

Abyssal A 751

Chapter 751: Secrets Surrounding The Beast

*RUMBLE!!!

Within the entertainment district, three figures could be seen dancing across the streets while a large mass of flesh crashed through several buildings.

Two of which were Rama who kept his distance while throwing daggers that combusted within the flesh. The last was Gwen who frowned at the mass of flesh.

This. . . thing.

It wasn't technically alive. A lump of desire and instinct that will burn itself out if given enough time.

What was the culprits goal in creating such a being?

For now, Gwen had Rama take the frontlines.

Flipping in mid air, Rama landed on a nearby roof and threw his dagger towards the beast.

Swapping locations, two daggers appeared in his hands as he unleashed a flurry of slashes. Naturally, his clones did the same, mirroring his movements and tripling the amount of slashes that he unleashed.

*KRKKK!!!!

Despite being cut into countless pieces, black tendrils shot out from the loose flesh, reconnecting with the main body and stitching itself back together.

"What the hell is this thing???" Rama shouted in annoyance.

At this point, it's not a case of simply holding back the beast. It's also a case of his pride.

The pride as a gang leader!

"Miss Cardinal, I know you told us to hold it back. But it should be fine if I kill it right?" Rama asked as his eyes lit up with a light blue hue.

"By all means, be my guest." Gwen took a step back.

First Resonance!

Behind Rama, space itself teared apart to reveal a ghostly figure. Long black hair that shielded his face, a severely scarred body and tattered white robes hanging loosely off him.

Attached to his waist was a sheath holding both a longsword and a dagger as Rama plunged his own weapon into his chest, carving out a hole.

Seeing this, the ghostly figure phased through his back as his hands clawed a way out from his chest.

Its body transforming into countless bandages that wrapped around Rama's body, turning into the same tattered white robe that the figure wore.

Blood began to soak the bandages, dying them with a crimson splatter as he drew the longsword with his right hand and the dagger with his left.

Second Resonance!

From his blade, blood began to expand as it dragged all three of them into Rama's personal Realm.

Tall trees that blocked out the skies, an uneven mountain path with a single crimson moon hanging above their head.

*KRKK!!!!

Seeing the unfamiliar world, the beast began to lash out in all directions. Yet the more it struggled, the more it began to slow down.

From the trees, barely noticeable chains were hanging loosely and with each wild strike, it would wrap around the beast's limbs.

*Step. . .

A footstep echoed out as Rama appeared just behind the beast.

*BANG!!!

Whipping around with a wild swing, the beast saw that its attack missed!

Rama was behind him once more as he took another step.

*RUMBLE!!!

The beast plunged its hands into the earth and ripped out a chunk of the ground!

*Step. . .

The third step.

No matter how the beast tried to catch Rama, he was always positioned behind it.

On the fourth step, another ghostly figure began to hover behind Rama as his sword dragged against the ground.

And on the fifth step, Rama struck!

He lunged forward with his longsword glowing with both an ominous crimson and the burning white purifying flames of Solaris.

*BANG!!!

Cleaving the beast in half, the chunks of flesh were set aflame as Rama glanced back.

He could see that the pieces of flesh still have 'life' left in them and unleashed the second strike!

A vertical cut to render the chunks into quarters.

Realising its imminent death, the chunks shot tendrils towards Rama in an attempt to hijack his body but he was prepared.

He knew how tenacious this beast is and unleashed a net of slashes using his dagger.

Most of the tendrils were shredded apart it refused to back down!

Even after being reduced to such a small size, it lunged out, hoping to hijack Rama's body and use it as a vessel.

Gritting his teeth, Rama wanted to dodge but the beast has created a swamp of blood beneath him!

"This is why I tell you people to just hold it back. But good attempt, you get a star~" Gwen's voice echoed out as a pillar of flames erupted around Rama, protecting him against the tendrils.

Without a second of hesitation, she appeared above what remains of the beast and grinned.

Arching her body back, she threw her spear like a javelin, turning it into a streak of flames that detonated on impact!

*RUMBLE!!!

Shattering the space that is Rama's personal realm, the two of them were ejected back into the real world as the burning remains of the beast crackled in front of them.

Retrieving her spear with a flick of her wrist, Gwen turned around and prepared to leave then her footstep hesitated for a moment.

Furrowing her brows, she let out a sigh before continuing towards the next closest target.

While Rama had been trying to kill the beast, she took this time to analyse it quickly.

First, there were two sources of energy within the beast.

Abyssal and Eldritch.

It wasn't out of her expectations but she felt as though there was something more in there.

Something else that made up the main body of the beast.

'Was it holy? No, that can't be the case. I couldn't sense any divinity emanating from it.' Gwen frowned.

Just Abyssal and Eldritch shouldn't be able to make a beast like that. There had to be something more.

Thinking up to this point, she froze for a moment as a deep frown appeared on her face.

She had a theory.

It might just be a coincidence but the signs were too similar to be ignored.

The Moon Church, the higher ups have practiced imbuing items or objects with souls to make them functional. It's not something they demonstrate in front of the masses but as a Cardinal, she's seen this being done once or twice.

If a soul was applied to the object while being mixed with both Abyssal and Eldritch energy, it would indeed have a high chance of producing a mass of instinct like the one she just killed.

Clicking her tongue, she decided to speed up a little.

Even if it's just coincidence, she can't ignore the hunch that this has something to do with the soul.

She had to report this to her dad once everything is taken care of.

Now that she had a slight hint to the truth behind the beasts, she didn't need to hold back.

Arriving on the scene of the second beast, she could see Rama's clones holding it back using chains, trying their best to stop it from moving.

Naturally, she wouldn't let his efforts go to waste.

Raising her hand above her head, energy began to surge towards her as a radiant halo manifested behind her head.

Clenching her fist, a golden sphere was detonated. Golden light erupted as though the sun had just collapsed, its radiance causing the beast to hiss out in pain.

Transforming the radiance into a greatsword, Gwen lunged down and released a slash!

*BANG!!!

Bursting out from the warehouse, a golden pillar of light tore a clean hole through the ceiling.

A small price to pay considering the beast was destroyed in one shot.

Making sure that there were no remnants left of the beast, Gwen dashed towards the final target.

Glancing behind her briefly, she frowned once more and picked up her pace.

Unlike the first two, Marcel was keeping up with the beast rather easily. In a one on one battle, he was taking advantage of the buffs that Gwen had given him in order to fend off the corruption.

Even going as far as to use his own body to tank the hits to force openings.

"Seems like you're the most capable one when it comes to fighting." Gwen smirked as Marcel let out a hearty laugh, clashing his fists together and pushing back the beast.

"A man should fight on the frontlines after all! Even if we die, we should die in a blaze of glory rather than sitting behind a desk or hiding in the back!"

"A respectable sentiment. Now unless you wish to die in a blaze of glory early, I suggest taking a step back so my attack doesn't kill you by accident." Gwen chuckled as Marcel nodded his head.

Jumping back, the beast was now all alone and Gwen clasped her hands together.

A golden ring formed into the sky before shattering apart with a loud crack!

Countless motes of swirling energy fused with the shards, transforming into blades that stabbed towards the beast, turning into a flaming ball of agony.

With the third beast down, Gwen let out a sigh of relief and landed on the ground.

"Work with the Sentinels and see if there are any more of these. Check if the other two are holding any contraband as well. I'm not saying you guys got it on purpose but there might be someone trying to sabotage you." Gwen ordered.

Even though he wasn't a fan of being ordered around, Marcel went along with it for now. To begin with, he felt like someone was trying to manipulate things from the shadows and Gwen just confirmed it for him.

With Marcel going to notify the others, Gwen smiled before suddenly throwing a spear behind her!

"Ahh!!!"

*BANG!!!!

Her spear pierced the walls of the warehouse, tearing a clean hole behind her.

Next to the hole was a short blue haired woman who turned pale and collapsed backwards with her knees giving up under her.

"Yo~ Did you enjoy watching me miss stalker?" Gwen narrowed her gaze as she recalled her spear.

"So tell me, how on earth did you evade my Vision for so long?"

Chapter 752: Kaia

Gwen eyed up the blue haired girl from head to toe.

The more she looked at her, the stranger this seemed.

First, her presence was extremely thin. If she wasn't on guard after wondering who might've been responsible for the beasts, she wouldn't have even detected her.

If she had to sum it up, forgettable would be the word she'll use.

Then there was the second problem.

How was she able to reduce her presence to such a degree?

"Little miss, do you always throw weapons first and talk later??? I'm just a passerby who's curious about what's going on." The girl paled seeing the spear tip and tried to push it to the side.

However, Gwen smacked her hand aside and aimed the spear at the girl's head.

"You haven't answered my question yet. How did you evade my Vision?" Gwen narrowed her gaze as the boundaries of her zone began to shrink rapidly.

The girl's hair stood on its end as she lost her smile and slammed down with her hand.

Gwen wanted to intercept her movement but found her body frozen in space!

Her pupils constricted as the blue haired girl stood up and gave her body a stretch.

"Iyaa~ I just wanted to check out the situation you know? It's pretty concerning when the whole city is mobilized and there's sentinels running all over the place." She giggled while patting Gwen on the shoulder.

"Keep it up miss Cardinal~ It's not like we'll see ea-"

*CRACK!!!

The blue haired girl's eyes snapped back towards Gwen.

A fracture.

Instantly jumping back, she wanted to create some distance but Gwen was faster!

"That still doesn't answer my question. Unless you want to do this the hard way I suggest you spill it out now." Gwen slashed back, loosening her grip on the spear momentarily to increase the range.

Bending her body back with incredible flexibility, the blue haired girl kicked the spear into the air and summoned a bow.

Sliding back to create some distance, she pulled back in an attempt to shoot but Gwen was way ahead of her.

"Now that I've locked onto you, you're not escaping my Vision!"

Ducking into the blue haired girl's range, she struck up with a palm strike, shattering the bow in half. Pivoting on her foot, she tried to go for a roundhouse kick but it was blocked by an invisible pillar.

Furrowing her brows, Gwen wanted to follow up with another strike but this time she was on the defensive.

Another boundary expanded, clashing with hers!

'Vision! No, this isn't on the level of Vision yet.'

Even amongst those within the Church, very few are able to grasp the base concept of Vision never mind achieving it. Yet despite never having seen this blue haired girl before, Gwen was surprised to see that she had a perfect grasp on the foundation of Vision.

Absolute Zone, the base requirement for achieving Vision. Something the people in the east dub as State of Unity.

From her understanding, only a handful at the top managed to grasp this and most of them were at Lord level.

Yet this girl reached the same level?

*BANG!!!

Exchanging several strikes and counters in hand to hand, both of them knew that Gwen was superior when it came to close quarters!

"Tch! Sun girlie, can't you take a hint? Why you gotta be like this huh?"

Gathering energy into a single orb, she forcefully detonated it as the two of them were sent crashing away from each other.

Quickly adjusting herself, Gwen summoned her spear ready for another throw.

Yet the blue haired girl was no where to be seen.

"Tch! You're not going anywhere."

Holding her spear out to the side, the golden glow began to turn ominous as it turned into a mix of orange and crimson.

Her eyes lit up with a flaming fury and the veins on the back of her hand bulged.

True Sight!

The boundary of her Vision expanded in an instant, covering the entire city.

Locking onto the blue haired girl's presence, she could see her zipping through the city.

Weaving through the alleyway, diving across the rooftops and just as she was about to throw her spear, the girl faced the sky and gave a taunting smirk.

Flipping her middle finger, she reached into her pouch and threw it beneath her.

A cloud of smoke expanded in an instant, shielding her body and her presence faded away!

"!!!"

Gwen's hand faltered.

She couldn't throw her spear like this.

It was too strange. The girl didn't have high attacking power but her evasion was top notch. She had several methods to keep herself alive even after being 'caught' by her.

"A game of cat and mouse huh? Sorry but I don't have the time to be playing around with you." Gwen narrowed her eyes.

Since she had already locked down on the girl's presence, even if she was to disappear, it won't matter.

No matter the distance, her strike will reach her!

Aiming into the sky, she threw her spear!

*RUMBLE!!!

Transforming into a flaming streak, the spear burst apart in mid air!

Flaming arcs transformed into wings as an elemental bird was formed from the flames.

Hovering for a moment, the bird let out a screech and dove towards the belltower.

"Got you!" Gwen grinned, dashing after the bird.

"Hey that's not fair! Why the hell can you do so many things?!?!" The blue haired girl cried out indignation, summoning her bow.

Pulling back on the bowstring, an azure arrow manifested.

*BANG!!!

Colliding with the bird in mid air, icy mist exploded out, slowing down the bird while Gwen lunged after the girl.

Golden chains erupted from her hand, sealing off the paths of escape.

"Any more tricks in your bag?" Gwen smirked.

Gritting her teeth, the girl let out a frustrated sigh and dismissed her bow.

"Nope, none. Don't you think it's a little unfair? Why the hell can you still track me when I've evaded your Zone?" She held her hands up in surrender.

"I'm a Cardinal, it's only natural that I can do this much. But back to you." Gwen chuckled, holding out her arm as the bird landed and transformed back into her spear.

"How did you avoid my Vision?" She aimed the spear tip against her throat.

"Woah woah woah~ Chill girlie. I get it, I'm not gonna run now. It's not that hard if you have the right powers." She let out an annoyed sigh and leaned against the pillar. "And I'm not exactly avoiding it. I'm making it so that you ignore me. I figured it was the same as the Sect Master's State of Unity but clearly that's not the case."

Raising an eyebrow, Gwen eyed the girl from head to toe.

No sign of Eldritch energy, no sign of corruption. No sign of divinity either and her powers aren't soul based.

It's very unlikely that she's the culprit behind the beasts so perhaps it's as she said, she's simply watching.

But she couldn't erase the fact that this girl was able to move freely to avoid detection.

Had she not gotten overly curious and stepped a bit too close, Gwen wouldn't have discovered her.

"Name." She asked, gesturing for the blue haired girl to introduce herself.

"Kaia. No surname." Kaia introduced herself, letting out a frustrated sigh.

"So what now sun girlie? Are you gonna kill me for being too curious? They do say curiosity killed the cat."

"Yes, curiosity killed the cat but, some would like to say that satisfaction brought it back." Gwen smirked.

Kaia was too useful to be gotten rid of.

Her main value came from the fact that she was able to avoid the detection of her Vision.

If she was able to figure out the inner workings and supplement her technique with her findings, her power will be upgraded by another level.

"What satisfaction is there to be gained from being caught? Tch." Kaia clicked her tongue.

"Since you don't have a surname, can I assume you don't have a family? Are you attached to this city at all?" Gwen asked, pulling back her spear and dismissing it.

"Nope. Got tossed into the streets at birth. I'll be damaged in the head if I had any form of affection for this place. Unfortunately, it's also the only place that doesn't ask questions when it comes to random people living here." Kaia shrugged her shoulders.

"Is that so?" Raising her eyebrows, Gwen turned around for a moment before lunged for a strike.

Just as her fist was about to collide with Kaia's stomach, she managed to parry the strike with a kick and did a backflip to create some distance.

"For someone who asked if I was going to kill you, you certainly don't want to die."

"No sh*t! Just because I know what might happen doesn't mean I'm happy about it!" Kaia snapped back.

"Hou? Then how about I give you two options right now? Help me with that stealth skill of yours or die." Gwen chuckled.

Her fists lit up with a radiant fire as she prepared to lunge towards Kaia depending on her answer.

"Is that really an option? Either die or become your tool." Kaia spat out. Deploying her own Zone, she knew it wouldn't hold up that well but it was still better than nothing.

"Your words not mine. Never said you were going to be my tool. Think of it more so as a . . . helper? Subordinate or sparring partner. Whatever you find more acceptable."

Gwen wanted Kaia's talents to help her get stronger.

And on the chance that she had bad intentions, what could she possibly do?

Chapter 753: Stray Cat

"Ah! Cardinal you're ba-" One of the sentinels went out to greet Gwen after noticing that she was back but paused seeing the disgruntled Kaia behind her.

"Erm. . . Who's this?" He pointed behind Gwen.

Gwen glanced back and chuckled lightly.

"Just a stray cat that I picked up."

"Wha! Your mother's a stray cat!" Kaia cursed as the Sentinel paled.

"But am I wrong though? You have no home, no family, no where to go. What are you if not a stray cat?" Gwen gave her a taunting smirk.

A vein bulged on Kaia's neck as she leaned down for a moment before whipping up with a strike that Gwen caught easily.

Twisting herself over Gwen's head, Kaia wrapped her legs around Gwen's neck and tried to throw her away but she wouldn't budge.

"Hm? Ohya? Perhaps I won't have you work as my sparring partner but instead as a pillow. These aren't too bad." Gwen joked, running her fingers along Kaia's thighs.

"Hii!!!" Letting out a cry of shock, Kaia quickly jumped off as goosebumps could be felt all over her arms.

"You should get yourself changed so you look more like one of us." Gwen suggested, calling over another Sentinel to help her get things sorted out.

"Are you sure this is okay?" The Sentinel frowned in worry as he snuck a few more glances at Kaia.

"What are you looking at? Do you want your eyes plucked or something? I can be of service if you do." She flashed her middle finger.

"Oh don't worry about it. She's all bark and no bite, in fact don't you think it's rather cute?" Gwen folded her arms while looking at the feral Kaia who wanted to lash out.

Unfortunately for Kaia, Gwen's Vision was now trained on her, never letting her out of her sight.

No matter how Kaia tried to diminish her presence, Gwen was focused entirely on her.

Grumbling while making her way to the changing rooms, Kaia's smile twitched seeing the clothing that was prepared. It wasn't the design that had her concerned but more so. . .

Everything was exactly her size! Even the underwear!

"Are you dissatisfied? I'm pretty confident that I judged your sizes accurately." Gwen smiled from outside the room.

"Yes I am! Can you not use your damn Vision to scan my body?!?!" Kaia shouted out from inside the room.

"No can do. That's simply how it works. I know exactly what muscle you use when you do a flip, throw a punch or even adjust your step in preparation to run."

"Tch!" Clicking her tongue, Kaia began to change her outfit.

And unfortunately for her, Gwen didn't let up on her Vision at all.

"Setting aside from the fact that you can evade my Vision, that space locking technique of yours. It's not a Sigil ability is it?" Gwen asked curiously.

"Well aren't you a smart princess. How did you notice?"

"Because rather than Abyssal Energy being the fuel to project the ability, it's more so a result of direct energy manipulation."

Plus, if her sensitivity to what kind of energy being used wasn't good enough, she wouldn't be crowned as a Cardinal. Even if her father is the Apostle.

Even if the church accepted it, her dad wouldn't.

"So care to share the secret?"

"Do I have choice in the matter?" Kaia asked with a sigh as she stepped out.

"Woah~ Would you look at that? Don't you just suit white and gold?" Gwen clapped her hands.

Since Kaia was a dexterity fighter, the armour Gwen provided wasn't heavy on the plates. Only a few light ones covering vital areas.

Shoulders, waist, arms and chest.

White plated armour with gold accents were layered on top of a white black and gold sleeveless dress that only reached around mid thigh.

White was the dominant colour with faint gold accents around the edges of the skirt and through the gaps were black fabric.

Naturally, the outfit came with a pair of shorts, not long enough to reveal through the skirt but enough so that even if she was to do a backflip, she won't be exposing herself.

The outfit came with a short white and gold cape with the icon of Solaris sewn onto the back.

"White and gold doesn't exactly scream stealth. And isn't there a bit too many loose parts? I'm pretty sure this dress will get caught on my armour or someone might tug my cape." Kaia complained spinning around briefly and seeing the cape flutter.

Even though it's short, it's still something for someone to grab.

"Then that just means you're not good enough to look fashionable and fight." Gwen laughed.

"Now then, care to share the secret?"

"Tch, you're still hung up on that." Kaia pulled a face of annoyance.

Scratching her hair, Kaia sighed out in reluctance and snapped her finger.

"Think of this ice as the energy around us. What I do is basically weaved the energy with each other, forming a net of sorts. This net latches onto you and stops your body from moving." Waving her other hand, Gwen found herself stuck in place again.

"But as you showed, with enough power, this net is easily breakable." Kaia shrugged.

Flexing her arm, Gwen released herself from the binding.

"Hmm. . ." Thinking about it for a moment, Gwen tried to replicate it on Kaia.

However, she couldn't form a complete net. If one side was done, the other would come loose and vice versa.

"Are you seriously trying to steal one of my trademarks right in front of me? Do you know how long it took for me to create this technique?" Kaia's smile twitched.

"No harm in trying. Plus aren't you here to steal the secrets of my Vision? With a talent like yours that can grasp the Absolute Zone, I'm sure there's already a seed of greed implanted into that brain of yours."

Hearing this, Kaia coughed awkwardly.

Gwen was spot on.

"But I dragged you here despite knowing that so try your best~ I'm not giving you any hints." She stuck out her tongue and turned around.

"Now follow me, I'm sure the others are concerned as to why I brought out a stray cat so you'll have to prove yourself. Though if you could defend yourself to some extent against me, I'm sure you can do just fine against them."

Folding her arms, Kaia rolled her eyes and clicked her tongue in annoyance.

Following behind Gwen, they soon arrived at the clearing where the Sentinels were waiting.

The one standing in the middle seems like a new recruit as Kaia could feel a burning gaze locking onto her.

Naturally, she didn't shy away and yawned lazily, provoking him further.

While Kaia and the new recruit were staring each other down, Gwen made her way off to the side as the current commander sighed.

"Must you really pick up a stray cat like her? I'm sure we have plenty of recruits that you can use if you need someone to help you." He asked while Gwen threw herself onto the chair next to him.

"She's better than most of the people we got here. You'll see~" She didn't explain much, surprising the commander.

Guinevere. Daughter of Arax and cardinal of the sun church.

Infamously lazy within the order yet her sense of responsibility burns strong. If innocents are involved and no one else is capable of protecting them, she'll step forward.

Of course, not everything is sunshine and rainbows as within that laziness and sense of responsibility, there's also her twisted obsessions with giving the sinful a painful 'purification' while remembering every second of their agony.

So if she was bringing someone in and even speaking up for how good Kaia is, then that must mean her capabilities are real.

But even so, he wanted to see it with his own eyes.

Right as he was about to begin the battle, Kaia held up her arm.

"Say, do you have anything in place to prevent death or do I have to hold back?" She asked lazily, causing Gwen to smile while the recruit felt as though a vein was about to burst.

"Don't worry, a barrier is in place so that if the injury becomes too severe, they'll be ejected from the arena." The commander replied as Kaia curved her mouth up into a lazy smile.

"Hou~ Didja hear that? You don't get to die today, congrats." She turned to the recruit.

*PUCHI!!!

With both fighters being ready to brawl, the commander raised his hand before signalling the start of the fight.

*BANG!!!

The recruit burst into action with radiant flames wrapping around his sword.

And just as Kaia was about to take a step back to dodge, a boundary was expanded!

"Ohya! Not quite an absolute one but an offensive one." Kaia blinked in surprise before flipping into the air, balancing herself on the recruit's head with an upside down handstand.

"But am I supposed to be impressed by a half baked zone?" She taunted.

Just as the recruit tried to activate his Sigils, he found himself outside of the arena.

"HUH!?!?!!" Looking around in confusion, he turned to Kaia who was still inside the arena while holding a bow.

The moment he tried to fight back, she immediately fired an ice arrow through him, 'killing' him and ending the duel.

The Sentinels were rather surprised since the recruit was not weak by any means. The fact that he was able to use the Offensive Zone already meant that he was better than most.

Yet she was able to evade him and counter, killing him before he can even use more of his skills.

"I see what you mean now. Even so, she'll still need to go through the prope-" Before the commander could finish his sentence, Gwen shot him a glare.

"Stray cat she may be, but she's mine. If anyone lays their unworthy hands on her, I'll cut it off personally."

Hearing this warning, the commander let out a sigh.

With Gwen being so protective of this stray cat, there's no doubt that a bunch of problems will appear.

Chapter 754: Psychology Behind Powers

Kaia. . .

To say that she is an enigma was putting it lightly for Gwen.

A woman who can evade the 'Vision', someone who was able to master the Zone. But most importantly, she felt like a woman wearing a mask.

It wasn't the way she acted or how she spoke. In a sense, it was Gwen's own intuition. Yet at the same time, it's also because she felt similar in a way.

To her, Kaia felt like someone with the whole world bearing down on her shoulders.

"So how was it? Was that enjoyable for you?" Gwen asked with a smile seeing Kaia walk away from the empty arena.

"Really? You think that was enjoyable?" Kaia raised an eyebrow.

"No harm in asking. You might have to get used to it since a few might want to test you a little further." She grinned, causing Kaia to let out a fatigued groan.

"Is that really needed? Surely you didn't kidnap me and force me to fight them? Just tell me what you want me to do." Kaia frowned.

Folding her arms, Gwen thought about it for a moment.

It made sense that she would be confused and a little short on her fuse.

She was technically kidnapped with no goal in mind.

'Even though I told her I want her to help me, I've pretty much sent her to fight others after bringing her back.' Gwen thought to herself.

After a brief moment, she made up her mind.

"Why don't you follow me and we'll take our time figuring that out hm?"

"Huh? So you had no plan for me in mind?" Kaia gritted her teeth as she glared at Gwen who laughed.

"Oh I have many plans in mind but none of which are suitable right now. So why don't we get used to each other first? You won't be going anywhere after all." Gwen licked her lips as Kaia shivered.

Jumping back slightly, she could feel Gwen's eyes scanning her from head to toe, even using her Vision at that.

"Can you stop that!? It feels gross!" Kaia paled, rubbing her arms as she wanted to back off but Gwen grinned.

Seeing Kaia squirm like this lit up something inside her. This reaction towards some light teasing. . .

Rushing forward to stop Kaia from leaving, Gwen wrapped her arms around Kaia's waist and held her chin.

"Oh hell nah!!!"

A cloud of darkness burst out around Kaia as she disappeared from Gwen's arms and reappeared not far away.

"Pftahaha~ You should see the look on your face. I'm only kidding around." Gwen laughed while Kaia pulled a face of distrust.

"You say that but you've been scanning my body since you've kidnapped me! There's an entertainment district just for you if you need it!"

"That simply won't do. No matter how lazy or how unbothered I am, there is still a certain reputation I must uphold. A cardinal going to the brothels. . . paints a rather bad picture don't you think?" Gwen smiled, hoisting herself onto the fence and holding one of her knees.

"So I'd rather keep my entertainment within arms reach or at least within the order."

"So you do this with your own people too and not just me??" Kaia was in disbelief.

"Ohya? Are you perhaps jealous? Does the fact that I might go teasing others bother you?" Gwen narrowed her gaze with a smirk.

"That- No- Wha? Huh?" Kaia was stunned.

That wasn't even her original intention yet with the way Gwen was wording things, it twisted the situation on its head.

"I'm only kidding. I don't do this with others, I'd rather spend my time sleeping after all. Plus, even if I try to talk to them do you think they can relax when talking to a cardinal?" Gwen flashed a momentary sad smile as it disappeared just as quickly as it appeared.

Of course, Kaia didn't miss that moment.

"So you're suffering from the fact that you're a cardinal? Isn't that another way of just saying you got on one to talk to so you're a bit lonely?" Kaia folded her arms, leaning on the same fence.

Hearing this, Gwen's smile twitched for a moment.

"Rather bold way of saying things. You may be a stray cat I picked up but I'm still a cardinal at the end of the day."

"So you threaten people who even remotely want to relax? Jeez no wonder you got no one to talk to." Kaia mocked.

A vein bulged on Gwen's neck.

"You're not even remotely afraid?"

"Why should I be? You've already kidnapped me, sexually harassed me, threatened death on me and I'm pretty sure I'll be disabled and killed if I try to run. What else is there left to be afraid of when you've already told me everything you wanna do to me?" Kaia listed things out one by one.

Gwen sat in silence.

It was a new kind of feeling.

Slight annoyance? Yet at the same time, perhaps this was what it felt to talk to someone without caring about status.

Granted, that's not very convincing since Kaia was only here because she was forced to be here.

"You really are one strange stray cat. I've picked up a few strays in the past but none have acted like you?" Gwen chuckled as her annoyance subsided.

"How do?" Kaia raised an eyebrow.

"None of them have been as bold as you. They've been quivering in their boots and too scared to even see me eye to eye. Even after I reassure them that I'm not going to kill them." Gwen shrugged.

"Oh b*tch please, I'm downright terrified right now. I've just learned not to show it in the slums will eat you alive the moment you show weakness." Kaia rolled her eyes.

"Put yourself in my shoes for a moment. You decide to check out something weird that's been going on. Next thing you know, this 'demon' is chasing you down no matter where you go and kidnaps you. They have the capability to kill you whenever they want and you can't do anything about it." She explained as Gwen listened silently.

"Then. . . Do you want to go back?" Gwen threw out the question.

Kaia wasn't sure how to reply.

The two stood in silence and it was Kaia who broke the silence with an annoyed groan.

"You are one weird princess. You kidnap me and threaten death then you offer freedom. If you're going to be like this why did you kidnap and threaten in the first place? First impressions are important you know?" Kaia sighed, turning to Gwen.

"If your first impression is tyrannical, not many will be willing to reach out towards you. They wouldn't want to build a connection. And even if some do, they might have other goals for doing so."

"Then are you following me and accepting this treatment because you have goals as well?" Gwen asked with a small smile.

"I won't deny that."

Once again, a silence dawned on the two.

Gwen was thinking to herself, how she should proceed. And partially, what Kaia's goal might be. She had already guessed that Kaia wanted the secret to her Vision. Perhaps even finding a way to properly evade that detection.

The . . . powers that people take are interesting to Gwen.

It's all about their psychology and what they want to achieve in life.

Hunters that choose the path of strength, aggression and destruction typically do so because they want to prove control through dominance. To abide by the laws of the jungle.

And a lot of them, Gwen noticed it to be a reflection of their helplessness. They felt what it's like to not have the overwhelming strength to overturn an unfavorable situation.

Thus they fall onto the path of seeking power in order to control what little they can.

A silent scream towards the world.

"Look at me, I'm not afraid anymore. I'm strong."

Hunts that choose the path of protection, like her dad, do so in order to protect the people around them. They fear the consequences of losing what they treasure so rather than going down the path of power in order to destroy the opposition, they opt for defence.

They grasp what they can in desperation and do their best to shield that from the world.

"I don't get if my body is hurt or broken so long as what I treasure is not lost."

Then there are the Hunters that focus on healing. They typically fall into three categories for Gwen.

Those who have a strong empathy, those who are guilty from seeing life lost before them, and those who want to control the mortality of others.

And to her, being a healer is a sad fate.

They offer the world so much of themselves that they sometimes fail to see the harm that is done to them. Their shift in psychology.

In Gwen's own words, "They stitch people back together, but who's there to heal them?"

Then there are people like Kaia.

Hunters who opt for stealth. People who hide, conceal and keep things away from themselves.

A desire to remain unseen, to avoid judgment. A fear of intimacy or exposing one's vulnerability.

Some might even do so because of trauma towards a loss of identity.

"She'd rather disappear than risk being know. What did the world do to her to make her hide?" That was the question that Gwen wanted to answer for Kaia specifically.

And on top of everything, Kaia is also someone who uses illusions and manipulation.

An obsession with perception and control. A sign of growing up being powerless in an environment where being herself isn't enough. She manipulates herself and the world around her in a desperate attempt to seem like they're 'enough'.

Because at the end of the day. . .

"People like that bend the world to their image because they fear it might crush them if they don't."

To hide behind a mask because they fear others taking advantage of their vulnerabilities.

Even though Gwen has only seen Kaia for a brief moment, this brief moment was enough to see the cracks in Kaia's expression.

The fractures across her body and her mindset.

In that aspect, Gwen wanted to give Kaia a hug. To tell her that no matter what happened in the past, everything was going to be okay.

It's alright if Kaia had her own goal. Gwen was willing to accept that as trust isn't so easily forged.

But her desire at the end of this long, long road. . .

Is someone she can talk to. A friend whom she could confide in and. . . she sees that possibility in Kaia.

Chapter 755: Gwen And Kaia

Alice leaned against the fence while maintaining a calm expression. She folded her arms and stood in silence, allowing it to carry on while Gwen was lost in her own thoughts.

Yet despite her calm exterior, the inside of her was screaming and sweating.

'She is a FREAK! Even though she's lost in thought why the hell is she still scanning my body??? I thought if you told me to tell her to go to the entertainment district she'll leave me alone!?!?' Alice screamed towards Cayla and Alyss.

Alyss was too busy clutching her stomach in pain from all the laughing while Cayla hid her face behind a book.

[Don't- Don't ask me. I don't know anything.] Cayla tried to shrug off the responsibilities.

They didn't want to tell Alice what the entertainment district was about but they thought it would be enough to push off Gwen. Yet they didn't realize it would backfire in such a fashion.

Hell, the cardinal even teased Alice on whether or not she was feeling jealous!

Even if she set aside the . . . nature of Gwen, the fact that she's allowing her to stay around was wayyyy too strange.

Like, abnormally so to the point where Alice was beginning to doubt this plan of hers.

This sun princess knew that Alice had her own goal, knew that she was trying to figure out the secret of this Vision yet she's allowing her to be kept around?

Even when the fact that Alice wanted to make use of Gwen was put on the table, Gwen simply smiled and sat in silence.

Alice needed some kind of reaction, anything. A clue, a hint, something for her to work with.

Yet this entire time, Gwen has just been teasing, joking and nothing else.

'Haa. . . So what now? Are you going to tell her you want to leave? She did give you the option.' Alyss asked curiously after calming herself down.

'That'll be too much of a waste now wouldn't it? But. . . Arg! I'm so confused right now!' Alice was frustrated.

This frustration strangely didn't stem from the fact that her plans are going awry nor was it because of annoyances.

No.

In fact it's precisely because of the fact that it's going stupidly well that had her confused.

In all her time, rarely did her plan go right the first time. She had to keep planning and planning and make adjustments as she went about the steps.

Yet this time, she didn't need to do any of that. She simply had to be 'herself' while sticking near Gwen and her objective will be achieved.

Hell, this was even better than what she had originally expected.

With Gwen now technically 'taking charge of her' as a stray cat, she could get more information than before. A direct path to the source.

But it was just. . . Too weird!

Was getting close to a cardinal really this. . . easy???

###

Kaia was the one to break the silence after the long pause.

"You know. . . people might take advantage of you if you act like this." Kaia glanced away.

"Oh? Ohya? Are you perhaps~ Worried about me?" Gwen blinked her eyes before a cheeky grin appeared on her face. "Hm~ If you're worried about me being taken advantage of~ maybe because I want to be? Or~" She trailed off.

"Because you want to take advantage of me? Depending on how you want to I might not be against the idea you know?"

"Tha- Tsk, you know that's not what I'm on about. But yes, maybe, just maybe, I'm worried that people might take advantage of you. You seem. . ." Kaia struggled to finish her sentence.

"Easy?" But Gwen helped her out.

"Your words not mine."

"Well~ I suppose you're not wrong. But let's be honest, do you think anyone is stupid enough to take advantage of a cardinal?" Gwen hopped off the fence and flicked her finger.

A flaming spear instantly appeared next to her as the air began to warp from the heat.

"Naturally that's including you. But you get a pass since you're two kinds of stupid. Stupid to try and take advantage of me and also stupidly cute so the two cancels out haha~" Gwen dismissed her spear while Kaia tilted her head.

"I'm pretty sure my appearance is average though?" She blinked, surprising Gwen for a moment.

Just a moment ago she was talking about how she should go to the entertainment district yet now she couldn't recognize some harmless flirting?

The two sides cancelled each other out as Gwen couldn't help but laugh.

"Seems like you're a little unaware of your own charm. But I suppose that's why I call you a stray cat."

"Huh? What does that have to do with anything?" Kaia furrowed her brows.

"Ah~ Don't worry about it my dear stray cat. Just pretend I'm a weirdo." Gwen dismissed.

"I don't need to pretend for that part. But seriously, what do I do here? Just. . . Standing around and talking seems. . ." Kaia frowned.

"Boring? Peaceful? Monotonous? Or all of the above?" Gwen asked, hands behind her back while walking over to Kaia's side.

"Let's go with all of the above."

"Oh dear. . . What kind of life did you live if you can't even handle a normal conversation?" Gwen blinked with pity in her eyes.

"Well that's fine as well. As you get on in life, you have to get used to moments of monotony like this. Because once you're on the battlefield for a long period of time, you'll miss these moments." Gwen shook her head.

"You'll miss these conversations, peaceful moments when you go for a drink with your friends. Joking around and simply free of the pressure and fear that you can be killed at a single moment."

"Don't you think that's a little ironic considering what you said to me earlier?" Kaia raised an eyebrow.

"I know what I said before but I don't kill for no reason. Didn't I even give you the option to walk away if you wanted? It's your choice to stay after all." Gwen shrugged, gesturing for Kaia to follow behind her for now.

"Tch. Where are we going?" Kaia asked curiously.

The temporary base was split into five sectors from what Kaia could see. A field for both sparring and training, a place to sleep, armory, supplies and a meeting room of sorts.

They essentially repurposed a small section of Yuhai port for their own use while they were here.

"Obviously to your room. Or are you going to sleep on the streets?" Gwen glanced back.

"Give me a blanket and an empty spot on the roof or some tree and I'll be good."

"No no, we can't have that. While you're following me around, I'm going to make sure you live like a proper human. None of this sleeping on the roof business okay?" Gwen shook her head.

Trying to be friends with someone who keeps others at bay wasn't going to be easy. Especially if Gwen wanted to foster a good close relationship.

She needed to be the one to bridge the gap, to build the bridge of trust.

And. . .

Even if she didn't want to admit it, she was very lonely. The only people that's been put under her have been her dad's subordinates. People that listen to orders rather than friends or someone she can talk to.

There was always the work relationship separating her from forming ideal connections with others.

But that's not to say she was completely clear of fault either.

Thanks to Kaia saying what she said earlier, Gwen also realized that her personally wasn't one suited to be friends with. At least for now. Her view towards the value of life was. . . warped in a sense.

That was something she needed to work on in her own time.

As they continued up the building, a frown slowly appeared on Kaia's face.

They were walking past a lot of the good rooms that were available yet Gwen wasn't stopping.

She simply hummed to herself while taking the lead.

"Are all the empty rooms occupied or?" Kaia couldn't hold back and asked.

"Hm? Oh no, they're just empty. We're only borrowing this place after all." Gwen answered without turning around.

"So. . . If that's the case then shouldn't I take one of the empty rooms?" Kaia raised an eyebrow.

"Hm~ Maybe~"

Tilting her head in confusion, they soon reached the top floor where Gwen brought out a set of keys.

Of course, breaking into a Cardinal's room was practically a death sentence so no one would be stupid enough to try.

Compared to the other rooms, this one was far more spacious.

There was an office, two bedrooms, even a kitchen and the living room with a view of the whole city.

"I hope you don't think badly of me. Since you're going to be following me, I'll have to keep an eye on you okay?" Gwen apologized as Kaia scratched her hair.

"So basically we're going to be sharing this place?"

"Yep~ Ah but don't worry, I don't be watching you while you sleep. That's a little far even for me. Instead, I'll simply make sure you're not snooping around at night." Gwen took off her shoes and made her way to the office.

Meanwhile, Kaia cast her gaze towards her room that was next to Gwen's office.

"Make yourself at home~"

Taking her advice, Kaia made her way to the room and shut the door. Sitting on the bed, she laid down and let out a deep sigh.

As for Gwen, she sat down behind her desk and took out an orb.

It's been a rather long day with a lot of things happening. Her dad and aunty must be worried by now. . .

Chapter 756: Gwen's Pain

Relaxing her body on the bed, Alice let out an internal sigh.

Even now, Gwen was keeping an eye on her.

Not in depth but enough so that if Alice was to snoop around, she would definitely know.

[It's not too late for you to back out now.] Cayla reminded but Alice shook her head.

'The opportunity is too good to give up. Even if Apostles are involved, as long as I play my cards right, I should be able to get free training and other stuff as well.'

[And if it doesn't?] Cayla sighed.

'We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Plus, you also agreed that this was too good to pass up. It's too late to back out now no?' Alice chuckled.

[It is definitely not too late. She's still giving you a path out!] Cayla retorted but Alice simply waved it off.

###

Making sure that no noise would leave her office, Gwen activated the orb and waited.

Little by little, it began to disassemble itself, forming a projector of sorts and after a short period, energy began to gather.

Having come to the east, she was rather surprised by how efficient some of their technology was. Especially the creations by the inventor called Suyin.

After buying some herself and even testing it out, she had urged her dad to supply it to the different groups, allowing them to maintain communication.

"Arg! How do I use this thing?" Her dad's voice echoed out from the hazy projection.

"You dumb oaf! Push the button on the side! Gwenny has already explained it to you last time how can you not do it now?!" Her aunt Shiera shouted out by the side, causing Gwen to laugh.

"It's fine aunty, dad doesn't use these things often anyways." Gwen chuckled.

"Don't cover for him Gwenny. This old man should be capable of doing this much. How can you block a meteor but you can't work this gadget???" Shiera continued to lecture while Arax let out a few grunts of struggle.

"I've got all the time in the world dad, don't rush it." Gwen smiled softly.

After a hard struggle, the projection finally began to clear but it was upside down, causing Gwen to laugh.

“It’s upside down dad!”

“Ah- I thought I had broken it.” Arax coughed. He didn’t want to say anything since he thought it was a result of his handling of the device.

Adjusting the gadget for a moment, Arax stood a step back and sat on a crate of boxes. His large stature made even the biggest crate seem small while Shiera stood next to him with her arms folded.

Shiera had long pristine white hair that was braided into a side plait while fragments of a golden crown sat as ornaments on her head.

Piercing golden eyes with a hint of warmth to them and a soft smile.

Golden earrings, a gold halo behind her and even golden accessories such as a necklace and wrist bracers. Beneath the gold, she wore a casual white dress with white trousers and a pair of golden heels.

An elegant goddess, that’s what many of the followers would think of her as and Gwen couldn’t agree more.

In a sense, she aspired to have the same kind of vibe as her aunty. Someone to be looked up to and respected.

As for her dad, he still had his short blonde hair with hints of white around the base. A set of blue eyes and a wide grin that gave anyone a sense of safety.

A reassuring smile that tells you everything was okay.

He has two scars. One across the bridge of his nose and the other from his cheek all the way down to his neck. The scar split his short beard in half on the side.

A trophy of sorts. The evidence of battle against the Apostles of Enris, wounds that cannot be healed easily.

Even with their purification powers, a scar was still left behind.

Unlike her aunt Shiera, her dad didn't wear any accessories. He kept it simple with a standard black t-shirt and black trousers along with a pair of normal boots.

If Shiera felt like a goddess, her dad was someone you could find down at the bar.

"Now then, shall we hear a report for the day?" Arax smiled as Gwen nodded, standing up straight.

"I've dealt with three groups of suspicious individuals trying to enter the city. Two groups had traces of fallen divinity and Eldritch energy but none were what you wanted me to find." Pausing for a brief moment, Gwen opened her mouth.

"There were more concerning developments within the city. Three anomalies and large quantities of contraband were found in possession of each of the gangs around midday. None of the gangs seemed responsible for this and it was clearly a sabotage plan.

"As for what the culprit wanted to achieve, I've yet to find that out. No lives were lost and the situation was dealt with on the spot."

Hearing this, Shiera raised an eyebrow.

"Is that why I sensed you opening the Vision? Did you track down the source?"

"Unfortunately, no. I didn't--"

"Wait, you didn't manage to track them down? Even with Vision?" Shiera was surprised.

She knew full well how capable Gwen is. Yet she was struggling to find the culprit.

Looking down, Gwen wasn't sure how to continue.

That's when her dad stepped in.

"Now now, anomalies are bound to appear. Don't worry too much about it. Instead, I want to hear more about this. . . stray cat that you brought in. Seems like you even warned Dragur about her." Arax revealed a helpless smile.

Gwen wasn't the only one they were receiving reports from.

It's not that he didn't trust his daughter but rather it was to keep things consistent. To make sure none of the information was missing.

"She's called Kaia. No surname, grew up on the streets. A. . ." Gwen wanted to say the word friend but paused. Debating in her mind, she gave up.

"A temporary interest." She decided to be logical at this moment.

"It's not like you to hold a temporary interest in someone. Did something happen? Enough for you to skimp out on work?" Arax asked curiously.

Gwen scratched her cheek.

"Well. . . her attitude is interesting. I haven't really interacted with someone like her before. An-" Before she could finish her sentence, both her dad and Shiera looked away.

"Sorry dear, I'll have to end things a little early." Arax revealed an apologetic smile.

“Ah no, that’s fine dad. Take care and don’t get hurt.” Gwen forced a smile.

And just like that, the projection was turned off.

Gwen stood rooted in the spot, staring at where the projection of her dad had been.

She didn’t say anything, simply stared.

Her throat felt tight. . .

It took a long time before she finally moved.

Tears welled up in her eyes, she wanted to punch something. Anything, to get rid of this frustration in her heart.

Work.

Always work.

She didn’t blame her dad but rather the position he occupied. He was someone with a boundless love and wanted to protect countless families and their happiness.

She understood that, she did!

But even so!

“AhhH!!!!!!” Gwen let out a frustrated shout, repeatedly punching the air in anger.

Outside of a report, she couldn’t even tell him about her day. How she might’ve found someone who could potentially become her first friend.

She couldn't tell him about this excitement.

She couldn't tell him about how much she enjoyed Kaia's reactions.

She couldn't tell him anything outside of what's required by the job.

She just. . .

Wanted to talk to someone.

Anyone.

Someone who she could share her joys, her sadness, her annoyances.

She didn't want to keep everything bottled up. She couldn't even talk to her dad!

She didn't want him to hear about her life from someone else! Why was Dragur allowed to tell him about Kaia but she wasn't?!?! She wanted him to hear it from her own mouth! Her own words!

Hugging her knees while sitting on the office chair, Gwen began to shed silent tears.

She missed her mother, she missed not being a Cardinal.

She loved what her dad did, she loved the feeling of being protected that he gave. But she hated everything else.

She wanted to be selfish, she wanted him to look at her.

Look at his daughter.

Is it really so much to ask for him to prioritize his own child over his work?

Gwen didn't know.

She knew that he had to make choices.

He still tries to talk to her every so often, no matter how much work he had to be responsible for.

To pick his child or the protection of countless. . .

The choice was obvious.

Gwen felt exhausted.

She just wanted to sleep.

To lay down and forget everything, just for a moment. She didn't want to think about this suffocating loneliness.

This. . . piercing pain in her heart. This ache.

The tears that won't stop once they start.

She didn't want to think about any of it.

She just wanted a day where she could be around her dad, a day where she could just talk about all the things she kept bottled up.

She thought about hunters that took the powers of stealth to keep the world at arm's length.

But she was the opposite.

She wanted to shine radiant. She wanted to be a beacon.

She wanted people to look at her.

"I'm here. Please look at me. Don't leave me alone."

She thought. . . That if she was in a dark room, all she had to do was become the light that illuminates it.

But when she became the sun in that room, she found it empty.

How can people look at her or leave her alone. . . if there were no one to do so in the first place. . .

Chapter 757: Gwen's Cooking

"Good~ Morning~! Did you sleep well? Any dreams? Or were you not used to the bed?" Gwen was loud in the morning, storming into Kaia's room as she groggily opened her eyes.

She was still half dressed in what she was wearing last night as Gwen let out a sigh.

"Kaia. . . You can't just sleep like that. It'll waste the clothes I got for you. Plus, they're also dirty from all the sparring." Gwen folded her arms.

Kaia sat up, yawning with the blanket draped over her head.

There was no energy in her eyes as she was still trying to wake up properly.

Seeing this, Gwen curved her lips up into a teasing smile.

"Fufu~ Defenceless Kaia. Are you trying to make me do something to you?" Gwen chuckled, leaning towards Kaia.

But to her surprise, Kaia was the first to make a move. She wrapped her arms around Gwen's waist and nuzzled against the stomach for a moment before going back to sleep.

Gwen froze up. She didn't expect this kind of reaction.

Seeing as how Kaia went back to sleep immediately, she realised that she must not be a morning person after all.

"Jeez, this stray cat's such a handful." Gwen smiled, climbing onto the bed and making herself comfortable while Kaia continued to sleep.

###

*Yawn~

Kaia let out a yawn along with a good stretch.

Usually, Ria or someone else would be the ones to wake her up for her dreaded early mornings but this time it wasn't the case.

In fact, she didn't even feel Gwen's Vision on her.

Feeling rather refreshed, she went to climb off the bed.

"Hya~"

"!!!"

Freezing on the spot, Kaia slowly turned around with Gwen on her bed, half dressed and staring at her with tender eyes.

"ARHHHG!!! Why are you in my bed?!?!" Kaia stumbled back, falling on the floor while Gwen burst out in laughter while putting parts of her clothes back on.

"Technically, this is my room and my bed. I simply let you stay the night after all. And second, I tried to wake you up earlier but you clung onto my waist so tightly I couldn't bear to wake you up." Gwen wiped her tears of laughter away while climbing out of bed.

"Still! You almost gave me a heart attack!" Kaia grumbled in annoyance while Gwen held back her laugh.

The way Kaia jumped up reminded her exactly of a startled cat.

"Hais~ And I thought people would rejoice from waking up to a half dressed cutie pie like myself." Gwen sighed with a shrug.

"Maybe if they're expecting it!"

"Semantics. I wouldn't scream like that if you were to climb into my bed at night instead." Gwen winked with Kaia getting goosebumps once more.

"Can you not? It's so early in the morning." Kaia groaned.

"Morning? It's afternoon. I would suggest some breakfast but it's more lunch by this point."

Leaving the room, Gwen tied her hair up into a ponytail and grabbed an apron.

"Do you have any issues with seafood?" Gwen asked as Kaia got dressed properly in some casual clothing instead of the uniform.

A plain white t-shirt with a pair of loose shorts. That was all she decided to wear.

Plopping herself down on the sofa, Kaia crossed her legs.

"Princess, I live by the port. Do you think I'd be against seafood?" Kaia rolled her eyes.

"No harm in asking, you never know what people might be allergic to." Gwen replied without turning around.

Since Kaia didn't mind seafood, she had just the meal in mind.

It might be a little. . . heavy for the first meal but some adjustments could be made.

Grabbing a small knife, she pulled out an assortment of frozen seafood that had been kept in her fridge.

Kaia watched silently.

Compared to the chefs that she saw in taverns and restaurants, Gwen felt more refined and focused on her work. Rather than a chef, she felt more like an artist, putting her desires into her work.

The way she gripped the knife, how she carefully held the ingredients.

Everything was done meticulously.

She laid out the rows of shrimp, scallops and lobster tails.

Slice, flick, arrange.

Slice, flick, arrange.

Gwen worked at speeds that were a direct result of countless hours of practice.

A rhythm.

And instead of using a recipe book or something that she wrote down, she simply worked off instinct.

Pulling out a large fish, she grabbed a long thin fillet knife and stripped away the bones with ease.

'Too much acid and the scallops lose their tenderness.' She thought to herself while preparing the lemons.

A handful of sea salt, some pepper, garlic and butter.

In her drawer were a delicate arrangement of different spices.

*Tzzzz!

Heating up a pan with her own fire, she brushed a layer of oil over the surface and added a dash of seasoning, some sauce and a few other ingredients from jars that she had already prepared.

Whatever she took out was placed back carefully.

Kaia found herself mesmerised by the proficiency of her actions. The care in her eyes as she worked with the food.

It was clear that Gwen took great care in making sure everything was as good as it could be.

She arranged the shrimp in a spiral pattern, their tails arching like petals. Scallops placed the outer ring and the lobster tails, the main focus, went into the centre. Its shell split and fanned out, showcasing the tender white flesh within the shell.

Seeing Gwen being so busy with cooking, Kaia didn't want to interrupt the process and made her way to the windows that overlooked the city.

She decided to use this time to try and figure out how Gwen was able to spread her 'Vision' to the rest of the city.

Kaia felt as though the key was the 'eye' in the sky that she felt. Like a chess player gazing down at the chessboard, the feeling of simply being one of many as the player took control.

How did she do it?

There was one hint that she got though.

That the Zone was the foundation to Vision.

Zone was to push your senses to their maximum output, to observe your surroundings based on the range of attack that you can accomplish. The reach of your weapon, the reach of your spells.

'Was it Emission? No, it didn't quite feel like a spell either.'

Casting style – Emission, was one that has the user project Abyssal Energy outwards to form an ability.

Streaks of fire, ice arrows and so on were all methods of Emission.

Meanwhile, the 'Vision' wasn't quite a manifestation of power. It's perception, observation, the understanding of one's surroundings but to a higher degree.

How?

Kaia expanded her Zone and Gwen noticed but didn't do anything about it.

'Was it Channelling?'

The channelling method uses the body as a conduit, reinforcing the mortal shell. To enhance what's already there.

But that wasn't quite accurate either since the source would still be her rather than an 'eye' in the sky looking down.

'It's not quite projection or channelling nor is it binding. Transmutation is definitely a no. Invocation?'

Was Gwen 'summoning' something to use as an anchor?

That's not quite right either.

Even though she felt as though the source came from the sky, nothing was there that could've possibly acted as an anchor.

Kaia wasn't sure how long she was stuck in this moment.

The back and forth of suggesting ideas, finding their flaws then shutting it down.

The boundaries of her Zone fluctuating back and forth, expanding and contracting.

The levels of focus, condensed within certain parts, loose in others.

Yet she was still missing one thing to make this entire thing click.

One thing to make it work.

How did Shiera, how did Gwen, figure out a way to project their observation into a 'Vision' that encompasses the entire city?

How did they manage to do so without the use of any of Yvael's casting methods?

Knowing how Shiera was a master of the Zone stance, Kaia could reasonably assume that this was a creation of the Apostle that took countless years to master.

But for her, she just needed one hint. One clue, one key.

A spark of inspiration.

The ignition of her ideas.

She needed one more push-

*Clack

The sound of food being placed on the table broke Kaia's concentration and the walls of her boundary crumbled apart.

There was a deep light of frustration in her eyes as she let out a deep sigh.

"Are you in that much of a hurry to get away from me? Take your time. Even for me, it took along while before I could even approach this 'Vision'." Gwen smiled, gesturing for Kaia to come over to the table.

"Not really. It's just. . . I feel like I'm this close to getting it. The lock is already partially open, I just need one moment to give it a good tug and it'll just- open. Ya know?" Kaia sighed.

"Of course I do. I went through exactly the same thing. Though~ If I were to give you a hint, it wouldn't benefit you. Vision is. . . something you have to discover yourself otherwise it won't truly be the same." Gwen rested her chin on her palms with a small smile.

"Just tell me you're feeling a bit stingy and want to bully me around a bit more." Kaia rolled her eyes.

"Perhaps~ Now come on, give this a try. Tell me what you think." Gwen chuckled, gesturing to the pot of sea food that she cooked up.

Grabbing a piece using a fork, Kaia took a bite and froze up.

This flavor. . . The tenderness of the lobster and the slight hint of. . . alcohol.

Kaia closed her eyes, savoring every last moment.

Seeing this, a wide smile appeared on Gwen's face. She couldn't hold it back, seeing someone eat her cooking and enjoying this much.

She had studied culinary for her dad as he kept eating rations or whatever was given to him.

Not once have they gotten a proper moment to share a meal yet. . .

A tear rolled down Gwen's cheek as she quickly wiped it away.

Chapter 758: Era Of Peace

"Oh my gods. . ." Kaia muttered, sprawling out on the sofa.

"Did you enjoy it that much?" Gwen laughed, clearing up the table and washing the dishes.

"Enjoy it? I loved it. I didn't know a Cardinal would have such a talent for cooking. Well. . . calling it a talent doesn't quite justify it. You must've practised a bunch. Is it a hobby?" Kaia asked, glancing over at Gwen who was surprised for a moment before composing herself.

"Hmm. . . I wouldn't go as far as calling it a hobby." Gwen glanced towards the city.

"It's more so a wish. I had hoped that if I cooked, my dad would be able to enjoy it. Unfortunately, work obligations get in the way of this pretty often haha~" She let out a hollow laugh.

Kaia could clearly see the sadness in her eyes but she understood that she shouldn't push further.

This kind of situation. . . was one that the speaker needed to open up about rather than someone prying into things.

Especially when they don't know the full situation.

Instead, she had a different idea.

"You don't happen to have a bit of alcohol on you now do you? Aside from the cooking kind." Kaia asked curiously.

Blinking her eyes in confusion, Gwen nodded her head.

"I have a few bottles here and there, nothing too fancy since they were essentially smuggled goods." She took Kaia over to the shelf storing the alcohol.

Folding her arms, Kaia scanned each and every bottle, picking up two that she was somewhat familiar with as she had seen it in a certain bartender's display.

"A friend of mine I met a while back taught me something. He is a great bartender, one of the best that I've seen and his drinks are to die for. I won't be able to make something on his level but it should give

you somewhat of a rough idea." Kaia smiled, grabbing some other ingredients from around the room as well as her own pouch.

"Oh? Are you going to be mixing a drink for me? Need I remind you that we have some work later. I'd rather not be on the job drunk, even if I'm a bit lazy in that department." Gwen chuckled, taking a seat this time.

"Oh don't worry, it shouldn't be anything too strong. Just think of it as some juice with a bit of alcohol in it." Kaia grinned.

Getting four glasses, two of which were different in sizes, she began to mix the ingredients while also creating a few ice cubes using her powers.

"Unlike you and him, I don't really have any talents like this. Or at least something that I've worked towards for a long time. A day to day skill for the average person. Instead, I'm simply someone that's good at fighting and killing." Kaia admitted while shaking the glass back and forth.

"Nothing more, nothing less. So when I see the two of you, people who have amazing skills outside of just fighting which anyone can do, it's impressive. Truly. Because god knows I can't do the same." Kaia chuckled, placing the cup down and pouring out the drink.

"Now, I'm not saying you shouldn't cook for your dad in hope of him eating it and giving you praise. I'm thinking, it wouldn't be a stretch for you to perhaps let your talents flourish. Open up a restaurant of something like that, letting others try your cooking." She suggested, placing a slice of fruit on the glass as decoration before handing Gwen the drink she mixed up.

"Seeing someone else's expressions as they enjoy something you made is a different kind of enjoyment and pride." Kaia grinned.

Raising her eyebrow, Gwen took a sip of the drink and paused in pleasant surprise.

Even though there was alcohol in there, it didn't feel like the harsh drinks that the soldiers like to drink. It felt. . . soothing and sweet. A gentle warmth that rose up from her stomach, spreading to the rest of her body.

"Oh wow. . ." Gwen muttered.

Seeing her reaction, Kaia chuckled.

"I'm an amateur at mixing drinks. All I did was replicate his actions without any of the knowledge and feeling. If it was him, he'll have one conversation with you and whip out the perfect drink." She grinned, praising Tristan.

"Even so, this tastes great already." Gwen finished her drink rather quickly and handed the glass back to Kaia.

"Well, if I get a chance in the future, I'll introduce you to him."

Cleaning up the bottles and glasses, both of them went to get changed into their uniforms and made their way down.

The schedule today was rather standard as it involves guarding the gates. There were also supposed to be a batch of criminals being transported over by another group of Sentinels.

Leftovers of the 'new' cult that tried to make use of the Outer Gods remains. They were going to be taken on a boat and shipped out as criminals so they were tasked to make sure everything would go smoothly.

Leaning against the wall while watching Gwen relax on her chair, Kaia couldn't help but shake her head.

"I know what you're thinking. I should take my job a bit seriously right?" Gwen laughed as Kaia shrugged.

"Your words not mine. I figured that as a Cardinal, there's a reason you've been put into that spot you know?"

"Nope. Not at all." Gwen shut that down immediately.

"Huh?"

"I'm not a Cardinal because I want to be in a sense. Of course, that's not to say I didn't desire this role. But rather, think of it as nepotism. Unlike others who have to work their whole lives to gain this role, I was kind of. . . given it." Gwen leaned back.

"Most of it was due to my family but that's not to say I'm weak. More so that had it not been for dad, I wouldn't have gotten the training I got, the favouritism and benefits. And without those, I'll probably just be a talentless bum on the streets." She laughed.

Kaia was silent.

It was rather surprising that. . . she was rather aware of her own situation.

"Again, just because I'm here because of nepotism doesn't mean I don't respect those who earned this role. Believe me when I say if someone more capable comes along, I'm more than willing to give up my role. Helping people and purifying the sinful doesn't require a Cardinal role after all."

It's what she respected about her dad. No matter what, no matter his role, his priority has always been to protect the people. He's often sent to places he doesn't want to be but he makes the most out of it.

Staying silent for a moment, Kaia decided to ask a question.

"Have you ever thought about what you wanted to do if you stop fighting? Like everything was to end. I wouldn't say no more wars but let's say the major threats are over. What then?"

What did Gwen want to do in an era of peace?

"If that includes my dad then I'll want to spend some more time with him. Despite the difficulties, he still tried his best when raising me. I want to repay his love." Gwen smiled softly.

"Anything outside of that?"

"Well that's for future me to decide isn't it? If it's truly an era of peace then I'll have all the time in the world to figure out what I want to do. There's no rush after all." Gwen laughed.

Just as Kaia was about to respond, Gwen sat up straight with a serious expression.

There was a deep frown on her face as she immediately got out of her chair.

"Seems like we have a bit of trouble."

"Hm?" Tilting her head, Kaia wasn't sure what she meant as she couldn't sense anything.

But after a short moment, she finally tracked it.

This. . . malevolent energy approaching the checkpoint. A twisted source of Abyssal Energy that felt like an unholy hybrid of both Abyssal and Eldritch.

And on top of everything, there was a layer of sickening energy that felt. . . dead. Necrotic and downright disgusting.

"Abyssal, Eldritch and even Fallen Divinity. Since you use the bow, can you give me some support fire?" Gwen asked, glancing back at Kaia who scratched her hair and nodded her head.

"Alright. But. . . be careful. That energy doesn't feel right."

"Oh? Ohya? Is Kaia worried about me? My~ I'm going to get emotional." Gwen smiled smugly as Kaia rolled her eyes.

"No harm in reminding you to be careful."

"I know I know~ I'll be leaving my back to you." Gwen chuckled.

Taking her 'Vision' off Kaia, Gwen summoned her spear and dashed towards the source of this energy.

Meanwhile, Kaia summoned a bow and climbed up to the top of the checkpoint.

She found herself a good foothold and narrowed her gaze.

With Gwen now taking her eyes off her, it's given her a moment of freedom. A window of opportunity. .
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By the port, a rather large group stood silently, waiting as time ticked by.

Seconds into minutes. Minutes into hours. And hours into days.

Yet still, no sign of a certain split haired girl.

Rosalyn looked as though she was about to blow at any moment. Veins bulged on the back of her hand and neck while a grinding sound could be heard from her mouth.

None of them wanted to say anything in fear of triggering her.

After waiting days, she couldn't hold back anymore.

"WHERE THE F*CK IS THIS SPLIT HAIRE B*TCH?!?!?"

Chapter 759: Corrupted Mass

Jumping through the air, Gwen furrowed her brows as the air grew thick with a sickening vile pressure.

The corruption wasn't a subtle feeling anymore. It wasn't a dark shadow in the horizon no, it was more like a old bleeding wound that won't stop. Festering rot spilling out into the world.

Visual indicators, the foul taste of the air and even the goosebumps that she was feeling on her skin.

The trail left behind the carriage in the distance caused the ground to crack apart with tendrils of darkness. Inky veins that dug into the earth. Where they spread, the soil began to wither and rot.

Trees decayed, flowers died and grass turned black. Even insects were left on the ground, their bodies spasming as a last vestiges of their life fade away.

From the caged carriage, a dark mist rolled out keeping itself close to the ground. Its movements were. . . unnatural. Almost as though it was sentient, slowly spreading across the landscape. What little remained from the tendril's influence was reduced to powder by the mist.

This. . . corruption was a blight. A desecration of life.

Gwen clenched her hand tightly.

She couldn't let this reach the city. If it did, there's no telling what kind of issues would arise because of the corruption left behind.

Hell, even as a cardinal, she wasn't sure if she could purify this much damage without spending a long long time in the area should the city be reduced to nothing.

***RUMBLE!!!**

Flames erupted from her body, wrapping her in flickering white flames as the air began to distort. Behind her, a golden halo spun to life.

*BANG!!!

Crashing down, Gwen stabbed her spear against the earth as flames burst out in a circle. The purifying flames caged the corruption, containing her for the moment.

There were thirty of them. Thirty sentinels that were sent to escort the caged corruption. Yet now, all thirty were no longer men.

Their armour clung to their bodies like skin, warped and fused with the flesh beneath. Where vigilant eyes once were visible through the helmet now hung empty sockets oozing a thick black sludge. Within the sludge, twitching tentacles threaded through the gaps, writhing like worms fumbling around.

They were dead yet 'something' puppeteered their corpses around, ever moving forward with a purpose. To reach the city.

Some slumped forward, others leaned back unnaturally. Their joints had long been melted and reformed with certain parts bending in unnatural fashion.

Then there was the 'thing' inside the cage. The source of it all.

Contained within the cage of metal was a stack of bones and mutated flesh. Pulsing, twitching, a nightmarish mass.

Impossible to tell when it began or where it ended. A mass of flesh, that's what it was. Faces of would be cultists stretched across its surface, some frozen mid scream, some laughing and most in silent horror.

Tubes of blackened muscle throbbed like boneless limbs.

From the tubes, black blood poured out, sizzling as it hit the ground and spreading the corruption.

The feeling that Gwen got from this. . . thing.

An incomplete Outer God?

'No not quite. It doesn't feel like one.' Gwen narrowed her eyes.

Outer Gods felt. . . unnatural. There's just something about them that the moment you lay your eyes on them, you understand that they're not from this world.

A foreign entity.

While this mass of flesh before her felt similar, she could still tell where the 'roots' are. Therefore, it's most likely 'someone' that tried to become one while they were being transported.

Either that or something else interfered.

However, setting her eyes on this thing confirmed one suspicion.

Whatever she fought within the city was not the work of an Outer God but rather a person.

Unfortunately, Kaia was still high up on her list of suspects even if she doesn't fit the exact criteria.

Had it been any other circumstance, Gwen would overlook it. But not this.

'Please don't make me doubt you Kaia.' Gwen thought to herself. She truly hoped that it was simply a misunderstanding as she had finally found someone she could talk to.

Someone who was casual with her regardless of status.

Taking a deep breath, Gwen calmed herself. She eliminated the unnecessary thoughts in her mind for now and summoned a flaming blade.

With Gwen presenting herself as an enemy, the ex sentinels lunged forward.

"O' flame that watches from the beyond." Gwen muttered as she took a step forward.

*BANG!!!

Her figure disappeared with a swirl of flames as she appeared in front of the first sentinel.

"Receive these souls, though broken and defiled. . ."

*KRK!!!

Slashing up, an arc of flames burst out, tearing the sentinel in half and burning his body to ash.

"Let not their torment echo in the dark. Let them burn bright and free."

Leaning back to avoid a slash, Gwen snapped her finger, igniting a spark of fire in front of her.

*RUMBLE!!!

A pillar of flames shot up, killing three more sentinels.

"May your burden be lifted, may your names be remembered."

The sentinels dropped back for a moment as each of them began to summon a black and purple flame that coated their weapons.

"May you returned to the light from whence you came."

Lifting the sword above her head, she pulled her arm back and slashed towards the space in front of her.

*BOOM!!!

Space itself fractured apart as flames spewed out in a wave. The first few sentinels to be caught up were reduced to ash while others quickly conjured shields to block the rest.

"O' holy flame, burn away the sins that bind them."

Tossing up her sword, Gwen clasped her hands together and created a false sun between her palms.

"Cleanse their souls and guide them back to your embrace.

"So that they may bask in your warm and radiant rays of light." Lifting the false sun above her, rays of light erupted from the orb, scorching whatever it came in contact with.

While she was focused on the sentinels in front of her, countless tendrils burst out from the ground behind.

Even though Gwen was prepared to counter, she noticed something and smiled.

*BANG!!!

The instant they were prepared to attack, an attack appeared! Colliding with the tendrils, they were frozen before shattering into dust.

Even though she couldn't sense Kaia anymore, she understood that the blue haired girl was still keeping an eye on the battle.

Meanwhile, back at the checkpoint, Kaia released a breath and created another arrow.

In front of her eyes, there were several clear disks made from ice, enhancing her vision so that she could accurately cover Gwen's back while she fights.

Tightening her fingers around the arrow, she pulled back.

'Do you think it's Voruth'Zal?'

[Maybe. The feeling is similar to an extent. Maybe a minor God or even an Idol of one was responsible for this.] Cayla replied as the two of them analyzed the strange mass of flesh.

Regardless of what it was, it was clear that they had to deal with it immediately.

*BANG!!!

Firing another arrow, the wall beneath her showed signs of cracking.

"Did they withdraw budget or some sh*t when it came to building this??? Why is it so unstable???" She groaned, finding another spot in fear of breaking the wall.

While firing the arrows, she noticed some of the sentinels throwing her confused looks as well as annoyed ones but she ignored it.

Why should she care about how they look at her? It's not like she cared about being here.

What she did care about was Gwen's perception. At least until she got what she wanted. And. . . even then, if she could avoid having her as an enemy, that would be preferable.

She wasn't kidding when she wanted to introduce Tristan to her. As two cardinals that have skill sets outside of just fighting, she felt the two would get along rather nicely.

However, that's only if the two won't kill each other on sight or if Gwen was to somehow forgive her for hiding her identity.

Regardless, that's a bridge she'll cross in the future. For now, she had to cover Gwen while she fought!

*BANG!!!

Ducking down, Gwen smiled seeing an arrow freeze two more sentinels, allowing her to purify them with ease.

Slashing up, she expanded her boundary, tracking any arrows that Kaia would fire and dodge if needed.

And in mere moments, all thirty of the sentinels were purified, leaving only the strange mass of flesh in the cage.

*Krkkkk Kzzzz

Letting out a series of hisses and croaks, the mass began to spew black blood around it in a frenzy, rusting the cage and breaking it apart.

From the sky, an arrow dropped towards it, shattering before contact and unleashing a wave of cold mist that froze the blood.

Just as Gwen was about to follow up with an attack, she quickly back off with a frown.

*BANG!!!

Breaking out of the ice, a tsunami of black blood poured with one of the faces warping into a sadistic grin.

Gwen could feel it. Touching that black blood was no different from a death sentence. Perhaps it's also the same black blood that took the lives of the sentinels.

Furrowing her brows, Sigils lit up on Gwen's body as she brought the flaming blade in front of her.

She had to purify this mass of corruption before it did anymore harm.

While the process might leave her a little open, she was confident that Kaia would cover her back.

"Skyfather above, blazing in eternal glory." She chanted, her eyes ignited with a golden hue.

"Bless your devoted daughter, born of your fire, forged in your will. Cleanse the sins, grant it mercy.

"Let your wrath flow through my veins, let your gaze burn through my enemies."

Tendrils burst out from the black blood, trying to corrupt Gwen but two arrows intercepted!

"Let your truth blind the deceivers and sear the heretic's tongue." Taking a step forward, Gwen pulled her arm back.

"By your divine blood, I cast off my sin. By your golden hand, I sanctify my blade. Purification!"

*RUMBLE!!!

Swinging her blade, a radiant tsunami of fire roared towards the mass, burning everything and anything in its path before detonating into a pillar of energy.

Seeing this, Gwen let out a sigh of relief-

"!!!"

She could feel it, the mass was still alive.

From the ground it stood upon, a thick sludge of Abyssal energy burst forth.

Chapter 760: Ashcoil Aberrant

The ground beneath the burning mass of flesh seethed, bubbled and cracked. Splitting apart like rotting flesh peeling away from bone.

Unholy energy burst forth from the depths below, a spray of corruption that twisted the air itself, distorting it. The very fabric of space twisting, stretching then ripping.

"No. . . No, no no!" Gwen took a step back in disbelief.

*KRK!!!!

The earth screamed as it split open with a hideous crack mimicking the sound of shattering bones. A tsunami of baleful energy surged forth, forcing Gwen into a desperate retreat, avoiding the energy at all cost.

She wanted to hold it back with her radiant flames but they were drowned out in an instant!

All light was extinguished as the abyssal realm spilt out onto the surface.

Like ink bleeding into clear water, the darkness spread and corrupted even the sky itself. The pristine clear blue darkened into night.

An Abyssal passage. Gateways between the two realms allowing travel. Bridges that connected the Abyss and Surface.

These pathways aren't something that can just be created on a whim considering the nature of the two realms that co exist.

While rare, natural passages do exist. A result where the boundaries of space wore thin, the friction between the two realms causing a tear.

On the other hand, man made passages are usually smaller and can only accommodate a small group. A method to pass between the layers bordering on simple teleportation rather than forming a gateway that remains.

Holes that would seal itself once the purpose was achieved.

Yet what she's seeing before her was overturning her current knowledge on the subject matter.

This. . . thing, ripped open a passage to the Abyss! The miasma that's spilling out, this pressure, this unholy aura, there was no doubt about it.

This wasn't some temporary gate that closes after a while. No, this was a permanent gateway like the natural passages that exist.

Gritting her teeth, Gwen recalled her spear and wrapped it in a layer of purifying flames.

Now that things have gotten to this stage, the city had to be abandoned. No civilians can live near the Abyssal passage as the miasma alone was like poison to them.

Especially the miasma from the deeper layers.

Not only that, but with the gateway open so close to the city, beasts can crawl out at any moment to destroy whatever man has built.

Unless they were willing to allocate manpower to protect this village, anyone who stays is wishing for death.

And that's assuming the manpower was enough. Gwen couldn't tell how far this passage reached. If it reached deep into the howling depth then. . .

She quickly shook her head.

*RUMBLE!!!

Just as a claw reached out from the passage, arrows rained down from the sky, freezing everything in the area for the moment.

"Kaia!" Gwen turned, surprised that Kaia took the initiative to come over instead of staying by the gate.

Once again, she was surprised by Kaia's technique of evading her Vision. It wasn't until she was this close did her perception finally pick up on Kaia's dim presence.

"Yo~ I thought you said we were just going to deal with some criminals. What in the f*ck is this?" Kaia asked, aiming another arrow as a second hand broke through the ice.

*BANG!!!

Another layer of ice was formed as Kaia shot her arrow.

"I don't know either. The. . . flesh thing made a passage to the Abyss right as it died. We're going to have to evacuate the city." Gwen dismissed her spear with an annoyed sigh.

"Huh? You're joking right? Can't we just like, seal this thing up?" Kaia frowned.

"Even if we do, do you think this city will remain functional with such a large passage outside their doorstep? If there was a large faction protecting this place then maybe. But it's just a den for criminals. No Lords are here to keep a watch on it." Gwen explained while clenching her fist.

"Wait so you're just going to abandon them? Without thinking about how you can help?" Kaia grabbed Gwen's arm.

Gwen felt a moment of annoyance but paused. She took a deep breath and calmed herself.

Kaia wasn't saying this to question her, she was saying this to ask if there was anything they can do.

She can't just lose her cool if things aren't going well.

"I don't want to abandon them but there's not much we can do. We can try a lot of things but. . . There's no good method to properly seal up an Abyssal passage way right now. Especially one with such thick miasma." Gwen turned around with an apologetic look in her eyes.

Kaia opened her mouth but no words came out.

"I. . . understand."

Gwen could see the frustration in her eyes. That helpless feeling when you want to do something but can't.

Just as she was about to walk away, she saw a flickering shadow by the ice that Kaia had created.

"!!!"

*CLANG!!!

Raising her spear, Gwen barely managed to block what seemed to be a tail as her body was flung backwards.

Kaia, on the other hand, tried to block but her bow was broken upon collision.

*CRACK!!!!

"!!!" The tail slammed into her arm, breaking it in the process as she was flung back.

"Kaia! Are you alright!?" Gwen shouted out, quickly rushing to Kaia's side and winced seeing the broken arm.

Clasping her hands together, a green flame was conjured, transforming into wire that threaded through Kaia's wounds, stitching the flesh together.

With her fire now healing Kaia, Gwen glared towards whatever crawled out from the Abyss.

Its form felt serpentine in nature yet the outline continuously shifted. What remained consistent, however, was the presence of nine tails wreathed in the glow of crimson veins.

Streaks that pulsed with vibrant orange as on the tips of each tail, a slitted eye of sorts could be seen. Each surrounded by searing red and blazing gold.

The creature's head was jagged, crowned with makings that would make out its teeth and eyes.

Yet before Gwen could fully understand its form, it shifted once more.

From the form of a nine tailed fox, it changed to that of a burning dragon with two tails and a tattered set of wings.

Then from a dragon, it turned into a chimeric beast with ribcages lining its neck, crimson horns that protruded from its spine and tentacles that burst out from the gaps of its body.

But through it all, eyes continued to hover in its shadow, gazing upon Gwen.

"A child of the sun. . . Oh what a treat."

The creature's voice was a wretched gurgle, like boiling tar choking through the gaps of what would be its throat. Every syllable that 'leaked' out of its throat sounded as though it was distorted with the echoes of a thousand screams.

It didn't speak no, it simply opened its mouth and the noise that escaped crudely replicated words.

The only reason why Gwen could understand it was because her brain was filling in the gaps. To recognise the pattern and estimate what it was trying to say.

Like seeing a word missing letters yet still being able to figure things out.

Gwen wasn't able to speak.

This sickening aura, this pressure.

No doubt about it. . .

The beast in front of her is a Lord level beast!

###

[Alice I'm warning you, do not make a single move. The Apostles are near and if you even let a speck of energy leak out of you, you're f*cked. Unbelievably so. Especially if that beast exposes who you are.] Cayla warned sternly.

She was already shocked by the fact that the half baked Outer God managed to rip open a passage to the Abyss.

But now that this creature has stepped out, the risk had just shot through the roof.

[Ashcoil Aberrant: Sealed Lord of A Hundred Beasts ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦]

A sealed lord of old with the Lord title of A Hundred Beasts.

[I don't know how it's unsealed but it's not like we've been checking up on what's happening deep in Terminus. My best bet is Tiamat.]

They already know that Tiamat managed to break out of her own binding. Knowing her anger towards the Will for sealing the old lords, the likelihood of her breaking them out was high.

'It's not like I can do anything right now anyways.' Alice squeezed out, trying her best to look fine.

Unfortunately, Gwen's healing flame carried an aspect of purification. And considering her blood is essentially super concentrated Abyss blood. . .

Regardless, Alice had to put all her focus on stopping her energy from leaking out while also preventing her disguise from falling apart. All while this 'healing' flame was burning her from the inside out.

Even if she wanted to fight, she couldn't.

###

"Kaia, I'm going to buy a bit of time. Take this chance to run okay?" Gwen forced a brave smile.

She was strong. As someone who could summon the mythos of Solaris, she knew that. But at the end of the day, she is still just a Six Sigil Cardinal.

She might be able to hold her own against a weak Lord for a brief moment but this beast felt anything but weak.

Without giving Kaia a chance to argue, Gwen took a step forward as her Sigils lit up with a radiant flame.

"Yes. . . It wouldn't fun if my food didn't fight back. You have no idea how long I've been stuck down there. . . A bit of exercise is good for digestion don't you agree little one?" Ashcoil curved its teeth into what would be a grin.

Gwen ignored its provocation and summoned her flaming spear.

Resonance!