1710 Daring Escape

The Chalice Knight resembled a human wearing a tattered suit of ancient armor that had turned green from rust. He towered at around two and a half meters of height, but seemed even taller because of the deer antlers attached to his closed helmet. The rusty helmet itself was fashioned to resemble the snout of a snarling beast, with deep darkness nestling in the crack of its visor.

There was moss growing here and there on the battered armor, and a ragged cloak, too weathered to retain any color, hanging from his shoulders like a torn banner.

The creature was holding a frightening battleaxe in his hand, its blade large and heavy enough to easily split a human in two.

The Huntsman... was like a dead knight that had crawled from under the roots of the forest that had claimed an ancient battlefield, ghastly and imposing enough to make Rain shudder.

Worse than that, the dark crack of his visor was already staring directly at her.

Her souls seemed to squirm under that gaze.

'Crap.'

Rain nocked another arrow on the string and prepared to draw her bow...

But before she could, the Huntsman had already reached the base of the tree that served as her sniper nest.

His dreadful battleaxe rose and fell. That dreadful strike was enough to make the mighty trunk of the ancient tree explode into a hurricane of splinters, obliterating a whole swath of it.

But, a moment later...

A sharp arrow fell from above and lodged itself into his knee. It struck precisely at the narrow gap between the bottom of the abominations's cuisse and the top of his poleyn — which were the armor elements responsible for protecting one's thigh and knee, respectively.

A pretty decent shot, considering the situation.

But Rain did not have any time to celebrate, because the tree was already toppling... and she was falling with it.

After a moment of weightlessness, the rope tied around her chest drew taut, and she found herself flying through the air.

If there was one thing her teacher had told her, it was that one should always leave themselves a path of retreat. Rain had never considered that climbing a tree would protect her from an Awakened Demon, so she naturally prepared a way to escape.

In this case, that way was swinging on a rope and flying between the trunks of terribly tall trees at breakneck speed. She had not carried a sizable length of silk rope all the way here in vain, at least.

As the wind whistled in her ears, Rain thought:

'This is going to hurt...'

Struggling to control her body, she spun at the last moment and used her legs to dissipate the shock of colliding with another tree at great speed. The other end of the rope was tied around one of its highest branches, which allowed her to swing like a pendulum... well, a badly designed pendulum, maybe.

She did not break her neck or crack her skull, which was a relief, but her feet were in agony. Ignoring it, Rain immediately cut the rope with her dagger and plummeted down, landing softly on the frozen ground.

There, leaning against the trunk of the tree, two things were waiting for her: her javelin, and another arrow.

Sheathing the dagger in one smooth motion, Rain grabbed the arrow and spun around, already drawing the bow.

The Huntsman was barreling toward her, so fast that it was hard to track his movements...

But still, he wasn't faster than her arrow.

With her mind clear, she could sense the movements of her enemy. So, she did not aim at where the abomination was, but at where it would be.

Another arrow pierced the air, striking at his other knee.

Sadly, this time, Rain's aim was a few millimeters off. The precious arrowhead struck the edge of the Huntsman's cuisse and shattered, only managing to slice some moss off the rusty green metal.

The Huntsman was an Awakened Demon, while the arrowheads of Rain's arrows were made from the bones of Awakened abominations.

Theoretically, the demon's armor and the arrowheads were of the same Rank... but she herself was not. Strangely enough, that made her arrows weaker than the rusty green metal.

It had something to do with essence, laws governing the world, and will. Rain wasn't entirely clear on the details, but what it meant in practice was that she had to strike at the cracks of the abomination's armor... which she had failed to do, this time.

She did not waste time lamenting the mistake.

Grabbing the javelin, Rain... spun, and ran away.

She ran as fast as she could.

What bravery? What courage? There was no such thing on the battlefield, only strength and weakness, life and death.

In normal circumstances, outrunning an Awakened Demon would have been impossible, but there was currently an arrowhead lodged in one of his knees. It didn't matter that such a small wound was not at all dangerous for a creature of his Rank and Class — a joint was a joint, and if there was something disrupting the joint's function, even a demon would be slowed down.

Rain had specifically fashioned the arrowheads in a way that would make removing them nearly impossible, unless the victim wanted to take a sizable chunk of flesh out with them. So even if the shaft of the arrow was broken, the damage still remained.

Granted, it would have been much better if both of the Huntsman's knees were hurt.

Because, now...

She really did not know if she would be able to escape his axe long enough to accomplish her goal.

'Run... run!'

Gritting her teeth, Rain did the unthinkable... she tossed away her bow. That was a terrible loss — not because he was afraid to lose it, but because the quiver of arrows she had hidden up ahead would be useless without it. But she had to sacrifice something, and her javelin seemed much more useful in a battle against such a large foe.

As for her sword... well, her teacher had given it to her. She would never discard it.

She felt incredibly lucky about leaving her coat and armor on the outskirts of the forest.

'Run, goddamn you!'

Rain did not have eyes on the back of her head, but she could feel the ground trembling, and hear the branches snapping behind her. In fact, the Huntsman was barreling directly through the trees, snapping the mighty trunks like matches. It was as though an unstoppable, inescapable behemoth was pursuing her, getting closer and closer. He was already no more than a dozen meters away.

A dozen meters... ten meters... six meters...

Rain's heart was beating wildly in her chest.

But then, finally, the trees receded, and she escaped into a vast open space.

That... was where she had wanted to fight the demon.

'Be more prepared. Control the battlefield, know the terrain, learn about the enemy. Take the initiative and don't make any mistakes. Have a clear mind and deadly resolve.'

That was the recipe for winning a battle against a demon... any battle, really.

So, this was the battlefield that Rain had chosen.

The open space in front of her was a swamp that hid in the depths of the forest.

Currently, it was frozen over, the treacherous depths encased in a layer of ice. The ice was covered by a thin carpet of snow.

Rain was light enough to walk on the ice without falling under its surface.

The Huntsman, though...

With his frightening size, heavy armor, and dreadful battleaxe, he was going to have a bit of a problem.

Feeling death approaching her from behind, Rain did not waste a single moment and stepped onto the hidden ice.