**Chapter 215: Welcome back! *Hug* (1)**

Looking up at the sky after a long time, the blue moonlight illuminated the ground.

Just as I thought it had been a while since I enjoyed such a leisurely moment immersed in sentiment and laid down on the bench, a question occurred to me.

"Why isn't she here?"

Grumpy, one who said she would come to the library after getting tested, hadn't arrived.

Even though the blessing and curse test queue was long, it shouldn't take this long.

I got up with this small doubt in mind. I was worried if she might have gotten into trouble again.

Just as I was about to head to the temple's main building with Belle, I noticed a figure trudging towards us from far away.

Complicated footsteps like walking through a deep forest.

A black-haired woman approached while looking down at the ground with her head hanging low.

"Master..."

Grumpy one called me with a choked voice.

The moment I heard that lifeless voice, I was certain.

"I... I received a blessing that makes me stronger the more Master embraces other women."

That she had become aware of the new curse engraved upon her.

"..."

It was a curse that left me speechless even when viewing it in the status window, but hearing it directly from her lips made it even more dizzying.

Grumpy unfolded the crumpled paper and showed it to me.

On that paper, which had clearly been clutched in her fist, was written an explanation slightly cruder than the status window.

[◆ Blessing of Netorare Masochist Corruption Enhancement]

-Grows stronger the more you witness your loved one embracing other women.

-The number of women you can accept increases as your feelings of love deepen.

The shocking blessing name and description text, no matter how many times I looked at it.

A cruel choice between the bond with one's loved one and one's own powerlessness.

The mysterious malice felt so clear, trying to drag her, already a severe masochist, down to who knows where.

But even while thinking this, I felt a sense of ownership as I watched her revealing her blessing to me without any hesitation.

"...Do you want to erase it?"

I asked after slight hesitation.

If I told her to erase it, Denshi would. If I told her to keep it, she would.

As the explorer Balkan, I didn't want it erased.

That person called Intert, Grumpy’s master, had given her quite a long period of freedom. Until the color of the bead she handed over turned black.

During that time, no, even after that, she would become a reliable supporter, so it would be a waste to throw away a precious blessing that gave +1 to all stats.

Moreover, since it was cumulative, if it piled up, it would become quite valuable.

But as the master keeping a slave named Denshi, it gave me slight concern.

I wanted to fully respect her choice. So I asked for her opinion.

"...I love you, Master."

Grumpy, who had hesitated for a moment, expressed her feelings with a serious face.

Neither in the status window nor on the blessing verification paper she held was the object of affection written.

"I care for and respect Master. I want to serve Master as my master for life."

But she looked at me with such an upright face as if her heart was directed at only one person.

"Master is destined to rise high. As always, many will cling to those in high positions, and Master will not reject the female power holders who increasingly approach."

"...?"

Though it seemed to be words of praise, my head tilted strangely.

Just what does this one think of me?

A small question arose, but Grumpy continued speaking with a face full of determined resolve.

"When Master reduced even that Explorer Union leader to just another female, I had already prepared myself. I can accept it."

"..."

"Other females taking Master? Ha! No. It's Master taking other females. Since the choice is entirely Master's will, it's not an area where I have any say....Though I am a bit jealous."

"..."

Grumpy continued speaking with an increasingly excited voice and her hand gradually moved toward the collar around her neck.

The collar tightly fastened around her neck. The collar I personally put on her. The collar she hadn't taken off once since that day.

Grumpy carefully grabbed my fingers while placing the collar's handle in my hand.

Before I knew it, her collar was in my hand.

"I will protect Master. As Master's sword and shield. I will be Master's faithful hunting dog. Master holds this hunting dog's leash."

-Squeeze.

The collar in my hand was gripped tight. I hadn't grabbed it. Grumpy had folded my fingers to make me grip the collar.

"As Master's hunting dog, I want to protect Master. I don't want to be separated again. I want to gain the power to protect Master. So…I want to become stronger."

The image of a man wearing a helmet was reflected in her slightly moistened eyes.

In his eyes, barely visible through the helmet's eye holes, her image was also reflected.

Grumpy eyes that had been standing on end softened and held a smile.

Her figure beneath the moonlight was beautiful.

"I don't want to miss the chance to become strong enough to protect Master's side."

I clearly felt the determination in her words and I finally realized what those words meant.

"So, when Master mingles bodies with other females...I'd like you to make a peeping hole for me to watch."

She meant she wanted a peeping hole to voyeur when I had relations with other women.

"You fool."

-Thump!

"Khung...!"

When I clenched my fist and hit her head, her eyes rolled up toward the sky and the corners of her mouth trembled.

The masochist slave who converted even the pain of the knock into pleasure savored the afterglow while giggling weakly.

"I wondered why you were talking so long. This was your conclusion?"

"Hehe...Getting this blessing doesn't change anything. From what I see, Master is bound to rise up while crushing various females anyway."

"..."

I couldn't completely deny her words. Because there were already things I had done.

"As time passes, the number of females around Master will increase anyway, so unless I have a blessing like this to become stronger, won't Master callously throw me away?"

-Smack!

"Kheut...!"

She grabbed her head again.

This time I hit harder because I was a bit angry at her self-deprecating answer.

"Don't say things like that."

"..."

"You're mine. What throwing away? Just don't run away even if I treat you harshly."

"Master..."

-Tug tug.

I pulled the collar of Grumpy who was looking at me with a slightly moved face.

While she didn't mind the embarrassing things she had said earlier, this seemed to make her shy, as her cheeks were as red as when a virgin had her first experience.

After rolling her eyes around with a flustered expression, she eventually grinned and scratched her cheek with an awkward face.

"...My lord. I... I also want a collar."

Belle, who had been watching Grumpy being pulled by the collar, pointed at her own empty neck and spoke.

"No no. Junior should stay put. This is a symbol of the senior slave."

"Th-that's unfair. Where is there such a law?"

"Right here. This was personally put on me by Master!"

Watching Grumpy and Belle bicker, I couldn't help but laugh helplessly.

Though the blessing's name was a bit questionable, since she had a positive mindset, my worries were lessened.

Now that we were done with everything at the temple...

"Let's go back."

It was time to return to that place that now felt as dear as a real home.

\*\*\*

"The Cozy Winter Night Inn hasn't been open lately, they say."

"Right. Since they're not open these days, we only go to other bars, but the taste is really...tsk tsk. The cooking skill is lacking. The cooking skill!!!"

"Ha. I know right. There wasn't a bar like that place in the explorer district! Haven't seen that alluring employee in a while either, wonder if she went to the labyrinth...Huh? That guy over there..."

Late at night Balkan heard strange rumors among the drunk people on the street.

Rumors that Diana's bar hadn't been open recently.

For more than a week, no less.

It was strange. Usually, Diana almost never closed the shop for more than a week.

Of course, there were times when she closed the shop to focus on dealing with her sexual desires due to the [Curse of Lewd Weakling Corruption Mark] placed on her, causing her to fall into heat...but that period shouldn't be now.

While trying to calm his inexplicably anxious heart, he ran to the inn.

"Master! Let me come with you!"

"My lord...!"

Behind him, Grumpy and Belle came running.

They had nowhere else suitable to go. Since they would be together for a while, he planned to let them stay at the same inn.

With such thoughts in mind, he arrived at the inn's entrance, which was tightly closed.

-Knock knock.

“Ahem.”

He cleared his throat while carefully knocking.

"Miss Diana."

There was no need to speak loudly. Just his usual baritone voice.

If Diana was inside the shop, she would hear this voice and come out.

Sure enough.

-Click.

Along with the sound of the door's lock being undone.

-Creeeak.

The door that made a small hinge sound opened wide.

He took in the appearance of the woman standing in front of the door.

Eyes always warmly half-closed, a gentle and kind smile softly set on her lips and hair resting on her shoulders, giving off a fragrant scent, every single element constituted the woman called Diana Ordia.

"Balkan!"

Meeting her after a long time, she greeted him with a voice higher than usual, perhaps due to joy.

While his gaze briefly went to the luggage box she was holding, Balkan impulsively rushed forward and embraced her.

"Huut...?"

Diana's voice, tinged with surprise, was buried in heavy breathing.

-Squeeze.

The sensation of abundant breasts that gently wrapped around the person being embraced, warm and cozy temperature that naturally made one drowsy.

Barely managing to speak while holding onto his fading consciousness.

"I'm back..."

Yes. This scent. Diana's scent. Diana's body temperature. Finally, as he shared a deep embrace with her, it felt real that he had returned from the labyrinth.

Diana was feeling similar sensations to Balkan.

Balkan had returned.

How long had she waited for this day over the past few months.

As she felt him in her arms, embracing her without any hesitation or reservation, a warm and fluffy feeling welled up from deep in her chest, drawing a smile.

-Thump. Thump.

Her intensely beating heart went without saying.

"Welcome..."

While feeling such sensations and looking at Balkan during their welcome-back embrace, in Diana's eyes.

[Number of sexual encounters (target): 3]

[Status: Non-virgin]

An unfamiliar number was reflected.

"...back...?"

The number had increased quite a bit.