

Temptation in the Bath Tub ☆

"Shinju, go ahead and get in the bath tub."

I could hear Seiko calling to me.

"Huh? Bath tub?"

A bathtub is like, um, something with a lot of hot water in it, right?

And if I go inside one, it'll make me transform.

What am I gonna do if I turn back into a mermaid?

What should I do?

"What's wrong? Aren't you going to go in?"

Seiko, I don't want you to see me like that...

I agreed, happily, figuring a way out of my dilemma.

SPLASH!

I jumped in, sloshing water everywhere.

I thrashed in the water.

Making big waves to keep it away from me

It was almost like a dance.

I made tons of bubbles in the water to hide my tail.

Soon there was so many that no one could see inside of the water that I had transformed.

No one could tell that underneath, I was still a mermaid.

I felt a big wave of relief that my secret identity as a mermaid was still hidden.

I successfully got inside of the bathtub.

Whoaaaaa!

I let out a huge sigh of relief.

After I transformed out of my mermaid form, I felt even better.

I didn't feel like I was going to have a panic attack.

Maybe there was a way I could use the magic of the Pearl to stay in human form all of the time.

I'm just glad this is such a huge bathtub.

Still, it was nice to feel like myself, like a mermaid again.

"Ack!"

Oh no.

I slipped.

On my out of the bath tub.

I wobbled, trying to regain my balance.

I forced myself back upright.

I clung to the wall next to me for support.

SLAM.

A big thud.

It was too slippery, I couldn't stay upright.

"Owwww, that hurt!"

Man, I never knew how much things could hurt out here in the human world!

Owwww.

Throb.

My tail was hanging out of the side of the bath tub.

And the doorway was propped open.

Anybody walking by might see me.

Crap!

Huh?

I could hear someone enter the dressing room.

Who could it be?

The glass in the bathroom was too cloudy for me to see who was there.

I could hear someone creeping closer.

"Who's there?"

It was Ryuuichi's voice.

And my tail was still hanging out of the bath tub.

This is no good.

What am I gonna do?

I've gotta transform back into human quickly.

My pearl necklace...

No way, no way!

Thunk!!

“.....”

“.....”

Ryuichi was about to come inside.

I stayed silent.

"S-shinju, I didn't realize you were in here. Seiko said she was going to get you to come in but I never heard back so I just - I just thought - Shinju I'm sorr-"

He blushed, obviously embarrassed.

And then he left.

I couldn't get that lucky again even in 180 million years. He left the bathroom.

And just in the nick of time, too, because I wasn't able to transform back into a human yet.

My tail was at least underwater in the bathtub again.

Ryuuichi was only able to catch a glimpse of my face and chest.

That's all.

But Ryuuichi.

Seemed a bit weird.

When he looked at me, his face turned all red.

Hmm.

Anyway.

With the pearl back in my hand, I could transform back into a human.

"Shinju!"

Someone was coming back into the bathroom.

This time, it was Seiko standing before me.

"Seiko?"

Her eyebrows were scrunched together.

She looked mad.

"Shinju, how could you!"

She shrieked angrily.

Yep, she was definitely pissed off.

"What's wrong, Seiko?"

"I knew that you had a crush on my brother all along, Shinju!"

"Huh..."

"And you knew he was outside of the entrance to the bathroom, you intentionally lured him inside."

Oh no.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing from Seiko.

"Why were you trying to lure him in like that? Why would you do that?"

W-wait a minute.

"I wasn't trying to lure him in here."

"Liar."

"I couldn't even see that it was Ryuichi trying to enter."

"When he heard that loud thud, you had to know that my brother would come to investigate what was going on."

"How is that my doing?"

The thud she was talking about was the sound of my tail, of course.

Mermaids don't really have the concept of temptation, but I guess luring or tempting someone is something humans get worried about.

Still.

I couldn't figure out what Seiko was talking about.

Her words weren't making any sense.

"Listen. I know what you're up to. I won't let someone like you trick my brother."

What was she saying?

What a challenging attitude.

I bet that even if Seiko understood what was going on, and knew about the magic involved, she still would be the way she is.

But I get the feeling that's not all she's thinking.

"Hey, Seiko, do you love your big brother?"

"Yeah, of course I love my brother. I've loved him ever since I was born."

Ahh.

So that's why she's giving me such a hard time.

"But you two are siblings, right?"

"Yeah. And there's nobody in the world that's good enough for him, if you ask me."

And then she stuck her tongue out at me.

Jeaz.

Well, I won't give up.

So I stuck my tongue out right back at her.

And with that, Seiko huffed off.

She's so annoying.

But I'll get her to come around.

I'm not going to give up because of Seiko.

"Pbbbbbbt!"

She stuck her tongue out and raspberried me as she went on her way.

"Seiko, what the heck are you doing?"

Ryuuichi.

"Oh, big brother! ♥"

Seiko immediately rushed over to Ryuuichi.

And ran to hide behind his back.

She made it seem like I was the one teasing her.

"Shinju was teasing me!"

"What! That's no true. She's the one who was teasing me!"

Ryuuichi was trying to figure out what to do.

Ryuuichi...

Hmph.

He kept looking me over.

Huh?

But why?

I've never noticed him doing that before.

Oh yeah.

It must be because Seiko was still hiding behind him.

"Let's go, Seiko"

"Okay! ♥"

And the two of them walked away.

"Hey, wait a minute!"

I yelled out.

Ryuuichi turned back to look at me.

Seiko turned back, and immediately stuck her tongue out at me again.

Even though I said something, I could already tell that it was in vein.

Was he going to just avoid me from now on?

Could it be... does Ryuichi hate me now?

But why?

I don't understand.

I don't understand at all.

And it's not like I can confess what's going on to him.

But.

I do plan to tell him what's going on one day.

But.

Right now, he won't even meet my gaze.

What am I gonna do?

Ugh.

This is no good, but Shinju, you've gotta do something.

Otherwise the world of mermaids is going to disappear.

And that's not all.

The sea witch Wyndia will plunge the entire world into darkness.

And who knows what would happen to the ocean with the sea witch Wyndia in charge...

On my chest.

A pearl necklace.

Weighing heavily.

I can feel its heaviness.

Father's room.

Creaaaaak.

Without a sound, the door opens wide.

And on the wall, a large painting of the ocean comes into view before me.

And there was a fishtank full of fish.

Seeing them, I felt a bit relieved.

"What's wrong, Shinju?"

I could hear the fish say to me.

"Oh, fishies...oh, you're butterfly fishes, aren't you?"

"That's right, we're butterfly fish."

They were beautifully striped, black and yellow. They were tropical fish.

Hey, what do you think I should do, should I tell him what's going on?"

Without even thinking about it, I started to cry.

"Well, Shinju, when you're in love with someone, you've got to do more than just tell them."

"Really?"

Is that so?

I didn't know.

"You have to consider his feelings, too."

His feelings?

Ryuuichi's feelings?

"Being in love means you have to put in a lot of effort."

Without thinking, I stuck my face up against the fish tank.

I didn't even notice that I was smushing my nose against it.

"Are you putting in effort?"

"I don't even know if Ryuuichi likes me or any other girl for that matter."

"But you like Ryuuichi, right?"

"Yes. When he was little his mom died, and so now he seems really family-oriented and concerned for their well-being."

"I see!"

Oh.

I can't, I can't.

I can't talk so loudly.

I put my finger over my mouth.

"I haven't been in the human world for very long, and there's lots I don't know."

"I see."

In the human world, I was like a newborn.

But the butterfly fish had been around Ryuuichi for a long time.

So I thought I'd get their advice.

He really is family-oriented.

.....!?

Huh?

Who was that, just now?

Seiko again?

It felt like there was someone standing in the doorway, listening to my confession.

What a relief.

I could hear Seiko's voice from far off in the distance.

So I guess I'm safe.

It must have just been the butterfly fish.

Peek, peek.

I looked around the room but didn't see anything.

There's no one there.

Maybe it was nothing.

Now where was I? Oh yes.

Ryuuichi's... feelings...

I hadn't really thought about them.

If I thought he liked me, I'd be OK to tell him my feelings.

But.

It just wasn't that simple yet.

It could be terrible to find out that I was in love with him and he didn't feel anything in return.

He wouldn't kiss me, for sure.

"I'll be okay..."

"Why are you being so timid? Shinju, you're the princess!"

"Yeah."

"And Shinju, everyone is waiting for you!"

"Oh, fishies..."

"Shinju, we're the butterfly fishes, and we're here for you."

The fishes swam around in their tank, lovely butterfly fishes so far away from their own real home, here to support me.

I felt a lot of love.

It'll be okay.

I've just got to keep doing my best.