

Abyssal A 781

Chapter 781: Shared Silence

I walk yet I do not know my path.

I stride yet this body fail me time and time again.

I yearn. . . though I cannot name the thing I desire.

Syrion. That is my name.

Not one of my choosing but one bestowed upon me by the one that lurks below.

A pawn of potential.

That's what I am.

A piece that can reach the end and be promoted. To the rank of Lord.

But is that what I seek? To become stronger?

I gaze towards the face of my blade, my reflection staring back at me upon its steel.

I lift my helmet and see the bundle of energy within.

Ah. . . I am neither dead nor alive.

Every time I think of the pursuit of strength, I feel a sense of desperation. Of longing.

I am aware of another 'me'.

Perhaps one who owns these memories.

He takes over every now and then, walks towards a direction in search of a home.

I will join him on this journey, a journey leading to a warmth that I am not familiar with.

But with that warmth comes a suffocating coldness.

We have walked many years now, always searching, always in pursuit.

So it is times like this, when I sit beneath the ever dark sky do I ponder.

I wonder if this pursuit is a fruitless one.

Though, even if it is, there is nought else for us to do. So I will keep walking.

I recalled fragments of his life. Ones that he doesn't remember. Ones of the Halcyon days, of his youth.

Of our youth.

I can remember the feeling when we first laid our hands on a blade.

Oh how we wished it was a wooden one. Our house was being robbed and the closest weapon we had was a kitchen knife.

The one whom I believe was our mother lay bleeding out on the ground. Intruders breaking everything around them in search of what little wealth we had.

From their words, my father has abandoned us. Sold us out to cover his debts.

Though time has passed, the rage still remains. Was a father not meant to protect his family? His children? His wife?

Was a father not supposed to be a reliable wall, a shield for which his offspring can grow up without worry?

Instead, my father chose to abandon us. My mother's desperate gaze, hoping I would run but my feet were firmly rooted to the ground.

I could run. But how far and for how long?

The chances of survival if I ran were slim. I couldn't outrun them.

So I chose to fight. To do what I can to kill them so that I may survive.

Ironically, my hatred towards them was far less than my hatred towards my father, the one who abandoned us.

I grasped the kitchen knife and lunged towards the first. I doubt they expected a child to fight. A child I may be at the time but still one with a weapon.

I stabbed, over and over. Even when the blood got into my eyes, I kept stabbing.

I used whatever I could get my hands on. His bones, his organs, to fight back against the second.

Looking back, it was nothing but a stroke of luck. I had survived but I was alone.

I stare at my mother's lifeless corpse and the memories end there.

Perhaps it was at that moment, the other me wanted to become a good father. One who didn't abandon his family no matter what.

But a part of me tells me that it's no longer possible. I had no basis for it. Simply instinct.

After all... I'm no longer alive. I'm a lingering ghost trapped in this coffin of steel.

###

I've noticed a woman observing our actions. Sitting off in the distance, observing.

She doesn't say anything and neither do I.

But I feel a sense of familiarity with her. Perhaps they belonged to the same order.

Though I do not recall ever seeing her face.

It's been more clear as of late. The memories are coming back faster and she's keeping an especially close eye on us.

I feel a sense of foreboding but at the same time, perhaps it's a sense of excitement. An omen that things are about to change.

So many years I've spent wandering these lands in search of home. So many years wasted.

And now it's coming to an end.

The most recent memory that I received, of a first meeting. A love at first sight.

Having sought out power in order to not lose things ever again, I had formed a rift between me and the others within the Order.

They feared me while I cared not for their companionship.

Solitude wasn't suffocating. In fact, it was peace. More time to hunt, more time to train.

Every new wound would be bandaged haphazardly. I set off towards every hunt regardless of the condition of my body.

I was the blade that sought out strength to cut down all my enemies.

Then she appeared.

A curious girl, one that wanted to see what people were so desperate to avoid.

Fearing that my peace would be disturbed, I pushed her away, proving why people feared me, my glare.

I thought that she would scream, she would shout, and then she would leave.

But she didn't.

She didn't do anything, she didn't talk, she didn't make conversation. She simply sat down beneath a tree near where I trained and kept to herself.

She read books, studied and she watched in silence.

She made sure not to disturb the peace I've come to enjoy.

I... Was grateful towards her.

Grateful that she didn't disturb this peace, thus I accepted her presence. I shared what I deemed precious, my personal space and my silence.

Occasionally, after training sessions where my wounds would reopen, I would notice a small vial of ointment with a note attached. Instructions on how to apply them.

There was no need for words between us. It was simply a show of goodwill for allowing her to use this space, a rare location of silence within the order.

I travelled far and wide for my hunts. Took boats across continents and even dove deep into the Abyss.

I knew that she was a woman who loved to read. While I'm unsure of what she enjoys, I made sure to bring back some souvenirs. Rare books documenting what the Abyss was like, books that covered specific medical research from the west, martial arts from the east and so on.

Whenever I finished my hunt, I would leave a stack of books where she usually sat.

There was no need for words between us. She gave me ointments, I repaid her with gifts.

This silence should be left untouched.

Then she began to leave meals. Once again, a note telling me to eat properly. She's noticed that I do long training sessions without proper rest.

A helpless smile appeared on my face. But... It felt nice.

Having someone worry about you. At the same time, this silence started to feel suffocating.

I... wanted to share my words with her. I wanted to talk, to thank her for not disturbing this peace. For respecting my area and understanding that I liked this silence.

My literacy levels weren't great. I could read a few words and make guesses but it wasn't enough to write a good note.

So I decided to use some of my time for study and she noticed almost immediately.

Usually, unless I was on a hunt, a majority of my time was spent here. But not, I've been splitting it between the library.

The next day, my lunch came with a note asking if she was disturbing this space and wondering if that's why I was leaving often.

She misunderstood but I found it hard to explain myself.

A simple reply, a brutish one.

[No]

A confusing one yet she managed to understand.

I saw her with a smile and stood rooted in my spot. She was giggling, laughing at the simple reply I gave her.

Embarrassment filled my face and I turned my back, making sure that she didn't see my expression.

It took me a month before I was confident enough to write her a note.

To thank her.

But what was this... nervousness I was feeling?

Was I afraid? Impossible.

Even when walking towards the jaws of death, I didn't feel my heart beating so hard.

So why now?

Even so, I had worked hard for a month so that I could write this note.

So I began to write. My handwriting was messy, disorganised. The words were barely acceptable, a far cry from how she would write her notes.

Before I knew it, everything was linking back to her.

If I ate some food outside, I preferred her cooking.

If I saw a book, I wondered if she would like it.

I saw a flower, it reminded me of her.

I sat in silence, felt sad when I noticed she wasn't there sharing the space with me.

I went on a hunt, but all that was in my heart was the desire to go back as soon as possible so that I could be next to her once more.

Finally, I finished my note of gratitude. I placed it where she usually sat and trained.

But she never appeared.

One day, two days, three days...

She had gotten into an accident and was trapped within the Abyss. They knew of the area but the beasts blocked their entrance. They needed to call for reinforcements but I didn't care.

I rushed out as fast as I could. The fear of losing her, losing a companion that shared this space with me drove me to push my body as hard as I could.

To tear down the beasts blocking their exit.

I saw her bleeding by the wall.

Rage.

I killed everything around us, secured our escape. I cared not for the others only that her safety was secured.

I wanted to say something, anything. But the silence stretched out between us once more.

So I broke it.

I broke the silence between us, the silence that I established.

I reassured her, promised that I'll get her to safety. That look of surprise was then followed by a gentle laugh.

"My life is in your hands hero."

Her voice was more beautiful than any song.

I realised it then and there...

I had fallen for the woman who shared my silence.

Chapter 782: Mementos

Having two people in control of the same body was... a curious feeling.

In my waking hours, I continued the walk that the other me embarks on. When I sleep, I wake to a place I don't remember sleeping at.

But there was a single constant.

The woman observing me.

Like usual, today she observed my actions.

Made no effort to strike up a conversation.

In a sense, she's similar to the woman I fell in love with, the one whom I shared my silence with.

But they were not the same.

I can feel it. Inside, there was a respect towards her.

Not as lovers, but as someone I could count on.

I found myself smiling recently. Though... without a body, I suppose that doesn't quite constitute as a smile.

But my spirits have been lifted. The memory of my, no. Our younger years.

The years after we broke the silence between us, they were blurred but always accompanied by a warmth that spread through this empty chest of mine.

Her lectures when I forget to eat, her laughs and excitement when I brought her books from afar.

Her rants when talking about how others were talking behind his back, mentioning how scary his face was.

Her warm and radiant smile when he brought her flowers for her birthday.

Ha... Even thinking back, facing her was the most difficult battle we could face. The nervousness in our hearts, the fear of failure and the desire to come out victorious.

Even when on a crusade against Lords despite not being one myself, I stood strong.

But against her, I found myself helpless.

She was my moment of respite. My pillar, my support. She was my everything and I gave her my everything in return.

Though looking back, I didn't have much to give. A simple orphan who knew how to swing a sword better than most. That's who I was.

Yet she still loved me all the same.

For her, I would dive into the deepest pits of the Abyss.

There was one other I would talk to. Someone I would talk to regarding the stories of my beloved, how I would praise her every action. My old friend, my superior.

She would lecture me about slacking off on the job to think about my beloved but she congratulated me all the same.

In life, I didn't have many friends. But those that I did have, I would give my life for.

Perhaps as the days go by, I'll remember more of our memories. But the other me...

*Sigh.

A pitiful one. A ghost with a singular task in mind. To walk to the ends of the earth in search of home.

If I were to get all the memories back, would I be in a similar state?

I do not wish for that to happen. Right now, I wish to simply immerse myself in the memories of her.

"How long will you keep watching?" I called out to the silent guest that's been watching my every move.

She seemed surprised. Surprised that I spoke and surprised that I was making conversation.

I don't blame her.

She appeared before me, a puppet body with joints of steel. She looked a little different to my memory of her.

But a part of me believes that it's to be expected.

Like me, her body has long withered and rotted away. While I encase myself with a coffin of steel, she dresses herself up with puppetry.

"Do you... remember?" She asked hesitantly, taking a seat before me.

Remember? Perhaps. But just a little as always. Fragments and sprinkles of what once was.

Seeing my reaction, she realised the truth and cast her gaze down. Sadness.

Was my state truly so despairing?

"Why the long face? It's rare I have a moment of clarity so why don't we talk a little?" I chuckled.

A part of me believes that this may be one of the last conversations I hold with someone.

They do say that when you're about to die, you see your life flash before you. I'm feeling that right now. My life playing back to me, memory by memory, day by day.

"Talk... Right." The woman in front of me smiled sadly before looking up.

"I don't suppose you have a topic in mind then? I don't know how much you remember after all."

I folded my arms.

I recalled a recent fragment. For old time's sake, perhaps this would bring a smile to her face.

"Hmm. I remember a woman who shared my silence. It was a strange but joyous meeting. Most would simply ignore and avoid me I believe."

The woman's pupils trembled for a moment before a smile appeared on her face.

"Even like this, you're the same as usual haha... I've never seen someone so in love with a woman you still talk about her even now."

She seemed to dwell on her thoughts for a moment before flicking the air in front of her.

Little by little, the space fractured apart and she pulled out a small box, carefully preserved.

Holding it gently with care, she presented the box to me.

"I think you'll like this. Especially if your memory is beginning to come back."

I felt a little confused but I accepted the box.

Opening it, I saw that there were only three items held inside.

The first, a small trinket no bigger than my palm. A necklace? A bracelet? Whatever it was, I could feel my chest tighten up.

I knew it was something important and this... relief that I feel, being able to see it again.

How strange...

The second was a ring with a carefully crafted rose on top.

And the last, a picture of three people.

"Is that... me?" I asked.

With my formless body encased in armour, it was hard to tell who I was in life. But the feeling in my chest as I lay my eyes upon the woman holding a small child in her arms, it's unmistakable.

"Mnm, it was you in the past."

I savoured this feeling. Felt everything it had to offer, the warmth it afforded to me.

"Thank you."

Perhaps I would still be chasing this feeling in the corridors of my memories had she not given me a reminder.

A feeling so close yet so far as though a veil separated us.

She hesitated for a moment, clearly deliberating over a choice.

In the end, she let out a sigh.

"I'll watch over you. Over the journey that you'll embark on old friend." She stood up and left without letting me say another word.

Looking down at the three items that she had given me, I curved my invisible lips up into a smile.

I've rested long enough, it's time for me to resume this journey in search of my home next to her.

The love of my life.

###

I couldn't tell him.

I couldn't tell him what happened to the rest of his family, what happened to the home he's searching for. I couldn't tell him that this was all that remained of his family.

"What am I even doing..."

I... I wanted to offer him a choice.

Perhaps it was simply a selfish desire but such an ending for him... Was too cruel.

A wanderer of many years only to find an end at the butcher's blade.

I wanted to offer him a chance. Perhaps I manage to convince Lumiria, he'll be able to receive a new body. A new lease in life.

But to do so would violate the agreement she made with Solaris.

I doubt my lady would accept that.

However...

Even if I could make him that offer, what then? Did I want him to walk this earth for the next few years in search of a replacement?

"At the end it's still just selfish desire."

We've already parted ways so what use is there to hope? To try and mend things back to the way they were?

We fought, we argued. He asked me why I couldn't protect his family while he was out at war, why he had to fight when I was stronger than him.

I had no response.

How could I bear to tell him the truth? The cruel bitter reality of his devotion.

Of their devotion meeting such an end.

Perhaps... Had I found him first, things would've been a little different.

Jealousy.

What a sharp knife.

I have no flesh yet I can feel it carving into my chest, this pain.

When he faces his end at the hands of those from the Sun... It may be my call to retire.

But I cannot. For my sins are heavier than a mountain, stretches further than the sea.

With each waking moment, I will continue to seek redemption for all that I have done.

All that the moon has done.

###

"My lady! Why!? Why was Vali's home found!? How did they find his wife and child!?" Griselda screamed towards Lumiria who sat upon her bed.

Tears streaming down her face as she recalled Vali's grief, his look of despair.

"I'll forgive you Griselda. I'll forgive you because of your connection to him. Because of your merits so don't repeat this mistake. But it was just a measly trade in the grand scheme of things." Lumiria furrowed her brows with a frown.

"A family can always be made again can it not? A small price to pay considering what Enris offered. And if you're so bothered, can't you just start a family with him? If you're worried about your body, I can find you a suitable vessel." She offered.

"But that's... No, that's. That's not the point..." Griselda collapsed onto her knees.

Lumiria sold them out.

She was the one who handed over the coordinates to Vali's family.

All because she wanted to accept an offer that the Eclipse offered. The very enemies they were fighting against...

Griselda felt a knife stab her heart. Her devotion faltering.

She thought she could accept anything the moon did. But this...

She couldn't accept.

Chapter 783: Bastardised Technique

"Where is he even trying to go?" Alice frowned, looking at the map dotted with the locations that Syrion had visited.

Sometimes he looped in a circle within a given area, sometimes he made a beeline through the forests.

Sometimes he'd even try to cut through a village with people trying to stop him. But unless they struck first, Syrion was a beast that kept wandering.

No goal in sight.

"No clue. But if they didn't give us a marker, I don't think we would be able to track him at all." Gwen sighed in relief.

Looking at the compass in her hands, she could see a blood arrow pointing them towards the direction they need to go. Although...

The arrow was currently spinning in circles since they weren't in the right realm.

Syrion had been wandering in the Abyss.

"True..."

In preparation, Gwen had gone out of her way to buy some Abyss Blood to assist with the Hunt. Of course, at this level, this rarely changes the outcome but having defensive measures was always good.

First, Ironhide Basilisk Blood. Drinking this toughened their skin enough to deflect bladed attacks. It didn't make the drinker impenetrable though. Rather, this was an option in case they couldn't dodge in time, to dampen the blow.

Next, the Black Veil Ray blood. An aquatic beast with the power to help sever unseen tethers. To separate a user from their weapon.

And in Syrion's case, the floating blades that he can conjure.

Healing wise, Gwen can handle that as they doubt Syrion would give them a chance to heal mid fight. The blood had to be taken before the fight began.

Next was weapons.

Alice essentially crafted her own bow so she didn't need any upgrades. But what could do with a bit of help was her arrows. In this aspect, Gwen had blacksmiths prepare a set of arrows that she could 'enchant' in a sense, infusing them with the energy of the fragment she received from Solaris.

Alice, being the bundle of corruption that she is, had to force a smile while pretending that holding these arrows didn't sting like a motherf*cker.

Other preparation included some additional armour and padding, some traps to disrupt Syrion if needed. To create a diversion for them to regroup and plan out emergency plans.

All that's left now was to find the beast and hunt it down.

###

Alice sat on the carriage, lost in thought. She wasn't thinking about the hunt nor was she trying to figure out the vision right now.

All that's on her mind was the sudden news that she saw.

The collapse of the Verona Queendom.

A sudden shock to the world with the nation capital being wiped from the map, leaving nothing but a corrupted mess behind.

All travel to the nation was now blocked with both members of the Sun and Moon being tasked to investigate the matter.

A matter so dire that they even gave up the barricade they put around the East.

Alice wanted to check things out but it wasn't going to be easy. In fact, it's hard to believe that Caera would allow things to progress to such a stage.

So whatever happened must've been beyond their control.

Egil, Selen...

Alice was worried. They were both strong, strong enough to even fight a Lord if they make use of Selen's powers.

But this didn't feel like the work of a Lord.

No, this was far worse.

'An Outer God?'

Gwen could see the worry on Alice's face and she already tried to reassure her before. But with Alice having friends in the north, it was hard to be optimistic.

In the end, she could only promise that she'll tell her any news she gets from the north once the investigation comes back.

*Sigh...

Alice massaged her eyes.

"Tired?"

"A little." Alice nodded, her brows still creased with worry.

She hadn't been able to sleep properly ever since finding out the news.

Gwen wanted to say that they were going to be fine. But with the entire nation disappearing...

There was one piece of good news.

"My dad and aunt are checking out the place. If they're there, the investigation should run smoothly."

Understanding that Gwen was trying her best to cheer her up, Alice let out a sigh and nodded.

"Yea you're right. It's not like I can do anything all the way here anyways. It's out of my hands." She laid down on her side of the carriage.

This was a harsh remainder.

A remainder that she couldn't stay here for too long. Couldn't let herself get too attached to Gwen considering what she has to do later.

All she needed to do was to learn Vision then leave, nothing more nothing less.

There was no need to make it a complicated issue.

"Gwen..." Alice called out, surprising the girl.

"What's up?"

"Are there really no hints you can give me for Vision? I've been trying for a while now but again, the best I can do is an isolated instance of Zone." Alice asked.

She'll figure out Vision by the time they face Syrion. Once that's happened, she'll leave and regroup with Rosalyn and the others.

Gwen folded her arms.

She could guess that Alice was probably feeling a little rushed with the knowledge that a nation disappeared.

But even with Vision, this wasn't something she could just rush into.

"Vision is... complicated. When I asked aunty for some hints back then, she simply told me that doing so would be detrimental to my growth instead. To give me bad habits rather than discovering my own 'version' of Vision.

"But I guess... If I were to describe mine, it'll be similar to harmonising myself with my surroundings. But that's just for me okay? It might be something completely different for you." Gwen explained before hastily correcting herself.

She knew how frustrating it was to not make any progress so she wanted to help Alice. Just a slight nudge in the right direction.

"Harmonising huh?" Alice muttered.

Her current understanding of Vision was significantly lacking, even with this hint. The core issue that she was facing, the part that stumped her the most, was how Gwen and Shiera was able to apply this Vision without energy.

Alice dwelled on her words.

It was in times like this where perhaps Yvael's inspirations would be of a great help but there's nothing.

No a single spark.

She had to break down everything that Gwen said, salvage as many hints as possible.

Correct her approach if it was wrong.

First, the reason why she didn't want to say much was because of bad habits.

Shiera was afraid of Gwen developing bad habits if she gives hints.

Meaning...

[Vision is probably something that varies from person to person. Vision for someone else might be entirely based on sound for example. At least that's my understanding of it.] Cayla spoke up as Alice nodded her head.

Indeed, not wanting to give hints was simply because Shiera wanted Gwen to be the one to establish the 'shape' of her Vision. How it functioned.

Which can further be implied that there was no specific blueprint for this technique. It simply boils down to knowledge and execution.

Shiera and Gwen projected a vision from something 'above', Alice didn't necessarily have to do the same.

She didn't need to make her vision a one to one copy.

Perhaps this was her mistake from the start. Due to her own sight through Cayla, she had already unknowingly formed a bad habit.

'I need to reset to zero. To build it from the ground up.'

Alice wanted to guess that perhaps 'Vision' was simply an end result. The process didn't matter. In that regard, it was similar to working backwards.

An inverted process as compared to the Zone.

If the Zone was to project your senses out to the world, the inverted would be to accept and absorb the information projected by the things in the world.

To become a receptacle for information.

Alice had an idea.

This thought process... It reminded her of the marker.

During the break while they were waiting, Alice had decided to bite the bullet and dismantle the marker.

She had to admit, the technology they involved were quite impressive.

Rituals and contracts housed within a single object that tethers itself to the strands of energy that should be imperceivable.

But just like how you can't see air but know it's there, the device latches onto the signature and traces itself through the countless threads, the countless weaves before reaching the source.

It was both receiving and discharging energy down this line to form the connection.

And the key was empty crystal.

When the market is placed, the empty crystal stores and houses the unique signature for that being specifically. Whether that be their energy, their life force or even the unique blend of both Holy and Abyssal, the capsule stores and creates a unique 'code' used to track down the target.

Alice closed her eyes.

To harmonize, to receive. To find her own way to become a receptacle of information. It doesn't necessarily have to be devoid of energy like Gwen and Shiera. In fact, that should've never been the main goal to begin with.

There wasn't a sudden spark of inspiration or a eureka moment. No.

For Alice, she simply remembered one thing.

Her most trusty technique, her favourite attack, was one that she haphazardly copied without knowing the process.

She simply saw the results and did everything she could to recreate it using her own tools.

The Void Flux.

She didn't need Yrael's inspiration, she simply needed to do what she's been doing all this time.

And with that, Alice could see a potential path towards mastering the Vision.

A path unique to her, her constitution and her experiences.

Perhaps it was a new technique but most likely, it was a bastardised version of the Vision.

But Alice didn't care.

Now, she needed to experiment.

Chapter 784: Inversion Of Exile

In order to achieve Vision, there were certain requirements that Alice wanted to hit regardless of the method.

As Gwen mentioned, it was a harmonization of herself to her surroundings.

The second requirement was for her to become a receptacle of information.

When using Void Flux as an inspiration, Alice wasn't necessarily thinking about the destructive potential.

Rather, it was the process in which she first constructed this attack.

To gather all energy from her surroundings.

One of her greatest benefits right now was how she could 'read' the strands of energy that other's couldn't.

As for the first method... There was something she tried in the past, something that Cayla warned her against.

Something unique to her.

[Oh no no, you are NOT doing that.] Cayla widened her eyes.

'Why not? I just gotta be careful right?' Alice grinned.

[Hell no! careful doesn't even come close to the risks associated with it!]

What Alice was planning, what she wanted to make use of, was the Inversion of her fifth Sigil!

By turning Exile into harmonisation, she'll be able to fulfil the first requirement.

'Yeah no, I agree with Cayla here. That's a little too dangerous, even for you.' Alyss frowned.

If they were to fail when using the inversion, they would become fused with the world. Essentially dying in the process.

'Which is why we put fail safes in case that does happen. I'm not going to just try it without planning don't worry, there are still things I need to do before I attempt the first experiment.' Alice reassured.

In order to make this as safe as possible, she needed several triggered casts in place. A balancing act between exile and harmonisation.

Simply put, her triggered casts will be walking a tightrope, ensuring that Alice doesn't fall to either side.

"Seems like you got an idea on how to achieve Vision." Gwen smiled, noticing Alice chuckling to herself.

"Oh just a little one. A tad bit risky since it's not a Sigil I use often. But I think I can achieve something on the level of Vision." Alice sat up.

"Oh now you got me interested."

Gwen noticed that Alice or rather, Kaia, didn't talk about herself much. Even when asking about her Sigils, she was mostly evasive. Thus far, she's only demonstrated around 4 Sigils worth of power with the rest being made up for by her fighting experience.

Hearing Kaia speak about a Sigil she didn't use often, Gwen found herself filled with a burning curiosity.

Scratching her hair, Kaia sighed.

"My fifth Sigil allows me to... put myself in an enhanced state. While in this state, I get a lot of power but also risk being exiled from this realm the longer I stay in it. Meaning I'll be expelled to the Abyss or the Void with no way back." Kaia stuck out her tongue.

Gwen's smile twitched.

What kind of Sigil did Kaia get?!?!

"Inversely, I can also change it to harmonise with my surroundings instead. I anchor my existence to this realm. However, the issue with this is that if I anchor myself for too long, I'll turn myself into energy pretty much and die."

"What kind of double edged blade is this??? Why did you take it?!?!"

"You don't have to shout... But it's why I said it's not a Sigil I use often. But I'm thinking if I keep alternating between the two, I should be able to strike a balance between exile and anchoring. And if I can do that, I get a bunch of information plugged into my brain." Kaia pointed at her own head.

Seeing this, Gwen only had one thing to say.

"Are you crazy!?"

Vision was a strong technique. Very strong with few being able to use it. And by few, she meant that the amount of people that can use Vision could probably be counted on one hand.

But while it was a strong technique, it didn't mean she should risk her life constantly to use it! And more shocking than that, was Kaia's willingness to put herself at risk without a single care.

Looking at her expression, Gwen could tell that this was something that happened often. Enough where she didn't even find anything wrong with her.

Kaia believed that this was an acceptable price!

Gwen couldn't find the words she wanted to say. In the end, she let out a deep fatigued sigh and sat back down.

"I swear... Do you see me risking my life to achieve Vision? It shouldn't be a technique that warranted risking your life otherwise Aunty wouldn't make it. The reason why she adjusted the Zone in the first place was because of the harmful side effects." Gwen massaged her eyes.

"If Aunty heard what you said she would've beaten you a new one and taught you again from the ground up."

"You know, that doesn't sound too bad. But I doubt they have time for that considering... well the north." Kaia shrugged.

"True... It's not just the north either. So many gateways are being formed between the realms that people are starting to call it the end. The approaching ruin far in the horizon. There were even a few who are saying that the world will end in a year at this rate.

"Calculations based on how fast the barriers between our world was collapsing." Gwen explained.

It was a headache to deal with especially since she received a few reports asking her to help. But with her on the hunt for her seventh Sigil, she was spared.

She did not envy those that had to deal with people trying to spread the word that the world was ending on the streets.

You can't exactly silence them through death either since it wasn't heretical in the sense that they had corrupt powers. They were simply people fearing for what's to come.

"What is the Moon doing about all of this? It feels like it's mostly the Sun resolving these issues with your Dad and Aunty being the busiest of all of them." Kaia asked curiously.

Their world was 'governed' by the three Religions. Sun, Moon and Eclipse. There's no need to talk about what the Eclipse was doing seeing as how this chaos is exactly what they want.

But the Moon felt the most passive. They mostly worked in the background with Abyss Blood and made small movements here and there.

Even when seeing a Cardinal of the Moon, Tristan, he was mostly at the port for holiday. To spend time with his sister rather than doing something for the Moon.

"Well it's kind of to be expected. The Moon doesn't care much about the casualties since they believe in longevity through the soul rather than the body. But for us, the Sun, we preach about protection and preservation.

"Even if it's sometimes just for show, we still need to demonstrate to the people that we can protect them otherwise belief in the order will falter. As lazy as Solaris is, I will admit that this is something he does well." Gwen grumbled.

"Even if it's because of the work that my Dad does rather than him."

True to their doctrine, the Sun church acted as the first bastion, the shield of humanity. No matter the issue, they are there to protect the people while the Moon grants relief and healing in the back.

If the Sun was the shield, the Moon the healer, the Eclipse would be the sword.

Though when the sword is pointing towards humanity, it wasn't exactly something to be happy about.

Folding her arms, Kaia thought about it for a moment before opening her mouth.

"Say your dad wasn't part of the Sun and you had no connections to any of the Religions, which doctrine would you follow?"

A question that Gwen never really thought about. She loved her dad, where he went she would probably follow. They were family after all and they only had each other in this world.

But if he was taken out of the equation...

"First of all, definitely not the Eclipse. They revel in chaos and bloodshed and the world they envision is not a good one at all. So absolutely not.

"The Moon I don't like either. The words they preach are nice to the ears but what they do are anything but nice. Following them basically means you're dying anyways.

"The Sun... Well, from the outside perspective it's probably the best of the three. But after being inside, it's all appearance and no substance. The only reason why this order even works is because of the people inside rather than the God." Gwen analysed.

"So if I really had to choose one, it would be none of them. I'll probably just be a freelancer working and helping where I can. I don't have to be a Cardinal to help people, it just helps." She shrugged.

If Alice was being honest, she was of the same mindset.

Unfortunately, because Gwen's Dad was in the Sun, separating her from this Order was probably going to be hard.

Ignoring the fact that they could be enemies in the future, Alice focused on setting up the right trigger casts needed to balance things out. And soon, they reached the gateway leading to the Abyss.

But it was a little... different to her initial expectations.

Rolling storm clouds hovered above the cavity leading into the depths, lightning that struck down from above.

And this pungent Abyssal miasma...

"Are you SURE this leads to Syrion?" Alice's smile twitched.

Rather than Syrion, it felt like this gateway would lead to the depths, perhaps even Terminus.

And if they were to land there, it would be VERY bad news.

"Yep, it says Syrion is past this gateway." Gwen was a little unsure but the compass didn't falter. It pointed directly at the gate.

Scratching her hair, Alice sighed and nodded towards Gwen.

The two of them jumped down.

Chapter 785: Return To The Abyss

"Holy sh*ttttt!!!!!" Alice screamed, falling down the gateway towards the Abyss.

The air beneath her cracked like glass beneath a hammer, the shattering of countless barriers. Stands of energy whipping around them, the unravelling of space itself.

Pulsing, warping, undulating pulses of the walls of this gateway.

A feeling that the Abyss was alive and thus swallowing them whole.

This wasn't a welcoming gateway, it wasn't a gentle stroll down the stairs. It was a consumption. Darkness rushed past them, invisible forces tossing them around, the wholes of unknown voices overlapping one another.

'I DO NOT remember it being this sh*tty to go into the Abyss!' She screamed in her mind.

[That's because it was Kaden who tossed you. But I will admit, THIS is far more turbulence than usual!] Cayla frowned.

While they already knew that the Will was doing something to the Abyss, seeing it react so... violently was something different entirely.

A passageway, while rough, shouldn't cause such turbulence.

Alice tried to create some balance using ice but the support was shattered immediately.

"Do you have any ideas!?" Alice turned to Gwen who was sitting with her legs crossed.

She seemed nonchalant at the current situation.

"Oh me? Oh no, we're f*cked." Gwen admitted truthfully.

Alice felt the sudden urge to strangle this girl in front of her.

[That's how it feels!]

Ignoring Cayla's celebration, Alice gritted her teeth.

"Hold onto me!" Alice shouted, creating a bow beneath her.

Several ice arrows started to form one after and she shot at the passage!

With their surroundings constantly dismantling whatever they create, Alice decided to use that to their advantage.

To create several large chunks of ice that when subjected to the unique properties of the passage, would become thin sheets that'll slow their descent.

*CRACK SHATTER!!!

The sound of ice breaking echoed out as the duo continued to crash through the layers.

Just as Alice was about to create another layer of ice, she noticed a sudden decrease in resistance.

A point of weakness within the passage and the two of them were being forced out!

*RUMBLE!!!

An invisible force pushed them to the side.

Up became down, left became right.

Tumbling through the air, even someone like Alice felt like throwing up.

As they were expelled from the passage, Alice sensed the familiar pressure of the Abyss. A sense of relaxation like making it back home after a long and busy day.

She could feel her entire body being revitalised. Yet before she could even relax, she came face to face with a pair of eyes.

Falling into a giant cloud of purple haze, a storm of smoke and shadows, the duo saw a pair of jaws breaking through the obscuring layer.

A body concealed yet two pairs of violet beady eyes pierced through the disguise. A long, drooping tongue flanked on the sides by serrated fangs dripping with purple saliva.

[Shadow Haze Tyrant – ◆◆◆◆◆◆]

A six star beast!

Usually, Alice wouldn't care if it was just a single six star beast. She could kill them with ease any day of the week.

But this wasn't just a single one.

It wasn't just two either.

No, there was a whole pack of them!

Within the cloud, Alice could see countless names flickering through the area.

They were surrounded.

[Careful! They're usually called Shadow Haze Spectres, a four star beast that hunts in large packs. One is weak but a whole pack can take down a six star beast with some sacrifice due to their poison!] Cayla warned, immediately putting her knowledge to use.

'Four??? I'm pretty sure I see six f*cking stars above their head!'

[Yeah no sh*t! Why do you think I said usually? These aren't Shadow Haze Spectres, they've all been enhanced!]

Gritting her teeth, Alice clenched her fist and projected a massive cloud of cold mist, freezing the haze that the beasts were emitting.

"They're not your average beast! Stronger than normal, very potent poison!" Alice shouted over to Gwen who was already wrapping herself in an emerald fire.

"Yeah I figured. My body was already starting to paralyse, you don't feel it?" Gwen raised an eyebrow in surprise.

"Not at all! Must be slow acting since I have some resistance, I'll probably feel it later!" Alice quickly made up an excuse before pointing her bow at the pack nose diving towards them.

"Enchant, Flame Renewal, Radiant Spirit!" Gwen activated her blessings one after the other.

Without chanting, they were weaker than what they could be. But it's not as though they have the luxury of time right now.

Even with her purification, Gwen felt sluggish. Her muscles were tightening up and each breath she took was becoming more difficult.

*RUMBLE!!!

Activating the Fragment of the Sun, Gwen felt a reservoir of power surge from within. Golden markings spread across her body and divinity filled her veins.

The poison was immediately purged, as expected of an artifact that's super effective against Abyssal Energy.

"We got two options, do you want to try kill them all or run?" Gwen asked curiously.

Since she was here as a duo rather than solo, she wanted to make sure she got Kaia's input as well.

"Does it look like they'll let us run? Look at the way they're staring at us." Alice rolled her eyes.

Frankly, their stares freak her out a little. Single minded beasts that only want to kill whatever's in front of them right now.

There seemed to be no thoughts behind those eyes.

"Us? Seems to me they're more focused on you than me." Gwen laughed, shifting herself to the side yet the beast's gaze didn't follow Gwen.

Instead, they were securely fastened to Alice's figure.

"F*ck!"

"Seems like they're in love with you Kaia~ Why don't you give them an autograph?" Gwen grinned.

"The only autograph they want is my flesh!"

Creating three ice arrows, Alice narrowed her eyes and fired them at the closest targets.

Right before the arrows were about to collide, they split into countless fragments, embedding themselves into the beast's body.

*KRK!!!!

In an instant, a layer of ice formed around the beast, ceasing the production of smoke but it wasn't dead yet.

Even in the ice, its eyes were focused on Alice.

'Freaky b*stards!'

With the ground rapidly approaching, Alice snapped her finger, creating a ramp of ice beneath her to slow down her descent.

In the meantime, Gwen got to work.

Fighting them in close quarters was annoying. Even with the Fragment of the Sun, inhaling too much of their poison and her body will lock up.

There's no telling if they'll suddenly turn their attention to Gwen despite being focused on Alice right now.

Summoning her spear, Gwen twirled the weapon around her body as the blade of the spear began to lit up with radiant flames.

With a twist, she slashed the spear up, unleashing a blazing arc that tore through several beasts, splitting the poison cloud in half!

Alice could see her targets better now.

Creating four ice arrows, she aimed precisely for their open jaws and fired!

The arrowhead pierced the back of their mouth before detonating!

Bursting out from the back of their heads were countless crimson spikes of ice!

"Remind me to reject you if you ever wanted to shoot an apple above my head." Gwen winced, seeing the limp corpses crash against the ground with a nasty splat.

"So you don't want me to shoot an apple above your head, but what if you held it in your mouth?" Alice slid down the ice ramp, coming to a stop before firing more arrows.

In her sight, she could count around 10 that were in close proximity and not suitable for her arrows.

Clicking her tongue, she dismissed her bow, opting for a sword inside.

Bending back to dodge the bite of the first beast, she stabbed up, piercing the underside of the jaw.

A second beast piled on, its purple saliva searing the ground beneath her with a single touch.

Using the first as a shield, Alice pressed her palm against its chest, firing a giant formation of ice that killed both.

Three more tried to pile on top but Gwen was there to cover Alice.

With a horizontal swing of her spear, the beasts were bisected horizontally with their wounds being charred almost instantly.

Taking the vanguard position, Gwen stepped towards the horde.

Her Vision expanded and a golden glow flickered through her eyes.

*BANG!!!

Her spear slammed into the side of a beast's head, breaking the skull and crushing the brain before knocking the corpse aside.

Bending down, she used the momentum to punch a hole through the next using the spearhead, destroying its heart and shattering the spine.

Kicking away the corpse, Gwen swiped up, creating a torrent of flames that burned the third to a crisp while three frozen arrows flew past her head, killing the fourth lunging from below.

Yet despite killing so many, the pack wasn't letting up at all. Each one held the mentality of trying its best to land at least one attack, no matter the sacrifice.

"They're bat sh*t f*cking insane!" Alice cursed.

She had never seen such bloodthirsty beasts that didn't even care for their own survival.

Even after killing so many, a normal pack should've dispersed by now!

Gwen's eye twitched for a moment, her body locked up briefly and her spear was slow.

From above, one of the Shadow Haze Tyrants pried open its mouth, unleashing a waterfall of poison smoke towards Gwen.

Alice stepped in, detonating a blast of cold mist into the air and freezing the poison before it could reach them.

Just as the frozen poison shattered apart, her pupils constricted at the sight she saw.

In the distance, more purple clouds were rushing towards them!

Reinforcements!

Chapter 786: Returning Home

Alice stomped her heel against the skull of the beast, ripping out her blade.

"Is... Is that all of them?" She took a deep breath, unable to believe the sheer number of beasts that they had to kill.

After the first wave of reinforcements, two more waves had showed up, forcing them into a battle of attrition.

Gwen tried her best to cull their numbers but the beasts learned their lesson and stayed far away, only attacking when her body locked up due to the poison.

But when that happened, Alice stepped in and covered for her.

It wasn't a difficult fight, just an exhausting one.

"I think that's all of them. I don't see anything else." Gwen wiped her sweat away while coating herself with a layer of fire, burning away the poison and Abyss Blood.

But more importantly, she was concerned about Kaia's body.

"Are you sure you're fine?"

The poison was strong enough to even penetrate her purifying flames, albeit just for a moment.

Yet Kaia was completely unfazed.

Sure she gave her a small buff but it shouldn't be enough to completely ignore the poison like this.

Gwen's suspicions were beginning to increase once more.

She had previously suspected Alice of being the one responsible for the corruption. However, she ruled it off once they fought and got to know each other.

The fact that she was her aunt's disciple was also helped.

But once again, she was having her doubts.

*BLERGH!!!

"Huh?"

Hearing the sound of throwing up behind her, Gwen turned back to see Kaia hurling up poison that sizzled against the ground.

"What the hell is that thing?!" Alice looked at the beasts in disgust.

If she hadn't thrown it up, her body would've taken a while to digest it. Sure, it wouldn't harm her.

But she'll be walking around feeling like sh*t until it passes.

And with a difficult fight coming up, she did NOT want that kind of distraction.

Alice looked and saw Gwen's surprise.

"What? Never seen a girl throw up? Trust me, give me a night of alcohol and you'll see it in the morning." Alice rolled her eyes.

"Pft! No no, it's nothing. Seems like you store poisons or impurities in your body if you're throwing it all up now." Gwen laughed.

"Kind of? Urg... I feel like there might still be some left in my body." Alice groaned, feeling a lack of energy and not wanting to use this time to explain.

If Gwen had already come to her own conclusion, then so be it.

Seeing Alice struggling with purging the poison, Gwen felt bad for even suspecting her and hoisted her over her back.

"What are you doing?" Alice groaned, feeling the urge to throw up again.

"We can't stay here since the blood will attract other beasts. I'll carry you while we go after Syrion." Gwen reassured with a laugh.

"If I throw up on your shoulder, don't blame me..." Alice closed her eyes.

"I won't-"

*Blergh~

"..."

"..."

*Sizzle...

Gwen set Alice down and got herself a new jacket.

###

Syrion marched towards an unknown destination.

As of late, more and more memories began to resurface. They weren't major memories, just his day to day life.

But even so, they were memories that urged him on for another day.

"So you've come again. If you wish to converse or simply to observe, why don't you walk with me?" He glanced back, noticing Griselda watching him not far away.

Pausing for a moment, Griselda stood next to him and walked.

"They arrived." She spoke after a brief pause.

"Oh?"

"The one who claimed your bounty. A child of the Sun." Griselda explained with Syrion rubbing his chin.

"Then I suppose I'll have to find my destination soon haha~ I wouldn't want to die before finding it." He let out a hearty laugh, surprising Griselda who turned towards the Sovereign.

"Don't look at me with such eyes old friend, you and I both now that I've been dead for a long time, wandering these lifeless plains in search of home." Syrion chuckled, taking a deep breath and looking up at the sunless sky.

"But what about your fam-"

"I may not remember but I can still make guesses. Every time I remember her face, every time I feel my son's hand, I feel a stabbing pain in my chest. My mind is blank but my heart knows. The other me, the one who wanders with a single purpose. 'He' probably remembers the bitterness clearly right?" Syrion interrupted, placing his hand over his chest.

From the fragmented memories, he started to piece together the clues of what truly happened.

What occurred at the end of his life.

How he ended in this state.

Griselda couldn't say anything. As expected, it was too cruel to prolong her friend's suffering. Doing so would just be fulfilling her own selfish desires.

"The child of the sun should take a while to find you. As for what you're looking for, let me take you there. But..." Griselda hesitated.

The location of his home has long become a den of monsters. A piece of the surface that was swallowed into the Abyss centuries ago.

Even so, she had remembered its coordinates, cleared out the beasts when she went to visit and tried her best to maintain the home in its original state.

"It doesn't matter what state it's in, I simply wish to rest at home."

Hearing this, Griselda revealed a helpless smile.

Despite his tough exterior and expressions, he was a family man. Someone who cared more about his family than whatever was going on.

A guardian with a heart of gold.

"Alright, I'll take you there."

This was her final gift to her old friend. A man who gave far too much to the moon, a man who lost everything he held dear.

This was her apology.

###

*Huff... Huff... Huff...

Blood on the walls, corpses on the ground.

She ran, ran and ran some more.

Behind her, a flickering crimson shadow chasing after her.

No matter what she did, it persisted.

"Stop watching already!"

But no matter how she called out to the one hovering above her, she refused to move.

"Oop, careful, there's something else in front." The floating woman chuckled, pointing at a lunch of shadows that suddenly grew a pair of eyes and a mouth.

Gritting her teeth, lightning surged through the woman's body.

Raikiri!

A quick draw! A thunderous arc and a destructive line. The ground tore apart from her attack but the shadow split itself into two before recombining.

Her attack missed!

Ria felt the sweat soaking her body, deep bags beneath her eyes as she hasn't been able to sleep properly.

Beasts chasing after her from all directions, this suffocating pressure and miasma.

And worse of all, Astrelya who hovered above her like a lamp in the darkness. She projected her energy outwards, drawing beasts towards them in droves, forcing Ria into life threatening situations.

"CAN YOU STOP! I'm already struggling with two!" Ria howled, stomping down and forcefully activating her second resonance.

If the shadow won't die, she had to kill the thing behind her!

Shinsei Raikiri!

Her fastest strike then combined with two fold lightning!

The afterimage behind her snapped forward as her attack pierced a hole into the beast.

Yet the crimson one looked down at the whole, smiled and watched it heal.

"Tsk! Perverted regen!" Ria cursed, crouching down and expanding a cage of lightning that encompassed all four of them.

Astrelya didn't care, this bit of lightning could never hurt her.

One regenerated while the other split apart. What she had to do was to keep hitting like a furious thunderstorm until nothing was left!

Drawing her blade, countless arcs of lightning struck out as Ria's body disappeared.

Fragmented afterimages that filled the area kept multiplying, converging, multiplying, converging.

Each conversion would cause a slash that destroyed a part of the beast.

A finely woven net of raw destruction in which everything in the area was reduced to dust!

*BANG!!!

With a final slash, Ria reappeared in the middle of a crater.

Everything within her cage was destroyed, even the surroundings yet Astrelya was completely untouched.

"Hm... that get s passable grade. But still not enough." Astrelya smiled.

Before Ria could even question what that meant, a chilling killing intent filled the area as shadows began to converge once more.

And within this shadow, sparks of crimson.

Both targets were still alive!

"You're still lacking that killing edge my dear. So much potential bundled into one yet you're refusing to tap into it. Don't you think it's a waste?" Astrelya asked with a sigh but Ria tossed a lightning bolt at her.

"Shut up. I don't care what you think but I'll deal with it my own way. So either you help out or shut the f*ck up and just watch." Ria glared, veins bulging on her neck.

But as much as she hated it, Astrelya was right.

Against the beasts of Terminus, her blades weren't enough.

She needed something more.

Speed wasn't enough.

Her edge needed something else in order to properly kill the enemies she'll be facing.

But to trust in the Eclipse was to walk past a line of no return.

A choice she refused to make!

"That arrogance and stubbornness will kill you dear Ria. You are not ready for these two." Astrelya spoke without emotion. Her eyes staring down at Ria who froze up.

A sudden burning hot sensation from her back and the creeping of pain.

Blood gushing from her lips as she slowly looked down.

Ria could see an arm piercing the side of her stomach.

A sense of death.

Chapter 787: Fighting In Terminus

"!!!" Ria's eyes shot open, she quickly sat up in a panic and felt the area around her stomach.

Empty.

There was no wound yet her outfit was torn all the same.

No beast would be kind enough to let her go after that kind of ordeal so...

"Did you save me?" Ria asked, turning her gaze towards the figure sitting on a withered tree not far from her.

"Save is a rather broad term. I may have stopped you from dying but you're still trapped in Terminus girlie." Astrelya grinned in amusement. "I didn't kill these two either so they'll keep chasing you until you kill them."

Snapping her finger, a cage of starlight manifested, displaying the two beasts that she caught earlier.

Ria frowned.

“So here’s what we’re going to do. If you’re too weak, dear Alice won’t give me the time of day for our duel. So you need to improve. The best way would be the bundle of potential inside you but since you’re firm on the matter, I won’t push for it.” Astrelya hopped off the branch and walked over to Ria.

“While we’re here in the Abyss, you are going to die. Every time you die, I’ll bring you back. Over and over until your mind crumbles or your body gives up. Alternatively, you can get stronger and kill them instead.” She held up Ria’s chin, making eye contact.

“But even if you do, you’ll face something stronger until I don’t need to bring you back anymore. I will emphasise this. Even if there is a portal leading out, I will break that passage in half and keep you locked in here.” Astrelya narrowed her eyes.

“And you think we should do this in Terminus?” Ria’s smile twitched.

There was something strange about Astrelya. But that strangeness could stem from her desire to die the way she wants to.

“Why not Terminus? Is this not the best place? So either you harness that talent inside of you or choose something else. In the first place, I don’t see why you’re so against the Eclipse.” Astrelya sighed, letting go of Ria.

“Isn’t that obvious?” Ria frowned.

Who wouldn’t deny the Eclipse after knowing everything they do?

“Not at all. If anything, I don’t think they’re too bad. Sure the rituals and blood goes a little far but in our world, when is there not blood? Wars and famine happen all the time, oppression, chaos, tyranny. You name it, humans have done it.” Astrelya yawned, floating on a bed of stars.

"I've seen people mask their greed with goodwill, rulers that exploit their citizens the moment something goes wrong. Honestly, I've grown so tired of this farce..."

Ria wanted to reply but with what?

Astrelya wasn't wrong.

"So just because the Eclipse put that at the forefront, are they really so bad? Of course, all the blood rituals and killings are bad don't get me wrong, but it's all a matter of perspective don't you think?" Astrelya asked with a smirk.

". . . Perspective huh." Ria sighed.

Perspective was a funny thing. What can kill can also save.

Just look at Abyss Blood.

A potion that can save you in times of need yet take too much and you become mutated beyond recognition. A fate worse than death.

But that was the price you needed to pay.

So what about the Eclipse? Was there something that could be redeemed from this cult?

Ria couldn't see it.

War, famine, rituals.

Just the thought of it disgusted her to her core.

“If you dislike them so much, why don’t you change the application of power?”

Ria looked up in surprise, it felt as though Astrelya was reading her mind.

“What do you mean?”

“I wonder~ That’s for you to figure out.” Astrelya stuck out her tongue before closing her eyes, not wanting to respond.

Snapping her finger, the cages around the beasts came undone.

Quickly jumping back, Ria unsheathed her sword but it was already too late.

A limb pierced her stomach once more.

“You motherf*cker... At least warn me if you’re going to let them out...”

###

Gwen had to change her outfit several times on the journey as Alice had ingested far more poison than they expected.

Every so often, a little would just dribble from her mouth without knowing. It was only when it began to sizzle and burn Gwen’s outfit did they realise.

“I’m starting to think you want me to run out of outfits.” Gwen’s smile twitched.

It wasn’t as though her jackets were simple clothing either. Each one had been reinforced with skills and so on. A meticulous weave of fabric soaked in a specific type of blood.

Yet all of them, without fail, sizzled and broke under the effects of the poison.

Which only confuses Gwen more as the question remained.

“How the hell can you have this much poison in your body?!?!?” Gwen shouted, pointing at her last change of clothes.

“Urg... I told you not to blame me if I throw up on you.” Alice groaned.

It had exceeded even her own expectations as this felt similar to the time she was in the Zenia prison. Days when they would over experiment, causing her body to collapse under the side effects. It took a whole day before she would be back to normal.

[The Shadow Haze poison shouldn't be this potent. It must've been the enhancements that's been happening.] Cayla frowned.

With how much poison was inside Alice's body, it would've been enough to kill a person 10 times over. Which was to be expected considering how many of these beasts they actually killed.

Not to mention the fact that nothing was protecting Alice from the fumes.

‘Yeah... Even if I can resist the effects, I should still avoid them when I can...’ Alice nodded weakly.

She's been over reliant on her physique for too long.

Now that it's reached this stage, she could only blame herself.

After throwing up so much poison, Alice estimated that around 35% was still left inside her body. Not enough to stop her from fighting but definitely distracting.

Looking at Alice who was sprawled out on the ground with poison seeping from her lips, Gwen let out a deep sigh.

Indeed, people have different ways to deal with poison. What worked for her was clearly struggling to keep up this time.

“Forget it. I’ll carry you with something else. If you ruin this shirt as well I’m actually going to hit you.” Gwen shook her head.

Walking over to a sturdy looking tree, she cut it down using her spear and turned parts of it into flat planks.

Tying everything together, she turned it into a makeshift board for Alice to lay on so that she could carry her along without worrying about her outfit.

“Urg... Thanks...” Alice slowly climbed up onto the board.

“Don’t worry about it. Just make sure you’re feeling better before we fight Sy-”

*COUGH!!!

*Sizzle...

“Ah...” Alice wanted to cry. She felt a stinging sensation in the back of her throat and along with it came an uncontrollable cough. She didn’t think the moment she coughed, the poison would splatter on Gwen’s shirt.

“That was your-”

“That was my last shirt yes.” Gwen interrupted, a vein bulging on the side of her forehead.

Feeling guilty, Alice quickly rummaged through her pouch looking for a spare change of clothing but everything she found was too small for Gwen!

When she disguised herself, she created the clothes alongside her disguise so she didn't need to buy anything bigger!

Not to mention the fact that these were all normal pieces of clothing rather than something reinforced like the ones that Gwen was wearing.

There was one other option though...

She could perhaps repurpose some of Velouria's work-

[Don't you f*cking dare.] Cayla glared with bloodthirst.

'Yeah I didn't think so.' Even if Cayla didn't say anything, Alice felt like the moment she repurposed the outfits, Velouria would probably scream from her grave.

"Turn around." Gwen spoke coldly.

Since it was her fault, Alice could only do as she was told when Gwen smacked her on the butt with her hand enhanced with blessings.

"HYAH!" Alice let out a cry as tears formed around her eyes.

She was already feeling unwell from the poison and now there was a stinging sensation on her ass, threatening to purify her.

"Just lay down and stop throwing up on me." Gwen huffed, tossing away her shirt into her bag.

Unfortunately, once the overall structure of the shirt was broken, the protective warding pretty much fell apart.

They were turned into normal everyday outfits with no other use.

Changing into something normal, Gwen could only hope that she could get away with this much. They had other preparations for Syrion.

###

The chase for Syrion lasted longer than Gwen would've hoped. Thankfully, Alice recovered on the second day, allowing them to pick up the pace of their travel.

Meanwhile, Alice was still feeling guilty over ruining Gwen's outfits so she took charge in killing most of the beasts on the way there, making sure to avoid attacks whenever she could.

No matter how resistant her body was, she could still be taken out of commission.

Even more so now that they've all been enhanced through strange means.

"Seems like we found our target." Alice frowned.

After travelling for a while, the compass started to shift more often whenever they took a slight turn.

A sign that they were close.

And as expected, they saw an intimidating figure sitting next to a tree. Hanging on one of the branches was an empty swing that he was pushing with his hands.

Not far from the swing was a house, strangely well kept yet abandoned. A family home.

It was time for Gwen to claim her final bounty.

Chapter 788: Talking With Syrion

"Ladies, why stand so far away? Why don't we have a talk?" Syrion was the first to speak, already noticing the presence of the two that have come to claim his life.

How could he not?

Gwen frowned as she and Alice looked at one another for a moment before standing up.

"What are you playing at?" Gwen asked cautiously.

She summoned a spear while deploying her Vision, ensuring that there weren't any traps around them.

"Nothing much. I simply wish to converse with the one who's been tasked to take my head.

"But please, no weapons near the house. I don't want my old home to be destroyed in the process." Syrion chuckled, glancing back briefly before turning his attention back to the swing.

Gwen stopped walking, as did Alice.

"We're here to fight, I don't think words are necessary." Gwen was on guard. She hadn't seen a beast that acted this way before.

It wasn't the first time she's seen a six star beast but one that wished to talk before they even fought? Almost unheard of.

Most of the time, they would make sure they have the upper hand before talking. Before that moment, they would focus on overpowering their opponent instead.

"You're right, words are unnecessary. However, I do hope you can spare an old man a bit of time."
Syrion let out a sigh, standing up while massaging his shoulders.

Seeing this, Alice drew her bow.

*BANG!!!

"!!!"

Before Alice could even fire, a blade dropped down from above, cutting off her shot.

"Not towards my house. Do so and I'll drop my courtesy." Syrion warned, killing intent cold as ice flooding towards the two.

Gwen took half a step back unknowingly while Alice stood her ground.

A frown on her face.

The blade had evaded her Zone.

Either his attacks have a unique property or this man knew how to battle people with Zone.

"I see that you two are members of the Sun. Surely followers of protection and preservation understand when to fight and when to take a step back?"

"So I offer an invitation, to sit down and talk like civilised people instead of barbarians. How this plays out is your decision." Syrion asked once more, retrieving the blade.

Gwen took a deep breath and sighed.

"Alright, we can talk."

Alice dismissed her bow and followed behind Gwen who walked towards the beast.

The two took face to face and their heights were made apparent.

Syrion was even taller than Allura, dwarfing Alice.

"Unfortunately, I am unable to step into my house without risking its destruction, so let us sit outside. It's my favourite spot when I was still alive after all. Not only could I train my sword but I could also watch my son play on his swing." Syrion chuckled, gesturing to a set of chairs and tables near the house.

As for him, he simply sat on the ground.

"So what did you want to talk about? I'm sure you know what we're here for so why?" Gwen asked the burning question on her mind.

"Because I found my home. If you can track me, I'm sure you know of my travels. Walking aimlessly in search of something. Well... this was my something." Syrion smiled behind his helmet, his hand gently caressing the brittle wooden pillars holding up a portion of the roof.

"On my travels, I've depraved countless who had a family to return to. A bitter feeling. So, I thought to myself, if you were my supposed executioners, why don't I get to know you a little better." Syrion laughed.

Both Alice and Gwen were shocked at his casual attitude. A man who could laugh even though he knew people were here to kill him. Was it confidence or was it simply who he was?

"But glad I am to see that you two can be reasoned with. A few folks found me before and attacked without care, even if it meant dragging my house along in the battle." Syrion sighed.

Beneath his sigh was an undercurrent of rage.

One could tell that this house meant everything to him.

Empty and worn it may be but it was his treasure.

"And in recent days, as the date of my supposed death approaches, I found myself remembering more and more about my life. Of who I once was. So instead of fighting like a beast, I'd rather go out as a man. To understand who I am fighting against.

"Therefore, why don't we talk?" Syrion offered.

Alice was the first to speak.

"Can you drink?"

"Hah! Can I drink? Of course I can. What man can't? Though I'm nothing but a husk of armour, I haven't tried drinking liquor yet." Syrion bashed his fist against his chest as his armour let out a hollow rumble.

Regardless, Alice pulled out a bottle of mead. Not Ayrian mead but good mead nevertheless.

"Why do you have that prepared..." Gwen sighed. She could already feel a headache coming.

Even though the one in front of them was someone close to becoming a Lord, Alice was still acting relaxed.

Gwen couldn't sit still, worried that he might attack at a moment's notice.

"Why wouldn't I have some mead? You never know when it might be your last drink so might as well be prepared." Alice shrugged, tossing a glass to Syrion who caught it in surprise.

Alice's attitude had baffled him as well, but he welcomed it.

Too long has he endured bloodshed on his journey.

Now that he was home, he simply wished to relax.

Alice took the first drink, leaning back and letting out a satisfied sigh.

After throwing up poison recently, she needed this.

Gwen was the next, surprised at the sweet liquor that Alice preferred while Syrion was last.

He simply did it out of respect and expected it to only be a gesture.

But to his surprise, he could... taste it.

This drink...

"A gift." Alice winked.

"Ah... So it is." Syrion chuckled.

He wasn't actually drinking it.

Rather, a memory, a hallucination.

To make him think he was, to experience what the sensation was like.

With all of them taking a drink, Syrion started the conversation.

"You know, as someone who remembers my life as a man, a husband, it never occurred to me that I would become a beast. It makes you wonder doesn't it? Souls." He began, looking at the swing.

"The Moon Church's focus is all about souls. To ferry you into the sweet beyond. Yet here I am, walking the wretched earth. It makes a man think, makes a man wonder. If my wife and son were waiting for me, or if they were in a similar situation."

A heavy topic that Gwen didn't know how to approach.

"Perhaps you didn't die but rather transformed when you were alive." Alice replied, taking another drink.

There were a few ways to become a beast and succumbing to side effects was simply one of them.

"Haha... You're right, that is the ideal scenario. Not becoming a beast of course, but rather the fact that I haven't died yet." Syrion let out a laugh.

Talking to himself during his journey has been ever so dull. Even his conversation with his old friend was brief.

It felt like she was doing it because she owed him, because she felt guilty.

They couldn't have a heart to heart.

So he was grateful, grateful that Alice was behind honest with him.

It made him feel alive and human rather than a beast.

"Truly, what a horrible world we live in. With my hands I have deprived so many of their chance to return home... Do you think that when I die, I'll see my family?"

In a sense, he felt like he was asking for forgiveness. For the things he's done during the years of wandering.

The guilt he feels knowing that people were simply attacking him because he's become a beast.

If it was him, he would probably do the same.

But now that he was a beast, he knew the perspective of the other side.

Even beasts had feelings. Thoughts of their own.

"I don't know. But I hope you do." Alice spoke honestly.

"Thank you... What about you? Do you have a family to return to?" Syrion asked hesitantly.

If it could be helped, he wished they would walk away. A bounty was a bounty, walking away was not an option.

"I do. I got friends and family that I treasure more than anything." Alice chuckled.

There was a softness in her expression, one that Gwen hadn't seen before.

A piece of her true self.

She didn't want to dwell on it.

"What about you young lady? You got someone waiting for you as well?" Syrion turned to Gwen who nodded.

"Mnm, I do. My father."

Hearing this, Syrion turned to the duo and reached out, patting both of their heads.

"You two are strong, stronger than most that I've already seen. Keep that feeling of returning to your family close to your chest and it will grant you strength like no other."

Despite his cold armour, his hand felt warm.

A father's hand.

"So, which one of you are here to claim my head?" Syrion retracted his hand, asking fearlessly with an invisible grin on his face.

"Bit of a brutal question don't you think? We're still drinking here." Alice raised an eyebrow but Syrion shrugged.

"What use is there to dodge the issue?"

"That is true..." Gwen sighed. "It's me. I'm the one who accepted your bounty."

"Hou? A young lady like you are already taking on someone like me? The new generation are truly talented haha! So I ask you, why do you want my power?"

Gwen contemplated. She knew that he wanted the truth from her, a moment to reflect on what she wanted to do.

In the end, there was only one choice. Her true desire after all these years of servitude.

"So I can kill Solaris if I have to."

Chapter 789: To Kill A God

"So I can kill Solaris if I have to." Gwen declared, her eyes cold.

Alice almost choked on her drink and Syrion froze up.

Neither of them expected such a declaration from Gwen, not even Alice.

She knew that there was some distrust but she didn't think it was on the level of wanting to kill a God.

"Young Lady... Killing a God is no easy task. In fact, it's frankly impossible for mortal selves to do so. And as you are someone who belongs to the Sun, you realise what you just said constitutes as heresy right?" Syrion pointed out.

Gwen nodded her head.

She knew full well how insane it sounds.

"Solaris is too prone in abusing his power. His lazy attitude, his pride and arrogance. He's no God, he's just someone that happened to be born lucky. I'll never accept someone like that as a God." Gwen frowned, glancing down at her drink.

"My dad is better than him." She pouted, feeling anger rising up in her chest the more she thought about it.

"Hahaha! Seems like you love your father a lot. Enough where you want to overthrow a God." Syrion laughed, patting Gwen's head.

"To feel such love from his daughter, your father is blessed to have you. Such love is every father's dream."

"But how do you even plan on killing a God? Just having Abyssal abilities won't be enough. It won't even be enough for an Apostle." Alice spoke up.

Since Gwen had plans to overthrow Solaris, she wanted to find out a little more. If... If things go well, she might not have to leave after exposing her identity.

They could work together with Gwen being her spy inside the Sun.

A spy.

Hearing this question, Gwen paused.

Indeed, it was easy to say such things but doing so was another matter on its own.

In fact, she couldn't even imagine how she would defeat her father never mind Solaris.

The power given by Solaris might be enough to make a weapon but how would she use it?

The Gods have a myriad of weapons at their disposal. Myths and legends that manifest as powers far beyond the Abyssal gifts.

So what then?

Syrion wasn't in a rush to comfort Gwen from the harsh truth.

Sometimes one needs to find out the bitter reality before making progress.

"You also need to remember, Apostles are fragments of Gods. They've been given a portion of the God's authority. What the Apostles can do, the Gods can do better.

"And you already told me yourself. Solaris almost killed you because you were having doubts. Even if your father is an Apostle, I don't think Solaris would tolerate that." Alice reminded.

"In fact, I would even hazard a guess that he'll find a chance to dismiss your father and deal with the two of you at the same time."

Gwen clenched her fist.

*Sigh...

Scratching her hair, Alice felt a little harsh but it had to be said.

"However... Killing Gods isn't impossible. The Abyssal Goddess, she died under the assault of the three Gods and... a betrayer." Alice frowned.

Syrion turned his gaze towards her in surprise.

"How did you find out?"

Even for him, he was only able to find out near the end of his life due to his contributions and loyalty.

He knew that the Gods worked hard to hide the existence of Ayr and its Goddess. Hell, most people don't even know a Goddess died much less it was by the hands of a betrayer.

"I like my history books." Alice lied.

"I don't think history books dive so deep into these things. If they did, I'm pretty sure the churches would've gotten to them." Syrion called her out but Alice simply shrugged her shoulder.

"Regardless, to kill a God, you must be someone capable of much more than Apostles." Alice summarized even though she knew of a method.

Well, calling it a method wasn't quite accurate.

It was simply the attack that did the most damage to Enris when she was in the Inverted World.

Using the Natural Laws of a Realm to crush a God's avatar that they manifest.

However, baiting them to use it was difficult since they too knew of the risks. Enris only did so because she didn't think Nyer would be capable of using the Natural Laws while Velouria lost too much control.

Yet it was this same expectation that bit her back as Nyer managed to do just that.

Control the Laws to crush her avatar.

"Your friend isn't wrong. So, do you think you can do that young lady?" Syrion smiled, turning his gaze over to Gwen.

She was in deep thought.

Could she defeat her father? What about her aunty?

Gwen couldn't see the path forward at all. But she knew it wasn't impossible.

Kazira, the Apostle of War died after all.

"What else can I do other than try to become a nine Sigil Lord? I've already established my six Sigils." Gwen smiled bitterly, finishing her drink.

Before she could even place her cup down, Alice tossed over a new bottle.

"How much mead do you even have?" Gwen's smile twitched.

"Enough." Alice smirked.

Shaking her head, Gwen opened the bottle and took a drink.

"So, what else can I even do other than hope it'll be enough?" Gwen asked with Syrion folding his arms.

Killing a God was heresy.

But for some reason, he could understand her.

This range buried in his chest, it felt similar.

There was his loyalty towards the moon. Yet with that loyalty, came a burning seething rage that he could barely hold back.

Every single thought towards the moon was paired with hatred. So much so that he could piece together one clue even with his missing memories.

His family's death, perhaps even his own, was a byproduct of what the moon did.

Which is rather ironic considering the fact that he was still using her powers even now.

Alice was silent.

Indeed, for a normal person, the act of killing a God was impossible.

Even for her, she got lucky with Kazira.

To kill a God, she needed something more. Something that'll let her bridge that gap outside of becoming a Goddess herself.

At least for now.

[Killing a God in their own realm is almost impossible. There are simply too many benefits given to them along with regeneration. Think of it as a Personal Realm but far far stronger.

[Even for Velouria at her prime, she wouldn't have been able to kill a God easily, not that she wanted to. The time it took to do so would mean the other Gods have a chance to clean up, letting two Gods die instead of one.] Cayla spoke up.

'What about Realm Rulers? Like Feris?' Alyss asked.

[That's a complicated one. Realm Rulers are similar to Gods but not quite the same. They have control over the Natural Laws in their own realm. So in theory, if a God and a Realm Ruler were to clash, it'll become a stalemate but the God would be at an advantage.

[Becoming a Realm Ruler on the other hand, is completely unknown even for me. We'll have to ask Feris if we want to find out.]

Alice was hesitant. She could still remember what Feris was like last time she saw her.

The way she reacted to Void Fang and how upset she seemed when it wasn't what she thought it was.

'I guess I'll talk to her once this is over.' Alice shook her head.

*CLAP!

Clapping his hands together, Syrion stood up.

"It's clear that you girls have a lot on your mind. Especially you young lady. As someone who will take my power, it's rather depressing to see you acting this way you realise that right? So let's fight. Clear your mind in the heat of battle." Syrion stood up with a chuckle.

"Eh?" Gwen blinked her eyes in confusion.

"When you're too busy dodging my sword, you won't be concerned about stuff. It was the same for my son. When he felt down, we would spar with wooden swords and he'll forget about his worries.

"So come, let us have a spar."

It wasn't a battle to the death, it wasn't a hunt.

But rather, it was a... spar?

A training session from the target they're trying to kill.

Gwen was hesitant but accepted in the end.

They were simply going to begin with sword sparring with no powers.

Just footwork and mind battles.

Stepping away from the house, they stood facing each other while Alice watched.

Gwen chose a sword and took an offensive stand, pointing the tip towards Syrion while he took a defensive one.

As for his weapon, two longswords that might as well be greatswords due to their size.

Alice snapped her finger and a piece of ice detonated above them, marking the start of their spar.

Gwen made the first move!

She lunged forward, aiming for a stab that Syrion side stepped and parried with his blade.

With her Vision activated however, Gwen saw this coming and adjusted her grip and footwork, turning a pierce into an upwards cleave.

*KRK!!!

The blades clashed with Syrion brushing it to the side.

Gwen took advantage of the momentum, coming down with a downwards slash.

*CLANG!!!

Pushing the blade back using his sword, Syrion slammed his shoulder into Gwen, launching her back as she stabilised herself with blade.

"It's my turn to attack now." Syrion laughed.

*BANG!!!

His first step shattered the ground beneath him as his figure appeared next to Gwen.

Even with her Vision, her body was late in reacting!

Syrion stopped his blade in front of Gwen's eyes.

"I believe that's one point to me."

Chapter 790: Alice Vs Syrion

"I believe that's one point to me." Syrion smiled, pulling back his blade.

Gwen stood rooted in her place while Alice was in disbelief.

She knew full well how powerful Vision was yet Syrion bypassed it- no, rather than bypass, he forced a gap then outpaced Gwen.

No matter how clear she sees it, she couldn't react.

If Alice was in Gwen's shoes and this was a serious battle, all she could do would be to hope that her regeneration would hold.

Either that or kill Syrion before he could kill her, not a very concrete plan.

"Again." Gwen demanded as Syrion hoisted his blade onto his shoulders.

"Of course, as much as you want young lady."

*CLANG!!!

Syrion's blade was aimed at Gwen's neck once more.

"Again!"

*CLANG!!!

"AGAIN!!!"

*BANG!!!

Crashing against the ground, Gwen tried to sit up but Syrion's finger pointed at her forehead.

"You're in too much of a rush young lady. You're relying on those eyes of yours a bit too much. You're too addicted to 'seeing' what's going to happen rather than acting." Syrion cut her off.

Unless she understood this point, she was going to be stuck at this bottleneck forever.

"Take a break for now. Mead girl, it's your turn." Syrion patted Gwen on the shoulder before looking over at Alice.

"Huh? Me? And also what's with that nickname." Alice sighed, placing down her glass of mead.

"Of course you. You're also here to help her fight are you not? If she's planning on taking on Solaris, don't tell me you plan on just watching? And I can tell you like that nickname so stop being so cheeky and get over here."

Rolling her eyes, Alice shrugged and made her way over.

Summoning her bow, she prepared to take aim.

"First of all, stop that. I can tell you're not an archer." Syrion stopped her head in her tracks.

Gwen glanced over.

"How many years do you think I spent on the battlefield? I've cut down archers up close and personal. I've seen how they move their body, how they prepare. And you, you are not one of them."

"You don't move that way. You don't posture like them. You don't even BREATHE like them.

"You, oh~ you're a different one alright. The way you move, the way you prepare, you're someone who gets up close and personal." Syrion analysed.

'F*ck.'

[He's got you there.] Cayla was impressed.

'He even called out the way you breathe twinnie, he's a tough one.' Alyss nodded.

Alice scratched her hair.

"Tsk, you just gotta go spoil things don't you? And here I was keeping it a secret too."

Since the cats out of the bag, Alice wasn't going to hold back.

"You're right. I get up close and personal. But it's not as though I'm not an archer, I simply adapt to the weapon I need in that moment of time. I'm someone who changes based on the environment."

Dismissing her bow, Alice clenched her fist and activated Void Fang.

Spear, bow, axe, halberd. It kept shifting through forms before landing on a longsword.

"Sorry Gwen, don't take it personally. It's not something I can just show to people." Alice glanced back before turning to Syrion.

Taking an offensive stance, Alice expanded her zone, knowing full well how dangerous Syrion is.

"That's a little better." Syrion nodded. If she wanted to get actual feedback, she needed to be fighting the way she usually fought. Not some imitation that she wasn't fully used to yet.

Gwen stared at Alice with conflicting emotions but she'll clear them later. For now, she raised her hand and detonated a mote of fire to signal the start of this battle.

*BANG!

Alice was the first to attack.

Energy converged into Void Fang and sent out an arc of energy.

'An artifact!' Gwen immediately recognised it to be a strong artifact weapon.

Alice could see several shadows flickering around Syrion. All of his possible moves.

'Eliminate the unlikely, don't get greedy.'

*CLANG!!!

Parrying the energy arc, Syrion was pleasantly surprised by how strong it was, enough to make him take half a step back.

It didn't seem like it but this little girl carried more power than most!

Since that was the case, he'll reply in kind!

*BANG!!!

Once again, Syrion disappeared using the same move he used on Gwen.

His blade ripped through the air and was about to reach Alice's neck.

But unlike Gwen, Alice's eyes were securely locked onto Syrion's blade.

As the blade was about to reach Alice, Void Fang intercepted!

Her body may not react in time but her weapon could! She simply had to command it the moment she spots the danger!

Alice ducked into his range.

*BANG!!!

Punching up with her fist, a hollow echo sounded out.

"Tch!"

"You're punching armour young lady, expect your hand to be hurt." Syrion laughed, lunging forward with a shoulder charge.

Alice stepped to the side before transforming Void Fang into a spear. Twirling around her body, she tried to attack Syrion from below but he caught it with his blades!

He tried to sweep Alice's legs but she jumped.

Turning Void Fang into a pair of gauntlets, Alice held her breath and punched!

This time, Syrion had to block with his weapon.

As their weapons collided, the impact sent him sliding back but he quickly recovered.

Through the dust, Alice took aim with her bow!

Consecutive shots!

*KRR!!!

However, despite not deploying a Zone or Vision, Syrion cut apart her arrows with deadly precision.

'No go huh?'

Alice narrowed her eyes.

Since that was the case, she'll use the martial arts that she learned in the east! She might not be a martial artist like Alyss but she could still use it to some extent!

Closing the gap in an instant, Alice slammed her palms into Syrion's chest, breaking his guard.

He tried to grab her but she took advantage of her small body, ducking down and weaving his grab while launching a counter towards his back.

Kicking the back of his knees, she tried to make him kneel but his stance was firm.

Regardless, she couldn't stand still otherwise Syrion would grab her!

Creating a hammer, Alice was about to strike down when her body froze.

Syrion's blade was aimed right at her eye and she wouldn't have been able to move out of the way in time.

"You're an experienced one. Your movements and proficiency with your weapon is a testament of how many times you fought battles.

"However, you're too used to taking charge of the momentum. Once you begin a combo, you rarely get it broken. Not saying it's bad but there's a pause. That pause is dangerous, a habit you should get rid of as soon as possible." Syrion smiled before pulling back his weapon.

"That and you seem to be thinking a bit too much. You work better with trusting your instincts. Not saying you shouldn't think but perhaps you can try to lean into that instinct."

Syrion had seen her type of fighter before.

Ones that would strategize despite having a ferocious instinct.

There were moments in that exchange where he felt like a feral animal was preparing to rip out his jugular, but at the last moment, reason and logic would take over.

If she wanted to continue her combo, trusting that feral instinct would've been better than strategizing and attacking from behind.

After all, it was that same thinking that allowed him to set a tempo trap for her. To make her think everything was in control before flipping the battle.

Alice was silent. She contemplated his words and found merit in them.

In order to be more effective in battle, there needs to be a balance. She has to find the line between instinct and reason.

Sometimes, it may lean to one side but never completely.

"I see..." Alice started to walk away, surprising Syrion.

"Don't you want to try again?"

He thought she would be like Gwen, asking for another battle in order to correct herself but Alice shook her head.

"Not much would be changed if I kept fighting. I need to figure out what kind of balance I need to strike." Alice admitted but Syrion waved his finger.

"Before that, let's take a look at your instincts." He wanted to see what Alice was like instinctually.

And to bring that out, he needed to overwhelm her!

*BANG!!!

Rushing forward, his blade had already reached Alice's head.

Her pupils constricted.

He wasn't stopping.

Relaxing her entire body in an instant, she dropped to the ground, narrowly avoiding the blade edge when a foot came into view.

Gritting her teeth, she entered a handstand on his leg, avoiding the kick before countering with her own attack.

However, Syrion grabbed her ankles in an attempt to slam her into the ground.

Alice wanted to defend but her mind screamed to attack.

Flicking her finger, Void Fang transformed into a dagger and pierced towards Syrion's face! He leaned back to dodge but Alice then transformed it into a hammer in an attempt to hit him from behind.

Yet all it hit was the face of Syrion's blade. He blocked!

"Don't tell me you're still holding back?" Syrion looked down at Alice.

"I can see if now. You are a cas-"

"Stop spoiling my secrets!" Alice twisted her body, covering her leg with Void Fang before kicking towards his arm, threatening to slice it off.

Syrion quickly let go, allowing Alice to create some distance between them.

"Don't you know it's rude to dig into a lady's secrets?" Alice narrowed her eyes.

"Well, I only had a son and not a daughter. Can't say I'm familiar." Syrion laughed.

Alice was a dangerous one.

Before choosing to use Void Fang, Syrion could see it. Alice's intent on simply twisting her leg off in order to create some distance.

'It must be regeneration.' Syrion narrowed his eyes.

This kind of fighting style that didn't care about the damage done to oneself...

"A berserker."