

A CARDINAL SIN

OCTOBER REQUEST STORY

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Alice hadn't been conscious to witness it. The visage of the boy she'd come to trust known as Kirito twisting into the very form of the Administrator that had stolen her memories and brainwashed her into becoming one of her loyal Integrity Knights. No, she'd been soundly unconscious, and by the time she awoke she was at the top of the very tower she'd scaled alongside Kirito and Eugeo.

...At the foot of the Administrator's bed. All of the damage that had been done to her chambers had seemingly been reversed, so much that she almost wondered if she was dreaming. Or if everything that had come before that was perhaps a dream. But the knight felt disoriented. She was groggy, her body felt heavy, and it seemed her right eye had somehow been fixed. **"Oh? Awake are we?"**

A voice sounded from atop the bed that sent a shiver up the Integrity Knight's spine. It was undoubtedly the voice of the Administrator, *Quinella*. Had Kirito not managed to defeat her even after Eugeo's sacrifice? Then... hope really was lost. A flight impulse welled up inside Alice and she inevitably found the energy to bounce to her feet and run towards the exit she knew existed without looking back. But would it be that easy?

"Aa, aa, aaaa." *Of course not.* The exit in the floor disappeared before Alice's very eyes, forcing her to turn and make eye contact with the lilac phantom that stood with sultry intent at the foot of the bed -- the singular piece of furniture in the white, open room. **"Did you really think you could just leave? But don't worry Alice, I'm not going to turn you into a knight again. I've lost a toy after all, so I need a replacement."**

“What?” The first word to escape the girl’s lips was such a simple question accompanied by a very firm tone. Bright blue eyes took stock of the Administrator’s body. Despite losing an arm in the earlier parts of their struggle, it seemed she had regained the use of both. With the woman’s control over the Underworld was there even anything she could do to escape? **“What do you mean by that?”** Lost a toy? Kirito? Eugeo? Cardinal? It could have been any of those three, but Alice failed to understand how Quinella could just replace a Fluctlight let alone a person.

A Fluctlight was a soul after all, could it really be replicated?

“It’s just as it sounds Alice. Because of you all I didn’t get to break them the way I wanted to, and so…” The Administrator seemingly opened a panel in front of her and began to tap away, entering a command of some sort as Alice’s bio appeared before her. Alice herself could gleam it even while standing closer to the far edge of the room.

At least up until the moment that her blue eyes began to glow crimson and white lettering wholly obscured her line of sight. *‘CARDINAL SYSTEM’*, it read, and her whole body tensed up as she felt an authority she didn’t typically possess being forced into her body like an alien invader. Of course Alice knew what that meant. The only person with that designation had given her life to the cause of destroying Quinella. The girl that had lived in the library; Cardinal.

Once the authority was firmly rooted in her core, next came an overwhelming pain that caused Alice to cry out in pain -- much to Quinella’s elation. It felt like she was being torn up from the inside, like the very fabric of her being was being corrupted. The girl by the name of Alice Schuberg had left her with this life, and now it was so easily being corrupted!? Had she failed?

But the pain just suddenly cut off, the display in her eyes fading as they returned to normal, or at least normal from the perspective of *‘they were no longer red and displaying words’*. What they were however was not their usual blue as deep as the ocean itself, but rather a dull chestnut that was almost painfully normal in comparison. **“You did something.”** Those chestnut eyes narrowed at Quinella. The woman didn’t drop her entertained smirk, having taken notice of the fact that the new settings were beginning to spread through Alice’s body.

The brown eyes, for example. Likewise the southernmost tips of her hair had begun to not only change shade but had begun to show natural curls, particularly in those that dangled down in front of her armor. They retained their pastel lightness, but the overall color seemed to be browning much like her eyes had. They’d surely remain the color of a chestnut to match the windows.

“Of course I did. You saw the Cardinal System permissions pop up, didn’t you? That runt was no match for me within my own domain so there won’t be any harm in giving you that role for the time being; until I grow bored at the very least.” Surely the Integrity Knight was thinking that such a thing was impossible,

but as long as Quinella retained the role of Administrator there was honestly very little she *couldn't* do. She'd merely been amicable enough to not use these hacks before, but it seemed that had been a misjudgment on her part. She'd been killed, and if not thanks to her benefactor she would have remained dead. *To think she'd once been the person who'd killed her.*

Before Alice could properly respond to the Administrator's bold claim she collapsed to one knee. Weakness quickly took her body and the armor that had been prepared specifically for her frame and level of power was aided by gravity to pin her in that position? "**Why is it so heavy!?**" This query elicited a cackle from her attacker.

"You know how small she was! Do you think a body like that could wield a knight's equipment!?"

Quinella was, of course, *correct*. The blonde could not properly see what was happening to her frame because her armor wholly obscured the sight, but it was growing so heavy because her muscle composition was beginning to shift towards the negative. Arms that were at least built enough to shoulder her armor and swing her sword lost their definition, bulges smoothing out as skin hung loose around her bones not only at the sides of her torso but below it as well.

The weight of her gauntlets forced Alice's hands downward without the strength to support them, but it was a concern for a very short time before golden steel crashed into the tiled floor on either side of her, giving a taste of just how much her form had dwindled under Quinella's influence. Like all of her armor, the gauntlets had been tailor-fit to her size. For them to fall off even with their weight could only mean her hands, and likewise her arms had grown too small for them to rest properly.

And the fingers that Alice managed to present to her eyes were significantly smaller. Not only were they tiny and practically childish in design, the physical damage from being a melee weapon user had all but vanished from their padding. Skin was completely soft, no sign of any hardening from repeated item use. Her wrists were likewise impossible thin and her elbows now bonked into the upper part of her arm armor as opposed to the bend where it had attached to her gauntlets.

But the Administrator suddenly waved her hand, and all of the equipment on Alice's body dissipated into thin air, leaving the girl to fall forward and just barely catch herself on the ground with those tiny hands. Chestnut-colored bangs swayed before her eyes from the sudden fall, the color seeping deeper towards her scalp as hair length crept towards her chin. "**It's boring if I can't see what's happening, hope you don't mind.**"

"You bitch!" Alice spat in response, brown eyes looking up to glare daggers at the lilac haired demon that had her wrapped around her finger *again*. Yet that demon was merely amused that her new toy was still that feisty -- perhaps Cardinal's personality had yet to start taking?

Personality or no, her body was surely beginning to betray the look of a steadfast knight quite readily. In her birthday suit it was quite evident just how much of her mass had been lost. Arms and legs were both short and thin, suggesting she wasn't accustomed to hard labor. Her frame was clearly one of a child, as evident by the lack of any substantial maturity in the forms of shapeliness on her bones and flesh. Butt, for example, had clenched inward to show signs of shapeliness, but instead of looking like a ripened peach it was clearly still growing into its perfect form.

The meat on Alice's chest hung like a pendulum at first, her breasts not usually a part of her body she thought much about. She was already in her late teens and had never once thought much about something like having sex appeal, and so as fat waned and the pair hugged closer to her bones with tinier nipples she afforded them little concern. But where had that fat gone? Seemingly her stomach. As her body crept towards an age that couldn't be much more than ten years old physically, the pudge typically found in a child replaced muscle in plenty of places. A tiny roll in her stomach, a bit of girth to her arms and legs, it distributed throughout a form that couldn't be much bigger than 4'10" to sell her new age.

"Administrator...! Quinella! To think you would resort to such a fiendish plan!" Alice's manner of speech had already become more proper. Hatred bled through her words, but there was the composure of someone with experience in dealing with this wench at the same time. The girl's mentalscape was accepting Cardinal's Fluctlight now and that identity was taking root in the form of both personality and memory.

Girlish lips turned into a frown as Alice suddenly gained the awareness of how to use the Cardinal System's authority summon a more comfortable ensemble of a velvet magician's robe to cover her exposed form and a pair of rounded spectacles upon the bridge of her nose. The last of the blonde in her hair was overtaken by brown, leaving a curly mane of chestnut beneath her new velvet hat that stopped just short of her shoulders.

Alice Cardinal rose to her feet, casting hand to the side as a staff likewise appeared from thin air. **"You sacrificed Alice to summon someone that can go toe-to-toe with you? Are you really that depraved in your boredom? Or no... I'm still Alice, aren't I? You've left me in a confused state, but I think you misunderstood the compatibility level of our Fluctlights."** Her memories as Cardinal were there, but likewise she still identified with her own life. Memory of what happened after she died still prevailed, and from that she could grasp this false Administrator's identity as well.

"So, Kirito..." The name and Cardinal's gaze were both pointed at Quinella, which seemed to rattle the ruler of this land a moment as if the name had triggered some sort of realization. While maintaining eye contact the child knelt down to pick something off the floor. The Fragrant Olive Sword that Alice Synthesis Thirty wielded. True Name Activation should have only worked with the assigned user, and yet... Golden petals suddenly took flight in place of the blade, dancing around

Cardinal and under her complete control. **"It seems we failed, hm? But I'll fix it somehow, I promise. On my name as Cardinal. On my name as Alice."**

"FIX IT!? What exactly do you plan to fix!? There's no escaping this chamber, you shouldn't have the power to do so! I nullified those functions in my domain!" But that was when Quinella noticed the golden petals forming above Cardinal. **"NO!"**

"And so the game of cat and mouse begins anew. Goodbye Kirito, until we meet next." Alice's petals crashed down from above the child, consuming her and crashing right through the floor beneath her. Quinella's authority did not stop her from using the blade, and as a collaborated existence she could use it freely enough to protect herself from their wrath. It was essentially an express elevator to safety, at which point she retreated back into her library once more.

Quinella was left both stunned and angered, bare foot stomping into the tiled ground as bare breasts bounced around. There were plenty of things she hated, but being mocked? She loathed it. Calling her Kirito...! It wasn't like she didn't know what her new existence had been built on, but just hearing it stirred something in her heart she hadn't felt since she'd been just a powerless knave. His presence on her soul churned this emotion.

She felt guilty.