

CHAPTER 6

The work at the stonemason's was pretty simple. Ginko didn't end up having anything to do, so she looked around at the projects Mr. Saunders was working on.

There were all kinds of amazing things: Statues, fountains, custom plaques and lots of other things. In an act of carelessness, Ginko bumped into a statue of the historical leader of the merpeople, Israel Lazuli, and she started to fall.

Luckily, Mr. Saunders had been watching and caught her before she hit the ground,

"Careful there, you don't want to get hurt."

Carlton Saunders was a very kind older man. As he was half Goblin, he was shorter than a normal man his age, but it didn't bother him. His wife Pauline had passed away a few years back, so he lived alone, but his business was booming, so he never really felt lonely.

"S-sorry!"

"It's quite alright, I'm more worried about you than that silly old statue. If it broke, I could easily make another one."

Stone magic like his wasn't very common around Nogard, so people like Mr. Saunders had easy work. Though he often preferred to put the finishing touches on by hand, he felt it made the job more personal that way.

"Say, have you ever heard the tale of Israel Lazuli?"

Ginko shook her head.

"Well, back in those days, I think it was before Nogard was founded, merpeople were persecuted as monsters, as minotaurs and goblins had been. A time came when a group of humans, corrupted by the Wicked Dragon, ventured to the merpeople's homeland, Sitnalta, though it wasn't called that yet, to hunt down and exterminate the lot of them. Now, a lot of merpeople at that time didn't fully know how to use their land legs, and so were basically crippled when the water magic users brought them out of the water. A great battle ensued with heavy losses on both sides. The morale of the merpeople was fading fast and some of them were really becoming hostile. But a lone merman, Israel Lazuli, realized the way to truly end the fight was to cease the fighting, not for either side to be wiped out. So he and a ragtag band of warriors who trusted him confronted the invaders. And then he noticed the dark aura surrounding them, so he used his own Purification magic to cleanse them of the Wicked Dragon's influence. After that he was hailed as a hero, and went on to establish good relations with many other nations."

Ginko's eyes were sparkling.

"Woowow. I never heard that story before! I knew my people had been unkind to them for a long time, but we were like that to everybody until we opened up trading with other nations a few hundred years ago."

Mr. Saunders grinned.

"I'm quite well versed in the history of this land. It comes with the business. If you'd like to hear any other stories while you're waiting for Sora I'd be glad to entertain you."

She pondered for a second.

"Come to think of it, you said something about a 'Wicked Dragon', I know about the legendary dragon that helped found Nogard, but is this a different one or something?"

"Ah, that's quite the story."

He took a seat.

"You see, thousands of years ago, the two dragons of order, the Holy Dragon Nogard and the Wicked Dragon Progard, kept order around the continent. That is, until Progard betrayed Nogard and started possessing people like in the story earlier. Now, Nogard was a patient sort, so she went to talk with Progard, to try to reason with him, but when she did, he lashed out and gravely wounded her. Only her holy dragon magic saved her life. After that, she fell asleep for 100 years, during which was what we call the 'Dark Ages'. Progard ruled with an iron fist...or wing, and half of the continent's population was under his control. When Nogard finally awoke, she saw what he had done and realized there was no reasoning with him, so she flew straight to his castle and struck him with her most vicious

attack, defeating him and purifying the land in the process. But she was still not fully recovered from the damage she had received 100 years earlier and so she passed on as well. They say the shrine dedicated to her still exists somewhere on Levon."

Ginko's eyes were sparkling more than before.

"Hahah, I guess you liked the story then?"

Ginko nodded excitedly.

"I love hearing old stories like this! It helps me better understand the world as it is today."

Just then, Sora came in, his hands covered with dirt.

"I'm all finished, Mr. Saunders."

"Wonderful, would you like to stay for lunch? I was about to fix up some sandwiches."

Sora looked at Ginko.

Ginko nodded happily.

"Well, I guess so if my Sensei is for it."

Mr. Saunders' eyes widened.

"Sensei? What are you teaching him?"

"I'm teaching him how to get stronger!"

"Wonderful, maybe I can hire him part time at my shop after you're done with him."

They shared a laugh and had a great lunch together.

Mr. Saunders shared many more tales while they ate, and Sora got a kick out of how interested Ginko was in the stories, though he was also interested.

After lunch, Mr. Saunders gave Sora some old tools he had recently replaced and the two left for home.

"Alright, so as soon as we get home, it's off to Magic training!"

"Sounds good, Sensei!"

Thankfully they didn't run into Spike on their way home, and they got to work immediately.

Sora stood in a clearing behind his house while Ginko sat on a pile of boxes researching in the magic book Midoriko had given her.

"Okay, first off let's see what you can do at the moment."

"Alright."

Sora tensed his muscles and an aura of light surrounded him, compressing into a light film covering his arms and legs.

"Very good, now try lifting the weights you lifted earlier."

As expected, he was able to do about twice as many lifts in half the time.

"Great so far, now let's try lifting something heavier."

She scanned the surrounding area.

"Ah, how about that?"

She pointed to a wheelbarrow full of bricks.

"Uhhh, WITH the bricks?"

"Yup, this should measure your limits nicely."

He stepped over to the wheelbarrow and with a deep breath, he lifted it a few inches off the ground, before flipping it and spilling the bricks all over the ground.

Sora fell to the ground to catch his breath.

"Haaaaaah, I guess that's about my limit for now."

Ginko flew over to him and had a smug look on her face.

"Well, maybe I have a way to improve your reinforcement magic now..."

"Really? Well come on, let's try it!"

He reset the wheelbarrow and listened carefully to Ginko's instructions.

"Okay, Reinforcement Magic: Relax your muscles."

Sora relaxed.

"Uhm, raise your right hand towards the object in question."

Sora complied.

"Place your left hand on top of your right wrist. And shout, channeling your

magic through both hands to come out of the one."

Sora did as instructed.

"Haaaaaaaaaah!!!"

Sora wasn't feeling the normal effects of reinforcement magic, so he thought perhaps he had been doing something wrong all this time.

Slowly, a black star began to appear on the side of the wheelbarrow.

Ginko was perplexed, she'd never heard of reinforcement magic doing that before. She checked the book again, when she did, her eyes widened, and she shot over to Sora and frantically shouted, "Sora, stop!"

"Huh?" He dropped his arms, and the star faded.

"What's the matter? Was I doing something wrong?"

Ginko embarrassedly pushed her pointer fingers together.

"Um...the thing is...I kinda was reading the wrong page..."

"So what magic was I using?"

"Well, the page before Reinforcement Magic...was Reincarnation Magic."

Sora's face went blank.

"What kinda magic is that?! I've never heard of it!"

"It's, um, a type of dark magic that seals a part of your soul into a designated object."

"So I just sealed part of my soul into that wheelbarrow?!"

"No, thankfully there's a decent window of cancellation before it's sealed. See how the mark is gone?"

"Oh, yeah. Why does that book have dark magic in it?"

Ginko looked at the publishing credits inside the front cover.

"Ah, this is from before we opened our borders. We weren't very picky about what magic we used back then..."

"So, I'm fine?"

"As far as I know. I've never encountered this magic either, I've only read about it."

They regained their composure and tried again, this time making sure to use the correct page.

"Okay, relax your muscles."

Sora gave Ginko a disappointed look.

"Hey, It says right here 'REINFORCEMENT MAGIC'. They just start off the same."

"Okay, but if it gets too similar, I'm stopping."

"Well, you won't have to. Now then, concentrate on your magic pool. Take very shallow breaths and very gently, tense up your muscles in the desired areas."

Sora did as instructed and the aura from before appeared again, enveloping his body in light. But it moved much more smoothly than before, creating almost the shape of gauntlets on his hands and greaves on his legs.

"Okay, now try lifting the wheelbarrow."

Sora bent over to grab the wheelbarrow, and to his surprise, he lifted it quite easily.

"H-hey! I did it!"

He danced around, holding the wheelbarrow over his head.

"Alright!"

Ginko clapped in joy.

Suddenly, the aura armor began to fade, and the full weight of the wheelbarrow began to hit him.

"Whoa, watch it!"

Ginko flew over to him, but it was too late. The wheelbarrow tipped and the bricks started to fall.

"Sora!"

Sora braced for impact, but no impact came.

He looked up to see the bricks cradled in a basket made of...water?

"Still as careless as ever I see."

Ginko and Sora looked in the sky, and saw their savior floating there with a snide look on her face.

"What are you doing here Murasako?!"

END OF CHAPTER 6