

As they tatsukoi entered the city of Aurelion, Takumi couldn't help but stop and stare and take in the sights. The city was much more massive than any other place he had ever been in, feeling that Sanctuary back home wasn't even as big as this. And up ahead, Aurelion's Grand Library stood, seemingly towering over all the other buildings.

"Impressive, isn't it?" Meryn asked as she started forward. Takumi could only nod as he numbly walking forward following her. She chuckled and mumbled, "yeah, that's how I looked the first time I came here too." Takumi shook himself out of his starry eyed gaze and looked over at her.

"What do you think we ought to get while we're here?" he asked. She had mentioned something on the path about going to the library to see if they could find any sort of maps of the fourth layer, something that Meryn hadn't thought to seek out her first time doing the climb.

"We're definitely going to need to stock up on food. Most things found on the trails through the labyrinth aren't edible even for the strongest of stomachs," she said. He nodded, that made sense and what little food they had packed between them had dwindled that morning down to a couple pieces of bread.

"Do you have any suggestions on where to go for that or..." he trailed off, gesturing at the grand city. "Or will anywhere suffice?" he asked with a chuckle. She smiled gently.

"I think anywhere would do but I know a few places that I go to from time to time if I'm feeling up for the climb out of the spines," she said.

As they walked, Takumi thought about everything he had done so far. He had managed to get through the Spines, made a new friend, and maybe would get to climb the rest of the falls with her instead of having to face the adventure alone. He counted himself very lucky indeed. He hoped that he would have some more luck on the next layer, considering all he did know and all that Meryn was unwilling to talk about, he felt that they could use as much luck as possible for the next layer ahead.

"We'll stop and eat first, find a hotel for the night then we'll go over to the library and see what we can find," Meryn suggested. "How much coin do you have on you?" she asked. Takumi fumbled his coin pouch as he rushed to take it out of his bag and held it up to her. Peering in, she whistled. "Your family gave you that much to go on this journey?" she asked incredulously. Takumi blushed and shrugged.

“Mom said that she wanted me to be prepared and have the best chance possible when tackling the falls,” he said. “My grandfather was a really good farmer and made a lot of money back before he passed and he gave everything he had including the farm to my mom,” he explained. An expression he couldn’t read passed across her face before she nodded and turned and kept walking. Takumi’s stomach sank as he hurried to keep up with her. “W-was it....d-did I s-say s-something wrong?” he asked, worried he had upset her. She kept silent for a few moments before she sighed, fists unclenching.

“It’s just...” she said, seemingly unsure of how to put her feelings into words. “Your family sounds so much different than mine and...” she stopped short, looking up at the sky. “I...I don’t really know what else to say,” she admitted. Takumi cautiously put a hand on her shoulder.

“It’s alright, I don’t expect you to say anything else. I just wanted to make sure I didn’t make you upset,” he said, happy he didn’t stutter that time. She smiled gently.

“It’s not that your words upset me, Umi, it’s just my own experiences and my own past compared with yours. Not your fault, not my fault,” she said, her stomach growling at that moment. “It’s time to find something to eat, come on, I know a place,” she said.

The cafe she took him to had just about every dessert you could find, including savory breads that Takumi let Meryn talk him into trying. It became a fast favorite as he noted how much she seemed to enjoy it as well. After they had eaten, they found a hotel room with two beds that Takumi covered, making a deal with Meryn that she could cover food. After putting their things in their room, they headed off towards the library to see what they could find.

Once inside the library, they started asking around for directions on what they were searching for. Or rather, Meryn asked while Takumi could have curled up in a corner and just started reading forever. When Meryn came over with the directions to the section written down and in her hand, she found him frozen.

“Alright, Takumi, I got some idea of where to find some maps and...Takumi?” she asked. Takumi was startled out of his trance and looked at her.

“I am so sorry, what did I miss?” he asked. She laughed.

“Got a thing for books?” she said with a chuckle. He smiled sheepishly and nodded.

"I was always running away from my lessons to go read or write. Had I lived here as a kid, they probably wouldn't have ever gotten me to leave," he admitted. Meryn shook her head. Takumi cocked his head to the side as he looked at her. Seeing his look, she sighed and looked away.

"I did the same thing but with art instead," she admitted. His eyes lit up.

"Maybe one day you could show me your work? I'll show you mine if you show me yours!" he said excitedly. He hated showing his work to others but she already hadn't minded his stuttering and awkwardness, maybe she wouldn't mind his writing too?

"Maybe. I haven't shown my stuff to anyone in a long time," she said hesitantly. He nodded.

"I understand, I'm the same way," he said, then looked up at the massive stacks of books on every shelf. "For now, let's get searching. Where to?" he asked, glancing at her note in her hand. She smiled and showed him.

"I've never actually been in here before and I think you might be a better guide in here than I would be, so lead the way," she said. He nodded and took the note she offered and reading it, led her deep into the library onto the fourth floor.

"It looks like the way everything here is laid out depends on what layer the thing you're looking for comes from which is a really smart way of organizing things, especially where maps and herbs and such are concerned," he said. Meryn smiled, glad he seemed to be at home here. Stitches who was riding on top of her bag nudged her and she raised an eyebrow at him who just hugged her arm instead. Puff was perched on her shoulder and had been quiet since entering, smart enough to stay quiet so he didn't get them kicked out. She knew what Stitches was trying to tell her but this wasn't the time so she filed that away in her mind while they were on a more important mission. It took a couple hours of searching and asking a few times for help from one of the librarians to find what they were looking for but when they did, Meryn almost cried.

"That's it! That's it..." she said. Takumi looked up, startled.

"Ryn, are you alright?" he asked. She nodded as she turned away.

"It's just...this was here the whole time...if I would have stopped and looked..." she said, trailing off. Takumi rubbed her back trying to calm her down.

“I know, I know, but we have it now. Which is better than both of us getting lost right?” he asked. When her expression didn’t change, he also pointed out something in the corner of the map. “Also, I don’t think this was here when you came through,” he said. Sure enough, the map was dated from *after* she had left the labyrinth. She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and nodded.

“Alright, let me get it copied,” she said and took it over to a table with her own piece of parchment and started copying everything over. Takumi watched her wordlessly in awe as she effortlessly copied everything down to the finest detail. By the time she was done, their stomachs were growling again and she carefully rolled it up and put it in her bag.