

Abyssal A 251

Chapter 251 - 251: Blurred Outline

'Severance and Corruption... I suppose Allura's Nova Core is based on a branch of Severance. Her Executioner's Blade severs the connection of the target to the Abyss before landing the final blow. Nova Core, on the other hand, most likely erases the connection at the post of impact.' Alice thought to herself as she remembered the phenomenon caused by Nova Core.

How it drew in energy from around it before appearing as a single spark of destruction.

With this in mind, it was clear that her Void Flux and Void Flux – Cleave should not only aim to condense its power to the absolute limit but also aim for the strands of energy that she could see.

If she learns how to differentiate these strands and understand which ones serve as the main connection to the Abyss, she'll be able to better utilise her abilities.

While Alice was thinking to herself, Kaden couldn't help but chuckle at her expression while deep in thought. He could practically see the gears in her mind turning as she theorised on the meaning behind these authorities and what they could do.

"Having fun?" Kaden smiled while giving Alice's head another pat.

"Mnm, I think I kind of understand the difference between my skill and Allura's. It gives me room to make some adjustments on my end but I'll deal with that later. Nalem and Allura are still waiting downstairs right? I'm guessing they'll be worried about my reaction." Alice nodded.

"It's not every day you hear someone claim that they can make adjustments based on an Apostle's authority. And yet here we are. Take your time, there's no rush. Both Allura and Nalem are patient people, more so if it's something that bothers you." Kaden chuckled.

"Don't worry, I've calmed down now. As long as it is limited to just my blood samples, I don't mind."

Glancing back at the city one more time, Alice made her way down.

While looking at the city, she couldn't help but notice a strange sight gathering towards the top of the castle. A sea of multicoloured strands gathered together, invisible to the naked eye but thanks to Cayla, she could see it.

With this in mind, Alice could only assume the Goddess was at the top of the castle.

###

"Welcome back. Are you feeling better now?" Allura asked after seeing Alice and Kaden returning to the table.

"I am. Sorry about earlier." Alice apologised but Allura shook her head.

"There's no need to apologise, it's normal to be weirded out by someone asking to perform experiments on you. As long as you're feeling better, I'll be relieved."

Placing a plate with some cake in front of Alice, Allura leaned back into her chair.

Alice could only smile before turning to Nalem.

"How much of my blood do you need? If you want, I can also give you some details about my blood that I know of."

"How much can you spare? The more tests I can run the more accurate the results will be." Nalem shrugged.

Thinking about it for a moment, Alice turned to Allura.

"In the pouch you confiscated after knocking me out, there should be a vial containing blood beads. They're made from my blood and should serve as a good sample. If you give me some vials, I can also fill

them with my blood. I presume you want it straight from my body rather than created from my Sigils right?

Since my third Sigil can conjure my blood." Alice asked while glancing at Nalem towards the end.

"That's right. The blood conjured from a Sigil while containing the same properties, have a different origin than the blood within your body. You can think of it as a product created by the Abyss after observing your blood. The origin will always be better." Nalem explained as Alice nodded her head.

While they were discussing this, Kaden took this time to teleport out before coming back with a small bag.

"I've brought the vial of blood beads and some empty vials for you." Kaden smiled while placing the bag on the table.

"You really didn't waste any time now did you?" Alice raised an eyebrow.

Shrugging her shoulders, she reached into the bag and brought out several vials.

"Do you have any healing vials? I'll need to replenish my blood."

"Actually, it's best if you don't drink a healing vial while extracting your blood since each sample will be slightly different." Nalem interjected but Alice shook her head.

"You don't have to worry about that. My blood is a little different. The only changes it receives are from Sigils."

Kaden simply chose to trust Alice and not pry while leaving to get some healing blood.

In the meantime, Alice made a cut on her arm before using her Sigil to control her blood.

Extracting the crimson fluid from her body, Alice continued to fill up the vials while Nalem was still contemplating about what her words meant.

Drinking the healing blood that Kaden had brought over, Alice filled a second batch of blood vials while Nalem began comparing the two.

Taking off his glasses, his Sigil marking appeared around his eyes as his pupils changed into a deep emerald colour.

"This... What the hell is your blood." Nalem muttered with trembling lips, surprising both Kaden and Allura.

This was the first time they had seen Nalem lose his composure in such a matter.

"Is something wrong?" Allura frowned while Nalem continued to compare different samples.

"Something wrong? Yes, everything is wrong. Alice's blood it's... it's completely immune to the permanent change brought forth by the Abyss. The traces left behind by the Abyss Blood is devoured by her own blood. While the effects may linger for a moment it seems... She's completely immune to side effects." Nalem muttered while looking at Alice in a mixture of shock and fascination.

This stare sent a chill down Alice's back as it was similar to how the Scholars stared at her.

Noticing his mistake, Nalem coughed and composed himself.

"Sorry. But as I was saying, it seems like her blood 'consumes' the effects of the Abyss before it can leave lasting marks. As you know, accepting a bounty for a Sigil is a contract formed with the Abyss. It's something that changes you fundamentally hence why Sigils are able to change Alice's blood.

However, even with the effects of Sigils, it seems like the foundations of her blood remain the same." He explained while raising the vial of blood against the lights.

"Wait... Are you suggesting that Alice can't ever turn into a beast?" Allura widened her eyes in surprise.

"Not quite. But I suppose it's not far off. How do I put it... Honestly I think Kaden might be able to explain this better than I can. This spills into his territory of understanding regarding the Soul's outline." Nalem smiled helplessly.

"When transforming into a beast, Sigils and Abyss Blood act as a mould for the soul. It changes its shape to fit that mould and eventually, that mould becomes a prison. But for Alice... Since she doesn't have a clear outline, it's difficult for a mould to be created." Kaden sighed as he created a ball of shadow.

"Think of it like this. A clear outline defines the normal soul born in the Abyss."

He adjusted the ball so that its outline was clear.

"Reshape it and you become a beast."

He snapped his finger and the shape transformed into a draconic creature.

"As for Alice? The outline of her 'soul' is so blurred, it's as though nothing is there yet she still exists. In a sense, she is like a construct but even a construct has a clear outline while she doesn't. Saying that she doesn't have a soul is the best description for this anomaly." Kaden admitted while waving his finger.

The outline of the ball started to blur until it is simply a blurry patch of colour that seemed to stretch on infinitely. But at the same time, it is also contained within the area above Kaden's hand.

If Alice tried to focus on the edges, she'll simply see the library while a patch of darkness appears in her peripherals. And when she tries to focus on the shape in her peripheral, it disappears while the surroundings become dark instead.

"How can you shape something where the outline is so indistinguishable and blurred that you don't even know you're looking at it? This is simply my current observation. I don't know how it's changed or hasn't changed but she is indeed immune to the changes brought forth by the Abyss.

No matter how much Abyss Blood she tries to drink, it will not succeed in defining her outline and thus, cannot shape her into a beast."

Hearing this, Alice finally understood her current condition.

10 years of work put in by the Scholars of the Zenia family could not compare to a day with an Apostle of the Abyss Goddess.

'If my outline is so blurred that the Abyss cannot shape me, then there is probably a way to define it. My one Sigil resonance made this crown above my head permanent. In a sense, using it has defined my 'soul'.' Alice thought to herself as she furrowed her brows.

Countless questions in her mind had become clear.

Why could she mimic the powers of Hunters if she drinks their blood? That was most likely a case of temporarily giving her 'soul' an outline. By ingesting their blood, she takes in the influence of their Sigil and the Abyss blood they have consumed over the course of their life.

However...

"If the shape of my outline can't be defined, what will happen if someone who has a clear outline drinks my blood? What I want to ask is, can I blur their outline to make them immune to the effects of the Abyss? Or perhaps even revert the changes?"

Chapter 252 - 252: Cayla

"It's hard to say since this kind of situation has never happened before. You're the first case of a blurred outline that I've seen." Kaden shook his head since they were in unknown territory regarding Alice's abilities.

"Theoretically, it's not impossible. We haven't observed the possible changes that can be brought forth by your blood. Whether or not your strange nature can change the foundation of life in the Abyss. But that's what we're trying to find out no?" Nalem smiled as he continued to examine the different samples.

Hearing this, Alice nodded her head as he was indeed correct. There was no need to rush things for now.

With the Inverted World bringing her to the past or perhaps a 'recording' of the history in the Abyss, it was a perfect chance for her to learn more about herself.

Keeping this in mind, Alice had 3 main objectives she wanted to complete.

First: The origin of her blood.

Second: Can she stop people from turning into a beast?

Third: What are the restrictions around her blood? What can or can't affect her and the limits of her resistance?

If she could accomplish these three objectives, she'll be able to utilize her blood to a much higher degree than before. Whether that be making medicine for Ria so that she can drink blood without worry or helping those who have begun their transformation into a beast.

After collecting enough samples for Nalem to work with, Alice drank another vial of healing blood and slumped in her seat.

Seeing Alice in this state, Allura shuffled a bit closer and patted her head.

"Why do you two like to pat my head so much. There's a crown floating there. Honestly, it's more of a hassle to try pat it than anything else." Alice grumbled but didn't have the energy to move her head away.

"Why not? You're small and cute. How often is it that I get to pat someone with two different hair colours?" Allura chuckled while playing around with Alice's hair.

"I'm average height. You're just too damn tall. Same goes for Kaden. If you look at Nalem, you can see we're both similar heights but he's a bit taller." Alice furrowed her brows.

"Regardless, you're still small for me." Allura chuckled.

"Everyone's small compared to you."

Meanwhile, Kaden simply watched with a smile on his face. Now that he had verified that Allura is Alice's adoptive mother in the future, seeing this interaction between the two of them made him smile. Perhaps it was destined after seeing how Allura treats Alice.

With the samples now collected, Nalem excused himself since he had a lot of work to do if he wanted to figure out the origin and properties of Alice's blood.

After Nalem left, it was just Alice, Kaden and Allura left in the library.

"Say... I've been meaning to ask but is there mead here?" Alice asked curiously.

With everything going on, she hadn't been able to inquire about the holy water. The mead of a long forgotten and destroyed city, what kind of drink would that be?

"Mead? We have mead but why do you ask?" Allura blinked her eyes in confusion.

"I wanna drink it obviously. I want to taste what kind of mead is available in Ayr hehe~" Alice grinned while rubbing her hands excitedly.

She had her flask at the ready but since she didn't know how long she was going to be here, she didn't want to go through all of her supplies. Plus, it doesn't hold as much as her original flask so she couldn't continue her rate of drinking.

However, if Ayr had mead of its own then there was no better supply.

"Do you want to go get some or shall I?" Allura glanced over to Kaden who had already returned with mead in hand.

"Damn... I should get a teleporting Sigil, that sh*t is too handy." Alice muttered as she jumped up and looked at the mead that Kaden has brought.

Just the smell alone was enough to make her fantasize about the taste.

But before she could even take a sip, a wave of lethargy washed over her as Alice felt her vision blurring.

Stumbling back, she held her head as she reached out for the drink. Her vision turned dark as she felt herself collapsing back into her seat. She could hear the muffled cries of Allura and Kaden but their voices continued to grow feint.

###

Snapping her eyes open, Alice immediately entered a defensive stance as she found herself floating in an empty void. Around her, a strange flow of darkness with strands of light surrounded her.

The light felt both near and far, within reach but her hand could never touch it.

Surveying her surroundings, Alice sensed a familiarity to this space but she couldn't quite put her finger to it.

'What's going on?' Alice frowned.

Sensing a gaze linger on her back, she jumped forward before twisting her body.

It was at this moment that Alice found out the source of the familiarity.

A pair of eyes stared down at her from above.

"Cayla?!" Alice widened her eyes in surprise. The Cayla in her mind only revealed one eye yet there was two here.

[So you do know of me. Master's assumption is correct then, you've come from a time beyond ours.] An unfamiliar voice rang out as strands of light manifested into a woman's body.

But unlike before, Cayla didn't mimic the Goddess's form nor did she mimic Alice's. Instead, it was her own body.

Standing before Alice, Cayla narrowed her gaze while scanning Alice from head to toe.

"I suppose if Kaden and Allura noticed me then it's only natural for the Goddess to know as well." Alice forced a smile as she could feel a sense of hostility from Cayla. It wasn't quite the to the point of killing intent but more so displeasure and annoyance.

'I'm guessing Cayla doesn't like the fact that I'm her new master...' It didn't surprise Alice.

After all, how could one be compared to a Goddess?

[Can I... Talk to 'me'? Or is she unavailable right now?] Cayla asked as her energy felt faint within Alice's body.

Like a fire that's almost put out yet held on persistently.

"Unavailable sorry. You fall asleep quite often." Alice shook her head as Cayla simply sighed.

[Then I shall talk to you, my future Master.]

Snapping her fingers, Cayla changed their surroundings into a garden with a single table and two seats.

Sitting down, she hugged one of her knees while the other foot helped balance her.

[Future master, if I am in your body, do you know what happened to Ayr?] Cayla asked without beating around the bush.

She wanted to know if her home was still around or if it had fallen to ruin.

Seeing the seriousness in Cayla's eyes, Alice understood that this was a very important question to Cayla.

Hesitating for a moment, Alice furrowed her brows before opening her mouth.

"Ayr no longer exists. I only heard about it from Allura by coincidence. If it wasn't for that, I doubt Allura would've told me."

Alice decided to be truthful towards Cayla. If she already knew that she was from the future, then a half assed lie wouldn't work. In fact, it'll even work against her and harm the chances of having a peaceful talk.

Upon hearing Alice's answer, Cayla's gaze trembled as she clenched her fist and bit her lip. A myriad of emotions swirled within her as every part of her being wanted to deny this truth.

[And the Goddess?]

"Passed on. I talked with a 'residual spirit' of the Goddess once. She said that she was no longer around and Allura confirmed this." Alice shook her head.

Staying silent, Cayla closed her eyes as she took several deep breaths to calm her mental state. If Alice's words are to be trusted then her beloved home was gone and her master, dead.

[How much do you know of Ayr's final fate? What happened during its final days?]

"Sorry... I don't know much about Ayr. I don't even know how I got here but I'm trying to learn as much as I can."

[I guess that's to be expected... Thank you for telling me.] Cayla muttered.

Her displeasure towards Alice had disappeared but all that remained was sadness over the discovery of Ayr and her Master's fate.

Alice couldn't find the right words to comfort Cayla as the two sat in silence.

[Master will want to see you at some point. All things considered, you are her successor. I'm sure there are plenty of things she wants to learn from you and vice versa.]

"I'm not sure how easy it is to arrange a meeting with a Goddess. Plus, isn't there a meeting coming up?"

[It'll be no hassle. Just let Kaden and Allura know that you want to see her and I'm sure they'll take you to her after some convincing. It's not like Master rejects visits in the first place, people are just too intimidated to ask for one.] Cayla shrugged.

To them, the Goddess is a figure that's outside of mortal comprehension. They believe she should be looked at from afar but that was no the case at all. In fact, she welcomes people to talk to her.

In a way, the Goddess of the Abyss was a lonely figure who tries her hardest for her citizens and followers.

Without waiting for Alice's reply, Cayla cut the connection between the two of them as she sat silently in this realm alone.

Tears began to fall as her shoulders trembled.

Was the destruction truly unavoidable? Could she not change her Master's fate?

Cayla didn't know.

Chapter 253 - 253: Successor

Groaning softly, Alice found herself laying down on a bed within the library. Both Allura and Kaden were working on some documents nearby.

Both of them had a serious expression on their face and even Allura was in a rare state of silence.

Her frown only deepened the further she read.

Sitting her, Alice held her head as her movements alerted the two.

"Ah, you're awake. Are you feeling better? What happened?" Allura asked, taking this chance to have a break from paperwork.

"Mnm, sorry. I'm feeling better now, how long was I out for?" Alice nodded with a small smile while Allura was checking her body to see if there was anything else that was wrong.

"You were out for 2 hours." Kaden chimed in.

Hearing this, Alice paused in surprise.

2 hours? She had only talked to Cayla briefly and nothing more. Yet that still knocked her out for 2 hours.

'Damn, at least she can choose to talk to me face to face next time.' Alice grumbled inwardly.

But considering neither Allura nor Kaden knew of Cayla in the future, perhaps Cayla didn't make herself known in this era.

To both of them, Cayla was simply known as the Eye.

"So any reason as to why you just passed out? Or was it the mead?" Kaden asked curiously. He's heard of people passing out after getting drunk but passing out at the sight of mead? This was the first.

"It wasn't mead. Just had a conversation with someone in my head."

Raising his eyebrow, Kaden saw that Alice wasn't joking.

"Should... Should we investigate it or is it fine?" He asked, wondering if Alice wanted assistance.

Shaking her head, Alice got out of the bed and looked for her shoes. Just as she was doing this, she had a realisation.

'Why the f*ck is there a bed in the library of all things?'

Turning around, she watched as Kaden snapped his fingers and the bed disappeared into his shadows.

'Damn... That sh*t is handy as f*ck.'

Once again, she was reminded of how efficient Kaden's shadows were.

With the bed now packed away, both Kaden and Allura returned to their work while Alice sat next to them watching curiously.

"Did something bad happen?" Alice asked.

"Just some annoyances. Beasts are becoming rowdier for an unknown reason. They're attacking everyone on site without care for their own survival. It's happening all over the Abyss on every layer, even the layers close to the surface with some from the deeper layers going up." Kaden sighed. Even if he could teleport him and Allura around the Abyss constantly, there were too many reports coming in.

Going to one place means another would be under attack.

The Queens Guard and Lord Commander Nyer were out dealing with this sudden uprising but there were only so many of them compared to the vast sea of beasts.

Naturally, he and Allura could make a move but Nyer has already contacted him saying that he'll handle it. The two of them should focus on defending the city since they've been granted authority from the Goddess.

Nyer wasn't granted an Authority but he didn't need one. After all, before he 'became' human, he was one of the most feared beasts that resided within Terminus. Even after being reborn thanks to the Goddess's power, he retained the strength he had previously.

If anything, in terms of raw power, he surpassed Allura and Kaden!

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Looking at the mountain of corpses before him, Nyer sighed and kneeled down. Closing his eyes, he gave them a silent prayer.

While they may have the form of a beast, they were humans to him. Each one had the potential to join them in their glorious city yet their insanity deprived them of such opportunities.

He didn't know what was happening, but it was clear that this was an attack aimed towards his Goddess. A challenge against the laws she put in place.

"I am in no mood for visitors. Please leave." Nyer warned without turning around.

"Why the cold greeting? I believe you know that I mean no harm to you." A feminine voice rang out behind him with a chuckle.

"What does the Apostle belonging to the Moon want with me now? I believe I have already rejected your proposal last time, don't make me repeat myself." Nyer warned as a heavy pressure descended upon the area.

Despite him not being an Apostle, the woman could feel a chill down her spine. He was the only one who could make her feel this way aside from the other Apostles.

"I just came to let you know that there's been a slight change that we've observed. You already know about the burden placed upon the Goddess of the Abyss. But what you see is only the surface. Do you truly know what is happening to her?"

Furrowing his brows, Nyer glanced back at the woman with a frown.

"Speak."

Seeing his response, the woman's smile grew wider as this was now a time for negotiation. If she plays her cards right, they may gain another ally.

"You see, the Abyss is expanding. The rate of expansion was slow before but it's beginning to speed up. However, the burden of expansion is being placed on your Goddess since her laws are being implemented.

"As a result, her condition should be deteriorating. How long do you think she can hold out before she cannot take it anymore? Even though she is a special entity in the Abyss, beneath the Will of the Abyss, she is but a pawn like the rest of you."

"Stop telling me riddles and just tell me what you want." Nyer glared. He wasn't unaware of the Goddess's condition. She who used to walk around her city with joy can no longer move away from her castle.

At this point, she can only look over her city while her body continues to suffer.

"We're looking for a way to confront the Will of the Abyss. While we do know it exists, we do not know where it resides. But with your assistance and cooperation, we'll be able to get one step closer."

"Is that all?" Nyer sighed as he turned away from the woman.

Hearing this, she was confused when Nyer opened his mouth once more.

"Her Highness already knows about her condition and the Will of the Abyss expanding. She also knows that the Gods of the Surface desire her power. Targeting me and convincing me to help you sever the connection is what you desire right?"

"If I help you sever her connection with the Abyss, you'll be able to target the source."

Furrowing her brows, she wasn't sure where Nyer was going with this.

"I bore of this. All of you Apostles want my power to help you target my Goddess. Be grateful that your Goddess of the Moon has blessed you for this encounter. Now leave."

Before she could even ask about what he was talking about, she noticed the area around them beginning to distort.

Countless cracks across the space revealed themselves as she had been surrounded by blades this entire time. A multilimbed beast loomed above her in the cracks between reality. Slowly, it retracted its weapons and the space sealed itself.

Cold sweat dripped down her back as she didn't even sense anything that was wrong with this space.

The only exception within the hierarchy of power. The one who can kill Apostles despite being 'just' an Abyss Lord.

Nyer, Lord Commander of Ayr.

Without hesitation, she took a step back and left the area.

Standing alone, Nyer closed his eyes.

The Gods knew that his will was wavering. That's why they kept sending Apostles to try convince him. His loyalty lies with the Goddess and no one else. Not even the Abyss.

It was she who saved him, not the Abyss. Yet to point his blade at the Abyss was equivalent to pointing his sword at the Goddess.

'If I don't do anything, she dies from the expansion. If I try to stop the Expansion, she may die from the backlash.' Taking a deep breath, Nyer sighed while looking up at the sky.

He was stuck between two impossible choices where the results would always end up with the Goddess's death. Was there no third path?

###

After dealing with the reports, Kaden stood up as he needed to do the patrols around the current Layer of the Abyss. With his powers of teleportation, he was the most suited for Patrols.

As for Allura, she was responsible for the safety within the city and any who targeted the outer walls. Alice will be joining Allura.

Before Kaden could teleport away, Alice opened her mouth.

"Would... Would it be possible for me to meet the Goddess?"

"You want to meet Master?" Kaden raised an eyebrow. Knowing that Alice is from the future, he understood that there were probably things she wanted to find out about. Things she couldn't easily talk about.

Hesitating for a moment, Kaden glanced towards the Castle.

"I'll ask Master. If she says yes, I can take you there now while Allura does her patrols around the city."

Wrapping himself in a cloak of shadows, Kaden disappeared from the area. It didn't take long for him to return and when he did, there was a strange expression on his face when looking at Alice.

"She has agreed to see you. I'll send you just outside her door."

Gesturing for Alice to grab onto him, Kaden thought back to what the Goddess said a moment ago.

"Yes... I've been wanting to talk with my successor. If she has some questions for me then let's take this time to answer some of them. You can bring her over Kaden."

'Successor? Alice is... the Successor of Master, the next Goddess of the Abyss?' Kaden thought to himself with a slight frown.

The fact that Alice is a Successor brings certain theories to mind that he didn't want to think about.

But regardless of what he thought, there was no denying that Alice came from the Future and that she is the Successor. Even if he wanted to change the outcome, he doubted that he could.

All he could do was simply follow the instructions given to him by the Goddess and bring Alice to her.

Chapter 254 - 254: Meeting The Goddess

Teleporting outside of the Goddess's room, Kaden looked at Alice with a strange expression before shaking his head.

"She's waiting for you inside. Hopefully, you'll be able to find out what you want." Kaden smiled as he patted Alice's head.

Thanking Kaden, Alice watched as he jumped back into the shadows and disappeared from the location.

Looking at the set of double doors before her, Alice couldn't help but feel nervous.

The Goddess of the Abyss.

That's who she is going to meet. A Divine entity revered by Kaden and Allura and the one who made this city.

Swallowing her saliva, Alice prepared herself mentally and pushed open the doors.

Widening her eyes, Alice found herself engulfed by a display of vibrant energy. Within the room, the air was filled with countless strands of energy that danced as though it was underwater, casting a luminescent glow around the room.

Each strand pulsed and shimmered with its own distinctive hue that would shift between colours.

In the centre of this sea of colour, a single woman sat with a smile on her face. Her hands caressed the strands of energy.

Even though she didn't say anything, Alice knew that this was the Goddess. She didn't need Kaden to tell her beforehand as the energy radiating off her was far too different from anything Alice had seen before.

Each strand extended by the Abyss was connected to her. Her every movement, every breath felt like an extension of the Abyss.

"Would you like to have some snacks while we talk?" Her voice echoed out, gesturing towards an empty seat next to her.

"Ah erm... No thank you, your Highness." Alice snapped out of her stupor as she adjusted her posture.

Seeing this, the Goddess simply chuckled as she shook her head.

"No need to be polite with me. In fact, it makes things more awkward if you force yourself."

Awkwardly walking over to the seat, Alice sat down but was still unable to relax herself.

"Is this perhaps the first time we've met? But considering you are my successor, you should have seen me before right? But then again, it's probably after I die." She chuckled, surprising Alice by her lack of reaction towards her own death.

"What's there to be surprised about? As the Goddess of the Abyss and someone who governs half of the Abyss, it's only natural that I know of my own deterioration and fate."

Flicking her hand, she gently pushed aside some of the strands so that she could get a better look at Alice.

"Ah... Seems like you only got half of Cayla. I don't suppose that means Cayla is currently asleep now, is she?" The Goddess asked while looking at Alice's right eye.

Not wanting to let the Goddess speak to herself during this 'conversation', Alice opened her mouth.

"She's asleep. But why half? Is she supposed to take over both of my eyes?"

To Alice, Cayla had always been mentioned as the 'Eye', singular. Even in her own mental space, there was only one eye that appeared in the space above.

She hadn't heard of Cayla being a pair.

"Of course. Cayla is also known as the Eyes of the Abyss. It's one of the blessings the Abyss gave me when I ascended as its Goddess. The Right Eye grants knowledge of the Abyss while the Left Eye grants control. But you only possess the Right Eye so either the Left Eye is given to someone else or Cayla has been wounded." The Goddess explained as she pointed to her own eyes.

"Aside from Cayla, you also possess a fragment of the Crown of the Abyss. But for it to be in such a state... I can only assume my passing is not a peaceful one." She chuckled while pointing at the markings around her neck.

Before Alice had activated the one Sigil resonance, the Crown had rested within her chest. She could only assume it was meant to manifest as a marking rather than a physical crown above her head.

"Aside from Cayla who's the Eye of the Abyss and the Crown, what other parts are there?" Alice asked after a brief pause.

"You don't know? Hm... Judging by the condition of Cayla and the Crown you were probably made into my Successor without proper explanation then. No matter. There are three key pieces." The Goddess smiled as she held up three fingers.

"First, the Crown of the Abyss. It serves as the Symbol of my rule, my Divinity. It acts as the foundation of my power and the channel in which the Abyss can funnel power into me.

"Second, the Eyes of the Abyss. Cayla acts similarly to a proxy. Through these eyes, I can see and control what goes on.

"Third, the Heart of the Abyss. I must ask, do you know what the Heart signifies in the Abyss?" She asked as Alice paused.

She recalled her talk with Cayla and the incident in Blackrock City.

"Cayla mentioned it before but it was cryptic. She simply said that the heart is the engine of the body and nothing else really. Other than that, she began to explain that after activating Sigils, a person's blood has already become Abyss Blood and how humans struggle to convert the power of others in a similar state."

"Ahaha, so Cayla didn't become better at explaining in the future. How fascinating. But while she is not wrong, she's not entirely correct either." The Goddess laughed softly as she snapped her finger and created a fake heart using the strands of energy around her.

"The heart that Cayla mentioned is not the heart that you're thinking about. But rather in this case, the Heart of your existence. The core of your being. When you make a contract with the Abyss to gain Sigils, you allow the Will to enter your body and tamper with your outline.

"Doing so, it reshapes you and moulds you into a vessel capable of accepting the power. With this in mind, you can say that the 'Heart' is the closest channel a person has to the Abyss. A direct connection if you will.

"For Lua, the Authority I have granted her directly severs the connection of your 'Heart'. While it is not powerful enough to completely destroy the connection permanently, it prevents the Abyss from further tampering with your outline."

Hearing this, Alice nodded her head. If she understood everything correctly, this 'Heart' was the single thing that allowed connection to the Abyss.

"Wait... Then this barrier around the city and its surroundings..."

"Yes, your guess is correct. It blocks the connection to the Abyss and thus, unless you've been granted permission, you cannot use Sigil Abilities." The Goddess nodded.

Which only served to further Alice's confusion.

Her flames could be manifested meaning they're not connected to the Abyss. Yet it was brought forward thanks to the abilities of her second Sigil.

Not only that, but she could also create a ritual with her flame to bring forth the strange draconic beast that she had seen when fighting Lyra back at the Academy.

However, it wasn't time to ask this question just yet. There was something else she wanted answering.

"Heart Blood. The purest blood that you can extract from a beast's body. Why? Is it connected to this other 'Heart' you mentioned?" Alice asked curiously.

"Correct. While the Spiritual Heart and the physical heart are two separate things, they are also bound. While the Spiritual Heart serves as the medium to connect the person to the Abyss, the physical heart acts as the funnel to channel power from the Spiritual Heart.

That's why the blood that comes directly from the heart is the purest you can extract." The Goddess nodded before waving her hand and dismissing the strands of light.

While Alice was digesting this information, she took this moment to observe her successor.

The strange outline of her soul was rather alarming. But there was something far more sinister in the deepest depths of this... 'patch'.

A single beast with an unsatiable blood lust towards the Abyss and by extension, her.

Her first instinct was to purge this beast, but as it is sealed within Alice's body, she decided to not make a move. But that wasn't the only reason.

'There's a seal placed upon the beast. It has... traces of my Divinity but its weak. Perhaps a residual spirit I left behind? The effect of this seal binds this beast and restrains it, weakening its sense of self.' She mused to herself.

It was quite a strange situation to see traces of her own actions yet 'she' was not the source of these actions.

"How peculiar..." The Goddess muttered as Alice glanced up in confusion.

"Don't mind me, I was thinking out loud. Now I have a few questions for you, Successor." She smiled.

"Does Ayr survive?"

Seeing the brief hesitation within Alice was all she needed to know as sadness washed over her eyes.

"I see... Do you know why I made Ayr in the first place?" She asked, making her way over to the balcony while gesturing for Alice to follow.

"Not really." Alice shook her head.

"I made Ayr so it can become a home for those without a home. A place in the Abyss where beasts can feel 'human'. And a final stop for those at the end of their life. You could say Ayr symbolizes death but it is in reality a second chance. A hope that the Abyss will allow them to be reborn as 'human' even if it's brief.

"Every human or beast in the Abyss is a citizen of Ayr as this is their final destination. But I suppose things didn't go well if Ayr no longer exists. So tell me, what is the future like?" She turned to Alice.

"Regale me with your tales for I wish to learn of the path my citizens are walking."

Chapter 255 - 255: Velouria

Hearing the Goddess's request, Alice wasn't sure how she should begin. First of all, Ayr no longer existed but she assumed the Goddess took that into consideration.

Meaning what she wanted to know was the progression of humanity within the Abyss. How they thrived.

"My knowledge... Is limited. I spent most of my life confined before Allura saved me. But if you still want to hear about it then I'll try and tell you as much as possible." Alice scratched her hair as the Goddess nodded her head.

"Anything is fine, I simply wish to learn about the future."

Seeing the Goddess look at her with expectant eyes, Alice couldn't help but feel as though she was about to tell a story to a child.

Right now, she was not the Goddess who ruled over all that lived in the Abyss. Right now, she is simply a human wanting to know about what kind of future was in store for this realm.

Thinking about her words carefully, Alice started from the beginning. How the surface and the Abyss live off one another.

Those that live on the Surface require Abyss Blood for medicinal purposes while those that live in the Abyss require the technology from the surface to better survive in the Abyss.

Alice told the Goddess about the Hunter profession despite the awkwardness. After all, she had just learnt that every beast in the Abyss had the potential to become a citizen of Ayr.

With that in mind, she had been killing 'humans' this entire time. Her process of imagining her opponents as 'beasts' couldn't quite work anymore. But that was something she'll deal with later. For now, she continued to tell the Goddess about the future.

While listening to Alice's explanations, the Goddess listened with a happy smile on her face.

"Are you not angry that people are hunting beasts for their blood?" Alice couldn't help but ask. She had omitted quite a few details such as constant harvesting, experimentations and so on. But she couldn't avoid the topic of targeting beasts.

And despite all this, the Goddess continued to listen with a smile.

"Hmm... How do I explain it. It's simply the cycle of life. Though humans speed it up drastically, it's not as though the people born in the Abyss avoid killing beasts either. One cannot deny the benefits that Abyss Blood can bring nor can one deny the benefits beasts gain from killing humans.

"Both sides will continue to target one another and it's not something I can change even as a Goddess chosen by the Abyss. Of course, excessive hunting saddens me but from the sound of it, beasts are not regulated in the future unlike the current situation in Ayr." She shook her head while glancing out to the city.

"Is it strange for you?" She asked as Alice nodded her head.

"Divine beings are... simply those with less restrictions than the mortals. They have the power to change rules, add new rules or even remove certain rules if the situation allows for it. But they are not all-powerful. I can see all of the suffering in the Abyss, hear their cries for help, the mournful tears of those who have lost family.

"But the most I can do for them is to create this city and have my retainers assist the world. It's why Gods and Goddess appoint Apostles though this will be the first time we properly acknowledge this. Either way, I am happy that you've shared the future with me. To know that the children of the Abyss continue to survive despite my passing brings joy to my heart.

Even if they are less likely to be reborn as a human." The Goddess smiled bitterly.

The rule she had set in place was for beasts to avoid killing humans unless it was self-defence. Succeeding in doing so will reward them with a higher chance of becoming human. As much as she disliked it, she was unable to guarantee this reward.

So for those who failed to become human despite adhering to the rules, they were given a heightened sense of self, gaining a humanoid body as a beast and the ability to communicate and even live amongst humans.

It wasn't a perfect fix but it sufficed for now.

Looking at the Goddess from behind, Alice was starting to see that she was not as unapproachable as she had originally expected. This nervousness within her body had all been for nought. If anything, treating her naturally might've been the best approach.

Scratching her hair, Alice took a deep breath before sighing.

"What should I call you? According to your spirit, there wasn't a translation for your name in the new language. Of course, if you want me to call you Goddess that's fine as well." Alice asked.

The Goddess was taken aback by her sudden change in tone and disposition, but a wide smile appeared on her face.

"You can call me whatever you want. But if you want to call me by a name then... Velouria. You can call me Velouria." Velouria suggested while tapping her chin.

"Mnm okay. So... Velouria." Alice nodded.

Hearing Alice call out her name, Velouria almost couldn't contain her smile and had to cough lightly to try and compose herself.

"When Kaden planted Cayla into my body, he mentioned something about an old promise. Though Allura mentioned I didn't have to go down this path if I didn't want to. I just want to know what kind of expectations they may have. Since they saved me from my prison, I want to repay them." Alice asked as Velouria paused for a moment.

"Expectations huh? I can't say for sure but I will estimate based on what I know about those two. First, the easy one to guess would be Kaden. Despite how he looks, he doesn't hold much sentimental value to objects and locations.

"Once I die and Ayr falls, I can only assume that Kaden may be saddened for a period of time before recovering his composure. He may not be fully healed inside but he'll do so to avoid worrying those around him. He treasures the connection between people rather than objects and location." Velouria answered while playing with several strands of energy near her.

"For Lua... She's a bit more complicated. She's a very sentimental person whether that be towards Ayr or to me. After my passing and the destruction of this city, there is a high chance that Lua will try to seek out revenge and ways to restore her home.

"And by extension, Kaden will help her because that's how he's like. So taking this into account, their expectations for you may not be as daunting as you imagine. Maybe it was different when they initially saved you but if Lua said that you can do whatever you want, I think she meant it." Velouria chuckled as Alice was silent.

"Then what about you? What are your expectations for me?"

She wanted to know what Velouria hoped she could achieve. Whether that be the restoration of Ayr or a way to save her citizens.

"Me? I'll be happy with anything you do so long as you don't have any regrets. You should live your life to its fullest, even more so if you had been imprisoned before Kaden saved you. Know this, I don't expect you to be a second me, nor do I expect you to live in my shadow. Just do what you want and make sure you don't regret your life, that is all I expect from you as my successor.

Everything else is simply a bonus." Velouria laughed as she waved her finger.

"But would that be okay? I... I possess both the crown and the Eye. Wouldn't it be a waste if I were to do whatever I wanted? Wouldn't that betray why Kaden saved me in the first place?" Alice sighed but Velouria simply shook her head.

"Nonsense. What do you think my role is in the grand scheme of things?" Velouria asked with a smile.

Furrowing her brows, Alice wasn't sure.

"My role is that of an icon. A testament for hope in the Abyss. As the first 'Human' born in the Abyss, I chose to pave the path so others can walk. But you don't have to do the same. The Abyss does not need a Goddess, it simply chose to grant me this power.

"Maybe it was out of a whim but since it gave me this power, I chose to wield it however I want. Perhaps that's the same for you. Kaden may have given you Cayla and you may have found the Crown, but in the end, it is still up to you to decide what kind of person you want to be. Just make sure that you don't come to regret your decisions." Velouria chuckled while patting Alice on the head.

"Why do all of you like to pat my head." Alice pouted. Despite the crown above her, they still take the extra effort to pat her head.

"Because you're cute fufu. Despite how you may compose yourself and act in front of others, there's always a hint of vulnerability within. A fear of what the world and its people may do to you. And it's this vulnerability that makes me want to pat your head and protect you.

Perhaps it's the same for Kaden and Lua." Velouria smiled as she pulled Alice into a hug and sat her down on the balcony as though she was a child.

Feeling embarrassed, Alice could only scratch her cheeks. But she didn't deny Velouria's claim of vulnerability.

She was scared.

Beneath this anger, this killing intent and this insanity, she was scared of the Zenia family.

She was scared of her father, her brothers and of betrayal.

There was always a fear present in her heart no matter how she tried to suppress it.

However, Allura, Kaden, Gin, Ria and even Luke have shown her that doing what she enjoyed helped her forget this fear.

The training sessions, the drinking parties and even just a simple shopping trip. It was a waste to use this time succumbing to fear when she could be enjoying life with her friends.

A small smile formed on Alice's face as she made up her mind.

If she is going to succeed the Goddess then there is only one goal in mind. Using her flames, she will find a way to revert the damages done by Abyss Blood.

That way, there will no longer be bitter farewells or experiments.

A tribute to her first friend, Lilia.

Chapter 256 - 256: Secrets Of The Violet Flame

"Velouria." Alice called out with a newfound determination in her eyes.

"Yes?"

"Do you think it's possible for someone to be immune to the effects of the Abyss? Well, immune is not the right way to put it but rather for someone to revert back to being a human even though the blood has tainted their outline." Alice asked, surprising Velouria with her seriousness.

Thinking to herself for a moment, she opened her mouth.

"It's not impossible. But it's far more difficult than you may think. Think of it like this. If you bend metal, after a certain point it'll become impossible to bend it back to the way it was unless you reforge the material. That's essentially what I'm doing. Once they're tainted, their 'outline' is reforged.

"But the method you're wanting is to turn them back without killing them right?" Velouria asked with a smile as Alice nodded her head.

"You see, I have these flames in me. These flames hate the Abyss and it has its own sentience. When I use it against other Hunters, it can burn through their abilities and consume it. In my case, no matter how much Abyss Blood was injected into me, I always turn back to a human.

I did some tests myself and found out that these flames are the complete opposite of the Abyss." Alice explained as she opened her palm and conjured a ball of fire.

Looking at this, Velouria observed the flame curiously.

Flicking her finger, a few stray strands of energy floated next to the flames and was destroyed in an instant.

"Oh my... Hmm... I've never seen something like this before. Did you say this fire was inside you?" She asked, looking up at Alice.

"It manifested thanks to my second Sigil. According to the description of the Sigil, it's called Foul Blood Manifestation. It brought out the potential of my blood and manifested it as these flames."

Hearing this, Velouria glanced at Alice in bewilderment.

"So you're saying you were born with the ability to resist the Abyss? How peculiar... Give me a moment okay?"

Looking out to the city, Velouria closed her eyes and snapped her finger.

At that moment, threads of energy began to weave together as Alice saw a familiar figure.

Cayla.

"Master, you summoned me?" Cayla tilted her head but paused after seeing Alice next to Velouria.

"Were you busy?"

"No, I have all the time in the world for you, Master." Cayla shook her head and composed herself.

The edges of her eyes were still red from the crying but she focused on the request Velouria had for her.

"Mnm, alright. I need your power for a moment."

Nodding her head, Cayla's body started to break apart as she turned into a strand of energy that entered Velouria's body.

Opening her eyes, she turned towards Alice who noticed a brighter glow in her eyes.

Alice assumed this was Cayla using her abilities and trying to figure out what was going on inside her body.

As the Goddess observed in silence, the frown on her face deepened which wasn't a great sign for Alice.

A Goddess of the Abyss was frowning at her condition.

Not wanting to disturb Velouria, Alice continued to wait. Soon, Velouria sighed and closed her eyes.

"I found the source of your power. But it seems the me from the future has already restrained it to a certain extent. It's not a perfect restraint but it prevents the power from going out of control since its sense of self is rather... strong." Velouria explained while snapping her fingers.

Cayla manifested next to her looking rather exhausted.

Sitting against the railings, she simply held her head as though she was having a headache.

"Is it bad?"

"It's not bad per say. But it's not exactly positive either." Velouria looked at Alice with a strange expression.

"The thing that acts as the source of your flames... Can be called a beast but at the same time, it's something completely foreign. It's better to call it a Chimera than anything. It holds resemblances to some of the powers that I know of but doesn't have a pure form. Always changing and never staying the same.

Perhaps that's why you're unaffected by the Abyss." She speculated but in the end, she couldn't tell Alice anything concrete.

"I can only give you some guesses based on my own observations and speculations. It seems this beast is linked to you on a level far deeper than what could be considered standard.

'I see... Maybe it was a result of the experiments then. But that doesn't make sense...' Alice furrowed her brows. If this... 'Chimera' was possibly a result of the experiments she endured, then how did she come back from being a beast?

"How deep is the connection? And are you able to tell when it was connected to me? Or has it been with me since the start?" Alice asked as Velouria thought to herself for a moment before opening her mouth.

"The current state of the connection is one where neither of you can live without the other. It's a delicate balance where if you were to die, the flames would fizzle out and perish. And if the flames were to be removed from your body, the balance would collapse within your body and the Abyss will take hold."

Hearing this, Alice couldn't help but sigh deeply.

According to Velouria, so long as the flames existed within her body, the Abyss could never take hold of her. But at the same time, her survival hinged on whether or not the flames continued to behave or not.

If the flames decide to rebel, there was nothing she could do about it.

"I know what you're worried about, but it's practically impossible to remove the flame without killing you in the first place. You'll die before the Abyss gets to you." Cayla added as the pain had subsided somewhat.

"What do you mean?" Alice tilted her head.

"The flames are acting as your Spiritual Heart right now. Remove that and you die, understand?"

Blinking her eyes in surprise, Alice now understood what they meant when they said it was linked far deeper than normal.

The flames were simultaneously serving as her connection to the Abyss and the very thing protecting her from it.

If so, it was probably from before she even got injected with the Abyss Blood during her birthday. Her flames probably saved her at that moment.

"I see... Would it be... Beneficial for me to seek out Sigils that enhance my fire?" Alice asked hesitantly. Her flames were helpful but at the same time, they were also dangerous. She needed to be cautious and not get swept up by its power.

"Of course it would be beneficial for you. But you'll need to work out the roles of you and this Spiritual Heart of yours. It's something you need to resolve by yourself since third party intervention would only hinder you." Velouria smiled before snapping her finger.

At that moment, golden chains manifested and displayed an illusion for Alice to see.

Hidden in an unknown space, a beast was chained up by the very chains that Velouria had summoned.

Seeing this, Alice recalled the moment she summoned the beast during her fight at the Academy.

How chains pulled it back in the end.

'Was that the restriction placed by Velouria?' Alice wondered to herself since Velouria had taken over her body briefly before.

"That and you need to remember this. Flames are simply how you chose to manifest this power. Since it acts as your Spiritual Heart, its form can be changed depending on the Sigils. I'm guessing Allura has left quite the impression on you." Velouria chuckled as Alice nodded her head.

To her, Allura has always been a symbol of power and control. If she could even reach just a fraction of her power, then vengeance against the Zenias would not be farfetched.

"So final confirmation about this power. As long as it's with me, I won't be affected by the Abyss right? Meaning I can drink blood as much as I want without worry right?"

"Yes, that would be correct." Velouria smiled.

"I see... Another question from me. Since this fire is serving as my Spiritual Heart, is that why I can copy someone else's power and Sigils if I drink their blood?"

At the mention of this, both Velouria and Cayla's expressions froze as they blinked their eyes.

"You what?" Cayla couldn't believe what she just heard.

"I can copy someone else's Sigils and power if I drink their blood. It doesn't really overwrite what I already have but rather adds onto it for a brief period of time." Alice explained while Velouria's expression turned grave and the same with Cayla.

Looking at one another, it seemed like they both had the same thought.

"Alice, I believe you should know that Sigils are contracts formed with the Abyss that changes your outline yes?" Velouria asked as Alice nodded.

"Each outline is unique to the person, it can't be copied or recreated. If someone gains the ability to make a clone to fight for them, the outline of that clone does not exist and there will be a tether from the clone to the main body.

"So for a clone to gain the powers of the main body, it's required to have a tether that can draw out power. But according to what you said, you can copy their abilities based on the consumption of their blood. I have two guesses for this and neither is great.

"The first guess is that by drinking their blood, you forcefully establish a connection between you two and draw upon their power. But this hinges on whether or not you can continue to get their power after they die. If you can, then it's not the first guess." Velouria asked as Alice shook her head.

"I can still get their power afterwards."

"I see... Then it's the second guess. When you drink their blood... Your flames forcefully tear off a part of their Spiritual Heart and implant it onto your outline. Perhaps that's why it feels like a Chimera."

Chapter 257 - 257: Velouria's Desire

"Your flames forcefully tear off a part of their Spiritual Heart and implant it onto your outline. Perhaps that's why it feels like a Chimera."

Hearing these words, Alice was silent.

According to what Velouria said then whenever she was drinking someone else's blood, she was taking a part of their soul into her.

That would indeed explain how she could gain their powers based on everything she knew regarding Sigils, the Abyss, Spiritual Heart and the contracts that were formed.

It was rather ironic to Alice. She who remained the most unaffected/normal in appearance was in fact tearing off someone's Spiritual Heart to copy their abilities.

"Could the damage done be repaired? Or is it permanent?" Alice asked curiously.

"It will repair itself in due time. But repeating the... 'extraction' on one person repeatedly will have consequences even if you don't kill them." Velouria explained.

Realising that this was a warning not to use it repeatedly on her allies, Alice nodded her head.

"Now with that out of the way, is there anything else you would like to know? There's going to be a meeting between me and the other Gods so I'll need to prepare the venue for the gather. *sigh, honestly these surface Gods are so enamoured by pretty decorations and pretences.

If it was up to me, just sitting in a garden or a room would've been good enough." Velouria complained as Alice shook her head.

There was nothing else she needed to know for now as most of her answers had been answered. All that's left now is how Velouria died and how Ayr disappeared.

But Alice wasn't keen on asking that question especially when Velouria didn't seem to know the answer to it herself or else she would've made preparations.

"Oh actually, there is one more thing. Cayla, can you have a look at Alice's eye? Maybe you are able to find out why future Cayla is asleep." Velouria clapped her hands as Cayla nodded her head and walked towards Alice.

She had taken a look at it before but not in great detail. Now that she was here with her Master, she may as well give it her all.

Gesturing for Alice to sit down, Cayla closed her eyes and held her hand over Alice's right eye.

After a moment of silence, Cayla shook her head.

"Sorry but the most I can do is feel 'my' presence. I can only establish a connection with Alice but something is blocking me from myself."

"Is that so... I suppose it's probably a limitation imposed by whatever happens in the future." Velouria shrugged as she stepped away from the balcony and sat down on her throne.

The threads of energy that filled the room shifted towards her as she closed her eyes and began to control the threads.

Before Alice could say anything, Cayla grabbed her wrist.

"Let Master focus. She's trying to see what's going on in the Abyss right now." Cayla reminded as Alice nodded her head.

Looking out to the city, Alice opened her palm and conjured a ball of violet flames.

She stared at the flickering flames in silence while digesting all of the information she had discovered on this short trip. The identity of these flames and their power. And more importantly, what she needed to do to achieve the goals she had set for herself.

*Ba-dum...

"Hm?" Pausing for a moment, Alice looked around her in confusion.

That heartbeat... She heard this sound before she was dragged into the Inverted World.

Furrowing her brows, Alice was about to say something when Velouria stood up.

"Seems like the time has arrived." She muttered with a serious look on her face.

"What's going on?"

"The passage between the surface and the Abyss has been fully established. The meeting between Gods will commence shortly. Lua, Kaden and Nyer have all completed their patrols and are on their way back. Alice, would you like to join this meeting?" She asked with a small smile while Alice blanked out for a moment.

"Me?"

"Of course you, who else? As my successor and future Goddess of the Abyss, it's only natural that you familiarize yourself with your... co-workers I suppose. We don't know how much time you have remaining in this... 'memory' so you may as well get the most out of it as you can." Velouria smiled sadly.

Upon the mention of memory, Alice paused.

"Don't look so surprised Alice. As the Goddess, it's only natural that I understand the connection between me and the Abyss. And no matter how 'alive' I may feel, I can tell the difference between a real connection and a fake one. You can hear it can't you?" Velouria sighed as she turned to Alice.

"You can hear the heartbeat of the Abyss. A signal telling the world that the Will of the Abyss is making its move. And in this case, it's a signal for you rather than for this... world of memory. As for me, I can't hear it anymore. My knowledge and power are limited to what I had at this moment in time, I cannot gain more knowledge from the Abyss itself."

Turning to Cayla, Velouria gave her an apologetic smile before snapping her finger.

Cayla's gaze turned blank as she stumbled back before leaning against the wall.

"I've cleared her memory for now. I know that if she realises she is a memory, she may descend into a panicked state. I'm not sure why the Abyss would send you into this memory and even create such convincing actors with sentience, but there must be a goal in the end.

"Remember this Alice, even though the Abyss may seem like a bystander at times, but it's actually more active than one might imagine. It doesn't do anything without a goal in mind. If it sends you to this memory, then there is something it wants you to know or perhaps a goal it wants you to achieve.

"But be warned, walking side by side with the Abyss means you will be forever shackled by its influence. It is when you've walked too far will you realise that restraints have been placed on you and you cannot escape. Just like the real Velouria." She sighed while looking at the strands of energy around her.

"You must be wondering what these strands represent right? These are a little different to the usual strands you may see. Each of these strands is connected to an Abyss Lord. While they are not at the same level as Apostles, you can think of them as retainers to the Goddess of the Abyss."

"Wait... each of these are Abyss Lords?" Alice widened her eyes as she looked at the countless strands around this room.

"Mnm, they are. As the Goddess, I hold a certain authority over all of the Abyss Lords. If I die, they will know. If a new one rises, they will know. Can you imagine the fear they must feel if a new Goddess showed signs of appearing?" She smiled, looking at Alice.

"I can sense the signs of the Abyss making a move but I can no longer hear its heartbeat. Meaning... You're probably experiencing changes in your body. I don't know how far into the future you are but for it to make such a move, it must've been quite long since the Abyss has gained a Goddess. The Surface Gods are the main rulers of these two lands right?" Velouria asked as Alice nodded her head.

Now that Velouria knows that she is a memory, there's no reason to hide more from her.

"Then there's more reason for you to come with me to the meeting. Familiarise with their characteristics and understand how they function. What you are lacking is information, information that can save your life. Once I die, I'm sure that none of the surface Gods are eager for a new Goddess to rise.

"Especially if it's in the Abyss as it signifies domination over all Abyss Lords." She shook her head while Alice frowned.

"Can't you... threaten them to stay back? If you have control over these Abyss Lords, who in their right mind would attack?"

"If it worked, I wouldn't be here as a memory, would I? But Gods and humans are more similar than you can imagine my dear. There is only one word you need to know. Greed.

"They greed for power and dominion so that the others cannot dictate their fate. It's a tale as old as time. Humans steal and kill one another because they greed for more time in this world. Gods aiming daggers behind each other's back because they greed for recognition by the masses." Velouria chuckled.

"Of course I have the option of turning my weapons against the Gods. But that's not why I made Ayr in the first place. But perhaps it's simply a mistake of how I am." She shrugged.

The discovery of being a memory seemed to have triggered something within her but despite all of that, she continued forward.

Even though she wasn't the real Velouria, she had her emotions, her thoughts and her desires. She feared death but if death is inevitable as proven by her current state, then she will use what little time she had left to prepare her successor.

A successor chosen by Allura and Kaden.

She will try her best to prepare this fragile girl for the chessboard played between the Gods and hope that she does not become a pawn of the Abyss but rather, the player at the table.

That was her only desire as the memory of Velouria, a Goddess who loved the beasts that resided in the Abyss and hoped they lived a normal life.

Chapter 258 - 258: Velouria's Hobby

Clapping her hands to dispel the negative atmosphere she created with her talks, Velouria stretched her body.

"The meeting should happen in the next two or three days. Each of the Gods will be arriving with two Apostles while I'm allowed to have my Apostles and Nyer join us. And since I am the host, I can get you in with me." Velouria winked.

"Is there anything I should be careful of? Won't they just try to kill me if they realise, I'm far too weak to be there?" Alice raised an eyebrow, worrying about her survival.

After all, Velouria was suggesting that she, a three star Hunter, join a meeting between four Gods. Beings that govern this world along with apostles that are far stronger than Abyss Lords.

"Oh don't worry about that. I'm the host of this meeting remember? If I want to, I can host it publicly and they can't do much about it. Of course, I'll give them a better reason when the time comes."

Hearing Velouria's response, Alice couldn't help but feel as though the Goddess before her had slowly become less reliable over time.

She seemed to be doing things on a whim but perhaps that was her true self. A self she couldn't expose to the citizens of her city and only to those who are close to her.

In Alice's case, a Successor.

"You'll get used to it. Master is... Indulgent in the weirdest places. I can only wish she was this happy about getting some break days for herself but no, she'd rather play pranks on the other Gods." Cayla sighed as she was familiar with the expression Alice was making.

She had given up long ago but the sight of that exact expression still makes her cry out 'That's how it feels!' in her heart.

"I can't exactly take a break from managing the city now can I?" Velouria smiled while Cayla didn't respond.

"Ahem, setting that aside, you have a day if we want to be safe. I know that you've been doing some light training with Lua and Kaden so would you like to explore your abilities more? You can also test the functionality of your blood while you're here before you go back." Velouria offered.

"Aren't they going to be busy with patrols?"

"They are but they're also my Apostles. Patrols can be left to the others for now while they help train the next successor. It's the main reason why we hired other people after all, they can help with the tasks."

Seeing that there was no reason to reject this proposal, Alice agreed while Velouria sent a message to Kaden and Allura.

Once they finished their patrols, it was simple for Kaden to take them to the castle via teleportation. But when they arrived, the two were shocked to see Velouria preparing all kinds of different dresses for Alice while they waited.

Her explanation was that Alice needed to dress the part if she wanted to join the meeting between Gods. After all, each of the surface Gods were picky about aesthetics so Alice couldn't arrive in the dress she was currently wearing.

Looking at Alice's expression, both Kaden and Allura felt pity rise up in their hearts as she looked as though she had just fought a thousand battles.

Even though Alice enjoyed shopping and looking for new clothes, this was too much for her.

When she browsed for clothes, she only took 30 minutes maximum to find what she considered cute.

But Velouria? It's been over an hour and she was still not remotely satisfied.

"Hmm... No no no! This doesn't make Alice look cute enough. I need something that'll blow the other Gods away so they don't have a reason to reject her presence." Velouria complained while tossing aside another outfit into the void.

"Lua, Kaden! Help me find something for Alice." She called out as Allura and Kaden looked at one another before smiling helplessly.

Seems like Alice had triggered Velouria's hobby and now, she can't escape her fate of being Velouria's doll for the next few hours.

"Maybe you should find something that matches her hair, it's a pretty big part of her look. Can't forget the broken crown too." Allura chimed in while Kaden could only chuckle softly.

While Alice was being dressed up by Velouria, Allura and Kaden, she did not know the chaos she had caused in the real world.

###

After Alice entered the inverted world, her actions caused a distortion from within and each of the contestants was sent to a different location. Teams were split up and none of the items were working.

A lot of the students realised what was happening and sought safety while those who were ignorant of the incident continued forth without worry.

Xinbei, Elara and Garrett formed rescue squads with Lothian, Hephas, Fae and Luke. Fynn stayed back to help with sending out commands since he wasn't fit for combat.

Each of them would be responsible for a full squad and commence rescue operations.

Even though Luke wanted to find Ria first, she wasn't the one that needed help right now. In fact, she seemed to be enjoying herself and fighting her way through the beasts without care.

On the other hand, the principal was dealing with other matters but still lent them the Ghost Flame Wyverns to help out with rescue efforts.

Sitting in her room, the principal had an annoyed expression on her face.

Even with things as they were, no matter how she tried to establish a connection with Kaden or Allura, neither of them answered.

"Gods f*cking dammit! How hard is it to accept a connection when sh*t hits the fan?!" She cried out in annoyance. Tearing at her hair, she took deep breaths to calm down before biting her fingertip.

Controlling her blood, she began to draw a ritual circle.

Since they won't accept her messages, she'll forcefully establish a link!

"Hmph! Let's see how you evade me now." She clicked her tongue before slamming her hand down.

Black and red energy gathered around the circle as little by little, a mirror like surface manifested and she managed to establish a connection between her and Allura.

"What in the blazes is this?" Allura frowned while looking at this screen.

Just as she was about to pull her hand back and punch it, the surface cleared up, revealing the principal.

"Oh! Lil Vampy! It's been a while, and you still have my appearance huh? Did you not drink anyone else's blood?" Allura asked with a smile.

"First of all, what makes you think that some random schmuck's blood would override what your damn blood did to me. Second of all, if someone's trying to establish a connection ANSWER THE DAMN CALL!" She seethed while Allura simply laughed.

"Ahahah sorry sorry, I was busy with a fight earlier. So what's up?"

"You know damn well what's up. That disciple of yours! Why the hell did the Abyss make such a big reaction? If the people from the surface find out she's here, my Academy will become a damn warzone!" The principal frowned while Allura scratched her chin.

"Honestly, her growth exceeded my expectations since Cayla is waking up this early. Just hang in there, I know you can do it. I'm already distracting the Churches so I doubt they can send over any heavy hitters." She waved her hand dismissively.

"And on the off chance they do?"

"You've got it handled." Allura grinned before snapping her finger, cutting off the connection.

"&£^%^^£!!!!"

Cursing aloud, the principal wanted to cry.

'The f*ck do you mean I got it handled! What if they send damn Abyss Lords to my doorstep!'

With no other choice, she created a second ritual circle and tried to establish a connection with Kaden.

Waiting for the fog to clear up, she saw Kaden in the middle of pulling someone's heart out.

"Lua! Wait no... Oh, it's you." Kaden paused before realizing who it was and wore a bored expression.

"What a charming greeting. Care to help out with the chaos you and Allura created at my Academy?"

"What kind of chaos are we talking about?" Kaden raised an eyebrow while twirling the heart with his fingers.

"You know damn well what kind of chaos I'm talking about."

"Then I'm sure you have it covered. Even though that brat is pretty damn weak, she's useful if you use her as a strategic asset. If any Abyss Lords show up just ask if she can give you a hand." Kaden waved his hand dismissively and tossed the heart aside.

Before he could say something else, a golden sword shot past his head as he twisted his body and snapped his finger.

From the ground, a pillar of shadows shot up and transformed into a giant maw, crushing the caster of the sword in an instant.

"Both you and Allura are busy, do you not care if the Churches sent Abyss Lords?!"

"Don't be so loud, kid. If you take a good look at where I am you'll realise I'm doing you a pretty big favour right now." Kaden rolled his eyes. Taking a step to the side, he revealed the blood stained crest belonging to the Church of the Sun.

Widening her eyes, the principal realized that Kaden had launched an attack on the Churches!

'Crazy b*stard!'

"Once they realise I'm knocking at their door, they won't have time to send the Abyss Lords. Of course, I'm only one man so what I can do is limited. But you should be able to deal with any stragglers going your way right, kid?" Kaden asked as she reluctantly nodded her head.

As long as it wasn't Abyss Lords, she could deal with them. But once the Churches send a Lord, things would look dire.

"Look, if you're are really worried about the Lords then I have a great tip for you." Kaden grinned as she felt hope appear in her heart.

A secret weapon? A hidden technique? Perhaps an item to keep them out?

"Just be stronger, kid."

Without saying anything else, Kaden cut off the connection.

"E"&\$&^!!! ARGGGG!!!"

The scream of the principal echoed throughout the chamber as talking to these two made her want to tear her hair out.

Chapter 259 - 259: Velouria's Bluff

Looking at the handiwork before them, Velouria, Allura and Kaden couldn't help but stifle a laugh while Alice sat motionlessly.

Four hours.

That's how long it took for them to settle on an outfit that they were satisfied with.

Four hours was the time she was subjected to their whims.

In the end, they settled on an outfit that was based on what she wore when she arrived near Ayr consisting of a large white jacket with large sleeves, a white dress, a pair of tights and some black knee-high boots.

The jacket was adorned with the crest of Ayr along with a pink and purple ribbing in the shape of a butterfly around the chest area and the shoulders. The back of the jacket reached all the way down to her legs.

Beneath the jacket, the dress was decorated with a myriad of patterns that were barely noticeable to the naked eye unless you looked carefully. However, these patterns radiated a soft ethereal glow when exposed to light.

Gold trims and accessories were given to Alice to go along with the outfit and with this assortment of clothing, she looked the part of Velouria's successor and a resident of Ayr.

When paired with her crown, she looked like a small princess in the eyes of Allura and Velouria.

Naturally, during this entire process, Kaden could've said something in an attempt to stop them. But he didn't want to interfere when they were having so much fun.

But now that they've chosen an outfit for Alice, it was time to get to work.

"Master, I believe you called me and Lua over for training purposes. It's probably best we make a start on the actual training before the guests arrive." Kaden spoke up as Velouria nodded her head.

"Fine~ We can use this outfit for training for now. When the surface Gods arrive, I'll prepare another set of clothing for Alice."

Hearing this, Alice felt a shiver down her spine, causing Velouria to laugh.

"This time I'll have it prepared beforehand so don't worry. Setting that aside, Kaden, Lua, your main focus will be helping Alice master her blood powers and her second Sigil. Even though her power manifested as flames, there is the potential for it to take other forms. See what you can do with it okay?"

"As you wish Master. Is there anything else we should keep in mind?" Kaden asked curiously.

"Nope, that should be everything. Though if Alice thinks of anything at the moment, do your best to help her okay?" Velouria clapped her hand.

"Make the most of the day and possibly tomorrow. Remember, don't be shy. If you need anything, just let Kaden and Lua know okay? If it's outside of their capabilities feel free to contact me." She turned to Alice and gave her another pat on the head.

"Thank you." Alice replied, grateful that Velouria was going this far and spending this much time to help her. Especially after finding out that she was simply a memory, and the real Velouria has been dead for a long time.

"It's only natural. If you really want to thank me you should spend some time letting me dress you up again." Velouria chuckled as she made her way over to her chair. Sitting down, she glanced towards Kaden and nodded.

Understanding that this was his signal to leave, he wrapped the three of them in shadows before disappearing from the room.

Once Velouria was sure that Kaden had left with the others, she coughed violently before slumping down on her throne. Meanwhile, Cayla bit her lip, unable to find the right words of comfort.

"Do you think... They noticed?" Velouria asked with a bitter smile as Cayla shook her head.

"I don't believe so Master."

"That's good... I wouldn't want to distract them from their training. Alice only has a limited amount of time with us, it's important she uses that time wisely." Velouria smiled, taking deep breaths to try to calm her coughs.

"But Master... Do you really have to accelerate your condition like this?" Cayla frowned.

During the four hours, Velouria had been secretly using her authority with the Abyss to fix some of the issues within Alice's body.

While others may not notice, as the Eyes of the Abyss, she could see it clearly. She could also see that by doing so, Velouria was speeding up the deterioration of her body!

"Haha... Sorry Cayla. I'm a dead woman anyway, may as well make the most of the time I have left and help my cute successor out. Even though we're simply memories, in order to construct an accurate picture, the Abyss has granted me a decent amount of power. Just enough to help place some fail safes within Alice's body." Velouria chuckled.

She knew that if she didn't trick Alice and the others with the outfits, they would definitely say no to what she was going to do.

Even if she was a memory, Alice didn't want her to suffer more and neither does Kaden and Allura.

But it was because of this that Velouria wanted to help out Alice more. She is a fake but she still remembers how cruel the Abyss is and how important it was to prepare Alice for its influence.

Biting her lip, Cayla took a deep breath and sighed.

"Let me handle the next 'operation' then."

"Huh?" Velouria blinked her eyes.

"You've finish setting up fail safes within her body, right? The next steps would be to repair 'me' and the Crown. If you do one more 'operation', you might not be able to trick the other Gods. So let me do it for you." Cayla explained but Velouria shook her head.

But before Velouria could say anything, Cayla cut her off.

"And this is how it feels to watch you put fail safes in Alice's body at the expense of yourself. So deal with it. Plus, aren't I a memory too? So logically, I'm basically doing what you're doing."

Seeing that Cayla wasn't giving her any room to reject her suggestion, Velouria could only sigh and nod her head.

"Then it's settled. Get as much rest as you can Master."

"Thank you." Velouria smiled.

"Mnm. Just because we're memories, it doesn't mean it hurts any less to see someone important to me hurting herself like this. So, take care of yourself more Master." Cayla looked down at the floor with sadness.

Even if her death was destined, was there a need for her to suffer so much before the time arrives? But knowing Velouria, she wouldn't stop even if it means her own suffering. That's just how she is. As the Goddess of the Abyss, she prioritises her people more than herself.

"Alright, I'm sorry Cayla." Velouria apologized as she knew the sadness in Cayla's heart. But there was nothing they could do about her destined death since they were simply memories.

Gesturing for Cayla to walk over, Velouria pulled her into a hug, surprising Cayla who froze up before relaxing herself.

"I'll take care of myself, so you don't go overboard either okay? I still want to see by my side when Alice leaves eventually."

Hearing this, Cayla nodded her head.

###

Teleporting away from the castle, Kaden brought Alice and Allura to a location beneath the ground. A cave filled with luminescent moss with a single opening in the ceiling. Water radiating a bioluminescent light poured from the ceiling like a waterfall.

Located in the centre of this cave was a single tree with crystalline leaves. Tall pillars supported the ceiling while archways and paths flanked by large glowing crystals illuminated the path.

"Where are we?" Alice asked curiously while looking at their surroundings.

She didn't think a place like this would be suited for training with the delicate surroundings.

"Cavern of Revelation. It's a place that'll help you visualise your abilities and how you want to use them. It's also the place where I helped Lua develop her Nova Core." Kaden explained as he snapped his finger.

One by one, the pillars lit up with a blue glow while Allura took this moment to stretch her body.

"In this place, you'll be able to analyse the application of your power, how much energy you're wasting and the force behind your attack. Since Master has told us to help you develop your blood powers and second Sigil, this is the best place for training."

Hearing this, Alice nodded her head and turned to Allura.

It seems like she'll be her opponent first.

"Place your hand on the tree first so you can synchronise yourself to this environment. Once you've done that, the tree will record your actions and display the application, energy waste and force on the pillars." Allura explained while pointing to the tree.

Located on the trunk, an indentation in the shape of a hand could be seen.

"It'll prick you and draw some blood but that's normal."

Placing her hand against the tree, Alice could feel a small needle jab against her palm as blood was drawn.

Little by little, a red glow began to manifest itself through the bark of the tree. Through Cayla, Alice could see a tether of energy connecting from her to the tree and from the tree to the different pillars.

"Try using your Sigil powers now." Kaden suggested with a smile while pulling out a chair and table by the side.

Snapping her finger, a metal blade manifested itself along with a swirl of blood.

Hearing a soft ring behind her, Alice glanced back and saw a diagram of her body along with several pathways that were now lit up with a red light.

On the second pillar, a vertical bar could be seen with only 30% of it being filled with a red light. And on the last pillar, another bar could be seen but this time it was filled to around 50%.

"First pillar shows your flow of power. Some Sigils requires more pathways to be utilized in order to maximise its abilities while others require less. The second shows how much is wasted and in this case, you're only using 30% of the energy you could be using. And the final bar shows how much power of that percentage you're manifesting.

"This should give you an idea of what this place is used for. By seeing the values of your attack and the manifestation of your Sigil power, you can fine tune your technique to a satisfactory level."

Chapter 260 - 260: Optimisation

Upon understanding the uses of each of these pillars, Alice glanced down at her body using Cayla and tried to see if she could spot the pathways used for the activations.

While she could sense how the energy was flowing through her body, it was muddled by all of the ambient strands when she tried to focus on it using Cayla.

'To optimise my abilities, it's probably best to see which pathway produces the most results for now. Once I have discovered the right pathway, I'll be able to adjust the efficiency and power behind the attack.' Alice thought to herself as she began to try different variations to summoning her blood.

Seeing Alice experiment by herself, Allura glanced over to Kaden and shrugged.

Sitting down next to Kaden, Allura didn't even need to say anything before Kaden pulled out a plate with some cake on it.

"Thank you~ Seems like she's pretty busy with her own thing. Doesn't seem like she'll need my help to test things in sparring for now." Allura smiled happily while eating her cake.

"Mnm, she's rather independent when it comes to things like this huh? Though I suppose in a way it kind of resembles how you are. Well... When you're actually focused." Kaden chuckled while seeing Alice experiment with different variations of her energy pathways.

On the pillar, he could see how she was fine-tuning where the energy flows. Which pathways generate more power and which ones synergise with one another.

Within the body, there are 12 main pathways, one for each Sigil and Resonance. These are created upon obtaining the Sigils. Each of the pathways has its own minor pathways that can help optimise the flow of power and efficiency of your abilities.

For Alice, she has access to four main paths.

"Shouldn't we give her some hints?" Allura asked curiously as Alice seemed frustrated while trying the different methods. Some of the minor pathways she used didn't let her activate her Sigil ability which frustrated her, but she was slowly eliminating the pathways she didn't need to use.

"We could but it's better to let her do her own thing for now. Let her experiment, struggle and discover breakthroughs on her own. Once she hits a bottleneck that she can't get past, she'll either seek our help or try new methods.

"The best way for her to grow is to do it herself. We're simply here as her backup." Kaden smiled.

"You sound like you're raising a child with that kind of advice." Allura smiled while sneaking a few glances at Kaden who was oblivious to these looks.

"Hmm... It's not far off I suppose. Even though Alice is very powerful, her understanding regarding Sigils and how to use them are lacking. Yet she can still produce this much power with just what she has access to right now is very impressive." Kaden nodded, causing Allura to sigh in annoyance.

'That isn't what I'm thinking about, idiot.' Allura grumbled inwardly while looking over to Alice.

During this period of testing, she realised that her energy would flow down one specific path without alterations when she activated her third Sigil. After that main path, the smaller ones would dictate the power and efficiency of her attack.

'I can't have everything. Going for efficiency causes the cast time and power to drop, and going for power causes efficiency and cast time to drop. Aiming for a fast cast time like I am now causes both to drop. If I aim for both Power and efficiency, the prep needed for activating increases heavily.' Alice thought to herself as she kneeled down on placed her hand on the ground.

Going by what she had discovered, there were certain ways of activating that benefitted the Sigil differently.

Summoning blood would require the fastest cast time but the lowest power since she wasn't using her blood to attack.

Metal, on the other hand, would require power since it needed to be sturdy. Alternatively, she doesn't need to cast it quickly since her main form of offence would be her flames.

Using this logic, she understood that if she focused on power against her battle with Lyra, she wouldn't have needed to form a ritual to overwhelm her. There would've been the possibility that her standard flames would've been enough as she had prioritised cast time thus far.

'Wait... Then all those times when Allura and Kaden instantly activated their abilities were... Lowest power!?' Alice widened her eyes, realising that Allura's Nova Core was a skill that heavily focused on cast time!

If she were to take longer with each cast, then the detonation result of the Nova Core would be outrageous!

Realising this, Alice glanced down at her hands before looking over to Kaden.

"How sturdy is this place?"

"Enough that Lua can't break it without going all out with her authority. Does that answer your question?" Kaden replied. This is a training ground; it was only natural that it was made from the best materials and reinforced to the limit.

Nodding her head, Alice took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

Since her Void Flux skill was an extension of her second Sigil, she needed to find the right pathways to heighten the power while ignoring the required cast time. Of course, she still needed to take into account the basic requirements.

Her Void Flux had to be achieved within a certain timeframe or else the skill would dissolve itself.

Breathing out, a flood of energy erupted within her body as she activated the first step.

Third pathway, maximum cast speed, minimum power!

Blood erupted around her as she snapped her finger and condensed the giant pool of blood into a single point.

Second pathway, maximum efficiency and cast speed, minimum power.

The blood collapsed in on itself while Alice activated the second half of her second Sigil.

Her flames.

Second pathway, maximum power, reduced efficiency and cast speed!

Transforming into a single spark of blinding light in front of her, Alice fired it to the opposite end of the training arena before detonating the attack.

At that moment, a wave of light filled the room while stellar flames erupted out from the core. The ambient energy around the room was sucked into the attack, acting as fuel for the flames.

Seeing this, Alice understood that using this method, it allowed her Void Flux to remain longer on her opponent's body rather than an instantaneous attack!

With this in mind, she adjusted her cast formula. This time, maximum cast time and efficiency!

Aiming her finger, Alice rapid-fired the attack and detonated them once they reached a satisfactory distance.

Using this method, the energy she needed to use this attack could be ignored but the power was now severely lacking. Those with sufficient armour would be able to defend against this attack pretty easily but that was not the main benefit of this method.

The pushback!

This variant of Void Flux allowed her to create a localized shock that could possibly knock aside attacks or even divert the path of a swing! Depending on the situation, it may be more beneficial to use this variant than creating a wall of her violet flames.

"Kaden, is there a way to shorten the cast time even more?" Alice asked curiously. She had already experimented with her second pathway to try to reduce the cast time needed as much as she could. She wanted to know if there was another method so she could cast her abilities instantaneously.

"Of course there is. You're already doing it." Kaden chuckled, causing Alice to pause in confusion.

Standing up, Kaden made his way over to her.

"Think back to the actions you go through when casting your skill. Think about what is required and what isn't, how can you simplify the casting process?" Kaden asked as Alice furrowed her brows.

Her casting process consisted of four actions. Creating blood, condensing blood, igniting the spark and then firing. Without these steps, she couldn't activate the skill.

"I can't. Manifest, condense, ignite then fire. I can't activate the skill without any of these steps." Alice frowned but Kaden simply laughed.

"I know. But that's not what I'm asking. Think outside the box. What else are you doing while doing these steps?"

Tilting her head, Alice decided to cast a Void Flux to see what Kaden was talking about.

First, she flicked her finger to manifest the blood, then she gathers the blood above her fingertip, she aims, ignites and then fires.

Looking over to Kaden, he still had the same smile on his face as Alice repeated the process once more.

'Outside the box... Outside the box... What does he mean by that? Am I missing something?' Alice thought to herself in frustration while repeating the casting process.

Unable to come up with an answer, Alice could only huff in annoyance.

"I'll give you a hint. Look at me, I'll give a quick demonstration." Kaden smiled as Alice turned towards him.

Tapping his foot on the ground, his shadows began to expand before transforming into a familiar.

"This is the first demonstration. Now, I'll do another one."

Taking a step to the side, Kaden turned around and pointed at Alice's shoulder.

Tilting her head, she glanced at her shoulder and realised that there was now a raven on her shoulder.

"That's the only hint I'll give you." He laughed while leaning against a pillar.

"???"

'When did he even cast?' Alice frowned.

He wanted her to compare the two methods he used but she didn't even know his second method!

Scratching her hair in annoyance, she sat down and crossed her legs while replaying what she saw in her mind.

The first time, he tapped his foot and his shadows enlarged to form a familiar. The second time, he took a step and the familiar was already on her shoulder. How?

As the scenes continued to replay, Alice realised a link but wasn't sure if she was reading too deep into it or not. Looking up at Kaden hesitantly, Alice opened her mouth.

"Was it the tapping of the foot? Did you merge that with your step?" Alice asked but Kaden shook his head.

"So close yet so far. But you're half right. What I did was eliminate the need for a separate casting action. Most people use an action to dictate their target and the skill they want to use. But if you completely eliminate that, the cast time will naturally increase while efficiency decreases." Kaden explained but Alice was still confused.

"Now what if the action and the cast is merged?" Kaden smiled and raised a single finger.

Mimicking Alice's casting action, shadows instantly converged towards a single point.