

Darkness enveloped me as I regained consciousness, feeling disoriented and confused. The world around me was a vast void of emptiness, except for one person. There in front of me stood Zaine. I stared at her, trying to make sense of the situation.

"Zaine..." I croaked, my voice barely a whisper, but she remained unresponsive, "Can you hear me?"

Feeling really exhausted, I reached out to her, but as always, Zaine seemed to exist in a place beyond my touch—intangible and unreachable. Zaine seemed to be on her knees, asleep with her head down and her arms up, appearing to be restrained by chains. Who are you...? I asked myself, looking at her. Are you okay...? If I find you, can you tell me who I am? My weak body couldn't stay standing any longer, and I fell to the ground. Lying flat, I gazed up at Zaine for a fleeting moment before closing my eyes.

The sound of creaking wheels and the gentle rocking motion pulled me out of my dream. With difficulty, I managed to open my eyes, which started to hurt by the brightness of the light. I woke up inside a moving carriage. I tried to move, but my body was weak and hot. With effort, I lowered my gaze, with vision blurred yet discerning enough to make out the form of Sunshine nestled upon my stomach. When Sunshine realized I had woken up, she got up from my stomach and flew in front of my face.



"Dox," Sunshine shouted in her high-pitched voice, looking at me in surprise, "You are awake! How are you feeling?"

"Like hell," I muttered, my throat parched and dry. I tried to sit up but was met with a wave of dizziness that forced me back down.

Sunshine flew out of my field of view for a second and returned holding a canteen almost the same size as she, "Here, Gnm... d-drink," Sunshine bent the canteen with struggle due to the weight towards my mouth.

I felt so weak that the only thing I could do was open my lips so that the water would drip into my dry mouth.

Sunshine's playful smirk softened into concern, "Dox, you got your ass kicked. What happened to you?"

As I lay there, I noticed the back of a woman outside the carriage I didn't know leading the horses. She had long, dark hair that danced in the breeze. W-Who is this stranger? ...Wait, also, how come Sunshine is out of the medallion?

I didn't have time to question what was happening anymore as I started to get dizzy. My fever intensified, making my skin feel like it was on fire. I closed my eyes, desperately seeking relief from the heat, but it only seemed to grow stronger. I suddenly felt like someone behind me put a wet cloth on my forehead. With each breath becoming more labored, I eventually succumbed to the darkness once more.

"Rest, Dox," I heard Sunshine whisper as I drifted into unconsciousness once again, "I'll be here when you wake."

I don't know how much time has passed, but as consciousness returned, I found myself lying at night inside the carriage. I was alone this time, yet I could hear the murmur of voices outside. My fever persisted, making it difficult to think clearly as beads of sweat trickled down my face. The air inside the carriage felt suffocating, making me want to go out and feel the fresh air hitting my body.

With great difficulty, I managed to push myself up and crawled toward the carriage back. It took every ounce of strength I had, but I finally stumbled out. The sight before me only added to my confusion. I was in the middle of the forest with two unfamiliar women sitting by a bonfire, their faces partially obscured by the flickering flames.

Who are they? As I tried to make sense of the situation, a small light appeared, moving in the forest's darkness, drawing closer to me. It took me a second to realize it was Sunshine.

"Darx," Sunshine said softly as she floated near my face, "What are you doing? You shouldn't overexert yourself."

"I... I need to know what's going on," I replied weakly, still struggling to catch my breath, "Who are they?" I asked, looking at the two women now standing next to the bonfire looking at me.

As they walked slowly toward me, I witnessed how the two women's human forms began to distort, shifting into demons. Their appearances were now completely different, especially because of the horns on the tops of their heads and the bat wings on their backs.

Namy



Usofra



"So, we meet again," The first demon spoke, her long black hair cascading over her white-skinned shoulders, "My name is Namy, in case you don't remember."

"And I am Usofra," Added the other demon, her equally stunning appearance complemented by long brown hair and dark eyes.

It took me a second to remember her as I realized Namy was the same demon who appeared in my room that night. Fearing for my safety, I tried to summon magic to attack the two demons but found myself too weak. As I tried to use my water magic, my legs gave way, and I fell to the ground, unable to maintain my balance.

"Yoo, Dox, calm down," Sunshine reassured me, her voice gentle yet firm, "The two slutty demons saved us from a group of people who were chasing us."

"The little bird is right," Namy spoke, "If we wanted to kill you, we would have done it already."

Usofra nodded in agreement, her gaze meeting mine.

"WHAT!!!! Call me little bird again and see what happens to you!" Sunshine raised her voice in annoyance while stretching her arms and legs.

I have no idea what's happening, but right now, I can hardly keep my eyes open. My body fell entirely to the ground, and my vision blurred as darkness threatened to consume me once more.

"His fever is getting worse," I heard one of them say, "If we don't do something to lower his fever, he is not going to make it."

"What? It doesn't make sense. Why is his fever getting worse?" Sunshine's voice answered.

As I lost consciousness, I couldn't help but wonder what these demons wanted from me.

Sometime later, I awoke again inside the moving carriage, this time moving quite fast. The horses seemed to be going at full speed, causing the carriage to shake brusquely, which is what caused me to wake up. My fever was just as bad, if not worse than before. I could feel a wet cloth on my forehead as well as chills and sweat all over my body.

The sun was setting, casting an orange glow over everything it touched. I slowly pushed myself into a sitting position, groaning softly as my body protested against the movement. Looking to the front of the carriage, I saw Namy guiding the horses, transformed back into a human form. Inside the carriage, the other demon sat quietly in the back, also in human form, just looking outside the carriage.

"Where are we going?" I asked, my voice hoarse.

"Later," Usofra responded, "We're being chased. We need to get as far away from the capital as possible."

"Chased? Who's after us?" I questioned.

"Who knows... probably adventurers," Usofra replied, her gaze never wavering, "When we started this escape, we took care of a group who was after you, but it looks like more parties want to capture you and collect the reward," Usofra replied coldly, "After what you did, I wouldn't be surprised if you are now the most wanted criminal. But don't worry, we will not let them have you."

R-Reward? For me...? My heart felt like it had stopped for a moment, remembering everything. All my memories of the last few days suddenly resurfaced. In the few moments I had been awake in the previous few days, I was so concerned with wanting to know what was happening that I forgot the reason why I was in this situation. I felt a searing pain in my chest as I remembered the image of Syvis in bed with Kase. S-She betrayed me...

More memories of that night began to emerge in my mind. During the whole fight, I felt like I was just a spectator in my own body, yet I remember the feeling of everything I did. I remember having Kase on his knees without his arm, looking at me with fear. I felt a great power capable of subduing an entire guild. What's more, while fighting Kase, I... I-I killed the Guild Master from Oblivion... and probably more people...

It's not a wonder I'm a wanted criminal now. I couldn't help but feel incredulous at all this. I never wanted anything special. I just wanted to be an adventurer and live a quiet life. I never messed with anyone and tried to follow the rules and laws. My hands clenched into fists as I struggled to come to terms with this new reality. My mother, Syvis, and even Amelia—the three people I used to trust more than anyone—betrayed me. And now I can't even return to my guild and live as an adventurer. I really lost... everything...

"Hey, Dox," Sunshine's voice snapped me out of my thoughts. She floated toward me with a teasing smile on her face, "You need to drink some water and eat something. You're gonna get even weaker if you don't."

Sunshine pointed at a bag that hung from a hook inside the carriage. It contained bread and fruit.

"Y-Yeah...", I muttered, forcing a weak smile.

Even though it seemed like I hadn't eaten for a while, I didn't feel hungry. On the other hand, my mouth was really dry, and I wished for some water. With difficulty for my weak body and all the shaking, I drank and forced myself to grab the bag and take a piece of bread, slowly nibbling on it as I drank more water.

"See? It's not so bad," Sunshine quipped, trying to cheer me up.

Just as I started to feel slightly better, Usofra's eyes widened, "Enemies are close. They've ambushed us from all sides."

"They sneaked past us!" Usofra yelled, making Namy immediately stop the carriage.

"I'm tired of them! Let's just kill them once and for all!" Namy shouts with anger in her voice.

Both Namy and Usofra stepped out, casting suspicious glances around the area. Before leaving, Usofra turned to me and said, "Stay inside," Then she turned to Sunshine, "Don't let anyone near the carriage while we handle the attackers."

With great difficulty, I crawled towards the back of the carriage, wincing in pain with each slow movement. My body felt like it was on fire, but I couldn't just sit there doing nothing. As I peered through a gap in the curtains, I saw several armed figures surrounding us. What struck me the most was their attire—these weren't mere adventurers or mercenaries; they were people from the church. From what I can see from here, there are at least eight of them.

"Do they also want to capture me?" I muttered under my breath.

Outside the carriage, Namy and Usofra tried their best to blend in as ordinary travelers, "Can we help you?" Namy asked, feigning fear and confusion, "Did we do something wrong? We're just travelers."

However, their facade was shattered when the attackers struck without saying a word. In a swift turn, Namy and Usofra transform, revealing their true forms.

"D-Demons!!" I heard the voices of the people in the church shout in shock and surprise.

The sight of the demon sisters' transformation left their enemies in shock, but it didn't deter them. Instead, they continued with their assault on Namy and Usofra, unleashing a barrage of different magical attacks upon them.

"You didn't expect that, did you?" Namy taunted, dodging an incoming blast of light flying high in the sky.

"You picked the wrong people to mess with!" Usofra shouted, her voice authoritative while also flying.

The attackers remained unyielding, continuing their assault while the demon sisters dodged the rain of attacks, moving away from the carriage to avoid it being hit by accident.

With effort and using all my strength, I made my way to get out of the carriage.

"Hey, what do you think you are doing?" Sunshine protested, fluttering in front of me. However, I ignored her plea.

As I stumbled out of the carriage, my legs threatened to give way beneath me, but I forced myself to stand. Having a wider view outside the carriage, I realized that they were more attackers than I had initially thought. They all wore outfits worn by church disciples.

Thanks to my time with Neku, I now know that there are many people like Neku who serve the church as disciples. Almost all are orphans raised by the church, and those who manage to become adventurers usually serve the church all their lives in one way or another. I realize the church has spies everywhere, and the adventurers who more openly protect the church wear the attire they are wearing but rarely leave the city since their main job is to protect the church's senior officials, who almost never leave Riledo. So why are so many of them here now?

"Darx!" Namy called out, both surprised and alarmed by my appearance outside the carriage, "What that hell do you think you are doing? Get inside!"

The attackers halted their assault as soon as they caught sight of me, their expressions morphing from aggression to astonishment. The person, who I assume is the leader of the group since he was not participating in the fight and was just looking, stepped forward with a confident smirk. He was a man, perhaps in his forties, dressed in long white and gold robes.

"Ahh, there you are," He said despotically, "We've been looking for you."

"Who are you, and why are you attacking us?" I replied through gritted teeth, glaring at him.

Namy and Usofra came flying, descending in front of me, seeming like they were trying to protect me from possible incoming attacks. Sunshine came out of the carriage soon after and stopped beside me.

"I told you to stay inside the carriage!" Usofra shouted, sounding angry without taking her eyes off the front.

"So you're the asshole that's been chasing us!" Sunshine yelled, "You don't know who you messed with, asshole!" Sunshine ended by giving the finger to the leader of the church group.

"Your defiance is admirable but futile. Surrender yourself, Darx, and give us back the relick and the fairy. We promise to treat you fairly; otherwise, we will use force," The leader offered, his tone dripping with hypocrisy.

"Yeah! We chose force!" Sunshine responded cheerfully.

"And what about us?" Namy asked, sounding sarcastic.

"You demons will be eliminated in either case." He replied without hesitation.

"Lowly humans should not speak so haughtily," Usofra responded, holding what looked like runes in her hand.

"...Why are you after us?" I asked.

The countenance of their leader, previously composed, contorted with fury, "Dare you even pose such a question?" He retorted, his voice rising in indignation, "Are you not aware in the situation you left us...? Because of you, the sanctity of our revered institution lies shattered, tarnished by your deceitful guise as the rightful sovereign, when in truth, you are nothing but a vile spawn of darkness! Now, our only recourse is to seize you ourselves and present you as a trophy to our loyal followers, a testament to the fate that awaits any who dare defy the devout adherents of our divine goddess, Imris!"

Of course... it seemed all too familiar—once I'm no longer of any use to them, they wanted to get rid of me to save their own necks. I'm done with being a pawn everyone thinks they can use or betray at will.

"You lot crafted this narrative yourselves, and you put yourself in that position," I retorted, feeling fed up with everything, "Don't attempt to shift the blame onto me now that your schemes have unraveled. The reality is clear: your church's concern has never extended beyond the pursuit of power, caring little for the well-being of the people, me, or even the goddess you claim to serve. I refuse to be entangled any further in your games. Now get that fuck off you will pay with your lives."

The leader's face contorted with even more anger, almost seeming indignant at what I said, "Very well," He responded, "Then we shall dispose of you and the fairy just as we did with your friend."

"...Friend?" I asked, confused.

The leader's smile curled into a sinister grin, looking at me as if he was about to enjoy what he would tell me next, "Did you truly believe we remained oblivious to your sudden interest in our affairs?" He taunted, savoring the moment, "You sought answers regarding Harold, did you not? You harbored suspicions of our involvement in his demise," His tone dripped with malice as he continued, "Allow me to enlighten you... It was indeed us... we made his lovely girlfriend kill Harold!" He declared with a chilling chuckle, "Harold posed a threat to our designs, much like yourself. And just as Harold met his end, so too shall you perish, like the dirty, wretched animals you both are! Hahaha!"

I felt a chill of fury that ran through my entire body. So it was them after all... I could feel the flames of my anger grow hotter in my chest. I had a new motivation in this fight. It wasn't just about survival. Whether it's Kase, the church, or whoever messes with me, they will pay.

"Why are you revealing this to me now?" I asked.

"Simple!" The leader responded, maintaining his cynic tone, "You want revenge, and I personally want to enjoy killing you, knowing that I denied you that. Nothing pleases me more than denying those last wishes to fools like you! Hahaha!"

"...We'll see who is the one who eats his words," I murmured, feeling an incessant desire to end his life.

The leader didn't wait any longer and took out a whip, which he infused with magic, turning the whip white and shiny. Looking confident, the leader tried to use the whip to attack me despite the long distance between him and me. Surprisingly, the whip extended a great distance, splitting everything in its path, almost reaching me. However, Usofra pushed me off the whip path.

"What do you think you're doing challenging someone to a fight in your state," Usofra yelled, sounding irritated, "Get in the carriage!"

Both Namy and Usofra flew, initiating the attack when they noticed that their leader was preparing a second attack.

"You bastards..." While in the air, Namy's black fingers suddenly extended really long, pointing black blades against the leader, but were intercepted by a stone wall created by one of the disciples.

While I was lying on the floor, barely able to move my body, I turned to Sunshine, who was flying close to me, "S-Sunshine, buy me some time," I said.

"Ah? Alright!" Sunshine responded, her demeanor bright and animated, as though she viewed the situation as nothing more than a playful diversion. With a jubilant laugh, she soared upward, "Prepare to witness my mighty powers, bitches!" She exclaimed. In the blink of an eye, colossal vines emerged from the ground.

I know I can barely remain standing, and because of the fever, I feel dizzy, but I still feel like I can do something. My body remembers the sensation I felt during my fight against Kase. That dark power is within me. I don't know if my body will resist in this state, but it's something I have to do. I closed my eyes and focused on that sensation, and shortly after, I began to feel that dark energy emerge, taking over my body. The veins in my body swelled and throbbed, sending waves of excruciating pain, but at the same time, I started to feel power. A dark, ominous black aura began to emerge from me. Just like last time, I could feel how this demonic power wanted to take control over my mind, too, but this time, I was resisting.

I slowly stood up. This power felt evil and overwhelming. It felt like if I gave it the chance, I would lose my sanity.



Sunshine was doing a good job keeping the disciples and the leader away from me, but one of them managed to evade Sunshine's vines moving at a breakneck speed, probably thanks to a skill. He appeared at my side with a sword in hand, prepared to end my life, "Die, demon!" He shouted while at the same time using a familiar skill, "[Double Slash]".

[Thunderstride]

My body instinctively triggered this skill that I stole from the Oblivion member. My body was surrounded by electricity, letting me move at a far faster speed than the disciple. With agility akin to lightning, I jump effortlessly, evading the twin slashes of his sword.

"Wha- Where is-" The disciple exclaimed, terrified as I disappeared from his sight.

Still in the air, flashes of my fight in the capital passed through my mind. There, I used incredible ice magic. I feel like I...

I instinctively emulated the way I could create many water balls and did the same, but this time, making ice spikes around me. With all this dark power that I felt, I managed to create an enormous amount of them—many more than what was my intention.

The disciple looked up in terror when he saw what was above him, "Y-You demon... how is that-"

"Be gone!" I said before unleashing the torrent of ice spikes that fell like rain. He screamed in agony as the multitude of ice spikes tore through his flesh and bones.

I fell to the ground and set my sights on the leader who was battling Usofra. However, before that, I would have to finish off the other disciples who already had their sights set on me. I had to finish this quickly, or I felt like this demonic power would consume me.