

Abyssal A 1061

Chapter 1061: Erasing Contracts

Alice glanced up at Allura, who was keeping her eyes focused on the two Lords on either side of the Royals.

Did she hear that correctly?

She wasn't sure.

Perhaps, for a moment, her own desires and reality overlapped. Or perhaps she might have spaced out, hearing what she hoped to hear rather than what Allura actually said.

A part of her couldn't believe what just happened but...

What the Queen said next confirmed what she had heard.

"She is your daughter? Pardon my rudeness, but I see little similarity between the two of you. Not to mention the fact that the youngest daughter of the Zenia family is one that both my husband and I met many years ago." She narrowed her eyes.

"Regardless of what may have happened in the time between then and now, even if you have adopted her as your own, little of what you said can dispel my doubts regarding dear Alice over there suddenly shifting her allegiance should a command fall from the top."

The contracts of the Zenia family could largely be summarised into three rules.

One, she must adhere to the hierarchy of the Zenia family.

Two, what happens in the Zenia family cannot be disclosed to outsiders without permission from the family.

Three, she will not harm the family.

Points one and three were the most concerning, as Alice, while having the role of the firstborn daughter, would still have to listen to her father if they met.

Even with Allura backing her up, a contract isn't exactly something they can just break without care.

Allura, at her prime with Severance, could make an attempt, but the chances of success were unknown.

Making empty promises, especially in front of the Queen of Extalia, would either backfire badly or, in the best case scenario, make them lose trust in the group.

Something to convince them...

Alice closed her eyes for a moment.

"You just need me to prove that they can't control me with the contract, right?" Alice spoke up despite the Lords having a stare down.

In this suffocating hall with four Lords on the verge of fighting, Alice spoke without care. She stood with her head held high, unaffected by the potential dangers and consequences of her actions.

She stared the Queen in the eyes, refusing to back down.

If Velouria wished for her to become the next ruler of Ayr, the next Goddess, the one who would stop Nyer...

How could she shrink back before a mere Queen? Respect was given. That much was certain. But respect did not mean giving up or backing down against their pressure.

There was no need to show open hostility either. All she needed to do was prove that she wouldn't be a liability. That's all.

And if the Royals requested that from her, then there was something she must also request. For this should be an equal partnership.

Their group was no less than the Kingdom of Extalia after all.

They had an Apostle, the Lords of Life and Death, a freak of nature who would become the Goddess of the Abyss, and a retainer of the Underground who served as direct access to Faust.

But that wasn't all. This was merely counting the people they had here.

However, through her journey, through her time travelling across the realm and the people she'd met...

Alice had no doubt that they would show up should she request their assistance.

She had connections with the Sun, Moon and Eclipse. And outside of that, alliances with the East and North, along with an immortal Vampire who couldn't be killed no matter what.

While asking for Rosalyn's brother's help might be difficult due to the restrictions he was under, just having him on their side was helpful enough.

The information he could access was no less than the Underground's and in some aspects, even better since Caelan had actually lived through the events himself.

With this kind of lineup, backing down was never an option.

Taking a deep breath, Alice brought out a vial of blood and drank it in one go.

The three Lord guards protecting the Royals were on guard, but Alice didn't make a move to attack them.

She drank the blood for another reason after all.

*BANG!!!

The tiles beneath her cracked from the sudden increase in her aura. The appearance of another Lord!

The Queen widened her eyes for a moment.

She wasn't sure if this power was a result of the Zenia family or not but... if Alice could elevate herself to the rank of Lord so easily, what about the rest of the family?

Swapping her Sigils around, Alice gave her body a stretch.

Allura was confused but seeing Alice's confident gaze, she took a step back.

Sometimes, being a parent meant simply trusting in your child's ability. There was something Alice wanted to prove and seemed confident in doing.

Even if she herself may have believed otherwise, she wouldn't stop Alice from proving herself. Removing the opportunity for success is what a bad parent would do.

"What are you doing?" Nalem asked the one question hanging in everyone's mind.

Was she planning to fight? Why was she powering up?

Did she not want this alliance to succeed?

However, Alice simply smiled.

"This negotiation can't finish so long as the contract is in place, right? Then I'll cut it all off. I'll remove my connection to the Zenia contract so that you won't have to worry."

Her Sigils started to light up one after another as the Three Abyssal Relics hummed to life.

Within her mental landscape, Cayla gave her body a good stretch.

[I suppose this will be a good experiment to see whether or not we can remove the influence of the Abyss from others.]

The last time they tried something like this, they received help from the Will.

But this time? Since it was simply a Law of Agreement, breaking it should be far easier to accomplish.

***RUMBLE!!!**

Condensing her power into a single spark, Alice snapped her fingers as her body was suddenly enveloped in a raging pillar of flames.

Back then, removing Arwen's contract acted similarly to a refund. She gave up everything the contract granted, thus ridding herself of the side effects.

But this time, Alice wasn't looking for a refund.

The Zenia contract gave her nothing. It was simply authority. Giving it up was easy enough.

Her eyes shifted.

A heartbeat could be heard throughout the hall.

A crown manifested above Alice's head as the aura of the Abyss spilled forth.

Every single Lord in the room widened their eyes without exception.

Including Allura.

Upgrading oneself to the rank of Lord was impressive. A jump in power so vast that it defied logic.

But it could be explained rather easily. Perhaps it was a temporary boost. Perhaps it was a contract of sorts. One that exchanged future potential for power in the present.

However.

What Alice had just done couldn't simply be explained by a contract.

As Lords, they were deeply sensitive to changes in Abyssal energy. They were granted authority by the Realm after all.

So imagine their shock when Alice's aura transformed.

No longer was she simply a Lord of the Abyss. This sensation. This energy...

It was not an exaggeration to call Alice the personification of the Abyss in this moment. A walking manifestation of the Realm.

Spectral strands of energy unwrapped from Alice's arm as they dug into her chest. Motes of energy hovered around Alice as they slowly transformed into symbols. The connection forming between her and each of these symbols...

The flow of power between them.

Alice narrowed her eyes.

A flood of energy swarmed her mind, but Cayla quickly stepped in and isolated the knowledge, preventing Alice from being overwhelmed.

Red spider lilies formed beneath Alice as a confident smile appeared on her face.

She had filtered through the information thanks to Cayla's help and, with that, found the contracts linking her to the Zenia family.

One of authority and subordination to the Family Head.

Though unsurprising, there were two contracts linking her to the Zenia family.

The first was the one she signed as Kale.

The second was one she must have signed as a child.

The Law of Agreement, the contract that binds the soul to a consensual agreement between two parties. A law designed to ensure that a deal is carried out without falsehood.

Usually, these laws are dispelled after the contract is fulfilled unless there is a lasting clause between parties. In which case, it would require consent from both parties or the death of one.

But right now, Alice was going to ignore that process altogether and destroy the contracts prematurely.

Energy gathered at her fingertips as Alice prepared to erase the links.

Yet just as her fingers came into contact with them, the world around her flashed into a realm of nothingness.

An expanse of white as far as the eye could see.

"Tsk, you really like to drop in unannounced, don't you? What's the problem this time? Am I going to die because I destroyed the contract?" Alice exhaled, resting her hand on her hip before turning around to face the Will of the Abyss.

He was hovering in the air, acting as though he were sitting on a chair with one leg tucked beneath him.

"You misunderstand. I'm not here to warn you but rather to congratulate you." The Will laughed, clapping his hands.

"Congratulate? What's there to congratulate?" Alice scoffed. She doubted the act of simply erasing a contract was enough to bother the Will. Especially since this wasn't a contract with the Abyss but rather one with the Zenia family.

"There is plenty. But shall I keep it simple?" He grinned, hopping off his chair and landing in front of Alice.

"With this accomplishment, the incomplete vessel has fulfilled one of the requirements I've been waiting dearly for." He laughed, creating a cake between them. On it was a single candle with a flickering violet flame.

"So of course I'm here to congratulate you."

He spread his arms wide.

"You are now one step closer to your birthday."

Chapter 1062: Alternative Fates

"You are now one step closer to your birthday." The Will laughed while spreading out his arms.

Though his actions didn't impress Alice.

"Of course you'll know the perfect way to creep a girl out." Alice pulled a face of disgust while looking at the cake between them.

"What do you want?"

"How cruel. And here I thought we were close enough to be casual with one another. You make it sound like I only approach you when there's something to be gained." The Will laughed, appearing next to Alice with a hand around her shoulders.

However, Alice had also aimed her finger at his chin. And on her fingertip glowed a single spark ready to fire on her command.

"Am I wrong? Every time you've shown up, it's always to mess with things for some mysterious goal. And now you suddenly show up saying I'm one step closer to my birthday." Alice narrowed her eyes.

"What exactly are you playing at?"

"That's a little harsh. There are times I've shown up to help you. Remember that girl with the Moon? She would've died had I not done anything. You would've earned the ire of a Cardinal of the Moon and... let's just say your journey would've been far more difficult without her survival." The Will snapped his finger.

In front of them, a scene unfolded.

Alice stood upon burning rubble. The Moon hung overhead while a Cardinal led the charge towards her.

Behind him, Apostles of the Moon granted him support.

Tristan twisted his body, bloody tears in his eyes as lunar chains rained down from above.

Alice twisted her body, dodging the chains, but Nanna was faster.

She spun the chakram around her body, restraining Alice in a field of energy while Griselda slammed her palms against the ground.

A theatre burst to life around her and puppets started to lunge towards Alice.

"With the death of his sister at your hands, Tristan fully delved into the blessings of the Moon and became the greatest Cardinal Lumiria had ever seen. In fact, what could only be called a fleeting love became nothing short of infatuation." The Will snickered.

"That burning desire, that longing in her eyes. She gave him everything. Her blessings, her power, her authority and even her life. And Tristan embraced all of it. Including Lumiria.

"He ascended as the God of the Moon, leading the charge against the Abyss and uniting the surface against you. That was what would've happened had I not stuck my nose into your business back then." He laughed, dispelling the scene with a flick of his finger.

This was merely one possibility of the future. A scene interpreted from the Cogs that had long fallen dormant due to Alice's actions.

Of course, fate could still lead to that kind of battle, but the requirements were now much harder to fulfil. Especially since the ties between Griselda and the Moon were hanging on by mere strands.

Even if a battle did play out in a similar manner, having Tristan lead the charge with two Apostles behind him was nearly impossible. Someone else would need to take his place.

Alice exhaled softly.

She knew how dangerous the operation was back then. But this kind of ending... she hadn't expected it.

"I don't believe the actions I've taken have been detrimental to you. If anything, they were beneficial. Why don't we have a look at another future?"

Swiping his finger, a different battle unfolded. One held in the East.

Alice could be seen buckled over with her body mutating to an insane degree. Eldritch energy running rampant while Golden Chains lay broken around her.

Tears flowed from her eyes as she mumbled a single word in desperation.

Alyss.

"This was another kind of future that awaited you. The balance within your vessel broken beyond repair. The chains unable to suppress the mutation of Eldritch energy within your body and, in the end, a soul with whom you share a body became a casualty in the exchange.

"In your grief, you were unable to hold yourself back and unleashed destruction upon the East. The land now a flaming ruin thanks to your rampage. Cayla tried to snap you out of it but, with much of her power sealed, she was consumed when Eldritch energy took over. Such a shame..." The Will let out a sigh of pity.

"But because of the actions I took, because of the warnings that I gave you up to that point, you managed to avoid such a fate. Where is my thanks?"

Clapping his hands together, a new scene interrupted.

Two suns clashing in the sky before being interrupted by a demon of wrath.

"Your identity discovered too soon and thus you parted ways with young Guinevere. A battle between her and the Sun is unavoidable, but yet she lacked the power to finish him off. Not only that, but Wrath

was granted to the grieving soul. Confused by his own hatred, he hunted anything and everything containing even a sliver of Divinity.

"Thus, with his fury, many of your allies were swept away as collateral damage. Another fate we avoided. With my intervention, how many of these requirements were discarded? Had I not intervened, the path to these fates would've been oh so easy to fall into."

*BANG!!!

Before the Will could say anything else, blood erupted around Alice, forcing him away.

Her hair flared around her as a pair of angry eyes glared at the featureless man.

"So your bullsh*t. If you could interfere with fate so easily, you would've done so long ago. You would've made it much easier for me to accomplish these requirements that you seek. To force the vessel into completion. Yet you didn't." She narrowed her eyes.

"Because you couldn't. You couldn't tamper with fate. You couldn't f*ck with it. Until recently, that is. My guess is that you probably figured out a way to mess with things and see what the choices of the past could've led to. With Nyer making his own moves and the fragments of Yrael doing whatever they wish...

"I'd much rather believe a theory that the Cogs are losing control than you orchestrating everything. So why don't you stop taking credit for something you didn't do."

The Will lost his smile and stared at Alice in silence.

"It seems like you are severely underestimating the power I hold. Have you forgotten? The Abyss originally belonged to me." He spoke coldly.

It lacked the usual playful tone he carried and, had it been in the past, Alice might've felt scared.

But not now.

Alice had no doubt that the Will was strong. Probably stronger than anything she had ever seen and ever would see. Perhaps even stronger than the Cogs of Fate. But he wasn't without his own restrictions.

There must've been invisible bindings in place that prevented him from doing whatever he wished. Something that made sure he didn't step out of line.

And that must be exactly what he wanted her to accomplish. To become a vessel of power that could possibly break this binding on him.

"Pft..." The Will hunched over before swinging his head back, letting out loud laughter. One that came from the pits of his soul, one that shook the entire realm as Alice flinched slightly, covering her ear.

He continued to laugh as the realm split apart. Black chains broke through, trying to restrain him, but a single eye snapped open on his face.

"This isn't your place to intervene."

*RUMBLE SHATTER!!!

Energy whipped out from the Will's body, faster than Alice's eyes could capture, and shattered the chains lunging for his body.

Alice's pupils constricted.

She hadn't expected him to destroy the chains so easily and in such a manner. These were the same methods used to restrain anomalies in their world and yet... the Will could ignore them!

Something had gone terribly wrong. The course of fate had no doubt diverted and the Cogs were losing their influence.

"What's wrong? You look scared. Am I really that scary to you?" The Will appeared in front of Alice.

His singular eye stared deep into her soul.

Beneath this gaze, she felt naked and devoid of defence. It felt as though nothing she did mattered and even the notion of trying to fight back seemed laughable.

The Will raised his hand and...

Patted her on the shoulder.

"Breathe, girl. We're not enemies here. We still have use for one another, don't you agree?" He finally grinned. His eye slowly closed until his face was featureless as usual.

Yet Alice couldn't quite calm down.

She hated to admit it but she had lost the initiative in this conversation.

"Honestly, I hate it when ants speak out. They just don't realise the gap in power, don't you agree? But I'm giving you preferential treatment. If it wasn't for that... I would've had you listen to every. Single. Word. I say. You get me?" The Will continued to pat her shoulder with a smile.

"If I tell you to jump, you'll answer me with 'how high?' If I tell you to run, you'll tell me 'how fast?' And if I tell you to get a certain Sigil, you'll respond with 'yes sir'. But it's not like that, is it?" He let go of her and took a step back.

"Instead, our relationship is similar to that of a friendship. I give you suggestions in the best interests of both of us. So when I congratulate you, the only thing on your mind should be 'thank you' instead of accusing me of using you. It hurts my feelings too." He laughed.

Alice creased her brows, cold sweat dripping down her back.

"I think I've given you enough to think about for one day. Let's see..." He paused.

"Next we meet, I hope it'll be when you get your seventh Sigil for Lordship. I'm sure we'll have a very fun moment when that time comes." The Will chuckled.

With a snap of his finger, the realm faded away and Alice was back in the royal hall.

Chapter 1063: Negotiation With Royals

Having returned to the royal hall, Alice swept her gaze across the room and watched as the strands of energy settled around her.

The contracts had been broken. She would no longer command nor take commands from the Zenia family.

All that bound them was the fact that they shared the same bloodline. But it lacked any capability of exerting control over her.

Taking a deep breath, she set aside what had just happened with the Will for now. Instead, her focus returned to the Queen.

"There, I believe I have proven myself with this little stunt. Or do you need someone to verify this?" Alice asked as the Queen furrowed her brows.

She wanted to say something but... what could she possibly say?

She wasn't a Lord, so she couldn't verify whether or not Alice had actually erased the contract.

But even then... none of them had ever heard of resolving a contract in such a one sided manner.

"Ahem." The King cleared his throat, taking control of the situation.

"While we're grateful for your demonstration and nonstandard way of resolving the contract, your actions have brought up another point of concern we hadn't expected to appear during our negotiations." The King chuckled, resting his chin on his hand.

"If you can destroy a contract so easily, what's stopping you from not holding up your side of the bargain?" he asked as Alice folded her arms.

Indeed. If she was capable of simply breaking off an agreement, the contract meant nothing to them.

And with nothing binding her, it was hard for the Royals to simply accept that kind of outcome.

"You know, before the Law of Agreement was a thing, we built trust between two parties before agreeing to such... alliances.

"With the Law now ineffective, why don't we fulfil one request from one another as a show of sincerity?" the King suggested.

Nalem narrowed his eyes.

He wasn't expecting the conversation to continue in this direction.

Originally, all that was supposed to happen was the group coming here and simply agreeing to the contract. Then they could delegate tasks and start making progress in stopping Nyer.

However... with this new variable, sorting out an alliance had become much more difficult.

If one side asked too big of a favour, the other side would naturally disagree. This would repeat back and forth until nothing was done and all they had accomplished was sitting around doing nothing.

If neither side was willing to back down...

Nalem clenched his teeth.

"If we keep walking around in circles, we'll never get anything done. And I don't think either side has time for that kind of luxury, don't you agree?" The Prince was the one to speak up, surprising both groups.

Both sides had half expected Alice to make the suggestion considering her boldness when it came to dissolving her contract.

But contrary to their beliefs, it was the Prince speaking up first.

"We believe that the Zenias seem to be staging a large scale invasion of some kind. An unknown force is giving them confidence that they'll be able to pull it off, even with the difference in quality between our two sides.

"Not only that, but reports suggest that a large amount of materials of an unknown origin is being transported through their network. Some are suggesting it may be necromancy that gives them the confidence to pull off this invasion. We've been trying to make contact with the Moon to sort this out, but communication has been difficult." He admitted casually with a shrug of his shoulders.

The Queen creased her brows. This was information they had planned to share once they had become allies, yet he was so willing to reveal it.

"The Zenia family cannot be allowed to continue gathering their forces at such speeds." He concluded, gesturing for Alice and the group to share some information from their side.

Alice folded her arms and tapped her chin.

She could tell that neither the King nor Queen had expected this as they were entirely planning on discussing the issues further without care for time.

But the Prince? He wanted this issue to be resolved as soon as possible.

Since that was the case... they couldn't blame her for showing a bit of rudeness.

Clasping her hands together, Alice stomped her foot down as Abyssal energy stirred. Both Lords prepared to move while Karya and Gin did the same.

Yet the only thing that happened was...

The construction of a table.

Flicking her finger, Cayla was summoned as files were spread across the surface.

Detailed findings she had on both the Zenia family and Nyer.

"I've been travelling around quite a bit and there are two cases where I've been involved in fighting against the Zenia family.

"When it comes to these unknown materials, I believe there are two possibilities. Outer Gods or the Hybrids." Alice smirked, picking out two stacks of files.

"I doubt it's the Outer Gods as I have a certain... ally, I suppose. Instead of the Zenia family, they're more involved with an ally of theirs. The two are connected, but I doubt the Zenia family would put all their eggs into one basket. Especially since this isn't directly controlled by them.

"Which then brings us to candidate two. Hybrids. These are monstrosities created by a special blood. It allows these people to look human and act human, but wield the power of beasts without the need for Sigils. A merge between the two species. Their powers are limited to six Sigils, but that's only from what I've witnessed." Alice explained, spreading out the documents she had created during her time in the North.

"It is entirely possible that in the time between then and now, the family has found a way to break through the boundary that separates average Hunters and Lordship. The same goes for the materials they require for the construction of said Hybrids. And with these facts, I believe that they're more likely to be amassing an army of Hybrids rather than Outer Gods."

One of the Lords flicked down to the table and grabbed a stack of reports. Alice naturally gestured with a smug smile, letting her take as many as she wished and whether or not she wanted extra copies for the other Royals.

A frown sat on the guard's face, but she accepted the extra copies without a word.

Bringing them back to the Royals, the King, Queen and Prince read through the reports carefully while the Princess seemed bored by everything.

She wanted to leave but... thinking about the potential issues of leaving a meeting like this, she'd rather stay put.

The more the King read, the deeper his frown became. They had some wild guesses regarding what the Zenia family was preparing, but they hadn't expected something like this.

Not only that, but this seemed to be just a small portion of the information the girl had gathered about the Zenia family. Their archive of data might just be far larger than what any of them had expected.

Exhaling softly, the King gave the Queen a side glance while the Queen hid her face behind her fan.

A silent communication between the two of them while the Prince crossed his legs.

His eyes scanned the reports. His fingers tapped against the armrest.

"I'm guessing you have information on the Nightmare Realm as well?" he suddenly spoke as Alice raised an eyebrow before nodding.

"I know what he's planning to do with it, a slight idea of how he's trying to do it. And I have a friend who's observing the issues with the realm. There are... a few methods I can use to resolve the issue of the Nightmare, but many of them aren't verified yet and mostly remain guesses and assumptions." Alice shrugged.

She wasn't going to provide more information than this. If anything, she wanted to say she was already being too generous considering the details of her findings. They only told her that the Zenias were preparing for something big, but she told them what they were preparing.

However, there was another issue at hand.

One that Alice had recently been reminded of thanks to the Will of the Abyss.

The royal family was still trying to get into contact with the Church of the Moon.

If Lumiria involved herself in this as well... things could take a turn for the worse very easily and very quickly.

Ideally, Alice would prefer working with the Sun thanks to Gwen's presence, but she doubted that would be possible.

There was also the looming issue of her friends still being stuck in Terminus.

The last she checked, they were preparing a way out, but she hadn't heard anything since.

Monika was also missing, along with Plume.

Both were occupied with a plan that they hadn't shared with her, so now there were two extra unknown factors at play.

But regardless of everything, the plan hadn't changed. There were still two main goals that she had to accomplish.

End the Zenia family and put a stop to whatever Nyer was planning.

Nothing more, nothing less.

Unfortunately for her, the deeper she dug, the more she realised things weren't as simple as she had initially thought.

The Will's intervention, Monika, the Outer Gods.

So many things converging at once. Stopping one would lead to a domino effect that created a greater issue if not handled properly.

"Why don't we take a break. I'm sure both sides have plenty to consider with the new information that's been shared between us." The King suggested as Nalem nodded his head.

Just as the group was about to leave, every Lord in the hall sensed a disturbance in the Kingdom's barrier.

A powerful invader had just collided with the outer ring.

Alice furrowed her brows.

They weren't just strong... but this energy was also familiar. One that—

"Oh f*ck." Alice widened her eyes.

She spun around and both Gin and Allura had the same look on their faces.

Slayer!

Chapter 1064: Gin And Theron

*BANG!!!

Theron's punch slammed against the barrier as his energy stirred.

His eyes were cold and detached. Emotionless as he carried out the task he was given.

He pulled his fist back...

*BANG!!!

Another punch. Ripples flowed from the point of contact.

Bella...

Theron clenched his teeth.

His wife wasn't a good person. That he knew full well. But when was it that she began to change?

When did the girl he used to know become one who enjoyed the suffering of others?

However...

Regardless of when that happened, the truth never changed.

He owed her everything.

And she was taken from him by Alice's hand.

*BANG!!!

His punch collided with the barrier once more as cracks began to form.

Just as he was about to throw another punch, he paused and tilted his head back.

He could sense several auras rushing towards him, flickering through the Void to cross the gap as fast as possible.

And within that group...

A smile formed on his face.

A bitter nostalgic one.

But regardless of who was part of that group, he had already made his choice clear.

Right now, standing before them, he was their enemy.

Pulling back his arm, Theron held it behind his back and closed his eyes.

He felt the wind brushing against his face, pulling back his hair. He recalled the days of old...

During those days, he and Gin were still young men with hot blood flowing through their veins. They would argue but have each other's backs.

One walked the path of Death, the other followed Allura down the path of Severance and would eventually reach the same realm she did.

Oblivion.

"Theron. Oi Theron, are you listening to me?" Gin's voice echoed in his mind.

The young Lord of Death had a lively grin on his face, devoid of scars and with eyes full of vigour. In his hands he gripped a bottle by its neck, laughing while pointing at the maps.

"I'm pretty sure we can find the beast in these ruins. Allura said it'll be a test of sorts but I think it's bullsh*t. Honestly, knowing her, this test would probably kill most people." He grumbled, swinging his head back to enjoy the drink.

"If Allura tasked us with such a mission then I believe there is a path to success." Theron smiled and casually responded while maintaining his blade.

While most would have treasures as weapons or even manifestations of their own power, he preferred traditional weapons. Ones that you took care of regularly, maintaining an edge and showing care for the weapon you entrusted your life to.

This kind of connection wasn't possible with something that was simply a manifestation of your own abilities.

It was a strange thought process that Gin couldn't quite get behind.

"Yeah well, she's the kind of woman who'll say that if a thread can go through a needle hole, you can shoot it with a bow from across the country and achieve the same outcome. That's the kind of possibility she offers." Gin rolled his eyes.

"Perhaps. But it proves her faith in you, does it not?"

Gin pursed his lips before laughing with a nod.

"I suppose it does."

Finishing his drink at the same time as Theron finished maintaining his blade, the two stood up.

Dark energy gathered around Gin to form a scythe while Theron enhanced his physical body.

"Same as usual?" Gin massaged his neck.

"Same as usual. I'm trusting you with my back." Theron chuckled.

Though he didn't say it out loud, he considered Gin a brother. Though the man was older than he was, he never let age stop him from acting close.

Like an older brother, Gin would cover for his mistakes in front of Allura and the two would even sneak out at times.

Taking a deep breath, Theron opened his eyes at the gathering of Lords that had appeared before him.

Gin's face had now aged with time. The numerous scars around his body.

Their relationship wasn't as close as it once was but it was never severed. The two still kept in contact at times, going out for a drink or two, sharing news and simply enjoying each other's company.

But now...

It was past the line of no return.

This connection between them was severed with no hope of reconciliation. After all, doing so required both sides to agree.

And even if Gin agreed, he refused.

"Theron..." Gin muttered with a deep sigh.

"Gin." Theron nodded.

"Is this really necessary?" Gin asked, landing in front of Theron.

In the back, Allura folded her arms with a serious look on her face.

Alice wanted to say something but Allura simply shook her head.

Her battle with Theron had ended before. Bella took Alice's friend and in turn, Alice killed Bella.

Right now, it was simply a case of two friends seeing each other while standing on opposite sides.

"Necessary huh... Perhaps not." Theron shook his head.

He glanced down at his hands.

"This might not be necessary. I'm certain I'm in the wrong. But even so... I suppose I can blame you for teaching me how to be stubborn, right?" Theron smiled.

There were deep bags under his eyes. Long gone was the calm and composed Theron that Gin used to know.

All that remained was a fatigued shell of who he once was. Moving for one goal and one goal alone.

"You!... God dammit!" Gin lunged forward with a punch as Theron dodged to the side.

But just as Theron was about to counter, Gin struck with his elbow, forcing Theron to stumble back.

"Right... That old move. How many times was I caught off guard by it?" Theron wiped the blood away as he raised his arm out to the right.

Shards slowly appeared one by one before condensing into a single blade.

*BANG!!!

Swinging it off to the side, the simple weapon with no guard unleashed a whip of energy that left a deep crevice in the ground.

"When I first ascended to Lordship, this weapon is something you and Allura got for me." Theron smiled fondly while Gin's expression warped with a hint of pain and anger.

"Do you still remember? I lost my treasured blade saving your life when we fought something beyond our level. You were bloodied and wounded, lying on the ground while your bones were visible to the naked eye. We were so close to death that day."

Flicking his wrist, Theron released two slashes that Gin quickly parried with his scythe.

With a smooth turn of his body, he diverted Theron's blade and slammed his shoulder into his chest.

"You put your life on the line for me. And I did the same for you." Theron flipped through the air before stepping onto an invisible foothold constructed with energy.

"Yeah we did. And look where that led us." Gin spat with a frown.

Even if Alice didn't kill Bella, so long as that mad woman was around, Theron would cover for her no matter what. He would try to do as much good as possible to offset the bad she did.

But life didn't work that way. It wasn't a cold transaction that could be shrugged off and Theron knew that full well.

So even without Alice, they would've fought sooner or later. The only difference would be...

They wouldn't be using blades to talk. Instead, they'd be chatting over a drink across a table perhaps. As brothers.

Dark energy converged around Gin's body.

"I know you're holding back on account of our connection. Unless you're willing to change your mind, don't act soft with me." He glared.

Gin's physical body started to revert back to his prime state. He needed to be in his best form to fight Theron.

Looking at Gin in this form, Theron chuckled and closed his eyes.

He recalled the past like a lingering dream that one couldn't quite forget. Those joyful days that felt like they would last forever.

The only things they had to worry about back then were laughable compared to their worries today. Mundane thoughts that passed by in a blink.

*CLANG!!!

Theron parried without looking.

Gin's scythe blade stopped inches away from his torso.

"Who's the soft one, Gin?" Theron spoke slowly.

Despite reverting back to his prime state, the weight behind his strike was... laughably weak.

"How many spars did we have back then? Not once did you hold back like you are doing today. Pierce, slice, impale if needed. What's holding you back?" Theron asked.

Pulling the scythe down, he headbutted Gin before twisting his body and slamming his heel into Gin's stomach.

"!!!"

Crashing against the ground, Gin stabbed his scythe into the earth to stop himself.

The two glared at one another.

The original day of farewell was still fresh in their minds. That moment when they walked their separate paths.

"Don't make me do this." Gin practically begged but Theron showed no sign of hesitation.

Back then, four cups sat upon a table as Allura was the first to raise her cup.

"The paths ahead will not remain the same forever. I've seen plenty of friends come and go. One day, we will stand beneath different skies and answer to different callings. When that day comes, walk straight without regret. For that is the only thing I wish."

Gin scoffed softly, lifting his own cup.

"Such a serious tone to start with. Shouldn't we be more casual and light-hearted? Let me say this. If any of you become unbearable and insufferable, I'll make sure to give you a good smack and remind you of who you used to be."

Karya rolled her eyes.

"You? Remind us? Senile old man, why don't you look in the mirror first. As the youngest here, I think it's only right for me to take that job."

Theron looked down at the reflection within his drink before raising it.

"I think that's a little too light-hearted and casual. But I suppose you wouldn't be Gin if you didn't say something like that. We walked together, fought together. Entrusted our backs to one another. No matter where we go after tonight, those days will never change."

"Well said." Allura grinned.

Four cups met in the middle with a soft click.

"To the days we shared." She tilted her head back and drank in one go.

"To the roads ahead." The remaining three spoke at the same time before doing the same.

Exhaling softly, Theron's eyes finally turned serious as he stopped holding back. That was his show of respect to the ones he saw as family.

Violent energy twisted around his blade as his aura started to climb.

The energy of Oblivion started to manifest.