

## Chapter 5: We're Back!

The return trip was painfully long for Jonas, whose face wound had been stinging relentlessly in the breeze. As they walked, Crono couldn't help but notice the look of gloom on Frog's downcast face, an indication that something troublesome was plaguing his mind. He wanted to offer consolation but soon gave up the idea, having no clear knowledge of what his green skinned companion might be thinking.

Upon arriving back at the castle and stepping into the grand entrance hall, they stopped to bid their new comrades, Ian and Jonas farewell. Offering not a single comment about Crono's hair or Lucca's clothes, the two entranceway guards stood in silence. Their behavior, as Crono reasoned, could very well have been attributed to any combination of present company: the chancellor, two soldiers, and a massive frog. Whichever the case, he was relieved by the absence of their foolhardy remarks. Once past this thought, he turned to Ian and Jonas, who were now taking their leave.

"Take care of him, Ian!" called Lucca as their new friends started off towards the Knights' quarters.

"Bah!" returned Jonas, his right hand still covering half of his face as he stumbled down the hall. "I don't need 'im. Some ointment and a little rest, and I'll be right back in the field! Next stop, Magus's castle!"

Ian simply rolled his eyes at his companion. "Farewell! And thanks again!"

Once they were out of sight, the chancellor, standing beside Queen Leene, began to speak. "Well, Milady, I'm sure the king is anxious to see you again."

"Yes, Clarus, as am I to see him," she replied.

With a smile, he turned to Crono, Lucca, and Frog. "Please, enter the throne room so that King Malcolm may first see the rescuers of his beloved Queen. Tell him of your venture, and we shall follow shortly."

Acknowledging with a nod, Crono led his friends up the stairs and into the throne room. Had he not already met the king once before, he probably would have felt far more nervous. King Malcolm Guardia XXI, apparently already aware of their purpose here, watched intently as the travelers came forward. His face was expressionless, revealing neither relief nor displeasure. Soon, the threesome came before the king and kneeled respectfully before relaying the details of their adventure.

Most of the castle's inhabitants already knew of the return of the real Queen and her rescuers, thanks, in part, to the speed of gossip and rich news within the castle walls. Overjoyed to observe a hint of peace in the land once again, the many denizens gathered around the hall to the throne to see the royal couple reunited.

Once the entire saga had been revealed to the king, he sat back with a deep breath, embarrassed for a moment at the realization that he, along with everyone else, had mistaken a stranger for his wife. After several moments, he stood, a small grin upon his face.

“Well, friends,” he said, “let this be a testimony to the queen’s beauty. We all mistook her for a teenager!”

Laughter reigned for a moment as the king’s eyes landed on two soldiers manning the throne room doors. Following his nod, they pulled the doors open, and the crowd fell silent.

In that moment, no face in the room remained without smile. There stood Queen Leene, grinning the widest of all as she locked eyes with her husband. She came forward as the doors were heaved shut, her unrushed pace allowing her to savor the moments of their reunion.

Finally, she stepped up to the throne, and King Guardia took her hand with a warm smile. Lucca turned gleefully to Crono, who returned an affable expression of satisfaction. Frog seemed bluntly serious and paid little attention to his surroundings.

Though the reigning mood was that of gladness, Crono couldn’t help but think about Marle as the reunion of the king and queen unfolded. Antsy to pick up their pursuit of Marle, he waited as patiently as he could for the scene to transpire.

Stillness fell in the room like an eerie wind as the king spoke. “You had me worried, Leene.” His wife smiled back at him with love. “But Guardia is at peace again, if only for this moment, knowing that our beautiful Queen is safe and sound.” They came together for a brief kiss and sat in their thrones, the crowd cheering in celebration.

As the applause subsided, Chancellor Clarus spoke out. “That no good Yakra! Impersonating me and kidnapping the queen! We *must* create a criminal justice system to do away with such fiends.” He turned to the crowds, speaking authoritatively from under his snow-white beard. “The kidnapping of royalty will *not* be tolerated in this kingdom!” There were many shouts of agreement from the crowd in response to his vow.

Frog suddenly stepped forward and kneeled, facing the king. “Your Majesty....” All remaining commotion from the crowd died away as the attention shifted to the somber amphibian. “I failed to protect Queen Leene. I have disgraced thee.” Having said his piece, he stood, turned, and started towards the doors, solemnity in his bearing.

Leene rose and called to him, “Frog!”

He stopped, hesitantly turning his head to the side. Without a word, he turned back to her, knelt respectfully, and resumed his course. The closing of the door echoed amongst a hushed, bemused atmosphere.

Controlled whispers and various conversations began to permeate the area throughout the chatterbox crowd.

“Didn’t know that that frog could be so brave in the first place,” said one Knight.

Captain Aron conversed with a few other high-ranking officials. “So! The cathedral was the heart of it all. That frog’s done a fine job, in my book.”

“Yes, but since Magus’s troops failed to kidnap Leene, they’ll probably be back soon. If only Cyrus were here!”

“But he’s not!” returned Aron sharply.

“I can’t believe the cathedral was their hideout! Those lousy blasphemers!”

“So that girl wasn’t Leene after all. Wow.”

Cal, the royal chef had only just arrived on the scene after having been tied up in the kitchen. “What?!” he fumed, overhearing the Knight’s comment. “That wasn’t Queen Leene?! And I wasted my time whipping up a batch of that ‘eyes cream’ she

wanted so badly! Yuck!” He angrily removed his gloves and walked out, leaving the Knights to shrug at his sudden and unexpected departure.

Crono and Lucca stood in the center of the happenings, still looking towards the doors. Finally, Leene cleared her throat, recovering their attention. “Your timing was perfect. Who knows what would have happened had you not saved me!” Lucca knowingly smiled and shifted her glasses. “By the way, where is the girl who was mistaken for me?”

Suddenly, Crono and Lucca turned to each other, Lucca displaying sudden excitement. “Oh, yeah! I forgot all about Princess Nadia! Crono! Where did Princess Nadia disappear? She may still be there!”

“You *forgot*...?!” He quickly remembered that he stood in the presence of royalty and recouped his manners accordingly. “Uh, upstairs, in the bedroom.”

“Wait,” said Leene. “Did you say ‘princess’?”

“Oh!” Lucca jumped, inwardly rebuking herself for her carelessness in words. “Yes, that’s just a nickname we gave her. I really should stop calling her that in public. Eh, Crono, did you say the bedroom?”

Crono nodded. “Yes.”

“Let’s go!”

Leene watched them take off down the hall with such excitement that they both nearly stumbled, her confusion keeping her quiet. “They’re strange, but, oddly enough, I feel I can trust them,” she finally said to her husband. He smiled and took her hand once again as the crowd began seeping out of the throne room in all directions.

“Don’t worry, my dear. Nothing will happen to you now. I promise.” Leene sighed relaxingly and leaned back in her throne.



Crono threw the queen’s chamber doors open with such force that he nearly lost his footing. He and Lucca slowed, looking nervously around the room. Hesitantly, Lucca took a few steps forward into the roomy chamber and stared at the empty space in the floor between a table and the bed, where the light green hoopskirt Marle had been wearing lay, with no body inside. Her stomach suddenly tightened as she began to fear the worst.

Her eyes moved towards Crono and her mouth began to open, but she stopped herself as she watched his face suddenly brighten at the sight of something around the other side of the bed.

“Marle!” exclaimed Crono with a rush of excitement. She was propped against the bed and looking back at him with mystified and wary eyes. The pearl-colored outfit she had kept on while previously in the hoopskirt was still fully intact on her body.

She raised her head very slowly. “Huh? What happened?”

“Princess Nadia!” Lucca called after coming around the bed.

Marle looked vacantly into her face, finally forcing herself to stand on trembling, unsteady legs. She held her hand against her forehead for a moment and then began to

feel her arms, face, and legs before lifting her eyes to those of the red-haired fellow behind Lucca.

“Crono!” Her shaky legs gave, and she fell to her knees, gasping and holding back tears. “It was awful! I can’t recall it all.... I was somewhere cold, dark...and lonely.” These last words had barely escaped as a whisper. Raising her head again, she said, “Is that what it’s like to...die?”

Lucca nervously adjusted her glasses without a response, but Crono approached Marle with poise and warmly wrapped an arm around her cool shoulders. There, he comforted her, and she allowed herself to lean into him, managing a small smile of relief.

Lucca reset her glasses and spoke up. “I...don’t know what it’s like to die, Princess, but you have just returned from a time freeze. We almost lost you. Technically, though, you didn’t die.”

Marle raised her glance to Lucca as she continued. “You had been mistaken for Queen Leene, your ancestor, when you appeared in this era. The real Queen was still missing, but everyone thought that *you* were the real Queen! You became frozen in the timeline because Leene was about to be killed, but we found her and returned everything to normal. At any rate—welcome back, Princess Nadia!”

Marle listened attentively, standing with Crono. “You risked your life to help me, too?!” She paused in realization of what Lucca had just said, her smile quickly disappearing. “Princess...*Nadia*...?!” Crono let her go and stood nearby. “Uh-oh....”

“What’s wrong?” asked Lucca.

Marle giggled slightly. “I guess you guys figured it out, huh? Sorry, Crono. I didn’t mean to deceive you.”

Crono opened his mouth to reply. “That’s o....” She stopped him from speaking by turning away to the old stone wall.

“I’m Princess Nadia Marle Guardia. My father’s King Guardia XXXIII. Most people who know me personally *do* call me Marle, but not formally.” Crono heard her sigh as she looked down. “I really enjoyed being with you at the festival. Even *I*, the princess, wanted to see the fair with a boy. But if you had known my identity—Crono, you wouldn’t have shown me around the fair....”

She turned back around to him. “...Right?”

“Marle....” He was at a sudden loss for words.

“See...,” started Marle, but Crono did not let her continue.

“No! I mean, no, that’s not true at all.” Finally, he could bring himself to speak. “I didn’t have to know your identity! Every time you vanished, I nearly went insane. It seemed that every time I got near you, something happened, like I had become some sort of curse. I rather started to think it would have been less hazardous for you to have walked the fair with the Elder of Medina than me.”

She cracked a meager smile, and Crono took this chance to place his hand on her arm consolingly. “Anyway, what I’m saying is that you’re a great person and I really enjoy your company. It didn’t matter if I saw a fellow commoner or a princess. All I know is that I had a great time with you; and...it was my...my *pleasure* to come after you.” He could have kicked himself for this last line, but, all things considered, he decided not to dwell on his current lack of eloquence.

Marle stared downcast at him, her previously coy smile stretching into a more pronounced grin. Lucca raised an eyebrow and remained silent.

Marle suddenly jumped into him, flinging her arms around his neck. “Oh, Crono! That’s why I like you!”

Lucca simply stared at the floor in light of what had perhaps been the most impressive monologue of Crono’s life. When Marle released him, she looked him in the eyes joyfully. “The real Queen’s safe, right? So let’s go home, Crono!”

Crono couldn’t help but smile in the bliss of his delightful triumph. His sudden speech to Marle, notwithstanding a trifling lack of perspicuity, had even impressed himself.

“Let’s head home, Lucca!” he echoed. Lucca returned a faint smirk and turned to leave.

As they came upon the stairwell, the two maids and the Knight whom Crono had encountered shortly after Marle’s disappearance were all chatting actively amongst themselves. When they saw Crono, Lucca, and Marle, they suddenly hushed their nattering and acknowledged them.

“You guys leaving? Wherever you’re heading, be careful!” smiled a maid.

“Thank you!” replied Marle. “I’m very sorry about the mix-up. I think we were all a little lost.”

The Knight responded, “Hmmm. The more I look at you, the stronger the resemblance. Astounding!” The maids returned to their chatter as the reunited trio entered the tower stairwell that went down into the throne room.

Once at the bottom, they quickly made their way down the short hall, approaching the thrones of the king and queen from behind. The king heard them coming and looked to his left as they came upon the throne. Crono and Lucca nodded respectfully as they walked past, but King Malcolm’s eyes were fixed on Marle as he stared at her with a half open mouth. Marle, unsure of what to say, also nodded her head to him as she joined with Crono and Lucca before the two thrones.

Leene smiled warmly to Crono and Lucca and soon turned to see Marle approaching. Immediately, her smile disappeared into her agape mouth as her eyes locked with Marle’s, who was in equal shock. Marle stood across from the queen and froze in order to face her distant ancestor.

After a few rather tense moments, Leene said without moving, “It’s as though I’m looking into a mirror!”

Marle shook her head slowly in disbelief. “So you’re the real Queen Leene, huh? Amazing!”

“You really could be my twin,” replied Leene. “Please, come closer.” Marle did as she was asked, and Leene stood to meet with her. Together, they stood side by side and faced the king, who stared back and forth with great interest.

After the king had seen enough, he exclaimed, “Remarkable! I must admit—it’s almost scary how close the resemblance is!” Leene left Marle and joined her husband back at the throne.

“Thank goodness you’re safe!” the king said, still looking at Marle. “You may resemble Leene, but you sure don’t act like her! One thing still puzzles me, though. If

you weren't Leene, and you really hadn't been kidnapped, why did you tell us that Crono had saved you?"

Marle hesitated, her pale cheeks slowly blushing as she searched for the right words to say. "Well...nobody believed me when I said I wasn't Leene, and somehow I knew Crono would come looking for me, so I had to figure out a way to get him in here."

"And, dear lady, I must ask, why did you continue to act as the queen when you surely knew better?"

She stood in silence for a moment. His question was, indeed, a valid one. "Well," she started, "if I had told you that I wasn't the queen, then I probably would have been killed for acting like her. I really didn't know what else to do."

He nodded slightly. "Yes, you're right. There probably would have been any number of punishments against you. It is a good thing that we now know the truth." After a moment, he leaned forward just a little and motioned with his hands while speaking. "But why did you order everyone to see to his comfort once he arrived...?"

Marle breathed a small, nervous laugh and stood speechless, unable to think of a response. Leene watched her and grinned widely, turning to the king. "Oh, this reminds me so much of how we met, dear! You always made sure that every servant around was tending to me whenever you managed to get me into the castle; that is, whenever you could keep it from your father."

"Oh, yes!" he chuckled. "He never understood that such feelings could exist for a simple commoner until I gave you that coral pin!" He leaned toward Leene for a kiss and turned back to the three travelers before him.

Just then, Crono spoke up. "Your Majesty...!" He began searching through his pouch until snatching a small, coral-flowered object and holding it out to Leene. "We found this in the sanctuary."

"Oh, look, Malcolm!" said Leene as Crono dropped the object into her hand. "It's my coral pin! Thank you so much, Crono."

Then he pulled the pendant he had been carrying from his pouch and showed it to Marle. "And, Marle...I believe this belongs to you." He then reached in front of her and placed it around her neck carefully, Leene still fixating her hairpin.

She smiled with relief at the sight of her pendant. "Thank you, Crono! I've been losing this way too much." She then tucked it safely under her top as Crono stepped back to her side.

King Guardia XXI turned to them all again, saying, "I do hope you'll be joining us this evening to celebrate Leene's safe return and the turning of the new year."

Lucca spoke up in response. "Thank you, Your Highness, but we must be on our way home. It is a very—long—way from here."

"That's a shame," Queen Leene replied. "I do hope that Frog will be there. He really is quite devoted to his job as my guardian, and he takes setbacks very hard."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Crono responded, "and Frog was the true hero in your rescue. Without his help, it could not have been done."

Leene shifted in her throne, stooping slightly so that a round, cerulean gem appeared from under her dress, dangling loosely from a golden chain. Marle, Crono, and Lucca froze like statues at the sight of it.

The king smiled and directed his words to all of them, unaffected by their sudden petrification. “Anyway, you’ve really helped us all, and we are indebted. Let me know how I can repay you.”

“Thank you, Your Highness!” returned Marle, her voice slightly higher than normal as the others nodded. “Well, you two better get along...or I’ll be in big trouble. I’ll keep my fingers crossed!”

After a long pause, the royal couple looked to each other ditheringly. “Excuse me?” asked Leene.

Lucca gave Marle a quick jab. “Um...never mind! I guess it’s time to go!”

“Please, visit whenever you can. You’re like one of the family now!”

Marle grinned at the comment, responding, “Well, I certainly feel like part of the family!” With a farewell wave, they left the throne room with Crono at the head. Lucca whispered something to her about pushing their temporal luck.

Crono froze on the balcony just above the steps to the exit, watching a bygone acquaintance turning to meet him. “Frog!”

Marle suddenly came around to see what was happening. She stood stunned as she looked upon Frog, her eyes quickly widening.

“Twas a fault of mine, which endangered the queen. I shall depart for good.” His eyes veered to Marle, initiating him to approach her with interest.

“*Eeeek!*” she shrieked.

He croaked loudly, which silenced her. “Indeed, your resemblance to the queen is uncanny.” He then walked halfway down the stairs, turning to add, “Crono, thou hast the potential to be a good swordsman!” He then hopped out of the castle with no further words.

Lucca was not swift enough for him to hear her last words to him. “You weren’t such a bad guy either, Frog.”

“Come on!” said Crono, running outside with the obvious intent of chasing him down. Sensing his desire, they dashed down through the forest path, spotting Frog hopping nimbly toward the remains of Zenan Bridge in the distance.

“Frog, wait!” he called in his mad dash down the grassy hill. But the amphibian pressed on towards the splintered remnants of the bridge, unresponsive to Crono’s calls.

After several minutes, Crono saw Frog disappear over the land’s edge and, realizing that this chase was futile, slowed to a jog. Still huffing, he approached a rather jittery soldier standing guard at what little was left of the bridge. Looking back, he noticed that Marle and Lucca had abandoned him midway down the hill.

“That frog just leapt into the water from the edge and swam toward the other side! That certainly took some guts!” the soldier exclaimed. Neither he nor Crono could see any trace of Frog from beyond the shore.

Breathing deeply, Crono took one look into the distance, seeing chimney smoke from a faraway village. He stared at the unrecognizable town and muttered his final words to that slightly unorthodox individual who had helped them in their ventures. “Farewell, Frog.”

He joined the others soon after, and they all headed back towards the town of Truce together. In the duration of Crono’s chase, Lucca had relayed to Marle all of the information on Frog and what he had done to aid them.

As they walked down the street, where there was a dwindling number of people bustling about, Marle spoke. "You can't help thinking, though: Is our time going to be any different since you guys saved the queen instead of the soldiers?"

"I doubt it," Lucca replied. "I don't believe anyone actually knew our names, and the queen seemed to give most of the credit to Frog."

"Speaking of our time, how exactly do we get back home?"

"Well, I have a theory, but let's get back to the canyon before I say anything more." She looked around the medieval town with fascination. "I wonder where *my* family is. I believe I still had a very 'great' grandfather and a grandmother in Truce in this age, but I'm not completely sure. All I can remember from our genealogy is that they often talked to the king about making something for the kingdom. Crono, did you see anyone that could be my ancestor?" She thought to herself for a moment as they walked and suddenly threw her fist down with mock frustration before Crono could answer. "Darn! I should have asked the king about him!"

Crono turned to her, shrugging his shoulders in dismissal. "There're a lot of people in Truce, Lucca. To be honest, my memory of my first visit here is kind of a blur."

She sighed in return as they walked past the blacksmith shop, where Leene's Bell sat awaiting future glory. "Oh well, I guess it's all for the better. I mean, I'd love to meet my ancestors, but we've seen what kind of trouble that can get us into!"



Crono, Marle, and Lucca fondly remembered the path into Truce Canyon. Before long, they had found their way back to the clearing where they had first appeared.

Lucca led them through the brush, stopping to pull out the item she had been working on with such speed and precision before her initial departure into the past. She held it out in front of her as she slowly stepped forward. Suddenly, as she neared the center of the clearing, the phenomenon she was expecting occurred.

"Whoa!" exclaimed Crono, "Look at that!"

A wavy, almost fluidic blue sphere with a pulsing region of light in the center had appeared, hovering over the brown grass and dirt of the clearing.

Marle stood close to the peculiar object, intrigued. "What is it?"

Lucca seemed to smile at the sight of the orb. "Your Highness, er, Princess, we...."

"Please call me Marle!"

"Well then, Marle...observe!" She waved the small device close to the sphere. With an abrupt spark, it expanded to form an eerie portal just like the one that had claimed Marle via the Telepod. Waves of energy flowed chaotically inside the hole, which appeared endless in both number and span. Its brilliant display of illumination, for the first time, appeared unimaginably beautiful to them all.

"Wow! Lucca, you're amazing!" cheered Marle.

She laughed heartily. "Ain't it the truth!"

"Geek," jested Crono.

“Oh, um, I mean....” She sighed, looking at Marle and dropping her shoulders helplessly. “I’m so sorry. I must sound very rude.”

“What are you talking about?” replied Marle with an inviting smile. “You can talk to me normally, Lucca—like you would to a friend.”

“Well, I can get a little carried away sometimes.”

“Enough with the false modesty!” added Marle. “You have a real gift—something that I could never have, princess or otherwise! I would trade my royal ancestry for your genius in a heartbeat!”

“Really? Well, if you say so....”

Crono appeared antsy. “Alright, so what do we do with this?”

“Right. I call this thing a ‘Gate.’ It’s kind of a portal that takes you to the same location and time in a different era. It seems that time is more—structured—than many have imagined. That’s just an observation, though, and may not apply in every case.

“Anyway, Gates are very unstable. So, I used the principle behind my Telepod device....” She held up her creation, which resembled a flower of jewels geometrically positioned with exactitude. “...to create a ‘Gate Key.’ Now we can come and go as we please.”

“But why did this Gate suddenly appear?” asked Marle.

Lucca crossed her arms and pensively stared at an orange-leaved plant near her. “Either the Telepod had something to do with it, or...something else made it.”

“Well *that* narrows it down!” interjected Crono. Lucca, as she was accustomed to doing, ignored him.

“This is getting pretty weird,” returned Marle. “Let’s at least get back to our own time while we know we still can!”

Lucca motioned her arms towards the Gate. “All right! Hop aboard!”

Together, they jumped into the portal that now granted them passage between two exclusive and strangely related points in the vast flow of time. They could only hope that they would emerge back home as they knew it.



With a deep and resounding rumble, a doorway through time itself opened to spit out the three travelers into the familiar year of 1000. Crono, Marle, and Lucca plopped clashingly onto the cobblestone floor of Leene Square between the two pods of Lucca’s short distance teleportation device, the Telepod. Little had she truly known how far her invention would take them that day.

“Phew! We’re back!” exclaimed Marle, jumping up from the heap.

“Well, that was sure interesting,” replied Lucca. “I’ll make sure this area gets sealed off so no one disturbs the Telepod.”

Crono glanced back at the pod that had taken them much farther than it had ever been designed to do, a recent memory coming back to him. “Hey, did you guys notice what Queen Leene had around her neck?”

“Yes!” perked Lucca, amazement strewn about her face. “Marle, how old *is* that pendant of yours?”

“I have no idea!” she replied, just as excited about what they had seen. “I knew it was an old family heirloom, but I never imagined it was more than 400 years old!”

Lucca stepped over to her with curiosity. “Mind if I have a look?”

“Sure.” Marle unfastened the chain carefully and handed it to Lucca. She examined it very closely, already fascinated by the promise of an indubitably dense history. Turning it over, she narrowed her eyes to read the writing on the back.

“*Liberò sigillum.*” Her eyes widened as though she had just mistakenly revealed the secrets of her next great invention. “Marle, this is the Ancient Language!”

“I pointed that out, as well,” interjected Crono in an attempt to tout his own cognition.

Marle nodded. “Yes, I’ve always known that. Do you know what it means, Lucca?”

“No,” she replied, “but I’d love to find out. Just the same, Marle, 400 years may be a drop in the bucket for this pendant. If this thing is truly authentic, we could be talking *millennia*. That’s just incredible!” Handling it all the more gingerly, she gave it back to Marle.

“Yeah,” started Crono, “but anyone could have engraved those words on the back.”

“Entirely true, Crono. Still, it’s hard to imagine anyone ever defacing a keepsake of the royal family with an engraving of the Ancient Language. It’s just odd...”

Marle spoke up again, shifting the conversation. “Crono, Lucca, why don’t you come home with me to the castle? I’d like you to come over for dinner!”

Crono rubbed his stomach nostalgically, remembering how long it had been since he had last eaten. “Wow, I guess it is almost suppertime. I’m famished!”

Lucca turned to Marle, dismissing the pendant. “Sorry for putting you through all that, Marle.”

“Are you joking? That’s the most fun I’ve had in months! And I have some new friends, too!”

Nodding, Lucca addressed Crono. “Crono, be a gentleman and take her home. I’ve got work to do. I’ll drop by as soon as I can!” With that, she hurried off.

“See you soon, Lucca!” Marle smiled as she left, spinning around to meet Crono. “Will you escort me home, Crono?”

With a large grin, Crono proffered his arm, which she accepted, and they strolled out of the square towards the town of Truce. This time, to Crono’s relief, they would go past his house on their way into the version of Truce he had known all his life. Simply knowing that his house was actually there, in that cozy spot on the side of the hill, was enough to push the traumas of their experience from his mind.

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En route to her island-situated home, Lucca decided to make a quick stop into the market to pick up some supplies. As she strolled into the small, timbered venue, Frederick, the owner and Elaine’s father, stood yelling into the back room. Silently, she approached the counter as he continued his rage.

“Elaine’s down at the pier again? That Fritz! Where could he be?” He turned from the doorway and snapped his eyes to Lucca. “Oh! Hello, Lucca! What can I do for you?”

“...I was just picking up those pieces of metal I ordered.”

“Oh, yes! The blacksmith recently brought them in. You’ve already paid, right?”

“Right.”

“Well, here you go.” He handed her a bundle of various metal shapes. “Have a nice day!”

She took the pieces into her arms carefully. “Sure. Fritz still not back, eh?”

“That boy’s in for some hard labor when he gets back!”

She smiled, knowing his way with his son. “I’m sure he’ll be fine. See ya around.” She left for her house, concerned once again that Fritz still had not returned home.



Being that his house was on the way, Crono had decided to inform his mother of his new plans for the evening. She was sitting at the kitchen table when he and Marle entered.

“My, how nice!” she responded at the sight of Marle. “I’ve only seen you with Lucca! Who’s your pretty new friend?”

Marle smiled warmly, thankful for Gina’s kindness. “Hi, I’m Marle!”

“Marle, eh? Hmm...I’m sure I’ve seen you before, dear. Now, where was that...?”

Crono cut in quickly. “Marle’s invited me to eat supper with her. Lucca should be coming along later.”

“Oh! That’s very nice, dear. Who are your parents, Marle? I wonder if I might know them.”

Crono felt himself twitch nervously but was surprised when Marle answered. “Their names are Ronan and Aliza, on the other side of town. They tend to keep to themselves, mostly.”

“Hmm,” she thought. “I don’t suppose I know them, then.”

Just then, two cats approached Crono and brushed against his legs. “Eh...?”

“Oh yes. I see you did well at the fair. A strange soldier came here to deliver a Poyozo doll and this female cat! I hope you can handle them, Crono!”

He smiled playfully at Marle, who also appeared amused. “Sure, Mom!”

“Okay. Well, you two have fun, and try to be home before dark, Crono.”

“Alright! See you, Mom!”

“Nice to meet you!” waved Marle. The two then ran out happily, his mother watching them melt into the warm, inviting picture of Truce Village. The setting sun added to the convivial scene with its gallant display of golden rays strewn across the sky. She smiled contently and got up to wash the dishes.



As they neared Truce, Crono turned to Marle, remembering the conversation with Gina. “Wow, that was close. Nice save back there! Did you just make up those names?”

She smiled with a faint giggle and replied, “Nope, those are their real names. Daddy’s own maidservants don’t even know his real first name, and only a handful actually remember Mother’s.” With a grin of his own, Crono savored the thought of what Marle had just said as they entered the town.

“So what kind of food do they serve up there?” asked Crono, eagerly leading them through town.

“Anything you want! The chef is excellent! You’ll never go hungry again!”

“Mmm! You’re making me even hungrier!” He began scratching his chin as though making a decision on something. “Hmm, let’s see.... I think I’ll have him cook me up a whole pheasant with some crusted sea bass and honey-dipped apple slices on the side. That should be enough to get me started!”

Marle reared her head back in laughter. “I’m sure he can handle that!”

After a moment, he reverted from the subject of food. “So, the king’s your dad?! I bet he’s a really great man!” he exclaimed enthusiastically. “This has got to be the most exciting time of my life!”

She smiled pleasantly. “That’s my dad: the King of Guardia.” They were now well on their way into Guardia Forest, where the crickets were just beginning to make their music as though practicing for the main symphony to come at night.

“So, how often do you have guests in the castle?”

“Well...actually, *I* haven’t had more than a couple of friends there over the years, but my father invites people all the time. They’re usually mayors or people of importance.”

“Only a couple?” Crono smiled inwardly. “So I’m one of the fortunate few, eh?”

Marle continued to walk as the leader. “Yeah, I suppose so,” she replied with a small snicker.

“Well...I’m honored to have dinner with such a lovely host.” Marle smiled again, enjoying Crono’s unnecessarily polite mannerisms.

They emerged from the forest and hiked onto the smooth steps of stone pieces leading up the steep hill to the door above. With every step they made, they found themselves considering the minute differences between the castle of 600 and that of the present, knowing that no other save Lucca could share in that perspective.

Marle finally turned and smiled happily, offering her arm to Crono. “I’m sure everyone will love your company, Crono. I know I do!”

Content in the presence of each other, they entered the castle excited about their big meal—a meal that they would share together.