

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 201

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Chapter 201. The Whispers of Secrets (3)

“Princess Arin, it’s Resmus.”

Despite announcing himself alongside the knock, there was no reply.

With that, Resmus cautiously opened the door and entered.

At the center of the room, Princess Arin was seated at a desk busily attending to her official duties.

Dozens of documents that needed sorting were neatly arranged in front of her.

“I’ve just sent out the imperial edicts to each city and territory. By tomorrow, the news should start spreading, beginning with the closer locations.”

“Thank you for your efforts, Resmus.”

With an indifferent remark, Arin returned her focus to her work.

Resmus looked as though he had something else to say, but after hesitating, he shook his head and stepped back.

About ten minutes passed.

“Princess Violet has arrived.”

Both women turned their gazes as they were informed of the new arrival from outside the door.

Arin rose from her seat in silence, preparing to welcome the distinguished guest.

The door opened, and Princess Violet entered with a beaming smile.

“You’ve been working hard, Arin.”

“Welcome, Sister.”

Arin greeted her with both hands neatly folded, a gesture of respect.

"I feel bad for visiting amidst your busyness. It seems like I've passed too much responsibility onto you, and as your sister, it weighs on my conscience."

"There's no need for concern. I'm only doing what I can."

"This matter mustn't feel very pleasant for you, Arin. It must be bringing back painful memories from the past."

"...!"

Arin's pupils flickered momentarily as she looked down.

"Don't get me wrong. I'm saying this out of concern that someone might reappear, possibly troubling your heart once again due to this affair."

Trying her best to conceal her emotions, Arin looked up with a bright smile.

"It's all in the past. I need to focus on the present challenges at hand."

"That's admirable. Our father's health is not what it was, and we must be even more resolute in our progression. Only then can we be deemed worthy members of the imperial family."

"I'll strive to do better."

With those meaningful words of encouragement, Violet left the room.

Arin resumed her work as though nothing had happened.

To outsiders, it might have seemed no different than before, but Resmus, who had been watching over her for nearly a decade, saw something else.

In Arin's indifferent gaze was a newly kindled flame of hatred and anger.

Whether it was directed at Princess Violet or the person she had referenced remained uncertain.

* * *

Two days had passed since my second encounter with that sly retired knight-commander.

People crowded around a bulletin board at the center of the street to read the latest imperial pronouncement.

Their expressions were filled with distrust and skepticism.

The death of Nephrodite Iris—saint of the Order of Light and messenger of the divine voice—was shocking enough,

but the full extent of her misdeeds, written in black and white, brought confusion and chaos.

“Can this really be true?”

“She wasn’t a saint but a madwoman! I’m ashamed to have praised her all this time.”

“What’s going to happen to the Order of Light now?”

The proclamation detailed how Nephrodite, the saint, had been embroiled in the recent kidnapping of the White Elves in Garam Kingdom and had used the knightly order for personal enrichment and tyrannical acts.

While it seemed exaggerated to the point of fiction, that wasn’t the important part.

What mattered was how people perceived it: shock, self-reproach, and a subsequent sense of unease.

For decades, the saint and the Order of Light had been pillars of prestige, and now their reputation plummeted into disgrace overnight.

I have to say, it’s comically absurd from the perspective of someone who knows a thing or two.

A suicide due to guilt and despondency? I admit that I dealt her a serious blow mentally.

However, had she been so weak-willed as to take her own life over it, she wouldn’t have shamelessly reigned as a saint for sixty years.

As I stood there, pondering vengeance and the absurdity of the supposed suicide,

the same lanky monks from the monastery I had seen before were busily proselytizing nearby.

The opposition towards the saint seemed to play a role in drawing a larger crowd to them today.

This event didn’t just expose the saint’s misdeeds; it undermined the dignity of the entire Ushif Empire,

challenging the legitimacy of not just the Order of Light but also of the imperial house itself.

What was the palace thinking, bragging about such a disgrace?

It couldn't be Emperor Dione's doing.

Two years ago, following a worsening heart condition, he had been unable to attend to state affairs properly.

So, could it be someone else in the imperial household?

Prince Luinel, the crown prince, had been stripped of power and had long since left the palace, and Empress Cassandra's sons, Fabian and Nerobian, lived quietly with little influence.

That left two suspects: Princess Violet, who currently held significant power, or Arin, who was almost always at her side.

If you had told me this scenario seven years ago, I'd have dismissed it as too ridiculous for even a fictitious plot.

Here I am, having advised to step forward, now unsure of where to go from here.

Turning on my heels, I headed back to the tavern where I had met the old man three nights ago.

I took the same seat, waiting silently for someone to show up.

Sure enough, the familiar old man came up the stairs and plopped down across from me.

"Sorry for the delay."

This was the third time such an encounter had repeated itself.

But today, the ambiance had changed; gone was the sly demeanor, replaced by the stern gaze of a seasoned knight.

"I won't be around for long, so I'll get straight to the point. I just reached a consensus with my men. I'm heading to the palace."

"Weren't you the retired knight who didn't care about the affairs of the world?"

"Didn't I say it? The older you get, the more sensitive to the truth you become. That tall woman was not the type to kill herself out of guilt. I'd stake my sixty years as a knight on it."

It seemed our thoughts aligned.

The old man, too, believed the palace was lying.

Having spent years by the saint's side, his opinion might be more accurate.

"Don't get me wrong, I'm no fan of hers. I never was. She tried several times to reform me with her meddling. I always managed to evade her tricks, but she certainly stood firm in her beliefs—that her existence contributed to the peace of the continent."

I was reminded of Iris's defiant declaration that no evil could bring her to despair.

"The palace is now vilifying her, and soon, the reputation of the Order of Light will plummet. Though I want peace in my old age, I can't stand by idly."

It was clear he intended to go see it all for himself.

"Unfortunately, our dealings must be postponed."

"And who's to say we will meet again?"

"We shall."

His eyes sparkled with certainty.

"For reasons unknown to me, I have a feeling we'll meet again at the palace."

"And what makes you think I'll be going there?"

"Call it an old man's intuition, but it's just a feeling! We'll see what happens."

With that, Jereon rose from his seat.

"Till the next time we meet, Sian Vert..."

He left with an air of self-importance, quite a spectacle indeed.

Now that my identity had been revealed, it wasn't surprising that he knew my name.

I wasn't particularly concerned that he might blab it around town.

However, unlike him, I had no destination in mind after this.

Perhaps I should return home and take a walk with Nana?

Suddenly, an unexpected guest, thumping down beside me, snapped me out of my thoughts.

Without a word, he offered a respectful bow and sat down.

It was a member of Mist, the same one who had previously delivered me documents about the faux disciples of Mist.

This time, there was a hint of unease around his eyes that hadn't been there before.

"Master insists this message must be delivered to you posthaste."

From within his clothing, he handed me a sealed letter.

I immediately recognized it as an order of operations.

At this point, a new subject for purification?

Perhaps someone from the palace displeased his taste.

"...?"

I showed the empty letter to the agent, confusion mounting.

"What does this mean?"

There was nothing written on it.

No cipher to decode. Just a blank sheet.

I knew all too well the implication of this blank command.

"I'm just a messenger..."

The agent remained elusive, but I sensed the uneasiness behind his eyes.

Once again, I dove into the heart of the matter.

"Are the orders you received the same as mine?"

"... No."

With a reluctant sigh, the man replied.

"Who's the subject of the operation?"

"..."

“Don’t make this harder on yourself. Whether you talk to me or report to the master, you’re in the same danger.”

The agent sighed deeply with frustration, clearly upset at being chosen for this task.

Instead of answering, he handed me another letter—presumably the orders he had been given.

“And, there’s a message from Master for you as well.”

“What message?”

“Don’t get involved this time. Don’t do anything...”

As I read the letter, my eyes turned as hard as stone.

The meaning of the blank command was simple.

Don’t act on it.

Let the other members take action without interference—just be a bystander.

“...”

Are they joking?

It would be one thing if they kept me in the dark entirely, but I’m supposed to ignore this?

At the bottom of the orders, in red ink, was the name of our next target.

My previously calm mind tightened as a rush of negative emotions flooded over me.

[Arin Severus];

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 202

Chapter 202. The Essence of Mist (1)

In a monastery situated in Brenu, a southern city of the Ushif Empire, a sermon is being delivered in a dim underground square that never sees the light.

“Humans’ lives are not eternal. Likewise, there is nothing eternal in all of creation. After all, the order maintaining the current peace is no different.”

As if enchanted by the monk’s eloquent rhetoric, most of the congregation couldn’t draw their eyes away, all but one—Schultz, who is sitting rigidly, only his eyes darting about.

‘What is this? These people are like a bunch of fanatics!’

Schultz happened upon a secret signal in the streets and infiltrated this place, but that’s where things became problematic. He thought there might be some connection to the Mist, but there wasn’t. The people here were just weak-minded followers, either entranced by or inducing others to succumb to some specific entity called the mist.

Being a mercenary isn’t for nothing. One can infer a lot about a person just by their eyes. The majority here must have spent their lives buried in books. All except for one man sitting right next to him.

Humans can see much without eyes, using instead the physical senses honed through experience. The man beside him had thick hands that didn’t match his small, slim frame. A body that seemed to have muscles but no fat, and even from a distance, the clear veins on his arms were visible.

A lion doesn’t look like a herbivore just because it grazes on grass. Schultz was certain that the man beside him was, like himself, hiding his true identity and had come to this place for a reason.

As the sermon that seemed to flow without notice came to an end, Schultz quickly followed the man as he hurried out of the monastery. The man headed toward the outskirts of the city, avoiding contact with anyone else. Just when it seemed he was getting away, he abruptly stopped in his tracks. He gave a cursory glance around before suddenly slipping into an alley off the main road. Schultz hurried after him, not wanting to lose sight.

Turning corner after corner, deeper into the obscure parts of the city, Schultz pursued doggedly, not letting the man out of his sight. Then, in an instant:

“.....?”

The man vanished. Surprised, Schultz turned around to find—

“.....!”

The man he had been following was now right in front of him. Sensing a threat, Schultz drew his sword from his cloak.

-Clang!

A quick decision saved his life. The tip of the man's dagger was aimed straight at Schultz's neck. After blocking the surprise attack, Schultz wasted no time in putting some distance between them. With tension rising, his heart pounded and sweat trickled down his back.

Finding no way to explain or escape, Schultz decided to make a bet that put his life on the line.

-Clank

With a loud metallic sound, the man's brow furrowed slightly as Schultz threw his sword to the ground in front of him.

"My name is Schultz. I have no family name."

Then, raising his hands to show he had no intention to attack, he said,

"You are, so to speak, a true follower of the Mist, aren't you?"

The man said nothing, staring at Schultz with an unyielding gaze.

"I certainly felt it in the monastery! That you are different from those monks reciting bizarre doctrines! I came here to find you all...!"

Without needing to hear more, the man who had put away his sword turned away indifferently. Desperate, Schultz called out, watching his retreating figure.

"I want to join the Mist!"

The words were too compelling to ignore, and the man turned back. His eyes, though relentless, did not have the same impact as those of the man he had seen in the Kingdom of Garam. Composing himself, Schultz manifested a sphere of mana in his hand.

Dark and dense with shadow attributes, the mana illustrated his suitability for the organization, an offering of proof.

The man watched in silence as Schultz presented his power.

After a moment, he turned away once more, but then, with a brief nod, he signaled for Schultz to follow. Swallowing hard, Schultz did just that.

* * *

Mercenaries often share stories with their comrades. They usually revolve around desires like money or women, but one topic that comes up from time to time was the Mist, the continent's foremost assassination group.

They moved not for money or wealth, but to fulfill their ideology and doctrines. If ever one were to encounter them, they were advised to abandon the mission immediately, regardless of contracts or payments. It was not about whether one could defeat the assassins but rather because they were not driven by conventional desires. Their readiness to sacrifice their lives for their cause meant there was nothing to gain by confronting them.

In a hut deep in the forest outside the city, Schultz was entering a world far removed from his known reality. The hut could barely fit two people, but inside was a powerful, undeniable presence.

The man gestured for Schultz to enter.

Taking a deep breath, Schultz went inside, the man following. The room was bare, save for a small dagger resting alone on an old wooden table. It was clearly no ordinary knife; whatever it emitted was disquieting and awakened dark feelings. It was not a weapon one wanted to hold.

"Take it," the man finally spoke.

Schultz hesitated at first, but then, firm in resolve, he grasped the handle.

-Woosh!

The black mist from the blade swirled out, filling the space.

Suddenly, Schultz found himself not in the hut but a strange place obscured by mist. A disconcerting figure emerged in front of him in this unfamiliar space—a man with jet-black hair and piercing eyes that resembled someone he knew very well. Though human in shape, he felt distinctly inhuman.

Blood-red tears fell from his eyes, and he clutched a blood-stained dagger. But the most perplexing part was the uncanny resemblance—this other man looked exactly like Schultz. It was as if he was looking at another version of himself from an unknown future.

The bloody tears were filled with rage and desire to kill, emotions Schultz had never known in his life.

"Haah..."

The doppelganger advanced ominously—not to greet, but clearly to kill. Realizing the gravity of the situation, Schultz understood this was a trial. Overcoming it would prove his worth and open the path forward. Clutching his weapon, Schultz prepared to fight.

As if on cue, the other Schultz charged.

-Clang!

An attack aimed at the face, particularly the eyes. Though the trajectory was clearly visible, allowing for a defense, the force behind it was astonishing, far exceeding anything Schultz could imagine himself capable of.

As Schultz tried to create some distance out of panic:

“Grk!”

The other Schultz wouldn’t allow it. As if to say Schultz had entered his domain with no escape, the other’s red dagger drew closer to his face, carrying the cold of impending death. The moment the bloody blade touched his neck...

-Whoosh!

The consuming mist cleared in an instant as Schultz found himself back in the small hut. The man looked down at the now-collapsed Schultz with a disdainful expression.

“What you encountered was another aspect of you — consumed by vengeance, rage, and thirst for blood. It’s a fierce force that can bring forth humanity’s frail nature in its purest form. But obsessively gained power without reason inevitably leads to self-destruction.”

It was a potent power, obtainable at the expense of blood and tears. To Schultz, who had experienced it firsthand, no further explanation was necessary.

“However, those who can’t overcome their rage-infested self...”

The man casually picked up the dagger from the table and tucked it away.

“...have no right to wield an assassin’s blade.”

With that, he left Schultz behind, stepping outside without another glance. Alone, Schultz lay down, utterly spent.

“Overcome an anger-infested me? Is that even possible?”

It was not a complaint for failing the trial but a genuine question.

“What kind of lives have you people lived?”

Schultz realized, keenly feeling with his entire being, that he was yet far from reaching the realm where these individuals existed.

* * *

“Have you no regrets?”

“Since the day I began my service to Lord Aer, I have eagerly awaited this moment. Why would there be anything to regret?”

“I’m just wondering if there’s any need to rush.”

“An assassin knows that hesitation is akin to death. Why would you, of all people, ask me this?”

“You always have a point.”

Footsteps approached quickly, someone closing in on their location. It was sooner than anticipated; could there be an issue? Aer was willing to intercede if necessary.

“There’s no need. I shall conclude this mind communion. Please, observe with interest...”

“Such harsh words.”

Aer vanished into the mist alongside his parting comment. As Silica opened her eyes, she saw Sian before her, impassive as always, though now his gaze carried a sharper edge.

“You have something to say, then speak.”

“What is it you want to say?”

“I communicated everything through the mission orders, didn’t I?”

“Do you mean the blank paper with nothing on it?”

“You understood it well then.”

Silica looked at Sian, tilting her head as if questioning any issue.

“Is there a problem? Do you think I’ll hesitate to assassinate Princess Arin?”

She could understand if that were the reason. But she knew Sian knew her well enough that wouldn't be the case. There must be another, deeper reason for excluding her, Sian must have thought.

"To say you wouldn't hesitate..."

Silica throws an unexpected question back at Sian.

(To be continued...)

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Chapter 203: The Essence of Fog (2)

Humans are frail creatures, yet they adapt remarkably quickly. The beginning is always the hardest, but once adaptation kicks in, it becomes natural, as if it was always a part of routine. I was no different. Initially, when I first grasped the assassin's sword after overcoming trials, hesitation filled me pointlessly. Do you know who was the first target of my sword's stabbing? It was myself. Not the me I faced through the trials, but the very me holding the sword. Only after piercing and bleeding out the weak nature within me could I properly wield the assassin's blade. After that, I naturally grew accustomed to it. Whether related by blood or acquaintance, hesitation ceased as I took the lives of those I had to kill. Not because I was me, but because an assassin must do so.

What is this situation, then? Can you say I wouldn't hesitate? Did the clan leader truly think I would falter, even slightly, in assassinating the delicate princess? Anyone else might, but me?

"Are you being serious? Do you honestly believe I cannot kill that hollow shell of a princess?" I asked.

"There's a 99% chance you could," they admitted.

The distinction between 100 and 99 is stark. It implies she believes there's a 1% chance I wouldn't follow through. I acknowledge it; my relationship with the delicate princess isn't merely ordinary. I was the one who first suggested she become empress and saved her from near assassination by a marionette in the imperial palace. More than that, when Princes Fabian and Nerobian sent assassins after me, I informed her and helped her build defenses, a sword, and shield. Lastly, I urged her to carry on, ensuring that one like me would never appear in this world again.

I admit it! All these unusual involvements were because of her, and it is she who unsettles me by appearing in my dreams begging for just one word. So what if that's the case? The moment I recognize her as a target, I will kill her without hesitation as I've always done.

"On what grounds do you doubt me? Have I shown any hesitation or reluctance in my purification work for the clan leader?" I demanded.

"No, you haven't. You have fulfilled your duties as an assassin better than anyone else," they conceded.

Suppressing a surge of resentment, I wondered why they doubted me, they, who understood better than anyone.

"Lemme ask then," the clan leader spoke up, squinting at me sharply. "Why didn't you kill your brother in Brenu seven years ago?"

I was momentarily speechless, not because I couldn't answer, but because I didn't expect those words from the clan leader at that moment.

"You said it was to inflict the greatest pain on your vengeance target, to let him feel the frustration of being unable to bring you down despite everything."

No explanation was necessary; they already knew the answer.

"Back then, you thought you could handle everything. No matter what others planned or what terrible deeds they did, you believed you could manage it all. The same holds true now."

Indeed. Whether then or now, I am prepared to bear responsibility for all my actions, for myself, and for all within my sphere.

"How selfish that thought is... you need to realize that now."

It felt like being hit on the back of the head with a massive hammer. Selfish? Is that what this is?

The words rang hollow. A powerless person's grand principles are nothing more than futile stubbornness. But that's not me. I have the power to protect myself and others. If even a god stands in my way, I am determined to kill him.

To be called selfish, after everything I've done and withstood, seemed ludicrous.

"You might think your present life, forged not to repeat past mistakes, has been built solely by your own efforts. But that's a grave misconception, Sian. You are the product of many hands shaping you into who you are now."

For some reason, their words resonated in my head like an echo.

“Isn’t that right, Sian? Humans are foolish creatures capable of compromising great causes for the sake of a small kindness. By choosing to be human yourself, you are also bound to make the same mistakes unless you cease to be human altogether...”

I felt sick. Amid this severe situation, the image of the weeping delicate princess flashed before my eyes, as if echoing the clan leader’s prediction.

“Just as you’ve overlooked many for the sake of your own and for those close to you in the past, this time we shall overlook you for your sake.”

With these turbulent emotions, my sealed lips refused to open. They seemed to say that any word from me would only diminish me more in this predicament.

“If you’re really itching to do something, why don’t you go walk around with Nana, who has been rather bored lately, preferably far from the imperial palace.”

With that, the clan leader rose and left her seat. I remained motionless as her steps receded into the distance.

Normally, Ceyram would have jumped out by now, mocking my pitiful state, but now, even she didn’t appear.

“Keek!”

A laugh escaped my lips unexpectedly. Despite the situation not being remotely amusing, I just started laughing. Perhaps it’s an indication that I am not in my usual state of mind.

* * *

“...Hence, the imperial family has decided to disband and reorganize the Knights of the Light. Further decisions will be communicated to each territory via official correspondence.”

]Sender: Arin Severus.];

The imperial edict received was just shy of reaching the imperial palace.

While others were unable to hide their shock, Jereon’s expression was remarkably indifferent. It was as if he’d expected this all along.

“Why do you all look so startled? We’re not even part of the Knights of the Light anymore, so why worry about its disbandment?”

“Are you truly unperturbed, Lord Jereon?”

“If something becomes unnecessary, it’s natural for it to be discarded. Isn’t that the way of the world? Should I even need to explain such things? You all act younger than your years.”

Though not as old as Jereon, they were men in the twilight of their lives, their hair white and faces wrinkled.

“The document states a reorganization, not a total disbandment. Roles naturally change with the times. The Knights of the Light are merely undergoing such a process.”

His subordinates struggled to respond, their eyes shifting elsewhere uncomfortably.

“You who stood unshaken before superior demons are now comically distressed by mere words.”

Jereon scanned his men with a hint of contempt.

“Are you still planning to go to the imperial palace?”

“I must. I am aware that the reception will not be as cordial as in the past...”

A reception quite the opposite was a real possibility.

“You typically ask such questions to deter someone, suspecting they’ll only see trouble upon arrival...”

As Jereon read their eyes, a smile formed on his lips.

“It seems you all desire to go to the imperial palace, eager to confront whatever awaits. If we’ve done nothing wrong, they surely won’t toss us into prison upon arrival.”

Their somber expressions began to ease.

“Let’s go and see for ourselves if the path we’ve taken was indeed the correct one.”

“We shall follow your command, Captain!”

The title ‘Captain’ might have felt awkward considering how long it had been, but Jereon’s men’s eyes shone with a fervor reminiscent of decades past when they proudly wore pure white armor on the battlefield.

Though their bond seemed everlasting at that moment, their resolve dissolved mere eight hours later.

When morning came and Jereon was nowhere to be found, Mark, sensing something amiss, entered his room.

“Lord Jereon?”

Mark’s eyes widened in disbelief. Jereon, who had promised to go to the imperial palace with his men, had vanished without a trace, leaving behind a casually written note.

]I’ll be back.];

* * *

“I was about to retrieve you myself, but I’m grateful that you came directly,” said Violet, brimming with smile as she poured tea for him.

Jereon glanced at the cup offered by the princess before taking a sip.

“I never imagined Violet, the princess, would personally receive me.”

“Is my presence inconvenient for you?”

“Of course not. I simply assumed it would be Princess Arin visiting me, hence my comment.”

Violet covered her mouth, laughing with poise.

“That child is quite busy nowadays, striving every day to be a worthy member of the imperial family. As her sister, I’m truly grateful for her efforts.”

A brief silence fell between them.

“Such an unforeseen event.”

“The disbandment of the Knights of the Light?” she inquired.

“It’s Princess Arin handling imperial duties that surprises me. When I retired, the imperial family was on the precipice of a storm. I never imagined she would mature so rapidly into her role.”

“What does lineage matter? With the right ability, anyone is deserving of their place. Much like you once were, Captain Jereon...”

Despite the significance of her words, Jereon dismissed them with a sip of tea.

“Until I passed through the city gate, I considered two possible scenarios.”

“What scenarios?”

“The first was being apprehended by knights upon entry. The second is the current situation.”

“Apprehended? Why would you entertain such a dreadful possibility?”

Violet appeared genuinely concerned.

“I would have preferred the former. It would reveal the imperial family’s intentions in this matter. But this situation is different.”

“How so?”

“As the former leader of the Knights of the Light, I simply show up at the imperial palace while they are being disbanded. What good does that do the imperial family? Yet, they welcome me with such kindness...”

Jereon’s gaze sharpened momentarily.

“They must want something from me. Isn’t that right, Princess Violet?”

Despite his probing, Violet maintained a tranquil demeanor, her lips curled into a satisfied smile.

“Always so astute, Captain Jereon! Then, without any further ado, I shall speak plainly.”

Rising, Violet took Jereon’s hands in hers and implored,

“Will you become our savior?”

(To be continued)

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Chapter 204: The Essence of Mist (3)

Savior.

By definition, it is someone who saves people from distress and trouble.

At a glance, a savior might seem like an indispensable being that the world cannot do without; however, this role can change in many ways depending on the situation.

Although a savior may bring salvation to some, to others, they might deliver despair.

Despite Violet's rash actions, Jereon asked in a calm tone,

"Who am I supposed to save with these wrinkled, aged hands?"

"You should begin by saving the Knights of Light, who have lost their way and wander in confusion. Although the Saintess led the order, was it not you, Commander Jereon, who truly guided the knights from within? You can provide a great sense of stability to those overwhelmed with chaos."

Having retired years ago but still commanding the respect and loyalty of many former subordinates from the Knights of Light,

it was clear he was being asked to realign the knights with well-crafted teachings.

Yes, this much was within expectation and thus not a surprise.

The problem was what came next.

Jereon needed to know what use there was for the power of the knightly order that he had been traded for.

"Did the Saintess Nephrodite... really take her own life?"

"I have been informed so. Surely my own sister would not lie to me."

However, the thinly veiled look in Violet's eyes told a different truth.

"That's unexpected. I heard you and the Saintess were not particularly close, Commander."

"We did spend 30 years together. Even if we were not the best of friends, we knew what we knew and remained unaware of what we didn't through all those years. But the Nephrodite I know..."

Jereon was about to set down the princess's hand when his eyes suddenly flashed open and he continued,

"...is not someone who would ever resort to suicide."

"People say you can never truly know what lies ten feet under water, nor what resides in a man's heart. Perhaps she was such a case."

That statement contained a fatal error.

Nephrodite was not a human; she was a white elf.

“Do you know why she went to the Kingdom of Garam, Commander?”

“I’ve only heard that she went to pursue some plan related to the white elves, nothing more.”

“Then let me explain briefly. Her goal was to find records from the ancient era. To stand against the entity that is the mist.”

A shadow crossed Jereon’s face at the mention of that name.

In the short sentence, two phrases particularly struck his mind. One was about the records of the ancient era,

“And the existence of mist?”

At the mention of mist, he was reminded of someone.

“Yes. Commander, do you remember the day seven years ago in Brenu when the mist swallowed the light?”

“Of course.”

“After that worst day, which we never imagined would come, we realized that with our current power, we couldn’t handle the might of the ever-expanding mist without warning...”

The plural reference ‘we’ had significant implications.

Not alone, but many.

With Jereon’s current knowledge, he could not identify who they were.

“The essence of mist is an unseen mystery. The light that shines upon this continent cannot disperse it. What do you think we should do to overcome such a desperate situation, Commander?”

Instead of an answer, Jereon found himself confronted by a question.

Who could define this as a desperate situation?

To us, the mist is still an enigmatic existence whose essence is yet to be grasped.

“Was that question too difficult? I was looking forward to an innovative answer from you, Commander. A pity.”

Violet stepped back, her expression one of regret.

“After much deliberation, we finally came to an answer. A light that cannot dispel the mist can no longer be our order; we must establish a new order that isn’t light.”

“A new order?”

“Yes. However, Saintess Nephrodite opposed this. She believed that only light could save this world. Perhaps, realizing her mistake too late, she chose to end her own life. It truly is a pity...”

-Clomp, clomp-

As he listened to the princess’s story, Jereon’s gaze suddenly shifted towards the door.

Footsteps were approaching from the end of the hall—ominous steps filled with a criminal aura.

“In summary, Your Highness and your people wish for me to join in creating this new order?”

“You are correct. What will be your decision? Will you give me an immediate answer?”

“I don’t understand. I’m practically a dead man walking with not much life left. How do you plan to use an old man who could collapse at any moment?”

“The more allies, the better, don’t you agree?”

Violet’s response was evasive.

“To be honest, I’m not sure. The person who wanted you was not me, but someone else.”

“...?”

With the revelation of this unexpected fact, Jereon frowned slightly.

A member of the noble imperial family offering themselves as another’s person?

Unlike the visibly flustered Jereon, the princess’s expression was of complete composure.

-Knock, knock-

The knocking on the door broke the escalating tension, and both sets of eyes turned in unison.

“It seems they’ve arrived. Please speak with them directly. About the savior who will lead our new order...”

The door opened and two men with subtle smiles stepped inside.

“Greetings to the esteemed former Commander of the Knights of Light, Sir Jereon Alkin.”

The handsome man with shining blonde hair bowed respectfully to him.

Jereon instantly recognized who he was.

Though he did not know the man personally, he looked very much alike someone he was connected with.

The master of a ducal house known as the guardians of the continent.

“Aschel Vert.”

At his waist hung a brilliant golden longsword, emitting a radiant aura of light.

* * *

“Only through surpassing one’s self, consumed by fury, can one wield the assassin’s blade. Indeed, it is not a state easily achieved.”

Lunev looked on with mild curiosity and a slight lift of her eyes.

In her hand lay a scroll circulating among the abbies across the empire—it contained teachings about the mist.

“Even I, who pride myself on reading every book in existence, have never seen such a text before. If I had the leisure, I’d spend days analyzing it.”

Before her, Schultz stood uneasily, his state more forlorn than when he had failed missions as a mercenary in his past life.

“Why do you wear such a face, like a puppy desperate for a bathroom break?”

“I, I am ashamed. To think I returned with such an outcome when Lunev trusted me with her task...”

Schultz’s self-reproach drew a puzzled look from her.

"I find your standards odd. Right now, I am thoroughly satisfied and even impressed with the work you have done."

"Do you truly mean that?"

"I'm not one for empty words."

Despite the bluntness of her reply, Schultz sighed inwardly with relief.

"Did you really intend to enter Mist, Mr. Schultz?"

"Pardon?"

"By taking on the trial to surpass yourself, it seems as if you had at least some desire to do so."

"The thought hadn't crossed my mind. Perhaps I accepted it out of a wish to overcome myself..."

As Schultz answered, he unwittingly turned away. Lunev did not press further.

"After all, you've brought me far more valuable information than the seven years I've spent wandering could yield."

"So, you have come alone?"

"Yes."

Lunev answered Schultz's bewildered gaze as if no one else should be there.

"What of the other scholars or your guardian knights?"

"Gone. I left without telling anyone."

For a moment, Schultz thought he'd misheard and blinked several times.

"By now, the academy must be in an uproar. And my grandfather? He must be quite angry. But what of it? I am already in the empire."

Whether she had done the same in the past was unclear, but she seemed unfazed by her decision.

"What are your plans from here?"

"Even as I traveled from the Ghaul to Brenu, I kept hearing interesting news."

The news of the negotiated return and subsequent suicide of Saintess Nephrodite, followed by the disbandment of the Knights of Light, was not to be ignored. This was far from an issue confined to the empire alone.

“Mr. Schultz, do you truly believe the Saintess took her own life?”

Unable to answer casually, Schultz was hesitant.

“We can’t be sure of it, not having witnessed it ourselves. But we can make an educated guess. Turning that guess into certainty, though, is another challenging matter...”

Schultz had a feeling.

He didn’t believe that Nephrodite had committed suicide.

“How could we not speculate after seeing such eyes?”

Lunev hadn’t been able to forget the look in Princess Arin’s eyes from the previous day’s negotiation.

Eyes full of numerous emotions but seemingly not the best ones.

She turned to Schultz, a small smile on her lips.

“Shall we go together, Mr. Schultz? To the royal palace...”

* * *

“I have nothing to say but sorry, Arin.”

“If you keep saying that, I’ll have nothing to say but ask you to stop, Father.”

Illness is a harsh reality, not only for the patient but even for onlookers.

The firm and unyielding Emperor of the Empire was no more.

Only a frail and weakened human remained, steeped in pain.

Arin hid her inner turmoil behind a smile.

“I’m sorry, yet proud. You and your siblings are filling my vacant spot all too well.”

“We are far from perfect. Please recover soon and point out our errors, Father.”

“Yes, I shall do so for you.”

Emperor Dione gazed intently at the smiling Arin.

“Arin.”

“Yes, Father.”

“There’s no need to hide your worries from me.”

Taken aback, Arin was momentarily at a loss for words.

“Wh-What do you mean?”

“I know that you, being human, have distresses you cannot voice to anyone. I won’t tell you to confide in me, but I hope you can confide in someone, anyone. Not for the sake of the imperial family, but for yourself...”

The Emperor’s genuine advice, not as a ruler but as a father, was evident.

Feeling emotion rise in her throat, Arin managed to respond,

“I’ll keep it in mind, Father.”

After visiting the Emperor, Arin immediately returned to her chambers to resume her duties without a moment’s rest.

Resmus approached her as she was about to return to work.

“Former Commander of the Knights of Light, Jereon Alkin, is at the palace. He is currently speaking with Princess Violet.”

Arin did not ask any further questions.

“Would it be alright not to visit?”

“There would be no change even if I went. Sister will handle it well.”

As if the situation did not concern her, Arin calmly resumed her work. Resmus eyed her, then whispered softly into her ear,

“We’ve located the whereabouts of the white elves.”

Arin’s eyes widened.

“Where?”

“They have just crossed the border from the Kingdom of Garam into the empire. It seemed likely they would return to the Kingdom of Spania, but they appear to have chosen our side for a swift return.”

While she pondered the news, Resmus quickly spread a map of the empire on her desk.

“The fastest route back to Fruina is to go across the capital. Yet, they will probably avoid contact with humans as much as possible, so they likely won’t pass through here. In that case...”

Resmus’s finger pointed to another location not far from the capital.

“Here is where they are most likely to pass through.”

The territory of the noble Quizzel family, relatives of Emperor Dione’s former wife, Diana Quizzel—

Aquizzel.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 205

Chapter 205: The Princess and the Elf (1)

A day’s travel from the royal capital of Severus was the domain of the Quizzel Ducal Family, Aquizzel. Under the setting sun in the western sky, the last passersby of the day made their way through the gates amidst the guards wrapping up their duties. Garnian, who passed through the main gate, looked back at his group and said, “The day has dimmed, so let’s stay here tonight.” He carefully put away the emblem he had shown the guards. It was a fake identification made for them by the Garam Magic Society. Thanks to it, they managed to pass through each city and domain from the Empire with relative ease. Some disguised their White Elf identity with magic, while those not adept at it covered their faces with hoods.

“I’ll go and find us a place to stay,” said Alphonse, leading a few others deeper into the domain to search for lodging. During the brief wait, Hastia gazed around with pure, innocent eyes. Even though it wasn’t as luxurious as Ghaul or other cities, the domain had a rustic and modest charm. “This place is called Aquizzel, a noble domain under the Ushif Empire,” Roel provided, noticing Hastia’s curious gaze. “The owner is the

Emperor's former father-in-law and one of the few possessors of the 9-star magic rank on the continent."

Hastia's eyes widened at the mention of the 9-star magic rank. "Though he has retired from his original work and is spending his twilight years here, it's best we don't encounter him. He could easily recognize our true identities." Hastia nodded silently. As someone wishing to safely return to Fruina, the last thing they wanted was their identities being exposed.

After a while, Alphonse and the others who had found lodging guided the group into the domain. Their footsteps soon halted in front of an inn with a tavern on the first floor. Given the time, it was full of people unwinding after a long day. Completely ignoring the patrons, the elves headed straight for their rooms. However, the other guests' eyes soon drifted towards Hastia. "Wow, look at that woman! Such white skin! She looks like a goddess rather than a person!" "Thought she was a new server, pity it's not the case! Haha! Would've made for some fun!" "Which room is that woman staying in?"

The lecherous comments made their way to Garnian's ears, and just as his anger flared, -thump!- Hastia grabbed his hand and shook her head. It was her way of saying she was fine. With no other choice, Garnian swallowed his anger and led her to their room. Fortunately, they hadn't encountered any of the feared situations on their way here. It seemed they could return to Fruina without much trouble, but actually going back wouldn't solve any issues.

"Sigh..." Amidst her complex thoughts, Hastia stared up at the night sky illuminated by the moon. As she thought of her clansmen waiting under that same moon, the path ahead seemed increasingly daunting. While Roel and Garnian prioritized returning to Fruina, Hastia couldn't help but worry about what would come after. A sigh escaped her, filled with frustration and the thought, 'I wonder what Sir Sian is doing?' In this desperate situation, she found it both funny and difficult to stop thinking about him. These weren't serious thoughts—just simple ones like 'Has he eaten? What might he be doing and where? Is he sleeping comfortably?'

— swish- The soul stone that Sian had returned still carried a faint wisp of his presence. "May I come in, Lady Hastia?" Roel's voice came from beyond the door. Hastia quickly hid the soul stone and scurried to open the door, letting Roel and Garnian enter. "Once we cross here, it's almost the Empire's northern boundary. From there on, it's hardly different from our territory, so please bear with us a little longer." Hastia reassured them with a bright smile, indicating she was managing well. "Please pay no mind to the earlier harassment by the humans. I'll stand guard outside, ensuring no insect can bother you," Garnian said, firmly ready to guard her door all night. Hastia tried to dissuade him but knowing how stubborn Garnian could be, she just sighed deep inside her heart.

— knock knock "Uh, may I come in, Lady Hastia?" Another clansman's voice reached them from outside. Garnian opened the door, and two clansmen entered, both looking extremely uneasy and cautious. "It's really shameless to have to tell you this, but it

seems we've caused an incident." As they spoke, sweat dripped down their faces. "An incident? What are you talking about?" "Well, we were patrolling outside the inn to ensure no suspicious individuals were present when, unfortunately, we got caught. They realized we're White Elves..."

Garnian's voice rose in alarm. "Have you lost your wits? To be discovered as White Elves?" "We were startled too. We thought we were well disguised with magic, but suddenly two human women approached us and asked if we were White Elves," they stammered. "They said they wished to speak with us..."

The situation clearly wasn't good, as if the humans had known White Elves were in the domain. "Where are these people now?" Roel inquired calmly. "They said they would wait on the first floor. We did ask them for identification..." The clansmen hesitated. "They were unexpected visitors..." "Who came, to cause such worry?" "It's the Empire's Princess. She said she's the 5th Princess, Arin Severus..."

Silence fell in the room. "Who did you say?" "The Empire's Princess! The 5th Princess, Arin Severus..."

Everyone was speechless with shock, but none more bewildered than Hastia herself. 'The Princess?'

* * *

About a month ago.

Arin was in the convent inside the imperial palace praying to Lumen Del as usual, a regular part of her routine unless there was something special happening. It wasn't out of devotion to Lumen Del, but merely a show for others, a way to mask her true self. "Humans have boundless potential for development. It's as if that saying was made for Princess Arin," commented the Saintess Nephrodite who approached her. "I bet even Lumen Del in the divine realm would be delighted seeing your growth. Perhaps he's enjoying watching it from above."

"You flatter me too much," replied Arin, her voice restrained, betraying no emotion in her gaze. "I've heard you're heading to the Garam Kingdom. Is there anything we can assist you with on behalf of our royal family?" "Do you know why I'm heading to the Garam Kingdom?" The official reason was for missionary work. However, at the hint of that query, Arin sensed there was more. "You seem unaware. Did they choose not to tell you, or were they planning to inform you later?"

Arin well understood who 'they' referred to. "It appears they intended to keep something from you, Princess." Instead of responding, Arin simply looked back with a steely gaze. "I see you were perhaps expecting this. You're not as vulnerable as they might think, Princess." The Saintess smiled behind her hand, looking quite pleased. "Since it's come to this, I shall tell you: I am going to the Garam Kingdom to search for records of the old

era.” “Records of the old era?” The words puzzled Arin slightly. “Yes. There is a prearranged plan. There will be some White Elves in the Garam Kingdom. I will help solve a problem they face and, in return, they will transfer the power of their key to me so I can retrieve records of the old era.”

Elves? Key? These were topics Arin hadn’t heard from Violet or anyone else. “What are you hoping to find in the records of the old era?” “At the very least, I can say I’m looking for a way to dissipate the fog.” Arin felt her heart sink at that proclamation but quickly composed herself without showing it. “I could make this knowledge available to everyone, or I could share it solely with you, Princess. Isn’t it intriguing? To know a secret unknown to others...”

“Why share this with me?” Arin asked. The Saintess leaned closer and whispered confidentially into her ear. “Because they are wary of me. And you are too.” Arin stiffened at the revelation. “Remember this, Princess Arin. To protect yourself, you must have at least one secret weapon that your opponent does not know of. And your opponent’s complacency towards you... can be the greatest weapon of all.”

The Saintess stepped back after her parting words. “Until we meet again after my return.” With a smile full of satisfaction, she left. “My opponent’s complacency...” Arin brooded over that saying, which persisted in her mind. To put that teaching into practice, she personally killed the Saintess, thereby gaining the other’s confidence. What Arin needed next was a secret of her own, unknown to them.

* * *

With only a day granted to finish her imperial tour, Arin was under pressure to locate and meet with the White Elves within that limited time. It was a sprint, but chance seemed to favor Arin, who successfully achieved her goal. She felt an odd, yet familiar energy by an inn and immediately recognized it as the aura of White Elves, revealing her identity to open a dialogue.

Now, gathered with the White Elves, the real importance lay in what would happen next. “Firstly, I want to thank you for accepting this sudden request to meet. I am Arin Severus, the 5th Princess of the Ushif Empire.” Arin and her companion, Resmus, bowed, showing respect to the group. “Whatever the reason for your summoning, we have no intention of staying longer in the Empire and are planning to return to Fruina,” came the reply.

“I’m aware of that. Therefore, to avoid wasting more of your precious time, I will get straight to the point of my visit,” Arin declared firmly, looking them in the eyes. “Please tell me about the problem facing your clan that you need to resolve.”

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 206

Chapter 206. Princess and the Elf (2)

The Problem of the Tribe.

Naturally, this was an issue that was highly sensitive to the elves, so sensitive that they had not spoken of it to anyone but the saintess while they were in the human world.

Knowing that there was a problem was impossible.

However, the princess before them had asked what the problem was.

Putting aside how she had known about it, her voice, her eyes, and her posture made everyone think the same thing.

It was as if she was asking because she intended to solve it herself,

Roel was the first to speak up.

"I do not know how you are aware that our tribe has a problem, but the way you speak, Your Highness, it seems as though you believe you can solve our troubles?"

"I am not yet aware of the specifics of your problem. Therefore, I cannot claim that I can resolve it. However, as a member of the Imperial family, I can confidently offer you my assistance, whatever the issue may be."

Roel, and indeed all of the elves, were taken aback.

"Ultimately, did you elves not also come here seeking assistance from us humans?"

Struck at the heart of the issue, none of them could give an answer.

The princess of the Empire offering help to resolve the issues of their tribe?

Despite what should have been a joyous situation, the elves' faces were full of doubt and suspicion.

The reasons were many.

Why?

Why would a princess, with whom they had no connection, offer to help with their problems?

It was something the elves simply could not understand.

“Are you saying you will help us?”

Garnian broke the silence and asked again.

“Yes.”

“Unless a fool, one does not offer help without reason. What do you desire from us?”

In this world, it was all about give and take.

There was no such thing as an altruistic favor without a price, and this was true even within elven society.

Until they understood the cost, they could not accept what help the princess was offering.

As expected, Arin exhaled briefly before continuing to speak.

“The elves are said to possess a power that can unlock the records of ancient times.”

“...!”

The elves’ faces instantly turned to stone.

“In exchange for helping you, may I have the chance to look at those ancient records?”

– Startled

Garnian, agitated, was the first to spring up from his seat.

“There’s no need to listen further. Please leave this place immediately!”

His face was flushed with uncontained emotion.

“Please calm down and listen to what I have to say...”

“I will not tell you twice! Leave at this moment!”

“Calm yourself, Garnian!”

Despite Roel’s attempt to intervene, Garnian was unheeding.

The look in his eyes had moved beyond denial to the point it now contained a threatening murder.

“Please, be reasonable.”

Behind Arin, her knight, Resmus, stepped forth,

“No matter if you are a stranger to our ways, at the very least, show some decency. This is the Ushif Empire, and this lady is the princess ruling it.”

“And what does that matter?”

“She is not someone you should glare at so fiercely with doubt....”

Roel and the other elves tried to mediate between the two firm presences, between a punch and a sword.

“Stop it, Resmus!”

“Calm down, Garnian!”

Surprised from both sides, they tried to intervene, but the escalated tensions were not easily calmed.

‘Please, everyone, leave....’

In the tense atmosphere, a distant voice echoed in Arin’s mind.

Arin, without realizing, flinched at the sound.

Not only Arin but all the elves, including Garnian, turned their gazes in one direction.

A white-haired girl who had been sitting demurely, quietly listening to the conversation, now stood up and looked at everyone.

‘I will speak to her personally.’

A small tremor of nervousness was evident in her eyes.

* * *

Garnian and Resmus, who had been staring each other down as if they were about to kill one another, and Roel and the other elves all left the room.

Now, Arin and Hastia were the only ones left inside.

]I apologize. Since I cannot speak, I can only communicate with you in this way.>

Hastia scribbled her intention on a piece of paper and handed it to Arin.

Arin was startled.

Unable to speak?

Then what was that voice she heard just a moment ago?

A voice as clear as the distinction of sound and pitch.

Not just her, but surely the other elves had heard it, too...

'Can you hear my voice?'

"Yes, I hear you clearly."

Without thinking, Arin answered and abruptly raised her head.

'Do you really hear me?'

"Yes. Very clearly...."

Hastia asked again, as if disbelieving.

'It's surprising. Humans generally have less sensitivity and have difficulty receiving mental communication, but it seems like I always meet those who can.'

"Is that so?"

Although the feeling was slightly different from the mental communication magic she knew, the fact that conversation was now much easier brought relief to Arin.

'My name is Hastia. May I call you Princess Arin?'

"Of course. Please speak comfortably."

Hastia's conversation began with a bit more ease of mind.

'Princess Arin, you want to see our ancient records, but to be honest, that's impossible. I'd like to help you, but I cannot in our current situation.'

As expected, it wasn't going to be easy, but Hastia had drawn a clear line, stating that it was not possible at present.

“May I ask why?”

‘Well, the truth is, I do have the power to unlock the ancient records. However, I cannot activate that power by myself. Part of the reason I am sealed is because the god who did not want the ancient records revealed had a purpose behind it.’

The reason was complex but clear.

The ancient records sealed by divine power, to be hidden from the current age of humanity.

Essentially, what Arin was trying to do was counter to divine providence.

“Then what on earth was Nephrodite the Saintess thinking...?”

‘...!’

Hastia flinched momentarily.

Realizing she had touched a sensitive spot, Arin quickly apologized.

“I’m sorry! I unintentionally stirred up bad memories!”

Hastia waved her hand, negating the concern.

‘It’s okay! In the case of that saintess, it seemed she was planning to transfer the power within me to her body. But as I said, even if you have the power, you can’t just unlock it whenever.’

“So, additional conditions are required?”

‘Yes. Since it’s a divine seal, you’d need a power that rivals that of the gods to unlock it.’

A power that rivals the gods?

This seemed impossible by all accounts.

Even if humanity has potential, there is a basic limit.

A creature’s power that rivals its creator.

Where in this world could one find such power?

‘Of course, ordinary beings like us possessing such power is impossible. But not impossible overall. At least, someone with divine arms would definitely be able to.’

Arin's face suddenly turned ashen.

"Divine arms?"

'Yes! Actually, I've met such a person not long ago. A kindly man who owned a demonic sword and helped our tribe....'

– Startled

Instinctively reacting with her body rather than her mind, Arin abruptly stood up, looking intently at Hastia.

"Ha, ha...."

In the moment of heightened emotion, Arin's breath grew ragged.

'Princess? Are you alright?'

"I'm s-sorry, Hastia! I was a bit out of my mind there...."

Arin, sitting back down, clasped her head to suppress her agitated feelings.

"Could it be that the owner of this demonic sword, his name is...."

– Startled

This time, it was Hastia who sprang to her feet, looking into the air.

As if sensing a familiar aura, she looked around before suddenly pulling something out.

It was a white stone whose purpose was unknown.

What was peculiar was that something like black smoke seemed to continuously surround the stone.

It appeared almost like a mist.

'The Soul Stone...'

Hastia thought.

The mist surrounding the Soul Stone was thicker than usual.

She knew what it meant.

The traces of someone carved into her second soul were growing denser.

In other words, that person was now very close by.

'They seem to be close....'

"Who are you talking about?"

'The owner of the demonic sword. Sir Sian!'

* * *

In a shabby building not far from the inn.

In contrast to the worn exterior, the interior was quite tidy, filled with desks, chairs, and other neat furnishings.

To the uninitiated, it might look like a classroom where students are taught.

At the front desk, an old man with neatly trimmed white beard relied on a single candle to read by.

– Thump, thump,

Finally, unfamiliar footsteps could be heard beyond the door, causing the old man to look up.

At first he seemed wary, then his brow furrowed slightly.

– Knock, knock,

With a knock on the door seeking permission to enter, the old man softly said,

"Come in."

As the door opened, a black-haired man stepped in.

None other than Sian.

"Even now, you still knock before entering, I see."

Unaffected by the old man's sarcastic remark, Sian asked calmly.

"You seem to be enjoying a fulfilling retirement."

"Well, it's not luxurious, but I am content with my life."

"You may have left your life as a noble behind, but not your life as an educator, huh?"

“And you? Did you abandon your noble life only to cling to your assassin’s blade?”

Without further retort, Sian sat down on a chair that was a fair distance from the old man.

“You didn’t come all this way just to see the face of your esteemed teacher, so what do you need?”

“Do you acknowledge me as your disciple?”

“I considered it, but seeing that you came empty-handed, I’ve changed my mind.”

Sian chuckled at the response but his gaze shifted to the book in the old man’s hand.

The old man also noticed the look and said with a laugh.

“Surprising for someone who usually wouldn’t touch them, you have an interest in books? Do you want to read it? After all, it’s gotten quite popular in the Empire, hasn’t it?”

“I’ve already read it quite some time ago. To not rob my precious teacher of his sleep with such matters, I will skip the pleasantries and get to the main point.”

The old man shrugged as if to say, go ahead and speak.

“Do you know who the author of that book is?”

“What if I do?”

“I would like you to share everything you know about that person.”

“Surprising. Putting aside why you’re curious, did you come looking for me just to ask this?”

“Why, everyone seems to refuse to answer my question. So shouldn’t I ask the most learned person in the continent?”

“.....”

“Chancellor Condor...”

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 207

Chapter 207: The Princess and the Assassin (1)

Does one's true nature ever change with age?

Perhaps it's someone who should have retired to a life of peace in a place with clean air who still has a position in education.

Although it's not a massive academy like the Royal Academy, but rather a small classroom with just about ten people, who are we to say anything if that person is teaching there because they want to?

Well, that's partly why I came here.

"Thinking about it now, it's actually quite funny. Why did you think I would know the author of this book?"

"I wasn't certain about it. But surely, as the academy's chancellor, you have an outstanding memory for observing students who have passed through, haven't you? I was just wondering if one of those who might have slipped by could be here."

"Your slippery nature hasn't changed, I see."

The chancellor clicked his tongue as if nothing had changed.

"It doesn't have to be the author of the book. Just tell me anything you know about the name Hapencus."

"Ah, yes. There was one person. A student of the academy with the name Hapencus..."

It's said that there's nothing more frustrating in life than wasting your time,

but at least it seems I won't be leaving empty-handed.

"It was around the time you submitted your notice of withdrawal. If I remember correctly, he was a commoner who had been granted honorary nobility, right? Not a regular new student but one who had entered through a special transfer process."

"What was the name?"

"Mia Hapencus."

It was certainly a name I had never heard before.

"What kind of student was she?"

“How would I know that? You threw in your notice of resignation and not long after, I stepped down from being the chancellor, so I don’t even remember her face.”

The chancellor looked at me with a gaze that seemed to wonder if there was a problem.

Well, it’s not like I gained nothing from this since I learned his name,

“I did she graduate?”

“I don’t know, do I? If you’re that curious, why don’t you go to the academy and ask? Even if Satwell knows, it’s not like he’d just hand over the information. And I’m not eager to exert special effort for a not-so-dear student.”

I’m sure that comment was meant to tease me.

I never expected any help from him to begin with, so I let it slide,

but in the end, it seems I will have to go to the academy if I want to find more clues.

It’s becoming quite the hassle.

Maybe I’ll have to resort to asking Brian...

“However, I wonder if you’ve approached this in the wrong order.”

“What do you mean?”

“You were ultimately interested in this Dio Hapencus, the author of the book, right? Then shouldn’t you have sought out the person who distributed this book first?”

“...”

“Don’t tell me you didn’t know? It’s implausible that the continent’s top assassin organization wouldn’t know something that even an old man teaching kids in a corner knows.”

“I can’t just waltz into the den of the Assassins’ Guild for unconfirmed information, can I?”

I replied nonchalantly.

It was just an act of nonchalance, though,

“But what about this proposal?”

“What are you suggesting now?”

“The girl, Arin, she’s in this city right now.”

“...!”

Involuntarily, the corners of my mouth twitched.

“I saw her passing by the window earlier. Doesn’t look like she’s here on official business. There was no one with her except for her usual accompanying knight.”

The knight accompanying her would inevitably be Resmus.

It’s unbelievable, honestly.

She came to Aquizzel with only one knight for protection?

She doesn’t realize that hundreds of blades surrounding her could target her at any moment—a truly blessed princess, indeed.

“Life sure teaches you things over time. Who would have guessed that the Imperial Family would go to such lengths to improve people’s perceptions of the mist? It seems like an opportunity for you, no? She couldn’t have gone far, so go and ask her straight up. Why on earth she would do such a thing...”

Does that sound more like an order than a suggestion, or is it just me?

But he’s not wrong.

If I wanted to find out about the author Dio Hapencus, I would naturally need to approach the person who distributed the book.

Especially if that person is incredibly close by,

I have no reason not to seek her out.

However,

-Thud, thud,

The sound of footsteps on the ground.

Not far from beyond the door.

The footsteps of a woman, proper yet bold.

Though I don’t yet know the owner of these mysterious footsteps,

“...!”

For some reason, my heart started to race, and sweat trickled down from my forehead.

As if my body was warning me that the owner of these footsteps was absolutely not a good person for me.

-Knock, knock

Shortly after, the footsteps stopped in front of the door, and there was a knock.

“Is anyone here, Headmaster?”

* * *

It was late, a time when you would normally have gone to bed if there wasn't anything special going on.

Knowing that coming here this late was impolite, Arin still felt compelled to visit.

“Is anyone here, Headmaster?”

She cautiously knocked and called out, but there was no response.

It didn't seem like there was nobody there.

There was a faint warmth and the presence of people beyond the door, so she was about to knock again when,

“Come in.”

A quiet voice answered from inside.

Arin and Resmus slowly opened the door and entered.

“You don't seem surprised at all?”

“I saw you and your knight passing by in the street. That's when I was surprised.”

A pleasant response to ease her tension, Arin smiled faintly.

“How have you been, Headmaster?”

“It has been a long time, Arin.”

Condor warmly welcomed the student he hadn't seen for a long time.

"I'm sorry for visiting so late. Have I interrupted your work?"

"Don't worry about it. It wasn't particularly pleasant work."

Condor quietly put the book he was reading away under the desk.

"Are you here for work?"

"Yes."

"Judging from the lack of official correspondence and your unplanned visit, it seems you didn't come here for any formal duty. Is this visit more of a personal matter than one related to the Imperial Family?"

"I suppose... it is."

Arin didn't deny Condor's probing.

After all, even if she tried to hide it, the truth would not stay hidden.

"I don't have much time, so I'll just ask directly."

Condor simply nodded without a word.

"Has Sian come here, by any chance?"

Before answering, Condor frowned, showing a puzzled reaction.

"Of all people to ask about that guy, why come to me first?"

"I somehow found out that Sian might be in the vicinity. So, just in case, I thought I'd ask..."

"He hasn't come here."

Stopped by such a resolute response, Arin found herself unable to continue.

She wanted to switch topics, but her lips refused to open again.

"People say that hearts can change yet often don't. Has yours not changed, still wanting to save him?"

"What's the use of that? Without the power to realize such feelings, it's all pointless..."

A look of futility was evident in Arin's eyes.

“At first, I thought that if I had enough power to break a rock with a wooden sword, then it would be possible. If I had the power to turn the impossible into the possible, that would be enough. But I was naive. The impossibility I aim to change wasn’t just of that magnitude...”

Learning is the driving force that makes you realize how foolish you once were.

Arin had never stopped striving for her goal of salvation during these past seven years.

It’s true that during that time, she had achieved meaningful growth. Yet time and again, she realized just how big and lofty a dream she had harbored.

Now, it seemed she would need the power of a god...

“I’m ashamed I only came to complain after so long. Next time, I’ll bring plenty of gifts for the students.”

As if she couldn’t stay any longer, Arin bid farewell to Condor.

Just as she was about to leave with Resmus,

“It may sound humorous to ask now but...”

Condor held her back one more time.

“If you were to meet him now, what would you say?”

Without turning back, Arin replied with a small smile,

“Maybe I’d just ask... how he’s been?”

It was the most she could hope to say with her current self.

“But even such words are not something I, as a princess, can say...”

As she lowered her head, her fist clenched tight.

Not yet,

She still couldn’t do anything even if she met him.

After more time has passed,

Though she didn’t know how much longer,

To face him without a shred of shame, for that day,

Arin continued to run down an endless road.

The road covered in an unknown mist.

“If Sian comes by, please give him this message for me.”

“Deliver it yourself.”

“...?”

Arin unconsciously turned her head in surprise.

“After all, you’re not here as a princess right now, are you? So, give it yourself. Not as Princess Arin Severus, but just as Arin Severus...”

“What do you mean?”

As she spoke in confusion, not comprehending his words,

-Click!

Condor flicked the mana he had manifested in his hand.

A transparent magical barrier spread around them with the sound of a small resonance.

Resmus, who had been watching from behind, hurried over in the sudden situation.

“Why are you suddenly putting up a barrier...?”

In that moment, Arin felt it.

In the corner of the space to her left.

In the dark space untouched by candlelight.

The presence of someone, whose presence was unknown but had been there from an unknown time.

Coincidentally, it was not an unfamiliar presence.

It was incredibly familiar,

The aura that she hadn’t forgotten for a single day in the past seven years.

Now, that eagerly longed-for presence was felt vividly before Arin.

-Thud

With distinct footsteps, a tall man emerged from the darkness, his sharp eyes like a sword's edge, and his dark hair unchanged even after seven years.

"Sian?"

* * *

I could have escaped at the sound of the footsteps, or rather the knock.

Magic, secret techniques, or just breaking through the window, I could have left in any way.

But I didn't.

I just hid in the shadows and eavesdropped on their conversation.

I didn't decide to with my head, but my body just moved on its own.

The chancellor pretended not to see me, and when she asked about my presence, he lied that I wasn't there.

It's unlikely he did that out of consideration for me.

He probably has his own plans, putting together an even bigger picture.

"...!"

The look in her eyes was tumultuous as she faced me.

It's not necessarily a bad thing.

In fact, if she had been indifferent, that would have been more shocking.

Yet I had to admit, despite it all, over those seven years, she had grown remarkably compared to before.

A true member of the Imperial Family, helpful to the empire.

Now, those words didn't seem so hard to say.

...

So what?

What does that have to do with me?

Did she honestly think she can say that to me?

To Sian Betrand, a traitor to the throne and the light?

It's so absurd, I'm left speechless.

It's said that a person's nature never changes,

And it seems her foolishness will remain the same for decades, perhaps centuries.

The anger that had been dormant inside me for so long flared up.

Then, a thought naturally rose in my mind.

She'll eventually die at the hands of the head of the household and the clan members anyway,

Why not just kill her here and now?

“ ... ”

In my hand shortly held a despicable demonic sword, gathering a fullness of killing intent on its sharp blade.

(To be continued...)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 208

Chapter 208: The Princess and the Assassin (2)

“!”

Before she could even indulge in the joy of reunion, Arin's eyes, which had been swinging wildly, soon shifted towards Sian's right hand.

The violet blade sharp as a razor, emitting a dense murderous intent.

And as her gaze finally met Sian's eyes while tracing the arm that held that sword,

Arin realized.

Sian was,

Trying to kill her.

“Step back, Your Highness!”

Resmus also noticed this and stood in front of Arin.

She drew her sword and at the same time, channeled the mana she manifested with her other hand directly into her blade.

Within scant seconds.

-Woong

The sword, responding to the mana, resonated, creating a blue aura.

She, too, was not unaware that the man before her was Sian Vert.

Not the youngest of the Duke Vert household, but Sian Vert, the assassin of Mist's first encounter.

Even staring into the eyes of a devil would not have made her tremble so intensely.

The piercing toxicity and murderous spirit lodged deeply within that blade-like gaze.

Resmus knew she could not retreat. If she lost focus but for a moment, she felt she might be consumed by that energy.

She was the guardian sword meant to protect the princess.

Even if the adversary was not a devil but a Demon King, she had to protect her charge.

-Jebuk

Despite the strong magical energy radiating from the longsword, Sian took a step forward.

“If you come any closer, I will consider it a threat and take action!”

Resmus shouted with determination, warning him, but Sian did not respond.

She didn't wait any longer and dashed forward, brandishing her sword with short, concise movements.

-Booom

Eliminating all unnecessary motions, it was a perfect sequence purely meant to subdue her opponent.

Not even a chance for a counterattack could be seen, but

-Chang!

Sian blocked her sword far too easily, with a face calm enough as if he had already predicted her every move.

“Haap!”

But Resmus did not panic, and with a shout, she exerted even stronger force.

Her sword, reinforced by both physical strength and mana, began to push Sian’s dagger back, achieving a more favorable position for her.

“.....”

Even Sian, who had been indifferent, showed some reaction.

His eyes, which had not expected her unexpected power, did shift, though only briefly.

“.....!”

Resmus’s sword was pushed back once again.

-Chang!

At that moment, Resmus shifted her footing, altering her stance to redirect the incoming blade of Sian’s to the side.

Quickly backing away to prevent a follow-up attack, she widened the distance between them.

“Haah, haah.....”

It had only been a few short seconds, but Resmus was breathing more ruggedly than ever before.

She soon realized something.

Sian had spared her just then.

Even when she had changed her stance, there had been a definitive opening for a follow-up attack.

Her turning the sword was evidence he had not lost his composure and had changed the direction toward her.

Up until that point, Resmus thought she was going to be done for.

But contrary to her concern, Sian didn't strike with his sword and had easily allowed her to create this distance.

Whether this was deception or consideration on his part was still unknown.

But one thing was certain,

Conventional methods would never be enough to defeat him.

With that realization, Resmus quietly whispered to Arin.

"Your Highness! I'll buy time, so please run outside and call for help!"

"What are you talking about, Resmus?"

"I'm afraid I'm not yet able to subdue that man with my power! Still, I'll do my best to delay him, so trust me and flee!"

It was an impossible ask for Arin.

Even if Resmus was her knight pledged to protect her, how could she abandon the woman ready to sacrifice her life for her own?

But for Arin in that moment, even the time to contemplate such luxuries was pointless.

"Haap!"

The moment Sian took one more step, Resmus dashed forward without hesitation to block his movement.

"....."

Sian effortlessly parried the strike.

His gaze was not on Resmus, but was entirely fixed on Arin.

"Do as your knight says."

Condor, who had been silently observing the situation, finally spoke up.

“My careless thoughts must have brought trouble to you both. It doesn’t seem like he would kill me or your knight given his nature, but.....”

When Condor saw the negative emotions brimming in Sian’s reddened eyes,

“It’s clear that he intends to kill you for certain.”

He frowned naturally.

Then, he raised his hand and pointed towards the door through which Arin had entered.

“I will temporarily lift the barrier. Quickly go out and ask for help using my name. If you do that, he must stop further action.”

“But what about you, Chancellor!”

“Right now, the one who should worry is not me but you, Princess Arin....”

Unable to say anything else in response to Condor’s firm answer, Arin found herself between a rock and a hard place:

Facing the man who wanted to kill her, Sian, and those who were trying to stop him, Resmus and Condor.

The worst situation she had vowed never to repeat, was unfolding before her eyes once more.

“I will return soon!”

With those words, Arin quickly ran out the door.

Not a single knight or person could be seen on the streets now shrouded in night.

To call for help, she had to find where the knights were, but two places came to mind: the training grounds and the domain lord’s residence.

However, both were far away.

If there was a closer location,

“City gates!”

It was the city gates where the sentries were stationed.

There would still be knights standing guard.

Arin hastily headed in that direction.

Soon, she could see a few knights standing vigil by the city walls.

Just as she breathed a sigh of relief and was about to continue running,

Arin's feet suddenly came to a stop.

Was this really the best she could do?

Had she spent the last seven years rushing about just to flee shamefully from a crisis such as this?

To hold her head high as a princess and not shy away from any given task,

How could she show such cowardice in the face of adversity?

Realizing once more what she had to do, Arin gripped the royal sword at her waist firmly.

With her spirits buoyed by indomitable determination, she turned around when,

".....!"

Arin involuntarily stepped back.

Sian, who had just been crossing swords with Resmus moments ago, was now facing her, scant ten paces away.

Every imaginable thought crossed her mind.

What had become of Resmus and Condor, who had claimed they would stop him?

Had he possibly killed them and now come for her?

Arin, uneasy, drew her sword and aimed it at Sian as she asked,

"What did you do to Resmus and Chancellor?"

Sian did not answer.

"Still, he was once like a master to you, and he was the person you saved. Did you really kill them without any emotion?"

"Is this really the time to worry about such things, when you can't comprehend the situation at all?"

Sian's words, brimming with frustration, were forceful,

"You had merely seconds."

".....?"

"Only seconds more and the knights at the gates would have seen you, Your Highness. They would've immediately rushed to your aid. If only that had happened, I would have reluctantly withdrawn."

Despite wanting to refute him, Arin found herself speechless after hearing Sian's first words.

"Don't misunderstand. The reason why I, having barely regained my senses, decided to hesitate was not because I couldn't kill you, Your Highness. Even if you were protected by all the knights in Aquizzel, I could kill you...."

Sian's words were an undeniable truth.

And Arin knew it.

"However, you had the chance to live, yet you hesitated, Your Highness."

"I didn't hesitate! I just...!"

"I distinctly told you to run!!!"

Sian's emotions exploded as he yelled at Arin.

"I hoped you could distinguish between right and wrong, what can be done and what can't be done! Surely you've not forgotten what helplessness can lead to and the outcomes it can bring!"

Sian's eyes now betrayed more than anger; there was a sense of disillusionment.

"You seem to have forgotten that, Your Highness...."

I haven't forgotten.

How could I?

These past seven years were lived to honor that promise.

Arin felt terribly unjust,

"You weren't supposed to confront me, Your Highness."

Sian took another step towards Arin.

“The best thing you could do in this situation was to flee pathetically and call for help.”

But for her, who didn't even take that best course of action, all that awaited was a ruthless death.

Sian steadily continued to approach Arin.

To give this foolish princess, who still didn't realize what she should do for her future, anymore chances would be meaningless.

Perhaps it's best for both himself and her to sever the entanglement of her complicated life right here,

Sian thought so.

However,

“Who says that? That my job was to run away?”

Arin objected.

“Right here, my task is to subdue and make you surrender!”

Instead, she adjusted her sword's grip, ready to confront Sian.

Sian's step halted at her unexpected resolve.

“Why do you think you can't? Does it seem impossible?”

It wasn't the empty bravado of a powerless individual.

In Arin's eyes, there was a firm belief that she could overcome this situation and an unwavering resolution to do so.

“Sorry, Sian. But my life over the past 7 years has been impossible itself. Do you have any idea how hard I've worked to turn what is impossible into possible...? You would never understand.”

Under normal circumstances, such a situation would only bring laughter.

Yet, for some reason, Sian couldn't bring himself to do so.

Could this foolish princess have really lost her mind, or did she believe in something else, stirring a rising sense of unease?

Seeing Sian flustered, Arin declared confidently,

“In the name of Arin Severus, the Fifth Princess of the Ushif Empire, I command,”

“.....?”

“Sian Vert, offspring of the House Vert, Guardians of the Continent, kneel and surrender to me, right here!”

About 10 seconds of silence passed.

Arin, having given her command to submit, awaited Sian’s response without uttering another word.

“Have you truly lost your mind?”

Sian asked, his question steeped in incredulity and scornful regard.

“Yeah, maybe I have to be mad to face you. But I’m not crazy. I’m not crazy, and everything I said thus far is the truth.”

Arin answered, without a hint of faltering.

“Am I still just Duke Vert’s youngest in noble garb to you?”

“Do I still look like a mere shell of a princess draped in the royal facade to you?”

Sian was unable to continue his sentence.

“Don’t bother to teach me. Just do what you intended to. I’m ready to face you....”

In front of Sian was no longer the incapable princess who couldn’t do anything seven years ago.

Now, there was only a woman named Arin Severus, who could do so much, who was capable of so much.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 209

Chapter 209: The Princess and the Assassin (3)

For two hours now.

Hastia's bright eyes remained unwaveringly fixed on the soul stone.

The black mist swirling around the lustrous white quartz stone seemed so tantalizing.

Although dubbed a soul stone, originally, it was nothing more than a pebble meant to serve as a guardian stone.

However, once it passed through Sian's hands, it began to harbor an unknown power.

It wasn't just meaningful—it became a dependable entity capable of truly protecting her.

It felt as if another presence of Sian was right there beside her.

Today, the mist enveloping the stone seemed unusually dense.

Hastia realized the moment she first noticed it two hours ago that this was certainly a signal indicating the one who had imbued power into the stone was near.

'Why has Lord Sian come here?'

For a brief moment, she entertained the vain delusion that he had come to see her, but, believing it to be unlikely, she quickly shook her head.

Whatever the reason for Sian's visit, it probably wasn't her. Could the ominous aura from the soul stone's mist be a harbinger of bad news for Sian?

She didn't believe it foretold anything good.

Then there was the memory of the aching princess.

As soon as she had heard there was a master of the cursed sword, she set off as if pulled by an invisible force.

Could this princess be connected to Sian in some secret way, like that woman from the Garam Magic Society?

With these thoughts, Hastia cautiously approached the door.

-Creak-

As she quietly opened it, her eyes met with Garnian's, who had been standing guard outside.

"Can't you sleep, Lady Hastia?"

Garnian asked with a puzzled expression, to which Hastia shook her head.

"If there's anything you need, please let me know. I will bring it to you."

'I-It's not that I need anything... I was wondering if you could step outside with me for a moment?'

* * *

I'm not sure what expression I'm wearing on the outside, but inside, I'm laughing.

Because it's absurd?

No, it doesn't seem like that.

The laugh is closer to ecstasy than absurdity.

To witness such a peculiar spectacle, one that I never could have imagined in my two lifetimes, is truly breathtaking.

And what's so breathtaking?

How could I not be in awe upon seeing her face?

The seemingly dense and foolish princess has finally shown her true self.

She has changed so much that even if another person's personality were inside her, I would believe it.

Yes.

She should be harboring resentment and hatred toward me, determined to submit me completely.

Only then,

could I kill her without a trace of unease.

The assassin's bloodlust within me now rises anew.

-Gyeing-

A bright, white light flickered from her hand, which was charged with mana.

The power of a six-star level, nearing seven-star prowess.

Yet, it's out of the ordinary for her to achieve such a state at her age.

The royal court has plenty of guardians with mana levels not even reaching hers.

When she transferred the prepared mana to her sword, the sword emitted a light almost as bright as the Sword of Salvation, stretching high into the dark night sky.

Without a second's hesitation, she charged at me.

-Clang!

The initial strike carried no weight but relied purely on the speed of her charge.

It was hardly even a swing; more like she had just placed her sword there.

But,

-Clang! Clang! Clang!

She followed up the first strike with three threatening consecutive attacks.

Not fixed in a single direction, she moved left and right with dynamic motions.

Not a simple contest of strength, but a continuous attack seeking any momentary gap.

Such movement isn't easy even for seasoned sword masters.

And it wasn't awkward.

Her posture, grip, and power control felt natural as if she had practiced them a countless number of times.

In short, it was perfect fundamental movement.

No one could achieve such a level with short-term training.

It was the result of years of unrelenting dedication, an effort made by her day in and day out.

However,

-Clang!

If she thought these basic sword techniques, practiced tens of thousands of times, could overpower me, I would have to take back my previous words.

Taken aback by the unexpected force, the princess regained her composure after a slight confusion.

I didn't stand before her to witness the process of her efforts over the past seven years.

She must demonstrate her maximum power to me.

Otherwise, there is no point.

"You have a look that says to give it my all, huh?" she pierces through my inner thoughts.

"That's right, I'll show you. Even if my body breaks apart in the process..."

With the intention to completely drain her mana,

a fierce whirlwind of mana began to surge around her body.

"In response to your words to move forward. I will clearly show you the efforts I've been making, Sian!"

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 210

Chapter 210. The Princess and the Assassin (4)

-Clang!

The fierce vibration running along the edge of the blade jolted my wrist harshly. It was odd, really—this kind of sound wasn't typical when a sword sliced into human flesh. Ceyram's sword was not buried into the soft flesh of Princess Arin, but was stuck against the barren stone floor.

That's right.

I couldn't do it.

Not that I didn't want to—it was that I couldn't.

Under normal circumstances, I would have calmed my mind and made sure to aim at my target carefully, ensuring that I wouldn't miss again. But I just couldn't do it. My mind and body were refusing to kill her.

“.....”

Swear words too crass to be spoken out loud jumbled together in my mind. Were they the result of some sympathetic feelings that had decided to appear now, of all times? But caring, affection—those were things that hadn't existed in someone like me.

Not only did I lack someone to give such sentiment to, but there was also no situation where those feelings might arise. Maybe that's why I was never treated like a person. Sure, that must have been the way it was in my past life.

However, in this current life, it seemed that annoying emotion called affection had managed to develop in me, sadly enough. Perhaps it had been there for quite some time, but I had been denying its existence.

Now, I've come to recognize it because of this foolish princess.

“How do you plan on saving me?”

Instead of my immobile hand, a question escaped my lips without my conscious intent. The princess, slightly perplexed, carefully opened her mouth.

“I've been thinking. Is the mist that obscures the light truly something evil...”

Doubt.

It's the very heart of what drives people to initiate any action. Her desire to save me originated from such doubt.

“The person you have shown me, at least the parts I've seen—though I'm sure there's much more that I haven't—I still don't think you're a bad person. At least to me, you were a mist that definitely played a helpful role.”

I couldn't even muster up the term 'foolish' anymore.

That's right, if you had seen my true nature from the start, you wouldn't have entertained such trifling thoughts. You are able to misunderstand because you don't know everything about me. I suppose I can concede that much.

But now? Don't you know who I really am? A merciless assassin who not only slaughters without hesitating but also feels no remorse whatsoever.

“You’re wise and capable. Someone decidedly different from a foolish person like me. So, I thought there must be a reason why you do these things. What path are you walking down? What lies at the end of this path...”

The princess’s breath became rougher as she spoke.

“Who was it that said that? If you want to see the true nature of something, give it power. It will naturally reveal its inherent character.”

It wasn’t incorrect.

Especially for humans.

Humans, born with inherent frailty, often reveal their true nature once they possess power. Is that why you’ve been spreading false edicts around the empire? To understand the essence of what I am a part of, this ‘mist’?

“Do you wish to know my true nature?”

Instead of replying, the princess simply nodded slightly.

“My true nature is exactly what the princess sees before her now.”

The princess furrowed her brows, indicating her disagreement.

“What you seek in the world, princess, has no need for someone like me! I am the sort that should be erased from this world!”

Overwhelmed by emotion, my voice rose without restraint.

The real me that hasn’t changed since our first meeting on the battlefield until now. You’re an existence that neither understands me nor has any need to.

“What world do you desire?”

The princess asked again, staring at me.

“Is there no place for me in the world you wish for?”

I found myself as mute as if I had swallowed honey, unable to say a word.

It wasn’t that I was contemplating what to say; rather, I simply had nothing to tell her.

“.....!”

Suddenly, a chilling intent at my back made me spin around, sword at the ready.

-Clash!

“Did you really have to do it this way!”

A fierce look, tangled with anger and hatred, was shouting at me.

Arin’s knight, Resmus Klein, was drenched as though she had been soaked in blood. Her entire body streaked with red as if she had been splattered in gore. Perhaps this is due to her being called the empire’s greatest sword in spirit? Though her life wasn’t threatened, she was clearly in places that would cause her unbearable pain if she moved even slightly.

I can assure you, she’s feeling pain worse than if dozens of swords were thrust into her body.

And yet she had endured all this and now rushed here, meaning to stop me.

Before I knew it, knights from the domain and even common people who had heard the commotion began to gather around.

“What on earth were you trying to do to the—”

Just as Resmus was about to mention the princess, I silenced her instantly, gripping her so tightly she could barely make a sound other than a groan.

“Kugh!”

Even so, Resmus didn’t look away from me but held her glare of fury. I looked back at her impassively and, with my free hand, slipped off my cloak.

-Whoosh

The cloak I had removed gently settled onto the princess who lay on the ground. In a moment, the princess’s body and face were fully shielded from people’s gaze by my cloak.

As I let go of Resmus, I stepped back from the scene.

“.....”

Resmus, gasping for breath, immediately rushed over to the princess.

“Prin-... Are you alright!”

Wrapped in the cloak, the princess struggled to rise and looked at me with a puzzled expression. Ignoring her gaze, I left the area.

“Why... why spare me?”

Her question, which seemed almost a whisper, reached me carried by the cold night breeze.

Of course, I had no intention of answering.

Even if I did want to, I couldn't say anything to her at that moment.

No matter what I might explain, it would only give her a false hope.

* * *

“Run!”

The knights, urgently armed to the teeth, were dashing toward the scene in the middle of the night, grave expressions on each of their faces.

“There seems to be some trouble in the streets.”

Hastia and Garnian, who had exited the inn, looked puzzled at the sight of the sudden appearance of knights but naturally followed them to see the commotion.

Then at a certain spot in the street...

Among the gathered crowd and knights keeping order, there were two women being supported, both obviously not in normal conditions.

‘.....!’

The eyes of Hastia and Garnian widened in recognition.

Within the crowd, they saw two women clearly in distress, and both women were familiar. Princess Arin of the Ushif Empire and her guardian knight, Resmus, who had come to visit them just a few hours ago.

Resmus, in particular, was in a severe condition. She was drenched in blood to the extent it was doubtful if she could even stand, propping up the princess who was...

‘Is that?’

Something all too familiar to Hastia was wrapped around the princess's body.

Unmistakably, it was a cloak owned by someone who had once treated it almost as a part of their body, never removed. It was Sian's cloak.

Realizing this, Hastia quickly pulled out the Soul Stone.

The stone was now emitting a much stronger aura than before, one that felt ominously powerful. Drawn to the stone's energy, Hastia instinctively turned and headed in a different direction.

"Hastia?!"

Garnian followed her, bemused.

Passing through the streets and houses into a quiet part of the forest, they arrived...

-Trickle, trickle

Following a clear water sound, they came upon a certain man.

"Who is that man?"

To Hastia, he was someone very familiar.

'Sian?'

Sian sat there, watching the stream flowing before him, his back turned to them. Even though he must have sensed their presence, he didn't look back.

Hastia felt both glad to see him and perplexed by his unresponsiveness.

'Garnian, could you please wait here a moment?'

"Yes? But..."

Garnian was hesitant, noting Sian's turned back with unease.

"That man... He seems to be in an extremely unsettled state compared to before. He might pose a danger to Hastia—"

'Don't worry. I'm approaching him to alleviate that anxiety.'

With an assuring look, Hastia slowly neared Sian, smiling gently.

'It's good to see you again, Sian.'

She reached out with a telepathic greeting, but no reply came.

Hastia leaned forward to take a closer look at his face.

“.....”

His eyes were tightly closed, and his mouth shut—as if asleep while sitting.

Caught off guard by his unexpected condition, she was considering how to proceed when suddenly...

-Snap

Sian's eyes flew open.

Startled, Hastia recoiled, but Sian grabbed her by the throat, refusing her any escape.

“Hastia!”

Garnian, alarmed, started to rush over, but...

‘Stop, Garnian!’

She quickly sent a telepathic message to halt his advance.

“Haah...”

Sian, breathing heavily, looked at her anxiously.

Hastia thought to herself that Sian was in a very unstable state. He didn't even realize she was approaching until she was right next to him and started telepathic communication.

He then violently reacted, mistaking her for a threatening presence.

Hastia calmly took his hand to reassure him, and after a moment, Sian loosened his grip on her neck.

“What are you?”

‘It's Hastia. Have you forgotten my name already?’

“That's not what I'm asking! Why are you here?!”

‘I was returning to Fruina with my clanmates when night fell, and we decided to stay here for the evening.’

Hastia explained without losing her smile.

‘The Soul Stone you returned to me resonated quite strongly. I guessed you must be nearby. So I came to look for you.’

Sian could only scoff in disbelief.

He turned his head away, facing the endlessly flowing stream.

‘Did something unpleasant happen?’

“Don’t worry about it.”

‘How can I not care? How can I, when the person who saved me wears such a sad expression? Even though my clan lives longer than humans, we hold on to the bonds and affection we form until death.’

The corners of Sian’s lips twitched, but his face remained troubled.

‘Earlier today, a member of this country’s royal family, Princess Arin, sought us out.’

Sian’s gaze returned to her once again.

“What for?”

‘She wanted to see the ancient records preserved by our clan. We wanted to oblige, but unfortunately, it was not something we could permit, so we had to decline.’

Hastia wanted to ask about the princess’s surprise at the Soul Stone and why she had Sian’s cloak, but the current circumstances stopped her from prying further.

‘Do you have any sort of relationship with her?’

Instead, she asked a single question that would answer all her queries.

“.....”

‘If it’s difficult to talk about, you don’t have to. They say that just having someone beside you during the hardest times can be the greatest comfort.’

“.....”

‘You don’t need to speak out loud. You can just think to yourself, or you can just stay silent. I’ll be right next to you. Because there is nothing sadder than being alone when you are suffering.’

Sian didn’t respond till the end.

Yet he did not reject Hastia's offer to stay by his side.

And so, without another word or action,

Hastia simply filled the space beside Sian.

As if to prove that it was enough on its own,

Sian could feel the multitude of negative emotions that had been choking his heart,

Slowly melting away.

(To be continued)