

The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin

chapter 8

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Episode 8: The Master of the Demon Sword (2)

August 12, 999th year of the Age of Creation.

We successfully expelled the army of the demon world that had occupied Belias.

However, contrary to expectations, their forces were incredibly strong, and the morale of the allied forces that experienced this was quite low.

In the pressing situation not knowing when the demon world army might invade again, the humans felt the limits of their power and finally raised the necessity for sacred artifacts of the gods.

Although everything was erased from the continent due to the Great War between demons and gods 300 years ago, some unerased traces still remained in various places.

Humans gathered these scant pieces of information and soon uncovered the truth that relics of a bygone era imbued with divine power were hidden across the continent.

Of those, the most needed was undoubtedly the holy sword Durandal, blessed by the protection of the God of Light, Lumen Del.

Due to the demons' vulnerability to light, the power of Lumen Del was potentially fatal to them, so finding Durandal was imperative.

The problem was that no one knew where the sword lay dormant.

It could only be assumed to be somewhere in the western part of the continent where the Temple of Light was presumed to have been.

In the end, I found it.

Purely by chance.

It was during a survey of the area around Belias, which we had reclaimed from the demon lord's forces, that I suddenly felt the urge to visit the mansion's back mountain.

I wanted to soothe my weary mind and body after the battles with the demons and organize my thoughts, but lo and behold?

Upon reaching the summit and laying flat on the grass, I sensed something was off.

The flow of mana in my surroundings was abnormal.

It felt as though something deep beneath the mountain was sucking in the energy from the area.

Something that I had not noticed when I was a snotty-nosed kid, I was now certain lay underneath this mountain.

Could it be that the legendary holy sword was right here?

With a feeling of perhaps, I gathered people to check, and certainly enough, it was revealed that the Temple of Light with the holy sword slumbered beneath the mountain.

A breathtaking coincidence indeed.

It didn't matter who found it—Aschel took the sword.

No one objected, and it seemed only natural that he should possess it.

I felt the same.

It was never a sword intended for my use, and I never thought myself worthy.

I was simply relieved that we could find it, even by chance.

But it didn't end there.

I had completed my goal of recovering the holy sword and was about to leave, when I felt an indescribable power seeping out from behind the pedestal where the sword was inserted.

Just as shadows are cast where there is light.

Yet no one pays attention to those shadows.

Another power that was hidden in the shadow of the holy sword, coexisting.

Drawn by that power, I alone sought out the temple and eventually discovered the chamber of the demon sword, which remained alongside the holy sword.

The demon sword I found, Ceyram, was a sword that governed the world's dark energies, along with the holy sword Durandal.

Only those who discover the truth in endless darkness could possess this other divine artifact.

The black gem embedded in the hilt seemed to lure me, begging to be drawn.

Led by the temptation, I drew the sword, and at that moment, my destiny was once again transformed.

* * *

[You, you?! What in the world are you? How can you dare to touch my body?]

“Don't pretend you don't know. Isn't there only one reason why this situation is even possible?”

The demon sword embedded in the pedestal, connected to the black-haired woman by a mist of black fog.

She wasn't a living creature but a spiritual entity that absolutely couldn't be physically grasped.

However, my hands were firmly grabbing her throat.

Which meant that I had a special power to control her.

[Why, why does the energy of 'Aer' emanate from you, boy? Don't tell me, you are his successor?]

“I was a successor... still am, to be accurate.”

[A successor... What does that even mean? I can clearly see the brand he carved into you!]

Honestly, my current state is tough to define with certainty.

Though she doesn't know it and becomes angry, what can I do?

I am merely stating the obvious truth.

“Let's keep it simple, Ceyram. It's annoying to explain this and that in a situation where I'm not even sure myself. How about you just follow me quietly?”

Her brow furrowed deeply.

[Has the imbecile's spirit finally escaped? Hey, kid! You keep pushing your luck, and you might truly die.....]

“Darkness Technique 9th Form: Demon Sword Control.”

[Argh!]

Flicking my finger to release the chant, the one who had been snarking at me clutched her head in agony.

[Ah, ahgh.....]

Soon after, she sat down on the ground, struggling to breathe heavily.

– Whoosh –

As I drew the sword from the pedestal, Ceyram separated from the mist and transformed into a perfectly human figure.

“Sorry, I haven't done it in a while and couldn't control my strength...”

I apologized, thinking it might have been too much.

Even as she covered her face, she yelled at me.

[You, you brat! If you hurt women like that, you won't live long, got it?]

Indeed, if her spirit wasn't strong, she couldn't be my cherished sword.

I refrained from flicking my finger again out of mercy.

The woman's identity was the soul indwelt in the demon sword Ceyram.

In other words, she's the living personality of this sword.

"By now, there's no need for more proof, right? It's within your purpose of existence to follow Aer's successor. Won't you take my hand and leave with me?"

Gasping for breath, she abruptly stood up.

Sitting cheekily upon the pedestal, she scanned my entire body with haughty eyes.

[That's how you actually look, right?]

I nodded.

I mean, it's not wrong, is it?

[Outwardly, you're a greenhorn no more than 10 years old, but why does your inside feel so complete? You leave no room for me to wedge myself in, do you?]

People are not always as they appear on the outside.

If there's one thing my past life taught me painfully, it's that truth.

Reflected in the sword in my hand was the figure of the 10-year-old boy I currently am.

On the other side, the face of my previous life, filled with regret at the moment before death.

Which one can truly be said to be me?

There's no need to deny either.

In the end, they are both me.

"Let me explain briefly. I'm someone who has already died once."

[Someone who has died once?]

Her eyes widened in surprise.

“To put it simply, a regression, perhaps? Though I died a sudden death by betrayal in my previous life, I was swept up by a phenomenon I don’t understand and returned to the past. During that life, I received Aer’s choice and fought battles with you.”

[Are you telling me to believe that?]

“Does it make sense for a greenhorn to control you?”

Ceyram started to hesitate in speech.

Truly, it’s not a story one can believe just by hearing it once.

However, if we assume my words to be truthful, my current situation of controlling a divine artifact also defines itself clearly.

After briefly contemplating, Ceyram asked again.

[What is your name?]

“Sian, Sian Vert...”

[A name I’ve never heard or seen before. You were chosen by Aer?]

“Yes. Otherwise, we couldn’t be having this conversation right now.”

The biggest reason why the incompetent me from my previous life could control Ceyram.

It was due to some god’s blessing.

Aer, the God of Black Mist, who was even shunned in the divine realms.

The very person who turned my life completely upside down.

[Well, even if he’s an oddball, he wouldn’t be foolish enough to choose a snotty kid...]

Actions speak louder than a hundred words.

She can't just dismiss my words as mere nonsense.

She must clearly feel his energy emanating from me at this moment, in addition to the secret techniques I showed her earlier...

[But, I'm confused? If you can control me with just a finger snap, it looks like you've already mastered all of his powers, so what did you do in your past life to die so early?]

That hits a sore spot.

But now there's nothing that needs to be hidden.

"Nothing much. Just betrayed by someone I trusted."

[Betrayal? Ah~ so you got stabbed in the back? Quite a disgraceful end for the master of the demonic sword, right? But then, there's no trade against betrayal – what could you, a human, do about it~?]

She laughed mockingly, waving her hand, then spoke sternly.

[But remember this: Whether you've regressed or whatever, I don't care. If I see even the slightest hint of feebleness or weakness in you, I'll consume you on the spot! Got it?]

Ceyram's finger skimmed my lips.

I tried to reassure her, but her personality shows, doesn't it?

My calm heart fluttered slightly at the provocation that wasn't just a tease.

I responded with a smile, showing no hint of the stir within.

"I can assure you, there's nobody else in this land who can handle you properly..."

[Ah? On what basis do you say so? Such a great person, why did he die early...?]

– Snap!

My empty left hand caught her hair in an instant.

Unable to resist, Ceyram was now at eye level with me.

“So, climb down a bit, Ceyram. A divine artifact can’t just be hovering around the kitchen slicing meat, right?”

Don’t get me wrong.

I’m giving her advice with an infinitely merciful smile.

Definitely not a warning or a threat.

Isn’t that clear from the ever-smiling expression on my face?

[Only time will tell... if you’ll satisfy me as a worthy master!]

Ceyram also responded with a piqued smile.

Just as expected of my cherished sword.

[But, you know...]

Suddenly, her brow furrowed in annoyance.

Something seemed to greatly offend her.

[Is that idiot still out there?]

“The idiot?”

As I looked back, light from the holy sword entered through the open temple door.

In this empty temple, there was nothing else that could be referred to as an idiot but that thing.

I stepped outside, holding Ceyram in my arms.

Having just come out of the darkness, the light of Durandal seemed even brighter than before.

[Wow! So it’s still here, sleeping? Hasn’t its owner appeared yet?]

Ceyram asked in curiosity upon seeing the holy sword.

“Maybe it would be better if they never appeared...”

I considered destroying it right there, but then shook my head at the thought that would probably bring a lot of trouble.

Ceyram watched me intently, then suddenly spoke.

[The one from your past life who betrayed you, is that idiot the owner of this holy sword?]

For a moment, my insides twitched, but I didn't let it show.

Turning away, I asked softly, “Why do you think so?”

[You don't seem to be the type to scowl at a holy sword unless it's you, throughout all history. It's written all over your face, 'This is the enemy of my past life'; how could I not notice unless I'm a fool?]

I tried to have a poker face, but I can't imagine it was that obvious.

That demonstrates the extent of my hatred for this sword and its owner.

“Looks like seasoning isn't wasted on the elderly, huh?”

[Cmon, faking indifference. So, are you planning revenge on the owner of the holy sword in this life?]

“No, that wouldn't be enough.”

I felt a renewed energy in my previously hesitant heart.

Standing before Ceyram, I walked defiantly towards the holy sword.

– Bang!

With a loud noise, the holy sword tilted to one side.

– Bang! Bang! Bang!

The sword, embedded deeply in the pedestal, did not come out easily.

After several kicks, the holy sword finally fell from the pedestal and tumbled onto the floor.

Whether that sword's owner appears or who takes it doesn't matter to me anymore.

A bringer of life's light?

I am one who thoroughly knows the true face of that so-called savior.

Why would I, knowing all this, serve this sword and its owner again?

What I desire is not revenge, but submission.

[.....?!]

Ceyram, who had been quietly observing, was shocked.

"Isn't this how it should be?"

By now, my feet were trampling the luminous blade of the holy sword.

The golden gem embedded in the hilt seemed to resent me as it looked on.

The true savior does not borrow the strength of others.

– Plink –

Without much force, the gem easily fell off.

At the same time, the lustrous radiance of the holy sword was reduced by half.

I pocketed the gem.

[What are you planning to do with that?]

Ceyram asked, her expression filled with curiosity.

"Who knows? Can't do much right now, but won't it be interesting later?"

Would they come begging me for that gem, or would they fight with all their might to snatch it away?

Whatever it may be, it's an interesting development for me.

If it's the latter, it would be even more exciting...

(To be continued in the next chapter)



Episode 9. The Duke's Trial (1)

“Hey, Master.”

Ceyram sat on the hard rock with a seductive posture, repeatedly yawning. Looking at me, she asked,

“Why are you looking for me?”

“To use you,” I replied in a flat tone.

“You think the legendary Demon Sword is as common as a kitchen knife on a chopping board? Isn't this clearly neglecting a relic?”

“I've told you. For the time being, it'll be hard even to bring you out. I can't carelessly show off a noble relic like you, can I?”

In the distance, I could see Yulken, who watches over me 24 hours a day. Of course, only I can see Ceyram's soul, but I still need to be cautious about any rash actions.

“Don't you know the saying that a man's weapon will dull if not used? It's the same with that thing of yours, isn't it?”

“You say such fine words in front of a child.”

“Talk about children later. Anyway, look at my dried-up skin! I’ve awoken after so many years and want to taste some blood again! When exactly will you unsheathe me?”

She was throwing a tantrum like a child clamoring for a snack.

“I’ll use you to your heart’s content once we’re on the battlefield. So please, just wait until then, Ceyram.”

“If that’s the case, then you should have only come to me right before leaving! Ugh, to wake up after hundreds of years only to meet such a weird master! Fine, if you won’t use me, I’m going back to sleep. Don’t wake me up!”

Ceyram, who turned into mist, disappeared into the dagger in my pocket in an instant. Despite her complaints, she spends half her day sleeping.

It’s natural, though. Maintaining a form needlessly only drains her strength.

While I feel somewhat guilty, for the time being, I cannot help it.

At least until I enter Remaya Valley, I will have no use for her.

I resumed my swordsmanship practice.

The month’s deadline promised to my father is now only three days away.

All I have done during this time is continuous physical training and flashy swordsmanship drills. With no clue what the trial might be, light training is all I could manage.

Honestly, I need to sharpen my real combat senses if I intend to hunt demons on the battlefield...

Even attempting to utilize Kranz seems futile lately since he hasn’t been seen.

He should have recovered from his injuries ages ago, but it seems he is intentionally avoiding me.

The saying goes, “When you need a remedy, even the dirt is gone.” Perhaps I should have been more moderate?

As the monotonous training went on, I couldn’t help but grumble to myself.

I lay down on the ground, stretching out like a star, thinking I might rest for a bit. Considering that my last sparring was with my sister Ellis, I must assume I'm quite rusty by now, though I'd hate to spar with an unworthy opponent.

I pondered if there might be a suitable opponent nearby.

Wait a minute.

There actually is someone close by, isn't there?

"Hey, Yulken! You there?"

I threw my head back, looking into the forest's depth.

Three seconds later, Yulken emerged from between the bushes, swiftly approaching me.

"What is it, young master?"

He seemed surprised that I could pinpoint his exact location.

"Uh, nothing serious. Can you do me a favor?"

"Please speak."

"Let's have a sparring match!"

"What?"

Perspiration broke out on Yulken's face.

A request out of the blue, and a rather peculiar one at that, but I was genuinely serious.

"Did you say... a sparring match with me, now?"

"Yes! The day promised to my father is fast approaching and I don't feel it's right to keep swinging my sword into thin air. I'd like to sharpen my actual combat senses. Can you help me?"

"There are other knights around if you need a sparring partner. My duty is to escort you, not to train you."

“That is precisely why I’m asking. It’s a personal request, separate from my father’s orders. You don’t really have to spar with me. Just defend against my attacks. Won’t be too hard, right?”

Asking him to simply defend without striking back hardly seemed like a proper duel, but Yulken agreed anyway.

What could go wrong with just parrying the young master’s attacks?

“If that is what you wish, I will comply. But instead of my sword, I will use its scabbard. I promise to only defend, as per your wish.”

Politely bowing, Yulken drew his sword, his blade an elite piece wielded by the Knight’s Order, with a scabbard sturdy enough to match famous swords in strength.

“Thanks. One more thing before we start...”

“Please speak.”

“For this spar, don’t report anything that happens to my father.”

“Pardon?”

Yulken’s expression grew complicated.

Not only was his duty to protect me, but it also involved monitoring my every move. The bold son who declared his wish to join the front lines – my father would be extremely curious about the nature of my training.

There was no reason he should fail to report today’s sparring to the Duke.

“It’s not a request but an order. As a scion of the Vert family, I order you not to divulge anything about what transpires here to anyone. Do you understand?”

A fresh bead of sweat trickled down Yulken’s cheek.

Was he considering whether I, not the Duke, had the authority to issue such a command to him? In all my lives, I have seen he is among the most honorable knights.

He has shown immense loyalty as the Duke’s right hand, so committed that he’d plunge into the vilest sludge if bidden.

Had I proceeded with the sparring without saying anything, he surely would have reported the event to the Duke.

Hence the need for this command.

Yulken's core mission is to protect the Duke, and by extension, as someone directly charged by the Duke, I hold a delegated authority.

Some might scoff at such talk, but for the knight before me, it doesn't matter.

"I understand, young master. I swear upon the honor of a guardian knight that I will not divulge any information regarding this sparring."

Taking the knight's oath, Yulken swore an oath that breaking would mean paying with his life, assuring me he wouldn't talk.

"Thank you, Yulken. Shall we begin?"

As I lifted my sword, Yulken too positioned the scabbard defensively.

With a definitive promise in hand, perhaps I could afford a bit of fun?

Honestly, these past few days have left me itching for some action.

Since Kranz is out of the picture and my last sparring with my sister Ellis brought unexpected urges, with a decisive leap, I charged.

– Clang!

The first strike delivered, I twisted my body to execute the desired blows freely.

Yulken caught every swing flawlessly, without a hint of deflection.

A thrilling synergy of vibrating blades combined with an exhilarating rush surged within me.

The dormant aspirations of a swordsman were reawakening.

As time passed, the corners of my lips turned upward, while Yulken's expression grew somber.

Although he didn't struggle with defense, it was hard to believe these were the sword skills of a mere ten-year-old.

About ten minutes into the assault, I felt a refreshing sense of fulfillment, as though completing a set exercise routine.

Ending with a downward slash aimed at his head, I ceased my attack.

"Good work, Yulken! Thanks for the help!"

"Y-you worked hard, young master..."

My cheerful smile was met with Yulken's awkward bow.

He observed his scabbard, somewhat marred despite the superior hardness.

"It looks like I've damaged it unintentionally. Should I compensate?"

"No, young master! I can take care of the repairs myself, please don't worry about it!"

Although full of questions, he surely wouldn't ask them, nor would he speak of this to anyone else.

A truly faithful knight.

"What do you think, Yulken?"

"About what may I ask, young master?"

"The trial father is preparing. Do you know anything about it?"

"I am regretfully uninformed, as I have been accompanying you recently."

Well, even if he knew, he wouldn't say...

"What could he be preparing? Perhaps a sparring with several high-ranking knights like you? Or maybe father himself will face me?"

As the day of the promise drew nearer, curiosity burgeoned.

What was the qualification the Duke spoke of, and what had he prepared for it?

Curiosity tinged with odd anticipation rose within me.

“...It won't be that.”

Surprisingly, quiet Yulken spoke up.

“Though it's only my conjecture, I don't believe the Duke would prepare something like a duel with people. The Duke sees far beyond what we can imagine, so he must have arranged a trial fitting his vision.”

Indeed, he has a different perspective.

Having served my father much longer than I have, he'd know him better.

“But as for you, young master...”

“...?”

“I suppose... no matter the trial, you would overcome it without issue.”

For the first time, the ordinarily stoic knight revealed a gentle smile.

Receiving acknowledgment from an elite knight was a dance-worthy joy.

It was a strange but not unpleasant feeling.

* * *

Time swiftly passed, and the day of the promise arrived.

Knights from the frontline had been waiting in the courtyard since dawn to take me with them.

With nothing to prepare, I followed them after breakfast.

From the windows of the mansion, hundreds of eyes watched me leave.

Nobody was permitted to accompany me, and among the dozens of knights, I was the only one under protection.

After a thirty-minute carriage ride through uninhabited wilderness, we arrived.

As I stepped out, I immediately faced the Duke.

“I greet you, father, Si An, the youngest of the Verts.”

“Come, Si An. Are you ready?”

Without any small talk, he directly asked if I was ready to undertake the trial.

“Of course. I am prepared to start at any moment.”

“Once more I ask: if you reconsider now, I will let you go without a word. Do you truly want to go to the frontier?”

“My sentiments have not wavered since I first expressed them. My heart is still set on the frontlines.”

Seeing my unwavering resolve, the Duke nodded.

“Responsibility accompanies every action, and one must be qualified to bear that responsibility. If you wish to uphold the beliefs of the Vert family, you must earn that right. Now, let’s see just how strong your resolve is.”

Having spoken, the Duke commanded the knights.

“Release it.”

Following his command, the knights brought forth something massive.

It looked like a huge cage designed to imprison someone.

As they unwrapped the giant covering, the truth of the Duke’s prepared trial came to light.

“Rrrrr...”

Within the cage, eyes filled with madness glared at me, those of a creature not native to this land.

To think the Duke would prepare such a trial.

Despite trying to maintain composure, my lips twitched uncontrollably.

The Hellhound of demons.

The cruel predator from the demon realm licked its jowls greedily, as if it could devour me at any moment.

(To be continued)