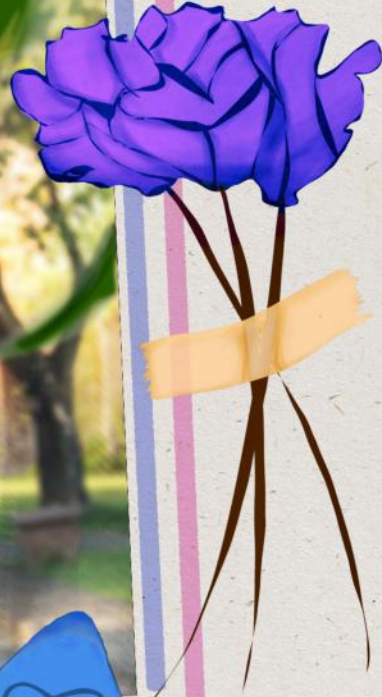


OCTA

TRAVELS

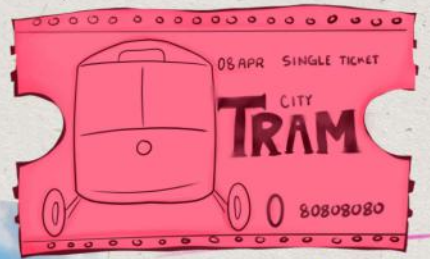




Poppet's shot of me from this morning

Today was my first day performing in this town. It was my first time visiting and I wouldn't have thought of doing a show here if not for an invitation from the mayor's wife. She and the high society ladies of this town wanted to invite entertainers from across South Elysium to perform during their town's peak tourist season.

There is a lot of greenery in this place, providing shade during sunny days. I arrived before noon so the tree lined streets were a welcome respite from the heat. There were bushes and vine-covered walls full of flowers too, giving color to the haze of leaves everywhere. However, the stage was not under the canopy of trees



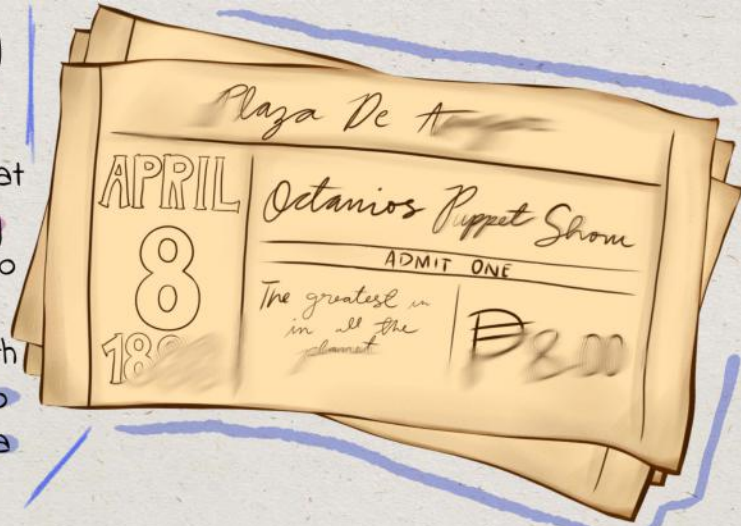
The stage has to look festive if we're performing next to the grand Bridge.



Sir Octavio
It would be of our greatest pleasure to have you bring your renowned puppet show to our plaza's celebration



The shows were to be held at the town's plaza by the riverside, near a mighty-looking stone bridge straddling the river. I saw carpenters erect a rectangular arch on top of a platform and I knew that this was where I would perform. I was the opening act and was impatient seeing the stage unfinished so asked if I could assist with stage decoration. The head carpenter was reluctant to share the task with me so I sought the organizer's approval. "Leave it to me," I said as soon as I got the OK. "You're getting a preview of Octavio's Puppet Show."



I opened my suitcase, drew out my baton and waved it over a bunch of poppets inside. My poppets sat up and waited while I pointed my baton to boxes of decor, and commanded them to put them up. It was a spectacle the townspeople had never seen before.

Everyone gathered around as the octoposse did their tasks, although a few poppets decided to wander as far as the bridge after they were done.



The sight of the octoposse in action drew a large crowd to the actual show. Their curiosity was appeased by my music and the poppets' dancing. It was a smash hit and I expect tomorrow will be the same.



I think they liked this part the most!



mestroe



Poppet





"SOLO" TRIP

FIT CHECK!

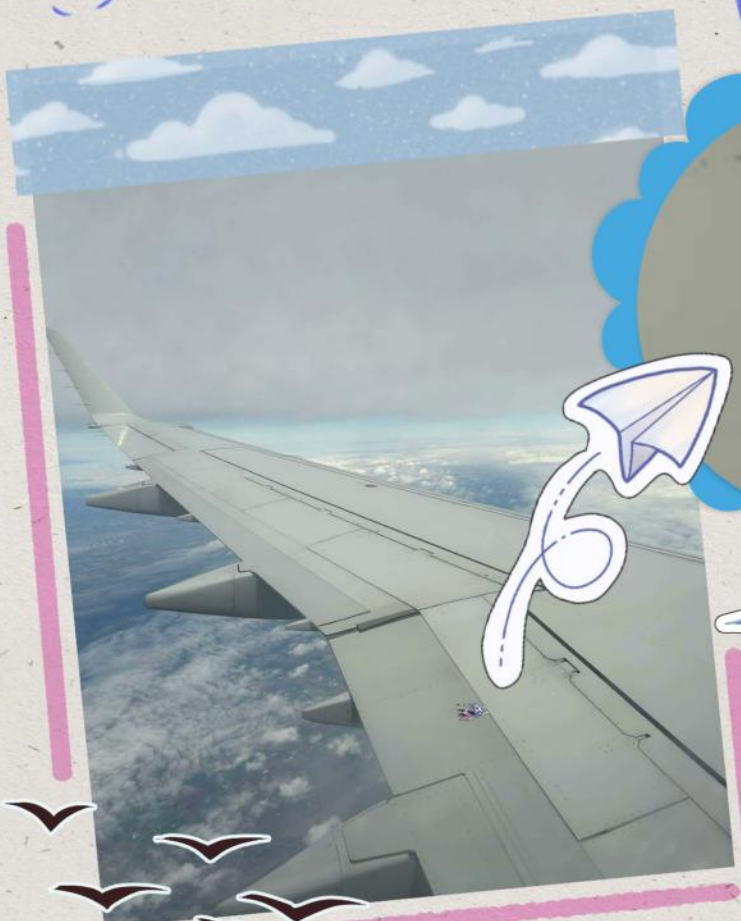


I had been hoping to write this journal entry about my peaceful, relaxing vacation, how I was feeling refreshed and ready to get back to work upon my return, and so on.

See, I thought I had been exceptionally clear with my poppets that they were to stay home and out of trouble. I even believed they'd listened when I'd gotten to the airport without noticing one of them tailing me.



It wasn't until I saw one clinging stubbornly to the wing beneath my window that I realized one had tagged along.



I couldn't very well send it back alone, so it came along with me for my "solitary" trip.



For all the stress at the start, the vacation itself has been pleasant. The architecture here is beautiful, though it reminds me of *Anathema* in some ways. My stowaway Poppet was particularly excited about all the flowers in bloom; it picked one for me, though I can't imagine why it chose this one in particular.



Perhaps I should have brought some poppets along from the start—it did make things livelier at the cost of my relaxation—but I don't want this to set a precedent for the others. If this had been a dangerous mission rather than a holiday, it could've ended badly. I'll need to think of better ways to deter them.

But for now, my priority is finding some way to fit Poppet into my carry-on before we fly home in the morning.



CRUISE VACATION



They keep side-eyeing the water... but they chose this seat

Cruises are very comfortable, extremely expensive traps floating in the middle of the ocean.



We're in the balcony of our cabin while the ship hums along somewhere between "port of departure" and "wherever they're taking us next."

Apparently, I won this entire trip from a raffle ticket someone slipped into my hand at an event weeks ago.

I assumed it was a coupon for a free drink or something equally harmless. Instead: a cruise.

Naturally, I brought poppets.
Someone has to carry the luggage.



Embarkation went smoothly until the luggage started... rattling. At first, I assumed the ship's engines were vibrating through the cases. Reasonable explanation. Perfectly logical.

Then one suitcase sneezed.
Yes. Sneezed.



I opened it and discovered a brand new poppet curled up between my clothes like a stowaway crab. No explanation, of course—just wide eyes and a very guilty expression. They kept pointing vaguely toward the water outside the terminal and shaking their head.



! we'll unpack that later. !



For now, the poppets are treating this ship like a moving playground. We toured the promenade, watched a cooking demonstration where one of them tried to steal a lemon garnish, and somehow ended up wandering dangerously close to the casino.

Let the record show: I was only observing the tables.

Purely academic interest.

Before I could even sit down, however, three poppets grabbed my coat sleeves and physically dragged me away from the blackjack table like tiny, panicked bodyguards.



Anyway, dinner is soon, and there's apparently a theater show afterward. Tomorrow, we might investigate the pool deck—though the new poppet turned pale the moment they saw the ocean stretching in every direction.

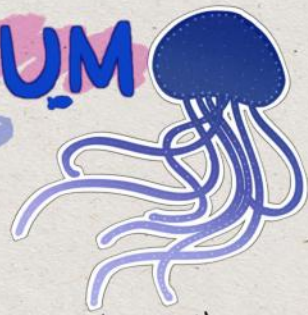
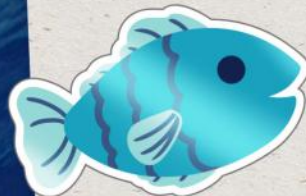
Curious.

Fortunately, we have several days on this ship.

Plenty of time to figure out why they hid in my suitcase... and perhaps convince them the water isn't planning to eat them.



AQUARIUM



I'm seated on a bench in the dim blue quiet of the aquarium's largest gallery. The light here filters through the glass like diluted sapphire—everything slow, drifting a little dreamlike. Poppet insisted we come, or rather several dozen poppets insisted, loudly and with much dramatics, until the ocean-view cabin felt less like a suite and more like a flock of very small seagulls.

Every fish that swims by is apparently 'the best one so far!'

While I attempt to write, they're scattered along the railing, pointing at everything that swims past as if the creatures might applaud them for noticing. One of them just tried to wave at a jellyfish. The jellyfish did not reciprocate.



The new poppet stayed behind me at first, clinging to the edge of the bench like the glass might suddenly burst and flood the entire building. Understandable, I suppose. A wall of water filled with drifting shapes isn't exactly comforting if you already distrust the ocean.

But curiosity is a powerful force.



A few minutes ago, I noticed them inching closer to the railing. Slowly. Carefully. Now they're standing between two other poppets, peering over the edge of the glass and pointing at a school of silver fish passing by.

Progress.



A small blue fish drifted past the glass a moment ago—bright, almost electric. I pointed it out.

"Huh," I said, tapping the glass lightly. "This one looks familiar. A creature that forgets. How convenient."

Several poppets stared up at me.

I waved it off.

"Never mind. Cultural reference."

They huddled together after that, chattering as if the fish might overhear them and clarify the joke.

Eventually, they dragged me through the gift shop instead—apparently the most important exhibit here. I'm now supervising a heated debate over which keychain best represents today's adventure.

In the end, they chose a tiny blue tang.

I informed them that we have a limited budget, so the keychain must be shared with the poppets back at the workshop. There was immediate outrage.

Personally, I think it builds character.

Also... it might help them remember where they got it.

Just in case one of them turns out like the fish one day.



F I S H





The sun is a menace.

BEACH

Fitting, I suppose—this is the final item on our itinerary, the last stop before the cruise spits us back into reality. I've taken refuge beneath a very large umbrella planted firmly in the sand like a flag of surrender. The beach itself is perfectly pleasant—bright water, soft wind, waves rolling in with that rhythmic hush-hush sound that makes people poetic. Unfortunately, the sun overhead is attempting to assassinate me.

So I came prepared.



I'm choosing to believe this is intentional



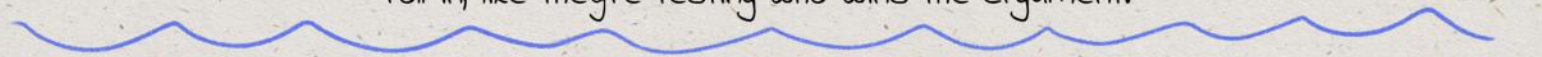
Beach hat. Sunglasses. Strategic shade placement. I chose a spot close enough to the water that the tide occasionally creeps toward our towels—purely coincidental, of course, and absolutely not because the scared poppet has been treating the ocean like a mythological beast that will devour them whole.

Exposure therapy, I suppose.



Right now they're standing ankle-deep in the shallows, chirping every time a wave touches their foot. The others keep dragging them back in.

Earlier they would barely step near the water at all. Now they're splashing back when the waves roll in, like they're testing who wins the argument.



In the meantime, I've been assigning small errands.

"Poppet," I called earlier, reclining comfortably, "fetch your Maestro a drink."

They did.

Then sunscreen.

Then a shell that looked "particularly photogenic."



It's a very effective distraction technique. Keeps them from spiraling into dramatic monologues about sea monsters.

At some point, however, I may have closed my eyes for a moment. Purely to rest them.

When I woke up, I discovered two things.

- First: the poppets had been unusually quiet.
- Second: I was buried in sand from the neck down.

Completely immobilized.

They were extremely proud of themselves.

Honestly... I suppose it's fair retaliation.



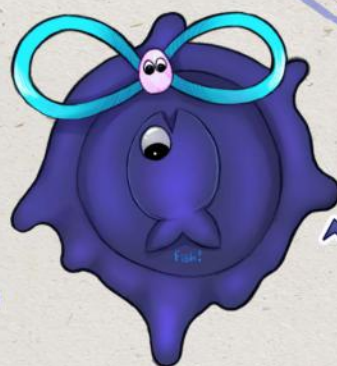
Still, they're laughing together now—running between the water and our umbrella, comparing shells and arguing about whose sandcastle looks the least like a collapsed pastry. The formerly fearful one has wandered farther now, letting the waves reach their knees before running back with the rest.

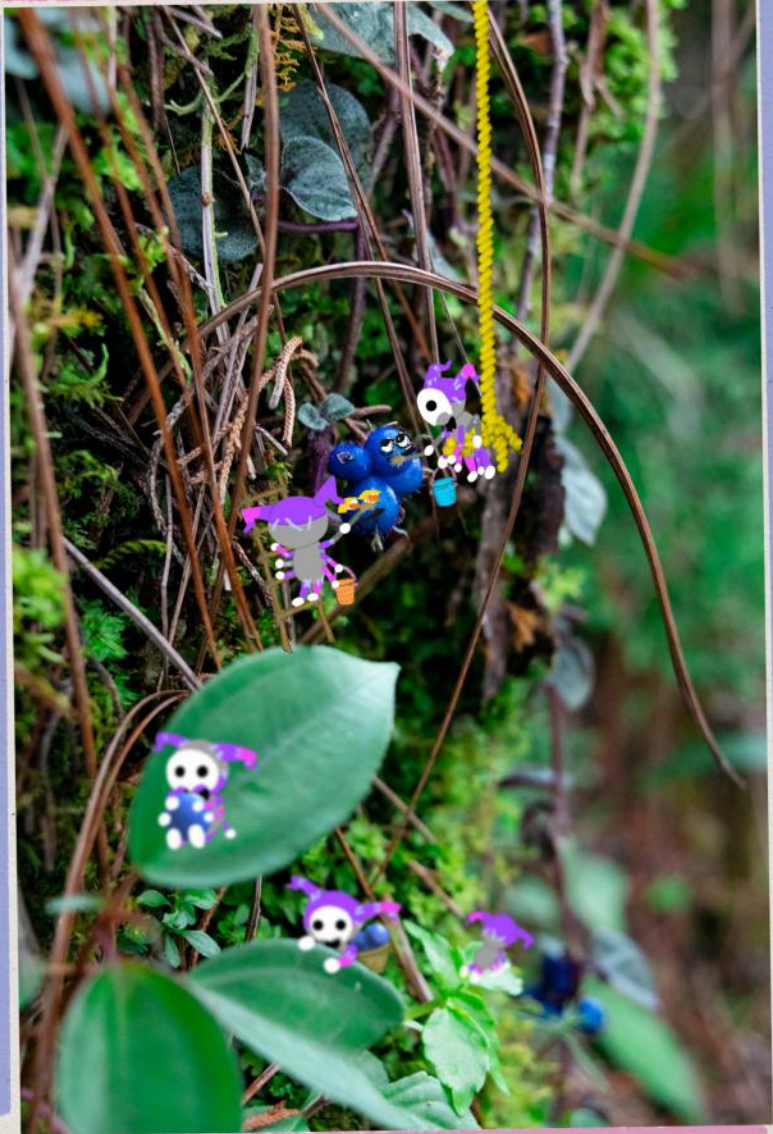
Anyway, we'll be heading back soon.

And just to be clear: going on vacation does not exempt anyone from their duties tomorrow.



Even the traitors.





Spring is upon us—the wind no longer bites with its chill, various animals wake from their hibernation, and wild berries begin to sprout.



Today, I let the poppets out to enjoy some time in the sun, bask in the pleasant spring weather, maybe even forage for something useful.

But of course, I shouldn't have expected anything normal from those creative critters.

Their creativity knows no bounds—just like mine!

They found some wild berries while frolicking in the nearby forest and when some of them kept tugging at my coat to follow, I thought they were going to ask whether those berries were edible or not, though it seemed like they had other plans.



Armed with tiny paintbrushes made with loose animal hair and with thimbles as paint buckets, some poppets started happily decorating these blue colored wild berries. The more resourceful of the bunch made a few ladders from fallen twigs on the ground so the painters could have an easier reach.



It was honestly so inspiring watching them work together to bring this little art project to life.

A D V E N T U R E

I asked them what they were doing this for, but all I got were expectant gazes, as if it should've already been obvious to me. Well, we may be intrinsically connected with the strings but I'm not a mindreader!

These poppets need to learn the difference one day...



Not everyone was gung-ho about giving these wild berries a little make-over, however. Some poppets were content to just lounge around and pick some berries to bring home.

I plucked one myself, and well, they didn't seem like the poisonous kind, and honestly, it was quite sweet.

A bit too tart for my liking.



I waited until they'd finished painting up a good bunch, and I gotta say—their work looked eerily similar to mine when I painted my own creations. Like Maestro like poppets, indeed.

It's a shame we had to leave those painted berries behind though. The poppets tried pleading their case but I simply told them that their new "siblings" shall be the guardian of the forests!

And they all lived happily ever after.

T₁ H₄ E₁
E₁ N₁ D₂



CHECKMATE!

well, then poppets!

From this point forward, I'm going to teach all of you some chess!



This art installation caught my eye the moment it got within sight. I was strolling alone, my poppets having gone ahead after I let them roam around the park.



It's not everyday they get to enjoy such a nice sunny day outside.



As I got closer to my target, something else piqued my interest. Small chattering chatters and familiar silhouettes surrounded the stone pieces of the exhibit.



Black and white supersized chess pieces were deliberately placed on a slightly raised chess board on the floor. A playable game for giants.

But the ones currently trying their hands with the pieces were nothing but teeny tiny little creatures.

I almost couldn't help the snort that escaped my nose at seeing a poppet with all their six arms and puny legs try to push a piece forward to no avail. I had to shake my head as well, finding my coat resting atop the black king's piece, a self-satisfied looking poppet making themselves cozy inside it while holding onto the chess piece (so that's where my coat went! I was trying to find it all morning!).

Hehe!

And as if that wasn't creative enough, some of them even had the gall to pull out some of the surrounding plants to wrap them around the white stone pieces for decoration.



The white chess pieces did look quite... "inspired" after all the moss and greens were stuck around them.

I couldn't even begin to fathom what goes on in their minds. I had to ask them if anyone even knows how to play chess but I was met with silence and confused hollow gazes. It's not like I'm one to talk, but I'd like to think I at least know the basics.



I do hope we don't get a visit from the city council or the park rangers... I did tell my poppets to clean them up back to how they first saw the sculptures. I made sure that white marble queen was sparkling!



And I don't think we have enough vases for the flowers!

Am I meant to eat all this chocolate?



The matters of the heart are too frivolous to let my poppets indulge in them, let alone be aware of them!



why, all they ever need to know is that I graciously gave them each a functioning heart and that the Strings That Bind are eternal! Their devotion is never lacking, of course, as proved by this ridiculous little ritual they insisted on doing for this sorry excuse for a holiday.



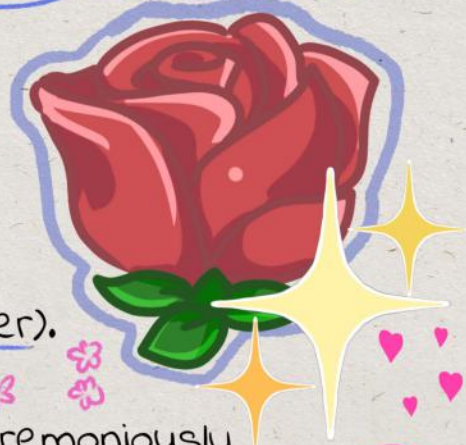
valentine's Day is not something I pay much attention to and I never thought the poppets would even know about it (I may need to restrict their internet access).



But here we are on this bench beneath a massive flower arch shaped like a freaking heart—how romantic... though dare I say this veil they made is quite fine quality.

I don't even know how they got their hands on such expensive silk... and not to mention the lace—huh, maybe I should check my coin box later.

They lead me here after a little "breakfast in bed" moment they bestowed upon me (let's just say calling it "breakfast" is me being generous and having it "in bed" almost made me not have a bed for the foreseeable future—but that's a story in itself for later).



I barely had my hair brushed before the veil got unceremoniously thrown over my head—I thought I was being kidnapped!

S W E E T

So many gifts of flowers and chocolates later, I asked them what those were even for. They simply looked at me like I'm stupid (how RUDE!) and chirped that they're for showing their gratitude to me as their puppeteer.

I won't lie and say their intent didn't tug on the heartstrings, but I can't have their egos inflated much more than they are.

Again, I don't really mind valentine's Day, but if that means getting showered in appreciation like this then it's not all so bad, I guess...





Poppet discovered a mysterious path during our walk in the woods. They had just run right into a bush without me! It was so thick, the branches kept getting stuck in my coat! But on the other side of the bush was this staircase going upward; we couldn't see what it was leading toward.

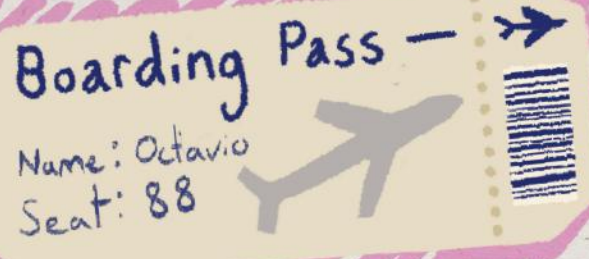


I can't believe that these carvings are here...

on the rock walls were carvings of the Quietus, and what looked like people surrounding it. They seemed to be in worship.

Poppet didn't seem to care. It was looking at a couple of flowers growing on a nearby bush. They kind of looked like the Quietus, or rather, their features were very similar to it. one had the shape, another had the color.

But they were not the same.



The staircase led to a hidden lake at the foot of the mountain. The pier seems to be in good shape; it doesn't shake when I walk on it. Those same flowers from the path seem to be growing around the lake shore.

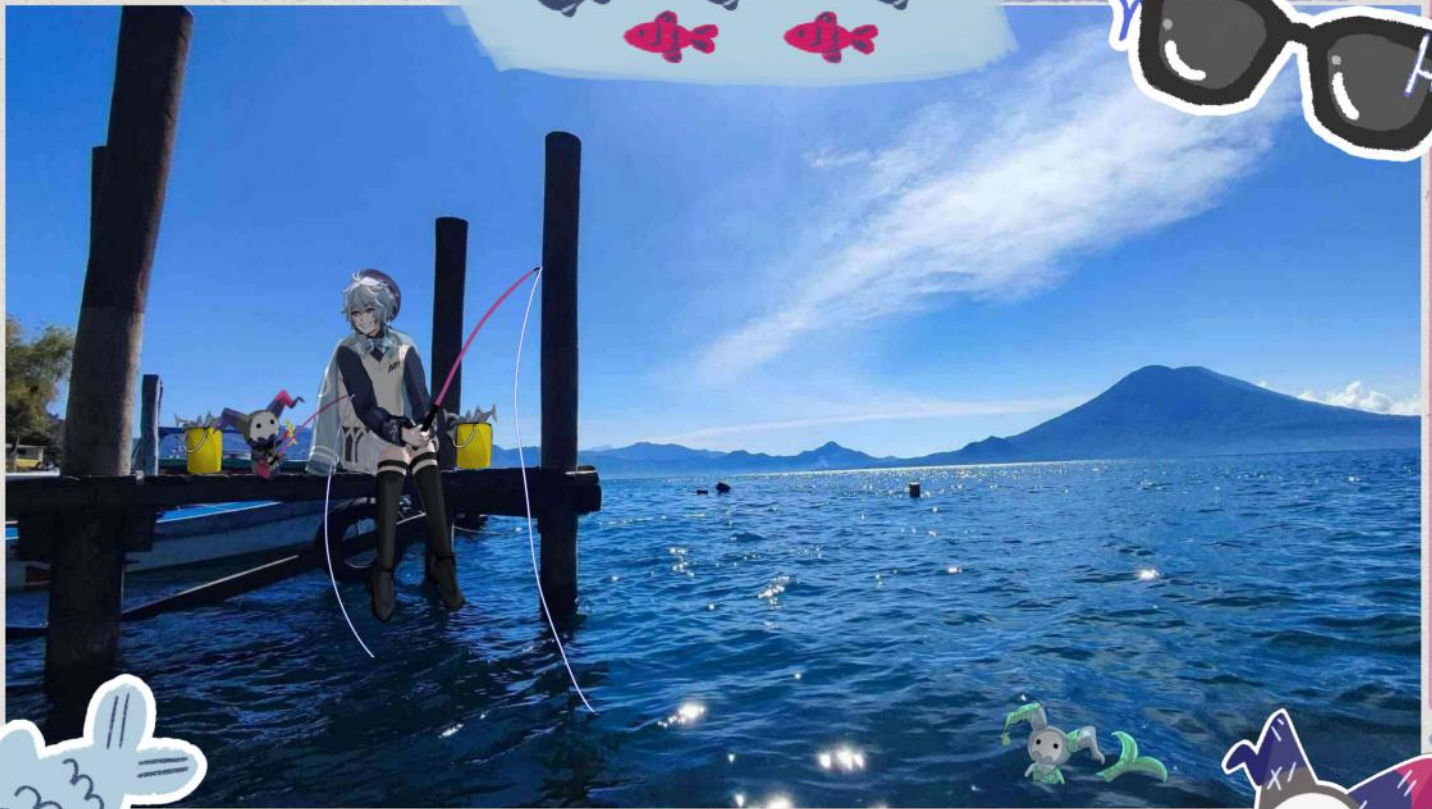
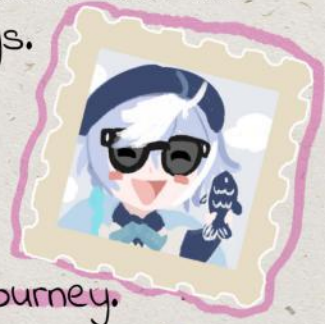


Perhaps this used to be a place of worship for the Quietus.

I would never expect to see something like this in Elysium, though it would explain all of the flower symbolism that we're seeing. But past the flowers and the carving, nothing else here seems to remain of those days.

Even so, it would have been a waste if me and Poppet had just left after confirming.

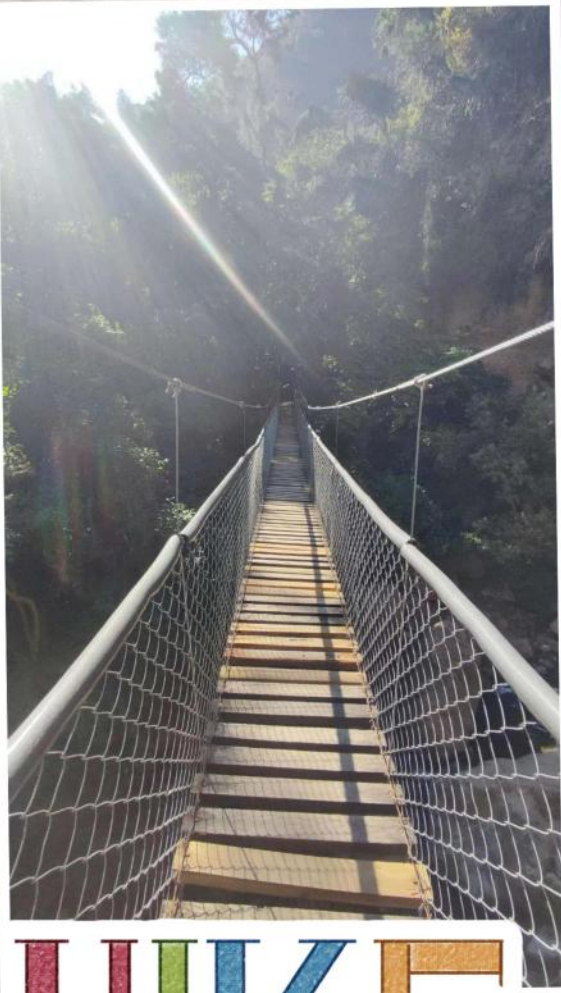
We'll relax around here for a bit before we continue on our journey.



Poppet seemed to have caught a fish!



Summer Time



HIKE

ADVENTURE

After that we kept on walking for a while.

Hiking is more exhausting than I expected...

I really thought it's nothing more than walking T-T

Today we arrived at a small town!

After looking around for a while, we found a hiking path. Since we were in the mood to explore, we followed it like real adventurers!

We quickly reached a forest filled with trees that I don't know the name of.

Hiking was fun, but it didn't take long for us to come face to face with our first challenge: A big bridge, no more than wood and rope...



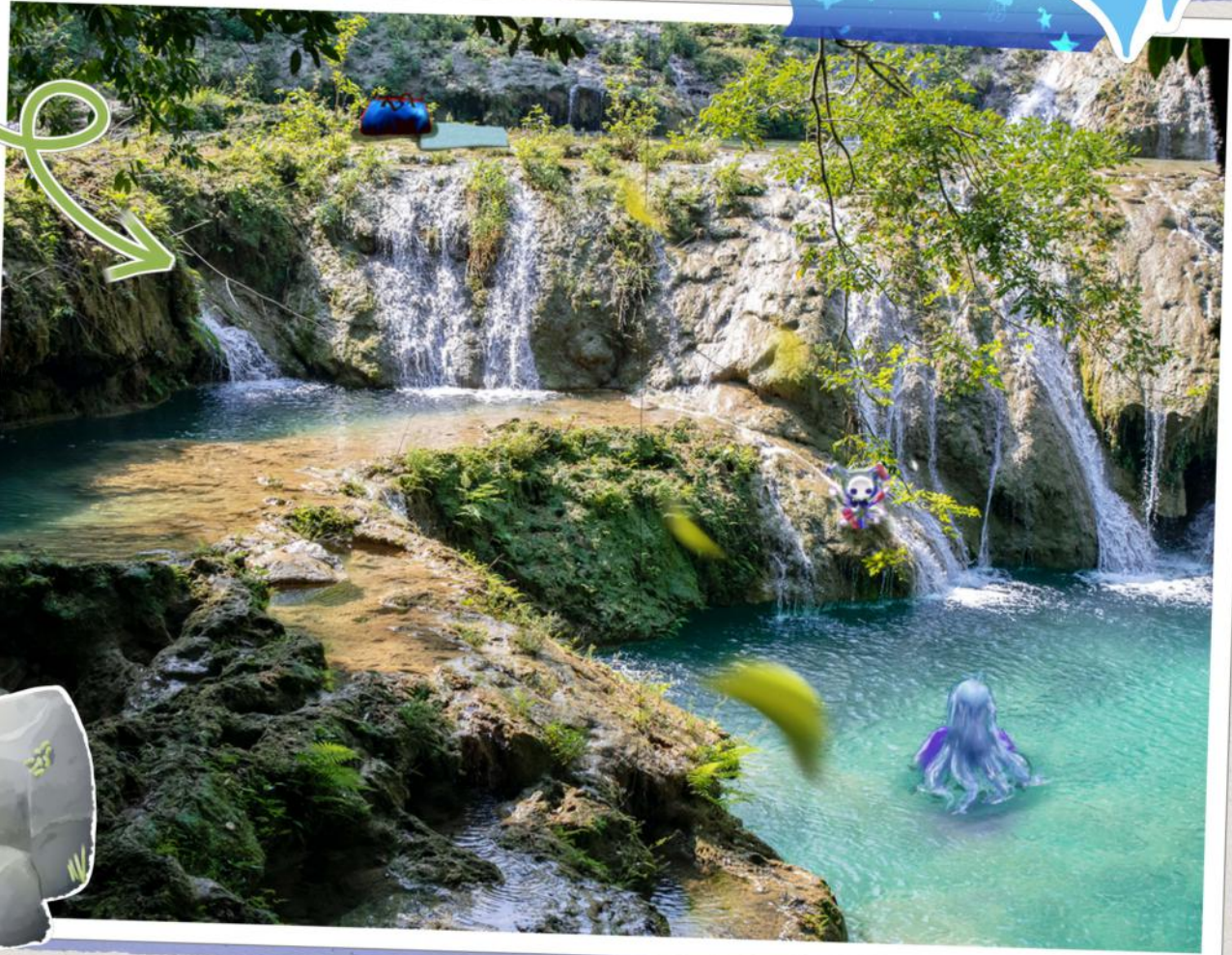
SO EXHAUSTING

I wanted to try my best and make it to the other side, but my legs wouldn't move... The only thing I could do was hold on to the rope on the side, afraid to fall off.


So, like a true savior, octavio picked me up, placed me in the front pocket of his shirt and easily made it over to the other side.



But all of the exhaustion was forgotten when we found this beautiful place to rest at: a small cliffside, mossy, water pouring down the rocks into small waterfalls and a pool of clear blue water that was deep enough to be able to swim in.







I didn't know a waterfall was that loud, but it was nice to listen to. It got even more calming when Octavio started humming to himself while he went to cool off in the water.

It was so comforting, warmed up by the afternoon sun and surrounded by nature. 

I almost fell asleep... But before I could fall asleep, I was hit by a wave of water. What started as a little prank from Octavio quickly turned into a real water fight. I tried to use one of the small waterfalls to my advantage, successfully splashing the water at Octavio. The air was filled with laughter!

On our way back we found a flower that we've never seen before!

 It looked interesting with a reddish color and spiky petals. Such a cool flower.   

Today was exhausting but it was so much fun!



Secret Flower Garden

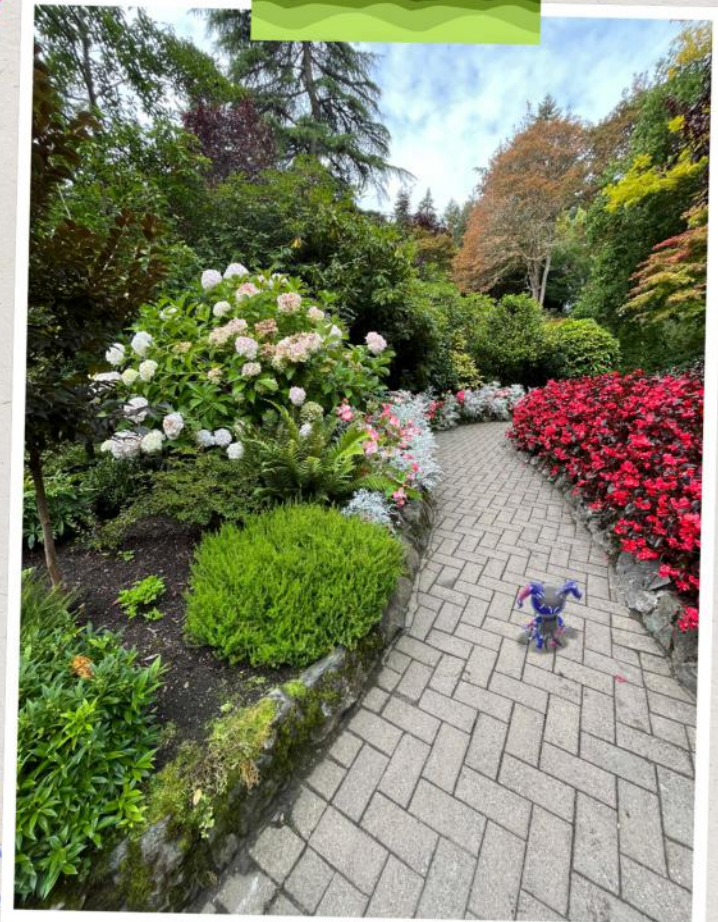
The place we're visiting today is filled with beautiful plants. You can smell flowers wherever you are!



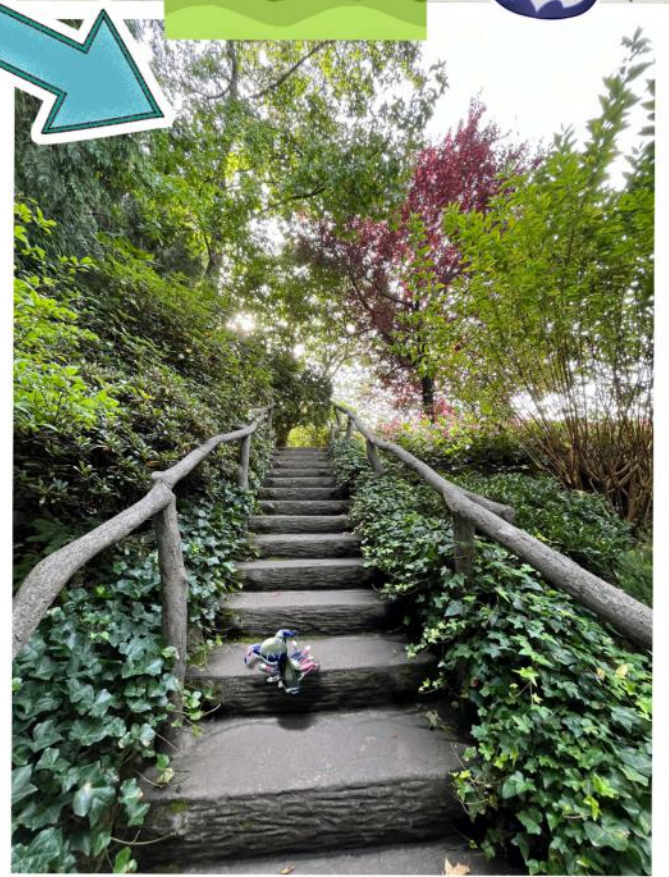
We started walking, curious to see what the town has to offer. After just a few minutes, we found a park with all kinds of flowers, making us feel like we walked into a secret garden.

I just couldn't help but get one of the pretty flowers for Octavio. Its color reminded me of his eyes, a beautiful shade of pink.

He smiled when I gave him the flower and held me up so I could put it in his hair.



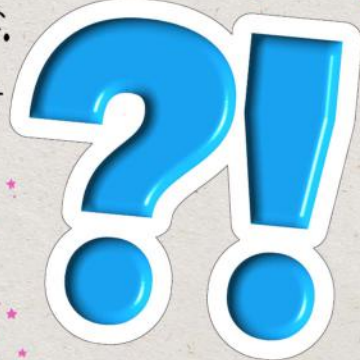
Hidden away in a corner, between smaller trees, we found stairs. I don't like stairs... they are tall and hard to climb. But I refused to let them beat me and made it to the top in the end!



We kept on walking for a while, in awe of how relaxing nature can be as we made our way deeper into the forest.

After what felt like an eternity, we found... another staircase. Even octavio mumbled something like, "what, there are MORE stairs?" to himself.

I tried my best to get up there, but my legs just wouldn't do what I wanted them to. Before I could give up, my view shifted and I had quickly been placed on octavio's shoulder.



once we reached the top, we checked out a big white building. I don't know what exactly it was, but we made it to the top floor and took in the view from up there.

It was incredible!

What it
LOOKED
LIKE



we could see so far, the town and nearby city almost hidden behind the forest. The sun and clouds painted nature in different shades of green and brown and the air felt fresher than ever before.

on our way back an idea formed in my head...

why walk down the stairs when you can use their railing as a slide?

It was a bit scary, but that quickly turned into fun when I felt the wind around me and heard octavio's surprised laughter.



It turns out stairs can be fun after all!

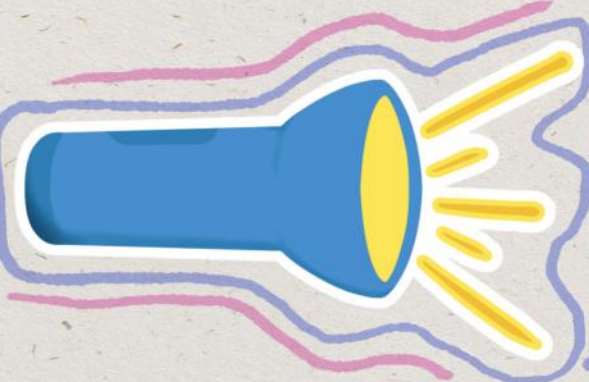


we found something super cool!



CAVE

octavio mentioned that it was rare to find caves in the Badlands, since they're normally covered in sand.




I wasn't sure if he was joking when he wanted to take a look—it was completely dark and there was no guarantee there would be anything inside.

But what do you know?

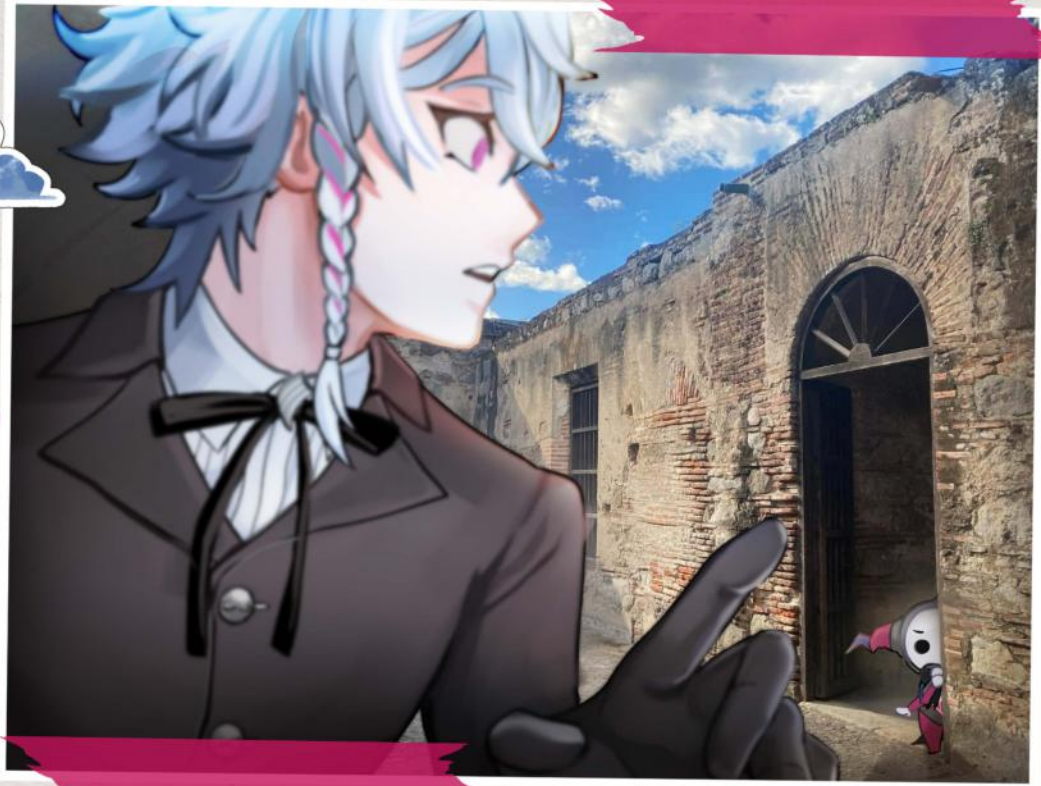


A D V E N T U R E



There was a town on the other side!

Completely abandoned who-knows-when for who-knows-why, but it was really fun to look around.



we had the entire place to ourselves, although I'm not sure how much longer that'll be true.



I could've sworn I heard him mention something about free real estate.



JUNGLE

Finally home!

I have no idea where we ended up or how we even got there but we're both safe and sound!

It was a very green and humid place, with lots of leaves and plants I'd never seen before.




C L O S E U P


It must've been at least twenty minutes of wandering but octavio insisted we weren't lost. I'm not sure how much I believe him.

we made it out thanks to a waterfall.





It was taller than most buildings, with enough water to fill a river!
It was honestly kind of scary up close. 

The plants were a lot denser at the riverside, and it was difficult to walk around, but there were so many flowers blooming that it wasn't all bad. 

They were really pretty! 

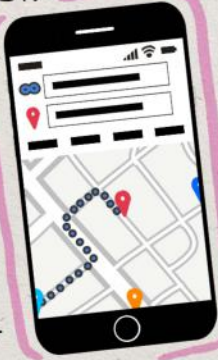


My latest mission brought me to a small urban prefecture in Xenokuni, in what was SUPPOSED to be a simple field survey but turned into a full-on cleanup of a Corruption Beast nest.

Nothing that Poppet and I couldn't manage, of course.

After receiving our reward (with additional fees for the extra work), we still had time before our return trip. Honestly, I would've just waited it out, but Poppet rushed over and pushed their iPad into my face, full of pictures of the local area's food.

Feeling my stomach rumble, I supposed I could indulge in this little... sidequest.



yum!



Poppet's confused face was soooo funny. I think they still don't get it XD

our first stop was a homely coffee shop down the street.

It had an intriguing but creative sign, which confused Poppet about whether the shop was actually open. Its elderly owners warmly greeted us with their brunch special: toasted bread served with homemade butter and an orange espresso.

They even added a cup of whipped cream for Poppet.

a tsuki ga kirei / 1d

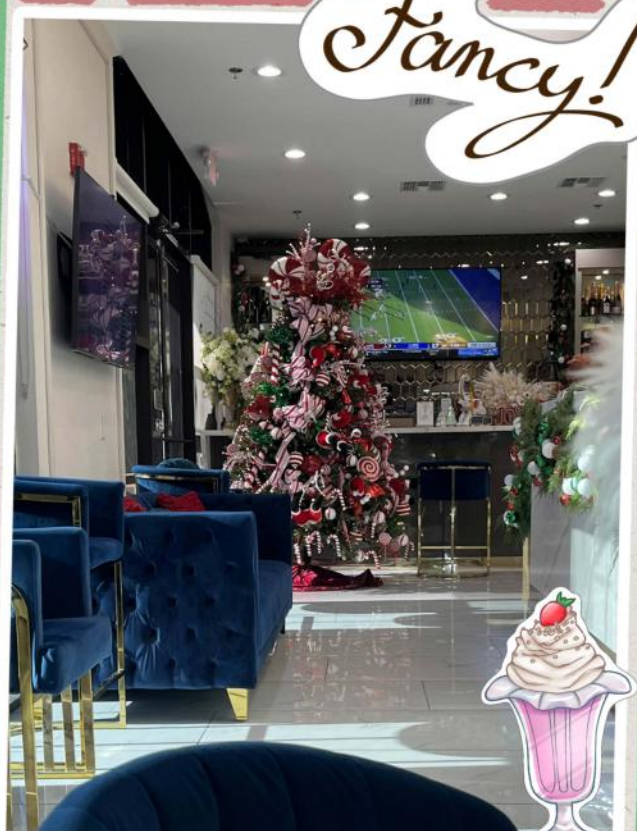
Fancy!



For our afternoon meal, Poppet led me to an upscale-looking restaurant.

I was skeptical at first, but I was sold after seeing they had Christmas decorations everywhere.

This restaurant is top-notch! I would give this



We were served several fancy dishes, but one dessert plate stood out the most for me.

It featured multiple sweets of various colors, flavors and textures.

Poppet →



All neatly arranged like a blooming flower garden and the tastes blending harmoniously in my mouth.



By evening, I decided that Poppet and I would try xenokunian convenience store food. But!

Instead of just one, why not go around the block and sample ALL the stores we could find? By the end of our run, we bought so many snacks, and Poppet learnt how to ask for "fukuro" from the store clerks.



As a reward, I treated them to 5012khgia's favorite snack: the legendary convenience store pudding.



Poppet later asked if we could come back here.

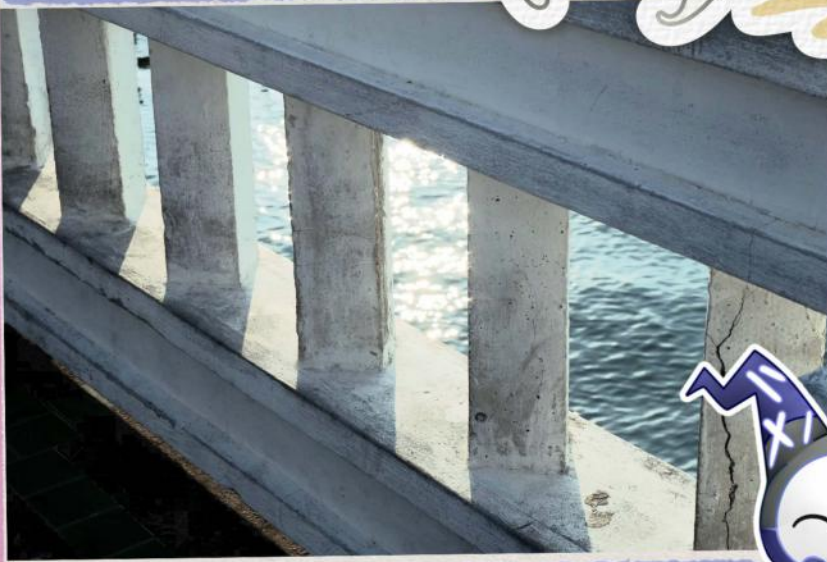
I scoffed and roughly patted their head.
"We haven't even left, and you're already wanting to come back? Quite greedy, aren't you?"

I gave no response to their pleading eyes, but at least I know... both of us really think alike.







anathema coast



The ocean in Anathema
* is really cold. *
I'd forgotten that until
I came here again.



Funny—it doesn't seem to bother my poppets. For all their whining and begging and bargaining to see this place for themselves, I was expecting their hopes to be way too high for what they were about to see. I thought they'd be put off, maybe. At the very least a touch disappointed.



There aren't any smooth shores to run along here, no soft sand to build a castle with or write 'MASTROE' on with a stick.

I brought them to satisfy their nagging curiosity and prove a point: Anathema is a cadaver and a memorial, and nothing more.

The salt spray tastes like sterile solution, the tide's just going through the motions, and even sitting in the sun, it's chilly.



It's really not much of a beach.



But I guess that's subjective, because as I write this, they're chittering happily from the rocks, combing the crevices and the tide pools for hidden treasures. To my left is a growing pile of shells: little, gleaming things, iridescent fragments they keep bringing me like peace offerings.

Probably trying to make up for that stunt they pulled in the water before, flailing around like they were drowning until I waded in to rescue them—not that they needed it.

I know a bad play when I see one, but still. I had to be sure.



S P L A S H



Anyway, now I'm "lifeguarding", which is to say, sitting in my soaked, heavy clothes, waiting to dry under the lukewarm sunlight while the culprits BEHAVE themselves (and they know I mean that as a threat). ☺

We still have a few hours of daylight left, and I'm less than excited about making the journey back through the gates to Elysium dripping wet, so I'm in no hurry to leave just yet.

It's weird. I actually used to hate this view, way back when. It always felt kind of lonely, but today... well, I was so busy keeping an eye on my poppets that I guess I forgot that, too.



sneaky Poppet -- I thought I heard my camera shutter go off

TRUST NO POPPET!

END
of the
LINE



Seriously, what a freaking day. what a DAY! Now we're finally back on the train and heading to our ACTUAL destination—several hours LATE, mind you—I can take a minute to immortalize the whole, annoying tale. >D

This leg of our journey was always going to be a long one, so we had an early start.

I mean, four o'clock in the morning isn't early for ME, but we're on vacation! I wanted to sleep in!

S N O O Z E

So once we were on the train, I set an alarm on my phone, shushed my poppets and rested my eyes for a bit—or it was SUPPOSED to be, anyway.

But it wasn't my alarm that woke me up; it was the train's conductor, shouting "End of the line!"



look at them all, suking like this wasn't the consequence of their own actions >:(



worse, my phone battery was dead—doubtless drained by certain someones using it for their baby sensory games—and my poppets were nowhere to be seen, not inside the train or on the platform in the middle of nowhere that we'd stopped at.

They'd just ditched me and wandered off!



LUCKILY, the conductor told me the next train out of there wouldn't be 'til the afternoon, so I had nothing but time on my hands to hunt down those little traitors.

A couple of scraps of their fabric caught on the platform's fence led me into the nearby forest, where I picked up a single trail of crushed undergrowth.

At least they stuck together. Small mercies.

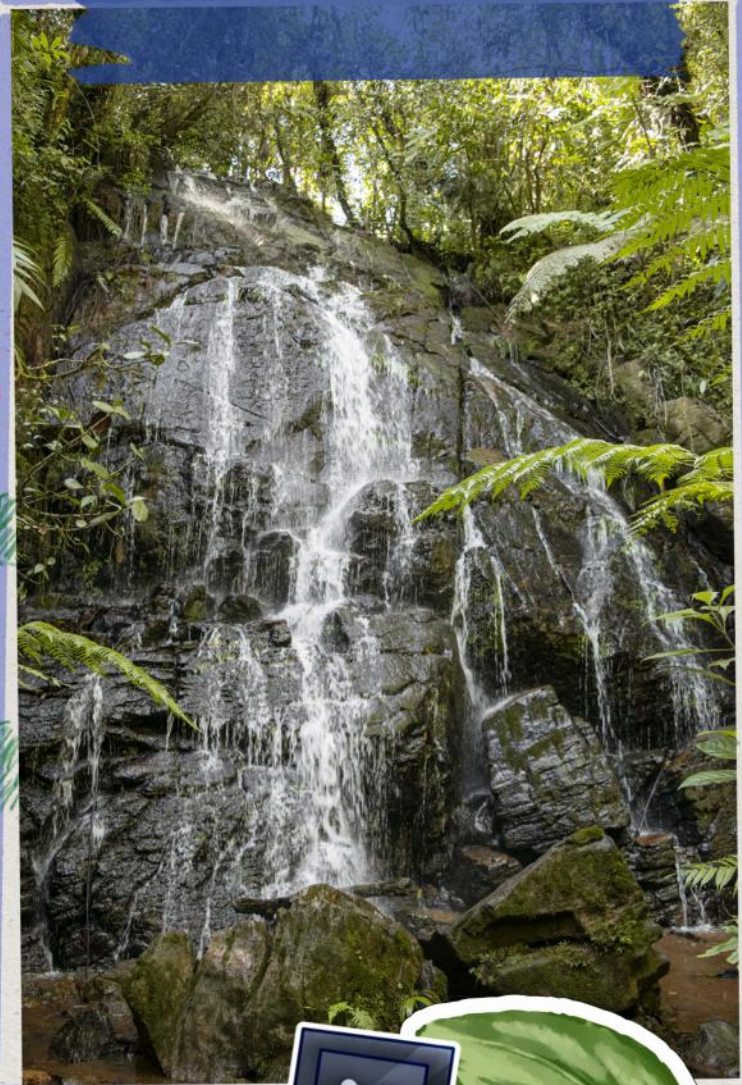
Hard cut to after THIRTY MINUTES of trekking through the forest, tripping over tree roots and getting my clothes caught on bushes, and I finally found them splashing around in some waterfall, not a care in the freaking world!

They claimed they wanted to let me "catch up on sleep", but I don't buy it. No one seemed particularly remorseful.

AND I got wet socks from all their messing around.

on the very tiny upside: we did make it back to the train on time, and I found some pretty nice shots from the day on my camera (which they'd also "borrowed").

Maybe I'll forgive them for the truancy. Eventually.





Morning Walks with Maestro

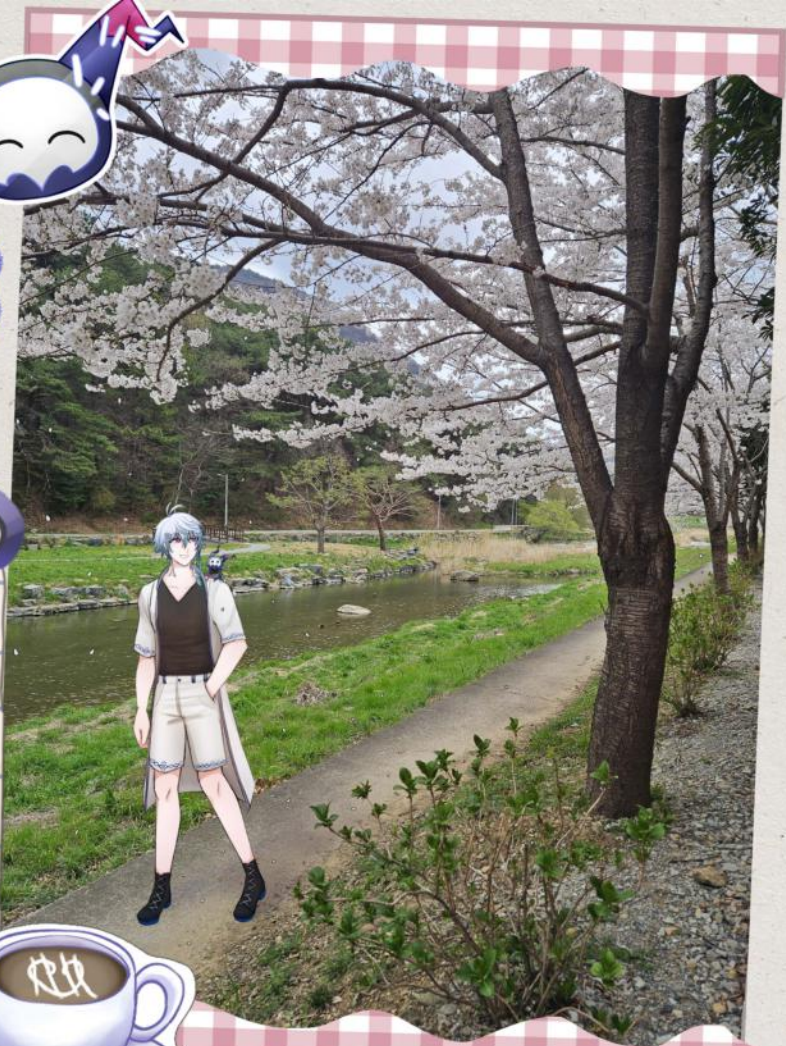
I love being a poppet. Especially its perks.

For example, this morning I woke up confused, itching to do something.

Bothered, I crawled inside the

Maestro's coat pocket, hoping that familiar warmth would calm me.

Suddenly, Maestro picked up the coat, whirling me into this little adventure.



We first went to a wooden restaurant. Their coffee smelled so good I peeked out, curious. Maestro got a cup (of course) and stood at the terrace, looking over a majestic river. It was tempting, the way the morning light played on the water. I wanted to swim there, maybe I could jump-

"Poppet." His voice froze me in place. "Time to go."

ADVENTURE

Sheepish, I buried myself back in his pocket. His steps were rhythmic, comforting. When everything was quiet, he dug me out, gave me a pat, then settled me on his right shoulder.





The dirt path we were on was sloping down, lined with lush vegetation. A distant rumbling sound grew into a roaring thunder. ⚡



The trees opened to an amazing view. Below was a big waterfall! Maestro carefully walked down, pausing on a flat stone, taking in the full view. I watched the rippling water, mesmerized.



"Go ahead," I heard him say.



I jumped.

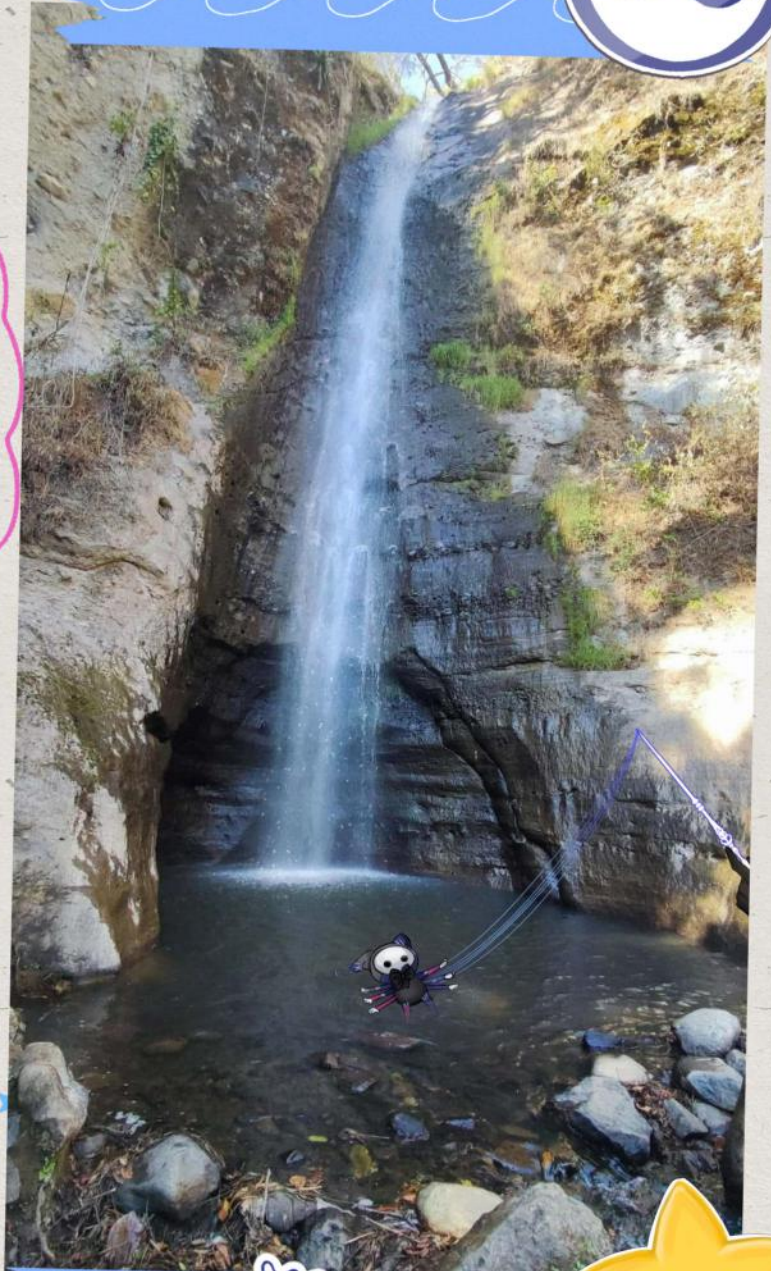
The cold water engulfed me. The adrenaline rush was the best feeling ever. I started treading water, but slowly sank, my cloth body soaking up the liquid. Admittedly, I was panicking, but Maestro was with me. With a tug on my strings I "floated" on the water. Maestro was sitting on a rock with a glowing fishing rod, its line attached to me.

He smiled.

I tested treading the water again. Now it felt real, familiar. The strings went unnoticed as I swam like I'd been doing it my whole life. Freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly, dive—I did all the tricks I knew, I played to my heart's content.

After all that, I laid on the stone, drying under the sun, so fulfilled I fell asleep.

I'm currently sitting in Maestro's lap, looking at the fluffy clouds outside the plane window, excited for a new adventure.



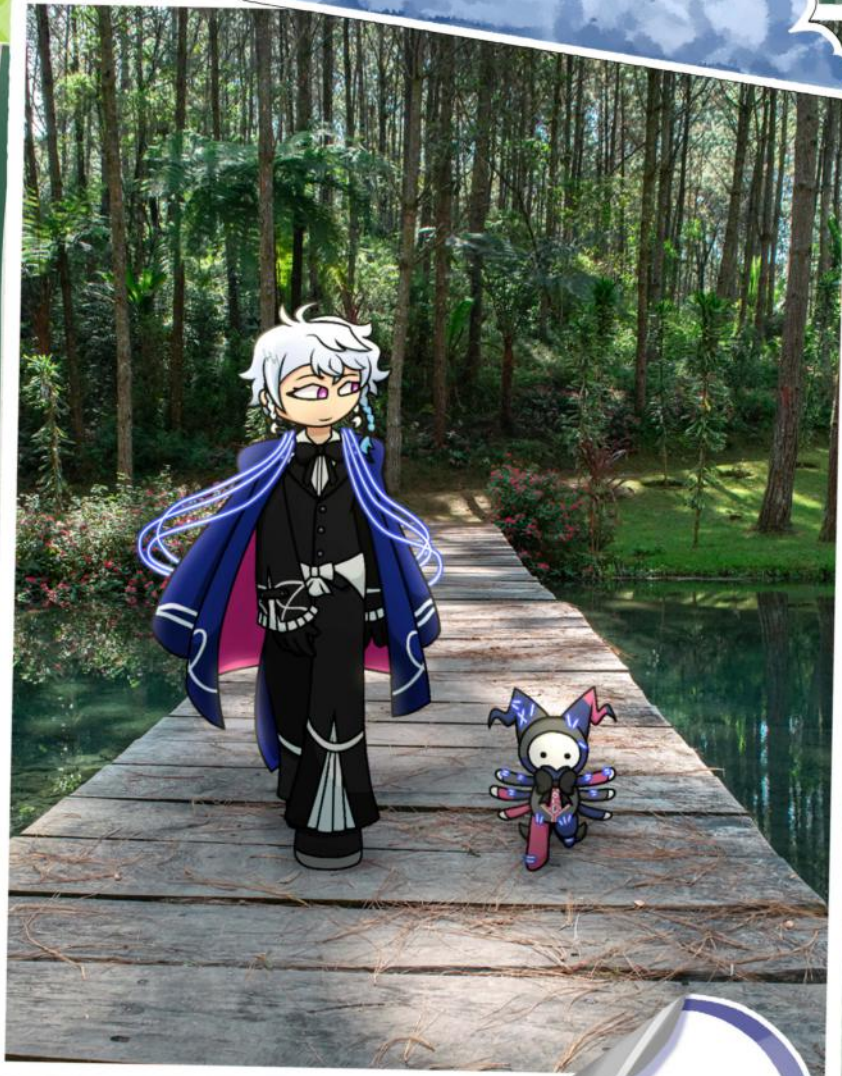
MAESTRO FINALLY TOOK ME OUTSIDE FOR A WALK!

well, it wasn't the first time I went outside, BUT, it had been a while since I went out the last time.

He called me a "curious" poppet because I would go somewhere else staring at things while the other poppets would stand around.

I don't go outside as much as the others because I "wander off" and I'm "very hard to keep track of" according to Maestro.

I don't know what any of that means, but I'm sure it's a good thing being a curious poppet after all! :D



HOP! **SKIP!** **VUMP!**



Anyways, Maestro decided to take me to a place that doesn't have sand, but grass and REALLY tall trees! we walked the dirt path and then we stumbled across a wooden path with big gaps in-between.

I was scared of my foot getting caught and so, I made a game where I hopped over each gap and crack!



OH! I started to wander off and I found this really cool orange rock right by the water. I had an idea and I got right to work!

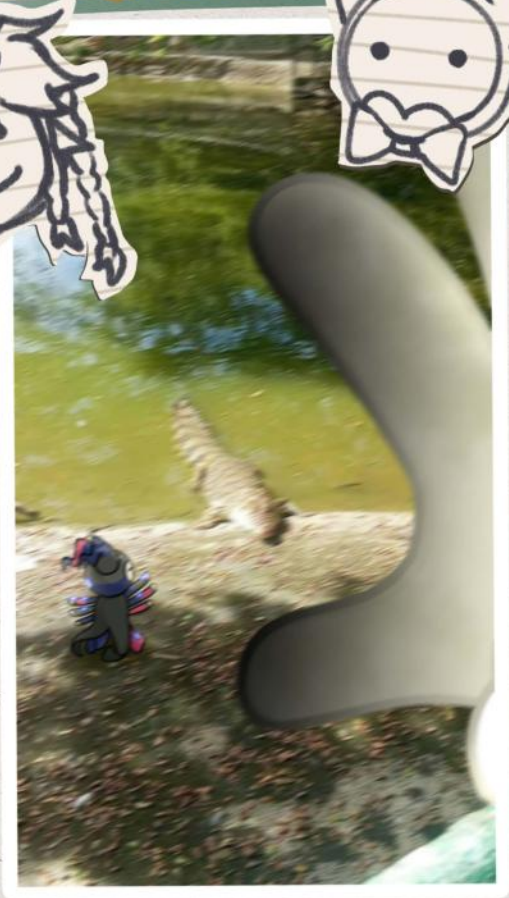
A few minutes went by and Maestro was calling out my name until he finally found me!

He gave me a funny look as he saw the drawing of me on the rock. But he did chuckle and took this picture of my self-portrait!



A D V E N T U R E

We continued our walk and I heard something in the water. I had no clue what it was but it started to climb out of its hiding spot. It was green, pointy, and it had a long tail! I skipped right past Maestro and ran towards the friendly, green thing to get a closer look—except it turned out that the green thing was not friendly... It was scary...



We finished our walk and went back home. This was the best day ever and I hope we do this again!

BIG GREEN SPIKY THING!



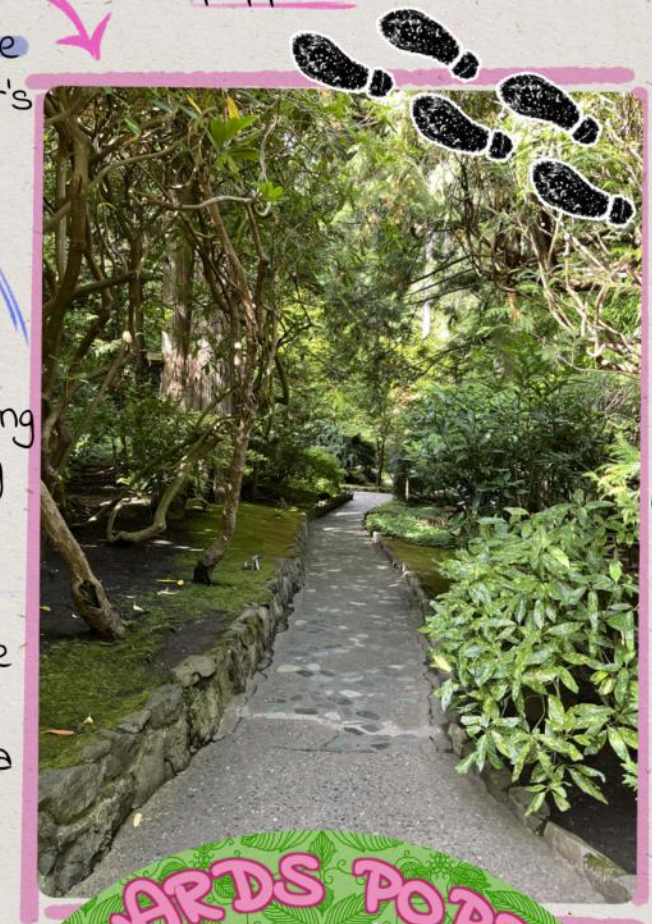
TAVI AND THE POPPETS JOURNEY IN THE JUNGLE

A band of poppets and I just returned to our hotel after meandering beneath the canopy. It was pretty great! We followed a magnificent path through the jungle and saw all sorts of neat things. There were flowers and leaves and a whole lot of green stuff. Around midday, we discovered a stream, and being thoroughly unprepared for swimming I turned to the poppets for ideas.

One bright little poppet pointed out a natural bridge made of large rocks that lifted out over the water's surface. I led the way of course, jumping from stone to stone, with poppets energetically in tow.

one of them got a little too excited and dove into the water to admire the vegetation. They made a very convincing argument about the water being pleasantly cool and refreshing, so we all jumped in after them.

An excellent idea! Unfortunately, one that left me with very squelchy, damp socks, though, so no head pats for this poppet. So close! I had half a mind to leave them behind as punishment, but the other poppets just wouldn't go along with it. Ah well...maybe I can feed them something strange later at dinner instead. 🥰



AWARDS POPPET!



We continued ambling along the stream for a while after that, and eventually came upon a small village.

The people there offered us a boat to speed things up. I couldn't exactly refuse them, could I? Unfortunately it was not a vessel fit for so many poppets, so a few had to continue by scampering along the shore nearby. From where I sat in the captain's seat I had a clear view of them struggling as the jungle got denser and denser.

Wow!



I didn't envy those land-locked poppets at all. I'm almost certain one or two got their strings eee tangled in the vines actually... eee

Perhaps we'll go back and fetch them in the morning.

Would you get a load of the petioles over here!



CUTE



what's the matter, poppet?

Haven't you ever seen an *Argyranthemum frutescens* before?



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