

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 71

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 71-80

Chapter 71. Banquet of Blood (4)

The banquet hall was thrown into chaos by the attack of the mysterious assailants.

People scattered in every direction, rushing to the corridors to escape the hall.

“.....!”

But the assailants were not only in the center.

Maids, waiters, guardian knights, even the guests themselves.

They seemed to have conspired, blocking the hall's entrance.

“What are you doing? Out of my way!”

It wasn't until a nobleman barked orders that they raised their heads.

“.....!”

At that moment, they came face to face with white masks.

“Aaahhh!”

The assailants indiscriminately swung their weapons at the innocent people.

“Protect the princess!”

The knights of the imperial guard prioritized the safety of Princess Arin who was in the hall.

“We must get you to safety, Your Highness!”

While the two girls had not yet grasped the situation and were frozen in shock,

A giant red glow emanated from the center of the hall occupied by the assailants.

“What is that?”

A summoning circle.

It was a kind of magic circle that appeared when summoning magical creatures.

The spreading red aura and the rising bloodlust.

The masked ones surrounding it chanted an unknown incantation, and soon a gigantic summon revealed itself within the circle.

“Krrrr...”

Sharp front paws, black fur, eyes glowing red like embers.

Overall, it resembled a hellhound, but it was massive in size.

It seemed to have been artificially enlarged during the summoning process, but the problem was that there was more than one.

-Swoosh

More demonic beasts were summoned one after another from the sustained circle.

An unprecedented event in the history of the empire, demons from the front line appearing within the imperial palace.

“Summoning circle, demons...”

Even amidst the chaos, Lunev carefully observed the summoning process of the beasts.

Arin grabbed her hand.

“Let’s go, Lunev! It’s dangerous to stay here!”

Under the protection of the knights, Arin and her company quickly exited the hall.

“Kwooaahh!”

As if responding to their escape, the summoned beasts roared and charged towards the direction they fled.

“Hold back the monsters!”

The once glistening banquet hall was now a horrific scene of slaughter stained with blood.

* * *

The masked assailants were not only in the hall.

They seemed to know Arin and Lunev’s escape route, appearing continuously and steadily reducing the number of guardian knights.

“Quickly, to the shelter with the princess...!”

But as if they would not allow it, assailants suddenly emerged from the ceiling and swooped down on Arin and her group.

-Clang!

They were not an easy enemy to deal with, yet not unbeatable either.

When they sensed a threat, they escaped divergent to the knights who had a responsibility to protect.

For Arin, who could only watch, it was a complication of feelings.

“Where did these assailants come from?”

“Who knows? Perhaps they are not even humans...”

While Arin was anxious, Lunev maintained her composure.

“What do you mean, Lunev?”

“Individuals vary in mana and strength, but these masked ones emit a consistent energy. As if they’re all copying the power from one person...”

“Krrrrrr!”

As if things couldn't get worse, a hellhound appeared from around the corner.

"The summon has made it here!"

"I need to check it out."

Lunev stretched out her hand and concentrated her mana.

"Blow forth! The cold wind of waters!"

At the moment of the chant, a vortex of water gushed forth from Lunev's hands.

The combined magic of water and wind, 'Aqua Blast'.

Although not a high-level spell, it wasn't an easy spell to perform either.

The demanding precision in merging two elements,

The more exact the process, the greater the magic's potency.

"Kuaak!"

The hellhound was hit squarely by the gust and flung against the wall.

But apparently, the power was lacking, as it stood once more, its black fangs exposed.

"Oh dear. Seems I lacked enough power."

Beads of sweat trickled down Lunev's cheek.

"Blow forth! The cold wind of waters!"

Another gust surged from behind with the same chant.

This time, the surge was rampant and fierce.

-Bang!

Not only sent flying, but the force was enough to break down a wall and pin down the hellhound.

The same magic, but of an entirely different level.

The two girls, stunned, were soon interrupted by a familiar voice.

“Are you hurt anywhere?”

It was Silica.

“Instructor Silica!”

Their exclamation of joy was short-lived as Arin’s gaze shifted to another woman beside her.

Judging from the situation, she seemed to be the caster of the spell that just hit the hellhound.

The reason for her gaze was simple.

Even to another woman, she was strikingly beautiful.

“We need to sort out the current situation first! Ellis! Please take care of the princess!”

“Yes, teacher!”

Hearing the name Ellis, Arin’s heart sank.

‘Ellis? Could it be Ellis Vert? So, Sian’s sister?!’

Looking closely, the facial features did indeed resemble Sian’s.

Lunev wasn’t immune to staring intently at her.

‘Tremendous mana... I feel an aura similar to the senior.’

While a woman reminisced about a certain man, the peculiar moment was interrupted.

-Squeak

Ellis boldly tore the dress she was wearing.

“This dress won’t do for proper fighting. Let’s go, everyone!”

“But, Instructor Silica!”

“It’s alright! Instructor Silica is a lot stronger than you think!”

With a reassuring push, she nudged the two girls forward.

“I will lead you to the shelter!”

Following her lead, the guardian knights regrouped and originated towards the shelter with the princess.

Left alone, Silica drew a small dagger hidden near her thigh.

-Swish!

Hesitation is a luxury for an assassin.

Silica charged at the assailants ahead, wielding her blade at an invisible speed, moving like a dance.

However, those cut by her sword fell mercilessly, pouring blood as they collapsed.

The time taken to deal with the assailants in the area was less than ten seconds.

-Swish

Approaching the body of an assailant, Silica removed the mask.

“.....!”

The face lay decayed beyond recognition as if it had been dead for quite some time.

It was an empty vessel, reanimated unto a puppet.

Silica immediately realized their nature.

“Marionettes...!”

Also known as puppet dolls.

Not a resurrection of the dead, but a magic that moves soulless corpses at the caster's will, essentially controlling puppets.

The mask-removed corpse soon dispersed into dust and vanished.

“Head!”

Once the situation was settled, members of the Mist who had infiltrated the palace rushed to her.

Silica promptly issued orders.

“Notify all agents in the vicinity. Leave the imperial palace, no, the imperial city immediately! There's a whole operation unfolding here that our Mist is unaware of....”

After receiving their instructions, the agents departed swiftly.

“What could be behind all of this...!”

Her eyes filled with murderous intent, and her lips clenched tightly.

It wasn't merely the frustration of being upstaged.

It was anger because there was something happening of such magnitude that even she couldn't handle.

“Where are you, Sian?”

Her concern was solely for her missing disciple.

* * *

The appearance of assailants and beasts showed no signs of abating.

Even as they blindly hurried towards the underground shelter, the paths were continuously barricaded as if they were passing through barriers, making it impossible to get closer.

So, the company of Arin had no choice but to flee outside the building.

The imperial palace's central garden was dotted with sculptures.

They decided to hide in a gazebo surrounded by flowers until they could catch their breath.

It was eerily silent, not even insect noises could be heard.

“We’ve managed a brief respite, but we can’t relax just yet.”

As Ellis surveyed the situation, she let out a sigh.

“Does it feel like they are particularly targeting us, or is it just me?”

“Right. They seemed to swarm around us unnaturally, almost as if they are drawn to our scent...”

As Lunev expressed her suspicion, Ellis nodded in agreement.

A feeling too unnatural, as if beasts were tracking down the scent of prey.

Arin then asked in a troubled voice,

“Is it because of me then?”

She seemed to think that her royal lineage had brought danger upon them all.

“We’ll have to confirm later. Whether it’s truly the royal family as a whole they’re targeting, or just you, Your Highness...”

Ellis gently consoled Arin’s sinking shoulders.

“By the way, Ellis, are you Sian’s sister?”

“Yes? Oh yes, that’s right! With all the commotion, we haven’t had a proper introduction. I’m Ellis Vert, the eldest daughter of the Vert family!”

Despite the urgency of the situation, Ellis properly curtsied.

“I heard you sent an invitation to my brother. Are you close with our Sian?”

“Well, that... there was no particular intent! I just felt sorry for Sian, staying at the academy even during vacations!”

“Arin sent the invitation to my senior?”

Lunev's downcast look made Arin even more flustered.

"What! What if I sent one – It's not like he even gave me the time of day after he came!"

Was it the resentment toward Sian rushing forth?

Arin's lips protruded in a pout.

"I'll have to scold my brother for making a lady wait, even if he is my own blood. I'll have to give Sian a piece of my mind later."

Of course, this was assuming they safely overcame the current circumstance.

Neither of the three women knew where Sian currently was or what he was doing.

-Swish Swish

The sound of fast-moving shrubs indicated someone approaching.

The guardian knights immediately went on high alert.

"There, over there!"

Dozens of masked assailants emerged from the blossoming flowerbed.

Instead of an ambush, they seemed to slowly encircle Arin and her party, tightening their hold from all sides.

"How did they gather so quickly?"

It was bewildering; no trace of their arrival had been felt.

As though they just materialized out of the flowerbeds.

Ellis quickly concentrated her mana.

The small force of just ten people.

It seemed impossible to fend off the assailants while protecting the two girls.

In her uncomfortable outfit, with no sword in hand,

Ellis realized the only thing she could rely on was her magic.

-Whirring

The mana vibrations for casting a high-level spell.

She intended to bring forth all her magical power.

“Ellis?!”

“The flowers seem to be wilting. Seems they need some watering. Though, it might be so excessive that everything could be swept away...”

Casting this spell would undoubtedly leave her drained and unconscious.

From there on, it would be up to the knights to take over.

-Thud!

“.....?”

Suddenly, a large sculpture in the garden fell with a loud noise.

Everybody, including the assailants, turned to look briefly,

Out of the dust emerged a silhouette shooting into the sky.

-Slice

Glowing beneath the golden full moon and emitting an unknown black mist was a figure in dark tuxedo and a black mask.

A stark contrast to the assailants' stark white masks.

-Tadada tat

‘What, what is this intense killing intent?!’

It was an unfamiliar energy that Ellis had never encountered before.

With a blood-red dagger emitting wild energy in hand,

He charged straight towards the masked assailants.

(To be continued)

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Chapter 72: The Banquet of Blood (5)

Arin, along with Ellis, Lunev, and the knights.

All of them were now of one mind, harboring the same thought.

The masked man was at least not part of these attackers.

The aura he emitted differed vastly.

Unlike the ghastly masked assailants who hardly seemed human, the masked man appeared to be human, but there was a strange feeling he might be a higher being, almost superhuman.

Yet, no one could ascertain his true identity.

-Swish!

A spectacular sword dance unfolded under the moonlight.

Flower petals dancing in the wind added to the dazzling scene of wonder.

The masked man swiftly cut down the surrounding assailants.

Sometimes his speed was too fast to follow.

Although he executed frontal sword strikes, he would suddenly move to the rear, freely roaming the given space.

Two minutes.

That was all it took for dozens of assailants to be annihilated.

Without any help or support, a lone figure performed this unbelievable feat.

“...!”

Suddenly, his gaze turned towards Arin and her group.

Meeting his glance, Arin felt as if all her senses had come to a halt, and her trembling legs refused to lift from the ground.

“D-don’t come any closer!”

The royal guards brandished their swords to protect the princess.

“Reveal your identity at once, and state your business here! Otherwise, you too will be deemed an enemy...”

-Swish!

Before the knight could finish speaking.

The masked man had disappeared from their sight.

-Whoosh!

A gust of violent wind followed.

The knights realized too late that the masked man had already passed them.

“...!”

Ellis and Lunev were bypassed in an instant as well.

The man’s final destination was right before Princess Arin.

It is said that when one is extremely startled, they become speechless.

Panicked, Arin stumbled backward, and tripping over herself, she lost her balance.

“Kyaa!”

As Arin helplessly fell backward,

-Thunk

The man's gentle touch supported her back.

"...!"

The faces of the man and woman naturally drew close.

Arin's face flushed red, while the man, undisturbed, raised his hand.

His hand reached towards her chest.

"What are you doing!"

Arin was about to struggle in panic but something was falling from her body.

-Clink clink

Gems shimmering like falling rain scattered about.

What the man had grabbed was the pendant Arin was wearing.

-Crunch!

The red gem everyone was focused on shattered into pieces as soon as he gripped it, turning to dust in his hand.

The man nonchalantly tossed the remnants to the ground.

"Your Highness!"

The guards regained their senses and rushed over.

"Are you alright? Are you injured?"

Of course, there were no injuries.

The masked man had merely snatched the necklace from her neck.

Still dazed, Arin stood there with a vacant expression.

"That, who was that man?"

It felt as if she had emerged from a fleeting illusion.

A midsummer night's dream wouldn't be as fleeting as this.

The masked man had vanished completely from everyone's view.

* * *

“Aaah!”

Emily and Nana were running for their lives, shouting, “Save us!” with Brian closely following to protect them.

“What in the world are those things? Why do they suddenly appear and attack us?”

Just a few minutes earlier.

After hearing screams from the banquet hall and wondering what was happening, they were suddenly attacked by the pale-masked assailants.

The entire royal palace was in chaos; there was no choice but to trust their legs and run.

“Sir Knight, have you offended those people? Otherwise, why do they keep chasing after poor us?!”

“Well, I don't know? For my part, I don't believe I've lived badly, or have I? Now that I think about it, it seems there might have been something...”

“What kind of knight wavers so much? Ah! What was the lord thinking when he took in people like you!?”

In her frustration amidst their escape, Emily burst out with her grievances.

But their escape was cut short as they were met with a dead-end wall.

“A wall?!”

With no retreat, they were trapped.

Emily's face contorted in utter despair.

“Perhaps this is for the best!”

Contrarily, Brian drew a dagger, not the longsword on his belt, but one from inside his clothing.

Five assailants were before them.

Though outnumbered, Brian was not intimidated.

On the contrary, he wore a hint of confidence.

“Are you mad, Sir Knight? How do you plan to handle so many on your own!”

“Do not fret, Maid! If I can’t overcome this much, how can I face the lord later!”

With a bold resolve, Brian charged forward.

Maximizing his senses while minimizing his movements.

In the last two years, he had learned the most efficient method to subdue enemies.

To eliminate five enemies required only five sword strikes.

Brian deftly cut down the masked assailants with clean, precise moves.

-Thud

The assailants fell without a sound.

Watching this scene, Emily questioned her own eyes.

Her blushing face was an added reaction.

“Are you hurt, Maid?”

“Isn’t that something you should be asking yourself?”

His suddenly clumsy and awkward appearance stood out.

Uneasily scratching the back of his head, Brian was quite the sight.

“Grrrr...”

A chilling sound evoked a cold shiver.

At this, Emily wrapped herself as if trying to get warm, and Brian adjusted his grip on the sword, readying his stance.

Soon, heavy animalistic footsteps approached—not human, but beast.

Around the corner, a large Hellhound emerged.

Its black, sharp teeth filled with malice directed at Emily and her party.

“This can’t be! Why is a Hellhound inside the royal palace?”

For Emily, with front-line experience, panicking was inevitable, and Brian also couldn’t hide his tension at the sight of this unknown magical beast.

“That, is that a magical beast?!”

-Clomp clomp

Amid this, Nana, who was quietly standing by, confidently stepped forward.

“Nana...?”

Before anyone could ask, she sniffed as if trying to catch a scent.

-Sniff

Then, she smiled knowingly, wetting her lips—a look akin to a carnivorous beast ravenous with hunger, murmuring softly.

“It looks delicious!”

Her newly grown white fangs bared as she prepared to leap.

-Crash!

Suddenly, a nearby window shattered.

“...!”

A man with a black mask flew in through the broken window.

His identity was still unknown.

“Grr!”

Confronted with this stranger, the fearless puppy barked valiantly.

“What’s this now?”

-Boot

Annoyed, he simply kicked the Hellhound out through the window.

“Sigh...”

After a deep sigh, he threw off his mask.

“Papa!”

The man was Sian, donning an obviously disgruntled expression.

“M-milord?”

Before they could respond to his call, Sian slumped down right there.

* * *

Having roamed the royal palace to the bone, I had only one thought in mind.

Ah, this is unbearably tiring.

It wasn’t my body that was weary, but my spirit.

I should have known since nagging premonitions never go astray. If only I hadn’t been left alone with this tedious matter.

“My, no, Master!”

Nana rushed into my arms with a beaming smile.

But wasn’t she just about to charge at a Hellhound? It must be my imagination.

“What are you doing, milord!”

Suddenly appearing, Emily split Nana and me apart.

“Do you realize the gravity of the situation? Where on earth is there a maid hugging her master? Besides, keeping another maid besides myself... Have you lost your mind, milord? Moreover, what about the Hellhound just now...?!”

Where on earth is a maid that asks her master if he’s gone mad?

I can’t afford to listen to her complaints right now.

“Nevermind. Emily, did you receive something from someone?”

“Receive something? Oh right! I forgot to give you something earlier...”

From her pocket, she pulled out a bow tie.

Before she could hand it over, I snatched it and crushed it with force.

-Crunch

The gem embedded in the tie shattered to dust.

Without a second thought, I tossed it out the window.

“What, what are you doing, milord!”

Stunned, Emily grabbed my collar and shook me vehemently.

“That was a gift from Lord Aschel! How could you destroy your brother’s present like that!”

Would she realize that they’ve been chased by assailants because of that stone?

Daze Stone.

One of the artifacts capable of holding a person’s magic.

While it might seem like just a red, ornate gem on the outside, it’s practically suicidal to possess it.

The magic trapped within intermittently emits an enthralling aura, attracting other beings,

Simply put, by possessing it, you become a target for marionettes and magical beasts.

That's why the princess and these people were harassed by those puppets until I arrived.

It wouldn't make any sense to explain this to her, so leaving her be would be the wiser choice.

"Brian?"

"Yes, milord!"

"Go get me a change of clothes from my room. You'll find a tuxedo similar to what I'm wearing."

"Right away!"

"Why are you asking the knight for that? That's a maid's job!"

What now?

"Let's go, Sir Knight! It'd be troublesome if you brought back wrinkled clothes, so I'll accompany you!"

How honorable, Emily was.

"Huh? Then I'll come along too!"

Nana also followed them, intending to go as well.

Three people going just to fetch a single change of clothes.

With Brian there, there shouldn't be any issues.

Not that being left alone is anything new for me.

[...]

Meanwhile, Ceyram leaned against the wall, resting and simply observing me with an odd smile that made her seem like a plotting devil.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

[Well, I was just wondering. Is it really alright to be so at ease?]

From her tone, she seemed more amused than concerned.

“The marionettes in the palace have all been dealt with. The same goes for the summoned creatures, and I’ve destroyed all the Daze Stones you mentioned, so the palace guards can handle the rest.”

[Are you sure you destroyed all the Daze Stones? Really think it’s all clear?]

“No doubt. You clearly told me...”

Suddenly, the cold warning of my cursed sword snapped me back to reality.

This was not a laughing matter.

“The pendant on the princess, and the bowtie Emily tried to give me... That was all, wasn’t it?”

I couldn’t have heard wrong.

There were Daze Stones in precisely those two locations, and I destroyed them.

That should be it, but why is Ceyram smiling like that?

[I never said there were just two.]

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 73

Chapter 73: The Banquet of Blood (6)

Humans, naturally complacent creatures, are prone to the illusion of familiarity.

I am no exception.

Perhaps I was fooled by the familiarity into thinking I could handle everything, briefly forgetting her true nature.

Ceyram is a demonic sword, not a kindly holy sword that aids its owner's complete fulfillment and desires, but rather a malicious weapon inclined to lead to chaos and destruction, feasting on its owner without making things easy for them.

Instead of offering a comfortable path, it tended to present challenges to its master.

The anti-eavesdropping barrier prevented me from hearing the conversation between the prince and Aschel,

which meant I had no choice but to take Ceyram's words at face value and act accordingly.

The prince's plan, as she described it, essentially boiled down to this:

Creation of a platoon of assassins through the forbidden summoning spell 'Marionette', disguised initially as musicians to infiltrate, followed by coordinating with additional assassins already embedded in the banquet hall, and finally inciting chaos in the palace with the aid of hellhound-like summoned creatures, all while utilizing the 'Daze Stones' to eliminate targets preset by the conspirators.

It was more preposterous than surprising.

Would people believe that this was a scheme concocted by the prince, the rightful heir to the empire, and the second guardian of the continent?

The Daze Stone is an artifact so forbidden that its use, let alone its creation, is strictly prohibited by the Imperial Magic Society.

Of course, this prohibition isn't applicable to everyone.

If the performance and use of the Daze Stone, and a status that could cover even if they were exposed, were guaranteed,

then it ultimately wasn't prohibited but rather a usable artifact.

Considering our all-powerful First Prince of the Empire, it's safe to assume he meets all these conditions.

Before anything else, there was one thing that puzzled me.

For what reason were Prince Luinel and Aschel causing such chaos in the palace?

Putting aside the turmoil in the palace, why burden me and Princess Arin with these stones and lead us into hardship?

Do they consider us a threat?

That seemed far-fetched.

While there might have been some doubt, I hadn't really done anything yet to pose a definite threat to Aschel.

And I had yet to even meet Prince Luinel, while Princess Arin had done little except diligently attend the academy.

Could it be a plan to make us the scapegoats for some ulterior motive?

This seemed quite possible.

The youngest of the imperial family and a duke's household—although we didn't have power or influence, we did have the title of nobility.

In other words, we were perfect as a pretext for whatever they wanted to accomplish.

Killed within the chaos and then shifting the blame onto to someone else? That seemed like a conceivable scenario.....

But, this was only speculation, and far from definite.

In the current situation, it would be difficult to grasp their true intentions.

However...

I've made a mistake.

Upon reflection, shouldn't I have first grasped the intentions of the demonic sword at my side rather than pursuing those of the perpetrators?

"What's your angle, Ceyram?"

When I asked with a raised eyebrow, she laughed as if incredulous.

[Hey, you'd think I was giving false info, huh? Didn't I tell you? They decided to pass on the Daze Stones through an unsuspecting third party, not them. One to that young princess and one to you!]

Right, she was correct.

Actually, Princess Arin had a Daze Stone embedded in her pendant.

If Ceyram was to be believed, the prince must have sent it to her disguised as a gift.

What about me, then?

Coincidentally, I hadn't received anything.

Or more accurately, I hadn't been able to.

The moment I first heard about it, I knew immediately who was supposed to hand me the Daze Stone.

It had to be Emily, without doubt.

But she hadn't given me a stone, or anything for that matter.

Did she intentionally not give it to me?

From what I see, she must have forgotten about it.

Caught up in the euphoria of her first time at the palace, she likely forgot to pass it on to me.

That's perfectly in character for her.

And sure enough, inside Emily's pocket was a bowtie-designed Daze Stone, which I then smashed on the spot.

If their plan had been successful, they would have turned the blame on Emily.

Did they think to pass it to me while taking the chance to see my face?

Clearly, they had brought her for a purpose from the start.

They wouldn't have anticipated she'd be such a naïve and clumsy maid, though...

Anyway, I wasn't mistaken in what I heard from Ceyram.

If there's an issue, it would be what she hadn't said.

Through a third party unaware of anything, the stones to both the princess and me...

Wait a second.

A sudden thought shot through my mind like a bolt.

"A third party?"

As mentioned before, the Daze Stone is an artifact whose creation is legally forbidden throughout the empire.

Even if the prince decided to use it, since its commercial production was banned a long time ago, there were no such stones left within the empire.

So what to do then?

Simple.

Obtain or receive the stones from a place where they still exist.

A certain group on this continent has no qualms in making and using Daze Stones.

Those without any restrictions or limitations on magic.

The Magic Society of the Kingdom of Garam.

There, making a Daze Stone or two wouldn't be any trouble at all.

So, who could be the related third party inside the palace currently?

There was only one person I could think of.

"...Lunev Rainriver?"

[Looks like our master has finally caught on, huh?]

With an irresistibly demonic smile, Ceyram faced me and watched without a word.

She wasn't implying that Lunev was the mastermind.

Before the banquet, Kellin made it clear when she came to see me.

There was some secret stratagem that Emperor and Aschel were plotting with Lunev.

Meaning the intended targets of the Daze Stones weren't just Princess Arin and me.

Lunev.

She was included as a target as well.

* * *

After the masked man in black annihilated the attackers, the situation eventually settled with the arrival of reinforcement troops from inside the palace.

"It's a huge relief! Her Highness the Princess was the only member of the royal family not yet in the shelter, so His Majesty was incredibly worried!"

"How is His Majesty?"

"He suffered a minor seizure from his chronic illness while fleeing, but he's now resting safely."

"What about Miss Silica?"

"Oh, you mean the eldest daughter of the Nigrity House? She is safe as well."

Upon hearing Silica was not harmed, Ellis breathed a sigh of relief.

"Though the situation is far from celebrating, casualties from this incident are surprisingly few."

Ellis responded with surprise.

“Really?”

“Yes. Even before the palace’s forces reached the Great Chamber, all the masked attackers were already annihilated. It might be that since they were ‘Marionettes’—forces created by magic power—they disappeared over time, but investigations show most of them vanished after sustaining injuries.”

In other words, someone had deliberately dealt with the attackers and the summoned creatures. The thought of a particular individual came naturally to the three women’s minds.

“But it’s still not safe, so it would be better for Your Highness to move to the shelter as well. We will escort you, so may we recommend you join us?”

“Yes, let’s go.”

Arin readily accepted the escort.

The chaos at the banquet, where everyone should have been happy, had ended, yet Arin and Ellis’s hearts were far from calm.

Who could have engineered such an unbelievable event and why?

Despite the conclusion of the immediate scenario, pondering the future processing of the case did not appear smooth sailing.

“.....”

Amidst all this, Lunev gazed fixedly at one spot she had been focusing on for a while.

It was the broken pendant that until recently adorned Arin’s neck.

Within the red dust, she could almost feel a faint trace of mana.

Lunev pulled something out of her pocket.

It was an intricate silver bracelet inlaid with various jewels.

“What are you doing, Lunev? If we don’t go now...”

Approaching her, Arin halted with a start.

In the center of the bracelet was a red gem the size of an adult's fingernail, very similar to the one in Arin's pendant.

"That, that looks extremely similar to mine. Where did you get it?"

"I, I received it from a councilor who accompanied me to the palace..."

She had been told it would be a good accessory for the banquet, but feeling it didn't suit her, she simply kept it in her pocket. Since Lunev only saw Arin's face during their first encounter, she never realized that there was a similar gem in her pendant.

Lunev realized.

This was unlikely to be just any gem.

That moment when she was about to sense the familiar magical aura that she had often studied at the academy,

"...?"

She heard footsteps rushing through the flower bed.

Without looking to see who was ahead, all heads turned to see a man hastening their way from not far off.

"Sir Sian?"

The man the two ladies had been searching for the length of the banquet.

It was Sian.

He charged towards them as if a supernatural being intent on preventing a tragedy, in full sprint.

His approach was so swift, the distance closed in an instant.

"...save Lunev!"

Lunev, somewhat dazed by the situation, didn't quite catch Sian's shouted words.

"What?!"

“Dodge!!”

It was certainly a call to dodge.

As to why he would shout such a thing out of the blue, her momentary confusion was interrupted as

Lunev felt murderous intent rising behind her and turned around.

“.....!”

It was a white-masked attacker that had yet to be subdued.

The attacker was poised to slash through Lunev with a grotesque sword raised overhead.

Lunev instinctively shut her eyes tight.

-Slash!

“Aagh!”

The heavy weapon swiped through the air at tremendous speed.

But the sword cut nothing but empty air; there was nothing proper to slice.

“Cough...”

Hearing a groan instead of her own, Lunev cautiously opened her eyes.

The warmth and sweat of the man enveloped her, the sensation spreading throughout her body.

“S, Sir...?”

Opening her eyes, Lunev immediately realized.

Sian had thrown himself in front of her to shield her from the attacker’s blade at the last moment.

She was safely enclosed within Sian’s protective arms.

-Drip

A lonely trail of blood ran down the back of a hand.

The blood wasn't hers, though.

Glancing up, she saw a clear, deep cut on Sian's shoulder, as though slashed by a blade.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 74

Chapter 74: Cutting of the Tail (1)

"There's a limit to blindly charging in. Just what were you thinking, rushing into the midst of those blades?"

My sister's gaze was sharper than any knife.

"I just acted on instinct to block it; it wasn't a particularly thoughtful move."

As I reluctantly avoided her eyes and spoke in a monotone, she sighed softly.

"Well, at least you're not hurt too badly. It's a wonder there weren't more casualties in all this chaos."

During the attempt to save Lunev, I had been grazed by the weapon of an assailant.

The assailant was promptly dealt with by the knights, and since the wound wasn't severe, I received some basic healing and had bandages wrapped around it.

It was a bit of a hassle, but it would be best to keep it on for a while.

"By the way, Sian, where have you been? I heard that quite a number of ladies were looking for you?"

“I wasn’t feeling well, so I was resting in my room. But then I heard a scream from the corridor, and suddenly there were assailants. So I hurriedly fled outside.”

Of course, that was a lie.

But before meeting with Emily and her party, I had been wearing a mask all the time, so there should be no witnesses to contradict my false alibi.

My sister stared at me without saying a word.

“Is there something on my face?”

“No, it’s just... I was reminded of someone with a similar vibe to you.”

She chuckled reluctantly.

“Really, you would have been amazed if you’d seen it. A single person was fighting against dozens. It was quite a rare sight.”

“Did you see the face?”

I asked as if casually curious.

“No, the face was covered by a black mask, so I couldn’t see. It seems they had no intention of revealing their identity from the start.”

I felt relieved that I had changed outfits beforehand.

“Still, you were quite the hero when you saved that Lunev girl, weren’t you? A knight in shining armor. I was planning to nag you about how a man should treat women, but I’ll let it slide this time.”

A question mark floated in my mind.

Had I done anything particularly wrong as to deserve such a nag?

Without showing it, I asked.

“What happened to that girl?”

“She was taken by the people from the Garam’s Magic Society. The Empire will probably start an investigation soon too.”

I sensed a downturn in my sister's voice.

Lunev and the others from the Magic Society could potentially be detained in the Imperial Palace for their involvement.

After all, the crucial Daze Stone had been found in her possession.

For now, I had not destroyed Lunev's stone.

Since it was a situation where identities had been revealed, I couldn't carelessly take action and shatter the stone, to then be connected to this mess myself.

"She must have been quite shocked. To be caught up in such chaos in a foreign country, and now unfairly under investigation. If you see her again, be sure to comfort her, Sian."

"Understood."

Well, that's assuming I see her again.

Having saved her life once, I didn't intend to get involved any further.

-Knock Knock-

It was a regular knock, but it made the hairs on my body stand on end.

My heartbeat quickened, and I started to feel anxious.

I instinctively knew who was behind the door.

"May I enter, Sian?"

That voice was one I could never forget.

Then, the owner of the voice entered through the opened door, grinning vilely at me.

"I'm glad to see you're alright, Sian."

It was Aschel, the eldest son of the Vert Household, whom I had not seen in two years.

* * *

Ellis's expression was not particularly bright at the arrival of her brother.

Her face seemed to question why he was there.

But then, she promptly concealed her inner thoughts and warmly greeted him.

"Welcome, brother. It's my first time seeing you here in the palace, isn't it?"

Aschel responded with a smile as well.

"I've been a bit busy with the Prince. I'm quite sorry I couldn't pay more attention to you all."

Was it just me, or did his sincerity seem questionable?

As Ellis averted her gaze, her eyes suddenly fell on Sian.

During the moment Aschel turned his head to close the door, Ellis unmistakably saw it.

The scowl on Sian's face seemed to emanate a strong intent to kill the very person before him.

"You're too kind, brother! I'm sorry to have caused you worry."

However, that aura vanished as soon as Sian lifted his head.

Ellis was left speechless from the sudden disappearance.

"Now that I see you, you have indeed grown up to be quite charming."

"Thank you for your kind words."

"But..."

The flow of conversation paused momentarily, filling the room with an unexplainable tension.

"Did you, by any chance, not receive my gift?"

Aschel's use of the word "gift" caused Ellis's heart to plummet.

While her pupils were violently shaking, Sian's face bore no change.

He did not immediately reply, but waited a couple of seconds before speaking.

"Do you mean the bowtie? Unfortunately, my maid was supposed to deliver it but lost it during the commotion. I am truly sorry for not being able to keep the precious gift you gave!"

As he was about to get up and bow, Aschel stopped him.

"It's fine. I had something that would suit you well, but it can't be helped. Next time, I'll make sure to give you a better gift."

As their conversation continued, Ellis grew increasingly anxious.

It felt as if she was witnessing two ticking bombs on the verge of explosion, but she couldn't explain why.

"As much as I'd like to spend more time with you, I must be leaving now. Don't worry about the aftermath. I'll ensure everything is taken care of so you won't be bothered."

With these words, Aschel rose to leave.

Ellis immediately rushed to see him off.

"Be, be careful, brother!"

After returning Aschel's smile, he left the room.

Ellis quickly turned to Sian.

His expression remained utterly neutral.

* * *

"I'm so relieved you're alright, Your Highness! You have no idea how worried I was!"

Resmus wouldn't leave Arin's side.

"But, but I'm fine, Resmus! Why are you like this today?"

Due to her status as a maid, Resmus could not accompany Arin to the banquet, and was unable to be by her side when the crisis occurred.

Her dread at not being able to protect her mistress in a time of danger was unbearable.

It was rare to see Resmus so forthright in her emotions, normally strict in her duties. Arin realized just how precious she was to her.

Over time, the incident concluded, but Arin's mood did not improve.

It was reasonable for her mind to be cluttered after such events.

However, Arin was obsessively replaying one scene in her mind.

The moment where Sian held Lunev in his embrace.

With repetition, the imagination adds to thoughts.

While she understood that he had jumped in to save Lunev, Arin's mind kept adding strange elements to the scene.

'Wasn't I right there next to him, or was I not even worth considering?'

She felt as if hours of effort adoring Sian had utterly gone to waste.

Despite this, Arin was embarrassed to be harbouring such petty thoughts during a crisis.

'Who was that person?'

The masked man who saved them was someone she couldn't forget.

He appeared during a crisis, destroyed her pendant containing a dangerous artifact known as the Daze Stone, then vanished.

Most importantly, he did something he clearly knew was necessary from the beginning, thus saving them from the assailants.

But who could it be?

She couldn't see his face due to the mask, but the feeling was strangely familiar.

It was as if she had encountered someone she knew well.

-Clang!-

The princess's door swung open abruptly.

To enter the chamber of the imperial family without warning was a grave offense.

But even the knights outside and the maidens within could not dare to stop the figure who entered.

“Brother Luinel...?”

It was the first prince of the Empire, Luinel Severus.

Despite being his sister's room officially, it was still the room of a girl, of the princess.

To Arin, the situation was somewhat uncomfortable.

Yet, unable to freely express this sentiment due to her position, she politely curtsied.

“Ah, welcome, brother. Your visit is an honor.....”

In contrast to her respectful greeting, the prince's face was not cheerful.

Without responding to her greeting, he sat down and crossed his legs.

“I'll ask you straight, Arin,”

The Prince spoke indifferently and coldly.

“Before the banquet, did you receive a pendant from my maid?”

She had received it, but not in the original state.

Trying to steady her trembling heart, Arin calmly replied.

“Yes, I treasured it as a gift from you, but regretfully it was destroyed in the recent commotion.”

Luinel scoffed.

“How foolish.”

“Excuse me?”

Arin couldn't help but retort, surprised.

“You've heard? That pendant contained an artifact known as the Daze Stone.”

“Yes, that's correct, but...”

“I did not direct that maid to deliver the pendant to you. And naturally, I've never seen that pendant. It means that maid concocted the entire scheme.”

The pendant, gifted as if from the prince, contained an enchantment-infused Daze Stone.

Because of it, Arin became the target of assailants and summoned creatures, bringing her close to a fatal crisis.

Although she managed to emerge unscathed, upon considering causality, it seemed as though Prince Luinel had plotted to kill Arin.

Nonetheless, the prince severed any relation to the incident, washing his hands clean of it.

“Do not dare link that pendant to me! Do you understand, Arin?”

Left without opportunity for retort, Arin could only nod in affirmation.

“Yes, brother.”

Having finished his business, the prince stood up.

“I thought you might have grown up, but you are truly naive to hope that I would send you a gift.”

Could she have not doubted it?

Perhaps the faint hope of family affection had overshadowed her suspicions.

Yet, at this moment, any naive hope that the prince considered her family shattered.

“Remember this! Your foolish lack of suspicion contributed to today’s tragedy as well!”

With those final words, Luinel departed from the room.

No one, not even Resmus, could find words to say to her.

All that echoed was the sound of her desperately trying to hold back tears.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 75

Chapter 75: Cutting off the Tail (2)

After the dreadful blood-soaked banquet came to a close, the imperial palace was left shrouded in bleakness. As the horrific night passed and dawn broke, the morning sun rose.

Exhausted but unable to fall asleep, Ellis stared vacantly out the window.

-Knock knock

“Come in.”

Her maid, Cecilia, entered.

“How did it go?”

“All the notable figures from the Garam Magic Society, including Lunev, have been taken by the palace knights. It seems they will undergo intensive investigation over the next few days.”

Ellis wasn’t particularly surprised; she had anticipated this. Given that Lunev Rainriver was found with the Daze Stone, they inevitably became prime suspects in the incident.

With a heavy heart, Ellis let out a sigh.

“Do you have any worries, my lady?”

After taking a moment to ponder Cecilia’s question, Ellis responded.

“Cecilia.”

“Yes, my lady.”

“Do you remember the first gift I received from brother Aschel when I was nine?”

“Of course. The lord gave you a magic scroll, a gift that you adored, knowing how interested you were in magic.”

A magic scroll.

It’s a sort of single-use magical artifact. It can be activated with mana alone, without any specific spells or complexities, making it a common training tool for apprentice mages or incoming academy freshmen.

“Even though I was often called a prodigy, that scroll was beyond what I could handle at the time. But Aschel said when he gave it to me...”

Ellis couldn’t forget the words he said.

“If you grow to the point where you can use this scroll, something truly tremendous will happen. Perhaps the whole world will look towards you. I hope I can see that before you start academy...”

It sounded like a warm, encouraging sentiment at first glance.

However, if Aschel truly meant it that way, Ellis wouldn’t have been wearing such a somber expression now.

“But do you know? I still have that scroll.”

Ellis took out an aged scroll from a small dimensional box on her desk, unrolling it for Cecilia to see.

“This can still be used. It’s perfectly intact, not torn or damaged in any way. However...”

“...!”

Cecilia was taken aback.

“Lady Ellis, you don’t mean that scroll is...?”

By her eyes, it was clear that this was no ordinary magical scroll.

“Yes. It’s not a magic scroll, but a summoning scroll capable of calling forth a demon beast...”

The scroll’s crimson magic circle, engraved at the center of the blue parchment, unmistakably denoted it as a summoning scroll for low-rank demon beasts from the front lines.

“Since when did you know, my lady?”

“Perhaps when I was around fourteen? It slipped my mind as I focused on my studies, but I chanced upon it again one day. By then, my abilities were about four-star, so I figured I wouldn’t have any trouble using it. I was utterly shocked... As a naive child, I had been clueless that this was a summoning scroll...”

The only requirement to activate a scroll is mana that matches its condition.

Even if the nature of the scroll was unknown, it could be activated, reacting solely to the caster’s magical power.

“I was horrified then. If I’d carelessly activated it back then, I would’ve faced a demon beast helplessly.”

Remembering that day, Ellis placed her hand over her heart.

“And then another thought crossed my mind. Did brother really think I could activate this scroll? What would have happened if I had actually done it? Was Aschel hoping for something after the activation? What would become of me?”

Ellis continued assertively, despite the grimness clouding her face.

“Didn’t Lord Aschel say anything?” Cecilia’s expression grew graver.

“I asked him once. If he still had the scroll he gave me. I lied, telling him I lost it...”

“Why did you do that?”

“I just felt like I had to. Perhaps Aschel himself didn’t know what the scroll was for. He seemed genuinely disappointed by my answer. But...”

Ellis clenched her fist as if overwhelmed with emotion.

“That look on his face, that was not one of ignorance. He knew everything from the start and seemed genuinely displeased that I hadn’t used the scroll. It was as if he wished misfortune upon me...”

Why? How could it be? Why would her own brother, her family, commit such a dreadful act against her? Ellis still could not fathom his motives.

“And now, it seems brother has sent another gift. This time not to me, but to Sian...”

“To the youngest lord?”

“Yes. I think it was a bow tie. A maid was supposed to deliver it, but she lost it somehow. He didn’t receive it...”

It was a recent occurrence that Ellis vividly remembered.

With a sense of regret and a foreboding gaze similar to what she encountered in the past, Ellis believed the item couldn’t have been a good gift for Sian.

‘Your brother might be far more remarkable than you think.’

She recalled the Duke’s words from Belias.

It was a fleeting moment, but from Sian’s eyes, Ellis could sense a definitive emotion—as if he knew everything about himself and was denying it.

“Does Sian know something?” Ellis wondered.

She hoped, just as the Duke had said, that Sian would become an incredibly great being.

That he would surpass her and even Aschel, emerging as the new heir for their lineage.

* * *

Three days had passed since the tumultuous night of the banquet.

The nobles who had attended were all investigated and then released. Most fled the capital, as if in escape.

The empire had yet to pinpoint a suspect for the incident.

Nevertheless, the Garam Magic Society was marked as a potential perpetrator, suggesting that their confinement and investigation at the palace would continue.

For the record, my sister and I were exempt from any investigations. It wasn't because our alibis were sound, but more likely someone's influence requested our exclusion. Not for our sake, of course, but entirely for their own.

The words I might spill wouldn't be favorable to them.

"To think my first dining out in the imperial capital would be in such a regular tavern... It's quite the twist in my life..."

Emily, who had buried her face in despair on the table, was consoled by Brian.

"There's nothing we can do, isn't there? With the times as they are, all the finer establishments have shuttered their doors..."

Rumors of assailants within the palace had spread, prompting even the slightly reputable restaurants to cease operations.

This tavern was one we fortunately stumbled upon after combing through back alleys and side streets.

"I can find places like this all over Belias! Do you even know how to drink?!"

"I'm not exactly proficient, but a bit perhaps..."

"I can eat! I'm not picky about food at all!"

"Why would a maid drink in the presence of her employer? Where did you even receive your maid training?"

Somehow, I wanted to throw these words right back at her.

“ ... ”

As soon as I felt a familiar aura, my gaze swiftly shifted.

I stood and left the tavern, heading into the alley where the sensation was strongest.

“Are you going out for a breath of air, my lord?”

Even without asking, Emily questioned if I was going out.

This woman’s perceptiveness...

“Yes. Take care of yourselves while I’m gone.”

Without delay, I left the tavern and strode towards the alley where I sensed the energy. There, Silica the head of the Mist waited, clad in a black long coat and hood, leaning against the wall.

No need for small talk. I went straight to the point.

“What are your plans regarding that maid?”

Naturally, the reference to “the maid” meant Emily.

“I have no intention of sending her back. No good would come of that. As long as she keeps her mouth shut, I presume you wouldn’t have any need to intervene?”

“Sounds prudent. As it happens, the maid who delivered the pendant to the princess recently bit her own tongue before taking her life. It’s likely they took preemptive measures.”

It was severing ties.

They were attempting to prove that they had no relation to the incident from the start.

Had I not destroyed the butterfly necktie Emily gave and kept it, it’s quite possible she would have met a similar fate.

“How are things on the Garam Magic Society’s side?”

“They seem to be dealing with the individual who brought the Daze Stone. They’re trying to cut off ties as well. Regens, the head of the academy, wouldn’t have been plotting something like this in a group, especially not when his granddaughter is involved.”

Even if they weren’t directly linked, the culprit was associated with the Garam Magic Society, a fact that couldn’t be denied. Regardless of the investigation’s outcome, this could lead to sensitive tensions between the Ushif Empire and the Garam Kingdom.

I anticipated we wouldn’t escape the surrounding noise any time soon.

“That aside, Sian, how did you come to know?”

The family head stepped forward with a bright smile, changing the subject abruptly.

“What do you mean?”

“That I’m engaged to Drenian. It was a secret engagement within the family, and certainly, only a few members knew about it. So how did our successor come to learn of this?”

Her hand crept towards the back of my neck, pulling me into an embrace to prevent any escape. I averted my gaze with an awkward smile.

“Well, as I mentioned before, a disciple should be aware of their master’s future...”

-Squeak

“Speak up clearly...!” She tightened her grip as if to say there would be no evading the subject. I could only sweat nervously when suddenly...

-Sshhh

Smoke arose from within my clothes.

At this, the head’s expression turned stern.

[How could the head ignore my warning?]

Ceyram, emerging from the mist, gently removed the head's hand from my neck with his chilling smile.

[Feeling grateful for not being sent to marry a wrinkled old toad is one thing, but do you really have to torment such an innocent and virtuous master?]

The head did not back down, maintaining her awkward smile.

“Ceyram is quite mischievous, I see. I heard you knew everything about the plan yet failed to properly inform Sian... Well, I'm not unaware of the nature of a demonic sword, but it feels like you're overindulging a bit.”

[Oh my? Not coming from someone who tried to kill their fiancé under the guise of a mission? Why didn't you tell your squad from the beginning he was your betrothed? Was it so embarrassing to reveal?]

“Why not? Better than living for hundreds of years without a man by your side, in my opinion...”

Had I let them continue, another commotion was bound to erupt, so it was time to intervene.

I regained control over Ceyram and then bowed to the head.

“Let's meet again at the academy, head.”

Naturally, Ceyram thrashed about.

[Won't you let go? I've always detested that woman! What does anyone have to say to me?]

Trying to pacify her was my burden, and I couldn't fathom why they were making such a fuss.

Having swallowed her anger, Ceyram addressed me.

[Are you considering turning your back on me as well? Frankly, I didn't have much fun, you know? What joy is there in barely a hundred souls?]

No need to fret over our demonic sword.

I had no intention of condemning him.

On the contrary, I was grateful for his presence, which allowed us to thwart their plans in whatever way was possible.

“I have nothing to say. In fact, I’m grateful.”

[.....]

Surprised at my unexpected response, he was speechless.

[Of course! Be thankful I was there! Where else could you find a demonic sword as sharp as I am?]

I didn’t disagree.

As he said, he was my sole cherished sword in this world.

However, increased control seemed necessary for the future...

Now that my meeting with the family head was over, I returned to the tavern where Emily and her company were.

Having spent some time, I imagined Nana, with her appetite, might have already cleared a table and headed back. However, upon my return...

“...?”

For a moment, I thought I saw incorrectly, and my brow furrowed in confusion.

Emily and Brian, equally astonished, hadn’t expected me, and Nana, indifferent, was engrossed in her meal.

And then...

“Welcome back, Senior Sian.”

With utmost naturalness, one more face was there to greet me.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 76

****Chapter 76: Cutting Off the Tail (3)****

10 seconds.

That was the time it took for me to look at her face and start talking.

I wasn't so much stunned as I was flooded with all sorts of thoughts.

Then, thinking that pondering was pointless, I simply asked her straight out.

"What's going on?"

In response to my short and concise question, she replied with focus-less and dark eyes.

"It looks like you're face-to-face with someone who should be locked up in the imperial palace, undergoing interrogation."

She knows too much.

I wouldn't have thought she had been tortured, but I had assumed her sanity wouldn't be intact. However, she seemed no different from when I had first met her before the banquet.

Lunev Rainriver.

The woman who should have been in the underground investigation room of the imperial palace was right in front of me, steam rising from the hot food between us.

"Please have a seat. You need to eat."

It just so happened that the seat she offered was directly across from me.

Since I couldn't just stand there, I sat down.

"You seem curious as to why I am here?"

"Why don't you just tell me, if you know? Surely you didn't break out of jail, did you?"

“Yes.”

I almost choked on my own breath, and Emily and Brian followed suit with fits of coughing.

“I’m kidding.”

I naturally didn’t believe her.

If it had truly been a jailbreak, the surroundings wouldn’t be this silent.

“Don’t worry. I’ve completed all the due interrogations and have been officially released. It has been determined that our Garam Magic Society had absolutely no involvement in this incident.”

That’s unlikely.

The current incident is entirely under the jurisdiction of the First Prince’s forces.

There’s no way they’d just release them; it wouldn’t make sense for people so keen on covering their own corrupt deeds.

“It seems you’re not too pleased?”

She pouted slightly, her cheeks puffing up a bit.

“Pleased or not, is it really all over? After all, wasn’t it someone from your side who brought out the Daze Stone?”

“Yes, while it was indeed someone from our side who had brought it, the society itself had no involvement with it. It was orchestrated by a single individual, and no one else was aware of it.”

“And the empire accepted that?”

“They decided to focus the investigation on that suspect first. It’s not too late to start with us afterwards. But...”

Lunev continued with the same composed look on her face.

“He’s dead. It seems he bit his own tongue and committed suicide...”

A sardonic laugh escaped me the moment I heard it.

Are they resorting to cutting off the tail even in this?

That meant the Garam Magic Society was even more wronged than I thought.

The primary suspect who could've cleared everything up had died without saying anything.

“But how were your charges cleared? Given the circumstances, they should have been more focused on investigating your side?”

“I don't know much, but it seems there were imperial orders to release us without charges. Both the empire and the kingdom promised not to publicly politicize this matter.”

Orders to release without charges from the imperial family?

It's unlikely the First Prince would issue such orders given he holds the authority.

If there were someone who could issue such orders, it would obviously be someone above the First Prince, and in this empire, there's only one such person.

The Emperor.

If her words were true, then the one who ended this matter was none other than Emperor Dione.

“That's why I was released. And the moment I was, I came to see you.”

“How did you know I was here?”

“Just thought that, maybe, you would be here enjoying a meal with a maid and a knight. So I just started looking for a restaurant that would be open in the imperial city. Luckily, I found it quickly.”

Quite a carefree little girl.

She'd come to see my face, even though she could have made a beeline back to her own country.

I truly couldn't understand her state of mind.

"I should probably go before the society sends people to find me. Enjoy your meal, senior."

After getting up from her seat, she briefly waved and then turned and left.

She didn't linger as much as she appeared to.

"Sir~?"

Emily stared at me, fixedly, with an awkward smile and an unsettled gaze.

It was clear what she wanted to say.

She wanted me to escort the girl.

Despite my irritation, I moved naturally.

"...?"

When I stepped outside, Lunev's half-closed eyes opened about 0.5cm wider.

Was she startled by this?

"Don't misunderstand. It's just a simple escort."

I walked with her for about 300 steps.

"That should be enough. Thanks for walking me out, senior."

Her voice was lively, seemingly pleased with the fact that I walked with her.

"Take care, and—"

I intended to send her off with a farewell greeting, when she suddenly embraced me tightly.

"You don't seem to be hurt..."

As she said that, she gently rubbed the injury on my shoulder.

I brushed her off, like a piece of luggage.

“The wound is fine, don’t worry. There’s no need for you to check it like this.”

“I hugged you just fine before...”

She pouted her lips in a display of inexplicable dissatisfaction.

“I’m really going now. See you at the academy, senior.”

With a brief farewell, I nodded silently, and soon Lunev disappeared from my sight.

[Whew~]

As soon as she left, I heard the sound of Ceyram’s mocking whistle.

[Isn’t that just like a prince on a white horse? Shouldn’t you thank me twice now for all this?]

I couldn’t help but laugh at the absurdity.

To anyone listening, it would seem like he had planned it all.

[Whether you like it or not, you’ve foiled that undesirable man’s plans, haven’t you? In the end, they gained nothing, right?]

“That’s right. By now, they’re probably frowning quite hard.”

I did have some regrets about not seeing that face myself.

[But setting everything else aside, how does that prince have the power to use puppets like that? That kind of magic isn’t easy to wield, even for the most talented human beings.]

“It wasn’t the prince who did it. Even Aschel wasn’t the one behind it.”

[Then who was it?]

“There is someone. Unlike me, who worked behind the scenes, he once dominated everything from the forefront, the greatest confidant of that devil...”

I almost forgot.

It should be around this time.

Marionettes, summoning spells, necromancy, dark magic.

He had mastered all magical realms that a human can reach—the strongest dark sorcerer.

“Boris Lehelm...”

Boris would be by Aschel’s side now in Aschel’s place.

* * *

The only space in the imperial palace reserved for one person, the Emperor’s office.

In the Emperor’s eyes, laden with deep thought, one could glimpse a multitude of emotions.

The desk was littered with dozens of documents, but he showed no intention to tidy them up.

–Thud, thud.

A person approached the office slowly.

From the speed of the footsteps, it looked like they were carrying urgent news.

The Emperor glanced neither at the footsteps nor at the person when they entered the office.

“I heard you released the Garam Magic Society representatives.”

“.....”

“Why? They have humiliated our Empire and committed irreverent acts of disturbance right here in the imperial palace under your presence!”

The Emperor remained silent, unresponsive to the tirade.

“Even if the Society itself was not involved, this is an important political tool that we can use against the Kingdom of Garam...”

“Luinel.”

The weight of the Emperor's voice seemed to settle the very air itself, and Prince Luinel fell silent.

He called him, but the Emperor didn't continue right away.

Instead, he waited for Luinel to gather himself before speaking.

"I won't ask why you did it. I won't ask how you did it."

"What, what do you mean?"

Luinel's sweaty face betrayed his distress.

"This is your last warning. Do not cause further turmoil in the Royal Household, no, in the Empire."

".....!"

Luinel struggled to control his expression, his eyes twitching to betray his tension.

"Despite all my shame, I do not understand what you wish to convey, my father."

"Don't play dumb with me. You can deceive everyone else in the palace, but not me."

"You accuse me with baseless suspicions?"

"Sometimes those suspicions are so sure, I have no choice but to ask."

The Emperor continued with a dark look.

"Luinel. You possess many abilities. You have leadership to guide others, and you have strong decisiveness. You are fully qualified to be the next Emperor after me. However, there is one thing you lack."

"And what might that be?"

"Tolerance."

Prince Luinel couldn't help but wince at the words.

“You generously favor those with talent, but on the other hand, you cast away everyone else you deem worthless. Do you think otherwise?”

Luinel had no answer.

“A ruler that only promotes talents but belittles and fails to embrace others is doomed to fall and never be recognized by all.”

This was the sole piece of advice the Emperor, as a father, could offer his son.

“It doesn’t matter if the Nephris family obstructs you, my place will undoubtedly go to you. So you, too, should not reject them but embrace them. That’s the virtue of a ruler.”

With the Emperor asserting his succession, Luinel should have shown happiness, but nothing of the sort could be seen on his face.

“I hope that my heart now continues to do so in the future.”

For a moment the prince trembled violently, but as he raised his head, Luinel’s face resolved into a calm mask, accepting the Emperor’s advice.

“...I will take your words to heart, father.”

Walking from the office to his Eastern Pavilion, Luinel managed to suppress the welling emotions.

And at last, when he reached his room and the door closed behind him,

–Bang!

Unable to hold back any longer, Luinel punched the desk violently.

“huff... huff...”

Without words, all he could do was repeat heavy breaths as a frightening intent filled his eyes.

* * *

Aschel opened his eyes, which had been closed in meditation.

Beside him sat a man other than his usual companion Kellin.

“How fares the prince?”

“It seems there was quite an infuriating event with the Emperor. He ordered not to be sought out for a while and remains in his room.”

Aschel stared blankly at the ceiling without much expression.

“Marionettes and summons annihilated by an unknown entity, the scheme to kill my younger brother and the Fifth Princess with the Daze Stone failed, and the plan to pin it all on Garam Magic Society fell apart due to the Emperor’s command. All in all, we’ve achieved nothing...”

It was strange that he was still alive given this unprecedented taste of failure and humiliation.

“I did, however, discover something interesting amidst the failure.”

“Something interesting?”

“Have a look at this, would you?”

The man pulled a small orb from his clothes, presenting it.

“I caught a strange aura while analyzing the remains of a marionette; it contained an unfamiliar energy.”

Gently rubbing the orb a couple of times, it shifted from transparent glass to a dark color and soon filled with a mysterious black smoke.

Aschel could scarcely believe his eyes.

“What is this aura? It’s not magic, or even the energy of demonic creatures, is it?”

It felt like the power of some spiritual entity, something inherently not human.

“This is the aura of a Demon Sword.”

Aschel’s question was quickly answered.

“The divine weapon imbued with the power of the higher beings. The marionettes and hellhounds I summoned all lost power because of this energy.”

“Are you certain?”

“I can assure you.”

Such wasn't light boasting. The mere aura exuded from the orb was vile and dark enough to be inextricable from a Demon Sword.

Aschel found it easy to consent.

“So, the owner of the Demon Sword was present in the imperial palace at the time.”

“Do you have anyone in mind?”

Aschel crossed his arms, sinking into deep contemplation once again.

A being capable of wielding a sacred weapon of the gods had disrupted their plans.

It could be a member of the palace or even one of the attendants of the banquet.

Therefore, it could be a noble, but who would dare bring such a monstrosity into this sacred imperial palace?

“By any chance, does controlling the Demon Sword have anything to do with elemental attributes?”

“Of course. Given the nature of Demon Swords, it's likely associated with dark attributes.”

Upon this, Aschel's lips curled into a knowing smile.

“Boris.”

“Yes, Aschel.”

“How about paying a visit to the Academy?”

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 77

Chapter 77: Return

After the tumultuous banquet ended, I returned to the academy, only to be summoned to the office by the chancellor.

Perhaps he wanted some private time with me?

As soon as the office door closed, a barrier was put in place, preventing anyone from entering.

One might think they were preparing for torture, not an interrogation.

“I’ll ask you straight.”

The determination in the chancellor’s eyes suggested this could get serious.

“Did you have prior knowledge of the events that unfolded?”

I answered calmly.

“If I had, none of this would have happened.”

The story of the so-called ‘Banquet of Blood’ had spread not just throughout the empire, but all across the continent, so the chancellor’s alarm was understandable.

After all, many related to the academy, including Instructor Silica, were involved in the event.

However, despite the magnitude of the incident, the aftermath was handled quite promptly.

Naturally, this raised questions for everyone.

There were casualties, albeit few, and it was strange that there was no backlash, especially when a member of the empress's influential family was among the dead.

On my way back, I couldn't help hearing wild rumors, including one that the former empress's family, the Quizzels, had instigated the whole mess to undermine the Nephris...

It was hard not to laugh at such speculation.

The dead can't speak, but that doesn't stop people from making them the subject of conversation.

While it's true the Quizzels were not entirely uninvolved, our dear chancellor seemed to be quite oblivious to the actual events. Unjust, isn't it?

Actually, now that I think of it, I'm the one being wronged.

I didn't mention it because I couldn't speak about it, but I was a genuine assassination target myself.

Not only did I handle the marionettes and summoned creatures in the royal palace, but I also went through great pains to rescue the remaining two. And now he suspects me?

The chancellor seemed to notice my thoughts, letting out a wry laugh.

"I've heard you saved that granddaughter of Chairman Regens."

"I sustained some injuries in the process," I said, despite having healed a long time ago.

"You seem the type who wouldn't care if someone else bit the dust. I was curious about why you'd risk your neck to save that girl. If you say you didn't know, that's enough for me."

"How wicked do you think I am?" I was at a loss for words.

I almost retorted back advising the chancellor to manage his household better, but I swallowed my words.

Instead, I took out a piece of paper from my person.

“While I’m here, I might as well give you this. Please do me this one favor.”

“A favor?”

The chancellor’s eyebrows furrowed slightly.

I suppose the idea of me asking for anything was surprising.

The document I handed over contained someone’s personal information.

“This is... a guardian knight’s registration, is it not?”

“Yes. I could have sent it to administrative affairs, but I thought it would be more direct coming from you, chancellor.”

I’ve explained before that academy regulations typically forbid the entry of servants. Only guardian knights are allowed to accompany or live with the students.

Most students disguise their servants as guardian knights to gain them entry to the academy.

If there’s a need to bring in additional personnel, one must submit a related registration to administrative affairs, but it’s a formality that’s rarely denied.

The best way is the easiest way, and if our chancellor does it, the proceedings will flow much more swiftly, right?

The chancellor looked over the registration I had handed him.

“Are you introducing a female knight?”

He seemed to assume this based on the name written on the document.

I shook my head and replied.

“She’s formally registered as a knight, but in reality, she’s just my servant.”

“A servant? Are you unaware that it’s against academy law for a student to bring in a personal servant?”

“Now that seems a bit petty, doesn’t it? Surely you’re also aware of such loopholes, chancellor?”

“Your brazenness is something else. I understand. I’ll take care of it, so you can go now.”

As he signaled his agreement and flicked his finger, the restrictive barrier that had surrounded the room a moment ago vanished.

“Just out of curiosity, aside from this maid you’re trying to bring in, is there anyone else?” the chancellor asked.

I felt guilty internally but kept my composure.

“No, there isn’t... Why do you ask?”

“I’m inquiring due to the unusual amount of meals being charged to your room. You’re supposed to only have one guardian knight, right? I don’t know if you have a voracious appetite, but it’s odd that a room for two gets four meals delivered daily. Supply personnel have raised this issue more than once.”

I turned away to hide my discomfort. There was no way I could reveal the presence of a half-human, half-beast with a hearty appetite living in my room.

“Well, my knight simply has a hearty appetite. It’s not strange for knights to eat well, is it?”

I deflected the best I could, using the unfailingly compliant Brian as a scapegoat.

After hastily explaining, I left the chancellor’s office as if fleeing.

* * *

– Bang!

The furious slam on the desk conveyed intense anger.

Though his expression was controlled, the tension in the room intensified due to his restraint.

“What have you been doing while this slippery eel was mucking up the stream?”

Chairman Regens Rainriver of the Garam Magic Society was incensed by the situation, and anyone linked to the society would have found it difficult to remain calm amidst this affair.

The critical piece of evidence, the Daze Stone, was property of Garam Magic Society, and it was members of their academy who disguised it as a jewel accessory to hand over to Princess Arin and Lunev.

That was all that had come to light. The individual who passed on the stone bit their own tongue and committed suicide, leaving no clue whether they were a spy, a defector, or what their motives were—nothing could be properly unraveled.

“That is exactly the point. We’ve investigated the person in question hurriedly, but we found no connection at all. Neither in background checks nor in social relationships, nothing tied the person to Ushif Empire, and there was no anomaly in their regular behavior or movements! It’s as if they just defected out of nowhere...”

The frustration was palpable for the presenter, who had to relay this befuddling chain of events.

“Let me get this straight. In the midst of this affair, the emperor of the Ushif Empire decided to drop the matter without any fuss?”

“Yes, the imperial court seems to prefer not to instigate conflict over an uncertain matter...”

“Something smells fishy to me. Perhaps the imperial family has its own reasons for wanting to wrap this up quickly.”

While flicking his index finger absently through the report, Rainriver’s gaze suddenly shifted.

“Where is Lunev?”

“Sh-she has just completed her regular examination and returned to her room.”

Realizing her whereabouts, Rainriver promptly left his chair and exited the room.

Walking down the long corridor, he arrived at the heavily book-filled room of a certain young girl.

This room didn't feel quite like a typical girl's room.

The room's owner was engrossed in her reading.

"Have you arrived, Grandfather?"

Her greeting received no response.

As Rainriver approached the girl, he got straight to the point without preamble.

"During your interrogation by the empire, did you notice anything suspicious from them?"

Her gaze remained on her book.

"At first, they were examining me like they would devour me, but they rapidly changed their attitude and released me shortly after."

"That's not what I called to hear about. I mean, did you sense any reluctance from them to reveal certain things, any movements that seemed off?"

His voice rose a bit harshly.

"There was nothing," she replied, her tone steady as she closed the book.

Rainriver glared at her for a moment with suspicion before changing the subject.

"Did you find out anything about the boy, as I had asked?"

She flinched slightly when holding the book but maintained her composure and said,

"Contrary to what I had heard, he seems to be a person of much affection."

"Affection?"

"Yes. Nobles do not often sit at the same table with a knight and maid for meals, but for him, it looked completely natural, without any discomfort."

“And what else?”

Cutting her off, perhaps dissatisfied with the answer, he pressed for more.

“He seemed to have a caring nature. He saved my life without asking for anything in return, and even despite my rash visit, he courteously saw me off. He doesn’t seem merely indifferent...”

“That’s not what I’m asking for!”

A thunderous command stirred a strong gust within the room.

“What about the boy’s magic? Did he hide any power? Who are the people around him? These are the important things!”

Silence. Even amidst the swirling books and hair, the girl remained unfazed.

After a moment, she finally responded.

“Why are you so fixated on him?”

With his excitement now subdued, Rainriver continued calmly,

“Haven’t I told you? Everything you do for me is for the advancement of our Magic Society. Since you were born as my granddaughter, you must adhere to these duties. Lunev...”

The life of obedience was imposed upon her as a consequence of being born into the Rainriver lineage.

With a small sigh, Lunev ultimately gave the answer he wanted to hear.

“The attribute rating is 93%, slightly higher than the figure you provided. The boy’s magic is at least 5-star, much higher than the 3-star official record at the academy. I’m not sure if he is hiding any special power, but I felt he had something concealed. What it is, I can’t quite put my finger on...”

“Are you certain?”

“Yes, I’m certain. I felt it myself when I embraced him.”

“Very well.”

With the matter concluded, Rainriver turned and left the room without gratitude or acknowledgment of her effort.

Left alone, the girl tried to resume her reading but soon closed the book again.

“Boring...”

Finally tossing the book aside, she laid down on her bed, exasperated.

Could every day be this tiresome?

Though her life had been dull from the beginning, the feeling of tedium only grew after her visit to the empire.

The dreary scene outside her window mirrored the monotony of her own life.

For a long time, she gazed out, happenstance directing her view toward the Royal Academy.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 78

Chapter 78. Lunev Rainriver (1)

“.....!”

Anyone would think this blanket was a top-grade magic robe.

Huddled under it for protection, trembling in fear, she looked quite pitiful.

“How long do you plan on staying like that?”

I asked, unable to bear the sight any longer.

“Master, what exactly did you bring in? How could you think of keeping such a creature in your room...”

“So you won’t be scared even if a demon stands before you now?”

“That, that’s different! Besides, that thing is not a demon, it’s that dra…….”

Her eyes, wide with fear, happened to meet Nana’s, who was in the middle of eating.

“Hiiiiek!”

As if frozen, Emily emitted a grotesque whimper and fled to her room.

Nana, looking baffled, approached me and asked.

“Papa. Why is big sis Emily like that?”

“Don’t worry about it. She’ll adapt on her own.”

I gently stroked her head, comforting her.

Nana smiled in contentment.

In the end, I brought Emily to the academy.

Technically, according to protocol, she should return to the Belias mansion.

However, a personal maid to a noble is akin to private property; if the master wishes, the destination can change at any time.

In other words, currently she is classified as my private maid, which means I have the right to decide her whereabouts.

Unless one is the head of the family, no one else can interfere in this matter.

Emily likely has no idea.

That she was used as a disposable pawn to murder me.

Although their plan failed, there was no reason to keep her alive, as that could lead to complications.

Even if she returns to Belias, she won’t meet a kind fate, and I have no intention of simply standing by.

Since no one will question the retrieval of my own maid, they will dare not approach carelessly.

Well, that's Emily, but...

My gaze returned to Nana, who had resumed her meal.

Is the worry of watching one's child grow each day and protecting them what parenthood feels like?

I managed to hide well over the past two years, but it wasn't perfect.

There are suspicions, not only about the cost of sustenance but also from other areas; if these keep accumulating, an eruption is inevitable.

At least she can freely transform into a human now, keeping her magical essence from leaking out...

But it's likely unsustainable to continue living this way.

If push comes to shove, rather than a covert job like Emily's, a covert school registration may be necessary.

"I've returned, Young Master."

At that moment, Brian, who had finished his private training, returned.

He immediately handed me two unfamiliar letters.

"Both were received from the official reception of the academy."

It seems I've been receiving letters quite often lately.

I'm slightly uneasy that it could be another weird invitation, but fortunately, it wasn't.

"Are you doing well, Sian?"

The first was a letter from Sister Ellis.

In her letter, she sent her regards and shared that she had finally decided on her career path.

She's going for it.

Joining the Order of the Knights of Light to continue the family's legacy.

It was hardly surprising.

Since childhood, she had heard endless talk of it, and she herself had reiterated the intent dozens of times; her choice was to be expected.

To say that she had chosen the best possible direction wouldn't be an overstatement.

Even I cannot deny that the Order of Knights of Light is the most fitting place for her innate talent.

The application process normally takes a review and probation period of six months to a year, but for Sister, that period is likely to be significantly shortened.

A special recruitment, one might say.

There's no need to waste time on a candidate whose reputation is well-known to the entire empire.

At worst, three months; if quick, in less than a month, Sister will bear the title of a Knight of Light.

The problem comes after that.

Despite one incident, her life is moving in the same direction as her past incarnation.

This means that the end of that life will likely be identical to her previous one, too.

Not much time is left.

Soon, another day will come when I must leave the academy again.

After reading Sister's letter carefully, I sealed it and stored it away.

Then, naturally, I turned to the second letter.

"What's this?"

The recipient was indeed addressed to me, but no matter where I looked, I couldn't find any information on the sender.

I opened the letter to check its contents.

“Are you well, Senior Sian?”

The moment I read the awkward title attached to my name, I knew who the sender was.

It was Lunev.

“It’s been over ten days since we’ve parted, senior.”

Anyone would think we had a poignant senior-junior relationship.

The more I read the letter, the more my brows furrowed. Was it just me feeling this?

Even a passing touch is considered a connection, but isn’t this a bit too much?

It’s almost as if one side is forcibly pushing the relationship.

And what goal does this kid have in trying to get close to me repeatedly?

While others might say, “Isn’t it obvious that this girl is showing interest in you?”, my mindset is naturally negative. So even such things stir no emotion in me.

Instead, they only provoke unnecessary wariness.

Just as I read the last sentence, the corners of my mouth inadvertently rose.

“Don’t get me wrong. I laughed because it’s absurd.”

Soon, I’ll come to visit? Is she implying she’ll visit me before the semester begins?

A strong sense of unease about some troublesome event brewing surged within me.

I was seriously contemplating going away for the rest of the vacation when,

-Knock knock

The unfamiliar sound of knocking echoed in my ears.

A visitor during the holiday period...

While I hadn't confirmed yet, I had an inkling of who was beyond the door.

Hoping it wasn't her, I cautiously opened the door.

-Creak

“.....”

After opening the door, I said nothing.

Not out of surprise, but because the expected sight simply unfolded before me.

The unfamiliar visitor looked at me with unreserved, naive eyes and said,

“It's been a while, senior.”

* * *

Obviously, I couldn't take her into the room, so I grabbed her by the wrist and led her outside.

Lunev followed weakly, like a spiritless doll, offering no resistance.

The place we ended up at was the cafeteria, where I had never set foot since my admission.

Of course, there was no one else but us.

“You're more violent than I thought, senior.”

She rubbed her wrist as she spoke.

“Just get to the point. Why are you here?”

“Because I'm bored.”

A confident and upright expression.

One couldn't sense even a trace of deceit.

“It seems to me, senior, that you’re meeting someone who looks like they’ve got something to hide.”

Spot on.

I admitted silently with my silence.

“It’s a little disappointing. After all, we’ve even shared a table together.”

To be precise, you joined me while I was eating without invitation.

I don’t want to waste time on trivial talk.

I leaned back and crossed my arms, making it clear from my guarded expression that I was wary.

“Look here, junior. It seems like you’ve misunderstood the appropriate senior-junior relationship. If we only count the direct face-to-face time we’ve had, it’s not even two hours.”

“I thought it was around 20 hours. I didn’t realize it was so little.”

Talk of 20 hours.

“Even if we spent 20 years together, trust in human relationships can fail to develop. Knowing that, don’t you find it strange that I would treat someone I’ve only known for two hours so closely?”

“.....”

She paused, as if struggling to find words, but her expression did not show shock.

“Senior, you speak as if you have the wisdom of someone who has lived over 20 years, yet we’re only a year apart in age...”

Finding no retort, I diverted my gaze for a moment.

She’s quick to notice.

“Alright. So you’re saying we need to build trust between us? I already trust you, senior, so all we need to do is build your trust in me.”

She speaks so clearly.

Lunev closed her eyes briefly, as if deep in thought.

It seemed she was pondering how to gain my trust.

“Should I share a secret from our society that senior would like?”

“.....?”

“Actually, my grandfather and the high-ranking members of our society are keeping an eye on you. The reason I was sent to the imperial banquet is also to investigate you.”

For a moment, I frowned as if I misheard.

What?

What am I listening to right now?

“It might seem unjust, but there have been several unsavory incidents happening in our society recently.”

“Unsavory incidents?”

“Yes. A knight who supplied demon blood to the frontline was suddenly assassinated one day, and the merchant who provided research materials and human test subjects to our society was unexpectedly found dead. There were also dragons that greatly supported the existence of our magical society, but they too were suddenly wiped out near the academy by someone. Too many critical incidents have happened to our society to be merely coincidental.”

I couldn't help but be astounded, but I couldn't laugh either.

All the incidents she'd mentioned were related to me.

For now, I didn't reveal my emotions and simply asked.

“...So, you're saying your society, including your grandfather, suspects me as the culprit behind these unsavory incidents?”

“Yes.”

Her response was consistent.

“Do you think I won’t realize you’re lying to get my trust?”

“I’m not lying. I’ve told you everything exactly as it is.”

I know.

I’m certain that the incidents she spoke of are definitely not lies.

The problem is that those incidents are related to the Garam Magic Society she belongs to and they’ve been eyeing me as the culprit.

“What’s your evidence for such claims?”

To me, it was necessary to dismiss it right away as an absurd claim.

“I don’t really think it makes any sense either. But since my grandfather is quite suspicious by nature, he considers all possibilities. He seems to be focusing on you, senior, due to your prior experience living on the frontline and the fact you’re a dark attribute wielder, which would make it easy to erase traces.”

“So, it’s a vague conjecture, not a solid inference?”

“That’s about it.”

Regens, the Society Chairman.

I knew he was a suspicious character, but I never imagined he’d keep me in mind.

And the dragons I killed were actually related to the Garam Magic Society...

This was a fact even I, in my past life, did not know.

Dragons and humans colluding.

How would the other countries and dragons react if they knew of this?

“So, if what you say is true, your grandfather and others in your society are currently suspecting me, and now you’ve told me their suspicions. Why are you going so far to gain my trust? I have nothing to offer you.”

This was not just a secret, it was clearly confidential information.

These weren't just friendly terms to discuss lightly.

So why? What is she after? Why does she continue to approach me to gain my trust?

Unless she speaks of it, she will never be free of my suspicion.

“.....”

The same detached gaze remained steadily focused on me.

Her slightly trembling pupils suggested deep contemplation.

Soon, Lunev began to speak.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 79

Chapter 79: Lunev Rainriver (2)

“I must have been about three years old. It was when my brain had developed enough to understand most things that my grandfather said to me,”

When asked to elaborate, he suddenly began a story from the past.

“As long as you are born into the Rainriver family, you must live for the advancement of the Garam Magic Society. That is the reason for your existence, your duty, and you, Lunev, cannot refuse this. I still vividly remember his words, even though I was only three years old.”

It shouldn't be unreasonable.

Such words must have been a painful shock even to a young child's brain.

I have no intention of defending them.

After all, it's only natural for a noble's child to put the ideals of their family ahead of themselves.

That's true for me as well.

"From then on, I was given early education. The textbooks from the academy, the research materials from the empires, not just kingdoms—grandfather did not limit me to anything related to magic."

"At that time, you wouldn't even have had mana, right?"

It was like making a child who had just learned to walk run a race.

"That's why it was early education. Regardless of whether it was beneficial or not, grandfather simply told me to learn. When I was about ten years old and began to generate mana, I immediately received an elemental aptitude test. Do you know what my magic attribute is, senior?"

"I don't know."

That was a lie.

I knew very well what her attribute was, even though I hadn't heard it in this life.

"Fire, water, wind, light, darkness. Each attribute was evenly distributed at 20%. I have a composite attribute that doesn't lean toward any particular side..."

As I've said before, although it's a valuable attribute, it's not exactly a welcomed one.

While it allows for a wide range of magic, since all have clear limitations in their numbers, it's difficult to develop a high ranking, and in reality, it often falls into mediocrity.

I asked, keeping my expression neutral.

"What did your grandfather say after seeing that?"

"He was happy."

That was a bit unexpected.

“Happy?”

“Yes. It was the first time I saw him so pleased.”

A slight bitterness seeped into her words.

“If you only try, you will become an unprecedented being in this world. You will be a high-ranking multi-attribute holder that no one has mastered. When that happens, you’ll be at the pinnacle of magic, and you could fulfill our Rainriver family’s long-cherished wish. Those words still haven’t changed.”

Theoretically, it’s not impossible.

If we compare the different attributes within her to the ‘vessels’, if her five ‘vessels’ are much larger than the single vessel others have, then it would be possible.

That is, if the 20% of darkness attribute she has is higher than the 90% or more darkness attribute I have, and if the other attributes are the same, then what’s the problem?

As the society chairman said, she would indeed be at the pinnacle of magic.

Of course, it’s just theoretical; in practice, it’s impossible.

There’s a definite limit to how much the human body can be stretched, given congenital limitations.

No matter how much mana you pour into such a unstable vessel, it will eventually overflow and not be contained. This is not something that can be resolved within the realm of human effort.

Regens, the society chairman, must know this too, as well as she does.

“Do you think it’s possible?”

“I’m not sure. Based on the knowledge I know, I think there should certainly be a limit, but grandfather didn’t seem to think so.”

A hollow laugh escaped my thoughts.

There are things that can be done with brute force and things that cannot.

Unless he's senile, did that old society chairman really think it was possible?

It's not possible unless you remodel the human body itself...

Wait a minute?

Blinded by the theoretical possibility, I momentarily forgot the group this girl belonged to.

The Kingdom of Garam Magic Society.

They were the sort who wouldn't hesitate to conduct human experiments for the sake of advancing magic research.

Considering the insane things they've done in a past life, it wouldn't be far-fetched for them to use their own granddaughter as a test subject...

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

"My hand?"

Without realizing, I extended one hand.

Lunev gently grasped my hand, and a faint light of mana emanated from her touch.

"Darkness attribute at 93% and magic rating of five stars. You're quite adept at other attribute magics as well."

"...What did you just do?"

"I manifested my mana and assessed your body's classification."

"That's possible?"

"It's a result of the experiments. Ever since that day, I've been subject to several trials at the society. Each time, I gained new abilities."

Her prediction was precisely on point.

"The 'scan ability' I just showed you is one of them. Once I held you at the Imperial City, I checked then, and I've relayed all that information back to grandfather."

Thankfully, it seemed she hadn't fully detected my magic power.

It appears to be at the level of a typical attribute assessment, but still, this shouldn't be underestimated.

As her mana grows over time, so too will the range of mana she can detect.

But the current problem isn't that.

New abilities from experiments?

Nothing special.

Once anyone reaches a six-star status, scanning a subject with a lower rank than oneself is not difficult.

I assert that those experiments have given this girl more than just improved physical abilities.

Something unsettling rests within this girl's inner being.

"The more the experiments went on, the less I felt accustomed to my own body. I feel like I'm gaining something for sure, but it's forcefully infused into me without my consent."

"... Is there a problem with your body?"

Lunev replied with a faint smile.

"I can't quite say there isn't. To be honest, it's quite bad. Although I haven't shown it to grandfather, I likely won't live long. Maybe three more years? It could be longer or shorter."

"What's your basis for that?"

"I know my body best. It's already falling apart from the magic being pumped into it through experiments. Estimating from how long I can hold on, that's about how long I think I'll last."

A chill ran down my spine as cold sweat trickled down my back.

This was like a divine prophecy to be scoffed at.

Her prediction was accurate.

Exactly three years later, the granddaughter of the Rainriver household, bestowed by the president of Garam Magic Society, indeed perishes unexpectedly one day.

“You asked if it’s okay to tell me this, right? It’s nothing. It’s of no use to me anyway, so I’m telling you. Rainriver family duty? What does it matter to me if I’m not going to live much longer? It’s better to gain your trust by telling you.”

Listing reasons, she explained meticulously, yet to me, it sounded like a despairing cry for help.

And yet, she managed to maintain an impressively calm demeanor.

“The reason I want to gain your trust? I’m not really sure myself. I was simply drawn to you when I first saw you at the Imperial City. A sense of kinship? I thought we were very similar.”

“Similar?”

“Yes. Do you like your family, senior?”

That was something I couldn’t even lie about.

“No.”

“Then we are similar. I really hate my family too. But unlike me, you’re trying to break free, right?”

“...Somewhat.”

“Then we’re different again. I haven’t even thought about that possibility.”

Similar yet not similar.

Hearing her words, I felt a sudden suffocation in my chest.

So what?

Am I supposed to do something about that?

I’m not a savior.

Busy enough taking care of myself and those around me, I'm not some divine being to attend to the life of a pitiable girl who predicts her own death.

The most I can offer as mercy or salvation is to listen to this conversation.

I spoke with an unaffected face.

“Living life as you wish for the time you have left is good. But you've chosen the wrong direction. At least, I'm not as good a person as you might think.”

“You are not a bad person either, right? Otherwise, you wouldn't have risked yourself to save me.”

“I did what was necessary. Nothing more to it.”

That too was not for you; it was for me.

I quietly stood up.

“Where are you going?”

“The restroom. It won't take long, so wait here.”

Of course, it was a lie.

When I return, she likely won't be here anymore.

“Take care, senior.”

Accepting my words at face value,

She sat still, her hands neatly folded, like a statue.

* * *

While Sian was away, Lunev thought.

Had she said something unnecessary, burdening him?

The feelings she carried weren't there when she'd first arrived, but as the conversation progressed, she ended up spilling all her secrets.

She knew.

That she was very attached to Sian.

But she did not understand why.

She explained it as feeling kinship, but the emotions Lunev felt towards Sian were more than that.

Beyond a sense of kinship, she was drawn to him from the first meeting, the desire to lean and rely on him gently blossoming.

Was he just another person?

Sian maintained his distance all the way, pushing off the notion that he wasn't involved.

Lunev couldn't help but feel disappointed.

“.....”

Suddenly, a group of strangers clad in blue robes appeared before her.

Surrounding her as if they intended to prevent her from going anywhere else.

Without needing to explain, she knew.

They were sent by the academy to take her back.

“We've come to escort Miss Lunev.”

“Could I stay a little longer? Two hours or even one hour would be enough, wouldn't it?”

“Miss Lunev's unauthorized absence has enraged the society chairman. It's best for you to return as soon as possible, even a minute sooner is in your best interest.”

Their indifferent response met her futile bravado.

Noticing that she could not sway them, Lunev stood up.

During this, she felt something off and looked around.

“By the way, who are you affiliated with? You all seem different from those who usually monitor me.”

Lunev had lived her life being monitored from birth.

Although Regens, the society chairman, regularly changed the watchers, with hundreds passing by, she remembered faces that she had once seen. So, if she saw them more than once, she'd instantly recall where she met them.

However, these five surrounding her were strangers.

She had never met them, nor did they linger in her memory.

“.....”

Despite her questioning, they offered no answer.

Her doubt quickly turned into suspicion, and in response, the man in front of her extended his hand towards her face.

“Sweet Sleep.”

White powder that emanated from his hand entered her nose and mouth.

Soon, Lunev fell into a deep slumber, and the magicians who held her swiftly disappeared from the location, unnoticed.

(To be continued)

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin chapter 80

Chapter 80: Lunev Rainriver (3)

Exactly three minutes.

It could have been faster, or it could have been slower.

The only welcome I received upon returning from my brief leave under the pretense of using the restroom was an empty warmth.

She must have left.

She had told me quite accurately about the condition of her body, and I had been aware of it from that moment on.

The underlings of the Garam Magic Society, who were exuding an unpleasant smell.

Well, I certainly didn't think she had been allowed to go out.

It's quite remarkable that she left without permission, but I couldn't help but chuckle when I considered that the delicate young girl had come here alone, crossing the border on her own.

Assuming Lunev's words were true, there was no point in deliberately encountering the society's underlings who were watching over me.

I vacated my seat with the intention of just letting them take away the granddaughter who had run away from home.

[Does our master seem to be in particularly low spirits? I rarely see such a face, like you've swallowed a bug.]

Ceyram taunted me with rich sarcasm.

To be honest, I can't deny that.

"I'm not particularly fond of it."

To put it more frankly, I find it incredibly filthy.

If her true intent was to stir me up, then I'd like to personally congratulate her.

The agitation inside me boiled just as she intended, making me feel absolutely rotten.

You might wonder if I felt any sympathy for her due to her short-lived life?

Don't be mistaken.

Life is not so tough to begin with.

At most, it's a bit tougher than a fly's.

Having seen countless deaths and having sent countless others to death, if I had felt sympathy over such things, I could assert that I have lived life incorrectly.

Let me make it clear once again, I am not a savior.

So why do I feel so disgusted?

I'm not sure.

Honestly, I don't even understand my own feelings right now.

What's certain is that the filth I'm feeling right now stems from a sense of discomfort.

A vile feeling that comes from being able to do something yet choosing not to.

It's pointless to think about it any further.

With a short snort, I turned my body around.

[Are you just going to leave?]

"Isn't it obvious? There's no reason for me to detain a granddaughter who has been told to be taken back. Getting involved will only give me a headache."

[Hmm... Really...?]

Normally, she would have provoked me with trivial talk, but today she showed a different reaction.

It's almost like she agrees, yet seems to have something to say, which made me even more suspicious.

"What do you want to say?"

I asked directly.

[Well, I mean, those guys who came to pick up the child. Did you happen to hear anything they were muttering to each other?]

"What would they say? They probably just talked about taking her away quickly before she gets into more trouble."

The later they are, the more their own lives are at risk.

[You didn't hear them?]

Her sinister laughter, which tickled my skin, naturally drew my gaze.

[They were doing mental communication. It was as if they didn't want the little one to hear, saying it openly right in front of her.]

The 'I' who hadn't heard and 'Ceyram' who did.

It was a familiar situation, and I couldn't bring myself to laugh.

"Mental communication?"

It wasn't an ordinary conversation with words but rather a psychic type of magic that communicated thoughts alone.

It's not an easy form of magic.

To convey your thoughts through mana requires a fair amount of calculation.

However, agents of Mist often use it since it is highly practical, but that's not the issue here.

Why go to such lengths?

Was there something that she shouldn't hear?

They could have just been exchanging trivial words like 'Let's quickly take her away before we get scolded more'.

Maybe even cursed her for causing them trouble.

Even if I have exceptional hearing as a rare breed, I can't hear mental communication.

More importantly, the fact that Ceyram shared this with me means...

She must have heard something interesting, at least to her.

Not to me, of course.

Suddenly, my gaze shifted to the chair on which she had been sitting.

I could faintly sense it.

Traces of mana that had not yet dissipated, scattered by someone.

Quickly, I placed my hand on it.

“Sweet Sleep...”

Seeing the whitish powder caked somewhat viscously on my hand, I was certain.

Residue of a five-star psychic sleep spell.

They had put Lunev to sleep.

Was there a need for that?

In a situation where there weren't even traces of resistance, why the need to put her to sleep to move her?

Unnecessary actions always provoke suspicion.

My gaze returned to Ceyram.

“What exactly did they say?”

Ceyram approached my ear as if she had expected my question and whispered.

[I'll tell you every word without leaving a single one out. Open your ears wide and listen~]

As Ceyram's malicious whispering resonated in my ear like an aria, my expression became increasingly foul as the moment lingered.

* * *

Somewhere on the outskirts of Rowen, in the border region between the Ushif Empire and the Garam Kingdom, a small merchant wagon — not a luxurious carriage befitting of nobility but one that traders might use — made its way through a barren desolate land.

In the front, two men were leading the wagon, and surrounding it were three other men spread in different directions to shield the carriage almost in a defensive formation.

One thing they all had in common was that they all wore blue robes.

A certain desperate emotion could be glimpsed upon their serious faces.

Silence.

Eventually, the leading man raised his hand, signaling a stop.

Appearing before the halted group was a border post of the Garam Kingdom.

To ensure that they didn't attract attention, they reversed the wagon a bit, maintaining a distance.

-Rustling-

They all simultaneously took off their robes and began to change into worn trader clothes as a means of disguising their identities.

In their hands, they held counterfeit merchant identity cards from another country.

-Thud-

A strange noise caught their attention.

They all abruptly turned their heads.

"...!"

A certain individual, exuding a sinister magical aura, stared back at them.

Cloaked in a grayish robe as though also trying to hide their identity.

As they watched this figure, the leading man who had been driving the wagon slowly approached.

The others kept a tense gaze as they observed but did not dare to come closer.

“Is she...?”

“The girl inside the wagon is under a sleep spell, though it seems the magic took to her better than expected. At least for a day or so, it should persist.”

“May I check?”

“Of course.”

The man led the woman in the grayish robe up to the front of the wagon.

She climbed aboard, navigating through the clutter of baggage until she found something hidden deep within.

A delicate young girl, her hands and feet bound, gagged in the mouth.

Upon confirmation of the girl’s identity, the woman smiled faintly.

“You’ve taken a lot of risk to bring her here.”

“Strictly speaking, the chance was almost non-existent.”

“Right. Who would have thought that the little girl, who seemed like she would rot in the society for life, would run away on her own to the society... of all places.”

Pulling out a letter from her pocket, the woman revealed it.

“By now, the real watchers sent by the society should have arrived at the society. Let’s get out of here before the border post gets the news.”

“Yes, understood.”

The man bowed as he received the letter.

The woman turned to leave, but suddenly cast another glance at the girl, whispering as if she should hear it even in her sleep.

“Don’t resent it too much. It’s better to make a meaningful contribution and die than to suffer from futile experiments all your life, isn’t it? This is actually for your own good.”

It sounded reasonable but there was no such sentiment in her expression or tone.

It was simply a means to achieving their goal.

To those in the wagon, the girl was an entity without any emotional significance.

The woman then turned away.

“Well, then, I shall be on my...!”

-Swish!

Along with the sound of the blade piercing flesh, the woman’s face twisted in agony.

“Cough...!”

Blood dripped to the ground, and in that brief moment as she looked up, what filled her view was a billowing black cloak in the wind.

“...!”

The blade had penetrated her vitals, a purplish unfamiliar energy seeping out of the wound.

Before she could even understand what it was, the owner of the blade mercilessly pulled it out.

-Thud-

A torrent of blood spilled out like a waterfall.

The woman fell forward with a groan and soon after, her breath ceased.

The witnesses of these events were stunned beyond belief.

“Li... Lightning...!”

The man who received the letter, in a panicked state, began to chant a spell hurriedly.

But the incantation was cut short, replaced instead by an anguished scream.

“Argggh...!”

That scream didn't last long.

With one hand channeling mana mercilessly severed, and a brutal sword aura aimed straight at his throat, the man's head swiftly flew towards the wagon.

-Thump-

It was said that when one is terrified beyond measure, their senses freeze, rendering them incapable of movement.

That was exactly the state they were in.

However, all their eyes were sharply focused on the unknown presence before them.

A physique reminiscent of a teenager.

Yet, the murderous intent beneath that simple black mask could paralyze anyone with fear.

There were only two thoughts that crossed the minds of the men facing this figure.

‘Why has this happened?’

Or

‘I must escape.’

Those who thought the latter were the quicker to assess the situation.

Had they realized that the masked figure's target was the wagon, they might have had time to burn the wagon with magic and flee.

However, surviving was not guaranteed.

It would just mean extending their life by a few seconds as they were still fated to be dismembered in the end.

But that thought occurred to only one among the four remaining.

The others, while puzzled by their predicament, were focused on taking down the entity before them.

Yet, they failed to act.

Just as they finally relaxed their stiffened nerves to gather mana...

-Swish-

That was merely the beginning of the end.

-Swish Swish Swish-

The relentless sounds of slaughter rang out.

Humans were advised never to hope to survive upon hearing such sounds.

It wasn't just the noise of flesh being sliced, but the sound of life itself gradually strangling, gnawing away at the last sliver of soul that remained.

If one perceives such sounds, they are said to no longer exist as human beings...

It was like a macabre dance performed by the reaper himself.

-Whistling-

The putrid scent of blood mingled with the desert wind, drifting through the barren wasteland.

(To be continued)