1711 On Thin Ice

Rain was ready to step on the ice when something inside her screamed. Perhaps it was because of the subtle change in the sounds behind her, or perhaps it was because of the change in the currents of the wind.

Perhaps she had subconsciously noticed the shadow moving unnaturally around her.

In any case, she didn't hesitate even for a split second before throwing her body down. An experienced warrior did not alloy themselves to be ruled by instinct, but they also never ignored it.

A warrior's instinct was the result of countless hours of training and rich battle experience, after all. Blood, sweat, and tears went into honing it into a life-saving tool.

Rain dodged, and in the next moment, her side was pierced by a flash of blinding pain.

She spun in the air and crashed into the ice, throwing herself into a roll. A moment later, Rain was already on her feet, sliding back as she held the javelin between herself and the enemy.

A muffled groan escaped from her lips.

The Huntsman was spinning his grotesque battleaxe, a few drops of blood marring its heavy green blade,

'Damn it.’

Rain briefly glanced down to assess the damage. It wasn't anything serious - the axe barely grazed her, leaving a long cut across her ribs. But if she had been even a little bit slower, it would have split her open like a log.

'More stitching…’

It was a little absurd, but she was more upset about having to mend her bodysuit than about receiving a wound. Her body was much more resilient than the threadbare bodysuit, after all.

"You bastard..."

As soon as the words left her mouth, the demon took a step forward.

Suddenly, they were surrounded by silence. The Huntsman entered the vast clearing, his armored boot sinking into the snow. Simultaneously, Rain backed away from his towering figure.

They were like a fearsome predator and its powerless prey, the predator preparing for a lethal lunge, the prey raising its quills in a vain hope to save itself. The heavy javelin usually gave Rain confidence, but in front of the dreadful master of frozen forest, it seemed a fragile willow branch.

'Come on, come closer.'

She needed to lure him into the depths of the swamp.

But, to Rain's outrage, the abomination halted after barely stepping on the ice. The darkness nestling in his helmet moved mockingly, and he raised the axe, pointing it at her.

‘Curse you!'

The demon was just as smart as she was. So, fhe seemed to have easily recognized the threat that a thin layer of ice hiding the treacherous swamp posed to him.

Rain had expected as much.

She smiled darkly and continued backing away, increasing the distance between them with each passing moment.

Demons were intelligent, but they were also absolutely crazy, like all Nightmare Creatures were. She could allow herself to walk away from the battle if she wanted to. But could the Huntsman allow a human soul to escape from his clutches?

She didn't think so.

And indeed, out there on the shore of the frozen swamp, the demon's fingers twitched. He stared at her silently, making Rain's skin crawl, and then let out a frenzied growl.

Coming from inside the Huntsman's helmet, which was shaped to resemble the snarling snout of a beast, his growl sounded more than a little bit menacing.

Rain's mouth was suddenly dry.

"...Really? Wow, Come get me, then."

The demon struck the ground with his axe, sending a tremor through it, and then took another step.

An echoing, melodious sound resounded from below them as the cover of ice started to crack.

She prepared herself.

In the next moment, the Huntsman lunged forward with stunning speed. The wind howled as his massive body tore through it, the terrible axe rising to deliver a fatal strike.

It all happened very fast.

As the demon was advancing, his foot fell through the ice, and in the next moment, he plummeted down. Black water and pieces of ice flew into the air as if there was an explosion, and Rain felt the swamp tremble.

Cold drops pelted her face.

Of course, water alone was not going to slow the Huntsman down.

A human would have been rendered helpless by the need to struggle against its weight, but an Awakened Demon was powerful enough to shrug such a burden off without any effort. At that distance from the shore, the water was only to the Huntsman's waist, so he continued moving forward after a momentary delay.

But, still...

It wasn't a lake or a river. There was no ground under his feet, only the treacherous mass of the ancient swamp. Although the abominations managed to prevent himself from sinking... for now..,, its speed still dropped.

More than that, the moment he fell through the Ice, Rain was already moving.

And before the Huntsman could regain his bearing, the heavy tip of her Javelin had already crashed Into his helmet.

She did not get greedy with that attack. Greed was the third most common cause of death among experienced fighters, following directly behind arrogance and bad luck. After delivering a strong blow to the demon's face, Rain immediately pulled back and jumped away.

And just in time a split second later, his axe whistled past the spot where she had stood before, colliding with the ice and splitting it.

The attack was much too fast for her to perceive and react in time. If Rain had not anticipated the danger and disengaged in advance, she would have died.

Her side burned with cold pain, but that pain only made her mind sharper. Her heart was beating steadily, pumping blood throughout her body. Her muscles seemed to have come alive, making her body light and alert, brimming with energy.

It was a state of absolute focus and awareness, so heightened that it couldn't last for too long.

'Let's see which one of us is the real demon…’

Brandishing her javelin, Rain grinned and escaped the cracking ice, already searching for a way to deliver another blow to the frenzied abomination.