

Abyssal A 151

Chapter 151 - 151: Following The Scent

"What the hell is going on?" Ria frowned while seeing the chaos within the city. Even as they spoke, people were dying around them as Alice frowned before opening her mouth.

"Ria, can you help the guards? I know you're stronger than them so you can deal with the threats more easily."

"Sure. But what will you do in the meantime?" Ria asked, noticing that Alice hadn't mentioned her own role within this.

"I want to keep looking for the people responsible. The City Lord is dealing with the woman underground so he doesn't have time to check the true culprits behind the outbreak. When we exchanged attacks, I noticed that she didn't have the smell of the Abyss Blood attached to her body.

"Usually, when you handle this blood, the smell is hard to get rid of. Even if it can be blended, there is still a distinct 'sting' to it. She didn't have any of that so I think there are more. I'm going to check to see if there are any other exits around this place." Alice explained as she was about to jump away when Ria grabbed her arm.

"What if there are people with more Sigils than you can handle?" Ria frowned.

She knew that Alice had her secrets and that she didn't know the full extent of her ability to 'borrow' Sigil power. But she couldn't just watch her friend jump into unknown danger.

"I have some backup plans don't worry." Alice reassured with a smile as she pointed the pouch on her hip.

"Trust me Ria, I don't plan on throwing my life away without taking down the Zenia family. I held out for 10 years, I'm not going to stop now."

Hearing this, Ria was silent.

Alice was similar to Allura. Having spent two weeks with Alice, she understood that Alice was just as stubborn and if she wanted to change her mind, it was going to be difficult.

"Fine. But give me a spare vial. If you need speed to get out of danger, my blood would be best, no?" Ria smiled.

Making a cut on her arm, Ria drained her blood into a vial before drinking some healing blood to stop the bleeding.

"Stay safe."

"You too." Alice smiled, receiving the vial of blood and storing it in her pouch.

Turning around, she activated her first Sigil and jumped to the next roof while using her threads to help her slow down her fall.

She was currently dashing through the Slums while trying to pick up the scent of the blood. After coming in contact with the main source in the sewers, she was now homed in on the smell and noticed that it was prevalent above as well.

'Whoever left the blood behind had already visited slums. If I want to catch the source, I need to track down a fresh scent!' Alice thought to herself.

*BANG!!!!

Bursting through some wooden fences, a half beast appeared as its eyes full of madness locked onto Alice. It had a wide grin on its face with countless thorns acting as teeth.

Slamming its hand against the walls, vines erupted out in an attempt to kill Alice but she was prepared. With her main target being those who seemingly have ties with the Scholars in the Zenia family, she wasn't about to slow down because of a beast!

In one swift motion, she activated her bracelet and turned it into a blade while slicing her arm, allowing it to feed off her blood.

With the edges of the blade coated in her blood, a Sigil appeared on her face as the blade exploded into a violet flame that tore through the vines without any issue.

"I'm sorry for what I must do but you're not slowing me down." Alice apologised coldly as she cleaved up with the blade, tearing the beast in half while the flames consumed its body.

The power of the flames seemed to grow in strength as their goals had aligned! All the flame wanted was to eradicate the filth that spawned from the Abyss while Alice was willing to cut down anything that blocked her path!

With this mutual goal in mind, controlling the flames had become far easier as she was able to extinguish the blaze so that she didn't leave behind any evidence of the purple fire.

Continuing through the Slums, she noticed the smell getting stronger as the trail seemed to have been made not long ago.

Alice could feel her mind becoming sharper as she locked onto this scent. Her senses were enhanced to their limit as it seemed as though the world had become clear to her. Despite not seeing the beast, she could feel a gaze locking onto her back.

Flicking her finger, she twisted her body and slashed her thread behind her while having it be coated with her blood. Slicing the beast in half, Alice continued to chase down this scent.

'It's leading out of the city.' Alice thought while narrowing her eyes.

Glancing at the city wall, she turned her blade into a hook before throwing it towards the top and using it to climb up. Landing on the battlement, Alice closed her eyes and focused on her sense of smell.

Within this darkness, a crimson trail slowly manifested as Alice understood that this was the scent she had been following!

Opening her eyes, she jumped down and dashed into the forest and noticed a group of unconscious guards near a sewer exit.

'The tracks are fresh. They're not far away.'

Hiding herself behind the tree trunks, Alice made her way through the forest and noticed a shadowy figure holding up a guard by the throat.

"Oh? One of the rats actually survived going against Tasia?" The figure smiled as he snapped his head towards Alice.

Realising her cover was blown, Alice slowly walked out of her cover with a frown.

Using Cayla, she noticed that he possessed 5 Sigils.

'Depending on what happens, I might be able to win this fight.' Alice thought to herself as she could smell the distinctive scent of the Abyss Blood on his body.

"Were you the one who smeared the blood on the wall? Where did you get that formula?" Alice asked while adjusting her grip on the dagger.

With her spare hand, she held the vial of blood belonging to the five star Hunter she killed.

"Is that how you tracked me down? I'm pretty sure I didn't leave any tracks behind." The figure wondered as he threw the corpse to the side.

"Now, I believe you can be reasoned with. Shall we do a little trade?" He laughed while sinking into his own shadow and manifesting above Alice on a tree branch.

"What kind of trade?" Alice asked while jumping back.

There was something about this man that sent shivers down her spine. She found his present abhorrent and every part of her body rejected the existence of this man. Just looking at him made her want to throw up in disgust.

"A simple one. Information for information. My contract with my client doesn't prevent me from obtaining information through trading with their enemies." He explained while hanging upside down using his legs to hook himself to the branch.

"What kind of information do you want? And what makes you think I can provide you with the information you need?" Alice questioned while slowly circling the man.

She noticed a group of unconscious scholars next to the guards. But unlike the guards who are death, they were still breathing.

"They're just unconscious. I wanted to talk to the rat that survived Tasia privately after all." He reassured while jumping down.

"What I want to know... Is about your friend who survived the Ritual of Starvation."

Before he could continue, Alice pointed her dagger at him.

"Never."

"Now now, don't be so quick to reject my offer. I have other ways of gathering information after all." He shrugged while snapping his finger.

Shadow chains erupted from her shadow as Alice reacted immediately and bent her body to the side, dodging the chains.

Right now, she was in a state of heightened senses and Abyss power was no exception.

Adjusting her grip, she swiped up with her dagger and cut the chains apart.

Pausing in surprise, the man didn't think a two star Hunter could actually break his chains.

'Her power shouldn't allow this... Is it her weapon? It's not a material I'm familiar with...' He narrowed his gaze as his curiosity was piqued.

'Should I test her out a little?' He mused to himself as he could find out information regarding the survivor later down the line. Right now, he wanted to know more about this woman who could break his chains without any difficulty.

Crossing his arms, he tapped his finger down as countless spears shot up from the ground.

Realising the time for talk was over, Alice jumped back and adjusted her dagger into a blade and dashed towards the figure.

*SHATTER!!!

Breaking the spears apart, she noticed that they transformed into droplets of ink.

'Ink?' Alice frowned as her initial expectation was that he was using shadows. But this was clearly different to what Kaden could do.

Sensing danger to her left, Alice bent her body back and avoided a thin blade of ink that cut off a small portion of her hair.

Having missed its initial target, the blade sunk itself deep into the tree trunk and slashed the tree in half.

'I can still deal with this for now!' The speed of these attacks, while fast, were still slower than what she had to experience from the Maiden!

Stomping down, Alice was about to dash forward when she could feel herself begin to sink as eight long legs made from ink erupted around her.

Without hesitation, she used her thread and coated it with her own blood. Twisting her body, she swiped towards one of the legs, cutting it in half and using the gap to escape.

"!!!"

Even though his intention was to simply trap her, the trap should've had more than enough power to hold her back. Even if he was overestimating her.

"Seems like I've underestimated you despite trying my best not to. Shall we make this more interesting?" He chuckled while clapping his hands.

From the shadows around the forest, creatures made from the same ink appeared as Alice glanced around her and frowned.

'If I use the Hunter blood, I NEED to make sure I can kill him. For now... This should suffice.'

Taking a deep breath, Alice sliced her arm with her blade and coated it in a violet flame.

Chapter 152 - 152: Tracking Down The True Culprit

Igniting her blade, Alice watched as the creatures immediately backed off in fright before baring their fangs at her.

She could sense the flame's will, it's desire to burst forth and run rampant!

'I will be your catalyst of destruction. So burn, burn to your hearts content!'

*ROAR!!!!

Erupting with joy, the flame on her blade seemed to have been injected with a dose of vigour as Alice charged towards the closest beast and slashed down.

*BANG!!!

Crashing down with new found might, the flame evaporated the beast in an instant as Alice twisted her body and slashed towards the next target.

However, this was all just a warm up. Her true target was the hooded man who was watching everything unfold. Even now, he was only using two Sigils to match her power. While he was still looking down on her, she was going to capitalise on this chance!

'I bet I can do it properly. I have full control over my flames at this moment. It's power, mine to command.' Alice thought to herself as she closed her eyes for a moment.

She knew her current state was strange. Her senses have been heightened to a state they've never been before. The way she could track the man down using the scent of Abyss Blood. Her control over her powers and the way the fire was reacting.

The conditions are perfect!

Snapping her eyes open, Alice stabbed her sword into the ground as she allowed it to siphon as much blood as it wanted from her body!

Activating her second Sigil, a tsunami of violet flames erupted out with Alice in the centre. The Abyss was dyed in a brilliant violet with the creatures being caught unaware.

"What the..." Backing off in surprise, the man could feel his control over his ink beasts wavering as something was interfering with his connection.

Glancing up at the pillar of flames, an unsettling feeling emerged in his heart. He didn't think a two star Hunter could invoke such a feeling from him yet here he is, worrying about his safety.

Snapping his fingers, all of the researchers were submerged into the ink before the flames could take them while he himself prepared to find some cover.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?" Alice's voice rang out from within the flames as the man glanced back and was surprised by Alice's appearance.

Her hair fluttered wildly behind her as a mix of lightning and flames twisted around her body. Within these flames, dark shards could be seen, slowly condensing above Alice's head to form a broken crown with countless splinters floating around the main body.

Several motes of lightning appeared around Alice as it gathered into her body, this was the effect of Ria's Sigil!

*BANG!!!!

The sound of lightning roared out as the flames were split in two from the sheer speed Alice was demonstrating.

Appearing behind the man, Alice gritted her teeth while condensing an orb of fire in front of her palm! She had to be careful with where she aimed the attack as it could erupt into the city if hse wasn't careful.

'Guide the flames to form a sphere. Allow it to manifest the full extent of its power and compress it to the limit.' Alice thought to herself as the violet flames understood its task.

It had already experienced the skill Nova Core!

With it now cooperating with Alice, the effects began to show as the violet flames started to burn a bright white as she slammed her palm into the man's back, activating the skill!

*BANG!!!!!!

A torrent of blinding white flames roared out as the forest immediately dried up and began to burn without coming into contact with the fire.

The land trembled as the stream of fire soon disappeared, revealing the sheer destruction it had caused with a large portion of the forest becoming charred and devoid of life.

Meanwhile, Alice had been sent stumbling back from the recoil of the skill but her body was in better condition compared to the first time she had used it. After all, she wasn't fighting against her flames to activate the skill, it was a product of their cooperation.

Taking a deep breath, Alice could see that there were no remains left of the man and sighed out in relief.

While she was unable to gather much information from him, the fact that he knew Ria was a survivor of the Ritual was enough for her to be wary of him.

Collapsing on the floor, Alice could feel Ria's power leaving her body as that attack had taken everything from her. She wanted to make sure he was dead after all.

"I suppose I should go back now..." Alice muttered.

"Go back where?"

"!!!" Widening her eyes, Alice froze up in shock as she was sure she had landed that attack without fail.

"Heh heh... When I made this clone, I didn't expect it to suffer such a defeat. I must say, that attack of yours, reminded me of a powerful Hunter from the past." He laughed. His voice sounding exhausted as Alice noticing he was missing most of his torso with it barely holding on due to the ink.

Kneeling in front of Alice, he grinned while inky blood poured out of his mouth.

"Such power, such raw talent. Only at two Sigils too... For your efforts, I will grant upon you a seed of knowledge. A hint, behind the parasite. Think about why the heart blood is the purest blood you can get from an Abyss Beast. That is your hint.

"Now... A question of my own. Do you know the name... Ayr?" He asked, narrowing his eyes with a sly smile.

Upon hearing the name spoken from his mouth, Alice widened her eyes, unable to utter a word back.

But despite not answering, the man got what he wanted and let out a laugh.

"The woman is not dead! Hahahahaha! I wonder how much she must have suffered to live to this day. To think the old witch would still dream of her home... Amusing. A trade has been completed. Information for information." The man chuckled, gazing deep into Alice's right eye before turning into a puddle of ink that seeped into the ground.

Sitting motionlessly, Alice stared silently at the puddle before sighing out laying on her back.

"Shit..." She muttered.

'He has a connection with the Zenia family and Allura... But who is he? He knows about Ayr. Is he as old as Allura? And his hint on the parasites... It has something to do with the heart blood. Is there a connection between heart blood from a beast and the strange veil I saw on the heart?' Alice thought to herself, her mind busy from the information she has received.

However, now was not the time to sit down and rest.

Before landing her final attack, the man had taken the Scholars away so she was unable to interrogate them regarding their experiment in this city.

Standing up, Alice made her way back to the city as the adrenaline left her body, allowing fatigue to overwhelm her.

As she climbed up the city walls, she noticed the City Lord hovering in the air as he was still in his resonance form. Raising one of his arms, he made a cut in the air as a rift appeared above Blackrock City. Countless blades could be seen as killing intent descended upon the city.

Without saying anything, he swiped down with his hand as blades rained down upon the city.

Each blade could crash down on a beast, slashing it in half, creating a small crater from the force of the blade.

Seeing countless blades rain down on the city, Alice understood that everything was now under control.

Sitting down, she noticed Ria was running around looking for her and decided to throw a ball of violet flames into the air to notify Ria.

As expected, Ria noticed the flames and rushed towards Alice's location.

"Alice! Are you okay? What happened? Are you hurt? Did you use Allura's skill again?! Who did you fight?" Ria asked as it was hard not to notice the massive attack that Alice had released while she was fighting.

"Yeah I'm fine. I'm not hurt, just tired. And yes, I used Allura's skill since I was against someone with five Sigils. I don't know their name but I know that they have a connection with my old family as well as Allura." Alice sighed.

"They have a connection with Allura?"

"Mnm. They mentioned her old home and sounded like they're just as old as Allura." Alice nodded as Ria fell silent.

"Well thankfully we can ask the City lord to have the Underground ask Allura to contact us as soon as possible. There's a lot to tell them." Ria sighed as she sat down next to Alice.

"Speaking of the City Lord, he might want to know what I found out. The man said that the parasite has something to do with the heart blood. Or at least the heart blood is a hint to figuring it out."

"Heart blood? Does it have something to do with the strange energy you found on the heart?" Ria asked. Seeing Alice nod, Ria scratched her hair and sighed heavily.

"Arg! This is too much for me. What the hell is even going on with the Abyss? It's been fine for years then all this weird crap is just happening all at once." Ria groaned while Alice had a slight idea on what might be the cause.

Cayla's awakening.

"Well we can deal with that later. For now, I could kill for a drink. I hope the inn wasn't damaged or else my precious mead is going to go to waste." Alice lamented as Ria rolled her eyes.

"You should really cut down on drinking so much you know? I know you're not getting drunk but still."

"But it's tasty..." Alice pouted.

As the two were talking and taking this time to rest up, clean up of the city had already began as guards that were uninjured could be seen helping out with rescuing those buried under debris as well as carrying away the injured.

Civilians were advised to either stay in their houses or go to the shelters as they had to clean up the streets to ensure the Abyss Blood didn't affect the civilians.

Despite the battle ending, Martial Law continued for two days while they cleaned up the streets but was lifted on the third day. On this day, Alice had also received the weapon she had asked for from the blacksmith.

Chapter 153 - 153: Bloodflame Blade

The blade was delivered to her room along with a note that was attached to the sheath.

It was a simple note that merely stated the name of the blade, the materials it was made from along with the name of the blacksmith, Oscar.

'The name of the blade stayed the same, Bloodflame Blade. But he's adjusted it so that it can better accommodate the fire from my Sigil.' Alice thought to herself as Oscar made sure to warn her regarding the power of her flames.

As he doesn't know the full capabilities or how strong it could get, she needed to be careful with how much power she channelled through the weapon or else the violet flames could overpower the materials and cause it to break apart.

With this in mind, Alice couldn't help but wonder what her main weapon, the Obsidian Retort was made from. It was able to take any shape she willed, drained her blood to empower the edge and was able to withstand the heat and power of her fire without issue.

Not even the threads in her gauntlet were safe despite their impressive elemental resistance.

Putting down the letter, Alice glanced at the weapon that was leaned against her bed. Despite being hidden in its sheath, Alice could sense the dangerous aura the weapon was radiating as she placed her hand on the handle of the blade.

She could immediately feel a connection as black and red mist started to seep through the gaps of the sheath.

'It's excited...' Alice thought to herself. She didn't know if the blade truly had a conscience or if it was just her own mind playing tricks with her but it felt as though it was 'alive' in her hand.

Pulling the blade out from the sheath, she held it against the light and marvelled at its appearance.

Bandages wrapped around the grip of the blade and there were no longer a guard separating the blade from the hilt. A single edged obsidian blade emitted a dark aura as black and red flames danced upon the edge.

Looking at this sword, it looked as though it was a fang of a malevolent beast dug out from the deepest pits of the Abyss.

"Bloodflame Blade huh?" Alice muttered with a smile as she made a small cut on her arm and fed the blade some of her blood before activating her second Sigil.

A connection was formed between the two flames as the Bloodflame Blade surrendered itself to be used as a catalyst for the violet flame, allowing it to manifest more power without burdening Alice.

Waving the sword around to get a better feel for the blade, Alice smiled in satisfaction as this was a good alternative to her main weapon.

Having a bracelet that could shift forms at will was far too eye catching and it would only serve to draw too much unwanted attention.

At least with this weapon, she could redirect people to the blacksmith who made it.

Fixing the sheath to her belt, Alice sheathed the blade away as she stepped out of her room.

During the time they were resting, they waited for an audience with the City Lord as he had been busy dealing with the cleanup of the city. With the Scholars and main culprit missing, the best they could do was make sure the parasite didn't spread while repairing the damage done to the city.

They had received news that Kallus was ready to see them whenever they are ready.

"Seems like you're happy with the weapon." Ria grinned as she noticed Alice testing it out in her room.

"Yep. Feels nice in the hands and lets me use my second Sigil with less hassle." Alice nodded. There was another benefit to the battle she had with the unknown man a few days ago. There was now a mutual understanding between her and the violet fire.

While she was still lacking in complete control, it was now easier to wield the flame. Almost as though it had accepted her after she proved her capabilities.

"Honestly, I don't want to imagine what else you can do if you master those flames. The damage you did to the forest is... Well, let's just say a lot of the guards were baffled by how it appeared." Ria laughed as people were too preoccupied with the outbreak of beasts within the city that very few checked up on the aftermath of Alice's fight.

"It should remain that way. Oh before I forget." Alice grinned and jogged back into her room. Grabbing her bottle of mead, she gave the glass a light kiss and placed it in her jacket.

"Jeez... At least you're not getting drunk. But that mead is practically your treasure now." Ria shook her head while Alice shrugged.

"I don't tell Allura about your recent gambling and you don't tell her about my drinking." Alice bargained.

". . . deal."

Giving Alice a high five, the two made their way out of the inn and towards the castle.

There were two things they needed to find the City Lord for. The first was the second half of Alice's reward. The drinking flask for her mead.

The second was to get some help in finding the Underground. They had looked around the city but failed in finding anything regarding the organisation.

Upon arriving at the castle, they noticed Elyn waiting for them as they understood that they must've found out that the two of them were on their way.

"The City Lord is waiting for you in his office. Please follow me." Elyn smiled as she guided the two to the office.

Upon opening the doors, she gestured for them to enter and closed the door behind them.

This was a meeting between the three of them so there was no need for her to be here.

"Pardon me for the long wait. There were more troubles than I had originally anticipated for the cleanup. I had not expected them to make so many false rooms in the ruins underground." Kallus smiled while turning to face the two.

"Now I must thank you two for your services. Without you, this might've taken longer than expected and the damage done would be far more than what had occurred. So how can I help you today?" Kallus smiled while sitting down on his chair.

"I'm just wondering if my flask is ready." Alice shrugged, causing Ria to choke on her words as she was planning on exchanging more pleasantries before getting onto the main topic.

"Of course. In fact, I had it prepared for this meeting. This flask is more than enough for you to carry roughly 5 bottles worth of fluid. Naturally, there are better flasks but this is the best I can get my hands on for the time being." Kallus sighed while opening one of the drawers to his desk.

Removing a box from the drawer, he placed the flask on the table. It was a simple metal flask with a chain hanging around the neck. As for its size, it was the size of Alice's hand.

"Thank you for the flask, sir." Alice grinned and pulled out her bottle of mead. Without waiting another moment, she started to fill the flask with her alcohol while Ria could only sigh.

"If you don't mind me asking sir, what happened to the woman you were fighting? She seems to be connected to both the Cult of the Eclipse as well as the parasites that were found in the bodies of those affected." Ria asked curiously.

Considering the fact that he reappeared in the city soon after, she could only assume the woman had been dealt with. If so, he must've gotten some information from her.

"I'm afraid she managed to escape. Her only goal was to stall me so that her partners could escape out of my notice as I had to bring my full power against her. With me focusing on the fight, I was unable to keep an eye on the city, a failure on my part. But yes, she is connected to the Cult as she is currently a Bishop in their hierarchy." Kallus explained as he leaned back.

"Meaning this outbreak was not a simple sacrifice but rather a small part of a wider plan. One that has enough importance for them to have a Bishop overlook the operations. Had I been successful in capturing her, I would've gotten more information out of her."

Hearing this, Alice paused for a moment before remembering the words the figure had told her.

"I managed to get some information out of someone before they disappeared. They said this outbreak was not just to try turn people into shards. A hint they gave was heart blood. There should be a connection between this experiment and why heart blood is so pure in the Abyss." Alice recounted.

Furrowing his brows, Kallus was silent before sighing.

"I will relay this to some researchers. Hopefully they can decipher what this means. If I get any news, I will have the Hunter's Guild send you a letter."

"Ah! Speaking of letters, can you help us out with the Underground? We tried looking for them in this city but they're nowhere to be found. We wanted them to have my grandfather and Alice's teacher, Allura, contact us as soon as possible." Ria cut in as Kallus nodded his head.

"Alright. The Underground is a little difficult to find in this city as the 'underground' is used for the sewers as well as old ruins. But I will get into contact with them. Do you have other matters to attend to in this city or are you leaving? The Martial Law has been lifted with the cleanup being sorted." He asked curiously.

"We're going to find a carriage to Isilvaria for now. We have made quite the detour on our journey so going to Isilvaria will help us get our bearings again." Ria laughed.

"There are many merchants journeying out of this city now that the Martial Law has been lifted. I'm sure you can find a spot as their guard."

With their talks now over, Alice and Ria bid the City Lord farewell as they left the castle.

All they need to do now was to collect the rest of their belongings and find a carriage in the stables.

Chapter 154 - 154: Scarlet Winged Monarch

With all of their belongings now packed up, Alice and Ria decided to do one last round of shopping before leaving. As they were going to be travelling for quite a while, especially with how much of a detour they took, they needed some clothes to change into in case their current outfit got damaged.

For Ria, she decided to buy some eastern clothing consisting of a sleeveless kimono, her lightning gloves, a long skirt that was split on the side for leg movement, and a pair of boots. Not only that, Ria had also bought some hair ties to tie up her hair into a ponytail, while Alice decided to let her hair loose and flow freely.

Her outfit choice mainly consists of dresses and large off-shoulder jackets.

With the two of them spending their coin earned through gambling on clothing, they now had 35 gold worth of travel money left, almost what a normal family would earn over the course of four weeks.

"If we can get hired as a guard, then we can save more of our funds. If not, we'll have to set aside emergency funds for the rest of the journey," Ria muttered.

"Can we set aside some funds for drinks?" Alice asked while enjoying her bottle of mead. Since the flask was now full and she still had 2 bottles on the side, she decided to drink them now so that she didn't have to carry them.

"Depends on how much we can earn. But we'll definitely have to cut down on how much you spend on mead if you still want to buy equipment for hunts," Ria shrugged since hunting equipment was expensive.

If they wanted the right Abyss Blood along with fighting equipment, they needed to start saving money or else they won't be able to buy what they needed. Some of the harder hunts require specific tools.

With her grandfather procuring what they needed for their previous hunts, they never had to earn the money to purchase these tools. Had it not been for her grandfather, the fights would've been borderline impossible. For Alice, the Maiden's hypnotic abilities would've taken her over.

For her, she wouldn't have been able to deal enough damage to the Leviathan to grant enough contribution for the Sigil.

'I'll be aiming for my fifth Sigil later while Alice will be going for her third. Knowing Alice, she'll probably go for something crazy strong, so we'll need to get the right equipment once we have a target,' Ria mused to herself while keeping the gold in her pouch.

"We also need funds to access libraries and buying bestiaries to learn about weak points," Ria sighed as there was too much to buy.

"I should probably think about getting my third Sigil then. We can't be paired up for certain hunts, right? The guild wouldn't let us." With Ria getting her license as a four-star Hunter and Alice being two stars, the Guild wouldn't let Ria take certain hunts out of concern for Alice's safety. Hence why, if they wanted to earn money fast, Alice would need to start thinking about her third Sigil.

"We don't need to rush for Sigil. Two-star hunts are still profitable, and we can just take the commissions available to us. It's also better to ask Allura if there are any beasts that'll suit you for your third Sigil," Ria shrugged as they made their way to the stables.

"True. But I actually have a few beasts in mind for my third Sigil." Hearing this, Ria paused in surprise.

"Oh?"

"For my third Sigil, I want something that can further enhance my control over blood and use it offensively without needing to invoke my flames. It benefits me in two ways. The first is that it gives me more options to spread the flames.

The second is that depending on the beast I choose, I will be able to heal myself without continuously drinking healing blood," Alice explained as healing was her main issue right now.

She is able to solve it to a certain degree as her second Sigil will stop blood loss and seal up the wound, but it does not replenish what is lost.

"I see... To be fair, your flames are already crazy strong. Especially when you use the skill you learned from Allura. What you lack right now is survivability. I'm not really lacking in survivability since I'm a frontline fighter anyway," Ria shrugged.

'There are certain beasts that are hard to come across. But if I can get my hands on them, my strength as a three-star Hunter would be hard to beat.' Alice mused to herself as she recalled some of the beast blood she had to ingest back in the Zenia prison.

With her new flame in mind along with her current plans going forward, it's safe to say that certain combinations would be undeniably strong if gained in Sigil form.

The combination that Alice was ideally aiming for was to gain the Sigil belonging to the Scarlet Winged Monarch, a fearsome beast whose blood allowed the user to regenerate as long as they continued to fight and wound their opponent.

It was a passive effect that occurred when the user came into contact with blood, and in her case, when she was stuck in the prison, it allowed her to gain unbelievable tenacity.

Had this blood been safer to use, the Zenia family would've no doubt changed the formula within the collar. It wasn't an issue of side effects but rather the difficulties that followed in trying to subdue Alice.

'If I can get my hands on that Sigil, I should be able to fight for much longer without worrying too much about my injuries.' She had already seen the form of the beast within her mind.

A nightmarish spawn from the deepest pits of the Abyss, a creature who walked on two legs covered with twisted strands of flesh. Two tattered wings protruded from its back as layers upon layers of muscle pulsed beneath its leathery skin.

Embedded upon its skin were countless yellow eyes decorating the surface of its infernal visage while obsidian horns and crimson barbs coated its spine down to the tail.

She didn't know the difficulty of this beast but just staring at its shadow caused shivers down her spine.

Alice knew that if she wished to hunt such a beast, she NEEDED to know everything there is to know. Going into this fight blind would be akin to suicide.

"What about you? Have you thought about your fifth Sigil?" Alice asked, but Ria shook her head.

"I was thinking about it, but I want to gain more control over what I have right now. There are still many avenues of power I haven't explored yet, and my combination of Sigils should allow for far more than what I've demonstrated. Didn't Allura say? The key to a Hunter's success comes from the mindset. I need to think outside of the box more." Ria grinned.

She was more than a match for the current four-star Hunters, but she hasn't met the true geniuses in the world just yet. Only once she has fought talented Hunters beyond her comprehension could she truly say she's done everything she could as a four-star Hunter.

"Anyways, let's not dally any longer. We still need to see if there are any merchants going to Isilvaria." She sighed as she couldn't help but think about how much it was going to cost.

There was only so much gambling the arena allowed before realizing they weren't going to defeat Ria and subsequently banned her from competing as she won too much money from them.

With limited funds and prayers, the two entered the stables and started to ask around for people journeying to Isilvaria.

The difficulty with this request lies in the sheer distance between Blackrock and Isilvaria. Not only that, but some are also uncomfortable with the current situation in the free city where no religion dominates.

Even Cult members belonging to the Eclipse could be walking out in broad daylight, and for those that believe in the Sun as well as their recent experience to the outbreak, they are less than enthusiastic regarding the city.

The only reason why the city continues to exist despite the three religions disliking one another is due to the agreement upheld where certain cities are designated as 'free'. There are multiple 'free cities' which allow all three religions to access, trade, and inhabit without difficulties, and those who disturb the peace are punished.

"The agreement for the existence of the free cities is one of the first cases of the Law of Agreement being used on a larger scale. And even to this day, they abide by the law. No religion will lay their hand on these cities." Ria explained while they continued to look for a travelling caravan leading to the city.

"Do they ignore each other in the city, or do fights break out?" Alice couldn't imagine it being conflict-free as they could also just wait outside of the city to settle their grudges.

"There is usually at least one Custodian present in the cities. They act similarly to the City Lord but are solely focused on maintaining the peace. It's a collaborative effort between the three religions, so each city has three Custodians in the vicinity." Ria recalled as Gin had explained all of this to her before.

"I see, then I'm guessing even though it's a 'free city', those not affiliated with a religion still lose out somewhat."

"To an extent." Ria shrugged. There could never be an unbiased city when the leadership in the Abyss is based on power. With power, anything is possible. For the religions, they keep each other in check so none of them can step out of line.

Exploring the stables some more, they soon found a small caravan that was planning on transporting some wares to the city of Eldoria. It wasn't quite Isilvaria but wasn't far off as it was the closest they could find. As for the city itself, it had a heavy focus on Abyss Engineering and tools rather than Sigils.

Chapter 155 - 155: Ellie Wildheart

The small caravan consisted of two merchant parties and one main group that oversaw the safety of the caravan. The rest of the guards were either lone Hunters or mercenaries who were going the same way. Unlike the main group, these lone Hunters and mercenaries didn't get paid.

They were simply allowed to travel with the group for safety, and everything else was up to them to find. Of course, they could pay the merchants for food if they couldn't find any dinner for the night.

With Ria asking permission to travel with them, Alice walked around and familiarized herself with some of the faces, especially the main group of Hunters who were responsible for their safety.

'The Hunters and mercenaries that are just tagging along seem pretty weak. Most of them only have 2 Sigils at best,' Alice thought with a slight frown.

She didn't think that getting Sigils was that difficult as she could get a third Sigil right now by killing a weak beast.

For people who didn't want to risk their lives so much, getting Sigils through weak beasts was usually what they aimed to do.

'Or maybe me and Ria are the abnormal ones?' She mused. Considering the fact that neither of them was scared of fighting nor were they against the idea of risking one's life for the hunt, it was to be expected that what they thought as difficult was different from the common folk.

"Oh, shit... Is this how Allura feels?" Alice muttered as the realization settled in.

Crossing her arms for a moment, Alice sighed as she felt like she was becoming more like Allura with each passing day.

"Yuck... I hope I don't start smoking like she does." She groaned, sticking her tongue out in disgust as she remembered the smell of the smoke vividly. A smell she could not get used to at all.

Setting aside her realization, Alice glanced toward the group of five Hunters huddled around the main carriage while talking to one another with a smile.

They called themselves the Raven's Watch.

'The leader seems to have four Sigils while the others have three. I assume they all have resonances unless they're like Ria.'

Noticing her gaze, the leader of the Hunting group gave Alice a small wave as a sign of courtesy while Alice did the same.

Giving them one last glance, she noticed the weapons they were carrying. The leader wielded a crossbow with a frame made from what seemed to be ice. Countless small contraptions could be seen around the top as it acted as a loading mechanism of sorts but strangely enough, he didn't have any bolts on him.

"Crossbow, greatsword, rapier, weird circle blades, and a longbow. I guess his role is to oversee the battlefield when a fight breaks out."

With her observations now done, Alice made her way back to Ria while taking a sip out of her flask.

With a slow sip, she enjoyed the sweetness of the mead unfolding before a gentle warmth spread through her body. Shivering from the sensation, Alice let out a satisfied sigh as her gaze blurred, fully immersed in enjoying the taste.

"What the f*ck?"

Ria's voice snapped her out of it as she put the lid back on her flask.

"How did it go?" Alice smiled.

"It went well. The guy organizing all of this said that the trip should take roughly a week or so since there is a lot of distance to cover. We'll be responsible for our own food, but they can give us some bedrolls to sleep in when we're out camping. If we cannot get any food, it'll be 30 silver per meal. A tad expensive but better than starving." Ria shrugged.

Should the two of them fail to get any food, 60 silver per night was still within their budget.

"Eug... 30 silver?" Alice's smile froze as she heard the price.

She stopped herself from saying the second half of her sentence as she knew that Ria would definitely scold her. After all, 30 silver could buy her a decent bottle of mead.

"Yep. But it's merchants so what can you do about it? At least they're giving us some camping supplies so we don't sleep out in the wild like we did when we were lost."

"True... When do we set off?" Alice asked as quite a lot of people were now gathering around the caravan.

"We're waiting on a few extras then we'll be ready. Cedric said that it'll be one hour at most. After that, we're leaving regardless of who is left behind unless they pay a hefty fee for delaying everyone."

With an hour to spare, Alice took this time to check out their route of travel as the path to Eldoria does not lead them to Isilvaria. Once they arrive at Eldoria, they'll need to take another caravan southeast to reach their destination.

'We'll be camping out in the wilds for the majority of the trip but there are some towns and villages we pass by on the way to Eldoria.' Alice thought to herself while checking the map.

She assumed that they would be taking a few stops. However, as she continued to study the map, tracing her finger across the route, Alice couldn't help but notice a slight peculiarity.

'This path... They're purposefully going into the forest where there are beasts roaming around?'

As she was pondering to herself, Ria glanced over Alice's shoulders and looked down at the map.

"Is there an issue with the route?" Ria asked curiously. She noticed after her many interactions with Alice that she was extremely intuitive to the small details.

"We seem to be taking the more dangerous route. Wouldn't it be faster and safer to avoid some of these stops?" Alice asked, pointing at the path where it enters the forest. If this was merely delivering goods and selling wares to different parts of the Abyss, there would be no need for such a detour.

"Hmm... Now that you mention it, it does seem a bit strange. However, it's not like we're being hired to fight. In fact, we're the ones tagging along to the next city." Ria shrugged.

"Mnm, maybe I'm being too paranoid after everything that's happened." Alice sighed but decided to remain on the side of caution.

###

The hour passed quickly, and soon the caravan was ready to set off. With this being Alice and Ria's first proper caravan trip without the protection of Allura and Gin, there was an air of excitement buzzing around them as Alice's eyes wandered across the groups.

The different travellers, merchants and Hunters gathered their belongings and gear while the organizer, Cedric, sat in the main carriage, ready to lead the way.

As they left Blackrock City, they were greeted once more by the familiar sights of the forest. Alice and Ria, without a carriage of their own, sat with a diverse group of merchants, each looking as though they were from a different part of the Abyss yet gathered under the banner of being a merchant.

Their carriage was one of the more common-looking carriages, lacking the fancy accessories and foam padding the others had. But it was enough for the time being.

To avoid talking to the others inside the carriage, as she just wanted to enjoy the journey for now while keeping an eye out for any dangers, Alice took the initiative to sit on the back of the carriage where some of the luggage was placed.

Meanwhile, the Raven's Watch took their positions around the caravan, protecting it from all angles and kept their weapons beside them, ready to be drawn at a moment's notice.

Thankfully, the journey was rather uneventful as they were still within the vicinity of the city. Most of the dangerous beasts have learned not to approach the radius lest they want to get hunted down for their blood and flesh.

Time passed, and Alice would occasionally take naps on the back of the carriage. But the discomfort from sitting down for long hours on the unpadded carriage eventually took its toll, and Alice decided to walk for a while in order to relieve the pain in her behind.

She noticed that most of the merchants were now sleeping in the carriages while drivers continued to steer. The leader of the caravan, Cedric, was wide awake and making sure nothing went wrong.

"Hey~ Are you not tired? I'm surprised you're taking a walk while everyone is sleeping?" A calm but cheerful voice called out as Alice glanced back and saw a Hunter belonging to the Raven's Watch.

"Butt hurts from sitting down too long. Figured a walk would help me out." Alice shrugged and admitted honestly.

"Ahhh, I get that. It was the same for me when I was first starting out, could never get used to the crappy seats they gave us. I noticed that you were looking at our group earlier when we were back in the city; are you curious about how Hunter groups work?"

"You could say that. I only ever travelled with my friend who's sleeping right now." Alice nodded as she couldn't deny that she was interested. She wanted to know how normal people acted and responded to being a Hunter.

"Well, for us, we decided to group up once we realized we fought well with one another. It's always safer to travel as a group, you know? I've been Hunting with these guys for about 3 years now." She grinned while walking with her hands behind her back.

"What was the three years like? Was it hard?"

"Hmm... naturally. We started as freelancers, fighting for jobs in the Hunter's Guild. Odd jobs, stray beasts that are getting too violent, and so on. It was only in our second year did we finally get a bit of recognition and now we're escorting caravans for some coin. We decided on the name Raven's Watch so that it's easier for merchants to hire us and recognize us.

Makes it sound more serious, you know?" She chuckled.

"By the way, my name is Ellie. Ellie Wildheart, and I'm the archer of the group." Ellie introduced herself as Alice seemed nice to talk to.

As their journey was going to be quite long, it was good to familiarize herself with some of the passengers.

"Alice, Alice Agnelia."

Chapter 156 - 156: Hunting For Dinner

As they walked, the two spent the entire time talking, with Ellie recounting some of their battles.

Unlike Alice and Ria, who relied on themselves to survive situations, Ellie's group often relied on strategies involving their entire party. It allowed them to take a safer approach and take down beasts that should theoretically, be much stronger than them.

'Ria went for absolute speed for survivability while I'm going for self-healing for survivability. It's a necessary part of our Sigil, as without it, we won't be able to hunt stronger beasts later. But for these people, they don't have the desire to go past high Sigils, so the risks they take are much lower,' Alice thought to herself, reaffirming Allura's lesson on the Hunter's mentality.

Only the truly dedicated and insane Hunters could reach the upper limit of human power.

'Since I already have 2 Anti-Hunter type Sigils, my next one should also be Anti-Hunter type to get my resonance. I know that Allura mentioned that there is a third stage of resonance. I need to be careful not to pick any Anti-Beast synergies.'

"By the way, I noticed that our route seems to diverge into a forest? If we go through the main path, shouldn't it be faster?" Alice asked, pulling out her map. Since she was talking to Ellie, she might as well see if they knew anything about this.

"Hm? Oh yeah, we're not just hired to safeguard the caravan. Cedric wanted to acquire some merchandise from that forest. Apparently, there's a special type of water that could be found in that forest, and it sells for quite a bit of money.

"The beasts in the surrounding area are rather weak, and they like to group up. With how many people we've got on our side, it shouldn't be an issue to collect some of the water. Naturally, once we get there, Cedric will ask if anyone else wants to help collect the water, as he'll purchase them off us when we collect them," Ellie clarified as she rummaged through her bag.

After a short moment, she pulled out what seemed to be the commission she received from the Hunter's Guild—a request for Sylvan Essence along with guarding the caravan to the next city.

"The pay is quite good too," Alice remarked, as the reward was 1 platina for the whole party.

'1 platina is around 100 gold for the average person, meaning that's 10 weeks' worth of earnings for one trip.'

"Yep. It's why Finn chose to take this quest," Ellie smiled while putting the commission sheet back in her bag. Finn was the leader of the Raven's watch, and their party was as follows:

Finn – Leader and strategist of the party.

Ellie – Archer.

Griffin – Frontline.

Kaida – Frontline support with the rapier.

Isabella – Assassin with the chakrams.

They all had secondary roles within the party, and Ellie played the part of healer.

She would handle the first aid and healing blood, while Isabella was the herbalist and alchemist.

She would give Ellie the needed materials if they were out in the wilds while procuring Abyss Blood for Hunts. Isabella made her own vials of blood for use rather than purchasing them from the stores, as it was far more expensive than doing it herself.

However, for rarer bloods or dangerous hunts, they would fork up the money for safety.

Hearing that Isabella dealt with Abyss Blood, Alice couldn't help but be a little wary due to her history.

"Ah, will you be okay with getting dinner once we set up camp? I know the meals here are way more expensive than the ones in the city. Of course, the quality doesn't match the price, sadly." Ellie asked in consideration.

"We'll be fine. We're actually planning on hunting some wild beasts for some food when we set up camp. It's what we've been doing when we got lost for two weeks. You just need to be careful with draining the blood cleanly, then cooking the meat thoroughly," Alice reassured.

Widening her eyes in disbelief, Ellie was speechless.

There was still a risk in eating wild beasts due to the Abyss Blood that was flowing through their veins. No matter how careful one was, it couldn't eliminate the inherent risk!

To eat wild beasts for two whole weeks was almost unthinkable for her.

"Well... I guess if you're lost for two weeks, you can't exactly help it, can you?" Ellie sighed, pitying them as she glanced at Alice's right eye and split hair.

Noticing this gaze, Alice simply smiled and stayed silent. It was better to let Ellie convince herself that these abnormalities on her body were a direct result of Abyss Blood side effects.

"You know... You don't have to hunt wild beasts tonight if you want. I can pay for your meal," she offered, but Alice shook her head.

"Don't worry. Plus, hunting wild beasts keeps the senses sharp. Let us stay on guard and ready for battle, even though we're just passengers," Alice chuckled.

'It'll give me a chance to test out the Bloodflame blade.' Alice thought to herself, caressing the grip of her katana.

The caravan's journey continued, and soon it was time for them to rest as Cedric announced for them to stop and set up the first camp for the night. With this being the first day of their journey, they wanted everyone to get comfortable first.

*Yawn~

Stretching her body, Ria scratched her hair as she still felt rather groggy from her nap while noticing that Alice was talking to Ellie.

"Alice~" Ria called out as Alice glanced back.

"Should we go hunting now? We'll need time to drain the blood if we want to eat early," she reminded while trying her best to wake up properly.

"Alright, I'll be right there," Alice nodded before turning to Ellie.

"I'll talk to you later. It's been a pleasure."

"The pleasure is all mine. Remember if you can't find anything, let me know; I'll be more than happy to pay for your meals," Ellie nodded while giving Alice a small wave.

Saying goodbye to Ellie for now, Alice made her way back to Ria.

"The other Hunters seemed to be preparing to Hunt for some food too, while the merchants and travellers are simply paying the price for a meal. We should set off now if we want to catch some easy prey, or do you want to go a little wild and find something bigger?" Ria asked curiously as Alice thought to herself for a moment before a grin crept up on her face.

"Let's go a little bigger. Plus, that means the others can have something to eat too if we're fast enough."

"So it's a time challenge then. Same as when we were lost?" Ria chuckled.

When they were lost, they had a competition they would host with one another to keep their senses sharp. They would see who could hunt a designated beast the fastest.

Naturally, Ria would hold herself back, as it would be unfair for Alice. She would limit herself to purely physical enhancement, while Alice was allowed to fight however she wanted.

Of course, she wouldn't use Abyss Blood to enhance herself, as this was just a fun competition between them.

"Whoever can bring something back first is the winner. We'll compete in the size of the kill and how clean the final blow is," Alice nodded as she laid out the ground rules.

They needed a clean kill so that the meat is actually edible. During one of their first hunts while being lost, Ria had used too much power, evaporating the meat in its entirety.

"Do you want a head start?"

"Don't mind if I do," Alice chuckled and turned around.

Without hesitation, she dashed towards the forest and activated her first Sigil.

*BANG!!!

Stomping down as hard as she could, she disappeared into the forest, surprising the Hunters who didn't think Alice would rush out so quickly.

Closing her eyes, Alice immersed herself in the feeling of the Hunt and smiled.

Back when she was training with Allura, she would flip a switch inside her mind and designate something or someone as the target for a Hunt.

It allowed her to ignore the fact that they were human and cut them down with brutal efficiency. A simple change in mindset when approaching the subject.

However, something had awakened inside her when she was tracking down the culprit during the battle in Blackrock City.

In this hunting state, her senses would reach an all-time high, and her reaction improved drastically. It was a sense of flow that she had never tapped into before.

While she couldn't reproduce the full effects of her state, the sensation was now open to her. She was still able to replicate a portion of the ability she had demonstrated.

Curling her lips into a wide grin, Alice let out a laugh as she used the tree trunks as a springboard to launch herself further into the forest.

Each jump would cause the wood to crumble inward from the force as she picked up some multitude of tracks within the forest.

There were several beasts roaming around, and considering the size of these tracks, they were only slightly bigger than her at best.

'Since Ria is giving me a head start, I'll aim for the biggest set of tracks.' Alice thought to herself as these tracks seemed different compared to the others. There was a distinct glow within the centre.

As she dashed through the forest, her ear twitched for a moment as she heard the sound of rapid movements to her right and understood that her quarry was trying to escape the range of her detection.

'Found you.'

Adjusting her direction, she jumped up to the branch and caught sight of her target.

The creature was covered in tough black skin with no traces of fur. Strange blue energy flared from each of its claws, leaving behind ghostly claw prints in the ground.

Seeing that it had been discovered, it slowly reared its head towards Alice as it took an aggressive stance, radiating with hostility.

The absence of fur revealed the contours of its body with powerful muscles wrapping around the bones. Its long tail whipped at the ground, cracking the air with a loud snap as it tried to ward Alice off.

"Lots of meat and muscles, you'll make for a nice dinner." Alice grinned, pulling her sword from the sheath as red and black flames danced on the blade's edge.

Chapter 157 - 157: Bloodflame Blade's First Hunt

In one swift motion, Alice unsheathed the katana and held it by her side. As the blade met the cold night air, it seemed to hum out in excitement as the flames flickered in the wind. The ethereal tune echoed in the silent forest as the beast could feel a sense of despair creeping up its back.

It kept an aggressive stance with its eyes not daring to stray away from Alice.

Silence ensued between the two as neither made a move.

Alice could feel her mind sharpening as her senses fully focused on the beast. The thrill of the hunt pumped through her veins as she activated her Sigils.

The gentle moonlight shone down from above, seeping through the gaps of the leaves as Alice spread out her arms and closed her eyes, basking in this feeling.

###

An unseen predator had appeared near its territory. A surge of bloodlust and killing intent washed over the forest and it had wanted to run but it was no use.

The intruder, a two legged figure with an unusual aura around her had already appeared near it.

The beast could sense an impending doom as she unsheathed a stunning blade that hummed with the song of destruction and malice.

It locked eyes with the intruder and knew that the moment it lost sight of her, it could spell its doom.

*BANG!!!!

With a heavy stomp, the woman shot from her location, swinging her blades with deadly intent. Flames danced forth from the blade as the creature jumped back, slashing its claws against the woman.

It managed to parry several attacks as the woman seemed unfamiliar with the weapon. However, she adapted to the situation, ducking to the side before twisting her body and letting out another slash.

By the time the beast had managed to jump aside and parry the slash with its own claws, the woman had disappeared.

There was an ominous crackle in the air as the beast started to panic. It had lost sight of woman but could still feel her gaze upon its figure.

A soft chuckle rang through the surroundings as bushes would rustle from the wind. It could not track her down at all as it felt like countless spectral beings danced through the forest, encircling it in a dance of death.

Sensing a burst of malevolent energy behind it, the beast howled in anger as it twisted its body and lashed out with the tail.

But upon seeing the thread holding up a dagger covered in flames, the beast knew the end drew near.

In the mist of its confusion, it heard a soft thud behind it and lashed out with its tail.

*BANG!

The beast's retaliation missed the mark as it was a simple branch that had been crushed under the attack. It could feel its mind cornering itself as fear took over. Taking several steps back, it howled out in defiance, putting up one last act to hopefully dissuade the attacker.

"It's late at night, don't cry so loud."

A soft voice echoed next to the beast's ear. Widening its eyes in panic, it rolled across the ground and clawed at the space behind it but the intruder was not there.

It was only after it had tried to retaliate did the beast notice the flaming blade pressed against its neck. Before the creature could let out one last cry, the blade dug deep into the flesh and separated the head from the body in one clean slice.

*Thud

Glancing up at the sky, the light in the beast's eyes faded away as its last sight of this world was of the moon.

###

Sheathing her blade, Alice took a deep breath and sighed out. The beast had surprising reactions and finding the opening for a clean kill was not easy.

She had to bait the beast into exposing its weak point before she could land the final blow.

However, with the beast now dead, her meal for the night had been secured. Taking a moment to survey her surroundings to make sure there weren't any more beasts nearby that could pose a threat to her, Alice grabbed the beast by one of its legs and started to drag it back to the camp while leaving the head behind for other beasts.

Meanwhile, Ria had just entered the forest and caught sight of the final attack that Alice had landed.

"Jeez, I wouldn't want to be on the receiving end of that sword." Ria remarked as that beast was rather sturdy to say the least. It was able to parry several attacks that Alice threw out yet still died to a single attack.

"Mnm, it's a good sword. Matches well with my fire. But since I got a clean kill, I suppose it's my win?" Alice chuckled, holding up the headless carcass.

"Yep. It's your win. Let's head back and start draining the blood. We got a bit of time to spare since you killed it pretty damn quickly." Ria smiled, pointing to the direction of the camp.

Making their way back, some of the Hunters were surprised to see Alice and Ria back so soon and with such a large quarry too.

With a beast this big, it would be enough to feed a whole party.

Naturally, it wasn't just the Hunters that were surprised by their speed and efficiency. Even the merchants were bewildered by how fast Alice had accomplished this task while Ellie was speechless.

It wasn't that long ago did she tell Alice that if they struggled with finding a beast to kill, she would cover for her meal.

With the beast now back at the camp, it was time to drain it of its blood so the meat doesn't go bad.

Laying the beast down in front of her, Alice made a small cut on her arm as she allowed her own blood to drip into the wound.

Closing her eyes, she focused her mind and activated her second Sigil.

The Sigil belonging to the Maiden of the Blood Moon allowed her to control blood at will. All Alice needed to do was to 'infuse' her blood into the target. With her target being a carcass, it was much easier to infuse and take control of all the blood within this body.

Little by little, the blood started to wiggle out from the wound and gather into an orb that floated above the carcass. She needed to drain all of the blood from the meat so that eating it would not have the risk of giving them side effects due to ingesting the blood.

As the orb of blood continued to grow above the beast, there were whispers between the merchants and Hunters but eventually they settled down.

The ability to control blood was not seen often as not many would choose this path. After all, the risks of gaining said ability was the concern over side effects of Abyss Blood.

Having seen Alice's eye and hair, they were convinced that this was the side effect of Alice choosing the Sigil.

Once the blood was drained, Alice took a deep breath and narrowed her eyes. She extended her hands, palms facing each other and started to exert greater control over the pool of blood that hovered before her.

As her hands inched closer to one another, the pool started to shrink as the outer edges seemed to crack and fracture yet retained its form.

With a final push, Alice clasped her hands together and the pool of blood was condensed into a small solid orb that could fit easily atop her palm.

Taking the orb, Alice placed it inside one of her empty vials and leaned back with sweat covering her forehead.

During their two weeks of travel, she started to use this method to substitute using large quantities of her own blood to ignite into flames.

As her blood had taken over, it was still able to invoke the violet flames but required her to compress the blood into an orb first. Unfortunately, she has not found a use for these orbs just yet as they proved to be difficult to utilize but she didn't give up on her experiments. Sooner or later, she will find a use for these orbs.

"Do you want to do the skinning and carving today or should I?" Alice asked curiously as she was feeling rather exhausted already.

"Since you hunted and drained the blood, I'll do the annoying job today."

However, just as Ria was about to borrow Alice's bracelet, she realised that using it in front of everyone may cause a bit of trouble.

But Alice had her covered. Grabbing her katana, she handed Ria the blade.

"You... Want me to use this to skin and carve the carcass?" Ria asked, unsure of Alice's plan.

"Yep. I mean it's sharp and it's the only knife we on hand." Alice shrugged nonchalantly as a blade was made to be used. She was simply using it outside of a hunt and in this case, to prepare their dinner.

Feeling her smile begin to twitch, Ria simply sighed and stared at the Bloodflame Blade. The fires upon its blade edge was silent as it seemed to also be in disbelief that its owner would actually degrade it into a mere butchering tool!

'I'm sorry.' Ria apologised as she began to skin and carve the meat, separating it into edible chunks that could be eaten while setting the parts that couldn't be used aside.

Once again, Ellie was speechless at their efficiency as Ria seemed to be experienced in preparing the meat.

Thinking about it for a moment, she decided to help out a little by giving them some spices that the merchants had offered to her.

"Would you like to have some spice with the meat? It should give it more flavour and make it more digestible." Ellie asked as Ria glanced back and nodded her head.

"If you don't mind. You can join us for the meal if you want." Alice offered as Ellie contemplated her options before shaking her head.

"It's fine, I have some food prepared for me already. It would be disrespectful to those that already made my meal." She declined and placed the spices next to Ria for her to use however she wanted.

Time passed quickly and soon Ria was done with the carving process. All that's left to do was to simply grill the meat and apply the spices.

Chapter 158 - 158: Isabella

With all of their preparations done, Ria started to grill the meat while Alice took a moment to rest and sat by their campfire.

Thanks to the spices that Ellie had given them, the delightful scent of the meat started to spread through the camp.

The fire crackled beneath the roasting meat as Ria took this time to offer a meal to those who wanted a portion.

Seeing how Ria was socialising with all of the Hunters that were part of this caravan, Alice couldn't help but chuckle. She was always the social type and even when they first met, it was Ria who reached out to her.

Just as Alice was about to eat her portion of the meal, she noticed a woman approaching her from the direction of the Raven's Watch.

It was Isabella, the woman who dealt with Abyss Blood within the group. She had long tousled blond hair and an aura of lethargy paired with her sleepy eyes. There was a sense of effortlessness around her yet the chakrams around her hips speak otherwise.

Despite her lazy aura and body language, there was a subtle 'sharpness' that she carried with each step.

Her attire was simple, consisting of leatherwear beneath a large cloak.

"Can I help you?" Alice asked as she was on guard against Isabella. She was someone who dealt with Abyss Blood so she couldn't easily bluff her way out of certain questions should Isabella ask them.

"Sorry for bothering you..." She muttered, her voice filled with the same lethargy that radiated from her body.

"I noticed how you drained the blood of that beast... Can I ask how it's done? And does the orb retain the properties of the original blood?"

"It's done through my second Sigil. It lets me hijack a blood source and control it to a certain extent but seems to be only useful on dead things right now. As for the orb... I'm not sure. I'm still experimenting with it right now, I don't know how pure it is and I haven't found a use for it yet." Alice replied as Isabella crouched down next to her and nodded her head.

"I see... Can I buy some samples from you? And what beast did you kill for the Sigil?"

Alice was caught off guard by the unexpected offer.

She didn't think that Isabella was interested in the blood orbs that she had created but considering she hadn't found any uses for them just yet, perhaps it was a good chance to get some hints.

"I can give you the one I just got right now. I don't need anything in terms of payment, just some research notes if you decide to experiment with these orbs. As for the beast that I killed, it was a Blood Widow."

Upon hearing the name Blood Widow, Isabella froze up as her eyes widened in a mixture of disbelief and doubt.

"A... Blood Widow?" She asked hesitantly as Alice nodded her head.

"Mnm. It was annoying to kill since I had to do a lot of training for it but the rewards are pretty worth." Alice shrugged.

". . . I see. But okay, I will give you some notes on these orbs once I'm done with them."

Handing over some samples to Isabella, Alice watched as she stepped away, seemingly still in shock that the target was a Blood Widow.

'I didn't tell her that it had ascended into a Maiden of The Blood Moon. It should be fine I think...' Alice mused to herself before focusing back on her dinner.

###

"Ah welcome back, how was it? Did Alice give you a sample of the blood?" Ellie asked, noticing Isabella's return.

"Yes she did. . ." Isabella nodded.

Seeing that her mind seemed to be elsewhere, Ellie tilted her head in confusion.

"Did something happen?"

"Your new friend... Her second Sigil belongs to a Blood Widow." Isabella answered as silence descended upon the Raven's Watch party.

Even Ellie froze up as they've encountered one in the past. Even after extensive preparation and countless weeks of research on the beast, it was still a hard-fought battle that had almost killed them. The hardest part of the battle was trying to resist the hypnosis effect the boss would radiate yet Alice was able to kill one and claim it as her Sigil.

Griffin, the frontline of the party, dropped in fork in shock.

"You're telling me that the girl over there killed a Blood Widow?" He asked hesitantly.

"She didn't seem to be lying." Isabella nodded.

"Well if she did, it explains how she managed to kill a Vor'thrak so quickly and brought it back to be cooked." Kaida sighed as he still remembered how nonchalant Alice looked bringing the corpse back to the camp.

The Vor'thrak was a dangerous three star beast that could break apart common weapons with ease. It was also hard to pin down the beast as its reaction and offensive capabilities are on the high end of the three star beasts.

"Do you think we can get her to help out with our commission then? With Vor'thraks being spotted, there's definitely going to be stronger beasts around the designated area." Finn, the leader asked as he was feeling a little wary with beasts that were stronger than what they expected appearing around the area.

"I mean... I can go ask her if you want me to." Ellie shrugged as Alice seemed easy to talk to.

"Let's ask if dangerous beasts keep appearing. If not, we should be able to deal with it ourselves." Griffin shrugged while picking up his dropped fork.

###

After finishing their meal, it was time to rest as everyone was given a bedroll for the night.

Finding a spot near their carriage, Alice stretched her body and yawned. The long travel followed by a hunt in the forest and the extraction of blood has taken a toll on her body. And with her barely taking a nap during the actual trip, she couldn't wait to rest her body.

"I'll take the first watch. You can sleep for now." Ria offered.

"Thank you~ Let me know when it's my turn." Alice replied, accepting the offer as she tucked herself into the bedroll and closed her eyes, dozing off to sleep.

###

[O' master of mine, you draweth near.]

Cayla's voice rang out through the darkness as Alice found herself in her own mind. The eye above the realm was opened albeit only slightly.

"Are you awake?" Alice asked curiously as she hadn't heard from Cayla ever since the hunt against the Maiden.

[I've merely been spurned from my slumber. I sense a relic or perhaps a ruin of the past. A deep connection to the Abyss. I can sense a tether linking to the depths but the path is not fully formed. If you desire... I can grant upon you a shard of my senses when you approach the tether.] Cayla offered.

". . . How dangerous is this tether? And how will it help me?"

[That is for you to judge mine master. Information is information. How you perceive that information is dependent on your goals. Perhaps the tether will grant you a boon or misfortune, I do not know. I'm merely stating that there is a tether nearby that links downwards into the depths of the realm. But there should be no danger placed upon thee as the tether is not a stable one.]

Contemplating for a moment, Alice nodded her head.

"Alright. I'll check it out if it's not too much trouble. Speaking of which, how familiar are you with Ayr and Allura's past?"

She wanted to find out some information of the strange figure if she could and with Cayla, she might be able to get a hint before Allura contacts her.

[I'm rather familiar.]

"Then do you know of someone who controls I think ink? And can make clones of himself. I'm not sure how strong he is but his clone has 5 Sigils. He spoke of Ayr and seems to know of Allura."

Silence.

There was a long pause as Cayla seemed to be gathering her thoughts.

[This... I do not know. Those who know of Ayr and Allura's connection are few and far between. But master mine, I must ask you to recall the interaction. Are you certain his 'clone' possesses five distinct Sigils?]

There was a strange sense of seriousness in Cayla's voice as Alice nodded her head.

"I'm sure it was five Sigils. That's why I thought it was weird. If he knew of Allura and Ayr, he must possess more. And those with more than six Sigils only show up as six for me right now."

[You are indeed correct master. For you see, while the boons of the Abyss do indeed grant the power to create a clone of thyself, a clone should not possess Sigils. The Sigils are markings that the Abyss grafts upon your body, a sign to say you've entered a contract with the realm.]

A clone does not possess that grafting even if it wields the same power as the source is still the main host of the body.]

[The power I grant upon you is not one that simply sees the Sigils but rather the contracts that people have formed with the realm itself. For a clone to possess Sigils meaneth this man has somehow discovered a way for the clone to act independently to the main host. I have no recollection of such a person and thus cannot help you with identifying this man.]

[However, I believe that you should inform Allura of such developments as soon as possible, mine master.]

Before Alice could reply, she could feel the connection between her and Cayla faltering. She knew that this meant Cayla was about to fall back to sleep as there was one last question on her mind.

The question regarding the heart blood.

"Cayla, last question. What is the heart blood? And why is it the purest blood that you can get from an Abyss Beast?" Alice called out.

[The heart. An organ wherein lies the engine of the body. Upon activating the Sigils or gaining a passive ability, thine blood has already become... Abyss Blood. 'Humans' merely struggle to convert the power of those in a similar state. That is to say, other 'humans'.]

With this final revelation, the connection between Alice and Cayla faded, leaving Alice alone in the silence of her mind once more.

Chapter 159 - 159: Late Night Training

'Upon activating the Sigils or gaining a passive ability, the blood has already become Abyss Blood... Does that mean once a person gets a Sigil they are already considered an Abyss Beast but in human skin?' Alice asked herself as she couldn't help but wonder if her strange state was linked to this.

The heightened senses, the bloodlust and the way her instincts warned her of danger.

It has surpassed the realm of ordinary humans.

Scratching her hair, Alice let out a deep sigh as she set in the empty void.

Cayla has now returned to her slumber and there was a faint mark on her hand.

It was different to the Sigil marks as it was something to help her track down the ruins.

'Not only that, but the guy I fought seemed to have made a whole 'new person' since his clones had Sigils. What could he be trying to do? Would Allura have an idea?'

But no matter how many questions she asked, Alice didn't get an answer and soon, she left the realm of her mind and enjoyed the silent slumber to ease her fatigued mind.

The night passed peacefully, and Alice was soon woken up by gentle nudges from Ria. It was her turn to keep the night watch and for Ria to get some sleep herself.

Sitting outside of the tent, Alice couldn't help but curl her lips into a grin as she pulled out her flask and opened the lip.

Taking a deep smell of the scent emanating from the flask, she shivered in anticipation.

As she was enjoying her drink while keeping an eye on her surroundings, she could see that several other Hunters were doing the same.

Even though they were travelling as a large group, they were still unfamiliar with one another and thus made their own arrangements.

Around the Raven's Watch camp, there was a miniature archer tower set up as Ellie could be spotted at the top, keeping an eye out on any distant threats. She would occasionally notch an arrow and fire it into the distance, warding off weak beasts that were getting too close to the camp without spilling blood.

Thinking about it for a moment, Alice decided to make her way over as it would be rather boring to spend the night drinking alone.

Approaching the archer tower, Alice gave Ellie a small wave before jumping up with ease.

"Yo! How's night watch going?" Alice asked with a smile while sitting down on the edge of the tower without care.

Leaning back, she lifted the flask and drank a mouthful of mead.

"Ehhh its alright. The number of beasts around the camp is more than expected but nothing too dangerous yet. If things get a little rough I'll wake up the others." Ellie chuckled as Alice nodded her head.

"Have you gotten some sleep yet? Keeping watch all night would be hard for you no?"

"Yes I have. Usually, it'll be Isabella who keeps watch all night due to her Sigil. It makes it hard for her to sleep hence why she's always tired. But today, she's been engrossed in her research with the blood orbs so I'm taking over for this shift." Ellie chuckled.

Raising an eyebrow in interest, Alice couldn't help but wonder what kind of Sigil would make it hard for her to sleep but if Ellie wasn't going into detail, it was probably something that was only shared between the party.

"Say, do you like drinking mead?" Alice asked, offering her flask but Ellie shook her head.

"Since I'm keeping watch right now, I don't want to dull my sensesahaha."

Nodding her head in agreement, Alice understood where Ellie was coming from.

"I don't mind doing a small competition though if you want. I have a spare longbow here."

"Oh?" Raising an eyebrow, Alice put her flask away and grabbed the bow that Ellie had offered.

Lifting it in front of her, Alice noticed the tension of the string was far stronger than what it seemed as it required her to activate her first Sigil to fully pull it back.

Despite how small Ellie's arms looked, they hid a surprising amount of strength behind it.

"So what kind of competition do you want to do?" Alice grinned as her fighting spirit ignited within her eyes.

###

Even though she said it was a competition, it was in fact more of a test. Their party had discussed that if the number of beasts continued to increase, they would ask for some help.

However, without seeing how Alice fought, it was impossible to judge how well they could cooperate. Hence the competition.

"Just beyond the main road, there are some Shadow Fang Serpents. Whoever can kill the most out of the group will win. We'll take turns take shots regardless of hitting or missing." Ellie explained as Alice nodded her head.

'The Shadow Fang Serpents are rather small and fast. It's quite difficult to hit unless you have great kinetic vision and talent or practice with the bow. Since she can take on hard hunts, she should have some experience with the bow and arrows.' Ellie thought to herself as this was just something she thought up of in the moment.

It wasn't a request from the party but if they do decide to ask Alice for her help, they would have more data to base her strength off of.

"Take turns huh? Can I make the arrows out of my own blood?"

"Of course. It is part of your Sigils after all." Ellie nodded.

Taking a step back, Ellie observed Alice's actions as she fixed her grip on the bow and made a small cut on her arm.

Blood oozed from her wound and formed an arrow that notched itself to the bowstring.

Just when Ellie thought Alice would begin to aim the bow, she released the arrow and watched it cut through the sky.

'I guess she's not that familiar with the bow. Maybe the alcohol is getting to her.' Ellie thought to herself as she walked up to the railing and glanced towards the group of Shadow Fang Serpents.

To her surprise, the blood arrow had pierced through three serpents that crossed the arrow's path.

"Was going for four but the fourth snake was pretty sharp. Noticed the arrow at the last moment and got away." Alice shrugged.

". . . How? How did you manage to lock onto all four and fire so quickly?" Ellie asked as she leaned in towards Alice.

'Is it a technique? Natural gift? Sigil power? If I want to perform as a archer I need this kind of power.' Ellie thought to herself as being able to find the best shooting course in such a short amount of time was practically godly in her eyes.

If she could even learn a fraction of this power she would be twice the archer she was before.

Even now, when in a battle, it takes too long for her to find a right shooting course without hitting her allies by accident.

"Ehh... It's just how my vision works and I instinctively shot towards what I thought was the right direction." Alice scratched her cheek awkwardly.

Hearing this, Ellie couldn't help but feel a little disappointed as this was the same as saying it was just talent.

"But you can usually predict a beast's movement so I'm sure what I did was nothing special. I just got a shortcut in performing the task." Alice reassured as Ellie could only sigh and nod her head.

"Okay, I have an idea. My teacher gave me a training task when I hunted the Blood Widow. While it's not used for archery, it should help out quite a bit."

'A training task? From her teacher? Maybe that'll contain a hint.'

"What kind of task is it?" Ellie asked curiously.

"It's simple. I will launch a variety of attacks using my blood. All you have to do is dodge them with your body. But since we're getting you to practice your bow, I'll change the spears to orbs for you. Your goal will be to hit multiple of them with one arrow with the least amount of prep time. You have to be on the move while you shoot as well." Alice chuckled.

'I've heard of this training before. It shouldn't be too difficult since it's just the standard training to navigate the battlefield.'

Ellie had experienced this kind of exercise before in the Hunter's Academy when she was younger. It was a task that every Hunter was expected to do as it massively boosts survival rates out in the field.

"Alright. Let me get ask Isabella for a favour while we try this training out." Ellie nodded.

It was just for a quick moment anyways. A simple training like this should be over in one round.

Climbing down from the tower, she made her way to the tent while Alice prepared the training ground.

Pushing aside the tent flaps, she could see Isabella still awake while experimenting with the blood orbs. Not only that, she had gathered a variety of strange contraptions around the orb as its form would twist and stretch with each second.

"Aren't you supposed to be keeping watch?" Isabella asked, not turning around.

"Yeah. But Alice wanted to do a quick training session for me so can you pause for a quick moment? It shouldn't take too long since it's just the standard evasion training." Ellie shrugged as Isabella sighed.

"If its just the standard evasion training why do you still want to do it?"

"Just out of curiosity. She said her master did one for her before she hunted the Blood Widow. I want to see what kind of training she'll provide. Plus, she mentioned using her blood so maybe you can get some hints for your experim-"

Before Ellie could even finish her sentence, Isabella was already on her way out while carrying her notebook.

"Why are you dawdling? Let's go, we're wasting time already."

Hearing this, Ellie couldn't help but chuckle and nod.

Making their way to the training ground that Alice had prepared, they noticed that Alice was making cuts on her arm while allowing her blood to drip onto the ground.

"Seems like you're ready." Alice smiled while glancing back.

"Yes I am. I'm ready to start whenever." Ellie nodded while Isabella took a step back so the two could have some space.

"In that case then let's begin." Alice grinned.

*BANG!!!!

In that moment, the oppressive aura of a malevolent beast exploded forth from Alice.

The cold hands of death grabbed hold of her limbs as Ellie realised this was no simple evasion training.

Chapter 160 - 160: Demonstration Of Allura's Training

"Wait wait wait!"

Ellie's screams could be heard as she frantically rolled to the side, barely managing to dodge the blood orb that was flying at her.

"What's wrong? This is several times slower than the training that my teacher gave me." Alice tilted her head.

She knew that Allura's standards were too extreme hence she scaled down the difficulty of the training.

Right now, there were a total of 20 blood orbs that were under her control. 15 would be responsible for attack while 5 would hover in predictable patterns.

Compared to the barrage that Allura presented to her, this was child's play.

Ducking down at the last moment, Ellie tried to prepare a shot when an orb charged in from the right side, knocking aside her aim and causing her to miss.

"This is too many attacks!" She cried out while taking a step back only to get hit by an orb from behind.

Once she was hit by one, a chain reaction occurred as she was unable to recover her posture to dodge the others.

Flicking her finger, Alice halted the orbs.

"Do I have to tone it down some more?" She asked, tilting her head in confusion while Ellie felt like she wanted to cry!

'This was toned down? It's like I'm getting attacked by a giant mob of beasts while trying to shoot something far away. How is this toned down?!' Ellie shouted in her mind.

"Urg... How am I supposed to even complete this?"

"It's honestly pretty simple. You just have to notice the pattern of movement and squeeze in between the attacks. Once you have that down, you just have to aim your bow and shoot." Alice scratched her hair.

It was just 15 orbs, most of them were rather slow and she had left Ellie plenty of gaps.

"How about... You do a demonstration for Ellie. An example of how it's done." Isabella suggested. She too was intrigued by how Alice dealt with this training.

"Hmm, you make a good point. Alright, watch carefully. It's going to be a bit biased since I'm controlling the orbs but I'll repeat the movement that I did for you."

Hearing this, Ellie nodded her head and stepped out of the way.

Flicking her fingers, Alice had the orbs repeat the motions that she had performed for Ellie and took a step into the barrage of attacks.

She navigated the storm effortlessly while moving as little as possible. Her steps were light but nimble, never staying in the same location for more than a split moment.

Isabella and Ellie watched in disbelief as it seemed as though Alice was phasing through the barrage of attacks. Nothing could hit her and she was evading all of the attacks easily.

"Do... do you think you can dodge like she can?" Ellie asked as Isabella was the assassin of the group. Out of all of them, she was the most nimble and flexible.

"Definitely not." Isabella shook her head.

She may survive longer than Ellie in that barrage but she wouldn't be able to find a chance to attack back.

Any attacking posture she assumed would get instantly hit by the orbs.

As Alice neared the centre of the barrage where it was most violent, she twisted her body and pulled out her arrow. Barely giving the orbs a glance, she released the arrow while dodging orbs that tried to attack from behind.

The arrow found its mark easily as it pierced the orbs with ease. With three of the five orbs pierced, the barrage stopped as Alice furrowed her brows.

"I still need some practice myself. I'm not an archer but seems like I need to take account of the arrow speed some more. It slowed down after the first few hits." She lamented.

". . ." Ellie was silent.

'Are you kidding me???' Her mind was not.

"But setting that aside, it's just a case of finding patterns and taking the fastest shot you can while maintaining accuracy." Alice shrugged.

Looking at each other, both Isabella and Ellie sighed.

"What's wrong?" Alice blinked in confusion, their reaction was certainly not what she had expected.

"Alice... What kind of training did your teacher give you?" Ellie asked hesitantly. If this was considered toned down, then she couldn't imagine what the original training was like.

"Oh that's simple. But I won't be able to do a demonstration since my mind will be focused on controlling the orbs. In this version, I had to rely on a few shields and gimmicks to survive and even then, I still barely landed a blow." Alice smiled while flicking her finger.

From her wound, countless blood orbs started to seep out as she began to replicate the attack pattern of the Blood Widow that Allura had demonstrated.

She couldn't imitate the attack completely as it was far too fast and far too complicated for her current level of control.

###

'This is the training she had to survive?' Ellie asked herself, unable to fully believe that it was possible for a 2 star Hunter to complete such a training task.

The sight before her was in no exaggeration, a meat grinder. There were hardly any safe spots that she could find and even after finding one, it would be quickly filled up with attacks that would shred her to countless pieces.

Each attack was filled with deadly precision and murderous intent while the passive aura that Alice emanated would slow her movements down.

Ellie knew the feeling in her heart.

Fear.

The fear one felt when facing an absolute beast you have no chance to fight against. The power difference one would experience and the futility of their actions against such overwhelming force.

That's what she felt right now.

Just the sight of this barrage of attacks caused despair to embed itself into her heart.

'If a two star Hunter could do this, does that mean there are 'weak' beasts who are just as strong as her?'

Fear gripped her throat.

What if her next hunt had a beast that could do what Alice is showing right now? How would she survive such an ordeal?

Ellie didn't know.

She had no answers.

After all, the only thing on her mind after seeing this was death.

If she stepped into that array, she would die.

If a beast released that attack, she would die.

Death was the only answer she could think of.

Clenching her chest, Ellie could feel the fear digging deep into her heart.

'How could Alice even survive this kind of attack?'

Looking at Alice's back, Ellie felt fear.

"#####!"

"#####!"

"Ellie!"

"Huh?" Ellie blinked as she glanced to her side and saw Isabella's worried expression.

"Ellie you scared me for a moment. Are you feeling alright?"

"Ah sorry, I think I'm feeling a bit more tired than I expected." Ellie smiled.

It was a lie.

"Ah I see. Go back to sleep then, I can cover the shift like usual."

"Mnm, thank you. Sorry Alice, I'm going to go back and rest for now. We can continue later if I have some time." Ellie apologised as Alice nodded her head.

It was a lie.

Stepping away from the two, Ellie made her way back to her tent. She tossed her bow to the side of her tent and sat down on her bedroll.

She was satisfied being the Hunter she was, the missions they took while dangerous, weren't something they couldn't deal with. But having saw what Alice demonstrated, her mind began to doubt and fear the unknown.

She felt the inevitability of death.

###

"Maybe she felt overwhelmed by what you showed. Sorry about that." Isabella apologised as they both understood that Ellie's reaction was unnatural. Isabella didn't blame Ellie as she too couldn't believe the spectacle that Alice demonstrated.

'Anyone would be turned into a meat paste if they tried to walk through that.'

"It's fine. Hopefully she feels better tomorrow. I'll go back to my tent now." Alice smiled.

Saying goodbye to Isabella, her smile slowly faded away.

Sitting down by her tent, Alice took out her flask but didn't take a drink.

*Sigh...

"She's definitely scared." Alice muttered.

It was a gaze she had seen before. Long ago when she was still part of the Zenia family.

'Was it during my birthday?' She asked herself. The moment she was injected and had become a beast.

Looking up at the moon, Alice realised that perhaps she was more unnatural than what she had originally expected. Or perhaps it was simply a byproduct of gaining strength.

The gap between her and normal Hunters would only widen as she needs to challenge her limits. If she wishes to accomplish her desire, vengeance and the recreation of Ayr, she needs the strength befitting of a Lord. An Abyss Lord with no equal.

Alice understood that she would feel these stares more often as she grows in strength.

Sighing out softly once more, Alice took a sip of her mead and enjoyed the comfort of the cold night wind.

###

As night passed, the caravan continued the journey and Alice noticed that Ellie seemed to have grown meek after the incident last night.

Deciding to give her some space, Alice spent the time laying on the rooftop of her carriage.

The following night and day followed the same routine as they continued towards their first destination.

With each passing moment, Alice could feel the mark on her hand growing stronger. She understood that they were approaching the 'ruins' that Cayla spoke of.

And soon, they reached the entrance of a forest where the path diverges. Should they go to the right, they would reach a faster path to their destination, Eldoria.

However, due to the mission that Cedric had given to the Raven's Watch party, they travelled to the left, entering the forest.

Alice could feel the reaction in her mark growing stronger than ever as they ventured into the forest.

'Seems like the ruins are in this forest. With the Raven's Watch needing to collect some water, I can probably use this time to explore a little on my end.' Alice thought to herself as Cayla had mentioned the ruins holding some information that she may want to know of.

