

# The Regressed Son of a Duke is an Assassin

## chapter 9

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.

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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)