

ABYSSAL AWAKENING

Chapter 9: Breakfast?

"Never what?" Lilia's voice rang out as she noticed Alice's serious expression. While her face was always serious without much emotion, her eyes betrayed a lot of what she thought inside. Lilia felt chills just looking at her. For a girl like Alice, even for the short time they've known each other, Lilia didn't think she had such hostility within her.

Everyone has their own story, especially if they ended up in a place like the slave coliseum, but Lilia couldn't deny that she was curious about Alice.

"Oh. Sorry, just thinking... about what happened before here." Alice shook her head as she paused for a bit, half-way through her sentence. Just calling those people family made her want to throw up in revulsion.

"Hmm, I'm assuming from your reaction, you don't want to think about them anymore." Lilia chuckled as Alice nodded in response.

"What about you? Did you hate... people before here too?"

Hearing this, Lilia paused. Flashes of her past flickered in her mind. The sight of a boy's body, the visions of a girl younger than her, both sharing her features. The smell of iron drifting through the air as she was covered head to toe in blood overtook her senses for a moment.

Clenching her arms tightly, Lilia forced a smile and nodded.

"Yes, I hated it. I hated it a lot. It's why I'm here after all. But enough about our past. What do you think they'll have us fight tomorrow?" Lilia asked, changing the subject. She'd rather not take the time to dwell on her past if she can help it.

"Maybe something weaker than Grave Robber. But stronger than the dog."
Alice guessed.

However, if the enemy was indeed something stronger than the Hound she killed earlier, things were going to be much harder than before. Alice had

never trained her body. She didn't ever get to learn any combat techniques to help her survive such a situation either.

The only reason she won yesterday was due to drinking the beast's blood along with her perception seeing an increase. If the Hound was a little smarter or if Alice made a single fatal mistake, she would be a corpse in the arena right now.

"Maybe. But I'm guessing we might have to eventually fight other slaves." Lilia replied in a low voice while eyeing the rest of the captives.

"I don't know the exact details of what goes on in this place but I have heard of slaves being pitted against one another on a whim. I know you showed no reaction to the body of the guy that died to the Lily AB, but have you ever killed anyone?" Lilia asked, her voice sounding serious.

Hearing this, Alice paused.

Did she ever kill anyone? Never. Did she think about it? Plenty of times. But thinking and acting are two very different things. The feeling of extinguishing a

life with your own hands, seeing the soul fade from their eyes as it loses its light amidst fear and desperation — Alice doesn't think she could do it.

Not unless it was towards her old family.

If she could help it, she would rather not fight. Yet for the sake of survival, she must revel in such acts to live. Thinking to herself for a long moment, she eventually opened her mouth.

"Never killed. But if killing means I live, I will do it."

Seeing Alice's determination, Lilia couldn't help but feel pity for the girl. If she weren't in a horrible situation herself, Lilia would have wanted to protect Alice, if possible. It would be an act of repentance for her sins in the past.

"Well, it's very unlikely, so you should be fine. As long as you can kill Abyss Beasts, that's all that matters. Just get some sleep for now. I had asked earlier about our schedule. It seems like once we wake up in the morning, we'll be given breakfast then sent off to do some labour before fighting again at night." Lilia waved her hand dismissively as she laid on her back and closed her eye.

Seeing this, Alice nodded and did the same. If they were going to be doing work early in the morning, it would be a good chance for her to build up some physical strength. She was simply too weak right now.

She hoped she wouldn't get the strange vision again since she needed a good night's rest.

That night, Alice dreamed of a time before her 10 years of pain. A time where things seemed too good to be real.

She felt as though there was something she was forgetting. Something which served as the key to everything that happened. Yet her memories were fractured. All she could remember were the sights of her birthday banquet. The moment where things went wrong.

Splintered visions of blood and death, moments where strange monstrous limbs would rupture from her own body.

Cries and screams, panicked calls of her name. A blurred vision of a woman jumping in front of her.

But she did not stop. She was an unstoppable killing machine and her thirst for blood could not be satiated.

Snapping her eyes open, Alice shot up in cold sweat as her memories of the strange dream blurred and faded. But the feelings were all real. Looking down at her hands, flashes of blood flickered through Alice's vision. She clutched her head from the pain.

"Alice? Alice! Can you hear me?"

Hearing Lilia calling her name, Alice looked over, finding the girl looking at her cage with worry on her face.

"Can hear. Sorry... bad dreams." Alice sighed as the pain faded away.

"If you're having bad dreams about it then I guess it must be pretty fresh in your mind then."

"No, 10 years old." Alice shook her head as she should've stopped having nightmares about that event by now, yet something spurred it to re-enter her dreams.

'Am I missing something from that day?' She wondered to herself.

Before their conversation could continue, a metal bowl was slammed in front of them with scratches and dents visible on the surface.

A thick, viscous fluid was slapped into the bowl with a loud splat as some of the liquid managed to get Alice in the face.

Feeling the texture and smelling the odour from the fluid, Alice felt disgust rising up from the pits of her heart. The sludge itself was creamy in colour with hints of green and purple. Strange chunks of what she imagined to be vegetables and other ingredients sunk into the fluid, unable to keep themselves buoyant.

"I'm guessing you never ate something like this, ahahaha! It's pretty much the usual food for slaves in these parts. Disgusting yet nutritious and very easy to make." Lilia laughed.

"This... Common?" Alice asked while prodding the breakfast with her finger. The fact that her finger did not sink into the fluid nor did any of it stick to her finger caused Alice to do a double take.

"Yep. It's a blended mesh of vegetables, wheat and some other leftovers they have lying around. Gives you what you need for the day and pretty damn hard for your body to chew through all of it, so it'll last the whole day." Lilia shrugged while picking up the bowl.

Even though Lilia said it was common and that she'd seen it plenty of times before, it still didn't detract from the innate disgust Alice felt towards the sludge.

"Here's a tip. Don't smell it, don't take a moment to savour how it tastes, and don't pause to chew it either. It's already blended and the chunks are small enough to just be swallowed without issue. The moment you pause and think

about how it tastes you'll regret it. Here, let me show you a demonstration." Lilia explained as she gestured for Alice to look towards her direction.

Pinching her nose, she grabbed the bowl and opened her mouth wide. Drinking the sludge in one motion without taking the time to chew, she swallowed it all in one go before slamming her bowl down.

Gritting her teeth, she forced a brave smile towards Alice while tears threatened to fall from her eyes. Lilia punched herself in the chest and gave a wide, teary smile. To Alice, it looked like she almost threw up.

"Whatever you do, don't throw it up. If you do, you'll be forced to clean it. Trust me, you don't want that to happen." Lilia warned repeatedly as Alice furrowed her brows and grabbed the bowl.

Pinching her nose in the same manner as Lilia, Alice squeezed her eyes shut and opened her mouth. The moment her tongue came into contact with the sludge, she already wanted to throw it away. It was stone cold to the touch, sending shivers through her entire body. But since the sludge seemed to be the only meal they would have today, Alice could not afford to waste it no matter how much she hated it.

With tears in her eyes, Alice forced herself to swallow the sludge as the cold thick mishmash of disgusting ingredients flowed down her throat before entering her stomach. She could feel where the food went due to the difference in temperature. She tried her best not to gag or retch. The moment any of that happened, Alice didn't think she could hold herself back from throwing up.

"You can do it Alice! Just a bit left!" Lilia cheered, praying hard that Alice could get used to the food for the time they were in the colosseum.

Gritting her teeth, Alice swallowed the last mouthful and slammed her bowl down before looking towards Lilia.

While her face was stone cold like before, the pain in her eyes and the slight redness to her cheeks from holding everything in betrayed her inner thoughts and her anguish from having to eat this type of food.

Giving Alice a thumbs up, Lilia had to admit that the fact that she didn't throw up on her first meal was impressive already.