

The way out of the Spines proved to take much longer than what Takumi was expecting. Not that he was very upset by this, but it was really testing his arm strength as well as resolve. He had never been one to really challenge himself and now he was regretting never starting before making the climb.

As they climbed, Takumi started hearing something clanging somewhere in the distance. Even Meryn took a pause to listen to it. After a few moments, she turned back to him, gesturing with her head.

"We're close to the mines, come on! Sometimes they're willing to give out things they don't think they can use or have too much of," she said. He nodded and continued climbing.

"I thought you had mentioned a lot of people on the Spines didn't tend to be generous," he said as he worked his way up the spires.

"They're not usually but the miners will sometimes take pity on someone if they're climbing the falls for the first time. Or if you look like you need the help, and I'm sure we do after everything that's happened," she said back.

"That's definitely true," he muttered and kept climbing.

Within minutes, they reached the peak of where the mines started. One of the miners saw them coming up and ran over to give them a hand. These guys seemed to know Meryn which made sense to Takumi, since she seemed to have lived here for so long.

"Come to trade for more rope or....?" one of the miners started to ask but looked between the two of them. Takumi blushed while Meryn rolled her eyes.

"Not this time. I'm helping him through the Spines," she said. The tatsukoi nodded.

"I see, first time?" he asked Takumi who nodded in response. The miner grinned. "Always can tell when people are coming through fresh," he said. "Actually, there's a weirdly shaped spine if you wanna have a crack at it," he offered, gesturing towards a weirdly shaped one that was put aside from all the others.

Takumi looked back at Meryn who nodded towards it and he walked over, a little wary. The miner followed and handed him a pickaxe which Takumi found not to be as heavy as he was originally thinking it would be.

“Aim for the center...errr...wherever you think that is on this one,” the miner said, giving a strange look to the thing. Takumi nodded, hoping he looked braver than he felt. Lifting the pickaxe, he took a swing with it, nicking it on the first try. “Try again, you almost got it!” he said. Takumi nodded, braver this time and swung again. This time he struck it in a way that laid it open, showing a strange black stone within.

“What is...” Takumi started to ask but Meryn jumped up.

“It’s obsidian! I didn’t know that could be found here!” she said excitedly.

“I’m guessing you have a thing for obsidian? Why?” the miner asked. She quelled her excitement but only by a little.

“I’ve always thought it was a cool type of rock with how it forms and everything,” she said sheepishly. Takumi noted this for another time and looked at the miner.

“Are we allowed to keep it?” he asked, thanking his mouth for cooperating and not stuttering. The miner grinned and nodded.

“Absolutely! You broke it, you keep it! Plus, it’s your first time going through the falls so count this as your reward for getting all the way here,” he said. Takumi grinned and picked up a couple of pieces, passing some to Meryn who noticed he was picking and choosing. As the miner headed back over to work, she knelt down next to him.

“You’re looking at them pretty hard before passing on them. What are you planning?” she asked, an eyebrow raised. He grinned at her.

“I have some ideas but nothing solid yet. I promise, I’ll tell you when I get things finished,” he said. She decided not to push the issue considering that this was the first time he didn’t tell her everything she wanted to know right off the bat so she figured she would let this one slide. Once they had the obsidian secured in their packs, they started walking towards where the mines ended.

“Which way now, Ryn?” Takumi asked, excited for what else they may find. She rolled her eyes and shook her head though he could see she was smiling a little.

“Still on that lame nickname huh?” she asked. Takumi laughed.

“I think it’s cute,” he said. Maryn looked surprised and blushed before looking away. “Besides,” he said, almost too quiet for her to hear. “I’ve not had many friends b-before that would let me u-use a nickname,” he admitted. Maryn considered him for a moment before looking at Stitches who looked back at her and nodded, their silent communication on display again.

“Fine, you can use it and I won’t bug you about it, Umi,” she said. “The last climb out of the Spines is this way,” she said, taking the lead.

“Umi?” he asked, stopping. She turned back to him a little.

“Well yeah, it’s your nickname now. Deal with it,” she said with a smirk. Takumi grinned and fell into step beside her.