

## CHAPTER 15

After over an hour had passed, Sora headed for home, still upset at the turn of events. He was taking sidestreets as he didn't want to get more depressed by passing by the castle. He was about to exit a path that led through the park by fire street river into fire street and lamented about his current situation.

"\*Sigh\*, if I'd been able to catch up with her, I'd have had a chance to explain my statement. Now she thinks I hate her..."

Unfortunately, his luck wasn't getting much better, as a familiar face was fast approaching...

"Well, well, if it isn't my favorite punching bag."

Sora raised his head to see the sneering face of Spike Tenma standing in front of him.

"\*Sigh\*, what do you want, Spike?"

"Well, if you must know, I'm on my way to a big business meeting at the castle, and I'm in a good mood so I thought I'd toss you a horn or two."

"Keep your chump change for the needy, I'm fine."

Spike knew his offer would be rejected, which was why he'd offered in the first place, he loved jabbing at Sora.

"You know," Spike began.

"What?"

"I still haven't paid you back for THAT."

Sora tried to remember what he might've been talking about. Nothing came to mind.

"No clue."

The veins in Spike's minotaur face were starting to bulge, as his stress levels were rising.

"Oh come now, you can't have forgotten that great injustice you caused me 2 years ago?"

It then clicked with Sora what exactly he meant.

"Oh! You're still upset about that?"

"And what would make me forget about that humiliating event?"

"You helped welcome a new life into the world."

"At the cost of the 10,000 keel that meeting would have brought my family."

"Well that lady didn't choose to go into labor right then and there."

"There are hospitals all over Nogard, she could have chosen any of them, the world would be a better place if more people were intelligent."

"(You're one to talk...)" Sora said under his breath.

"What was that?!"

"I don't have time for this. See ya."

Sora tried to walk past him, but Spike blocked him with his cane.

"Hmm, you look as though something has gone wrong in your perfect life. Did something happen with your little girlfriend?"

"She's not-"

Sora caught himself.

"Wasn't, my girlfriend..."

"Oh, dear me, I see something happened since we last met!"

His face curled into a sinister grin.

"Heheheheh, tell me, what happened?"

"I don't have to tell you anything." Sora said, releasing himself from Spike's grasp.

"What, did she fall for a man more her size?"

"Don't you talk about my Sensei."

"Or what? You gonna beat me up? I'll take you to court for that, and you know I'll win. Heheheh...But don't feel too bad about her, she probably didn't think much of you to begin with."

Sora snapped. He grabbed Spike by the scruff of his neck and pinned him against the fencing.

"I dare you to say one more word about her!"

Sora's eyes were getting scary.

"Hah! I already told you what would happen if-"

A spark of red energy flared around Sora's shoulders for a second.

"Um, okay, okay! I surrender!"

Sora began to calm down and let go of Spike, who fell to the ground.

He scowled at Spike.

"Get out of here."

Spike got up and scrambled away as fast as he could.

As Sora walked away from him, returning to his original route, he felt slightly dizzy.

"W-wha?"

It lasted only a few seconds though, so he paid it no mind.

Spike Tenma reached the royal district around the castle and leaned on the side of a building to catch his breath.

"What in the world? How does he...?"

He took out a handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his brow.

He then pulled an envelope out of his coat.

"W-well, that's all the more reason I need to get this to the king at once!"

He regained his composure and headed for the castle.

Sora entered his house and immediately went to his room and slumped down onto his bed. He wasn't feeling very hungry, so he skipped dinner and quickly fell asleep. Due to this, he woke up 2 hours earlier than usual.

"Great, now what do I do?"

He decided to get some early morning training in, but after about an hour he started to get seriously depressed.

"I can't do this without her..."

He sat by the side of his house and thought for a while.

"What am I doing... I should be able to do this, but I can't get her out of my head. \*sigh\*."

He wasn't in the right mindset for training, and he couldn't get back to sleep, so he ended up going to the nearby church a few blocks down wood street.

It was still early, so the church wasn't open yet. So Sora sat down to the side of the front door and stared up into the misty sky.

"Murasako didn't even come back, I wonder what happened?"

As he sat there, a man in white robes approached him.

"Why, hello my son, what brings you here so early?"

It was the pastor of Wood Street Church, Father Luke.

With a kind smile, he welcomed Sora into the church. Sora proceeded to take a seat in the second row from the front.

Father Luke grabbed a stool from beside the altar and sat on it in front of Sora.

"So," He began. "Tell me what's on your mind."

He was a longtime friend of Sora's, so it was easy for him to tell when something was particularly wrong.

Sora proceeded to relate the tale of his apprenticeship with Ginko from the moment she crashed into his bag of produce to when she flew off crying at the amusement park.

Father Luke Smiled.

"Son, it sounds like you really care deeply for Ginko."

"I do. It's just, if Murasako hasn't come back yet, that must mean she couldn't convey the truth to her, and I don't know how else to get through to her with her at the castle."

"Do you want my honest opinion?"

"Yes, please!"

He gazed behind him at the great crucifix hanging on the wall above the altar.

"I think you should do what is within your own power to get the message to her. If the Lord wants you to be together, he'll sort out the stuff you can't do."

Sora wiped a tear from his eye.

"\*sniff\* Thanks, Father."

"Always glad to help a troubled young one."

Father Luke heated up some coffee for Sora, and then saw him to the door.

"Feeling better?"

"Loads. I'm gonna get her back!"

"I pray for your success. By the way, will you be assisting us at the bake sale on Friday?"

"If I can make it. Depending on the timing, I might even bring Murasako and Aoko along to help. Of course, I'll bring Ginko too."

He grinned a grin of confidence.

"Ha ha ha, the more the merrier!"

Sora waved goodbye and ran off for his next destination, the castle.

It wasn't that far of a walk, as most of the main streets in Nogard converged at the castle. Sora had obviously been around the royal district before, but today was the first time he was going to go into the castle itself. At least, he hoped to.

He weaved his way past the light crowd and made it to the gate.

Two guards crossed their spears to block the way.

"Do you have business in the castle?" Said the taller of the two in a deep voice.

Sora gulped and bravely held his ground.

"In fact, I do. I have business with Ginko Chiyosei, the royal translator."

The guards gave him a look that said without words, 'really?'

"Do you have any identification to prove this?"

As Sora lived in the catacombs, where nobody was technically allowed to live, mainly because there were no houses other than his there, he had no ID to speak of. He'd never needed to have one since pretty much everyone in town knew him. That is, everyone outside of the castle.

Sora calmly said, "N-no, I don't."

"Then get out of here!"

The shorter guard bumped Sora with his spear, knocking him onto the ground.

Brushing the dirt off himself, Sora pleaded.

"Look, can you at least give her a message for me? If you'll do that much, I'll go without any trouble."

The shorter guard grinned disdainfully.

"You think a punk like you is in any position to make requests of us?"

He prepared to swing his spear at Sora, but the taller guard stopped him.

"We don't need to get violent. Delivering a message is nothing. I think the boy is being reasonable, so why can't we?"

"Grr, fine. What's your message, kid?"

Sora took a deep breath, and spilled his heart out into a simple message.

"Sensei, I don't know what you thought I meant when you heard what you did yesterday, but I haven't given up on the training or you. So please come back!"

The taller guard scribbled it down on a small piece of paper.

With that, Sora bowed and took his leave.

The taller guard scratched his chin as Sora walked away.

"I wonder what his story is?"

He was about to head off to deliver the message when the shorter guard blocked his way.

"Let me do it."

"As long as the message reaches its target."

He looked hurt.

"Come now, do you think so little of me?"

"...Alright. I'll keep watch here."

The shorter guard scurried off, a look of contempt for Sora in his eyes.

"Filthy commoner thinks he can say whatever he wants..."

Aoko and Murasako stood outside Ginko's door in their nightwear, having just got up a few minutes ago. All they could hear inside was a continuous stream of sobbing.

"Alright, what did you do?"

"What? Why is it always MY fault? Maybe she screwed it up. She's ALWAYS complaining about that kinda stuff."

"Yeah, but she's never cried for 12 hours straight before."

"...Yeah."

Aoko knocked lightly on the door.

"Ginko, are you okay?"

"\*sniff\* Go \*sniff\* away \*sniff\* Aoko..."

Aoko turned back to her sister.

"Murasako...!"

Murasako was starting to sweat. Even though she was her sister, she was still afraid of Aoko when she got truly upset.

She related the previous day's events to her sister.

Aoko's face became something worse than before. Disappointed.

"\*sigh\* Why must you cause trouble for others..."

She knocked on the door again.

"Ginko! Don't pay any mind to what happened yesterday. You should hear him out."

Murasako sulked on the floor behind her.

"\*sniff\* No, Murasako was right! \*sniff\* He doesn't want to be with \*sniff\* a useless fairy who can't do anything right! I'm still not even that good with my reflect magic even though we've both been training so much!"

Aoko then realized what Ginko needed the most right now.

"Come on, let's go."

She turned to leave.

"H-huh?"

"What Ginko needs now is time alone. Time to collect her thoughts and sort out her feelings. If she herself is serious about Sora, then she'll be fine."

"I guess that makes sense."

They dressed for the day and headed for the door.

The two exited the common room and encountered a particular short guard.

"Oh, captain. Good morning."

"At ease, anything to report?"

The guard grinned.

"Nothing at all, all's quiet at the moment."

"Very well, as you were."

The two parties parted, with an undelivered message threatening to stay that way.

Sora wandered aimlessly around the capital. He didn't feel like going home and training without Ginko there to coach him, so he decided to head to the river he passed on the way home the previous night.

There weren't a lot of people there, but there were a few families setting up picnics here and there.

Sora took a seat on the ground near a bridge and thought.

"What can I do now? I think I've done all I have the power to do at the castle aside from breaking in, and I don't really want to get on the King's bad side when I'm supposed to be training to rescue his daughter."

He sighed deeply.

"I guess the only thing to do is wait and see what happens. At the very least, Aoko should drop by sometime to bring me up to speed, she doesn't seem like the type to leave me in the dark. She's a good friend."

He stood up triumphantly.

"Okay! Maybe training out here'll help me calm down."

Sora gathered up some logs and large rocks scattered around the park, found a clearing where he wouldn't be in anyone's way, and did some makeshift training until lunch.

After lunch, which Sora bought from a street vendor just outside the park, something in the sky caught Sora's eye. Sora looked up and noticed it was Aoko.

"Hey, Aoko!" He called.

She flew down to greet him.

"Hey there, what's up? Ah! You're probably wondering how Ginko's doing."

Sora responded with desperation, "Yes, please!"

"Well, she's having a bit of a crybaby spell, so she's difficult to deal with right now. Murasako told me what happened, I'm assuming what you were saying wasn't anything like she thought, right?"

"That's right! I was defending her, not dismissing her!"

Aoko sighed.

"I figured as much. I just wish we could get that through to her. We've tried, and she won't listen."

Aoko shook her head.

"For now, we just need to let her be so she can sort out her emotions."

"Okay... But I feel worthless not doing more."

"Don't feel that way, you've done nothing wrong. Now I've got to go deliver this letter. I can swing by your place when I'm finished if you want to spar some more."

"Sure, it'd probably help me to cool my head."

The rest of the day played out uneventfully. Sora and Aoko trained all afternoon, Sora's stamina having increased quite a bit since his training began, although Aoko could see that he wasn't putting his all into it.

The sun began to set, and Aoko bid him farewell for now, promising to fill him in if there was any news on Ginko's situation.

Around midnight, a carriage pulls up outside an extravagant mansion. The driver quickly hopped out to open the door for her lone passenger, who just ended a long meeting with a business associate.

The man entered his home and immediately moved from the front hall to his study to check on his mail. He was pleased to find just the thing he wanted to see, a letter from the castle approving a proposition he had made just the previous day.

Without wasting another second, he ripped open the envelope to see what the King had to say.

The letter read as follows:

Dear Mr. Tenma, we have read your proposal to organize a committee to clean up the capital, and we are quite pleased with your great enthusiasm in making the capital a better place to live for all.

Unfortunately, King Radius Enclavius was unavailable to deal with this matter.

However, as his personal secretary, I see nothing wrong with such a proposition when considering the positive effect it should have on our town during this hard time. And seeing the great history of prosperity you and your family's company have brought to our country, I shall give my own stamp of approval on your project.

You may begin whenever you wish, and feel free to advertise as you'd like.

Good luck, and I look forward to seeing the good you'll accomplish.

-Royal

Secretary David Whitefox

Spike Tenma set the letter down and reclined in his favorite chair.

A twisted smile came across his dark face.

"Kekekekeke, we'll see who has the last laugh now, boy..."

From there, the days dragged on.

Aoko and Murasako still showed up to assist in Sora's training, but they had nothing positive to say regarding Ginko. Even if they brought him into the castle with their authority, with the state Ginko was in, he probably wouldn't be able to do much good.

He continued to get stronger, but his heart just wasn't in it since Ginko left.

Ginko herself stayed locked in her room. Only coming out to get something to eat once in a while. Fortunately, Aoko had been able to convince the King that Ginko just needed some rest, and that the mission was still proceeding as planned, so Ginko wasn't in danger of losing her job.

Friday helped a bit, as Sora, Murasako and Aoko helped out at the church's bake sale, which increased their profits by a good amount, but every now and then Sora

would think how fun it would be if Ginko had been helping them as well and would get depressed, so Father Luke would take him aside for a few minutes to calm down. But on Tuesday, the one week anniversary of Ginko's departure, Sora was starting to really lose it.

"Captain, I just can't take it anymore."

"You know you don't need the formality, we're all friends here."

"O-oh, you're right, sorry. But I can't continue this if Ginko isn't here..."

Aoko flew up to him and patted him on the head.

"Don't worry, Ginko will return to you. She just needs some more time."

"Yeah..."

"How about we end training for today. Let's all get some rest and start fresh in the morning."

"Sounds good to me. You know, you guys could use Ginko's room if you want. It probably needs dusted anyway."

Obviously, Sora couldn't get into the room to dust, so the sisters agreed for the sake of convenience.

The two sisters scoped out Ginko's room.

"Huh, come to think of it, I don't think I've been in here before now. Nice place." Murasako observed.

Her room wasn't super big, so dusting it didn't take long.

Ginko's bed was only big enough for one, so the sisters played rock paper scissors to see who had to sleep on the floor.

As Aoko got ready for bed, and Murasako got into her futon on the floor, Murasako made an observation.

"You know, maybe this'll help Ginko make a move."

"How so?"

"If she hears about us staying over at her boyfriend's place, maybe she'll come flying over to pick a fight."

She rested her chin on her hand and grinned.

Aoko shot her a dirty look.

"Do you ever shut up?"

"Aww, lighten up a bit. I've got a point."

She turned away from Murasako as she finished brushing her hair.

"Yeah... Maybe you do."

The next day, Sora was up waaaaay earlier than usual. He was already working out when Aoko got up at 5:30.

"You must be feeling better if you're up this early."

"\*huff\* Yep \*huff\* gotta \*huff\* stay in shape \*huff\*."

Aoko shrugged and brewed a pot of coffee.

A few hours later, Murasako got up and sluggishly fluttered over to the kitchen for breakfast. Though Sora and Aoko ate earlier.

She rubbed the sleep out of her eyes as she sat down and noticed nobody else was in the kitchen. But she heard voices outside. Not the voices she expected to hear, they sounded like they were arguing.

She flew over to the window to see what the ruckus was.

A large group of people was gathered outside. Against them stood Sora and Aoko.

Murasako quickly flew outside to help.

"What's going on?"

"These guys apparently want to tear my house down."

"What?!"

A certain slimy minotaur stepped forward.

"Ohoho, and we will, my dear friend. We will. Go ahead and get started boys!"

The group of construction workers started to charge ahead towards the house.

"You aren't tearing down anything!"

Aoko immediately donned her Valkyrie armor and Sora followed in suit.

"I'm sorry, miss captain of the royal knights, but I have a warrant signed by the

King to clear this junk out of here! All part of my 'Clean up the Capital' program. You don't want to disobey orders from the top, do you?"

Aoko was familiar with the King's personal secretary, so she knew immediately that it was his handwriting, but it didn't change the fact that it counted as the King's signature, so she could do nothing to stop it, or risk her position in the royal knights.

"Rrgh..."

She disarmed herself and flew aside.

"A-Aoko?!"

"I'm sorry Sora, I can't disobey an order from the King."

Sora painfully understood her position.

"That's good, you shouldn't have even been allowed to stay here this long, you know. The Royal Housing Code doesn't say anything about strange alleyways being proper living conditions!"

"I can't just let you take my house, this is where I live with Sensei!"

He powered up again and charged at the mob.

Just then, the ground shook wildly.

Everyone got thrown off their feet, except for the two fairies who were in the air at the time.

"W-what did you do?" Sora asked.

Spike looked around indignantly.

"Don't look at me, I didn't do that!"

Sora ran towards the entrance to the catacombs.

"You guys stay put until I get back!"

He could see dust clouds up ahead, and the ground shook more and more.

When he got to the entrance, he finally understood the shaking.

Hordes of trolls were rampaging through the kingdom, destroying everything in their path.

END OF CHAPTER 15