[Series: Touhou Project]
[inflation, popping]

Lily Of The Valley (Convallaria majalis)

> “Small, fragrant, drooping, waxy white, bell-shaped, spring-blooming flowers on 6-8in stems rising above to broad basal leaves. Requirements: partial shade, regular water.
>
> All parts are poisonous.”
>
> - Sunset Western Garden Book, 1995 edition, page 239.

Thousands of white-bells swayed. Daytime winds combed across purple hills, shallowly rising and falling for dozens of kilometers on end.

If one were to wander long enough, they may have encountered Medicine Melancholy. A frilly black shirt that bloomed into a red bell-dress made sure she was *very* distinct to the eye.

For the typical person, this would also likely be the *last* thing they ever encountered.

“Another one?” spoke Yukari Yakumo, overseer of Gensokyo.

“Another one. So stupid.”

“I warn them not to snoop around. There’s quite a few places in Gensokyo that welcome humans. A field of poisonous flowers is... *not*.”

Yukari paused, smoothly looking toward Medicine. She crossed her arms and huffed at the mere mention of... *those*.

“Dimwits. All of them. You *know* they won’t listen. Those animals prance around on their hind legs and get themselves killed. They throw a *single* rock a ***billion*** years ago and think they’re untouchable... buffoonish, really.”

Medicine continued to wince, tensing her doll-joints and twisting the attached appendages in place. A small familiar bobbed next to her, bearing the same overall look and feel of Medicine. It *also* grimaced when its owner did.

"If I shared a species with them, I'd gore myself with a sword out of embarrassment. Every human I hear about doing *this-or-that thing* keeps getting more embarrassing than the last. How do ***you*** deal with their existence, Miss Yakumo?"

Yukari chuckled. "I toy with them, mostly. It's fun to see what people do when dropped into a land they know nothing about."

Both paused, glancing into the distance.

"*...you* clearly have your fun too. Whenever I find a body here, they always reek of your poisons. Must have fumed them *real* good."

Huff. Medicine crossed her arms. "No mystery there. That's me. You're *crazy* if you think I **enjoy** it, though. If a human never crossed my sights again, I'd be much happier."

"Would you?"

"Did I misspeak?"

Yukari thought for a moment, thumb running across a mild grin.

"...if you would like, I can *easily* redirect people away from your field. You'll never see a human face around here again- not even the shrine maiden. I would just need to know first: are you truly, *definitely* sure?"

"Wait, you could've *done that* the *entire time??* Yes, **do it!** Make it happen yesterday!!"

"As you wish." Yukari said, giving a snap of the fingers. "I'll dispose of *this* for you, as well."

"Splendid- but why didn't you tell me earlier?"

"I'll leave that for *you* to ruminate on." Yukari casually leapt backward into an open gap, rifting back to her residence.

Medicine was left by herself. She let out a soft exhale.

"Finally."

Months passed, seasons passed. True to Yukari's word, not a single human entered the Hill of the Nameless.

"Much quieter around here- isn't that right?" Medicine said to herself, nodding in agreement.

"The flowers are in full bloom- no *animals* here to trample on them." Fields of lilies glistened whiter-than-ever, fuming with a devilishly-sweet tang.

"hfffff-". She took in a long waft. "Delectable, wouldn't you say?"

Her smaller self sucked in a smaller sniff, nodding firmly in agreement.

"The *shrine maiden* hasn't come by at all since the Sixty Year Cycle incident. Exactly as Lady Yakumo promised. Nor has the *witch* she pals around with... makes sense. That twitchy-fingered kleptomaniac *neanderthal* isn't interested in *anything* unless there's some valuables to get her grubby mitts on... shame about the former, though. Of all the humans to stumble here, she's the one I dislike least."

Both paused.

"The *least*. She's still a grumpy nag. If you held me at knifepoint to pick one, though, my choice would be *pretty* clear."

More months passed, the seasons cycled once more. The aforementioned "shrine maiden" and "neanderthal" sometimes passed by Medicine's line-of-sight, flying off to solve whatever new incidents arose. They didn't pay her much mind, nor did she pay them.

The lilies grew more numerous, blossomed further, and emitted even more of their succulent toxin. The floor had become *so* overgrown with soft flowers that Medicine was often able to lay on the ground and fall asleep.

When she woke up one day, however-

(sqrrk-)

There was a slightly-audible *squeaking* sound as she bent upward. She paused for a moment, eyes opening to a confused furrow.

...

Probably nothing?

Though, her next few days felt more... *sluggish* than usual. Moving about was a little more cumbersome- walking, flying, even looking around was more effort than it usually took. How annoying... perhaps it would solve itself within a few days?

(sqk.)

Not the case. If anything, the issue became *worse*. A glance down would show her a tubby, paunchy gut that blocked her toes.

Why?, she thought. Dolls didn't gain weight. They didn't even have a digestive system to speak of. Medicine hadn't eaten a day in her life. No stomach, no fleshy-squishy bits, no nothing. The closest thing she had were a set of plastic teeth and a fabric tongue- purely for avoiding the uncanny valley, of course.

She sucked in a huff of poison, her belly not fully receding when she exhaled. A scowl formed across her face.

"YUKARI!" she shouted, certain that the gap maiden was listening. "Come explain the meaning of this **NOW!!**"

...

Whether Yukari was listening or not, she didn't answer. Medicine stood amidst a massive swell of flowers, their height now stretching up a tiny bit past her knee. They emitted a constant cloud of tangy smoke that had begun to dissuade even the most sturdy of creatures from passing overhead. Of course, this was not something that would immediately concern Medicine. She couldn't smell anything- she'd instead passively take in the flower's sickly aroma and utilize it in her Danmaku.

While Medicine hadn't realized it yet- that was the issue. Not a single soul had trampled on her flowers for half a decade at this point, nor had she gotten the opportunity to release her toxins onto others. If anything, Yukari would have been surprised that this wasn't happening sooner.

Assuming she was listening, that is.

"Yukari!!"

fwsssh. Medicine plumped up a single centimeter wide over the course of an hour, and then the next hour, and then the next hour...

"nnnN**NNN**GHH!!" she groaned, multiple weeks of meandering and searching leaving her a walking ball. Each step was followed by a deep *bwoom* from her torso, stubby legs struggling to carry her further each following day. Flying was out of the question too- while gaseous poisons had little weight, they still had *a* weight to them. Weight that added up over the course of ***however*** *long it had been*...

flump.

That meandering slowed to a stop, feet spread too far apart to walk any further. She *would* cross her arms, had they not *also* been bloated into barely-movable domes.

"tccCChhhh...!"

Medicine grit her teeth, furiously swiping her head side-to-side, what little movement she *did* have left, in order to find her smaller half.

It would arrive... eventually. Not the day of, nor the day after. Not even the proceeding week! It instead took nearly *an entire month* to blow toward her direction in the same fashion as a tumbleweed. While Medicine's mini-me was full of the same noxious gas that she was, it was only heavy as a volleyball. Medicine herself was unable to see it approaching, head now sunken into the top of her own ball-shaped body... but she did feel a suspiciously-round object bounce off her broad, swollen flanks.

"grhh..."

The grumble was accompanied by an exhaust of toxins seeping between her teeth. A tiny smokestack atop her massively-round, nigh-featureless form.

While *any* human bloated to the point of immobility could be described as 'featureless'... as Medicine's dress *extremely-gradually* pulled apart at the seams, it would be revealed that she had no genitalia to speak of. Not so much as a nipple on her body- a round, pale orb with hills and divots to indicate where her limbs and head were. Past-tense 'were', as these eventually showed signs of smoothing out as well.

For those foolhardy enough to soar overhead, she almost seemed akin to an especially-large lily. Same bell-shape, same glossy-white coloring.

crck.

Medicine felt a sharp scratch at her side, eyes widening.

crack!

A scratch, this one having the sensation of something steaming out.

crrrk, crack, crick... ***crack!***

Like wine leaking out between the wooden planks of a barrel, poison furiously seeped out from all angles. Medicine thrashed back-and-forth, inadvertently squashing her tiny-self; it burst into a small, strong puff of gas.

PSSSSSSSSSHH...

Clenching her face tightly, Medicine was able to angrily shout one more vulgar thought, hoping anyone would hear it:

"You're a GOOD-FOR-NOTHING **RAT**, *Yukari Yakumo!!*"

BWOOSHHHHHHH...

A massive plume of toxic purple mist flooded across the fields, blowing past a swath of lilies. They swayed and brushed against the ground, before standing back up. As though nothing had even happened...

A boisterous jazz piece played from the Prismrivers' stage, fifty-odd patrons attending the outdoor venue. Marisa, Alice, Reimu, and Yukari sat at a table somewhere near the center.

"Another year, huh?" Marisa said, leaning forward onto her elbow. "How far *up there* are ya getting now, anyway?"

"Marisa, we're the same age." Reimu said back neutrally.

"*Ohhh* yeah... that's right!" Marisa then said in the most 'I most certainly did *not* lose track of how old I am' voice possible.

"I think it's nice that you thought of her." Alice interjected.

“Indeed.” Yukari nodded. “Humans have very short lives, so you had *better* make the most of it. If you blink, entire decades can pass you by.”

“Yeah, but we’ve already done so much already! There’s a new thing every like, six months. Times that by the 20ish times some weirdo gets a smart idea, and that’s *basically* a decade, right?”

“They’re called ‘incidents’.” Reimu began with a stern tone, before lightening up. “And, y’know... you’re pretty *weird* yourself.”

“In a nice way?”

“In your own way.”

Both let out a hearty little giggle.

“It’s almost getting difficult to keep track of all these guys.” Marisa began. “Like... for example... Alice?”

“Yes?”

“I could’ve *sworn* we came across someone like you some time back... I think it was during the uh...” Marisa snapped her fingers a few times. “The uhh... the one with Eiki...”

“The Sixty Year Cycle incident. Too many spirits in the Higan.” Reimu reminded her.

“Yeah! There was this one girl we came across on our way there... you’d like her Alice. She was really into dolls I think. What was her name again?”

“I think you’re just imagining things.” Yukari said.

“Eh... maybe.”