

After walking all day, we finally found ourselves on the main path flanked by farms and large crop fields on both sides, leading towards the city gate. As dusk set in, the sky painted in red and dark blue hues, we caught our first glimpse of Oidao's towering walls, still far away. I felt a mix of relief at finally arriving at a large city where we could resupply and rest before continuing with our journey and nervousness at the sight of camps filled with soldiers and adventurers all around outside the city walls. All those soldiers and adventurers are probably some of the forces sent to confront and stop the Demon invasion. Since I am now a wanted criminal, if someone were to discover me, it would be a big problem with all those adventurers and soldiers here.

"Wow, look at all those people," Namy said, her eyes scanning the bustling camps still far away, "Seems like everyone wants a piece of the action."

Usofra frowned, "A foolish endeavor if you ask me. These humans have no idea what they're up against. They still don't understand how superior the demons are."

Sunshine chimed in from inside the medallion, "If you ask me, humans and demons can kill each other for all I care. I hate them both. But at least the fight should be entertaining to watch."

Namy brought her face closer to the medallion at the height of my chest, a mocking smile playing on her lips, "Are you sure those are wise words to say when you have two demons and a human at your side, little bird?"

"W-WHAT!!!!!! I dare you to call me a bird again, you fucking bitch!!" Sunshine yelled, sounding furious from the medallion, "Dox, get me out of the medallion! I will show this whore what a real fuck is!! How dare she call me a bird when birds are Fairies' worst enemies."

"Are birds really the Fairies' worst enemies?" Usofra asked, sounding genuinely curious.

"Of course!" Sunshine replied, "Birds are even worse than Humans and Demons combined!"

"In that case, I'm team birds!" Namy declared, still trying to annoy Sunshine.

I sighed, "Calm down, both of you. Namy was just joking around. You know I won't let anything happen to you, Sunshine."

"I guess," Sunshine said, still sounding angry, "But promise me you'll teach that bitch a lesson."

I nodded, "S-Sure..."

"Uhhh," Namy said, pressing her breasts against my shoulder, "I'm curious to know what lesson you'll teach me. I've been a bad girl!"

"More importantly," Usofra interjected, looking irritated, pulling her sister off of me and putting herself next to me, "What are we going to do about what the rabbit said? The rabbit said we should meet her at The Sore Bears Inn."

"Going there could be a trap," Namy replied, "We don't want to draw attention to ourselves, especially with all the adventurers that are in the city."

"Agreed," I added, "It's best to avoid anything that might cause trouble. Furthermore, there is no interest on our part since our objective is something that no one can help us with. And we don't have time to get involved in other people's affairs."

"Besides," Sunshine added, "I wouldn't trust advice from a talking animal. That was weird..."

"Alright then," I decided, "We'll find another place to stay. We can't afford any distractions."

With our decision made, we approached the city gate. The high walls of Oidao loomed above us, and the hustle and bustle of people entering and exiting filled the air with noise despite being night already. I pulled my hooded cape lower over my face and adjusted a blindfold to cover one of my eyes, hoping to avoid recognition. Sunshine was safe inside the medallion, so the only thing left was for Namy and Usofra, who were in their human form, to convince the guards to give us access to the city.

As we neared the entrance, we noticed the increased security measures. Guards scrutinized every traveler, checking documents and asking questions. I felt a knot in my stomach as we queued up for inspection.

"Don't worry. I'll handle this." Namy whispered, placing her hand on my arm.

Before I could reply, it was our turn to face the guards. Their cold, watchful eyes bore into us as they examined our group.

"State your business in [Oidao]," One of the guards demanded.

"We're here to purchase supplies and seek shelter for the night," Namy replied sweetly, batting her eyelashes at the guard.

"Documents?" He asked gruffly.

"Of course," Namy purred, handing over some papers.

The guard turned to me and asked the same thing, "Hey, are you deaf? Documents."

Shit! I don't have documents since I used to have access to almost anywhere just by showing the pocket watch I was given for being part of Midnight Dawn, but if I show it now, they'll probably realize who I am.

As the guard started to look at me with suspicion, Namy leaned closer to him, "I'm sorry, it's my fault! My brother gave me his documents to keep safe, but I lost them."

"What?" The guard questioned, not seeming to believe the story.

"See!" Namy said, unbuttoning her blouse and showing her cleavage, causing him to blush, "I kept them here between my breasts, but I think my breasts are too small, and they slipped, "Look!" Namy said, doing an act that caught the attention of all the men around.

"I-In my opinion, they are not small at all," The guard said nervously, "In fact, they are quite a good size."

"Lies!" Namy said, continuing her act, "You're just saying that to make me feel good." Namy, at that moment, grabbed the guard's hand and put it between her breasts, causing even more attention, with more men beginning to gather for a better view, blocking the path, "Feel it! If my tits weren't small, the documents wouldn't have fallen."

The guard took the opportunity to grope Namy's breasts, but the pushing began, and the guards realized that they had to establish order, "Hey! Stop pushing!" The guard stammered, handing back Namy's papers, "You can enter, but don't cause any more trouble, and make sure your brother gets new documents."

"Thank you, kind sir," Namy said with a wink as she rebuttoned her blouse, leading us past the guards and into the city.

As we entered Oidao, I couldn't help but marvel at the city since the infrastructure differs greatly from Riledo's. The buildings here feature tiered pagodas with upturned eaves, dark polished wood, and vibrant red and gold tiles. The city combines narrow, winding streets with wide, bustling avenues lined with stone lanterns. Besides that, I noticed that most of the people here have slanted eyes.

"Wow, this city is amazing," Usofra whispered as we walked through the crowded streets.

"Indeed," Namy agreed, keeping a watchful eye on our surroundings, "But we need to find an Inn for the night."

"Yeah!" I nodded.

Despite our determination, finding an Inn proved to be more complicated than anticipated. With so many adventurers and soldiers in the city, every Inn we visited was fully booked.

"Damn it," Usofra muttered, frustration mounting as we left the fifth Inn, "At this rate, we'll have to sleep on the streets."

"We just have to keep looking," I said, trying to stay optimistic as we leaned against some boxes next to an alley.

"Perhaps we should ask someone for directions," Usofra suggested, scanning the crowd for a potential source of information.

"Maybe we could try asking one of the guards?" Namy replied, nodding in the direction of a group of guards nearby.

Before anyone answered, Namy approached the guards, flashing them a charming smile, "Excuse me, handsome," She said sweetly, "We're having trouble finding an Inn with vacancies. Could you help us?"

The guards exchanged glances and shrugged, "Sorry, miss," One of them replied, "It's been difficult recently due to the influx of adventurers and soldiers."

"Thank you for your help anyway," Namy replied graciously.

Namy then returned to us, disappointment evident in her eyes. Just as we turned to leave, Usofra stood up abruptly from the box where she was sitting, looking down the alley. Then, a familiar female voice caught our attention.

"Perhaps I can help you find a place to stay?" The voice came from the alley next to us.

We all became alert, recognizing the voice as the same one belonging to the rabbit we had encountered on our way to Oidao. A shadow emerged from the dark alley, and as it stepped into the light from the main path, we were surprised to see that it was a dog.

"Ah, our mysterious friend again," Namy remarked with sarcasm.

"I suspected that you wouldn't follow my instructions the first time, so I was guarding the entrance to the city waiting for you," The dog said in the same feminine voice as the rabbit, "Follow me to The Sore Bears Inn," The talking dog instructed, "It's a hidden establishment where we can talk."

"Sure, stupid dog," Sunshine said sarcastically from the medallion, "If you have something to say, say it now. I'm too smart to fall into your traps."

"W-Where is that voice coming from?" The dog said, sounding surprised.

While the dog turned her back, looking for where the voice was coming from, Usofra leaned in and whispered something in my ear, ensuring the dog didn't see us. After hearing what Usofra had to say in secret, I nodded, keeping my thoughts to myself.

"Let's follow her and see once and for all what this is all about," I said, turning to look at Namy.

"Ah? Are you serious?" Namy said with a surprised and angry tone, "You were the one who said we had to be careful and didn't have time to- waist..." Namy, seeing the seriousness on my face, seemed to understand that I had something on my mind, "Oh well... if that's what you want, then let's go, but don't blame me if it ends up being a trap."

"Smart decision," The dog said before starting to walk down the alley, "Follow me."

I followed the dog closely, with Namy right behind me. Usofra trailed behind us, walking slowly, gradually increasing the distance between us.

The dog took us through various paths and alleys, and after walking for a while, we arrived at what appeared to be a pretty old Inn—located away from the busiest areas of Oidao.

"Welcome to The Sore Bears Inn," The dog said, "Come inside, there is someone waiting for you."

As I took the first step into the Inn, I noticed that Usofra was no longer with us. I kept this observation to myself and walked in, Namy following closely behind. The dimly lit interior matched the worn exterior of the building. The most curious thing was that despite being called an Inn, the place was empty. It felt like an ideal hiding place, away from prying eyes.

"Who's waiting for us?" Namy asked suspiciously, her gaze darting around the room.

"Ah, you'll see," Replied the dog cryptically.

We were soon greeted by a tall, slim man with tousled black hair and a crescent-shaped scar on his left cheek who was coming down the stairs, "Welcome, my name is Tashiro." He confidently said, "I've been expecting you, Darx."

"Who are you, and how do you know my name?" I asked, my hand instinctively reaching for the hilt of my sword.

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves," Tashiro said, raising his hands in a placating gesture, "I know that you are a criminal for whom an absurd amount of money is being offered to capture you, and I'm ready to report you and your friends to the authorities if you don't comply with my demands."

My blood boiled at his words, and I took a threatening step toward Tashiro, "You think you can blackmail me? You'll be dead before you can utter a single word."

"Ah, but you see," Tashiro replied calmly, pointing to the dog we'd followed into the Inn, "My partner here is controlling this dog, and she's aware of everything happening. If you harm me,

she will alert the city guards and adventurers. They'll all come after you. Do you think you can escape after thousands of soldiers and adventurers are behind you, wanting to collect the reward?"

His words made me pause, anger still surging within me. I clenched my fists and spoke through gritted teeth, "What do you want from us?"

"Smart choice," Tashiro said, a smug smile playing on his lips, "There's no time to waste, so I'll get straight to the point. I want you to eliminate a nobleman and rescue a group of women held captive in his mansion."

The dog at Tashiro's side added, "We know what you did in Riledo and that you are strong enough to take on an entire guild, so you should be able to do what we ask of you."

Namy's eyes narrowed as she asked, "Why do you want that? What's in it for you?"

"Our reasons are not something that you should care about," Tashiro replied, avoiding Namy's question, "Regardless of our reasons, if you do this, it's an opportunity for all of you to avoid capture."

"Tell us more about this job," I grumbled, buying time.

"Count Earl is a corrupt and vile man," Tashiro began, "He keeps a number of innocent women imprisoned in his mansion, and I want you to rescue them after killing him and all his bodyguards."

As he mentioned Count Earl's name, a twinge of recognition washed over me, "Count Earl!?" I murmured.

I feel like I've heard that name before. Where? After a few moments, it came back to me – Count Earl was the nobleman who had made Shalia's life miserable. I recalled Shalia telling me about him: how Shalia had to flee her village because Count Earl, obsessed with her, had sabotaged her parents' business and even gone as far as to murder her then-boyfriend to force her to be with him.

Tashiro stared at me, seeming to have realized my surprise at having heard that name, and said in a glum tone, "Darx, do you know where Shalia is?"

I couldn't hide my surprise when I heard Tashiro mention Shalia's name. Who the hell are these two, and how do they know about Shalia? There was no reason for them to know about her. At that moment, I realized that Tashiro and his partner had thoroughly investigated me, leaving me puzzled about their motives.

"How do you know about her," I snapped, trying to maintain control.

"Let's just say I have my reasons," Tashiro replied evasively, "But if you want more answers, you will have to do what I am asking. Now, do we have a deal?"

I was feeling the anger bubble up inside me. However, I just had to wait a little longer to get the answers I wanted. This Tashiro guy is acting confidently and trying to keep control of the situation, but I can see how nervous he is. He is not someone who is used to doing this kind of thing. After all, Tashiro has yet to notice that Usofra isn't here. I just need to buy a little more time.

"Fine," I spat, "We'll do it. But after that, you better have some real answers for us."

"Good," Tashiro said, pulling out a city map. He pointed at a mansion on the map and continued, "This is Count Earl's mansion. It is a huge place full of adventurers and guards who protect him. I want you to go there, kill him and his bodyguards, and rescue the women inside."

"Rescue?" Namy interjected, her eyes narrowing, "What is this Count Earl doing to these girls?"

Tashiro responded, unable to hide an expression of anger after hearing Namy's question, "L-Let's just say they've suffered enough already,"

From Tashiro's expression, I can see that he has a personal motive for doing all this. Is it possible that someone Tashiro knows is one of these girls?

"We have a plan in which we can enter—" Tashiro continued explaining until he suddenly stopped after hearing the dog bark loudly.

Tashiro's face contorted with surprise while looking at the dog nervously. The dog continued to bark and act like any normal dog would, which seemed to confuse and worry Tashiro even more.

"Is something wrong?" Namy asked sarcastically, a smirk playing on her lips as she observed Tashiro's distress.

"W-Wait..." Tashiro muttered, his eyes darting between me and Namy, "There should be two women with you. Where's the other one?"

"Maybe your partner messed up their count," I replied coolly, not giving away any concern.

"Maybe we're just really good at hiding people," Namy added, grinning mischievously, "Or maybe you two aren't as clever as you thought,"

Just then, the door of the Inn swung open, and Usofra strode in, dragging a woman by the arm. The woman's face was filled with fear.

"I'm sorry for the delay," Usofra spoke with a smile, "She was well hidden."

"Let Hana go!" Tashiro shouted, lunging towards Usofra in an attempt to free the woman.

Before Tashiro could reach them, I stepped in, grabbing Tashiro's arm and twisting it behind his back, subduing him with ease against the table.

"It's about time you two start explaining yourselves," I demanded, "Who exactly are you two, and how did you find us?"

Usofra released Hana, who stood trembling in fear.

"W-We'll tell you, so please don't hurt him," Hana said, her voice quivering as she tried to beg for his companion's life.

I noticed that Hana wore a white blouse and a dark vest that hugged her petite, athletic frame. Her long, straight black hair was tied back in a neat bun, with a few loose strands framing her face. Like most people in this place, she had slanted eyes. Hana's way of dressing caught my attention since I thought I had seen her somewhere else, but I don't remember exactly where it was at that moment.

"Run, Hana!" Tashiro said, still against the table, unable to move.

"I don't recommend you do that," Namy said, making her fingers grow into what appeared to be black claws, "It seems like they know a lot about Darx but nothing about us. I'll say this once. We're not patient, so I'll cut you off in little pizes right here if you try anything funny."

Hana, seeming to understand the situation she was in, asked, looking at Usofra, "How... how did you find me?"

"Usofra has quite advanced sensory abilities," Namy replied nonchalantly.

"I simply felt the same presence of the dog in another part of the city and concluded that that person – meaning you – was the one controlling the dog," Usofra responded, "It's a rookie mistake not to research the people you want to blackmail although I doubt you'd find any information about us anyway even if you tried."

Hana's eyes widened in shock while Tashiro scowled at us, "You might have found Hana, but we still have allies throughout the city," He warned, struggling in my grip, "If you harm us, they'll report you to the guards."

"Nice try," I retorted, tightening my hold on his arm, "But we don't believe you. Now start talking."



Hana glanced at Tashiro, who nodded reluctantly. With a deep breath, she began to speak, "Fine," Hana sighed, her voice quivering slightly, "My name is Hana, and I work for the Adventurer Guild in Oidao."

The Adventurer Guild!? Now I remember where I recognized her outfit from. Every major city has an Adventurer Guild. It is a place where adventurers without a guild can get work, although it is usually work that doesn't pay very well. Hana's outfit is the same one worn by the staff at those places.

"Go on," I prompted, my eyes still locked onto Tashiro, who grunted in pain as I maintained my grip.

"Since my job is to distribute the quests that come to us to the adventurers, making sure that they meet the quest's requirements, I know most of the adventurers who frequent the Adventurer Guild for work well," Hana started to speak.

"Get to the point," Namy said impatiently, "We're not interested in your personal life."

"O-Over the past few months, I've noticed a pattern of strange disappearances among female adventurers. We all found it odd in the Adventurer Guild since they tended to disappear while on relatively easy quests. Initially, it was assumed they had had an unfortunate encounter with a monster in the forest. We thought it was just a coincidence in the first disappearances, but as two more female adventurers vanished without a trace, I couldn't ignore it any longer," After a short pause, Hana continued with her tale, "I started investigating on my own, discreetly following leads and questioning people. It wasn't easy, but eventually, I discovered that Count Earl was responsible."

"Count Earl?" I asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Yes," Hana replied, her expression turning grim, "One night, I witnessed the kidnapping of a female adventurer while I was controlling a rabbit in the forest investigating. She was an adventurer who was on a quest to collect herbs that I had given her that morning. A group of hooded people attacked her, and she, being of low rank, lost against them. She was drugged and put into a carriage. I managed to sneak into the carriage. As they passed through the city gate, I expected the guards on duty to stop and inspect the carriage, but I saw the driver hand a bag of coins to the guard, realizing the guards had been bribed. The carriage then headed straight to Count Earl's mansion, confirming my worst fears."

"Did you manage to get inside the mansion?" Uosfra questioned, her interest piqued.

"Yes..." Hana responded by lowering her gaze, "But I was discovered shortly after. The rabbit I controlled was killed instantly. Even so, I managed to see several of the missing women inside the mansion acting strangely."

"Acting strangely?" Namy asked.

"Yes," Hana continued, "They seemed... subdued, almost like they were under some sort of control or influence. I couldn't see more, but it was clear that they were in trouble."

As Hana told her story, Tashiro's face grew darker by the second. Finally, he couldn't contain himself any longer, "Those female adventurers that make Hana suspicious... t-they're my sisters," Tashiro said, his voice heavy with anger and desperation.

"Sisters?" I looked at Tashiro.

"Yumi and Aiko are my younger sisters. I raised them after our parents passed away," Tashiro explained, his jaw clenched in frustration, "It was their first quest after becoming adventurers... They just wanted a better life..." I noticed Tashiro's red eyes, almost ready to shed tears, "When they didn't return from their quests, I tried to alert the guards, but they brushed me off, saying that the girls must have simply run into some trouble on their journey. I couldn't even get anyone to listen, let alone help! I am a simple carpenter. I didn't have the resources to pay a guild to send high-ranking adventurers to investigate the disappearance of my sisters."

I was right. Although it seems that they planned everything well, these two do not have the skills or experience to carry out what they wanted to do. Hana has an interesting skill that allows her to pass her consciousness to animals, but other than that, she has no experience on the battlefield. And Tashiro is just an average person.

"I was in despair until Hana approached me, offering her help," Tashiro continued, "We've been trying to figure out how to save them by ourselves since adventurers and guards have been ignoring us because they are busy with the war."

Hana took over the explanation, "We had to proceed cautiously because Count Earl is one of the nobles with the most money and influence in the city, besides being known for his cruelty," She said, her voice trembling slightly, "Amidst the war's chaos, Count Earl exploited the distraction to carry out these kidnappings, leveraging his power to buy off soldiers and shield his criminal activities from scrutiny."

"Now I understand your reasons, but that doesn't explain why we are here," I interrupted, my eyebrows furrowing in confusion, "How do you know about Shalia and me? Why did you approach us?"

Hana sighed before responding, clearly anticipating the question, "By working in the Adventurer Guild, I received important information from the capital," She explained, "That's how I knew about what you did in the capital, your appearance, and where they thought you were going."

As she spoke, I couldn't help but feel uneasy. The fact that they had tracked me down like this...

"Fine," I conceded, trying to suppress the doubts swirling in my mind, "But you still don't explain how you know about Shalia."

Hana hesitated momentarily, her hands nervously fidgeting with the hem of her clothes. Then, she took a deep breath and revealed the shocking news I never expected to hear.

"While I was reviewing the documents about Midnight Dawn trying to find information about you, I came across Shalia's information," Hana said, her voice barely above a whisper, "I recognized her face...because Shalia is one of the girls I saw inside Count Earl's mansion."

"W-What did you just say...?"