

Abyssal A 171

Chapter 171 - 171: Unbound Demonette

"The commissioner is actually a noble of the city and the story behind it is pretty sad. However, the reward is nice and from what the Guild has told me, the Unbound Demonette is only really known for their blade attacks and speed. Both of which I can deal with rather easily." Ria explained while Alcie raised her eyebrow.

"Oh? There's a story behind this one?"

"Yep. Apparently, the Demonette was something a small Lord commissioned after his wife had passed away. It was supposed to be a reminder of what he lost. However, due to his dealings with Abyss Blood, it seems to have corrupted the original mannequin and now its gone out of control. He's asking for it to be disposed of before it could cause any harm." Ria explained.

The Guild didn't give her too much context but this was merely the rumours that people have heard regarding this Demonette.

Hearing this, Alice couldn't help but tilt her head. If she recalled, there were indeed types of blood that could take over certain tools but they were usually limited to plant types rather than whatever beast this was.

"How many are taking this commission right now and where is it?"

"We're the only ones right now. But if we take too long some others might take the mission." Ria shrugged.

Contemplating to herself for a moment, Alice suggested that they should begin the mission tomorrow as they had just arrived at the city today. They still need some lodging and the clues regarding beasts for her third Sigil should also arrive tonight.

"It also gives us some time to do some research on this Unbound Demonette. I haven't heard of it before, so it'll be good if we find out about its weaknesses. It'll make the hunt smoother."

Alice knew that even if it was a three star hunt and with Ria being far above average in strength for a four star Hunter, they shouldn't let their guard down. Caution is their best friend in the depths of the Abyss.

"Actually, it's funny you mention that. You see, this guild is actually attached to the Inn as well as one of the biggest libraries in this city." Ria grinned, causing Alice to pause in surprise.

She had asked the receptionist regarding a library when she accepted this commission. After all, no matter how confident she was with her own power, she wanted to verify her knowledge of her target before hunting.

That was the basic principle of being a Hunter. A Hunter who goes into a fight blind is not a real Hunter.

"Shall we go?"

"Of course we should go. Why wouldn't we go?" Rolling her eyes, Alice finished her drink in one gulp and wiped her mouth using her sleeves.

Getting Ria to lead the way, they took an elevator leading down the Guild and into the depths of this city.

Compared to the elevators in Zadash, the elevator in this guild was smooth and hardly made a noise. As the doors opened, Alice and Ria found themselves in the heart of the library with a single person sitting behind a desk in front of them.

Looking around them, Alice could see countless rows of towering bookshelves, each filled to the brink with books of varying ages. Some were worn down with the leather bindings practically peeling apart while some were fresh.

The cumulative wisdom from the efforts of countless Hunters and Scholars.

The middle aged librarian behind the desk gave them a quick glance before focusing back on his own book.

"Hello~ Do know where you keep the books for beasts? The one we're hunting is puppet like." Ria asked as he glanced up once more.

"Name?"

"Ah Ri-"

"Not yours. The beast." The man rolled his eyes as Ria felt the urge to smack him on the head but held herself back.

"Unbound Demonette."

Nodding his head, the man took out a small handbook before flipping through the pages.

Alice managed to catch a glance at one of the pages and it was filled to the brim with names of beasts. It was in alphabetical order and the location of said book was marked next to the name.

"Section 57 on the second floor. Look for the shelf labelled A2 and the books there should have what you need." He replied before putting his handbook away.

Seeing that he wasn't inclined on talking to them anymore, Alice thanked him before dragging Ria away who seemed to be annoyed by his disinterest and lack of politeness.

"Gods! What's with him?" Ria huffed while Alice couldn't help but chuckle.

"He's probably had to deal with countless Hunters on a daily basis. He probably wants to get the interaction over with and read his book."

"True but still, where's the professionalism." Ria shook her head.

Compared to the people they met earlier today, the service was far too poor in comparison. While Alice agreed with her opinion, she didn't mind the short interaction as he showed them exactly where they needed to go.

Arriving at the location he mentioned, Alice and Ria decided to split up so they could find the book they needed faster.

As Alice was going through the different titles, she couldn't help but notice that most of these were based on rituals and possession.

Narrowing her eyes, Alice decided to pick up the book titled: The Mystic's Codex on Possession Type Beasts.

Giving it a brief skim, she could tell that this book mainly detailed on how the different rituals that could be performed to create such a beast but lacked the details of the rituals. Merely mentions of names as well as the effects followed by how to control said beast.

As she flipped towards the end, she found the page that documented the history of the Unbound Demonette rather than the creation.

'The Unbound Demonette is a testament for those who grieve their lost ones. Sometimes it's better to leave them be than to reach into the afterlife. An unholy mockery of the life we have been given and the mimic that now stands in its place.

'The Demonette was first discovered in the 9th Umbral Year. A sudden influx of puppets that expelled blades from their body invaded the Abyss as Scholars at the time realised these beasts could be artificially manufactured...?!' Widening her eyes, Alice paused in shock as she continued to read.

'The Unbound Demonette could be found in the wild as they were usually spawned from the corpses of those that have died to beasts. Travelling merchants or civilians with no Sigils were especially susceptible. Once killed, depending on their surroundings, their bodies would slowly petrify before being turned into Organic Porcelain.

It is from there, they become the Abyssal Beast known as the Unbound Demonette.

'However, one of the methods of artificially creating the Unbound Demonette is to recreate the surrounding environment required for the transformation to begin. There are many more methods of creation as the Unbound Demonette proves itself to be one of the most mass producible Beasts...

'Some of the key weaknesses to dealing with the Unbound Demonette is its adverse reaction towards light and cold temperatures. The Organic Porcelain that cover the Demonette is extremely fragile despite the insides housing numerous blades. Exposure to light and cold temperatures causes the skin to dry up and crack apart with the beast unable to sustain itself.

'As a three star difficulty beast, it has a reputation to being extremely aggressive and fast but the durability is rather weak. Proceed with caution and when hunting, prepare multiple source of light. Having one source of light will make the user of said light the prime target of the Unbound Demonette.'

Closing the book, Alice was silent. Her mind digested the information along with the implications of the fact that the Unbound Demonette could be artificially reproduced.

With a connection to grief and death, she couldn't help but wonder if the beast was truly an accidental remembrance gone wrong or was there something darker at work.

Keeping a hold on the book for now, Alice made her way to Ria so that they could share the information.

She noticed Ria reading a few books before putting them back with disinterest as she seemed to be having a hard time finding the information they wanted.

"I found something that you might want to see." Alice called out, holding the Codex.

"Apparently the Demonette can be artificially reproduced in mass quantities. Not sure if the Lord did it purposefully or accidentally. Hard to tell."

Hearing this, Ria's expression shifted and accepted the book.

Flipping to the page that Alice was reading, she read the passages herself before frowning deeply.

"These requirements does seem... Hard to come across in a city. Especially if it requires the original body. Unless... It's not an Unbound Demonette?" Ria asked as it could be a mistake on the Guild's side. A beast that looks similar but not quite the Demonette.

"I mean... It's possible. But if it is indeed the Demonette then it might've been done on purpose." Alice sighed.

"Let's take it slow then. We'll talk to the Lord that commissioned this first and get a quick look at the beast. If it's the Unbound Demonette then we'll take it out. If not, we'll take a step back and investigate the situation first."

Agreeing to Ria's suggestion, the two placed the books back before making their way out of the library.

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"Dammit! Can the Hunters take care of the beast already?!" A man dressed in lavish clothes complained while pacing back and forth in a room.

"Relax yourself my Lord. The beast will fall and that is a certainty. The Guild has notified me that another has taken the Commission, I do believe they will be in contact soon."

"They better make it quick then! So many have already failed. Any longer and we'll have to take matters into my own hands!" The Lord grumbled before leaving the room.

If this Unbound Demonette continues to run rampant, the amount of damage done to his home would be unthinkable. He couldn't let this continue anymore.

'How hard is it to take care of one damn beast!?'

Chapter 172 - 172: Andrius Blackthorn

"Now I believe you have requested to meet me due to some questions about the task, yes?" The Lord smiled while having his butler serve some tea to the two ladies in front of him.

Lord Andrius Blackthorn, the esteemed noble of the city that had assisted in creating the mechanical guards that patrol these streets. A striking figure with black hair accentuated by streaks of white, signs of his age.

A cleanly trimmed beard framed his face marked by a scar that travelled up from the corner of his lips to his cheek.

He wore a fancy black shirt with silver embroidery, a raise collar along with a set of earrings and a necklace. Black suit pants and a pair of shoes to match his dark attire.

"Indeed, Lord Blackthorn. We wanted to ask some questions regarding the Unbound Demonette so that the Hunt can proceed smoothly. After all, several Hunters have already failed to dispatch the beast." Ria nodded with a polite nod.

"Then ask away. I will provide you with as much information as I can though... I am unsure how it would benefit your hunt." He gestured while leaning back on his seat.

"We just wanted to make sure it was indeed an Unbound Demonette and not something similar. Different beasts possess different weaknesses while some may assist the beast instead. Since the Hunters have failed, it clearly meant something had gone wrong so we wanted to verify some facts." Alice interjected as she rested her elbows on her knees.

"The creation of the Unbound Demonette is usually discovered in the wild, it is hard pressed to find it being created within the city, accident or no. So perhaps it was a similar beast that disguised itself as the Unbound Demonette?

"I'm not sure if you are familiar with a certain beast known as the Silver Masquerade. It's a beast that can mimic and act as though it is another beast while displaying similar abilities. However, it will not share the same weaknesses. We're worried that we might be dealing with a beast similar to the Silver Masquerade hence why we need to verify a few details.

I hope Lord Blackthorn doesn't take offence." Alice smiled while Ria paused in surprise.

She didn't expect Alice to be able to speak like this nor act in this manner. Her expectations was simply for her to start questioning the Lord if he was the one behind the creation.

"Ah I see. I have indeed heard of such beast but I assure you that doesn't seem to be the case." Andruis shook his head.

"When I was transporting the replica statue of my late wife, I was also dealing with a shipment of Abyss Blood that was to be tested with a new generation of the Mechanical Legion. We wanted to see if we could use the speed and power of the Unbound Demonette for our creations.

Unfortunately, one of my servants that had been cleaning the workshop had knocked the vial over and the contents stained the doll." He sighed while massaging his nose bridge.

"I'm unsure what followed after but the doll I commissioned came to life with blades appearing around her body and the distinct smile belonging to the Demonette. It has taken over my old residence and I had the guards seal the place off with the Mechanical Legion so that the others cannot enter by mistake nor could the beast leave."

Seeing the Lord drop his shoulders helplessly, Ria wanted to say something when Alice spoke up first.

"I see. In which case would it be okay for us to investigate the old residence first? Once we see the beast for ourselves, we should be able to make better arrangements for its disposal."

"Of course. If you'd like, I can have my butler show you the way to the house." Andrius offered but Alice shook her head.

"It will be fine. The Guild has already let us know of the location. As long as you let them we're coming everything will be fine."

Thanking the butler for the tea, Alice gestured for Ria to leave as the two made their way out of the mansion.

Watching Alice and Ria leave, the Lord narrowed his eyes for a moment before getting his butler to notify the guards regarding Alice and Ria.

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"What the hell was that?"

"What the hell was what?" Alice raised an eyebrow while taking a drink from her flask in order to wash away the taste of tea.

"The way you were talking and smiling, didn't feel like the usual... You."

"Of course it didn't. I was copying other people." Alice shrugged.

She had seen the way the barkeep and the owner of the Apothecary had conducted themselves and simply took inspiration. She knew that she was not the most delicate with words hence why she copied the way they acted along with their mannerisms.

To make herself seem more 'normal', trustworthy and professional.

"So what did you think? Is the Lord suspicious or is he not guilty?"

"Something's definitely wrong. From my knowledge, just the blood itself would not 'recreate' a beast using a doll. But we can't rule out the possibility either since the Abyss is changing with each passing day." Alice admitted.

"Hmm... Well let's just see what happens. Honestly I just want the 250 gold reward so we can splurge a little on buying stuff." Ria laughed while Alice couldn't help but agree.

Their main goal in this city was simply to earn some coin and begin the hunt for her third Sigil.

As they made their way to the location of the Lord Blackthorn's old residence, they noticed the increase in guards that patrolled the city.

Hunters dressed in uniform would walk around with a mechanical beast in tow, each with different designs and uses.

Taking this chance, Alice got a better look at the way the blood was being used as fuel and couldn't help but notice countless pipes running to the chest.

'Seems like it mimics blood flow of beasts and people... Once again it ties back to the heart. Why is the heart so important for Abyss Blood?' Alice asked herself.

The robed figure's final hints regarding the secret behind the outbreak and the true nature of heart blood.

Placing her hand on her chest, Alice sighed and shook her head, dismissing the thoughts from her mind for now.

Soon, they reached the mansion. The old residence of Lord Blackthorn stood proud against the surrounding buildings encircled by iron gates carved with ornate designs. The guards and their mechanical partners patrolled the area, making sure that no one could approach without permission.

Upon seeing Alice and Ria, the guards gave them a polite salute as they have been notified about the two. Stepping aside, they allowed the two to enter.

Seeing the large metal doors that sealed the inside of the mansion from the outside world.

Looking at one another, the two nodded before pushing the doors open and stepping into the house.

Darkness filled the space as dust was sent into the air from the opening of the doors.

"Seems like the perfect environment for the Demonette." Ria muttered while snapping her finger and created a small pulsing orb of lightning that shed some light into the house.

She didn't mind the beast targeting her as she is the stronger one between the two of them.

"Take care not to damage anything too important. If we have to pay for damages after we may as well not have taken this commission."

Unsheathing her blade, Alice allowed the red flames to burn freely while making sure they didn't get too close to anything flammable.

Walking over to what seemed to be the lights, Ria could see deep slashes, destroying the mechanism used for turning on the light.

While Ria was investigating the light, Alice started to make her way in while using her blade as a torch. Not only did it serve as a light source but by having it in front of her, she could attack whatever rushed towards them at a moment's notice.

As she made her way deeper into the mansion, she could see traces of old battles. Broken weapons and torches were thrown around the floor. Kneeling down, Alice glanced at the weapons and noticed that despite being broken, they carried a trace of frost upon the edges.

'Seems like they prepared well for this fight. Logic dictates that the Demonette should recoil and break apart based on its weakness. However... Seems like this didn't work.'

"Ria, did the Guild tell us why the other Hunters failed?" Alice asked while checking out the other battle scars.

"Yes they did. A few died before they could let the Guild know anything though."

"Oh? What did they say then?" Alice raised an eyebrow. She was surprised Ria didn't say anything earlier but if she's only bringing it up now then it must not have been that important.

"They said the beast was too fast. Screamed that the light didn't work. Panicked as it broke their weapons apart. Neither light nor cold worked on the beast."

Pausing mid movement, Alice slowly stood up and held her blade beside her. Something was wrong as that was most certainly not Ria speaking.

However, it had her voice and tone of speaking.

"Is that so? Then what worked?" Alice asked while slowly scanning her eyes across the darkness, hoping to catch a glimpse of the tag above the beast.

"Nothing. They died."

Ria's voice whispered out as Alice felt as though it was spoke directly next to her ear.

Slashing out with her blade instinctively, she found herself alone in the darkness.

Even the door they had entered from had disappeared as Alice took a deep breath and calmed her mind.

She remembered the lessons that Allura had thought and with the nature of her second Sigil, Alice did not hesitate to make a cut on her arm before setting her blood aflame.

The fumes from her blood began to clear her mind as the darkness slowly retreated.

Alice could finally see their target hanging from the ceiling, barely illuminated by the light from her flames.

She hung suspended from the ceiling while thin barely noticeable thread dangled from her body. Her white porcelain skin showed countless scars and stiches while blades tore through the surface. Cracks decorated her skin and blood dyed her dress.

The flickering of the flames revealed her ghastly expression of a smiling woman. Her eyelid forcefully pulled open through threads.

[Unbound Demonette (Incomplete) - ♦♦♦♦]

Chapter 173 - 173: Fighting The Demonette

Upon seeing Alice breaking out of her illusion, the Demonette twitched uncomfortably as blades pulsed across her body like a heartbeat. She recoiled in surprise before carving a hole through the ceiling and climbing through, disappearing into the darkness of the mansion.

Furrowing her brows, Alice didn't think she would leave just like that but first things first, she needed to find Ria.

Making her way back to where she had come from, she noticed Ria clenching her heat with furrowed brows.

"Ria! Are you okay?"

"Huh? Yeah, don't come here. Please tell me you're actually Alice and not whatever the hell that was." Ria groaned as she clearly had a harder time breaking out of that illusion than Alice did.

Before she could say anything, Alice felt a chill down her spine and she immediately bent her body back out of instinct.

Above her, a shimmering blade reflected her visage as Ria had transformed into the same smiling woman that had disappeared into the cracks of the house earlier.

Widening her eyes, Alice rolled to the side and activated her second Sigil.

The violet flames now covered her blade as the illusion was shattered once more.

She was still in the same location while the smiling woman growled in annoyance.

'What the... Did it cast a second Illusion after I broke out of the first one? Where's Ria?' Alice thought to herself as she didn't dare to let the violet flames drop for even a moment.

She didn't know if she would be dragged into another illusion if she allowed the flames to extinguish.

After seeing Alice break out of its illusion for a second time, the beast seemed more annoyed than before as she crouched down and slowly backed away.

Alice's main priority right now was to find Ria, not to fight this beast. Until she found Ria and made sure she was safe, she didn't want to commit herself to a fight.

Just as Alice took a step back, the Demonette pounced forward. Her speed, far surpassing Alice's expectations as she was already in front of her face by the time she could react!

***BANG!!!**

Cleaving her blade up to parry the claw, Alice was sent crashing into the walls of the mansion as the Demonette followed up with a spray of thin threads that aimed for her limbs.

Stabbing her sword above her, Alice dragged her body up to dodge the threads before using the wall as a launch pad. Lunging at the beast with a blade in hand, Alice slashed down diagonally only for her attack to miss as the beast split itself in two.

Widening her eyes, Alice watched as her blade passed through the gap and missed her target entirely.

Threading herself back together, a blade jutted out of the beast's chest, stabbing into Alice's shoulder as she rolled back.

Gritting her teeth, Alice sealed her wound using her blood for now but she couldn't keep taking attacks like this.

'What the hell is up with that speed? Not to mention... I didn't think she could separate her torso like that.'

This was no ordinary Unbound Demonette. The illusionary abilities and the way it was separating itself was outside of the usual skill set.

On top of that, the Organic Porcelain was having no reaction towards the light shed by her blade.

With one of the aforementioned weaknesses of the beast no off the table, they had two choices. The first was to observe and take samples to see what it would react to.

Impossible given the current situation and the limits of their power.

The second was to brute force it!

It wasn't going to let her reach Ria in this state. The moment she even shows a slight hint of weakness it would lung for her life.

Taking a deep breath, Alice gave her surroundings a quick glance to see if there was anything she could use. This was the time to be resourceful while she figured out where she was at.

'Did the beast cast an illusion the moment we stepped in? This place seems to be rather deep into the mansion.' Alice wondered to herself while creating a set of blood needles and shot it towards the beast.

Once the beast parried her needles, she charged forward and cleaved up with her blade only for the beast to separate itself once more.

But this was what she was aiming for!

The needles that the beast had parried suddenly burst into flames as they attached themselves to her innards, burning her from the inside out.

Letting out an ear piercing screech, she swung her claws at Alice while cutting off pieces of herself to stop the fires from spreading.

"Tsk!" Clicking her tongue, Alice threw a dagger of blood at the beast but it was now cautious of her attacks.

Jumping to the side, the beast began to breathe heavily as streaks of red slowly stained its porcelain skin. A primal growl escaped her mouth while the blades started to vibrate with each breath.

Alice could feel the temperature around her dropping rapidly as frost started to form on the walls while her breath created clouds of mist.

Widening her eyes, Alice understood that this beast is an Unbound Demonette that was no longer vulnerable to her original weaknesses!

Disappearing with a burst of shadow, the beast vanished from Alice's view.

"!!!"

Turning around out of instinct, she was barely able to catch a glimpse of her reflection upon the Demonette's blade before it disappeared once more.

No matter how fast she turned, the Demonette always seemed to be right behind her, waiting for the perfect moment after she tires herself out. She could never catch more than a glimpse of her target while frost slowly built up on her body, slowing down her movement.

Clenching her fist, Alice amplified the heat emitted by her blade to try stave off the coldness, but it did not stop the decreasing temperature of the room.

The harder she fought, the colder it became.

Turning around once more, Alice decided to run to the closest window if she wanted a chance to get out of this predicament.

Even if she risked the Demonette attacking from behind, it was a risk she was willing to take!

*CLANG!!!

Parrying the Demonette the moment it had attacked, Alice used the force from its claw to push herself further away.

As Alice pushed herself away from the frenzied Demonette's attack, she raced further into the mansion in a desperate attempt to find a window that she could use.

*CLANG!!!

Parrying a second attack, a layer of ice manifested around her fingers as she reopened the wound on her shoulder. Getting the blood to splash on her hand, she enveloped them in a violet flame to warm herself up before resealing the wound.

'Do I use Allura's skill? No... doing so will do more harm than good in this situation.' Alice bit her lips while trying to think of a way out.

Parrying another attack aiming for her throat, Alice tried to kick the beast away only for its torso to open up into a swirling mess of blades, waiting to tear her leg apart.

Stopping herself before she lost her leg, Alice rammed her shoulder into the beast's head, forcing it to stumble back.

Adjusting the grip of her sword, she slashed towards the beast once more as it flickered into the darkness before reappearing beside her.

Her claws were mere centimetres away from her eyes as Alice tilted her head to the side, causing the beast to scratch her face.

Countering with a swipe of her blade, Alice jumped back as the cold air assaulted her lungs.

No matter what she did, the cold seemed to invade every part of her body and her flames weren't strong enough to counter the coldness.

Pushing into a corner, Alice could feel her heart begin to panic as she scratched away at her neck. No matter what she envisioned herself doing, it felt impossible to take down this beast.

'Think! What else can my Sigil do?!' She cried out in her mind.

Her first Sigil made her blood poisonous and dispelled Abyssal influences due to her second Sigil.

Her second Sigil created flames from her body while also allowing her to control blood.

Parrying another strike from the Demonette, Alice slammed into a bookshelf and broke it apart while the beast lunged at her from above.

Quickly rolling to the side, she threw a handful of blood towards the beast. Dodging the splash, the beast attacked from behind once more as Alice barely managed to block with her sword but her reaction was slowing now.

'F*ck it! I can worry about damages after this b*tch is dead!' With no other choice, Alice enveloped herself in a frenzy of purple flames, preventing the beast from approaching before gathering it into an orb above her palm.

"Come on then!! Didn't you enjoy trying to rip my head off?! Try to do it again! I dare you m*therf*cker!" Alice shouted as the orb started to stabilise itself.

But before she could fire her attack, a blade erupted from the ground beneath her, piercing deep into her arm.

"!!!"

Widening her eyes, Alice understood that the Demonette had detached a part of itself to interrupt the cast of her skill!

Unable to pull her arm away, Alice was flung into the walls as the orb destabilised and collapsed in on itself, causing a burst of flames to erupt out and slammed against Alice.

With her arm almost torn off due to the blade and the cold invading her body, Alice could feel herself reaching her limit.

Her breathing was shallow as her gaze blurred.

'Is this the end?' She wondered to herself.

She wanted to muster up the power but her mind was surrendering to the coldness that surrounded her. She just wanted to close her eyes and sleep in this moment.

No! She had survived for far too long for this to be the end!

Gritting her teeth, she set the blood within her body aflame as she was engulfed in the violet flare.

The blood she spilt started to surge towards her as she covered up her wounds. There was now a new malevolent light in her eyes as a cruel unhinged grin manifested on her face.

She remembered the feeling of being pushed to the brink when she was in the Colosseum. The bestial urge that erupted out from within. 'Her switch' that she would flip when she began a hunt.

"Yo~ Demonette. Shall we go for round 2?"

Chapter 174 - 174: Truth Behind The Demonette

Alice couldn't hold back as she let out a laugh from the deepest part of her soul.

In this state, she could recognise a distinct emotion from the beast in front of her. Despite her smiling visage and aggressiveness, she was 'afraid'.

The Unbound Demonette was feeling fear as Alice stood up while flames engulfed her body.

Jumping back to make some distance between them, she had the piece of herself that she split off earlier shoot another blade towards Alice's face.

*PSHH!!!

Blocking the blade with her arm, Alice grabbed the blade with her bare hands and pulled it out of her arm.

"Just because this thing is split from you doesn't mean you can't feel it right~"

Pulling the blade out of the ground, Alice could see threads and flesh extending from beneath the wooden planks.

Naturally, she could burn it to cinders but she had other goals.

No, she felt... Hungry.

Pulling out the flesh from the floorboards, Alice started to bite down as she swallowed the flesh, allowing the tainted blood to flow into her body. The smile on her face only seemed to grow as she lunged towards the Demonette with the flames still burning across her body.

As she lunged towards the Demonette, Alice couldn't help but wonder why she had been so reserved. Why did she restrain herself? She should be indulging in the blood of her enemies, tearing them limb from limb.

Missing her lung against the beast, Alice laughed as she aimed her palm towards the Demonette and released the same blade that the Demonette had used.

*CLANG!!!!

Parrying the attack, the Demonette used to leverage its speed against Alice but she was now catching up!

No longer could she take the Hunter off guard through raw speed!

"What's wrong? Running out of ideas?" Alice snickered as even the cold no longer bothered her. With the flames running through her body to clear the illusions and Unbound Demonette's blood keeping the cold from killing her, this had become her turf.

Kicking off the bookshelf, Alice lunged forward and grabbed the beast by the throat.

Blades pierced her body but her response was to laugh. Blood splashed against the Demonette as violet flames assaulted her body.

No matter how she attacked Alice, she seemed to shrug off the wounds as tendrils of flesh would weave around the damage, fixing itself.

As she was holding the beast up by the throat, Alice could feel herself sinking deep into the bestial nature that lay dormant within her.

This... Sadistic nature where she does not care for the damage caused upon her so long as her enemy suffers and dies.

Her vision started to blur as all she could imagine was the warm corpses of those belonging to the Zenia family. How she would gut them and pull them apart for their sins. How she would drink deep of their blood and watch as the life faded from their eyes.

She had felt this before, yes.

This sensation that she's been deprived of.

A shudder of excitement rang through her body as she snapped open her mouth and bit down against the Demonette's neck.

The squirming, the panic, it felt just perfect. How the blades cut against her skin only to show the Demonette her futility.

She remembers the feeling of warm blood coating her body, the sensation of blades trying to stop her. She remembers the screams and the cries. The pleas and soon, the silence.

Just as she was about to continue her savagery, Alice paused as the Demonette had stopped resisting.

Her limbs fell limp beside her while Alice sat in the pool of blood, panting heavily. Her face, flushed with excitement as her hands trembled in glee.

This is who she is.

She who revelled where there is bloodshed. It was never a 'state' nor the flip of a switch. It was merely the act of her giving up her restraints. This is her nature.

Touching the warm blood that splashed against her face, Alice couldn't help but lick her lips in satisfaction.

She wanted more of this feeling, the feeling of a life slipping into the embrace of death. How the warm blood loses its heat and how the body turns cold.

"Alice?"

Hearing her name called out, Alice slowly looked behind her and saw Ria by the doorway.

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Ria knew that Alice's past was largely unknown. As much as Alice was sharing, there were parts of her history that she did not want to share.

She respected that as she too did not tell her full history to Alice.

However, there had always been a side to Alice that she could never wrap her head around. That killing intent and savagery that she displayed was not something you would see often.

Perhaps a side effect of her imprisonment? Or was she imprisoned because of this state?

As she laid her eyes once more upon the brutality that Alice could cause to the Demonette, Ria couldn't help but think it was the latter.

The way she laughed as blades cut into her body, the joy she felt when tearing out the guts from the beast. She was clearly not in the right state of mind as she didn't even notice the abnormalities in the beast.

All she did was pull out its insides and enjoy the shower of blood.

Even now, Ria felt as though she was staring at a beast, ready to pounce at a moment's notice. She had no doubt that if she was not Alice's friend, she would most certainly lunge towards her at this moment and tear out her insides just like what she did to the Demonette.

"Are you alright?" Ria asked out of concern. She wanted to know how Alice was feeling, if she was back to normal and if she knew what had just happened.

After stepping into this place, Ria felt her mind being mired in a swamp of her own thoughts and hallucinations with no sign of being able to break out. But before she knew it, she was back in her own mind, leaning against the wall not far from the entrance of the mansion.

She could hear the sounds of battle in the distance and clearly, halfway through the battle, the beast had given up on maintaining the illusion. And when she arrived, Alice was brutalising its corpse without a care in mind.

"Hm? Yeah I am. I was just... indulging myself a little. My wounds... should be fine without healing blood if you're worried about that."

'Seems like she has returned back to her usual self. At least... somewhat.' Ria thought to herself before examining the corpse.

"Wait... weren't we supposed to check out if there's anything wrong with the beast?"

###

As the two stood before the brutalised corpse of the Demonette, Alice finally returned to her usual state of mind and was silent.

She didn't know what had come over her but her memories of the fight were largely a blur. All she knew was that it felt good and she caused this.

"Well sh*t. Hm... I mean... It wasn't a normal Demonette since it wasn't weak to light or cold. In fact, it was the one making the surroundings cold. Not to mention it could use illusions which is most definitely not part of its skill set." Alice scratched her hair in confusion as she wasn't sure what kind of beast this was.

"But Cayla did show that it was indeed a Demonette and with three stars at that. But it said something about it being... incomplete?"

If she hadn't murdered the beast in such a way, she might've been able to investigate the truth a little easier but now they were on their own.

"We could just take the money that's owed to us since we completed the task. But its definitely weird. The Guild mentioned that those who survived left and gave up on the task because they didn't feel like they could accomplish the task. When asked about it they only said they don't know but something felt wrong." Ria shrugged.

Just as Alice was about to open her mouth, a sudden realisation dawned on her.

"Ria... Do you still remember what the Lord said about the beast?"

"Hm? I mean yeah but you're gonna have to be more specific than that." Ria nodded.

"Remember how he got his hands on the Demonette."

Tilting her head, Ria furrowed her brows before searching her memories. And upon remembering the Lord's words, she too paused in realisation as her eyes slowly widened in shock.

"He mentioned that it was a replica statue of his late wife. But why would a statue have blood and organs?" Alice spoke slowly as she looked at the state of the skin.

It was a strange rubbery texture, not quite skin yet not quite Porcelain. The lustre and shimmer of the surface mirrored that of Porcelain to a poor degree.

Looking at the eyes, Alice could still see the horror and fear that the beast showed in the final moments, but they were definitely organic.

If the Abyss Blood had merely possessed a statue replica it wouldn't have 'grown' the organs. Not to mention, what about the rest of the body? It was clearly all organic.

Hesitating for a moment, Alice gave the woman a silent prayer before using her dagger to pry the head open.

"Why would a statue have a need for a brain?" Alice narrowed her eyes.

". . ." Ria was silent.

This was not the replica statue of the Lord's wife. This was a living breathing person before they got forcefully transformed into an Abyss Beast. Even now, Alice could see the signs of surgery on her body.

"We should report this to the Guild." Alice suggested as Ria nodded her head.

However, before they could leave, they felt the ground beneath them disappear as they fell into the darkness.

Chapter 175 - 175: Paradoxical Existence

As the two fell through the darkness, Alice tried her best to stabilise herself but it was futile. The darkness clung to her like thick viscous liquid that refused to budge no matter how much strength she used.

"Arg! A-Alice!" Ria called out, wanting to find out where Alice was within this sludge so that they didn't separate.

Gritting her teeth, Alice mustered up as much strength as she could and unsheathed her blade.

Bright red flames erupted out in an attempt to illuminate their surroundings but the darkness snuffed out the fire in an instant.

Reaching out to try to grab onto Ria, Alice could feel them falling deeper into the Abyss...

###

The rhythmic footsteps rang out through the dusty mansion as Lord Andrius arrived at the spot where Alice and Ria disappeared.

Narrowing his eyes at the corpse of the beast in front of him, he scoffed with a smile before tapping his foot against the floorboards.

"We'll need to prepare some... Corpses if you want the Guild to believe they died with the beast."

"Naturally. Though I must say, I wish I had observed the situation closer. But had I chosen to approach, the split haired girl would've noticed me. Her senses are rather sharp and I'm surprised she was actually able to break out of Mermaid's Call so easily.

That is an illusion skill that a two Sigil bearer should have no right to resist." The man beside him muttered with intrigue as he recalled her fight.

The brilliant violet flames that cut through the darkness and flesh, the way she fought at the end, not caring about the damage done to her own body. Oh how he wished he could turn her into the perfect specimen and figure out what kind of secrets she was hiding.

"And your verdict on the prototype?" Andrius asked, knocking the corpse of his wife to the side in disgust.

"Fast and deadly. But lacks... Adaptability once their prey discovers a way to counter their illusions. And outside of the illusion, the offensive capabilities leave much to be desired. In exchange for getting rid of its weaknesses, it had lost out on the speed and deadliness a true Unbound Demonette has." The man muttered while tapping his finger against his notebook.

"Meaning?"

"We'll have to make some additional changes and add more samples for the future prototypes. But worry not, this fight has given me much inspiration for the abilities that are required. Now, I will deal with our two new... subjects." He chuckled while giving the Lord a bow.

"Before you go, I believe you still owe me something?" Andrius raised an eyebrow as the man laughed and reached into his pocket.

"Silly me. Here you are my Lord. Her ladyship will be very proud of the work you've done for the greater will."

Handing the Lord a vial of blood, the man bowed once more before falling backwards and disappearing into a pool of blood.

Swirling the vial lightly, the Lord smiled and placed it into his pouch before leaving the mansion.

All that's left was to report the 'failure' of Alice and Ria to return alive while the issue regarding the Unbound Demonette has been resolved. He just needed to get the corpses put in place.

###

Continuing to fall through the darkness, Alice and Ria found their senses overwhelmed by countless voices in the dark.

The cries of the young, the pleas of the homeless, the mournful sadness of those that remain. Their identities blurred together, threatening to invade their mind when a blinding light filled their vision.

Shielding their eyes from the light, the darkness surrounding them finally released its grasp as the two fell without hindrance.

Quickly adjusting themselves in mid air, they landed on the ground and summoned their weapons.

Alice brought out her blade and coated it with the innate blood flame while Ria created a spear out of lightning.

Looking around, Alice observed a twisted landscape that defied the laws of reality or anything that she had seen in the Abyss.

Strange misshapen trees cast ominous shadows over the lands as countless islands floated in the void.

This cluster of floating islands were connected by thick chains while cages hung off each segment.

Within the cages, countless corpses rested lifelessly. Some large some small, some humanoid some bestial.

Glancing above them, a blood red sky could be seen yet no moon was present.

And at the heart of this realm stood a sinister altar. The altar, looked as though it was crafted from blood obsidian and etched with ritualistic symbols. Dried blood stained the ground while dried husks kneeled in perpetual prayer, stuck in the motion of reverence.

Their ghastly expressions bore neither happiness nor sadness. Only fear.

"What in the hell... Are we still in the Abyss?" Ria asked hesitantly as something about this realm sent the shivers down her spine.

She could feel every part of her body rejecting this place. It felt as though she was in the presence of something... unnatural and should not exist.

It was a different feeling compared to Alice. It was far more ominous.

"I... Don't know." Alice shook her head.

Her voice filled with a mixture of uncertainty as she recognised some of the symbols. Only a small fraction but she had definitely seen them before.

It had nothing to do with the Cult of the Eclipse nor did it have anything to do with the Rituals that she had seen thus far in her ventures deep into the Abyss.

No, she had seen these in her time on the surface.

In the Zenia prison.

'These symbols... two of them were near the operating table.... Do the Zenia's control this realm?' Alice thought to herself hesitantly as she was ready to activate the gift that Allura had given her if things showed even the faintest signs of going south.

She was not ready to face the Zenia family again and she knew this. It was too early for her to expose her existence to them.

"Beautiful isn't it?"

""!!!""

Hearing a voice behind them, body Alice and Ria slashed out at the same time as lightning and fire weaved together into a wave of destruction.

However, their target was composed as the wave of energy soon dissipated before reaching him.

'What?!' Widening her eyes, Alice didn't expect this to happen as she had never seen the powers of the Abyss dissipate in such a way.

The only time she had seen something remotely similar was her violet flames!

"Surprised? The gift of the Abyss does not reach this far." He smiled while walking towards Alice and Ria.

"Now, I must applaud your efforts. Especially you young lass, you actually killed the Unbound Demonette. That sort of power with only two measly Sigils at that. I believe your talent can be put to better use than the Abyss."

Hearing this, Alice couldn't help but frown while Ria lunged forward with a spear.

She wouldn't usually attack like this, but she could not stand the presence of this person!

To her surprise, her weapon and body phased through the man as though they were not present.

"We are merely here in spirit. Not flesh. Had we been here in flesh we would've died to his benevolent gaze. But this is merely a glimpse into the future of this realm. The Abyss to be claimed by the one true Lord."

Snapping his finger, a wave of lethargy washed over both Alice and Ria as they collapsed on their knees, finding it hard to stay awake.

Gritting their teeth, the two glared at the man as he paused in a mixture of confusion and surprise.

'Their souls are rather... resilient. How?'

Narrowing his eyes, he scrutinised Ria, staring deep into her eyes before smiling.

"I see... Your soul has already been tainted by the God of the Eclipse. What shame. A tether? No... A collar seems more fitting. Seems like your Lord will not let go of his control so easily. Now... What about you young lass?"

Walking over to Alice, he kneeled down and stared deep into her eyes.

There seemed to be an endless darkness within her gaze as the longer he stared, the deeper he felt himself sinking.

Her gaze was mesmerising, magnetic even and he found himself unable to take his eyes off her. Alice's right eye, this strange orb where the whites have been dyed by the darkest black. Something seemed to call out from within.

In her gaze, he saw his own reflection. His shaded figure when suddenly, his reflection smiled.

"!!!"

Wanting to pull back his gaze, the man tried to take a step back but he was unable to. He could only watch as his reflection moved without his permission.

Little by little, 'he' seemed to walk closer to the veil separating the two of them.

Was this the girl's soul? No, it was not. It was a reflection of his own yet twisted beyond recognition. A reflection of the sins he's indulged in.

He saw his own death. Deep within, the girl envisioned herself gorging upon his flesh, tearing him limb from limb.

She envisioned ripping off his head and carving out his brain, using his skull as a cup while his body lay lifeless.

She envisioned countless beasts eating him alive, clawing out his eyes and digging their claws deep into his body.

She imagined the bodies of spider like beasts injecting their eggs within his body to be used as a host, a plant like beast planting its roots deep into his nervous system and then there was simply him.

Alone in the darkness with a single girl who stared at him with a smile.

Chains latched around his figure as she stepped up, slowly digging out his flesh and consuming it with a charming smile.

He felt pain.

Pain in the deepest parts of his mind.

*BANG!!!

A barrier interrupted his vision as he stumbled back, cold sweat covering his face as his visage within this ghostly realm was distorted, on the verge of breaking apart.

Had he continued to stare into her gaze, his soul would've been swallowed up!

"What are you?!" He screamed out in bewilderment.

She has no soul! She is an empty void existing to devour! An empty husk ready to devour any soul brave enough to step into her depraved mind.

She is a being that cannot, should not exist! She is no man nor beast.

She is an empty husk, a shell of what once was.

Chapter 176 - 176: Escaping The Realm

Clutching his head in pain, the man glared at Alice before taking deep breaths to calm himself.

Both Alice and Ria were confused by his reactions but right now there was nothing they could do.

'She has no soul yet she is in this realm. Something is anchoring her down to the realm of the living... But what?' The man thought to himself.

He had attempted to peer into the true nature of their souls, to see why they were able to resist the influence of his most benevolent lord. For Ria, it was because the Cult of the Eclipse kept its hold over her.

For Alice, it was something far too paradoxical in nature. A being with no soul yet she is still pulled into the realm of souls. She who should by rights be a husk could think and act on her own.

Strange, too strange.

Getting over the initial shock of almost having his soul devoured by this husk, the man watched in silence as he contemplated his next moves.

With two prime subjects, talented ones at that, he didn't want to waste this chance. However, he couldn't make use of them in their current state.

'I need to observe them... But the Eclipse girl can't be tampered with. At least not yet. As for the girl with no soul, I can't mark what doesn't exist.' He frowned.

But he couldn't deny that once he got over his initial shock, he was very intrigued by the girl's existence.

An impossible anomaly.

"I'm simply me. What do you mean what am I?" Alice retorted with a brave smile but her mind raced for a solution.

Above his head, Alice couldn't see anything meaning this was not Sigil power. This was something else entirely.

He was able to influence their souls while they could not harm him at all.

'Ria is holding on strong but her attacks can't harm him. He said the influence of the Abyss doesn't reach this far but is that the same for my violet flames? My flames are technically manifested from my own blood while the Sigils merely help me in bringing it out...' Alice wondered to herself.

However, she couldn't expose her intentions so easily or else she'll lose the element of surprise.

". . . Perhaps it would be better to deal with you now. You are clearly an anomaly upon this world. Perhaps I may even be doing the world justice to get rid of you." The man squinted as Alice gritted her teeth and lunged towards him.

Sighing at the futility, the man simply stood when he felt something was wrong!

*BANG!!!

Exploding out of her body, violet flames roared out into the shape of a dragon and clawed down towards the man, aiming to consume him in his entirety.

Jumping back, he activated strange glyphs that's been etched onto his skin and chains erupted from the ground.

The same chains that held the islands to one another.

Wrapping around the flaming dragon, it was forced to kneel down as Alice ran past the dragon and dodged the chains.

She could tell the flames were working!

Taking a deep breath, she enveloped her entire body in flames and launched a punch towards him.

*BANG!!!

Parrying with his arm, he tried to push her away but the flames lashed out at him in defiance.

"What are these flames?!"

Without responding, Alice used his arm as a handle and launched a kick towards his head.

Dodging the kick, he created a dark spike above his hand and stabbed towards Alice's chest but she was able to flip backwards and avoid the attack.

The chains around the dragon shattered as it was unleashed once more, releasing a torrent of flames towards the man who conjured a wall of darkness to swallow the flames.

Seeing that it wasn't working, he adjusted his skill and an opening appeared behind him, releasing the flames while avoiding the damage.

Looking at the violet flames that were burning on his arm, he frowned before flicking his wrist. A portion of his arm was separated from him as it the flames fizzled out having consumed the piece he discarded.

"Answer me now. What are you?" He asked while frowning at Alice.

"Haven't I explained myself already? I'm simply me."

"Fine. Better to remove you from this world than to pursue a fruitless task." He scowled as the glyphs around his body started to light up.

Blood pooled beneath him as a large ritualistic symbol slowly manifested.

*RUMBLE!!!

Before he could continue his ritual, he could feel an oppressive aura descending upon the realm. The island trembled as the man glanced up in shock and bowed immediately while neither Alice nor Ria dared to turn around.

'Something' was behind them and turning around meant death!

Silence dawned on the realm.

As quickly as it arrived, the aura disappeared leaving Alice and Ria panting for air.

"Unfortunately, it seems like our meeting will be cut short. Perhaps my benevolent lord has taken a liking to you and your... strange talents. Perhaps he sees a use for you in the true future of this realm. I dare not presume his will as I am merely his loyal subject. But I will do as the lord commands." He sighed.

Flicking his finger, a rift opened beneath Alice and Ria, expelling them from this realm.

Kneeling towards the altar, the man gave one more prayer.

His Lord has given him his order.

'Keep an eye on the Anomalies. Find out the secret behind the girl with no soul.'

"All is as you command my Lord." He muttered before leaving the realm.

While he could not tamper with the soul of the girl that belongs to the Eclipse, marking her was still possible.

"Seems like I'll have to apologise to my lady. Lord Andrius will be dealt with and his secrets left untold for my benevolent Lord has ordered the observation of these two young seedlings. Meaning, Andrius shall be sacrificed for the greater good." He smiled, flickering through the realm as he sought out Andrius.

###

After being expelled from the strange realm, Alice and Ria found themselves collapsed beside the road.

Both of them were silent as they digested what had just happened.

How they were dragged into a strange realm for the soul. How the man proclaimed the future of the Abyss is to be ruled by his 'Lord'.

"With each day we have more sh*t to tell my grandfather and Allura. At this point I'm wondering if it was better for them to just follow us." Ria sighed while scratching her hair.

She couldn't help but feel angry about the fact that she couldn't do anything in that realm. Her 'soul' was helpless there.

The only one who could move was Alice and even then, he was able to handle her strange fire with ease.

"Mnm. I don't know why he looked afraid for a moment though... Is it because of Cayla?" Alice muttered.

She could see his fear when he was staring into her eyes.

It was genuine fear that couldn't be faked. Not to mention his reaction afterwards, questioning who she was.

"How many Sigils did he have?"

"No idea. He had nothing above his head. Not a single Sigil."

Hearing this, Ria paused. Everything that he did, all of the powers he demonstrated and the strange symbols on his body. None of it was Sigil related.

"Should... We use one of the life saving tools that Allura and grandfather gave us? I feel like this information shouldn't wait." Ria asked hesitantly.

"Maybe Allura might know more. But these are supposed to be used to save our lives. I'm not sure if it'll summon them or not." Alice frowned.

They only mentioned that these will help them and didn't tell them the effects of activating these items.

"True... Urg, what the hell is even going on. No matter how strong we get it never feels enough. We might need to speed up a little and get more Sigils." Ria sighed in frustration.

Nodding her head in agreement, Alice wanted to get her hands on her third Sigil as quickly as possible.

Standing up, Alice looked down at her outfit and frowned. Giving her sleeve a quick smell, she couldn't help but recoil in disgust as the stench was an unbearable mix of dried blood and trash.

"Let's get changed first. I don't want to spend another second in this state."

Ria couldn't agree more as the two made their way to their room within the Guild.

They needed to sort out how they should deal with the Lord who clearly hide something from them and the Guild.

The fact that the Demonette was a person and not a puppet was not something they could just overlook.

Leaving the area, they didn't notice a single lone raven staring at them from the building above.

Its eyes sparked with intelligence as the bird let out a cry before flapping its wings, flying away from the duo.

###

Cleaning his hands, the man that had taken Alice and Ria earlier looked down at his handy work. The body of Lord Andrius now laid dead beneath him without a single wound.

His face warped with anger and betrayal.

"Quite the interesting way you've decided to deal with that Lord. I must say, it's not often that you meet someone who can directly communicate with the soul." A voice rang out behind him as he froze up in surprise.

He didn't know who it was but he could clearly tell the other party was far above his level. Even with his traits, it was not something he could deal with.

He didn't dare to turn around.

"May I ask who it is that I'm speaking to?"

"Don't bother. I'm merely visiting to see who dares to tamper with my little lass. And it turns out to be quite the strange fellow. You know, you had me concerned when she suddenly disappeared from my radar." The visitor chuckled as the cries of ravens started to echo out.

The man could see a raven bird landing on his shoulder while shadows stretched out around him.

"So why don't you tell me why you bear unfamiliar crests upon your body. They're not gifts of the Abyss." Kaden narrowed his eyes as the realm lost its colour.

"Ah... Seems like I've attracted the attention of someone powerful. However, my Lord has work for me elsewhere, I do hope we can meet in better circumstances." With an explosion of blood, the man disappeared as Kaden furrowed his brows.

"Strange b*stard. What has that girl gotten herself into."

Chapter 177 - 177: Thane

Returning to the Guild, the two ignored the stares they were receiving and made their way to their rooms for a shower and then a change of clothes.

After the shower, Alice decided to go for something comfy consisting of a large brown jacket, a white dress, a pair of tights and shoes. Just as she was about to leave her room, she heard a knock and opened the door.

She could see two staff members with serious expressions on their faces.

"Can I help you two?"

"I believe you accepted a commission with Lord Andrius Blackthorn earlier today, am I correct?" The first staff member asked as Alice nodded her head, wondering why they were looking for her. If anything, it should be the other way around since the details of the commission were clearly incorrect.

"The body of Lord Andrius was discovered in an alley not far from the Guild. We're ordered to take everyone who is involved. That includes you and your friend who took the commission with you." He explained with a serious expression.

Hearing this, Alice couldn't help but pause in surprise as she didn't think the Lord would just die like that.

"Alright. We were about to report to the Guild regarding an issue with this commission as well." Alice nodded.

"We will listen to what you wish to say once we've gathered all involved parties."

Leading Alice out of her room, they escorted her to the upper floors of the Guild where Alice noticed Ria was also waiting. Sitting down next to her, both of them sighed at the same time.

"What a pain in the ass..." Ria groaned.

"Yep... I just had a shower too. I haven't even had food yet." Alice lamented, feeling hungry.

"So Andrius is dead. How are we even going to get our reward money? I really hope they didn't make us waste our time."

"I'm pretty sure he already handed the gold to the Guild. The main issue right now is that he's well... Unalived. What do you think happened?" Alice asked curiously.

They were busy with killing the Demonette then waking up on the street so it wasn't a crime that they could commit.

The only fear now was that they would get slandered and be blamed for his death.

"Wait, he's dead???" Ria blinked her eyes in surprise as she wasn't told about that when they took her in.

"Yeah."

"Well sh*t... Were we the last ones that saw him at his house? Though I suppose his butler would've been the last one.

As they were waiting, more and more people were brought in ranging from simple guards to workers of the house.

Alice and Ria were taken to a separate room as there were two people there waiting to question them regarding where they were and what they were doing.

Answering honestly, the two explained that they were in his old mansion tracking down the Unbound Demonette.

Naturally, they didn't forget to mention the fact that the Demonette was actually human and not a puppet. Signs of surgery as well as organs could be found within her body and did not match up to what the commission detailed.

Hearing this, the interrogators were concerned about the new information and decided to investigate the old mansion for the Demonette's corpse to verify their claims.

With nothing else they needed Alice and Ria to answer, they allowed the two to leave for now.

Sighing out in relief, the two made their way down to the main guild.

"Do you want to try to get our reward money or... Should we go gambling some more? I want to get my mead money soon since I'm running out of mead." Alice asked while shaking her flask gently.

"Let's see if we can get our reward money since we technically completed it. There were just complications at the end since the commissioner is dead." Ria shrugged.

###

"I'm sorry but I cannot give you the reward money just yet. The Guild has yet to verify the completion of the task and due to the complications on the commissioner's side, the reward money will be held in the guild for 3 days or until the higher ups give the go ahead." The receptionist explained as both Alice and Ria groaned before turning around without hesitation.

"Gambling?"

"Gambling. Want to take part this time?" Ria offered as Alice thought for a moment before nodding her head.

"Sure, I'll fight a few fights myself. I want to get used to using my blade after all. The last fight with the Demonette showed me that I lack the technique required. What I'm doing right now is basically swinging on instinct." Alice sighed.

She'll admit that she had a talent for these weapons but there was only so far instinct could take her. After a certain point, she'll need techniques to bring out more of her potential.

And thus far, the best way she could think of honing her technique would be through experience.

Meaning battles in the gambling den.

Hearing this, Ria had a wide smile on her face as all it took was the first step before she became addicted to the arenas. Not that she was addicted herself of course.

"Alright, leave it to me. I'll find the gambling den in no time then we can earn some quick coin." Ria proclaimed while hitting her chest.

Asking Alice to wait by the tables next to the bar in the Guild, Ria ran out in search of the gambling den.

With her now being left alone, Alice wondered what she could do to pass the time.

'Maybe I should visit the library again.'

She wanted to see if the library had any books regarding fighting techniques so she could improve her combat with weapons.

However, she doubted she could learn much from just reading as she felt more comfortable with a demonstration.

It was how she learned the skill Nova Core from Allura after all.

As long as she could see it in action and the logic behind the actions, Alice figured that she'll have a good chance in replicating said technique.

Just as she was about to stand up and make her way to the library, a man sat down opposite her with a smile.

There was a strange sense of confidence and mystery to him as he made himself comfortable on the seat. He had long black hair that had been tied up into a ponytail and a pair of black eyes filled with amusement.

Dressed in a sleek black suit that showcased his lean figure, he draped a slightly oversized jacket over his shoulders.

Something about him felt familiar to Alice but she couldn't quite put her finger to it.

Glancing above his head, she could see six floating Sigils and her guard was instantly up.

"Don't mind me, I couldn't help but overhear that you are planning to go to the gambling arena to earn some coin." He chuckled while resting his chin against his palm. He narrowed his eyes at the girl in front of him, clearly on guard against his present.

"I am." Alice replied short and direct.

She didn't want to say the wrong thing to annoy this man as he is someone dangerous. Or at least, if he was in a bad mood, he could kill her with a single thought.

"How do you feel about earning extra on top of the normal payout? I have a few fighters in mind and let's just say if you were able to defeat them, you get a large reward. For each fighter you defeat, the reward is increased. If you lose, the gamble is over. How about it?" He offered causing Alice to furrow her brow immediately.

This deal seemed too nice for her. It was dangerous.

"What's in it for you? I'm sorry but I'm a simple two Sigil user. I'm not sure what you're expecting from me." Alice asked, taking a step back as the man only tapped his finger against the table.

"Now now don't be in a rush. Let me explain my side of things."

An invisible pressure loomed over Alice as it restricted her movements, preventing her from leaving this spot.

All she could do was stay silent and listen to this strange man.

"You see, the gambling arena in this city has been... A little too eager for earnings. While arenas do indeed rig certain matches, this arena rigs every match for coin and it's hurting the overall profits in a long term scenario.

"Hence I want you to defeat some of their best fighters and even it out a little." He explained but Alice still wasn't convinced.

"You can be honest with me you know?"

Hearing this, Alice couldn't help but raise her eyebrow.

'Like hell I can! You're a potential Abyss Lord!!!'

"It seems too suspicious. I'm sure there are better candidates than me. What made you approach me out of everyone in this Guild? Not to mention, it seems like they're not hearing any of this conversation either. You're blocking off the sound aren't you?"

Blinking his eyes in surprise, the man paused before nodding his head.

"Indeed. Well then, I'll be frank with you. I'm merely curious about who Allura has decided to train. I'm an old friend of her's you see, very difficult not to notice her presence on you when you're wearing her amulet." He admitted while pointing at the amulet hung around Alice's neck.

It was the gift that Allura had given her and it was something to be used when her life was in danger.

"And as her old friend, I have a responsibility to see how you are doing while she's busy on the frontlines. So do you believe me now? Plus if I actually had harmful intentions for you, do you think you'll still be breathing right now?" He squinted his eyes dangerously as Alice gave the Sigils above his head another glance before nodding her head.

"Fantastic. Let's work out the arrangement as well as the list of names I want you to beat in combat shall we?" He clapped his hands, dispelling the aura and allowing Alice to move freely.

"Before that, what do I call you?"

"You can call me Thane. You should be honoured to meet me."

Chapter 178 - 178: Thane's Gamble

Raising her eyebrow, Alice didn't think he would say it was her honour to meet him. However, considering that he could be a potential Abyss Lord, she wasn't going to retort to his statement.

'Even though he says he's Allura's old friend, I can't take his word for granted. But I can't just not do what he says either... Let's just play along for now.'

"So how many of them do I have to beat? Like I said earlier, I only have two Sigils. There's a limit to what I can do." Alice shrugged since her limit was probably going against three star Hunters.

Of course, that wasn't taking into account the properties of her body and flames. If she includes them, then she could fight up to five star Hunters should they underestimate her.

"If you were anyone else I might've agreed. But we both know Allura doesn't do things the simple way. I assume you can probably skip stars and defeat those higher level than you right?" Thane smirked while calling over the waiter for some alcohol.

". . .Perhaps."

"Then it's simple. Your first opponent will be three stars and once you show your capabilities we'll move to four stars. Naturally, the people gambling there will bid for the contestants provided by the arena. Especially the VIP's when seeing the Sigil difference. That's when they realise you aren't simple and you've already cost them hundreds of gold perhaps even platina." Thane chuckled.

"And you're so sure they'll bid against me because?"

"Because I'll be bidding you up obviously. There's no way a scrawny brat like you can even generate enough interest for bids let alone bids in the hundreds." He rolled his eyes while reaching into his pocket and pulled out a note.

Seeing this, Alice understood that he was never asking her to take part.

"First opponent, a swordsman who dual wields while having a greatsword nearby. Basically a three sword user. Three Sigils and his powers are based on leaving 'traces' of his slashes in the arena. Be careful of where he already slashed or else you might be in for a nasty surprise." Thane explained while looking through his notes.

"Let's go now since he should be free for a match."

"Ah! Wait, Ria hasn't come back yet." Alice called out as she didn't want to leave without notifying Ria.

"Ria? Right... the grandkid of that brat. I don't have any responsibility for her. Why should I bother?" Thane asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Well... Because Ria was also trained by Allura. So if you have a responsibility for me since Allura is training me, surely Ria is accounted for right?"

Staring at Alice for a moment, Thane was silent before leaning back in annoyance.

"Heads or tails?" He asked suddenly.

"Huh?"

"Heads or tails. Pick one."

Blinking her eyes in confusion, Alice wasn't sure if this was a trick question or not.

"Don't tell me you don't even know about heads or tails? Tch fine. Basically, I flip a coin and you guess what side it lands on. If it lands on the one you called, you win. So if you get it right I'll take responsibility for a second brat and not just you." Thane waved his hand lazily while pulling out a coin.

"Now pick one before I say no."

"Ah! Erm... errr.... Heads!"

Flicking the coin the moment Alice mentioned her choice, Thane closed his eyes and allowed the coin to drop against the table. After a series of bounces, the coin started to spin before stopping on heads.

Seeing this, Alice's eyes lit up in happiness while Thane let out the deepest, most annoyed groan he could.

"How long is the brat even going to be?" Thane asked while accepting the beverage that the waiter brought over for him.

"I'm not sure. She said she was looking for the arena."

"Then why am I even bothering with waiting? Tch." Rolling his eyes, Thane closed one of his eyes before covering it with his hand.

Activating two of his Sigils, he sat in silence while Alice didn't want to bother him.

"Found the brat."

Tapping his finger against the table, a swirl of darkness gathered above them as it started to distort.

Finally, piercing the veil of darkness, a human leg could be seen.

"SH*TTTTT!!!!"

A woman's cry out heard as she fell from the portal and landed against the floor.

*BANG!!

Hitting her head from not being prepared, Ria curled up into a foetal position while clutching her head.

"Ria?!" Alice cried out in shock as she didn't think Thane would just bring Ria here of all things.

"F*ck! Huh??? Alice?? Why am I back here?" Ria widened her eyes in surprise as she immediately froze up upon seeing Thane who was sitting in front of Alice.

He had a bored look in his eyes while glancing down at Ria from above.

"It's... kind of a long story." Alice forced a smile while surveying their surroundings.

The sudden appearance of Ria had attracted quite a bit of unwanted attention. While Thane didn't care, it may make things more complicated for the two of them so Alice suggested they make their way to the arena while she explained the situation.

"Sure go ahead. I've fulfilled my side of things by bringing her here. Let's go to the arena now before I get bored waiting." Thane yawned while finishing his drink.

Standing up, he made his way out of the Guild building while Alice and Ria followed behind.

Hearing the situation from Alice, Ria couldn't help but look at Thane with scepticism. After all, this seemed too good to be real, even if he was an old friend of Allura.

There must be something more that he wasn't telling, especially considering that he's a potential Abyss Lord. Hell, even six star Hunters wouldn't bother with small fries like them.

Alice had avoided explaining some of the situation as she couldn't just say he had six Sigils. Instead, she held up six fingers while pointing to her Sigil.

"Let's just play along for now. Not like we can go against what he says anyway. But if things get too ridiculous, let's use you know what." Ria whispered while Alice nodded her head.

However, a small hammer made from shadows appeared above Ria as it hit her on the head, causing her to cry out in pain.

"Oi brat, I can hear you. Even if you use the tools they gave you, they won't be able to save you. Especially that brat who mingles with death." Thane scoffed, sounding as though he was offended by the very notion that some tools could stop him.

Where he wanted to go, nothing can stop him.

Making their way through the city, they took a train that slowly descended into the lower half of the city.

As they made their way down, the surface disappeared from their sight while another city appeared beneath the surface.

Surprise filled Alice's face as the undercity looked as though it was bathed in sunlight. When compared to the darkness that prevailed in the Abyss all day every day, this felt like a breath of fresh air.

It was cheap mimicry but for Alice, this was the first time in 10 years that she felt as though she was out in the open.

Clutching her chest, Alice couldn't help but wonder what it'll feel like once she finally arrived at the surface and out of the Abyss.

Seeing this, Thane couldn't help but smirk to himself.

The arena in this under city was located in the very centre. While there was indeed gambling, it wasn't the main attraction since many of the residents came here to watch the machine prototypes fight one another as a form of entertainment.

They would different companies compete with one another to see who has made the best guard to be implemented into the cities defences. The human battles were merely an addition to the machine battles.

Registration for the arena was simple just like how it was in the last city. They just needed to present their Guild ID which verifies how many Sigils they own.

After asking to be put up against the fighter known as Mortis, the receptionist gave her a questioning look before asking about the wager.

They needed to make sure it was worth his time.

Before Alice could say anything, Thane placed a coin pouch on the desk.

"I want to bet 100 platina on her victory." He grinned, causing everyone who heard him to pause in shock.

100 platina!

For a single match between a two star Hunter and a three star Hunter!

Not even the matches between four star Hunters would have this high of a wager never mind the battle for a two star Hunter. Not only that, this was for her victory!?

"Erm... Sorry! This is too much for me to deal with. Allow me to get my manager." The receptionist apologised as she quickly ran to get someone who was more qualified to deal with this much money. This was 100 platina for gods sake! This was far above what someone like her was trained to handle!

Noticing Alice and Ria staring at him in shock, Thane only shrugged.

"You want to fight and I want to make it interesting for my own sake. Just some pocket change compared to some of the other stuff I've collected over the years."

Hearing his response, Alice's smile twitched as she didn't think her fight would now have a wager of 100 platina.

However, the main issue came from the fact that there were now going to be more eyes on this fight than ever...

###

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! WE HAVE AN ASTOUNDING FIGHT FOR YOU TODAY! A WAGER OF 100 WHOLE PLATINA! YOU HEARD IT RIGHT, YOU'RE NOT HALLUCINATING! 100 PLATINA IS BEING USED AS A WAGER FOR THIS FIGHT!"

Hearing the announcer cry out in excitement, Alice stood on the arena with her face being hidden by the shadow cast by her hair.

Around her was the arena, a breathtaking spectacle of metal and stone. Towering pillars served as obstacles within the arena while seating arrangements surrounded the main platform, allowing everyone to get a good view on the stage.

There was only one thought in Alice's mind.

'F*ck...'

She wanted to cry. She didn't mind fighting but in front of everyone and 100 platina on the line as well? No thanks.

Chapter 179 - 179: Inner Hunger

Sitting in the VIP suite, Thane had a bored look on his face while leaning against the sofa. He was currently overlooking the entire venue as he had arranged subsequent fights for Alice after she finished the current match.

'She seems to be doing well for herself. Doesn't quite have the same look in her eyes as she did in the prison. I guess Allura must've treated her quite nicely in the time they spent together.' He mused to himself.

Alice had even taken on some of Allura's habits that she has from time to time. The way she would sigh and posture her body when she felt annoyed or helpless at a situation.

Even back in the Guild, he felt like he was looking at a younger Allura which is why he decided to play a prank on her.

If it wasn't for that, he wouldn't have stepped in like he has done right now. It was simply not his nature to do so.

But since he was here, he may as well make it worth it for the girl.

'She's not using the weapon I had Nalem give her. I suppose using the heirloom of a family I ruined might be a bit too much out in the open. For someone of her strength anyways.'

Then there was the case of the brat next to him. Even if he did make the bet with Alice out of boredom, he wasn't going to go back on his promise.

And while he was here, he may as well guide her a little.

"Oi brat." Thane called out as Ria frowned slightly before glancing over.

"What is it?"

"What are your Sigils and what do you plan to aim for?" He asked directly while tilting his head to the side lazily.

"Huh?"

"Stop wasting my time and just tell me. I'm pretty sure Allura and your grandfather have given you some tips but they're both too soft. Answer me and I can help you get stronger."

Hearing this, Ria paused. She thought back to the moment she felt helpless against the strange man in the realm of souls. How her attacks did nothing and how only Alice could react.

She didn't want to be helpless. She didn't want to suffer the same way she did at the hands of the Cult like she did before.

Biting her lip for a moment, Ria stood up and activated her Sigils, allowing them to manifest on her body.

"Stormweaver, Thundercoil Harpy, Thunder Fury Serpent and Storm Leviathan." Ria answered truthfully as Thane gave her Sigils a glance before nodding.

"Seems like you're aiming to be a physical fighter with lightning. Storm Leviathan is pretty impressive if you got it as your forth. Did Allura ask you to choose the Lightning Ascent skill?"

Pausing in surprise, Ria didn't expect him to be able to guess so accurately and nod her head.

"As expected of her." Thane chuckled. Even after so many years, Allura still favoured Sigils that boosted physical attributes and diverse effects. Just judging from her overall choice of Sigils right now, Thane could already simulate the fighting style in his head.

"Have you tried focusing on ranged attacks rather than physical?" Thane smiled.

Her combination of Sigils may be used for physical fighters but he knew that there was more to it than just being a frontliner.

Plus, just because someone is ranged doesn't mean they're weak in close combat. It's a mistake that many Hunters make when underestimating their opponents.

It's also a tactic used by stronger beasts so they waste less energy when dealing with weaklings that don't deserve their time.

"Once the lass has finished her fights I'll show you something later. Do as you please with the information. You can ignore it, you can take it to heart or you can even sell it. I don't care what you do with it." Thane waved his hand, gesturing for her to sit down since the fight was about to start.

He wanted to see how Alice was doing in terms of surviving in the Abyss.

###

Looking at her opponent Mortis, Alice could already feel a silent pressure dawn on her as he looked around at the numerous spectators that came to watch the hundred platina fight.

He is a tall figure wearing a tattered cloak that exposed some light armour through the gaps that didn't hinder his mobility. Two swords in their sheaths were strapped to his waist while a large greatsword could be spotted on his back.

With a large hood and mask covering his facial features, Alice could only see a pair of crimson eyes surveying the arena.

"100 Platina. A price that not even I could reject. Who are you? I don't know who is reckless enough to gamble such a large amount for this kind of fight." Mortis asked, finally looking at his opponent.

"He said he was an old friend of my master and wanted to make things interesting. I'm not exactly in a situation to stop him." Alice smiled bitterly while observing her surroundings.

With Mortis having three Sigils, there was a high chance that he had a Resonance or else Thane wouldn't have paired them together.

'Knowing how Allura is and how similar they act, he definitely picked someone stronger than average. I can't take this opponent lightly.' Alice thought to herself while narrowing her eyes at him.

Unsheathing her blade, Alice held it by her side as the announcer had finally finished hyping up the battle.

Most people understood that this fight wasn't exactly going to be a spectacle, they were merely here because of the large wager that even the nobles were shocked by.

Alice could hear their whispers of doubt. How they found it impossible for her to stand against one of the best three star Hunters of the arena.

"I see. I will apologise in advance but I won't be taking this battle lightly. Even if you are supposedly weaker than I." Mortis nodded as he reached behind him and pulled out the greatsword effortlessly.

Stabbing it into the smooth ground in front of him, he crouched down slightly and placed his hands against the handle of his sword.

In that instant, Alice could feel an overwhelming pressure wash over her as her instincts were immediately kicked into survival mode.

This was the aura of a man who's fought life and death battles.

Unknowingly, Alice took a step forward with a smile on her face. Anticipation bright in her eyes and a ravenous hunger blossoming within her mind.

###

What is this girl?

I asked myself in confusion. The killing intent I had so proudly cultivated in my many battles was met with happiness and excitement.

A far cry from the reaction I would usually get.

Instead of stepping back, she stepped forward. Instead of panicking, she laughed in excitement. There was no hint of fear or composure in her eyes.

'She's too strange.'

Something about her was off. She felt unnatural.

Every cell in my body was warning me, begging me to step away from this battle in pursuit of safety. A feeling that I only felt when I was out on the field.

'She feels just like an Abyss Beast.'

That was the conclusion I came to. Perhaps she had spent a long time with them or perhaps it was due to some other circumstances.

The stance she took was reminiscent of a beast. Full of openings yet should I attack recklessly, she would not hesitate to sacrifice a part of herself to deal the same damage back to me.

A deranged beast was the best description I could give to her.

No matter her appearance or way of speaking, she could not hide her bestial nature.

I was starting to regret my decision to accept this battle but it was no use in thinking about that now. The hosts have already instructed me on what to do. I need to win this battle like I have done before.

Closing my eyes I focused my mind. The announcer should be starting the battle soon.

When he does, I'll land the first strike.

###

"Begin!"

"!!!"

Before Mortis could even unsheathe his blades, Alice's sword appeared in his vision. She had thrown her weapon the moment the battle began!

*CLANG!!!!

'What is this force?!' Mortis thought to himself in shock.

Even after blocking her attack, his hands were ringing from the collision. This was not the strength a normal two star Hunter should be able to exert yet the results speak for themselves.

He leaned forward, expecting the girl to be behind the blade but she was nowhere to be found.

Above, behind, left or right, not even her shadow could be spotted. Almost as if she had disappeared entirely.

'No! It's a hallucination!'

In realisation, he hurriedly activated his Resonance to dispel the effect, but it was too slow.

She had already appeared in front of him in all of her unsatiable hunger. Her blade above her head, ready to cleave down. There was no technique, no refinement. Only pure brutality!

***BANG!!!**

Kicking his leg down, he used the greatsword as a shield to block the strike.

Yet her response is simple, primal even.

She grabbed hold of the blade edge of the greatsword and swung herself towards him, kicking him in the chest and pushing him back, setting Mortis off balance.

'She's an instinctual fighter! I need to take hold of the tempo of this fight or else she'll keep pushing me until I fall in defeat!'

He had kept his blades sheathed due to the effects of his Sigil, unsheathing them would've produced the most speed and power but clearly it was a mistake! Even if he lost in power, he should've taken the first move.

Just as he pulled his blades halfway out of their sheath, Alice stomped down against the pommel, forcing him to sheath his blades once more.

He could see her preparing to knee him in the face but once again his vision blurred. Another illusion!

But the duration of this illusion was far shorter than the other due to his resonance and he was able to react in time to block her knee.

Grabbing the arm he used to block, Alice laughed as excitement was apparent in her eyes. Her face was flushed from ecstasy as the feeling of battle took over her mind.

Bending her body back, she was able to avoid the greatsword slashing towards her from behind. Going into a handstand, she grabbed his neck with her leg before throwing him away to the other side of the arena.

This was how it should've been. She should never have denied her inner hunger.

Chapter 180 - 180: Thane's Dilemma

Narrowing his eyes, Thane was silent. Alice's condition was far from normal.

Even for someone like him, who barely knew her could tell. This bloodlust, this hunger, this drive for violence.

'Does Allura know? And if she does, what did she say about it? Hmm... This is a little concerning. I haven't heard of a condition like this before. Unless it's possession? I doubt it.

There were no signs of such when I found her.'

Tapping his finger for a moment, he made up his mind.

'Seems like I'll have to investigate the Zenia family a little more and find out what they did with the lass while they had her locked up. Might clear up my questions of why her cell was so heavily guarded.'

But for now, he will watch how the fight unfolded. If needed, he will intervene.

###

Parrying her attacks to the best of his ability, Mortis gritted his teeth as she was like a spectre.

Through a mixture of hallucinations and speed, she continuously evaded his gaze while attacking him from his blind spots.

Jumping out of the way, Morits hid himself behind a pillar to try catch his breath but felt danger above him.

As he tilted his head back, he could see Alice waiting for him from above.

Launching herself towards him, her sword was ready to cleave him in half!

'This isn't a duel anymore! She's trying to kill me!' Mortis thought to himself while rolling back to dodge the attack.

Sliding against the ground, he gritted his teeth and decided to fight as though his life was dependent on it. In this case, it was!

Slamming his hand down, he called back his greatsword and twisted his body, letting out a large horizontal slash before unsheathing his other two blades.

As expected, Alice managed to dodge the initial slash but gave him enough time to prepare.

'Three fold ambush!'

Dashing forward, Mortis cleaved down with his left sword while his right sword slashed twice towards Alice. A technique designed to cut off her escape should she dodge the first attack!

"!?!?!" Widening his eyes in disbelief and shock, Mortis couldn't believe the sight in front of him right now.

Alice did not fear the first cleave. Instead, she parried it with her own sword while biting right hand, preventing him from slashing her with the other blade.

Flinching from the pain, Mortis couldn't help but drop his blade while trying to shake Alice off.

Tearing off a chunk of his hand, Alice stumbled back as she licked her lips with a smile before shuddering in satisfaction.

When did her thirst for blood begin?

This was a question that had been on Alice's mind since the start of this battle. This hunger that was rampant within her mind, this desire to kill. When did she first feel this?

'Ah~ I remember now...'

Closing her eyes, Alice remembered this first hunger.

The party banquet, that's when she felt it. She could feel this rush of starvation flooding through her body as she sought to quench this desire with anything she could get her hands on.

The second time she felt this hunger was after she woke up.

When they forced her into the room with the mad scholars who tore away at her body. She could finally remember the words she spoke that day, the requests she had and the way she looked at the servants, wanting to quench her hunger.

"Father... Can I eat what I ate at the party again?" Alice muttered while she slowly leaned back, staring at the ceiling of this arena.

She finally remembered the face fear, grief and anger that her father displayed.

Every day this hunger continued. She fought the scholars for two reasons.

First was for survival. Second was to satiate this desire.

Somewhere along the decade of imprisonment, the hunger disappeared and her only reason to hold on was for survival. But now it's back.

And Alice wanted to enjoy herself.

Snapping her body forward, Alice shot towards Mortis like a ravenous beast, hungry for blood.

Out of instinct, Morits swung his blade but Alice was ready.

Grabbing the blade with her bare hands, she pushed it to the side before slashing down with her sword.

Silence descended upon the stadium as no one dared to make a single sound.

"Let's calm down for now. As much as I don't care for his safety, let's not break the rules of this arena." Thane's voice rang out as he covered her eyes with his hand from behind while he caught her blade mid swing using his finger.

He could still see the ravenous smile on Alice's face as her chest heaved with excitement. However, in the darkness cast by Thane's hand covering her eyes, Alice was able to regain some form of control as the smile slowly faded away.

". . ."

Closing her eyes, Alice sheathed her blade as she took a deep breath to try to calm herself.

She wanted to figure out the source of this side of her, why it reappeared. There were hints of it before when she would 'flip the switch' but never was it this oppressive to the point she couldn't even control herself.

"Shall we take a break from the fighting today?" Thane asked as Alice nodded silently. She didn't want to speak right now.

In the darkness created by Thane's hand, she felt oddly at peace. It felt comforting and wrapped around her mind like a blanket, soothing her agitation.

Looking down at Mortis who felt death pass by him, Thane shrugged before taking Alice away from the arena while keeping his hand over her eyes.

Right now, he was using his own Sigil powers to calm her mind but he didn't think her desire for slaughter would be this strong.

It felt no different from the blood-starved beasts that he fought in ages past. The beasts hidden within Terminus.

###

With the first match ending in such a manner, Thane cancelled the remaining matches and didn't care about the pocket change he would be penalized for doing so. He had much bigger issues to take care of right now than to care for coin.

He had Alice lay down on the sofa in the vip room of the arena while covering her eyes with his hand and resting her head against his leg. Ria sat next to him with a worried expression while looking at Alice.

"Will she be alright?" Ria asked hesitantly.

If an Abyss Lord had to rush out to stop Alice when the fight ended, she didn't want to imagine what was happening within Alice's mind right now.

"Hmm... Maybe? Who knows." Thane shrugged. This was nothing like anything he had seen before.

Hearing this, Ria couldn't help but feel disappointed. If Thane didn't know then who could they even ask for help from? Allura and her grandfather were busy with their own tasks and couldn't be reached out to unless they do it first.

"Tsk, you look like the lass had just died in my hands. Her condition is... strange to say the least. It reminds me of certain conditions that I've seen occur in beasts. Ones that are dominated by their baser instincts. Difficult to control and in her case, highly destructive.

"I'm sure even you can imagine what kind of trouble she'll cause if she ran rampant within the city. Now, I'm all for a little bit of chaos here and there to alleviate this boredom but even for me, letting her kill everything in sight is pure stupidity. Such a sight won't relieve my boredom, only makes me look at it with annoyance and dissatisfaction.

"If I wanted to see such a sight I would've just gone deeper in the layers. But setting aside my own enjoyment, this seems to be something she has to figure out herself rather than have us intervene. Fighting against one's baser instincts, especially instincts on this level, is something she has to sort out on her own." Thane shrugged as he released his hand.

With the darkness disappearing, Alice opened her eyes once more and saw Ria's worried expression.

"Sorry for the trouble." Alice apologised while sitting up.

Even now, she had a headache but she felt more in control.

"Ah its fine. How... How are you feeling?"

"Complete sh*t." Alice groaned. She felt exhausted both mentally and physically as the fight had taken everything out of her. It had pushed her body beyond her limits and her joints feel like they'll dislocate with the slightest movement.

"Care to tell me when that condition began?" Thane asked while giving Alice one last glance, making sure there wasn't anything else that was wrong with her at the moment.

"I... I think it resurfaced after I almost died to the Demonette. I had this kind of feeling before but it was controllable. After almost dying to the Demonette, it's like... How do I explain it..." Alice furrowed her brows while trying to think of the words to use.

This side of her now felt unrestrained. As though she lost the chains that were holding it back after almost dying against the beast in the mansion.

"Whatever it is, seems like you were able to control it before. Have you tried using the same method to control yourself?"

"Haven't tried yet." Alice shook her head.

"Hm... Alright. Well just get some rest for now. You're in no state to continue humouring me. And for you, I'll get you later." Thane waved his hand lazily before stepping out of room.

Taking a deep breath, he sighed while scratching his hair.

'Why did I even come down here again? The more I involve myself the more time I waste. I'm pretty sure if Lua saw me now she won't let me leave so easily...' Thane thought to himself while leaning against the wall.

It was always hard to say no to her.

'I'm sure she felt the brat's signal disappear from our radar completely. Even if it was just for a moment. Yet she's not contacting her. Do I really have to send out a raven to get her?'

Clicking his tongue in annoyance, Thane snapped his finger and created a shadow raven on his shoulder.

Hesitating for a moment, he decided against this and dismissed his summon.

He'd rather extend his trip than to face Allura again.

'It shouldn't be that much of a headache right? I'll sort out her instinct issue then leave the Abyss like nothing ever happened. She wouldn't need to know I came down here again after so many years.'