

A Wish

A Crimson Curse
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He was the first to arrive atop the mountain after three months of travel. The summer heat was hateful and his once white cloak was stained in red and brown. He'd killed so many to get here.

He pulled himself up onto the final plateau and took in the sights. A verdant grove, so peaceful, and despite the height the air was thick and warm. Trees lined the area, white bark with sharp, angular branches and leaves. At the centre of the plateau was another higher area, so he walked across the flower field to get there. He stepped through a series of black and white and red roses, their thorns catching on his cloak and snagging his boots.

He reached out to climb the central rise and the rock face shifted, creating easy handholds for him. He hesitated a moment then climbed. He'd come this far, he wouldn't be deterred. This would be his only chance. This only happened once in a thousand years.

At the top he found a strange creature. A small, furry dog with large bat wings tucked in at its sides. Its tail was long. Too long. It swayed in the air in curls and loops like a vine. Its eyes were hollow, and looking into them he thought he saw the universe. This creature was a God.

"You are worthy. State your wish." Its voice echoed through his skull and its lips never moved. It was deep yet high pitched at the same time. Masculine yet feminine. Calming yet terrifying.

"I wish to become the world's greatest hunter. I ask for strength and agility. I ask to be able to take down any target."

“Your wish is granted.” The voice was louder than before and hurt him in a way he couldn’t describe. Was it speaking directly to his soul? Tearing it apart with its presence?

He felt himself change. His various cuts and bruises healed, his arms and legs grew stronger. His fatigue—the exhaustion of the trial to get here—was gone. He’d never felt more awake, more alive. His clothes changed too. His cloak became naturally red, and so did everything else. His tunic became a shirt that buttoned down the front and his heavy travel trousers with their many pockets became sleek suit trousers more suited to business or a ball. He gained a waistcoat and a long-tailed jacket.

“You will be my hunter.” The voice said, softer this time. “Every thousand years when I arise you will be by my side. You will travel my domain and kill those who seek my power, letting only the worthy reach me. That is the cost of your wish. The eternal hunt.”

The tail of the creature swung forward and split, grabbing him by the arms and legs and neck. He was pulled to his knees, the fur of the tail electrified and painful to the touch. He couldn’t move, he couldn’t weep. He’d sought out the wish so he could feel the thrill of the hunt for the rest of his life, and it seemed he’d get that. He recalled the creatures he’d hunted over the years, the people he’d saved from monsters, the destruction he’d prevented. It was over now.

He wondered if he would remember the thousand year sleeps. Would it even be a sleep? Would he be forced to stay awake that entire time or would he just jump to the next hunt for the wish? Would he get to live a normal life between now and then? He doubted that last one.

“Come, my faithful servant. It is time to serve your new

purpose.”

Darkness took what used to be him, and when he awoke he would be the Crimson Hunter.