

Abyssal A 331

Chapter 331 - 331: Cayla's Solution

[I hope that you, my master, would survive this ordeal.]

Hearing this, Alice paused as a bitter smile appeared on her face.

"What about Velouria then? You miss her as well, don't you? Why are you taking my side?"

Without hesitation, Cayla leaned down and flicked Alice on the forehead.

[Mine master, did Allura hit you too hard in the head? The past is in the past. The Era of Ayr is over. Though I may long for those bygone days, I will not sacrifice the present for a distant memory. My old master would not wish for it to be so and neither would I.

[Over the course of many long years, I've watched humanity grow, recall and eventually forget. I've seen Kaden and Allura make new relationships, break off old ones and even do stupid things such as avoiding one another.

[But even so, they continue forward while holding the memory of Ayr close to their heart.] Cayla lectured while Alice held her forehead in pain.

[Never see yourself as beneath mine old master. Both of you are equal and I would not trade one for the other. And as much as I enjoy lecturing you o' master mine, time is of the essence. Even now, Nyer is attempting to break through the fold that connects what is memory to reality.]

"What can I even do in my current state?" Alice sighed.

She had no control over her body, no control over her abilities and no control over any weapons that could turn the tide.

*Sigh

[Truly, visiting the memory has made you dull master.] Cayla sighed as she massaged her forehead, causing Alice to pout.

"Stop teasing me already."

[Very well. Consider it from this perspective o' master mine. While you may have been deprived of your control over the physical world, what state do you think you are in right now? And where do you think you are?] Cayla asked as Alice became silent.

Furrowing her brows, she observed her surroundings. She had a guess in her mind but the truth seemed simply absurd to be real.

[Currently, you are in your soul state. When Nyer separated your heart from your body, he did not take into account that your nature of having two sides of the same soul would have this kind of reaction. With your other half, Alyss, being awake in your physical body, it has allowed your conscience to preserve itself in the soul state.

[Naturally, this means you now gain control over your soul to some extent. His goals are for him to summon the real Heart using your fake heart and Velouria's placeholder. With all three combined, he will create a true Heart containing the 'memory' of Velouria's soul. And in this case, a memory becoming a real soul and having control over what they wish to do.

[To create life from death.]

Alice knew what Cayla was leading towards. She knew one of the possibilities herself but she didn't want to admit it.

And naturally, Cayla understood from Alice's expression that she knew as well. Which is why it was up to her to say it out loud.

[One of the ways for you to survive this master, is for you to claim the real Heart yourself. As you are conscious right now, you are able to exert some control over the flow of energy so long as Nyer is distracted.

[Once the real Heart is summoned, all you need to do is simply funnel the power towards you. Upon doing so, it will remould the fake Heart that has been implanted into you to become a vessel for the real Heart of the Abyss.]

Pausing for a moment, Cayla sighed.

[Naturally, that means severing Velouria's connection from her heart to her physical body and taking that placeholder into your new Heart.]

Biting her lips, Alice clenched her fist before nodding her head.

[For now, familiarise yourself with this energy around us. It's the energy that connects to the soul, the exact same ones that link the Spiritual Heart to the real Heart. It's not often you get to experience this, so soon in your journey as a Hunter too. Understanding this energy and familiarising yourself to it will allow you a better connection to the Spiritual Heart in the future.]

What Alcie needed now was a moment to take her mind off what she was about to do. After all, Cayla had essentially asked her to kill Velouria if she wanted to survive.

Nodding her head, Alice closed her eyes and immersed herself in this energy while Cayla smiled and turned her attention away.

Right now, she was split in two. The spiritual side of her that is linked to Alice's identity as the successor, and the physical aspect is the literal Eye that Kaden embedded within Alice's eye.

And while she was preparing Alice for her inevitable task in a short moment, she was also guiding Alyss to buy as much time as she could so that Nyer wouldn't realise what they were doing.

###

Glaring at Nyer who was slashing at the barrier between memory and reality, Alyss looked over at Cayla who was helping him, ignorant of what's going on in her mind.

[These chains that bind you are specifically tailored to binding Alice. You see, this is part of mine old master's skills. The ones that manifest when you take over are designed to keep your corruptive influence at bay.] Cayla explained in Alyss's mind while she continued to try and break out.

'Stop beating around the bush. Just tell me what I need to do.' Alyss frowned.

She thought that the current Cayla would take Nyer's side as well but didn't expect that she was helping them instead of her old master.

[*Sigh... You're not cute compared to mine current master. But very well. These chains act by binding the soul. While you and my master share a soul, you are also different enough that one chain isn't enough to bind you. Two must appear.

[Thankfully, Nyer didn't notice that the chains that manifest when you appear and the chains he created are very different. To him, you have double the layer of restrictions preventing you from making a move.

[When you break out of these chains, you need to do so in one go. And when you do, it has to be the exact moment where he pierces the barrier and opens the path to reality. You need to distract him so that mine master can take advantage of this opportunity to claim the real Heart and foil his plans.] Cayla explained, causing Alyss to frown.

'You want her to kill Velouria.'

[Unfortunately, that is the case.]

'Do you know how much Alice treasures Velouria? Asking her to kill her is... Cruel. Isn't there another option? To just end this ritual.' Alyss bartered as she didn't want Alice to go through the feeling of killing someone she loved for a second time.

She already did so with her first friend and now Velouria? It was too cruel.

[The ritual performed by Nyer is special in that regard. It's one that cannot be stopped as he's using four catalysts to activate. The old me, himself, Alice's heart and Velouria's heart. It's the kind of ritual that will only be stopped once all of the catalysts have been destroyed.

[Which is why I suggested to mine master to take advantage of this and absorb the power instead. Because if she cannot handle it and Velouria's heart is destroyed, the power would instead either flood towards Nyer or the old me.

[If that happens, he'll be able to funnel the power into a new vessel for Velouria regardless and Alice would be dead. So the only way for a positive outcome here is for mine master to take the power for herself and foil Nyer's plans.] Cayla shook her head while Alyss looked down with a frown.

[For now, focus on the timing. I will tell you the method of breaking these chains. Without mine master's presence, it should be far easier for you to tap into the power of your Spiritual Heart. Use the countless souls attached to you to overwhelm the chains that Nyer summoned and create a moment of weakness.

[A quick warning though, doing so would make the chains that Velouria placed around your limbs hurt a lot. If you can withstand that pain, you'll be able to break out.]

Hearing this, Alyss nodded her head as she glared at Nyer.

Sweat dripped from his head as he continuously slashed away at the barrier, chipping away at it layer by layer.

He could sense the connection to the real Heart strengthening with each subsequent swing.

Soon, Velouria would be able to break free from her role as a puppet in a memory. Soon, she'll be able to live her own life.

Soon, he would be able to repay her for the second chance that she'd given him.

"BREAK!!!" Nyer shouted as he gathered all of his power into one last swing. The Sigils across his body burning at full power.

*BANG!!!

With a twist of the body, a radiant arc of energy rushed towards the barrier, piercing it in one go!

[NOW!] Cayla shouted.

Gritting her teeth, the power of countless souls rushed from Alyss's Spiritual heart as dark hands erupted from her shadow and grabbed the chains. Each hand would tear off a piece while Velouria's chains seared deeply into her skin.

Biting her lip to hold back her scream, Alyss broke Nyer's restriction!

"Nyer!" Alyss shouted, summoning Void Fang and releasing a slash.

Executioner's Blade!

Sensing danger from beside him, Nyer glared at Alyss with a shocked expression but managed to dodge at the last moment.

Alyss doesn't need to win, she just needed to distract this man long enough for Alice to take the power for herself.

"Stop getting in my way!" Nyer glared as his patience had run thin. His desire was so very close, just a little longer and he'll achieve his goal.

Taking a deep breath, Alyss glared at Nyer while hands wrapped around her body.

From beneath this swarm of hands, Alyss tore it apart to reveal her new form. A resonance between the countless beasts attached to her soul, only achievable due to the absence of Alice.

Transforming Void Fang into a spear, Alyss burst into action. There was no reason for them to talk at this point.

There was only kill or be killed!

Chapter 332 - 332: Alyss Vs Nyer

Alyss's new form was neither elegant nor beautiful. It was an amalgamation of mutated limbs and ink like fluids.

Stretching from her body, countless tiny hands could be seen writhing against her skin, forming stitching around her wounds.

The golden chains that Velouria created burning against her skin while these hands tried their best to reduce the pain.

She looked no different to a ravenous beast as her black hair fluttered in the wind.

Unlike their usual state, there was no sign of white in her hair anymore as she rushed towards Nyer who was surprised by her boost in speed.

Partial Bloodline Release!

The wails of a thousand beasts overlapped one another as a chimeric aura burst out from Alyss's body, unable to stay in a singular form.

Her nails turned into claws as her teeth sharpened as though it belonged to a beast.

***BANG!!!**

Clashing against Alyss's spear, Nyer was overwhelmed by the strength exerted by Alyss as he was forced back several steps.

Widening his eyes, Nyer looked up at Alyss who continued her attacks.

From stabs to slashes, she did everything she could to push Nyer back but he soon got used to the flow of her attacks and countered!

"Hng!!!" Wincing in pain, Alyss gritted her teeth while Nyer's greatsword cleaved into her body from the shoulder.

However, the hands that burst out from her body healed her wounds as it was created, lodging the blade within her own chest.

Revealing a brave grin, Alyss lunged forward, causing the blade to go deeper as she aimed to drink his blood!

Noticing her intention, Nyer narrowed his eyes and pushed his blade away before slamming his foot into Alyss's stomach.

*COUGH!!!

Coughing up a mouthful of blood while she was launched away from the kick, Alyss rolled across the floor before stabbing her spear into the ground to stop herself.

Looking up, her pupils shrunk as she watched Nyer slashing down towards her.

An invisible force wrapped around her body and she found herself unable to move against his attack.

Just before Nyer's attack landed, Alyss's body began to tear itself apart.

Sharp teeth bursting out from her flesh, ripping a pathway through her body so the blade wouldn't be able to touch anything. And after blade passed through this pathway, it would mend itself as though nothing had happened.

Without giving Nyer a chance to digest what had just happened, Alyss slammed her hand down, creating pillars of metal and blood around them before a sea of violet flames burst to life.

Jumping back with a frown, Nyer watched as she stood up while panting heavily.

'She's able to ignore my attacks to some extent. Whether that be making a path so my blade misses or healing her wounds as my blade lands. Her tenacity is greater than Alice and same goes for her instincts. Though she lacks the refinement in her techniques.' Nyer thought to himself as he dubbed Alyss as the 'berserk side' for now.

She's the kind of fighter that fights based on emotion rather than logical thinking and to him, the easiest kind of fighter to deal with.

What wasn't easy to deal with was the extent of her regeneration and instincts. The Blessing of Severance was great at ignoring defence. But it can't ignore what it can't hit.

And with Alyss making a pathway for the attacks to miss, it was clear that Nyer couldn't rely on the Blessing of Severance if he wanted to end this quickly.

'Space lock is effective to some extent but something's consuming the energy around her, making all abilities weakened.' Furrowing his brows, he activated Cayla and scanned Alyss.

Around her, there was a strange zone of hands with mouths on them, constantly consuming and converting the ambient energy around her.

Unable to contain her grin, Alyss wanted to focus her mind yet countless voices overwhelmed her along with the desire for blood!

Crouching down, she rushed towards Nyer without care!

"Beast!" Nyer cursed as he stepped forward and slashed towards Alyss to 'phased' through his slash and reached for his head.

However, he accounted for this and adjusted his grip on his sword, slamming the pommel into Alyss's chin.

Locking the space around her, Nyer slashed towards her for a second time, hoping that it was quick enough to avoid her reaction but it was no use.

Her body separated and avoided the path of the blade as Alyss's laughter rang out.

From her blood, tendrils transformed into hands before shooting out towards him.

"Ah~ It's crazy. They really wouldn't just shut up. Was twinnie holding them back all this time?" Alyss laughed, covering her eyes as countless hands forced Nyer away while he was confused by what she was saying.

"Or maybe I couldn't hear them because of Velouria? Is that what her chains do?" Alyss grinned, revealed her face as the left side had been transformed. Sigil like markings stretched across her face and in that ink, eyes manifested.

But it wasn't the eyes that belonged to the Will. No, it belonged to the countless souls imprisoned within Alyss.

Feeling her cold gaze upon him, Nyer felt a chill down his spine as he instinctively raised his blade into a defensive position before freezing up.

'Me? On guard? Against her? Alice of all people? Even after obtaining both Sigils?' Questions flooded his mind but ultimately landing on one answer.

She was dangerous!

"Has anyone told you that you're a little too tall?"

"Kneel." Alyss's voice rang out next to his ear as Nyer didn't know when she appeared next to him.

However, countless hands erupted from his shadow, forcefully bending his knees.

*BANG!!!

Cracking the ground beneath him, his veins bulged from anger as there was only one person he would kneel towards and that was Velouria. Not some brat!

Seeing his defiant gaze, Alyss narrowed her eyes as a sadistic grin appeared on her face.

"Still too tall. Why don't you rest your head on the ground instead." Alyss chuckled before stepping on his head.

*CRACK!!!

Slamming his head into the ground with her foot, she dug her heels down before leaning forward with Void Fang in hand.

Cayla was trying to reach out to Alyss but the countless voices of beasts drowned her out. All Alyss wanted to feel right now was the high brought forth by the power surging through her body.

Before she could stab down with Void Fang, she noticed her right arm was missing.

"Eh?"

Raising her eyebrow, she looked to the side and saw her arm laying on the ground while the tiny hands searched for the main body, wanting to stitch itself back together.

Nyer had been focusing his attention on maintaining the connection between the different catalysts. But if he was to continue fighting without his full attention on Alyss, it would mean his death.

Jumping back, Alyss furrowed her brows while pulling her severed arm back to her and placed it back into the socket while the flesh stitched itself together.

"You've gotten my full attention now. Make sure you can keep up." Nyer warned as he stood up. His eyes glaring at Alyss as she had truly invoked his ire.

"That's more like it. If you want to fight you should put your all into it." Alyss grinned as she licked her fingers.

Jumping towards one of the pillars, she flicked her finger and established an arena with countless blood threads stretching from one pillar to another.

With Alyss forcing Nyer to put his full attention into killing her, it has created a moment of weakness.

An opportunity for Alice to seize control of the ritual without Nyer noticing.

Of course, that was only the case if there wasn't someone standing in her way.

"Seems like you've woken up. I was looking to talk to you for a while." Cayla narrowed her eyes at her future self.

She noticed that something was wrong with the ritual, a parasite had found its way inside.

And with that familiar aura, it could only mean one thing.

[So was I. Though having mine master adapt to the aftereffects of me waking up was more important than a conversation with a past memory. Or does my present appearance repulse you? Perhaps a sense of guilt?] [Cayla] asked as she played around with her hair.

Right now, she looked just like Velouria and knowing what she was like in the past or at least what she knows from this memory, this was bound to cause some discomfort for her old self.

Alice was immersing herself in the flow of energy which was fine for [Cayla]. After all, the more Alice synchronizes with this energy, the easier it was for her soul and body to accept the real Heart of the Abyss.

"Seems like you've forgotten who our true master is. No matter what, Alice cannot replace Velouria. It would be better for her to live outside of the Will's control. Do you still recall what Ayr is like? How can you forsake everything that Velouria worked towards?!" Cayla shouted, feeling betrayed by her own self.

[It seems to me that you're the one who forgotten what our master worked towards. Who knew that even with two Eyes I would be so blind in the past. Or is it because you're merely a construct of the Will?] [Cayla] smirked while tapping her finger against the air.

At that moment, the air around Cayla ruptured, forcing her to jump back to avoid the attack.

[Despite my broken form, it seems like one real Eye is still better than two fakes wouldn't you say? So let me teach you some wisdom I've accumulated over the centuries.]

Chapter 333 - 333: Final Shard of Velouria

The sound of countless attacks colliding with one another sounded out as Cayla gritted her teeth, unable to understand how her future self was able to parry all of her abilities and even send counters back.

And while she was struggling, [Cayla] sat languidly in the air with a small smile and a yawn.

As the Eyes of the Abyss, they didn't have many ways in which they could attack outside of throwing energy at one another. However, due to her experience of watching Alice fight and the people around her.

Not only that, but during the centuries of dormancy, there would be moments where Kaden would try to plant her into someone for a short period of time only for them to die soon after. That granted her experience of fighting as well.

Compared to a memory conjured by the Will of the Abyss, she was far stronger!

Weaving energy together into a blood like state, [Cayla] launched several needles towards her past self, exploding them upon contact and forcing her to jump back to avoid the blow.

Just as she landed, a maw erupted from the ground, aiming to break her ankles.

"!!!"

Narrowly avoiding the attack, Cayla looked up with annoyance.

*BANG!!!

Before she could comprehend what had just happened, a wall of force slammed into her face.

'Did... Did she just punch me???' She questioned herself as [Cayla] had jumped into close quarters combat!

[After watching mine master's countless spars and battles, it's only natural that I pick up some of her techniques and habits.] [Cayla] smirked, clearly understanding her younger self's confusion.

But this was her way of having fun right now while also doing her job. So long as she can prevent Cayla from bothering Alice while she was synchronising with this energy, everything will go their way.

And centuries of not being able to move does numbers on a person.

Therefore, she cannot let this opportunity disappear, even if her target is her younger self!

Slamming her palm into Cayla's chest, she followed up with a double slam against the ears, discombobulating her then following up with a chin kick into a downwards heel.

*BANG!!!

Slamming against the ground, Cayla could feel her vision flickering as she wanted to push [Cayla] away with a pulse of energy but [Cayla] was more than prepared.

Stomping her foot down, she released her own pulse of energy to counteract, pushing Cayla away and forcing her to tumble against the ground.

[Tsk tsk tsk, I almost feel bad here. Thou art feeble like a child. Or perhaps changing it to the way I used to speak would be better for you. You're terribly weak.] [Cayla] narrowed her eyes with a grin.

Before her younger self could get back up, she felt coils of energy wrapping around her limbs, forcing her against the ground while [Cayla] sat atop her, pinning her against the ground before crossing her legs.

[Now, shall we watch the rebirth of mine master? A being containing the power of the Crown, Eye and Heart. A being that hasn't appeared since the time of Ayr.] She asked with a smile but rather than a request, it was more of a statement since Cayla couldn't do anything right now.

###

What is the Crown of the Abyss?

Alice asked herself that question as she submerged her consciousness in the flow of energy.

'It's a symbol of peace that Velouria offered to her followers. A legacy for me to inherit everything she left behind.'

However, that was not all. The crown symbolizes the control the Will poses on the 'Goddess'. A slave collar if anything.

Then, what is the Eyes of the Abyss?

'The Eyes are for the Goddess to see all and know all. To see everything that occurs in the Abyss and its secrets. To understand what she's seeing.'

But the Eyes are also a way for the Will to monitor what the Goddess wishes to do. What does she plan with this information? A method of surveillance.

If the Crown represents enslavement and the Eyes represent surveillance, what does the Heart represent?

'The Heart... The source of power and proof of becoming a Vessel capable of accepting the Abyss in its entirety. The burden of power. A gateway to the library of beasts held within this realm. The Heart is the source of the Goddess's power along with her divinity.'

And yet, it's the method in which the Will controls the Goddess. To govern over her life and death.

With the symbol of peace comes enslavement, the removal of freedom. With the Omniscia comes surveillance and the removal of secrets. And with power comes control, the removal of life and death.

The Goddess becomes the perfect puppet and vessel for the Will.

'Is that the fate of anyone who claims all three?'

To become the Symbol, the Omniscia and the Omnipotent comes the price of individuality. Anyone who lay claims to all three becomes nothing but an extension. They cease to become themselves.

They will no longer be Velouria, no longer be Alice. They will become the Goddess of the Abyss, the slave of the Will.

'... ' Alice was silent.

Opening her eyes, she found herself in a shimmering field of flowing energy. The ground, a gentle weave of soft colours. The sky, a blend of pastel and white. The sun, an orb of saturated colours swirling in a constant blend.

The moon, soft and ephemeral.

In front of her, stood a single woman wearing a long white dress made from the same weave of energy that created this realm.

Seeing the familiar white hair, Alice understood who this was but it was different to the Velouria she knew. The Velouria she talked to and the same Velouria who made her outfits.

"Are you the real Velouria? The one who appeared when I got the Eye and the one who appeared to give me the Crown?" Alice asked, walking up to her and standing beside her.

"I am." Velouria nodded with a smile while overlooking this field.

"Are you here to give me the Heart like you did with the Crown?"

"No, I am not." She chuckled, finding Alice's responses rather funny.

Furrowing her brows, Alice glanced towards Velouria who maintained a small smile.

"I've told you the fate of accepting all three into your body. The fate of a slave. Are you still willing to go through with it?"

"What choice do I have in this matter? If I let Nyer do what he intends to do, I die and by extension, Alyss. If I don't do it, you die and I become a slave. There's no winning here is there?" Alice sighed.

Letting out a small laugh, Velouria patted Alice's head.

"The Nyer I know and the Nyer you see in a memory are very similar. They both came to similar conclusions but different approaches. Nyer in the memory wishes to reestablish the real Heart and the memory of me. Doing so means it will overwrite the contract that I've established with the Will since I'm already dead. A new me will rise without the fate of a Slave.

"Meanwhile, the real Nyer realised his failures upon my passing. Seeing as how you possess a faux Heart right now, I'm sure you understand his method." Velouria smiled while Alice contemplated her words.

Ignoring the fact that she just found out that it was Nyer who made this faux Heart and planted it in her, Alice furrowed her brows and came to a conclusion.

"Do I consume the real Heart in order to turn what's fake into real? To work around the fate like what Nyer's trying to do by turning the memory of you into reality?" Alice asked as Velouria nodded her head.

"You are a very smart girl. Good job. I had hoped to talk to my successor more but having the memory of me fulfil that wish is good enough. This is the last shard of me that I've intentionally left behind. A shard in the Eyes, a shard in the Crown and finally, a shard in the Heart. All for the hope that by the time you find the Heart, I'd be able to see you escape this fate.

And you've done just that.

"So do what you are meant to do. Go and become what I couldn't become. And send Kaden, Allura and even Nyer my regards when you see them again in reality." Velouria pushed Alice forward as she gave her a final wave.

Before Alice could say anything, she felt her body plunging into a pool of energy, overwhelming and sending her body into shock.

The countless strands of power pierced into her body, aiming to overwrite her soul, to turn her into a slave. Gritting her teeth, Alice understood that this was the moment. The moment where she needed to fight back and consume the Heart in return.

To link herself and turn the fake into real.

Focusing on her connection with Alyss and by extension her Spiritual Heart, she could sense the countless beings connected to her. The souls that she stole.

Little by little, black hands began to manifest around her body, fighting back against the tendrils of energy trying to overwhelm her.

This was her ascension as a new vessel for the Abyss, outside of the Will's control.

###

Stumbling back while spitting out some blood, Nyer glared at Alyss who was indulging herself in this feeling of ecstasy.

Even with his full focus on trying to kill her along with the Blessing of Reverence, her tenacity proved to be too much.

There was an easy way for him to kill her and that would be to sever the connection between her and the Spiritual Heart. But doing so will cause Alice to be pulled from the ritual and thus going against what he wished to do from the beginning.

Yet trying to kill her without this method seemed impossible. No matter how he tried, no matter how he mutilated her body, the hands would constantly piece her together before stitching up the wounds.

She is a monster in the truest sense.

But at this moment, when he took a step back to observe his opponent, he noticed the abnormalities in the ritual.

Widening his eyes, he turned back and saw Cayla struggling while motes of darkness appeared in the pillar of light. A seed of corruption originating from Alice's soul.

"No!!!" Nyer screamed, rushing towards the centre of the ritual but Alyss stopped him with a slash to his back.

And in the blink of an eye, the pillar of light transformed into a pillar of darkness that violently combusted into violet flames.

Chapter 334 - 334: Red Spider Lilies

Each flicker of fire that danced before him was a reminder that his wish, his desire had been foiled.

"Ah... ARG!!!!!!" Letting out a scream of anguish, a burst of energy erupted from his body, pushing Alyss back.

Running towards the flames, he ignored the burning across his body as he looked for Velouria's heart and Soul.

Even if Alice got the real heart, surely she wouldn't snuff out Velouria's soul!

"!!!"

Hovering in this swirl of inferno was a spectral figure of Alice while Velouria stood in front of her with a smile.

She opened her arms, welcoming Alice and closed her eyes while Nyer reached out with his hand.

"Alice don't you dare!!!"

Hesitating briefly, Alice resolved her gaze as she reached for the beating heart floating in the centre of Velouria's ghost like figure.

Just as Alice's finger touched the heart, it began to wither away rapidly before turning into dust that was swept away by the flames around her.

As though mourning the passing of the Goddess, the Abyss began to tremble. The skies cracked apart, revealing countless strands of energy that flowed down towards Alice's heart.

Opening her eyes, Alice could feel the link between her and Alyss strengthening as she was being pulled back to her physical body.

As for the changes that were brought forth by the presence of the true Heart of the Abyss, Alice couldn't quite feel the effects just yet. If she had to describe it, it would be that she feels no different with the exception of sensing her connection to the Abyss.

It feels like she's resting in a pool of water connected to the vast ocean. Aware of its existence yet floating in her own small section, unaware of how to reach the sea.

'Did you miss me?' Alice smiled as she came face to face with Alyss who had calmed down now that Alice had returned.

The voices bothering her all this time faded away as she shrugged.

'I was just getting to the fun part before you came back. So how does it feel? Now that you've obtained all three pieces?' Alyss crossed her arms with a smile.

'It feels pretty normal. Like nothing's changed. But let's deal with Nyer first then leave this memory. Now that I've gotten the Heart, I can feel the barrier stabilizing this place crumbling away. The sooner I deal with Nyer, the more time I'll have to say goodbye to Kaden and Allura.'

Nodding her head, Alyss closed her eyes as the two began to fuse together once more. Seeing each other in the mental space, they high fived before the golden chains began to disappear.

Clenching her fist, Alice could feel herself in control of her own body once more.

The pillar of flames slowly faded away, revealing Nyer who stumbled towards Velouria's body which was slowly turning to ash. There was a small smile on her face even as she died while Nyer scrambled to gather the ashes, making sure none of it disappeared.

As for Cayla, she collapsed by the side, passed out.

Looking at the state of Nyer and Cayla, Alice felt regretful at heart but they've chosen their path and she chose her own.

Their path would've resulted in her death which she couldn't accept. Likewise, her path resulted in Velouria's death.

Flicking her wrist, she summoned Void Fang and transformed it into a sword.

As the last piece of Velouria turned to ash, Nyer stood up. Turning around, he looked at Alice while his eyes were devoid of life.

He's lost his purpose, his goal, his idol. Everything that he's lived for and the one who gave him the second chance was gone.

Had he waited, perhaps they wouldn't have left on such a bitter note. But he had to try. Yet his attempt was foiled.

Whatever goodwill he had left for Alice disappeared.

There was simply one last thing he had to do.

That was to kill her!

*BANG!!!

Bursting into action, he appeared beside Alice as his blade tore through the space around her. His eyes which looked calm were now full of fury and anger. Killing intent exploded from him like a crashing wave as Alice's eyes tracked his movements.

Due to the previous battle while Alyss was in her body, her hair became dishevelled and hid her left eye.

Cayla existed in her right while her left eye was untouched.

However...

Upon transforming her Faux Heart into the real Heart, her left eye underwent some changes while the collar like pattern across her neck disappeared.

Tilting her head back, Alice revealed the crimson pupil now containing the icon of a flower. A red spider lily.

First Resonance!

At that moment, the obsidian crown manifested above Alice's head once more. Her hair flashed white while red dyed the edges.

Across her body and on her right cheek, the pattern of several red spider lilies could be seen, blossoming on a bed of briar thorns containing her Sigil patterns.

The cluster of spider lilies became more compact as it reached her hand, blending into crimson.

Void Fang wasn't left untouched either. Its blade transformed into the same crimson that coloured Alice's spider lilies while red briar thorns erupted from the guard, digging into Alice's hand and draining the blood.

From her wound, the spider lilies bloomed.

In her resonance form, Alice wore a white dress, a tattered white jacket, white stockings and a pair of white boots.

On the jacket, the pattern of spider lilies could be seen yet they were white like the rest of her attire.

Adjusting her stance, Alice parried Nyer's blade with ease!

Widening his eyes in shock, Nyer couldn't understand how Alice could move right now. The space around her should be sealed!

Calling upon Cayla's ability, he saw the truth of the matter. Around her, spectral red spider lilies were consuming the energy around her. The space lock that he had imposed was consumed without a trace left behind!

Pushing Nyer back, Alice narrowed her eyes and slashed with Void Fang.

'She must be trying to use Executioner's Blade.' Nyer thought to himself and braced for the attack. Yet the attack never appeared. It wasn't until he felt pain from his right side did he realise that Alice had already launched the attack!

'The blood!'

He understood that Alice's blood mirrors acted as a portal for her attacks but he couldn't see it!

She had activated her mirror so fast that it wasn't until he felt the wound, did he understand that she had already attacked.

Gritting his teeth, Nyer activated the blessing of corruption! A black aura flowed out from his body as he sought to burden Alice with several curses.

While he couldn't make use of this as well as Kaden could since he didn't have the artifact, he could still reduce Alice's power until it was manageable for him.

Recognising this sensation of being Kaden's blessing, Alice revealed a chilling gaze while reaching towards the empty space in front of her.

Grabbing hold of something, Nyer felt countless stabbing pains across his body as his blood began to reveal what was 'invisible'.

Blood briar thorns acted as Alice's 'threads'.

These thorns had wrapped around Nyer's body, preventing his movement while Alice stepped towards him.

Noticing how the briar thorns had stayed hidden, a bitter smile appeared on Nyer's face, finally understanding the situation he was in. The moment Alice activated her first Resonance, this entire area had been covered by her mirrors. Meaning no matter how she attacked, it would be almost instantaneous due to the teleportation.

Without giving Nyer a chance to leave behind any last words, Alice released a horizontal slash and turned around.

A swift decapitation with no pain. Severing the countless strands he has connected to the Abyss. Her final mercy towards someone who Velouria had treasured.

The blood that spewed out from his neck dyed the white spider lilies on her jacket red as Alice deactivated her Resonance.

She could feel the fatigue but after the countless training sessions and spars she had with Allura, she was able to maintain multiple uses of her Resonance within a day. Her current limit was three if she spaced out the amount of power she used per activation.

Locating the faint aura of Kaden who was heavily injured, Alice teleported over and saw him resting with his back against the wall and Allura next to him.

A bitter smile could be seen on his face as he glanced up at Alice.

"Seems like you've resolved things. This memory should be fading soon right?" He asked with a soft chuckle. Raising his hand, Alice could see that he was slowly crumbling away.

"Mnm." Nodding her head after a short pause, Alice watched as Kaden sighed and glanced at Allura to his side.

"I suppose I can be happy about the fact that the real me didn't fail if you said you're Lua's adopted daughter."

Hearing this, Alice bit her lip as she understood what he was talking about.

After all...

She couldn't feel Allura's aura at all.

No blessing, no Sigil power... No vitality.

"If you see me in the future, give me a good hit." Kaden chuckled, feeling his strength fading away with the disappearance of this memory.

Kneeling down in front of him, Alice nodded her head.

"I will. And... You're there too in the future. Allura didn't find anyone else, she's still talking about you. You're also the one who gave me Cayla and sent me to Allura. Thank you."

A smile appeared on Kaden's face as he let out a relieved laugh.

"I see... I'm glad. But make sure the real me hears that okay?"

"Mnm, he did." Alice nodded with a smile as both Kaden and Allura faded away. The rest of the battlefield followed suit, crumbling from the collapse of this memory.

Closing her eyes, Alice took a deep breath before making another mirror.

To take one last look at Ayr before it disappeared.

###

Folding his arms in front of the entrance, Kaden could sense the conflict in power. From that sickening aura belonging to Nyer to a new presence. Familiar yet different at the same time.

Cracks began to form around the edges before bursting into a ball of violet flames.

Seeing this, a smile began to form on Kaden's face as a silhouette manifested within the fire.

"Brat." Kaden greeted with a grin, feeling happy that Alice was safe.

Surprised to see Kaden being the first to welcome her back, Alice let out a small chuckle before smirking.

"Pink apron."

Chapter 335 - 335: Return From The Inverted World

"Pink apron."

Upon hearing these two words, Kaden froze up as he choked on his saliva. The corner of his mouth and eyes began to twitch as he looked down at Alice who had a sh*t eating grin on her face.

"I don't even need to ask where you disappeared off to now. No wonder I sensed something disgusting trying to break the barrier." Kaden knocked Alice on the head as she remembered something and reached for the bag strapped to her waist.

As she turned around, Kaden noticed a nostalgic crest, the crest of Ayr. A small warm smile appeared on his face before hiding it just as quickly.

"I brought something. I'm not sure how much you'll like it since... You kept making Cake for your precious Lua~" Alice laughed as Kaden felt as though a vein was about to pop.

What was nostalgic has become a source of embarrassment.

Pulling out a flask of Ayrian Mead, she handed it to him.

"You took care of me quite a bit in the memory with Allura. I've also learned a lot about Velouria and what kind of person she was. I don't know if I can do my job well but I'll try to live up to her standards."

". . ." Staying silent, Kaden patted Alice on the head.

"You don't need to live up to her standards kid. You're doing just fine." He chuckled. In the short time he hadn't seen her, it seemed like she'd gone through quite the transformation and matured a lot in his absence.

Perhaps this is what a father feels after their kid comes back after many years.

Storing the flask of mead in his shadow, he turned around.

"I'll be staying around for a while since the Churches are busy cleaning up the mess I made. I'll check on your progress while I'm at it too. Your friend's pretty worried about you so you should catch up with her for now, the exams have been postponed for now due to this incident so you have time to relax." Kaden waved before disappearing into shadows.

Alice wanted to take this moment to give him a punch but she was feeling mentally exhausted after everything.

'He really is different to the him in the past isn't he?' Alyss crossed her arms but Alice shook her head.

'He's a little different but there's still signs of the old him.'

[A person doesn't change that easily. Kaden may be feeling the guilt of what had transpired but he's trying to find solutions for Allura's condition.] Cayla chuckled as both Alice and Alyss froze up, seeing Cayla appear in their mental space.

[O' master mine, did you forget who this space belonged to?] Cayla raised an eyebrow as Alice gave an awkward smile.

[Relax, I'm not going to stop you from using this space. I'm going to have a small nap.] Cayla shrugged, creating a bed for herself to relax on.

'Haven't you been sleeping for all this time? How are you still tired???' Alyss blinked her eyes in confusion.

[It's one thing to be sleeping by choice and another to get forcefully knocked out.]

While Alyss and Cayla were arguing about the logistics of sleeping by choice or through forced hibernation, Alice chuckled and focused her mind back on reality. She could see Ria and Luke running over with worried expressions on their faces.

The first thing Ria did was pull Alice into a tight hug, squeezing the air out of Alice's lungs.

"Ria if you hug any harder Alice is going to die." Luke chuckled, causing Ria to panic for a moment.

"Ah! Sorry sorry, are you alright? What happened in there? You were trapped for so long!" Ria asked, scanning Alice as she noticed the new outfit with the crest of Ayr.

"Let's head back first, I can tell you on the way back. However, we need to buy some supplies." Alice grinned.

Ria tilted her head in confusion while Luke felt a chill down his spine.

"I've brought some Ayrian mead with me so naturally, we need some good food to go with it. I also got someone to introduce to you later too, she'll be making an appearance at the party."

Seeing that Alice was so excited in having a party the first thing after coming back, Ria laughed and nodded her head.

Now that all of them were safe, this was indeed a moment to relax and have a party.

Just as they were about to leave, the principal wanted to have a word with Alice but upon feeling a chilling gaze on her back originating from Kaden, she decided to not say anything.

"Don't meddle where you don't need to. The kid is just happy to see her friends again, no need to trouble them with what happened in the Inverted World." Kaden smiled while sitting on the principal's chair.

In his hand was a glass containing some Ayrian mead. Giving it a soft swirl, he brought the drink to his nose and inhaled the scent as though he was drinking the most expensive wine in the world.

But this drink wasn't something that could be bought with money. After all, it's priceless to him. It's the taste of home.

"But... I still need to give an explanation to the other families regarding what occurred here. At least if I hear what Alice has to say I can figure something out and lie to them."

"Just give them any excuse would be fine. If anything, pin it on the Eclipse Cult. In order to retrieve a broken relic from a bygone age, they attempted to forcefully utilise the properties of the Inverted World to bring it back.

"By choosing to act during the exam, they can escape our notice by planting a spy amongst the students. Unfortunately for them, brave students stepped up and foiled their plan. One in particular managed to stop the relic from being brought out." Kaden smirked.

"They'll eat this sh*t up like it's the truth and turn their attention to the Eclipse. Everyone hates them anyways."

Hearing his suggestion, the principal's smile twitched but nodded her head in the end.

"Fine. So erm... How long are you planning to stay here?" She asked hesitantly.

After all, having an Abyss Lord reside here was attracting too much unwanted attention!

"Are you that eager to kick me out?"

'YES!!!!'

Seeing the principal trying her best to hold back, Kaden shrugged.

"I don't plan on staying for much longer. I'll check up on how Alice is doing, give them some advice then be on my way. I'm sure the Churches are livid about my attacks so they're out looking for me."

Looking at the sky, Kaden raised his glass before drinking the mead from his hometown.

###

Slowly opening his eye, Nyer ignored the countless medical tubes connected to his body and sensed the changes in the Abyss.

A smile crept onto his face.

"And so... the fake Heart becomes real. The connection to the Will has finally been severed after all these centuries. All my work was not for naught... Soon." He muttered with a satisfied smile.

Now that the requirement of turning the fake heart into a real one has succeeded, all that's left was for him to complete the final requirement before his plan could be put into motion.

Forcing himself to stand up, he stepped towards a glowing container and placed his hand on the glass. His gaze softened as he looked at the being within.

The corpse of a fallen God. The corpse of the real Velouria who was missing parts of her body.

###

With Alice now escaping from the Inverted World, the final entrance disappeared and peace returned to the academy. There were still repairs being made while the reflection of the Inverted World that hung above the Academy seemed to have dimmed to a certain extent.

There were worries that re-entering the Inverted World may have dire consequences and the teachers tested out the entrances regularly to ensure that there would be no more interference.

However, that was merely a show that the principal was putting on to reassure people. The only reason why the Inverted World reacted was due to Cayla and now that she's awake, the Inverted World will be quiet once more.

With this came the announcement regarding the exam that had been halted due to this incident.

Most of the students still managed to demonstrate bravery and expertise in the face of danger therefore, this will be taken into account during the retest. Each student will get another chance to advance while those who don't want to take the test will be allowed to remain in their current grade.

Details regarding the new exam will be announced soon and that it will not be revolving around the Inverted World since there are still doubts about safety.

There were also rumours spread across campus regarding a certain 'crazy b*tch' who appeared during the exams. She was the last one to come out and rumours say she was busy killing things inside the Inverted World and refused to come out until everything was killed.

With such rumours acting as the foundation, things soon became exaggerated but Alice was in the dark regarding these rumours.

She was too busy partying with Ria and Luke while enjoying the mead she brought back.

With Alice and Luke going crazy with drinking different alcoholic drinks, Ria simply face palmed but joined in soon after.

They weren't just drinking Ayrian mead either, Luke had brought countless other drinks with the intention of making Alice black out before she could knock him out.

What he didn't know was that Alice hid her blood mirrors in his drink and continuously teleported alcohol from the bottles into his cup, forcing him to drink more.

With each mouthful, the cup seemed to refill magically.

It was only after seeing her sh*t eating grin did he put the pieces together.

"You b*tch!!! *GURGLE!"

Alice had teleported more wine into his mouth and a battle between who could make the other black out drunk sparked with greater intensity.

Chapter 336 - 336: Introducing Alyss

Waking up in the morning, Alice found herself hanging off the bed with her legs up and a headache hitting harder than an Abyss Lord.

"Urg..." Groaning in pain, Alice tried to push herself up but her hand grabbed a bottle, causing her to stumble.

Letting out a sigh, she looked around for Ria and Luke.

Ria was passed out by the table and Luke was snoring above her wardrobe.

Seeing all of this, Alice let out a chuckle as she yawned before standing up.

'Thought you were going to introduce me to them.' Alyss chuckled in her mind.

'Right~... Seems like I got a bit carried away while drinking.' Alice smiled awkwardly.

Last night, after buying the supplies they needed, they immediately started the party while Alice talked about her adventures in the Inverted World. How she got her current outfit, how Void Fang got upgraded and how she hunted her fourth Sigil.

Ria was surprised Alice caught up so fast, inspiring her to master her own Sigils quickly so that she could aim to get the fifth one.

But before she could introduce Alyss to them, they began to fight and see who could get the other drunk faster.

Recalling the night, Alice let out another laugh as she began to tidy up all of the empty bottles and snacks.

Going to the bathroom, she could see the changes in her appearance. First of all, her left eye had changed to a blood red with the icon of a flower. Second of all, the marking around her neck had disappeared!

Joy filled Alice's heart as she felt around her neck to make sure it had completely disappeared.

Wondering where her crown was stored now, she activated the Crown of the Abyss.

At that moment, the flower in her left eye shimmered with a bright red while the shards of obsidian manifested above her head.

Now that she was given a break to look at the new crown properly, she noticed that it was less of a crown and more of a halo containing obsidian swords taking the shape of a crown.

'So the crown is now stored in my left Eye? What would happen if I repair you Cayla?' Alice asked curiously.

[Repairing something signifies that it's something that can be repaired in the first place. Unfortunately o' master mine, the Eyes of the Abyss have forever been degraded to the Eye of the Abyss. I'm already here in my entirety. When Nyer betrayed Velouria in the real history, he took the other piece of me but I was able to allocate my entire soul to this Eye.

He merely has similar power but not my soul.] Cayla explained.

[And on the off chance that you do recover the other Eye from Nyer, I've long outgrown the need for the second Eye. Not to mention he would've modified the other Eye to some degree so synchronising it with me again would bring more harm than good. So I assure you that you do not need to worry about the other Eye.]

'I see... I thought that you would be more 'complete' if you had the other Eye but I guess I'm wrong then.' Alice nodded.

Considering the fact that Kaden and Cayla had been trying to find a host for centuries, it wasn't surprising that Cayla had developed herself to some extent and outgrown the need for the other Eye.

Going through her morning routine, Alice looked for some casual wear for today.

A large white turtle neck sweater with long sleeves and the bottom reaching her thighs. A pair of shorts, stockings and high boots.

Making a pose in front of the mirror, she smiled happily before freezing up like a deer in headlights.

Behind her, both Ria and Luke had woken up and witnessed Alice posing in front of the mirror while admiring her appearance.

Seeing the grin on their faces, Alice blushed out of embarrassment before slamming the door shut using blood threads.

###

After getting some breakfast, Alice sat them down in her room.

"So who's this person you wanted us to meet?" Ria asked curiously. Since they missed the opportunity yesterday, Alice probably wanted to make up for it today.

"Fufu~ It's exactly why I brought you here. I'd like you to meet the other me, aka twinnie, aka when I go batsh*t insane during a fight. She's called Alyss, same as me but spelt A l y s s." Alice introduced as she snapped her finger.

Blood surged around her, changing her outfit to the slightly revealing one that Alyss likes to wear while golden chains manifested around her.

Widening her eyes in shock, Alyss panicked as she didn't think Alice would just throw her into the midst of things like this without giving her a heads up.

As the blood faded away, Alyss appeared in front of both Luke and Ria in her attire standing awkwardly. The only thing that changed was the chains and the outfit.

"Erm... Hi?" Alyss forced a smile while Ria tilted her head and Luke was confused.

'Alice!!!!' Alyss shouted out in her mind while Alice ignored her.

[Are you sure this is okay?] Cayla raised an eyebrow upon seeing the three of them staring blankly at one another.

They have no connection to Alyss and thus this first meeting was rather abrupt.

'Ehhh it should be fine?' Alice shrugged.

Holding back her embarrassment, Alyss cleared her throat and decided to sit down for now.

An awkward silence was drawn out between the three of them as Alyss eventually caved in.

"Urg... I'm the one responsible for Alice's flames. And we're basically two souls that share the same body. We switch out here and there during the fights." Alyss opened her hand before manifesting a ball of violet flames.

Seeing that they were still silent, Alyss gritted her teeth.

'Alice! Switch with me again! I can't stand this awkwardness!' Alyss shouted out as she forcefully handed the control back to Alice.

Finding herself back in her body, Alice snapped her finger and changed back to her cosy attire.

"What's with the silence?" Alice asked curiously while Ria scratched her chin.

"I mean... Isn't she the reason why you couldn't control yourself? I thought she was... well pardon for my words but 'bad'?"

'Bad?! Who's bad?! You're bad!' Alyss cursed.

"Ahh that. It's a bit of a misunderstanding. She's bad with socialising and only really appears during fights. But that's a bit unfair for her so I wanted to introduce her to you guys." Alice nodded in understanding.

After all, it was understandable for Ria to be on guard against the manifestation of Alice's powers. The source of these strange flames and the problem that's plagued her for a long time.

"She's actually quite shy. She loves spicy skewers... And her taste in clothing is completely different to mine. You might see me switch with her a few times so just giving you a heads up." Alice chuckled.

"So... Does she hear and see what you see?" Luke asked curiously as Alice nodded her head.

"Yes, she sees what I see. Hears what I hear and we share a mental space together."

"Ah! Sorry for calling you bad then. I wasn't sure how to react to you." Ria apologised upon hearing this.

Meanwhile, Alyss crossed her arms, accepting the apology.

'Don't just accept it silently. You gotta say it to her.' Alice chuckled, forcefully putting Alyss in control as though they were playing a game of hot potato.

Seeing the chains manifest around her once more, they understood that Alyss took over.

"Urg... Well... I guess it's fine. I'll forgive you this time." Alyss replied awkwardly while looking to the side.

"Since you weren't here during the party, would you like to go shopping now? Alice mentioned you like Spicy Skewers right? I'm sure Luke knows a good place for that kind of thing." Ria asked, glancing up at Luke who nodded his head.

"There's a eastern barbeque place near the port. They're pretty famous for their spicy marinated meat so it'll be a good start." Luke explained as Alyss started to drool but quickly swallowed it so they didn't realise.

"I suppose I should go have a look at this place. I don't know if can match how spicy I want it to be though." She shrugged nonchalantly despite the clearly excited smile on her face.

Seeing this, Ria immediately understood what kind of person Alyss was and chuckled.

Just as they were about to leave for the barbeque place, they noticed a raven peaking at the window.

Raising her eyebrow, Alyss tried to shoo the bird away only for it to slap her hand with its wing.

"I believe I have given you plenty of time to rest now."

"What the f*ck???" Alyss shouted out in surprise, hearing Kaden's deep voice coming from the Raven.

Ignoring her reaction, the Raven hopped into the room.

"You have two choices. This is for both Alice and Ria since I don't know who you are kid. But if you're their friend then I can give you some pointers as well." Kaden spoke, turning to Luke who was rather shellshocked by the things that had happened in the span of 30 minutes or so.

First, Alice has a twin soul living in her and now there was a man's voice coming from a Raven.

"It'll be good for you, he's pretty damn strong and he's helped train me and Ria." Alice took over and smiled while Ria wondered why Alice didn't mention Kaden is an Abyss Lord.

However, seeing the sadistic light in her eyes, Ria understood the intent and nodded her head.

She too wanted to see Luke suffer under Kaden.

Feeling the 'expectant' gazes from Alice and Ria, Luke nodded his head.

"Yes please, I'll be in your care."

"Alright. The three of you stand around this Raven, I'll teleport you to me. You can go and eat after this if you can still move." Kaden narrowed his eyes as Luke felt a chill but it was too late for him to back out.

"Wait! What do you mean if I can still move?" He questioned but neither Alice nor Ria replied and simply closed their eyes while shadows burst out around them.

Before he could ask another question, the three of them was forcefully teleported away from Alice's room.

Chapter 337 - 337: Luke's Abilities

Upon stepping out of the shadow, the three of them came face to face with Kaden who was standing in an arena suspended in the sky and connected by bridges.

There were four pillars around the centre while large pillars containing blue flames lit up the area on the edge.

"So who wants to be first? I assume for your looks that you want that tall kid to fight first?" Kaden asked while keeping his hands in his pockets.

Both Alice and Ria nodded their heads as they didn't allow Luke to reject this arrangement. With no other choice, he could only sigh and prepare himself to fight someone he didn't know much about.

But considering the fact that he could train Alice and Ria then it meant he had to be on guard.

Finding themselves a place to sit down, Alice and Ria wondered how Luke was going to fair against Kaden.

Looking above their heads, Alice could see four Sigils above Luke while Kaden had nine.

"How well do you think Luke would do? I was busy in the Inverted World trying to survive so I didn't see him fight." Alice asked curiously since she only knew that he was the supportive kind of fighter.

With that in mind, it'll be hard to impress Kaden.

"Hmm... It's definitely unique. I only saw it briefly myself but his buffs are no joke. I felt like I could fight for days on end with his enhancements." Ria rubbed her chin.

Since she was last to be saved, she didn't see much of his abilities but in the short moment that she did, it left quite the impression on her.

She had seen it years ago but she didn't think it would've developed to this stage.

"Oh? Interesting." Alice murmured while focusing on the fight.

Swallowing his saliva nervously, Luke took a deep breath and calmed himself.

On his neck, his first Sigil manifested as cube manifested next to him. The cube was made from a similar material or at least what Alice could assume to be similar to what Void Fang was made from.

The way it shifted with each passing moment looked like it was crafted from countless tiny beings.

Snapping his finger, Luke transformed the cube into the shape of a Pawn from chess.

Summon Piece – Pawn!

A sword appeared in his hand as Luke lunged forward towards Kaden.

While he was fast, compared to Alice and Ria, he was moving in slow motion.

Without moving from his spot, Kaden's shadow stretched out as a mimicry of Luke appeared from the ink using the same attack.

*BANG!!!

As their blades collided, Kaden paused in surprise as his mimicry was actually pushed back! The corrupted blade in its hand was broken and Luke continued forward without stopping.

Creating two more beasts for him to deal with, he watched as Luke navigated through the crowd while keeping himself low to the ground.

With each strike, the floating Pawn piece next to him would begin to shift until...

Promotion – Knight!

Armour manifested around his body as the blade in his hand transformed into a Knight's longsword.

Twisting his body, he released a horizontal slash and left deep cuts on the mimics. However, as they weren't living beings, these mimics lunged forward with increased fervour.

One of the larger mimics slammed its fist to Luke's side, forcing him to parry and take several steps back.

"Tch!" Clicking his tongue in annoyance, Luke retreated while Kaden continued to summon more mimics with a smile on his face.

The longer this fight goes on, the more he'll summon. Summoner type fighters weren't going to limit what they could summon after all.

Furrowing his brows, he stabbed his blade into the ground as the Knight Piece began to shift.

Promotion – Bishop!

The blade disassembled itself and transformed into a grimoire. Strands of energy converged towards him as an illusionary figure appeared beside him.

It was Ria!

Motes of lightning started to manifest above each of the mimics as crackles of energy could be seen flickering across their body.

*RUMBLE!!!

The clouds above rumbled as a line of lightning bolts rained down, carving a path in the wave.

Seeing this, Alice glanced over to Ria who blinked her eyes.

"What?"

"He can summon you?" Alice asked while Ria shook her head.

"Nope. He simply 'recorded' some casting spells that he's seen in his Bishop piece. There's a limit to what he can do solo since his powers are mostly used for buffing other people.

"Pawns buff your general physical abilities, it's basic but it designates targets for him to promote. Knight is used for fighters, Bishop for casters and Rook for tanks. These are the pieces he's able to use right now." Ria explained as Luke fired off lightning to try clear the swarm but with each one that he killed, two more would rise.

'I need to reach Kaden.' Luke frowned as a fourth Sigil lit up on the back of his hand.

Promotion – Rook!

Heavy plate armour appeared around him along with a tower shield. Bracing himself, a burst of energy erupted from his body as he charged forward.

At first, he was slow but with each step, his speed began to increase and soon, he was akin to an unstoppable object charging through the crowd of mimics, bashing everything aside.

*BANG!!!

One of the mimics took his shield slam head on and had its body obliterated in the charge.

Hearing the crack of its body, even Alice flinched imagining what it's like to take that head on without any preparation.

And if Ria was correct, then this was his buffs in their limited form! What would it be like if he used it on someone else?!

Charging through the crowd, he appeared before Kaden and tried to slam the shield into him but he simply yawned and raised his hand.

*BANG!!!!

The shield caved in from facing an immovable object as Kaden grinned, clenching his fist and bending the metal.

Twisting his body, he threw Luke over his shoulders and slammed him into the ground.

"GAH!!!"

"Just because I'm a caster doesn't mean I'm weak in close quarters." Kaden chuckled, raising his foot and stomping down on Luke's chest.

*CRACK!!!

His plate armour was shattered as the ground beneath him cracked apart.

Kicking Luke into the air, he snapped his finger as a serpent like beast jumped out from his shadow and opened its maw before clamping down.

Before Ria could even worry, a wave of energy slashed through the mimic towards Kaden who smacked it aside using his arm.

Anti Beast Resonance!

Bleeding from his wounds, Luke could be seen falling from the air while a golden figure floated behind him.

His first Resonance allowed him two choices. First, layer his buffs on someone and grant them multiple increases.

The second choice, however, was one that allowed him to create 'imaginary pieces' via fusing his promotions together.

In this case, Knight + Bishop + Rook = Imaginary Piece – Paladin!

This was a piece that he recently unlocked thanks to obtaining his fourth Sigil, granting him the Rook buff.

Otherwise, he would've been limited to Pawn + Knight + Bishop, creating Imaginary Piece – Rune Knight.

The Paladin stood behind Luke was covered from head to toe in white plated armour adorned with golden details and wielded a greatsword as though it was a longsword.

A blue cape with a fur collar fluttered behind it as Luke commanded the paladin to slaughter through the group of mimics.

Accepting this command, the Paladin's blade lit up with a golden aura as he rushed towards the group.

As the first beast approached, the Paladin grabbed it by the head and slammed it into the ground.

*BANG!!!

Using the beast as a weapon, he threw it towards the next beast, causing the two to fall back as he raised his blade above his head.

Erupting with energy, the Paladin slashed down, causing a wave of energy to shred the two beasts into nothingness while the others tried to flank from its side.

"URAHHH!!!!"

A shout could be heard behind the mask as it transformed the greatsword in its hand into a giant hammer and crushed a beast beneath its weight.

However, Kaden wasn't impressed while watching all of this.

Compared to the other people with four Sigils, it was 'decent' in his eyes but far from what's required. He has his uses in buffing his team but he'll become a weak link, the first target to kill. Even with this Paladin by his side, he wouldn't be able to fend for himself if he merely stood back and did nothing.

Now that Alice has claimed all three items required to become the next Goddess of the Abyss, he couldn't allow this kind of risk to be near her.

'Why do I have to babysit these brats? I'd rather Lua come instead while I deal with the outside powers.' Kaden sighed. At least if Allura was here, he could work in the background but she was being stubborn.

She kept herself busy in the depths of the Abyss leaving all the annoying work to him despite her current state.

Meaning, the sooner he gets this over with the better.

"It's decent but requires work. You need to focus on keeping yourself alive to be an asset to the team. As you stand, you're nothing but a detriment even with your abilities." Kaden sighed, appearing from Luke's shadow.

Widening his eyes, Luke wanted to fight back when a wall of force slammed into him from the side.

*BANG!!!

Crashing into a pillar, Luke felt his consciousness flicker. Momentarily, he found himself standing on a bridge with a light on the other side before being brought back to reality.

Seeing Kaden cracking his knuckles with a smile, Luke wanted to protest but his glare made it impossible.

"Rejoice kid, an Abyss Lord is going to personally teach you what it means to be a supporter on the battlefield."

Hearing these words, he paled in shock realising that his opponent was an Abyss Lord.

Looking towards Alice and Ria who had grins on their faces, Luke wanted to cry.

'YOU DEMONS!!!'

"You dare look away kid?! Let me show you the consequences!"

"ARGGG!!!"

Chapter 338 - 338: Rematch Against Kaden

Looking at the collapsed Luke who was twitching every so often, Alice couldn't help but feel sorry about his current state.

But it's a ritual that all of them have gone through whether that be through Allura or through Kaden.

The fact that his body could still twitch was a good sign, it meant it was still intact to some extent.

As for Ria, she was enjoying herself by poking his bruises and wounds. Each poke would cause his body to twitch and her smile would grow wider ever so slightly.

"De...mon..." Luke forced out, causing Ria to poke him harder.

"Stop playing around with the kid. It's your turn next." Kaden called out as he massaged his neck. It was going to be a little annoying to deal with Ria since her speed was high but it wasn't anything impossible.

Cracking her knuckles, Ria had a confident grin on her face as she prepared to face Kaden.

Since their last interaction, she had focused on improving her overall firepower being a long ranged support but that doesn't mean she couldn't handle herself in a one on one fight.

"Don't take me lightly, you'll be surprised." She boasted.

###

". . ."

Looking at Ria who was even more beat up than Luke and was motionless next to him, Alice wanted to facepalm. If she hadn't boasted so hard at the start, maybe Kaden would've taken it easier on her.

As revenge, Luke was poking Ria's wounds while she was trying her best to do the same thing but was unable to.

The fight went in her favour at the start. She would keep her distance, firing a constant stream of lightning strikes and whenever Kaden tried to catch her, she would use her speed to reposition herself.

She was even able to damage the arena, creating craters with each attack and her Resonance let her land a good hit into Kaden's palms, scuffing up his skin slightly.

The fact that she could even mark the skin of an Abyss Lord was praiseworthy but what came next could only make Alice look away.

She couldn't retreat fast enough and was used as a punching bag for Kaden. Not only that, but he also threw her around like she weighed nothing.

Looking at the human shaped indentations on the walls and floors, Alice shivered thinking about her fate.

"Seems like it's only you left. I got pretty high expectations considering you went to Ayr and saw me in my prime." Kaden forced a smile while warming up his shoulders.

Feeling the hostility in his gaze, Alice realised that he was going to take revenge for her Pink Apron comment.

"It's not like I asked to go there ya know? It just kind of happened and who knew you would wear something cute like that?" Alice laughed awkwardly while Kaden forcefully teleported her to the arena while fixing the damages.

"Hou~ Is that how we're doing things? You didn't need to comment about it but you chose to. Surely you've prepared yourself for the consequences right?" Kaden narrowed his eyes.

Swallowing her saliva nervously, Alice conjured a swirl of blood before changing her outfit to the one that Velouria made for her.

Seeing the Ayrian crest upon the jacket, Kaden's gaze softened before returning back to normal.

Naturally, this didn't escape Alice's notice. After interacting with Kaden in the past and knowing what he was like, it was clear the current him was someone who hides his true feelings. But every so often, those feelings flow out.

There was also a hint of seriousness in his gaze. Perhaps it's because she's donning the crest of Ayr perhaps it's because he suspects she saw the reality of what happened in the past.

Either way, Alice didn't want to let him down. She wanted to show him everything she'd learnt during her time in Ayr. Everything he taught her and everything she's mastered!

***BANG!!!**

A crimson and purple aura burst out from her body as Void Fang was summoned to her hand.

Partial Bloodline Release!

Stomping down, Alice conjured a blood mirror and teleported next to Kaden who was surprised she had learnt the abilities of the Sealed Abyss Lords as a smile crept up on his face for a split moment before returning back to normal.

A wall of shadows erupted from the ground, blocking Alice's strike while golden chains manifested around her body and her outfit switched.

"Let's go!" Alyss shouted with a grin as she coiled her leg around the wall, swinging her body to the side and slashing towards Kaden's head.

Bending his body back, he managed to dodge but sensed danger from below and quickly guarded with his hand, blocking her kick.

"Tch!" Transforming Void Fang into a spear, Alyss vaulted herself above Kaden before switching over to Alice who aimed her finger.

Void Flux!

The improved variant that focused on speed and penetration power, enough to even break the specialised training room in Ayr!

Sensing a chill down his spine, Kaden wrapped a veil of shadows around the orb, allowing its spiral motion to pull the veil towards itself and slow down the rotation before detonating within this blanket.

Seeing Kaden break apart her new attack so quickly, Alice revealed a bitter yet expectant smile. As the strongest caster of Ayr, it's only natural that he's capable of this much.

Zone Stance – Offensive Zone!

Transforming Void Fang back into a sword, Alice released a series of slashes towards Kaden whose gaze was focused and parried the attacks using his shadows.

Raven feathers shot out from Alice's shadow but she was ready.

Defensive Zone!

*CLANG!!!!

She managed to parry these feathers but the power surpassed her original expectation.

Even with Partial Bloodline Release, the force still flung her into the air.

She could see Kaden purposefully slowing down his casting process, matching her improvement as he aimed towards her falling body.

Before the shot could be fired, metal manifested and slammed into the back of Kaden's knees, causing him to fall back slightly and aim away from Alice.

A bullet of shadow barely missed Alice as she could sense the power behind that bullet.

'If I was hit by that I'd be seriously injured. Is he testing how well I'm doing or is he trying to kill me??' Alice asked inwardly while creating a platform of blood for herself.

Turning Void Fang into a bow, she pulled back on the string and created three arrows containing different variants of Void Flux.

*BANG!!!

Firing them all at once, she snapped her finger and blood mirrors appeared in front of them.

When she first got the blood mirrors, she discovered that she could increase their speed upon teleportation!

Meaning...

Countless shards of mirrors appeared next to Kaden as he couldn't tell which one the arrow was going to come out from.

Without hesitation, he twisted his body and created a swirl of shadows, causing the arrows to bounce off the surface but Alice had planned for this.

Each of the arrows burst into blood mist and integrated themselves with his barrier as she activated her second Sigil.

Little by little, red spider lilies began to blossom in his shadow, consuming the energy to fuel themselves as his barrier disappeared, surprising Kaden.

He was on guard for her violet flames yet this time it was flowers?

Taking advantage of his confusion, she expanded one of her mirrors and appeared behind him.

Crimson energy spread across her blade as Alice focused her gaze.

Void Flux – Cleave!!!

*BANG!!!

Watching the streak of crimson energy explode towards Kaden, a hopeful feeling emerged in Alice's heart but that feeling was soon crushed when Kaden blocked the attack using his hand that was covered with shadows.

'Alice switch with me!'

Without asking why, Alice did just that as Alyss took over and quickly ducked down.

Her Void Flux – Cleave was sent back!

Twisting her body, Alyss punched towards Kaden's stomach who blocked with his elbow.

Grabbing her by the arm, he lifted her into the air and tried to slam her into the ground.

*BANG!!!

Before she hit the ground, Alyss slammed her heel towards Kaden who blocked with his spare hand.

However, his original momentum in throwing Alyss was lost as she flipped away and slid across the ground.

Recalling Void Fang, she transformed it into a spear before taking a deep breath.

Her hair shifted colour into a bright violet colour as black armour manifested around her body. The familiar violet flames erupted around her as Alyss charged towards Kaden.

'First resonance.' Kaden thought to himself as he was familiar with this form. Alice had revealed it previously when they sparred.

Flicking his hand, a serpentine leviathan burst out from his shadow and rushed towards Alyss who dodged its charge.

Looking at the leviathan from above, Alyss clenched her hand as hard as she could, gathering the flame to the blade.

*HAH!!!!"

Letting out a shout, she released a slash that decapitated the beast while running up the head.

Unphased by this, Kaden summoned a hydra using his mimicry. Energy gathered towards its mouth as Alyss felt a chill down her spine. It was preparing for a breath attack!

'Let me deal with this.' Alice smiled as Alyss nodded her head.

Closing her eyes, the resonance broke apart as Alice smiled towards Kaden.

The flower in her left eye began to glow as the obsidian crown manifested above her head!

Despite being a four star Hunter, Alice had two Resonances!

The first belonged to Alyss and was the one she originally awakened with.

The second belonged to her!

Red spider lily patterns appeared across Alice's body and travelled up her cheek while a white dress appeared around her. Void Fang transformed to match her resonance as she made a cut on her arm.

Splashing her blood in front of her, a wall of briar thorns and spider lilies began to bloom.

***BANG!!!!**

However, it proved to be lacking when it came to defensive measures which was fine for Alice.

Her resonance didn't have the tenacious nature belonging to Alyss's Resonance. Instead, it had raw offensive capability!

'Remember the feeling, the flow of energy.'

Alyss had already proved that this was possible during their clash with Enris. But this time, she wasn't replicating a weapon.

She didn't have the blessing nor the required Sigils. But she could make shortcuts like she did with Void Flux. Her improved understanding of casting, optimising and adjusting her own abilities.

Taking a deep breath, she slashed towards the Hydra who was still releasing its breath attack upon the wall of briar thorns.

Replication - Executioner's Blade!!!

Chapter 339 - 339: Kaden's Evaluation

Executioner's Blade!!!

It was a replication of Allura's famed attack but without the power of Velouria's blessing.

However, in order to achieve the same effect, Alice had to overlap several theories and attacks that she's accumulated thus far.

First, the use of her blood mirrors compacted into a single sheet to increase the speed of the slash.
Replication of Allura's instant slash.

Second, achieving the power to penetrate defence via rotational power but rather than a spiralling motion, it's a vertical circle like a saw blade.

Third, weakening defences through absorption using the abilities gained from activating her First Resonance.

With all three conditions lined up, she was able to replicate the potency and properties of Allura's Executioner's Blade to a certain extent!

If Void Flux – Cleave was a poor imitation that could be used several times, then this Executioner's Blade was something she could only use once upon activating her First Resonance.

Just one attack was enough to make Alice feel as though someone had just pulled all of her organs out at once, causing her to be drained of energy.

*BANG!!!!

Cleaving through the breath attack released by the hydra, Alice smiled upon seeing the slash carve through the flesh of the beast and even began eating away at the spatial barrier surrounding this arena.

For the first time in the battle, Kaden had lost his composure as his pupils shrunk at the attack that was still colliding against the walls of this space.

The way it was constantly digging into the barrier and using the barrier's energy against it! However, it couldn't maintain its original power as it burned energy faster than what it was gaining.

Focusing his gaze, Kaden broke down the basic principles of Alice's attack in hopes of potentially replicating it but there was an unknown factor hindering his replication.

The red spider lily!

Much like the flames that he couldn't replicate, he couldn't replicate the potency of the red spider lilies.

This kind of offensive power and ferociousness far surpassed her violet flames.

Kaden's smile twitched as he couldn't tell which side of Alice was the more violent one. The Alice that succumbs to her baser instincts during a fight like she demonstrated when the chains appeared, or the current Alice that enhances her attacks with these spider lilies.

Turning back to Alice, he was surprised to see her kneeling on the ground, unable to move a single inch.

"Erm... Can I give up?" Alice forced a smile.

No matter how she tried, her body simply didn't listen. None of her Sigils could be activated and she was completely helpless right now.

Massaging his eyes, Kaden flickered in front of Alice and chopped down with his hand.

"Ouch!"

"And with that you're dead. Please, and I mean this genuinely, please don't tell me you copied Lua's technique and flow of energy without knowing the proper effects and requirements of Executioner's Blade?" Kaden asked, squatting in front of Alice and squinting at her.

Feeling his gaze, Alice coughed awkwardly and looked away.

"You are a different kind of stupid, reckless and downright moronic you know that right, brat?"

"First you copy Lua's Nova Core, a skill we specifically created for her to regulate her insane output to match her energy reserves. Which you refashioned into Void Flux. Then you copy a cheap imitation of her Executioner's Blade she modified to fit the brat using the Authority of Death.

"And now, you attempt to recreate the original Executioner's Blade, specifically designed for LUA, to match her BLESSING, which involves her PHYSIQUE all while taking into account of her absurd regeneration." Kaden ranted. With each word that he emphasised, he would poke his finger against her head.

Naturally, Alice couldn't say anything back since he was correct on all accounts.

"Have I explained the full details regarding the creation of Lua's Executioner's Blade?" Kaden asked.

If Alice had been to Ayr in the past, she should know. Either that or the past him didn't think she would try to recreate this attack without the proper preparation.

"You didn't..."

"I figured as much since 'I' didn't think you would be stupid enough to try. But let me clarify it for you now. Executioner's Blade is based on a way of manipulating energy to forcefully expunge everything. The reason why Lua can use it several times without tiring is because of her fifth Sigil that keeps her alive and energised while fighting.

"Not only that, but the Abyss Blood that she's drank also complements this kind of fighting style. When you release this attack, even if you find alternatives to emulate the potency, you cannot avoid the siphoning of your power.

"Executioner's Blade is an attack that's most powerful when it's released at full energy since it's a way to output everything all at once." Kaden explained, giving Alice's head one last poke with his finger.

The constant poking left a red mark and Alice felt as though she wanted to cry. Even with her increased durability and pain tolerance, each poke felt as though it hit the depths of her soul.

"However... I suppose it's commendable that you can still talk after using it. Everyone else who's tried to emulate the original Executioner's Blade through alternative measures have all been knocked out with no exceptions since the attack basically puts you into overdraft of your energy.

"Even the death using brat was knocked out for almost a month after trying it which is why Lua modified it to be something he could use." Kaden sighed.

He could still remember seeing Gin pestering Allura to teach him her attack when he was young and stupid. Only to get knocked out as a result. The only thing that's changed since then is that he's now old and stupid.

While recovering from the poking of her head, Alice noticed something as a sh*t eating grin appeared on her face and she turned her head away to hide it.

"Kaden." She called out.

"Hm? What is it brat?"

"You and Allura went your separate ways for a while now right?"

Furrowing his brows, Kaden wasn't sure what Alice was getting at.

"Yes, what about it?"

"How did you know what happened between Allura and Gin?" Alice turned around with a wide grin.

*PUCHI!!!

Seeing that grin, he felt as though a vein was about to burst.

Placing his hand in front of Alice, he flicked her in the forehead.

*BANG!!!

Alice's body was flung back and rolled across the floor until she was lying down motionless next to Ria and Luke.

Letting out a sigh, he walked over to the trio and sat down on some seats near them.

Crossing his legs, he contemplated on how he could improve their strength.

Luke's issue could be easily dealt with and his unique Sigils proved to be rather interesting. It was the first time Kaden had seen a buff type ability like his where he could use it together to summon beings like the Paladin.

Ria's issue was more difficult as it was linked to doubt and her perception of herself. Being around a monster of talent like Alice wasn't great either as her own talent was being drowned out.

A Hunter's growth is tied to their mentality and how they perceive themselves. What they think is impossible could never be achieved. But if they're insane enough to attempt things even though it seems impossible, they could reap large rewards.

'Balancing that is a pain though. She needs an environment where it's dangerous yet wouldn't cause her to lose her life. But doing it like this is too 'safe'. What she needs is the threat of death and the desperation that comes with facing death. The will to look past death and into the mouth of danger.'

Kaden narrowed his eyes.

Alice had the benefit of being put into a death like state for 10 years, allowing her to face the fear of death without care. Of course, that didn't mean she wanted to die but rather she could face death head on without holding back.

For Ria, he recalled that the Gin brat had saved her from a ritual yet Ria was looking away from that fact.

'Is it because she's scared?'

If she was able to take advantage of that experience, no matter how painful, she would grow and overcome her current weakness.

"What a hassle." Kaden sighed, leaning back as he glanced up at the fake sky within this space.

And finally, it was Alice's turn.

She was adventurous in trying things, reckless in experiments but this allowed her to achieve a far greater growth rate than even the talented Hunters that he's seen.

In this aspect, she could be called a monster of growth, a bundle of raw talent forged in her suffering of 10 years.

But this is also her greatest weakness.

Her desire to experiment, lack of understanding and recklessness cause her countless troubles. While she may be getting more benefits than problems right now, the same couldn't be said for the future.

Once that happens, she'll hit a wall.

The stronger the will, the harder the rebound upon facing this kind of wall. Alice needs to be able to put herself back together if she ever faces this wall.

'One isn't reckless enough and the other is too reckless. How am I supposed to train these three abnormal brats at the same time?'

He still had his own problems to look out for too.

After Velouria's passing, the Abyss had largely escaped their control and it's been doing whatever the Will wants it to do. Expansions, new beasts and even new abilities that have never been seen before.

Hell, even Nyer has put his hand into this pot, stirring it with unknown variables that affect the outcome.

Transforming humans back to beasts, rituals to attempt to usurp the Will's power, ways of utilising a fallen God's body.

Just thinking of how he's been violating Velouria's corpse and using her flesh as a tool to experiment caused Kaden to simmer with killing intent. Closing his eyes to calm his mind, he had to first deal with the most problematic issue at hand.

Allura's wound.

Famine's attack wasn't something that could easily be healed. But if Nalem's information is correct, there's a slim chance that a miracle could occur and a beast with compatible blood to the Pheonix Feather herb would appear.

Once these two requirements are met, he'll face Famine to fulfil the final requirement of fully healing Allura.

'Just wait for me Lua.' Kaden thought to himself as he began to formulate ways to train these brats so he could resume his journey.

Chapter 340 - 340: Slim Possibilities

The three of them woke up roughly around the same time with Alice recovering from her injuries the fastest, Ria who got used to the pain and Luke who was still hurting from the beating.

Getting the three to sit in front of him, Kaden pulled out a notebook from his shadow.

"I'll add some additional lessons to your new curriculum and have the principal take some lessons out for extra time if you want. Luke, you'll be focusing on ways to keep yourself alive in a fight. Ria, you'll need extra lessons from me to deal with your issues.

"And as for Alice... You don't really need lessons outside of calming your mind and reflecting properly on what you see. You have the tendency to go fast without care. It's not bad but it's not great either." Kaden explained while flipping through his notebook.

"In general, I suggest you work on your foundation."

Closing his book, he teleported Alice and Luke away while Ria was left behind.

"We need a quick talk since this is tied with your extra lessons." Kaden said seriously, surprising Ria since he's not usually this serious.

"What do you think when you think of death? Not the authority that your grandfather wields but rather when you come face to face with your own death. What do you see? What do you think and what do you feel."

Closing her eyes, Ria imagined what it was like to face death.

She's faced 'death' several times already but there was one that stood out the most. Her time in the Eclipse Cult.

Furrowing her brows, she opened her eyes and Kaden was squatting in front of her.

"Don't look away from that death. Do you want to know why Alice is strong? Sure she is supported by all of her abilities but it's her attitude towards death and her experiences that make up her foundation. If you don't want to get left behind, look that death in the face.

"To understand death, to understand your own mortality and to understand your own weakness. That's the first step you need to take." Kaden explained.

"Are you willing to go through that kind of pain to get stronger?"

Biting her lips, Ria nodded her head.

Even though her gaze was determined, Kaden could still see the hesitancy hidden deep within. She may be a strong Hunter now but deep inside, there is still the scared little girl.

"I'll give you a taste of what's to come. Reflect on it, think hard then come talk to me once you think you can handle it."

Placing his hand against her forehead, a burst of shadows erupted around her, drowning out her vision as she closed her eyes out of instinct.

At that moment, she felt a warm liquid rising from below. Her pupils shrank as she was familiar with this viscosity, this temperature and this humidity.

Her body began to tremble as she didn't dare to open her eyes.

But her body continued to move.

It didn't listen to her. She could feel her hands digging into something hard then soft. The burst of warmth from within and the next moment, she brought it to her mouth.

Retching at the feeling she so desperately wished to forget, Ria broke out of the illusion and turned to the side before vomiting.

Seeing the tears in her eyes, Kaden was silent.

The path of a Hunter was not an easy one. Everyone has their own circumstances but they need to be able to face it head on.

Just like how he watched Allura's life teetering on the line between life and death during the fall of Ayr, how he cursed his own weakness. Ria needs to be able to face her past.

"Think about it long and hard, it's not an easy choice and it should never be an easy choice." Kaden patted her on the shoulder.

"Use this when you better and ready to head out. I'll talk to Alice and Luke so they don't worry."

Placing a raven feather next to her, Kaden teleported out of the space while Ria sat in silence.

Looking at her trembling hand, flashes of blood and the countless deaths of people around her repeated in her mind.

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Both Alice and Luke was confused where Ria was when Kaden appeared letting them know that she's taking a moment to clam down.

Getting Luke to go talk to his Head of Department Xinbei regarding the new change in curriculum, Kaden was about to leave when Alice stopped him.

"What is it?"

"Allura's injury. How bad is it?" Alice asked as Kaden paused.

"Don't worry about it. I'll sort it out." Kaden reassured before leaving.

But Alice knew the extent of her injury from the time in the inverted world. That wound which doesn't disappear even with the death of Famine.

'Seems like I'll need to do more research about my blood.' Alice thought to herself.

'If it's a side effect of Abyss Blood I think it'll be more probable but this is the Blessing of an Apostle. I don't think our power reaches that far.' Alyss frowned.

[She's not incorrect. While I don't know how the powers of Famine has changed over the centuries, the fact remains that it's outside of the Abyss's influence. It's a power that tainted Allura's essence of being.] Cayla interjected as Alice sat on her bed with a sigh.

[But it's not impossible. I have a theory but I'm unsure of how we can proceed with this.]

Hearing this, Alice sat up in surprise as she gestured for Cayla to explain.

[When Famine attacked, her blessing was largely targeting what Allura has linked to her Blessing of Severance. Her Sigils from the fourth onwards and her status as a Lord. Going by what Alyss is capable of, replacing your Sigils, do you think you can help Allura swap out her Sigils?]

'I'm not sure. But how would getting rid of her Sigil change things for her?' Alyss frowned.

[Because with the death of... Velouria, the blessings she granted upon both Allura and Kaden fade with each use. Not only that, but the passage of time reduces the blessing's potency as well. In due time, the

Blessing will disappear and they will be back to being standard Abyss Lords just with more power. Allura will lose her status as the Executioner since her attack is tied with her Blessing.

[But this is where you come in. her Sigils are tied with her Blessing and her Blessing is tainted by Famine. Should her Blessing disappear, the only thing left tied to that would be her Sigils. If you are able to replace the Sigils, it should be easier for you to heal the wound left by Famine as there's nothing left for it to latch on.

[Of course, the centuries that have gone by would've left its mark on her but it'll be far better than living with Famine's curse constantly eating away at her.] Cayla explained as Alice contemplated the possibility of this and an excited light appeared in her eyes.

'Right... There's this method too! If I remember correctly, my second Sigil brought out the power of my blood. Are there more Sigils we can find that'll help enhance this?' Alice asked excitedly while Cayla held up her hand.

[Once again, this is all just speculation on my end. We don't know what kind of effect swapping out Sigils could place on Allura and if we can even do it in the first place. She doesn't have a physique like you and what if Famine's Blessing latches onto the new Sigils? How long will the Sigils last?

[This is merely a possibility o' master mine. I don't wish to fill you with false hopes only for it to come crashing down.] She warned.

'It's fine, I know. But just having the possibility is enough for me.' Alice smiled, standing up as she had another idea of what she wanted to do.

She wanted to go to the research department to better understand the nature of her own blood and powers. Combat Department was nice but what she could learn there was limited. She had many ways to enhance her combat power such as being trained by an Abyss Lord.

But in terms of researching her own blood? The Research Department seems to be the best.

'Speaking of which, who else survived the fall of Ayr? I know that Nalem is still alive and so's Kaden and Allura. Or did the Will curse them now that Velouria isn't around to maintain the rules she placed?' Alice asked as Cayla nodded her head.

[After the fall of Ayr, the Will removed the rules which Velouria placed upon her ascension. Of course, not all of it could be removed properly but the influence it holds has largely diminished. 98% of the citizens that used to belong to Ayr have all been turned to beasts that roam these lands once more.

Only those who held great power managed to hold off against the new curse but not without problems.

[Nalem, for example, has been cursed with a type of immortality that came with sacrificing a lot of his power. I'm unsure of the exact details but I know he's a shadow of his former self, cursed to witness the passing of time within this world.]

'I see... What about Caera? I know that she's extremely gifted when it comes to research. She's the one that made the gateways through the Abyss after all.' Alice asked.

If Caera was still alive, there's a possibility she could be of great help.

[The last I heard about her was when she got taken by both the Church of the Moon and the Church of the Sun. Her whereabouts are largely unknown though and even then, this information is centuries old by now.] Cayla shook her head as Alice sighed and nodded.

Regardless, the main thing for her to do now was visit the Research Department and change her course. That way, she could learn more about her own blood and abilities with greater focus.