

Usofra, Namy, and I walked through the city's alleys at night, cloaked in black hoods, heading toward Count Earl's mansion. From the information Namy and Usofra obtained from Leona and Gerald, it seems that Leona, Gerald, and Shalia were originally stationed at another part of the border but were reassigned to the border near [Oidao] weeks ago to bolster defenses in the area. Since Shalia's house is nearby, she decided to leave Leona and Gerald for a few days to visit her parents. Unfortunately, on her way there, Shalia was kidnapped by Count Earl's men and taken to his mansion.

Leona and Gerald, worried when Shalia did not return, began searching for her and discovered that Shalia never arrived at her parents' house. Their suspicions, knowing Shalia's past, led them to believe Count Earl was involved in her disappearance. However, neither Leona nor Gerald couldn't just break into Count Earl's mansion, as that would be a severe crime. Given Count Earl's influence, the bribed guards would not do anything against him. Just as Hana and Tashiro said, only criminals like us who are not tied by human laws anymore can rescue Shalia and the other girls. Since I am already a criminal, I don't mind killing a nobleman to save a friend. I can make Count Earl and his men pay for all the evil they have done without showing mercy.

The plan is simple. Usofra will use the rune engraved on the ring of her middle finger's left hand, which has a spell that creates a thick fog over a large area. This fog is special since it blocks sensory abilities from the outside for twenty minutes, so that is the period we will have to save Shalia and leave the mansion before adventurers and guards notice our presence. Hana will be waiting outside the mansion for us to guide us along a secret path to the city's outskirts once we finish the rescue, where Tashiro will be waiting in a carriage loaded with all the supplies we need to continue our journey. If everything goes well, we will save Shalia and the other kidnapped girls and then flee the city without being discovered.

We walk through the city's alleys, wearing hooded capes and taking advantage of the darkness to reach the mansion unnoticed. Upon reaching the end of the alley in front of the mansion, Usofra used her rune, and the thick fog began to form, first enveloping us and then spreading throughout the mansion and nearby areas pretty fast.

"The time has come," I said, releasing Sunshine from the medallion once her presence would not be detected, thanks to the fog.

"Remember, we only have twenty minutes," Usofra stated, "Sunshine and I will enter through the front entrance while Darx and Usofra enter through the back."

"Why do I have to go with Namy?" Sunshine said, looking disappointed, "I want to go with Dox!"

"Believe me, I didn't want to go with you either!" Namy responded by giving Sunshine the finger.

"Hey! We don't have time for this!" Usofra scolded them, "The front entrance is the most guarded area of the mansion, so your job is to attract the attention of the guards and

adventurers of the mansion, killing anyone who gets in your way while Darx and I enter from the back, searching for the kidnapped girls and slaying Count Earl. Once we finish what we came to do, we will meet again here. Understood?" Usofra finished with a demanding tone.

"Yes..." Sunshine and Namy responded in unison, looking at Usofra with fear, similar to two kids looking at her mother after being scolded.

"Well, let's go!" I said.

"Once you kill that asshole, don't leave without me, Dox!" Sunshine told me with worry in her voice that I would abandon her.

"Of course not!" I responded. But after seeing Sunshine still looking crestfallen, I told her something I knew would make her happy, "But to finish quickly, you will have to make sure that the bodyguards outside do not come inside to help Count Earl, so go crazy!"

Sunshine smiled with her typical mischievous smile, "You bet!"

Namy and Sunshine flew to the front of the mansion while Usofra and I ran to the back. We barely jumped over the backyard fence when we heard screams from the front patio of the mansion.

"Seems like Sunshine is doing her part," I said, hearing the distant screams.

"Are you sure it wasn't too much to tell Sunshine, go crazy?" Usofra asked, "I dislike humans, but even I feel bad about what that evil butterfly may do."

"Don't worry about it now!" I told Usofra while trying to find the mansion's back door through the fog.

But before finding the entrance, I spotted around ten guards. Their expressions shifted from confusion to surprise as they noticed us.

"Ready?" I asked, gripping my sword tighter.

"Always," Usofra replied, a wicked grin spreading across her face.

With that, we charged towards the group of guards. Despite their numbers, they were no match for us. My sword cut through the air, slicing into one guard after another. Usofra used the runes engraved on the ring on her right ring finger, from which balls of fire came out against the remaining guards.

As we dispatched the last of the guards, the mansion's back door swung open. Two more guards came out, but I immediately realized that these two were different. These two people

were wearing outfits different from the guards' armor; one wielded a katana, and the other held a spear. They didn't need to say anything for me to realize that these two were high-ranking adventurers.

Their eyes widened in shock at the sight of the fallen guards, then narrowed as they focused on us.

"Who are you?" Demanded the spear-wielding adventurer, his voice dripping with hostility.

Usofra smirked, "Come here if you want to find out."

The katana-wielding adventurer lunged first, his blade slicing towards me. I parried the attack with ease, my sword clashing against his with a resounding clang.

"Did you really think you could attack Count Ear's mansion and come out alive?" The katana-wielder said, launching another series of rapid strikes.

"I don't think it's going to be that difficult." I taunted.

Due to the agility and strength of their attacks, these two must be B-Ranks. If I used the skills given by the goddess, it would be easy for me to eliminate him. But since I can only depend on demonic energy to not lose control, I must be careful, or I could end up destroying the entire mansion.

"Is that all you've got?" He taunted.

"Hardly!" I retorted as I fended off his attacks.

Beside us, Usofra was facing the spear-user.

"Your weak magic won't save you from me, bitch!" The spear-wielder snarled, attempting to pierce Usofra defenses.

However, Usofra was well protected using the magic of another of her runes in the ring on her left thumb finger called [Ethereal Armor], which creates magical plate armor that surrounds Usofra and protects her as if it were an actual plate armor, but without any weight.

"Of course not," Usofra replied coolly, dodging a particularly vicious jab, "But it'll certainly distract you long enough for this."

Usofra purposely placed the spear adventurer in line with the katana adventurer. I quickly understood what Usofra expected me to do. I let the demonic energy coursing through me. Although I still didn't have this power under control, I focused the demonic energy in my palm, which I pointed against them. As the next attack came, I deflected it before summoning a

devastating beam of demonic energy that tore through the katana user and the adventurer with the spear behind him, killing them both instantly and, at the same time, destroying a section of the mansion.

A great scandal was heard when part of the corner of the mansion collapsed. Just as I thought, I couldn't control the amount of demonic energy I let out. I just hope that adventurers from the surrounding area don't come to investigate what happened. At the same time, I felt an intense pain in my palm, which looked a little burned by the beam of demonic energy that came out of my palm. At this point, I may only be able to use this dark beam one more time before I burn my hand with my own attack. I really don't want my hand to end up like those two adventurers I just defeated who are on the ground with their bodies wholly burned with strange black flames still scorching their bodies.

"Come on, Usofra," I urged, stepping over the fallen adversaries as we entered the mansion, "We need to find Shalia and make Count Earl pay for what he's done."

As we entered and ventured deeper into the mansion, the lavish decorations and intricate architecture stood in stark contrast to the grim task at hand. I took the lead, my eyes scanning the dimly lit hallways for any signs of Shalia or more guards. Usofra followed closely behind.

"Darx," She whispered, "I sense more guards patrolling next hallway."

"Let's make this quick," I replied, gritting my teeth as we pressed on.

We encountered several guards and a few adventurous souls foolish enough to try their luck against us. Though they put in an effort, they were no match for us. In the same way, the sounds of combat echoed through the front of the mansion, meaning that Namy and Sunshine have already entered the mansion too.

As we turned a corner, I was taken aback by the sight before me: several half-naked women huddled together, their eyes wide with terror. I could only assume these were some of the kidnapped victims, though Shalia was not among them.

"Where is Shalia?" I demanded softly, trying not to frighten them further, "And where can we find Count Earl?"

The women exchanged fearful glances, too scared to speak. Their trembling bodies spoke volumes about the horrors they had endured within these walls.

"Please," I implored, trying to keep my voice gentle despite my growing impatience, "We're here to help you. Tell us where we can find Shalia and Count Earl so we can put an end to all of this."

One woman hesitantly stepped forward, her eyes downcast, "C-Count-Earl... I think he's upstairs. But I don't know who Shalia is, I-I swear."

"Thank you," I said, nodding my appreciation. I turned to Usofra, "Let's go. We're getting closer."

We continued to advance through the mansion, eliminating more guards along the way. As we reached wide stairs, we came upon yet another frightened, half-naked girl. She cowered against the stairs, her chest heaving with panicked breaths. I approached her cautiously, not wanting to startle her further.

"Please, can you tell us where the other kidnapped girls are? And where is Count Earl?" I asked, my voice soft but firm.

The girl hesitated, her lip quivering as she looked between me and Usofra. Finally, she whispered, "The rest of the girls are in the basement. Count Earl... he's in his room on the second floor."

"Thank you," I said, a mixture of relief and rage coursing through me. Turning to Usofra, "We don't have much time. Go join Namy and Sunshine. Find Shalia and the other girls in the basement and get them out of here. I'll take care of Count Earl."

Usofra nodded, "Be careful, Darx. We don't know what awaits you upstairs."

"I will," I promised, clenching my fists, "Just make sure those girls are safe."

As Usofra disappeared down the hall, I ascended the steps to the second floor. As I climbed, my thoughts couldn't help but drift to Shalia – how long had she been held captive here? Did that asshole do something to her? I swear I will make him suffer if he did.

I reach the second floor. The opulent hallway stretched before me, adorned with lavish paintings and decorative weaponry. I sprinted down the hallway, my sword at the ready, prepared to face any guards that might impede my path. As expected, they emerged from shadowy alcoves, their expressions twisted with malice. With each clash of steel, I felt my anger intensify.

"Where is Count Earl?!" I demanded, parrying a guard's swing before sending him sprawling onto the floor. The other guards hesitated, glancing at one another, fear evident in their eyes.

"Y-you'll never reach him!" One stammered out before I silenced him with a swift slash across his throat.

Continuing down the corridor, a pair of ornate doors caught my attention. Two guards stood watch, flanking what appeared to be another adventurer, who eyed me with an arrogant smirk. It was clear they were protecting something important.

The two guards attacked me first and died just as quickly. The adventurer behind them, who didn't seem to have any weapons, pulled out a strange pendant from his pocket.

"You criminals will pay for all the chaos you have made!" He shouted, twirling the pendant between his fingers, "Let's see if you can resist this."

As he swung the pendant back and forth, I noticed a strange and acute sound. I felt dizzy for a moment, but it went away quickly. I thought the adventurer would do something more. However, that was all. The adventurer's smirk faltered, surprise and disbelief flashing across his face.

"I-Impossible!" He exclaimed, taking a step back, "How could you resist my hypnosis?"

"I have no idea what you are trying to do, but your tricks won't work on me," I snarled, charging at him.

The guy tried to escape, but my sword cut him in two before he could do so. I turned my attention back to the door. Would Count Earl be inside? I pushed the doors open, not wasting any time. The sight that awaited me was unexpected. On the other side of the door was an elegant bedroom, and there, in front of a desk with a big mirror, sat Shalia. She stared blankly into a large mirror, wearing her battle attire, her beautiful pink hair cascading down her back.

"Shalia!" I called to her, running toward her.

"Shalia! Are you okay? I come to... Shalia?" I asked after she continued staring at the mirror, ignoring my existence, "Shalia, can you hear me?"

Shalia's eyes remained fixed on her reflection in the mirror, unresponsive to my words. It was clear that she was under some form of mental manipulation or control. Did the adventurer outside do to her what he tried to do to me, too?

"Damn you, Count Earl," I muttered, clenching my fists as anger surged through me.

Checking Shalia's body, she didn't seem hurt. I tried to touch Shalia's shoulder to see if I could get her out of her trance, but before I could touch her, a kind of transparent green aura started to surround Shalia, repelling my hand.

I don't recall Shalia having a skill like this, but when I look closely, it seems she is holding something in her hand. Could it be a magical artifact? The green shield protecting her appears almost out of energy, and I could probably force my way through it if I tried. Whatever the case, seeing that I can't touch Shalia and that she's wearing her combat clothes relieves me a little. It means Shalia managed to do something to prevent herself from being touched. I'm sure she put up a good fight.

Kneeling beside Shalia, I gently whispered into her ear, "Everything will be fine soon, I promise. Just hang in there."

As much as I wanted to stay by her side, I knew that every second I wasted here endangered things. With one last look at her entranced face, I left the room.

"Count Earl, you'll pay for what you've done to her," I vowed, my voice seething with hatred.

I stormed through the mansion's hallways, dispatching any guards who dared to stand in my way. My heart pounded in my chest, each beat driving me forward, closer to avenging Shalia. As I ventured closer to my target, I could feel the darkness within me growing stronger, feeding off my desire for revenge. I finally reached a room with double doors at the end of a hallway where I was sure Count Earl would be.

I was so angry that I didn't realize when my demonic energy started to get out of my control. I could feel the temperature dropping drastically, freezing everything around me. Shortly after, I slammed open the double doors, revealing my ominous silhouette cloaked in darkness, my black hooded cloak obscuring my face.

Inside were two more adventurers, and in the background, a really fat man in an elegant white suit, trembling with fear, hiding behind a huge bed.

"Who are you, and why are you doing this?" The obese man that I assume to be Count Earl shouted and then addressed his bodyguards, "KILL HIM! WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR!"

The two bodyguards tried to attack, but I made razor-sharp pillars of ice erupt from the floor and ceiling, stopping them in their tracks. These two adventurers are undoubtedly the strongest in the mansion. They should both be A-Ranks, but they seem insignificant to me now.

Though they attempted to evade the icy onslaught, their efforts were in vain, and soon, their blood began to stain the crystalline floor. Despite their wounds, the bodyguards refused to yield, yet their determination faltered as a chilling realization dawned upon them. From the icy pillars emerged my summons-spectral figures with the appearance of women made of ice. Though summons should have been voiceless, their laughter echoed hauntingly through the chamber.

Out of anger, I didn't realize that I was using my skills given by the goddess.

As the summoned specters advanced with eerie grace, their frost-laden breath seemed to seep into the very bones of the bodyguards, freezing their limbs with numbing cold as they yelled in fear and confusion. Struggling against the encroaching paralysis, the defenders fought desperately to resist the icy embrace that threatened to consume them whole. Despite their efforts, the bitter chill of the summons proved too much to bear.

One of the bodyguards succumbed to the freezing onslaught, his forms gradually transforming into ice, "STOP! I-I GIVE UP!" He screamed before being turned into a statue of ice.

Only a bodyguard remained from the crowd of adventurers and guards who protected the mansion.

"DO SOMETHING!" Count Earl yelled at the adventurer, who had more than half his body frozen and could not move.

The adventurer only turned to look at me before closing his eyes forever.

I slowly advanced, my figure still cloaked in darkness.

"W-who are you?" The Count asked, terrified, "W-what do you want? M-Money? I have plenty! I-I can pay you whatever you want!"

With a sense of dread creeping over him, the Count watched as I lifted my head ever so slightly. As the seconds stretched, the Count could do nothing but watch in helpless horror, knowing that his fate lay in my hands.

"Ask me for anything I want! I can get you anything you want. Money, women, status, so please don't hurt me!" Count Earl continued with tears in his eyes.

After what felt like an eternity, I finally spoke.

"Your wealth and power mean nothing to me," I said, my voice cold, "Do you know why I'm here?"

He stammered, his eyes darting around the room as if searching for an escape, "N-no, I d-don't."

"Shalia," I said, feeling my anger boil within me at the mere mention of her name, "What you have done to her is unforgivable."

The Count's face paled even further, his eyes widening with realization, "Y-you're with her? I'm going to let her go! I promise not to look for her or her parents anymore! Please, I beg you, show me mercy!" He said on his knees, crying, pleading at my feet.

"Mercy?" I scoffed, my eyes locking onto his trembling body.

"Please, I'll do anything!" He cried out, his voice cracking.

"Someone like you doesn't deserve mercy," I said, making one of my summons behind me approach and touch Count Earl's foot, which gradually began to freeze.

"NO!" He screamed, but it was too late. The frost began to creep up his legs, a slow and agonizing process that left him writhing in pain.



"Please, stop! I beg you!" He wailed, but I only watched with cold detachment as the ice continued its relentless ascent.

Tears streamed down Count Earl's face, freezing upon contact with the encroaching frost. His pleas grew weaker, more desperate, but they fell on deaf ears. My rage, the hatred I bore for this man who had hurt Shalia so deeply, in a certain way, made me enjoy his suffering.

As the ice reached his chest, his cries became little more than whimpers. And finally, with one last shuddering breath, he was silenced. The frost had claimed him completely, his body now nothing more than the ice statue of a dirty son of a bitch begging for his life.

With Count Earl's lifeless form before me, I began to feel the impact of having used the skills given by the goddess. My body tensed, and I could feel my demonic energy surging, threatening to consume me from within. I gritted my teeth, focusing on maintaining control over my body and conscience.

"Darx!" Uofra's voice broke through my struggle, accompanied by Nami and Sunshine, "We found the kidnapped girls, but Shalia wasn't with them! Even so, we need to leave now! The fog is about to disappear."

"Dox!" Sunshine also said, flying around me, "It was so much fun! I didn't let any of the bad guys bother you like you asked."

Uofra's eyes widened as she took in the frozen scene before her, her gaze flickering between me and the ice statue that was once Count Earl, "Darx, your demonic energy... it's getting out of control," She said anxiously.

I clenched my fists, focusing my thoughts on suppressing the dark energy within me. Sweat beaded on my forehead as I fought to regain control. Finally, with a deep breath, I felt the demonic power stabilize, remaining dormant for the time being.

"Using the goddess's skills was reckless, Darx," Uofra scolded, her concern evident in her stern tone, "You could have lost control completely."

"My bad..." I replied, my voice strained from my internal battle.

"Hey, we can save the scolding for later!" Nami added, "We have to leave immediately!"

As my gaze fell upon Count Earl's lifeless body one last time, I knew we couldn't waste any more time, "I found Shalia," I informed the others, "We need to get her and get out of here now."

"Alright, let's go!" Nami agreed, her expression determined as she prepared to move.

"Wait," I instructed Sunshine, who hovered around me, "Enter the medallion. Your presence is easily detectable out of the fog, and we might need you to help us escape."

"Got it, boss!" Sunshine chirped before disappearing into the medallion around my neck.

With that settled, we hurried through the mansion, retracing my steps back to Shalia's room.

As we approached Shalia's room, I quickly went ahead and entered the room.

"Shalia," I called to her softly. She was still sitting in front of the mirror, seemingly entranced by her reflection. I gently lifted her into my arms, ignoring the searing pain that shot through my body due to the protective shield surrounding her.

"Darx, are you okay?" Usofra asked, her eyes filled with worry as she noticed my pained expression.

"Let's just get out of here," I grunted, trying to focus on anything but the pain. Together, we made our way out of the mansion. The fog began to dissipate just as we reached the exit, revealing the moonlit grounds outside.

"Over there!" Namy exclaimed, pointing towards the alley where a dog controlled by Hina stood waiting for us.

"Good," I thought, relieved that Hina and Tashiro were holding up their end of the deal.

"Let's go," I urged, sprinting towards the dog.

As we crossed the street, I glimpsed two familiar faces in the distance—Leona and Gerald, running in the street toward the mansion. After the surprise, I couldn't help but smile to see my friends after so long.

Both Leona and Gerald stopped running, looking at me in shock when they saw me. When they left [Riledo], they still thought that I died in the cave. I don't know if they found out that I was still alive or if they knew what happened in the city and that now I am a criminal. Whatever the case, I'm glad to see them now more than I'm entering the territory of the demons, and I don't know when I'll see them again.

"D-Darx!" Leona called out after me, her voice filled with confusion and surprise. But there was no time for explanations. I briefly set Shalia down on the ground, "We'll see each other again." I said, looking at Shalia's now relaxed countenance.

I ran into the alley, leaving Shalia, Leona, and Gerald behind.

Once inside the alley, Hana asked through the dog, "Did you manage to save the kidnapped girls?"

Namy replied, her voice confident, "We did. We also killed Count Earl."

"Oh my good! Thank you!" Hana said with relief in her voice. Now, follow me. We didn't have much time before the guards and adventurers noticed what happened. It'll take you to a secret exit out of the city."

I followed the dog, my heart racing as we sprinted through the narrow, winding alleys. The sound of people gathering around the mansion grew louder, and I knew it wouldn't be long before someone discovered what had transpired inside.

"Darx," Hana said, her voice tense, "We need to move quickly. The city will be on high alert soon."

"I know," I replied, my eyes darting around as we navigated the maze-like alleyways.

After a few more twists and turns, the dog led us to the Inn, which, to our surprise, had a hidden underground tunnel that would lead us out of the city. Once outside the city walls, we found ourselves far enough from the adventurer camps outside the walls to run, crouching, following the dog heading into the forest. As we entered the forest, we saw a carriage with Tashiro and Hana waiting for us.

"Did you manage to save my sisters?" Tashiro asked, his eyes searching mine for reassurance.

"Yes, we saved all the women inside the mansion," I confirmed, my voice steady. Relief washed over Tashiro's face, and he nodded gratefully, a weight visibly lifted from his shoulders.

"Thank you," He said, his voice thick with emotion, "Take the carriage. Inside are all the supplies that you asked for. You'll need it to escape quickly."

We climbed into the carriage, and I looked back at the city one last time, knowing it might be a long time before I returned. As the carriage pulled away, I turned back to see Hana and Tashiro waving goodbye to us before running towards the city.

"Darx, are you alright?" Namy asked, her tone softer than usual.

I sighed, feeling the exhaustion finally catching up to me, "I will be," I replied quietly, "There's still so much to do."

"We are already close to the border," Usofra added, "Soon, we will enter the territory of the demons, where we will finally be able to save Zaine."