

## CHAPTER 13

Rolling the clock back a few hours, we rejoin our heroes, who have just reached the front gate at the water street aquarium.

Sora and Ginko stood mesmerized at the sight of the imposingly large building. It seemed to have been built out of an old ship of some sort.

Sora got out his wallet to pay for the tickets, but Ginko pushed past him. "Let me pay this time."

Sora wanted to protest, but Ginko's smile showed just how much fun she was starting to have, so he let it go. Sora then learned just how much money a royal translator made, which made him feel a tad inferior.

There was still time before the circus show, so they had a while to look around.

They got inside and saw there were many different ways they could go. They decided to check out the amphibian exhibit first.

There were tanks of all shapes and sizes in the somewhat dimly lit room. They walked past a family with a bunch of kids who seemed to have their volume control off, screaming wildly at the wide variety of salamanders and frogs. Sora was a little annoyed by the noise, and tried to be considerate to his date.

"We can head to another area for now if the noise is too much for you."

But Ginko replied with a smile, "Why? Isn't it great that those kids are having so much fun? Ooh! What's that?"

They scurried over to a cylindrical tank suspended from the ceiling by ropes, the sign on the front said 'Poison Dart Frogs'.

"Woow, I wonder how dangerous they are?"

"Hmm, let's see." Sora looked at the description on the sign.

'A carnivorous creature, these frogs use their poison to slowly eliminate prey many times larger than themselves to procure food for their family. The toxins also have a preservative nature that helps the prey keep longer'.

"Hmm, it doesn't say how they poison their target."

"Maybe it's their skin?"

"That makes the most sense, I mean, how else-"

One of the frogs hopped over in front of them. It was one of the larger ones, so it caught their attention. Without further ado, it opened its mouth wide, and Ginko could see what looked like a little tube under its tongue. With a low croak, something shot from the tube straight at them, and bounced off the glass, falling into the pool of water in the tank.

The event startled our heroes, making them both fall backward onto the ground.

They sat up, looked at each other, and shared a laugh.

Sora stood.

"So that's why they're called 'Poison Dart Frogs'. Pretty accurate name, I'd say."

Ginko stared at the dart floating in the water.

"Yeah, seems like they'd be a pretty dangerous foe in the wild."

"So where should we go next?"

They next headed over to the reptile exhibit, which was on the second floor.

It seemed a lot more crowded as they went up, which was probably because the show would be starting pretty soon, and it was on the rooftop stage.

"Wow, there's a lot more in this room." Sora said as they entered.

Just then, something caught his eye which drew him over in a way that confused Ginko.

He knelt down in front of a long rectangular tank with just a little water in it. Ginko flew over to see what had caught his attention.

A dumpy turtle with a stupid look on its face stared back at them.

"A...turtle?"

Ginko turned to look at Sora, who had a joyful look of overflowing love on his face.

"Y-you like turtles I take it?"

"Aren't they the best? Look how cute he is."

He was falling into baby talk, as people quite often do when talking to or about

cute animals.

"I guess I can see the appeal."

Ginko may not have had as much of a love for turtles as Sora, but the look of sheer joy on his face made her glad that she got to see such a different side of him.

She looked around the room a bit while Sora finished up baby talking the turtles. She noticed a tank in the wall with nothing in it.

"That's funny, are they cleaning it or something?"

As she said this, a white snake dropped from the roof of the tank.

It stared right at her as it got up.

"...!!!"

Ginko started shaking and began to faint. But as she fell, she hit something soft.

Sora had caught her just before she hit the ground.

"Are you okay?"

"U-uhh, y-y-yeah! I'm f-f-f-fine."

"Let's go down to the fish exhibit. I think we've seen enough here."

"O-okay..."

They were a little quiet as they went back down. Sora glanced over at Ginko, who looked quite embarrassed for the incident.

"So, you're not good with snakes?"

Ginko rubbed her arm, "I...one of my friends when I was a kid was attacked by a snake, I tried to help her, but I was so scared I couldn't move. Her dad finally came to help, and she was alright, but ever since then I've just had this horrible fear of snakes."

She looked down.

"I'm sorry I can be so useless sometimes..."

Sora grabbed her and set her on his shoulder.

"Eep?!"

"Don't worry, now you've got me, I can take care of any snakes that come your way."

Ginko became mesmerized by the heroic look in his eyes.

The fish room, though it sounds like the most boring of the exhibits, was actually the greatest fun they had looking around.

The sheer immensity of the variety of species was astounding.

They had everything from Goldfish to Angelfish and even some rarer species.

Sora spotted a tank in a corner that was pitch black.

"Hey, Sensei. Come over here."

"What'd you find?"

The tank was completely dark, but if you payed attention, you could see little flashing lights here and there.

"Oooh, what are those?"

Sora looked at the sign.

"Apparently they're 'Flashlight Fish'. They need darkness to survive. It looks like they're using some kind of shadow magic to keep it dark."

"Coooooool."

They also saw other strange and wonderful species, like a species of Seahorse that looks like living seaweed, and a species from the merpeople nation of Sitnalta called an 'Anchorfish', which attaches itself to the bottom of moving objects to get around.

They were having so much fun, they nearly forgot about the show which was starting in 15 minutes.

"Uh oh!"

"What is it, Sora?"

"We're out of time, it starts in 15 minutes."

"We better get to the roof."

The fish room was much larger than the other exhibit rooms, so they were kinda lost.

Sora spotted a sign saying 'Magic Elevators' which lead through the shark exhibit.

"You good with sharks?"

"I think so, I don't think I've ever seen a real one before."

So they went over to it and waited their turn to enter.

It was strange though, the people looked like they were going into the water.

"Oh, that?" The exhibit attendant explained, "Well, when you traverse the exhibit, you enter a bubble made of a mix of water magic and wind magic, letting you walk alongside the sharks. I do assure you, it is 101% safe! We have never had a single failure."

Ginko was getting excited.

And finally, it was their turn.

"Now remember to follow the course."

He opened the gate and let them through.

As the bubble formed around them, they got a good look at the aquatic wonder they were about to behold. Walking through the water, surrounded by the magical bubble, they were in a wonderland of sea life. To keep the exhibit from becoming stale, they had added some other creatures outside of the sharks' diet.

Every so often, a shark or two would pass over them.

"Whooooaaa!" They'd say in unison.

Sora and Ginko walked through the impossible beauty of the twinkling water without a thought to the time. Before they knew it, they had 5 minutes left.

Ginko looked at the time through the exit wall they were nearing.

"Sora, we gotta run!"

He noticed the time as well and they hurried through the rest of the exhibit.

While they were on the elevator, they talked nonstop about how great the shark exhibit was, nearly missing their stop, but they got out right before the elevator went back down.

The area around the stage was tremendously crowded, thankfully though, the cost of the show was included in their entry ticket, so Sora and Ginko weren't about to miss out.

After a little struggle, Ginko flew above and found two free seats next to each other. And they were literally just in time, the announcer began his introduction right as Sora was sitting down.

"Welcome, everyone! I am your host, Lombardo Ravioli, here to present to you the greatest performance you'll see in this lifetime! ...At least until next year's show."

The announcer's personality had the crowd in stitches, he kept cracking jokes as he introduced the acts.

"Next up, we have our underwater acrobats! Feels contradictory, but who cares!"

The performers were amazing, they even had sea lions they had taught to use water magic making paths for a sea dancer to swim through.

The entire thing was awe inspiring. But, just as they thought it couldn't get any better, the host made a big announcement.

"Everyone, it brings me great pleasure and sorrow to announce, the finale to our wonderful show!"

The giant tank the performers had been performing out of rose out of the ground, letting everyone see all of the performers who had performed today giving a bow.

"Now, without further ado, our big song and dance number! Feel free to sing along if you can!"

The sight of everyone sailing through the water in such precise ways while others weaved past them without a wasted movement was breathtaking to say the least, all the while the famous mermaid band 'The Shells Belles' sang their latest hit.

Ginko was watching everything with wonder in her eyes, she turned to Sora to see if he was enjoying it himself. She then noticed he seemed to be staring pretty intently at the band.

She gave him a punch, not that it hurt him, and then sat in silence pouting.

Sora looked back at Ginko and realized what he'd done. So he leaned in close to

Ginko to apologize.

"Sorry Sensei, it was an accident."

But Ginko wouldn't budge.

Sora could only think of one more thing to try. So he closed his eyes tight.

"Alright Sensei, to prove I'm sorry I won't watch any more."

Ginko looked over at him, and, seeing that he seriously wasn't watching anymore, she timidly replied.

"Y-you can finish watching the show...J-just remember who your date is!"

"Right, I'm sorry."

The show ended with a bang, literally, as they fired off the legendary 'Mermaid Cannonball' through a string of water hoops created by the sea lions.

The show let out at around 4:30 to an impossibly dense crowd. Ginko and Sora were stuck somewhere in the middle of it all.

"I really hope we can get out of here soon."

"Yeah," Ginko replied. "I'm \*yawn\* getting tired."

They were very slowly able to inch their way forward, but it was slow going. About halfway to the elevator, they were moving ahead, but accidentally bumped into the guy in front of them, which was honestly hard to avoid.

"Oh! I'm sorry."

The man they bumped into turned around and greeted them cheerfully.

"Don't worry about it! Man, this crowd is packed!"

Ginko, half asleep, perked up her eyes when she noticed who it was they had bumped into.

"Mr. Riviera?"

Gall Riviera smiled.

"Oh, hey! That little fairy girl from the infirmary at the castle! You still a doctor at the castle?"

"U-um, no, I never was one, I'm a royal translator."

"Ohhhh, then why were you in the infirmary?"

"Because we were short on staff at the time..."

"Okay, that makes sense! Sorry for pulling that prank on you by the way, it was just too funny to pass up!"

Sora could see that Ginko was a bit uncomfortable, so he tried to join in to make the conversation easier.

"S-so, Mr. Riviera?"

"Yeah?"

"What were you doing at the aquarium show?"

Gall crossed his arms and gave a hearty laugh.

"Bwahahah, I was here to see my good buddy Jericho! He was one of the acrobats in the show."

"Mr. Tourmaline is a performer? I never would have guessed." Ginko responded. She then realized that must've been why he was in town in the first place.

After the initial stress, Gall was a mostly likable guy. He followed them to the door, where they met up with Jericho Tourmaline as well. They seemed to be on slightly better terms than when they met.

"Say, are you and your friend free?"

"Yeah, why, Mr. Tourmaline?"

"I got a big bonus since the show did so well, and I'd like to treat you to dinner to make up for Gall's prank at the infirmary."

"I already apologized..." Gall said.

"Th-that's okay! You don't have to buy me dinner."

Just then both Ginko and Sora's stomachs began growling.

"..."

"..."

"..."

"..."

"..."

They went to a nice restaurant run by goblins which was only a few blocks away from the aquarium. The name was lit up in big letters on the front of the building, 'The Grand Melody'.

They entered and noticed how packed the place was. Ginko was worried they wouldn't be able to get a table, but Jericho spoke to the woman at the entrance, he apparently had a reservation for two and wanted to see if he could change it to four. After checking with her manager, she confirmed that he could, and they were seated immediately.

They sat on opposite sides of their large table, Sora next to Ginko and Gall next to Jericho.

A waiter soon came over to them to take their orders.

After placing their orders, Gall asked THAT question.

"So, are you two on a date or something?"

Sora and Ginko blushed.

"Gahaha! Guess I got it right!"

Jericho jabbed his side with his elbow.

"Ow! What did you do that for?"

"Have some delicacy."

Jericho tried to be considerate to the new couple and attempted to change the subject.

"So, did you two like the performance?"

Sora shook off his embarrassment.

"Y-yeah, it was amazing!"

Jericho smiled.

"Heh, I'm glad. We spent a long time working on it to make it perfect, I'm happy to know our efforts were successful."

"I wish my family could've gone to see it, but my boy had a dentist appointment, and he obviously couldn't go by himself."

Ginko snapped out of her daze.

"Mr. Riviera, you're married?"

"Hahah! Sure am! It'll be 15 years this september. She just couldn't resist my charms, hahahah!"

Gall then turned to Sora.

"Say kid, what's your story? What do you do?"

"U-um, well, I'm currently training to try and save the Princess."

"Alright! Glad to hear people haven't given up on the poor girl yet. We didn't stand a chance, but maybe you will! What'd you do before that? Lemme guess, followin' in your old man's footsteps, right?"

"No, um..."

Sora looked distant.

"Are you okay Sora?" Ginko asked him, worried.

"Yeah, it's just, I never knew my parents. I grew up at an orphanage, and they say I just showed up there one day with a note saying to take good care of me."

The table was quiet.

"Oh! U-um, I didn't mean to kill the mood." Sora said, scratching the back of his head.

"Nah, I'm the one who should be sorry, I shouldn't have brought up such a sensitive subject."

"N-no, you couldn't have known about that, don't worry about it."

Thankfully, the food came right then, so the mood improved greatly.

Dinner stretched on for a while, due to Gall's endless pointless stories, but once they got used to him, he was fun to be around, and then they parted ways and headed home.

They both sighed in unison as they walked towards the entrance to the catacombs.

Ginko looked somewhat depressed.

"Is something the matter, sensei?"

"Well, it's just that I never knew you were an orphan. I'm your g-g-girlfriend now, and I didn't even know that about you..."

"That's not your fault, I just never thought it was something to bring up. I may be pretty social, but I guess I'm not good at being the one in the spotlight."

Sora smiled at Ginko, flying beside him. She couldn't help returning it.

"Today was fun." Ginko said.

Sora thought back to the long, eventful day they had. "Yeah, it didn't start out very good, but I think we made the most of our first date."

Ginko then remembered that it was, in fact, her first date, and blushed.

"N-now, we can't forget that we have training to do! So first thing tomorrow, back to work!"

"You got it Sensei!"

And so ended their first date.

END OF CHAPTER 13