

The reddish hue of the setting sun cast long shadows across the dusty road as our group was about to reach what appeared to be a checkpoint before the crossing of a small bridge.

"Sunshine, get into the medallion," I whispered urgently, not wanting the soldiers who manned the post to discover her.

As Sunshine complied, her small fairy form disappeared into a flash of light getting inside the medallion. I also tightened my hooded cloak around my face, covering my red eyes. I was almost sure it was still too early for information about me to reach the soldiers in the north. However, the skill of some adventurers could be used to communicate over long distances, and if that is the case, since I'm now a wanted criminal, they could probably recognize me by my eyes. If possible, I would like to avoid having to face soldiers who are only doing their job.

"State your names and business," A gruff voice barked as we drew near. The soldiers with suspicious gazes surrounded and examined the entire carriage. I kept silent, allowing Namy and Usofra to take the lead in this uncomfortable interaction.

"Ah, good evening," Namy said sweetly, her voice laced with charm, "My name is Lila, and this is my sister Mara. We are traveling north to visit our grandmother."

"How far north?" One soldier asked, frowning his brow, "Everyone's heading south to escape the war." He stepped closer to Namy and Usofra, inspecting them while his comrades kept their weapons at the ready.

"Indeed," Usofra chimed in, adopting a somber tone, "Our dear grandmother raised us, and we simply cannot leave her to suffer alone. Our goal is to convince our stubborn grandmother to leave her house and come with us to our village in the South."

I peeked out from beneath my hood as Namy and Usofra spun their tale. They both smiled kindly, making the soldiers look more relaxed. I pretended to be asleep as I noticed a soldier moving towards the back and peering inside the wagon. My hood obscured my vision, allowing me to only catch a glimpse of his stomach.

"Who is this?" The soldier asked.

I remained still, my breath slow and steady. Namy and Usofra exchanged a quick glance before Namy responded smoothly, "Oh, that is our brother, Darin," Namy replied smoothly, her voice steady despite the lie, "He's a bit under the weather right now, so he is resting. As you know, it is dangerous for two pretty women to travel alone, so he is accompanying us to protect us."

"Well, he doesn't look very reliable if you asked me," The soldier responded, seeming to believe the story, "What kind of bodyguard lets two pretty girls hold the reins of the horses?" The soldier said, sounding confident as if he wanted to sound appealing to get Namy and Usofra's attention.

Namy chuckled softly, "He may appear weak now, but he has proven himself time and time again," Namy replied smoothly, her voice dripping with honeyed sweetness, "Although I admit that he is still not on par with a strong-looking guy like you seem to be."

The soldier's cheeks flushed slightly at Namy's words, clearly taken by her charm.

After what felt like an eternity, the soldier straightened up and gestured to his comrades to step back, "Alright then, safe travels to your grandmother's place," He grunted before waving us through, "There is a small village ahead. You should spend the night there and not travel at night."

"That's great to hear! We'll definitely need some good rest," Namy said, waving to the soldier with one hand while using the other to shake the horses' reins, causing them to move forward.

"We're staying there, too. Maybe we'll see each other later." The soldier yelled in a flirtatious tone, keeping his gaze on our carriage moving forward.

I stayed still until the soldiers were out of sight. When it was safe, I took off my hood and freed Sunshine from the medallion.

"Good job back there," I said to Namy and Usofra, "We can't afford any unnecessary complications."

"Please... you should know that I'm good at deceiving people," Namy replied with a cynical smile.

I don't know if that's a good or bad thing...

As night fell, we finally almost reached the small village the soldiers mentioned. We advanced along a road with large fields of crops on both sides until we finally reached the village entrance. I looked around cautiously from inside the wagon, keeping my hood covering my eyes.

"Sunshine, stay in the medallion for now," I said, not wanting to risk her being discovered.

"What? Again?" Sunshine replied with a hint of disappointment, "Why?"

You know why," I replied, feeling a bit bad for Sunshine, "There are many people here, and a fairy would attract a lot of attention, and that's something we don't want right now. I'll let you free once we're inside the room. I will also make sure to get you some delicious fruits. What do you say?"

"Okay... but remember that I like them juicy..." Sunshine said, disappearing back into the medallion.

After leaving the carriage and paying a few coins for the horses to be cared for, Namy, Usofra, and I made our way toward the village Inn, scanning the surroundings for any signs of guards or adventurers who might recognize me.

"Stay close and keep an eye out," I advised Namy and Usofra as we walked through the dimly lit streets, "We don't know who might be watching."

"You are too serious..." Usofra responded, her voice calm and collected.

"You still worried too much, handsome," Namy added, "In that aspect, you haven't changed at all since I met you in the castle."

As I looked around, the village appeared peaceful, with only regular people and no adventurers or guards on the streets. Namy and Usofra seemed unconcerned as well, which relaxed me a bit. As we approached the Inn entrance, I saw a few men drinking and loitering near the door. Their eyes followed Namy and Usofra with evident interest if not outright lust.

"Let's just get inside," Usofra spoke, keeping her gaze at the front after noticing the same.

When we entered the Inn, we were greeted by the warmth of a roaring fire and soft murmurs from customers enjoying their meals and ale. This Inn was just like other Inns in small villages like this one, with rough-hewn wooden tables and benches scattered throughout the room. A long bar stood on one side while a chubby woman went from table to table, serving drinks to weary travelers and locals. We made our way through the crowded room toward the bar. The smell of roasted meats filled my nostrils, making my stomach rumble.

As we walked, I noticed that Namy and Usofra had attracted the attention of several men in the room. They gave them curious glances, and some, more boldly, even complimented them using vulgarities and invited them to sit with them.

"Hey, gorgeous," One man called out, "Why don't you come over here and join us?"

"Such a fine specimen," Another added, "I bet you could keep me warm all night."

Namy seemed to enjoy the attention, her eyes sparkling and a smile playing upon her lips. She blew a playful kiss towards the men, causing them to hoot and holler for more. On the other hand, Usofra looked irritated, her eyes narrowing as she clenched her fists.

"Let's just find a place to sleep," Usofra said through gritted teeth, clearly agitated by the unwanted advances.

It was not a good idea for Namy and Usofra to choose the appearance of two attractive humans, considering that we are traveling trying not to attract attention. I hope this doesn't cause us any trouble.

We approached the bar, where a grizzled middle-aged man with a bushy beard stood behind the counter, cleaning glasses with an old rag. He eyed us suspiciously as we came closer, his gaze lingering on me as I tried to appear inconspicuous by pulling my hood further down over my eyes.

"Excuse me, sir," Namy began, using her alluring charm to divert his attention from me, "We're in need of a room for the night. Do you have any vacancies?"

The Innkeeper studied Namy and Usofra briefly before grunting in response, "Aye, there's one left. It's got a single bed, though."

"That works! One bed is enough," Usofra replied curtly, paying for the room.

The Innkeeper turned to look at me, possibly misunderstanding the use that three people would give to a single bed, "Lucky bastard," The Innkeeper said before handing Namy a worn brass key.

As we climbed the creaky stairs to our room, men continued to throw dirty compliments and invitations at Namy and Usofra. Namy responded with seductive smiles and teasing gestures, while Usofra did her best to ignore them. Once inside our small, dimly lit room, I locked the door behind us. The space was cramped, filled with worn wooden furniture, and illuminated by flickering candlelight casting eerie shadows on the walls.

"Finally, some peace and quiet," Usofra muttered as she sat down on the edge of the bed, massaging her temples.

Namy, on the other hand, seemed unfazed by the events in the common room. She walked over to the window and looked out at the village below, the moonlight casting a soft glow on her face.

"Quite an interesting night, don't you think?" Namy asked playfully, turning to me with a mischievous smile.

"Interesting" wasn't exactly the word I would have chosen. But for now, we were safe and had a place to rest. There would be time to worry about tomorrow when it came.

"Speaking of rest, there's only one bed," I said, glancing at the small mattress that hardly seemed enough for even two people, "Maybe we should try to get another room?"

Namy chuckled, her laughter almost seeming to make fun of me, "Don't worry, Darx. Usofra and I don't plan to spend the night in this room, so you can have the bed."

"Wait, what? Where are you going?" I asked, suddenly concerned about their intentions.

"Darx, darling," Namy purred, walking seductively toward me, "You seem to have forgotten that we're succubus. We need the vitality of men to recharge our mana."

"Uh? I don't follow..." I replied.

"Despite what it seems, we are both pretty horny right now. My sister and I used a lot of mana in the fight against the church members days ago, and as a succubus, our mana can regenerate on its own but much more slowly compared to humans. When we are low in mana, we get horny. However, we can quickly accelerate our mana regeneration by absorbing the vitality of men through sex," Namy's dark eyes sparkled as she pressed herself against me, her soft curves enticingly close, "Of course, we could always stay here with you if you're willing to take over the responsibility of tending to our needs. What do you say, Darx? Are you up to the task?"

O-Oh... I now understand what she meant.

"I'm not interested. I think it's best if we all stick to our own methods for now." I responded by gently pushing her away from me with the palm of my hand.

Namy pouted her lips but didn't push any further, "Very well, Darx. Maybe next time, then." She gave me a playful wink before grabbing Usofra's hand and leading her toward the door.

"Have a good night!" Namy said, dragging Usofra, who had her cheeks flushed with embarrassment. The door clicked shut behind them, leaving me alone in the dimly lit room.

I sighed, feeling a strange mixture of relief and confusion.

Lying on the creaky bed, I stared up at the ceiling, savoring the rare moment of silence. When Namy and Usofra said they were succubus, I wasn't sure what they meant. It seems there are different kinds of demons. It will be necessary for me to learn more about demons since I will literally enter enemy territory in my search for Zaine.

My thoughts drifted to the uncertain path ahead, but more than anything, I was preoccupied with the thoughts of my friends. Oliver, Mia, Emma, Ryul, and my other companions from Midnight Dawn who are still in the city—surely, they must already know what transpired and the actions I took. I knew that vile rumors about me would soon spread throughout all human territory, potentially causing problems for them for their association with me.

Even those on the northern border—Shalia, Leona, Gelard, and Dante—would not remain oblivious for long. The news would reach them, too. I couldn't help but wonder what they would think about me when they learned the truth. Although I was not in control of my body and I only felt like a spectator, I remember well how I ended the lives of the Oblivion guild master and some of its other members.

Clearing my name will be almost impossible, but more than that, I'm not even sure if that's what I want. There is so much shit and secrets in Riledo that I never knew who I could trust. And the people I trusted the most betrayed me... I don't know who is right or wrong. Who are the good guys or the bad guys? The only thing that is clear to me is that I need to become stronger if I want to survive, and to do that, I need to control this dark power within me.

"Hey! How much longer do you plan to keep me locked up here? Let me out!" Suddenly, I heard Sunshine's voice filled with irritation.

"Alright, alright," I muttered as I reached for the medallion hanging around my neck, releasing her.

"Finally!" Sunshine exclaimed, stretching her tiny wings with a yawn, "You know, it's not exactly fun being cooped up in that thing all the time."

"Sorry, but we had to be careful," I said apologetically, "I'll try not to keep you in there unless necessary."

"Good! Now, where are my fruits?" Sunshine demanded playfully, fluttering around me with an air of impatience.

"I haven't forgotten. I'll go get them for you shortly," I assured her.

"Great! I'm starving," She replied, settling down on the windowsill and peering out at the quiet village below.

It's strange. I don't know Sunshine for very long, but I feel like she's the only one I can rely on now. I guess it helps that we have similar goals and destinations.

"Sunshine, I need you to stay in the room while I go out to get your fruits, okay? Just don't do anything that might attract attention." I said.

"Fine," Sunshine huffed, crossing her arms, "But you better hurry back, or I'll get bored."

"Deal!" I replied with a small smile.

I pulled the hood over my eyes once again and left the room, quietly descending the stairs. The Inn's common room remained lively, the chatter and clinking of mugs filling the air. I scanned the crowd for any sign of Namy and Usofra, but they were nowhere to be found. I wondered where they could be.

"Uh?" The Innkeeper greeted me as I approached the counter, "What can I get you?"

"Some fruit, please," I replied.

The Innkeeper remained silent momentarily while cleaning a jar with a rag. Maybe curious as to why I only let half of my face be seen, "Ah, got a bit of a sweet tooth, eh?" The Innkeeper grinned, handing me a small sack filled with various fruits, "That'll be thirty copper pieces."

That's expensive...

"T-Thanks," I said, paying him and taking the sack. Luckily, the money we got from church members will last us for a while longer.

As I turned to leave, I remembered something—the horses. I know we paid to have them taken care of, but maybe ensuring they are okay and fed would be a good idea. Without them, the long journey on foot would be even more complicated.

Leaving the warmth and noise of the Inn behind, I stepped out into the crisp night air. The cold wind nipped at my cheeks as I made my way toward the stable, clutching the sack of fruit tightly. Upon reaching the stable, I found our horses standing in their stalls, their breaths visible in the chilly air, "Hey there, guys," I murmured softly, stroking their manes reassuringly. Opening the sack, I fed each horse a piece of fruit, watching as they eagerly devoured the treats.

As I caressed their heads while feeling the cold wind, it helped me relax. Ever since the altercation with the church members, I have felt that dark power within me even more percent. It lies dormant as long as I remain calm, but whenever I recall the night I uncovered Syvis's betrayal, I can sense this demonic power stir. It seems to react to my negative emotions.

After a while, it was time to go back. "Stay safe, my friends," I whispered to the horses before heading back toward the Inn.

As I turned to leave the stable, I realized that I had given all the fruit to the horses in my absent-mindedness. Sighing, I knew I would have to buy more fruits for Sunshine. She must be hungry and mad right now.

Halfway to the Inn, I noticed one of the soldiers from the checkpoint earlier leaving one of the houses without a shirt, his bare chest glistening with sweat. He casually leaned against a tree to relieve himself before returning inside the house. In the small moment, he opened the door to enter again; I'm almost sure I heard Namy's voice inside.

I got really curious, and I couldn't help but sneak up to the window to see what was happening within.

(Wait, what am I doing?) I scolded myself internally. I've been cautious all this time, and if the soldiers see me sneaking, it could cause a big problem. Regardless, my curiosity got the better of me, and I found myself peeking through the slightly ajar window.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Inside the dimly lit room, I could barely make out the figures of Namy and Usofra naked, their faces flushed and bodies entwined with two of the soldiers. My heart raced as I watched them, unable to look away from the sight before me.

The soldier who had just entered was already behind Namy, doing her from behind while his hands roamed across her ass.

"Ah, such a good ass!" The soldier moaned, moving with intensity.

"AmNh... YES!! Your energy is so strong and powerful; I can feel it coursing through your veins." Namy said between moans.

Meanwhile, Usofra lay on the bed with the other soldier, who was on top of her. He thrust into her, their bodies glistening with sweat. Usofra's face was flushed, her eyes clouded with lust as she bit her lip to stifle her moans.

"Mnah... Harder! Just like that!" Usofra begged breathlessly, her nails digging into the soldier's back as he eagerly complied with her request.

The soldier grinned wickedly, his voice husky as he responded, "You're so tight. I never thought I'd have the pleasure of fucking such a sexy woman."

"Cum inside! Give me all your energy," Namy purred, her eyes glinting with dark desire as she pushed the soldier she was with toward the bed, joining Usofra and her partner, "We need every last drop."

Namy's face ended up on top of Usofra's. They smiled at each other, and soon after, they started kissing, to my surprise and the soldier's surprise, who seemed quite happy with the scene.

I now knew that Namy and Usofra needed the vitality of men to recharge their mana, but seeing them like this was quite shocking.

Still, I guess this is none of my business, and I had no right to intrude on their affairs. Our alliance is only temporary, after all. Trying not to make noise, I moved away from the window and returned to the Inn, my face probably still flushed with embarrassment. Upon entering the Inn, I quickly purchased more fruit from the Innkeeper and returned to our room.

"What took you so long?" Sunshine screamed as soon as she saw me enter the room.

"S-Sorry..." I replied.

Sunshine, who was fluttering impaciente in the room, immediately noticed my flushed face, "Dox, why is your face so red?" She asked, her voice filled with curiosity.

"It's nothing. Just a little cold outside," I lied, avoiding eye contact as I handed her the fruits.

Sunshine seemed to accept my explanation, flying happily for the fruits. After eating and chatting with Sunshine for a while, we went to sleep. I blew out the candles and lay down on the bed while Sunshine lay on my stomach, also ready to sleep. I closed my eyes but couldn't shake off the image of Namy and Usofra entwined with those two soldiers. It will be hard to see their faces tomorrow.

As we prepared to continue our journey the following day, I left our room and made our way to the carriage, where Namy and Usofra were already waiting for us.

"Hello!" Namy said smiling, "Lovely morning, don't you think?"

"Y-Yeah..." I responded while loading my things into the wagon. Though I tried my best to hide my unease, I knew that they could sense something was amiss.

"It was a shame you didn't want to join us last night. Usofra and I spent an incredible night with a couple of soldiers." Namy said provocatively, "We took all their vitality."

"Y-You didn't kill them, right?" I asked, a bit concerned.

"Of course not, although I doubt they will be able to get out of bed all day, hahaha!" Namy responded, sounding proud. On the other hand, Usofra seemed embarrassed, avoiding turning to see me.

After a long sigh, I got into the wagon while Namy and Usofra took the horses' reins. We still have a long journey ahead of us.

THREE MONTHS LATER

I found myself in the dark place, sitting with my head between my knees in front of Zaine. I tried remembering how or when I got here, but it was impossible. For some reason, I just felt incredibly sleepy and struggled to keep myself awake. I closed my eyes again, wanting to go back to sleep.

"You need to wake up!" I suddenly heard Zaine's weak voice.

I opened my eyes a little surprised, as on other occasions when I have come to talk with Zaine, she has remained silent, seeming like she was in a deep sleep.

"Zaine..." I spoke with a weak and sleepy voice, just like her.

"Darx, you must wake up... you have to stop." Zaine continued, leaving me confused as to what she was referring to.

"Stop what, Zaine? What do you mean?" I asked, trying to shake off the drowsiness that had taken over me.

"Before... before it's too late," She whispered before closing her eyes again, returning to her deep slumber.

"Zaine!" I called out, but there was no response. Frustrated and confused, I tried to make sense of her cryptic warning. Why did I need to wake up? And what did I have to stop?

I attempted to rise from my seated position, but my body felt heavy as if an unseen force was holding me down. Panic crept in as I realized I couldn't move or wake up from this strange state.

"What's going on?" I mutter, desperate for answers. But Zaine remained silent and unresponsive.

As I struggled against my invisible restraints, questions raced through my mind. The more I fought, the more exhausted I became, feeling like the darkness threatened to consume me entirely.

"Darx! Darx, wake up!" Namy's voice suddenly pierced through the haze surrounding me.

"Dox, you need to stop!" Sunshine's frantic voice echoed in my ears. The desperation in their voices alarmed me, making me struggle harder against the darkness that held me captive.

With a final surge of determination, I finally broke free from the darkness, gasping for breath as if I had just surfaced from deep water. My eyes snapped open, and I found myself standing in the middle of a forest, with myself surrounded by demonic energy. My hands were wrapped tightly around Usofra's neck, choking her as she fought for air.

"Darx, let her go!" Namy screamed, trying to pry my fingers away from Usofra's throat.

"Snap out of it!" Sunshine shouted, darting around my face in an attempt to bring me back to reality.

At once, I released Usofra, and she collapsed to the ground, gulping in the air while coughing violently. I fell to my knees, still struggling to regain control over my body.

"Sunshine, help him," Namy commanded while helping her sister.

Without hesitation, Sunshine soared towards me, her tiny body shining, radiating powerful magic, causing thick vines coming from the ground to wrap themselves securely around my trembling body as a precaution in case I lost control again.

"Stay still, Dox," Sunshine instructed, "Let me help you regain control."

It took a while, but little by little, I began to suppress the demonic energy that emanated from me. My breathing slowed, and my heart rate began to return to normal. Soon, the overwhelming darkness calmed within me. However, my body stayed weak with a fever.

"I'm... sorry..." I whispered, my voice filled with guilt, still not being able to get up from the ground.

"Darx..." Usofra gasped, rubbing her bruised neck, "It's...it's okay."

"Is it? I nearly killed you," I muttered, my voice cracking under the weight of my emotions.

"You weren't yourself," Namy said, reassuringly touching my shoulder, "However, we really need to figure out how to make you control your demonic power. The methods we have taught you are not working, and this is the third time the same thing has happened to you. I'm worried that you won't be able to control yourself next time."

This is indeed the third time this has happened to me. The first time, it happened while I was fighting some bandits. I lost control, and when I regained my sanity, I had already killed them all. The second time was while we were fighting some monsters that crossed our path, and the same thing happened. That time, Namy, Usofra, and Sunshine had to escape until I regained consciousness. However, this time, it happened while I was sleeping. The last thing I remember was going to sleep at night, and when I woke up, all this happened.

"Shit..." I said after turning to the side and seeing that I had destroyed the carriage and killed the horses.

"Oidao is not too far from here; we can walk," Usofra spoke, "Being the second largest city after Riledo, it is likely that we will find an alchemist who has some potion that can help you."

