

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin

chapter 36-40

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin Chapter 36

Chapter 36: The Royal Academy (4)

After concluding her meeting with the dean, Silica exited the main building and headed toward her research lab located in the annex.

“Ah, right! How could I forget to check on this?”

It suddenly occurred to her that she might have left something behind, so she turned around and re-entered the main building, making her way to the research data room accessible only to staff members.

“It should be around here somewhere...”

As they say, when you’re looking for something, it becomes invisible. Today, for whatever reason, the location eluded her.

Fumbling through books to guess at its position, she soon stopped at a particular spot.

“...?”

A space uniquely vacant amidst the densely-packed bookshelves.

Instead of the something that should certainly have been there, only a cloud of dust fluttered through the air.

“Looking for this?”

An unexpected voice sounded from behind her.

Silica quickly turned her head.

“Uh, well... you’re Sian, the student, right?”

The owner of the voice was Sian Vert, whom she had seen engaged in a lengthy discussion with the dean just a while ago.

In his hand was a red hardcover book.

“This is a restricted area for students. How did you get in here? These materials are all critical research documents... You can’t just touch them recklessly...”

Sian simply smiled enigmatically in silence.

“Could you... give it back to me? It’s critical for the research work I have to do today...”

“Ah, yes, of course. I’ll return it to you, naturally.”

Sian extended the book to her without any hesitation.

“Thank you, student Sian...”

As she touched it, her eyes flared with surprise at the thin texture she felt.

What she was holding was not the thick, red hardcover but a thin piece of black paper.

“Wasn’t this what you were searching for, Professor Silica? Or should I say... Lady Silica?”

“...”

The silence that followed churned like a stormy sea at rest.

Soon, the warm look that had been in her eyes disappeared, replaced by a gaze filled with bloodthirstiness.

“What are you?”

* * *

Silica Nigrity.

An academic instructor at the Royal Academy.

With a bright personality and outstanding teaching skills, she was one of the educators widely recognized by students and instructors alike within the academy.

However, this was merely a disguise.

Should her true identity ever become known to the world, the Royal Academy might very well be shut down the next day.

Who could possibly predict?

At an academy where the titled nobility of the continent gather, that the leader of an assassin organization, hunting nobles, would be operating as an instructor...

Her formerly unassuming self had vanished without a trace.

Now, before me, stood not a teacher or a colleague, but an assassin.

“Claiming to have seen the secret letter, your evidence seems quite lacking. How much do you really know?”

The black paper hidden within the hardcover book was a type of clandestine message used by the organization to exchange information secretly.

The other members within the academy would gather the information they had collected from various territories and hide it here for her, the leader, to collect.

Of course, written in code, it would not be a problem should others see it.

But even if the contents of the letter were understood, I had just inadvertently revealed an undeniable truth with my own mouth—that I know of Silica ‘the instructor’ and Silica ‘the member’... as well as Silica ‘the leader’.

“I won’t meander with my words. Please judge based on what you see.”

Actions speak louder than words. To answer her question, I released the energy of the mist that I had sealed away.

“...!”

The black mist that seeped out from between the folds of my clothes began to spread, gradually filling the entire research room.

The change in Silica's expression was fleeting,
as her quick hands grabbed hold of my collar.

The spreading mist dissipated in an instant.

"That's enough. We can't have it spreading any further. The academy is home to many sensitive individuals."

Dutifully re-buttoning my clothes, she then offered a radiant smile.

"Shall we move to another location?"

* * *

In Silica's private research lab located in the annex of the academy.

Amongst various magical tools, swords, and tomes were numerous traces of research, but they were all mere facades.

The art of disguise was truly unparalleled.

Silica was cornered, brewing tea for me.

"You seem calmer than expected?"

"Only pretending. There's no point in showing how shocked I feel."

"You truly are different on the inside than you appear on the outside."

"Take it as a compliment."

With a smile, she passed me a cup of tea.

The deep, ruddy color seemed no different from ordinary black tea, but something about it seemed off.

"Why the poison?"

"Don't worry, it's not a lethal toxin. At most, it'll make your internal organs leak a bit."

Her unabashed boldness elicited an involuntary exclamation from me.

I knew she was capable, but this was truly a remarkable level of gall.

“Well then, since it seems unlikely you’ll drink the tea, shall we begin our discussion?”

With her arms resting on the desk, Silica faced me with a beaming smile.

“Need we even speak? Haven’t I already shown you who I am through my actions?”

“Ha-ha. I had my suspicions, but you’re quite audacious. You want to say, ‘I am also a Mist, right here in front of me,’ do you?”

“Do I need to prove it further?”

She suddenly let out a raucous laugh.

“That sort of black mist can be easily created with magic. Besides, we both participated in the attribute tests today, right? With a darkness attribute of 92%... you could turn a bright day into night.”

“Didn’t you see my magic grade? It’s only 1-star.”

“Don’t underestimate a teacher at the academy. Did you think I wouldn’t know that the specialty of the darkness attribute is concealment?”

Indeed, she’s not one to be easily taken in.

I took a sip of the tea she had offered without hesitation.

“...!”

“It seems the tea leaves were steeped a bit too long. Please make it lighter next time.”

To someone like me who has fed on the blood of demonic beasts, this level of poison is like slightly bitter water.

She maintained her poker face to the end.

“The empire has gotten quite noisy while I was on the front for a year. Wherever I went, the guards kept pestering me, asking if I needed escorts, it was quite a hassle.”

“Considering that, it looks like you haven’t hired any. I’ve heard you only had one accompanying knight, right?”

“To be precise, even he was merely a coachman.”

Though now a different story.

“Hmm, that’s a lot of confidence, isn’t it? There’s a coachman, but no knight... Does it mean that you needed no protection?”

“There was no reason to hold a shield when spears weren’t pointed at me.”

I replied with an easy smile.

At first glance, our exchange might have resembled a cordial conversation filled with laughter, but it was nothing more than a deceptive charade.

I could see it.

The savage smile that concealed the barbed-wire-like caution.

Now was the time to provoke her further.

“The Mist has really begun to operate again, haven’t they?”

“What operation~?”

Silica feigned ignorance.

“The purification work. There hasn’t been a successor yet, has there?”

Between the moments of zero and 0.2 seconds, her face registered two reactions.

Her brow pinched at the mention of purification work,

her eyes fluttered at the word successor.

These were moments imperceptible to the ordinary eye, but not to mine.

“....”

Had I struck a nerve a bit too hard?

The barbed wire of caution that had been intact now gave way, revealing the sharp lethal intent that had been hiding.

Moreover, an ominous aura of mana began to rise from her body.

“Do you intend to kill me here in the academy? You said there are many sensitive people around, did you not?”

“Do you feel the spears pointed at you now?”

“I see no reason to lift a shield, even so.”

If spears are aimed at me, it’s simple—I’ll just have to take up a spear in response.

Two auras of killing intent blossomed within the small cubic space of a mere ten pyeong.

It didn’t take long for these forces to clash head-on.

-Thump

The desk overturned, and her concealed black dagger flew towards me.

-Clang!

With a swift motion, I drew the Ceyram I’d carried inside my cloak and countered her attack.

Still bearing a deadly smile, Silica spoke.

“May I ask... what you meant by ‘purification work?’”

Strike first, ask later—is that it?

“The order seems a bit off, doesn’t it?”

Purification work.

Although it’s known as the continent’s preeminent assassination group, within Mist, they don’t refer to their activities as assassinations.

They consider it merely a purification process—polishing away the dirty and despicable aspects of human society to create something more affluent.

It certainly is not a deed that transcends the ethical boundaries of human behavior...

...or so they say, but really, it's just a euphemism.

Apart from religious zealots, who would call killing by such a grandiose term as 'purification work?' It seems even the members cringe at the expression, freely using the word assassination when they're among themselves.

I relayed everything I just explained to her.

Silica burst into laughter as if she'd gone mad, then eased her sword.

"You really are something else. You don't exist at all in my memory, yet I can feel His power and traces of our organization in you."

"It's fortunate that you've recognized me now."

I relaxed and lowered my sword, thinking the storm had passed.

"That means I have all the more reason to kill you..."

"...?"

I quickly raised my sword again.

Her newfound kinetic energy, filled with murderous intent, came at me once more.

-Clang! Clang! Clang!

These blows were more forceful than before.

"Is this proof still insufficient?"

"No, it's enough! You are indeed a child whose traces I can feel..."

Amidst a smile of deadly intent, black mist began to rise from between the folds of her clothes.

“But I don’t know you. A member of Mist I don’t know isn’t possible. Therefore, you’re an existence that shouldn’t be.”

Well, I seem to have been too complacent.

Our leader is more stubborn than I thought.

“Wouldn’t it be wiser to reconsider? If you make a mistake, you could end your life as an instructor.”

“Why don’t you worry about yourself? You’re in a situation where your life could end now.”

She wasn’t the type to settle for shaky negotiations.

To be honest, my body is tingling with anticipation.

After such a long time, I felt the tingling excitement of meeting a worthy opponent’s murderous intent.

Not the mediocre demonic beasts or frail humans, but the true killing intent of an assassin.

With such a perfect killing intent before me, how could my body not respond?

However, I am not a fool who would abandon future plans for immediate desires.

“Do we not yet have a second question to resolve?”

“Second question?”

Silica’s pupils wavered once again.

The second word to which she had previously reacted following ‘purification work.’

“Are you trying to scrape by with even a second more to live, or trying to save time?”

“If you’re worried, I’ll clarify: Right now, only the two of us know I’m here with you. Needless to say, there won’t be anyone coming to my rescue.”

“I’ll also clarify: No matter what you say here, you won’t leave alive. Even if you were the successor...!”

“I am the successor.”

“...?”

Silica’s lips froze in a straight line.

“Would you even kill the successor?”

As the leader of a group dedicated to Aer, she couldn’t possibly ignore that word, ‘successor.’

Whether my words were true or false, the mere mention of ‘successor’ meant she could not kill me in this place.

“Do you think I’ll believe that?”

“Why not verify it for yourself?”

I showed her the black jewel set in the hilt of my Ceyram.

The power of the magic sword, and the energy of Aer within the magic gem.

A leader of Mist couldn’t possibly fail to recognize it.

Upon seeing the gemstone, Silica’s face took on a grave expression.

I smiled and said,

“Take me to the hideout.”

(To be continued)

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****Chapter 37: Followers of the Black Mist (1)****

“How do you find academy life?”

Despite the instructor’s lively question, the boy did not respond.

“I didn’t think it was such a difficult question, but you can’t seem to answer it. If you like it, say you like it; if not, say you dislike it. Just be honest.”

“It’s just so-so....”

The boy answered disinterestedly.

“Judging by your expression, it seems you want to finish this boring consultation quickly. I’m sorry, but I have no choice. The quarterly personal consultations with students are essential for an academy instructor, so it has to be done.”

I know that.

Even if she were the well-reputed instructor Silica, he knew that she wouldn’t sincerely care for someone reputed to be the incompetent of his family.

At that time, the boy was filled with very negative thoughts.

“To see such listlessness from the youngest of the House of Duke Vert, the guardian of the continent, it doesn’t look good. Kranz, your brother, seems to have adapted quite well. Why didn’t you ask him for help?”

Cruel.

She nonchalantly utters such cruel words, not ignorant of how that devil called a brother would treat him.

Overwhelmed with emotion, the boy clenched his fists tightly.

“I’m sorry. It was not my intention to enrage you, but it seems that I have inadvertently offended you.”

It felt more like mockery than an apology.

“I think that should be enough for now. There is no need for you to spend more of your precious time on me. I will take my leave.”

“What are you talking about? The conversation is just beginning.”

She stopped the boy as he tried to rise from his seat.

“To be honest, I’m very interested in you, Sian.”

“Are you referring to me?”

“Of course! How could I, as an instructor, not take an interest in a student with a record-breaking dark attribute of 84%?”

Up until then, the boy had thought that the instructor was merely mocking him.

“Isn’t it just a worthless attribute without any substance?”

“You say some dangerous things! Nothing in this world is worthless. Even a pebble lying on the roadside has its own value.”

“...Pardon?”

The boy didn’t understand.

“Do you think your attribute is worthless? That’s possible. After all, there’s not much research available on the dark attribute yet. But do you know what that means? It means that there’s infinite potential yet to be discovered....”

These words might seem hollow at a glance, but to the still naïve eleven-year-old boy, he was quickly captivated by her rhetoric.

He had nobody around to say such things to him.

Additionally, he felt something different about Instructor Silica than usual.

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Because it’s natural for an instructor to wish for a student’s growth.”

To hope for growth.

The boy had been written off by his family after a sword-fighting duel with his brothers.

And now to hear once more the hope for growth, the boy found himself engulfed in complex emotions.

“I’ll be looking forward to your limitless growth, Sian~!”

Instructor Silica encouraged the boy with a cheerful smile. But until then, the boy didn’t know that the infinite growth she spoke of was not as an innocent student, but the development of a ruthless assassin...

* * *

The streets of Rowen at dusk were not different from any other city.

Walking and recalling the connection with her from his past life, he soon neared his destination.

Occasionally there were lights on, but the street was deserted.

There may be scholars researching magic where lights were on, merchants preparing for tomorrow’s market, or places lit up for no particular reason.

However, the place he and she reached was steeped in a creepy atmosphere, even without lights.

A chilling dampness soaked through his body.

-Creak

Silica formed a small mana sphere in her hand and placed it on the doorknob.

The blue mana sphere turned black upon touching the doorknob and soon a metallic ‘clunk’ sound was heard.

-Creak

“Go inside.”

She opened the door for me and directed me to enter first.

-Whoosh

The moment I stepped inside, a sinister killing intent surged from the front.

I walked deeper without concern, and Silica remained silent, merely following me quietly.

Perhaps to prevent me from escaping, she was blocking the way out.

No knockout, no blindfolds to obstruct my vision.

She had simply brought me here without any restrictions.

Confident I could find my way back here later on my own.

Not because she trusted me.

Whatever her intentions, it was clear that she was here to end my existence in this place.

And it was also clear, as I walked forward and the killing intent around me grew thicker, that it wasn't out of any good will.

-Swish!

Out of the pitch-black darkness, a sharp blade flew at me.

Dodging it with ease, more blades followed in quick succession from all directions.

I spun my body, creating a spiral of sword energy.

-Clang!

The created energy deflected all the blades, and they clattered helplessly to the floor.

Greenish, viscous liquid oozed from the blades.

"You're not saying anything."

She spoke to me.

Remaining silent even after disarming the trap meant that I knew it was there from the start.

"Is the ambush intended for the invaders too light?"

At the word 'light,' she gave a sardonic smile.

Then, I felt multiple killing intents rushing towards me at a terrifying speed.

Six assassins in total.

I didn't wait; I lunged forward to meet them.

The six assassins, each armed with a pair of poison-coated daggers in their hands...

-Slash

The leading assassin swung his sword at me.

I ducked lightly to dodge and then swung my sword at the two assassins following behind.

-Clang!

Unable to withstand the blows, the assassins dropped their daggers, and I struck their abdomens with my fists, knocking them unconscious.

"...!"

The remaining three assassins hesitated in surprise.

A moment's hesitation was like suicide for an assassin.

I mercilessly attacked them, not with the blade, but with the hilt of my sword.

-Thud

They fell lifelessly, and just as I turned my back, the lead assassin who had missed earlier charged at me again.

-Clang!

His bravely crossed blades were effortlessly stopped by the tip of Ceyram's sword.

-Thump!

My clenched fist struck his abdomen, and the six assassins collapsed, unable to have mounted a proper attack.

“ ... ”

Silica watched the whole scene but didn't say anything.

I, too, continued on the path without asking any questions.

After about five minutes...

The narrow corridor suddenly opened into a spacious plaza.

Without hesitation, I moved forward and upon reaching the center of the plaza...

-Pop! Pop! Pop!

From four directions – east, west, south, north – assassins with a more intense killing intent than before rushed towards me.

The difference this time: they were not armed with daggers, but scimitars with curved blades like crescent moons.

They moved at the exact same speed and assumed different postures as if to execute a predetermined formation.

The Formation of the Dead Angle.

One of Mist's secret techniques creating an inescapable angle of death to divide the opponent's body into four.

It was a skill that required selecting members from Mist with fast reflexes and innate talent, honed through intensive training, only executable by senior assassins.

This meant that the members seen before were of a completely different level.

Silica stayed back, observing how I would deal with the situation.

Despite the escalating threat, I remained calm and waited until they got close.

-Slash

Right when the curved blades aimed to slice my abdomen, a powerful red pulse surged from under my feet.

“...!”

-Bang!

The wave engulfed all four assassins simultaneously, disrupting the formation of the dead angle before it could be completed.

“Ugh!”

Thrown by the pulse, some of the assassins dropped their swords.

They hastily regained their composure and repositioned themselves, but the wrists holding the swords trembled, a different appearance from earlier.

-Swoosh

With that, Silica, observing silently, gestured to stop.

The assassins obeyed the order and cleared the way without a word.

She asked me, “Did you use the Pulse of Killing Intent?”

The Pulse of Killing Intent.

An assassin’s unique skill manifesting the murderous intent to kill, projecting it outwards.

Approaching with half-hearted killing intent, they would be repelled without even touching and would lose their will to fight, a technique to subdue the enemy without swinging a sword.

This technique, unlike others named ‘Shadowless’ from Mist, was directly imparted to me by the head in my previous life.

“It was not defined as a technique, but it’s a good name. I’ll refer to it as such from now on.”

I replied with a nonchalant smile.

“...”

For a brief moment, I could sense her lips curving into a smile.

Five more minutes down the corridor, amidst swirling wind, I could sense a killing intent far different from the ones faced before.

Soon, at the end of the corridor, two assassins appeared.

They were not armed with daggers or scimitars.

Their hands held claw-shaped gloves resembling sharp animal claws, "Claws."

Some high-class knights say that swords are not for overpowering the enemy but for protecting oneself and others from danger.

But not those weapons.

They exist solely for harming and killing.

Designed to bring maximal pain to the target, not just to silently kill with minimal effort.

Moreover, they were weapons only usable by the leaders of Mist, not ordinary or even senior members.

These two were not mere members; they were experts with vast assassination experience, just beneath the leader in ranking skills.

-Whoosh

Without delay, the two locked eyes with me and charged with great speed.

The claws gleamed with light and mist, as if ready to use mana and secret techniques.

As a response, I gripped my sword tighter, awakening the dormant power of the mist.

-Ssssss

Like a dragon exhaling breath, mist poured from my mouth and soon enveloped my whole body.

A skill that a year ago relied on the power of Ceyram, but now, having consumed the blood of beastkin and undergone rigorous training, I could freely use the Mist Sword technique without the power of the magic sword.

I murmured to the assassins racing towards me like arrows, “Mist Sword: The Firm Beam of...!”

-Clang!

Just as I was about to finish the chant, my hurriedly raised sword met not a claw, but a dark mist-wrapped blood dagger.

It was the leader’s dagger.

“I can’t take it anymore!”

She exclaimed with a rising frenzy, unlike the impassive demeanor previously shown.

“Show me your real power! Sian Vert!”

Her eyes shone with ecstasy, not killing intent, as if genuinely delighted.

(Continue in the next episode)

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The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin Chapter 38

Chapter 38: Followers of the Black Mist (2)

Desire.

A social construct that, for humans, can never be completely satisfied no matter how much they try.

Yet, desire can become the greatest or the worst power a person can have, depending on the circumstances.

What do you think is the most dangerous among the driving forces of human nature, which are like a double-edged sword?

The greed for material wealth?

The lust for sexual acts?

Honestly, it's tough to determine which one prevails, but personally, I'd like to add another to this list.

The desire for combat, known as combativeness.

This somewhat unfamiliar desire for combat may have you question how many such people there could be.

But ironically, in my past life, I was almost killed by one such person consumed by this combativeness.

The longing for the strong and the joy of battle.

Despite sounding manly and thrilling at first glance, those who have experienced it wouldn't dare say the same.

"Weren't you going to test me step by step? I haven't even faced those assassins yet."

"It doesn't matter! You already have the potential to surpass those officers!"

I was slightly bewildered and gently asked, but she was already too engrossed in her combativeness to be stopped.

Silica Nigrity, the head of the Mist.

By day, a respected academic instructor at the academy, and by night, an outstanding leader commanding assassins.

She was indeed a talent acknowledged by everyone.

People wonder whenever they come across such talents.

What drives that person?

What qualities enable them to display such exceptional skills?

It's simple.

She possessed the desire known as combativeness.

The burning fighting spirit each time she encountered the strong, the desire to become strong themselves to face such opponents. Driven by this wheel-like force, she amassed power and skill, eventually reigning supreme as the greatest assassin commanding other ruthless killers.

But as I mentioned before, desire is a double-edged sword.

It can become the highest power, but conversely, it can also become the worst power.

Especially for others, rather than oneself...

"It's amazing! Even for an heir, I didn't expect you to show such capabilities! Sian Vert! Did you approach me because you wanted this after all?"

Let's get this straight, Madam Head.

I acknowledge that you were the greatest mentor in my past life, but I had no intention of learning your deranged side.

I released the power of mana inherited through the sword along with the mist, pushing her back.

-Whoosh-

The untied hair that fluttered with the vibration highlighted her manic appearance.

And without stopping there, she licked her lips as she looked at me.

"Do you acknowledge that I am the heir?"

"I had my doubts when I saw the cursed sword, but when you used the wave of killing intent, I became certain! To confirm further, I would need to check if you have a Mist Stone in you, but there's no need! I need to fight you right now! Sian Vert!"

Before long, other members of the Mist had gathered around, encircling me and Silica.

Judging by the panic they couldn't hide, it was clear that they, too, were caught off guard by the current situation.

"This place is a sacred subspace created by Lord Aer! Any repercussions that leak out will be automatically blocked! It means no matter how much we fight and make a mess here, it won't cause any trouble outside!"

The head of the Mist was ever so considerate.

Just as she said, this place was Mist's secret hideout located right in the heart of Rowen, but not actually in the city itself.

A sacred subspace.

An ethereal space created by divine power, nonexistent on the land above.

A perfect hideout undetectable even by magic.

That's why she was able to be so unrestrained.

But to be honest, I was also feeling a bit of regret.

Having shed and tasted blood in countless battles through both my past and present lives, I don't carry foolish notions like 'the best way to win a fight is to avoid it.'

After leaving the front lines, I too must sate the itching desire of my body, mustn't I?

Since this is Aer's space anyway.

Whatever happens here, the cleanup can be dealt with cleanly.

That's what I thought, and the combativeness that had been lying dormant within me naturally began to rise.

-Ssss-

"...?"

Along with the surging combativeness, another energy blossomed within me.

"Ceyram?"

The tall woman with long flowing black hair.

Ceyram, who had not shown herself since I entered the academy, finally revealed herself after a long absence.

[I knew this would happen.]

With her usual haughty and sharp glare, she looked down upon me.

But something felt different.

Her feet planted on the ground and the shadow cast by the torchlight.

It was an entirely different ambiance from the typical manifestations she had shown so far.

She was no longer existing in a spiritual state.

“Is this...?”

Silica and everyone else’s gazes shifted toward her.

A perfect human form without the enveloping mist or flickering afterimages, yet still exuding the brutal killing intent of a cursed sword.

[.....]

Ceyram surveyed them all in silence without a word.

A divine weapon imbued with the power of a god.

An exalted being far beyond the reach of ordinary humans.

Furthermore, she was a sword endowed with the power of the god Aer, whom the Mist worshipped.

To them, she was an idol synonymous with Aer.

-Click-

All the assassins knelt before her, the divine weapon, in reverence.

Despite receiving worship from her followers, she seemed somewhat reluctant.

“I thought you were dead since it’s been so quiet?”

[I didn’t really like appearing because the air here is rather stuffy.]

Thinking back, this was the first time I had brought her with me to the academy.

The frontline, where the vile and evil spirits of demons ran rampant, might have been an ideal place for her to thrive.

But not this place, intertwined with countless magical energies.

It was not at all absurd for her not to want to reveal herself voluntarily.

“...!”

Suddenly, a bout of faintness washed over me.

As mentioned before, Ceyram was not just in a spiritual state but had fully materialized as a person.

For the spirit of a sword to have a body requires the absolute power of its owner, which meant that she was currently sustained entirely by my life force.

Since prolonged manifestation could affect the owner’s lifespan, she, in her past life, also rarely used this method.

Her decision to reveal herself to not just me but all the assassins here meant...

That she didn’t really want me to fight Silica.

“Mist’s Head, Silica Nigrity. It’s an honor to meet you, Blade of the Divine Heir!”

Even though she had lost her composure just a moment ago, she calmly greeted Ceyram.

[You seem to know who I am?]

“I have heard from Lord Aer. They mentioned that somewhere in this continent, a divine weapon bearing their power exists... I had no idea the heir had already possessed you.”

Ceyram was giving Silica a disdainful look.

[Normally, I'd never appear so casually. Yet, I've shown myself, which means I'm really not fond of the current circumstance.]

“What do you find displeasing?”

[You saw me in the room earlier, didn't you?]

“...!”

A flash of killing intent flashed in Ceyram's eyes.

[You're the head, so there's no way you wouldn't recognize me, and this guy clearly stated he's the heir. Then you brought him here...]

“I did....”

[So, what's going on here? It's not just anyone else, but you guys who worship Aer, instigating against me, my own master, before my presence...?]

A swirl of red energy surged from beneath her feet.

[Is that a challenge against me?]

The whirlwind of killing intent stirred up a violent wind around her.

Silica faced Ceyram with a resolute look in her eyes.

“If it's a challenge, I cannot refuse! And if it's against you, I won't have any second thoughts!”

Ceyram's body emitted an equal surge of combativeness as Silica's desire for combat boiled over once again.

In the divine subspace, the harsh killing intent of the two women swirled, leaving us bystanders merely to watch with blank stares.

(That's enough...)

A majestic voice echoed throughout the subspace.

All eyes turned to one point.

[.....!]

“Lord Aer!?”

The raging killing intent of the two women instantly extinguished upon hearing the voice.

(Send the heir to the altar immediately.)

At the end of the pathway that opened up was a space shimmering with dark radiance, calling to me again, my absolute master who can never be forgotten or erased.

(To be continued)

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The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin Chapter 39

Chapter 39: Followers of the Black Mist (3)

People say,

“The God of the Black Mist seeks to deny the intrinsic dignity and values inherent to mankind.”

“He incites humans to commit heinous acts they would not normally conceive, justifying them as right deeds for the sake of the world.”

But the god I know once said,

“It’s because they wished for it.”

“I merely bestowed power to fulfill the desperate wishes of those who couldn’t rise.”

“Ultimately, it’s not others but oneself who judges what’s right and wrong.”

To the unacquainted, it might seem like a god’s irresponsible abstinence from interference.

However, I’d like to make it clear.

This god isn’t irresponsible but deficient.

A foolish god who has forsaken the dignity of divinity; focusing solely on fiercely defending those who believe and follow him...

At the far reaches of a subspace where the presence of a transcendent being is felt, there was an altar similar to where Ceyram had once slept.

Enveloped in black mist with a faint human silhouette within, the figure sat calmly on the altar as if it had been waiting for my arrival.

(Do you know who I am?)

Without delay, he posed the question.

“Aer, the god of the black mist.”

It was clear; he was the master of this space.

(I didn’t particularly expect it, but you don’t seem at all surprised.)

Although it had been a long time, the omnipresent mist that lingered around me felt familiar, not strange at all.

He continued to ask.

(What is your name?)

“Sian Vert.”

(Since when did you know you were my successor?)

“Since a year ago.”

It wasn’t a lie.

Considering current history, it must've been around that time when I obtained the Mist Stone after ending my previous life and returning to the past.

Aer maintained silence for a moment before speaking again.

(There are two ways to become a successor. First is when I myself appoint a successor and grant them a Mist Stone engraved with my mark...)

That was me in a previous life.

(The second is when someone worthy of succession emerges, and the Mist Stone finds its way to them. You have the Mist Stone now, but I don't recall giving it to you. So, it must be the latter.)

This meant the Mist Stone had come to me at the same time as my return to this world.

In other words, a swap had taken place.

The Mist Stone from my past life had vanished, and a new one from this world had entered me.

And with the disappearance of the Mist Stone, the organization must have realized that a successor had appeared and begun the cleansing.

(Furthermore, you've even managed to awaken and control a cursed sword that even I did not know of... Your way is quite unprecedented for me. Ceyram...)

[...]

Despite the mention of his name, Ceyram made no response, only glaring intensely while biting his lips.

(I see in your eyes recognition of me, a Mist Stone I never gave, and secret techniques never taught by those children... From the outside and within, it seems there's nothing left I can do. You're the finished product itself.)

While Aer seemed puzzled yet content, I could tell the look he had seen in me was quite familiar.

(It seems you come from a different timeline that's not in my memory...)

A successor who appeared suddenly and fully formed without any warning signs.

Perhaps, my current existence is defying all the natural order that Aer and the Mist were supposed to fulfill.

Considering I had skipped all the intermediate steps they were meant to lead and nurture their successor through.

That's why I thought the source of this absurd situation might lie with this banished god.

"I had thought this was somehow related to you."

But Aer scoffed as if that weren't the case.

(What power do I have to do such things? It's been a long while since I was stripped of the title 'god.' If you expected an all-powerful being, it seems you've come to the wrong world.)

That didn't seem to be right.

At least, the Aer I knew was very much present here, examining me with a curious gaze.

(Hmm... Involuntarily, it feels like things have become quite convenient, haven't they?)

"...For what reason?"

(Without needing to teach or give anything, a complete successor has appeared before me, reducing the necessity of guidance. From my perspective, it's as if the role of benefactor has been tossed aside, isn't it?)

"How very like you to say..."

In my past life, I'd have wondered how a god could say such a thing.

But now I know those words were spoken in complete sincerity.

On the other hand, Ceyram's expression looked as if he was genuinely disgusted.

(Just bear in mind one thing. By your existence, the causalities of the world have already twisted greatly. It's solely your burden to bear.)

“ ... ”

(So at times, look around you. Those whose lives you've touched may return to offer their hands again.)

The people whose lives I've touched...

To be honest, all I recall are bloodstained memories, but advice is advice, and should be heeded nonetheless.

“I'll keep it in mind.”

Aer showed a more satisfied smile than ever.

(Now, I guess it's time for me to finish an overdue conversation with my daughter.)

[...?]

Suddenly, his gaze turned from me to Ceyram.

(You've changed a lot since we last saw each other, Ceyram. I don't know how much your master has dominated you, but your compliant look suits you well.)

[What are you talking about, you foolish god? Who decided I'm your daughter?]

Ceyram protested fiercely, trying to hide behind me to prevent him from getting closer.

Ceyram, barely half my size, was trying to... block him with what?

[Won't you go away? This libertine seeks to mischief me again...!]

(I have nothing to give your master, so why not give something to you? Stay put for a moment.)

In the end, Aer grasped her wrist and inscribed a magic circle on the back of her hand.

-Ping!

Through the completed magic circle, a large amount of mist poured in, and Ceyram clutched her head as if in pain.

“...?”

My strength, instead of fading, was improving.

Even though maintaining Ceyram’s full corporeal form had been constantly draining my energy, it felt as if the supply had been cut off.

[What, what did you do to me?]

(Nothing much. I’ve merely shared a part of my life force with you. It’s unclear how often you’ll need to fully materialize in the future, but it wouldn’t be right to always leech off your master’s life force, would it?)

That was it.

Instead of relying on the life force of the owner, we’d be using the life force of the creator for actualization?

It wasn’t just life force he had transferred.

The vast amounts of energy felt through the mist most likely meant he’d passed on a substantial portion of his godly energy (神氣) to her.

[You did something unnecessary...]

(Why think it unnecessary? Isn’t actualization important? Now your master can legally embrace you. Ah! Since your physical development isn’t complete yet, would that be considered a crime...?)

[What?! You imbecile!]

Ceyram exploded in fury, grabbing Aer’s collar and shaking him violently.

Like father, like daughter, both seemed quite similar.

Weakened, Aer was unable to respond and was simply shaken back and forth.

(To be continued)

FOOTNOTE:

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Chapter 40. The Continent's Greatest Swordmaster (1)

After the meeting with Aer ended, the next day dawned.

It was the moment when the full-scale opening of the academy was just a day away.

For the students, it was time to prepare various items needed for classes and academy life.

Of course, that's for the real freshmen who had a lot to learn, I, for one, hadn't even bought the textbooks yet.

Still, feeling the need to get ready, I was about to head out to the streets when...

"What in the world is going on here, young master?"

Brian, unable to comprehend the situation in front of him, asked me.

"I'm sorry, but I don't have anything else to say. Just let it slide for now..."

This situation was never something I intended from the start.

[Can you believe it~! A instructor visiting a student's dormitory this early in the morning? What would people think if they saw this? Isn't it just absurd?]

Ceyram, lying on the sofa in a seductive pose, blinked and said.

"Of course! It's a perfectly normal situation for an academic instructor to deliver textbooks for the proper conduct of classes!"

Silica retorted without batting an eyelid.

But really, when does an instructor personally deliver textbooks to a student?

More so when you're not an assistant but an academic instructor...

[Wouldn't you say it's careless of the Mist head to be so incautious? It's neither a forbidden relationship between student and teacher, nor is it okay to keep coming and going like this. Haven't you thought that it might lead our lord to be suspected~?]

"Ceyram, you're the one being careless. Even if Aer has given you life energy and made complete manifestation free for you, this place is an academy. It's filled with experts sensitive to mana and spiritual energy. What if your existence is discovered? Wouldn't that put our student Sian in a difficult position?"

The sharp exchange between the two women left no room for me to interject.

For now, I decided to just watch.

[Oh my~! What's there to worry about? Our lord is not a coward, and we could just sweep everything away with us~?]

"That's why I'm telling you it's not possible! If we were to sweep everything from the start, why would we have come here? Are you planning to turn the lord's plans into nothing?"

A chilly laugh echoed through the spacious room.

Brian, unable to bear it any longer, wrapped his arms around himself as if chilled.

Not able to stand it any longer, I finally spoke.

"Excuse me, Mist head. No matter the reason, this doesn't seem right. An academic instructor coming to the student's dormitory is..."

I flinched involuntarily under her gaze that suddenly caught mine.

"Sian, you should be careful with your words. Mist head, you say? If someone heard that, it'd be troublesome..."

Why is she suddenly using formal language?

As she walked up to me, she lowered her body and said,

“In the academy, we are simply a student and an instructor. Please be more careful with how you address me from now on?”

Is this about separating public and private matters?

While I understand the head’s interest in the successor, this is a bit too much...

“That’s not to say we should be strictly formal! We have to be together for a long while, don’t we? There’s much to learn and grow continuously! We have to...”

The brief moment of her tenderly ruffling my hair was interrupted as her eyes suddenly gleamed.

“Won’t you lead our organization splendidly, successor Sian Vert?”

The obsession directed at me was burning in her eyes.

Is it just me, or has she become even more obsessed than in my previous life?

Just when I thought she might have a split personality, a dark mana sphere flew between us and her.

Ceyram was the perpetrator.

[Where do you think you’re touching?]

Displeasure and cold anger lingered in her eyes.

Sigh, somehow, this is more tiring than battling demons.

It seems I’ll only be uncomfortable if I stay here.

Leaving the two women, who were like lionesses marking their territories, behind, I quietly slipped away.

“Shall we go out for a drink, young master?” Brian was the one asking if I was now heading out for a drink on my own.

“Yes, if they ask where I went, just say you don’t know. They’ll be too busy snarling at each other to care anyway.”

In reality, they were like a volcano on the verge of eruption, consumed in their own disputes.

I left the room and exited the Royal Hall entirely.

The streets of Rowen bathed in the morning sun.

It was undeniably more vibrant and brimming with positive energy than the other dim cities I had visited, probably because it was a border town close to three different countries. This location made frequent exchanges inevitable, naturally turning it into a bustling trade and market town.

Originally, I had stepped out with the intention of maybe looking over some textbooks and making some preparations, but with the head of the household excusing himself and handing everything off, the purpose of my outing had evaporated.

“.....”

Peaceful.

Had I ever encountered such tranquility in my life?

To be honest, ‘peaceful’ was not a word that suited me very well. Not that I was being pessimistic, it’s just the truth.

After all, I was someone who had been steeped in blood and engaged in all sorts of dirty dealings.

Walking under this clear, blue sky, on this affectionate and lively street...

Well, it wasn’t too bad.

It seems that I still retained at least a shred of humanity.

On a whim, I decided to venture into the one place that felt even more out of place for me—the famed natural park of Rowen.

Under the warm sun, unnamed flowers bloomed in abundance.

This was a place even my reclusive former self had visited only a handful of times.

I sat on a bench that seemed reasonable and took in my surroundings.

This place indeed deserved to be called a landmark of Rowen.

It was as gorgeous as a divine garden, with its fountains and statues adding a slight touristy flair here and there.

Hmm...

Looking at this peaceful scene, my mind unhelpfully visualized the white flowers stained with blood and verdant trees blazing in fire.

It appears I really am sick.

With a sigh to shake off such morbid thoughts, I turned my head when—

“.....!”

Not that it's anything to brag about, but I have a keen sense of smell.

Not the scent of food or anything mundane, but rather, I can pick up the malicious odor that seeps from human emotions.

Precisely eleven o'clock from my bench, under a deeply shaded tree, I spotted four boys around my age (well, eleven years old, strictly speaking).

From a distance, they might seem just like mischievous kids up to no good, but Rowen was not as harmonious as it appeared.

Three boys.

Three young lads who barely knew the world were harassing another boy leaning against the tree.

Judging by their appearance, they were all students from the same academy as me.

Usually, bullying is something cruel that children might partake in at that age.

However, this is Royal Academy, and in a world where nobles' paths could cross at any time.

Interactions were meant to strengthen bonds, not fracture them through petty acts of exclusion.

Thus, the situation could be explained in two ways:

Either the boy being bullied was not an academy student, or he was not a noble.

My guess was the latter.

He was likely a noble in name only.

At Royal Academy, there were instances where teachers would bring in talented commoner children, giving them a chance at education through special admissions.

But due to academy rules, children of commoner status couldn't enroll, leading teachers to elevate their status temporarily.

So-called honorary nobles.

While they were nobles in name, they were empty inside, lacking any true substance. To our pure nobles, whose pride and dignity pierce the heavens, the very idea of attending the academy alongside these nominal nobles, essentially commoners, is likely a source of considerable displeasure. From what I recall, about five of my fellow incoming students were honorary nobles.

Help them? Well, honestly, situations like this aren't rare or extraordinary but a part of everyday life, so it wouldn't be peculiar no matter when you come across it. Does that mean there are many who lend a hand? Far from it. If there were many willing to help our frail commoner friend, such bullying would never happen in the first place. Look around. There are dozens of us here in the park, and everyone just walks by, aware that getting involved would bring them no good, especially if the bullies come from well-known families. After all, it's said that half-hearted help is worse than no help at all. Even if I intervened to resolve the situation, it would be a temporary solution. Eventually, the commoner friend would likely face even more relentless bullying. It's not as if there's a lack of onlookers, so let's just leave them to it....

– Snap

A crisp, refreshing sound snaps me back to reality. The blond bruiser who was grabbing the collar of the smaller child had just been slapped across the face. Given my acute hearing, the fact that the sound reached me indicates the force behind it.

– Thwack Thwack Thwack

The heavy sound of blows landing one after the other follows. Whether on the face, stomach, or legs, the bully is enthusiastically doling out punches. This looks more intense than a sparring session among fighters. Still, the one receiving the blows seems to have a decent resilience, managing not to fall and stubbornly holding their ground.

“...?”

Just when I thought it would end with just a beating, the situation seemed to escalate. The blond bruiser held a red mana orb in his hand, aiming to shove it into the commoner friend’s mouth. At eleven years old, a body is just beginning to adapt to the surges of mana, a crucial period for harmonizing with it. Forcing a mismatched mana into someone could cause a clash, potentially collapsing the flow of mana altogether. Then forget about casting spells; even injecting mana into objects would become an impossibility. It was almost the equivalent of exacting revenge on a mortal enemy.

They twisted the commoner friend’s arm, tilting his face upwards, rendering him unable to resist. They weren’t just scaring him; they intended to go through with it. The blond bully’s vile smirk seemed hellish. Just as he was about to insert the mana orb into the commoner’s mouth,

“What do you think you’re doing!?”

“...!?”

A vibrant cry of justice turned their heads like owls. Just to clarify, I hadn’t moved an inch. It seems the world isn’t entirely devoid of hope after all, with a valourous champion stepping forward to rescue the commoner friend in the face of injustice. However, this champion of justice seems vaguely familiar...

“How can you, as fellow students, commit such barbaric acts? Aren’t you ashamed to call yourselves nobles?”

The silver hair that had grown considerably in the past year suited the academy's uniform quite well.

“ ... ”

The young nobles sensed the arrival of a significant figure and stepped back from her. Arin Sevellus. The fifth princess of the Ushif Empire. Her gaze, meeting mine after a year, carried a sharpness that wasn't there before.

(To be continued)