**Chapter 275: Hug (1)**

"You're late. I heard you caught the Elder Lich. You really worked hard. Come sit beside me and rest a little."

Diana emphasized the words 'beside me' as she tapped the seat next to her.

Considering who her narrowed hunter-like eyes were focused on, such a sharp reaction wasn't unreasonable.

"My disciple. Go sit down. Your side must be feeling cold."

The woman who had been arguing fiercely just hours ago, and even told me to reflect on embracing her man, was by my side again.

I sensed the subtle tension between the two and sat down beside Diana.

-Swish.

I immediately felt an arm wrapping around my waist.

It wasn't the occasional suggestive and sticky touch.

This was a defensive touch born from fear that her possession might be taken away.

I felt a warm touch filled with the desire to protect what was hers and a hint of anxiety about possibly losing it.

The boldness I had seen when she confronted Denshi was now hidden behind this anxiety.

'Somehow, the blonde tanned delinquent-like Idelbert and the kind honor student-like Diana have both good and oddly bad chemistry.'

If romance were involved between them, they would definitely cause trouble, I should say.

Snug—

I smiled bitterly and placed my hand over Diana's.

"..."

Our eyes met as Diana silently looked at me.

While gazing into her amber eyes, I carefully removed my dark helmet.

With my expanded field of vision, I could fully take in the beautiful woman with black hair draped to one side.

I smiled brightly to reassure her and let her know that nothing like what she was thinking had happened. Only then did the tension Diana had been subtly exuding finally ease.

Squeeze—

Diana grasped my hand that was layered over hers.

With each careful caress of her thick, firm fingers—tougher and more calloused than when I first saw them—relief spread across Diana's face.

"When the male goes out to work and returns, instead of being grateful, you show jealousy. You're messed up, Diana. Indeed, the current you should get pregnant and have a baby."

"Y-you...! W-what are you suddenly saying—"

While Diana was flustered by Idelbert's sudden outburst, her cheeks reddening, a piece of paper was thrust in front of her.

"I didn't come here for a battle of wills, so I'll get straight to the point. My disciple has done something great. He discovered the hideout of the Envy worshipper."

"...!"

Diana turned her head slightly in surprise to look at me.

A face full of questions: How? Really?

I gave her a thumbs up and told her about everything that happened today, which made Diana's expression grow more complex.

"While I was away, such things happened...I should have been there with you. I'm sorry."

"What does Diana have to be sorry for? I just got involved in something messy."

What could Diana possibly be sorry about?

Even I didn't expect to get involved in such a matter when I went to the temple without much thought.

Idelbert, who had been staring at us intently, finally spoke after a pause.

"We'll go after them as soon as possible....Diana. I need your help."

The strategy was to catch and crush them all before the opponent sensed danger and fled.

That straightforward, almost crude strategy was Idelbert's plan.

When Diana showed hesitation after being asked to lend her strength, Idelbert continued.

"We don't need many people against the Envy worshipper. Unless they have strong mental fortitude, they'll fall to that woman's brainwashing or emotional manipulation, causing internal strife or turning against us. We need more reliable forces. Those with strong mental fortitude and skill."

Against Envy demon worshipper specialized in brainwashing abilities, a large force could become a liability.

So Idelbert wanted to capture the Envy worshipper with a small elite team possessing outstanding mental strength.

"My disciple and I would be enough, but if I get excited to the point of losing my reason, I need someone to stop me. For that role, no one is better than you, Diana—"

"Wait. What did you say?"

Diana, who had been listening attentively while pondering, expressed doubt and looked back and forth between me and Idelbert.

"Balkan is coming too? Why? There's no reason for Balkan to be involved in such a battle—"

"My disciple is more than enough. He responds calmly to most situations, and not just because he's my disciple, but with Balkan's skills in the current situation, he's definitely a deployable force."

"No, even so—"

"I said I wanted to go along, Diana."

Diana's expression hardened at my calm response.

"No. It's too dangerous. You experienced it before at the royal palace, didn't you? How unreasonable and dangerous those demon worshippers are!"

"It's because I know they're dangerous that I'm going. Dangerous enemies have always brought me greater achievements. And I won't be fighting the demon worshipper directly, but taking care of the brainwashed people guarding them."

"Balkan. If you delve into more dangerous paths for growth, you'll only make things harder for yourself. There's no need to walk down a thorny path—"

"I need it. The thorny path."

My brief statement was followed by silence.

Diana was at a loss for words, just staring at me.

"I want to become stronger. Not just strong enough to get by comfortably, but strong enough to reach the very bottom, the edge of the labyrinth."

I have both a duty and a purpose.

I must reach the end of the labyrinth to follow my younger sister's traces.

How could there not be thorns on such a path?

I recognized the danger and know that although I've grown much stronger, I'm still not enough to reach the end of the labyrinth.

In that sense, the Envy worshipper is quite a good prey.

'According to Idelbert, the one-on-one combat ability of the Envy worshipper is merely similar to my current level.'

The key points of attack are the near-brainwashing emotional manipulation ability and the guards protecting the Envy worshipper.

I agreed to take on at least two of the three guards so that Idelbert could focus on battling the Envy worshipper.

"Of course it's dangerous. In the unpredictable labyrinth, fighting against crazy women who worship demons. But."

How can one become stronger without battles where blood is spilled and flesh is torn?

"I've been prepared for that much since I first entered the labyrinth."

This combat experience will be an opportunity I may never have again.

"...Sigh. Really..."

Diana sighed and rubbed her forehead.

"...If you insist that much, I have no choice but to go along too."

Idelbert's lips curled slightly upon hearing the news of Diana's confirmed participation.

She must feel like she's gained a reliable ally.

However, Diana glared at Idelbert and set one condition.

"But, I'll only step in when it's absolutely critical. I have a feeling I'll soon receive 'that' again..."

"Hmm. You mean the curse of lust. Can't be helped. I should understand that."

"The curse of lust?"

When I muttered while looking at Idelbert, who nodded in understanding, she spoke as if surprised I didn't know.

"It's a curse placed on Diana. A curse she got when she re-sealed the lust demon whose seal had been broken. The reason that woman has all those pathetic mat-like blessings and curses is because of that curse's influence—"

"D-don't talk about other people's information so freely...!"

Diana, her face bright red, hurriedly covered Idelbert's mouth.

"..."

"..."

My eyes met Diana's as she covered Idelbert's mouth.

[Diana Ordia LV.65]

[Current blessings and curses possessed by Diana Ordia: 6]

[◆Curse of Rejecting Lousy Dicks]

[◆Curse of Decadence from the Black Moon]

[◆ Curse of Breast Milk Climax Stat Drain]

[◆ Curse of Sensitive Constitution]

Immediately, a lineup of vicious and lewd curses were listed in her status window.

The secrets I had discovered about Diana so far were there in her status window.

Due to the level difference, not all blessings and curses were visible yet, but one of them seemed to be the curse of lust.

'...Could this be why Diana retired as an explorer?'

No matter how hard she tried, was there no possibility of gaining normal blessings anymore, and she feared receiving only female mat optimization blessings or curses?

Since curses imbued with demonic energy were very difficult to remove, as in Celsia's case, it might not be wrong to think—

"T-that's not it."

Did she sense what I was thinking?

Diana immediately shook her head and looked at me with a face confronting a crisis.

Her fully open amber eyes held only me.

"I won't accept you through underhanded methods like Idelbert did."

"...You want a longer night than pathetic vagina and premature penis sex that only lasts 3 minutes?"

"Y-yes. We can't waste our precious first time so futilely. After all this time of holding back, I need to ensure at least three children are definitely conceived...H-huh!"

Diana, who was expressing her wishes caught up in the mood, quickly blushed and squeezed her eyes shut.

"Three children?"

"T-that's... uh... nngh...!"

When I teasingly asked again, I tried desperately not to laugh at the sight of Diana being unbearably embarrassed.

As Diana, unable to hide her embarrassment, tried to conceal her reddened face, I spread my arms wide.

"We couldn't do it this time."

"Mmgh..."

I didn't specify what we couldn't do. Diana didn't ask either.

We both knew what needed to be done.

Diana's arms slipped under my armpits, her soft breasts gently crushed against my pectoral muscles.

Feeling her warm arms firmly embracing my back, I too carefully embraced Diana.

Close enough to feel each other's heartbeats, sticky enough to blend our body heat, we shared a welcome-back hug.

Our lips met.

Denshi and Ellie blankly watched the scene of the two embracing from the top of the stairs.

A sticky exchange of tongues, rubbing of uterine covering flesh and penis, hot air filling the tavern and rising to the second floor of the inn... an embrace closer to mating, really.

The bodies of the two females, who had been holding their breath watching the mating hug that lasted nearly thirty minutes, gradually heated up.

"I don't think it's time for us to fight among ourselves anymore. There are too many strong opponents..."

"...? Why opponents? To me, they're my foster mother and aunt."

"..."

"Hmph. I still get what you mean though."

As Ellie nodded quietly after speaking, Denshi also nodded and looked at Ellie.

The two women bumped their fists together and muttered.

"For now, a temporary alliance."