

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 61

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Chapter 61: Elise Berth (1)

In the faint dawn breaking across the early morning sky, a woman's dark blue hair fluttered gracefully in the mingling dim light.

"Are you leaving?"

The familiar voice that suddenly came from behind made the woman turn her head. A fist-sized spirit shimmered with a transparent light.

"You didn't come to see me off, did you?"

"Don't misunderstand. I simply happened to find you while I was out enjoying the morning air."

The woman chuckled softly, covering her mouth, as if she knew the spirit didn't mean it.

"It's a pity, but I just left a letter and quietly left. I couldn't impose any more trouble on you all."

"Trouble... I don't think the children would see it that way. It's strange to see you shy away from something you've never shown before."

"Is that so?"

Trying not to show the emotions inside, she still managed a smile.

"Either way, I've had my struggles as a stranger taken care of for the past two years. I'll cherish the memories here as precious moments I'll never forget."

"I wonder if there were truly such good memories. It's fortunate if you have any memories worth taking with you."

A hint of bitterness colored the spirit's words.

“Are you heading back home?”

“Somewhat, but I have a place to visit before I go. I need to meet someone who guided me to this point in time.”

“I see. Take care on your journey back.”

“Yes! Marian, may you live long and healthy!”

The spirit couldn't help but laugh dryly at the wish for it to live long. After all, wishing longevity for a being with a lifespan far exceeding a human's was quite peculiar.

As the woman took her leave, her figure soon disappeared beyond the horizon where the sun was rising. The spirit remained alone, intently looking at the spot where she had vanished.

“It's truly regrettable. She has innate talent, but it's a shame that it couldn't fully blossom before her premature demise...”

The spirit seemed reluctant to leave, their steps heavy with lingering feelings.

“Perhaps it's better to die early than to suffer a life of being tossed about. Live well with the little time you have left, Elise Berth...”

Although all it could offer was pointless sympathy, the spirit turned away to return to the dark forest.

Where the spirit had been, only a faint mystical energy lingered.

* * *

“Please confirm your identity.”

At the city gates where a long queue had formed, a woman presented her badge upon request.

“...?”

It was a golden emblem, with three different swords crossed. It symbolized one of the most influential families in the Ussif Empire, the Duchy of Berth. Owning it was proof that one was part of the Berth ducal family.

The guard's eyes widened as he looked at the woman who handed him the emblem.

"Eh..."

Her deep ocean-blue hair gleamed.

Her pure silver eyes showed no hint of malice.

Her attractive physique could stir the innate desires of any human being.

To bear these features and possess this emblem meant she could only be one person in the whole world.

"Are you, Lady Elise Berth?"

Renowned as the child of the gods, Elise Berth was the second child of the Berth family and a graduate of the Royal Academy.

"I've graduated, but I still have the right to enter, right?"

No person, young or old, could deny her entry upon witnessing her beaming smile.

With no issues to address, she concluded the simple procedures and entered the city.

It had been a full three years since her last visit.

With each step she took, all eyes turned her way.

Her goddess-like appearance made it impossible for hearts not to race, and the sheer force of her magical aura caused many to sweat in her presence.

But Elise, with her face calm and tranquil, simply followed the golden path toward the Academy.

The first place she headed following the footsteps of memory was the main building of the Academy, straight to the headmaster's office on the top floor.

"..."

The headmaster, who was busy with his work, gave her a steady stare.

“It’s exactly been three years.”

Welcoming her as if she had been an expected guest, Headmaster Kundel rose to greet her.

“I was worried I might have been expelled, but I’m relieved.”

The girl who had been hailed as a child of the gods at 16 had grown into a stunning woman after three years, so much so that one might not be exaggerating to call her a goddess.

Elise smiled casually as she took a seat.

“So, how do you feel after three years of traveling the continent?”

“To tell you frankly, there wasn’t much continent traveling involved. I was in ‘Freuina’ for two whole years.”

“The realm of the White Elves?”

The headmaster raised his eyebrows in surprise.

“That’s a place not particularly welcoming to humans.”

“I thought it would be a good place to reflect on the meaning of harmony you spoke about. How much could I shine as a being within a group filled with distrust and rejection? It certainly was not easy. It took a full year before I was truly accepted by them.”

Freuina, the northern territory of the continent with its snow-white lands, was home to the White Elves. They had lived secluded from outsiders for hundreds of years, and were known to outright reject human presence. The fact that Elise had lived there for two years, blending in as if a native, made the headmaster inwardly think that only she could have accomplished such a feat.

“Three years ago, right before I graduated, you gave me much advice. Do you remember it?”

He couldn’t possibly forget.

After all, he was not the type to freely offer advice to just anyone.

'Wherever you go, whatever organization you join, it will inevitably thrive.'

'Therefore, you must continuously reflect and ponder where you should belong.'

As a student who had shown prodigious talents, the headmaster had no doubt that wherever she went after graduation would become the center of power on the continent.

So, he suggested she take time for a journey, a time to organize her thoughts.

It was made without any special intention. He just wanted, as an educator before a headmaster, to set her on a path for a good life.

Accepting his advice with alacrity, Elise had spent three years and now reappeared before him, her gaze sharpened and filled with firm resolution.

"By the look in your eyes, you seem to have made a decision."

"Yes. The more I thought about it, the more I realized the answer was predetermined from the beginning."

A bittersweet sentiment accompanied Elise's words.

The headmaster did not press, instead waiting for her to speak.

"I'll join the Knights of the Light."

The headmaster's expression tensed slightly in response.

The Knights of the Light was a high-ranked knightly order that pursued the peace of the continent under the doctrine of the God of Light, Lumendel. Its members included high-ranking warriors who had achieved top martial prowess, and it was led by the Guardian of the Continent, the Duke of Berth, on the mission to protect from demonic threats.

It wasn't surprising.

Most people who knew Elise had expected her to join the Knights of the Light after graduation.

At the age of 16, she had reached a 6-star level.

With an astounding 88% water attribute affinity.

Her swordsmanship was excellent enough to defeat even the most skilled instructors at the Academy.

And considering her father led the order, it was the prime place where she needed to be and could stand out.

The headmaster understood why she made that choice, though he did not wish for her to join the Knights of the Light.

His reasons were difficult to explain.

Affection for a cherished student?

The intuition of a senile old man?

Somehow, he felt that it wouldn't end well if she joined them. He had suggested her journey in hope that her heart might change.

“Ultimately, it's what my heart tells me. Someone must take on this task. If I can do it, if I can bear it, then I must. At least so that my younger siblings studying here now can live peacefully...”

Her mention of younger siblings caused a subtle change in Kundel's eyes.

“Siblings, did you say?”

“Yes, that's right! You know them, right? Cranzt and Xian! Are they doing well without trouble?”

The headmaster hesitated to answer.

“Headmaster?”

Instead of a straightforward reply, he posed a question back to her.

“What do you think of your siblings?”

Elise replied without thinking much.

“For Cranzt, he's a bit malicious, but with proper guidance, I think he could grow up to be a good man...”

There were no objections regarding Cranzt.

“But Xian is still difficult to read. He seems to have an inexplicable talent. He’s a child with much to learn! Though a bit timid is a flaw... Headmaster, why so serious?”

Noticing the headmaster’s hardened expression, Elise was confused and concerned.

Just then, a knock came on the door.

Kundel sighed lightly before continuing.

“One of those people has just arrived.”

“...?”

“Come in.”

As the door opened, Elise naturally turned to look.

A young man with dusk-colored hair and sharp eyes. His stature was comparable to hers but slightly shorter, in the late 160s. However, his face seemed younger.

Though his features had changed a bit, Elise recognized him instantly.

“Xian?”

It was Xian Berth, the youngest of the Berth family and her brother.

(To be continued)

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Chapter 62: Elise Bert (2)

July 2nd, 988th year of the founding forces.

I have lived my life never forgetting this day, from my past life until now.

No, it would be more accurate to say that I couldn't forget it.

Without any malice or purpose,

Treating me with a sincere heart alone,

It was the last day I saw Elise noona alive.

-Knock knock

With the intention to at least show minimal courtesy, I knocked on the door and waited for two seconds.

When there was no answer, I naturally opened the door to the Dean's office as if it were my own home.

-Flung open

".....!"

Perhaps cursing me, the Dean Kündel's brow was furrowed with annoyance.

Before him, Elise noona, whose eyes widened like a startled cat, was seated.

"Xian?"

Without a second's hesitation, noona called me by my name.

That face, that smile.

It was exactly the same as it had been decades ago.

In the blink of an eye, she hurried over and mussed my hair.

"What brings you here? Could it be that you knew I was coming?"

"As if I would have known? I came to have a private meeting with the Dean."

Of course, that was a lie.

I had simply come earlier knowing that Noona would visit the Dean's office first.

Was the skeptical look from the Dean as if to ask when I had scheduled a meeting just my imagination?

"You've become quite the man, haven't you? In a little while, you're going to surpass my height too, right?"

"It would be possible if you step down from those heels."

"Your twisted personality remains unchanged!"

Noona pulled at my cheeks with force as she spoke.

Two years had passed as smoothly as flowing water.

Just as she returned here after two years of living abroad, I too was here after two years at the academy.

"Surprising? I thought you would have naturally gone to Bellias for the holidays. Why are you still at the academy?"

The leisurely summer sun was beating down on the land.

Students at the academy during the holidays were split into two groups:

Those who returned home for rest,

And those who stayed at the academy to continue self-directed studies.

The latter wasn't so much a choice, as it was almost a mandate for students who hadn't met the mandatory grades required by the academy during the term and needed to take remedial lessons.

Of course, it wasn't like me to stay and endure such bothers.

I was a student who had just completed the first semester of my third year at the academy but I had never gone home once in the past two years, including the entire duration so far.

"With no one to welcome me home, isn't it obvious?"

Noona scratched her face at my plain response.

It was odd to make the long journey home when there was no one to welcome you.

This was no different from my previous life.

Despite having 12 holidays over six years, the number of times I returned home was zero.

It wasn't just me—Krantz was in the same situation.

It's ironic that Lady Margaret, who dearly loved him, even advised him not to come home during the holidays, but to travel around the empire and mingle with the nobility.

Well, I had no related cumbersome business to attend to.

The Royal Academy took care of the convenience of students: even during the holidays, they allowed students to stay in the dormitories.

In the end, I was continuing my dormitory life into the third year, just like in my previous life.

“Did you know your sister was coming?”

“It was hard to miss with all the commotion in the streets. The return of the ‘child of the gods’ caused quite an uproar.”

I nonchalantly dismissed the Dean's somewhat skeptical question.

“Well alright, I don't want to disturb the touching reunion of siblings. Just leave what you've brought there on the top, and go out with your sister.”

Noona's gaze naturally drifted toward the bundle of papers in my hand.

Without care, I approached the Dean's desk and placed them there.

“Even if you're a graduate, there's no one here to stop you, Elise. Stay as long as you like. If you wish, I'll even offer you the dormitory.”

“Ah, yes... Thank you, Dean.”

The atmosphere suggested forcing an end to the conversation, but it didn't seem necessary to worry about it.

-Swish

As I moved toward the door, I casually grasped noona's hand.

"Let's go, noona."

A flush of surprise colored noona's face at the unexpected physical contact.

* * *

Elise felt bewildered by the current situation.

She was surprised by the boldness of her brother, whom she hadn't seen in a while, grabbing her hand, but fundamentally, the aura emanating from Xian was noticeably different from before.

The grown-up demeanor was contrary to his youthful face.

Even a slight mana presence that she was not aware of could be sensed.

'Has he grown this much in just 3 years?'

One year of frontline life and two years at the academy.

It wasn't a short period, but even she, who had been called a genius throughout her life, hadn't been this impressive.

Her stern gaze even had a hint of wariness.

'Does he still want to continue the legacy of our house?'

Three years ago, when she returned to the mansion, she couldn't forget his determination to continue the family legacy.

Counter to the naive fantasies she had thought, he had truly meant to fight when they crossed swords – even with her using half her strength, his will was indomitable.

However, Elise hoped that Xian's feelings had changed inwardly.

For the heart of a person was as light as a feather, capable of changing at any time.

She did not want him to choose the difficult path of being the guardian of the continent.

Instead, if he had found something else he wanted to do, she would have wanted to support him wholeheartedly.

That was a sister's natural role, after all.

There was no reason to hesitate.

If she wondered, she could just ask directly.

As she was about to speak with a cheerful smile, that very moment, Xian spoke.

“Do you really have to go to the Order of the Light Knights?”

“Hmm?”

Caught off guard by such a direct question, she found herself suddenly speechless.

Xian waited for her answer impassively.

* * *

Noona's response was unexpectedly interesting.

It was the first time she was at a loss for words to this extent.

But it didn't take long for her to find an answer.

“Why do you ask that?”

When someone questions a decision, the reason is simple: because they do not want it to happen.

I too did not want noona to go to the Light Knights—I asked that question for that reason.

“It’s out of jealousy.”

However, my mouth gave an answer contrary to my true feelings.

“Huh?”

“If it’s the Light Knights then it must be gathering of the greatest knights in the empire, isn’t it? It’s the honorable knighthood that everyone dreams of joining, who wouldn’t be jealous?”

Noona bust into laughter.

“Puhaha! And here I thought! My brother, lovely as he is, would be on my side, yet you speak of jealousy?”

If it had seemed to me that her joining the Light Knights were against her will, I was sorely mistaken.

Noona was unlike me—born predestined to dedicate her innate talent to the family, a fact she neither denied nor resented, but rather embraced.

The Light Knights was indisputably the continent’s supreme knighthood, and absolutely the highest place she could aspire to.

Whether it’s for the family’s sake, or for personal reasons, those were merely secondary to her.

She had always dreamed of shining in the Light Knights.

But I knew.

If she goes there, noona will die.

Elise Bert, who entered the Order with much public attention, will meet a tragic death before her prime.

This was an undeniable fact from my past life.

Would I just watch with open eyes as she walked voluntarily into death’s maw?

“It looks like your mind hasn’t changed about continuing the family legacy, right? There’s no stopping you now. You dream of the Light Knights too, don’t you?”

I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: the family legacy is none of my concern anymore.

The Light Knights?

Even if they begged, I wouldn’t join.

But for her, it was a lifelong dream, a desire, a duty.

For now, there’s no use convincing her with trivial words not to go.

Just to set things straight.

If pests come to nibble on the flower on the verge of blooming,

I’ll catch them all and burn them to ashes.

“I must pave the way well, even for such an admirable little brother.”

However, noona wouldn’t know all this, my words would just seem endearing to her.

And there she was, stroking my head like one might pet a puppy, when my height was nearly matching hers by now.

“Are things going well with Krants?”

There was a momentary tremor in noona’s eyes when she mentioned Krants.

What seemed like an innocuous question was anything but.

She was beseeching with that question, hoping for a positive response.

I had only seen noona rage furiously once in my entire life.

It was around when I was about 8 years old, not yet enrolled in the academy.

I was receiving a brutal beating from Krants under the guise of swordsmanship training, a scenario all too common in my past life.

No one came to help, only Emily was helplessly stamping her feet in the distance, a heartbreaking sight, yet a reality I was all too familiar with. That was the scene noona had stumbled upon.

She thought just an ordinary scuffle between young siblings at first.

But she was no fool.

Krants' face was unscathed and pristine, while mine was almost a bloodied mess.

Seeing bystanders who treated the scene as if it were normal, noona swiftly grasped the situation.

It was truly the first time.

I saw her beautiful face contort with rage, her usually calm mana storm chaotically like a raging tempest.

That moment might have instilled fear in me more than when facing the Demon King.

I swear, if Krants hadn't been her brother, he would have been torn to shreds right there.

Noona's anger was more than anyone could bear.

How could they turn a blind eye while her brother was in such a state? Was this the true face of the Bert Dukedom, protector of the continent? She vented her indignation to those around.

To this day, I remember clearly how vivid that was.

Honestly, at the time, I wasn't pleased.

Not because she took my side, but because it pained me to see her, so pure, express anger and grief.

I'd rather have suffered and fallen ill than witness that sight of her again—I truly detested it.

That feeling hasn't changed even now.

For the past three years, I never once came face to face with Krants.

Now, it's unlikely such things will occur again,

But if noona ever finds out that Krants and Lady Margaret plotted to have me assassinated by knights of the domain on the day I left for the academy, I honestly hate even to imagine her reaction.

Yet,

“We’ve been living almost like strangers.”

“...Why?”

“Even if we are brothers, I cannot laugh and rub shoulders with someone who tried to kill me.”

Noona’s pure eyes quivered intensely.

“What do you mean?”

“Two years ago, on the day I left for the academy, Krants and the Duchess conspired to have knights within the domain attempt to assassinate me.”

“ ... ”

A sudden chill enveloped the air around us.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 63

Chapter 63. Ellis Berto (3)

As we live in this world, we often hear this saying:

To know is to have power.

Or perhaps, not knowing is a remedy.

Neither side is entirely wrong, but should someone ask which is more correct, it wouldn't be easy to judge.

So, what if we were to strike a fine balance between the two?

Here's how I define it:

Ignorance makes a fool, but knowledge allows for action.

The household was turned upside down after my sister witnessed Krantz's assault.

However, it didn't last long.

She soon had to return to the academy, and without my only protector, I was once again left to be a loner.

Afterward, Krantz harassed me in even more persistent and sly ways, while others around me continued to stand by and watch, with nothing changed.

Before my sister left, she told me to talk to her whenever things got tough.

But I didn't say a word.

I didn't want to see her angry and sad again.

Then, as now, I didn't want to hide behind a woman's skirts and avoid reality.

But as I mentioned earlier, being ignorant makes you a fool and leaves you unable to deal with what lies ahead.

I wanted my sister to know.

She needed to understand just how filthy and miserable the so-called maintenance of our family's honor was.

That it wasn't something worth sacrificing herself to preserve.

That's why I'm bringing it up now.

".....!"

My sister's right hand was trembling violently.

It looked like she might draw her sword and charge at Belias at any moment.

For the time being, I waited in silence for her to speak first.

“Is what you just said all true?”

“I wouldn’t joke about such things.”

“Then how did you survive and arrive here?”

At that moment, a young man approached us and bowed his head.

“Wh-who are you?”

He seemed about twenty, a youth with tidy brown hair and innocent eyes — Brian.

“I am Brian Kendrick, a formal knight of Sir Belias. Currently, I serve as his guardian knight and stay at his side.”

“A guardian knight?”

Brian, with not a hint of hesitation in his precise pronunciation, recounted the events of the last three years.

He had been tasked by the Duchess but betrayed her when he deemed it unjust, and then he safely escorted me to the academy.

Essentially, he took credit for all the deeds I had accomplished.

Of course, I had ordered him to do so.

“I don’t understand! Why didn’t you tell anyone?”

“There was no one to tell. Our father has always been too busy with the front lines, hasn’t he?”

“Even so, you should have at least told me!”

This seems to be a first.

My sister showing genuine anger towards me.

But you know what?

I've never had anyone in my life who cared enough to be angry on my behalf.

Normally, being scolded would make one feel depressed and upset, but strangely, I feel like smiling more and more.

I must be a bit of a weirdo, thinking of it that way.

With my emotions firmly under control, I replied calmly.

"You left to explore the continent for three years for your own life, Sister, just as I have kept silent for mine. Once the Duchess knew she had made a mistake, she took no further action. Krantz, too, stayed quiet, knowing his wrong. That I am speaking to you now, Sister, is because everything has resolved well."

"How can you say that it ended well!"

In a fury, my sister grabbed my shoulders and shouted.

The tears welling in her eyes, I looked on without a hint of my inner turmoil.

"I'm sorry, Sian. After all my resolutions to live for you guys, I didn't even realize what you were going through."

My sister is smart and strong.

With these words I've shared, she now quickly understands what needs to be done.

"It seems difficult to take a leisurely stroll around your dormitory and have a chat. An urgent matter has come up."

That would be problematic.

If our little darling wakes from her nap, it would create quite a scene.

I asked nonchalantly.

"Will you come back?"

"Of course."

I thought she would simply pat my head again, but this time she gently embraced me.

“You don’t have to shoulder everything alone, Sian. If it’s tough, you can say it’s tough.”

As her soft breath brushed my ear, an unparalleled tranquility swept over me.

It was so warm and cozy.

I thought I wouldn’t experience this feeling again, but it seems I’ve been fortunate since my regression.

All that’s left is to protect this warmth.

As long as I am living and whole, the day will never come when her warm touch turns to a cold, stiff grasp.

My fist clenched with determination.

* * *

“Are you alright, Young Master?”

After my sister left, Brian, who had lingered, asked with concern.

“Why?”

“Perhaps it’s presumptuous of me, but did we worry Lady Ellis unnecessarily? Frankly, I never expected you to share that story...”

I shrugged.

“The hearts of people are as fickle as reeds, yet sometimes as unchanging as solid rock.”

Especially people like my sister.

“We need to instill vigilance. They must come to realize little by little that all they believed in without doubt has gone wrong. Otherwise, they’ll keep straying until inevitable ruin.”

If asked if this comes from experience, I wouldn’t particularly want to answer.

All I hope is that, disguised as advice, this warning helps her cope with what will unfold.

She's surely capable of overcoming it.

Now that my sister's matters seem settled...

I turned my gaze to Brian.

"Why are you looking at me, Young Master?"

"You did quite a good job acting, didn't you? I thought you'd be too nervous to say a word."

Embarrassed, Brian scratched the back of his head.

"Ha-ha! I, I practiced all night without sleep! To be honest, I'm not sure if Lady Ellis believed it..."

Remarkable progress compared to two years ago when he was clueless.

Can I say he's someone who can become serious when needed?

"What would our sister be, if not a divine child? She'd understand half a sentence even if you stuttered through it."

"Th-that's good then."

I stared at the blushing man.

"Why's your face all red?"

"What?!"

Even a girl on her first love wouldn't blush this much.

"Ah, it is my first time seeing Lady Ellis in person! She's as beautiful as the rumors say! Please don't misunderstand, Young Master! I hold no strange feelings!"

Strange feelings, huh.

Well, he's a man too, so I can understand.

Even I think my sister is the most beautiful woman I've ever seen.

Why do I feel such a strong urge to punch him?

I looked at my clenched fist, idly wondering whether I should bash it on his head.

It was a seriously tempting moment.

* * *

After sending my sister off, I headed once more to the principal's office.

As I knocked and pushed the door open, the principal, busy at his desk, met me with a knowing look.

"It seems you've confirmed it."

He was reading the white paper document I'd handed him just before.

"As usual, I won't ask where you got this information from."

"All I can do is thank you."

"Instead, I have another question: do you really expect me to believe all this?"

His reproachful gaze was quite piercing.

"If I were to summarize the document you gave me, it would read: Certain high-ranking knights of the Order of Light are connected to the Imperial family, likely aligned with First Prince Luinel Sevellarus. They're planning to incite the monsters near the front lines to create a major conflict. And this is scheduled to happen during the royal family's inspection tour of the battlefield... Such fiction wouldn't be so absurd if written in a novel."

If captivating tales could jump so effortlessly to mind, what need would there be for literary classes?

Unfortunately, the words discussed are not fiction but grim reality.

The principal's look suggested he was still half-doubtful.

“It’s been over a decade since I left the family, but that doesn’t mean I’ve shut my ears. You mean to tell me that while I was unaware, my family and Luinel were concocting such plots? Honestly, if someone other than you had handed me this document, I would have torn it up by now.”

His assumptions seemed a bit incongruous for someone who supposedly didn’t care about family honor, but I decided to overlook it.

“The truth of the matter is not for me to prove to you, is it?”

“Indeed. It seems my own informants will not take long to bring back the devastating news. Whether I’m duped or not.”

He speaks so freely, a result of experience, I suppose.

“Is this connected to your sister?”

“Why would you think that?”

“Age comes with its benefits. Your usually unimpassioned eyes quivered the moment you faced Ellis.”

There seemed no point in denying it.

“To be honest, it was unexpected. I thought you were a loner who wouldn’t care for anyone other than yourself, but blood runs thick, I suppose. After all, of all the students who have passed through here, Ellis is the only one I would have wanted as a daughter.”

“That’s a dangerous thing to say.”

I was sincere.

For a moment, I wondered if the old man was going senile.

No matter what, that crosses a line, Principal.

Unaffected, he continued.

“So, having given me this fantastical information, what do you expect from me?”

I am not one for charitable acts without expecting something in turn.

The principal knew this, and yet he always asked what I wanted with each exchange. But I'd already been receiving ample reward.

"Aren't you already giving enough?"

"Ha, are you referring to your delinquent school life?"

Delinquent?

I thought I'd been quite unobtrusive, but being called that put me in a strange mood.

I smiled as I responded.

"As I've told you before, don't overthink it. Just consider it a gift for accommodating my conveniences."

"A gift? It's more like a bribe. Just don't change your tune later."

I couldn't help but chuckle at the mention of a bribe.

"Really, one can never quite figure out what's in your head."

Hearing that, a thought suddenly struck me.

Should I ask?

"May I ask one thing?"

"What is it?"

"A while back, I overheard you telling my sister about a student who passed through your hands, one whose motives you couldn't figure out."

More than eavesdropping, it was something I just happened to hear.

"Yes, that's counting before your admission."

The principal replied nonchalantly.

"Do you think you could tell me who that person was?"

Why ask?

It's a simple curiosity.

I'm suddenly intrigued to know just how keen the old man's discernment is.

The principal grinned faintly before replying.

"Why ask if you already know the answer? No need for the question. It's that person you're thinking of."

Trust the principal to truly see people.

If only he could foresee his own future.

(To be continued in the next issue)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin Chapter 64: To the Imperial Capital (1)

After my meeting with the principal ended, I headed straight back to the dormitory.

As expected, I was the only one fully using the Royal dormitory.

There were no idle royals who would stay at the academy even during the vacation.

Bryan was waiting for me in the silence of the empty halls.

"Master, this is..."

He handed me two envelopes that looked like letters.

"Where did you get these?"

I inquired about the sender first.

"One came from the academy's official mailbox, the other from a cleaner at the Royal dormitory. Both were meant to be delivered directly to you, Master."

I held one envelope in each hand, comparing them.

One shimmered, a golden envelope with the emblem of the Ushif Empire's royal family embossed on it.

It was clearly an official letter, even without opening it.

The other was an ordinary white envelope marked with an enigmatic black 'X'.

This was probably the one given by the cleaner.

Without even examining the contents yet, if asked which letter was more important...

It was, without a doubt, the letter from the cleaner.

I decided to open the less important golden envelope first.

A frown formed on my face the moment I saw the contents.

"What is the letter about, Master?"

"If you're curious, read it yourself."

I carelessly threw the paper to him.

"An invitation?!"

Bryan's eyes sparkled as he read.

"Master! Isn't this an invitation to a banquet held by the empire?"

"A banquet where people don silly masks and merely laugh and drink trivially," I thought.

To me, it was too dull even if I were to be begged to attend.

"But wasn't it sent from the royal family? Could it be... a direct invitation for you, Master?"

-Swish-

Suddenly, the invitation in his hand was snatched away.

Startled, Bryan looked around. In an instant, Keram appeared, sitting on the couch, checking the invitation.

[An invitation from the royal family... Oh, how our Master has come up in the world.]

To me, it wasn't entirely clear if this could be called success.

Of course, a royal banquet is not something to which just anyone is invited.

Only significant figures, considered important by the royal family, receive an invitation.

So Bryan's suggestion that I'd been directly invited wasn't impossible.

Our family would regularly receive invitations, but it was the first time my name was specifically written on one.

Typically, they were addressed to my father, Duke Bert.

With my father unable to attend, it was usually my sister, Krantz, or that kid who would go in accordance with tradition.

[Siân Bert... Seeing your name written here means they want you, doesn't it?]

Exactly.

It's not a common occurrence for an invitation to be specifically made out to a person, rather than a family.

The royal family sent this invitation wanting me, Siân Bert, not a member of the Bert household.

It doesn't make sense.

Why would the royal family call for me?

Although I knew I had caught the Emperor's attention, I hadn't done anything particularly noticeable in the past two years.

What could be the purpose of sending an invitation with my name on it now?

I pondered on this for a moment, chin in hand.

Meanwhile, Keram read the invitation aloud.

[...We invite the esteemed guest to our Royal Summer Banquet. Sender: Arin Sebellus?]

I was taken aback.

“What did you say?”

I snatched the invitation to review the name at the bottom.

Seeing that unwelcome name, I heaved a sigh without realizing it.

“Of course, it’s her...”

Normally, the sender’s name would be the host’s, so it should have been Emperor Dione Sebellus or Empress Cassandra Nepellis.

The sender’s name written on my invitation was none other than the Fifth Princess.

The meaning of this was all too clear to me.

[Ha-ha-ha! Just when things were quiet, that little princess sent her adorable summons, didn’t she?]

Keram laughed, holding his belly, as he grasped the situation.

“What do you mean by that, Master Keram?”

[This little princess has sent a personal invitation to our young Master. What does that mean? It’s a sort of love letter, suggesting she’ll be all dressed up and looking lovely, hoping you’ll come see her! How lucky is our Master to receive a personal invitation from none other than the princess of this country!]

“Ah, I see! Congratulations, Master!”

These fools were conspiring together to make fun of me.

As Keram had explained, this wasn't an invitation from the royal family, but a personal one from the princess herself.

She had written it in her own handwriting with great care.

What is this woman thinking?

Not content with dragging me to every class, she now wanted to involve me in their banquet?

Regardless of what she was expecting, now that I knew she had sent it, my decision was firm.

"I won't go."

I tossed the invitation onto the table.

It would only bring annoying challenges, so there was no reason to go.

Ignoring Keram's nagging, I opened the truly important second envelope.

A letter written on black paper with some sort of code. The sender was... the head of the Sirika family.

I deciphered the code in my head and read the letter.

The family head wasn't at the academy at the moment.

She was away for personal matters, and I didn't know her exact whereabouts.

Now, she was assigning a new target for Mist.

Nepellis, the name of the powerful imperial family where Empress Cassandra belongs.

The target was someone from their household.

I hadn't checked the name yet, but just the fact that it was the Nepellis family implied it was a person of great importance...

Thinking back on my previous life, I felt I knew who the target was.

Is that to say she'll share more details face-to-face?

For the time being, it seems I must leave this place.

I had met with my sister, and with no further reason to stay at the academy, I might as well head somewhere far from the royal capital...

“Wait a moment...”

A moment later, recollections from my past life flashed through my mind.

Empress, Nepellis Marquisate, assassination.

I remembered a significant event related to the words just mentioned.

While trying to recall it, I checked the location and date written at the bottom of the letter.

Things were connecting.

Although I hadn't heard it from the family head yet, the target seemed clear.

The assassination of Drenian Nepellis, the Emperor's brother-in-law and Empress Cassandra's brother.

It was an incident that had a massive impact on the empire and the entire continent in my past life.

Back then, I was a mere underling, merely confined to the dormitory, wielding a wooden sword, so I had no direct part in it.

I was now about to be involved in a mission that had significantly shaken the world in my previous life, which was quite astonishing.

-Fwoosh-

I conjured a small flame in my hand and burned the letter on the spot.

Then I picked up the princess's invitation, which I had discarded carelessly, and sealed it carefully once again.

Unintentionally, I had a good excuse to head to the royal capital, given my current status.

There was no need to waste it.

However...

My gaze naturally turned to Bryan and Keram.

And to our little one, who had been sound asleep in the other room.

What should I do with these guys?

Keram could simply stay in my pocket, and I could bring Bryan as my knight, but Nana was the issue.

It would be impossible to cope with any trouble if she were left alone.

And I couldn't just lock her in a cave to hibernate for two weeks, right?

Should I bring her to the capital and leave her with other Mist members?

Leaving the mission aside for a moment, the serious concern became what to do with Nana. Even to myself, it was a moment to shake my head at.

Come to think of it, hadn't she been asleep for a long time?

"Hasn't it been a while since Nana should've woken up? When did she go to bed?"

"As per the usual time, but it seems she's waking up later than usual today. Let me check on her."

Nana's routine was to take a five-hour nap after lunch.

But now the sun was setting, and it was well past 6 o'clock.

Usually, before dinner preparations even began, she would've already been whining, 'Papa I'm hungry!' but today she seemed to have been lost in some dreamy dessert world.

-Clunk-

"Papa I'm hungry!"

As if called into being by my thoughts, Nana came out of the room.

“Alright, the meal is ready, so wash your hands quickly and come to the table...”

...?

Me, Bryan, Keram.

The eyes of us three, aside from Nana, were violently shaking.

We were all undoubtedly doubting if we were seeing things correctly.

“Master, what is with Nana’s appearance right now...?”

Could I possibly know? As if I’ve ever raised a dragonkin.

She was stark naked, not a thread on.

It wasn’t that she wasn’t wearing clothes.

Her previously fitting clothes seemed to have shrunk off her.

“What’s wrong, Papa?”

She sleepily rubbed her eyes and tilted her head.

[What’s with you staring blatantly! Turn away your eyes, will you?!]

Finally, Keram snatched me and Bryan by our heads and forced us to look away.

[Hey, kiddo! Why did you come out naked?]

“Huh? I don’t know. When I woke up, no clothes fit me?”

Nana seemed to have grown twice a tail length, swaying it idly.

I knew she belonged to a species that grew fast, but is this degree of sudden growth even possible?

To clarify, Nana has shown no less than the expected growth rate in the last two years.

Roughly equivalent to a human at about 6 years old?

She had been growing noticeably day by day, then had been quiet for a while, making me think she might slow down. Just yesterday, she barely reached half my height, and now she had grown up to my chest in just one day?

She now seemed as if she was a new freshman joining the academy.

“.....?”

Puzzled by our reactions, Nana’s eyes twinkled innocently.

(To be continued)

FOOTNOTES:

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 65

Chapter 65: To the Imperial City (2)

Do they say children’s appetites grow with them?

I have already had to reset the dining table four times.

“Yum yum.”

The child’s appetite seemed to have doubled just as their size had.

Should I call it rapid growth?

It is not growing slowly over a long period but a phenomenon of quickly surging in growth once a certain stage is reached.

I’m not sure if pureblooded dragons are like this since I haven’t seen it, but for now, this interpretation seemed right.

I didn’t have any female clothes on hand, so I had her wear my uniform for the time being,

And looking at her now, she indeed looked quite noble.

In that state, enrolling her here would be perfect.

“Brian?”

“Yes, young master.”

“We may be leaving for the imperial city as early as tomorrow. Prepare for us to depart.”

“It’s settled then? Very well!”

Brian went outside to prepare for the journey.

There would be much to do, from carriage maintenance to various arrangements.

[And what about that little one, no, the little lady?]

Keram asked with a puzzled face.

“Would they believe me if I say she is the new youngest of the Bert family?”

[Why? Why not just say she is truly your daughter?]

With no good ideas coming to mind, I just spouted some meaningless words.

Now that she has grown so much, it’s not like I can hold her and take her along.

“We might be able to disguise her as a maid...”

Of course, I said that in jest.

With those horns, those wings, and that tail, who would actually see her as an ordinary human maid?

If only we could hide them somehow...

“Puah! I’m stuffed!”

After her meal, Nana rubbed her stomach with an expression of contentment.

-Swish

In an instant, just like a bird folding its wings, Nana's horns and wings miraculously vanished.

".....?"

Keram and I looked at each other with disbelief.

[What happened, little one? Where did your horns and wings go?]

"Uh, what do you mean?"

When she stretched, as if waking from sleep, her previously hidden horns and wings reappeared.

"Can you hide those at will?"

"Hm? Maybe? It just happened all of the sudden?"

Nana waved her horns and wings freely.

Was this another consequence of her rapid growth?

As absurd as it sounds, this was an excellent situation for us at the moment.

"What about your tail? Can you hide that too?"

"The tail? Hold on, let me try."

She clenched her little hands and, as if gathering her strength with a shout, her tail just as naturally disappeared.

-Slip

Watching this unfold, I immediately grabbed Nana's shoulder and said,

"Nana?"

"Yeah?"

"How about we go out for a bit?"

* * *

-Crash!

The doors to the mansion opened boisterously, more like they were smashed, really.

The high-ranking knights gathered but none could move.

Her indigo hair fluttering in the desolate wind was both fearsome enough to trigger an instinctive terror and yet paradoxically beautiful.

The knights looked at each other, not knowing how to react.

“Where is mother—no, where is the Duchess?”

Her eerily chilling tone made some of the knights shrink back.

“She is on this floor, ma’am.”

She walked into the mansion without any hesitation.

Entering the Duchess’ room on the second floor without knocking,

Margaret Erjes, visibly flustered, was faced by her second daughter, Ellis Bert, gone for three years with a suspiciously threatening look in her eye.

“El, Ellis?”

“Mother, I’ve thought of you a lot on my way here – to the point that I couldn’t bear it. So, I’ve brought you a small gift.”

“What? You shouldn’t have, just coming is more than—”

While technically mother and daughter, they weren’t exactly close.

Margaret was strangely hopeful hearing about a gift, though cautiously so given Ellis’s demeanor.

-Clap!

Margaret, unprepared for such a ‘gift,’ felt a stinging pain flush her cheek.

In a daze, her eyes shook violently, while Ellis’s eyes glinted with consuming fury.

“You witch! Have you gone completely mad!?”

Margaret, clutching her face, yelled at Ellis.

“Me? Mad? No, it’s you who should be worried, Duchess Margaret.”

“What?”

Ellis’s tone carried no more respect for her.

“You tried to kill Si-ahn!!”

Ellis exploded with pent-up emotion.

Taken aback, Margaret lost her words.

“He is just a child! What has he done to deserve your loathing to such an extent?”

“Produce evidence, evidence! Do you have any proof that I attempted Si-ahn’s assassination?”

Ellis was firm.

“Bry-an Ken-drick!”

“.....!”

“The knight of Belias who acted on your orders two years ago to orchestrate Si-ahn’s assassination? He now serves as Si-ahn’s guardian knight, does he not?”

Margaret’s hands shook uncontrollably.

“Do you think I would let that go unnoticed? How could you live with yourself after such heinous acts? What would father think if he knew?”

Margaret, quivering, found her voice amid panic.

“This is all because scum like you recklessly act out of place! People of your unsure origin, if allowed to enter a ducal lineage, should behave with some dignity, not causing trouble. Si-ahn was an unnecessary existence here from the onset!”

-Crack!

Following a twisted sound, Ellis reached for her chest.

“Gah!”

Margaret was pulled forward by her collar and came face to face with Ellis.

“An unnecessary existence, did you say? Funny, let’s see who is more unnecessary, shall we?”

“What are you saying?”

“What if we say that we fought to the death here? How will father react? Between his wife and daughter, who would he favor more? Are you so sure he’ll side with you, Duchess?”

“Of, of course, I’m the legitimate wife of this house...!”

Ellis’s grip intensified.

“Don’t fool yourself! You know what this household stands for! It doesn’t matter if it’s the son, daughter, or even a wife, as long as the family’s legacy continues. That’s how our father operates!”

“Ah!”

She released Margaret’s collar, who lost her balance and crashed to the ground.

Ellis still emanated a grim determination.

“Consider this a warning. Do not touch Si-ahn again! If anything happens to him, you will receive a ‘gift’ much harsher than a mere slap!”

With that serious admonition, Ellis left the room.

Left alone, Margaret struggled to gather herself.

“To think those insignificant pests dare to defy me...”

Instead of despair, she muttered incomprehensibly.

“Unnecessary? Before that child, they are all worthless! No matter how much they struggle, they can’t compare to that child...”

Her mysterious laughter filled the room with a chilling presence.

* * *

Finishing her business with the Duchess, Ellis emerged from the mansion where a female knight approached her.

“Welcome back, Miss Ellis.”

The situation hardly seemed a cause for celebration.

Ellis replied, unfazed.

“The circumstances aren’t ideal for a reunion, are they? How have you been, Cecilia?”

“I’m always doing just the same.”

The high-ranking knight of the Light Brigade, ‘Cecilia Lien,’ held a particularly special bond with Ellis far beyond that of a dedicated maidservant.

“I don’t know if you expected this outcome, but the Duke is currently searching for you.”

“My father?”

It was rather early summons considering she had just returned to the territory.

Though it was surprising, it was not troubling.

Ellis replied with resolute eyes.

“Alright. Let’s go see him, Cecilia.”

Cecilia, along with the waiting knights, escorted Ellis to the boundary gate.

Crossing the human realm’s boundary gate, Ellis showed no hint of hesitation.

Arriving at the campsite where Duke Bert was located, she took a deep breath to settle her mind.

“Phew...”

Without hesitation, Ellis stepped inside.

The Duke appeared busy with his work, but a seat had been prepared for her.

“Please come in, Ellis.”

“Greetings, father. It’s been a long time.”

The pair reunited after years yet the atmosphere was rigid.

The grim frontline environment only exacerbated that feeling.

“Have you completed your journey well?”

“Yes, I have succeeded.”

The journey itself had not been problematic.

The aftermath, on the other hand, was a different story.

“You seem angry despite a successful trip.”

“Do you already know what I’ve done at the mansion?”

The Duke silently responded.

“Given the current situation, I’ll ask you directly. Father, did you know the Duchess attempted to assassinate Si-ahn?”

“.....”

The Duke maintained his silence.

Ellis clearly understood that silence as affirmation.

“How could you? Regardless of the peace of the continent, how could you do nothing when your own child...!”

“I have no intent to make excuses, Ellis.”

The Duke’s tone was cold and heavy.

“Since sitting in this seat, my priority has always been protecting the continent from the demons. You know that, don’t you? The maintenance of the Bert family involves such responsibilities...”

The knowledge was all too familiar, and perhaps that’s what rendered Ellis unable to speak.

The Duke continued.

“Why I looked away from Si-ahn’s situation? Nothing special. I was certain that a mere assassination attempt wouldn’t be the end of him.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“For a young child to kill six knights and head to the academy alone – do you believe it was mere luck and a change of heart from a guardian knight? Do you really think so?”

Even the often-praised genius, Ellis, needed time to comprehend the Duke’s meaning.

“Are you saying Si-ahn personally overcame the assassins sent for him?”

The Duke’s eyes were steadfast.

“Your brother may be far more extraordinary than you think.”

“But, he’s still just...”

The Duke silently handed her an envelope.

“It’s an invitation to a royal banquet. As always, I can’t attend, so I’d like you to go in my place. Take some time to cool your head.”

With the task done, the Duke rose from his seat.

“Then, I shall return to the frontline camp. Journey safely, Ellis.”

In less than three seconds, the Duke left his daughter behind.

Alone in the tent, Cecilia approached Ellis.

“Unintentionally, the Duke has granted you leave. He’s asked that I accompany you during this time.”

Ellis gazed at the invitation the Duke had left behind with a stern look.

“Cecilia.”

“Yes, Miss Ellis.”

“Would there be any other siblings attending this banquet besides me?”

“In addition to Lord Eshel’s attendance, rumor has it that the fifth princess, Arin Sevillus, has personally sent an invitation to the youngest lord.”

“The Princess Arin?”

Her reaction implied surprise but something decisively changed within her as her lips pursed tightly.

“Let us depart for the imperial city, Cecilia.”

(Continued in the next part)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 66

Chapter 66: To the Imperial City (3)

Under the tranquil sunlight and the blue sky where clouds flowed, the forest lush with greenery and a clear valley stream presented the utterly common visage of nature—yet such a scene could be exceedingly fascinating to some.

“Look, Papa! Isn’t that amazing?” Nana couldn’t tear her eyes away from the window. It was a fresh experience for her, after all. Although I often took her for walks, this was her first journey so far from home.

“Nana, are you remembering everything I told you?” I asked.

“Of course! I am your maid now, right, Papa? I learned everything about how a maid should act from the books!” she exclaimed with confidence.

What kind of books was she reading that taught her such things? Admittedly, I was a bit worried that her mind hadn't developed as much as her body had, but there didn't seem to be any major problems. Just by looking at her seated posture, she didn't seem like some petulant child but a mature young lady instead. Not only did she inherit my intelligence, but she also seemed more mature now. Is this the joy of raising a child?

Thud, thud, thud.

Suddenly, the carriage began to slow down, prompting me to lean out the window by the coachman's seat where Brian was.

"What's going on?" I inquired.

"It seems there is something ahead," Brian reported.

As soon as he spoke, I sensed a foreign presence from the front—about 7 to 8 people, perfectly split on both sides of the forested path. Bandits, of course. It's a typical event: a carriage traversing remote woods and the bandits lurking for an easy score. Normally, a noble's carriage would be guarded by several knights, but the only person with me was Brian, who was steering the carriage. It would actually be foolish not to target such an unprotected treasure trove.

Screech.

Brian brought the carriage to a halt and dismounted, saying, "I'll handle this quickly, young master."

He drew his sword and walked forward. I leaned back into the carriage and waited for the situation to be resolved.

"What's happening, Papa?" Nana asked.

"Some pests seem to have gathered. Brian will take care of it," I reassured her.

Swish.

The merciless sound of being cut through permeated from beyond the window. If an outsider heard it, they might think we were slicing fruit. Not a single scream or death rattle could be heard.

“It’s done, young master! We’re setting off again!” Brian called out, not even a minute later. He climbed back onto the coachman’s seat and we resumed our journey. Peering out the window, I saw the neatly severed bodies of the bandits sprawled out disorderly. Nana wasn’t the only one who had grown so much in the past two years; Brian had also become a fine knight. Considering the intense training I put him through, it would have been odd if he hadn’t improved. Starting with basic physical training, swordsmanship, body techniques, and even magical power management—Brian had achieved a level of growth in two years that no other master could possibly bestow. The dragon blood he consumed played a significant part in this, significantly enhancing his physical abilities across the board. Brian’s magical attribute was wind, fitting for his swift and agile movement spells, making him particularly suitable for assassinations that required instantaneous reactions. There wouldn’t be any more incidents of him getting caught off guard.

How long had we been driving? As the forest thinned, the familiar aura of mist became palpable. Brian sensed it too and gradually slowed the carriage. This time, I got off myself. The man awaiting me wore a black long hair and an eye patch—a member of Mist.

Bow.

Upon seeing me, he bowed his head slightly and presented a small envelope.

“This is a message from our Lord.”

I immediately opened the envelope and examined the secret letter.

“Got it. I saw it.” After careful inspection, I burned the letter on the spot. Without another word, the agent bowed once more and promptly left the area. I returned to the carriage and continued our journey toward the imperial city. As I gazed out at the passing scenery, an enigmatic smile graced my lips.

“Why are you smiling, Papa?” Nana asked curiously.

“Hm? Oh, just looking forward to something,” I responded. Nana tilted her head in puzzlement, unable to understand. They say anticipation blooms when one imagines something unfamiliar they’ve not experienced before. That’s exactly the feeling I have right now. And not only me; among the attendees at the banquet, there’s another distinguished guest from Mist I’m looking forward to seeing—the Lord himself, all dressed up. The anticipation is immense.

* * *

Under the cloud-covered sky, in a tranquil space, a woman reading alone in a room was approached by a maid.

“Madam Sirika, the carriage of Sir Sian has just entered the imperial city,” the maid reported.

“And his companions?”

“A single knight and a young maid.”

“Maid? Sian has no maid,” Sirika pondered, confused by the news.

“They say it was a little girl, about ten years old, with pink hair.”

“Pink hair? Could it be... Nana was brought along too?” Sirika mused with surprise.

“For now, that seems to be the case.”

“Well, it’s probably better than leaving her alone at the academy.”

However, the term “maid” caught her attention. The Nana she had seen last was no more than a six-year-old child, so thinking of her as a ten-year-old girl seemed incongruent.

She decided to leave the matter for now.

“This is a list of those attending the upcoming banquet,” the maid handed Sirika a list filled with the profiles of multiple individuals.

Sirika scrutinized the names on the list; one by one, they were prominent figures from the empire and other nations.

Suddenly, her brows furrowed at an unexpected name.

“The granddaughter of the head of the Rigens Academy is also attending?”

“Yes. She’s currently en route to the empire with the members of the Garam Kingdom’s Magic Academy.”

“That’s unexpected. Who would have thought the academy would send her...”

The girl wasn't someone noteworthy to keep an eye on for their missions. Yet, Sirika's expression while reviewing the list seemed less than pleased.

"With this many distinguished guests attending, it might be wise to postpone the operation if the prospects are not favorable..." the maid suggested, noticing the increased number of attendees, which was inherently detrimental to the operation.

"There's no need to force a dangerous course of action," Sirika concurred. "Let's wait and see for now; there's still time before the banquet."

"Yes, Madam Sirika."

"What's that?" Sirika's attention abruptly shifted to the maid's left hand.

"Ah, this is a letter from the Drenians..."

The maid seemed hesitant to hand it over as if dreading the reaction.

Sirika simply snapped her fingers, and the maid had no choice but to give it up. Reading the letter, Sirika's face darkened.

"Drenian Nephelis... As if asking for a swift death."

The thoughts of postponing the plan were wiped away in an instant. Sirika's eyes bore the resolute intent to eliminate the target at the upcoming banquet, no matter what.

She burned the letter and spoke firmly, "Inform the agents. Tell them to be ready and not to slack off until the day arrives. There will be no postponement."

"Yes, Madam Sirika."

After completing her report, the maid exited. Sirika, who was about to immerse herself back in her book, closed it instead and gazed out at the thick clouds outside the window. The sky looked unusually somber as if foreboding significant events to come, adding to the desolate mood.

* * *

"Wow...!"

They say that when people are too astounded, they can't even make a sound of admiration, and right now, that was a fitting description of their reactions.

"Is, is this really a place where people live...?"

Brian stood with his mouth wide open as if inviting insects in, overwhelmed by the sight.

Yes, when else would they have the chance to roam the imperial city streets? It might be a once-in-a-lifetime glorious moment, so for now, I decided to let them bask in it.

Sebelinus, the capital of the Ussip Empire, was the land where the founding emperor, Rashtadt Sevelus, established the nation's foundation. For over hundreds of years, it had been the primary city that sustained the empire's prosperity. The city's opulent and exquisite sights could invoke images of a divine realm, but as with any city that has flourished for so long, it also harbored its share of rotten elements—meaning it wasn't all just beauty.

Thump!

While admiring the streets, Nana got too engrossed and bumped into someone, tumbling over.

"I'm, I'm so sorry!" she quickly apologized, rising to her feet.

"It's alright, little lady. Just be careful and watch where you're going," said the man with a kind smile.

In such situations, it was common to encounter hostile attitudes that could lead to conflict, but this man shrugged it off with benevolence.

"Wow, Papa! People here seem really nice! They don't even seem angry!" exclaimed Nana, smiling brightly at me.

"Not necessarily," I said as I patted her head. "It doesn't seem like anyone would mistake you as just any maid."

Everyone passing by glanced at Nana's face at least once, charmed by her almost dangerously adorable features that could outshine the offspring of prestigious noble houses.

“Where should we head to now, young master?” asked Brian. With two days left until the banquet, there was no need to rush to the palace.

“Let’s eat first; I’m hungry.”

I casually walked into the fanciest restaurant nearby.

“Uh, would you like to dine here?” asked the owner, who seemed surprised to see us. Typically, one would ask, “How many in the party?”

Perhaps my attire didn’t seem very imposing, hence the question. I simply took out an emblem and showed it to him.

“Three. Find us a secluded spot, away from the crowd.”

Upon seeing the emblem, the server’s attitude shifted drastically.

“I’ll seat you right away! This way, please!”

Changing someone’s demeanor is simple. Just show them where you stand; it’s a basic rule in a world where status dictates everything.

I let Brian and Nana pick whatever they wanted from the menu. With Nana’s appetite, she could probably dine on the entire kitchen’s worth.

While waiting for the food, I pondered about the target.

Drenian Nefelis of House Nefelis, a member of the imperial family through his sister, the Empress Consort. Essentially, he held considerable influence in this country. In his late thirties, he was a widower with children but no wife. More infamously, he had a reputation among nobles for indecencies beyond reproach—a detestable adulterer specializing in victims who were married women, committing unspeakable acts of violence. A despicable being, unworthy of the title “human,” and deserving of death. Yet, with the influence of the imperial family, he wasn’t an easy target to eliminate.

Killing him wasn’t the problem—it was the aftermath that was difficult. Given his status, if it became known that Mist was behind Drenian’s death, the organization would make an enemy of the imperial family. That would not only hamper our activities but also lead to a widespread manhunt for Mist throughout the empire.

No doubt, the Lord pondered deeply over this cleansing mission. It was not without significance that the banquet was chosen as the time for action.

Step, step.

From a corner came footsteps. At first, I assumed it was a server with our food, but I sensed an unusual mana presence and turned my head sharply. It wasn't overtly hostile—a stranger's energy was simply not to be taken lightly.

Soon after, a young girl wrapped in a blue robe appeared before our table. She was about Nana's height and looked at me intently.

“Sian Vert... That's you, right?”

(To be continued in the next episode...)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 67

Chapter 67: To the Imperial City (4)

It's not something I'd brag about, but wherever I went, there was something I always heard.

That my face looked stern, always appeared somber.

I still didn't understand why people said such things about my face, but looking at this girl before me now, I felt I could grasp a bit more what they meant.

She wore her cool, sky-blue hair in a short ponytail.

A face so adorable it would make any father, fearful of exposing her to the world.

Yet, those who harbored ill intentions against such a girl would surely retract their malice and flee upon meeting her gaze.

A look so dark and piercing it could be considered ominous.

I found myself feeling a little sympathetic, wondering if this is how others felt when they looked at me.

Do you know her?

Not at all.

Through my current life in its entirety, I've never even passed by someone remotely resembling her—this was our first encounter.

Nonetheless, this girl had just called me by my name.

That must mean she knows me.

“Do you know me?”

I asked her calmly, matching her approach to our secluded table with my composed inquiry.

“Yes. You're a third-year student at the Royal Academy, aren't you? How could I not know someone as renowned as you?”

Her tone was calm yet crisp.

Honestly, if I was famous for anything, it would only be for my absences.

Without betraying my thoughts, I replied.

“Ah, well, famous is an overstatement. So, you're an academy student as well?”

“Yes, I'm a sophomore. Please, call me... Lunév.”

A sophomore, so not a new intake, but she was offering just her first name, omitting the family name? Odd as it seemed, not my business – so I let it slide.

“Sorry, but I don't make it a habit to remember each junior's face.”

“It's fine. Truthfully, I'm rarely at the academy due to my frail health.”

It was a bit disconcerting to have her share such unasked-for information.

“Now that you’ve addressed me as a junior, can I address you as ‘senior’? Senior Sian?”

With that, she sat down unreservedly at the empty place before us.

Was this friendliness, or lack of manners?

I wasn’t particular about formal titles, so I let it slide.

Her gaze shifted to Nana and Bryan sitting across.

“!”

While her lineage was unknown to me, given she’s part of the Royal Academy, there was a high likelihood she was a noble.

Nana and Bryan shrank under her stare.

“It looks like a maid and a guard you have here. You seem quite close? Sharing a meal together.....”

“It’s more convenient to sit together than apart, don’t you think?”

“An unexpectedly sound argument. You may be more compassionate than you seem.”

It was hard to say if her comment was a compliment or an insult, but I noticed a sparkle in her eyes, so I took no offense.

“Excuse the disruption.”

Two waiters approached to serve our food.

With more than ten plates being served, it took quite some time.

Lunév watched with keen interest as the table filled with dishes.

“Are you really going to eat all that?”

“W-well, yes. My attendants have hearty appetites.....”

In reality, it was for Nana.

“Bon appétit! Father... I mean, my lord!”

As usual, Nana voraciously tucked into her meal.

The girl named Lunév watched Nana eat with a bemused and faintly admiring gaze.

On closer inspection, her robe seemed familiar—reminiscent of the blue glow that emanates when mana is manifested.

I hadn't seen the back of her head, so I couldn't be sure, but only one place on this continent held those stylish clothes.

“You're with the Garam Kingdom's Magic Society, aren't you?”

Lunév responded with a flat gaze.

“Yes, you're right. How did you know?”

“I figured from the robe you're wearing. That mana robe isn't available just anywhere.”

“You have a keen eye.”

An elusive excitement seemed to play across her raised eyebrows.

“But why would you, renowned for staying at the academy even during breaks, be here in the imperial city?”

For a moment, I was puzzled that an outsider, a foreigner no less, would inquire about my whereabouts. Truthfully, it was a question I should have been asking her.

Despite the curiosity, I answered since she asked.

“I'm here to attend a banquet I was invited to by the imperial family.”

She tilted her head, intrigued.

“That's unexpected. I thought you'd be a hermit not fond of such places, so it's a relief nonetheless.”

Why would my attendance be of any relief to her?

Before I could retort, she pulled out a familiar envelope.

“I also received an invitation to the imperial banquet. I really didn’t want to come, but my grandfather insisted. At least it’s a relief to see you here.”

To an onlooker, this exchange might suggest we’d been close for over a decade.

Her use of the word ‘relief’ tempted me to enlighten her about its actual dictionary meaning, but just then, several individuals dressed in blue robes like hers appeared around a corner, presumably her entourage.

Some of them grimaced or failed to maintain their composure upon setting eyes on me.

“Sorry to interrupt your meal. Enjoy, and I hope to see you again at the banquet, Senior Sian.”

She bowed politely, and I wasn’t sure how to react – I awkwardly waved back.

It was a perplexing encounter, to say the least.

What exactly did she want from me?

Well, now that she’s gone, best to concentrate on my meal – I thought, grasping the spoon.

“And my name is Lunév Rainriver…….”

“……?”

“Please remember it. Senior Sian.”

With a smile that seemed to hold no particular meaning, she said her full name and then disappeared from my sight.

My right hand, now holding the spoon, hung in the air motionless for a while.

“Rainriver……?”

* * *

After the meal, I haphazardly checked into any nearby inn to find a place to rest.

In the imperial city, they would provide a guest room without my having to ask, but I saw no reason to settle within their domain.

I intended to attend the banquet right on schedule.

Sitting in a chair and looking out at the moonlit night, I couldn't help but be troubled by that girl I had encountered in the evening.

The Garam Kingdom's Magic Society.

A gathering of madmen undeterred to pursue any manner of research for the sake of magic's advancement.

The very head of those madmen was the Rainriver family.

Regens Rainriver.

A detestably mad man known for not hesitating to experiment on his own family if it served his purposes.

Lunév Rainriver.....

I had no clue who she was when I heard only her given name.

I had thought she was just a daughter or granddaughter from a prestigious household within the society.

But I never expected she'd be a scion of the Rainriver house.

Recalling faint memories, I remembered her as a rare holder of attributes—not leaning towards any one side, but rather possessing an equal 20% in fire, water, wind, light, and dark—a considerable talent able to wield all five elements' powers evenly.

Perhaps she was even rarer than someone like me, who was skewed towards one attribute.

The variety of magic she could wield was much broader, after all.

Though each attribute had a ceiling of ability beyond which one couldn't progress.

Regardless of her potential and her prestigious family, she had been absent from my memories.

The reason for that was simple—she had died young before she could blossom.

Her frail health was probably a fact as she had succumbed to illness before even graduating from the academy.

At the time, I paid it little heed, but I couldn't imagine she was that girl.

But this was none of my business.

Whether she attends the banquet or not, that's up to her.

I'm not the sort of senior with the leisure to care for sickly juniors.

“.....”

Suddenly, I sensed a familiar presence brushing against my intuition.

I stood up and started to prepare to leave.

“Where are you headed, my lord?”

Bryan, who was exercising, asked as he saw me.

“Just out for a bit. Watch Nana while I'm away.”

Nana had long since drifted off to dreamland.

I stepped out of the inn and directed myself towards a dark alleyway untouched by moonlight.

As I made my way, cutting through the chilly night air, a man soon appeared.

“It's been a while, Lord Sian.”

It was Kelvin Diego, a faithful servant of Eshel.

“There’s no need for a lengthy greeting. Just tell me what you’re here for.”

Undeterred by my brusque response, Kelvin continued.

“In about 10 minutes or so, a number of infiltrators will close in around you, Lord Sian.”

“Who sent them?”

“Lord Eshel.”

I couldn’t help but let out a sardonic laugh.

“If they knew what forces I command, they wouldn’t dare. Why now, then?”

“It seems they’re using the imperial city to their advantage. Much like us, they likely didn’t expect you to engage in a fight here.”

Every land has a significant starting point, and Sebelinus is no exception.

The royal household does not tolerate crimes within their city.

Were one to be foolish enough to commit murder here, they would find themselves entangled in the troublesome eyes of the royal surveillance.

Is this an opportunity for them to watch me?

It’s not so much a trap as the timing is well-chosen.

“Understood. Make sure you observe everything and report back.”

“Understood.”

Upon receiving the order, Kelvin nodded.

Yet he didn’t turn to leave, continuing to fix his gaze on me.

“Is there something else you want to say?”

Kelvin asked hesitantly.

“Is there another reason for you attending this banquet?”

Should I explain further, it's evident Kelvin's personality has been altered.

His previous self, who planned on dedicating everything to Eshel, now lies dormant—in its stead, a new persona I've instilled is taking over.

Meaning his question was purely out of concern for me.

However, there's no need to reveal everything.

"What if there is?"

I parried with an evasive question.

"I don't know what you plan to do, but perhaps you should postpone it."

"Why?"

"I'm not sure about the specifics. But there seems to be some scheme between the First Prince and Lord Eshel at this banquet."

A scheme?

That was something I couldn't ignore.

"What scheme?"

"Assassination."

A brief surge of incongruity dilated my pupils.

Assassination?

That was peculiarly amusing.

"Who's the target?"

"Lunév Rainriver."

That name, while not entirely unfamiliar, couldn't be overlooked.

At this moment, extraneous thoughts faded, leaving one encompassing contemplation.

Are they insane?

(To be continued in the next episode)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 68

Chapter 68: The Banquet of Blood (1)

In the Great Chamber on the third floor and the west end of the imperial palace, Arin's face was quite tense as she was unable to take her eyes off the mirror. Her silver hair was neatly smoothed out. Her skin was evenly powdered to a pale white. Even her lips were brightened with the white of crushed lily petals.

Clearly, she went through great lengths with her appearance today, and anyone could tell she had put extra effort into looking beautiful. She was thirteen years old and right in the midst of puberty, a time of significant change when a young girl's interest naturally drifts towards beauty.

Despite having attended this annual banquet every year, she had never been so preoccupied with her makeup before. It was as if she was trying to impress someone in particular.

"How do I look, Resimus? Do I look alright?" she asked nervously.

"You're beautiful, Princess! In all my time serving, I've never seen you look more stunning. You can stop looking now!" assured Resimus, trying to ease her nerves.

"No, I need to check just a little more!" Arin protested, dissatisfied.

One had to wonder why she even asked in the first place. The same scene had been repeating for hours now, and Resimus, along with the other handmaidens, couldn't help but sigh.

Of course, this was the imperial palace, home to the emperor and the imperial family. And why was Resimus here, despite not being of noble birth? Simply because Princess Arin wished for it.

Their relationship was that of master and servant. If Arin desired, she could bring Resimus anywhere with her. At first, many opposed her presence in the palace due to her commoner status. However, it was not uncommon for a father to indulge his youngest daughter's requests. The emperor himself recognized and permitted their relationship, allowing Resimus to continue her life in the palace alongside Arin.

"Too much makeup can be a poison, you know? Based on Sir Cyan's personality, he likely won't appreciate all this extravagance," Resimus suggested cautiously.

Startled, Arin retorted, "Wh-What are you talking about! I'm not dressing up to impress Cyan!"

"You should only make excuses when necessary, Princess! Even after you've sent the invitation directly," Resimus teased.

"A-Actually, it's... that is to say... I never thought he would actually come!" Arin's face reddened like a girl experiencing her first love.

"I just felt sorry that Cyan had to stay at the academy even during the holidays... and I was wondering if he had ever experienced a banquet like this, so I just..."

Although the excuse was plausible, Resimus wasn't convinced. She had long noticed Arin's growing fondness for Cyan. The nervous princess only looked pitiable now, unable to sit still.

Knock, knock.

A knock sounded from the door; it must have been the royal guards in the halls. But Arin, consumed with her own reflection in the mirror, paid no heed. One of the handmaidens approached the door to check who it was.

"Princess Arin. You have a visitor from Prince Luinel!" the maiden called.

"Hmm?" Arin's head spun around instantly, blinking in surprise, unsure if she had heard correctly.

"P-Prince Luinel has sent someone?"

"Yes! It seems to be the prince's personal handmaiden. Should we let her in?"

This was a completely unexpected situation. The first prince, who normally didn't even give her a second glance, had unexpectedly sent someone to her. Arin's eyes were wide with shock.

"L-Let her in...!" She gave the order despite her surprise, as it wouldn't be proper to turn away the prince's handmaiden.

Upon entering, the handmaiden immediately beamed at the sight of Arin.

"My goodness, Princess Arin! You are absolutely stunning! Like a young goddess," she exclaimed, not hiding her admiration.

Anyone with a sense could detect the flattery in her words—and Arin was no exception.

"Th-Thank you for the kind words... but what brings you here?" Arin inquired.

"I came to deliver this!" The handmaiden placed a small jewel box on the table in front of the princess.

"Prince Luinel told me to give this to you! He said it would suit you, Princess Arin!"

"He sent a gift for me?"

"Yes! Please, open it and see for yourself!"

Arin cautiously opened the golden box and everyone present couldn't help but admire the contents.

"Wow...!" Inside was a beautiful pendant, studded with small gems and centered with a red stone that could have been a ruby or garnet—it captivated all who looked upon it.

"It's so beautiful... Is it really okay for me to accept this?"

"Of course! It's as if the jewel has found its rightful owner. Please, try it on!"

So Arin did, clasping the pendant around her neck.

"How does it look?" she asked nervously.

Everyone in the room showered her with compliments.

“It suits you wonderfully, Princess! Surely Cyan would approve as well!”

“That’s right! With this, even Cyan would... Wait, no! I didn’t get this to show to Cyan!” Arin’s face flushed with embarrassment once again, and the jewel pendant around her neck sparkled with a crimson light in response.

* * *

The Grand Hall of the imperial palace was the largest venue within its walls. Crowds of nobles gathered under the gleam of dozens of chandeliers, intent on enjoying the banquet.

It was time to assess the attendees. There were roughly 60 in total, guarded by twice as many protectors—about 120 knights. Including the maidservants and various attendants, the number was close to 300 people occupying the hall.

Among them, about 10 members of the Mist, including myself, were infiltrated. The rest awaited outside the palace.

Adaptation to such an environment was never easy, especially with the continent’s elite present, all boasting their pretenses to the extreme. How easily they disguised their true selves behind masks of laughter and smiles, their concealment skills rivaled that of the Mist’s own secret techniques.

[You seem quite busy scanning the crowd. Looking for someone, perhaps?] someone observed telepathically.

“Less of looking, more of needing to keep tabs on everyone,” I casually responded.

[That doll’s words seem to be bothering you.]

It would be a lie to say they weren’t. I did not believe that Kellin would intentionally lie to me without cause. There must be some basis for her warning: the assassination of Lunab Rainriver.

In the midst of this assembly, a hit was intended on her? Was the first prince already preparing for war with the Kingdom of Garam?

This was a scenario absent from my past life. Was it an instance thwarted in previous attempts, or was it a new initiative brought on by the changing tides of this life?

It looked like further investigation was necessary.

“You shouldn’t wear such a grim expression at a banquet,” remarked a familiar voice behind me.

Turning around, I was greeted by the sight of a woman with lavish crimson hair accentuated by a flowing long wave, cinching a slender waist and ample figure with a blood-hued silk dress. Her mature poise was undeniably alluring.

“The dress looks great on you, Instructor Sirica.” I complimented her, offering a smile.

“Your eyes are rather dangerous. Be careful where you let them wander, lest you be misunderstood,” she replied, elegantly swirling her wine glass as she sipped it.

[Hah...!] The disapproving snort probably came from Keiram.

It seemed the clan leader noticed his disapproval, smirking defiantly.

Sirica Negriti, a scholar from the Royal Academy and the leader of the Mist. However, she also held another title unspoken of until now: the eldest daughter of the Negriti House of Counts, a noble lineage with prestigious scholarly repute throughout the empire.

In other words, she was of nobility herself, hence fittingly present at the gathering under the guise of a guest.

For me, she was the most convenient ally to have here. But unlike the other nobles, I had no time to indulge in gossip behind smiling masks.

Turning away discreetly, I spoke quietly to her, ‘There’s no time for pleasantries, so I’ll keep this brief.’

“You appear puzzled,” she noted.

‘Delay the cleansing operation. Just give me some time.’

‘Why is that?’

Despite my sudden telepathic message, the clan leader responded without missing a beat.

‘The first prince is planning to assassinate Lunab Rainriver.’

“...!?” Her pupils slightly fluctuated with surprise.

‘Are you certain?’ she probed.

‘It’s a fifty-fifty chance. I have no solid evidence as of now, which is why I intend to find out more. Until then, please postpone the cleansing.’

Without hesitation, she made her decision.

‘Fine. But I can’t give you much time—only an hour from now. If a conclusion isn’t reached by then, it will be problematic. Is that enough time?’

‘More than enough.’

‘Don’t push yourself too hard, Cyan. If it’s really concerning, we can hold off on the operation altogether.’

‘That’s not an option. For the clan leader’s sake, Dreinian must be dealt with today, wouldn’t you agree?’

‘What are you implying?’ There was a hint of annoyance in her tone.

‘Dreinian Nephalis’s engagement ceremony is coming up soon, isn’t it?’ I pointed out.

She frowned, a clear sign of discomposure.

“Where did you hear about that?”

“Shouldn’t a student be concerned about their mentor’s future?” I shrugged with feigned nonchalance.

“Well, I shall meet you again shortly, Instructor Sirica.”

With a brisk exit from the encounter, I could feel the blazing gaze of the clan leader on my back.

It seems there will be a lengthy discussion after this concludes. But that concern can be addressed later.

Exiting the hall and entering the corridor, Bryan awaited me.

“How’s Lana?”

“She’s in the guestroom. She said she wouldn’t take a step outside, so she should be fine.”

Let’s hope she keeps her word.

“What’s your assessment?”

“Nothing out of the ordinary so far. I didn’t detect any suspicious movements or intent while outside the hall.”

With so many eyes within the palace, surely no one would boldly announce their intent to kill.

“The thought still seems unbelievable—an assassination attempt within the royal family... against the person we saw yesterday.”

“Keep your voice down. Too many ears around.” I quickly warned Bryan, who clasped his hand over his mouth.

“For now, I’ll keep looking around. If anything happens, contact me immediately and discreetly.”

“Yes. Understood...”

Footsteps suddenly approached from around the corner. Bryan and I promptly ceased our conversation.

The light, unburdened steps did not belong to a noble but seemed more like those of a maidservant in a hurry.

We waited silently for the owner of the footsteps to pass.

The moment the servant caught sight of a dressed noble and his guard, she quickly averted her eyes and continued on without a moment’s pause. Her attire did not match that of the palace maidservants, suggesting she was privately employed.

Just as we expected her to leave without incident, she surprisingly turned around and stopped in front of us once more.

Our eyes met, seemingly drawn together by a familiar aura, and after a couple of seconds of intense staring, we both realized.

“Y-Young master?”

My already convoluted thoughts became even more muddled. Why was she here of all places, in the palace?

My defiant handmaiden, the only one I ever had, whose gaze hadn’t changed in the two years since we last saw each other—Emily.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin **chapter 69**

Chapter 69: The Banquet of Blood (2)

“Wow, look how tall our young master has become! You look quite sophisticated all dressed up like this!”

His face seemed a bit more mature now, though he was as exuberant as ever.

Well, a change in physique doesn’t necessarily mean a change in personality.

“You’ve changed so much I almost passed you by without recognizing you! You’ve become even more manly since I saw you last.”

The girl was greeting him somewhat vigorously, as if she was making up for the last two years.

Brian, gaping at the scene, looked utterly ridiculous.

“How can you not contact me for two years? You didn’t come back even during vacations! With no news of you, I feared something had happened.”

Seeing her after so long was of course a pleasant surprise.

Her cheerful nature hadn't diminished a bit, rendering it impossible for grievance to take hold.

"You haven't been confined to your room, avoiding going out, have you? Or are you being bullied? That simply won't do! I must hold my head high among the other maids only when our young master is doing well!"

Typical Emily.

Just when you think you might start to fancy her, she quickly squashes that idea.

She's exactly the kind of maid I need.

"So why are you here?"

"Is that what you ask someone you're seeing after so long? You might not know, young master, but I'm quite well-regarded among the maids at the mansion!"

I couldn't help but chuckle.

One should lie within reason.

"What? You don't believe me? Eshel himself was considering taking me on as his personal maid!"

My eyebrows twitched as I doubted my ears.

Someone wanted to take her on as a personal maid?

"Why would my brother...?"

"Why, indeed? It's clearly because I'm capable. Not only have I raised you into a fine young master, but I'm also a steadfast maid who has lived on the frontlines! Who wouldn't want me by their side?"

Not to belittle your words, but that's highly unlikely.

Coming from anyone else, I would have been less skeptical, but not from him.

Unless he has some insidious scheme, he wouldn't propose to have her as his maid.

“So, Emily, have you come here as my brother’s maid?”

My voice seemed tense despite my effort to keep it under control.

“No, of course not!”

Emily responded with triumphant eyes.

“I outright rejected it. Although Eshel may be handsome, the only one I wish to serve is you, young master!”

“.....”

For a moment, unsure of how to react, my expression turned awkward.

“What’s with that face? Did you take me for a disloyal maid?”

I nearly nodded in agreement.

I’ve known her since she was a snotty child and have gone through life and death together, but why did I just assume she would go to Eshel?

I suddenly felt uncomfortable.

“How did you end up here, then?”

“When Eshel was coming to the royal capital, he brought me with him. He said I should take the chance to see you. He’s really considerate, isn’t he? It’s a shame I couldn’t see more of the royal capital.”

Why would he...? For what reason?

And he even said to see my face while he was at it?

No matter how I think about it, multiple suspicions arise.

Without further thought, I focused my gaze on Emily.

Her naivety is transparent to the point of stupidity.

Eshel, who usually has an eye for people, wouldn’t mistake her for anything other than what she is.

But still, it's too risky to let her go like this.

"Brian."

"Yes, young master!"

"Take her to my room."

Both of them blinked as if they misheard.

"I'm sorry, what did you say, young master?"

"Stay in my room until the banquet is over. I'll let you go afterwards."

Her flustered face was as entertaining as ever.

"What are you saying, young master! Why would you suddenly...?"

"I'll show you around the royal capital afterwards."

".....!"

Her demeanor changed instantly.

"Where should I go, young master~?"

* * *

"Oh my, Princess Arin looks absolutely beautiful today~!"

"That pendant suits you perfectly. You've become a proper lady."

Princess Arin, having finished all her preparations, finally arrived at the banquet hall.

Like the other members of the royal family, she was too busy engaging in conversations with the attendees to take a breath.

But those were just formal greetings.

After a question or two about her well-being, they soon departed to converse elsewhere.

Yet she took it in stride, as it was nothing more than the usual occurrence at such gatherings.

Time passed, and around Arin, unlike the other royals who engaged in deep conversations, no one remained.

‘Where could Sian be?’

She glanced around, but the person she sought was nowhere to be seen.

‘Shouldn’t he come to me first since I came here because of him?’

She muttered wistfully, but without the person in question, it was all for naught.

Was he resting due to illness?

With slight concern, she looked around once again when she noticed a girl of a similar age from the corner of her eye.

The girl, with blue hair reminiscent of pure mana tied up adorably, was looking around as if searching for someone.

“.....!”

Their eyes met suddenly, and after a brief pause, the girl approached Arin.

Lightly placing one hand on her chest, she bowed slightly.

“It is an honor to meet you, Princess Arin Sevelerus.”

Her cute appearance was in contrast to her grown-up greeting.

It reminded Arin abruptly of someone.

“Uh, I’m pleased to meet you too! Your name is... Rainriver Lunav, right?”

The girl wasn’t a stranger to Arin either.

She was Garam Kingdom’s prodigious magic girl who joined the Academy a year ago.

The granddaughter of Garam's magical society's president, which stood on an equal with the Westerfern Magic Assembly.

Arin had often heard stories about her but had never met her face to face.

"You're really pretty."

"Me? Oh, this pendant? It's a gift from my royal brother..."

"No, I meant you, Princess. You look truly beautiful, quite different from when I saw you at the academy."

It didn't sound like the usual formal compliment.

The true admiration reflected in her apathetic eyes touched Arin, easing the heaviness in her heart.

The conversation flowed smoothly between the two.

They talked about their academy life, the art of magic, and the common worries they shared as fellow women.

It had been a long time since Arin had found a peer with whom she could connect so well.

"But what were you doing just before, Lunav? You were looking around a lot."

"I was searching for someone. They were supposed to be here at the banquet, but I still haven't seen them..."

"Really? I'm in the same boat right now. It must be a close friend?"

Upon hearing 'close friend,' Lunav appeared contemplative.

"We're not exactly close friends, but we do use senior-junior titles."

"Senior-junior? So, they are a student at our academy? What's their name?"

Arin asked out of genuine curiosity, and Lunav responded with a pure, malice-free tone.

"It's senior Sian."

“.....?”

Arin’s face, which was blooming like a vibrant flower, suddenly stiffened.

Did she hear wrong, or did she wish she had heard wrong?

Not expecting to hear his name in such a situation,

Arin suddenly felt unsettled, putting aside the actual name itself.

“Si, Senior Sian.....?”

* * *

In a guestroom area given to the nobles attending the banquet, located in the east wing of the Great Chamber of the Imperial Palace.

Right next to it, in the west wing, the children of the Emperor, including Princess Arin, resided.

Practically, the only area I was free to roam at present was this east wing.

Having checked, I found the guestrooms clear.

Even the presumed royal chamber of Eshel didn’t feel any different, which suggested this area was unrelated.

In conclusion, I’d have to visit one of the presumed significant locations.

Since the entrance to the west wing was guarded, there was no peaceful way in.

Peaceful, that is. In a non-peaceful sense, there was nowhere in this Imperial Palace I couldn’t go.

After all, I knew the layout of this palace inside out.

I raised my hand calmly and tapped on the wall.

-Thud, thud.

An empty rather than a solid sound echoed.

Normal stone walls shouldn't produce such noises.

This had to imply there was a space behind it.

"Amu 2nd Art: Spatial Transference."

The mist spreading from my body enveloped my right hand, which I extended toward the wall.

-Woosh.

Like ripples in water, the wall fluctuated.

Without a second thought, I stepped into the wall.

A dim void with scarce light.

The air felt slightly thin, but not suffocating.

[This place is suffocating, isn't it?]

She didn't seem particularly affected, though.

"These are the Palace's secret passages, a sort of escape route for the children of the Emperor who reside in the west wing."

From the chambers of the First Prince to the Fifth Princess, all five rooms connected to this one passage, which led directly outside the Palace.

It's designed for escaping outside during emergency situations.

[It's a space for the imperial offspring. How does our master know about it?]

Her thinly veiled question was full of intention.

"Well, it's no good reason."

Though intended for the imperial family, I had found my way here before.

As I had mentioned, it wasn't for a praiseworthy reason.

Not wanting to reveal painful memories,

I selectively recalled what I needed and proceeded along.

While ascending the dust-layered staircase, I discerned sounds.

If my memory served right, I was approaching the First Prince's chamber.

And the presence felt was not of one person.

Without hesitation, I headed that way.

“.....!”

I halted my steps when I was close enough.

Ahead of me, through a slim divide in the wall, light leaked.

I could feel it.

The presence of the room's owner, the First Prince, along with another familiar one nearby.

Automatically, my fists clenched, my teeth gritted, and my pulse raced.

I wasn't certain, but I felt convinced.

Eshel was just beyond that wall.

“Huff.....”

Barely containing my rising urge to kill, I tried to grasp the situation.

The banquet was in full swing.

Two prominent figures were now seated in a room together, surrounded by an invisible barrier of mana.

It was an anti-surveillance barrier.

A precaution to keep their conversation private.

As it stood, no matter how hard I listened, I couldn't hear their words.

I could dismantle the barrier.

A twitch of my hand would be enough, but doing so posed a great risk of being detected.

They weren't fools naive enough not to notice the disappearance of their barrier.

I pondered alternative methods when suddenly...

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

Kairam's unexpected exclamation.

It wasn't directed at me but to the beings beyond the wall.

"Can you hear their words?"

[Of course. Did you think a barrier like this could block my hearing?]

Sporting an intriguing smile, Kairam continued eavesdropping.

I had no choice but to focus not on the wall but on her face.

[Hey, Master.]

"What?"

[Do you want to see some blood tonight?]

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin Chapter 70: The Banquet of Blood (3)

Arriving at Sian's room, Emily and Brian were in disbelief.

"Um, Sir Knight?"

"Yes, maid?"

Two years ago, when Sian had left for the academy, Emily, a maid, and Brian, the coachman, were acquainted.

Of course, neither really remembered each other now.

“I can’t make sense of this situation... who is this child?”

A girl with shiny eyes and adorable lips curved in a smile stood in front of them. By contrast, Emily looked awkward with her corners of the mouth forced up and her heavy gaze.

Emily tried to assess the situation.

She’s young.

Probably ten or eleven years old.

She’s roughly Sian’s age or slightly younger.

But she’s wearing a maid’s uniform similar to hers.

And she’s in Sian’s room wearing that uniform.

Which means...

“Pleased to meet you! I’m Nana, the maid serving Sian Vert!”

Nana’s voice was both cute and resonant.

“Maid?”

Faced with such disbelief, Emily just laughed emptily, over and over.

“Leaving me behind and you get a little girl to be a maid? Has the young master gone mad?”

The more Emily spoke, the more cold sweat dripped down Brian’s body.

How could she speak so boldly without batting an eye?

It was a new level of respect and astonishment for the strong bond she seemed to have with Sian.

“Hey Sir Knight! Don’t tell me our young master hasn’t been returning from his holidays because of her?”

The naive Brian gave an honest reply.

“Ah, well, possibly. Having Nana so young, she requires quite some care. Though there have been times when he’s left the academy for work, he’s never left her for an extended period...”

“What? So he hasn’t been coming back because of this kid? Ridiculous! To think I turned down offers and stayed loyal, and he’s been getting a new maid in my absence? Just let him come back and...”

“Were you also our master’s maid, sis?”

Unable to hold back, the brash little maid interjected.

“Of course! I was his exclusive maid!”

“Wow! Then how long have you been with him?”

“Since he was out of diapers, over five years easy! No one else has been around him longer than me!”

Her boast sounded like a lifetime achievement.

After prattling away, she chuckled merrily to herself.

Observing all of this, Brian thought to himself.

What a simple woman.

“Oh, right. I forgot to deliver this to the master.”

“...!”

Nana’s previously cheerful face tensed.

Emily pulled out a red bow tie.

“A bow tie?”

“Yes, young master Aschel said our youngest would look good wearing it, and asked me to deliver it to him.”

The bow tie had a red gem planted in the center.

“What to do? Should I go give it to him now?”

“Screaaam!”

A scream echoed from the corridor, but fortunately, Emily missed seeing the ears poking out of the startled Nana’s head as she sniffed out the faint smell of blood.

Nana’s eyes sharpened instantly.

“It’s the scent of a beast!”

* * *

The banquet hall was filled with colorful flowers, each flaunting their beauty.

But among these flowers, there was one that stood out as the most beautiful.

“Ah...”

Men and women alike were spellbound, their faces flushed, their hearts pounding.

Ellis Vert, the first daughter of the Duke Vert family, once called a ‘child of the gods,’ made her stunning appearance in the banquet hall.

“A goddess has descended to the mortal realm...!”

Her noble aura seemed untouchable, deterring anyone from carelessly approaching.

While some onlookers smirked salaciously, Ellis paid little attention.

She simply strolled with a gentle smile.

“The lady of the house has grown up. Ellis?”

Delighted by the familiar voice, Ellis turned her head.

“Instructor Silica!”

Ellis’s beaming smile was met with Silica’s warm eyes.

“You truly are beautiful, instructor! How did you manage to hide it all this time?”

“It feels like a compliment, but why does it feel so odd? How do you become more beautiful by the day?”

No Instructor dislikes a well-behaved and intelligent student.

Likewise, no student rejects a competent and esteemed Instructor.

Among the academy’s instructors with whom Ellis had good relations, Silica was undoubtedly the closest.

During the reunion, the two women continued their conversation amidst constant laughter.

“I never expected you to attend a banquet, Instructor! You don’t like such noisy places, do you?”

“A person can’t always cling to her stubbornness. Sometimes you need a change of atmosphere to feel alive.”

“Then you should get married! Even now, there must be dozens of men ready to propose to you, Instructor. You can’t just immerse yourself in research forever!”

At the mention of marriage, Silica forced a smile.

“Now that’s scary talk.”

It was a half-serious, half-joking comment edged with truth.

Their somber talk paused momentarily as a group of men and women in black tuxedos appeared in the hall’s corridor, heading towards the center. They seemed to be musicians, carrying their instruments, all wearing unfathomable white masks.

Once they settled into their positions, Drenian Nephris, who had been babbling smoothly, ascended the central podium to draw everyone’s attention, explaining why the musicians had arrived, praising Silica’s beauty.

Ellis could only feel great sadness.

How could her revered Instructor become engaged to such a despicable man?

She was determined to do anything to stop it.

“Shink!”

The unmistakable sound of a sharp blade cutting through flesh drew immediate attention.

“Screeeam!”

Drenian’s severed head rolled on the floor, and his assailant, dripping with crimson blood, stood poised with a sharp rapier.

The masked figures held not instruments, but twisted weapons, radiating a brutal aura.

“What on earth?”

The banquet hall quickly descended into chaos.

* * *

“What are you talking about! Attacked by assailants?”

Emperor Dione was furious and shouted in his chamber.

“Please calm yourself, Your Majesty! We must evacuate immediately...!”

Evacuation was against the Emperor’s nature when enemies were present.

“I shall see this with my own eyes! Dare to commit a despicable act in my sacred palace... Urgh!”

The Emperor, about to rush to the scene, collapsed, his chronic heart condition triggered by the sudden excitement.

“What are you doing? Move the Emperor to safety!”

The Crown Prince rushed in.

“Luinel...!”

“I will take responsibility for this incident! Please take care of yourself, Father!”

Despite his desire to speak, the Emperor’s heartache silenced him.

“What in the world is going on?”

Queen Cassandra arrived in panic.

“Drenian is dead! My brother is dead! How do we address this?”

Luinel, with a steady voice, assured the Queen.

“Do not worry, Your Majesty. All will be well. Please evacuate with the Emperor now.”

Then, a man approached Cassandra.

“Aschel, would you escort Her Majesty?”

The blond man with an extraordinary aura calmed Cassandra’s frantic heart.

“Are you Aschel?”

“I apologize for not formally introducing myself earlier, but please follow me for now!”

There was no sign of refusal on the Queen’s face.

Enchanted as by a beautiful flower, she had a look that would follow him even into the fires of hell.

Aschel and the Crown Prince exchanged a meaningful look, each comprehending the silent message in the other’s eyes.

(To be continued)

FOOTNOTES: