**Chapter 310: Return to Ground (6)**

 [Balkan. Do you desire this body?]

"What are you suddenly talking about?"

I looked at Bunny, who was whispering in a subtly seductive voice, with bewildered eyes.

[...Hmm hmm. It doesn't have to be someone specifically. Objects, people, food, or even unclear things like power are fine. Haven't you felt an intense desire for such things?]

"Of course."

Every time I starved for days in the labyrinth, I thought of a warm bowl of soup.

Every time that beautiful woman ignited fire in my chest, I wanted to have her.

When I experienced absurd things and when people around me and my comrades fell into crisis, I craved power.

Humans always long for and yearn for something.

Living life, one inevitably feels certain desires.

[Yes. Even mortals have such desires. But your desires have at least a minimum line of good.]

However, even those living in the rough and violent labyrinth city recognize the minimum line that shouldn't be crossed as human beings.

Everyone does their best to achieve their goals and desires but that doesn't mean there are many who commit such vile acts as to abandon human ethics.

[We demons are those whose such desires have gathered and gathered to become the reason for living. To fulfill desires, we can do any deed whatsoever.]

Beings whose specific desires have gathered to the extreme, whose life's signpost has been corrupted into desire itself.

Those who don't hesitate even at countless sacrifices to fulfill their own desires.

Bunny defined such beings as demons.

[The one possessing your slave's body, now called the Puppeteer, is also a demon soaked in greed.]

She said the Puppeteer was a demon of greed.

—Infiltrate the human world like that greedy bastard.

What came to mind simultaneously was the message that Lilith had heard from the demon of lust.

The Puppeteer had been resurrected and escaped outside the labyrinth at least ten years ago.

"...I thought all demons were in a sealed state."

[Hundreds of years have already passed. No matter how detestable that Earth Mother Goddess is, she can't keep us sealed for such a long time. Seals inevitably deteriorate as time passes.]

Well, Diana's party had also made such sacrifices to prevent the seal of the demon of lust from breaking.

'The demon of sloth also said its seal was precarious and asked me to kill the sloth worshippers...'

A similar incident might happen again within the next decade or so.

[Except for sloth, we're not the type to stay still either.]

Upon hearing Bunny's words, I recalled the strange hallucination I saw when I fell into the fountain on the multiple-of-5 floor.

The fragment of the Earth Mother Goddess trapped in a cage of light.

The being that struggled to suppress the darkness pervading the labyrinth.

—This place has a peace treaty with the demon of sloth. It's a bit safer than other floors.

I heard such words when conversing with the fragment of the Earth Mother Goddess at the fountain on the 15th floor.

If the 15th floor was a place with a peace treaty with the demon of sloth who had no intention of escaping the seal.

'Does that mean on floors where other demons are sealed, they're still continuing a tense tug-of-war?'

If so, just how long has the being called the Earth Mother Goddess... been fighting an invisible battle?

I stood frozen in an indescribable sensation before finally coming to my senses.

"What is the Puppeteer's purpose... wish?"

The intense wish that a demon who greedily devours everything might harbor.

That bastard was trying to use Denshi and me to achieve some wish, but I couldn't guess what it might be.

'If I could know even a hint, I could stick a big middle finger in that shameless face.'

When I looked at Bunny asking if she had any guesses, she spoke in a shameless voice.

[This body was busy fulfilling this body's desires, so I don't know well what other demons wanted or how much.]

Typical Bunny.

I didn't say the words "I didn't expect anything anyway..."

[But I did hear that greed's mind went crazy a few years before being sealed.]

Useful information always comes later.

"Its mind went crazy?"

[I heard it was completely bewitched by some woman. Later it turned out that was the hero.]

"The Puppeteer was bewitched by the Earth Mother Goddess?"

What kind of absurd story is this?

A demon bewitched by a hero?

[At least according to this body's memory, that's how it was. The bastard who had been plundering everything around and greedily expanding its domain suddenly stopped raiding and started jumping into every battlefield the hero participated in, making us wonder if it had finally gone mad.]

Bunny continued telling me the stories she remembered.

Stories of trolling whenever there was a chance to kill the hero, ruining operations.

Stories of infiltrating field camps where the hero had stayed alone to collect dead skin cells or hair.

"...Really, it did such stalker-like things?"

[Yes. At least until this body was sealed first and lost consciousness, the greed bastard's obsession was abnormal. It was as if all desires had turned toward the Earth Mother Goddess.]

The desires that composed the demon of greed were directed toward the Earth Mother Goddess? Why?

'Surely it couldn't have fallen in love.'

The possibility of being bisexual couldn't be ignored, but recalling recent events, the Puppeteer seemed closer to heterosexual.

"If the wish is related to the Earth Mother Goddess who was called a hero, what does that have to do with us?"

[This body is curious too. You... no, you aside, your slave girl doesn't seem to have any relationship with the Earth Mother Goddess.]

Denshi wasn't from the religious order, and was a bastard who grew up working as a slave in the lawless zone.

Actually, until she first met me, she had been used by a lawless clan and was tainted by them.

—Indeed. To make a lowly lawless-born reach the level of resolve to approach a 'wish', one needs this degree of coercion...

I mulled over the Puppeteer's words.

What kind of resolve did Denshi, born of lowly lawless origins, harbor to warrant the expression that she had "approached" a 'wish'?

I had taken Denshi as a slave, and she had also been loyal to me for a long time.

Setting everything else aside, she had rushed into the Elder Lich explosion just to save only me.

At that time, Denshi was prepared to die for me.

The fragment of the Earth Mother Goddess also maintains the demons' seals by sacrificing for a long time.

The scale is different, but the essence is similar.

'The resolve to die for others.'

The resolve to sacrifice one's remaining life solely for others.

It was also after the Elder Lich subjugation that the color of Denshi's 'Free Activity' jewel began to change clearly.

"Perhaps..."

[Hmm? Do you have a guess?]

"Isn't it trying to create a second hero? One with a noble heart like the Earth Mother Goddess."

[......]

At my words, Bunny remained quietly silent.

Could it have sounded somewhat plausible?

[Puhaha!]

What came back while I was thinking this was laughter clearly mixed with mockery.

[That's quite an amusing idea! But if it's the greed I know, that's impossible. It's probably just trying to create a species that suits its taste.]

"You said the Puppeteer you knew went crazy in its final years."

[...Hmm...]

Bunny, who had been chuckling and dismissing it as impossible, fell quietly silent at my words.

As I continued thinking, one person came to mind.

Intert, who claimed to be Denshi's teacher and was the Puppeteer's minion.

'If I catch that bastard, couldn't I get at least some rough information?'

"Ugh..."

While I was lost in such thoughts, I heard a low groan and a voice complaining of stuffiness.

When I quickly raised my head, Denshi was looking at me blankly with a deeply furrowed brow.

"Master...?"

"That damn Puppeteer bitch."

"...Huh?"

When I suddenly cursed about the Puppeteer, bewilderment appeared on Denshi's face.

It seemed like this time it was really Denshi.

"Sorry for cursing as soon as you woke up. Are you feeling clear-headed? How's your body?"

"...Ah, I'm fine. I feel a bit sluggish like I slept too long... Master."

"Yeah?"

"I was just... preparing breakfast."

In Denshi's eyes as she looked at her own body lying on the bed wearing neat clothes, there was fear about a phenomenon she couldn't understand.

"I wasn't wearing such luxurious and neat clothes either... and I wasn't lying on the bed..."

"Denshi."

"...Did that bastard steal my body again? Like that time?"

"......"

When I nodded silently, she hugged me tightly.

With her face buried in my chest, she asked while trembling.

"...I didn't hurt you, did I, Master?"

"There was no physical fight. So don't be too scared."

I carefully embraced Denshi.

The faithful servant trembled with fear that she might have hurt her master while her consciousness was stolen, rather than worrying about her body being taken.

-Pat. Pat.

I gently patted her trembling back.

With the reassuring weight, gentle rhythm, and warm body temperature, Denshi's breathing gradually regained stability.

"...I'm sorry. My will is weak—"

"Don't apologize. It's not a problem with your will."

How could this be called Denshi's fault?

[◆2nd Puppet's Curse]

"The bad one is the bastard who carved such a curse on you."

"......"

Was she shocked by the fact that she had no memory of several days and had almost hurt me?

Denshi's expression, which had always been positive, hardened stiffly and wouldn't soften.

It was hard to see Denshi so depressed.

"You said you'd get revenge, right?"

"...What?"

"Back then. You said you'd get revenge on the Puppeteer who stole our first experience."

The eyes that had been soaked in fear, guilt, and anxiety about such things possibly happening again looked at me blankly.

Had she recalled the hatred and desire for revenge she felt toward the Puppeteer then?

Denshi's gloomy eyes began to burn brightly and regain their vitality.

"I still haven't forgotten about that time, but you—"

"Me too!!!"

Denshi, who raised her voice loudly, looked at me while scattering murderous intent toward the being that had stolen her most precious experience.

"I haven't forgotten either...! How could I forget?! I will definitely kill the bastard who defiled my first experience with Master!!!"

"Then, is it okay to keep being depressed like this?"

"No!!!"

-Thump!

Denshi jumped up from the bed, ran to the corner, took a small dagger, and came to me.

"Master! I'm insufficient as I am now...! I need to become stronger than now to even have a match with that bastard!"

"That would be so."

"Yes! So! You must be tired, but! Please give me a training session!"

Seeing Denshi bowing passionately after shaking off her gloomy emotions made me chuckle.

"Follow me to the backyard."

"Yes sir!!"

I vigorously petted Denshi's head as she was being so admirable, thinking about the things I needed to do.

'The Puppet's Curse...'

How dare. That detestable curse that so shamelessly tries to put a spoon in what's mine... I need to erase it as soon as possible.

The next morning.

"Haaak, hek, heeeeek... va, vagina hurts... Balkan-nim, please save me, wuup—"

I put a gag and collar on Lilith, who had climaxed hundreds of times during several days of neglect play.

"Ugh, ughhh... Master... I have no strength in my body..."

"Don't worry. I'll drag you without it hurting."

"Ughhh... ah, it wouldn't particularly matter if it hurt... if anything, I'd be happy if you dragged me so my butt gets scraped..."

After putting a collar on Denshi, who was exhausted from all-night training, I nodded with satisfaction seeing the sight of the two women being dragged like pets.

And I waited for party members in front of Eden's portal with the mother-daughter pair Ellie and Diana.

Now it's time to head to the surface again.