1463 The More They Desired

Sunny studied the tranquil surface of the crimson lake, unnerved. He had died in its waters a few times, and each of those deaths was both torturous and gruesome. But now that he knew what had caused him to die, he felt even more wary of the red water than before.

Indeed... the entire blood lake was, in a sense, a Nightmare Creature However, it was not a single living being.

Instead, there were mindless, microscopic, insatiable creatures living in the bloody water, too tiny to see and too numerous to count. Each drop of the bloody water contained millions of them. Sunny had fought and killed many abominations, from titanic behemoths to insect-like vermin that hunted in giant swarms. However, he had never faced Nightmare Creatures that were no different from flesh-eating bacteria.

The whole lake had become a colony for these tiny horrors. Sunny did not know whether they had come from inside the giant corpse, or if the winged being simply was one of their victims. Perhaps it was both. What he did know was that the abomination's blood provided nearly endless nourishment for the tiny devourers, allowing them to propagate at astonishing speed and infect the entire lake.

Thus becoming the lake.

...No wonder he had died screaming in its crimson waters.

Sunny took a deep breath, dismounted, and gave Effie a grim look.

"Stay away from the water."

The huntress climbed off the Covetous Coffer and sighed.

"Yeah. I gathered that much... but, Sunny. How are you going to kill a lake? Short of somehow evaporating the entire thing, I don't see a way."

He hesitated.

Indeed, how was anyone supposed to kill a lake? Sunny shook his head, then headed toward the shore.

"I don't think I can kill it. Making it out of that lake alive, though... I think I'll manage."

He manipulated the mist to cover their approach and stuck to the shadows. Tense, they made their way to the shore — Effie stayed back, but Sunny walked to the very edge of the crimson water. The overbearing stench of blood assaulted his nostrils.

Feeling incredibly uncomfortable, Sunny took a deep breath and summoned a Memory. White sparks swirled around his hand, and soon, a beautiful chalice of white jade appeared in his hand, overflowing with sinister black liquid.

The Bitter Cusp... a cup of poison that the Jade Queen had once served her rapacious guests. Despite the fact that Sunny had started his Awakened career as a poisoner, he did not use this Memory often. The last time he had, it was to coat the arrows and bullets of the First Evacuation Army soldiers with the Black Venom. It helped them a lot during the mad dash to Falcon Scott...

But who knew it would come in handy today?

Sending all five of his shadows to wrap themselves around the Bitter Cusp, Sunny tilted it and watched as a stream of black liquid fell into the crimson water. The poison flowed and flowed.

'The mistress of the palace herself presented them with a cup of the sweetest nectar. No matter how much of the sweet nectar they drank, the cup remained full. The more of it they consumed, the more of it they desired...'

The words of the description of the sinister Memory surfaced in his mind.

Indeed, no matter how much of the glossy black liquid he poured into the lake, it continued to flow. There was no doubt that more of it had flowed out of the Bitter Cusp than the jade chalice was supposed to contain. There was no explanation for where the poison was coming from, not that he needed one.

Endless Spring was always like that, as were many Memories. Mundane logic almost never applied to how they functioned.

Sunny did not need an explanation, though. All he needed was for the blood lake to drink as much of the poison as there was.

After a while, it seemed as though the crimson waters had become restless. Subtle ripples spread over the lake's surface, and shallow waves licked its shore. Forcing himself to stay still, Sunny threw over the shoulder:

"Step back."

Effie obediently waddled a few steps away from him and grew still. He did not move a centimeter, though, no matter how much he wanted to, and continued to pour the black poison into the water.

As time went on, the blood lake started to look more and more eerie. Its crimson waters seemed to be tinted a subtly darker shade now, and rippled silently. Although there was no wind, the waves rolling across the surface of the lake were becoming more noticeable.

Sunny took a deep breath.

He knew that only about half an hour had passed, but it felt like an eternity. Finally, the stream of poison grew thinner, then thinner still. Then, it broke, and only a few stray drops of the black liquid fell down.

The Bitter Cusp was empty.

"Well. That's done."

Standing some distance away, Effie asked:

"Now that you've poisoned this lake so thoroughly... what are you going to do next?"

Sunny dismissed Ananke's Mantle and gave her a dark look. After a few moments of silence, he said:

"What do you think? Now, I'm going to go for a swim."

Effie's eyes grew round.

"What? Swimming in an abominable lake wasn't enough, so you decided to add deadly poison to the soup first?"

He couldn't suppress a short laugh.

"Well, I am immune to most poisons. It's going to sting a bit, for sure, but with some luck... it will be alright."

He sighed, then dismissed the Bitter Cusp and called the five shadows back. Evaluating how much essence he had left, Sunny then opened the gate of the Shadow Lantern and manifested the Shadowspawn Shell around his body. Summoning the Mantle to cover it with a layer of onyx armor, he reinforced that armor with five layers of augmentation, and then gave Effie a wink.

She seemed to pale a little at the sight.

"I'm off. There is some food in the Coffer... I told it not to bite your hands off, so feel free to explore."

With that, Sunny cursed inwardly...

And dove into the hungry, man-eating lake.