at a slave market during his merchant days for a hefty sum and subsequently freed him, hiring him as his guard knight and bringing him to the domain, so there was a certain attachment.

Already strong in his own right, the knight had also been fed the blood of demonic beasts, acquired through great difficulty in the dark market, making him able to withstand the strength of dozens of adult men, almost like Vince's final line of defense.

Despite the menacing presence coming forward, the demon with red eyes did not stop his advance.

He showed no signs of slowing his stride, his gaze fixed uninterruptedly on Vince.

-Whoosh!

The bulky knight swung a massive fist.

-Thud!

A dull sound echoed, and the sensation of striking solid jawbone was palpable.

Sensing that his blow had hit its mark and intending to send him flying with his strength, something unexpected happened.

"...?"

Strangely, the unidentified knight did not budge an inch.

It was only a passing moment before the knight felt a numb pain where his face met his clenched fist.

The bulky knight belatedly realized that what his fist had encountered was not the other's face, but a hand—precisely, not even the palm, but the back of the hand.

The swiftly swung fist had been simply blocked by a slightly raised hand.

Unbelievable as the sight was, the pupils of the knight quaked.

Without a word,

(The ominous red gaze finally shifted from Vince to the knight.

Just for a second, the knight's wrist was firmly grasped.

No matter how much he struggled, the wrist wouldn't budge.

In frustration, as the knight was about to swing his other fist,

-Crack!

As if wringing out wet laundry, the knight's wrist began to twist.

“Arghhh!”

The knight screamed in agony as the pain in the twisted bone and nerves merged into one.

The pain was so intense he didn't even notice his body lifting off the ground.

-Thump!

With a brutal crash, blood flowed from under their feet, where the demon casually released the knight's hand and once again started towards Vince.

“What are you all doing? Stop him! Stop him now!”)

Vince, more anxious than ever, hurriedly ordered what remained of his knights to block the advance.

It was a suicidal move.

The knights, having no choice but tears and mustered, charged forward.

They had numerical superiority, thinking of using this to advantage in some way, but,

“Ah!”

Their hopes didn't last long.

-Thump

In the blink of an eye, ten knights lay collapsed.

No sword or spear was swung,

No hand or foot was moved.

Only a strange gust of wind had swiftly passed by.

Now, only two people, including Vince himself, stood properly on the ground.

“What is this...”)

His legs gave way, and Vince found himself sitting on the ground.

Grasping the situation, his face contorted in fear, Vince at last understood.

Denial of reality was not what he had to do now.

Humble acceptance of everything was the only thing he could do—

to pray earnestly that he might die less painfully at the hands of this demon, that was all he could manage.

* * *

Panting heavily, though the bleeding had stopped, the sensation in his body had not returned.

All he could do was gasp for air, gazing in the direction his face was turned.

It might have been better not to look....

But before his eyes, an unspeakable, brutal scene unfolded.

The man with black hair doubted, then doubted again.

Could such an act truly be performed by a human being?

Even he, familiar with the sword and blood from an early age, could hardly face the view completely.

But he witnessed every moment clearly.

Despite the organs in his body turning cold and sweat pouring down, he did not once close his eyes or avert his gaze.

As if utterly captivated by the scene before him...

-Whoosh

After concluding the execution, the demon finally rose from his seat.

The black hair as dark as the night sky,

Eyes stained with blood,

The eerie chill emanating from the purple dagger.

Was this the “Devil with Black Hair” he’d heard about in rumors—having actually appeared?

A mix of excitement and trepidation washed over the man, and he swallowed, tasting the dry blood mixed with spittle.

The devil’s gaze finally met the man’s.

In the workshop, they were the only two maintaining their composure.

Wondering whether he, too, would be targeted, the man’s heart flooded with anxiety and fear.

Yet, he did not look away.

If he had to explain why, it was because fascination overpowered the fear of the demon.

It was as if he suddenly understood what it meant to be seduced by a devil.

Without a word,

(The demon fixed his profound gaze on the man.

In this situation, he looked at him with interest, as if somewhat entertained by his unwavering eyes.

He took a step.

Finally, the demon moved towards the man and sat down in front of him, meeting his eyes.

For a moment, a silent exchange of looks ensued,

-Whoa

Soon a pure white light emerged from the demon's hand.

The light permeated the wounded man's body, instilling warmth into his bitterly cold flesh.

Pain gradually subsided, the numbness faded, and sensation began to return.

Before long, the man could rise.

It felt even better than before he was subdued by the bulky knight.

An unbelievable series of events.

As he glanced over his body, still stunned, then quickly raised his head,

But the mysterious demon had vanished without a trace.

Only the black mist, proof of his presence, faintly lingered in his stead.)

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 178

Chapter 178: The Black-Haired Demon (3)

Name: Schultz.

He had no surname and knew neither the faces of his parents as an orphan who has roamed through various cities since childhood, picking up an assortment of jobs.

At the age of seventeen, he caught the eye of a retired knight-turned-mercenary of the Ushif Empire and joined a mercenary guild known as 'Red Horse'.

Possessing unnoticed talent, he was quickly taught fencing and specialized skills necessary for mercenary activity by his comrades, drawing much attention and being called a promising recruit.

However, just two years after joining the mercenary guild, Schultz left.

Dismissing his companions' queries, he simply stated he no longer wished to do such dangerous work.

His rationale was reasonable.

Given that the rewards of mercenary missions were higher with increased danger, he had witnessed far too many colleagues meet their deaths, enduring countless brushes with his own mortality.

Indeed, the real reason for his departure was that he felt uncomfortable with the dirty deeds often necessary to earn money, which inflicted upon him a lingering guilt.

While his peers ridiculed this as a pointless sentiment, Schultz was profoundly influenced by such ignoble feelings.

Eventually, Schultz crossed into the Garam Kingdom upon hearing of laborer recruitment at the Vito mines.

He used the alias 'Sion' when crossing into the kingdom.

About seven years ago, he had been a cigarette peddler in the neutral city of Lambert's red-light district when a boy caused a stir by single-handedly overturning the continent's most notorious criminal city. Oddly enough, despite many witnesses, none could remember his face; what remained was just the name 'Sion.'

Schultz, feeling admiration for someone of a similar age, had since continued using this alias.

Mining turned out to be less taxing than anticipated, and the pay was comparably good.

Thinking that a few years' work here would amass a modest fund sufficient to avoid starvation, Schultz presumed most laborers arrived with such goals.

However, the atmosphere at the mines was peculiar.

Conversations about when someone would steal mana crystals and escape were frequent, alongside stories claiming several already had, now living in riches elsewhere.

Such occurrences perplexed Schultz: capture meant immediate forfeiture of laborer status and enslavement to the mine's slaves.

He couldn't understand why people went crazy over mere shiny stones imbued with a bit of mana.

Former slaves, now confined to separate work zones, were inaccessible for him to inquire further.

"Shall I just check it out myself?"

Perhaps infected by the workplace's complacency, Schultz yielded to a nagging curiosity.

Yet, by bad luck, he was caught by the lord.

The lord likely harbored a grudge from when Schultz intervened against the daytime beating of a laborer.

Faced with potential enslavement, Schultz was resigned to a head-on confrontation.

There were powerful individuals in this wide world, and the lord was no mere bumbling pig in size – he was akin to a demon in a pig's skin.

His strength had roots far beyond sheer muscle; the enlightenment came with a grim lesson.

Quickly battered and nearly dead, Schultz faced a meaningless demise.

Had he anticipated such an end, he would have continued the life of a mercenary.

Regrets notwithstanding, he prepared to meet death gracefully—until the black-haired demon appeared.

"What were you doing on the dawn of that day?"

"Got up early, as usual, and proceeded with my morning exercise."

"There should be several witnesses, so my alibi is solid."

The investigator, scrutinizing Schultz's records, could hardly hide a look of dissatisfaction.

"All right, we might summon you again later, so please wait in your quarters for now."

Nodding, Schultz promptly stood and left the room.

The investigation seemed troublesome.

Understandable, given the sole survivor – Schultz himself – currently maintained silence.

With no honorable actions to report, why voluntarily come forward?

He had erased all traces with his signature darkness magic, so discovery seemed unlikely,

unless that black-haired demon spoke out.

With ongoing investigations, a temporary halt to the mining activities was decreed, effectively putting laborers under enforced respite.

While the enforced break felt more like confinement, it didn't appear to be ending anytime soon.

As Schultz lay in bed, thoughts of the demon haunted him.

Although termed a demon, the figure seemed human-like and had even healed and saved Schultz from death – practically an angelic being to him.

Considering the context, it seemed the man had appeared with an intent to kill Lord Vince from the onset.

But why?

Did he bear a particular grudge against the lord?

And why save the one witness – Schultz – willing to speak of it?

With questions begetting questions, sleep eluded him.

“Enough!”

Eventually, he rose and headed out into the night – his destination, the mine.

The late hour did not deter the congregation of individuals investigating the site.

Standing out would only provoke unwarranted suspicion.

Realizing perpetrators often return to the scene felt out of place,

especially since he was the only one spared in that incident.

Returning would entail only the risk of eliminating the potential complication he presented...

“Suddenly!”

Sometimes, with no sign or evidence, a thought strikes with certainty.

A sense of foreboding washed over him as he walked the deserted, mist-enshrouded streets of the night.

Recently, he had passed a hooded man – the man who now, like a struck pickaxe, drove a profound realization into Schultz’s mind.

‘It’s that man!’

Schultz turned rapidly, only to find the empty street devoid of any figure.

How could someone vanish in mere moments?

Despite racing thoughts, the mine’s status remained unchanged.

There was neither sign of the man nor indication of his arrival,

despite waiting in the forest for nearly two hours...

“Yawn.”

The overpowering sense of futility compelled him to consider returning to rest.

But as he turned, unexpected paralysis took hold.

-Swiss

A chilling fog encircled him.

At its heart, only ten paces ahead, sat the black-haired man on a rotting tree stump, looking at Schultz with an intense gaze.

When had he arrived, unnoticed?

Absorbed in the mine, he’d neglected his surroundings – but how had he missed even the slightest sound?

Was this being truly a demon and not a man?

Frozen amidst fear and doubt, the demon rose.

Schultz realized the foolishness of once considering the man an angel.

Years as a mercenary hadn't gone to waste.

Surely one wouldn't seek out eye contact without reason?

Look at those red eyes suffused with killing intent – an unmistakable messenger of death.

Curiosity can indeed attract calamity – despite being spared, he should've remained still as a mouse.

Now his newfound lifeline was at risk of being cut.

Amidst this realization, Schultz thought of a final strategy.

“Bam!”

He fell to the ground, his forehead to the dirt.

“I have been searching for you, noble sir!!!”

The approaching man halted abruptly.

“I have said nothing about you to anyone! For reasons unknown, you showed me mercy, and I now seek you out in gratitude! Please, take me under your wing!”

Sweat from his head forming puddles on the ground,

“.....”

Despite receiving no response or even the sound of a footstep, Schultz was too petrified to lift his gaze.

After an indeterminate wait, possibly longer than his vigil at the mine, he was greeted only by the relentless march of insects upon his drenched limbs.

Fearing that the black-haired demon might simply leave him to desiccate, Schultz finally glanced upward.

“.....?”

Nothing.

No one was there.

A frantic sweep of his surroundings yielded only the silent, desolate forest – devoid of life.

“What is this?”

In his perplexed state, he wondered if it had all been a midsummer night’s dream, lingering bewildered in place.

* * *

“Sion!”

He’d normally awaken at the faintest call, but today, even vigorous shaking barely roused him.

“What is it?”

“The investigators wish to see you again!”

Schultz’s heart plummeted.

“Do you know why?”

“How should I know? It seems someone from Garam Magic Society has come to look into this event, and they wish to reexamine certain things, isn’t that so?”

Garam Magic Society?

People were sent from Garam Magic Society for this case?

Struggling to shake off his stupor, Schultz felt overwhelming confusion.

“And why are you sweating so much? You never sweat, even while working.”

“Ah, well! I must go!”

Hurriedly, Schultz left the room towards the lord’s quarters, knocking on the door.

No response.

“I am Sion, an Vito mine laborer. May I enter?”

“Come in.”

A girl’s indifferent voice beckoned from within.

Upon entering, Schultz halted mid-sentence.

Despite anticipating a female based on the voice, the sight of a real girl caught him off guard.

With a sky-blue ponytail, she was disarmingly cute.

Her dark eyes, chillingly stern...

“Nice to meet you, Mr. Sion. Please, have a seat.”

Dumbfounded, Schultz complied.

“Is Sion your real name?”

She asked suddenly, her gaze on his record rather than him.

“An alias.”

“I suspected as much,” she said to his surprise.

“I’ve reviewed the miners’ records. Your magic attribute is darkness, right?”

“...!”

Schultz responded calmly amidst the panic.

“Does that relate to this case?”

“Of course. To both the case and why I’m here...”

His frown deepened with confusion as,

“Lunev, may I come in?”

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 179

Chapter 179: The Black-Haired Devil (4)

“Lu, Lunev?”

Schultz doubted his ears and questioned himself several times whether he had heard wrongly.

The name that one can never be ignorant of, even if one is not from the kingdom, as long as they have stayed for more than a day.

Lunev Rainriver, the granddaughter of the head of Garam Kingdom's Magic Society, Regens Rainriver, and a once-in-three-hundred-years prodigal genius magician.

Recently, at just nineteen years of age, she reached the exceptional realm of 8-star mage, practically a being beyond human.

Could it really be that the woman who could crumble this very building with a mere flick of her finger now sat before him?

It was impossible.

It must be a different person with the same name.

A person reputed to be holed up all day in the Society studying magic wouldn't come all this way just to investigate a murder case.

Schultz refused to accept the reality.

"Please come in."

Upon her permission to enter, a member of the Society cloaked in blue entered.

"Sir James Rodrian. Lunev Rainriver at your service!"

"...?!"

Schultz's denial couldn't last long.

While it's possible to encounter people with the same name, Lunev, having the same surname, Rainriver, was inconceivable.

Thus, the woman before Schultz was without a doubt the same Lunev he knew.

What kind of bolt from the blue was this?

While it seemed that the Society member was delivering some report, Schultz couldn't register a thing.

"Why are you stiff as if you've been petrified?" Lunev asked carelessly, her gaze on Schultz.

“No, that’s not it!”

Schultz briskly straightened his spine, adopting a rigid posture.

“I heard that on the morning the murder happened, you were exercising... Have you always done that regularly?”

“Yes, well, that’s correct...”

“You don’t often go near the mine?”

“I pass by occasionally, but I did not go there that day.”

“Then you wouldn’t have seen the knights who were waiting in front of the mine that day, right?”

“Of, of course not.”

After his reply, a moment of silence passed.

Looking intently at Schultz, Lunev handed him a few pieces of paper from her desk.

A list with the personal details of various individuals.

“Is there anyone you recognize here?” she asked.

Schultz didn’t respond right away.

There were around sixty names on the list, some of which were all too familiar to him.

“May I know what this list is for? May I ask?”

“It’s a list of people who died that day.”

Lunev spoke casually, shrugging her shoulders.

“On that day, including the lord of Vince, a total of 63 people died in the mine. Although they were impersonating knights of the territory, they were all mercenaries personally hired by the lord of Vince. There were unregistered mages and mercenaries from other countries mixed in too.”

“Why are you showing this to me?” Schultz inquired, swallowing dryly.

“You came from another country as a mercenary, didn’t you?”

“That’s correct...”

Realizing that she must have already researched him somewhat, he didn't bother to deny it.

It was fortunate, perhaps, that there was no mention of the mercenaries from his former group, the Red Horse.

"Yeah, there are a few people I've seen while doing mercenary work, but I don't really know them well. After all, I've left that life behind," Schultz said, distancing himself from those listed as unrelated.

"Could you lend me your hand for a moment?"

Out of the blue, Lunev requested his hand.

Bewildered, Schultz extended his hand, and Lunev, holding it in hers, closed her eyes deeply.

After about ten seconds, she opened her eyes and nodded.

"Approximately 6-star in magic ability, and an attribute score of 51%. Those are pretty decent figures. It's rare to find someone with such an attribute score in darkness..."

Schultz's eyes widened in a flash.

"What did you just do?"

"Don't be alarmed. I simply used my ability to check your capabilities. With talent like this, even if there was a mass slaughter in the mine, you could have easily erased all traces with darkness magic."

With every word, it felt like a pointed jab at his very core.

Schultz's heart pounded loudly within him.

"You seem to be sweating a lot. Is that normal for you?"

As the shocks mounted, Schultz found himself unable to continue the conversation.

Lunev looked at him with an oddly interested smile.

"I guess you'll need to join me at the mine."

Unable to give an affirmative yes or a negative no, Schultz realized his body was already following her to the mine.

Arriving at the work area within the Vito mine,

Lunev led Schultz away from the accompanying knights and Society members to where the body of the lord of Vince had been discovered.

“Sniff, sniff.”

Suddenly, as if searching for its owner like a puppy, she began to sniff around.

“What are you doing?”

“Just looking for a certain scent. But with several days gone, there doesn’t seem to be anything in particular.”

Would even a dog be able to smell anything after so long? Schultz kept his thoughts to himself.

While he watched,

Lunev, sitting on the ground, applied the mana she manifested onto the surface.

-Woong

A strange resonance emerged from the ground as it reacted to the magic.

As Schultz gazed at this alien sight, Lunev calmly absorbed the vibrations of the earth.

“I had suspected, but it seems there was more interesting stuff than I thought?”

After a while, she stood up and while glancing over casually remarked,

“What do you mean?”

“Was it like seeing the black-haired devil right before your eyes?”

“...!”

Schultz’s pupils quivered like an earthquake.

“Why would you bring up the black-haired devil all of a sudden?”

“There’s no need to deny it. I’ve just confirmed what happened here the other day.”

“How do you say that?”

Facing the doubtful Schultz, Lunev flicked her finger.

Then, the sphere of mana still in her hand suddenly headed towards him and began to rotate around his head.

Confused, Schultz blinked, and soon vivid memories of the past day replayed in his mind like a dream.

“It’s magic called ‘Replay.’ It uses the remnants of magic and energy in a specific space to show you scenes from the past day in your head.”

“I’ve never heard of such magic.”

“That makes sense. Even my grandfather, at the Society, doesn’t know about this spell yet.”

Magic unknown even to the Society?

Could there really be magic that even the most obsessed magic fanatics haven’t heard of?

Glancing at Schultz, who looked utterly dazed, Lunev watched him with a profound gaze.

“Despite your claim of not going near the mine, you were at the scene, and you even received healing from the black-haired devil?”

With the realization that she had witnessed the same memories he had, any further denial would be futile.

Schultz, with no hesitation, bowed his head to the ground, just as the day before.

“I don’t know what you want, but I have nothing to do with that devil! It was just a coincidence that I ended up there...”

“It’s not a devil.”

A totally unexpected response surprised Schultz, causing him to slowly lift his head.

“Not a devil wearing a disguise, but an assassin. One who goes around saving various people, including you and me...”

Unable to understand, Schultz merely blinked in confusion.

“It seems we have a lot more to talk about, don’t we?”

Crouching, Lunev met his gaze with an oddly mixed look of intrigue.

* * *

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 180

Chapter 180. The One Who is Protected by the Gods (1)

I had not misheard.

This was undoubtedly a form of Telepathy magic.

Someone nearby had spoken directly into my mind.

'Please, I beg of you! If anyone can hear this voice, save me!'

The more I listened, the clearer it became: a voice so desperate and tender that it triggered an instinct to protect.

A rather novel cry for help.

In any case, it was a far better approach than screaming meaninglessly into the void.

Of course, this assumes that there was someone nearby who could actually hear the plea.

It's not as if every random scream of telepathy could be heard by just anyone. Especially not without a specific target in mind.

As for me, after rolling around in so many skirmishes over time, I've nearly reached the absolute peak in decoding mana.

And yet, it's unlikely that anyone else in this place could hear the frail plea of this unknown woman.

It's an odd stroke of fortune or misfortune, you could say.

The one-in-ten-thousand chance that someone who could hear the voice appeared, but it's happening at a one-in-a-thousand chance that the same person ignores injustice and moves on.

With a mere wisp of hope that next time someone who could hear and would not tolerate injustice would come, I turned away.

[Hmm... There's a cute cat inside the carriage?]

Right. If I just walked away now, my beloved sword wouldn't forgive me.

I didn't need to say it; I knew.

The usual lines about how a man can't simply pass by without helping a woman in danger, and how that's against a man's duty.

Predictable.

Not that I was ever fooled by such trivial tricks—...

[.....]

Just as Ceyram looked intently at the carriage, his gaze shifted.

[Why? What is it?]

Puzzled by the unexpected quiet, I caught his glance, and Ceyram stuck out his chin in what seemed to be annoyance.

“Aren't you going to say anything?”

[So, what?]

“You're not going to order to save the person inside...?”

An uncomfortable silence settled in, unfamiliar and unwelcome.

Ceyram, who had been looking at me dumbfounded, quickly flashed a mischievous smile.

[Seems like our master has matured along with his body? Have you finally realized what to do without this sister having to spell it out for you?]

I had been played.

It was as if I had dug my own grave and then willingly jumped in.

Ignoring Ceyram's taunts, I hastily widened the distance from the carriage.

[I was going to pass by originally, but I had no idea our master would take an interest? How about it? Given the situation, should I tell you about the cat in the carriage?]

“There's no godly intervention that could make me care.”

Of course, if that goddamn god was present, it'd be a different story.

[There's a White Elf inside.]

My stride halted abruptly.

“Who did you say was there?”

[Wh-i-te Elf!]

She emphasized each syllable, making clear there was no need for further questions.

“...!”

[Moreover, it's a female.]

* * *

On a narrow mountain path that a small carriage could barely pass, the uneven dirt trail made for an unpleasantly bumpy ride.

-Dulguduk Dulguduk

The carriage raced urgently, with no consideration for the person inside.

Bound hand and foot with rope, she was jostled violently, resulting in bruises blossoming across her limbs.

‘Please help me! Help!’

A gag muffled her cries, leaving her only the futile hope of telepathy for aid.

But regardless of her pleas, there was no one to hear her voice.

Desperately isolated, tears fell endlessly from the woman's eyes.

-Sssss

Suddenly thin black mist seeped through the crevices around the door, lightly wrapping around her.

Briefly disoriented, she soon noticed a figure appearing amidst the tear-blurred view.

A woman with long, flowing black hair and vivid red eyes—a strikingly formidable appearance.

She sat with legs crossed on the facing seat, regarding the other woman with curious eyes.

And the woman understood.

What she was witnessing was a being far from ordinary.

Not human, for sure, but emitting an aura that only the most noble of beings could possess.

‘Are you a goddess?’

“Choke!”

Startled by the unanticipated encounter, the carriage came to an abrupt stop, accompanied by a muffled groan from outside.

Peering out, liquids of unknown origin were seen splattering against the opaque windows.

‘What’s happening?’

Darkness stirs primal human fears easily.

Blind to events, and uncertain of what comes next.

Though alarming, it was the sensation of a devil crawling up from hell’s depths to approach her that truly kindled her terror.

Wrapped tightly in dread, she drew protectively inward.

– Thud thud

The life force of the dozen guards dissipated, leaving only one mysterious energy approaching the carriage.

The woman thought if that door opened, she would undoubtedly die.

“ ... ”

The executor of death arrived at the door and—

-Click

With a rough metallic sound, the handle turned, and the carriage door swung open.

-Thump

She fainted.

* * *

Just to be clear, I did not start this over zeal for saving the woman in the carriage.

Truthfully.

Even after hearing from Ceyram about the White Elf, I felt no stir of emotion. I intended to continue on my way.

So why have I caused such a scene?

Not for the woman inside, but for the armed escorts ostensibly guarding the carriage.

Although they might seem like adventurers or mercenaries completing a task, they were all actually knights affiliated with a certain organization.

The evidence was in the swords they carried.

There are many types of swords in this world.

Classified by size and weight as longswords, shortwords, greatswords, smallswords, and so forth, each swordsman chooses a weapon that best suits their build and attitude to maximize their capabilities.

Just as a favored pen writes best, all the more for a sword that's meant to protect oneself.

Even members of Mist, who disguises themselves for missions, rarely change their swords.

And certainly, knights—who value honor and faith above all—would never do so willingly.

It might be dismissed if there were only one or two, but over ten men carrying similar blades hinted at something suspicious.

Especially since they were swords of the Light's Knights...

After the incident seven years ago, the Empire expanded the Light's Knight Order to eradicate followers of the Black Mist—myself included.

Sure, it didn't mean that knights like Yulken, active on the front lines, had increased in number.

Mostly, it was these greenhorns with barely any mark to show for their affiliation.

Otherwise, they wouldn't crumble so pathetically without proper formation.

Nevertheless, what should catch my attention wasn't them.

It was rather curious that knights of the Light's Knight Order of the Empire were kidnapping a White Elf in a foreign land, not the Empire itself.

The stench is so foul it's nauseating.

Moreover, how did they manage to kidnap a White Elf?

They treat humans with as much disdain as insects; it wasn't likely she came willingly, and it didn't make sense to kidnap her with any specific purpose...

No need to muse over it—better to ask the person involved.

[This child is thoroughly unconscious.]

Ceyram jested, pinching her pale cheeks.

I had opened the door wondering if questioning her was possible, but upon seeing my face, she passed out promptly.

It's not an unfamiliar situation, but it feels like I've been swept into a rather troubled affair.

I contemplated waking her with a shake, but then—

-Spark

My hand seemed to emit a strong current, as if sparking.

“What's this?”

As if her body's strong aura was repelling my approach, I could even feel a palpable pressure.

[I told you. There's a cute kitty here.]

Ceyram sat across from me, lips curving into an alluring smile.

[She is under the protection of a god.]

* * *

She awoke to the cool touch of the earth, the warmth of the cloak unwittingly providing a peaceful slumber.

Blinking quickly, the woman sat up and surveyed her surroundings.

Just as before, she was still in the carriage.

The only difference was that the restraints on her hands and feet and the gag in her mouth were gone—instead, a stranger’s black cloak was wrapped around her.

She recalled the last memory before passing out:

The carriage stopping, the sounds of screams, a dark presence approaching—one that couldn’t belong to this earth.

And when the door opened, she had fainted...

It felt like an odd midday dream.

“...”

Sounds of trickling water from outside the door distracted her.

As she cautiously pressed her ear to the door—

-Creak

The carriage door opened weakly.

Debating whether to leave, she finally mustered her courage and stepped out.

Bright afternoon sunlight and the clear waters of a mountain stream greeted her.

Enchanted by the pristine current, she rushed towards the creek and collected water in her cupped hands, moistening her parched mouth.

“Ah...”

Only then did a contented smile spread across her face.

“!”

Her bliss was short-lived, shattered by an unfamiliar presence behind her.

She quickly turned to a man with indifferent eyes and crossed arms watching her.

The woman presented the cloak defensively, but soon realized—

The cloak she clung to belonged to the man before her.

She inspected her body with wide eyes.

Covered in wounds just moments ago, her body was now unblemished.

Did this man not only save her but heal her injuries too?

She was sure that this man had heard her urgent telepathic plea.

‘Did you save me?’

She tried to reach out with her mind again, but—

“...”

The man merely furrowed his eyebrows, not replying.

Wondering if her voice hadn’t reached him, just as she was about to try again,

‘Can’t you speak?’

His voice, apathetic yet sweet, resounded deep within her.

(To be continued)