

Abyssal A 881

Chapter 881: Alyss' Nightmare

Alyss blinked her eyes.

She felt the breeze on her face, the distant howls.

The fog obscuring her view from all sides.

She glanced down at the marble white stone beneath her feet, the path that never seemed to change no matter how many turns she takes.

Stretching her body, she couldn't quite get used to this sensation.

There wasn't this... sense of restriction.

Even with her physical powers weakened, her movements weren't 'held back' by the golden chains.

In this dream, her body was 'free'.

But the biggest change of all... She couldn't sense her connection to Alice.

Alice could sense the tether but she couldn't.

In this Nightmare, Alyss couldn't tell if her twin was alive or dead. What was she feeling? What was she thinking?

Everything felt so foreign for her.

"Alice..." Alyss mumbled. Looking at the path around her, she clenched the Embryo and made her way towards the next camp.

Was this how normal people felt?

Such...

"Emptiness." Alyss sighed.

Or perhaps she simply wasn't normal anymore.

Not in the sense of her power being abnormally high or that her martial senses were good.

But normality in the fact that she felt like she couldn't function without Alice.

She had become dependent on her twin.

Their relationship has been rather... strange to say the least.

All along she thought she was the abnormal one created by Nyer, locked away and sealed. Forced to take on the brunt of the experiments when Alice couldn't handle it anymore.

There was a sense of hatred at first. Indignation at the fact that she had to suffer.

Why?

Why did she have to suffer the worst of it when Alice didn't want to anymore?

She sat in the darkness, watching Alice.

When Kaden broke Alice out, Alyss's presence was thinner than ever.

She rarely appeared only giving power every now and then.

In those moments, Alyss truly felt like she was nothing but a battery to Alice.

Was her fate to be used as a source of power? Was that the end?

Her monstrous form, the manifestation of her rage. The burning desire to turn everything to ash.

And then came the inverted world when they confronted one another.

She came face to face with Alice and...

Her existence was acknowledged.

A small smile crept onto Alyss's face.

Ever since that day, she stopped being merely a spectator, a battery.

In a sense, she was given an identity.

Alyss.

Ironical considering she was what people would call the 'original'.

Some might even question why she was fine with having her name usurped by Alice.

Shouldn't the monster born from the syringe be the one called Alyss?

Sounds the same but different in spelling.

Just like Alice.

They looked the same, had the same memories.

But fundamentally, Alice was someone else.

She was someone new, a child still learning her place in this world.

Still growing.

She was not Alice Zenia.

She is Alice Agnelia.

And...

Alyss herself is still Alyss Zenia.

She knew that Allura would probably give her the same surname if she asked. And she knew that Alice would offer the same.

They were 'twins' after all. Two sides of the same coin.

However...

It didn't feel right for her.

She... Can't deny the fact that she still thinks about the happy memories before everything turned out the way it did.

Her brother is trying to redeem himself right now, journeying with his master.

But could the same be said for her other sibling and her father? Would they repent?

And even if he did, how could he repent for everything the Zenia family has done?

But could she deny her father from trying if he did?

So many ifs and buts.

"I haven't even confirmed if he would repent or not." Alyss scratched her hair.

When one is... as idle as she is, one tends to overthink a lot of things.

Of course, that wasn't her blaming Alice.

Their situation was simply unique in the fact that only one of them can control the body at a time.

Hence why she spends most of these days feeling rather lethargic.

Closing her eyes, Alyss listened to the movements in the fog.

She kept herself still. Not a single ripple of movement aside from what's allowed by the wind.

"Huu..." Letting out a calm breath, she entered a defensive stance with her hands in front of her.

Calm water stance.

A lesser version of the Zone that she quickly created having realised her base stats were reduced.

In this stance, she calms all emotions, all movements.

Like the surface of the water, she absorbs information from her surroundings. She pushes her senses to the max. If sight was obscured by the fog, she'll simply rely on everything else.

Hearing, taste, touch, smell.

The gentle wind does not cause the surface to ripple.

But if an animal or insect was to touch the surface, even if it's a leaf...

A ripple will naturally form.

Alyss snapped her eyes open.

*BANG!!!

Twisting her body, she avoided a cleaver slamming down from above.

Following the momentum of her movement, she kicked up with her right foot, breaking the attacker's stance!

With the guard now open, she pressed her palm against its stomach.

While Alice chose a half caster half fighter class, Alyss chose differently.

Her energy wasn't used for spells.

Instead, it was used to set herself into a buff state!

*RUMBLE!!!

Flames burst out from her fists as she activated her buff.

*BANG!!!

Slamming her fist into the beast's stomach, a scorched fist print could be seen but she wasn't done.

A second punch.

Third.

Weaving to the right, she spun her body and slammed her heel into the beast's lower back.

Once again, flames burst out as she dropped into a hand stand.

Glaring at the beast, flames coated her body and she kicked up with the full strength of her body.

*CRACK!!!

A torrent of flames burst out as the initial impact snapped the beast's spine in half while the flames scorched everything else.

Landed on the ground and standing up gracefully, Alyss didn't even bend down to pick up the Embryo.

Instead, she simply stomped her foot down, causing the crystal to jump into the air and caught it.

Holding it against the air, she squinted her eyes and smiled.

A different colour. Even though her surroundings looked the same, the beasts were getting stronger thus the drops were better.

"Seems like I can enhance my stats again." She chuckled.

Like Alice, she had also maxed out everything before progressing.

Even though they were worlds apart, even though they couldn't sense each other, their choices were still the same.

She might hesitate. She might overthink.

She might get bored, she might get frustrated.

But she'll never lose her trust in Alice.

She trusts that Alice will do fine, she trusts that she'll be able to find a way out. She trusts that if she were go down the wrong path, hesitate where she's not meant to, Alice will be there to pull her back.

And...

If Alice was to do the same, she'll also be there to pull her back.

That's their connections.

Twins who will forever help one another.

Of course, she'll be too embarrassed to say this in front of Alice.

If she was to say such sentimental things, Alice might tease her about it till the end of days.

Thinking about her twin, Alyss couldn't help but chuckle.

The more she interacted with this world, the more she learned.

Her love of mead. Her love of fashion, her excitement when discovering a new place.

And once everything was over, she'll be able to figure out her own dream.

What she wanted to accomplish as her own person.

Alyss looked forward to that day.

*BANG!!!

Her body shot backwards like a sling shot.

With her right hand, she gripped at a robed figure's throat. They gagged and clawed at Alyss's arm but she refused to budge.

"H-how!?" The robed figure gasped as his eyes stared at Alyss in shock.

With the distance between them, she shouldn't have sensed his presence! He was even making sure to conceal himself!

Then he saw it. Her eyes were closed.

Alyss tapped her ear lightly, then her nose.

She stuck out her tongue and tapped her own tongue.

"There are more senses to just sight. The rustling of your clothes, your breath against the fog." Alyss smiled as she slowly opened her eyes.

"Tell me..." She trailed off as the robed figure trembled.

He felt goosebumps across his body as he kicked and flailed to escape Alyss's grasp.

"Ah~ So you do feel fear after all. You're not like those mindless beasts are you? And yet it seems like you lurkers go after your fellow humans who unfortunately find themselves in this realm.

"Such a shame. But I wonder, does an ex-human like you drop Embryos?" Alyss tilted her head with a wide smile.

Her eyes were eerily calm and without reflection.

The lurker felt as though his soul was about to be sucked away when the temperature began to rise.

His pupils constricted in panic, his legs kicked harder than ever.

*TSSSS!!!!

A hissing sound began to rise with flames appearing on Alyss's arm. Maintaining a firm grip, she dug her fingers into his throat, burning away at the flesh slowly.

Until finally, her fingers touched his spine.

The lurker lost the strength to kick but his body twitched from the pain.

Seeing that no more pain could be inflicted onto him, she pulled her left arm back and punched a hole through his stomach with the flames consuming his body.

Within the ash of his remains, Alyss noticed a small glimmer.

A crystal.

Not quite big enough to be an Embryo but... it looked to be made from the same material...

Chapter 882: Vene

"A level 2 upgrade? So this is the second zone I presume." Alyss muttered as she tightened her fingers around the embryo.

Like a spider web, butterfly trails began to appear.

Unfortunately for Alyss, with the location she's in, these trails didn't help her at all. Especially since her paths are linear thus far. There had only been a few twists and turns along the way but nothing that really allowed her to explore the location.

And... with what's beyond the edge of the barriers obscured by fog, Alyss would rather not jump down to find out.

Regardless, she continued down her path as there was nothing else to do. Eventually, she will reach her destination. Nothing more, nothing less.

Observing Alyss from a spire rather far away, a woman could be seen holding a pair of opera binoculars.

She dressed herself up in full steampunk fashion. A high collared blouse, a brown corset with copper accessories. Gears that clicked and whirled with every breath that she took.

On her head sat a brown top hat with a metal ribbon and a pair of goggles.

Flicking her wrist, the opera binoculars disassemble themselves and reattached onto her arm as a pair of copper rimmed glasses could be seen.

Taking a deep drag of her metal pipe, she puffed out a small cloud of smoke.

"She's already reached the second zone." She muttered. Her expression was neutral but her eyes were focused on Alyss like a hawk.

Reaching down with her right hand, her fingers brushed against the rifle resting on her hip. The mechanisms inside humming as it awaited the next orders.

A moment of silence passed but she eventually decided against it.

Alyss's presence was an anomaly in itself.

She didn't have a 'body'.

Those who come to the nightmare, an invisible tether is formed between the soul and body. But her? She didn't have such a thing. All she had was a tether to another soul.

Even if the Nightmare was to coil its fingers around her, she wouldn't have anything it could 'take'.

But despite not having a body, her physical control was abnormally high. Her martial prowess made it so that the beasts wouldn't pose a challenge to her, even if three of them were to attack at once.

And as for the level 2 beast that showed up, it was dispatched with ease.

Unless the odds were truly stacked against her in the form of a boss, she would remain unharmed.

"Hmm..." Shaking her head, she let out a sigh.

The Cathedral of the Blood Moon was her zone. Even as the Zone representative, there were certain lines she must not cross at all.

Tampering with a 'player's' progress was one of those. Unless certain requirements are fulfilled, she cannot increase the difficulty even if Alyss was abnormally strong.

If she did...

The woman shivered at the thought.

Then again, she should've expected this. After all, when she first saw Alyss in the tutorial camp, she noticed how composed and calm she is.

Even in this strange realm, Alyss managed to handle herself, avoiding deaths that would kill most people.

She slaughtered the wandering beasts as though they were nought but a slight hassle.

"My position is going to drop. Why did I have to end up with this freak of nature of all people." She grumbled.

Furrowing her brows, she leaned back and glanced at the butterfly landing next to her.

The Witch of Nightmares. The only exception within the Zone representatives.

The one who can do whatever she wanted without punishment and despite that, she still adheres to the rules.

Somewhat.

"Hi~ This is our first meeting I believe. And... This is your area right?" Monika stepped out of the fog while adjusting her hat.

Vene massaged her temples, holding back the urge to sigh.

After all, they say with each sigh a bit of your happiness escapes.

Monika glanced at the magnificent cathedral before her and gasped in awe.

Her eyes sparkling with delight as she took in the full view of Vene's domain.

"Wah! You should've invited me over much sooner if your place looks this pretty! Just imagine the tea parties we can hold!" Monika pouted, stomping her leg in annoyance.

Suspended in the air around them was the colossal Cathedral of the Blood Moon, a marvel of architecture glistening with radiance. A pristine maze of white adorned with the splendour of gold.

Tall pillars held the structure above the sea of mist below, while above, the sky was split between two moons.

One large white moon, cracked and shedding shimmering fragments, bleeding stellar light into the night sky.

And over it, almost as though consuming the white moon, hung a crimson moon, absorbing the white fragments and turning them into a shade of crimson.

The horizon itself flickered between blood red and midnight blue, a clash of two moons.

Vene opened one eye half way, glaring at Monika.

"You weren't invited." She grumbled.

"Gasp! Vene! How could you! Oh deary me my poor heart." Monika shed a tear in dramatic fashion before smiling and summoning her staff.

Snapping her finger, she had it float horizontally as she sat down and crossed her legs elegantly.

"Then again, I suppose that's very true to your name. Vene, the wanderer, the scout. You who is one with the wind. It's a solitary name I suppose." Monika chuckled as Vene clicked her tongue.

"How did you even come to this place. Or is it because of her?" Vene gestured with her chin towards Alyss who was smashing apart beasts using her flaming fists.

Even though three were charging at her, she vaulted over their shoulders while landing hits against their skulls.

The timing of her parries, her dodges, no movement was wasted and whenever there was a gap for a counter, her fists would snap forward like a viper.

Fast and lethal.

"I was simply tracking down the connections a certain little flame had. She seemed rather worried about the allies she had in this realm. But to my surprise, I am to find someone who looks like a mirror reflection of her." Monika chuckled.

Snapping her finger, a table floated next to her with two sets of teacups filled with tea.

"Would you care for a drink? Some snacks?" Monika offered as a plate with some biscuits appeared on the table.

"I'll pass." Vene shook her head.

Partaking in her 'tea party' was advised against. No matter how beneficial it may seem at first.

"Scared are we? Are rumours really so frightening?" Monika sighed.

"I'd rather err on the side of caution. Especially when the rumours involve the Witch of all people." Vene replied instantly.

"It wouldn't kill yo-"

"Yes but it'll expose my fate." Vene narrowed her eyes, cutting Monika off.

Monika paused. Her smile widening to a crescent arc that sent chills down Vene's spine.

"Shame. And here I was rather curious about what kind of life you'll live." Monika dismissed the tea set.

"Being a wanderer and someone who goes along with the wind means not knowing what is in store for the future. Even if you don't tell me, I'd rather not have someone know my fate." Vene rolled her eyes.

"It's not like I know everything." Monika shrugged her shoulders.

"But enough where you can make adjustments to the smaller cogs, right?"

Monika didn't reply and simply stuck out her tongue.

"If you're just here to have a look at this girl then you can leave now." Vene dismissed with a wave of her hand but Monika remained.

"I'm here for two things. First, as you said it was to take a look at the girl. And as for the second... I'm actually here for you."

Hearing this, Vene glanced back with a frown but there was surprise in her eyes.

"Me?"

What did the Witch of Nightmares want with her?

But the moment Vene made eye contact with Monika, her entire body froze.

That moment when you stare at the face of death. The moment when a blade is inches away from cutting you in half...

When you see an attack falling towards you yet you can't run away...

The fear that roots you in your place as death approaches.

The guillotine that falls...

The air that escapes your lungs as you drown...

That final moment, Vene had just felt it.

Gritting her teeth, she ignored the rules. She ignored everything she had learned up till now.

Self preservation came first!

The mechanical holster snapped into place as Vene grabbed her rifle and fired without hesitation.

*BANG!!!

The bullet tore through Monika's forehead, blood splattered into the air as she stumbled backwards and collapsed onto the roof.

Vene panted, cold sweat dripping down her back.

The feeling hasn't disappeared.

Gritting her teeth, her glasses shifted as a gear cog appeared in her right eye.

Flicking her wrist, the rifle transformed into a pistol as she fired behind her without looking.

Slamming her left hand down, lightning sparked in an area around her as machinery and weapons were crafted from the very material they were standing on.

Cogs spinning with power as she summoned an array of guns around her, facing all directions.

*BANG!!!

Firing all of them without exception, Vene transformed the area into a deadly zone of bullets and lightning.

Yet the feeling remained.

Where? Where is she?! Where is the Witch who came here for her?!

"Shh~ Your rifle is rather loud don't you think. Wouldn't want the mirror gal over there to notice now do we?"

"!!!"

Vene didn't dare turn around.

But she could sense the fog converging and transforming into the silhouette of Monika.

There was a barrier of butterflies around them, concealing their location and sound from outsiders.

Gritting her teeth, Vene loaded a special bullet and fired through her own stomach.

*BANG!!!

Ripping a hole through her own body, Vene collapsed on her knee.

It was just a normal bullet when hitting someone like her.

But if it was to hit Monika...

"Even I would be harmed?" Monika finished Vene's thought with an amused smile.

"Let's not make this difficult. I just need you to do a little favour for me~ No need for you to die." She giggled softly.

Reaching out with her hand, she slowly but firmly dug her fingers into Vene's chest.

Chapter 883: Shop Within The Nightmare

"F*cking... sh*t." Elias cursed with a deep sigh.

In his hands, he held a sword and shield as he had expected. The issue was, he remembered why he had died so much to begin with.

While monsters were annoying, there was another reason for this annoyance.

The space they occupied.

The monsters themselves had simple attack moves like Alice had mentioned.

Sure he struggled to track them, but with the preparations they've made, it should be a simple matter.

Only...

If his area wasn't a poison swamp that is.

The poison swamp stretched out far beyond the veil of the fog, what little he could see already gave him an idea of what the rest could look like.

A graveyard of trees, twisting silhouette with moss and strands of fungus draping down from above.

Every breath he took clogged his lungs with a metallic taste and smell, the humidity that made everything sweaty and sticky.

Around the camp, a pool of swamp water stretched out. Whatever was decomposing in the bottom caused bubbles to rise to the surface before exploding with a putrid smell.

Plop... plop... plop, plop.

That's all he heard from the swamp.

Every step he took would be followed by a disgusting squelch as the ground beneath his feet would give out slightly as swamp water filled his boots.

Sometimes the beast would be lying in ambush below the surface, sometimes they would drop down from above.

Sometimes... the trees themselves would be his enemy.

And... the longer he stayed in this swamp water, the more nauseous he would feel, needing to find some land to rest and recover.

If he didn't, at a certain point, he would just lose feeling in his body and collapse, dying in the swamp.

The worst part is that if a beast were to ever knock him face first into the swamp, it'll significantly speed up this process, causing him to die much faster than expected.

Stabbing his sword into the disgusting swamp water, Elias revealed a face of grief and helplessness.

What could he do but walk onwards? To follow the butterfly trail and hope that the next camp is soon. The sooner the better, and the faster he gets out of this swamp the more progress he'll make.

Taking a deep breath by the camp, Elias pulled his helmet down and advanced into the swamp.

Most of the monsters here were plant like in nature. Their attacks are numerous but weak individually.

'A few meters from the camp, there is a vine like monster waiting in ambush. First strike is a wild lash from the sides, front and above. Can be blocked and avoided by pushing to the right. Opportunity for two slashes to reduce the vines.' Elias planned out in his mind.

Right on queue, several green vines burst out from the swamp.

*BANG!!!

Parrying the one on the right, Elias lunged forward, slashing down before cleaving up.

A stab into the main body of the beast before backing off.

The second attack came from the bottom. Hopping to the side to avoid it, he slashed the vine before bashing his shield into the beast's body.

With his opponent now off balance, he stabbed the main body repeatedly until it was nothing but ash and a single embryo rose from the swamp.

Picking up the crystal covered by swamp water and moss, Elias pulled a face of disgust before storing it away. Just like this, he'll push forward one step at a time.

He can still remember the path he took last time, how far he got, how many ambushes await him.

The traps that cause him to sink into the swamp and drown.

The path paved with blood, his blood, was laid out in front of him.

He can only hope that no more deaths would occur before he found the next camp.

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When one thinks about a shop and a shopkeeper, what do they expect?

Perhaps a building located in the shopping district, the gentle ring of a bell as you enter the store. Shelves lined with goods and an old but kind keeper behind the counter.

Or maybe you expect a wandering merchant with a small but useful assortment of items held within a cart.

Some might even expect something more ritualistic, to give an offering to something greater than you on an altar and receive an item in return.

Whatever it was, Alice certainly didn't expect what she was seeing in front of her.

"The f*ck you looking at." The shopkeeper scowled while smoking a pipe.

Alice was... speechless. She couldn't even apologise as she wasn't sure what she was looking at.

In front of her, there was a small... shelf created from fog. Several items could be seen on the shelves and sat in front of this was...

A cat?

It wasn't a normal cat either. It postured like a human and was rather... fat. It crossed the legs and blew a cloud of smoke towards Alice's face.

"Ain't never seen a talking cat before?" It asked, picking the gaps of its teeth using its claws before spitting out some left over crumbs.

"Can't say I have..." Alice furrowed her brows.

She wasn't sure but considering the items on the shelf, this should be the shop that Marina mentioned.

As for how she came across the shop, during her walk through the city, she noticed a new branch of butterflies after finding her second camp.

Unlike the one she usually saw, this one was blue in colour.

And what awaited her was this cat tucked in the corner of the city.

"Well you've seen me now so stop gawking. You gonna buy anything? Or you just starin'?" He asked, tapping the fog shelf using his pipe.

"I mean... Do you accept these as payment?" Alice brought out an Embryo, choosing not to question the world for now.

That was one of the key rules after all.

She simply has to accept that a talking fat cat owns a store in the Nightmare realm.

"Hmm... A little crap in quality but if you bring me enough of those, I'll accept." The cat held the Embryo against the mote of light he had on the side and nodded.

"Since you only have the cheap crap, this is what's available for you."

Tapping his pipe against the shelf, some of the items disappeared, leaving just a single row of wares for Alice to purchase.

There were five items up for purchase that didn't have a stated quantity.

First, a similar bundle of leaves like the one that Alice had picked up earlier. Second was a small vial filled with white pills.

The third was a few throwing knives and the fourth seemed to be small bombs. As for the last item, it was simply arrows.

None of them had any limits to what she could purchase unlike the next selection.

Weapons, armour and even accessories.

"Do you happen to have any spells for sale?" Alice asked curiously.

"Nope. Do I look like a book f*cker to you? I'm a talking cat not one of those people that came from the academy." The cat rolled his eyes as Alice held back the urge to curse.

"But~ If you happen to come across any tomes from the academy or anyone who holds one, bring it to me. I'll teach you a thing or two." He laughed while Alice raised an eyebrow.

"I thought you didn't come from the academy, how would you know how to cast?"

"Are you stupid? What part of a talking cat doesn't scream magic to you? I swear you people get more stupid by the day. 'How would you know how to cast', f*cking idiot." The cat mocked Alice's tone.

*PUCHI!!!

Alice's smile twitched.

'Hold it in Alice, he's just a vendor. Nothing more nothing less.' She calmed herself.

"How would I know a tome is special? I doubt you want me to waste your time." Alice kept herself composed.

"The book covers usually glow with a slight blue if you use the same method you did to find me. You followed the butterflies right? They're sensitive to most magical things. Anyways either buy something

or leave. Can't have you blocking my view." The cat tapped the shelf, urging Alice to buy something for now.

She wanted to ask a few more questions but the cat closed his eyes and pretended not to hear her.

Letting out a slight sigh, she turned her attention to the shop.

She didn't have much of a complaint with her armour for now. What she needed was weapons, spells and a method to heal outside of camps.

Thankfully, under each item, there was a line to describe the uses.

The grass increased her stamina regeneration upon consumption along with a small effect of increased regeneration for a short period.

The pills helped regenerate energy while the knives and bombs were self-explanatory.

Alice decided to buy a few of the grass bundles along with three bottles of the pills for now.

Weapon wise, Alice decided to keep with her rapier for now since the weapons on sale were far too bulky and heavy for her to use effectively. And... as for the ones she can use, she'd rather not use a dagger.

Not with her stats as they are right now.

Lastly, she glanced towards the accessories section.

There were only two rings on display and both were a one time purchase.

Their prices were rather... ridiculous since each one costs around 200 Embryos. If she wanted both, she'll have to gather 400 Embryos, ignoring the fact that some beasts might not even drop it.

But as she looked at the name of the rings, her pupils trembled.

[Ayrian Ring.]

Chapter 884: Ayrian Ring

[Ayrian Ring]

Boosts Abyssal Magic.

Found in the ruins of Ayr, a long forgotten sanctuary that resided within the abyss. The sands of time have ground down the once magnificent spires and buried the history under layers of mystery.

"Where did you find that ring?" Alice asked as the cat pretended to ignore her once more.

But this time, she wasn't in the mood to joke around or follow his antics.

Without warning, a tsunami of killing intent burst out as Alice slammed her palm against the desk.

"GWAH!!!" The cat jumped up in surprise as its fur stood on its ends.

Landing on all fours, he glared at Alice who glared back.

"Stop playing dumb and answer me. How the f*ck did you get this ring?"

"Ever heard of don't f*ck with the vendor? What's stopping me from not selling sh*t to you." The cat warned but Alice didn't react.

She simply leaned in and stared at the cat without blinking.

"I will burn every part of this place to the f*cking ground. I will find your energy within the sea of threads, your soul amidst all those that were dragged into this nightmare.

"And once I find your soul, I will read your data. I will understand every part of you. Your desires, your love, your hate, your joys.

"I will find everything that gives you even an ounce of joy in this insignificant life of yours and I WILL erase everything. And when I do, when you are alone in this world with no joy left to be had, I will carve out the deepest parts of your essence and I will scatter it into the wind, never to be reborn henceforth.

"I. Will. Erase. You." Alice warned with an eerie calmness in her tone.

As if this wasn't a huge effort for her. As if it was simply a task she can do whenever she wanted at any given moment.

The cat was silent.

Even though he was the vendor, even though she was the player, when submerged in such dense killing intent along with the warning, he couldn't help but feel weak in the knees.

But with this weakness came a seething rage.

"You dare threaten me?! ME?!" The cat began to grow in size but Alice grabbed him by the throat.

"Yes. I dare, so what now? You can kill me how ever many times you want. But can you violate the rules set in this place? The camps that act as a safe sanctuary? When push comes to shove, no matter the barrier, even if you bar me from leaving this realm, there WILL be a method for me to get out.

"And once I do, everything you'd done to me in this realm will be paid back hundred fold. I will even make you immortal to ensure I inflict as much pain as I can you. You will become a pass time for my enjoyment.

"You can run, you can hide. You can do whatever you can to evade my gaze. But I will chase you to the ends of finality just so that I can exact my revenge. On this I vow upon my own soul. My vengeance will burn hotter than a thousand suns!" Alice lifted him up as the cat gritted his teeth.

Sweat dripped down his fur.

Every part of his soul was telling him that the girl in front of her was speaking the truth. Every work without an ounce of a lie.

If he were to incur her wrath, she WILL do everything she can to hunt him down.

"Bah! It's just a f*cking trinket I found in some ruins. What's got your panties in a twist." He tried to smack her hand away but Alice's grip was firm.

"Everything in this world is woven from the collective dream. If you found this in some ruins, the likelihood of it happening before I arrived is high. Therefore, there is someone else here who knows of Ayr. So let me rephrase my question.

"Where is Nyer."

"Nyer? Never heard of him." The cat scratched his chin while Alice allowed him to sit down again.

"Then can you give me the coordinates to the Ayrian Ruins that you spoke about?" Alice folded her arms.

She'd rather not use such... violent methods when it comes to negotiation but matters related to Ayr was different.

With Ayr practically erased from history thanks to the three religions, anyone who knew about the place was either old monsters who had lived centuries or people who someone managed to come across the information through various means.

The former being far more likely.

And with the state of this nightmare realm, the chances of it being Nyer or someone close to him was very high.

"Give you the coordinates... are a bit..." The cat scratched his cheek.

Giving away coordinates to a player was a little beyond the scope of things he's allowed to work with.

Crossing that line...

"Then what can you do? Surely you got a method to give me some hints every now and then.

"Monika did it, same with Karina." Alice furrowed her brows.

"Don't loop me together with the Witch. She's a unique case while Karina... I can't say. Grrr tsk, hey, got anything to sell me?" The cat asked as he pointed at her pocket.

"Sell? Why would I want to sell anything?"

She had just bought the stuff she needed, selling it again would make her actions earlier useless.

"Just do it. Trust me." The cat sighed.

Tilting her head, Alice eventually decided to sell him the healing grass she got from her first kill in this zone.

Having received the grass, the cat tossed over a shimmering blue embryo.

It was different to the ones she usually had.

"Don't use that one to raise your strength. It'll let me find you whenever you're near one of my shops. That way I can guarantee I'm the one you get when you find the store." The cat picked his teeth.

"I can't tell you stuff directly but as you said, hints are possible depending on how far you get. The coordinates to the ruins that I found were... rather far. But I think you'll be able to get there eventually." He shrugged.

Examining the Embryo, Alice nodded her head and stored it away in her upper pocket.

"And since you mentioned Monika, I assume she's already marked you since you're walking around without care. Be careful of that Witch." The cat narrowed his eyes.

"I've had the misfortune of meeting her once and that's enough to make me not want to see her ever again." He sighed.

"Can't say more?"

"Nope. I might be a magic talking cat, but nine lives aren't enough to survive that b*tch if she ever turns her hat towards me." He grumbled.

Staying silent for a moment, Alice smiled and nodded.

"Thank you. And about what I said earlier... Sorry. I won't say I was lying since it's all truth. But I'd rather not go that far. You got your limitations so I won't force you to tell me everything." Alice apologised as the cat clicked his tongue.

"Then give me back that crystal. Getting involved with people like you are the reason why cats need nine lives to begin with." He held out his paws.

"No way, you've already promised to help me!"

"Promised?! What part of that looked willing to you!" He raged.

And even though Alice felt bad, she couldn't let him off the hook yet. It's an unfortunate situation but his help and assistance was something she needed in this strange realm.

If everything goes well, she won't do anything to him. Hell, she'll even help him if the situation called for it.

"You can call me Agnelia. What's your name?"

"Stop. Just call me whatever you want. But my name is something I can't give easily." The cat showed a serious face as Alice raised an eyebrow.

"Hmm... Let me call you Rolo then." Alice smirked before walking away.

The cat raised an eyebrow.

"Rolo? Why Rolo?"

"Pft... because you look like you can roll over really well." Alice revealed a smug expression.

Rolo pulled a face of confusion before looking down at his belly.

With his roundness...

"You b*tch! You just called me fat!" He screamed but Alice was already running away with a laugh.

###

Cayla stood with her guard up.

She was progressing through the zone using some of the tips that Alice had told her. But she had chosen a pure caster class so she had to be careful with what she did.

Hunting beasts by groups rather than one by one in order to maximise the usage of her mana while looking for camps.

"I'm not here to kill you or take you away. So why the hostility?"

"Can you really blame me?" Cayla forced a smile.

She may be in a guarded stance but... What could she even do?

"Fair point. I... figured I may as well come say hi since we're alone right now. No third party to listen in on our conversation." The figure before her shrugged.

"What is there even to speak of? Our history and connection has long since ended, don't you agree? What is there left but to be enemies?" She narrowed her eyes.

Why did he appear before her? What did he want to talk about?

And...

"Am I here to take you away? Is that what you want to ask?"

"Wow~ would you look at that? Seems like you can read my mind." Cayla took a step back, but the figure took a step forward.

He kept their distance perfectly spaced out at 20 steps between them.

"I'm not reading your mind. Simply estimating what you want to say considering our meetings before. In a realm where you are victim to its laws, it's only natural to wonder about your own safety." He shook his head.

"But don't worry, I'm not here to take you away. There's no use for it since you've already bound yourself to Alice.

"Instead, I'm here for another reason. So why don't we speak casually?

"As the old retainers of the Queen." Nyer smiled, facing Cayla with his hands behind his back.

Chapter 885: Death Is The Fuel Of Life

"As the old retainers of the Queen? You lost that right the moment you started walking down a path that Velouria would hate." Cayla glared as veins bulged on her neck.

Nyer was silent. He simply stared at her while maintaining his usual expression.

"Tell me Cayla, what do you hope for this world?" Nyer asked, walking towards Cayla calmly.

"What do I hope for this world?" Cayla frowned.

A question she never really thought about.

"Indeed. A world mired with all its troubles, its imperfections. Its... parasites. What do you hope for this world?" Nyer asked.

Flicking his fingers, the fog obscuring Cayla's view disappeared with a simple gust and the world around them revealed itself to her.

Her pupils constricted.

This wasn't where she was before. In the time that it took for the fog to dissipate, Nyer had transported her to the ruins of Ayr.

"Have you ever seen a nation as prosperous as the era of Ayr? The three religions that claw at each other, the Outer Gods that have leaked into our realm, the noble families of Extalia... Zenia especially."

"Go f*ck yourself. Talk all you want but how many of those are a result of your direct intervention huh? Outer Gods? Zenia? They wouldn't be that much of an issue had you not existed." Cayla spat out.

Nyer chuckled and rubbed his chin.

"I may have caused them but I wasn't the only trigger. The cogs of this world are already set. All it takes is a tiny initiator to set things in motion. Had I not struck a deal, someone else would've welcomed the Outers.

"Even if I didn't create Alice, the Zenia family would've diverted from their path eventually. I merely took the resources available and used them to my own disposal. Better used towards a goal suitable for Ayr rather than someone else, don't you agree?" Nyer glanced back.

It didn't matter how calm he was acting, Cayla could tell the insanity that had been eating away at him all this time. His life was nothing but a chase towards a goal that cannot be.

"Maybe. If the circumstances are up to me, I might've done the same a while ago. But thankfully I don't have to think about that. I can't say I disagree but you know who will?" Cayla gritted her teeth.

"Velouria will. Everything you stand for right now, everything you're doing. She'll reject all of it."

What else can she do but to play this game that he's set out? It's not like she could fight him.

All she can do right now was simply converse from one person to another.

"I know. I've made peace with that long ago." Nyer chuckled, sitting down and looking out at the ruins of Ayr.

Gesturing for Cayla to sit down and enjoy the view, he shrugged when she rejected.

"History is a fickle thing. It's not an accurate record you see. The winners write their version of history while the rest fade into obscurity. The original goals now defiled and modified by the generations to come.

"Did you know that in the foundation of Extalia, there was actually a nation to the west that shared the same place? The people of Extalia were actually invaders. They stole the land, planted the world tree and erased all signs of the other nation.

"You can look towards the three divine thrones. How many today still know of the glory of Ayr? How many know of the Gods' betrayal towards Velouria who showed them favour?" Nyer asked with a bitter smile.

"I'm not arrogant enough to think that what I'm doing is for the greater good and that these sacrifices I'm forcing others to make are justified. This is simply the selfish desires of an insane man." He laughed.

"I'm glad you at least know what you are." Cayla frowned.

"I do indeed. Which is why no matter what anyone else says, no matter how you try to dissuade me using Velouria's name, I will continue down this path. I will use the world's resources to my own benefit. I will strike deals with the Gods, the Outers and even noble families.

"I will construct this chimeric realm if it means taking an extra step closer to the end.

"So that when the final cog of our era spins..." Nyer smiled.

"Velouria will be there to guide this world to a better future. A future where the three gods sat upon their lofty thrones cannot harm mankind no more. Can you truly say there is someone else who loved life more than Velouria?" He asked, glancing back at Cayla.

She glanced down at the ground, her eyelashes trembling as memories flooded her mind.

Velouria treasured everyone. Whether they be from the Abyss or surface, she wanted the life that struggled so hard to live in the Abyss to persist and reach happiness. She understood the natural cycle and abided by it but saved what she could.

She introduced new laws to allow for even beasts to have a chance to live as man.

She gave her everything to make this world a better place.

It was no exaggeration to say she was like a mother for those who live in the Abyss.

"And when you bring her back, you want her to see a sea of corpses that you have created?" Cayla looked at Nyer's back with pity.

Nyer didn't respond.

After a long pause, did he finally open his mouth.

"Death is the fuel of life. To live is to let something die as fuel. For new seeds to grow, fertile land must be provided. I don't ask for recognition, I don't ask to be looked at as if I'm a good person. It will hurt but I will accept Velouria's hate for my actions.

"Because at the end of the day, I believe that what I'm doing, what I'm going to do, will lead to a better outcome.

"Tell me Cayla, can you imagine any of the three Gods leading this world as Velouria did for Ayr?" He asked.

Cayla clenched her fist. Solaris? Certainly not. That slothful god sat upon his lofty throne has no care for humanity. He simply wishes for his own prosperity and enjoyment.

Lumiria, goddess of the moon desires only entertainment at the cost of humanity. The pursuit of her own twisted love until she gets bored.

Enris will drown this world in chaos and bloodshed until she finally cultivates the blade that will end her for good. But at the end of that, a new world will not be born. Through the fires and ash, all that awaits humanity was extinction.

Then there was the fourth. The Will of the Abyss.

He desires the expansion of the Abyss yet has stopped doing so. He desires a vessel but makes no moves when Alice is close to death.

His goals, unknown.

A mysterious variable who is simply content with just watching for now.

"In reality, you and I are not so different. We will make the same choices, the same decisions. Allow me to write a scenario. Should Alice to die to one of my schemes, to one of her opponents, would you not do the same as I? Or would you seek a new host?"

Cayla froze.

"I've observed parts of her journey. Her close brushes with death. One of these days, that point of no return will be crossed and you will make a decision. For me, that point of no return happened when Ayr fell, when Velouria died to the betrayal of the Gods.

"So what will you do when that choice falls on your lap?"

Cayla didn't respond.

"We stand at opposite ends Cayla. I'm a man driven insane by thoughts of the past while you are someone who desires the outcome of the future.

"Every day I remember the past. The days of Ayr when we would stumble into Kaden while he's still cooking for Lua. The look on Velouria's face when she made clothes for all of us.

"Even the monotonous days of Ayr are filled with such warmth. The amusement I felt when I saw the research department move locations once more because they blew up their building. All of this I still long for. Which is why I am not regret for everything I have done. Everything that I will do.

"I will persist down this path of insanity until the goal is met. And... I do not want to see you guys die. I don't wish for any of the people of Ayr to die when Velouria's resurrection is close at hand. I wish for you guys to see the new world."

Cayla gritted her teeth and grabbed him by the collar.

"You and Alice, you both seek the same goals. I can't imagine a world with the other gods but I can with Alice! I can with Velouria! So why can't you just talk and figure somethi-"

"Cayla." Nyer gently removed Cayla's hand from his collar.

"The ideal path leads to a divergence. One where Velouria is resurrected and one where Alice continues. Being greedy for both simply means that both becomes sealed off. At that point, the probabilities of a far worst ending increase drastically.

"And for me, the resurrection of Velouria requires the death of Alice."

Patting her head, Nyer chuckled.

"Stand your ground Cayla. You, Lua and Kaden fight for Alice while I fight for Velouria. Don't falter, do what you think is right. Let our actions prove the strength of our desires."

Turning around, Nyer walked away.

A clash will no doubt happen. The day where he has to fight Allura and Kaden once more. And perhaps...

Nyer closed his eyes momentarily.

There's no need to falter. A single path is laid out before him. It's not a path of glory but it's a path that only he can take.

Chapter 886: 'Liar'

"Oh my! And here you kept rejecting the gifts I sent you before. Yet in private you wear something like this?" A woman wearing a long flowing dress gasped.

"Argh! That's..." A man wearing a pink apron covered his face in embarrassment.

"Aw look at him~ Seems like he's a little embarrassedahaha." She chuckled softly, nudging the man next to her.

In the house, a tall woman could be seen sitting on the sofa.

"Pft, why wouldn't he be? He spent all this time building up a serious and calm image for his subordinates. And now you just saw him wearing... that." She laughed.

"Why are you talking like this isn't your fault to begin with... You're the one who bought that apron..." Kaden groaned.

"And did you ever reject it?" Allura rolled her eyes.

"Urg..."

"Ahahah~ Lua's right you know? A part of you must enjoy it too right? Hmm~ What to do~ Perhaps I should introduce a dash of pink to your wardrobe~" Velouria smiled, walking in with her hands behind her back.

"Please don't. How would the others think if they saw the Apostle of Corruption wearing pink." Kaden practically begged, causing Velouria to act shocked.

"Boo hoo~ Lua~ Kaden doesn't want to wear my clothes anymore *sob*"

"Huh! That's not- That's... I didn't mean..."

"Stop teasing him your highness. I might get jealous if you get more reactions out of him than I do." Allura chuckled, shuffling over so that Velouria could take a seat.

"Aww I don't mean to. He'll dress up in pink if you ask but look at his rejection when I ask. Isn't it clear that he treasures you more?" Velouria hugged Allura while patting her head.

"Honestly despite being my apostle, if someone were to ask him to save a person between me and you, he'll probably pick you." She laughed while Kaden scratched his cheek.

"That's..."

"I'm not blaming you Kaden, don't worry. If anything, I'll be more annoying if you picked me over cutie Lua over here." Velouria shook her head.

"But..." Allura furrowed her brows.

"I know I know. I'm the queen~ I'm the Goddess~ I've heard that too many times now. But you guys are my family. If it means your survival, giving up my life is the most romantic and lovely thing I can do for you, don't you agree?" Velouria laughed.

"I'm afraid this topic is a little heavy for the situation." The man behind Velouria smiled helplessly.

"Hmm~ I suppose it is. Alright, let's cheer up the mood with a little picnic then! Did you know a new place appeared in the Abyss recently? The sight is gorgeous!" Velouria suggested as Kaden chuckled.

"I'll prepare a few meals for us to enjoy on the outing then.

"Fufu~ And a picnic means you have to change right? Lua~ Let's go upstairs and spend some girl time together. Let the boys do their thing downstairs." Velouria grinned, dragging Allura up the stairs.

Looking at each other, Nyer and Kaden shrugged with a laugh.

"Need any help?" Nyer offered but Kaden shook his head.

"The Lord Commander need not step into the kitchen don't worry. I have it covered." Kaden reassured while grabbing the tools that he needed.

Sitting down, Nyer looked at the house that Kaden and Allura lived in.

His own place was... rather baren compared to this as he spends most of his time outside the house.

There were no memories to speak of.

Yet this place was filled with memories for the two of them.

Then he thought back to Velouria's question from earlier.

If someone was to ask them who to save between Velouria and Allura... Nyer would choose Velouria 10 times out of 10.

No matter how romantic or lovely Velouria may think it is... Nyer couldn't let Velouria sacrifice herself in such a manner.

"Quite a serious expression you got on there Lord Commander." Kaden spoke as Nyer glanced over.

"Hm? Ah my apologies. I was just thinking about something." Nyer apologised as Kaden smiled.

"Are you perhaps thinking about what her highness spoke about a moment ago?"

"Was it that obvious?" Nyer scratched his cheek as Kaden nodded.

"Thankfully these are just hypotheticals so we can joke about it. But if the situation does indeed arise, we will naturally strive for the best result we can achieve, don't you agree?" Kaden asked as Nyer nodded his head.

Indeed...

The best result they can achieve...

Closing his eyes, Nyer felt the gentle breeze brush against his face.

"You know, when I took in Kaden and Allura, I didn't think they would have such affinity for one another. It's cute to look at." Velouria chuckled as they watched the two enjoy the view.

"They were rather confrontational at the start." Nyer chuckled.

"Yep. But once they got past their differences, turns out they were more like minded than they thought." She chuckled, resting her chin on her palm.

"So... About my question from earlier. What's your response?" She asked, glancing at Nyer with a side eye.

"Pardon?"

"Between me and Allura, who would you choose? Well... Let me adjust it a little. Between me and those who will come in the future, who will you choose?" Velouria asked, surprising Nyer.

"As the one closest to me, you know that with each expansion, my body grows weaker. Soon... I might not even be able to leave that tower of mine." She smiled sadly.

"At that point, a successor will have to be appointed, even if I want to spend more time with everyone. And... Well. I suppose I won't be around anymore." Velouria shrugged her shoulders.

Nyer was silent.

"So what's your decision?" Velouria asked once more as Nyer opened his mouth.

"I suppose... I'll look to the future." Nyer scratched his hair.

But Velouria flashed a sad smile.

"Is that your answer? Or is that an answer you think I want to hear?"

"..."

"I'm not blaming you. It's just, I hope you can learn how to love the world as much as I do. Everyone has their hardships yet they still fight for tomorrow. Don't you think that's simply beautiful?

"And I love that beauty with every fibre of my being." Velouria dusted herself lightly and stood up.

"So I want to share that love with those close to me. I want you to love this world as much as I do so that when... when the time comes, the hole I leave in your heart can be filled with the love of this world."
She leaned forward, placing her hand against his chest.

"It'll be hard, it'll be difficult. But... I hope you can do it. For me."

Glancing down, Nyer placed his hand over Velouria's hand.

Contemplating for a moment, he nodded.

"I will do as you command. I'll... try to love the world as much as you do."

Velouria wrapped her arms around him and gave him a hug.

"That's all I ask..."

Even though he couldn't see her expression, Nyer knew.

There was sadness on her face.

She had probably realised it then...

That he couldn't do what she had requested.

He couldn't love the world as she did.

This gaping hole in his heart...

No matter what the world gave him, it refused to fill. A bottomless chasm that swallowed anything and everything yet still left him as empty as the day before.

"Nyer..." Her voice echoed out weakly as Nyer lifted his head.

In his arms, a bloodied Velouria could be seen.

Despite her wounds, she maintained a smile on her face.

With what little of her strength she had left, she lifted her hand and caressed his cheek.

He couldn't say anything.

All he felt was the chilling understanding that this was her last moment.

The emptiness in his chest that began to expand.

"I'm sorry..."

He held her hand as the world burned around them.

She opened her mouth but no more words came out. She simply looked at the man with sadness and grief in her eyes.

The man who will embark on a path of insanity and obsession.

A man who could not bring himself to love the world.

He who is stuck in the past and cannot move to the future.

"Nyer!"

A pair of hands grabbed his shoulder and began to shake.

Opening his eyes, Nyer found himself back in reality. Beside him... His latest project.

That familiar face, that familiar voice.

Yet it was still lacking.

"Did you have a bad dream again?" She asked with worry as he smiled and shook his head.

"Just thinking about the past. I had a little visit with an old friend." He patted her hair, causing her to pout.

"It's not fair. You get to see all of your friends but I can't even see my sister. When am I allowed to go out? It's boring stuck in here." She huffed, sitting on the armrest in annoyance.

"Every day I eat, I sleep and I watch you do all these fun stuff but I can't do any of it."

Smiling helplessly, Nyer stood up and lifted the girl.

"A little longer."

"That's what you always say." She frowned.

"Liar."

Nyer flinched slightly.

A bitter smile appeared on his face.

Hearing the word liar coming from Velouria's voice... Perhaps it's deserved.

When the end was approaching, how many lies had he spoken to her? Lies spoken despite knowing the truth inside his heart. Knowing that he would go against everything she pursued because of his own selfish desire.

"Sorry. Why don't we work on a new experiment? I think you'll be able to meet your sister if the experiment is a success." He suggested as she glanced back with sparkles in her eyes.

"Really?"

"Mnm. It won't be in person though. Your body isn't fit for that yet. You can meet her in the dream."

Nodding her head, she smiled happily thinking about the moment she could finally meet her sister.

Chapter 887: Adela Attempt Number 2

After buying the grass and pills, farming the beasts definitely became easier. Not to mention the fact that there's a small chance that the plant like beasts could drop the healing grass as well.

Unfortunately, the zone Alice was in seemed to still be in the first zone. None of the Embryos that she found were tier 2.

"Isn't this place a little too big for a tutorial zone?" Alice grumbled, tilting her head to the side in order to avoid a sword stab.

Twisting her body, followed the motion and slashed up with her rapier, cutting the wrist of the beast and forcing it to drop its weapon.

With the beast now disarmed, Alice dashed up its arm, stabbing her blade into the eyes before sitting on the head.

"Don't you agree? I swear I feel like I'm going f*cking insane here. I turn left and there's more of you f*ckers. Turn right and there's a bunch of plants. Go south and that's just the way I came from." She grumbled while the beast flailed around beneath her.

"And don't you think there are too many bosses? Ignoring the one I died to the first time I crossed over the chasm, there's one underground, one on the main path into the city and one on the rooftops.

"Who the hell dreamed of this place? Are they a sadist? Maybe they should try fighting this many bosses first!"

Jumping off the beast with a flip, Alice landed the final strike as the beast burst into ash, leaving behind another Embryo she couldn't use.

Picking up her loot, she made her way back to Rolo's shop.

"Ah great, the b*tch is back." Rolo grumbled.

"Can you really blame me? There's nothing but death traps around this zone." Alice shrugged, stocking up on more healing grass and pills.

"It is pretty weird. Most people would've gotten to zone two now without fighting a boss. A boss only showing up blocking the entrance to zone three. But you... You surrounded by bosses leading to zone 2." Rolo scratched his chin.

It was weird, too weird.

While he doubted Monika could do something like this, he couldn't exactly erase that possibility.

But that's as far as he was willing to think about it. Getting too involved when he's nothing but a vendor would spell trouble far above his paygrade.

He was simply here to sell wares fairly, no more no less.

"Right? I tried to go back as well. To see if there's another path next to the chasm or something. But with the fog covering my view, I can't exactly see anything that would need me to jump down." Leaning against Rolo's store, Alice glanced at the butterflies leading towards each of the boss gates.

In the end, she has to challenge them after all.

"Say, Rolo."

"Not my name. But what?"

"What weapon do you think would suit me? Something that mixes magic and physical attacks." Alice asked.

Blowing out a cloud of smoke, Rolo glanced up at Alice.

"Nothing I have in stock right now. It's no harm to tell you but... If you kill the bosses, you'll be able to steal one of their aspects. Whether that be their weapon, armour or spell that they might've used. If you kill them, you can take their unique Embryo and transform it into equipment."

Hearing this, Alice scratched her chin.

If his words are correct, then if she was to kill Sister Adela, she'll be able to steal those floating blades? Or were those blades a spell?

Thinking about it for a moment, Alice hopped off the table and gave her body a stretch.

"I guess I can't avoid it. I'll fight Sister Adela for now since I have information about her. If I fight the others, the chances of me randomly dying are far greater."

"Good luck." Rolo yawned lazily as Alice nodded.

Making her way through the city, she eventually arrived back at the entrance to the garden.

Once more, she saw the mound located in the centre as black fences sealed off the location.

Sister Adela who was praying in front of that mound...

Alice kept her guard up in case the Lurker was to push her in for the second time but he wasn't around at all.

"Tch." Clicking her tongue, Alice wanted to get her revenge but it didn't seem possible.

She checked her gear.

Some healing grass and a few bottles of pills.

If she had bought more, she wouldn't be able to carry them properly.

She unsheathed her rapier and made sure it was doing fine.

With a weapon like this, the chances of it breaking are high if she wasn't careful.

Thankfully, it didn't seem like she needed to worry as the blade was in pristine condition.

And once everything was checked, Alice stepped into the arena.

She wanted to test if she could hit Sister Adela outside of the garden but the range of her Pale Lance was lacking.

Sensing Alice's approach, Sister Adela stood up and opened her mouth.

"Oh weary wanderer, you tread upon sanctified soil. I see the stains of my kindred upon thy hands, the sins that run deep in thy veins." She spoke, turning to face Alice fully.

"Come, let us pray. Let us pray and purify your sins under the hymn of righteous blood."

The same script as she had heard last time.

Alice saw the mound convulsing as the giant black casket appeared, slamming into the ground behind Adela.

From the casket, two blades appeared in the air.

This time, Monika wasn't there to introduce the boss.

*BANG!!!

Alice dashed forward and aimed her palm.

Pale Lance!!!

Like before, Adela turned to dodge but Alice grinned.

Pulling back her hand and shifting her footwork with a slight hop, she actually cancelled the cast!

*CLANG!!!

Alice slashed up only for her slash to be blocked by one of Adela's blades.

"Tsk!"

Stepping to the side before the second blade could slash down, Alice aimed with her palm and actually carried out the cast this time.

The spell pierced Adela's shoulder as she stumbled back.

With a backstep, she stabbed both blades towards Alice but everything was captured in Alice's zone.

She fainted a forward dash only to cancel it into a side step, causing the attack to miss as it tried to predict her movements.

Sensing danger, Alice jumped into the air and watched as the second blade rushed past her feet.

With both attacks dodged, she aimed once more and fired another Pale Lance!

'Don't forget to breathe. Give time for my stamina to regenerate, don't be caught unable to dodge.'
Alice reminded herself as she could already feel her lungs begging for air.

Rather than pressing her advantage, she jumped back and wiped the sweat away from her head.

Catching her breath, she watched as Adela recovered from her wounds.

'The third blade hasn't spawned yet. Seems like I didn't do enough damage... Makes sense.'

In her first attempt, when the opportunity presented itself, Alice took full advantage of it and unleashed several slashes and stabs into Adela without care of her stamina.

But all that achieved was spawning the third blade while she didn't have the endurance to dodge properly.

With Adela now recovered, both blades swung towards Alice once more.

They were too heavy for her to parry thus she focused primarily on dodging. Unlike before, her attacks seemed to be getting faster.

'Her speech and visual cues are probably a sign of how close she is to death. The opening of the casket is probably a sign of the second half of the fight. If the third blade is another sign then... that's probably 25% into the fight.'

Alice analysed while memorising Adela's attack patterns.

She maintained her distance, focusing on dodging rather than attacking.

With the estimation that the third blade was 25% into the fight, Alice began to calculate roughly how much damage each of her attacks would do.

Licking her lips, a grin appeared on her face. Everything was calculated, everything she can do was accounted for. Now, it was time to put it into a plan of attack while maintaining her stamina. Reaching into her pocket, Alice placed a single leaf on her tongue and held it in her mouth.

A soothing sensation spread through her body.

While the healing grass's primary function was to replenish her health, it also sped up stamina regeneration slightly.

Adjusting her grip on the rapier, Alice rushed forward!

*BANG!!!

Leaning to the side to avoid the first stab, she slid under the second horizontal slash before jumping up in front of Adela.

Pale Lance!

*KRK!!!

Her spell slammed into Adela's head, forcing her against the ground as Alice landed on her body.

Stomping her feet down against Adela's biceps, Alice prevented her from using her arms and began to slash away at Adela's body.

Stab against the heart and throat, a slash targeting the tendons.

Point blank Pale Lance into the stomach and a final stab piercing the lower jaw and through the head.

She could see the third blade manifesting.

"Ah... poor lost lamb. You wish not for the blessing of the blood?" Adela squeezed out through her lips as Alice narrowed her eyes.

'If I stop here, regenerating my stamina for another opportunity is gonna be a pain. I'll force her into phase 2 now!'

Without giving the blade a chance to attack, Alice fired another Pale Lance and unleashed a barrage of slashes against Adela.

Jumping back, Alice watched as Adela stood up before collapsing like a puppet without strings.

The casket began to open, mummified fingers clawed out and the familiar pair of eyes stared at her through the gaps.

Phase 2 has begun.

"I'm here for my runback m*therf*cker." Alice grinned.

Chapter 888: Adela's End

Alice already knew her body would be rooted in place while the strange being inside the casket lifted Adela up. Coating her body with blood, Adela began to twitch as the second arm pushed the casket open.

The head that creeped through gave Alice the shivers.

Hairless with a mix of loose yet tight skin.

That wide smile with the row of disgusting teeth and long serpentine neck.

"Disgusting as always." Alice grumbled while Adela took a step forward and grabbed a blood blade from the pool.

The instant Alice was given back her movement, she dashed to the right and threw the pills into her mouth.

Just eating one wasn't enough. These pills only took effect once the entire bottle was eaten.

Strange but Alice wasn't going to question it.

With the empty bottle in her hands, she tossed it towards Adela while jumping into the air.

Pale Lance!

*BANG!!!

Firing her spell, Alice's eyes snapped to the blade above her as she raised her rapier and used it to push her body off to the side.

'Three swords in the air, Adela has her own weapon. Then the bald head will fire an attack that covers most of the garden.' Alice analysed her current situation.

Based on her memories from the last fight, this arena had two safe spots from the beam attack.

One at the base of the casket and the other behind a broken statue.

If she chose the casket location, Adela would stand at the boundary of the casket safe stop without approaching further.

But whether or not that would be the same for the statue safe spot Alice wasn't sure.

What she was sure of, though, was that choosing the casket was not an option.

Especially if the hands within grab her like last time.

Guaranteed death.

Rushing forward, Alice slid under a horizontal slash before swiping up with her hand.

Pale Lance!

*CLANG!!!

Adela parried the strike but her body was lifted up from the momentum.

Adjusting her footwork, Alice readied her rapier and stabbed up!

Giving Adela space would only allow her to use the three hovering blades. But if she was to keep the distance between them short, she'll be able to focus on Adela.

Yet as she was about to unleash her second strike, Alice noticed a growing shadow below her.

'Above!'

*BANG!!!

Alice was barely able to roll to the side when she noticed the casket beast's arm where she was a moment ago.

A new attack she hadn't taken into account.

'So the casket covers close quarters while the blades cover distance. Tch, what an annoying boss.' Alice creased her brows.

Taking deep breaths to recover a bit of her stamina, she reached into her pocket and pulled out some healing grass.

It didn't seem like the head was charging up the attack for now so she didn't have to worry. Instead, she needed to focus on Adela.

The main question on her mind though...

'If I kill Adela, would the fight end. Or do I have to kill the baldy...'

If it was the latter, this fight could drag on far beyond what she was ready to challenge.

Even with the healing grass and her managing her stamina, she was already beginning to feel light headed.

All this running was starting to get to her, especially since she wasn't able to raise her stats past the limit yet.

With her only having access to tier one Embryos, one bad hit was all it took for her to die.

Scratching her hair, Alice let out a sigh before focusing her gaze.

*BANG!!!

Right as Adela slashed towards her using one of the floating blades, Alice threw a Pale Lance towards the nun.

Ducking under the swing, Alice watched as Adela parried her spell.

'If I don't use a Pale Lance to occupy her, she'll try to catch me off guard by attacking right after I dodge the first. But without Pale Lance, I also miss out on an attack opportunity.'

The more she watched Adela fight, the more she was beginning to understand this boss.

Moments of opportunity, traps, move sets and how to bait out certain attacks.

Jumping back, Alice tried the same approach once more, expecting Adela to react the same.

Instead, she pulled her arm back and slashed using her blood blade.

"!!!"

Quickly dropping to the ground, Alice watched as an arc of energy rush past her head.

Following the first strike, two more were on the way as she quickly threw herself to the right.

Rolling across the blood and mud, Alice ignored how her current state and focused on dodging.

With the third strike avoided, Alice noticed Adela jumping into the air and preparing for a fourth and final strike.

The energy coursing through her blade dyed the entire arena in crimson as Alice understood that this attack would probably destroy an area around her.

Meaning, she had to dodge!

Alice jumped back but Adela didn't attack.

Her eyes focused on Alice.

'Sh*t... It's a delay.' Alice realised before her foot even touched the ground.

She had jumped back a tad too early.

If nothing else changes, by the time she is able to dodge again, Adela would've landed her strike.

Alice's finger twitched.

If death was approaching... she might as well take a gamble!

She flicked her finger, Pale Lance was summoned and spun 180 degrees, targeting Alice instead of the boss.

Gritting her teeth, Alice fired!

Adela slashed towards the ground as a bloody flower began to erupt in an area.

*RUMBLE!!!

The ground trembled as Adela stood in the wreckage of her attack.

Yet to her surprise, Alice wasn't there.

Pinned against the black fences, Alice could be seen with Pale Lance embedded deep into her shoulder as blood poured from her wound.

*COUGH!!!

Wiping away the blood on her lips, Alice began to laugh as she reached into her pocket and stuffed healing grass into her mouth.

As her spell faded away, her wound started to heal albeit very slowly.

There was a slight hint of insanity in her eyes as her grin widened.

"Ah~ So spells can be used like this as well. I was hesitant but seems like my gambled paid off. But man! This sh*t stings like a b*tch!" Alice laughed, clutching her shoulder.

Her healing was slow... too slow.

Adela was already walking towards her.

She couldn't take another hit from the Pale Lance. She didn't have the durability to survive a second one.

However, now that she was aware of the delay, Alice won't be caught by that anymore.

Picking up her rapier, Alice narrowed her eyes at Adela.

"Anything else up your sleeve? If not, shall we end this song and dance?"

Stomping down, Alice rushed towards Adela.

Tossing her rapier into the air, she grabbed it with her mouth before aiming her palm.

Adela prepared for the cast but Alice adjusted her footwork and cancelled!

Crossing the distance, Alice spat out her rapier and prepared to slash.

Adela went for a parry but Alice only smirked.

Pale Lance!

*BANG!!!

A Pale Lance crashed into Adela from the left. Alice faked not being able to use her arm!

Adela crashed against the ground and Alice jumped on top of her.

Unleashing several stabs against the nun, she stabbed her rapier against the nun's throat, pinning her against the ground.

Letting go, she aimed at Adela's head.

Pale Lance!

Pale Lance!!

Pale Lance!!!

Rapidly firing three spells, she removed her blade and jumped back.

The hovering blades swung above Adela in an attempt to push Alice off but she was no longer there.

The creature in the casket reared its head back as energy charged towards its mouth.

Alice took cover behind the statue while swallowing the white pills.

Feeling her energy regenerate, she watched as Adela dragged herself back onto her feet.

Despite her face being in shambles from the attacks, she continued to stumble towards Alice.

'Tch is it the casket after all?' Alice furrowed her brows in annoyance.

Despite the wounds she inflicted on Adela, the casket was unharmed and still energetic as ever.

*BOOM!!!

As the pillar of light erupted from the beast's mouth, the entire garden was covered by flames.

With Adela not being in the safe zone, Alice could see her flesh being burned away, leaving a charred mess behind.

She opened her mouth but no words were spoken.

Alice simply aimed her finger towards Adela.

Pale Lance.

*KRK!!!

As the final Pale Lance stabbed through Adela's torso, she collapsed on the burning ground. Her body breaking away from the edges, leaving behind a pile of ash.

With Adela's body now gone, Alice peeked over her cover, towards the casket.

"!!!"

She felt a chill.

Did... the Casket's smile just grow wider?

Little by little, the head retreated back into the casket as the fingers closed the cover.

Alice found herself rooted, unable to move, forced to watch as her enemy retreated into safety.

Once the beast was completely sealed into the casket, it sunk into the ground, taking the mound of flesh with it and left behind the branch where the butterflies perched once more.

Only after the danger was gone was Alice finally allowed to move again.

Letting out a sigh of relief, she glanced at entrance and saw that it was no longer blocked off.

Her view was still obstructed but it seems like the garden was a 'no fog zone'.

Walking over to the pile of ash, Alice could see several Embryos and items hidden within.

First, was as Rolo mentioned. The unique Embryo belonging to Adela. A black and white outer shell with shimmering blood trapped in the middle.

Second, Adela had dropped around ten tier two Embryos.

But buried the deepest was two items.

A key and a necklace with a strange icon.

There was nothing else in the ash and Alice rested at the campsite.

As she sat down, fog condensed.

A single figure stepped through.

Monika.

Chapter 889: Second Meeting With Monika

"Hi~ Did you miss me? Little flame looking as cute as ever~" Monika chuckled, crossing her legs while resting her chin on her hand.

"Not particularly. Especially since you're being treated like an anomaly out here." Alice shrugged with a slight frown on her face.

Out of all the 'guides', Monika was the one who acted with the most freedom. At least from what she's seen thus far.

Then there was the way others treated her. They didn't tell much but...

It was definitely...

Fear.

"Heh~ Seems like you've heard a few stories about me. I suppose taking an overly familiar tone would only put you more on guard right? Hmm..." Leaning back slightly, she adjusted her posture to something more elegant and serious.

With both palms resting on her lap while her staff was next to her, she smiled professionally.

"Welcome, dear Hunter. It seems as though your hunt has been rather successful. The prayers of Adela have now met eternal silence.

"May you take this time to rest up by this branch, it will provide you with warmth in these trying times." Monika spoke with an unfamiliar tone.

Furrowing her brows, Alice let out a sigh.

"Why the sigh, dear Hunter? Or perhaps are you curious about the origins of the departed Adela? She belonged to a church like no other. One of blood and love. Though... Can you really see that 'thing' as an icon of worship?

"Doesn't it make you curious? The hands of man that calls forth the descent of a God far greater than them. A mysterious thing, don't you think? An act that's no different from a doll creating a living breathing human, the same as the one who's very hands have crafted that doll from porcelain."

"Alright alright, let's stop it there. It doesn't matter what tone you use it still gives me the creeps." Alice sighed, stopping Monika in her tracks.

"Fufu~ That wasn't what you said last time." She chuckled, leaning forward while the light of the branch danced off her outfit.

"Yeah well, last time you had a different tone. A little more professional than this but not as professional as the tone you used just now." Alice massaged her temples.

Now that she's got a rough idea of how things work in this realm, Monika's acts are beginning to ring warning bells in her mind.

Not so much as fear but rather... an aversion to something troublesome.

"First impressions are an important thing. Just like names. As you know, the meaning behind my name means advisor. The one who warns and the one who tells the truth. And when combined..."

"The lonesome watcher who warns." Alice recalled the meaning behind Monika's name.

"Exactly. If you had received advice from someone with my earlier flippant tone, would you believe them? Had I invited you to a tea party with that tone, would you accept? No right?" Monika smiled as Alice felt a slight chill.

Monika was a bundle of mysteries and masks not unlike her mirror jester. Right when she felt like she figured Monika out, she would peel away that mask and reveal something new.

"So, what are you here for? I doubt you're just here to talk. Especially since the other guides don't give details like you do. Are you trying to make me learn more about this realm?" Alice narrowed her eyes.

Even though one of the rules of this realm was to accept it for what it was... Alice was beginning to have doubts.

Now that she knew Karina was involved, could her information truly be trusted?

Were the rules real or were they fake? Or perhaps... was accepting the world more harmful than questioning everything?

The more knowledge she gained, the more chaotic the current situation felt.

"Hm~ What do you think? We're no longer children who have adults making decisions for us. What you do, what you believe, what you deny is all up to you. Everyone talks with hidden agendas and goals.

"Just like how you are talking in a manner that drags as much information out of me as possible, I talk with an unknown goal in mind." Monika smiled.

Tapping her finger against the staff, she created a table and a tea set.

"Some tea?" She offered but Alice frowned.

"Shame." Monika shrugged.

Closing her eyes, she hummed to herself for a moment before opening her mouth.

"Then how about I give you some information as an apology? I'll give you a small hint." Monika offered with a smile.

Alice found it suspicious but she won't deny free information.

"As you know, the place we are in right now is the Nightmare realm. A realm woven by the dreams of many. But dreams are fundamentally fake, even if grounded in reality. You can dream about winning the

lottery by finding a gold mine, you can dream about earning the love of the most handsome man or the most beautiful women.

"But when you wake up, all of it disappears, staying in the dream that you had enjoyed a moment ago." Monika smiled, closing one eye.

"So tell me, why do you think the physical power you earn and the techniques you are imbued with when you choose a class transfer to the real world?

"That comes with understanding. You observe, you comprehend, you use your body as an anchor for that knowledge. And when you become linked with this realm, your mind becomes an ark. With each Embryo, the vessel grows.

"The storage of 'memory' increases. And with that, you carry the data back into reality, thus turning fake into real. Your power, your techniques. Everything you learn in this Nightmare is taken back to Extalia."

The more Alice listened, the wider her eyes became.

"That's right. With every insight gained, every boss slain, and every new area uncovered, the fog pulls back. Further and further until everything is revealed.

"With each discovery, more and more of this realm bleeds into reality. Once it does, it'll cease to be simply a Nightmare, a dream. It becomes truth." Monika chuckled.

Alice furrowed her brows.

"So you telling me about Adela..."

"Yep. It simply speeds up the process a little." Monika grinned.

Alice was now on guard.

Accept the realm was a bait all along. The more she accepted this realm, the more dangerous it became.

"Just kidding~" Monika stuck out her tongue.

"Huh?"

"Well, I was partially kidding. Everything I said before was still the truth but about Adela, that was for a different purpose. By telling you about Adela, I've anchored that boss to this location.

"Whenever you wake up, the Nightmare 'refreshes'. And when that happens, the bosses sealed within change. Even if you fought Adela the first time, it might not be the same the next time. And I doubt you'd want to fight a completely new guardian right?" Monika waved her hand.

"So in a sense, I helped you avoid potential deaths you might've had."

Even though she said this, how much could Alice trust? How many of her words are lies and how many are the truth.

"Then what about the rules that Karina spoke about. Are they lies as well?" Alice narrowed her eyes.

"Nope~ They're all truth. Do not stare at the sentinels, watchers of this realm. You've yet to see one so this doesn't apply. But trust me, you'll know when you spot one of them.

"Second, do not chase or delve after shadows of familiar ones. Do so and you get lost in your own nightmare.

"Dreams and reality become blurred, you don't know if you're back in reality or stuck in a maze of your own perception. Time flows differently for you and you alone. And without outside interference, you'll sink deeper and deeper until you can no longer get out, even with help.

"And lastly, no matter what, do not cause a scene. Accept the world for what it is. Tell me, little flame, what do you think will happen if you deny the reality of this Nightmare?" Monika asked, leaning forward.

"Rejection?"

"Rejection. Deny the realm and the realm denies you. When you don't want to play by the rules, the sentinels will take care of any anomalies disturbing the function of this realm. As you are right now, I doubt you have defences put into place for that kind of attack right? So it's best if you play along for the moment." Monika laughed, summoning a teacup and drinking some tea.

Alice folded her arms.

"I won't take up more of your time. I've given you some information as an apology for concealing a bit of myself. Now, it is time for me to give you some advice." She placed the teacup down.

"Embryos have more uses than just currency and a method of getting stronger. They signal life itself. No matter if it's a long fall or a poisonous room, toss an Embryo in and see how it reacts."

Once she finished saying this, Monika grabbed her staff and tapped it against the ground.

Fog began to coil around her body as she prepared to leave.

"Behind us is a new area where higher tier Embryos exist. But be careful my dear little flame. Stay too long in the zone without protection and madness will encroach on your mind."

Before Alice could even respond, Monika disappeared.

Scratching her hair in frustration, Alice let out a sigh.

This was the second meeting with Monika. Like the first time, the information she gained was priceless. But there was also the issue of knowing too much was bad.

Increasing her insight into this realm would only speed up the process...

And she wasn't the only target.

How long has this realm been around for? How many targets has it dragged in?

And...

How much of it has been turned real.

Chapter 890: Adela's Rewards

Even though Alice had countless questions in her mind, there was no one to give her the answers to them.

For now, she simply focused on getting stronger and having a look at the loot she received from Adela.

First was the key that she had dropped.

The key itself was shaped rather... strangely as it felt almost like mummified remains rather than metal. Dried and tough skin stretched over bone.

There was a slight groove where she would hold and twist the key but aside from that, there was nothing else.

Next was the necklace.

Like the Embryos, the moment Alice clenched it and focused, a strange phenomenon began to happen as information was injected into her mind.

[Adela's Necklace of Worship]

A necklace braided from crimson threads and darkened beads imbued by half forgotten prayers.

"Adela oh Adela, you must offer your all to the one who bleeds. Harken to the sounds of the hollow choir, pray for the souls starved of power."

In her final moment, she bled herself dry to hear the voice of her God in their purest form.

And this necklace drank every last drop of that crimson ichor.

Effects:

+20% Cast time, duration and potency when mana is below 30%.

Decrease maximum mana by 20%.

Increases the potency of Blood Magic by an extra 20% when mana is below 30%.

Just the description alone gave Alice some clues to this world. The way it classified their spells.

The Ayrian ring would've boosted her Abyssal spells while Adela's necklace boosted blood magic.

With this in mind, she is now made aware of two schools of casting.

Whatever Pale Lance belonged to, Abyssal and Blood.

Folding her arms, Alice couldn't help but wonder if it was similar to the classifications that Yrael created in the past.

For now, she'll call Pale Lance type spells Neutral spells since there's no distinct element tied to it. It's simply a manifestation of mana in an offensive form.

Weighing the necklace on her hand for a moment, Alice decided to equip it for now.

The moment she wore the accessory, she felt energy draining from her body as her maximum capacity was decreased by 20% as expected.

With this, she could only fire around 3 Pale Lances before she's exhausted. Though... This does mean her third hit would be a lot stronger than the rest with 20% increases to casting time and strength.

Alice wasn't too sure about the duration but she assumed it was probably translated to range since her Pale Lance dissipates after a certain distance.

Of course, this duration could act differently for spells she'll get in the future.

And while she was on this thought, Alice pulled out Adela's unique Embryo.

According to Rolo, if she was to attune to this, she'll be able to receive a special weapon or spell that Adela had used.

Weapon wise... she could only think about the blood blade she created during the second phase.

But it wasn't just limited to weapon either. It could also be a piece of equipment she used.

'There's no way it can be that casket... right?' Alice's smile twitched.

Thinking about walking around with that creepy thing following her... She felt goosebumps appearing on her skin.

Shivering at the thought, she closed her eyes and held out the Embryo towards the branch.

It melted into a strange black and red liquid and dripped onto the roots that drank it greedily.

In the next moment, Alice found herself in the familiar space where she had chosen her class along with her physical boosts.

To her left, a set of modified clothing that was similar to what Adela was wearing.

[Vestments of the Blood Moon worshipper]

A ceremonial outfit used in rites towards the blood moon.

When the Blood Moon rose, its worshippers siphoned their blood and faith into cloth.

These vestments pulse faintly beneath the wearer's touch. A heartbeat? A sign of the life that once was?

These garbs greatly nourishes the wearer's mana reserves and increases the potency of one's blood magic.

When the wellspring of mana run dry, these vestments offer an exchange like no other...

Effects:

+10% boost to all Blood magic and Mana capacity.

Unique Effect: Lifeblood Conduit.

If a spell cost would exceed the Mana available, the user can use their own blood and life to substitute the cost of the cast. The amount of hp allowed to be converted is equal to how much mana one has.

Alice leaned back slightly and folded her arms.

"Sh*t... that's pretty good." She mumbled.

But wearing something that's still 'alive' and had blood poured into it...

She winced in slight disgust.

But good equipment is good equipment.

She could only hope the second option is better than the first.

Otherwise she'll have to walk around the Nightmare wearing these... robes.

Turning her gaze over, she discovered a bundle of mana as information was injected into her mind.

[Adela's Blood Blade – Blood Magic]

An invocation of old used by Adela. With a prayer, three blood forged blades shall erupt before the caster, unleashing three devastating slashes that rends flesh and armour alike.

However, this power can also be adjusted to enhance the caster's primary weapon instead, coating in a layer of blood. In this state, the caster's weapon counts as using Blood Magic.

"F*ck... that's also good."

If she could enhance her main weapon using this spell, she'll be able to take advantage of her necklace's power as her attacks now classify as Blood Magic.

On one hand, she has something that can boost her current power and accessories.

On the other... she has an item that allowed her to convert her health into mana.

It was a good emergency option. Though... Most of her stats from now will be focused around Speed, Spiritual and Endurance.

Vitality, or rather, Physicality wasn't a priority, same with Power and Faith.

Even if she chose the equipment, she wouldn't be able to convert much of her hp as she didn't have a lot to begin with.

If her mana was going to end up with 100 points, her hp would stall around 30. At that point, she might accidentally kill herself if she casts something too strong for her hp.

But if she chose to invest more into hp, it'll indirectly buff her mana capacity.

Furrowing her brows, Alice was stuck.

In the end, she decided to go with the spell.

First, with no other Blood magic at her disposal, she wouldn't be able to make full use of the passive effects from the necklace and the vestment.

At most, it'll simply allow her to cast a little more with some risks due to the hp conversion.

On the other hand, choosing the spell now allowed her to tap into the full power of her necklace while also boosting her physical attacks. By using the second variant of casting, she'll turn her weapon into something that dealt blood magic damage.

And if she was to drop her mana below the threshold, her standard attacks gain another boost.

Making her choice, Alice's pupils constricted as she felt as though fire rushed through her veins for a moment.

Collapsing on her knee, she gritted her teeth and held back a cry.

Her body was being reshaped in the nightmare realm in order to allow her to cast said skill.

Once the pain was over, Alice found herself back by the branch.

A new spell was now imprinted into her mind and all she needed to do was chant out a prayer.

Standing up, she made her way to the centre of the garden and narrowed her eyes.

As she initiated the spell, it felt as though a portion of her control was robbed away from her.

She began to move instinctively and blood converged around her body.

Unfamiliar words flowed out of her mouth as crimson lights shone down from above.

Three swords solidified as she swiped with her arm.

The first unleashed a vertical slash, the second a horizontal one while the third would react to whatever moves they did to the second slash.

Though... the power felt a little disappointing.

Alice furrowed her brows.

With the amount of force she felt from these blades, her Pale Lance might have it beat in that regard.

As for the mana consumption, it was actually more efficient than Pale Lance, taking less mana overall.

"I guess the low damage is fine if it consumes less mana." Alice mumbled.

Shaking her head, she adjusted her stance and pulled out her rapier.

The second use of the spell was to coat her blade in blood and register it as Blood Magic.

Activating the spell, a prayer escaped her lips once more.

Blood burst out from the guard, coating her blade with a crimson sheen.

Unleashing a few slashes, Alice's frown deepened as she felt no difference from the slash.

Was she missing something? A mechanic she wasn't taking into account of?

With the necklace and the spell, she should be doing far more damage than this no?

So why did everything feel weaker than her Pale Lance.

Sheathing her weapon, Alice glanced around her.

There were two exits to this garden.

One to the next zone and one where she came from.

Thinking about it for a moment, she decided it was best to ask Rolo first before venturing forth.

###

"Hah??? Are you stupid? Why would you take that spell when you can't even use it properly." Rolo blew a mouthful of smoke into Alice's face.

"What do you mean?"

"The Spell mentioned prayer right? Do you pray for your Pale Lance to cast? Or do you use your own power? That's the Spirituality stat. So why the hell did you pick a Faith scaling spell when you don't put a single point into Faith?"

". . ." Alice froze.

She had just wasted her first boss reward selection.