

I was sitting in the world of darkness, facing Zaine without being able to get close to her. She was motionless on her knees with her arms raised high, held by chains that seemed to bind more than just her body. I was contemplating her silhouette, shrouded in shadows, which exuded a profound sadness, making me feel helpless because I couldn't do anything for her even though she is in front of me. Thinking about it, my nightmares started when I was just a child, possibly coinciding with the moment she was imprisoned in this place. Many years have passed... I can't fathom the overwhelming loneliness she must have endured, trapped in this desolate place with no memory of who she is. At least for now, the only thing I can do for her is come here whenever I can to keep her company. Unfortunately, since I left the cave, Zaine has rarely been conscious. It's painfully clear that she doesn't have much time left.

"Where are you?" I murmured to myself, my voice barely a whisper.

Still sitting, I drew my legs close, resting my head on my knees. I closed my eyes, exhaustion weighing heavily on me. Yet, being near Zaine brought a strange comfort, a solace that eased my sleepless nights. Without realizing it, I drifted into slumber. But my sleep was not peaceful. The same nightmare that had tormented me from time to time, recounting what happened that night when I discovered Syvis with Kase. The scene of everything that happened that night seems to haunt me, no matter how much I try to put it all behind me. My nightmare, as usual, starts when I find the two of them in bed and usually ends when I punch through Agnes's chest, killing her, jolting me awake, disorientated, and with heavy breathing.

"Are you okay?" I heard a soft and gentle voice.

I immediately recognized Zaine's voice. When I looked up, I saw her in the same position as always, unmoving. Even so, a slight smile appeared on my lips after hearing her voice after so long.

"I'm fine. It was just a nightmare," I replied, stretching my legs, though the tension in my body lingered.

"What was your nightmare about?" Zaine asked, her voice tired and frail yet tinged with curiosity.

"...I don't remember." I lied, not wanting to talk about it.

"I see," Zaine murmured, seeming to detect my lie, but she didn't push further.

"And you? Were you dreaming about anything?" I asked, hoping to shift the focus.

After a moment of silence, Zaine responded in a voice heavy with melancholy, "No. I really don't have dreams. When I lose consciousness, everything is darkness, just like here."

Hearing her response, an uncomfortable feeling settled in my stomach. The thought of Zaine being denied even the escape of dreams felt unbearably cruel. Could her memory loss be the reason for this void? I didn't know what to say, causing an awkward silence for a few seconds, but it was Zaine who broke the silence shortly after.

"Well..." Zaine continued, her tone sounding a little more cheerful, "I once had a dream. A long time ago. Even before you and I could talk like we do now."

"Really? What was the dream about?" I asked, feeling slightly relieved that she at least had that, "If you don't mind telling me, I'd like to know."

Zaine was silent for a few seconds. For a moment, I thought maybe she wouldn't want to share her dream, but soon after, she started narrating her dream.

"In the dream, I found myself in beautiful, extensive gardens that seemed to have no end. I remember seeing a blue sky and feeling the wind refreshing me from the sun. The vibrant colors of the various flowers and plants surrounded me while the air was filled with their sweet fragrance," Zaine described, her voice gaining strength as she recounted her dream, "And I wasn't alone."

"Who were you with?" I prompted, curious about the details.

"I was with someone, but I couldn't see her face clearly. A young woman was sitting next to me. I remember her silver, almost white hair spread everywhere due to the wind. But the most striking thing about her was a pair of red eyes," Zaine explained, trying to recall more details.

Red eyes?

"Did you two talk?" I asked.

"No, we didn't. But I remember feeling happiness in that moment, sitting beside her. Our shoulders touching gently while she seemed to be talking about something I couldn't hear," Zaine continued, her weak voice sounding brighter and filled with longing, "Then, a familiar man's voice was heard behind me. I couldn't turn to see who he was, but his voice... it made my heart feel warm and safe. My happiness increased even more just by hearing him speak."

"Did the man say anything specific?" I inquired, hoping for more clues.

"Unfortunately, no. I could only hear his voice, but I couldn't make out the words," Zaine replied.

"I see. It sounds like a beautiful dream," I commented, thinking about the peaceful scene.

"Yes, it was truly wonderful. Even though I don't remember anything else, that dream somehow gives me hope," Zaine confessed, her voice softening once again.

"Those two people seem important. Once we free you and you recover your memory, you will be able to remember who they are," I try to encourage her.

Feeling connected with Zaine, I suddenly felt like sharing my nightmare with her, "Since you told me about your dream, I'll tell you about a recurring nightmare I've been having."

"You don't have to if you don't want to," Zaine offered, her concern evident in her voice.

"I recounted my nightmare. I told Zaine that what happened that night occasionally appeared in my dreams. I lost control, and, full of fury, I fought, killing several people. My hands are stained with blood while I hear screams of despair and terror around me. In those moments, I feel an overwhelming sense of despair wash over me." I recounted, feeling strange since I hadn't told anyone about this.

"It must be difficult for you to endure such a nightmare," Zaine said, her voice filled with a touch of sadness.

"Don't worry too much. I'll get over it soon," I replied, though my words felt hollow, "The harder part in all of this is not being able to understand... of comprehend how someone who claimed to love me lied to me and betrayed me like that. Was it all a lie from the start? Was it all fake? What was true, and what was a lie? I don't know."

"I guess betrayal is beyond reason," Zaine sighed softly, "From what you've told me about myself, how I used to be the Demon Queen but was betrayed and ended up here... Even though that title means nothing to me now, since I know so little about the world outside this place, I can only assume that I also trusted the wrong people. Thinking that someone I trusted helped put me through such misery fills me with sorrow and confusion, just like what you must be feeling. So, I understand you, at least a little."

"Zaine," I said, my voice firm yet gentle, "I promise you, I will free you from this place. We'll both find the answers we seek, and we will make those who did this to you pay."

"Thank you, Darx," She replied, her voice laced with gratitude, "I'll hold on for as long as possible, waiting for you to come."

"We're getting closer to Demon territory now. Soon, we'll enter it, and we'll be one step closer to finding you."

"Really?" Zaine asked, her curiosity piqued, "Tell me more about this Demon territory. This is the place I used to rule, right!?"

I started telling her everything I knew, which was, more than anything, all that Namy and Usofra had shared with me and the little I had seen from a distance. I promised her that next time, once I had seen more with my own eyes, I'll tell you more.

"Sounds... interesting," Zaine murmured, "Trying to imagine the place you described. I can't help but feel a strange sense of longing."

"Darx," Zaine asked hesitantly, "You mentioned Namy and Usofra before. Can you tell me more about them? They are the Demons helping you to find me, right?"

"Of course," I replied, "Namy is a succubus with a flirtatious personality and long black hair. Even though Namy is not as serious as her sister Usofra and tends to play around, sometimes a bit too much, still, when the situation requires it, Namy is someone I can trust. Then Usofra, despite being the more serious of the two, usually follows whatever her sister Namy decides. Usofra is also a succubus. She's more reserved and proud, with a strong sense of honor, even though she can be clumsy at times," I paused briefly before continuing, "What I am sure of is that both are fiercely loyal to you and would do anything to free you and help you reclaim your position as Demon Queen. Namy and Usofra might sometimes be a bit strange, but they're good people."

"They both seem interesting. It's a shame I can't remember them," Zaine said softly, "The journey you three are taking must be arduous but entertaining at the same time with two girls like them by your side."

"Yeah... in addition to Namy and Usofra, we have one more travel companion," I continued, "We're also traveling with a Fairy named Sunshine. She's quite small and funny and has a bizarre rivalry with birds. Don't ask me why because I don't understand either."

"Really? How strange," Zaine said, and then she let out a soft laugh.

I was taken aback for a moment. It was the first time I had heard Zaine laugh, and it was a captivating sound, feminine and elegant.

"Your laugh is beautiful," I blurted out, unable to keep my thoughts to myself.

"R-Relly? Thank you." She replied, seeming taken by surprise.

Shit! Why did I say that...?

As we continued talking, I noticed Zaine's voice growing weaker, her sentences trailing off. She was clearly getting tired and beginning to doze.

"Zaine," I said gently, "You should rest now. We'll talk again soon."

"It is a pity. I wanted to keep talking to you, but I'm having difficulty staying conscious," She whispered, her voice barely audible.

"Sleep well," I said softly, a lump forming in my throat. I knew this conversation could be the last one for a while since Zaine had rarely been awake lately.

"See you... soon... Darx," Zaine murmured before going silent.

"Just hold on a little longer. We'll find you and bring you back to the world where you belong." I promised.

In the quiet that followed, I stared into her motionless figure shrouded in darkness. Strangely looking forward to hearing her laugh again.

The morning sun filtered through the cave's entrance, rousing me from my slumber. My thoughts still lingered on my conversation with Zaine as I stretched and glanced around at my companions. Namy and Usofra were nestled together while Sunshine slept peacefully atop a rock.

"Wake up," I called out gently, nudging Namy and Usofra, "The rain has stopped, and it's time to continue our journey."

Namy groaned sleepily and rubbed her eyes while Usofra sat up gracefully, fixing her hair with an air of elegance. Sunshine fluttered her wings excitedly, ready for another day of adventure.

"Finally, we can get moving again!" Sunshine chirped, flying around, her enthusiasm through the clouds even though she had just woken up.

As we gathered our belongings, I couldn't help but feel a renewed sense of determination to find Zaine, but then I noticed Usofra studying me closely, her brow furrowed.

"Darx, you seem... different this morning. More... motivated. Did something happen?" Usofra asked cautiously.

Wow, how did she find out?

"Nothing special..." I replied, evading her question, "I'm just the same as always."

Usofra didn't look entirely convinced, but she didn't press further. Instead, she focused on packing her things and assisted Namy when needed.

"Alright, everyone ready?" Sunshine asked, glancing at each of us, "You're taking too long!"

"It would be faster if you helped!" Namy replied, making an annoyed face, "You are the one who makes the most mess and helps the least!"

"I don't want to touch the things of a demon whore!" Sunshine responded by giving Namy the finger.

"You little...." Namy yelled, about to lose her temper.

"Stop fighting!" I intervened, "We don't have time for this. Let's take advantage of the fact that the weather seems calm to move forward as much as possible."

"Yeah, let's go," Usofra agreed.

Namy and Sunshine gave each other the finger before each going their separate ways.

"Lead the way, fearless leader!" Sunshine chimed in, her playful voice echoing through the cave.

As we stepped out of the cave, I couldn't shake the feeling that something was off. I scanned our surroundings, trying to pinpoint the source of my unease, and then I saw them – a group of crows hovering above us.

"Does anyone else find it strange that there are always crows around us lately?" I asked, voicing my concern.

Namy and Usofra exchanged glances before Namy replied, "Now that you mention it, it is odd."

"Could someone be spying on us?" Usofra suggested, her eyes narrowing in suspicion.

As far as I know, only one person is capable of controlling crows, Stella—the guild master of my guild, Midnight Dawn. However, I have seen crows several times, and if it is really Stella and she knows our location, why have no adventurers come to attack us? Only the Queen could order Stella to locate us. But if they know where we are and don't do anything, what's the point? I don't understand. Or is it just my imagination, and are they just crows that inhabit this area? Whatever the case may be, once we cross the mountains and enter demonic territory, neither Stella nor the Queen will be able to do something.

"I told you!" Sunshine spoke, "Birds are the enemy!"

"Let's not jump to conclusions," I said, keeping my tone calm despite my growing paranoia, "For now, let's just focus on our journey. We can't afford any distractions."

With that, we set off once more on our arduous trek across the mountains. The days blended together as we faced treacherous paths, battled through storms, and fought various monsters that crossed our paths. After what felt like an eternity, we finally crossed the mountains,

reaching demon territory. The landscape on the other side of the mountains was a stark contrast to the rugged terrain we had traversed. Lush forests stretched as far as the eye could see, reminiscent of the forest inside human territory we just left behind.

"Beautiful, isn't it? This area is very similar to the surroundings of [Oidado], " Namy commented, her eyes taking in the picturesque scenery before us, "However, most of the Demon territory is not like here. Much of the Demons' territory is rocky, and in the north, even though there are more forests, the cold is brutal. Despite the vastness of the demon territory, there aren't many good lands for crops. That's one of the reasons why the Demons are eager to conquer more territories south of our border."

Namy's words surprised me a little. Given the Demons' limited land for cultivation and their enmity with other races, they cannot engage in trade. This means their resources to feed such a large population must be severely limited. I didn't know all this. The demons' resentment towards the other races must be deep if they chose isolation for so many years despite their needs and now prefer conquest over dialogue. Now more than ever, I wonder how it all really started. Did the Princess Of Calamity really betray the Demons, as is said, and that's what started it all? It seems that the Princess of Calamity is equally hated by Demons and Humans since she is also blamed for being the one who destroyed the city of [Zrephia].

Namy continued walking, leaving me alone with my thoughts. My gaze drifted upwards, scanning the skies for any sign of those ominous crows that had been haunting our journey. To my relief, there were none in sight. The sky was clear, filled only with the soft glow of sunlight filtering through the clouds. For now, at least, it seemed our suspicions were alleviated.

As we continued to make our way through the lush forest, I asked something that maybe I should have asked a long time ago, "Namy, Usofra," I began, "How can I go unnoticed now that we are inside demon territory?"

Usofra glanced at me before responding, her voice calm, "It will be easy, Darx. You already have a demonic presence, so you will pass as a Demon."

"However," Namy chimed in, "There is the detail of horns that all Demons have, but you don't. Still, that could easily be solved if you pose as our slave."

"Slave?" I asked, raising an eyebrow at her suggestion.

"Allow us to explain," Usofra said, noting the hesitation in my voice, "Horns are as valuable as their own lives for Demons. A Demon without horns means they have lost their dignity as a Demon. It's common in duels between Demons for the winning Demon to take one or both of the losing Demon's horns, which can be sold for a reasonable price. Usually, the slaves are Demons without horns, so you, who don't have horns, can pass as our slave."

I frowned, weighing the options in my mind. It wasn't ideal, but it seemed like the best course of action. If posing as their slave would help us move more freely within the demon territory, then so be it. My main priority was rescuing Zaine and finding answers about my own identity.

"This sucks..." I conceded.

"Good decision," Namy said approvingly while Usofra nodded in agreement.

Sunshine, who had been quietly hovering near my shoulder, finally piped up with a hint of concern in her high-pitched voice, "What about me? What's the plan for keeping me hidden?"

Usofra looked at the small Fairy before answering, "As long as you remain in the medallion when we're in areas with demons around, you should not be discovered. That medallion completely erases your presence, even for sensory abilities like mine, so you'll be safe."

"Fine, fine. Just don't forget about me in there..." Sunshine huffed while crossing her arms.

"Of course not, Sunshine," I reassured her with a small smile.

"Alright then," Usofra said, turning to address Namy, "Namy, we will also need to change our appearances since it's likely we'll be recognized. It must be well known by now that we betrayed the Demon King. So, to avoid being recognized, let's change our appearances."

"Good thinking," Namy agreed.

I just kept looking curious to see what they would come up with while Namy and Usofra whispered something to each other.

"Watch closely, Darx," Namy announced, her eyes gleaming with excitement, "You're in for quite a show." She glanced at Usofra, who nodded her readiness.

Namy used her skill, and at the same time, Usofra activated the rune on her ring with Namy's skill. A sudden wave of energy erupted from them, engulfing their bodies in a shimmering aura. Within moments, the energy dissipated, revealing two tall, stunning demonesses with long, flowing red hair and huge breasts.

"Wow..." I muttered, unable to tear my eyes away from them. Their flawless pale skin contrasted sharply with their vibrant crimson locks and dark, captivating eyes. Both Namy and Usofra had taken on voluptuous, alluring figures, accentuated by the revealing outfits they now wore. The only thing that stayed the same were their horns and tails.

Namy grinned mischievously at my reaction, "So, what do you think, Darx? Will this be convincing enough?"



"Uh, yeah," I stammered, trying to regain my composure, "I guess..."

Actually, this appearance is quite different from their normal appearance or the appearance they have when they are in human form. There is no way they can be recognized.

"Every time you two look for more perverted appearances," Sunshine spoke with a confused expression, seeing Namy and Usofra's new appearances.

"Shut up, bird, no one asked for your opinion!" Namy responded, annoyed.

"Anyway, Darx," Namy purred, moving closer to me, her ample breasts almost touching my chest, "Do you find our new appearance... appealing?"

I could feel my cheeks warming as I tried to maintain eye contact, but it was challenging with her cleavage so close, "It's, um, certainly attention-grabbing."

"If you want, tonight, you can check this body more thoroughly, just the two of us," Namy whispered in my ear.

"Enough of this!" Usofra interrupted, clearly annoyed, as she stepped between Namy and me, separating us, "We need to focus on our mission and not waste time flirting."

"Someone sounds jealous," Sunshine teased, causing Usofra to glare at her in denial while her face turned a deeper shade of red.

"W-W-W-WHAT DID YOU SAY???" Usofra said, completely nervous and red, "M-Me? Jealous of a human? W-What no-nsense! I don't care what Darx does! I-I'm not lying!"

Namy, on her part, was overcome with laughter, seeming to be enjoying teasing her sister Usofra.

"L-Let's just get going," I insisted, eager to change the subject and put some distance between myself and the two demonesses.

"Y-Yeah, let's stop the nonsense and keep moving forward," Usofra said, also eager to change the subject, "Let's keep walking."

After Namy and Sunshine finally stopped laughing with a nod, we all started walking deeper into the dense forest, leaving the mountains behind.