

The dim glow of the flickering candles cast eerie shadows on the walls as I followed Neku into Stella's office. The late hour and the unexpected visit to Stella's office filled me with a sense of unease, making my stomach churn unpleasantly. Despite that, I couldn't deny my curiosity about the purpose behind all of this.

"Ah, you're both here," Stella greeted us with a cool nod. Her expression was unreadable, making it impossible for me to discern her intentions.

"Everything went according to plan," Neku reported confidently. She then turned to me with an anticipatory look, "Darx, show her the medallion."

"Uh?" I replied, surprised.

"Hey, who is she?" I heard Sunshine ask multiple times.

I hesitated to do it for some reason. However, seeing how the guild master and Neku were standing still, waiting for me, I decided to obey and remove the medallion from my neck and place it on Stella's desk, watching as her eyes scanned it thoroughly.

"Very well," Stella said after a long moment of silence. Her gaze shifted from the medallion to me, studying me as if I were some kind of enigma she needed to solve, "Nobody saw you, right?"

"Everything went well. When I left the church, no one had noticed anything yet," Neku responded to Stella. Then Neku turned to see me, "Relax, Darx," She interjected, sensing my growing tension, "We're on the same side here."

"Indeed," Stella agreed cryptically. She leaned back in her chair, hands clasped together on the desk, "You've proven yourself to be quite resourceful, Darx."

"I'm sorry, but I'm not understanding what's happening," My voice wavered, betraying my anxiety.

I wouldn't say I liked this feeling of being kept in the dark, especially from those I considered my allies.

"Let me explain," Stella said calmly, "Neku here present is a double agent. She was initially sent by the church to infiltrate Midnight Dawn and gather intelligence on us. However, after a long story that I don't plan to talk about now, Neku chose to switch her allegiance and now aids us in gathering information on the church. I was the one who asked her to retrieve the medallion."

My eyes widened at the revelation, and I turned to Neku, who simply nodded in confirmation. My heart raced, my mind struggling to process this new information. Although, now that I think

about it, I know from the quest in the cave that Neku had a strange closeness to the church. I just didn't know what kind.

"Is that why you knew about the medallion and Sunshine?" I asked Neku.

"Exactly," Neku confirmed, "I was present when people from the church gave the medallion with the fairy to Priest Gabriel. Luckily, no one noticed that I saw that, so I was able to report it to Stella and act to recover the medallion without them suspecting me."

"Are you sure about that?" I asked, "Exactly what is your relationship with the church?"

Neku sighed, looking down for a moment before meeting my gaze, "To sum up, I was an orphan raised by the church. From a young age, they raised me and other orphans to serve them in various capacities. Upon reaching the required age, we were sent to take the ritual to become adventurers. Those of us who made it were dispatched as spies to different guilds, important locations, or even the castle. Those who failed were sent to infiltrate the criminal world for the same purpose."

Her words sent a chill down my spine, and I couldn't help but feel sympathy for her. I thought of my own difficult upbringing, but at least I had my mother and friends.

"Being so close to the church allowed me to witness the nefarious actions committed by its members," Neku continued, "Actions done in the name of the goddess, but often for the benefit of a select few. That's when I decided that enough was enough. I wanted to expose their hidden evils, punish the guilty, and restore the church to its intended purpose. So, I joined forces with Stella."

Stella nodded, her expression grave, "The church is concealing and altering crucial information. Priest Gabriel especially has consistently attempted to eliminate anyone who mentions the fairy goddess, though the reason remains unclear. Rescuing the fairy from the medallion is crucial to obtaining more information about this mysterious situation."

As Stella spoke, memories of my quest came flooding back - the bandits sent by the church to kill a man who spoke about the fairy goddess. At that time, we managed to save him and the village, but now I am sure the same thing is happening elsewhere.

Then why did the goddess Imris told me to trust the church? They are clearly evil people with personal ambitions. Or could it be that I misinterpreted your message? If not the church, then who are the people the goddess told me to trust and rely on?

"Alright," I said, feeling the urgency of the situation, "How do we free Sunshine from the medallion? What's the process?"

Neku intervened, looking at me, "If my theory is accurate, you have the ability to achieve that."

"Me?" I asked, genuinely confused by her statement, "I-I have no idea how to do that!"

"The fact that you were able to get the medallion confirms my theory that only you are capable of doing it," Neku told me, grabbing the medallion from the desk and handing it to me, "Try it."

I don't understand what one thing has to do with the other. What Neku is asking of me is unreasonable. How the hell does she want me to free Sunshine from the medallion just like that without giving me an explanation or telling me how?

To make things worse, as soon as I grabbed the medallion, I heard Sunshine's irritated voice, "Dox, you asshole!!" Her erupted from the medallion, anger evident in her tone, "You've been deceiving me this whole time! You could've freed me earlier, couldn't you? Why did you make me wait if you knew how? Speak!!"

"I swear I didn't know," I replied, trying to calm Sunshine down, "I'm just as clueless about this as you are," Then I turned to look at Neku, "Neku, can you please explain what you mean? How did the church lock up Sunshine in the medallion in the first place? That might give me a clue on what to do."

Neku responded as she crossed her arms, "Another relic is necessary to get someone locked up and out of the medallion. Priest Gabriel has a ring that does that. However, you should be able to do it without needing that."

"How the hell am I going to-" I try to speak.

"Just go ahead and try to release Sunshine from the medallion!" Neku said in an irritated tone.

I hesitated, still perplexed by Neku's claim. Then, it struck me - a memory surfaced of a previous incident in a cave where I had inadvertently activated the platform that got Syvis and me out of the cave by reading the inscriptions written on the platform aloud. Drawing a parallel, I contemplated trying the same approach since the medallion also has similar writings on the edges.

"I'll give it a shot..." I took the medallion into my hands, closely examining the intricate inscriptions etched on its surface.

"D-Dox?" Sunshine asked, sounding nervous, "Are you sure you know what you're doing?"

"Here goes nothing," I muttered.

I began to read the words aloud. As I spoke, a warm sensation emanated from the medallion.

"Sunshine, can you feel anything?" I asked, my voice trembling with anticipation.

"S-Something's happening," She replied, a hint of hope in her voice, "Keep going, Dox!"

Encouraged by Sunshine's response, I continued reciting the inscriptions, carefully reading each word and hoping for the best. To my surprise, the medallion started to vibrate in response.

"Whoa!" I exclaimed, feeling the energy pulsating from the medallion.

"Keep going, Dox!" Sunshine urged, excitement building in her voice, "I can feel it working!"

Suddenly, what I can assume is a fairy began to emerge from the medallion, enveloped in a faint white light. As Sunshine emerged, her size increased until finally, she came out completely, appearing in front of me, now free from the confines of the medallion. It was my first time seeing a fairy. Sunshine, roughly the size of a pigeon, was hovering in front of me. Sunshine had green and yellow wings resembling those of a butterfly and long green hair that matched her green dress; she was a stunning sight.

<https://i.imgur.com/wQ9yN9m.png>

"Finally!" She exclaimed, stretching her tiny limbs and fluttering her wings, "That felt like an eternity!"

Sunshine started flying back and forth like she was really enjoying being able to use her wings again, with a big smile on her face. It would seem like a touching image if it weren't for all the bad words and vulgarities coming out of her mouth against the church as she flew happily.

"Goddamn Priest and his bullshit!" She said as she flew in a circle around the office, "That fucking bastard! I must think of the best prank of my life to make those who locked me up pay!"

"Sunshine!" I called out, trying to calm her down, "Calm down!"

"Ah? Right... Sorry, Dox, I got a little excited," Sunshine apologized, "It's just that it's been a while since I was able to use my wings."

Before Sunshine could make any other move, Stella raised her hand, cautioning Sunshine, "Remember, attempting to escape might result in being confined in the medallion again, so don't try anything funny."

"Ha! That won't be possible!" Sunshine mocked, her confidence unwavering.

Stella warned her tone stern, "Even if we fail to lock you up again, the church will surely not fail. They will hunt you down mercilessly."

I saw a flicker of fear cross Sunshine's face as she glanced between Stella and me, "Trust us, Sunshine. We'll keep you safe."

"Shit... I guess my release wasn't free, so let's get this over with and tell me what you want?" Sunshine asked as she crossed her arms and puffed out her cheeks with an annoyed face.

"I want you to answer some of our questions." Stella continued.

After a moment of hesitation, Sunshine nodded, "Fine, but only if you provide me with some fruits to eat."

"Deal," I agreed, setting off to find the fruits she requested.

As I returned, Sunshine eagerly devoured the fruits while answering Stella's questions. Stella began by asking about Sunshine's identity and presence in locations far from the fairy forests.

"Who are you exactly? And what brings you so far from your home?"

"Ugh, fine," Sunshine sighed, swallowing a mouthful of fruit, "My name, as you now know, is Sunshine, and I'm on a journey to the demons' territory, searching for the truth about what happened to the fairy goddess."

The revelation surprised everyone in the room. Stella raised an eyebrow. "The fairy goddess? It's funny that just a short time ago, the goddess of fairies was a topic that was not common, and lately, it seems to be on everyone's lips."

"Ha! Like I care about your beliefs," Sunshine scoffed, her tiny fists clenched, "Our goddess exists! I'm the only fairy with the courage to venture beyond the fairy forests in the dwarves' territory, traveling all the way north to the demons' land, hoping to find traces of what truly happened to our goddess."

"You want to go north," Stella asked, "Are you aware that a war is about to start?"

"I don't care about the affairs of humans or demons. If you wish to wage war and spill each other's blood, it matters not to me. After all, both humans and demons bear responsibility for burning our sacred forest in the previous war," Sunshine responded without stopping eating, "Humans are no better than demons. The moment I entered your territories, humans were already pursuing me, seeking to imprison me."

"I can't deny that, but I'm curious..." Stella continued with her questions, "What makes you think that the fairy goddess exists and even more so that you will find answers in the territory of the demons."

"That's simple! "Every race has a goddess, so logically, we should have one too," Sunshine responded as she struggled to fit a whole grape into her mouth.

"Demons have no goddess," Neku added.

"Yes, but we fairies are not demons."

"And why do you think you will find answers in the territory of the demons?" I asked.

"In the territory of the demons are the ruins of Zrephia. There must be clues the-, cough cough," Sunshine said before starting to choke on the grape, "W-Water! Water!!!"

I hurried to serve her water in a glass, which I had to fill to the maximum so that she could drink.

"Wait, that's all your logic that motivated you to go on this suicidal trip?" Stella asked, looking shocked.

"Yup!" Sunshine responded, looking happily without a care in the world while eating her fruits.

After watching and hearing Sunshine for a while, I couldn't help but wonder... Could it be that Sunshine is just dumb!? What she is planning to do is really suicidal.

Maybe because I was staring at Sunshine, she noticed, and with an irritated expression, she asked me, "Are you thinking bad things about me, aren't you, Dox?"

"W-What! N-No!!" I responded, surprised.

"Hmmm..." Sunshine stared at me with her face covered in different fruits.

"Alright, Sunshine," Stella interjected, trying to get back on track, "You've answered our questions, so what do you plan to do now?"

Sunshine wiped her face with the back of her hand and stood up, "I'm leaving! I've got a goddess to find, remember?" She said defiantly.

"Wait," Stella warned, her voice serious, "Leaving now is a bad idea. The church will soon discover the medallion's disappearance, and they'll be actively searching for you."

"I know...!" Sunshine spat, stomping towards the door, "But this time, I will fly faster than them! And maybe I can hex one or two as punishment."

"Sunshine, listen to me," Stella spoke, "The church cannot detect your presence inside the medallion. If you stay there for a while longer, it'll be safer for everyone."

"WHAT?? Absolutely not!" Sunshine yelled, throwing a tantrum, "Why would I return to the medallion when I just left? Absolutely not! I will deal with those evil people my way. I'll show them what happens when they mess with the fairy with the best pranks!"

"Your unique magical presence makes it easy for them to locate you," Stella explained patiently, "Even now, the only reason they can't detect you is because of my skill that blocks the sensory skills to detect anything inside this room."

Stella can block outside sensory skills!? I didn't know that. I had never noticed anything strange in this office. I looked around the office but couldn't detect anything out of the ordinary.

Sunshine's tantrum faltered as she turned to me, her eyes pleading, "What do you think, Dox?"

I hesitated, taken aback by her sudden interest in my opinion. But after weighing the options, I concurred with Stella, "I think you should listen to Stella, Sunshine. It's safer for you to stay hidden for now. When it is safe, I promise to free you again."

"W-Well, the guys who caught me are a little scary... Mmm... Fine..." Sunshine snapped, crossing her arms and pouting, "But I'm not happy about it!"

"Thank you for understanding," I said.

"I will only do it as long as it is only for a few days, and when possible, you have to take me out of this city and leave me in a place far from those crazy people," Sunshine said.

"Understood," Stella said calmly to Sunshine, then turned to look at me, "Darx, you'll take care of the medallion."

"Me? Why? Wouldn't Sunshine be safer with you, guild master!?" I asked, puzzled.

"Only you can release Sunshine at will, so I'll leave it to your discretion when to release her. Just make sure you stay away from the church and don't have the medallion in sight," Stella replied to me, "Besides, I doubt Sunshine wants to stay in this office locked in some drawer."

"It's true, don't even think about keeping me locked up in a dark place! At least from the medallion, I can see what's happening outside and talk to whoever is holding the medallion." Sunshine added, standing in front of me.

I believe I understand the Guild Master's intentions. She's not just leaving me with the medallion because I can free Sunshine; she's also ensuring that I won't be able to go near the church while I have the medallion. It seems like Stella is determined to keep me away from the church. I can't help but wonder if the Queen asked Stella to prevent me from getting closer to the church. Perhaps the Queen is genuinely concerned about me aligning with the church and becoming entangled in their plans.

"All right..." I reply.

"We're going to be stuck together for a while. Aren't you excited, Dox?" Sunshine said while maintaining her mischievous smile.

At that moment, I wasn't really paying attention to Sunshine since my mind was wandering to another topic, which I said out loud without realizing it, "Why exactly can only I use the medallion? It doesn't make sense."

Neku, who had been leaning against the wall, stepped forward, "The answers to these questions should be obvious to you by now, Darx. As I told you before, a specific relic is needed to bypass the traps, especially the magic circle leading to the room with the medallion. That relic is always with Priest Gabriel. Before asking for your help, I tried to get the medallion, but I realized it would be impossible without the relic. But then you reappeared from the dead. When I heard you were back, I knew you could do it. Thanks to my research and the time I spent with you in the cave, I know well that apart from the relic, someone with Zrephia royal blood can bypass through those ancient tramps. Same for the medallion."

I shook my head, dismissing Neku's explanation, "It must be a mistake. There's no way I have royal blood. I'm just a regular person from a normal family in a small village. I'm getting tired of repeating the same thing."

Stella raised an eyebrow, "Your distinct red eyes are not a mere coincidence, Darx. Haven't you ever questioned why you're the only one with such unique eyes?"

"Of course, I've thought about it! But that doesn't mean I'm some kind of royalty from an extinct kingdom!"

"It can really be irritating how stupid or naive you can be," Neku continued, "It's like everyone notices except you."

"What did you say?" I said, feeling insulted.

"What I'm saying is, how much longer are you going to continue with the story that you're a normal person when everything points to the opposite!" Neku continued raising her voice, looking like she was getting angry, too, "From your eyes, your strange awakening, and your strange abilities. How the hell does someone go from an E-Rank to a B-Rank? How do you explain that? How could you see and pass the traps in the cave and those in the hallway leading to the medallion? Tell me! Some time ago, in the cave, we found you in front of the corpse of the demon. What happened? How the hell did you kill that demon? And even now, how is it that after being trapped in that strange portal, you come back as if nothing had happened? Explain all that, normal boy!"



W-What is her problem...? "It's true that I can't explain all that, but that doesn't mean I am whatever you expect me to be. You don't know anything about me!"

"For the love of..." Neku continued as she looked more angry and frustrated with every passing second, "You know what I think. I think you actually are aware that everything I'm telling you is true, but you're too cowardly to accept it. You are too cowardly to accept that everything you think you are is a lie, and you are afraid to face reality and search for answers you don't want to find. If you really are who I think you are, it is a disappointment to know that someone like you is the one who inherited that noble destiny."

With a more relaxed voice, Stella added, "Darx, are you sure that what your mother has been telling you all this time is true? How can you be so sure of your origins?"

"Eh??? W-What's going on here? I'm not understanding. Why is everyone furious all of a sudden?" Sunshine said as she looked around, looking confused.

I was also getting angrier; however, I couldn't deny what Neku and Stella were saying. Maybe this anger is because I know deep down that what Neku said is true. I took a deep breath, trying to gain control over my emotions. My hands clenched into fists at my sides as I considered the implications of Neku's words.

"My mother lied to me. Is that what you're trying to imply?" I asked.

"Darx, calm down," Stella intervened, "We're not accusing your mother of anything. We're only trying to understand the truth."

"I understand your position, but there is no answer I can give right now," I said, "I need time to think. If this was all, I will retire to-"

"Before that," Stella stopped me, "You've been helping us because you wanted to know about Harold. What really happened to him, right!? Before you leave, I imagine you want what you were promised."

"What? Of course," I replied, feeling a lump in my throat, "Tell me what you know," I said, bracing myself for what was to come.

"Krista, Harold's girlfriend, was his murderer," Stella revealed, her voice solemn. The words struck me like a sledgehammer, leaving me momentarily speechless.

"Wh-What?!" I stammered, my heart pounding in disbelief.

Neku stepped forward, her face somber, "Harold's death was part of a sinister plot orchestrated by none other than Priest Gabriel. Krista was also a church spy, just like me," She confessed, her voice full of remorse.

The shock of this revelation left me reeling. My legs felt weak, and it took all my strength not to collapse, "Why... Why would she do that?" I whispered, my voice choked with emotion.

Even though Harold and Krista tried to keep their relationship discreet while I was in the castle, I saw them together several times, looking happy. Dante even told me on one occasion that they were planning to marry me. Then why...?

"Once Krista killed Harold, the guilt became too much for her to bear," Neku continued, "She ended up taking her own life."

"Then why haven't we done anything?" I demanded, looking between Stella and Neku, "If we know who's responsible, why haven't you or the Queen brought them to justice?"

"Darx, it's not that simple," Stella explained, "There are countless church believers. If we were to take swift action against Priest Gabriel and the church, it could cause turmoil. The church has been spreading rumors about the Queen's legitimacy and the arrival of a true King."

"You mean the plan that the church wants to use me as a puppet for them to govern!?" I said, my mind racing as I tried to piece everything together.

"Exactly," Stella confirmed, "The kingdom isn't ready for a civil war now that we have the war in the north, and the Queen wishes to address the issue when the time is right."

As I absorbed the weight of these revelations, I couldn't help but feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the situation. My life, my relationships, and even my own identity seemed to be shrouded in lies and deception.

"Darx," Stella said softly, trying to console me, "Trust me, I understand how you feel. I would also like to go out and rip his head off for what they did to Harold. I know this is difficult to accept, but you must be patient. Priest Gabriel and all his accomplices will face the consequences of his actions in time. But for now, it's crucial that you stay away from the church."

I clenched my fists, struggling to process everything I had just learned, but I knew she was right, "A-Alright... I'll do what I can to stay clear of the church."

"Thank you, Darx," Stella said gratefully, "And you too, Neku. Your help with retrieving the medallion has been invaluable. Darx, I need you to protect the medallion housing Sunshine. Will you do that?"

"Yes..." I replied, still feeling like my mind was somewhere else.

Sunshine chimed in, agreeing to remain hidden within the medallion for a few days to avoid detection by the church. She asked us to take her far from the city when the time came, allowing her to continue her quest for the truth about the fairy goddess. Stella agreed to Sunshine's request, stressing the importance of waiting a few days to evade the church's pursuit. After a brief conversation with Sunshine, she returned to the medallion voluntarily.

"Take care, both of you," Stella said as we prepared to leave her office.

After leaving the office, Neku took his own path without telling me anything. As I returned to my room, I couldn't shake the doubts plaguing me about all I just learned. How much of what my mother had told me was true? I especially had one question in my mind. Has my mother lied to me? At this moment, I still don't feel like seeing her, but I need to know the truth.

I spent the night almost unable to sleep. But in the morning, I had already made a decision. I need to talk with my mother. The problem is where to find her.