

Shadow 681

Chapter 681: This Is Wendy

Damon narrowed his eyes at the copper-skinned woman. Her eyes he knew that intensity, that gaze.

This was a gaze straight from the Evil Forest. An old enemy he had wanted to kill. One who had every reason to hate him.

One who wanted to kill him.

He smiled coldly, the blood trickling from his nose down to his lips.

"You're Wendy, aren't you?"

The woman holding the bone blade was quite a beauty, even with all that hide and rags, and her unkempt hair. It was as if she didn't know how to be a person and was more used to being a beast.

"Must kill," she spoke coldly, clenching her bone blade, her fangs gleaming faintly under the light.

Damon reached into the shadows and pulled out his dealer's hand. His arm felt heavy, like lead. He was in no shape to fight.

Still, Damon was not about to lose his bravado. He stood up with a faint, mocking smile on his face.

"My squirrel. Hand her over, she has nothing to do with this."

She tilted her head, confusion flickering across her expression. Damon was glad she wasn't attacking yet.

Instead, she reached into her chest, tapping lightly as if giving a signal. Scar poked its head out of her chest, eyes narrowing as it scanned the room until they stopped at Damon.

It pushed itself out of her body, stood upon her chest, and began cleaning the soot from its fur.

As if clearing its throat, it squealed and pointed straight at Damon.

"That's him! He's the one you're looking for!" it squealed toward the Wendigo, now in human form.

Its eyes widened as it squealed again, putting on its cutest expression.

"Spare me! I was forced to do this! It was all that damn raven! This baby-killing fiend forced me to!"

Damon listened to its squeals with a deadpan expression on his face.

"You little furball, you... I can't believe you're a turncoat... I mean, a turn-fur. What happened to sniffing her out for me?"

The Wendigo slowly raised her bone blade.

"You are human. Killer."

Damon wasn't just talking he was, in fact, trying to reach the tent exit and leave.

He forced a smile, circling around her carefully, ignoring the cowardly little creature that clearly had no sense of loyalty.

"Look here, Wendy... it's not like that. I'm a man who doesn't believe in the philosophy of an eye for an eye. Would you believe me if I told you I let go of my grudges a long time ago?"

His lies almost made the squirrel gasp in shock. Wasn't the whole reason Scar got involved with Damon because he had come back to kill the Evil Forest Wendigo?

However, the Wendigo, now human, seemed more interested in something else.

"Wendy... what is Wendy?"

Damon took a slow breath, his head aching as he contemplated calling his shadow clone, but that wasn't possible.

"It's... a name. Wendy. You don't have a name, do you? People have names."

He wasn't against fighting her, but from her aura alone, Damon knew it would be troublesome. Even if he managed to win, he would be half-dead by the end of it.

'I can use a soul blaze potion, but I have just two... for a battle I'm not even sure I can win.'

She touched her chest, as if the very concept of a name was something sacred.

"I... I are Wendy."

Damon shook his head slightly.

"I am... You don't have very much human experience, do you?"

She tilted her head again, confused by his words. He continued.

"Otherwise you would have seen this coming."

His dealer's hand shot out of his grasp, and he turned into a shadow, rushing for the door. However, something was wrong. When he threw his dealer's hand, her bone sword slashed it away. But instead of giving chase, she turned toward the sofa...

Where a young man was sleeping away like a princess in a fairy tale.

Damon froze as she grabbed Waton, his expression twisting in disbelief.

What the hell... that fool had been asleep even when an enemy came into the tent and had a conversation with him.

'That guy has the survival instincts of a blade of grass.'

The Wendigo no, Wendy grabbed him. Her face shifted into a smile Damon recognized instantly. It was the same smile he had worn the night he massacred her cubs months ago.

Waton gasped, jerked awake by her grip.

"Huh... huh, what... what is it? Morning already?"

His eyes fluttered open, confusion still lingering. The woman's arm was wrapped around his neck, while Damon's dealer's hand hovered a meter away too far to make a difference.

If Damon moved, Waton would die. Normally, he wouldn't have cared. In truth, there were many times Damon had wanted the young man dead. But not now. Not when he needed him alive for twenty-four hours.

Damon could not afford to fail the quest. This was his one chance to find a way to restore Matia back to how she was before.

Even if he had to kill everyone in the arena, he couldn't let Waton die and fail.

"Don't move, wagon," he hissed, as she moved her bone blade to Waton's throat. Her dark eyes focused sharply on Damon.

"I not kill and eat you. I want blood for blood. I kill your cub, then eat you. I get revenge."

Damon chuckled, a thin smile forming on his lips.

"You can barely talk. You're tripping over your words, can't form coherent sentences, and know nothing of the world. But you know about revenge... how laughable."

Her eyes widened in fury. This had once been an intelligent monster now, she was something closer to a beast-kin stripped of her core.

She was what one would call a member of the goddess races; thus, she was a person.

"You... you... kill... I kill too."

Damon moved his dealer's hand back into his palm, his eyes colder than ice.

"I'll make it easy on you. If you kill him... you will beg to die."

She glared with unflinching hatred.

"I kill."

Before she could slice Waton's throat—

"Wait!!!!"

Waton screamed, freezing the air in the tent.

"Don't I get a say in this? I'm not his cub! At the very least, tell me why I'm dying and who... who are you?"

The Wendigo glanced at Damon, who saw an opportunity to talk or at least bluff his way through to saving Waton.

"This is Wendy... she's an old friend."

Chapter 682: The Instrument To Make More

Have you ever had that ominous feeling that things were not going well for you? That one intuition that screamed, get away from this place, it's bad news...

But what if you couldn't get away? What if you were trapped?

This was how Waton had been feeling ever since he met Damon Grey. He wanted to curse his luck for running into this ominous star.

Right now, Waton was fighting for his life or rather, he had seen his whole life flash before his eyes. One moment he had been sleeping after a hard battle and several near-death experiences, completely exhausted and under immense pressure. He just wanted to rest a little.

The next thing he knew, he was taken hostage by a crazy woman and Damon Grey was daring her to kill him.

He had to swallow his fear and speak up for himself.

"Miss! Miss, I am a prince! I am the son of Kronos of Valtheron... I am not his cub!"

He turned to Damon, his head beading with sweat as he tried to plead for help.

"Damon... Damon, what's this? Who is she? Tell her... tell her I have nothing to do with whatever this... is!"

There was a thin smile on Damon's face as he looked up at the chandeliers. This was not the time to go to extremes.

Wendy was still naive unused to the human world and its complexities. From the look of it, she was not blindly aggressive.

'She's like a mature baby...'

"Ahhh..." Damon sighed as the magic orbs surrounding them zeroed in on him.

"It's a long story, Waton..."

Damon sighed again. Seeing his unwillingness to speak, Wendy pressed the blade closer to Waton's neck.

"Wait! Wait, Miss! I am a prince! I can get justice for you... please, let me act as an arbiter!"

She glanced at Damon, who smiled faintly.

"It's true. He is a prince it's like a pack leader."

Watson forced a trembling smile as sweat rolled down his neck.

"Talk, dammit... it's not like I'm dying here!"

Damon almost laughed at the absurdity of the situation. Truly, the most dire of tragedies, when viewed from afar, were nothing but grand comedies.

"Wendy and I have something of a past... let's just say there were three infants involved."

Watson felt her grip on him tighten when Damon said that, and his expression grew pale.

"That's it... I'm dead. I'm going to die because of his love debts..."

He didn't even realize he had muttered that aloud, which almost made Damon wince but Damon kept his eyes calm and steady.

"You... you left the infants alone...child abandonment... you deadbeat."

Watson imagined Damon must have impregnated this poor woman and abandoned her and the children. Now she was back for revenge, it was only fair.

Damon chuckled, his voice cold.

"Of course not... how can I abandon infants to this cruel world?"

He glanced at the Wendigo. Watson almost let out a sigh of relief.

"I killed them."

His words almost made Watson pass out. The sheer coldness of the statement froze him in place.

"Yo... you killed infa...nts?"

The woman made a low, guttural growl deep in her throat, causing Waton to regain his senses.

"Why?"

Damon sighed.

"For revenge. I mean, she attacked me first."

"Why not kill me... why kill little ones!" she screamed, her voice raw with the pain of a mother who had come to her den only to find her lifeless young.

Damon shrugged his shoulders, stepping closer.

"If I could, I would. A shame really, you were stronger."

Waton blinked, confused. His mind scrambled for clarity.

Damon decided to clear the air.

"Wendy here isn't a person... or at least, she wasn't. She used to be a Wendigo, in the outskirts of the Evil Forest. That was where we first met."

Waton felt her hands trembling. He couldn't see her face, but something warm was dripping onto his shoulder, it wasn't blood, it was tears.

"This monster somehow lost her monster core and became a beast-kin of unknown variety, thus allowing her to pass the barrier."

"I was as surprised as you, but don't worry, I'll kill her."

Damon took another careful step forward.

"Now she wants her revenge. She became a person solely for me... isn't that right, Wendy?"

He was already close enough. Damon lunged forward and grabbed her bone blade with his hand. The sharp edge sliced into his flesh as he pulled Waton toward him.

However, Wendy growled, letting go of the blade. In a blur, she kicked Waton toward Damon, then lunged on all fours and snatched him again before Damon could react.

He was slow due to his injuries and that had cost him.

She didn't hesitate claws formed along her fingers as she prepared to bring death to Waton.

His eyes widened in terror. He knew he had to think fast.

Waton used his first-class skill to drastically slow his perception of time, giving him enough awareness to realize he would die in a single strike.

His thoughts converged on one desperate conclusion.

He had to make the most of it.

Pushing his body aside, the claw tore into the left side of his stomach. Gritting his teeth, he held back his scream, fighting through the pain. He had to act, to gamble his life just like Damon would. If he was going to die, he might as well die trying.

"I can bring back your infants!!!"

His scream made both Damon and Wendy freeze mid-motion.

Did he have the power to reverse death? Obviously not.

Watson coughed up blood, turning to look at Damon.

"I can bring back what you lost..."

Wendy grabbed him, her hand trembling. She was ready to crush him, but she still asked, her voice cracking,

"How... you do it?"

Watson smiled weakly, blood spilling from his lips.

"Hehehe..."

He pointed at Damon.

"He can make more... he can make as many as you want..."

Wendy glanced at Damon, confused.

Watson chuckled faintly, pale from blood loss.

"You're a person now... you have our biology... he has the instrument... to make more... you lost three... he can make as many as... y...y...you want..."

Watson went limp while Damon went pale as Wendy's wide, trembling eyes turned toward him.

"Make... more... make more..."

Chapter 683: Pure Soul

This seemed familiar. Damon was sure he had seen that look before somewhere. The look Watson was giving him was one he had seen far too many times.

Though it had never been directed at him, he was certain he had seen the pimps on the streets of Valerion look at the prostitutes they worked with the same way.

He almost felt as if the limp Watson would scream, "Bitch, get my money," at him.

A pimp's job was hard; they really had to sell the product. In this case, the product was Damon, and Watson was fighting for his life.

The Wendigo, or rather Wendy as Damon called her, seemed uncertain.

Watson saw hope. Coughing up blood and lying on the ground, he wheezed, struggling to speak.

"You c...can kill him after you get your children..."

Damon's expression was deadpan. This was ridiculous. Was he really being pimped to a Wendigo by Watson?

He tried getting ready for another attack, but the Wendigo grabbed Watson and held him in front of her, muttering the same words as before.

"Make more... how make more... how I make more..."

Waton was already teetering on the edge, about to die.

"He... heal... me..." he pleaded weakly as his vision began to fade, unsure if it was blood loss or the angel of death coming to visit him.

Wendy seemed taken aback.

She glanced at Damon, recalling that this wretch had a way to heal lethal wounds by drinking something.

Damon sighed, tossing a healing potion toward Waton, which was caught by the Wendigo. She crushed the vial into his wounds, letting the potion soak in as she healed him, still holding him firmly in her grasp.

She crawled toward her bone blade, which was lying on the floor, and picked it up, holding Waton hostage as his wounds began to close. The prince gasped, realizing he had just earned himself another few minutes of life.

Damon sighed. Wendy wasn't giving him any openings. He just needed her to slip up a little, then he would draw his bow and shoot her.

He tried to steady his breathing, but he might have been in even worse shape than Waton. This was supposed to be an opportunity to rest and recover, but....

'Well, that's fine... I just need to hold on until the time limit is over, then summon Matia.'

Wendy seemed intrigued, and right before the broadcasting magic orbs, Waton went into a long, desperate lecture on how reproduction worked. Like a sponge, Wendy absorbed all that knowledge, her face lighting up like that of a child who had just discovered where babies actually came from.

She whispered softly, her tone filled with awe.

"No... no magic... just flesh."

Waton nodded vigorously and went into even more visceral detail, including his own personal experiences.

She turned to Damon, her eyes narrowing before muttering in a low, guttural voice.

"Pay back children... then die."

Damon sighed with a faint smile.

"Ahhh, you're right... I agree."

Waton's eyes widened, tears welling up.

"Y... you would sacrifice yourself for me..."

Damon smiled, his eyes distant.

"Of course... I deserve this... but you are innocent. You must live, Wagon."

Waton was moved to tears. The Wendigo suspected something, since she knew Damon was wicked, but after seeing Waton's tears and Damon's weakened state, she figured he couldn't do anything.

She glanced toward the squirrel that had moved to one corner of the tent, watching the proceedings silently.

"Me trust human..." she asked, seeking Scar's approval as if that alone was enough to risk it. After all, this squirrel had been her next-door neighbor for a long time in the Evil Forest.

Scar remained calm, but when it saw Damon's cold smile, the red squirrel hesitated, its scarlet fur gleaming in the dim light.

It had a passing thought.

This fiend had pissed off everyone imaginable, yet he was still alive. He had even been killed a few times but didn't die.

Was it really wise to anger him for real?

It shuddered slightly.

Yes, the answer was simple.

Scar squealed and agreed with the Wendigo, assuring her that Damon was harmless. It even went into a short example of his weaknesses.

Damon smiled faintly, coughing up blood to sell the illusion of frailty.

Watson gasped as the Wendigo pushed him in front, her bone blade still resting against his back. She walked forward cautiously until she was close to Damon.

Then she glanced at the young man with blood trickling down his nose.

"Off... off clothes..."

Damon smiled, his eyes cold.

"That's close enough."

He pointed his hand forward. A sharp bang burst from his finger, the projectile flying toward her head. But he wasn't aiming for her skull; Waton was still in the way.

No, he aimed for her antlers. The magic bullet struck one, jerking her head back violently. Damon reacted instantly, pulling out his bow, and with a booming rip of air, he fired an arrow.

The arrow flew the instant the string left his fingers. Its force struck as she tried to lift her head again from the shock of being shot. Right as her head straightened, the arrow pierced straight through her eye.

It drove clean through, the tip puncturing her skull. Blood poured down her face as she touched the arrow with trembling fingers, her expression one of disbelief at what had just happened.

It was fast—too fast. A fluid, precise motion born from countless battles and cold calculation.

"Growl..."

She released her bone blade as she fell backward, her head crashing into a stool behind her.

Blood gushed out as her body went limp.

Damon coughed up blood, falling to his knees with a low, raspy chuckle.

"Hahahah..." Blood oozed from his mouth as he held onto one of the Soul Blaze potions.

"Hahaha... we're even now... we're even... now I've had my revenge... hahaha..."

He laughed, his grudge washing away with the sight of her corpse.

'I didn't even have to waste a Soul Blaze potion...'

Waton grabbed Damon as he collapsed, blood dripping from his ears. His soul wounds were worsening.

He glanced weakly at the squirrel.

"Good job, Scar."

The smell of blood grew thicker as Damon's head throbbed with intense agony.

It was in that moment he felt a strange clarity—a realization.

'Wai...t... the system didn't notify me of her... death.'

His eyes widened in horror as he looked toward her corpse. Bloodshot and trembling, he watched as she stood back up, pulling the arrow from her eye.

Her one eye was a bloody mess, her expression dark and primal as she glared at Damon and Waton.

"I not die... I not able to die at your hand... this is my skill... [Pure Soul]."

Chapter 684: A Cycle

[Pure Soul] — this was a skill that guaranteed as long as the one who kills is depraved, thou shall not die.

He appraised her skill.

In this case, Damon, who had obtained Ashcroft's Seed of Depravity, could not kill her. If he did, the activation condition for her skill would be triggered.

Wendy was not aware of many things in this world outside the evil forest. She was unsure of herself, barely knowing how to speak from sneaking around and mimicking people.

But she was sure of one thing her death would never be at the hands of Damon Grey. His hands could not kill her. She knew that from the moment she became what she was. That was what the voice had told her as her heart festered with resentment.

This was its promise.

He had told her that Damon Grey, the human she was looking for, would be here. That was why she had come. It had guided her to her great enemy.

She didn't care for his life. She just wanted to be paid back for what he took from her.

Her bone blade gleamed in her hand as her eyes began to regenerate.

Damon's eyes trembled as he moved the potion in his hand to his mouth.

"I didn't think I would have to waste one of these on you..." he muttered, his tone low.

"But fine... I can't kill you, you say? That's good... let's see how true that is. How many pieces can I cut you into?"

He downed the potion. As soon as he drank it, he felt the familiar warmth of his soul returning to normal. The pain faded then it was gone. He felt like someone who had been suffering a dire fever only to feel the relief of recovery.

It was like having his nostrils unclogged, finally able to breathe in fresh air again.

Normal was special after going through something horrible. Damon flexed his arms, his joints cracking audibly.

He only had a few minutes of this... but a few minutes were more than enough.

'Maybe this is the battle I need to reach the third class.'

His peak second-class aura exploded, filling the entire tent with overwhelming pressure. The shadows deepened as his living shadow stirred, rising like dark tendrils. The light of the chandeliers dimmed beneath his presence.

"Growl!!!"

Wendy howled as she lunged forward, her bone weapon flashing in her grasp.

Damon grabbed Waton with one hand, pulling the prince behind him as Wendy's feral aura swept across the tent. Her killing intent carried sadness and primal, mournful rage.

The distance closed in an instant. Her bone blade slashed through the air, but Damon moved to the side, his movements sharp and precise.

"No technique. Holding a sword doesn't mean you know how to use it."

He caught her by the antlers with his free hand. With ruthless strength, he swung and threw her out of the tent. Her body crashed through the ruins outside, smashing into the stone street with a thunderous impact.

"This tent is expensive... go outside...beast."

Damon grabbed Waton by the collar as he walked out. Behind him, the tent slowly sank into the shadows until it vanished completely, returning to his shadow storage.

Waton stared, wide-eyed, his body trembling as Damon carried him effortlessly with one hand.

"So strong..." he whispered in disbelief.

This was the strength of someone at the peak of the second class.... no, partially at the third.

'What a monster...'

Wendy rose again, her fangs sharpening, anger boiling in her glowing eyes. She surged forward with such speed that a sonic boom echoed through the ruins, shattering the ground and walls as she charged.

Damon slowly raised his hand. The familiar agony of burning tenfold spread through his body as he spoke softly, almost a whisper.

"Burn."

A shadow-like flame erupted from his hand, engulfing Wendy and the surrounding area. The explosion was both hot and cold, distorting the air itself. A soul-wrenching scream echoed as her body and soul were tortured by the flames... the very flames of the dark spirit Rashi Ignath.

[Ashborn]

Still, Damon saw her grit her teeth as her flesh peeled away, only to regenerate under the effect of her class skill, Pure Soul.

He didn't know exactly what the skill did, but he was sure as hell going to try to kill her. He wanted to see the exact limit of her regeneration.

He raised his hand, increasing the intensity of the flames. But even as her flesh burned to ash, she continued to move. Her screams ceased, her face twisting in agony and defiance. Her hand covered her face, but even that burned away.

Each step she took was torture. But she wasn't the only one suffering. Damon's mind was being torn apart by the same agony tenfold the pain of burning alive every time he used Ashborn to attack her.

When she got close enough, her bone blade broke apart, disintegrating into ash. Still, she walked through the blaze. Her clothes were gone, her smoldering, charred flesh barely covering her body.

Then Damon saw her eyes.

There was pain in them, but more than that, there was a fierce, unyielding will. A will that would rather die than submit. It was defiance.

That look made Damon's flames falter for a moment. In that instant, Wendy lunged forward.

His dealer's hand appeared in his hands in a blur. He slashed across her stomach and then stabbed her through the chest.

He grabbed her arm, twisted her over, and slammed her onto the ground. His dealer's hand impaled her chest, pinning her in place before she could recover enough to use her power.

The wound didn't kill her, but each strike made her weaker, weak enough for him to finally overpower her. That was the flaw in her skill.

The initial arrow to the head had already done its damage. If she had fled and recovered, Damon might not have won so easily.

"In the end, you're just a beast. If you had recovered properly, you might have given me some trouble."

"You fought me in a form you weren't accustomed to... naive."

He watched her thrash and scream in pain.

Her eyes reminded Damon of himself of the boy who once refused to kneel even when he couldn't win. He had been the one defying power. Now, he was the one holding it.

Somewhere along the line, the weak one had become the oppressor.

Then her words reached him raw, broken, filled with anguish. Half her face was still regenerating as she spoke.

"Why... why you take from me... why... I only attack you... why you not attack only me... why kill cubs..."

She gritted her teeth, her fangs gleaming in the dim, ash-filled air.

"Why you wicked... why you only take..."

The places had switched now. Damon was the one with the power.

He had taken it all.

"I usurped the power..." he muttered. Usurper that was what Ashcroft had called him. Someone who only takes.

The shadows around him stirred violently. Damon heard it, the familiar call.

The call of the third class.

Chapter 685: Dethrone

The call of the third class was much different from his second. In this class, Damon felt all his mana surge and pour into his heart, where it began to condense, filling his heart with mana.

It was overwhelming; his circuits absorbed all that energy from all around him. His body produced even more, feeding his heart.

The mana turned into strings that began weaving themselves around his heart, disappearing as they reinforced it. Blood pumped through his body, his bones grew denser and stronger, his body trembled as the change consumed him.

The voice spoke in his ears.

[The mightiest of warriors, the wisest of kings, and the cruelest of tyrants were once sniveling brats... You have walked the path of the one who takes.]

[O, Usurper... your might makes right....]

[You have awakened the unique class — Usurper.]

[Rule by fire, by force.]

[Class Skill – Dethrone: ‘All rule is temporary. All glory, a debt. Take, hold, and make the debt yours to collect.’]

Then Damon heard a whisper.

[Rarely does one get three in a row. Be wary of the boons of this imperfect God... more often than not, they are banes.]

[Your fable grows.]

His system chimed as his status updated, but Damon didn’t focus on it. His eyes turned toward the Wendigo, who was struggling to remove his Dealer’s Hand from her chest.

Damon glanced at his system panel.

[Rank Up: Class – Usurper]

[Class Skill Unlocked: Dethrone]

[Class Stat Distribution Applied]

[HP +2000]

[Mana +12000]

[Strength +5000]

[Agility +4000]

[Speed +6000]

[Endurance +6000]

[Class: Usurper]

"Rule by fire, by force."

Skill – [Dethrone]

'All rule is temporary. All glory, a debt. Take, hold, and make the debt yours to collect.'

You have been bestowed with the power to temporarily stop the use of a single skill of your opponent.

Damon felt his power explode. His body grew light, yet his aura grew heavier. He glanced at his third skill.

[Dethrone.]

This skill allowed him to prevent a single opponent from using their skill entirely. That was all it did—stop.

It was the act of dethroning the rightful owner of the skill and negating their power over something as intimate as their skill.

It was uncommon for someone to gain three skills in a row. Most people only gained four skills across all seven classes, their other skills obtained through training or rare skill scrolls.

Yet, it seemed the unknown god had been generous with Damon.

That brought him to what his new skill truly did. It was the power to jam and disable another's skill. Damon's eyes shifted toward the Wendigo.

"I can kill you now."

She lay there, glaring at him with hateful eyes. Damon smiled faintly and activated Dethrone, targeting her skill — Pure Soul.

He felt the Dethrone skill activate. Something within Wendy twisted violently, and both their skills shut down. Damon smiled wickedly.

Then he drove his fist into her pretty face, raising his hand and snapping her neck. The sharp crack echoed.

He stood, cleaning his hands as he pulled out his Dealer's Hand.

That was it. She was dead. Waton walked up behind him, looking down at her body.

"Is... is she dead... poor thing..."

Damon frowned, staring at the corpse. She wasn't breathing her pulse, her heartbeat, everything had gone still. Then why... why was the system silent? Why wasn't it announcing her death?

He frowned, disabling Dethrone.

As soon as he did, her Pure Soul skill reactivated. Her broken neck twisted back into place with a sickening crack, and she lunged back to life, clawing wildly.

Damon was caught off guard as she slammed into him, pushing him backward, her claws denting his armor and drawing blood.

With that same motion, she jumped back, landing on all fours before letting out a feral growl. Her bones snapped and popped as her body began to change shape.

Her arms elongated, her dark eyes turned pale white, and her antlers grew, twisting outward as her form expanded. Her mouth extended into a snout filled with serrated teeth, and her eyes burned with murderous light.

She towered at least eight meters tall, her monstrous form radiating an aura of primal fury. The naïve look of her human form was gone, replaced by the predatory grace of a beast born for the hunt.

Damon frowned, trying to make sense of everything.

'Dethrone can deactivate any skill — one at a time. Using it means I can't use Dethrone on someone else.'

He glanced at the towering Wendigo.

'Then what about her... ah, I see. My skill keeps Pure Soul deactivated, allowing me to kill her. But the moment I stop using Dethrone, the Pure Soul skill reactivates, reversing her death.'

Damon scratched his head wearily.

'Well played, unknown god... I should've known it would never be this easy.'

This was bad. Damon had used a Soul Blaze potion earlier; his condition was already deteriorating. He wasn't in good shape to fight without it. Once its effects wore off, his injuries would hit him hard.

'Hmm... I have to figure out how to kill her — or at least test how far Dethrone lets me bend her skill's rules.'

The Wendigo before him was the past form of the woman he had just killed.

'How the hell did she even get into this war game? It's for people under forty years of age... Did her age as a person make her fit the requirement?'

Watson trembled from the sheer pressure of the Wendigo's aura. The creature was at least ten times stronger than before.

But Damon didn't seem fazed. He stood calmly, his gaze cold, unshaken. Watson didn't know if it was arrogance or sheer certainty in his strength, but his composure didn't waver.

"H... how do you fight something that can't die?"

Damon chuckled softly, his hand gripping a sword he pulled from his shadow.

"Don't be ridiculous, Watson... there is nothing that can't be killed. Death comes for us all."

The Wendigo charged forward, the ground cracking beneath her enormous frame.

"It's just a matter of how..."

Damon's eyes gleamed darkly as he raised his blade.

"Let's see how unkillable you are when I dismember your corpse."

Chapter 686: Wendy Was Still Alive

It was quite a spectacle for anyone who happened to be watching the proceedings. All of it began with that damned tent.

Luna watched with a somewhat surprised expression, her eyes glancing toward Iris, who was also looking at her.

"Erm... you don't think..." She asked, her tone hinting at something toward the pink-haired girl.

Iris shook her head dismissively.

"No, no way... he probably stole it..."

Luna nodded, accepting the girl's words.

It was more likely her brother did steal the tent...

Time passed, and what came next was the arrival of a strange woman who appeared out of nowhere.

When Damon started talking and mentioned three children, Luna felt her heart leap to her throat. For a moment, she thought no, feared her brother had done something reckless again. But it turned out to be a misunderstanding.

Her brother didn't have any children. Though, the woman he called Wendy clearly wanted him dead.

Not long after, Luna's face turned red as Prince Waton began giving a visceral lecture on reproduction, where babies came from, no less. It was so bad that everyone turned toward the Emperor, who coughed awkwardly, waving his hand to mute their portion of the broadcast.

Luna had seen a lot and heard too much, but one thing struck her harder than anything else her brother never shared his burdens with her.

He never did. In truth, he always kept everything locked deep inside.

She clenched her teeth.

It was because she was weak... sickly... always relying on him for everything.

"I... I hate this."

Damon, meanwhile, hadn't been in the best shape at least, not until he took that potion. After that, everything changed. His body surged with overwhelming mana, his power radiating dominance. Watching him fight made Iris's eyes sparkle.

This was Damon's true strength. Seeing him in battle again was an eye-opener, a far cry from their sparring sessions. The intensity now was on a whole other level.

While the two girls focused on those small details, the truly powerful figures watching from afar were more interested in the implications behind everything unfolding before them.

"A monster that became a person... is this the will of the goddess, or an omen of things to come?" Aurelius Venn muttered quietly to Father Dantalion beside him.

"Regardless of what it is, we have to bring her back to the Holy City. This is clearly the will of the goddess," Father Dantalion replied, his mind already spinning with schemes.

Aurelius narrowed his eyes.

"What if—"

"Don't say it. That would be blasphemy. The only god with any power is the goddess," Father Dantalion cut him off sharply, his expression darkening at the thought of the unknown god.

Aurelius sighed, closing his eyes with a resigned expression.

"Will she come willingly? That's the problem. We could try taking her by force, though... that wouldn't sit well with certain entities here."

He reached for a glass and drank from it slowly.

"They're getting bolder recently, and we're losing their trust. I fear we may end up fighting amongst ourselves if we don't start another demon war soon."

Father Dantalion smiled faintly.

"No matter. We only need wait... the era is truly coming to an end. It will favor us. When he awakens completely, we will be ready to destroy all our enemies."

They weren't the only ones having such a conversation.

Everyone watching had taken some interest in Wendy.

The researchers from the Magic Continent wanted to bring her back as a specimen to study her, to unlock the secrets of her transformation.

Some purists and racial supremacists wanted to eliminate her altogether.

However, the overall sentiment toward her was mild. No one truly saw her as a monster anymore. If anything, the beastkin didn't mind her presence. Killing her openly on the grounds that she was no longer a monstrous beast would certainly cause friction with them.

But this had little to do with Damon, who was still inside the arena. He couldn't hear what was happening outside and even if he could, he wouldn't have cared.

The Wendigo lunged forward, its claws slicing through the air. Damon raised his sword, bringing it down with a dark, crescent slash of energy.

[Dark Blade]

The Wendigo's massive body tanked the blow, barely flinching as the slash exploded across its chest. With a thunderous boom, dust and wind rippled through the ruins as Damon blocked her follow-up strike. His boots skidded across the cracked ground, carving deep marks as he steadied himself.

"Hmmm... you're stronger than before. Is it because you're more familiar with this monstrous form?"

"Argggghhhh!"

She roared, claws tearing through the air. Damon leapt over her swipe and landed atop her antlers, balancing perfectly.

"Burn."

He unleashed Ashborn across her large frame, black flames crawling like serpents of death. But Wendy rolled violently, slamming him off with her antlers. Damon hit the ground hard, sliding back while stabbing his sword into the earth to halt his momentum.

In one breath, he vanished, teleporting to her side. His sword swung, biting deep into her neck before he ripped it free and stabbed into the gap between her front legs.

The blade sank in deep. He left it there, stepping back with a small grin on his face.

"Wait for it... wait for it..."

Wendy charged at him, her claws raised. But before she could strike, her growl faltered, turning into a guttural, pained sound.

"Painful, isn't it? That's a sword called Broken Bonds. It can disintegrate the soul of its target."

His third-class skill, Dethrone, had been active the entire time.

"What you're feeling now... is your soul breaking apart, slowly disintegrating. Horrible experience, I know."

He reached into his shadow storage and pulled out a staff, turning toward Waton, who was hiding among the ruined buildings.

The squirrel, Scar, was crouched beside him, trembling.

"You two might wanna hide a little farther away..."

Damon raised the staff high.

[Staff of Carnage]

He was planning to blow whatever was left of the Wendigo straight to hell.

Wendy felt her body weaken as she desperately pulled the sword from her chest. When she looked up, she saw a writhing black mass condensing in the sky above her an orb of destruction, swirling with the burning heat of Ashborn flames and the chilling cold that froze the soul.

Then, the world was consumed by a heaven-shaking explosion. A storm of annihilation erupted, ripping through the air and swallowing everything in its wake.

When the dust finally settled, Damon stood at the edge of a vast crater, his hair fluttering in the wind.

"Ahhh, come on... you've got to be kidding me."

Small pieces of flesh were wriggling on the ground slowly crawling toward each other, knitting themselves back together.

Wendy... was still alive.

Chapter 687: Evolve

His expression remained impassive, but inside, Damon had to admit he was stunned beyond words. If not for the fact that he was being broadcasted, and losing his composure would make him lose the aura he was farming, he would have already started shouting for a referee to appear.

This was just too unfair. He had planned her death beautifully.

First, he had destroyed her soul using Alazard's cursed blade, the sword known as Broken Bonds. It was a wretched weapon forged to disintegrate the very soul of its target.

Damon knew this power all too well. He had once been on the receiving end of it when Alazard cut him back in Lysithara.

He liked the sword. Its effect was absolute. But like most weapons in his arsenal, it had one fatal flaw. It could not withstand the overwhelming heat of Ashborn. He had lost more than a few blades that way, reduced to molten scraps by his own flames.

That was why he didn't use Broken Bonds often.

The next part of his plan was to erase her body completely, and for that, he used the Staff of Carnage. The weapon could gather energy and unleash it in a devastating explosion. The longer he charged it, the greater the destruction.

With this combination, Damon had meticulously eviscerated every part of Wendy's being, body and soul.

And yet, she wasn't dead.

The shattered pieces of her flesh began to twitch. Small fragments crawled toward larger ones, merging, fusing, rebuilding bones and sinew.

Damon's jaw tightened. The effects of the Soul Blaze Potion were fading, the strength draining from his body with every passing second. He didn't have much time before weakness claimed him again.

"Are you a Wendigo or a cockroach...just... die."

He raised his hand, unleashing the flames of Ashborn across the writhing remains. The black fire tore through her forming body, consuming flesh and bone in waves of infernal heat, yet she continued to regenerate.

Damon frowned. Something was off. This wasn't the same as before. The flames weren't working.

He increased their intensity, the air around him warping from the heat, but the more he burned her, the less damage the flames did.

Her flesh... he had seen something like this before. No, he had experienced something like this before.

"She's adapting to my attacks."

His voice dropped, realization dawning with grim clarity. This was similar to his own mastery mechanic.

What the hell was this? An enemy that couldn't be killed, one that could adapt to his every move?

Wendy's monstrous form reconstituted fully, larger than before, her presence heavier and more violent. For the first time ever, Damon saw Ashborn rendered completely useless.

The flames that burned both body and soul had no significant effect on her now. She was resisting Ashborn completely.

"My attempts to kill her only made her stronger."

Blood trickled from his nose as the potion's effect wore off further, his power flickering as his wounded soul ached violently.

'Ashborn destroys both body and soul. That means her soul itself is evolving. No, it's becoming more durable.'

"Rawrrrrr....grrrrr!"

The massive Wendigo roared, her hatred exploding outward in a wave of killing intent as she charged straight at him.

Damon gritted his teeth, raising his hand to grip his sword tightly. The ground split beneath his feet as he caught her massive claw mid-swing, dust exploding outward.

"I can try possessing her, but that's just a temporary solution. Her soul still won't die. Ahhh, annoying."

He leapt, propelling himself over a large building and sprinting across its crumbling rooftop. The Wendigo followed, crashing through structures like a walking calamity.

Around them, nearby demon beasts stirred, drawn by the chaos. They roared and began to move, their instincts reacting to the battle. But when Damon turned his cold gaze toward them, their rage faltered. Fear replaced it. They backed away, then turned on the Wendigo instead.

She tore through them effortlessly, a single swipe of her claws splattering their bodies like mud.

Damon knew time was running out. He pressed his palms together and slashed both Dealer's Hand and Broken Bonds in a cross formation.

[Dark Blade]

Two massive crescent slashes screamed forward, tearing through the air before colliding with her. But when the energy cleared, all they had done was draw shallow cuts, barely any blood.

He clicked his tongue. Her body was adapting to his sword strikes now too.

He pointed his hand forward.

Bang. Bang.

Magic bullets fired, pelting her body, but each impact merely bounced off her skin, the energy dispersing harmlessly against her growing resistance.

"Hmmm."

That wasn't unusual. Some monsters naturally had magic resistance. Damon himself had plenty of it. But something about this was off. The spells weren't entirely useless. They just lacked force.

'These are blunt trauma attacks.'

Magic bullets were powerful because they were fast, sharp, and cost little mana. They were never meant to pierce creatures like her.

He slid down the side of a collapsing structure, pushing off a wall mid-fall. The Wendigo's claws cut through the air where he had been a heartbeat earlier. Damon landed on her arm, slashing deep before kicking away, his strength faltering even as his movements remained precise.

She lunged again, fangs bared, but he met her charge with a fierce backhand. The impact sent her crashing through a half-ruined building that crumbled entirely upon impact.

Debris rained from above as the two clashed amid the falling dust, Damon's breathing heavy now, his strength slipping away while hers grew more monstrous by the second.

'What if I improved the penetrating power of the magic bullets.'

He ducked a swing, spun low, and kicked her square in the chest, then followed up with an uppercut that cracked against her snout.

'No, why not make it bigger, no, faster.'

He thrust his hand forward, mana surging. A large sphere of energy began to form in his palm, spinning rapidly, condensing into a sharp, vibrating javelin of pure force. The air itself seemed to sizzle around it.

"Then launch."

With a deafening crack, the projectile tore through the air like lightning, slamming straight through the Wendigo's arm. The vibrations detonated a moment later, causing a violent explosion that shattered what remained of the building and sent her flying.

The shockwave rippled outward, wind howling past Damon's hair as dust billowed around him.

"Rawrrrr!"

Her pained roar echoed through the ruins.

Then came a familiar chime.

[Mastery... Magic Missile]

Damon's eyes narrowed. Using the brief pause, he activated Appraisal and scanned her status. His expression hardened.

It was so unfair. No, this was practically cheating.

Her second-class skill appeared before his eyes.

[Evolve]

Chapter 688: Magical Arsenal

[Evolve]

Life and death are nature's laws, inevitable and unchanging, for all who live must one day die. No beast nor man escapes this circle.

Only endure. The one who endures the longest in this circle must adapt, change, and evolve.

You have been granted the ability to adapt and evolve fast. What doesn't kill you will only make you evolve.

This was what her skill did, and Damon was on the verge of coughing up blood—literally—from his injuries and from the realization that the unknown god had just rage-baited him.

The only way to kill Wendy would be to damage her before she could evolve. But her third-class skill, Pure Soul, prevented Damon from doing just that.

That skill was almost like his Deathless skill, which prevented him from dying. That raised the question:

What use did the unknown god have for Wendy here?

Why would the unknown god go out of his way for a mere Wendigo? Why turn a monster into a person?

Why give her so many gifts? Was this skill the reason she had been able to get rid of her monster core and evolve into a person?

If so, why bring her here to the war games?

'I don't have much time, and my opponent is only becoming more resistant to my power.'

"If she can grow too, then so must I."

Damon took a deep breath as his head began to feel heavy.

Cough. Cough.

Blood spilled from his mouth. The effects of the potion were beginning to fade.

He returned Broken Bonds into his shadow storage, then grasped his Dealer's Hand. The broken sword gleamed faintly, even under the dim light of the ruined city.

He had many skills he could use, but his strength was dwindling.

He activated [5x] to boost his speed.

"Let's try putting some distance between us."

The Wendigo lunged forward. Damon swung his sword in three crescent slashes at the large hulking form before him.

[Dark Blade]

She weaved between them in a blur of motion. Damon gritted his teeth, vanishing with a step.

[Flash Step]

The wide maw of the Wendigo opened as he appeared in front of her, but before she could bite down, he ducked, slipping beneath the snapping jaws exactly as he intended. The effects of his skill,

[Beholder's Gaze],

slowed his perception of time. That was all he needed.

Taking another deep breath, Damon tightened his grip around the hilt of his sword with both hands and swung upward.

[Midnight]

A wave of magical energy spread through his sword's path as he thrust forward. A ball of slashes scattered and speared toward the center of the Wendigo's head.

Boom.

Brains and blood exploded in all directions, splattering across Damon's face as her body went still, a gaping hole torn through her skull.

This was Midnight or at least, that was what Damon had renamed it. It was the second form of Brightwater Swordsmanship, though the original name had been Noon.

Damon didn't possess the light attribute, so he had renamed it Midnight, since his own power resembled darkness more than light.

The technique involved lifting the sword to the center of one's body, just like the sun at high noon, then striking with gathered energy that manifested as a wave of slashes, condensed into a piercing thrust.

It was a complex move.

Damon breathed heavily as her body remained still. He just needed a moment to catch his breath. He knew that attack wouldn't kill her. As expected, she began to regenerate.

The magic missile was a good spell, but it lacked refinement. Using Midnight gave him an epiphany no, a brand new path for his magic.

"What if I incorporate rune magic into it..."

It was a crazy idea. And for that, he needed space lots of it.

"Let's start by leveling this whole area."

He leapt into the sky. He had no wings, but he had the Airwalk skill.

Bouncing on invisible steps, Damon rose higher, blood dripping from his nose as Wendy began to stir below.

"Yes... it's like a fog has been lifted."

He spread his arms, blood streaking his face, the broadcast orb capturing his expression as he ascended through the smoky air. He stopped midair and spread his arms wider. Mana burst from his body in all directions.

From the ground, Waton stared upward, eyes wide.

"What's he trying to do..."

The mana began to collide against itself, creating sharp sparks that twisted and vibrated, turning into small glowing pellets. Magic bullets. But that wasn't all those pellets stretched, reshaping into long, spear-like projectiles.

Magic missiles.

The Wendigo spread her massive maw. For the first time since her transformation, she spoke.

"Give back children... give backkkkk!!!"

She launched into the air with a deafening sonic boom. Waton's gaze followed her, then shifted to the sky, where hundreds of enormous javelins of mana formed above.

It looked as if an unseen hand had drawn back the heavens and loosed a thousand arrows toward the earth.

"Black angels descend to earth... what a spectacular sight," Waton whispered.

"...What a magnificent spell..."

His eyes widened at the distant glow as the missiles screamed downward, pulling the Wendigo with them. The resulting explosion flattened everything in its path. The ruins were reduced to dust and rubble, the entire district leveled.

But Wendy survived.

The whole area was now an open field. She had already experienced Magic Missile while grievously injured. This didn't kill her either.

However, Damon's expression changed. The calm vanished, replaced by a wicked smile.

"Ahaha... ahahaha..."

He laughed wildly, as if he had expected it all along. He brought his palms together. Runes began to appear in the air. No, not runes, the magic missiles themselves were bending, reshaping into intricate runes.

Blood seeped from Damon's eyes, ears, and mouth, but still he laughed.

Waton wasn't fluent in rune language, but even he recognized what the symbols formed.

The word Sword.

Right before his eyes, the glowing runes changed, transforming into hundreds of dark shadow swords hanging in the sky.

Damon pointed toward Wendy his voice echoing in the air.

"You can see it, Wendigo... you can see my magic spell."

He thrust his hand forward. As the Wendigo tried to reach him, the hundreds of blades fell from the heavens, engulfing everything below.

Waton trembled uncontrollably, his hands shaking.

"Wha... what overwhelming might..."

Damon heard a whisper in his ear as she descended into the hell he had created.

This was the culmination of his Magic Bullet spell, his new path in magic.

[Mastery: Magical Arsenal]

Chapter 689: An Offer

This was the culmination of everything he knew about the magic bullet. Damon had been wrong about something; he had been treating the magic bullets as nothing but projectiles when he should have seen that they were actually weapons.

He realized this when he created the magic missile. Through its creation, he came to a realization, the magic bullets were malleable pieces of mana that could be shaped into any weapon of his choice.

With that thought in mind, what if he used them to form runes and name the weapon he wanted them to become? By that measure, the magic itself would create the weapon he desired.

He would have an unlimited arsenal of weapons, a magical arsenal.

Its power was far more devastating than he expected. A quarter of his massive mana pool had been depleted from this battle alone. He had truly created a fine spell, one whose destructive capability could rival a small army.

This was an area-of-effect attack.

He stood amid the rubble, blood dripping from his orifices as he walked forward with trembling hands. The effect of the Soul Blaze potion had now worn off. Still, he was determined. The pain spread throughout his whole body, eating at his mind like a million termites tearing at his soul.

He stepped into a pool of blood, the soft ripples the only sound as his boots soaked it up. The crown on his head was soaked with blood and dust, masking his face in grime and exhaustion.

His gaze fell upon the dark shadowy swords that impaled the beastly form of the Wendigo. Blood poured from the grievous wounds; her antlers were broken, her flesh shredded. Blood and bones were visible, organs half destroyed and pierced by swords matte black as the night.

The Wendigo slowly tried to raise her head but failed. Her eyes were listless, showing only the emotion of defeat. Tears of blood and frustration poured from those empty eyes.

"Ahhh," Damon sighed, his breath ragged with pain.

He sat down, crossing his legs in the pool of blood.

"You really didn't die... well, it can't be helped. I don't even care to kill you anymore. As far as getting revenge is concerned... I've gotten even."

Damon was in agony too. His body was scraped and damaged, blood dripping from his nose. He just wanted to close his eyes for a moment.

It made him wonder how did his grudge with the Wendigo even start? His hate for the creature was shallow at best.

He had gone into a forest, and she had attacked him like any beast would. It was the same as someone stumbling upon a bear in its own hunting ground. Wanting to kill it for defending its territory was just shallow.

Damon was a shallow person.

"You almost killed me back then, and now I've killed you many times..."

But that wasn't all. Why did he kill the Wendigo's cubs? What wrong had they done? He was no match for the mother, so he massacred her cubs.

Damon looked around the clearing that had been created from their battle, the blood seeping into the hardened ground.

"I really hated losing. I knew I would lose. That's why... I wanted to always be that one insect who would bite back, even as I got crushed..."

He whispered those words without knowing why.

"The weak are pathetic... because they are weak. And even more pathetic when they fight back. Submission and acceptance are always the wisest choice."

Her blood continued to spill on the ground, her eyes weakly staring at Damon as the swords pinned her down.

He chuckled. "Well, so what? Being a fool is fine by me. I'd rather be the first fool who charges to his death than live knowing I was living on someone's mercy."

Wendy's voice came weakly from her destroyed snout.

"But... you still live..."

Damon turned to her, then chuckled softly.

"Is it worth it though, to live with so much heartache?"

Wendy was not sure what Damon wanted. Was he trying to convince her to die?

"Living hard, dying scary... living mean second chance. Live to fight, live to grow from pathetic weak to proud strong... like you... I live... I will not die..."

Damon's dark eyes closed as he looked at the sky. Her speaking had improved..she was learning.

"You and I are not much different. How the roles have changed... You created asexually produced offspring because you didn't want to be alone, right?"

He glanced at her and stood up.

"I'll let you decide. Make a choice if you will..."

Damon glanced down at her again.

"It's clear to me that you can't die due to your skill. No one who is depraved can kill you. By our nature, men are beasts, so everyone is depraved in a sense... which means you can't die to just anyone only a pure soul."

He closed his eyes. There was only one person he could think of, one truly pure soul, someone simple in desire, someone who had met him with genuine purity.

'The only person who can kill her is Leona Valefier.... Maybe Matia too'

Glancing at her coldly, he continued, "But I sure as hell am going to try. Even if it can't kill you, I will break you, your body, your spirit, everything until you are a mindless husk of who you once were, alive but dead."

He smiled faintly and reached into his shadow storage, pulling out a coffin made of ice.

"This is the Furnace of Frost. It's a coffin that freezes whatever is placed inside, keeping them frozen in that moment forever."

The chill of the coffin made Wendy's eyes flicker.

"I can toss you inside and discard this coffin at the bottom of the sea for all eternity. You will be forever trapped... alone."

Wendy's eyes trembled as she gazed at Damon.

"You fear loneliness. Why else would you create cubs that are merely biological clones of yourself? I couldn't help but notice they were all female. You must fear loneliness above all else. That is your fear."

Wendy's heart was already healing from being impaled, but it began to beat faster and faster. Damon could practically smell her fear.

He reached out his hand, and though she flinched and closed her eyes, his touch was gentle.

"I understand solitude... and no one should have to be alone. I offer you an alternative join me, and I will give back all you have lost and so much more."

Wendy opened her eyes, staring at Damon's hand as it gently stroked her bloody head.

"Joi...n you..."

Damon smiled lightly. "Yes, and you will never know solitude."

Her eyes watered as she wavered.

"You give hundred children too..."

Damon's eyes twitched as he barely held back the urge to cough blood.

His lips twitched. The absurdity almost made him laugh. Even now, on the brink of collapse, she managed to misunderstand him."

"Erhmm, yes... well, I can't make any promises, but we'll see..."

Wendy's eyes flickered, then slowly she began to turn back into a woman. As she transformed, shadows wrapped around her body, forming white fabric to cover her. Damon almost let out a sigh of relief. He was weaker than ever, with no fight left in him.

"Well, that's tomorrow's problem..."

He stood, then froze, looking at the ground. Wendy's blood was being absorbed into it.

Damon crouched down and rubbed away the dust, then spread his shadow perception.

He froze.

Chapter 690: Godfather

There was some degree of shock in Damon's eyes because it was a symbol of a god. But the reason he was truly surprised was because it wasn't the ominous mark of the Unknown God radiating before him, not something that carried both holy and unholy traits.

This was the symbol of the Goddess of Doom, a bleeding heart.

All who knew of this symbol revered it.

This particular symbol wasn't often used or seen publicly. Statues of her were far more common. However, this was the highest and purest form of her mark, a bleeding heart that symbolized war, death, and doom itself.

Damon moved closer to examine it. When he got near enough, he noticed that Wendy's blood was being absorbed into the symbol, slowly spreading through unseen channels beneath the ground.

He reached out his hand to touch it but froze midway.

He knew better than to interfere with Doom... or any true god, for that matter. The last time he had merely learned something about the nature of their secret, he was destroyed for it.

Luckily, the Unknown God had brought him back.

Still, Damon bit his lip. Something about this mark felt wrong deeply ominous. Why would Doom hide something like this? Why siphon blood from Wendy?

The Unknown God had made sure Wendy came here. It was feasible to think this was all part of his plan.

So Damon bit down harder, his jaw tight, and pressed his hand to the mark. The instant he did, the world disappeared from his view.

His heart stopped beating. His head felt frozen. The world around him became a lightless darkness alien, wrong, and suffocating.

This aura... he had felt it many times before. But this time it was different far more intense, far more consuming.

It was a familiar feeling, the same one he felt when he reached into his shadow storage.

This was the Unknown God's presence.

Damon ripped his hand away, cold sweat breaking out across his face as he coughed blood onto the altar.

Yes an altar.

It had been an altar all along, buried beneath the ruins this entire time.

Damon spread his shadow perception across the area, letting it seep into the earth and debris, and then he noticed something unsettling.

'Where's the blood from the demon beasts we killed?'

While he and Wendy fought, they had slain a few creatures, yet not a single trace of their blood remained. Damon turned toward the broadcast magic orb hovering nearby, but it didn't seem to be working.

Its surface was frozen mid-image, as if whatever was happening here wasn't meant to be seen by anyone.

Damon bit his lip again, muttering, "Ahhh, I have a feeling I'm about to experience something extremely horrible and traumatizing."

He turned around to find Wendy standing before him, fully healed, her expression serious.

Damon frowned awkwardly.

'She doesn't realize I can't fight right now...'

"Wha... what do you want?" he asked coldly, facing the woman wrapped in white blankets.

She blinked, studying him. Then she repeated softly, "Wha... what do you want..."

Damon sighed, realizing she was mimicking him, probably trying to learn how to speak properly. She was already improving, though.

He glanced at her, then at the blanket draped loosely over her figure.

"Hmmm, I can't have you going around in those, now can I? Hold on, I have some girl clothes here."

Damon reached into his shadow storage and pulled out a short-length dress that obviously belonged to Abellona of Valtheron. He handed it to her.

She glanced at it curiously, then let go of the white blanket. Damon's eyes widened as he hurriedly reached forward, pressing the blanket back against her chest to stop it from falling his hand inadvertently grabbing her in the process.

"Ahh... ahh..." He froze, forcing an awkward smile while still feeling the softness under his hand. Then he spoke quickly, more to the orbs than to her.

"This looks worse than it looks..."

She didn't understand what he meant, but thankfully she didn't attack him. Damon pulled the blanket up again, covering her properly.

"Wear this," he said, offering the dress.

She took it, sniffing it with her nose.

"No, no... not smell strong."

Damon almost coughed blood again, both from his injuries and from anger.

"Huh? Are yah crazy? This is piyon! It's worth several million zeni, and it's really durable! I was going to sell it! Besides, apparently it's exclusive, this used to belong to a princess! How dare you disrespect money like that!"

Wendy bared her fangs slightly but restrained herself, growling softly.

"Starching it... and looking at it..." she murmured, still confused about how to wear it.

Damon sighed, showing her how to put it on before turning away and grabbing the magic orbs to stop the broadcast.

As soon as his hand touched them, the medallions Waton had given him disappeared.

He sneered. "So that's the penalty for touching them. I wonder what the penalty for destroying them would be."

After a few moments, he figured Wendy was dressed, so he turned around. She was wearing the dress now, and he let out a long sigh of relief.

Then his eyes moved to her hair tangled, unkempt, and filled with dust, soothe and ash.

"We're gonna have to clean you up," he muttered, "but we'll do that later."

He turned again to find Waton running toward him, a squirrel perched on his shoulder.

The young prince stopped in front of him, smiling brightly.

"Haha... ahh... you won! I never doubted you!"

Damon rolled his eyes. "No shit..."

Watson grinned and approached Wendy.

"Congratulations, ma'am! You two finally settled your dispute! I'm always happy to see lovers get back together a broken heart is no good for anybody."

He seemed genuinely excited.

"Be sure to invite me to the naming ceremony when the baby, I mean babies are born. I would gladly be their godfather!"

Damon just stood there, shooting the bastard a disgusted glare.