

Abyssal A 911

Chapter 911: Summoning Miralith

Watching Selen sit down to contemplate her choices, Caera couldn't help but cover her mouth with her hand.

After all, if she didn't... Selen will see the wide smile upon her face.

The fact that she needed a moment to make a choice made the situation clear.

She knew it, Selen knew it.

The kind of power she needed was one that belonged to the King.

But there are multiple factors that she needed to consider.

First, her contract with Miralith meant that she was connected to the King by extension. Why did the beast seal away the king? Would the beast revolt against her if she used her power against the King?

What about the King? The origin of Miralith's ability?

What if Selen tried to use her powers against him and it doesn't work?

All of these were factors she needed to consider if she wanted to attempt this Hunt.

However... It is also this mindset that allowed one to achieve greatness.

And the reason as to why Caera couldn't stop smiling.

The possibilities when one bends time to their will... She wanted to see it.

Both Miralith and Selen have showcased the potential behind their powers. The power to manipulate the acceleration, deceleration and even hints of the present.

But what about the recently unsealed King? He who controls the present? What kind of power could he bring forth? And if Selen succeeds, what kind of power could she wield?

Caera wanted to know. This thirst for knowledge must be quenched. Now that Selen is considering the option, it was practically akin to a chef waving their finest meal in front of your nose.

How can one resist? The temptation, the idea, it's all been implanted into the brain at this point.

So Caera simply watched.

###

"With so many uncertainties... are you sure?" Egil asked as Selen had a frown on her face. She glanced at the hands and thought about the power she wielded. The potential of her abilities and... The danger they'll face.

She could still recall the moment Nyer appeared before them. The one who tampered with Velouria's ascension.

His mild surprise at her power, the ability to warp perception. But after hitting him once and inflicting what would've been a mortal wound with the help of others, he simply shrugged it off.

Regenerated the parts of his body that was missing and after that, her perception warp didn't work on him anymore. He didn't focus on anything, simply allowing himself to do what must be done.

A reflective counter against the attacks launched against him. There was no focus needed, simply a response towards stimuli.

And with that, her effectiveness was instantly rendered to zero even if she could accelerate or decelerate.

It doesn't matter when the space they inhabit becomes solidified, preventing movements of any kind.

So, if she was to face him again, what can she do? To ensure that her effectiveness isn't eliminated because her gimmick was seen through.

The fourth option was the only choice.

"Mnm, the other abilities are good. But I don't think they're going to be enough. However, I won't blindly challenge the King with half hearted preparation." Selen smiled.

With so much of the King's history veiled in mystery, there was only one being she could ask about him.

Miralith.

"Can you guard me? I'm going to establish a connection with Miralith once more. And... I don't know if the Zenia's will have any safety nets put into place. If anything goes wrong, use Alice's flames to break that connection." Selen requested as Egil paused for a moment before nodding.

"Alright. Do what you need, I'm here to support you." He smiled.

Hearing this, Selen nodded. As long as she gets Egil's support, it felt like she could do anything in the world.

Even plans as reckless as this.

Perhaps she got the bad habit from Alice. She is a bad influence after all.

Walking away so that she could have a large enough space for herself, Selen took a deep breath.

Contacting Miralith wasn't difficult. As someone who's established a contract, this was easy as simply going through the motions.

But the annoying part of all of this was... Informing the Zenia family that she was still alive and kicking. That their contract was still in effect and she'll be enslaved if she wasn't careful.

However, should this come to pass, Egil will be there to help her. As a Hybrid created from Alice's blood, he's gained some of the properties that help with fighting beasts.

The power to burn away Abyssal energy.

The same fire that Sigurd borrowed from Alice through a contract that they established. And with a bit of training, Egil could now wield it with some degree of familiarity.

"Wish me luck." Selen closed her eyes.

*RUMBLE!!!

Immediately, Abyssal energy burst out of her body. The aura of a Lord began to seep out of her body. Foreign, different from the usual aura possessed by Selen.

This was far older...

Miralith's aura!

Selen's hair flashed white.

Resonance!

A staff appeared in her hand as her outfit shifted to that of a white and black dress with straps of fabric hovering around her, defying gravity.

Raising her staff, she slammed it into the ground as the imprint of a clock face began to expand beneath her.

The ticking of the clock hand echoed with each passing second.

And behind her, the silhouette of a wingless draconic beast began to manifest.

A pair of jagged horns, four eyes that bore down on the women who had summoned it.

Narrowing its gaze, the giant figure faded away as scales appeared beneath Selen's left eye.

"It's been a while. A little girl has finally decided to show herself, had enough fun playing dead?"
Miralith's voice rang out inside Selen's head.

She could sense that her main body was simply resting. She made no movement.

And even with the sudden contact through the ritual, Miralith used her powers to conceal the aura to the best of her abilities. Of course, there was only so much she could do while sealed, this was simply to delay things as long as possible.

"We're you worried?" Selen smiled.

Her relationship with Miralith wasn't bad. How else was she allowed to have her contract? Through the façade she had to put on for the Zenia family, Miralith knew what she was like inside.

"Worried? Me? What kind of fool do you take me for? I can still sense it every time you borrow a bit of my power." Miralith revealed a slight smirk along with a mocking tone.

"I can tell from a mile away that you were simply playing dead like a possum. So what changed? Got bored of hiding yourself? And considering... This nostalgic miasma, you're deep in terminus at that."

Opening her eyes, Selen's left eye had transformed into the same draconic eye that Miralith possessed.

"A few things happened and I'm down here for a while. Hunting for my seventh Sigil."

Miralith stirred a little. The beast raised her eyebrow and let out a slight growl.

"So the cry baby who wanted nothing to do with me has grown this much. My how children grow fast. In the blink of an eye you are already bordering on the status of Lordship." Miralith closed her eyes.

She could still recall what the young Selen was like, scrambling to the corner of the cage screaming for help. The fear and panic in her small frame.

But most importantly, the fact that she was able to adapt to the 'time' within her cage.

The reason why she had taken interest in the small child sent to die.

"But if you're risking yourself to contact me despite knowing both of our predicaments, it seems the seventh is not a simple one."

Selen began to hesitate.

And she decided to be truthful towards Miralith, the one who gave her power and the beast who is her friend.

"I was given four options for my Sigil. Four paths of power that have its own benefits. First the beast of possibilities. A whale with countless eyes that can see the potential of time. The options available in that moment.

"Second the lady who gazes upon tomorrow. The Old Lord who peers into the future and bring the consequences to the present." Selen recounted the options Caera gave her.

Miralith listened, as one of the oldest who govern time and even gaining the conceptual Authority revolving around the word 'Time', she was familiar with those who mastered a portion of the powers.

"Third the serpent who devours the past."

Upon hearing to this point, Miralith's smile slowly faded.

Potential, Future, Past...

That leaves only one.

A rush of memories, a flood of experiences. In that instant, his name floated in her mind once more as her memories travelled through the rivers of time.

To the era where her master first discovered her. The one true king who governs the present.

A king with a mask that no one peered under, the throne of loneliness. He who walked alone in the present.

"So have you summoned me because you are worried about our connection? About how the powers are interacting? Or..." Miralith cut Selen off.

And her next words filled Selen's heart with a wave of guilt.

The nature of the request that she was about to ask of Miralith and what she's about to set out to do.

"Or are you asking me to bid farewell to my master and closest friend for the second time? To ask me how to best stop his heart from beating and remove life from his fingertips?"

Chapter 912: Miralith And The King

Seeing Selen fall silent with guilt, Miralith let out a sigh.

"Seeing as how you know about my connection with my old friend, can I assume you know how our story ended?" Miralith asked. Her voice lacked anger.

She wasn't mad that Selen wanted to know about how to kill the King.

She was simply saddened by the reality of the situation and the memories that she suddenly recalled.

Selen clenched her fist and nodded.

"The ending of your story was one that had you seal him away. And... it seems like his seal had been recently undone hence why he is now a target available for the bounty."

Miralith closed her eyes.

"History is always an interesting case. Information gets warped through the passage of time. Bias becomes truth, events that did not happen become reality. Interpretation is the biggest enemy.

"It is true that only I knew of my King's end. It is true that only I was there. But I did not seal away my King. Why would I? As his only friend." Miralith shook her head.

"He had sealed himself. Abandoned all that he had obtained and simply chose to slumber."

Hearing this, even Caera was surprised.

The Tyrant of the Present... chose to seal himself? Why? For what reason? He had everything he could've ever wanted.

Why would the King choose to throw everything away?

"But let's not talk about history. You summoned me forth in order to find out about his power. This request I shall answer.

"The reason why my King is known as the Tyrant of the Present is because his power manipulates the current section of time that you reside in. He desynchronises that portion from the stream, analyses everything, carries out an action then erases it from the flow.

"That is my King's power. Recall your first meeting with me. They brought you here and you were forced to walk into the cage. But what if the moment you walked to that door and blinked, you already found yourself in the cage. The passage of the present had been erased yet the actions have been carried out. You simply don't recall as you could not perceive that erasure." Miralith explained as she closed her eyes.

Selen might think this was contradictory. To ask if she was asking her to abandon her friend for a second time yet still telling her of his powers. To give her an edge that she needed.

"However, let me warn you before you make any plans. Within this desynchronisation, your actions are locked. You have already reacted based on the information you have seen and the flow of action will no doubt be carried out. But my King is different.

"In this time, he alone acts with free will. His course of action can always be adjusted based on how you react."

Selen furrowed her brows.

The ultimate late throw in rock paper scissors. While she has already made her choice, the King would be able to change his answer.

Before she could ask Miralith anything else, the connection was cut off. Not because of her own doing or an interference, but rather because of Miralith's own choice.

"Well... His powers are definitely not just as simple as I originally thought." Caera spoke after the ritual faded away.

The scales disappeared from Selen's body and she was returned back to normal.

In the documents of the past, the King had always been written as having powers to erase time. The exact details were unknown but they knew he was strong when it comes to assassinations.

However...

Now that they knew he can move freely within that erased time while everyone has a set course of action, it's clear why assassinations were so simple for him. What can you even do if you die within this erased time?

But there was something off about it. Perhaps it wasn't the full truth otherwise there wouldn't even have been a speck of information about it.

How else would people know he erased time?

Did he release that information himself? Or was it Miralith who told people?

As the closest retainer to that King, Miralith knew information that others didn't.

"If... I mess with his perception, I might be able to counter the erasure to some degree. Make him focus during that moment so he misses his opportunity. Though he might see through it with a single glance." Selen folded her arms.

"Hou~ You're still insistent on trying to fight it out? Even after knowing his power?"

"What else is there to do? And..." Selen hesitated.

"Before the fight, I want to try and talk to him. To have an audience with the King. Miralith mentioned that he sealed himself away. Why? Miralith is his close friend so why was she left behind? I want to know. I want to know so that Miralith can get some closure." She explained while Caera nodded with a smile.

"There's no hurry to establish a bounty. When the time comes, I'll link you up to the statue remotely so that you can claim the bounty. Before that, let's hope we can get you an audience with the King."

###

Sitting upon a throne, a man could be seen with his head resting on his hand. He sat in a relaxed posture, not looking at the red haired woman in front of him.

The one who undid his seal but also the one who sought his assistance.

The man sat on the throne had short grey with streaks of silver along the edges, a lean but muscular build and wore a loose fitting shirt that exposed his neck and chest.

Golden armour decorated his shoulder, forearms, waist and leg while white and black cloth wrapped around the rest of his body.

Opening his eyes, a pair of golden irises stared at the woman. Unlike normal eyes, he lacked a pupil. A golden glistening sea of energy acted as his iris. One spun slowly, almost unnoticeable in a clockwise motion while the other spun anticlockwise.

Like pouring glitter into water and watching it flow along the tide.

One saw the future, the other saw the past.

And combined, he observed the present.

"I cannot help you. There is no history to speak of within that body of yours. Rewinding will only reestablish the seals placed upon your body and not return your power. Such is the nature of oblivion that not even time can overcome.

"For at the end of the river of time lies only oblivion. A flow you cannot fight against." He spoke slowly towards the woman who sought his help.

"She was half dead! A walking corpse! She had nothing to her name and you're telling me even in that state she can erase everything I've worked for?!" Tiamat shouted, rage visible in her eyes as veins bulged on her neck.

All of the core principles that she had learned, her habits, the method of manipulating energy. All of it was gone!

Reduced to nothingness!

She knew she could do it but how!? How should she manipulate this wellspring of energy within her core!?

Thanks to Allura's attack, Tiamat had truly been set to zero.

To know history yet not know why.

A situation where it's similar to suddenly giving a tail to a human and tell them to move it like their arm.

They wouldn't know how to.

That's Tiamat's situation with Abyssal energy. A completely foreign energy where the most efficient method no longer worked.

In fact, anything that originated or was based on her instinct no longer worked!

She had to create something completely separated from everything.

An impossible task.

"She was half dead and yet you still chose to be arrogant. Tiamat, I allowed this audience because we are both rulers. Yet I see you bereft of the ruler's composure." He spoke calmly.

Didn't rush nor was he deliberately slow.

He was simply stating a fact like any other, even if the one he's talking to was the Queen of the Apocalypse.

"As the one who rules over others, you should never show doubt even if you are worried. Never yield even as the tides crash against your will. Never show weakness even if you cannot see your victory." He stood up from his throne and walked slowly towards Tiamat.

Step by step, one word at a time.

"And never surrender even as the Gods knock on your door. Yet all I see before me is a babbling woman who is crying about the circumstances that could've been avoided.

"Where is your dignity? Where is your pride? Right now, at this moment, I see no Queen. I see a pathetic fool." He lectured.

Tiamat opened her mouth, wanting to fight back but when meeting his eyes, she found herself unable to utter a single word.

"Humble yourself. Did you become the Queen of the Apocalypse overnight? Or was it the result of years of gruelling effort? If you wish to reach the height of your power again, start from the bottom. Rebuild your foundation.

"In the era of our time, there was no guidance for us to rely on. We had to be the pioneers of our own power. Or are you saying that you cannot do so anymore? Because there is the easy way out?"

"Easy for you to say! You haven't lose everything!!!" Tiamat raged while he simply let out a laugh.

"Oi... why are you laughing." Tiamat's eyes turned bloodshot.

But he continued to laugh.

"OI!"

She grabbed his collar but before she knew it, her hands had been cut off.

"!!!"

Jumping back, her regeneration began to kick in.

"I laugh because a Queen has become a clown before my very eyes. Leave, to speak further is utterly meaningless to a fool who cannot see the path before her eyes." He took a single step and reappeared upon his throne.

Sitting down, he closed his eyes, clearly not willing to speak any further.

Gritting her teeth, Tiamat could only walk away.

Chapter 913: Axis Of Time

The King sat upon the throne.

Even after being unsealed, he didn't make a move.

He remembered Tiamat's request, for him to roam free and reclaim whatever land he wanted. For the era of old has returned.

Yet he paid her command no attention.

He has already felt the height for pleasure, such achievements meant nothing to him anymore.

Civilisation gained and lost on a whim.

He ruled with mercy, he ruled with tyranny. He's tried it all.

He peered into what the future would hold and it was ever so...

Dull.

Do people find pleasure in being a king?

For what reason?

More responsibility? To show kindness?

One doesn't need to be a King in order to be kind.

A king is a status, one he did not require anymore.

He peered into the past of this realm, saw the battles of old. The clash of Gods, the death of a mage who saw through fate. He saw the rise and fall of civilisations born afterwards, the wars fought between nations.

Nothing had changed.

Even after spending all these years slumbering in the seal, the world has not changed in the slightest. Everything remains the same.

And now he sat in the future upon a Throne with an empty court.

His retainers have long returned to the earth. The only one that can possibly remain...

Miralith.

The beast he once took in on a whim, his only friend.

After a momentary pause, the King made a decision.

Lifting his finger slightly, he tapped it against the armrest.

*RUMBLE!!!

The earth began to shake, the borders of Terminus groaned in pain.

His energy ceaselessly poured out without stop. Above his temple, the clouds scattered and fissures began to manifest from the rush of energy.

"I would appreciate it if you didn't turn my home upside down." A voice rang out.

A faceless figure, a white silhouette with a single mouth.

"I never heard of a homeowner preferring to have an intruder within their rooms." The King opened one eye and stared at the Will of the Abyss.

"Depends on the owner. What barrier can stop you if you wish to leave? But must you really cause such destruction?" The Will sighed helplessly.

"I have given you peace even with the half hearted bindings I allowed you to place upon my body. My expectations were that you would find something better to hold me back and yet I find this prison lacking.

"Am I to assume that you have failed to meet such expectations?" The King stood up while the Will shrugged his shoulders.

"Why seek to seal that which cannot be sealed? I simply wish you didn't cause such a large commotion on your way down from the stage."

The King narrowed his eyes.

A subtle threat.

"Has the observer finally decided to make a move personally? Will you coronate my return with a sea of flames?"

A ruler never doubts, a ruler never yields, A ruler never shows weakness, even when the being in front of him is the Will of the Abyss.

"Nope~ I don't intend to fight anyone. And..." He trailed off before revealing his signature toothy grin.

"I need not make a move for someone whose fate is reaching its final destination."

"By whose decree?"

"By a certain witch who spent too long looking at cogs." The Will turned around, flicking his finger to repair the barriers of Terminus.

"O' King of eld who saw the past, future and present. He who records each dusk and dawn. The one who observes history through the lens of time.

"You sit upon your throne and watch as the land write the same story.

"The rise and fall of nations, heroes born of circumstance. Legend forged from lies, endless loops of which you have seen time and time again.

"Do you still remember the passion you felt when you first received your power? Your oath to remember the past, walk through the present and stride towards the future?

"O' weary King tapped in time, tell me.

"Since when did your steps grow still?

"When did you cease your strides towards the future? When did your foresight turn to sloth?

"You saw every ending and thus chose none. You claim it to be the wisdom of rulers, but the world saw it as stagnation.

"An empire fallen.

"Conqueror of time, thy fate has split in twain.

"O' King of eld, await the hour hand's strike.

"The creation of man will claim sovereignty over the sands of time.

"Her birth tolls the bells of the end. The one of many.

"So wait.

"Wait upon thy throne like you always have/watch as your future cease to exist.

"Thus spoke Yrael Velcarion. Seer of Cogs, Observer of Fates. The Watcher at the Axis of Time." The Will declared as the King finally revealed a single emotion.

Annoyance.

Who is she to declare his fate? Who is she to claim that his future is predestined?

Who is she to call herself the Watcher at the Axis of Time?

No one is beyond the grasp of time. Not even God.

If she dares say that she's observing through the Axis of Time then he will tear away that folly right here! Right now!

The Will grinned.

The King stood up, energy coursing through his veins as the world was halted. The present was desynchronised and the flow of time became visible.

If she claims herself to be at the axis of time, then there is only one destination he must reach.

That singular transcendent moment. The immovable centre where past present, future and possibilities all align.

It exists in theory but he has never seen it.

Yet she claims to be the watcher who resides there?

"Lies."

Opening his palm, the sound of ticking echoed out endlessly, multiplying, looping, synching, desynching.

Everything happening at once. The conversation undone, redone and also never even happening played out in the world around him.

In order to find the Axis, he must first transcend this world in its entirety. To escape the boundaries of time that he had familiarised himself with.

It is only then can he reach the Axis. It is only there can he observe every age at once, the cycles, the possibilities.

Everything.

Power bordering on Omniscience, clairvoyance of such degree that nothing becomes unknown anymore.

[Shh]

A voice reverberating in his very soul.

A sound that could not be blocked out.

A presence he could not ignore.

The King's world darkened, outside of the boundaries of time, his eyes grant him no power.

The eye that saw the past blinded.

The eye that saw the future erased.

The present unobservable.

For the first time, the King was blind.

But in that blindness, he saw the silhouette of a woman. A finger over her lips, a smile.

Then the sands of time shackled his limbs.

"!!!"

He 'saw' the Axis but was still bound by time.

The King staggered.

[O' weary King.]

[You may have conquered time in your era. But no one escapes it.]

[For time simply has to wait.]

[It will always win in the end.]

[Even now at the Axis, I speak from the past.]

Then, as she spoke this line, she snapped her fingers and the King was dragged back.

The sands of time flowed backwards, actions erased. Choices undone.

*BANG!!!

Slamming back into his throne, the King creased his brows as he saw the markings upon his limbs. He felt the invisible chains around his neck.

"Ah~ Ya shouldn't have done that. Now your fate is locked in place." The Will shook his head.

"Didn't I tell you her prophecy? That your fate was split in twain? That moment of choice happened the instant I told you. And your choice was to chase the impossible. And now the Cogs are set into place.

"Your fate is now turning and it heads towards the end. Like always, you should've just waited." The Will sighed and started to walk away.

Waving his hand, he disappeared from the temple.

Veins bulged on the King's neck, he tried to move but at this point, only the actions allowed by fate could be done. Black chains that bound every unacceptable movement.

With a single choice, his freedom was surrendered.

And now, against his will, the King could only wait.

###

Caelan felt a stir. He sat up in his chair and frowned.

He sensed it.

Another that tried to transcend fate only to get burned by it in the end.

When his mother turned him into an immortal, it was an experiment.

And as a result, he gained a body that could not die. But his actions were also dictated by the cursed chains.

Where this purpose ends, he did not know. But from what little he knew, this curse of immortality may remain.

Even as time sinks into oblivion, he alone will persist.

"Is something wrong?" Caelan's assistant glanced over in confusion.

"Nothing. I just pity a fool who tried to do the impossible. Though I suppose their fate is still better than mine." Caelan shook his head, returning to work.

Had the fool not made such a move, they would still retain their 'freedom'.

###

Returning to his realm, the Will of the Abyss had an amused smile on his face.

One of the unknowns had finally been verified today.

The status of Yrael Velcarion. Her true fate and where she now resides.

The axis of time is simply one of many.

"Truly outrageous." He laughed.

But that was in character for her. And...

Like Caelan and now the King, she too was bound by the consequences of her own actions.

In that moment where the King tried to access the Axis, The Will saw her.

The multiple variations of her living in different moments. Some dead, some alive.

Some in the past, some in the future.

But all of it linked back to the one that was bound in that darkness.

To him, she was no longer the Seer of Cogs, the Observer of Fates nor was she the Watcher at the Axis of Time.

There is only one title befitting a woman like her.

The Fragmented One.

Chapter 914: Ideal Medicine

"Seems like the preparations are done." Alice wiped her sweat away as she felt a tether attach to herself. A flow of energy helping her 'back up' her memories while making sure her mind isn't overloaded by the information.

"Somewhat. But we have to sync it up and clear the memory every so often. There's only so much the machine can handle. If too much is deleted at once, even the machine can't help." Cayla warned, sprawling out on the ground in exhaustion.

Hours upon hours of tuning and adjustment before the device could finally be used.

Suyin enjoyed every second of it, even taking the time to investigate what kind of existence Cayla was. To have the ability to reside within Alice's mind yet being able to construct a body for herself and even roam free.

Sadly, she wasn't able to get the answers she wanted but it was a good project she could do during the breaks they took from the main experiment.

"Ideally we should refresh the system every hour. But that's a little unrealistic so we can settle for every 2 to 3 hours instead. We can also scan to see which parts are currently being targeted for modification and only store those memories instead." Suyin spoke up as her real body spun on a chair.

Around her, different inventions of hers moved autonomously, helping to decrease her responsibilities where she didn't need to do anything.

In Suyin's own words, "I'm not being lazy, I'm just being smart. So why struggle twice as hard when you just have to think hard once?"

It was this philosophy that allowed her to find all manners of shortcuts and efficiency in her work.

"How long does the sync take? Can I move while it's being done?" Alice asked. If there were any rules they have to know about, it's better to know now.

"You can move, you can even fight while it's happening. The only slight issue would be the fact that you'll have a headache while doing so. It'll last... 5 minutes? Maybe a little more give or take." Suyin estimated while biting a pen in her mouth.

Naturally still spinning on her chair.

If anything, Alice was surprised she isn't dizzy. Then again, this was the same woman who can enhance yourself through exoskeletons and fight hand to hand with hybrids.

This much is to be expected.

Meanwhile, Elias was reading the results from their testing of Alice's blood, which he didn't know belonged to her.

The more he read, the deeper his frown became.

As a doctor who has been treating Abyssal Side Effects for many years of this life now, the very nature of her blood contradicts everything he knew.

The way it behaved, its unique properties, everything he had learned in his years were thrown out the window after seeing this blood.

However, even though his knowledge has been completely flipped on its head, he could still use the foundation he established to proceed with a few ideas.

First, the blood in his possession should be classified as a catalyst.

The moment it comes into contact with blood or energy that contains any form of Abyssal Influence, whether that be Sigil powers or side effects, it will immediately begin its attack.

Consuming, adapting then erasing all of the effects.

Then, despite 'consuming' everything, the blood returns back to normal.

With this in mind, what if he combines it with some of his abilities?

To 'train' the blood to target only specific parts of the Abyssal energy. What if before it returns to normal, he stimulates it with a copy of the side effect?

And thus, when it's in the 'consume' state, he injects it into the body and makes sure it only consumes what's been asked of it.

Then, once its done, before it could adapt to the new aspect of the Abyssal Energy, he extracts the blood.

However, one must also be careful as this blood was also the most lethal poison at the same time. One mistake and everything it's 'consumed' will come spilling out, thus injecting the patient with countless side effects far worse than what they're experiencing.

A double edged blade. One brings death the other brings life.

But...

'I can do it. I can reach my dream with this.' Elias had a brave smile on his face as sweat dripped down his skin.

If he could master the application of this blood, he'll be able to eliminate the dangers of side effects.

All he needs is being able to reproduce this blood while also making it into medicine of sorts. One that must first be calibrated so that it can work without direct intervention.

"You seem like you're in a jolly mood. Figured something out?" Alice leaned against the desk with a smile.

Elias nodded his head.

"Yeah, ideas just keep flowing into my brain. How much of this blood do you have spare? I want to make some prototype medicine and put them to the test.

"With my Sigil abilities and some tools, I think I can make some test pills that specifically target side effects without poisoning the host." Elias clenched his fist as his heart pounded with excitement.

"Depends. How much do you need? There's only so much I have in stock for this. All of it needs to be used carefully." Alice asked.

Of course, that was a lie. But Elias didn't know she was the host to the blood just yet. There was no need for him to know.

Their relationship was a contractual one to begin with.

It'll take time to build trust between them. So for now, all he needed to know is that this blood came from a victim of the Zenia family and she just so happened to be there, 'helping'.

Nothing more.

"Hmm... I might be getting a bit greedy but do you have 4 more vials? Not even just four. 2 would do."

"I only have 5 vials. I'll give you three to work with while the other two I'll keep for now. They're precious resources after all." Alice nodded her head.

Reaching into her pouch, she pretended to pull out two more vials of her blood and handed it over.

With three vials of blood in his hands, Elias took a deep breath and calmed himself. He put it into his own storage and began writing down several ideas and tests that he can perform.

With the blood being able to 'reset' itself, it meant that these three vials could be used far more than normal blood.

However, depending on how many side effects are involved, it may bring changes that one doesn't expect.

Negative reactions towards certain combinations of side effects and so on.

Cases he's seen in the past.

Take for example, the side effects of a certain flying beast was rather harmless on its own. But when combined with an insect, it caused feathers to start growing from their blood vessels.

Their body will begin to collapse. They'll feel a stabbing pain inside their body as feathers continue to grow. Through the stomach, eyes, tongue, everything.

And in the end, they'll become a corpse of feathers and flesh.

A horrible fate that people didn't expect.

The growth of feathers stimulated by the properties of the insect.

Hence why with the blood being a 'storage' of various side effects, he needed to find a way to ensure that the side effects doesn't go berserk during the treatment.

Safety should be number one priority.

With Elias working on some final notes before beginning his research and Suyin finished with the device, it was finally time for them to leave the city. Leave and hope they're not dragged into the nightmare while on the road.

###

"This... This has traces of her." Gin's smile twitched. He could sense the lingering power in this portion of the nation despite the destruction around them.

First was the unnatural power that they sensed a few times in the North, something that should feel abyssal and beast like in nature.

Yet strangely... human?

It was the same kind as those that were Abyss born.

No, this felt artificial.

Then there's the hints of Void energy. The spirals of power that fought against what would've felt like a meteor, the hints of artifact power and...

Alice's unique signature.

Not to mention the fact that not long ago, they had also come across another 'trace' of Alice's.

It was hard to miss.

The raw destructive power that was displayed in that village...

The hints of an Abyss break with countless beasts spewing forth.

Then the traces of Tiamat.

Without knowing the full context of the situation, the three Lords could only ask one question.

What the hell was Alice doing in the north?!

What battles did she fight? What kind of enemies were biting at her heels?

And most importantly, how did she reach this level of firepower?

Even Gin had to admit.

After seeing countless Hunters in his life, this was the first time he's seen such perverted offensive potential.

How many Sigils did she have when doing this? Did she consume blood from a Lord?

Because even low power Lords will struggle to output this level of damage in such a focused area.

Despite the failed ascension, despite the corrupted divinity invading the land, the traces of Alice's power continued to linger.

A testament to how powerful she had become.

While Gin and Allura were surprised, they already knew what kind of monster Alice was.

But Karya didn't.

She couldn't believe that this power came from the same girl they were talking about.

Most work their entire lives to reach six Sigils.

But she only became a Hunter how long ago?

And in this short time, she was outputting power like this!?

Karya found herself having a hard time to believe this. But... It was also Gin and Allura who were vouching for Alice.

In her mind, Alice's silhouette was becoming blurred. She struggled to imagine the kind of girl who could do this much destruction.

Chapter 915: Cornering Deva

"Ha... Ha..."

*drip...

Kaden leaned against the wall with his entire body bleeding and wounded.

Cracks spread across his body. Damage that wasn't purely physical.

His authority eating away at his own flesh.

Before him, Famine twitched in a pool of her own blood that's been tainted by darkness.

Neither of them were in a state to keep fighting.

Famine glared at Kaden with anger, a million curses that she wanted to spew out were stuck in her throat.

"We could've avoided all this if you released the effects of your authority on Lua. Now look at us." Kaden couldn't help but find this moment laughable.

He didn't have any strength left to move.

She didn't have any strength left to run.

The sentinels surrounded them yet didn't make a single move.

"F*ck... You..." Famine squeezed out as her eyes were bloodshot from the pain.

"I'll pass. You're simply not my type." Kaden shook his head.

He wanted to take a break to recover but with how long it'll take to recover from the backlash of using two primal sins, it was unlikely.

However...

The finish line was in front of him.

Famine was at the end of her ropes. As long as he could leave with her in tow, Allura can be healed!

"Don't you all just love to watch..." Kaden mumbled, forcing himself to stand on his own.

Creating a spear from his shadow, he took slow steps towards Deva.

In that moment, he sensed the movement of the Sentinels that surrounded them.

"So you're finally making a move... Get the hell out of my way!!!"

A rush of adrenaline surged through Kaden's body.

He couldn't withstand using spells so instead he'll fall back on his foundation!

To enhance his physical body using energy and channel his authority through the staff!

Hone his senses, discard what's unnecessary.

Feel the danger, react instinctively. Allow mind and body to become one.

He was never as strong as Allura when it came to fighting physically. But just because he wasn't as strong as her didn't mean he couldn't hold his own!

*BANG!!!

Slamming his spear into the ground, Kaden vaulted into the sky as he sensed danger coming from all directions.

There's no need for fanciful techniques. He simply needs to do what he can in the shortest time possible, in the most efficient manner.

Who cares about the beauty of the technique?!

*CLANG!!!

Twirling the spear, Kaden parried every strike around him!

Gritting his teeth, he could feel the feedback from the strike and was forced backwards.

"Tch!" Sliding back from the impact, he felt his arm turning numb from the impact.

In the distance, Deva was slowly getting up.

If he wanted to chase her down, she wanted to run no matter what.

"You're not getting away!"

Crouching down, Kaden dug his foot into the ground and shot forward!

From above, an invisible sentinel slashed towards him with one of its hands but Kaden simply glared at the sentinel.

Even though he couldn't see the beast, he could tell it was there! And that alone was enough!

Stopping his dash immediately, he dodged the strike and ran up the arm.

'Three approaching from behind. One jumping from above.' Kaden analysed.

Stabbing the spear into the arm, he ran to the underside while still dragging his weapon.

Once the sentinels were inches away from hitting him, he jumped from the arm and dodged the strikes.

"DEVA!!!" He roared.

Going after the sentinel was simply to dragged the others away from Deva!

*CRACK!!!

Widening his eyes, Kaden felt an invisible hand grab his spear and shatter it.

There was one more sentinel.

One who hid his presence around Deva.

Revealing a bitter smile, Kaden projected energy outwards to form a shield!

*BANG!!!

###

"Hm?" Alice frowned, she placed her hand over her own chest.

Pain?

For a moment, she felt a slight pain in her chest.

Her body condition was fine, she felt healthy. But that ache as definitely there.

A split instant.

"Something wrong?" Suyin asked in her puppet form.

"Nothing, don't worry." Alice shook her head with a smile.

With everything set up, they were on their way out of the city.

The portals had been shrunk down in order to keep them inconspicuous. After all, if the guards saw them, even if they're not part of the Zenia family and knew of the Nightmare, they would still question what Alice and the group are up to.

If possible, she'd rather avoid that kind of delay.

Sitting on the carriage that Elias has bought, Alice leaned against the seat and glanced at the roots of the world tree threading through the land.

This city... had given her much to think about.

The Nightmare realm, the Zenia family.

And... the noble families still resisting their take over.

Nightingale, Serathei and Varyn.

Out of the three families, Serathei was probably in the most danger. Especially since Karina was working as a double agent for both the Zenia family and the Underground. She had access to information on everything she wanted to know and thus by extension...

The Zenia family knew as well.

As for the easiest one to talk to, it was probably the Nightingale family.

Especially since she had a connection with Miki.

They're on the verge of falling so giving them a hand to tide over this period would be killing two birds with one stone.

The first is helping an old friend and possibly gaining the favour of her family. The second was foiling the Zenia family's plans.

House Varyn was probably finding considering they're the sword of the Royal family.

A faction like them wouldn't fall so easily to the Zenia family.

"Don't you think they'll find us suspicious if we were to offer our help at this moment in time? What's to say they wouldn't treat us as spies?" Elias asked curiously while the umbrella was opened next to him to block out the sun.

"Probably. I'm somewhat banking on the fact that an old friend of mine is there. If she isn't... Well, at that point we can only let our actions do the talking right?" Alice shrugged with a smile.

"Urg..." Elias let out a sigh.

"I swear, do you ever formulate a proper plan?"

"Of course I do." Alice raised an eyebrow but Elias shook his head.

"I wouldn't call those plans. More so... a checklist of things to do."

"Leaving blanks give room for improvisation no?"

"Nope. Improvisation is only needed if things go off the rails. Having a proper plan is still ideal. Then everyone knows the rough approach they should take. Without a foundation to work on, things will deviate too much." Elias explained while Alice folded her arms.

[He's got a point. Making plans are ideal to keep everyone on the same wavelength.] Cayla agreed with Elias' point while Alice let out a groan.

"Urg... making plans are a painnn..." Alice flailed her arms lazily while Suyin let out a chuckle.

"You get me right?" Alice glanced over as Suyin nodded her head.

"Yep. I do things on the fly, it's easier for me that way. Only because I got all my plans and projects already written out on my whiteboard. I just see whatever interests me and do it." Suyin shrugged.

"However, if I don't have anything like that, having a plan that's better than just let's see what happens is ideal." She grinned, causing Alice to let out another groan.

Thinking of plans makes her head hurt. There were so many variables to consider and when so many of those occur at once, she just wants to throw her hands in the air and give up.

Of course, it's not like she didn't make plans in the past. But rather they were broad enough where she can maintain her sense of freedom.

Take for example the battle against Kazira. They made plans using the corpse they retrieved and so on, but the main details of the battle was still just, in Alice's own words, "F*ck it, we ball."

But with things as they are, using that philosophy might not be appropriate for the time being.

Scratching her head, Alice let out a sigh.

"Fine, let's go with this for now then. Our goal is to arrive at the city where the Nightingale family is most active. Help them out if possible, drive back the Zenia family. Investigate the reaches of this Nightmare, its rules and effects. Find effective counters and deconstruct this new realm in the making."

"That's still just a checklist of things." Elias chuckled, causing Alice to throw her shoe at him.

"Shuddap! We'll flesh it out once we have more information. But my main goal is to stop whatever the Zenia family are doing and put an end to everything." Alice huffed, causing Suyin to laugh.

Joking on the way out, the group left the city behind.

Thankfully, the guards by the city walls didn't give them much trouble and they were allowed to leave without much issue. On the way out, they felt a small spike of energy and the machines roared to life.

As expected, the moment one leaves the city, their memories are modified to prevent information from leaking out.

Elias needed a slight break from the effects and so did Cayla, but after a short moment, they remembered everything once more.

The machines succeeded in retaining memory without overload!

With everything secured, they approached the next city.

###

"I don't like this." Karya frowned deeply as they stood at the border between Verona and Extalia. The land before her felt... unnatural.

"I agree. It does not feel like a place that should exist. Something is overlapping this nation." Allura furrowed her brows.

Right now, it was simply a 'feeling'. But something that could disturb a Lord's senses this much wasn't going to be good.

"Only one way to find out." Gin shrugged as the three nodded and took their first steps into Extalia.

Chapter 916 Third Meeting

Having left the city, their next destination was the Grand Cantia. A city build in three layers and one that is home to the Nightingale family.

Every family that live in this city devote their time to Abyssal Engineering and inventions in general.

It wouldn't be a stretch to call it the home of the inventors.

The carriage swayed as it rolled along the road, the sound of wheel to ground were their music for the trip along with the occasional groan from Alice.

Elias focused on noting down some experiment ideas while Suyin's doll was put into sleep mode.

She herself was doing her own experiments in her lab.

In her boredom, Alice had begun counting trees.

Of course, travelling was never a real issue since she could teleport around the place. But with them now deep in enemy territory, there was no telling when they'll suddenly be dragged into the Nightmare and have their memories manipulated.

And with her needing to maintain the portal to the memory device, using large skills was advised against.

Or at least until they're certain of the range of the Nightmare.

Once night falls, if they're still conscious, keeping the device connected would only be needed when they exit a city.

"We should've gotten some information on what kind of city Grand Cantia is." Alice groaned.

So far, the only thing she knew was where they needed to go, the fact that it's built on three layers and the name.

Nothing more, nothing less.

"Well considering the fact that Karina is part of the Zenia family, using the Underground services might not be a great idea. Especially since we don't know who might be a double agent. It's best to investigate everything ourselves." Elias spoke up.

The strangest part of that is the fact that even after knowing Alice is part of the Zenia family, they have yet to make any moves.

It's almost as though they're content with leaving her be, to allow her to do whatever she wanted.

“If you wanted information about Grand Cantia you could’ve just asked me.” Suyin poked her head around the corner while mixing two agents together and giving it a light shake.

The colour immediately shifted and she had to throw it away.

Then, after a second.

*BANG!!!

Alice blinked her eyes, she could see Suyin’s lab shaking while her autonomous drones cleaned up the impact.

Lifting up her goggles, she slid over on her chair without being phased by the accident.

“It’s not a very... interesting city if I have to say so. At least that’s my impression of it. Might be different for other people.” Suyin shrugged.

She dragged over a whiteboard and made a rough diagram of the city.

An underground section, the surface, then giant buildings lifted above the surface.

“The lowest layer acts as the manufacturing plant. Everything they make is done here, giant machines that would block out the sky are hidden underground. People who work here practically never see the sky since orders are so frequent.

“There are a few Abyssal gateways here too, easy access to materials that can only be found in the Abyss. But unlike the one you saw in the previous city, these ones aren’t for commercial use. They’re only used for transportation of materials.” Suyin spoke while circling the underground section.

It was a simple drawing so Alice couldn’t really tell how big the actual place is.

“Next is the surface. Commerce, housing and testing grounds. You can’t have testing grounds below the surface since it might cause the ceiling to collapse. Explosions and so on. Schools and everything else is also done on the surface.”

Then there was the giant buildings held up in the sky via several pillars of support.

Giant towers that dwarfed the main city.

“This is what they call heaven. It’s where the rich live. Most of the inventions that are useful are sent up there. Expensive trades and so on. I’ve been there a few times but honestly, a lot of the people here are f*cking insufferable.” Suyin pulled a face of disgust.

“You’ve been there before?” Alice blinked her eyes in surprise.

She didn’t think someone like Suyin would spend her time outside of her labs voluntarily.

“Yeah it was before the time I was crowned as the best genius in the east. I was invited there as an exchange program between Extalia and Sikha. To send groups of their best students and expand their worldview.” Suyin sighed.

“Oh I remember that. It was only ever done once but there was an accident so it was never done again. It was all over the news. If I remember correctly... It happened quite long ago. Like yea-”

“It happened. That’s all that matters okay?” Suyin reached through the portal and grabbed Elias by the mouth, stopping him from finishing his sentence.

She will NOT let him reveal how long ago that was in years. All they need to know is that she is forever seventeen.

“Accident?” Alice was more curious about the accident that occurred.

“Yep. A bunch of extremists who hated the idea of mixing Abyssal energy and human technology together. They staged a terror attack on the second day of the exchange. Bombs were set up everywhere. To put it simply, all three layers collapsed and it took a while for them to clean everything up.” Suyin drew some marks across the support pillars.

Even without saying more, Alice already understood what had happened.

“Ever seen a bunch of delusional rich people thinking money can solve everything? Just throw them into a disaster and they’ll soon realise their money doesn’t do sh*t.” Suyin shrugged.

“If an attack like that happened in the past, why are they lifting everything into the air again?” Alice furrowed her brows.

“Because of the air quality amongst other things. With the manufacturing plant being underground, even with the vents pushing smoke and other gasses out, it’ll still effect the surface. While those in the air have a barrier that specifically keep out the gasses so everything they get is ‘clean’.

“Either way, if your friend is from a noble family, she’s probably living in the upper layer.”

Folding her arms, Alice recalled her interactions with Miki. Based on her personality, Alice doubted Miki would like this kind of separation. Especially when the surface is suffering from the manufacturing from underground.

But all of this was just assumptions. It’s still better to see things in person.

As they travelled along the road, the sun started to set and they quickly set up camp.

Suyin had Alice shut the portal for now since it’s probably best not to have Suyin affected by the Nightmare if it should occur.

Setting up her recording devices, she hooked Alice and Elias up to the machines while they waited for the sun to set.

[Since we're out of the city, it shouldn't affected us I hope. After all, leaving the city had me and Elias recoiling from the memory wipe.] Cayla furrowed her brows.

'It's hard to say when it comes to these things. It's better to be safe than sorry.' Alyss shook her head.

Then, as the sun touched the horizon line, both Alice and Elias felt a wave of dizziness. It wasn't as strong as what it was in the city but they could definitely feel it.

The pull of the nightmare calling them to another realm.

The machines roared to live, numbers being written down as the two resisted the pull. Overhead, the moon slowly turned a deep crimson as it dyed the night sky in an ominous red.

"You're holding on strong but the pull of the nightmare is increasing. I don't sense anything walking around so we're clear for that." Suyin reported through her puppet. Unlike her time in the city, there weren't any invisible beings walking around just yet.

And ideally, they hope it remains that way.

Elias was beginning to lose himself. His body swayed despite him trying to fight the pull of the Nightmare.

Same with Cayla as the two of them died the most.

Their connection with the realm is definitely stronger than normal.

Alyss was struggling but not to the same extent.

However, despite fighting against it, the two eventually couldn't hold on anymore and fell asleep.

###

Blinking her eyes, Alice found herself back at the camp where she found the logs belonging to the man who lost himself to insanity. the storm outside had calmed down a little and travel shouldn't be an issue.

Sitting by the branch, she could instinctively sense the roots connected to the branches she had already resonated with. With a single thought, she could teleport over without any issue.

However, there was one problem she hadn't expected to see.

The woman sat opposite her.

Monika.

Their third meeting.

"Heh~ it took you a while this time. Resisting the call? I do suppose the pull is weaker when you're out in the wild." She smiled, crossing her legs with a knowing smile on her face.

"Are you also with the Zenia family?" Alice decided to ask straight up without any small talk.

With Karina knowing who she is, it'll be no surprise if Monika did as well.

"Hmm~ I'm not strictly part of the family. But I also won't deny the connection with them. Ah but don't worry, I'm not giving them information about you. Not that it would change anything." Monika chuckled with a wave of her hand.

"So they already know what I'm doing in the Nightmare?" Alice sighed.

"Yep. They knew the moment you stepped in here. It's hard to disguise ones soul after all." Monika nodded.

A silence spread between them. Alice had a frown on her face as she had been dancing in the palm of the Zenia family all this time. Yet they haven't done anything major.

Why? What did they want her to do in the Nightmare?

The only one that could potentially tell her anything was...

"Why are you here again?"

Monika smiled a creepy smile. One that sent shivers down Alice's spine.

"I came to give you a little prophecy."

Chapter 917: World Of Cogs

"I came to give you a little prophecy." Monika grinned while Alice pulled a face of annoyance.

"What is it with you and prophecies. Can't you just be normal?" Alice groaned.

Every time Monika appeared it was always followed by a giant headache.

Not to mention the fact that she's a guide so there's no doubt she's connected to the Zenia family. If so, what was her goal in all of this?

"Now now, don't be like that. Prophecies are usually spoken because they help steer people towards a better future, don't you agree? Though sometimes speaking it aloud could also influence the wrong cogs to set into place, leading the participant to ruin instead." Monika waved her hand lazily.

"You telling me that doesn't exactly scream confidence you know?"

"I'm aware. But you're a doubtful one towards anything tied to the Zenia family aren't you? Which is why I'm laying as many cards as I can on the table. So that you can see the dealer has her hands free and won't pull any tricks." Monika winked and stuck out her tongue playfully.

"Putting that much effort into convincing me just makes you more suspicious." Alice prepared to stand up but Monika was going to do the same.

Immediately, Alice understood that even if she was to walk around and Hunt, Monika would follow and do the same.

Letting out an annoyed sigh, she sat back down.

"Tea?" Monika offered.

"No thanks."

"Shame. Since you don't like freebies, why don't we play a game?" Monika intertwined her fingers and stared at Alice with a calm smile.

In that moment, Alice felt a sense of déjà vu.

"A game?"

"Indeed. A game where you can get some information from me and in return, I can get some information from you. We'll take turns asking two questions, you decide when to stop but you can only stop when both of us have asked and answered an equal number of questions.

"For the questions, you are allowed one lie and one truth. It's up to you to determine what's truth and what's false. I don't recommend lying twice in a row." Monika explained with an ominous chuckle.

"So, do you want to play?" She held out her hands.

Alice froze.

Her mind snapped back to a certain Immortal Lord she met a while ago. Rosalyn's brother. He proposed the same game, offered her free information and almost tried to kill her when he realised she had interacted with beings at the pinnacle of their world.

An action she still didn't understand to this day.

And now, Monika was proposing the same game with the same rules?

"How do you know about this game?" Alice furrowed her brows.

"I wonder~ maybe I read it from your memories, maybe it's a common game. Maybe I made it up just now. If you're that curious, why don't you ask that as a question? So, would you like to play?" Monika offered.

Alice hesitated.

She recalled the tips that Caelan taught her before.

Truth, when mixed with a few lies, still count as false. But lies can't become truth. So in this game, you can make them think an answer is true but it's actually false should you mix in the lies.

But that also works for Monika.

And right now, Monika had the upper hand when it comes to information.

While playing this might help Alice to some degree, there's too much for her to lose.

Monika mentioned that she was involved with the Zenia but won't tell them about Alice's movements.

Was that true or false?

"I'll pass. I can't trust the kind of questions you'll ask." Alice shook her head while Monika shrugged.

Tapping her staff, she created a tea table next to her and sipped some tea.

"What a shame. And here I thought it was the perfect moment to swap some information with you."

"Maybe so, but the kind of questions you can ask and the kind that I can aren't equal in importance. What I ask you can probably be found later. But what you ask will probably be secrets I don't want to share." Alice countered as Monika narrowed her eyes.

"Was it so obvious? Well I wasn't actually intending to hide that fact in the first place. I simply wanted to see, understand and observe this anomaly before me. I suppose I won't tell you the full prophecy that I saw in the cogs then. How about a slight hint instead?

"Certain people have now become victims of the Nightmare." Flicking her finger, Monika created two objects in front of her.

The first was a raven feather, the second a silver blade with Ayr's marking on the guard along with white flames crackling along the edge of the blade.

Seeing this, Alice's pupils constricted as she already knew what this meant.

Allura and Kaden were in Extalia!

Why were they in Extalia? Wasn't Kaden looking for Famine?

'No, not necessarily. She never mentioned Extalia specifically but rather that the nightmare got to them. We haven't checked the range of the Nightmare on the surface yet. We just know we're safe in the Abyss. So there's a chance that Kaden was caught elsewhere.' Alice calmed herself down as she stared at Monika who simply gathered some snow using her staff.

Snapping her fingers, the snow transformed into a tiny snowman.

Monika giggled while tapping its head with her finger.

"Do you want to hear the rest of the prophecy now?" She offered but Alice still shook her head.

Prophecies rub her the wrong way.

Sometimes, people on their way to defy the prophecy only fulfil it in the end. The strings of fate that shouldn't be observed.

Once observed, it sets them into place.

Alice disliked that idea.

"Leave it be. I don't care what fate has in store for me, I'll just keep doing the things I've been doing." Alice prepared to leave but Monika smiled.

"Even if it meant losing someone precious? The fate that's laid out before you is one painted in blood. Are you sure you don't want to know? Perhaps you can save a life or two." Monika asked, her voice slowly turning into a whisper that planted ideas into Alice's mind.

Alice clenched her fist.

Was she curious? Yes, yes she was. She wanted to know who this person was.

Who would die? Can she stop it?

However...

"I'll do what I can to overturn that fate when it happens in front of me. Having someone dictate my actions through what they choose to reveal to me... I hate it. If you're only here to tell me what some invisible force wants to decide for me, then leave." Alice glared while Monika flicked her finger, removing the snowman's head.

"Hm~ that's a good choice. Observing fate has always been the action of the foolish. Paranoid people who disguise their fear as wanting to know everything. They simply wish to control every aspect of their life." Monika stood up, dusting the snow off her skirt.

"I knew of a woman once. Foolish to the extreme. She sought to overturn fate after witnessing what's in store for her. She wished to dictate the movement of the world, to set down the seeds that could overturn the very foundation of this world.

"In the end, in her fear, she was punished for her actions. A punishment that she's still suffering to this day. What do you think? Foolish isn't it." Monika asked, skipping over to Alice's side.

"Isn't that the same as you? Aren't you observing fate right now?" Alice asked.

If Monika could give her prophecies, then there's no doubt she's doing the same thing.

"That's just my nature. Just like how you have a special eye that lets you see things that normally shouldn't be seen, I have eyes that transform the world differently in my view." Monika chuckled, leaning towards Alice who wanted to back off but her movements were frozen.

"Even if I want to avoid it, I see the cogs that spin with each ticking second. The movement of the world, the actions of fate.

"I see the cogs locking into place with each choice, the crossroads where men make a decision. What do you think I see right now?" She asked.

Without giving Alice a chance to reply, Monika tapped her staff and Alice found the Nightmare around her shifting.

All colours disappeared, outlines faded. There was only an endless expanse of cogs. Some turned faster than others, some waited for a connection.

Even Monika's appearance changed. A being made up of cogs that spun ever so slightly.

"Take this wall for example. You see this cog that's not moving? If I were to interact with it ever so slightly..." Monika trailed off.

Pulling Alice over, she gently tapped the cog with her finger.

The instant her cogs connected with the wall, a series of connections were formed. Each cog helping the other to turn then finally, the wall collapsed and the cogs broke.

"Every action is tied to a cog that you don't see. There are times when my view transforms into this world of fate. It's all I can see. But sometimes, it returns to normal like this. A fluctuation." Monika snapped her finger and Alice's view turned back to normal.

Before them was the crumbled wall.

Alice stumbled back.

Seeing energy was similar. Those with lots of energy have countless strands connected to them, sometimes these strands obscure her view. However, Alice could at least choose when to focus on this view or when to filter it out from her sight.

But if what Monika said was true... She had no control over this power of hers.

This world of Cogs chooses when to reveal itself to her.

Living like that...

Alice couldn't help but feel pity for this woman. Even if they may be enemies at the end of the day.

Chapter 918: Black Chains Of Fate

But even though Alice felt pity, it didn't change the fact that they could be enemies.

"So, everything you've told me, every bit of info you shared, are they simply actions to place cogs into necessary places?" Alice asked, composing herself.

"Is that what it felt like?" Monika smiled.

"Well, after what you just showed me? Somewhat." Alice sighed, walking out to the snowfield.

While she somewhat expected it, it was still surprising to see Monika following along.

She tossed her staff forward and had it float in the air.

Sitting on the staff, she crossed her legs and hovered next to Alice.

"I don't blame you. Sometimes one can't help but interfere with fate when you see it happen." Monika shrugged, acting as though nothing was wrong.

"You're... following along?" Alice furrowed her brows.

"Hm? Don't worry, I'm not going to be breaking any rules, such as helping you kill things. I'm just an observer that you can see. Or... would you rather have me watch you from the dark? Where you can't see?" Monika smiled, causing Alice to shiver.

"Urg... I guess this is slightly better."

"I know right? Who wouldn't want a pretty witch like me as a companion?" Monika flipped her hair while Alice slouched in fatigue.

She hadn't fought anything yet but she was already tired.

"I'll pass on that." Alice shook her head as she made her way into the snowfield.

Taking a deep breath, she focused her mind and tried to sense the enemies around her.

But while doing this, she couldn't help but notice Monika's lack of presence. Rather than a person, she felt more like an object.

Ignoring this for now, Alice noticed a snow woman lying in wait by a snow pile.

A free kill.

Taking aim with her rapier, Alice lunged forward.

Pale La-

"!!!"

The moment Alice entered the range, her pupils constricted. Primordial fear shot through her veins as her eyes slowly moved down.

The world slowed, adrenaline shot coursed through her body.

She could see the shining ice spikes shooting out of the ground as she approached the snow woman lying in ambush.

She couldn't stop her movement.

If she didn't do anything, that spike will hit a precious place she'll never recover from!

Gritting her teeth, Alice could already feel the phantom pain approaching.

Should she cancel her movement? It was too late.

All she could do was finish her spell and hope something would change!

Pale Lance!

***BANG!!!**

Firing the lance below her, a cloud of snow was blown into the air as Monika floated back to avoid the battle.

As the snow cleared, Alice could be seen with a pale expression.

Between her legs, the spike narrowly missed as her attack managed to push her back just enough.

If it had hit...

Alice shivered.

She would've lost several things not just her dignity.

Veins bulged on Alice's neck as she glared at the Snow Woman who was now preparing the second attack.

Without hesitation, she jumped up and lunged for the monster.

After a short exchange, only a pile of ash remained on the ground but not a single loot drop.

"Perverved beast!" Alice kicked the snow in annoyance.

Monika smirked at Alice's reaction. Unfortunately for her, the Snow Women received an 'update' after discovering this rather effective strategy.

The snow zone isn't only unique to Alice's Nightmare.

It's appeared in several other places and this trap proved to be rather effective on the hunter's in the Nightmare.

Who in the right mind would protect their rear during a battle?

They may guard the front, they may guard their sides, they may even guard against a surprise attack from the bottom aiming for the head.

But one that aimed the rear?

No one expected it.

But when the first hunter died to this attack, he struggled to adjust. Causing several deaths to pile up and the realm to acknowledge it as a new attack.

Then, as they pushed this 'update' to the other snow women, waiting in ambush with their skills, more and more victims started to appear.

The goal of the Nightmare was, at the end of the night, cause as much death as possible. To integrate the hunters to this dream.

So the most effective strategy will naturally be abused by this realm.

Until the moment Hunters stop dying to it of course.

Journeying along the snowfield, Alice was ambushed several times by snow woman who all targeted the same... area.

Enough to the point where Alice slid a plate of armour under her pants as insurance in case she couldn't dodge in time. While walking, there was a blush on her face.

Shameless but an effective counter.

What else could she do?

She tried to jump away at one point but that required her to crouch.

And the moment she did, she felt the ice poke her a little.

Enough to throw off her jump.

"M-O-N-I-K-A!!! Why are these pervy beasts trying to stab the ass!?!?" Alice grabbed Monika's shoulder as she only laughed.

"Don't blame me~ Blame the people that died to it over and over." She stuck out her tongue.

Hearing the fact that people were dying to this, Alice felt a shiver. Just imaging that kind of death...

She paled and cringed from the thought.

It was the same as hearing someone kicking a wall while a needle was under their nail, or a man seeing a fellow man get hit in the crotch as they fall onto a fence.

This phantom pain was psychological damage.

So imagining the hunters who died to this insidious technique, Alice could only close her eyes and pray for their well-being.

"Don't tell me the bosses... will also do the same..." Alice glared at Monika who shook her head.

"Don't worry, the bosses of the area are different. They're not like the fodder who adapt based on the Nightmare.

"Even if you fought Adela again, she'll do her usual attacks without targeting your butt." Monika grinned.

Letting out a sigh, Alice continued through the snowfield.

"How much about this realm are you allowed to tell me as a guide?" She spoke after a while.

"Interested? We can always play the game. And that's not just me wanting to get information from you. Games are a way for people to bypass certain... restraints and create loopholes." Monika laid down on her staff while twirling her finger.

Little by little, a black ring on her finger. On the ring, a metal chain appeared. The chain wasn't connected to anything but Alice knew it wasn't natural.

There was something unsettling about it but she didn't know what.

"Let me change the question then. Why are you insistent on giving me knowledge in such a roundabout why? Are you trying to set fate in stone? Or well... I guess cogs in this case."

Alice wanted to figure out what Monika's motive was. What did she want from her?

"I wouldn't deny that it's to put certain cogs into place. The more foundations I place, the more consistent the outcome. Think of it as increasing odds.

"If I don't do anything, the changes of fate changing is 50/50. Sometimes the results are good or it could be bad. But if I set up the right foundations, that probability changes.

"So long as I play my cards right, I can even turn that 50% into a guarantee. Though one must be careful when tampering with the workings of fate. Changing one's fate means something else must suffer.

"Increasing the odds of me winning this gamble by 50% means that someone else must suffer consequences equal to what you win. So rather than making it a guarantee, it's better to set fate to a high probability. That way, the consequences are manageable." Monika created coins in the air and flipped them.

"Is that what happened to the woman you spoke about earlier? Peering into fate and got burned by it." Alice asked curiously.

This information was rather interesting to her. She still didn't like the idea but... she couldn't deny the fact that this knowledge was useful.

"Somewhat. Her case is unique though. First in history, that's what she is." Monika shrugged.

"In this world, there are several people affected by the black chains of fate. Chains that lock their actions to certain predestined paths that they cannot avoid. From the moment these chains are attached, they move under rules set by fate.

"What they're allowed to do, what they're not allowed to do. Unfortunately, fate isn't exactly a living being either. A natural law that ensures that the world travels towards its end without interruption.

"Therefore, you can't exactly bargain with fate. Trying to do so is denying its existence. Contradictory, isn't it? To ask Fate itself to deny its own existence and purpose. Who would accept?" Monika explained as her gaze rested on her own black chains of fate.

Her restrictions were small but she still walks towards oblivion.

She cannot deny her path no matter what she does.

These chains are proof.

Alice noticed this and decided not to ask about Monika's chains.

Was Caelan affected by these chains too? Was that the price of his immortality that his mother imposed on him?

Is that why... he wouldn't be able to help even if Rosalyn is about to die to Outer Gods?

Are the Outer Gods required by fate?

If so...

What did fate want with their world?

Chapter 919: Nightmare Mimics

The snowfields were sparse of enemies. Not only was this land struck by famine but the dangers are more natural dangers than those that come from being killed by beasts.

Even in the nightmare, this didn't change.

Monika spent this time talking about tea parties and several tales she's witnessed through the Nightmare.

Of course, all tales that she could speak about without giving away information.

"You weren't here before but oh jeez there was a period where the Nightmare had chests. But not just any chest, they were mimics. The moment someone approached to open it, it would swallow them whole and spit corrosive acid all over their body." Monika laughed.

"But it wasn't the same every time. They changed the way the chest was trapped. Sometimes mimics, sometimes there were holes in the ground right before the chest. Sometimes an assassin was waiting just behind the door in stealth so the moment you drop your guard, they'll strike.

"I'm pretty sure it racked up quite a lot of kills during that period. But once people started to ignore the chests, the strategy wasn't quite effective and served as a waste of energy. So the Nightmare stopped using them." She shrugged.

"Ah, there was one girl though. An elf from the capital. Said something about each chest having infinite potential despite knowing it was a mimic. She died A LOT. And I mean, A LOT even for my standards."

"Even after the Nightmare stopped adding mimics?" Alice's smile twitched.

"Yep, her's is the only area that still has chest mimics in large quantities. Practically around every corner.

"She's used most of her points into defence in order to open as many chests as she can between rests. A strange girl but can't deny that it's rather amusing to some degree." Monika twirled some snow using her finger.

She created a rough visage of what the elf girl looked like but Alice didn't have much interest.

She was more focused on staying alive and getting rid of the boss in this area.

"Speaking of which, why are there visages of the past here? Am I supposed to learn about history or what?" Alice asked curiously.

She hadn't expected to meet ghosts of the past who suffered from famine.

Monika froze.

"Excuse me?"

"Yeah ghosts of the past. I saw a few survivors who lived during the time of the great famine. They interacted with me just fine and I even managed to bring them some food. I even found a record of someone who went insane.

"But from your reaction, I don't think this is supposed to be the case." Alice asked as Monika frowned before shaking her head.

"Nope. Having visages of the past here means that the owner is especially in tune with what happened in the past.

"The depths of their trauma. These visages can either represent themselves, the people around them or even the choices they wished they could've made. Regrets to put it simply.

"However, visages usually appear when... the trauma is especially deep. And that becomes their Nightmare, not yours. So the fact that you saw visages... You're sharing a space with someone else.

"Which in itself is strange since I didn't find anyone else in this zone aside from you." Monika hopped off her staff.

Tapping the pommel against the ground, snow was blown away from her as golden threads sunk into the ground.

After a moment, Monika sighed.

"Yep, there should be no one who can manifest visages near you. Unless this is your memory, something is wrong."

This was an issue. If the Nightmare was manifesting visages, it's clear the system was faulty.

Either that... or something/someone has infiltrated this area.

No good, she had to investigate this situation.

Not as a guide but as someone who doesn't want the cogs to be misaligned.

"Unfortunately I have to take my leave here. Don't worry, I'll still help you anchor down the bosses so they don't change." Monika winked.

"Goodbye, hope you trip." Alice parried a spear stabbing up from below and fired several spells towards the snow woman hiding behind a tree.

"I suppose they do say some people show affection through violence. See you soon~" Monika waved, transforming into a streak of butterflies.

With Monika finally gone, Alice could finally let out a sigh of relief.

Having someone who can read and even affect the cogs was stressful.

Especially when she didn't know what Monika's goal was.

Why was she asking these questions? Why was she talking about this specific story?

And knowledge... Knowledge was a dangerous thing.

Sometimes just knowing about it could bring about great changes, even if she didn't plan on using that information.

Take for example, between two people, one knows the other's absolute weakness. One that will make it so that they can't fight back.

Even if the person doesn't intend to abuse that weakness, just knowing about it has already shifted the dynamic between them.

It has already created the hierarchy where one could never rebel against the other.

Freedom stripped.

Perhaps it's the same with the black chains of fate.

Knowing too much and trying to act against it, only forces the hierarchy to change.

'What if they want to change fate but not be tied down by the black chains? How will they achieve that?' Alice couldn't help but wonder.

A part of her was beginning to formulate theories ones more. Countless ideas that passed through her mind. Yrael's influence.

This inquisitive nature of hers was a double edged blade.

Curiosity was good. But too much would backfire.

She had to make sure she didn't let this desire spiral out of control or else she'll become a prisoner of the black chains.

Killing the snow woman, Alice made her way to the next camp.

Injecting the embryos, she upgraded her stats one more, prioritising her main stats for the moment.

Thanks to Monika's stories, she had a rough idea on how the Nightmare wanted to kill people. To force them to drop their guard.

Therefore, she had to treat everything as a potential danger, even the ground or air.

Shaking her head, Alice exited the strange space and proceeded towards the boss arena.

Since entering this zone, the arena had always been obvious. There was only one path that she could travel down.

The closer she got to what she presumed to be the arena, the more crowded it become. More beasts were roaming around, more traps.

But it was all things she had already seen thus didn't pose much of a danger when it comes to potential deaths.

If the ground collapses, she'll climb back up.

Strong gusts of wind threatening to knock her into a chasm? She'll stab her sword into the ground and anchor down.

An influx of beasts? She could deal with it easily.

The Nightmare even attempted to have one seemed to be a chest. Alice fired a few spells from afar to make sure it wasn't a mimic before scouting the area around the chest.

As expected, an assassin hiding in one of the trees.

Inside the chest was a small pile of Embryo's and a strange silver nugget.

An item she'll keep for now and ask Rolo about it later.

As she approached the arena, another branch appeared right before the entrance.

'Must be a difficult fight if a checkpoint is here by the door. Is the Nightmare truly that kind though?' Alice was a little doubtful.

What could possibly be up with the next fight that a branch was required to be stationed so close? Was it to keep things fair?

Shaking her head, Alice carefully made her way to the camp.

Seeing that there were no monsters, she let out a sigh of relief.

"Hm?" Blinking her eyes, Alice frowned.

She couldn't resonate with the branch?

Why?

Unable to find an answer, Alice tried to sync up with the branch once more.

*CRRRR!

The sound of roots snapping could be heard as a giant wooden arm burst out from the ground.

"!!!"

Alice wasn't able to jump back in time and was caught by the grip.

"You've got to be f*cking with me!" She tried out as she tried to kick the arm but the grip was firm.

The branch was a mimic!

With her body restrained, Alice tried to gather energy to fire a spell.

*BANG!!!

"GAH!!!"

She was slammed into the ground without hesitation.

Roots dug into her flesh as wood scraped against her bones.

The monster's grip tightened and Alice watched as the 'branch' crawled out from the ground before splitting its torso in half.

It was going to eat her.

"F*cker..." Alice cursed as the beast tossed her into the mouth.

*CRUNCH!!!

Waking up from the darkness, Alice panted as she could still feel the pain of wood crushing her bones.

Looking around her, she noticed that she was at the previous camp and let out a sigh before anger boiled in her veins.

The only safe spot in the Nightmare... And it dare turn it into a mimic!?

Another death.

Even if she was careful, she had to make sure she was hesitant about everything around the. Even the campsites now apparently.

However, that was also her own blunder. She had just reminded herself that mimics might appear yet she still tried to rest without care.

Dismissing the negative thoughts for now, Alice made her way back to where she had died in order to get revenge against the branch beast.

###

Monika shifted through the layers of the Nightmare. She checked the overall structure, making sure that nothing was wrong.

Yet despite the overall structure of the Nightmare being unharmed, hell, practically untouched, something felt off.

There was a thin trace of energy.

Abyssal? No.

Rather...

"Divinity." Monika mumbled.

Chapter 920: Aldric

Panting heavily, Alice watched as the branch mimic faded to ash. What's left behind was the real branch along with a single twig that was flickering with energy.

Picking up the item, she was hesitant with resonating with the branch. She was careful to make sure it wasn't another mimic before finally sitting down.

She didn't think a mimic could copy the only safe spot in this Nightmare.

Shaking her head in annoyance over her third death, Alice glanced at the twig that was dropped.

Holding it up against the sky, she couldn't help but wonder what kind of item it was.

Was it similar to the items she bought from Rolo? Ones that regenerate her health, mana or stamina.

Either way, her priority right now was the boss hidden within this arena.

Her items were restocked. She had plenty of healing pots and mana pots.

There were still a few more kills she can do in order to raise her stats further. There was still room for growth. Unfortunately, her death set it back a little but she managed to recover it using the Embryos she had spare.

The only annoying thing was how little monsters there were in the snowfields.

Trying to accumulate Embryos to upgrade stats weren't easy.

In the end, she decided to take a few laps around the place. Only when her stats reach the highest they can be would she be satisfied with challenging the boss.

But~ it doesn't harm anyone to take a quick peak.

Making sure there weren't any lurkers waiting to push her in, Alice stood by the edge of the arena.

In the middle, there was a single... woman? No, it was simply a beautiful looking man. Long red hair that clashed against this winter wonderland, golden armour that covered most of his body and a white cape that blended with the snow.

Around him, frozen blood almost formed a cage of sorts, surrounding him in this crimson prison.

He had placed his helmet before a grave...

"That's a sword." Alice mumbled.

The giant slab in front of the knight wasn't a grave, rather, it was a giant sword with a single sharp edge stabbed into the ground.

Even from outside the arena, Alice felt as though her skin was already being cut by razors. This man was akin to an unsheathed blade, ready to cut down anything and everything.

Against this kind of opponent, she couldn't half ass it.

Thus, she descended the mountain, killing as many monsters as she could to increase her stats.

Strangely, the refugees she saw earlier have all disappeared. Including the girl she saw before.

There were no traces of them left behind at the camp. All the traces were old, it's as though they simply disappeared.

Were they removed? The way their traces were erased couldn't be natural.

Monika?

Alice doubted it. She seemed just as confused as she was so it must've been an anomaly.

Regardless, she focused herself on the task at hand.

###

When I was a little girl, we were forced to leave our village.

We would die if we stayed.

No food, no warmth.

What few remained gathered together and left.

The hunters saw traces of another village during their hunt.

A gamble, but one that might give us a better chance at surviving.

At least it was better than staying here.

They saw what my parents did. What they sacrificed and I was brought along. I carried what little I could.

Food.

We moved slowly through the snow. Made sure no one was too cold.

Slowly, as a huddle, we pushed forth. Carts creaked behind them and the kids were told to sit in the back since we couldn't keep up.

But... With how cold it got, some of us froze and never woke up again.

After the first, we started to participate in the walks.

To make sure we endured for as long as possible.

I walked at the back.

These people were my neighbours but...

I didn't know them very well. Not personally.

My parents might've.

But I didn't.

We continued like this for a while.

Whenever an adult died, we continued. They were 'buried' just out of sight.

But it was familiar.

The taste.

Just like my mom.

However... Whenever a kid died, the parents would give up.

At that point, I knew the truth.

The price of survival.

The meat we had to eat if we wanted to endure.

Is it strange that it didn't sicken me?

I suppose... It was romantic in a sense.

When I was a little girl, this act wasn't a gruesome one. It was a necessity.

Just like waking up, just like walking.

Eating was simply...

Needed.

I could still remember their looks of horror when I spoke for the first time to them on the journey.

The other kids didn't know.

The adults did.

And so did I.

So I spoke.

"Can we make soup?"

To them, I must've seemed like the devil.

A kid who was unfazed by death. Who spoke about eating a mother's child right in front of her.

They were horrified, but they also understood.

They grieved but a part of them wondered.

How long do they have to wait here for the mother to calm down?

How long till they have more rations?

They couldn't waste more energy here.

As a little girl, I saw the darkness in desperate times.

Perhaps that twisted a part of me. We are products of our surroundings after all.

If our surroundings are that of evil, it's only natural to see that a part of the mind would become warped.

I simply made sure I was never the one being sacrificed.

But the one doing the sacrificing.

I rationed my food carefully, preserved it in ice. Spoke only when I needed to.

I used everything my mother taught me, the way she carefully chose pieces of herself so that she could last the longest.

I couldn't let the adults give up.

If they did, I would die too.

So whenever a kid looked weak...

I'll huddle myself near the parent.

I'll slowly give them information. Information on how my mother carefully used parts of herself.

The method to stall as long as possible without dying.

To make sure the kid endures.

It was simply efficiency.

If the kid dies, the mother dies with him.

Sure we'll have more rations, but that was more weight for them to carry and one less pair of hands to help carry them.

We have more food but also more burdens.

I couldn't let that happen.

Everything for the sake of survival.

Of course, I knew that I was the one at the biggest risk.

I was surviving simply due to good will. Whatever good karma my mother and father accumulated in their life, whatever favour they did for the neighbours, that was what kept me alive.

What made them give me my portion of food.

So I worked, made sure I wasn't a burden.

I helped push what I could. Scouted ahead if needed.

The other kids didn't get that. A few did, but most didn't.

When the parent stalled as long as possible but still died, they lost their path.

The kids didn't know what else to do. They sat in the back, expecting things to be done to help them.

They were just useless mouths to feed at this point.

What use is there to keep them alive?

At that point... better to have some food.

Hypocritical, considering I was one of them.

But I wanted to live.

I had concocted a plan. To help gather rations while people are sleeping.

Dying from the cold in your sleep is normal after all.

But I had to be careful.

If I gather too many rations, they'll get suspicious.

It had to look 'natural'.

I'll carry my plan out tomorrow. The first victim.

I knew what to do, all that's left was to carry it out.

That morning, we came across a strange knight.

He was walking through the snow wearing his armour. Red hair that I couldn't forget.

A hunter, one with Sigils.

He saw us and instantly ran over to help.

A kind natured person.

But I don't know why... a part of me felt sickened.

Sickened by the fact that he existed. Sickened by the fact that he was helping. Sickened by the fact that I couldn't carry out my plan.

Not when he was making sure a warm fire was provided along with food.

Since he had power, he could hunt whatever he wanted whenever they appeared.

He could easily get food.

Because he existed, all my calculations and acts were now 'evil'.

I could feel the shift in their looks towards me.

I started to sleep less.

What if they try to get rid of me in my own sleep?

The guilty walk with shadows chasing after them.

But that never happened.

For the knight sat next to me when I slept. He protected me.

And one night, he spoke.

"Good job. For hanging on till now."

I was confused.

Was he simply being kind? That wasn't the case. I could tell by the pity in his eyes.

He knew what I had done yet still remained by my side.

He didn't say anything else, he simply sat by my side and allowed me to sleep peacefully.

When I was a little girl...

I didn't know I would become a queen.

I didn't know that in the endless snow, I had found my first knight.

One that allowed me to become who I am today.

One that passed on his hope, his dreams.

A knight who hoped a child of the north didn't have to starve ever again.

That a child of the north didn't have to make the choices I made.

He was Aldric, the first knight of Verona.