1712 Icebreaker

Less than a minute later, a vast swath of the frozen swamp had turned into a ravaged scene of devastation. The pure white snow was washed away, the ice was broken and shattered, its shards floating in the black water like dirty glass. The water itself was restless, boiling and rippling from the furious movements of the Huntsman and the escaping gas.

The swamp was trying to swallow the frenzied abomination, but was getting battered by him instead. The demon would sink deeper from time to time, but then tear himself from the insidious embrace of the marsh... even though that struggle allowed Rain to survive so far, it was not enough to grant her victory.

She was breathing laboriously.

Rain had continued to retreat deeper into the swamp, and the demon continued to pursue her like a demented executioner. She had delivered more than a dozen strikes to him, but none dealt any serious damage - even when her javelin pierced the cracks of the Huntsman's armor, it felt as if she was trying to cut wet fur. Rain did do some damage to the hidden flesh of the demon, but not nearly enough to matter.

At the same time, her own body was not faring well, She had not been cut by the dreadful battleaxe again, so there was little blood... relatively speaking... however, there were bruises. In fact, after being tossed around by the furlous power of the demon's blows, Rain felt like her entire body was one glant bruise, by now.

And that was even considering that she fought as cautiously and cowardly as she could.

The Huntsman had much longer limbs, and his battleaxe had much more reach than the black sword her teacher had given her. So, even if Rain was willing to risk clashing with the abomination face-to-face despite being slower and weaker than him, he would have held a great advantage.

Stories like to speak about exalted skill and unbreakable resolve, but in a real fight, the outcome was often decided by the most mundane of things. Reach trumped skill, and weight definitely trumped will.

Well, perhaps it was different for the Awakened, whose power refused to obey common sense. But for someone like Rain, having a longer weapon meant emerging victorious more often than not.

Which was why she did not draw her sword yet, relying instead on the heavy javelin.

'It's alright...'

Her javelin was crafted from the same material as her arrows, and it was not as if a mundane human could not leave a scratch on the body of an Awakened abomination - in fact, it was entirely possible to slay one, just a bit hard.

Things would have been different if Rain was facing a Fallen Nightmare Creature, but then again, she would have never allowed herself to end up in such a situation. Her teacher tasked her with slaying an Awakened Demon precisely because it was not Impossible for her to succeed.

It was just that...

The Huntsman had proven to be much tougher than she had anticipated. Rain had expected to be powerless against his armor, but even when she managed to bypass it, the result was minimal. It as a though there was another layer of protection hiding behind the suit of rusted green armor.

Something had to change.

The demon was just as domineering and frightening as before, his movements just as foreboding... Rain, on the other hand, was starting to feel tired. Not only did she have to attack and dodge the terrible axe, but she also had to be careful about the ice - if she fell under it, then she would die from her own trap.

And with more and more of the ice ending up shattered, staying away from the black swamp was becoming more and more difficult.

Her lungs felt like they were on fire. And not only because she was pushing her resilient body too far - the air reeked, as well, full of foul gasses released when the ice encasing the swamp was broken,

Something had to change soon...

Luckily, a change was coming up.

Not too far behind her, and drawing closer with each frenetic sequence of offense and retreat, was a twisted tree. The tree itself did not mean anything, but the fact that it stood in the middle of a swamp meant that there was enough soll there to support its roots.

There was a tiny Island underneath the tree, which could save Rain, or doom her.

‘To hell with it'

Rain was about to take another step back, but then paused and stood her ground instead. Her body tensed like a powerful spring, and surged with strength. From her feet to her thighs, through her core to her shoulder, and finally into her arm - a powerful force was transferred and multiplied, and as Rain's torso turned, her arm flew forward like a whip.

She let go of the javelin.

The heavy weapon flashed through frigid air, dove under the Huntsman's axe, and plunged deeply into the crack on his rusty breastplate.

The power of her throw was dire enough to give the demon a momentary pause.

...Using that short moment, Rain turned around and dashed toward the distant tree. She knew that the abomination would follow... but it was slowed down by the swamp, sinking deeper the deeper they ventured into it. By now, the dirty water was already above the Huntsman's waist, and his speed had dropped significantly,

Rain ran to the tiny island, pursued by the sound of breaking ice and surging water.

There was just barely enough time.

Reaching the tree, she ignored the quiver of arrows hidden beneath its branches - without a bow, they were all but useless now. Instead, she grabbed something else... a bottle of hard liquor her teacher had procured somewhere the day she turned twenty. Currently, there was a length of cloth dangling from the mouth of the bottle.

His voice suddenly resounded from the shadows:

"W-wait... what are you doing, ungrateful brat? That's my most expensive bottle, you know!"

Rain ignored the startled voice and produced a brass lighter. She wasn't fond of drinking, anyway... no, really, what had he been thinking, gifting a young girl alcohol? What kind of attitude was that for a teacher?

Had her teacher been a delinquent in his youth?

Igniting the cloth, Rain stood up and swiftly turned around.

The Huntsman was barreling toward her like a frenzied icebreaker. He had long torn her javelin from his chest and snapped it in two, leaving the broken pieces far behind.

For a moment, her heart ached for her trusty weapon,

Then, Rain gritted her teeth and tossed the bottle at the demon.

"Catch this, you rusty piece of…”

The Huntsman did not even bother to move his axe, swiping the bottle away with his gauntlet.

Of course, It shattered instantly, spilling burning alcohol all over his towering figure.

The flammable cocktail was not going to damage an Awakened Demon.

But that stench in the air...

There was a lot of gas trapped beneath the ice, and currently, all of it had been released, surrounding the abomination like an invisible cloud.

And when the bottle shattered, the cloud instantly turned into a sea of raging flame.

Of course, Rain did not see any of it, because she was already diving behind the twisted tree.