

Stephanie's shoes gently clicked against the rocky ground, with Notches in her sweater's hood and Lucy on her shoulder.

Everything was still dark, but Stephanie could see through the dark as she looked at the rock walls around her.

Is this some sort of maze for her?

Suddenly, something shone before them, and Stephanie stopped walking, seeing it look like a lamp.

"Who are you?" the voice asked. "Come here so we can see you."

Stephanie nodded and followed the lamp's light, stepping out from the hallways into a larger room.

Once she stepped into the larger room, Stephanie was surprised to see three people waiting for her as they noticed her.



One of the figures held a lamp in her hand and resembled Aries but was a female doll at the height of adults.

She has short, curly dark brown hair, with a pair of ram horns with a crown on top of her head.

She also has light brown eyes and a fluffy collar around her neck with the Aries Zodiac symbol on the right side.

The doll wore a blue long-sleeved jacket with a hidden collar underneath the fluffy one and a blue ribbon tie, a long-sleeved cream shirt with buttons, cream pants, long white socks with yellow diamonds on the sides, and boots that are shaped like a ram's legs.

The second resembles the Flacon Zodiac and was at adults' height and was a beautiful woman.

Some parts of her body were covered with feathers, and her legs were replaced with the legs of a falcon and the wings attached to her back.

The woman has beautiful yellow eyes, fair skin, and long brown hair with a few feathers stuck to her hair and wore light brown Native American clothes with beautiful embroidery designs.

The third was a male with the ears, hind legs, and tail of a rat with gray hair, fair skin, and light red eyes and wore a Chinese uniform with two swords on his back.

And the fourth was a beautiful deer with green cloth clothes and a shield with a sword in its hilt on her back and wearing some jewelry with green face paint on her fur.

They all perked after Stephanie stepped into the larger room as the woman with the lantern in her hand stepped back to allow her to step inside.

“Who are you?” the half-rat Chinese man asked, taking out one of his swords. “How did you get in here?”

“Calm down, Shu,” Lucy spoke to the half-rat Chinese man, Shu. “She’s the current wielder of the Zodiac Pocket Watch.”

All three looked at each other after Lucy told them as the half-falcon Native American woman asked, “Can you show us the Zodiac Pocket Watch?”

Stephanie nodded and reached into the pocket of her blue jeans, taking out the Zodiac Pocket Watch and showing it to the three.

They all looked surprised that she *was* holding the Zodiac Pocket Watch as Shu placed his sword away as the half-goat doll said, “You *are* the wielder! We are so sorry. We thought you were a Nightmare in disguise.”

“It’s alright,” Stephanie assured with chuckles. “I get that a lot. What are your names?”

“I’m Shu,” Shu responded.

“I’m Chayton,” the half-falcon Native American woman answered.

“I’m Moina,” the anthro deer responded with a Scottish accent.

“And I am Amelia,” the life-sized doll responded.

“Pleased to meet you all,” Stephanie nodded. “I’m Stephanie, Stephanie Allen.”

She mentioned to Notches, as she could tell they knew who Lucy was, “This is Notches, my friend.”

“*Hello.*” Notches smiled.

Chayton clapped her hands as the crystals on the room’s walls lit up, causing Stephanie to squint a little as the lights turned on, her eyes adjusting.

She took her glasses off for a minute to blink a few times and pushed her glasses into place after taking a few minutes before being startled when Amelia gently cupped her face.

“Oh, you are *cute!*” Amelia cooed as Stephanie blushed. “You have beautiful azure eyes and,” she paused in confusion after noticing Stephanie’s long blue hair. “Blue hair?”

“It’s natural,” Stephanie softly smiled with a sigh.

“Natural?” All four echoed, looking at her long hair.

“You’re saying you were *born* with blue hair?” Shu asked.

“Exactly!” Stephanie nodded. “I had a lot of people ask if I dyed my hair, but it is all-natural blue hair.”

“With pointed ears?” Chayton asked as Shu rubbed his finger against the side of her ear.

“Yes, that too,” Stephanie’s ear flicked from Shu’s finger rubbing against the side as he pulled it back.

The four glanced at each other after seeing Stephanie’s long blue hair and pointed ears, looking like they had *seen* this before.

But they could not put their fingers on it, so they ignored it as they looked at her outfit and appearance.

“耶穌,” Shu remarked after noticing how long her hair was. “Have you ever had someone cut your hair?”

“No,” Stephanie sighed. “They wouldn’t allow me to go to a barber.”

She paused and corrected herself with a slightly irritated tone, “I meant my so-called foster parents.”

They glanced at her long hair curiously while Chayton felt confused about why Stephanie looked *irritated* about them as Shu said, taking out one of his swords that made Stephanie nervous, “Don’t worry! I’ll cut it.”

“Now, wait a minute,” Chayton spoke before Shu could do anything as Stephanie took a couple steps backward. “What if you accidentally slice her?”

“I’ve done this a bunch of times!” Shu smiled. “Besides, I’m careful.”

“Maybe you *should* listen to her,” Stephanie worriedly smiled. “And I have thick hair, too. So it’ll be a little difficult for you to slice cleanly. It’s not like how Mulan does it.”

Shu rolled his eyes after Stephanie told him and mumbled as he put his sword away, “Fine. Got any better ideas?”

“Find a barber!” Stephanie exclaimed. “As much as I want all this cut off because it is hard to care for, I would like a professional to do it.”

“Good point,” Amelia nodded. “Now, about the pocket watch.”

“Oh, right.” Stephanie held out her hand as she held her pocket watch, watching as it floated out of her hand and the back opened.

“The diamond is still intact,” Chayton nodded. “Let’s help stabilize it.”

Chayton first tapped the Zodiac Pocket Watch, which glowed for a minute before Amelia and Shu, and Moina did the same after Chayton.

Stephanie watched as the diamond went from a faint to a brighter color before a memory flashed into her mind as she watched it.

*The memory showed a young man climbing down a mountain carefully, his hands on the side of the mountain while moving his feet to place them on the rocks.*

*He has short brown hair, light brown eyes, fair skin, and a long-sleeved shirt with a light brown jacket, black pants with boots, and a cap.*

*Suddenly, he slipped and started falling down the mountain, and was trying to grab onto a rock to stop himself before a hand shot out and grabbed his wrist, stopping him from falling over a cliff.*

*After grabbing the man, the stranger pulled him back onto a flat ground, and the man looked over at who grabbed him and saw another man, except with ocean-blue eyes and blue hair.*

*He has fair skin and wears a white toga with strange markings on his arms and legs, even barefoot.*

*The blue-haired man perked after the man looked at him and turned around as he called, "Wait, who are you?"*

*The blue-haired man turned around to the stranger and responded, "Just some random stranger. Don't tell anyone about me."*

*With that, the blue-haired stranger disappeared around the corner of the path as the man followed, looking around and seeing he had disappeared.*

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The memory disappeared as Stephanie blinked, looking confused after the memory disappeared and wondering what that memory was.

"There," Chayton smiled, seeing she did not see the memory like Stephanie. "The Falcon Zodiac, the Rat Zodiac, the Deer Zodiac, and the Aries Zodiac are stable for you."

"Thank you," Stephanie smiled as the back closed after they stabilized it and placed it into the pocket of her blue jeans. "Do you mind if I come here to help practice using the Zodiacs?"

“Of course!” Shu nodded. “Though, since you ‘unlocked,’” Shu quotes with his fingers. “The gate, we won’t be here. We are going to return to the respective realm we escaped from.”

“Wait, your realm?” Stephanie asked with confusion. “What realm?”

“The Zodiac Realm,” Chayton explained. “It’s a realm where Zodiacs like Shu, Amelia, Moina, and I reside to give our respective Zodiacs to children of all kinds.”

“Oh,” Stephanie perked with a smile. “Does this mean I could find out what mine is?”

“Sort of,” Amelia responded with a so-so gesture of her hand. “It’ll take a long time since we don’t have everyone around.”

“Okay,” Stephanie nodded. “Do I follow you or just step out from where I walked in?”

All four looked behind Stephanie after she asked and noticed that the hallway she walked through was sealed off.

“Yes,” Chayton nodded. “You can follow us.”

She gently took Stephanie by the hand as they started walking through another hallway as Amelia used her lantern to shine the way.

“So, how did you get to Sodor?” Shu asked.

“Using Avril’s Dust Whistle,” Stephanie responded, taking the whistle out and showing it to the three.

“Did you find the whistle at *Shining Time Station*?” Chayton asked.

“Yes,” Stephanie nodded. “You all learned about how the Nightmares were freed, right?”

“Sort of,” Amelia responded as she looked over her shoulder. “We had to escape from our realm because of the Nightmares leaking in and had to hide from the Black Zodiacs as they were hunting us down. So we *don’t* know who freed them or sent out those monsters after us.”

Stephanie paused a little after Amelia explained as they continued walking down the hallway, and Shu asked, “So what kind of Dusts did you learn?”

“Well,” Stephanie began. “Gold Dust helps you travel from Shining Time Station to Sodor, turning people from stone to normal. Then I learned that the Silver Dust can turn someone into a steam locomotive.”

“It actually transforms them into any type of vehicle they ‘represent,’” Lucy explained as she quoted her fingers.

“Really?” Stephanie asked.

“Yes,” Lucy nodded. “I saw how Avril used the Dusts before and know which one does which.”

“That’s great!” Stephanie smiled as she turned to Lucy. “Can you teach me how to use the Dusts?”

“Of course,” Lucy nodded.

They soon stepped out from the stone hallway and into a large beautiful dome filled with millions of stars in the sky, and the ground had turned from a stone floor to a translucent light midnight blue color.

In the middle of the enormous room was a large circle filled with what looked like a black liquid inside.

Even books and scrolls were littered with either half-empty or half-full cabinets, and pillows were tossed around too.

“Here we are,” Amelia smiled. “This is the room we reside in.”

“Och,” Moina sighed with a light tsk of her tongue. “It’s trashit. Luckily they didnae touch any o’ the scrolls or books.”

Stephanie’s eyes were sparkling with amazement as she looked around her with curiosity, even at that large circle in the center of the room.

Chayton released Stephanie’s hand after stepping into the room and looking at the water with the others.

Stephanie curiously looked at the water as it was pitch black but could not see anything.

“Is this bad?” Stephanie asked, looking up at Chayton.

“Yes, very,” Shu nodded. “We can’t see anything since the Nightmare turned the Great Pool into a black pool. We need the others to help cleanse it.”

Stephanie glanced back at the Great Pool curiously as Chayton, Amelia, and Shu looked around at the damage, seeing that most of the scrolls and books were littered, but none were ripped or shredded.

“God, what a mess,” Amelia groaned with irritation as she huffed.

“This is gaun’ae tak us ages tae clean aw this up!” Moina moaned.

Notches climbed out of Stephanie’s hook as Lucy hopped off her shoulder, growing to adult height as she looked back at her.

“Stephanie?” Lucy asked as she knelt to her height. “What are you thinking?”

Stephanie glanced at Lucy, surprised that she had grown to her height, and asked, “How did you get to my height?”

“The magic from the Zodiac Realm can transform me to an adult’s height since I connect to the realm itself,” Lucy explained.

“Oh!” Stephanie perked. “But you stayed normal on my shoulder.”

Lucy shrugged and responded, “It’s complicated to explain, but you didn’t answer my question.”

Stephanie perked and responded, “Nothing... but I have a nagging feeling.”

“*Of what?*” Notches asked before realizing. “*Don’t tell me you’re going to reach your hand into the Great Pool.*”

“Yes, listen to the cat,” Lucy nodded. “What if it infects you?”

But Stephanie was too zoned at the Great Pool to listen to the two talking, feeling something was *calling* her.

She could not put her finger on what it could be... but it was faintly telling her to *reach* her hand into the pool.

...Should Stephanie touch the Great Pool, though?

Stephanie took a deep and slow breath before reaching a hand to the Great Pool but flinched when Lucy grabbed her wrist, causing her to glance over as her hand just hovered over the surface of the black water.

“Are you insane?” Lucy hissed. “You don’t reach your hand into-”

The water suddenly rippled after Lucy grabbed her wrist, and she glanced over with confusion as Stephanie decided to take this chance.

Stephanie moved her hand down and touched the surface of the Great Pool, causing it to ripple again as Lucy instantly released her wrist and moved back.

Suddenly, the water turned clear after Stephanie touched its surface, removing the inky clouds and revealing a beautiful pool.

Stephanie perked after the clouds were removed as she moved her hand up, as something lifted from the pond with her hand.

She instantly moved her hand away with a gasp after seeing a beautiful prism-shaped gemstone just a few feet away from her palm.

The other Zodaics appeared after seeing Stephanie bending over with Lucy, and Notches scrambled back a little.

“What’s that?” Chayton asked as she wrapped her arms around Stephanie and her left wing to shield her.

“What did you do?!” Shu asked as he took out his swords, and Miona took her sword.

“I-I don’t know!” Stephanie stammered. “All I did was touch the surface of the Great Pool, and this happened!”

The gemstone then went towards Stephanie and hovered before it glowed and transformed from a gemstone into a staff.

The staff was made of wood with a gold band keeping the gemstone on top.

They all stared at the staff with surprised expressions, and Shu reached over to the staff, but it moved away before he could grab it.

Shu moved his hand away as the staff went back forward, and Amelia did the same as the staff moved away from her.



Chayton attempted to do the same with her wing that was shielding Stephanie, but it did the same thing and moved back.

“I think it wants *you* to grab it,” Lucy responded.

“Whit?!” Miona exclaimed. “Ye’re allowin’ her tae grab a random scepter thon juist poppit oot o’ the Great Pool?!”

“Well, it won’t stop hovering over her,” Shu exclaimed. “And if we attempt to leave,

it will continue following her.”

Stephanie stood up from the group as they watched nervously, reaching over to the staff as it moved forward and went into her hand, allowing her to grab it.

After gripping the staff, Stephanie looked at the staff with curiosity, seeing signs of being used before, and the gemstone was a beautiful ocean blue color.

“Whose staff does it belong?” Shu asked, walking over to look at it.

“I don’t know,” Stephanie responded, looking up at the others. “But it’s beautiful.”

They looked around the staff curiously as Stephanie held it in her hands, allowing them to look at it as they put away their weapons.

“I have never seen such staff before,” Chayton remarked. “Nor one that allows itself to go to a human before.”

Stephanie looked down at the staff before it transformed into a gold bracelet with the gemstone in the center.

“Hey!” Shu exclaimed as Stephanie placed the bracelet on her right wrist, which tightened at her wrist’s size, but not too tightly. “The Great Pool is clear!”

“Wait, really?!” Amelia exclaimed, hopping over and peering over the ledge.

Sure enough, the Great Pool was clear enough that they could see through it as it showed what looked like the world itself.

“This is fantastic!” Amelia grinned.

“How did you do that?” Chayton asked.

Stephanie shrugged her shoulders as she responded, “I don’t know. It was... *calling* to me, and I just placed my hand on the surface.”

All four glanced at each other after Stephanie explained to them, and Stephanie then asked, “Can I help clean up around here?”

“Of course,” Amelia nodded as she stood up. “Let me show you which one goes to which cabinet.”

Stephanie helped clean the place that Chayton told her that it is the Zodiac Realm, and Amelia told her which cabinet the books or scrolls go to.

She even sorted through the runes after looking at the symbols on the fronts and placing them in their correct bags.

The cleaning lasted a few minutes before placing the pillows in the correct positions and telling which pillow belonged to which.

Stephanie brushed the last pillow off as she stepped back, admiring her work as everything was cleaned and sorted through,

“Thank you so much for helping us!” Amelia smiled, giving Stephanie a hug as she stiffened a little.

“Yeah, it helped a lot!” Shu nodded in agreement as she hugged Stephanie with one arm as Chayton patted her shoulder.

“Ye did a great job!” Miona perked.

Stephanie blushed a little from their compliments as they released her, seeing her blushing as they looked faintly confused at the color of her shade.

“You’re welcome,” Stephanie softly nodded with a smile before perking. “Oh, I need to go see Sir Topham Hatt. He might be worried that I’m taking too long.”

Then she paused and asked, “How do I get out of here?”

The bracelet around Stephanie’s wrist glowed as Stephanie looked at it with confusion, seeing the gemstone start to glow.

The last thing Stephanie, Notches, and Lucy knew, they were suddenly teleported from the Zodiac Realm to outside at the bottom of the mountain.

“That... was quick.” Stephanie slowly spoke with confusion.

She glanced over at the shed where Culdee and the others looked flabbergasted that she had appeared out of nowhere.

“How did you get here?!” Culdee exclaimed. “You were at the top of *Devil’s Back*, and now you’re here with us!”

“Ah, well,” Stephanie blushed, still wearing the bracelet around her wrist. “I’ll explain everything after visiting Sir Topham Hatt.”

She reached into the pocket of her blue jeans and took out the Zodiac Pocket Watch, taking the top as she transformed into her Flacon Zodaic.

Instead, Stephanie transformed into a harpy version of the Zodiac, wearing different clothes than usual.

She was wearing a long-sleeve light brown shirt with a dark brown shawl and light gray pants and was barefoot, revealing her talons.

Stephanie also has a pair of wings on her back as some parts of her body are covered with feathers, her eyes the shape of a falcon, and her tail feathers.

“Whoops!” Stephanie exclaimed as the feathers on her cheeks ruffled. “Ah, still need practice.”

*“This is perfect,”* Notches assured. *“You can carry me with Lucy.”*

Culdee and others watched in surprise after watching Stephanie transform into a bird as she picked Notches up from the ground with Lucy before shakily taking off in the air.

“Did you...?” Culdee slowly asked, looking over at the others.

“Yes,” nodded Lord Harry. “We must lay off the Welsh coal for a while.”