

Abyssal A 1051

Chapter 1051: A Lord's Help

Ruri ran through the familiar city. The countless pathways that she's taken in the past, the marks she left behind.

Right now, her brain was working at maximum potential. No, in fact it was working harder than ever.

"Sh*t! Sh*t! Leave me alone!" Ruri shouted, tears rolling from the corner of her eyes as she activated her Sigil once more.

In her hands, a dagger appeared as she immediately threw it into the ground.

A portal opened up as she dove through and reappeared on the other side of the city.

But in the same moment, a set of eyes snapped towards her location.

"!!!"

Inhaling a sharp breath, she quickly hid her tracks and tried to hide but it was futile.

Opposite her, a single droplet of blood started to roll down the side of the wall as fear took hold of Ruri's chest.

From that droplet, the inverted world reflected from its crimson surface.

A single droplet became two. Then two became four. It split itself over and over until this droplet had become a stream of blood that was now flooding the room.

Ruri finally got hold of herself as she turned to run.

Yet the moment this droplet appeared, her exits were already sealed.

*BANG!!!

Metal bars shot out of the blood, caging off the window as Ruri stumbled back.

Should she fight?

Even if she wanted to fight, how???

*Crack...

The sounds of bones crunching appeared behind her as Ruri slowly glanced back.

From that pool, a figure started to emerge as the blood swelled until Suna's face could be seen.

A smile, a flick of her cigarette and that lazy look in her eyes.

This was no trouble for her at all.

"Why don't we talk about this, yeah?" Ruri forced a smile as Suna chuckled.

"Talk? Sure. But I don't think talking requires you to run so fearfully now does it?" Suna scratched her chin before taking a deep drag of her cigarette.

Blowing out a cloud of smoke, she flicked what remains towards Ruri's face as she whipped her finger to the right.

A needle was caught between her fingers and the target would've been her temple.

Ruri clicked her tongue. Even using her Sigils to conceal the needle as best she could, the moment it crossed a certain distance, Suna reacted almost instantaneously.

A boundary of absolute focus that could not be crossed no matter what.

Manipulating perception didn't work as Suna's defence relied on multiple factors outside of her conscious control.

Narrowing her eyes, Ruri was able to spot the issue immediately and understood that trying to sneak attack the woman in front of her was impossible.

"Now, provided that you don't run, I'm more than happy with a talk." Suna snapped her finger as two chairs appeared from the blood.

Recoiling at the sight of blood staining the chair, Ruri had a face of disgust as her hand touched the chair.

Her eyes narrowed and immediately tossed the chair towards Suna's face.

Batting it aside casually, Suna watched as Ruri dipped into the shadows and run away from the place.

"Well, Lab did say she was an energetic one based on the reports. No wonder the people in the capital struggled to capture her." She chuckled, taking a step forward and diving into the blood.

Her gravity flipped onto its head as she exited in the Void and propelled herself towards Ruri's location and made an exit portal.

Spotting Ruri beneath her, Suna slowly reached out with her hand to catch the young princess.

"I'M SORRY PLEASE HELP MEEEE!!!" Ruri screamed.

In that moment, Suna or rather, Alice's senses were heightened to the maximum.

The sudden feeling of a Lord level entity staring at her direction.

Her pupils constricted and Alice immediately gave up on catching Ruri. Instead, she traced a line with a finger and a tear in reality appeared in front of her.

*BANG!!!

A spear of light was immediately swallowed but the impact forced Alice backwards.

Sliding across the rooftops, a frown hung on her lips.

'Seems like you played a bit too much. Can you handle the heat?' Alyss smiled.

Ideally, they would've been able to have a conversation with the princess and by extension the Royal family. But after seeing the tricks the princess was pulling, Alice wanted to mess around.

And now, a Lord was intervening.

'Of course I can. Who the hell do you think I am? No matter who comes, be it Lord, Apostle or God, so long as they bleed...' A grin formed on Alice's face.

'Why do I need to fear?'

Hearing the confident remark, Alyss was about to say something when both of them paused.

Overhead, the clouds parted to reveal countless shining spears manifesting one by one.

An array of weapons, each radiating with an obscene amount of power where even just one would've been enough to erase a village.

And in the middle, a figure of splendour could be seen draped in white and gold.

'Sh*t...' Alice mumbled as cold sweat rolled down her back.

'Are you still sure there's nothing to worry about?' Alyss clapped back as Alice rolled her eyes.

Taking a deep breath, Alice immediately configured her Sigils for full offense, minus what's already been changed.

"So you're the one chasing the princess." A voice echoed out behind Alice.

Fast.

A speed comparable if not faster than her maximum speed using Void Steps that Feris taught her.

Alice couldn't turn around.

Doing so would trigger a battle to break out.

"If the princess didn't run, there would be no need to chase would there? I simply wanted to talk." Alice shrugged as a halo whirled to life above her.

Energy snapped into place as Void Fang manifested in the form of a spear.

*BANG!!!

Alice stabbed backwards, creating the much needed space between her and the newcomer.

"As expected." The woman mumbled, flicking her finger as wings covered the upper half of her face.

Golden threads rained down from above with spears chasing right after.

Tracing her fingers along the ground, Alice's eyes darted around the place as her Sigils lit up one by one.

Vision!

A pulse of energy expanded with her in the centre.

The world revealed itself to her as her 'eyes' captured everything in her surroundings.

Hidden threads, invisible traps. Ruri hiding in the corner, watching everything while it unfolded.

Stabbing Void Fang into the ground, a smile widened on Alice's face.

Void Flux!

Channelling her signature move through Void Fang, singularities sparked to life around her.

Countless orbs of Void energy perfectly positioned to intercept each and every spear and thread.
Making sure that nothing breached a 100 meter radius around her body with the exception of the Lord.

She glanced up and raised her eyebrows in surprise.

Not yet a Lord... And still wielding such a ludicrous output like no other.

"What now?" Alice exhaled softly.

The Lord hadn't been taking her seriously despite the absurd flood of energy.

Even though she made it seem easy, pushing her mind to the limit for just one exchange was a little... worrying.

The worst part being the fact that had she not stopped it, what kind of destruction would follow?

"Be patient, darling. So much time yet you choose to rush towards your death. What a waste of life."
The woman shook her head.

Three feathers stabbed into her back before dispersing into golden energy that threaded into her body.

*BANG!!!

"!!!"

Instinctively, through both Vision and Triggered casts, Alice raised her sword as the woman's fist collided with the face of her blade.

An overwhelming flood of force slammed into Alice's body as she was tossed into the air without a chance to counter.

'That's not normal strength. She must've modified something or else your Vision wouldn't be taken by surprise.' Alyss warned as Alice agreed.

It must've been Ruri.

To make one ignore the presence of another... a power similar to Sellen only to a lesser extent.

Twisting her body in the air, Alice created a clone of Void Fang and used it as a platform to slow herself down.

Yet before she could come to a complete stop, a palm appeared in front of her view.

The Lord had crossed the distance already!

Inversion!

Activating Duality, Alice jumped backwards while the woman suddenly grabbed her own throat, much to her surprise.

Stumbling back, she moved her fingers a few times before lunging forward towards Alice with renewed vigour.

'Ah hell no! F*ck you mean she figured it out with just a twitch of her finger!' Alice deactivated the inversion as the woman adjusted in an instant.

Either she was a freak of nature who was a master at hand to hand combat or she was more than familiar with the body!

Holding her breath, Alice unleashed a wave of slashes that were all parried one after another. Punching the empty air, the crackling of energy pushed Alice's guard out of the way as a secondary punch rushed towards Alice's stomach.

Twisting her body at the last second thanks to Vision, Alice spun her body and slashed.

Void Flux Cleave!

An arc of energy was instantly swallowed and dispersed by five radiant spears.

"Five? Thought two would've been enough." The woman mumbled. It was meant to be praise yet Alice's smile twitched.

To her, it was an insult.

'Since she thinks two is enough let's see how she thinks about this.'

Energy crackled around her body as Alice was too focused on the fight to even notice her disguise slowly being stripped away.

Tiamat's wings unfolded as the crown above Alice's head radiated a menacing red.

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"She's not giving Alice an easy time if she." An old man smiled helplessly.

"No, I suppose she isn't." A woman chuckled with a soft smile. She was resting her chin on her palm while watching the fight. A sense of warmth could be seen in her gaze as she reached for the cup and took a sip of mead.

And next to the mead, a cigarette had been prepared.

Chapter 1052: Alice Vs Karya

Above the city of Elyndor, the sky had become a battlefield of exploding abilities and arcs of energy.

Behind, the giant white tower stretching towards the heavens was untouched, its surface reflecting the slashes of colour that mirrored the war raging between two combatants.

Each clash sent the clouds further apart as the blue sky was clear for all to see.

Trails of burning light and rivers of blood clashed. Void portals opening and closing in mere moments.

Yet all of it felt ignored as none of the civilians seemed perturbed by what was happening.

Radiant spears descended once more like meteor showers, each one blazing with Abyssal energy, enough to carve canyons into the landscape.

The Lord hurled the attack without hesitation, as though the destruction of the city was irrelevant to her. It felt as though she only had one goal. The annihilation of the woman fighting against her.

"Reckless b*tch!" Alice cursed, her disguise now fully torn apart. Her strands of white and black hair fluttered in the wind as her eyes darted across the battlefield.

She registered every single spear that was being launched.

Clenching her fist, she raised her hand into the air and opened her hand. A single swirling mass of Void energy spun to life as a tsunami of blood erupted around her.

It twisted through the air before condensing into tiny orbs that lingered in front of every spear and detonated with thunderous force.

Each birthing a singularity tailored to swallow the attack whole as the spears disappeared before they could destroy the city.

Taking a deep breath to calm the beating of her heart, Alice glared at the woman hovering above her. The Void portals casting an ominous purple light behind the woman while a pair of radiant eyes stared back.

Almost uncaring.

Just as Alice was about to say something, the Lord took this chance to launch a spear that Alice quickly ducked under.

The moment the spear missed, the Lord swapped places and Alice's eyes constricted.

*BANG!!!

A single line stretching from one side of the city to another. A spear stab that couldn't have been dodged without Vision.

Alice stared at the spear shaft just inches away from her nose. She had dodged back at the last second but had she been even a second slower...

Turning her body, she swiped up with her hand as an arc of blood shot forward.

The Lord unleashed a veil of radiant energy, pushing the blood away and creating some distance between the two of them.

"Still holding back? Do you think you have that leisure?" The Lord narrowed her eyes.

"Leisure? You're mistaken. I was taking it slow so that I have time to analyse everything." Alice massaged her neck with a grin on her face.

While she had to admit that there were a few close calls during their exchanges, she had also been focused on something else entirely.

The replication of this Lord's attack methods!

Analyse, understand. Refine and replicate!

And right now, her threshold of understanding had just reached a level that Alice was satisfied with.

Her sixth Sigil burned as Alice traced the woman's fighting style.

With a wave of her hand, metal spears intertwined with blood started to appear once after another as the Lord frowned.

That familiar movement... The way she shifted her body...

It felt as though she was looking into a mirror.

And to seal the deal, Alice had perfectly replicated her spears and even the hidden traps she's set around the place.

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Karya took a deep breath. She knew the girl in front of her was abnormal but not to this extent.

The reaction speed of Allura in her prime. The casting capabilities of Kaden and the Sigils of Lords.

Allura had warned her not to look down on Alice but this...

This was no longer just a casual greeting. This felt like a battle to the death.

Karya had long stopped holding back, even using some of her strongest abilities yet Alice persisted.

And now, to make matters worse, somehow the girl had perfectly copied her abilities and habits. As for whether or not this included her fighting style...

She'll find out sooner or later!

*RUMBLE!!!

Karya clasped her hands together as golden light enveloped the area.

Second Resonance!

In order to gain an advantage, she'll bring forth her personal domain! To turn the tides of this battle, to guarantee her victory-

*CRACK!!!

"Eh?"

Karya blinked. A deep dread rippled through her body as her eyes slowly turned up.

The personal domain she had tried to deploy just now...

Had a fracture running along its surface.

Not just one, but multiple.

However, Alice didn't give her the chance to understand what was going on.

In a split instant, she had already appeared in front of Karya who quickly lifted her spear to parry.

Alice committed to the same motion as their spear tips collided at the exact same moment. The same motion.

Sweep into stab, stab into pommel jab followed up with a twist then kick.

Even her desperate movements were copied one for one and Karya understood that Alice must have learned her decision making and not just habits during that time.

'What a freak.' Karya thought to herself as cold sweat dripped down her back.

Creating some distance between the two of them, Karya wanted to reestablish her control over the battle but Alcie didn't give her the opportunity.

Behind her, a Void portal opened as blood spears shot through.

Quickly defending herself, Karya's eyes snapped up as chains rained down from above in an attempt to restrain her.

Thinking about it for a moment, she came to a conclusion.

Right now, she needed to focus on evasion!

Discarding her spear, wings unfurled behind Karya as she dove down at breakneck speeds.

Her surroundings started to stretch to a blur but before she could get her hopes up, countless rifts opened around the airspace.

Triggered Cast!

No matter where she flew, streaks of energy would shoot out, intercepting her movements.

Forcing her to make erratic evasive manoeuvres in order to avoid capture.

Time was running out. And soon, defeat would arrive.

Narrowing her eyes, she glanced towards the tower before making up her mind.

She already knew Alice probably had the power to kill an Apostle if the conditions line up. But how would she deal with the unexpected?

As the Lord of Life, fighting was never her strong suit. And it was exactly because of that weakness did Karya improve on hand to hand combat with Allura.

But at the end of the day, her power was still classified as a 'gimmick'. And thus, she had her own methods of concluding a fight.

*BANG!!!

Flying straight up towards the sun, Karya unfolded her wings as golden threads of light filled the airspace. Alice couldn't avoid it even if she wanted to!

Seeing the split haired girl rushing towards her with the threads now latched onto her body, Karya sighed inwardly.

Charging head on with brute force rather than thinking about what these threads could do.

Absolutely reckless behaviour.

Before she could even say anything, Alice aimed her finger and detonated a Void Flux at point blank.

*BANG!!!

Both of them were flung back as confusion could be seen on Alice's face.

Stopping herself in the air, Karya glanced down at her wound.

Through the golden threads, the damage was being patched up at an absurd rate.

'Her vitality is insane...'

Turning her eyes back to Alice, she summoned a spear.

"What will you do now? Hurting me means hurting yourself. Can your body handle it?" Karya asked confidently.

Yet Alice's next response shattered this confidence.

"Pft! Pftahahaha! Can my body handle it? MY body? Of course I can. If I can't, who can? The real question you should be asking... is whether or not you're ready for what's to come." Alice laughed.

There was a sickening glint in her eyes that sent shivers down Karya's spine.

A deep insanity comparable to the cultists of the Eclipse. These were eyes belonging to a mad woman who cared not about the damage done to her own body.

Unfurling a set of draconic wings behind her, Alice gathered her energy into a single orb.

Compressing it until it was no bigger than a spark, she pointed it at her own arm and fired.

*BANG!!!

"The f*ck!?" Karya cried out instinctively. She couldn't hold it back.

The sheer confusion as to why Alice would harm herself.

"Ah~ So the damage doesn't transfer from me to you. Only from you to me. But such an ability would have its downsides. Let's get to figuring that out shall we?" Alice grinned, lifting up the stump of an arm.

Then, from that charred lump of flesh, bones started to regrow. After the bones came the veins, then flesh and finally skin.

Until her arm was good as new. A regeneration stronger than any Karya has seen before.

'Moon? No, it's different. The usage of souls seems to be similar but it's operating on something completely foreign from what the Moon does.' Karya creased her brows.

And with this realisation, Karya froze.

She understood what Alice was about to do.

And as she feared, the split haired girl traversed the space between them in less than a second using Void Steps.

Void Flux Cleave!

A slash tore through her shoulder and the damage was reflected back to Alice.

Karya winced from the pain. Her wounds healed but the pain was still very much real. And it should've been the same case for Alice...

At least she hoped so.

Instead, Alice fired another slash.

Then another.

And another.

A continuous barrage of slashes without care for her own body, stressing the limits of their link until a weakness revealed itself.

In her madness of blood and laughter, Karya came to a single conclusion.

This girl is insane!

Chapter 1053: A Familiar Trick

Watching the limits of their link strain to the max, Karya could feel sweat rolling down her face. She understood that, right now, Alice would stop at nothing to reach her goal.

The charge of a madman with no care for her own safety.

She didn't even get a chance to try to talk things out as Alice lunged forward for another slash.

Quickly ducking down, Karya twisted her body and aimed to disarm Alice, only for the girl to activate Void Steps and appear behind her.

Clenching her teeth, she created two spears to parry Alice's next strike.

But the strike never arrived.

Now that Alice understood her fighting patterns, planning ahead had become too simple.

With a twist of her body, she slammed her heel into Karya's face, throwing her backwards.

A sharp ringing sound dominated her ears as she found herself having to reorient herself.

Alice's figure kept disappearing and reappearing through the use of Void Steps and portals. Sometimes she even used decoys.

The depth of her fighting experience proved superior, and Karya was now at a full disadvantage.

She couldn't see any way for her to break out of this. No possibility in which she reclaimed the tempo of this fight.

Right now, this was simply a death spiral towards her defeat. The only question left was how long.

Had her Second Resonance been allowed to activate as she had originally planned, maybe there would have been a way out. But there was something hindering the deployment of her personal realm.

And thus, Karya's offensive capabilities had been reduced by more than 50%.

Surrounding herself with a defensive formation of spears, her mind spun quickly.

Every suggestion was shut down almost immediately as Alice slowly tightened the encirclement.

'It's over.' Karya smiled bitterly as she felt the link reach its limit.

The damage Alice had done would have been enough to kill someone over and over with ease and yet... she brute-forced it.

She cared not for the rules that would have been set down with the deployment of said link. Like a barbarian, she pushed her way through without care.

Against this kind of fighter, Karya was helpless.

Seeing the flickering shadow approach her, Karya sighed and prepared to surrender.

Yet before Alice's strike could hit, an eruption of energy exploded near the tower as both Alice and Karya froze.

Karya realised who it was, and before she could even say anything, an arc of creepy dark energy rushed across the airspace as Alice quickly jumped back to counter.

A wall of blood and metal was prepared, yet the moment it came into contact with the energy, it was swallowed in an instant.

Alice's pupils constricted as she quickly escaped through the Void before appearing a little further away than intended, giving Karya the time needed to break off the link and recover from her fatigue.

Crossing the gap, a young man could be seen, much to Karya's confusion considering she knew who he was.

He had short black hair and a pair of glowing crimson eyes. Stitch markings slowly appeared around his neck as a tattered robe covered his body. In his hands, a sword could be seen, yet...

There was a hazy outline that seemed to be that of a scythe.

"What the f*ck are you doing here?" Karya frowned, but the young man didn't turn around.

Instead, he created a purple orb before crushing it, creating a zone of dark energy that quickly swallowed and destroyed the countless threads Alice had left behind.

But more importantly, it 'cleansed' the traps set on Karya's body without her knowledge.

Her eyes widened and the young man spoke.

"You can't deal with the kid. Just let me handle it."

Karya wanted to say something but held back. Instead, she started to walk away when Alice suddenly appeared above them.

Void Fang hummed with malice in her hands as energy rippled outwards.

The young man remained composed. With a snap of his fingers, a flash of 'black light' washed across the airspace and Alice's form started to distort.

The illusion she had set into place was torn apart as her true self was revealed to be below them all along.

There was a frown on her face, but she kept her thoughts to herself.

The fact that her attack and illusion had been destroyed so easily...

There must have been a property to the man's energy that made him the bane of Hunters.

Zenia?

No, she doubted it.

It had a different feeling, and this ability was most certainly Abyssal in nature.

Thus, she concluded that it must be an authority of some kind.

Either Withering or one similar to it.

"Don't get distracted now." His voice rang out.

"!!!"

Alice instinctively unleashed a horizontal slash around her, but her attack was pinched and then extinguished between his fingers.

Converging flames rushed towards her body, and Alice detonated an orb of blood to force him away.

A defensive move. One that surrounded the area with her own blood so that Abyssal abilities became weaker.

Of course, the same applied to herself, but it was much better than fighting an unknown threat. Especially when his abilities were still largely unknown to her.

'Cayla, can you help me analyse it?' Alice requested while watching the man retreat casually.

[You don't need to ask. I'm already doing so.]

Taking a deep breath, Alice was about to make a move when it felt as though the world had frozen in place.

The young man who should have been standing by the opposite window was now behind her.

His blade pointed at the back of her neck and his crimson eyes bore down on her.

Death.

A feeling she hadn't felt in a while.

Not when she could rely on her superior regeneration.

Yet now, that feeling was stronger than ever. It wasn't the 'death' she felt from Apostles, nor was it what she felt when fighting Enris.

It felt like true death.

As though one touch would be enough to summon the reaper to take her life.

Even with her defence of countless souls hiding her true 'core', one wrong move would mean the end of her.

This was not damage that could be ignored and shrugged off with regeneration.

I need to dodge.

That was the only thought in Alice's mind.

With the cold hand of death rapidly approaching her neck, she activated Physical Resonance in a split second and detonated her own body!

Transforming herself into a mass of blood, her 'Vision' focused entirely on the attack as she carefully traced its path and avoided all contact.

BANG!!!

With the slash missing its target, Alice quickly reformed her body a little further away, creating several singularities to fire streaks of energy at the new attacker.

Yet with a single twist of his hand, dark mist enveloped the area, swallowing the attacks.

Zero feedback.

Her attacks missed or rather, were completely erased from existence.

"Tch."

Clicking her tongue, Alice wanted to analyse the composition of that strange mist to figure out the Lord's authority, but before she could, the mist disappeared.

It was as though the Lord knew what Alice was going for and held back before she could get a clue.

'It must have been from the time I was fighting the other Lord. He won't give me the chance to analyse and adapt to his attacks.' Alice exhaled softly.

With that in mind, she understood that the Lord would be trying to end this as fast as possible.

She didn't want to admit it, but after killing an Apostle, she had allowed arrogance to corrupt her mind.

Her confidence had shot through the roof, and she wasn't being as careful as she once was.

If the current her were to fight her past self, there was a good chance that the current her would lose.

The slothfulness that had appeared due to her repeated success and power.

This was a wake-up call.

BANG!!!

A huge wave of energy burst out from Alice's body as her hair fluttered in the wind.

Since when did she start holding back during a fight? When did she start thinking about conserving her strength?

When did she start looking down on her opponents because of her regeneration?

"Hais... This isn't good. I'm slacking on my fundamentals." Alice chuckled as she massaged her neck.

To an outside observer, she might have looked like she was simply expelling energy in order to appear intimidating.

But the young man opposite her could tell that a net of triggered casts was being woven around her.

The moment he made a move, countless attacks would be unleashed towards him without her needing to give a single command.

Raising her hand, Alice retrieved her personal artifact as the 'ban' on personal domains was lifted.

Since this opponent was someone who had the potential to kill her, she shouldn't hold back.

Not against him.

"If you have a personal domain, I suggest you use it. I'm not going to hold back anymore." Alice lost her smile as she slammed her palms together.

Energy converged to a single point as a droplet of black blood appeared between her palms.

Her eyes shimmered with energy as all six Sigils lit up across her body.

Just as she activated her ability, she noticed a reaper forming behind the young man and her eyes constricted in shock.

That familiar form...

That power...

Back when she had just started her journey as a Hunter, she couldn't see the full depths of this authority.

But now? After all of her experiences, she could tell how terrifying it was to face the Lord of Death.

The chill that couldn't be shaken off.

Her energy faded and the young man stopped his summoning.

Understanding that the fight was over, he placed his hand over his face as his body started to rapidly age until he became a weary old man.

Gin let out a slight groan. In the short time they had been apart, he never expected Alice to reach the point where he would need to pull out this move just to stand a chance.

But now was not the time to give praise.

Instead, he should be handing over the spotlight to someone else.

Behind Alice, a woman approached silently.

Her presence was hidden to perfection. A familiar trick that she loved to pull. One that had surprised Alice time and time again.

And as she lifted her hand, expecting it to work as usual...

Alice spun around and threw herself into the woman's embrace.

"!!!"

Such a trick wouldn't work on her again.

The woman's surprise lasted for just a moment before a smile appeared on her face.

"You've grown."

Chapter 1054: Reunion

". . ."

". . ."

Both Lab and Elias were... unsure as to what they were looking at right now.

Just moments ago, there was a spectacle of explosions and clashes above the sky. The appearance of a second Lord with Lab wanting to make a move but Alice refusing to give the signal.

Then, with the appearance of a third combatant, Alice suddenly stopped. The next thing they knew, she had turned around and hugged the woman, thus leading to this current... situation.

They were led into the tower and rested in a guest room of sorts.

Much like the rest of the tower, white marble stretched beneath their feet and across the walls and ceiling. Liquid gold seemed to flow within the marble as cracks were filled with splendour that shimmered under the chandeliers.

To their left, tall windows reached from floor to ceiling while flowing curtains tied with golden thread parted to reveal a jaw dropping view of the city.

But rather than the view of the city, they were more shocked by the view in front of them.

A disconnect between their understanding of Alice and what... is being presented.

Nestled in Allura's arms, Alice and Allura sat in the same seat with Alice refusing to let go.

Her arms were wrapped firmly around the tall woman who simply smiled and patted the short girl's hair. Like a cat or rather a baby, Alice had a happy look on her face while ignoring the gaze of her companions.

"What? Something on my face?" Alice glanced over, wondering why they weren't saying anything.

"That's... No, never mind." Elias sighed, massaging his eyes. How was he even supposed to tell Alice to let go of Allura?

He may not know the full picture but he fully understood the desire to hug a loved one after a long time of separation.

It's something he wished I could do but has forever lost the opportunity to do so.

And now that Alice had the chance, who was he to deny her of this chance?

"I think they're just concerned about everything that's going on." Allura chuckled, patting Alice on the head while trying to sit up straight.

But Alice, having missed being next to Allura, simply glanced up with a set of puppy eyes that made it hard for Allura to deny.

'Urg... this isn't good for my heart.' She thought to herself before glancing towards Karya and Gin for a bit of help.

Noticing this signal, Karya was the one who decided to step in.

"I know you're excited about the reunion but are you aware of Allura's current condition?"

At the mention of Allura's health, it was akin to a basin of cold water being doused over Alice.

Her fingers twitched as reluctance and pain appeared in her eyes.

In the end, she slowly let go of Allura and sat down next to her. This was as much as she was willing to compromise.

Seeing the delicate fingers holding onto her sleeve, Allura felt a pang of guilt in her chest.

To think she was even thinking about not meeting Alice in order to help her deal with the dangers elsewhere...

It may have come from a place of care but... at the end of the day, with such little time left, she wanted to spend it near people she cared about.

"I... know. She has less than a year left, right?" Alice bit her lip before letting out a sigh.

She knew that Karya was pointing towards. For her not to waste time if possible.

Even though she wanted to try and help resolve Allura's issue asap, the more pressing matter as on what Nyer was planning.

The transformation of the Void Realm along with the World Tree.

And to address the biggest issue would be to talk about the Nightmare realm that was all over Extalia.

Organising her thoughts, Alice started her report.

Small journeys could be left out for now. From the moment of their departure, she retold everything she had gone through to Allura.

When she reached the part about meeting Kaden, Allura's finger twitched. She tried to keep herself composed but Alice could tell that a myriad of thoughts were drifting through her mind right now.

She continued the report...

Meeting Velouria in the Inverted World, Nyer's plans, the Allies she's made, her encounters with the churches and Cults.

Everything.

The more the group listened, the wider their eyes became.

In the short time that Alice had been away from Allura, the journey she had embarked on was unlike anything they had ever expected.

When they thought the story was over, she would continue the tale. The journey to the east, her travels through the layers of the Abyss. Her meeting with Rosalyn's brother and information gained on Yrael.

Monika and Plume.

The visions she saw in the Nightmare.

And finally, her agreement with Enris.

At the mention of this part, Gin's expression turned sour but he quickly hid it. Yet not fast enough as Alice clearly noticed his displeasure.

She didn't blame him.

After all... She couldn't quite believe she chose to work with Enris herself.

While it wasn't a verbal agreement, both of them understood that they had to work with one another if they wish to take care of Nyer, the greatest threat of all.

Once she finished speaking about Enris, Alice mentioned her partnership with the Outer God Zal-Ka'Rith.

By the end of her story, the group sat in silence, digesting everything they've just learned.

Lab was overwhelmed by the sheer absurdity of Alice's journey. From being simply a weak Hunter to now contending against Lords and even being the one to kill Kazira.

Hell. The only reason why she was even allowed to know all of this was because there's no point in hiding things anymore.

Alice saw no point in it, not when things have gotten to this stage.

The death of an Apostle was small compared to the Realm fusing with the Void.

Elias... zoned out. He was a simple doctor looking for a cure for side effects.

All of this was already far above what he was prepared to handle.

Gin, while worried about Alice, was more worried about Ria.

The two had been separated for a while with little communication between them. While her safety shouldn't be an issue, as her guardian, he was still worried and wanted to find his granddaughter as soon as possible.

Finally, Allura let out a deep exhale.

She glanced at Alice who was looking up at her with a kind of expectant gaze and her heart melted in an instant.

Giving Alice a hug, she patted her on the back.

"You've done well. You don't need to shoulder everything alone anymore. I'm here."

Hearing Allura say this, tears started to well up in Alice's eyes.

It's as though the pressure that had been bearing down on her disappeared in an instant.

All this time, she's put on a bit of a brave front. To make sure the people around her weren't worried and to trick herself into believing that everything was fine.

But the truth was that she felt overwhelmed all along.

Overwhelmed, scared and stressed out on what she should be doing.

It felt as though one mistake would cause everything around her to come crumbling down all at once if she wasn't careful.

One mistake would be all it took for Nyer to achieve his goals and for a doomed future to arrive.

Yet with a single line from Allura, it felt as though all of her worries had melted away.

Unable to hold herself back, Alice sunk her face into Allura's embrace as her shoulders trembled from the tears that refused to stop.

###

It took a while for Alice to stop crying. Once she finally stopped and separated from Allura, her eyes were now puffy and red while Allura's shirt was stained with tears.

Feeling embarrassed, Alice was about to hurl a string of curses at Lab and Elias when Allura raised her eyebrow.

One action was all it took to tame Alice as she swallowed her curses and sat like a good girl.

"There's a lot of things we should address, especially with the information that Alice brought with her." Allura spoke first as both Karya and Gin turned serious.

"Nyer is advancing his plans faster than I thought. And... With Kaden managing to escape somehow, that's one less thing we need to worry about. Knowing him, if he's escaped but haven't shown himself, he's probably looking for a way to recover or he's occupied with something else."

Karya folded her arms.

"Raven b*stard doesn't die easily. If anything, I'm tempted to gamble on the fact that he probably left behind a familiar to keep tabs on everything that's happening." She grumbled.

It's clear that Kaden didn't have a great reputation amongst their friends.

Allura chuckled in agreement.

A part of her wanted to look for him as well but... with her lifeforce constantly draining from her body like a broken hour glass, she had to be careful with what she chose to do.

"Since Alice is here, I think our best bet would be to split up the group a little. Not by much. Gin, I want you to take Nalem with you to look for the others still stuck in the Abyss. With the two of you, finding a way out shouldn't be an issue." Allura suggested, surprising Alice as she hadn't expected Nalem to be here as well.

Noticing this, Allura quickly clarified.

"Nalem came to the capital looking for me as well. He mentioned that Nyer got a hold of Kaden but didn't know where he was currently. It's only now that you've confirmed his survival. As for where he is, he's currently borrowing the Royal library."

Hearing this, Alice nodded her head as Allura continued to the next point.

"And speaking of the Royal library, I think it's best I tell you why we've stayed in the capital for so long. Our original plan was to look for you but... some information came up that we simply couldn't ignore." Allura narrowed her eyes.

"This tower that we're in right now..."

"There are traces that Velouria might've been involved in its creation."

Chapter 1055: Authority Of Life

Alice instantly sat up upon the mention of Velouria possibly being involved in this tower's creation.

She turned to Allura, who had a serious expression on her face, and realised this was no joke.

Allura wouldn't joke about something like this.

"When we arrived here, I noticed something similar to a resonance. A connection with the authority inside my own body," Allura spoke.

With Alice's recounting of her adventures, she understood that the young girl had gone through far more than what she had expected since they parted ways.

So much so that there was no need to hide or deliberately obscure information.

"It wasn't a full resonance with Severance, but enough to make me realise that there was a trace of Velouria here. A fragment of a dead god. Either her body had been donated by... Nyer, or she left a trace of herself here. Regardless, we're still in the middle of negotiating with the Royal Family." Allura shrugged her shoulders with a sigh.

"Wait, negotiating?" Alice tilted her head.

If the tower was this important, she half expected Allura to coerce the Royal Family into helping. But if she was negotiating with them, it would explain why it had taken this long.

"The Royal Family seems to have a... unique connection with this tower. So long as they are inside, they are offered certain benefits. Benefits that I can sense using my authority, but dealing with it might be troublesome." Allura scratched her hair.

Out of habit, she reached for a cigarette due to her stress.

Without even getting a chance to light it, Alice snapped her fingers and recreated her finger lighter.

Blinking her eyes, Allura chuckled before accepting the light.

Taking a deep drag, she exhaled a cloud of smoke.

"Severing connections like that is both easy and hard. It entirely depends on who they made the contract with. A Law of Agreement between people? Easy enough. Even one between Lords.

"But this?" Allura narrowed her eyes.

"This is on a level above an Apostle. If I want to tamper with a connection like this, I'll need my full power, not just Severance."

"Oblivion?" Alice interrupted, surprising the three Lords while Lab was confused.

"Wait, how do you know about Oblivion?" Allura asked curiously.

During Alice's retelling of her journey, she hadn't mentioned anyone who would tell her about Oblivion. If there was one...

"You met the Slayer, didn't you?" Karya was the first one to ask as Alice slowly nodded her head.

"I met him while I was recruiting Elias. I... finished the job and walked away. He's probably looking for me about now," Alice admitted.

She had left out the Slayer earlier, simply calling him a normal Lord since he showed connections with Allura.

Alice didn't want to talk about it if she could help it.

Like a guilty child after doing something bad, she didn't want to speak about the incident that could have been resolved had she left it be.

But how could she?

That was the woman who killed Lilia.

She couldn't possibly look the other way, even if she was suffering from the consequences of drinking her blood.

If anything, it was more akin to mercy.

Gin glanced down and exhaled softly.

He knew this would happen eventually but still...

The parting of any old friend left a void in one's heart, no matter what the reason may be.

One would still remember the good times they had spent and the connections they had built across the years.

Why else would Allura teach him how to tap into the Void?

Allura reached out and patted Alice's head.

"In life, there are times when you stand on opposing sides. He made that choice when he allowed his wife to commit the atrocities in the Colosseum. In that regard, we're not innocent either, as we didn't stop him.

"What's important is that you're safe. That is my priority," Allura reassured.

The only reason she was surprised was because Alice seemed unharmed.

To face Oblivion and still live to tell the tale...

Though she doubted Theron would have fought Alice at full power during that moment.

His priority would most likely have been to keep his wife safe and...

Protecting something was always harder than killing.

"But yes, you are right. If I want to destroy this connection they have with the tower, Oblivion and Severance would be needed. But doing so may also destroy the purpose of the tower, and without knowing that, it's not a risk I'm willing to take."

"If you can even take that risk in the first place." Karya narrowed her eyes.

Tapping into the power of Oblivion?

In her current state?

Absolutely not.

"I know, I know. I won't do it, okay?" Allura pursed her lips.

Karya was making it sound as though she was completely reckless, but that couldn't be further from the truth.

Definitely.

Meanwhile, Elias held back a laugh.

The way Allura was reacting...

It felt almost identical to Alice.

Though it was probably the other way around.

One could practically see what they were thinking through their expressions, even if Allura didn't realise it.

"Setting all that aside, because the Royal Family is so annoying to deal with, we're in the middle of a negotiation. They want to deal with the Zenia Family, which lines up with what we want to do. If things go well, they'll have the power of two Lords at their disposal while we get information on the tower, along with a myriad of other things." Allura smiled as Alice tilted her head momentarily.

"Is Nalem responsible for the negotiations?" If he was, it would make sense why he wasn't here right now.

"Yes. Though I'm sure that with the information on Kaden that you've brought, there are probably more things he needs to request on top of what we require as it stands. Right now, we just need to wait for him to finish up, then we can get started on resolving the Nightmare issue." Allura grinned, patting Alice's head.

Closing her eyes, Alice immersed herself in the feeling.

Having Allura here...

It felt like anything was possible.

The heavy responsibility on her shoulders had now been lifted, and the stress she felt disappeared bit by bit.

However...

Having been in that position herself, Alice realised just how much pressure was on Allura's shoulders.

The weight of every decision.

The knowledge that she might not be able to fight when the time came.

Sitting back and letting Allura handle everything was too cruel.

Alice turned to Karya.

"You linked Allura's life force to her energy reserves, right?" she asked out of the blue, surprising the Lord of Life.

Karya nodded slowly.

"Do you think there is a way for you to attach her vitality to my own? As you saw during our fight, my body is far from normal. While I'm not entirely sure how my regeneration works, I'm confident that I should be able to help sustain Allura's life far better than a leaking energy storage," Alice asked, pointing at herself.

Of course, like before, she omitted a bit of information that might have gotten her into trouble.

The fact that, through Griselda's own words, rather than regenerating, she was more so 'dying' and reviving.

Resetting her body to its 'prime' state.

Karya furrowed her brows before shaking her head.

"If you had been there since the very beginning, then it would have been possible. I would have been able to 'borrow' a bit of your vitality rather than using my own and Gin's to compensate for what Lua lacked," Karya admitted.

When they activated this technique, Allura was literally grasping at straws.

Her body was weak to the point that she couldn't even walk on her own without Gin's help.

The fact that Karya had even been able to compensate for such a loss of vitality was already a miracle.

"However, trying to attach another source afterwards would turn it into a completely different ability. It could backfire badly."

Borrowing time from the reaper and then trying to attach more conditions?

That was asking for death.

One couldn't simply attach more conditions after signing an agreement.

And for Allura, that agreement was to extend her life by another year through burning everything.

"What kind of ability is it? One-time use? Once per person? Per contract?" Alice asked.

The more she knew about this ability, the better.

And perhaps...

She might even be able to find a loophole for Allura.

Elias sat up straight.

His mind clicked, and he understood exactly what Alice was trying to do.

Depending on the exact nature of this ability...

They could exploit it!

"It's per authority, per person, and per contract. I can only form this kind of contract with each person once in their life. Once it's put into place, no more contracts can be made. That's the kind of deal Lua made to extend her life." Karya shook her head.

Alice's breathing sped up.

Per authority, per person, per contract.

It wasn't a one-time thing!

At least, not in her case.

"What if there was a second Lord of Life? Would we be able to give Allura a new contract?"

Karya furrowed her brows.

"Are you telling me to die?" she narrowed her eyes, but Alice shook her head quickly.

She glanced at Allura before looking back at Karya.

"Can you give me some of your blood? I want to show you something."

By this point, Allura had a knowing smile on her face. But since this was something Alice wanted to do, she decided to simply sit back and watch for the moment.

Even Gin was shocked as he started mumbling to himself.

But seeing neither of the two stop Alice, Karya pricked her finger and dripped the blood into an empty vial.

Accepting the vial, Alice didn't hesitate and immediately drank the small amount of blood Karya had offered.

Before the Lord of Life could even question the meaning behind such actions, her eyes constricted in shock as the aura of a Lord erupted from Alice's body.

And with that...

The Authority of Life itself.

Chapter 1056: The Reaper

Karya stared at Alice.

Her mind failed to comprehend exactly what she was seeing, what she was feeling.

The Authority of Life.

Something that should've been unique to her had been... duplicated?

"Wha... Huh? How?" Karya blinked her eyes in disbelief.

Walking over to Alice, she grabbed her by the arm and lifted it.

A quick scan of Alice's body told her everything she needed to know.

At this moment in time, Alice was essentially a mirror reflection of herself. She had the same number of Sigils along with the Authority that came with her title.

Was the drinking of blood a contract? No, she didn't feel anything of the sort. In fact, she might even go as far as to say this 'contract', if you can even call it that, is a one-sided thing where Alice could essentially force herself to take your power.

While Karya was confused by the fact that Alice was somehow able to borrow her power, Alice was busy getting used to this strange feeling.

The Authority of Life felt... different to the other authorities she'd hijacked in the past.

For those, all she needed to do was simply tap into the reservoir of power held within her body. After that, the power was hers to access.

But this?

This was different. It didn't work the same as what she had expected. It felt as though there was an additional... verification that needed to be done.

Alice furrowed her brows.

The fact that this Authority needed 'verification' didn't sit right with her. Something that wasn't the Abyss had a hand in this power...

"One of my abilities is to link my lifeforce with my opponent and make it so that all damage is reflected back to them. Can you see if you can activate this ability?" Karya asked, wanting to test things out as Alice nodded her head.

Recalling the exact ability that Karya had performed, Alice did the same and soon, a tether stretched between the two of them.

Karya furrowed her brows.

"Never mind, this isn't going to work." She sighed, stepping away and surprising Alice.

Even Allura was surprised as she didn't expect Karya to flat out deny the possibility, especially after seeing Alice holding the Authority of Life.

"Why wouldn't it work? Didn't I use your ability just fine?" Alice frowned, pointing at the tether between them.

"That's the exact issue." Karya leaned against the table.

"The Authority of Life is a little different from the others. Think of it this way, Authorities are weapons that Lords can wield in order to exert their influence on the world. But Life doesn't work that way.

"Rather, the true Authority is hidden away in a box. Tapping into that specific power would require a Key. And what we have..." Karya paused.

"What we have is the Key. The fact that you were only able to use the tether told me enough. You're bound by the same limitations as I am. In essence, unless I can access the Authority freely, you're stuck with what I've got." She folded her arms.

Had Alice revealed more power than expected, perhaps even a new ability with the Tether, Karya would've been more inclined to believe that her pitch would've been possible.

But not like this, not with these limitations.

Holding the key was one thing, but accessing the box required you to 'discuss' its usage with the one guarding the Authority.

The Reaper.

Life and Death were two sides of the same coin. Just as how the Lord of Death could be hit by the backlash of not being able to kill his opponent and die in the process, the Authority of Life had its own drawbacks.

In the first place, granting life was going against the natural order. In order for something to be granted life, a price must be paid. It's why she preferred to understand it as 'buying' time from the Reaper.

When she performed the ability on Allura, she traded all of Allura's 'potential future' for a conversion, along with adding some extra such as her own 'time' and Gin's. All so that the Reaper would accept the payment and thus allow Allura's lifeforce to be connected with her energy storage.

This hole in the reserves? It's a leak maintained by the Reaper to ensure that nothing abnormal occurs with the contract they have formed.

And once the energy runs out...

No more bargaining, no more second wind. This was the last chance that Allura had.

"So if you want to help Allura, the only way you would've been able to do so would've been somehow inheriting the full Authority without 'asking for permission', then carrying out the contract to transfer lifeforce. And since that didn't happen, it's not possible." Karya summarised as Alice clenched her fist in disappointment.

For a moment, she thought she had seen a possibility. A path forward for Allura.

But now... Karya had denied that path.

However, she wasn't about to give up.

For the sake of saving Allura, she refused to back down so easily.

"I just need to use the key to open the box, right? What do I need to prepare?" Alice asked.

Since the Authority had now doubled up, it shouldn't be an issue for her to 'request' something from the full Authority. In which case, it would be to add a new layer to Allura's contract or, if nothing else, to add herself as a contributor to how much time Allura had left.

That was the best she could hope for.

Karya folded her arms.

Not unheard of, but definitely difficult to pull off. There was little to guarantee that the Reaper wouldn't immediately try to kill Alice because it might see her as a usurper. An unqualified individual who somehow stole the key.

The ideal scenario would be for it to treat Alice as a fellow Lord of Life rather than someone unwanted.

"Are you aware of the entity known as the Reaper?" She asked as Alice paused for a moment before nodding her head.

She knew who the Reaper was to some extent. After all, she had personally witnessed Gin summon the Avatar of Death.

Life and Death, two sides of the same coin. If the Reaper can take life, it can also give life by 'delaying' its reaping.

"Good, then I don't need to explain too much. To use the true Authority of Life, one must bargain with the Reaper. To make an equal or unfair exchange, favouring the Reaper of course.

"But if successfully done, Life can be breathed into a dead body and so too will abilities follow. I've given up parts of myself for power and abilities that some may deem... inhuman."

Little by little, wings unfurled from behind Karya's head and covered her eyes. The moment they did, her aura shifted.

She no longer felt like a human nor a beast. If anything... it felt more like an Outer God. That sense of staring at something 'foreign'. But even then, it wasn't exactly the same as the Outer Gods.

Going back to normal, Karya shrugged her shoulders.

"There is one thing you must remember when making deals with the Reaper. And that is to understand where you currently stand.

"The Reaper is as honourable as he is gentle. He will usher you into a gentle death to ensure you feel no pain at all. But if you don't wish to go gently, he will chase you down with a malice surpassing that of demons. Thus, you must understand where you currently stand. Are you in his 'good books' or are you a criminal in his eyes?" She warned.

"Depending on the answer, his stance and services will naturally change."

Just as Alice was about to say something, she paused.

A realisation slowly hit as shivers travelled down her spine.

"When you say he is honourable... What exactly do you mean?" Alice forced a smile.

"Hmm... Honourable as in respecting those who respect the cycle of life and death. Surprisingly, even doctors are involved. Life is precious in the Reaper's eyes. Those who don't value it do not deserve his mercy.

"Hunters who evade death through certain means, revive the dead, and engage in excessive killing will cause some friction between themselves and the Reaper. But on the other hand, treasuring life, saving it, purifying, and giving those raised from the dead a peaceful death will grant you favour.

"I know it sounds strange for the Reaper to treasure Life. But who am I to tell this god-like being how to do his job?" Karya shrugged. She failed to notice the nervousness present on Alice's face.

Based on what Karya had just said... Alice had a slight hunch that she might be the exact thing that the Reaper hated the most.

"Say, what if there is someone who's 'died' a bunch of times but still lives?" Alice asked as Karya thought about it.

"There are cases in the past where people have violated the cycle of Life and Death. To evade and remove themselves from the cycle in strange ways. I'm sure you've seen some yourself, people such as the brother of the Vampire you mentioned. These kinds of people who should've died but can't are watched carefully by the Reaper.

"The moment an opportunity arises, he will no doubt appear to finish the job when you least expect it."

Alice massaged her eyes.

Now that she had hijacked the Authority of Life, she'd essentially allowed the Reaper an easy way of finding her.

The existence of someone who evades their rightful death.

A violation of the natural order.

The only question now is...

Why hasn't he appeared yet? Or was she classified as 'immortal'?

But that was false. Her regeneration might be strong, but there are plenty of attacks that can still kill her. Even Gin, with his Authority of Death, 'scared' her not long ago.

So there must be a different reason as to why the Reaper is allowing her to walk free for now.

And honestly... she didn't want him to show up for her to find out.

If he did, her poor little heart wouldn't be able to take it.

But little did Alice know, the Reaper had long noticed her presence...

Chapter 1057: Hair Comb

Allura moved towards the balcony slowly. Her footsteps soft against the polished stone floor beneath her.

The meeting was long and with ideas flying left and right, possibilities being shut down and Alice's downcast expression realising that it wasn't possible to help her.

They decided to let it rest for a night before they discussed further. An opportunity for the mind to rest and for them to digest everything they've learned. Not just about Nyer but everything else as well.

Knowledge such as Kaden's uncertain fate.

Taking a deep breath, the biting cold welcomed her as cool winds brushed past her.

A freshness to the air unlike that of the Abyss. Crisp to sting the inside of her nose.

Her hair fluttered in the gentle winds as she paused, taking in this moment in its entirety. She closed her eyes as indescribable emotions washed over her.

The relief in seeing Alice being healthy and happy. The joy seeing her growth and...

The bitterness in her heart realising that there were no more exceptions. This meagre time she had left... it was the end.

Was this serenity that she was feeling... inner peace? Knowing that her death is approaching with unhurried steps. Day by day, second by second, step by step.

She stepped over to the railings. Above her, the sky stretched far into the horizon as stars shimmered in the midnight sky. Thousands, millions of distant lights making themselves known in this darkness.

Each one holding a story of its own and like them, their fates were simply one of many.

Who knows... Perhaps to a being like the Outer Gods, the destruction of their world was nothing but a tiny shimmering star amongst the larger cluster. Some were steady, others flickered with tenacity, fighting against the dying light.

For a moment, she stood in silence, looking up at the stars and wondering what lay beyond.

But it was in a moment like this that she remembered something that Velouria once said to her.

Looking beyond and wondering what lies ahead is fine. But one mustn't lose themselves in the possibilities and forget what's happening in the present. One can only reach the future if the present is secure.

Perhaps that's what Nyer struggled with.

Always looking ahead for the future where Velouria came back and not caring about the present.

For the world he desired, the destruction of the present was required.

Allura slowly turned her eyes towards the city, removing her gaze from the stars beyond and focusing on the world beneath her feet.

The city had now settled into darkness. The marble structures that stood proud in the day now becoming rough silhouettes beneath the starlight. One by one, lights flickered to life as golden squares lit up one after another.

Windows into the lives of families unaware of the chaos happening in the world. Or perhaps they were aware and simply choosing to make the most of what little time they had left.

Views of happy families, laughing around the dinner table brought a smile to Allura's face.

The air picked up and Allura brushed her hair away from her eyes. Night had fully set and the temperature dropped. She reached into her pocket and retrieved a cigarette.

They had long lost their functionality and purpose. Unable to hold off the corruption of Famine while also being unable to relieve her pain.

As it stands, it was nothing but a habit and a way for her to relieve some stress. She lifted her finger and the foreign energy twisted around her hand.

Nightmare energy. The Void that had been mutated and bastardised for Nyer's own goals.

It's hard to tell what Feris was currently undergoing. But Allura could tell that Void energy was slowly getting weaker while the manifestation of Nightmare was growing stronger.

Even in that last battle... It felt as though Alice's Void was 'unstable'. But because of her high control, it was largely ignored.

Shaking her head, Allura let out a sigh before bringing the cigarette to her lips.

Even though the world is in chaos right now... the biggest worry on her mind was still, in the end, Alice.

The countless fates that revolve around a single girl... The Outer Gods, the surface Gods, the old Lords, Nyer's plans, Yrael's 'fortunes'. With such little time left, how much can she even do to help Alice out?

As the one who brought Alice out to the world, Allura felt responsible for the girl. She didn't want to die while the world was still in chaos. If possible... She wanted to hold out until everything was resolved.

Only when she was sure her powers wouldn't be needed, would she be okay with the notion of dying.

A bitter smile formed on her lips.

The passage of time erodes on all minds. Like water against rock, even if one doesn't feel it, changes are bound to occur.

If Allura of the past saw what she had become, no doubt a fight would break out. Screams of confusion and anger, on why she became the way she did. How could she give up so easily? How could she resolve herself for death?

How could she become so soft?

Where was the executioner? Where was the infamous blade of Velouria? Where was the madness that cut through an army for the sake of Ayr?

All that's left is a walking corpse smoking a cigarette late at night.

'If the old me appeared right now... No doubt she would call this a sh*tty life.' Allura laughed inwardly.

She was only gentle when she was around Kaden. Outside of it... well... the past should remain in the past.

"Kaden..."

At the mention of his name, Allura's fingers tightened.

There was a period when... neither of them talked to each other. They simply lived with the knowledge that the other was alive. How many years has it been since she last saw him face to face?

It's always been messages or ravens.

In front of familiars, she could still laugh it off. Still lash out and rage. But if she saw him in person...

*Knock knock...

A gentle soft knock interrupted her thoughts as Allura glanced back.

With her life now tied to her energy, she had to let go of her habit of setting up a radius of detection.

A barrier that would've warned her if anything or anyone with malicious intent was to approach.

With her original barrier down, Karya and Gin had decided to take over the job themselves. So if neither of them appeared...

'It wasn't an enemy.'

"Yes? Come in." Allura called out as the door slowly opened.

A small gap just big enough for Allura to see who was on the other side.

'Ah...'

She recognised the small hand holding onto the door handle.

A strand of white hair poked out as if testing whether or not it was allowed before the rest of her head followed.

The black and white hair of a certain mead loving girl.

Alice hesitantly poked her head through the gap, just enough so that her eyes could be seen but not the rest of her body.

Between her arms she held a pillow as the words she had prepared in her mind disappeared the moment she saw Allura.

Stammering through her words, Alice glanced down and tugged at her fingers.

"I... erm... Can... Can I sleep with you... tonight..." Her words became quieter near the end.

It was a strange and childish request. For Alice, sleeping alone in a tree or any room for that matter would've been normal.

It's not like she hadn't tasted her own fair share of hardships.

But now that she found Allura again, a single desire dominated her mind.

She wanted to be next to her. To feel safe in her shadow.

A gentle smile appeared on Allura's face as she nodded her head.

"Of course. Is something troubling your mind?" Allura asked softly.

Hearing this, Alice's eyes shimmered like precious gems as she quickly ran into the room.

*Pit, pat, pit pat~

Her bare feet pattered across the floor as she arrived by Allura's side.

Her excitement quickly cooled as she wasn't sure what she was allowed to do.

Seeing her reservations, Allura laughed inwardly and made the first move.

Her arms wrapped around Alice and pulled her into a hug.

"!!!"

"Since it was more of a serious discussion earlier, you couldn't relax properly could you?" Allura spoke softly.

Feeling Allura's embrace, Alice shook her head as she closed her eyes and hugged Allura back.

An uncontrollable smile hung on her lips but Alice buried herself deeper to hide it.

Allura felt her heart ache. Not from pain but from the sweetness of seeing Alice act like this. Like seeing a tiny kitten nuzzle up to your arm, she felt her heart filled with a sweetness like no other.

As her fingers brushed through Alice's hair, she paused momentarily.

"You know, Velouria used to do something for me when I was first adopted under her care." Allura chuckled. She glanced around before pulling a small chair towards her.

"Hm?" Alice tilted her head in confusion before following Allura's orders and sat down.

Allura spun Alice around, making sure the girl faced the night sky along with the stars.

"Fighting battles is fine but one must understand how to take care of themselves." Allura spoke with a gentle tone, one that was similar to how Velouria spoke to her back then.

She reached into her pockets and pulled out a small hair comb. It was obvious at a first glance that it was a rather old. The material had lost some of its original sheen, and faint signs of wear marked its surface. Yet every edge was smooth, every tooth intact. It had been maintained with care over many years.

Slowly, Allura started to brush Alice's hair. Each stroke was gentle.

No rush in her movements, making sure that the comb wouldn't get tangled in Alice's hair. A slow rhythm that Alice found herself getting lost in.

Some may call it monotony, but Alice found herself treasuring this moment like no other.

Allura's hands remained steady, gathering sections of Alice's hair before brushing it through with extra care.

The love and care that Velouria showed back then... The gentleness she showed to the girl scarred from battle and scared of the world...

She'll show it to Alice.

Chapter 1058: Allura's Care

Kicking her legs back and forth, Alice had a happy smile on her face while Allura carefully combed her hair.

All this time, no matter where she was, no matter what she was doing, she had neglected the condition of her hair.

Thankfully, due to the flow of energy in her body, keeping her in fighting shape, her hair avoided damage.

But even so, she could still tell the difference between brushing and not brushing.

Twirling her hair between her fingers, she could feel how soft it was after brushing.

"There, much better right?" Allura chuckled, placing the comb in Alice's hands.

"Make sure you brush your hair in the morning and night okay?"

Feeling Allura's hand pat her head, Alice nodded and stored the comb away carefully.

"It's a precious item given to me by Velouria when she first adopted me. I think it's only fitting I give it to you." Allura exhaled softly, hugging Alice from behind.

Blinking her eyes, Alice glanced back, wondering why Allura was hugging her all of a sudden.

"Allura?" Alice mumbled in confusion before Allura let go and smiled.

"Alright, I'm also feeling a bit better now. Can you tell me more about what you went through in the Inverted World? I'm sure that with the others there, you had to omit some things the others shouldn't know."

"Ah! Almost forgot." Alice jumped onto her feet.

Quickly pulling out her pouch, she rummaged through before pulling out a bottle of mead.

"Drinking before sleep? Don't tell me this is a habit?" Allura rolled her eyes but Alice quickly shook her head.

"No no! Erm... I don't usually drink before bed. Only if I drink too much and get drunk... But that only happens rarely!" She confessed like a guilty child when confronted with something they've done.

"This is for you. I thought erm... you might like it."

Alice lifted the bottle with both hands as Allura blinked her eyes.

"For me?"

Picking up the bottle, Allura was about to say something when she noticed the familiar design of the bottle. It hadn't been on her mind but now that she saw it again...

Her breathing sped up momentarily as she glanced at Alice.

She almost couldn't believe what she was holding in her hands. Hesitating for a moment, she reached for the lid and opened it.

In an instant, the aroma of Ayrian mead drifted through the air as Allura's lips trembled.

Ah... This nostalgic scent. How long as it been?

Grabbing two cups, Allura poured two portions out before handing one to Alice.

Taking a sip first, she could feel her entire body relax as memories flooded her mind.

Those days when she would run off with her subordinates to the tavern for a drink after work. Their laughter echoing as they celebrated for no reason at all. Simply the fact that they were all there in that moment.

While Allura was bold with her sips along with her posture, Alice was more conservative this time. She wasn't as daring as she was when drinking with Eryn, her drinking buddy.

But that's only because she's drinking with Allura right now, someone whom she saw as a mother.

Though... Now that she was here, Alice was feeling a hint of hesitation.

Would Allura appreciate being called mom? Or would she feel awkward about the whole ordeal.

Would it be accepted or would it be reluctance.

In a moment like this, Alice realised how selfish she had been.

Projecting her own desires onto Allura and simply hoping she would accept.

"You know, mead wasn't actually the best thing about Ayr." Allura chuckled.

"It was actually the meat you had with it. As strange as it may seem, especially considering the reason for Ayr's existence, Abyssal Beast meat was actually a delicacy there.

"Most people would be against eating it if not properly dealt with due to the blood. But Ayr had a method of making it safe to eat, thanks to Velouria's blessings of course. That small hint of blood actually gave it a 'spicy' taste and was highly addicting if you enjoyed spicy foods." She laughed.

Though Alice's smile twitched as Abyss meat had to be carefully drained before it was safe for consumption. Yet Ayrians actually liked to use the blood as a spice?

"Now then, tell me about your journey in Ayr." Allura patted the bed next to her as she enjoyed the mead.

Alice started telling her story. From the moment she arrived to the moment she left. Every detail spoken about with nothing left out.

Her meeting with Kaden, meeting with young Allura and even the pink apron incident.

The mention of that caused Allura to laugh as she quickly rummaged through her storage and pulled out an old but cared for apron. The same one that Alice saw in the Abyss and surpassingly, one that Kaden didn't destroy.

When Alice spoke about Velouria's handiwork, the outfits that she created, Allura was naturally interested.

One by one, Alice set them out on the bed.

Seeing this old but familiar designs, tears welled up in Allura's eyes before she quickly wiped them away.

Seeing and hearing the interactions that Velouria had with Alice, it's as though a cloudy memory became clear for Allura.

The passing of time wears down all memories. And even for Allura, she had to admit that her passion may not be as strong as it once was. The reason for her actions, the emotions tied to her promises.

But now that she was reminded of it, everything came flooring back. A renewed desire to fulfil Velouria's will.

To ensure the world would not be changed through Nyer's actions. The violation of the natural order.

Then, just as Alice was about to stop, she noticed Allura's gaze and paused. It's clear that she wanted to hear the rest, even if it included the battle against Nyer and Velouria's death.

With little choice, Alice continued and Allura listened in silence.

The battle between Apostles, past Allura's new attack inspired by Alice yet one that she hadn't made herself.

Each 'step' pushing her closer to the core of severance and perhaps...

Had she actually thought up of such a strike in the past, she might've achieved Oblivion far sooner than expected.

After all, the core techniques within the technique are similar to the pinnacle of offensive abilities at this moment.

Then came the battle between Gods, Nyer's intervention. Velouria's death and the replacement of Alice's heart.

By the end of the story, they were now deep into the night with Alice feeling rather fatigued. Yawns kept escaping her lips and her eyes were struggling to stay open.

In the comfort of Allura's presence, Alice found it difficult to stay on guard.

A rather cute sight if Allura had to say so herself.

Placing the cups mead on the bedside table, Allura pulled the covers over Alice.

The moment Alice's head touched the pillow, it's as though sleep dragged her by the ankles. Her consciousness fading and with Allura gently patting her shoulder, it was hard not to fall asleep.

"You've gone through a lot. Take this moment to rest okay? Don't think about anything. Just relax your mind. I'm here." Allura whispered.

All of the pressure Alice was feeling escaped in an instant. Her body sunk into the bed, her muscles relaxed.

It was a strange but welcome feeling.

"Tomorrow we'll be meeting the royals for the final steps of the negotiation. You'll need plenty of rest."

"Mnm..." Alice nodded slowly, her voice almost inaudible.

Seeing her like this, Allura was reminded of how 'young' Alice was actually. The fact that her soul only manifested after the incident and yet... she had to carry such burdens.

The weight of the world resting on a pair of delicate shoulders.

On the hopes of a girl who barely knew the world would in turn come to save it.

The desire that even through all the suffering she endured, she would make the right choice.

"How cruel..." Allura muttered with a helpless smile.

Pity in her eyes as her fingers stroked her hair.

"You don't know half of it." A voice echoed out.

Golden chains appeared on Alice's wrists momentarily as Abyssal energy stirred. A cluster of energy gathered by the bedside table and Cayla appeared.

Alyss had borrowed control for a moment so that Cayla could talk to Allura.

"She actually left out quite a lot you know? The doubts she's faced. The breakdowns, the realisations of what she must do." Cayla folded her arms with a sigh.

"Long time no see." Allura chuckled. Though she half expected Cayla to be a little... bigger.

"Yeah. Long time no see." It wasn't exactly a hearty reunion considering they had little interaction with one another. Even in the past. They knew of each other, greeted one another.

Calling them friends wouldn't be an exaggeration but it wasn't to the level of Cayla actively seeking Allura out.

She was more focused on what Velouria was doing.

And for her, there was only one reason why she would be out here in this moment.

"What do you think?" Cayla asked as Allura tilted her head.

"About what?"

"About Alice. Do you think she has it in her? To save this world?" Cayla exhaled while Allura carefully brushed Alice's hair aside.

"It's not about whether or not she has it in her. Rather, it's about our willingness to place the burden on her right?" Allura smiled.

She knew what Alice was capable of. This girl was more receptive to the world than people thought.

She may put on a brave front but deep down, she was like a child who's maturing with each passing day.

Rather than seeing Alice as the young adult her physical appearance may suggest her to be, it was better to ask whether or not they were okay with pressuring a child to save the world.

In which case...

"And if we're talking about willingness... Absolutely not. If I can resolve things for her, I would. It's why I pushed myself but... It seems like I've only burned what little time I could've had with her instead." A bitter smile appeared on Allura's face.

"You can still have those times you know? Just stand by her. Support her and show her you're there. She craves family love more than anything you know?" Cayla tightened her fingers.

It may be going against Alice's wishes but Cayla had to say it. If she didn't, Alice would simply keep it buried deep down without ever saying anything.

She stared Allura in the eyes.

"Do you know what you are to her?"

Chapter 1059: A Simple Breakfast

"Uuu... do I have to?" Alice mumbled, still feeling half asleep.

She was struggling to keep herself upright while her eyes blinked slowly. Allura was currently brushing her hair while picking out some outfits for the girl.

"Of course you have to. Even if we may be allies, they are still royalty. Ones that I'd rather not offend for no reason when an amicable resolution is at hand." Allura chuckled, brushing her fingers through Alice's hair.

Holding a few hair ties in her mouth, she started to style Alice's hair.

Her fingers separated Alice's hair into separate bundles. Taking sections from either side of Alice's head, she started to braid them together with surprising ease.

Her fingers danced through the hair effortlessly as she wove the strands towards the back of Alice's head. Then, as the two sections met, she tied them together with a hair tie before moving onto the main portion.

She gathered a thicker cluster of hair from the back and divided it into three equal sections. One over the other, she created a large braid that lay on top of Alice's hair.

"Do you not worry about someone grabbing your hair when you fight?" Allura asked curiously.

Alice had a lot of hair, so when she was dashing through the Void, Allura wouldn't be surprised if a dirty fighter took advantage of it.

At least for herself, when she fought seriously, she had a helmet on which reduced the risks.

"Mnm... Not really." Alice mumbled, still half asleep. "I have a barrier around me that alerts me if I'm about to be hit... So if they try to grab my hair, my automatic defence will move it out of the way."

Her voice was soft and clearly still half asleep.

Their discussions were rather mundane while Allura styled Alice's hair. Topics such as worries during combat, what kind of food she usually ate, and where she slept.

On the matter of food, Alice even got a slight scolding from Allura when she realised Alice hadn't been eating well. Rather, she was mostly sustaining herself on a mead and meat based diet.

Soon, Allura leaned back slightly to appraise her work on Alice's hair and nodded in satisfaction before finishing it off with a black ribbon at the back.

Turning Alice towards the mirror, her fingers adjusted her bangs so that they didn't cover her right eye.

There was no reason to hide it anymore and if anyone was to look down on Alice due to her appearance, Allura would be the first one to teach them a lesson.

"Doesn't this just look adorable?" Allura smiled while Alice tilted her head.

"Really? I don't mind it but wouldn't people find it scary to look at?"

"That's how stupid people who can't appreciate beauty think. What do YOU think?" Allura shook her head.

Staying silent for a moment, Alice lifted the corners of her lips into a small smile.

With the adjustment of her bangs and the braids in her hair, she had a more youthful look rather than that of a barbaric fighter.

"I like it." She nodded.

"Good, now let's get your outfit sorted out."

While Allura was rummaging through the outfits that Velouria had made in the past, Alice sat in silence while her fingers ran through her own hair.

Rather than enjoying the hairstyle, she found herself focusing more on Allura the entire time. The way she brushed the hair, her fingers that nimbly braided everything without any mistakes.

Despite the chaos in the world, she was still allowed a moment like this. And already, her heart felt content. She could feel strength returning to her body and her will to fight igniting with passion.

All so that she could protect this moment of monotony that now occupied a corner of her heart.

She watched Allura mumble to herself while picking out the outfit.

"Too extravagant, too restrictive. Absolutely not." Allura creased her brows.

Then, at one point, Allura started to mix and match certain pieces in order to form new outfits and landed on one that was elegant enough to meet royalty while also making it comfortable to wear.

Alice blinked in surprise at the choice that Allura made in the end.

She hadn't told Allura what she preferred and yet...

The outfit was an elegant black dress with an off shoulder design. A jacket carefully camouflaged by the dress's frills. Large baggy sleeves, her favourite, reached down to her thighs. Around the wrists, Allura had attached some ribbons and frills to give it more detail while white fabric was layered underneath the sleeves, making them resemble flowers.

The dress was much the same. The black skirt only reached around thigh height but the addition of white fabric underneath made it reach the knees.

A pair of white frilled long socks and a pair of black shoes.

It was a completely different style to what she usually wore as it was tailored to meet royalty yet... it maintained much of what she liked.

"How did you..."

"Like it?" Allura smiled.

Alice nodded her head frantically as Allura let out a laugh.

"It's hard not to notice your preferences when I see a bunch of long sleeves in your wardrobe. Do you like them that much?" Allura helped Alice get into her new outfit as Alice wiggled her arms around.

Seeing the sleeves flutter, Allura paused before letting out a cheerful laugh.

Alice had answered the question without saying anything.

It was simple after all.

She found them cute.

With her outfit and hairstyle now done, Allura had Alice do a small twirl on the spot along with a few steps to make sure everything was comfortable.

There were a few finishing touches that Allura wanted to add though.

Tying a ribbon around Alice's waist, she adorned it with a red rose while adding some jewellery to the rest of the outfit.

Then, while looking through the accessories that Velouria had prepared, Allura froze.

She found a clip with the design of two feathers. One black, the other silver.

Since it was from Velouria, it was clear what it represented, though it was carefully concealed since this clip was actually part of another outfit. Only after removing it did one see the hidden message.

Her gaze softened as she clipped the two feathers onto Alice's dress, to the upper right above where her heart would be.

"Now then, I believe we should get some breakfast before we meet the King and Queen. Wouldn't want your stomach to rumble halfway through, right? And we absolutely need you to start eating some of your veggies." Allura picked up Alice without warning, surprising her.

"Ah!"

To Alice's shock, Allura carried her all the way to the dining room before pulling out an apron for herself. She tied her hair into a ponytail and made her way to the kitchen.

Allura was actually planning on making Alice's breakfast herself!

Alice wanted to stop her but Allura's eyes told her that rejection was not an option.

She would make this breakfast no matter what.

[Heh, feeling spoiled?] Cayla chuckled.

'... Shuddap.' Alice blushed in embarrassment as Cayla and Alyss had been watching everything since last night.

When she had snuck into Allura's room after thinking the two of them were asleep.

Alyss simply smirked as seeing Alice being treated this way brought a warm feeling to her heart.

The others woke up soon after and gathered by the dining hall only to be scolded by Allura, who told them to make their own food. Her focus was on Alice today.

Seeing the tiny murder machine all dressed up and embarrassed, Elias decided not to think anymore and sat down while Lab held back a soft laugh.

Even Alice had her moments like this.

Food didn't take long to make. The quantity was far bigger than what one person should be able to eat and despite how simple some of the dishes were, Alice found herself drooling at the sight of it.

"Even for the two of us, this is a lot, right?" Alice glanced over.

It was a lot for two people but not enough for everyone in the room.

"Of course. This is a meal for three after all. If your diet is as bad as you say, there's no way Alyss kept a good diet following you. I swear, you two are bad influences on one another." Allura grinned, resting her chin on her palm.

"We won't be leaving until I see both of you girls eat healthy."

Inside Alice's mind, Alyss paused in surprise as she hadn't expected Allura to factor in her portion as well.

"Now stop staring and start eating, young lady."

Hesitating for a moment, Alice took a bite of the first dish. It was a simple dish of mixed vegetables with some sauce.

It wasn't even as extravagant as some of the meals that Gwen had made for her when they were living together and yet...

Her throat tightened.

*Drip...

Tears rolled down Alice's cheeks as she started to eat her breakfast.

Allura had a gentle smile on her face while she watched this and the others allowed the duo to have their moment.

Alice didn't say anything the entire time. Too emotional to say a single word. And when her meal was over, golden chains appeared and Alyss was given control without another word.

"This girl... she didn't even say thank you." Alyss sighed, wiping Alice's tears away from her face.

"It's fine. I'm afraid if she says anything she might start sobbing. Wouldn't want her eyes to be red when meeting royalty after all." Allura waved it off before looking Alyss in the eyes.

"Thank you for staying with her, keeping her company and looking after her. I'm glad you two have each other."

It was a heartfelt message of gratitude for the soul that Alice shared a body with. One that didn't hold any grudges and instead saw the girl as a sister.

Coughing awkwardly, Alyss looked down and nodded. While she may not be as emotional as Alice, she too felt a little embarrassed but happy.

A simple breakfast but one that neither of the girls would ever forget.

Chapter 1060: Meeting Royals

After breakfast, the group made their way towards the main hall where Nalem was already waiting. There was a serious look on his face as he spared little in the way of pleasantries.

He was surprised to see Alice but it amounted to nothing more than a slight nod as a greeting. They couldn't spend too much time talking since the royal family was waiting on the other side of these doors.

Even without entering, Alice could sense what it was like on the other side. It wasn't crowded.

Far from it.

No nobles, no audience.

Only four figures out in the open and a few... hidden surprises scattered around the room.

As the doors to the hall parted ways, the group was greeted by a pristine hall filled with towering windows, chandeliers adorned with jewellery and pillars of marble that held up the ceiling.

Sat on the main throne was the king. Aleric Extalia.

Like the picture that Lab showed her not long ago, he was a middle aged man with a gentle smile. A pair of sharp eyes that made it hard to maintain eye contact despite his friendly demeanour in this moment.

Six known Sigils and yet...

Alice narrowed her eyes slightly.

The King was Lord level.

Eight Sigils hovered above his head.

Next was his wife. Vivian Extalia. A distinguished lady from the Varyn family, personally selected by the King's mother. Rarely made a public appearance and was mostly responsible for deals behind closed doors.

She hid the lower half of her face behind a crimson fan while her bright crimson hair contrasted the dark material of the throne behind her.

Her pitch black eyes swept over the party as Elias shivered and kept his eyes focused on the ground.

Eyes devoid of warmth.

As for her Sigils, she only had five Sigils hovering above her head. Though it made sense considering there's no need for the Queen to fight when the King is a Lord level being, not to mention the guards with him.

Beneath the King and Queen were the Prince and Princess.

One of which she's met just the other day. Ruri Extalia.

She tried to keep her composure but the moment she saw Alice, she turned her gaze away while sweat rolled down her cheek.

Her avoidance of Alice wasn't unnoticed as her brother smirked and focused on the split haired girl.

Damien Extalia.

Unlike Lab's reports, he wasn't maintaining his appearance of a lazy unmotivated genius. In fact, he was making his caution and aura well known. His presence was on a similar level to his father and it was clear that he was being groomed into the next King.

And most evident of what was the seven Sigils hovering above his head.

Another Lord!

Alice exhaled softly.

The King had Eight Sigils while the Prince had Seven. The Princess was slacking but that's probably because she had little to no interest in raw power but rather focused on her own hobbies.

Just the King and Prince would have most people on guard however...

There were other figures in this room.

Two guards stood on either side of the royals. One was an elf, shown by the pointed ears poking out from the hair.

She had pale green hair that was closer to white than green. Her hair only reached her shoulders with two clusters around the back reaching past her waist.

A pair of emerald eyes and what seemed to be prosthetics attached across her body. She wore a rather revealing white dress and sleeves while silver armour adorned her shoulders, torso, arms and legs.

As for her power...

Though controlled to an absurd degree, Alice could still see it.

The rushing waves of energy hidden within her vessel.

The power that awaited instruction and her calmness despite four Lords in their group.

A peak Lord with nine Sigils!

An elf that stood at the summit of the mortal realm, just below the threshold of Apostles.

But that wasn't the worst news. It wasn't just one Peak Lord.

No.

On the opposite side, another peak Lord stood. The upper half of his face was concealed by a black pointed mask. Housed in the centre of that mask was a strange golden face with its eyes closed.

Beneath that mask, long strands of dark hair was allowed to flow freely to his lower back. He wore a smart attire, consisting of a black suit, black shirt and black pants. All adorned with gold accessories and golden buttons.

A furred cloak was draped around his shoulder while a sword hung on his waist.

Alice wasn't sure if that sword was purely decorative or his actual weapon but it seemed to be a 'regular' sword with no additional properties.

A strange sight as most Hunters past a certain point would use weapons conjured by their abilities.

Rarely would they find a blacksmith talented enough to create a weapon that won't be broken easily.

With two Peak Lords guarding the Royals, most would think that this would be sufficient.

And they would be correct except...

Alice noticed a third presence.

Thanks to Cayla, she was able to peer into the strands of energy that permeated this room.

And hidden within the cluster of energy barely released by the Lords, carefully camouflaging itself was a third signature.

A hidden Lord who deliberately entangled their aura with the other two in order to conceal their presence.

Even if other Lord were to try their best, they would be undiscovered. The only exception being the abnormality that was Alice and her eyes that could see energy.

Alice forcefully calmed herself.

That third Signature felt... dangerous.

It wasn't a case where it was stronger or that it had a creepy outline. Instead, it was her hunch. A gut instinct. Something warned her not to take that third signature lightly.

There was... 'Something' that made it stand out against the other two Peak Lords.

Something that unnerved Alice to the point she unconsciously clenched her fist.

Then, she felt a hand holding her own and glanced up slightly.

It was Allura.

There was a smile on her face, reassuring her that everything will be fine.

After all, their group weren't lacking for firepower. Appearance wise, they were outnumbered in terms of Lords but that would be incorrect.

As Alice can quickly upgrade herself to reach the level of one and overturn the battle.

Taking a deep breath to calm her mind, she observed the King.

"It seems like your group has grown quite a bit since I last checked." The King stop first with a smile.

He had heard from his daughter about the clash above the city. Not that he needed her to report after all.

In order to maintain order, he had his retainers deploy a barrier to keep the battle hidden. And if things had gotten too out of hand, he would've involved himself instead of letting Allura's group handle everything.

He had his assumptions but seeing all of them gathered together, his assumptions proved to be true.

"However, I'm sure pleasantries of the court will bore guests such as yourself. So let us discuss the issue at hand without unnecessary formalities." He spoke with a slight laugh while the Queen gave her husband a slight nudge with her elbow.

Nalem took the lead, laying out the conditions that they've drafted thus far.

What the Kingdom of Extalia desires in this moment is simple.

First, to destroy the Nightmare spreading across the nation.

A realm like that couldn't be left to expand at will. Not only that, but granting such power everyone was the quickest method to cause chaos.

When a hooligan could access power rivalling that of Six Sigil hunters, it's little wonder that even the average civilian are quick to throw themselves into the Nightmare for 'safety'.

But doing so only risks foreign entities from taking over their body.

A sign that the King wished not to see.

The second issue, would be the rebellion led by the Zenia family. It's clear that the family had discarded their masks and revealed their true intentions.

Ignoring everything else the King might desire, these two were the most pressing matters plaguing Extalia.

The good news for the group is that both objects coincide with what they want to deal with as well.

Namely, Nyer's connection with everything.

But before they could continue with the agreement, the Queen closed her fan.

"Had things remained the way they were, I'm sure we would have no problems with allowing you knowledge on the secrets we hold within this country. Secrets that may serve well as a weapon towards this threat that we now face." She spoke and the King didn't stop her.

After all, her concerns were also his own.

There was one glaring issue they haven't addressed since the start of this discussion.

With the Queen interrupting the meeting, Nalem furrowed his brows.

By his calculations, this meeting should've proceeded smoothly as most of the work had already been handled by him before Alice's group arrived.

"However..." She narrowed her eyes.

"Among you walks a daughter of Zenia. With the Zenia family as our enemy, how can you bring a potential enemy into our midst? I'm sure I needn't warn you of the contracts that the Zenia family employ within their group. One that makes it extremely difficult to disobey the hierarchy unless you have a method of cancelling the contract."

Turning her gaze to Alice, the Queen lifted her head slightly.

"Alice Zenia, can you prove that you won't become a weapon against our cause?"

Both of the guards beside the royals started to apply pressure towards Alice while Karya and Gin frowned.

Before any of them could do anything, Allura was the first to act as she stood up and lit a cigarette.

Exhaling a cloud of smoke, she glared at the two Guards. Even without using her energy, Allura's presence as an Apostle was hard to ignore.

Without losing her smile, she lifted Alice and brought her close to her side.

"I think you're mistaking something." Allura chuckled, brushing her hair back.

"She walks here not as a daughter of Zenia but as one of Agnelia. Her name is Alice Agnelia so don't you forget that."

Both Gin and Karya stepped forward as Allura smirked.

"And she's MY daughter, your highness."