Chapter 9.4: Fishes Rock, I Guess

Even after walking out of the general school area, Aiya and I were still holding hands.

Can you guess where we were headed?

Nope, we weren't heading back to the dorms to rest for the weekend; we were heading to our apparent date.

Of course, Aiya didn't tell me we were going on one, but I came to such a conclusion considering we went on a date yesterday, though it was still just a hunch.

One that happened to be proven to be correct.

"Eiya-kun," Aiya said. "I hope you're ready for another date!"

Her voice was enthusiastic; it felt like her words bounced around—it was very nice to hear.

"Yup," I replied.

When did she start sounding like this?

Well, her voice was always like this whenever she was on a date with me, but I didn't notice because I wasn't as focused as I am now.

You see, I was focused because I was holding Aiya's hand. The release of dopamine, endorphins, and oxytocin inadvertently heightened my senses.

Not that I hated it, though. I liked being fully able to hear her beautiful voice and hold her hands.

The more I was entranced by Suzuki Aiya, the more curious I was about what kind of person Aiya was—her likes, dislikes, and who she really was.

Yeah, I knew she liked baking, apparently liked me, was popular, was a gyaru, and had lots of friends.

But I didn't know what she was like, really? She was a social butterfly who was nice and had quite a number of friends, but why?

Was that just her personality? But then, why not just be a cheerful and uplifting girl like Kagura? Why was she a gyaru?

Was it peer pressure, or familial influence, or something else? As you can see, I knew next to nothing about her.

To be frank, we barely spoke; most times, it was even she who initiated the conversation.

And yeah, we made some side comments here and there during class, but were we even friends before we started dating?

I couldn't tell. No, perhaps I *could* tell—we were more than acquaintances but not friends.

If that was true, I had more of a reason to know more about her. Yes, I really wanted to know more about her—about Suzuki Aiya, my girlfriend.

I would start from this date—hopefully, it would only be Aiya and me, and she would just take the lead with me learning.

She would be my textbook, just for today.

“So, Aiya, where are we going today?”

“The mall!”

I sorta expected that; well, at least she’s *enthusiastic about it.*

I didn’t hate the mall, but I also didn’t get why teenagers—er, people my age—loved to go there. It was just a place where you could get stuff; that simplistic concept wasn’t anything too interesting, yet it was always packed.

I was sure that when Aiya and I headed over there, people would make side comments about us holding hands, probably realising we were dating.

Not that we hid it in the first place, though.

That being said, I didn’t really know where a good place for a date would be, so I just let Aiya decide; after all, I was trying to learn, not teach.

“Wait, I changed my mind,” Aiya said. “I wanna surprise you; by the way, I’ve actually never gone here before.”

“Hmm?”

“Mhm. I want to take you to a special place that will be new to both of us, so we celebrate our one-day anniversary.”

Wait, what?

Today I was to learn about Aiya, but we weren’t going to a place she frequented.

So, what was the point in going to this new place for our anniversary? Is it supposed to be a novel experience that would be etched permanently in our memories?

It was probably that, but I couldn’t shake the feeling that Aiya had the same thought as I and wanted to learn more about me.

That was very probable because just like I knew nothing about her, she knew nothing about me. Well, if that was what she was doing, she could have just asked me whatever she wanted to know.

After all, I knew myself better than anyone and was pretty much an open book.

“Are you really sure?”

“Super sure,” she grinned.

“Well, if you’re sure, then fine.”

I wondered where she was taking me, but I just kept quiet and let her lead me to wherever she wanted to go—especially since it was a surprise.

I made sure not to stare too long at landmarks because, since I memorised the map, it was easy to guess where we were.

However, we walked for quite a while—perhaps Aiya wanted to use it to confuse me?

I didn’t know yet.

And I made sure not to think too much about the location until we arrived.

And we arrived at—

“Welcome to the Elysian Aquarium!” Aiya presented with a very contented expression.

Seems like she’s proud of herself. Well, it looks good, but why an aquarium?

“Whoa, it sure is big, isn’t it?”

We walked in after paying an entrance fee of 1,700 Rp. Of course, I didn’t know if it was expensive or cheap, though considering my balance, it was expensive to me.

Even this much is a lot for me.

I kept a wry smile after paying the fee before entering; it was like stepping into a new world. The air completely changed—it was cool, a bit filtered, and faintly salty.

The lights were dimmed to a soft blue, with a path that got progressively dimmer and soft jazz playing in the background.

“Right? I thought you’d like it because it’s kinda exotic, so was I right?” She had a soft smile, staring eagerly to see how I would respond or react to this gesture.

Exotic, huh?

I suppose she was trying to figure out what I liked, but as I said earlier, she could just have asked. It would make things flow more easily.

For me, at least.

“Yeah, I love learning new stuff, so I wanna see some cool stuff and learn how it works,” I said, returning a soft smile to her. With this, she’d learn more about me.

“So you’re that type of guy? The nerdy type, right?”

“Nerdy? Come on, isn’t it normal to wanna learn new stuff?”

“I guess so, but the way you said it made you sound like a nerd,” she teased.

And here I tried to make myself not sound as un-nerdy as possible.

“Anyway, Aiya, what exhibit are we going to?”

“Why don’t you pick?”

“Alright, but how do we know the different choices?”

“Look at a sign over there.”

We walked over to the electronic signboard, which pointed in 6 directions, each being a regional or thematic zone, and the last being an exit.

“Since it’s a bit late, let’s go to only 3 exhibits. Are you fine with that?” she asked, her voice dripping with kindness.

She was being considerate of me because the last time we stayed till it was late.

“Yeah.”

“Ok, then follow me,” she dragged me along.

“Didn’t you just say I should pick an exhibit?”

“You were taking too much time. Why don’t you just leave everything to me?”

“Well, ok then.”

We went to the first exhibit—the freshwater section. It had an indoor stream and lake with rocks, plants, and flowing water.

There were some catfish, carp, and arowana. There were also some turtles, salamanders, and crabs.

The tank perfectly mimicked their natural habitat—having gravel bottoms, water lilies, reeds, logs, and gentle currents.

“Whoa! Eiya-kun, look at that cute turtle,” Aiya bent a bit on a railing as she pointed enthusiastically.

The turtle was cute, but that wasn't what I focused on; her skirt was very short, so I could see her pink panties. Luckily, no one was around.

"Y-Yup, super cute."

"It's just eating that seaweed. It's really chilling, isn't it?"

"Mhm."

Really wish you wouldn't bend so much.

Unfortunately, I couldn't tell her that; instead, I directed her attention to something else.

"Look at the facts over there," I pointed at a signboard.

The facts on the signboard read:

"This tank recreates the upper reaches of Japan's Kiso River, where the water stays below 15℃ year-round. Here are some special facts…"

It went on to explain some cool stuff that some animals could do, like how arowanas can jump 2 metres high, Arapaima can actually breathe air, and stuff like that.

Everything here was amazing and cool; it was truly something interesting.

…Though I already knew all this.

The date ended up following this format—at each exhibit, I tried to get a read on Aiya or at least learn something, but instead, I was sent on a date to try and just learn stuff on aquatic organisms.

Stuff that I already know.

“Well, that’s three done,” Aiya sighed.

We had done all that, but I barely changed my expression; I suppose it was my fault for not faking it.

“Wanna leave?” she asked.

I nodded in affirmation.

No point in staying here.

“...I see. I need to go use the restroom,” Aiya left, her expression a bit downcast.

Yup, I definitely should have just acted.

I didn’t really enjoy the date because I couldn’t achieve what I wanted. Sure, I knew Aiya was considerate and assertive, but I’d always known that, so I learnt nothing new.

Anyway, as I waited patiently for Aiya, I remembered today was our anniversary.

I should get something for her, shouldn’t I?

Just before she came, I bought a souvenir and put it in my school bag. When she came back, she had two hot dogs and two milkshakes in her hand.

“Ready to go?” She held a soft smile, one that didn’t seem to be genuine, though.

“Uh, sure.”

The walk out of the aquarium was silent, completely devoid of the earlier enthusiasm. We didn't even hold hands; we just walked side-by-side

All that was there was the sound of both of us chewing and drinking—very monotonous.

Perhaps coming here was a mistake on my end. I should have changed her mind.

"So, how was the date?" Aiya asked.

"It was fine," I answered plainly.

"That boring, huh? I wanted to do something different, but maybe I shouldn't have…"

"…"

"I am really bad at stuff like that; I'm sure you can tell."

"…"

"Like what kind of girlfriend picks an aquarium date after a long day of school? I didn't even give you time to rest."

"…"

"I thought the aquarium would be calming…and cute," her voice cracked slightly. "I should have listened to what you wanted instead of mixing up calming with boring. I even tried to make it more…interesting."

Her voice wavered a bit at 'interesting'; perhaps she was referring to when she bent over a bit.

Wait, that was… Intentional?

“...”

I didn’t know what to say. It was awkward to hear someone like Aiya talk about herself like this. The right thing to do was to stop her; however, for today, Aiya was my textbook.

I already wasted the aquarium date, so for now I had to learn something, even if it would leave Aiya in such a sorry state of mind.

After all, I also needed to know how she handled stress.

“I really am a huge idiot, aren’t I?” Aiya stopped in her tracks.

That being said, I need to stop her.

I needed to learn, but how would I defend myself when push came to shove? I was her boyfriend, yet I didn’t stop self-degradation, so at least I had to say something. Anything.

“Aiy—”

“I made a big mistake, but I don’t regret it,” Aiya cut me off. “After all, I got to learn more about you.”

“About me?”

Learn? When?

“I realised you’re quite a curious person; anyway, here’s your gift,” Aiya presented it earnestly to me. “Happy one-day anniversary.”

“...Thanks, Aiya. Actually, I got something for you, too,” I handed her a small box.

“For real? How come? I didn’t expect to do that, especially on short notice.”

“Why won’t I? I mean, I *am* your boyfriend.”

“Yeah, you are,” Aiya grinned. “Anyway, let’s open up our boxes together.”

“Sure.”

We both opened our boxes with enthusiasm—I handed Aiya a koi fish keychain, and she handed me a Rubik’s Cube.

Hmm?

I stared intently at my present until I saw a huge smile on Aiya’s face.

“Well, what do you think? I wanted to give you something that can solve your curiosity and boredom. Was I spot on?”

“Yeah, what do you think of the koi fish?”

“It’s kinda cute. Anyway, Eiya, thanks for today; I really enjoyed myself also…” Aiya went forward and kissed my forehead suddenly.

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Eh?!!!

“Uh, um, see you later.”

She ran away with her cheek red as raspberries, just like mine. Her kiss was such a shock that I became utterly petrified by it.

“See you tomorrow,” I managed to push out, but she was already out of sight.

“Well, time to head home.”

I headed straight to my dorm room after catching my breath and calming down. After arriving at my room, I went about my normal daily routine—I prepared dinner and took a bath.

The said routine ended with me drying my hair and heading to bed, but I left my nightstand on.

I was solving the Rubik’s Cube—Aiya was right; it solved my need for curiosity.

“But it’s not really a need, though. Perhaps just an itch? At any rate, it can be easily stopped. Not that I need to, though.”

After all, every human was indeed a curious creature, though there has been a common misconception about curiosity.

I’m sure you’ve heard of this saying:

“Curiosity killed the cat.”

It was quite a popular saying, one that is often cut in the middle. The full saying went like this:

“Curiosity killed the cat…but Satisfaction brought it back.”

It implied that the satisfaction from finding something out can account for the punishment for one’s curiosity.

One example was when I eavesdropped on Innō—my punishment was losing Rp, but I also got a girlfriend and helped a friend.

Of course, this wasn’t absolute, but was anything absolute in the first place?

That being said, that wasn’t why I thought so much about this. I was trying to pass the time as I solved the Rubik's Cube—it was too easy to solve just by itself.

“Just barely 3 minutes, huh?”

I tried to solve it with a timer to see how fast I could solve it. It was kinda easy, so I was surprised why I took so much time.

Though the reason it was easy was that I couldn’t really be useless at creative thinking and pattern recognition.

Moreover, I had read a lot about Erno Rubik—he created the Rubik’s Cube, the Rubik’s Magic, and the Rubik’s Snake.

He was a Hungarian architect and civil engineer—I read a bit about his story in a book, and about why he made the Rubik’s Cube and the idea behind it.

However, I never laid hands on one because ***he*** didn’t believe it was standard in checking intelligence. After all, you just had to know specific patterns.

That meant reading about him and the Rubik's Cube, as well as how and why it was made, already made it easier for us to know how to solve one.

“That being said, it’s still kinda tricky because we didn’t actually know any of the patterns,” I said, tossing the Rubik’s Cube into the air and constantly catching it as I lay in bed.

“Also, can’t believe today was a total loss. I didn’t learn a single thing about Aiya.”

However, something really bothered me. How did Aiya know that I was a person supposedly burdened by curiosity and boredom?

“Not that I am, though.”

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Author’s Note:

Well, that was something, huh. It is a really amazing chapter, if I do say so myself.

Though Aiya is really an amazing girlfriend, she’s everything I need and want, and more.

Can’t believe I’m talking about my character like that. Anyway, remember to comment, share, and leave a review. Thanks for reading the chapter, and see you in the next one.