

Abyssal A 38

Chapter 38: Spectral Maiden

Tall elongated feminine figures with spectral veils covering their body. A crown of silver that draped shadow over their faces. Strange bone like spikes jutted out from the bottom of their skirt while two freakishly long fingers held a lantern delicately.

These were called Spectral Maidens and they wandered silent forests. Anyone who is caught by these woman had their essence drained from their body and sealed within the lantern. The brighter the glow, the stronger the Maiden.

Usually, one would find a singular Maiden wandering a single forest. Yet Alice was surrounded by more than 15 of these creatures of darkness.

Sitting on a tree branch while trying her best to keep herself silent, Alice gritted her teeth thinking back to what Allura had said on the carriage.

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A good lesson to learn as a hunter is stealth! With stealth, you are able to approach your pray and study it without being discovered. Stealth is especially important for you since your first Sigil relies on a one hit kill with overwhelming force or it becomes disadvantageous for you." Allura grinned as she gestured for the driver to stop next to a seemingly normal forest.

"Therefore, I want you take a lap around the forest. There are a few Abyss Beasts but nothing too serious. As long as you learn how to hide yourself, you'll get through easily." She reassured with a grin.

"How should I take the lap? Are there checkpoints?" Alice asked curiously while glancing towards the forest.

It was a strange forest as the tree's themselves seemed to be alive with the way they were swaying yet there was no signs of life. Their branches were oddly flexible while the rustling of their leaves served as ambience.

"As you enter the forest, there is a special area deep within where the leaves turn to a vibrant shade of purple. Just pluck a few of the leaves and bring them back.

"I don't have a map so just err... keep walking forward until you find it."

Hearing this 'advice', Alice suppressed the urge to retort about how little she was telling her.

But a task is a task and if this helps her get stronger, Alice didn't see any reason not to do it.

"Just normal beasts yeah?" Alice asked as Allura nodded her head, yet she only felt more suspicious with Allura's smile.

Ignoring her instincts, Alice jumped off the carriage and made her way into the forest.

Since Allura wanted her to work on her stealth, Alice assumed Allura was wanting her to be both fast and undetected.

Narrowing her eyes, she jumped up onto the branches and started to make her way through the forest using the branches.

"What is she? A monkey?" Allura blinked her eyes while pulling out a cigarette.

"Whatever. She'll need to hide in the branches if she wants to dodge the Spectral Maidens. If she alerts one, the others will find out and rush to her position unless she kills it in one go." Allura smirked while giving her body a stretch. She knew that there was a slight abnormality within these forests as Maiden's don't usually gather like this. But it was a good chance for training.

She wasn't irresponsible to the point where she won't even observe the situation after saying she'll look after Alice. It was the minimum she should do to keep Alice safe. And if it truly came down to it, she'll intervene but only at the last possible moment.

The threat of death kept a Hunter on their toes after all.

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'Normal beasts my ass! These are f*cking Spectral Maidens!!! Even someone like me knows about them.' Alice gritted her teeth since these are the last things you want to run into when you're alone.

They were often the target for scary bedtime stories told towards children who wished to stay up late.

A story about an old woman who lost her children to the dark. Wandering out into the forest, she carries a single lantern and her cries forever echoing out, searching for her child.

The misfortunate children that enter their sights will never see their family again as their souls join the others within the lantern. The lantern containing the misfortunate souls whom the Maiden mistook as her child.

While most of the tale was largely exaggerated and changed to scare the children, it did not change the fact that they did indeed kill on sight.

Taking several deep breaths to steady herself, Alice peaked over the tree trunk and made a mental note on how many Maidens were wandering around her area.

'I still haven't found the purple leaves yet. There are two Maiden's to my left, three on my right and one that's standing in the middle. There are others but they wander to other places before coming back... How many are there?' Alice thought to herself as she prepared to jump to another branch.

She didn't know why they were patrolling around this area. Were they looking for something? Or was there so many Maidens that they were simply relocated to this area.

Either way, Alice didn't want to stay around and find out. All she wanted to get was the purple leaf then she can leave without looking back.

Jumping over the gap, Alice landed roughly on the branch and quickly hid herself on the branch above.

Just as she hid herself, two Maidens swarmed her landing spot.

Their hollowed voices sent shivers down Alice's spine as the eerie glow of their lanterns reflected the faces of dead Hunters that they captured.

Finding nothing, the two eventually returned back to their original position as the sound of whispering faded away, allowing Alice a moment to properly recover her breath.

Calming her nerves, Alice looked for the next landing spot.

If what Allura said was correct, she had to keep going forward in order to find the special area. While she hasn't exactly made a bee line towards the spot due to the presence of these Maidens, Alice estimated that she should be on the right track.

'How long is left? Urg... next time I'll ask her to tell me everything about the training before I actually do it. I almost got caught earlier because I wasn't prepared for Maidens to appear in this forest.' Alice sighed inwardly as she repeated the process until the presence of the Spectral Maiden's could no longer be sensed or seen.

Once she was in the clear, Alice took the biggest sigh of relief she had done in a while.

With the Maidens now out of the way, she should have a relatively easy path forward. Unlike the earlier area that was swarming with Maidens, this area was strangely silent.

It was the kind of silent that screamed something was off. There was wind yet the leaves made no sound. Stepping on one of the branches, Alice snapped it in half yet she could hear nothing.

Furrowing her brows, a bad feeling surfaced in her heart as she wanted to turn around and run away from this area.

But it was already too late.

A strange melody fluctuated through the air as Alice could feel her body's control being wrestled away from her. Little by little, her legs moved against her will and she stumbled further north.

Despite her trying her best to control her body, her mind was losing its grip as well.

This melody, this comfort that it brings. The allure was something irresistible.

Walking past some foliage, Alice could see that she arrived at a clearing with a single lake surrounded by tall trees. Within the lake, a single blond woman stood while singing her beautiful melody.

As her voice rang out, Alice saw that she wasn't the only one trapped by her song.

Several others including Maidens were enraptured by her singing as they slowly approached the river only to be snapped up by something unseen.

Understanding that things would be dangerous if she entered the water, Alice tried her best to fight against this choir of allure and temptation.

Thankfully, she felt the grips of this song loosening as she jumped back and stumbled against the wet mud.

Collapsing on the floor, she glanced back and saw the figure slowly turning towards her location.

'I know Allura said I should be stealthy, but I need to stop this song!'

Gritting her teeth, Alice activated her first Sigil as she grabbed a nearby pebble and threw it as hard as she could at the woman's head to stop the singing.

Surprisingly, she didn't even attempt to dodge as the rock collided against her head, causing it to fall limp.

While she had succeeded in silencing the song, the eerie feeling did not fade away.

Little by little, the hair of the woman started to unfurl and so did the rest of her body. Turning inside out, the grotesque form revealed itself while basking in the centre of the lake. With black tentacles crawling out from within, sharp teeth lined the edges of her flesh like a zipper while numerous hands clawed the water around it.

A single opening on the chest resumed the song she had been singing but the effects had already started to fade for Alice. All that it achieved was decreasing her physical powers. Thankfully, her first Sigil combatted this effect.

Seeing that Alice was no longer affected by her song, the creature seemed to shake on the spot as the water around it started to boil.