

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin

chapter 26-30

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin Chapter 26

Chapter 26: Return (4)

For a precise ten seconds since the door opened, I could neither speak nor act.

Only my hand aimlessly wandering in the air and my eyes trembling anxiously served as ambassadors of my current unstable state of mind.

“You do not remember me, do you? Well, that’s understandable. The last time I saw you was before entering the academy...”

The most despicable creature is now smiling at me.

Looking at that smile, my heart seems to boil, and my blood vessels feel like they are about to burst.

Calm down.

Getting agitated now won’t do me any good.

Wasn’t this a situation bound to come, eventually?

I’ve sworn to strangle him and chew every single molar thoroughly until I erase his existence.

If I lose control now, it’ll all go wrong soon enough.

Right, for now, I need to keep a normal facade, as if nothing is wrong.

To do that, I should carry on the conversation with a calm... a calm...

...

Are you kidding me?

After ripping his limbs and shattering his bones into pieces, even scattering them in a volcano wouldn't be satisfying enough!

Here he is right before me, and I'm supposed to just let him live?

Am I supposed to destroy his future thoroughly?

Is there any need to see his future?

No! I just need to kill him right here!

No need to drag it out, just sever this cursed tie from my past, here and now!

As if responding to my will, my wandering right hand moves towards my chest.

Soon, it grips the hilt of Ceyram's sword within my garments.

The moment I grab the hilt, all my stray thoughts vanish, leaving only a single emotion called murderous intent.

– Click.

“?!?!”

A mysterious hand suddenly grabs my wrist.

[If you don't want to crack your skull, snap out of it.]

The cold, yet calm whisper of the demonic sword.

Simultaneously, the murderous aura invading my body quickly subsides.

“Sian, the youngest of the Vert family, greets his elder brother...”

With controlled composure, I pull my hand from within my garment and immediately bow.

It's the best course of action for me at this moment.

“...Do you remember me?”

“Of course. How could I, as a younger brother, fail to recognize my brother's face?”

“I am glad. Honestly, I feared that you wouldn’t recognize me, but I’m relieved you remembered me at first glance.”

Aschel pats my head affectionately.

I force back the rising urge to kill once more.

“First, I should apologize. I intruded into your room uninvited. It must have been unpleasant for you to find a stranger in your space.”

“It’s alright. It was nothing more than an empty room with no owner.”

“You probably don’t know how long I’ve waited for this moment, Sian. My visit today was solely to meet you.”

To meet me? You?

In my past life, the first time I met him was long after graduating from the academy.

A person like him, who never bothers with anything unnecessary, has come to meet me now?

Unless there’s a hidden agenda. The moment I perceive his intent, my roiling emotions cool down and my thoughts shift to reason.

I conceal all my inner thoughts and speak softly.

“I also sincerely wished to see you, brother.”

* * *

“Really, you have so little baggage, but still you make me carry it. You really don’t understand women at all, do you, young master?”

Emily is climbing the stairs with a bag containing nothing but clothes.

Having finished helping with the packing, she’s now headed to Sian’s room with his remaining belongings.

But for some reason, the faces of the other attendants who helped pack looked strangely serious.

As if they were trying to hide something they all knew.

Among them, one maid she was close to pushed her towards Sian's room, implying there was something she needed to see.

Expecting some sort of surprise for her efforts, even though it seemed unlikely, Emily reached Sian's door without much thought and knocked.

– Knock knock.

“...”

Silence was the only response.

Tilting her head, Emily knocked again.

– Knock knock.

“Young master, it's Emily! I brought up your luggage!”

A moment later, Sian's heavy voice came through from the other side.

“...Come in.”

Taken aback by the unexpected atmosphere, she nevertheless entered the room.

“You call this luggage? You could've easily carried it up yourself, I had to...”

Her usual grumbling paused as she froze, struck by the sight before her.

Her eyes captured the presence of two men.

“Ah, is that lady her? The maid you spent time with at the front?”

The unfamiliar man greeted her with a bright smile.

Emily knew him, though.

He had the kind of striking look that made one think a divine being had descended to the mortal world.

There was only one person in the Vert family with such a distinguished appearance.

“First... Young master...?”

The heir of the Vert family, Aschel.

For some unknown reason, he was sitting right there in Sian’s room.

Emily quickly covered her mouth, bowing deeply in haste.

“I apologize for my rudeness, not knowing you were here, First Young Master!”

She wished she could disappear into a mouse hole, having shown such a casual demeanor before the person regarded as the most desirable master among all attendants.

“Ha, it seems you are quite comfortable with each other. After all, you must be the maid Sian cherished enough to take to the front.”

“...”

Sian responded with silence.

It appeared that Aschel was getting ready to leave, indicating that they had already had some discussion.

“Sorry for taking your time right after you’ve arrived home. You must be tired.”

“It is no trouble at all. It was an honor to have a conversation with my elder brother.”

Aschel stands up, smoothly, patting the also-standing Sian’s head.

Sian remains silent, accepting the gesture.

“I should go and see mother now. If you face any difficulties at the academy, feel free to contact me.”

“I will. Thank you.”

With a gentle smile, Aschel leaves the room.

Once his footsteps fade away, Emily exhales a breath she didn't realize she was holding.

"Phew! I was nervous to death! If I knew the First Young Master was here, I would've come prepared!"

"..."

Despite her rambles, Sian remains silent.

"What did you and the First Young Master talk about? He wouldn't visit without a reason! Could it be he came to see you? If that's the case, it really shows how much..."

"Emily..."

Sian's call halts her mid-sentence.

Startled, Emily cautiously looks into Sian's eyes.

"I'm sorry, but could you leave for a bit...?"

His voice is low but filled with a profound gravity.

"Why are you acting like that all of a sudden...?"

"Don't make me repeat myself."

Seeing Sian's expression, Emily couldn't say another word.

Ever since the duel with Kranz, Sian had always shown a confident façade, but now for the first time, a darker side emerged.

If he had a knife in his hand, it seemed as though he would brutally slaughter anyone, regardless of who it was.

His face was filled with an overflow of anger and killing intent.

* * *

The moment I released my repressed nature, I felt as if the blood in my veins reversed flow.

Unable to withstand it any longer, I ran to the restroom inside the room.

“Bleugh!”

Witnessing my vomit, I felt as if I looked at the repulsiveness of my deceit and pretense.

“Heh...”

Somehow, I managed to keep calm during that moment, and a bitter laugh escapes me out of disbelief.

[It's him, isn't it?]

Lifting my head, I see Ceyram looking down at me with her arms crossed.

Had she not stopped my hand, I would surely have torn him apart then and there.

Laughing like a madman, I nonetheless ask her quietly, “Why did you stop me?”

[Aren't you going to thank me first?]

“Wasn't it a chance for you too? If I had killed him on the spot, you would have found the perfect opportunity to absorb me, right?”

A soulless being lost to rage is a delicacy for a demonic sword. If Ceyram really wanted it, she could have revealed her true nature and devoured me, her own master, seizing my body for herself.

But she didn't.

Instead, she desperately prevented it.

That's why I am now here, wide-eyed and conversing with her.

[Don't be mistaken. You're nothing but raw meat yet to be ripened. Eating slightly burnt raw food would only spoil the taste. You need to ripen further...]

Her gaze is cold, her lips curling upwards in a haughty smile.

It was a hideous smile unattainable by anyone else, a true show of a magic sword's ugliness.

An ordinary human might have tingled nerves and bones turned to ice upon such a sight, but I can't help but smile.

Now that's the attitude of my beloved sword!

[But after seeing the face of that bastard, I get why you started growling like a rabid dog. How'd it feel, meeting the enemy of your past life?]

"It was fortunate."

[Fortunate?]

Ceyram raises her brow in surprise.

"I've often thought of it while living this damned life again. When did he start hating me, the man I trusted and followed my whole life? Was it because my capabilities were too great, leading to his impatience, and did that impatience turn into envy? What if I had never been by his side from the beginning? Perhaps then I could have avoided such a wretched death?"

[How naively foolish. What? After considering him a brother, did you start to pity him?]

"Do you think that of me? He's still nothing but a shell without any significant title. What's the point of raising my sword in vengeance against such an unworthy bastard? It wouldn't settle my accumulated rage."

If it were 20 years later, maybe, but the current Aschel is nothing more than a rough stone yet to be carved.

To say he is different from the person who thrust the holy sword through my heart would be an understatement. What would killing such a man achieve?

"And yet, the moment I faced him, I knew..."

[What did you know?]

I can feel the pang in my heart as I recall that moment when the golden holy sword penetrated my heart.

He claimed he had never fully trusted me all the time we were together.

That deceitful look in his eyes.

His gaze was exactly the same then as it is now, chillingly identical.

“It wasn’t me who changed him; he was always vile from the beginning. Sucking blood dry when needed and discarding without hesitation once uses are served... He was always that kind of person.”

No matter how it’s hidden behind a cunning smile, I’ve already seen his true nature.

It’s like an indelible brand on my body, instantly recognizable on first sight.

“So how lucky can I be? The person named Aschel Vert, the one I want to impose all of the world’s suffering upon, exists exactly as I wished...”

Nevertheless, I still won’t kill him yet.

As Ceyram said, meat tastes best when properly cooked.

Eating it as soon as you see a slight char won’t let you enjoy the best flavor.

“It’s going to get a lot more interesting from now on, Ceyram.”

[It should. That way, I won’t regret my actions today.]

My resolution to achieve everything on my own.

In the life I vowed for myself, the name Aschel Vert will not exist.

Even if the gods stand behind him, it doesn’t concern me.

I will utterly erase him from this world.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 27

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Chapter 27: To the Academy (1)

At the very end of the hallway on the fifth floor of the mansion was a silver door. A robust man dressed in the mansion's staff uniform approached the door.

-Knock knock-

"Come in."

It was late, a time when even the designated servants wouldn't visit, but the room's owner granted entrance. As soon as the man faced the room's owner, he bowed his head. Aschel was there, sitting in a chair, leisurely reading a book.

"I have confirmed the location of the second young lady, as you asked."

While still fixing his eyes on the book, Aschel asked in a calm tone, "Where was she?"

"In the northern part of the continent, within the territory of the White Elves called 'Fruina'. It seems she has been settled there for quite some time now."

"Fruina... With a race that detests outsiders, her adaptability seems remarkable indeed." Aschel closed his book and looked out the window at the moonlight, smiling enigmatically. "Keep an eye on her and let me know if she shows any signs of returning to the empire."

"Understood."

Watching Aschel's demeanor, the man cautiously inquired. "Have you received some good news?"

"Why do you ask?"

"It's just that your face looks unusually bright today. Did meeting your sibling excite you that much?"

At the mention of his sibling, Aschel's smile widened into a chuckle. "Exciting, you say... I suppose you could put it that way depending on the situation. But, Kellin, you've got it wrong. I'm actually in a very bad mood..."

His eyebrows arched sarcastically, and his lips were set in a firm line, presenting a countenance starkly different from when he spoke of his sibling.

“I apologize for being unable to discern the feelings of Lord Aschel.”

The man quickly bowed his head.

“It’s alright. If hiding my own thoughts is this difficult, how much harder must it be to understand the thoughts of others? Let alone a boy who has only recently gotten the smell of milk off himself...”

It was said that even if one knows the depth of waters, the heart of another remains unfathomable. Aschel had been irked by his interaction with Sian just a few hours before.

“May I ask what discussion you had with your sibling, Sian?”

“Nothing much. We simply caught up and exchanged pleasantries. But... why does this make me feel so displeased?”

A negative emotion clung stubbornly to Aschel’s face, which had hardened even in the reflection of his eyes.

“He was quite surprised to see me...”

“Well, it’s only natural to be surprised after such a long separation, isn’t it?”

“There was no ‘long separation’. I had never once exchanged a single word with him face-to-face until today.”

The age difference between Sian and Aschel was seven years. Aschel had never shown any interest in Sian, and given his character focused on necessity, it was unlikely he ever would.

“It was like seeing an enemy from a past life. The look in his eyes... It was like he could kill me on the spot, though he has no recollection of me in his head...”

A brutal will to kill. At that moment, Sian’s eyes seemed not human but demonic.

“He’s an undeniably troublesome sibling. We’ll have to keep a close eye on him to ensure he doesn’t stray.”

The man instantly understood Aschel's words.

"...I'll assign someone to him."

Aschel responded with silence.

Once the man had finished his business, he promptly left the room. Alone, Aschel stood up and absently gazed up at the night sky. The dense curtain of darkness, not a star in sight, enshrouded in a faint mist. Even the bright moonlight couldn't penetrate the strange scene, as if it evoked the memory of someone.

* * *

(Date: 986th Year of Creation, February 18th)

On the third day since his return to the mansion, in the dawn as chores were being finished, a coach and knights prepared to depart were already standing by in the yard.

"Huh..." The dawn air was crisp and breaths turned to steam.

The scene contrasted with Kranz's departure two days earlier. Except for the coachman and knights, the rest of the mansion residents likely assumed I would leave around midday.

Not wishing to receive awkward attentions as Kranz did, I deliberately misled them about my departure time and left alone in the early hours.

All except one person, that is.

"You actually managed to turn up, Emily...?"

Emily stood in front of the coach, glaring at me with fiery eyes. Her cheeks were puffed with displeasure, seemingly ready to burst at any moment.

"I'm really disappointed in you, young master..."

"I told you, it's not possible to bring personal servants to the academy. It's not that I won't take you; I can't take you."

"Why didn't you just say so from the start? Why did you only tell me the day before?!"

Was she afraid of my hysteria? I had intended to tell her as soon as I returned to the mansion, but an unexpectedly dire encounter made me forget.

That it's impossible to bring personal servants is, in fact, a lie.

According to the academy's laws, servants are nominally forbidden. However, there are ways to circumvent such principles. If a companion's status is not a servant but a guardian knight, then the story changes.

Given that nobles from all over the continent gather at the academy, there's no telling what may happen, so the academy does not limit personal protection. Taking advantage of this, nobles disguise their servants as guardian knights to gain them entry, a tactic commonly used.

I could have employed this trick with Emily, but I chose not to. After all, the academy might be a far more dreadful and vile place for her than a battlefield teeming with demonic beasts.

"Still, I'm genuinely grateful for everything you've done. If it weren't for you, I wouldn't have lasted in this mansion."

"Just go and take care of yourself, young master."

Although Emily waved me off, she couldn't hide her flushed face.

Seeing her like that, I unwittingly smiled.

She's like a slightly less wise but good-hearted older sister. Whether in my past life or now, she was more than just a precious maid to me.

Given the distance, returning to this place from the academy would be uncommon. While I don't know when we'll meet again, I hope she remains healthy and well.

"Well then, I'm off, Emily. Stay out of trouble!"

"Make sure you don't get ostracized there! Don't get depression or social phobia and end up doing something drastic like suicide!"

"..."

Truly a fitting maid of mine, chasing away any residual warmth with her peerless charm.

Without any further attachment, I boarded the coach.

“Hyah!”

With a spirited command from the coachman, the coach set off, followed quickly by the guardian knights.

My destination was the city of Luwen in the southeast of the empire, where the Royal Academy was located. Being at the very edge of the empire’s western border, it was virtually the furthest place I could go.

Due to the tight schedule, I needed to make haste to avoid being late to the enrollment ceremony. Though, in reality, it would hardly matter.

I’m not aiming to be an honor student, am I?

Irrespective of the academy’s title as the premier educational institution, I had already mastered those lessons in the past.

While revisiting old knowledge is crucial in life, I am not a senile old man who needs to review lessons akin to multiplication tables.

Of course, my personal standards apply here, and I’m not implying that the academy’s curriculum is that elementary.

My quest to the academy is not for education, but purely for my own objectives. As long as I get my business done without drawing too much attention, everything should be fine...

But who knows, it might turn out to be more taxing than life on the front lines.

-Thump thump-

Before long, the coach left the estate and was racing across the vast plains, closely guarded by precisely six guardian knights.

Hmm...

It seems I might see blood before this journey even truly begins.

* * *

The sun was setting in the western sky.

The continuous gallop of hooves ceased, rousing me from my rest. Mid-yawn, a knock resonated at the door.

“Young Master Sian, I believe we should camp out here for the night.”

I kept my composure and asked, “How far have we come?”

“We’re near the central city of ‘Saphern’. We expect to reach the city by tomorrow morning.”

It was a lie.

There’s no forest near Saphern giving off such a pungent smell of grass. It would at least take another day.

“Got it. Let me know when you’re finished setting up.”

“Of course, young master.”

The knight’s footsteps gradually receded, and along with it, Kerym emerged from my embrace.

“You knew, didn’t you?”

“Of course. I spotted it even before we started.”

“Why are you making enemies left and right from the get-go? If you live like that, you’ll be disgraced again and meet an early end, won’t you?”

“Once is enough for a prodigious end. Isn’t it strange for an assassin to not attract enemies?”

It’s all for survival.

Truthfully, I had foreseen this, but I hadn’t expected it to happen so quickly.

We were in a dense forest valley, a place where anyone could disappear without a trace.

I chuckled at how blatantly obvious their intentions were.

-Thud, thud-

After a short while, the sound of the knights' footsteps approached from behind the door. They halted right outside my door without moving away.

These knights weren't here to escort me.

They had me surrounded.

"Young Master Sian, you may come out now."

Since they're kindly asking, I suppose I should oblige.

I opened the door and stepped out without hesitation.

Six knights encircled me, making sure I wouldn't run.

They each had a variety of expressions and looks, but they all seemed pitiful in their own way.

Do they pity me now?

First, with an unaffected face, I inhaled the fresh air of the mountain valley deeply.

"Nice air, huh? Was there such a forest near Saphern?"

The knights said nothing.

I asked casually as if following the flow of water.

"Whose orders are you following...?"

Though some knights' eyes wavered, they remained silent.

"Have you all turned into mute bees? Your young lord is speaking, and you don't answer?"

"Snicker..."

At 3 o'clock from where I stood, a long-haired knight with a black mole under his eye chuckled mockingly.

Laughing?

I barely restrained my temper from flaring up.

“...There are no personal feelings involved.”

One of the knights in front of me finally spoke.

“I didn’t ask about your feelings. My question was different, wasn’t it?”

“We’ll honor our last duty to you, sending you off with as little pain as possible. You can close your eyes peacefully and drift into sleep.”

What kind of ridiculous non-answer is this?

Yeah, you do what you’re told like puppets, so what fault could you hold? But then again, being reduced to such puppets might also be their fault.

Even being unlucky can be a fault too.

But still, shouldn’t you at least answer my question?

“This is the fourth time I’ve asked you. For the last time... Who’s behind this?”

The answer came unexpectedly from elsewhere.

“The dying need not know...”

Really? It’s getting unbearable.

The knight with the black mole, who had just mocked me, added another comment. That finally snapped what little restraint I had.

-Shlick-

In less than a second, and just five steps away, a pleasing sound accompanied the splash of red across my face, and a sizable head fell to the ground.

The ashen faces of the knights looked rather amusing in an instant.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin

chapter 28

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin Chapter 28

Chapter 28: To the Academy (2)

The scent of blood scattered in all directions as if the god of death had passed by.

Sir Brian Kendrick, a formal knight of Belias, couldn't believe the scene that unfolded before his eyes.

Screams of knights were heard almost every second, while at the same time, crimson rain poured cruelly from the heavens.

Could an 11-year-old boy truly be responsible for this?

The boy whose gaze had been on the bodies of the knights now turned toward him.

"Eek!"

Upon making eye contact with the boy, Brian's legs gave out, and he collapsed. Sian Vert, the youngest son of the Duke of Willius Vert, protector of the continent.

Just a year ago, he was derided as the incompetent of his family.

Yet, over the past year, he grew to become the most talked-about son in the territory.

A son who earned the Duke's recognition,

A prince who protected the princess from demons,

A returnee who had survived the Devil Dragon.

Sian's reputation had risen so swiftly that those who didn't know could only wonder whose story was being told.

But...

‘Did he learn assassination techniques from the knights?’

Even those highly-reputed senior knights would not employ such brutal swordsmanship.

Holding a small sword no larger than a lady’s comb, he would first sever both arms that wielded weapons, then both legs to prevent standing, and as a finale, he would decapitate the head. It was a wonder that anyone witnessing such brutality did not faint.

Sian, who had executed such gore without a second thought, casually approached the valley and began to wash his face.

The action seemed so natural, as if it were something he often did.

“It seems knights nowadays also double as coachmen, don’t they?”

Sian asked indifferently, but Brian was unable to respond.

He wanted to say something, but only futile moans escaped his trembling vocal cords.

After washing up, Sian walked towards Brian, who was on his knees, and met his eyes.

“Speak.”

With a phrasing that stimulated all senses like a whisper from a ghost.

It meant for him to confess everything without any resistance.

What stood before Brian was no longer a young boy.

It was an executioner of cruel death, who could send anyone to the pits of hell on a whim.

Brian, terrified, began to reveal everything as though bewitched.

“I received the orders from Duchess Margaret! ‘Assassinate Lord Sian on his way to the Royal Academy.’ It was a secret mission assigned to me and six other knights!”

“Why?”

“I do not know the details, but I heard something! Before going to the academy, the fourth young lord, Crantz, earnestly requested something from the Duchess! Perhaps the Duchess accepted his request and decided on this action, and we could only speculate among ourselves.”

Sian let out a hollow laugh.

“No wonder he fled with his tail between his legs.”

The questioning continued.

“So. What were your plans after killing me?”

“We were just planning to return and report the situation, then claim we were attacked by bandits and killed, and deal with the situation that way... followed by receiving the promised compensation.”

“Compensation?”

Hearing the story, Sian chuckled.

“You’re all minor knights, aren’t you? Just promoted from apprentices...”

“Yes, but...”

“Let me tell you something. If you had returned, you would have been executed immediately.”

“...!”

“You think if you had failed to protect me and let me die, saying ‘The prince has unfortunately perished from a bandit attack,’ they would just accept it and move on? Of course, they would make you pay for your failure.”

Brian’s eyes darted wildly.

“And do you think she would quietly let you go after you killed the heir of the Duke’s family, even if you’re not professional mercenaries but just minor knights?”

“But she promised us safety...”

Sian continued with an almost pitying look.

“Well, what can you, being so minor, know about the Duchess? You’re nothing. Just disposable pawns to her. Pawns that knew nothing and were meant to be discarded.”

It was a truth anyone could realize with a bit of thought.

The sudden assassination mission assigned to seven minor knights.

While they might have felt something fishy, they were loyal knights of the territory and had to follow orders.

In short, they were simply unlucky.

With no right to refuse, they had been thrown into the pit of death.

Realizing the truth, Brian shook uncontrollably from emotions indescribable.

“Are you going to kill me too?”

He asked tentatively, sounding resigned.

“Why do you think that?”

“I have nothing left to tell you. There’s no reason for you to keep me alive.”

“...”

Sian silently stared at him, head bowed.

“Don’t you resent me?”

“It was us who first tried to kill you. Do I have the right to resent?”

Sian smiled enigmatically.

“Not being needed and not being worth keeping alive are different things.”

“Sir?”

“I’m not that kind of person.”

Brian couldn't understand his words.

"Besides, you still have work to do for me."

"What work are you speaking of?"

Sian just jerked his head towards the carriage left alone next to the strewn bodies.

Despite some splatters of blood, the horses and the carriage were still in perfect condition.

"You drive a carriage quite well."

* * *

[What are you thinking?]

"What do you mean what? I can't walk all that distance on foot."

[Come on, are you keeping the power of that fancy god just to grind sesame seeds? You could use a carriage and move it with the help of ghosts. Why bother with such a guy?]

"Why bother advertising ghost carriages? Why not just declare that the appearance of the legacy of the mist god?"

[The merciful assassin arrives!]

Although Cayram jeered, she couldn't help but click her tongue.

Merciful, huh...

Not sure if that's what to call it.

It's sort of like the only one who survived among his companions is driving the cart of the enemy.

Honestly, sure, it might be shameful, but...

Well, I understand Cayram's question of why there was a need to spare him, but on the other hand, there was also no need to kill him.

If you're going back to face certain death, making good use of him could be beneficial, and maybe if he had something to live for, it would be a win-win, right?

I leaned out of the carriage window.

– Thump thump

His alert eyes and firm grip on the reins.

He maintained the right speed, seamlessly navigating obstacles.

Despite rough terrain, the carriage provided a very satisfying ride without jolting.

So much so that I even fell asleep for a while which says it all.

“...Huh!”

Brian turned around, startled by an unfamiliar presence, and saw me.

The sudden motion twisted the reins, rocking the carriage noticeably.

“Is, is there something you need?”

“Nothing. Focus on driving.”

“Yes...”

Brian quickly corrected his posture and continued the journey.

“How old are you?”

“I, I am nineteen this year.”

Nineteen. The same age as Emily.

“What makes you so good at managing horses? How did you become a formal knight?”

With an awkward scratch of his head, Brian cautiously answered.

“Truth to be told, I was just an apprentice knight. I used to do odd jobs around the territory. Due to the mass transfer of formal knights to other places, I simply got lucky and was appointed a knight.”

“Formal knights were moved? Why?”

“I’m not quite sure, but since a year ago, There’s been an increase in the number of nobles from the capital and other parts of the empire looking for personal guards. The pay’s good, and the treatment is quite decent, so a lot of competent knights have already left, as I know.”

Maybe because I’ve been on the front lines for so long, I hadn’t heard about this?

Then again, the knights defending the front lines are mostly from the Order of Light, separate from the territory’s knight orders, but this was an unexpected fact.

To think the frequency of looking for guards would’ve increased so much that even knights from the territories had been drawn out...

It seems something significant has occurred.

“So, you simply filled a headcount to become a knight?”

“Yes... being formally knighted isn’t easy, and I thought I was just lucky. It was a rare opportunity, after all. Even after becoming a knight, the work I did remained the same...”

Yeah, I’d say you’re lucky alright.

If you had been wearing armor instead of a coachman’s uniform, you would have met the same fate.

As the silence lingered, the city’s outline became visible within the vast wilderness.

“Sir, Safurn is in sight, my lord!”

Safurn, a mid-level city within the empire.

It might not be large, but it was known as a rather wealthy land within the empire.

As we slowed and reached the checkpoint, armed guards approached and blocked the carriage's path.

"Where do you hail from?"

"Uh, the thing is..."

Brian, sitting on the coachman's seat, was sweaty and unable to form a coherent sentence.

Any onlooker might think he was hiding corpses.

I stepped out of the carriage and showed the guards the Vert family crest.

"Sian Vert, the son of the Duke of Belias. I am on my way to Luwen for the Royal Academy."

After inspecting the crest, the guards began to scrutinize my attire.

Inspecting one's attire was a traditional method to verify status, and my crisp, flashy silver uniform did just that.

"Are you... traveling alone?"

"Just with one coachman and a guard."

The guards looked skeptically between me and Brian for about three seconds.

"Alright. We'll grant you permission to enter."

Once the guards completed the process, they cleared the way.

"I hate to give advice, but if you have the chance, it might be wise to hire a few guards in the city. The atmosphere of the empire is quite uneasy these days."

"Thanks for the advice. I'll think about it."

I climbed back into the carriage and entered Safurn.

"..."

As soon as we entered the city, I could feel a bleak atmosphere permeating the air.

A sense of caution, perhaps?

To confirm this, I saw many guard troops armed with swords and spears patrolling the streets.

This was certainly not the Safurn I knew from this era.

A feeling of unease told me that I might not just be passing through this city.

“Where should I go, my lord?”

“To an inn. Avoid the luxurious ones. Any place where we can leave the carriage will do.”

“Understood.”

For now, I decided to leave my things and explore slowly.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 29

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin Chapter 29

Chapter 29: To the Academy (3)

“Boss! Another serving of roast whole pig over here!”

“We’re out of booze at our table! Hurry and bring some more!”

Amidst the boisterous atmosphere, drunken men engaged in rough revelry.

It wasn’t quite a fitting place for an eleven-year-old boy, but it didn’t matter.

This country wasn’t so strict as to deny minors a taste of alcohol.

I found a vacant spot without any fuss and sat down.

As if on cue, dozens of gazes turned my way.

I also scanned the table occupants lazily.

Unremarkable swords and armor—the hallmarks of common mercenaries who lived off commissions.

“This doesn’t seem quite the place for a young lord, does it?” voiced a woman in a red silk dress, approaching to take my order.

Perhaps in her late twenties?

The deep cleavage was noticeable, though it wasn’t much of a distraction for me.

“You don’t appear to be here to drink. What will you have?”

Her tone was flat, betraying a hint of annoyance.

“Of course. The best thing you have here.”

Indifferently, I retrieved a gold coin from my pocket and handed it to her.

“Hm?”

The woman’s eyes sparkled for a moment upon receiving the coin.

“This... are you sure? This is more than enough to buy all the food here...”

“Then bring me some drink to accompany the meal, and keep the change as a tip.”

Her face brightened instantly at the mention of a tip.

“A young lord who knows how to spend! Please wait a moment. Customer~!”

Her tone completely changed as she rushed into the kitchen.

I watched her leave, then returned my attention to the others, now focusing on me once more.

Some seemed to relish the smell of money coming off me.

“Has the rich young master come to tour the city?”

Eventually, a man from across the room approached my table.

He was a burly mercenary, large enough that the table shook when he sat down in front of me.

“I didn’t invite you to sit.”

And he reeked of sweat. Did he even bathe today?

“So stiff! I almost want to mark that pretty face with a few bruises! Ku-ha-ha!”

Was that intended to be a joke?

The sight of him laughing to himself made me think that bruises would be his, not mine.

“You seem young and unaware of the world. Money should be spent where it’s useful, not tipping a wench for shaking her chest!”

And what does that have to do with me?

“Moreover, in times like these, walking around alone without guards could lead to an untimely death! How about it? I don’t know where you’re headed, but why not hire me to ensure a safe journey?”

I couldn’t help but smirk at his proposal.

With knights themselves in high demand, was there really a market for such low-quality mercenaries?

Clearly unworthy of consideration.

“As you’re still young, I’ll offer you a special discount—”

“Get lost.”

The people around us started murmuring.

“What did you say?”

“I said, get lost. I have no desire to eat with your face in view.”

The color rose in the mercenary’s face, flushed with anger.

“A cocky young master, aren’t you? But you should watch whom you’re addressing. One wrong step could spoil that pretty face, you know?”

He tried to intimidate me, exuding a false aura of threat.

I had merely stopped by for a bite, and now some good-for-nothing was trying to ruffle my feathers.

I contemplated whether to gouge his eyes out or break his fingers and stuff them in every orifice—but in the end, dirtying my hands on him wasn’t worth it.

Instead, I simply locked eyes with him, uttering no word.

After all, true predators do not blindly attack their own kind. They measure each other with stares, the first to sense a limit submitting and withdrawing.

Would it be different with humans?

For a lumbering creature that’s hardly a predator, a real killing intent is all it takes to subjugate it.

-Sssss

As a menacing red aura slowly arose, my hair fluttered in the pulsing energy.

The weighty silence of the surrounding atmosphere became charged with deadly promise.

“.....!?”

The mercenary was clearly feeling overwhelmed, with fear beginning to take root.

A bead of sweat traced its way down his cheek, betraying his inner tension.

If he didn’t want to be torn limb from limb, he had to leave—immediately and without a word.

“Sorry to interrupt your meal...”

He mumbled a pathetic apology and swiftly stood up.

He seemed to be retreating to his own table, but then, in a haste as if fleeing, he disappeared out of the tavern.

He was even more of a coward than I'd thought.

"What just happened here?"

The waitress, who had taken my order, returned food in hand, sitting down beside me suddenly.

"Did you just send that ruffian packing?"

"He left on his own accord."

I played dumb.

"That bastard is well-known around here! He preys on outside merchants, acts as if he's protecting them for the day, then demands a hefty sum for his 'services'!"

Hmm, none of my concern.

My sole purpose here was to eat.

I began to prepare for the meal silently.

She had brought me a delectable stew packed with generous chunks of meat and a side of fresh fruit juice.

"I asked the kitchen to add more meat especially for you! It's one of Safern's specialties, and I'm certain you will be satisfied!"

I'd have to taste it to be sure.

I scooped up a spoonful and took a bite.

The rich butter blended with the springy, plump meat, creating a pleasantly harmonious flavor.

Without much fanfare, I quietly continued to enjoy my meal.

“But are you really traveling alone, sir? In times like these, it’s unusual to see nobility without guards, especially with the rumors of fearsome assassins on the loose...”

“Not feeling the need...”

A coachman would suffice, if anything.

“Still, it might be wise to have a few guards. With all those assassins roaming about the country...”

At the mention of assassins, I stopped eating for a moment.

“Assassins?”

Were they referring to murderers, not mere thieves?

“Do you know the name of this assassin group?”

“Their name? I think it was Mi... something?”

It was then that Brian, whom I’d sent on an errand, entered the tavern.

“There you are, my lord!”

He looked sweaty as if he’d been searching for me for a while.

“Get this lad something decent to drink.”

“Of course! Just a minute, please!”

The waitress eagerly rose from her seat.

“What are you waiting for? Have a seat.”

“Th-thank you!”

Brian sat down awkwardly. “Did you find out what I asked you about?”

Once we arrived at the inn and unpacked our things, I’d given him a sort of mission—find out why the empire was so desperate for more bodyguards.

He started to speak with confidence in his eyes.

“It wasn’t difficult to find out. It’s an issue that extends beyond Safern to the whole empire—it seems even children in the streets are aware of it.”

Even street kids knew, and I was unaware?

That was unsettling.

“They say assassins appeared, is that correct?”

“Yes, it’s a group of assassins named Mistra...”

-Plop.

My spoon dropped into the stew.

My eyes, previously detached, snapped open at the response, and Brian froze, caught off guard by my reaction.

“Is, is there a problem?”

“Do you even know what ‘Mistra’ means?”

My gaze was sharp and questioning.

“Well, it’s quite famous, isn’t it? Following the ‘Divine Massacre’ decades ago, some disciples enraged by the loss formed a group of killers, targeting nobles across the continent...”

Yes.

But that was only the surface of the truth.

There were certainly distortions within that narrative, but that wasn’t the focus now.

“What evidence do they have those people have reappeared?”

“People say the bodies left behind by these assassins are chopped into dozens of pieces, and black mist covers the area. Plus, the victims are usually corrupt officials or nobles, resembling the acts of those who vanished years ago...”

The waitress, returning with a drink, chimed in.

“Yes, that’s right! That’s why nobles and wealthy people have been seeking extra guards lately, all fearful for their safety. Even the local lord is among them.”

I leaned back in my chair and lost myself in thought for a moment.

How should I respond to such an unexpected situation?

Under normal circumstances, I would’ve ignored it, but this wasn’t something I could simply dismiss.

The solution was simple, however.

I just had to see for myself.

-Swish

I pushed my chair back and stood up.

“Where are you going?”

“Just out.”

Before leaving, I slid the half-eaten bowl of stew toward Brian.

“What is this?”

“It looked good, but I couldn’t quite taste it.”

With a look of bewilderment, Brian and the waitress watched as I left the tavern with ease.

Night had fallen, and a chilling air roamed the streets as darkness set in.

* * *

“Someone came looking for me? The son of Duke Verto?”

A bald man rolling a drink in his hand asked with half-closed eyes.

“Yes! He stopped by on his way to the Royal Academy.”

“Oh, you mean the dud from the Verto household. I hear he’s been coming and going from the frontlines over the past year, but never mind; it’s none of my business.”

Disinterestedly, the man snorted through his nose.

“What about the other matter I asked you to look into?”

“Well, I’ve been thoroughly investigating, reaching out to mercenaries from other countries... How about we stop there, lord? If we keep increasing the guard at this rate, it might affect the management of your lands...”

“What? You think I should just be killed by those bastards?”

“No, that’s not what I meant...”

-Whack!

“Ugh!”

Struck on the head by a wine glass, the servant toppled backward.

“I’m not hiring guards just to protect my own neck. What good is it to just shake in fear of some lowly assassins? They must be caught and made an example of, or they’ll never learn their place!”

“My lord, I apologize for failing to see your profound intention!”

The servant scrambled up, no time to nurse his wound, bowing profusely.

“If you understand, then don’t argue. Make sure by tomorrow to have the number of men I’ve called for. And silence the lips of those around us, understood?”

“Yes, my lord, I’ll make the arrangements!”

Hastily, the servant left with a bleeding head.

Now alone, the lord cursed and slammed drink after drink.

“What good did those fools ever do? You think if I die, you’ll take my place?”

The drunken lord managed to stand, unsteady on his feet.

“I am Fawaqron, the lord of Safern! Followers of the Black Mist? Come if you dare! I’ll tear your flesh to shreds to garnish my drinks! Ku-ha-ha!”

As he stumbled around the room, bellowing and cursing, a cold voice pierced the air.

“.....Nonsense.”

Startled, the lord halted his rants, scanning the surroundings.

“What the—?”

No one was in sight, but a strange black smoke curled up from a corner of the room, soon enveloping the lord.

“Hiiiek!”

In panic, he rushed toward the door.

-Bang, bang, bang!

“What’s happening? Why won’t it open?”

The door was locked, and no one responded to his shouts.

“Anyone there? Come quickly! They’re here! The followers of Black Mist...!”

As his calls were cut short, the lord’s body slumped as if lifeless.

Moments later, his body was dragged away, disappearing into the darkness.

The room was left silent, save for the sound of rolling empty bottles.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin Chapter 30: To the Academy (4)

What happens when one is born human but is denied humanity?

They are exiled from society, become isolated, and receive no recognition from anyone.

As weak individuals form groups, establish order, and make laws, to remain a part of that human group, one must abide by these rules.

And if they don't?

Simple, they are no longer considered human.

Look at the heinous criminals who commit murder, rape, assault, and so on.

Do we treat them as human?

As much as they commit inhumane acts, we never place them in the same category.

It may seem minor, but being denied one's very essence is a terrifying thing.

And we never know what those who are excluded will turn into later on...

So why am I bringing this up?

Because even among those exalted beings, the gods, there are those who have been excluded in this way.

Among the gods, there was one who was not acknowledged as a deity and was banished from the celestial realm, the scorned deity — Aer, the God of the Black Mist.

This decree by the gods also applied to their creations, the humans.

One must not follow the God of the Black Mist.

No one taught us this; it's like a taboo ingrained in our minds the moment we are born.

This notion has been perpetuated in human society for a long time.

However, just as the human heart cannot remain consistent, this idea wasn't destined to last forever.

On the day the Black Mist was first witnessed on the continent,

there were those who defied the longstanding notion of the gods and later came to be known as 'Followers of the Mist'.

For the first time as humans, they revered Aer as a god, and even negated other gods.

But the price for denying the divine order was steep.

Those who stuck to the old beliefs saw the Followers as negative beings that should not exist in the world, insisting that only ostracization and annihilation were the answer.

In other words, they denied their own humanity.

And so the Followers of the Mist were thoroughly ostracized by their fellow humans and ultimately exterminated, and only a handful of survivors later regrouped to form an organization known as 'Mist'.

Having experienced exile once, they retained no complacency or mercy.

They aimed to denounce the world order centered around the light and reveal the vile aspects of humanity lurking in shadow, with assassination as their chosen method.

Their primary targets were the upper classes of human society, whose atrocious acts remained hidden from public knowledge.

However, due to their brutal methods, even the common people held them in poor regard.

In the end, like the entity they worshipped, they continued to exist, denied the very essence of being human.

Now, how do I know this story?

Because I was an assassin within the Mist.

Common knowledge claimed that the Mist was purged by the 'Purification Army', led by the Knights of Light, but this was nothing but a distortion of the truth.

They were not subjugated; they merely concealed their own presence.

Supposedly waiting for the day when the heir to the divine power would reemerge, but that's complete nonsense; it was primarily the whims of that foolish god.

Anyway, the main reason I'm heading to the academy is to make contact with Mist once again.

But how could they have started operating already without me?

Unless that cursed god played another whim, it makes no sense.

I cannot travel to the academy in peace without verifying it with my own eyes.

With a calm heart, I looked around.

Just as a bright sculpture casts a dark shadow, even a thriving city has its exceptions.

Roads stretched in all directions and buildings rose densely between them. At some luxurious buildings sporadically visible, armed guards in swords and armor stood watch.

At a glance, they seemed not like professional guards with knightly experience, but rather ordinary mercenaries.

It was an atmosphere devoid of warmth or compassion, to say the least.

[Have you come out for hunter only to be reduced to hunting humans?]

Ceyram materialized and pinched my cheek, speaking firmly.

"Just something I want to find with my own eyes."

[That 'Mist' or 'Meatball', that thing? Even Aer, pretending to be a god, must have wanted a group of followers at his beck and call, right?]

Surprisingly, Ceyram didn't know about the Mist.

Even though she's a demon sword that inherited the divine power related to the Mist, as you know, she's been in slumber for hundreds of years.

It was impossible for her to know an organization that had been the talk of humans just a few decades ago.

Besides, she didn't particularly fond of that foolish god who was akin to her father.

[Looking for a needle in a sand dune? How do you plan to find these maybe-there folks?]

"It's nothing. Just like throwing bait to catch fish."

I entered a deep alleyway with no guards in sight.

A void with not even an ant passing by.

The perfect atmosphere for a quiet killing.

Finally finding a suitable spot, I squatted down and slowly closed my eyes, drawing out the black mist energy that had been lurking within me.

-Swish.

The dense clusters of mist filled the chilly alley.

Any ordinary human lacking courage would turn tail and run at once.

The fundamental principle of an assassin is to leave no trace, but the followers of the Black Mist are different.

Wherever they have been, there's always a dirty black mist left behind as impossible to occur naturally.

It's like a marker proving they were once there.

Now, if you really are hidden in this city, you cannot ignore the scent I am now emitting.

So come forward and witness my presence!

I will prove whether you are the ones I'm looking for!

"....."

But as I said earlier, if the ones supposed to smell me aren't in this city, then this black mist is nothing more than smog.

After coiling in one spot for 30 minutes waiting, the only thing that came was the damp evening breeze.

Eventually, I began to feel self-critical for what I was doing.

[Is master playing at being a plaster statue again?]

Ceyram appeared to be amused by my seemingly foolish actions (?).

Indeed, if I haven't seen an ant for so long, they probably don't exist in this city.

I could have just gone to the headquarters and woken up that foolish god to ask directly, right?

I've been acting like a blind man in front of the most certain method.

I rose from my spot and dusted myself off.

-Slither slither

Just as I was ready to disperse the mist and head back to my lodging, I heard a strange noise from the far end of the alley.

It sounded like something being dragged with effort.

I immediately tuned my ears to the source of the noise.

-Clap, clap.

Mixed with the noise were the footsteps of a stranger.

The footsteps belonged to one person, but the presence I felt was not solitary.

Moreover...

[Do you smell blood?]

As if having caught a whiff of something exquisite, Ceyram savored the scent.

Mixed with the growing presence was the filthy scent of blood.

Pleased that my 30 minutes playing at being a statue wasn't in vain?

My lips, which had been straight, were now curving into a broad smile.

“.....?”

But the excitement of waiting for them to approach was short-lived, as the footsteps that had been drawing closer suddenly snapped to a halt.

-Dart dart!

They stopped, and then there was the sound of a sprint.

The problem was that it wasn't coming towards me, but instead moving away.

Meaning they were running away from me.

[Running away?]

“What is this madness?”

Without a moment's hesitation, I dashed from my spot.

I had baited and waited, only to have the prey sniff and flee?

It was clear that the figure wasn't scared of the unfamiliar mist, but was fleeing from my presence within it.

As I cut through the mist and turned the left corner, I finally spotted the back of the retreating figure.

-Thump!

Without hesitation, I grabbed the throat and slammed him to the ground.

“Choke!”

The overpowered figure coughed in agony.

I calmed my racing heart and quickly scanned his entire body.

Height, around 170 cm; weight, about 70 kg.

Though his face was hidden by a black mask, judging from the wrinkled skin on his nape and the sound of his voice, he was a middle-aged man.

In his outstretched right hand, a bloody wooden club.

Next to his wandering left hand, a huge sack fit for stuffing a person.

Judging by the red stains visible through the yellow fabric, it was clear the blood scent had come from there.

“Damn!”

The bloody club danced in the air.

The scoundrel tried to grab the club and swing it at me.

But since my hand clung tightly to his throat, the club fell far short of its mark.

I squeezed his throat even harder.

“Crack...!”

His vocal cords strained and in the pain of being strangled, he lost his senses.

Only when his body went cold and he was on the verge of fainting did I let go.

[Is this guy a follower of that buffoonsome god?]

Ceyram poked his head with her finger to see if he was still alive.

The black mask, blood-stained club, and though I hadn't checked yet, the sack that likely held a person—they all seemed to fit the criteria... but something was too clumsy.

“Sa...”

The man, gasping for breath, barely managed to make a sound.

“Spare me, please...!”

A desperate plea for life.

I found myself sighing without realizing it.

It was a sham.

A fake who'd clumsily mimicked the appearance of others.

For an assassin who shook the continent to beg for life so pitifully...

It was impossible for true members of Mist to tolerate such contemptible behavior.

This man was not from the Mist.

-Wriggle

Suddenly, the beige sack next to me stirred.

“Ughhh...”

Accompanied by an unsettling groan.

Considering the rough and husky voice, it didn't seem likely to contain a beautiful woman.

Curiosity piqued, I untied the sack to take a look.

Hmm...

Inside was a middle-aged man with no hair and a potbelly like a mountain.

Though I did not recognize the face, the quality of his clothing suggested he might be a wealthy noble.

It appeared he had been struck with something blunt, as there was a wound on his forehead with dark red blood flowing.

It seemed the intention wasn't to kill with a single blow, but merely to knock out and kidnap...

A miss.

I had come in search of Mist and instead got entangled in a mundane crime scene.

The more I get involved, the more it seems like it's only going to give me a headache...

"That man must not..."

The masked man reached weakly toward the sack with desperate eyes as if it contained bars of gold.

What a pathetic sight, almost enough to bring tears to my eyes.

I tied the sack up again and handed it back to him.

".....?"

Through the mask, his eyes blinked, clearly puzzled.

"I don't care what your game is, if you don't want to be torn apart, don't go around like this."

"...Yes?"

"If someone other than me had seen you, you'd already be dead."

Subsequently, the mists that had dominated the area dispersed.

Leaving the man lying there in bewilderment, I left the place at my leisure.

(To be continued)

Editor's musings:

We will change Dark Mist to Black Mist. It sounds better.

FOOTNOTE: