

## CHAPTER 11

After confirming that Sora was alright, Aoko and Ginko carried him to his bed where he could recover from whatever that was he had tapped into.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Asked Ginko, sitting on the edge of the bed.

"Yeah, as much as that hurt, I'm not so weak as to break that easily. Ngh..." Aoko grabbed her head.

"I guess a bit of a headache is better than what he got."

"Yeah, what even was that?"

"I don't know. It felt so...menacing. It's like he tapped into something buried deep inside him that wasn't ready to be unearthed."

"Wait a minute." Ginko pondered for a moment.

"I wonder if this has anything to do with the reading my scan gave me."

Aoko looked puzzled, "What DID your scan say to make you pick him to train?"

"Um, it said he would become roughly as powerful as..."

"Yes?"

Ginko braced herself for Aoko's reaction.

"...The legendary dragon Nogard."

Aoko at first didn't know how to take this information. Her common sense told her to take it as a mistake, or a tall tale Ginko had made up. But a few things prevented this from sticking, 1. Ginko was no liar. and 2. The battle from before proved something was going on with Sora. So Aoko hunched over and held her head.

"This is too much to process with my head like this. You got any headache medicine?"

"Probably, I'll go check."

Ginko flew off to check the medicine cabinet in the living room.

Aoko, her head throbbing, looked over at Sora.

"Just what are you exactly?"

At that moment, Sora began to move a bit. Which made Aoko instinctively flinch.

"Hey Ginko, he seems to be coming to."

Ginko slammed the doors to the medicine cabinet shut and rushed back to the bedroom.

"Is he okay?!"

"Calm down, he's fine for now. See?"

Sora slowly opened his eyes.

"Huh? What happened?"

He sat up and Ginko burst into tears as she flew over to him.

"I thought I told you to know your limits!"

Sora scratched his head.

"Um, I still don't know what's going on. The last thing I remember is starting to fight Aoko outside, and then suddenly I'm here."

Aoko took flight and answered him.

"What happened was, during our battle, you seemed to tap into some unknown power. You started glowing red and then you completely shattered my armor with an almost lethal punch. After that, you passed out."

Sora's eyes grew wide.

"I did all that? Are you okay, Aoko?"

He took a look at her, still wrapped in the towel Ginko had brought her, and turned his head away, blushing.

Her modesty kicked in, so she turned away from him as well and somewhat awkwardly replied.

"I'm fine, a little headache, but nothing major. Ginko, do you have any clothes I could borrow?"

"Y-yeah, of course! Let me go get some for you."

She and Aoko flew off to the living room to allow Aoko to change.

They regrouped in the kitchen and Ginko brought refreshments.

As she set the platter she was holding down and carried Sora's drink over to him, she expressed her concern for him.

"Are you sure you should be out of bed so soon?"

"I don't really feel bad at all, on the contrary, I kinda feel better than before."

"Well, if you're sure..."

Ginko passed Aoko hers and then sat down herself so they could discuss something very important.

"So..." Aoko began. "What was that power, and should we pursue it, or avoid it?" Sora took a sip of his tea.

"I personally think I should train to tap into it, that power might be the only chance we have to save the Princess."

Ginko slammed her hands down onto the table.

"After all that happened, you can't be serious! It's way too dangerous for both you and the people around you!"

Aoko crossed her legs and cleared her throat.

"Both of you raise very good arguments. On the one side, we have a dangerous, unknown superpower, and on the other side we have a strong asset with the ability to achieve our goals. It feels like there's no right answer, but it also feels like there's no wrong answer, if Sora's current condition is any indication of the effects of using that power."

Sora flexed his muscles.

"Yeah, I'm fit as a fiddle."

Ginko grumbled due to her worry.

Aoko continued, "So what I think we should do is continue training as we have, and wait to try using that power again until Sora's had time to grow in magic control."

"Awww..." Sora said, disappointed.

"You tell him Aoko!"

"You also need to keep practicing your reflect magic. If he gets out of hand again, you might be the only one who can stop him."

"I-is reflect magic that resilient?"

"I knew the old squad 1 captain before he retired and he never let an attack through once. He even reached the level where his screens could hold up heavy falling objects."

"So what should we do for the rest of the day?" Sora asked.

"Well, how's your magic pool doing?"

"It actually feels pretty full. If I didn't know better I'd think that weird magic refilled my reserves. N-not that I really know anything about that magic in the first place."

"Hmm, well you could spar with Ginko."

The two said in unison, "Huh?!"

"Think about it, You need to train your offense magic, she needs to train her defense magic. You really couldn't have made better sparring partners if you'd had the same magic type. It'll be kind of like a boxing coach wearing those mitts to help his student punch better."

"What are you going to do, Aoko?"

"I think I'll head back to castle Nogard to rest. Oh, and I'll fill sis in on what happened, she might be able to find something out from the castle library."

"I hope your head feels better soon, Aoko."

"Thanks for your concern, Sora. But I should be fine after I rest for a bit. I've taken worse hits than that. I think."

Sora didn't feel much confidence after hearing that last part.

After that, they said goodbye to Aoko, who promised she'd return the dress Ginko loaned her next time she helped out with training. And then they began their first sparring session.

Sora and Ginko stood on opposite sides of the training area, now just a bit further away from the house.

"You ready for me, Sensei?"

"Um, I think so. I'm still not too sure about this, but I'll try my best!"

"Alrighty then, here I come!"

Sora's gauntlets and greaves appeared, and he began to charge at Ginko.

"Eep!"

Ginko frantically called up her barrier, and held it out to block Sora's attack. However, Sora's fist flew straight through it and nearly collided with her face. Ginko, naturally terrified, fell to the ground in shock.

"Are you okay?!" Sora asked, dropping his armor.

He picked up Ginko, who was half-unconscious with tears streaming down her face. Slowly, she calmed down.

"I don't think I'm ready for this..." She said, still crying.

"No, I probably just went too hard on you. I guess I was still in the mindset of fighting Aoko. I've got an idea."

They reset their positions.

"Okay, ready your barrier."

"O-okay."

Ginko manifested her shield once more.

"Here I come."

He charged at her without activating his own magic.

"Huh?"

She was surprised at his actions, but managed to keep the barrier in place.

Sora threw a Punch, aimed directly at Ginko's barrier.

It collided and bounced off perfectly.

"Alright, good going Sensei!"

"I blocked your punch!"

"Let's keep going!"

The two of them, once worried about overdoing it, were having so much fun that they kept training into the night.

Over the next two weeks, the training continued without any real problems. Sora kept his strange new power under lock and key for now, and Murasako and Aoko occasionally came by to help out. Sora kept improving his fighting skills and magic control, and Ginko became more and more experienced with her barriers, though her progress was slower than his. However, at the end of the first day of their third week of training, the 2nd of May, something began to change between them.

Aoko was just finishing up a sparring session with Sora, His gauntlets and greaves looked much more solid, almost as if they weren't just magic particles anymore. And Aoko was in her 'Valkyrie of the Sun' getup, as Sora could keep up with her since the last time she'd come for training a few days ago.

Sora rushed over to her and threw a punch. She dodged it as usual and struck down on his head, which was now also covered by a helmet created by his reinforcement magic. The blow did nothing to damage his armor, but the clang did disorient him a bit.

She saw her chance to deal a heavy blow to his exposed stomach region, so she took it. Sora rolled out of the way and kicked the wall to flip into the air, landing facing Aoko.

"You've improved even more since last time."

"Heh, what kind of student would I be if I didn't keep improving?"

"Alright, time to get serious."

Aoko pulled out her sword, immediately covering it in her fire magic.

"Hey!" Sora said, angrily.

"You said the first time we sparred that you'd go all out, but you were hiding this?"

"This, is reserved for those whose skill I've acknowledged. You were still inexperienced at that time. It was nothing personal."

"Fine then, but you'd better not be holding out on me this time!"

"Believe me, I'd like to have another trick up my sleeve."

Aoko sped towards him, her blazing sword sparkling radiantly as it arced through

the air. Sora put up his defenses, and her blade collided with him.

Aoko's sword flew out of her hand and clattered on the ground, but Sora's armor had a big chunk gouged in it. He saw an opportunity to deliver a finishing blow to Aoko, so he took it. Unfortunately for him, he'd forgotten that she was good at fighting even without her sword, and so she shot a fireball towards the ground to propel herself upwards, following it with another larger fireball aimed at his exposed back, ending in her win.

The group of four sat outside drinking lemonade that Ginko had just prepared. Aoko was very impressed with Sora's skills.

"You have improved greatly, I fathom you'd have an easy time passing the royal knights exam after this ordeal is over."

"You really think so? Gosh, I always thought stuff like that was out of my reach."

"Eh, don't think too much about it, if they accepted her, they must not have very high standards." Said an irritated Murasako.

Ginko motioned to Murasako.

"So have you found anything to solve our mystery?"

Murasako slammed her cup down next to her.

"No. Nothing. It really bothers me when there's something like this I can't figure out with simple research!"

Ginko could see she was trying really hard to do this for them, and it made her happy.

"Well, if you'll excuse me for a moment, I must visit the little boys room."

Sora stepped inside for a moment.

"You know..." Aoko said, taking a sip of her lemonade.

"You two look good together."

"What?" Ginko said, blushing.

"You know, I thought they were already dating when I first came to straighten out Ginko's crappy training regimen. I thought she chose him to train because he's hot."

"Wh-wh-wh-wha???" Ginko was getting dizzy from the sudden girl talk.

"So, any progress on that side of things?" Murasako said, her gossipy side shining through.

"O-of course not! We're training so we can save the Princess from the clutches of those evil trolls, we don't have time for romance!"

She pushed her index fingers together.

"I mean, I bet he wouldn't even be interested in someone like me..."

Aoko and Murasako looked at each other and then back at Ginko.

"Are you crazy?" Murasako said. "There's no way a normal dude like him wouldn't be interested in a cute goody-two-shoes like you."

"Quite true." Aoko agreed. "Besides, who was it that pulled him out of his mundane life and helped him become strong?"

"Well, you're the one who helped him learn to fight, Aoko. And we both would've been lost without your help, Murasako..."

Aoko leaned closer to her.

"Yes, but YOU started this whole thing. YOU've been by his side, helping him through his struggles."

"The least you can do is try. If he rejects you, so what. I've been rejected lots of times."

"\*mostly to the same guy\*" Aoko said under her breath.

"What was that?"

"Nothing, you must've been hearing things."

"Oh, I know what things I heard. You don't even know what it's like to like someone for a long time without any progress."

Aoko's words seemed to harshen from this.

"Didn't that pixie end up marrying Akako from Susagep?"

"That's it, stop bringing up that little thief!"

"Perhaps if you'd clean up that attitude of yours, men would actually want to go

out with you."

While the sisters were arguing about their love lives, Ginko was processing what they had said to her. She had become really good friends with Sora, but if she went for it and asked him out, would that hurt the relationship they had now? Would he want to be trained by Aoko instead from now on? She had so much to consider that she decided to put the matter on hold for the time being.

"U-um, guys..."

The sisters stopped fighting.

"...I don't think I can do it. At least not right now. I don't want to hurt what we've got right now. And besides, we've made so much progress that we might be able to head out soon."

She gave a somewhat sad smile.

"So it's fine, really."

The two looked a bit embarrassed for fighting.

"Yeah, well, if that's what you think is best..."

"Indeed. Your reasoning is quite sound. I'm a bit proud of you for being so mature about this."

At this time, Sora returned from his bathroom break.

"So, I miss anything interesting?"

The mood was quite awkward. Sora grew increasingly uneasy and inquired.

"Uh, did I do something?"

Murasako finished her lemonade and grabbed Aoko's arm.

"Nah, everything's fine. Come on sis, let's go."

"Alright. Take care you two."

"Bye guys, feel free to come back anytime!"

The sisters headed back to the castle.

The air still felt tense.

After they sat in silence for a few minutes, Sora spoke up, he had something very important to say.

"Um, I heard you guys talking before."

"!" Ginko grew a look of panic.

"Ever since we met, lots of people have been thinking we're a couple. It's been pretty awkward to say the least."

Ginko's heart was beating out of her chest.

"So... Ah, how do I say this..."

He scratched his head and blushed.

"Tomorrow's a day off, so... wanna go somewhere?"

Ginko fainted.

The following day, their first date began.

END OF CHAPTER 11