

R Cultivator 191

Chapter 191: Stalking

"Big Sis... Trust me. This little guy is definitely worth it. We should try to lure him to our department," Hawk said, her tone unusually serious as she stared at the virtual screen before her. The urgency in her voice was clear. "If we don't do something soon, our college might be permanently removed from the list of branches of Starfire Academy."

On the other side of the virtual call, Hawk's superior, known simply as "Big Sis," was focused on several tasks at once. She wore a sleek, tech-enhanced helmet, her hands moving rapidly in the air as if typing on invisible keys. She seemed deep in thought, multitasking as she dealt with other matters.

"I understand," Big Sis replied after a brief pause. "He even has the medal, which means he's definitely worthy enough to join Starfire Academy, according to our higher-ups."

Hawk felt a surge of excitement at Big Sis's recognition of the boy's potential. She was already imagining how recruiting someone like Tyler could save their department, and perhaps even gain them some fame within the academy. But her excitement was quickly cut short when Big Sis suddenly stopped typing and asked, "What do you know about him?"

Hawk hesitated for a second, blinking as if she'd been caught off guard. "He's cute..." she blurted out, the words escaping her before she could stop them.

Big Sis raised an eyebrow. "And?" she prodded, waiting for a more substantial response.

"That's all I know..." Hawk confessed, lowering her head in embarrassment.

A long sigh escaped from the other side of the screen. Big Sis pinched the bridge of her nose, exasperated. "So, let me get this straight," she began slowly, "you were just flirting with a young man you happened to stumble upon by coincidence?"

Hawk winced at how blunt her Big Sis was, but she wasn't about to give up that easily. "A wise turtle once said, 'there are no coincidences.' It must be destiny!" she proclaimed, trying to make her moment of discovery sound profound while conveniently ignoring how flustered she'd been when she first met Tyler.

Big Sis's expression didn't change. "That's 'there are no accidents,' and it wasn't a turtle—it was a tortoise," she corrected with a shake of her head. "And this isn't about destiny, Hawk. We need solid facts about this kid."

Hawk grimaced. She knew Big Sis was right, but that didn't mean she had to like it. "Fine, fine," she muttered under her breath. "I'll keep an eye on him. Maybe I'll learn more about what he's capable of. He does seem... different."

Big Sis looked skeptical but allowed it. "Go and keep an eye on him, then. Report back once you know more. We need to figure out what we can offer him that'll convince him to choose our department over the others."

Hawk's eyes gleamed with excitement. "Stalking him... I can do that!" she said with more enthusiasm than was appropriate for the task. She wiped away the small bead of drool forming at the corner of her mouth as she envisioned her new "mission."

Meanwhile, Tyler, who had no idea that a perverted stalker was observing him, returned to shore after a productive day. As soon as his feet hit the sand, Darla came running toward him with enthusiasm, her face lighting up when she saw him.

"Boss White! Vice Captain Lily told me to check the specialty products of this island," Darla said, catching her breath before handing him a jar. "Other than pearls, seaweed, and some fish, these dried fish are pretty famous here."

Tyler took the jar from her, noticing the heavy, salty scent that emanated from it. He squinted at the contents. "Dried fish?" he asked.

Darla nodded eagerly. "Yes! According to the locals, these products are highly sought after on the other islands. The dried fish can be stored for weeks, which makes them really popular among adventurers. Fishermen here sell them to other islands once or twice a month."

"Good work," Tyler said, smiling. Darla blushed at the compliment, her heart fluttering. She'd developed a bit of a crush on her young captain ever since they began working together, and it was hard to resist how charming he could be in his smaller form.

Tyler's expression grew thoughtful as he considered the information. After a few moments, he asked, "What do the islanders need? What's in demand here?"

Darla snapped back into business mode, clearing her throat before answering. "They need almost everything. The islands don't have advanced facilities, so they rely heavily on traveling merchants for their supplies. In fact, they're eager to buy as much as they can from us. People from other islands in the Triangle are on their way to trade, too."

"Interesting," Tyler mused. "Darla, ask them if we can buy some land on one of these islands. Better yet, see if we can purchase an entire island."

Darla's eyes widened. "An entire island?" she repeated, a little stunned by the sudden request. But seeing Tyler's calm determination, she nodded. "I'll speak to the elders."

As Darla hurried off to complete the task, high above in the sky, hidden by a powerful concealment array, Hawk was spying on Tyler from her hoverboard. She had been following him ever since her conversation with Big Sis, determined to find out more about this intriguing young man.

"Cute... rich... young," Hawk murmured to herself, once again wiping away imaginary drool as she watched Tyler's every move.

Five days passed since Tyler's crew had arrived on the island. In that time, Tyler had rented a manor where the group stayed together, using the downtime to plan and organize. Mana, their mysterious companion, had sent Tyler a telepathic message saying she was off to hunt treasure beneath the Triangle Islands, so her presence was notably absent.

Three days ago, Darla had come back with news about Tyler's request. "The smallest island in the Triangle is Blueford Town," she reported. "It's the size of a small town, and it's the only one they're willing to sell. The people there are struggling, and it doesn't have much in terms of resources."

Tyler had listened carefully and made his decision without hesitation. "We'll buy it," he had said, paying the full amount for the island on the spot.

Blueford Town was the smallest and poorest of the islands in the Triangle. It had no natural rivers or vegetation, and its residents had been eager to sell their homes, seeing no future for themselves there. But Tyler wasn't deterred. He saw opportunity where others saw scarcity.

Over the next week, Tyler set to work on his grand plans for Blueford Town. Hawk, still watching from afar, was flabbergasted by the scale and speed of his efforts. In just days, Tyler transformed the rundown island into a bustling trading hub. With his extensive resources and sharp mind, he built a new port, marketplaces, and inns, turning Blueford Town into a center of commerce in the Triangle Islands. His efforts didn't stop there—Tyler made strategic deals with the locals to secure exclusive contracts for their dried fish and other local specialties. He wasted no time in setting up a network to import goods from the New Rose Kingdom, expanding the island's trade capabilities significantly.

Additionally, Tyler sent a team to establish a branch on the neighboring island to oversee import and export operations, while also hiring a group of mercenaries to assist with construction and maintain security. His efficient management quickly breathed new life into the island. The residents of Blueford Town were stunned by the transformation, going from poverty-stricken isolation to being at the heart of the Triangle's growing trade. It wasn't long before word spread across the nearby islands about the rise of this new trading powerhouse, now known as the White Trading Center.

Meanwhile, up in the skies, Hawk was watching the entire operation unfold with her jaw practically on the floor. She had underestimated Tyler's influence, expecting perhaps a rich boy who was showing off a little wealth. But what she witnessed was something else entirely. Tyler was building an empire right in front of her eyes, and Hawk was at a loss for words.

Every day, Hawk reported back to her Big Sis, who was equally amazed by Tyler's swift and strategic rise. "This kid... he must be from a major merchant family, right?" Big Sis guessed after hearing Hawk's updates. "He doesn't just have money—he knows how to use it. He's got the connections and the foresight of someone who's been trained for this."

"He didn't even flinch at buying an entire island," Hawk added, still in awe.

Big Sis frowned, her helmet casting a shadow over her eyes as she tapped away at invisible keys. "We're going to need something significant if we want to attract him to our department. He clearly doesn't lack resources, and he has plenty of opportunities. What do you think he's interested in?"

Hawk paused, thinking back to her interactions with Tyler. "He... uh... seemed to really like my hoverboard," she offered, recalling the way his eyes had lingered on the sleek device when they first met.

Big Sis raised an eyebrow. "Your hoverboard?"

"Yeah he looked at it like how I looked at him."

"What does that mean?"

"He looked at it like he wanted to remove it naked and play with it."

"..."

Chapter 192: Offer

Inside the rented mansion, Tyler watched as Zuzia, the little dragon in loli form, lay sprawled on top of a pile of gold coins, treasure chests, shiny pearls, and various other glittering items. Among the treasures was a fish with a metallic gleam. It had died, but its body remained encased in a silver sheen, harder than most materials Tyler had ever seen. Its skin wasn't just colored silver—it was silver.

"Only now do you actually behave like a dragon," Tyler muttered, half in amusement, as he observed the scene. According to his readings, dragons had an instinctive love for hoarding shiny objects, a behavior Zuzia had rarely shown until now. Most of the time, the small dragon spent her days lazily sleeping or lounging around the ship. But this was the first time she'd gone out of her way to collect treasures like a true dragon.

Tyler approached the pile, curious about her newfound trove. Zuzia, sensing him drawing near, growled softly. Her growl, however, was more cute than threatening, because she is in young girl form, a far cry from the intimidating roars of full-grown dragons.

"Are you really going to act protective of this junk?" Tyler teased as he reached out his hand, aiming to ruffle her head.

Without warning, the little loli dragon opened her mouth and bit down on his index finger.

Bite

Tyler barely flinched as her teeth clamped down on his finger. Instead of pain, what followed was a bang as a puff of smoke rose from Zuzia's head. Tyler rubbed his fist which he used to bonk her head.

She tilted her head in confusion, her golden eyes blinking as if trying to understand what just happened. Tyler smirked, shaking his head. "You are tough as iron even in humanoid form." he remarked, not even surprised anymore by her strength.

Zuzia let go, distracted by the smell of food. Taka, the octopus fishman, walked into the room with a tray of fresh-cooked seafood. The second she caught the scent, her eyes lit up, and she eagerly leapt off the pile of treasures, abandoning her hoard in favor of the food. She bounded toward Taka, snatching a piece of fish right off the tray before he could even offer it.

Tyler chuckled, turning his attention back to the 'treasures' she'd collected. Some of it looked valuable, but a lot of it was just shiny junk. Still, he couldn't help but feel a sense of pride in Zuzia's little dragon instincts kicking in.

Just then, Mana appeared beside him, phasing into view like a wisp of air. "Mana, did you find anything interesting?" Tyler asked casually, still examining the treasures.

Mana's eyes sparkled with a bit of intrigue. "The sword cut of that legendary warrior. Mana can see the traces even in the ocean."

Tyler paused, raising an eyebrow. "A sword cut? The same one that divided the Triangle Islands?"

"Indeed," Mana confirmed. "If you look closely, the slice is so precise that even the natural flow of the ocean has been disrupted. The traces of power linger."

Tyler widened his eyes, impressed. "That's some sharp intuition."

"However," Mana continued, her voice more serious now, "there's no sword resonance left. It appears that many warriors in the past have already harvested it. Normally, a slash that powerful would leave a resonance that others could absorb and cultivate. But not here."

Tyler nodded thoughtfully. "Makes sense. If warriors have been visiting these islands for centuries, most of the valuable resonance would have been taken. Not that it matters much to us—we don't really have any swordmasters in the crew, do we?"

Mana shook her head. "None. Even Lily prefers the whip arts."

Before they could continue their conversation, a servant entered the room, bowing politely. "Boss White, there's a lady by the name of Hawk who is requesting to see you."

"Hawk?" Tyler muttered under his breath. He quickly stood up, intrigued by the unexpected visit. "Invite her to the guest room."

As Tyler made his way to greet Hawk, he didn't notice the small virtual screen that popped up next to her when she entered the room. Hawk's Big Sis appeared in the projection, her face partially hidden behind a helmet. Hawk, fully aware of the silent exchange, nodded slightly, acknowledging the words from her Big Sis. Tyler, however, remained oblivious to the fact that they were being watched.

"He's really young and cute..." Big Sis commented through the screen, her voice only audible to Hawk.

Hawk gave an inward nod of agreement, her eyes settling on Tyler. And though Tyler couldn't hear it, Hawk agreed wholeheartedly.

"The tea is so tasty," Hawk commented as she sipped the cup Taka had served.

Tyler grinned, leaning back in his chair. "Glad you like it."

"Cute..." Hawk blurted out without thinking, her eyes darting toward Tyler's boyish grin. Realizing her slip, she coughed awkwardly and quickly moved on. "Ahem, Mr. White, I hope you'll consider choosing our branch college and use your medal to join the main branch."

Tyler arched an eyebrow, his tone curious yet cautious. "Same question. What's in it for me?"

Hawk straightened, a serious expression crossing her face. "I noticed you were interested in my hoverboard. If technology catches your eye, you should know we were once the leading academy in that field."

"Once?" Tyler caught onto her choice of words immediately.

A bit flustered, Hawk stammered, "Yeah... uh, not now... actually—"

Before she could continue, her Big Sis sighed in the virtual screen, shaking her head. "Connect him with me."

"Huh... alright, Big Sis," Hawk responded, fumbling to hand Tyler a pair of sleek, advanced glasses.

Tyler blinked, looking around as Hawk handed him the glasses. "Who are you talking to?"

"Just wear these. My HOD is on the line," Hawk explained, her cheeks flushed in embarrassment.

Intrigued by the new technology, Tyler's eyes lit up as he accepted the glasses. As soon as he slid them onto his face, a virtual screen appeared in front of him. On it was a woman wearing a helmet, her messy

green hair spilling out in all directions. She had striking purple eyes, accentuated by deep bags beneath them, making her look exhausted but sharp. With a smooth motion, she removed her helmet and offered a tired but genuine smile.

"Hello. I'm Serena, Head of the Elite Academy of Magic and Science, which is a branch of Starfire Academy," she introduced herself.

Tyler, still impressed by the sleek tech in front of him, nodded politely. "I'm Tyler White," he replied, his tone reflecting his intrigue.

Serena's smile widened, though the exhaustion in her expression remained. "Such a polite kid," she commented with a chuckle. "I hear you're a merchant at sea. Did you know that in the North, merchants are a hundred times faster when it comes to delivering goods?"

Tyler leaned forward, interest piqued. "A hundred times? How is that possible?"

Serena's tired eyes glimmered as she leaned into the screen, waiting for his reaction. "Teleportation portals," she said, letting the words hang in the air for effect.

But Tyler's expression remained unchanged. His previous world was full of advanced formations, and teleportation wasn't an unfamiliar concept to him. Serena blinked, surprised that her big reveal didn't elicit the shock she'd anticipated. She quickly masked her surprise and continued.

"Well, our academy can help you build teleportation portals," she added confidently.

"Don't other branches build teleportation portals too?" Tyler asked, curiosity still evident in his voice.

Serena leaned back, the fatigue in her expression deepening as she explained, "You could try, but the teleportation portals my academy builds are exclusive. Other branches use different types of arrays, but none come close to our technology. Ours is patented, otherwise, they would've stolen it long ago." She sighed heavily, reflecting on the decline of her once-prestigious academy. "We were at the top because of this invention. Now... we're at the bottom of the rankings."

Tyler raised an eyebrow. "Exclusive, huh? So I'd be the only merchant using them?"

Serena nodded. "You'd have access to the most advanced teleportation system available, something no one else could offer. But..." she trailed off, biting her lip.

"But?" Tyler pressed.

"Building even one portal requires immense resources," Serena admitted, her tone filled with regret. "The materials are rare, and the construction process is... complex. It's not just something we can set up overnight."

Tyler fell into deep thought, his mind running through the logistics of it all.

Finally, he spoke up. "I might consider it," Tyler said cautiously, "but I need to discuss it with my crew first."

Both Serena and Hawk's eyes lit up, realizing there was still a chance. Tyler hadn't turned them down outright, and that meant they were still in the game.

Serena's tired smile returned, though this time there was a glimmer of hope. "Take your time, Mr. White. I'm sure once you see the potential, you'll realize how much this could change everything."

Tyler nodded. "We'll see. I'll reach out once I've made a decision."

Chapter 193: Extended Stay

Hawk left Tyler's place with a dazed expression, her mind still racing from the bold exchange that had just taken place. As she flew away on her hoverboard, she muttered to herself, "Too young... or else I would have..." The rest of the sentence was barely a whisper, but the thought lingered in her head, making her cheeks flush red. Her usually composed demeanor was completely shattered, and she felt like a rabbit running from a lion—only in this case, the 'lion' was an unassuming, overly confident young man.

What truly threw her off balance wasn't just her playful admission but Tyler's response. His words echoed in her mind: "Well, if it's a beautiful Big Sister like Hawk, then I'm ready. I'm at the age where I'm interested in girls. You can teach me a thing or two." The casual way he said it, with his charming grin, struck her so hard that she had barely managed a flustered, "I'll think about it," before darting away in a panic.

For all her teasing and bravado, she hadn't expected Tyler to throw it right back at her. She couldn't help but laugh at herself. Damn, that kid's dangerous she thought as she soared through the sky, her heart racing and her mind still stuck on that mischievous smile.

As soon as she disappeared over the horizon, the silence in the mansion was broken by the sound of stifled giggles. From behind one of the pillars, Lily, Mathilda, and Silvia emerged, having been eavesdropping on the entire conversation.

"Well, that escalated quickly," Lily said with a smirk, her eyes twinkling with amusement. "You're really going all out, aren't you, Captain?" She playfully nudged Tyler's shoulder. Tyler just shrugged, a cheeky grin still on his face.

"It's not my fault if she can't handle a bit of flirting," Tyler replied. "She set herself up for it."

Silvia, who had been listening quietly, suddenly spoke up with excitement. "Are we really going to join the Academy?" Her eyes sparkled with hope. Tyler had previously explained to her what an academy was, how it was a place where students could learn different types of magic, technology, and skills. For someone like Silvia, who had always been curious about the world beyond their travels, this was an exciting prospect.

Tyler smiled, his expression softening as he saw the excitement on Silvia's face. "Yeah," he said, "I'll talk to Hawk and Serena about letting all of you join as well. If I'm going, there's no reason you can't come with me."

Silvia let out a small cheer, her eyes lighting up with anticipation. "I can finally learn authentic magic!" she said, practically bouncing in place.

Tyler coughed awkwardly. Even though he is both Warrior and Mage. He doesn't know a thing about being mage. He failed to teach Silvia anything.

Whiteford City, formerly known as Blueford Town, had become a bustling hub of activity within the Triangle Islands. The city was still very much under construction, but despite the unfinished state, it was overflowing with customers, merchants, and ships stranded due to the ongoing bad weather. Tyler's decision to rename the town had spurred significant changes, and Whiteford City quickly rose to dominate the local fishing industry with its fresh goods and low prices. The smaller shops and local fishermen couldn't compete, and many had either given up or started working for Tyler's expanding enterprise.

One of the most notable products that had surged in popularity across the Triangle Islands was "Mint Fragrance," a specialty from a neighboring island. This tobacco-like product wasn't smoked, but instead chewed, giving users a minty aroma and a refreshing, intoxicating effect. Many people in the islands now carried that signature scent, marking them as part of the growing influence of Whiteford City's trade network.

However, with the harsh weather continuing, much of the usual fishing and seafaring activities had come to a halt. Ships that sought refuge in Whiteford City were packed into the docks, and while some of the sailors grew restless, others enjoyed the newfound comforts of the trading hub. The city's influence was undeniable, even in its incomplete state.

Tyler, however, was less focused on the booming trade and more on his personal development. He and Lily had taken to training vigorously, hoping to sharpen their skills despite the confined space caused by the weather. The crackle of lightning echoed through the area as Lily sent another whip attack toward Tyler.

Tyler twisted his body to dodge, moving swiftly with precision. His body, however, didn't feel entirely right, and he found himself commenting, "It's kind of hard to move in this little body."

He sighed. He Along Lily, Mathilda and Astrid underwent a transformation after eating Life orb their body become of that 12 year old.

"Yeah, me too... but that's why we're practicing," Lily replied, her tone steady despite the strain of their training.

Mode Dragon

Suddenly, Tyler activated his Dragon Mode. Scales rippled over his body as he powered up, his movements becoming faster, more powerful. He blurred out of sight, reappearing next to Lily before dashing past her and slamming into a nearby tree. The impact caused the tree to crack and collapse, leaving Tyler sprawled on the ground.

"I still can't control my Dragon Mode properly," Tyler muttered, frustrated.

Lily, observing his struggles, decided to shift the conversation with an unexpected question. "You know, I'm actually curious. You're always ready to flirt with random girls, but you've never extended your claws to any of the crew members. Why is that?"

Tyler blinked, surprised by the sudden topic. "That's so random," he coughed, attempting to deflect her inquiry.

Lily smirked, not letting him off that easily. "Really? Even though you almost touched Mathilda—only after some ridiculous circumstances. And let's not even mention Darla, who's clearly waiting for you push her down. You haven't even tried."

Tyler let out a deep sigh, his expression softening from his usual carefree attitude. He stared up at the overcast sky for a moment, gathering his thoughts before responding. "It's because of an incident in my past."

Lily's eyes widened slightly at Tyler's confession, a mixture of surprise and curiosity crossing her face. It wasn't often that he opened up so candidly, especially about something that clearly left a lasting impression on him. She had known Tyler to be a flirt, a charmer with no shortage of confidence, but this was a side of him she rarely saw—a man who understood the weight of his actions.

"So, you had an affair with a married woman?" she asked, her voice steady despite the gravity of the topic.

Tyler nodded, rubbing the back of his neck as if the memory still unsettled him. "Yeah... it wasn't one of my proudest moments. The guy, her husband, had a harem, and he was always messing around with other women. But no matter what, he always came back to his wife. I think she just reached her breaking point. She was tired of feeling like she was just one of many, so she decided to seduce me as payback."

Lily frowned, not out of judgment but out of understanding. "So, you gave in."

"I did," Tyler admitted. "I was young, reckless, and I didn't really think about the consequences at the time. She told her husband about it afterward. That's when it hit him—when he finally realized how much pain he had been putting her through all those years. It was too late by then, though. They separated."

Lily let out a slow breath, absorbing the weight of the story. It wasn't just about infidelity or temptation—it was about the emotional scars left behind. She could see how that experience shaped Tyler's outlook on relationships, even if he tried to keep things lighthearted most of the time.

"And that's when you realized the responsibility that comes with being in a relationship," Lily said, piecing it together.

"Exactly," Tyler replied, his gaze serious. "I'm not really a good man when it comes to love. I'm a playboy, and I know it. That's why I stick to hooking up with random girls for one-night stands. It's simple, no strings attached. No feelings to get in the way. But if I were to get involved with someone from the crew... someone I see every day... that's a different story. Our relationship would inevitably change, and if things went south, it would bring unnecessary drama onboard."

Lily was silent for a moment, her eyes searching his face. She had always known Tyler had his reasons for not getting too close to the women on the crew, but hearing it laid out like this made her understand him better. He wasn't just avoiding attachments for the sake of being a playboy—he was protecting the stability of their relationships as crewmates and friends.

"That's... actually pretty thoughtful," Lily said, her voice softening. "You're looking out for us in your own way."

Tyler shrugged, his usual smirk returning. "Don't get me wrong, I still enjoy flirting and having fun. But I've seen what can happen when things get messy. I don't want that for any of us."

Lily crossed her arms and gave him a sly grin. "So, basically, you're saying you're restraining yourself from breaking our hearts."

He laughed, shaking his head. "Something like that. But trust me, it's better this way. We all have a job to do, and we can't let personal drama get in the way of that."

Lily nodded, her expression more understanding now. "Well, I appreciate that, Captain. But don't think for a second that we can't handle ourselves. If any of us ever decided we wanted more, you'd better be ready for the challenge."

Tyler raised an eyebrow, intrigued by the shift in her tone. "Oh? You think I'd be the one struggling?"

Lily winked. "I'm just saying, don't underestimate us girls."

She came near Tyler and whispered, "We might even push you down one day."

Chapter 194: Leaving

The thunderstorm raged on, relentless in its fury, as heavy rain fell across the sea and drenched the Triangle Islands. Thick, dark clouds blotted out the sun, casting a gloomy pall over the islands and halting all activity. Ships that once bustled in the harbor of Whiteford City were docked, their crews forced to stay ashore. The newly built city buzzed with activity indoors, but the weather made further construction impossible. Tyler's crew, along with the locals, hunkered down to wait out the storm.

"It's raining cats and dogs out here," Tyler muttered, looking at the storm. He sighed, knowing that their journey would be delayed for an unknown period.

Beside him stood Hawk, unfazed by the downpour. She pointed to her wristwatch, a sleek, advanced piece of technology that seemed out of place in the storm-soaked setting. "Well, if you want, I can bring

you to the academy using my portable waypoint." Hawk's voice was casual, though there was a hint of mischief in her tone.

Tyler glanced at the watch, considering the offer for a moment. "No thanks," he replied, his voice as steady as ever. "I want to join with my friends. Is there any specific time we need to be at the academy?"

Hawk tilted her head slightly, thinking. "Yeah, you've got time. There are still six months until the next semester starts," she said.

"Six months, huh?" Tyler mused aloud. "Is there an age limit for joining?"

Hawk didn't answer right away. Tyler turned to look at her and immediately regretted it.

She wasn't listening anymore. Her eyes had turned into heart shapes, her lips parted slightly, and a thin line of drool trickled down her chin. She mumbled under her breath, "Age doesn't matter... who would judge if we kept it to ourselves..."

Cough Tyler cleared his throat, snapping Hawk out of her daze.

Hawk wiped the drool from her chin, her face flushing as she realized what had happened. She coughed in an attempt to regain her composure. "Age doesn't matter," she repeated more clearly this time. "The academy cares about achievements, money, and more money. That's it."

Tyler chuckled softly but didn't push the subject. Instead, his gaze returned to the storm. They were both standing out in the rain, though neither of them seemed particularly bothered by it. Hawk, in particular, held an Air Umbrella, a marvel of technology. It didn't look like an umbrella in the traditional sense—more like a flashlight, really—but it generated a jet of fast-moving air that pushed the rain away from them in all directions. Not a drop touched them.

"Not a bad piece of tech," Tyler said with a grin, eyeing the device with interest.

Hawk smirked. "You really came with me to gather herbs in the rain," she said with a teasing tone. "You're not worried that my Big Sis will eat you?"

Tyler chuckled again, a playful glint in his eyes. "Actually, I'm hoping she will," he said, his voice lowering just slightly. "I wouldn't mind getting eaten by Big Sis."

For a moment, Hawk froze. Her brain seemed to short-circuit, and a small trickle of blood began to leak from her nose. She quickly wiped it away, her face turning red. "H-Hey!" she stammered, taking a step back.

Tyler stepped forward, oblivious to the effect he was having. He moved closer because he didn't want to get wet, but to Hawk, the gesture felt much more intimate.

"Huh... wait... I'm not ready yet..." Hawk mumbled under her breath, her thoughts running wild.

Tyler blinked, confused by her behavior. He glanced behind her and pointed. "Isn't that the herb you were looking for?"

Hawk snapped out of her flustered state, turning quickly to where Tyler was pointing. Sure enough, there was the rare herb she had been searching for: Rain Dew Spores. They were small, delicate-looking plants that only grew during heavy rainstorms. Their rarity came from the fact that they only appeared in such conditions and vanished soon after.

"Y-Yeah, that's the one!" Hawk said, still trying to regain her composure. She quickly scanned the herb with her wristwatch, causing the plant to disappear and get stored in the device.

"With that, my task is done," she said with a satisfied nod, finally regaining control of her emotions.

"So you came all the way here just to get this?" Tyler asked, eyeing the spot where the plant had been.

"Yeah, it's a rare one. Needed it for a project," Hawk explained. "Now that I've got it, I guess I'll be leaving."

Tyler folded his arms, his expression thoughtful. "I don't think I can join the academy for the upcoming semester," he said.

Hawk raised an eyebrow. "Why not?"

Tyler scratched his chin. "According to Lily, it'll take us nearly a year to reach the Ixalaria Continent by ship. I'm not exactly familiar with traveling between continents, but that's what she told me."

"Ixalaria Continent is where most of the academies are." Hawk nodded. "It's one of the few actual continents in this world. Most people in the south don't even know they exist beyond the islands." She paused, then added, "But you don't have to wait a year. You could reach Ixalaria quickly by using the teleportation array at Cedar Island. But you can't bring your whole ship through the array, only yourself and a few others."

Tyler frowned. "Teleportation, huh? That's useful. But leaving the ship behind would be tricky. I have to think about it."

Hawk shrugged. "It's up to you. But the option's there."

Tyler nodded slowly, considering the idea. "Just as I said before, I'll think about it. For now, I'll wait until the storm passes. Then I'll head to Cedar Island."

With a final nod, Hawk gave him a quick peck on the cheek, her lips brushing his skin before he could react. "See you around," she said with a wink, her voice back to its teasing self. She tapped her wristwatch, activating the portable waypoint.

A shimmering portal appeared before her, and her hoverboard floated up beside her. With a wave, she stepped through the portal and disappeared, leaving Tyler standing alone in the rain as the portal closed behind her.

Tyler suddenly looked at his hand. He is pretty sure he saw his hand turning into water before turned back normal.

Chapter 195: Calm After the Storm

It took another week for the storm to subside. The violent winds, crashing waves, and torrential rain that had plagued the seas around the Triangle Islands finally gave way to calm. The white-flagged vessels of the White Merchant Group, led by Tyler, finally departed from the harbor, setting sail once again. During their extended stay, Tyler had taken the opportunity to expand his influence, recruiting numerous locals to work for him. These new recruits signed contracts, ensuring their loyalty to the ever-growing White Merchant Group. Thanks to the help of the Bank of Atlantis, another stream of income was about to pour into Tyler's coffers as his ventures continued to grow, both on land and at sea.

The ship sailed smoothly, slicing through the ocean, heading toward their next destination.

"Lily, are we going to Cedar Island?" Mana asked, her voice curious yet tinged with nostalgia.

Lily, standing at the helm with her hands clasped behind her back, nodded. "Yeah, that's the plan. By the way you're asking, I'm guessing you've been there before?" She raised an eyebrow at Mana.

Mana's expression softened as she smiled and nodded. "Yeah, it's Mana's hometown. That's where Mana was born."

Surprise flickered across Lily's face before she patted Mana's head, her small hand gently ruffling her hair. Both of them were in their child forms, making the scene undeniably adorable. Two children, standing side by side, preparing for another adventure.

Lily spoke softly, her voice filled with warmth. "I didn't know that, Mana. It must be exciting to be returning home."

Mana's eyes brightened, but there was a trace of something else—perhaps apprehension about what awaited her on Cedar Island.

Meanwhile, inside one of the ship's rooms, Tyler, Mathilda, and Silvia sat in quiet concentration, their noses buried in books. These weren't the usual adventure manuals or navigation guides they often perused on their journey. No, these were more academic in nature—books given to them by Hawk during her recent visit.

"Basic Mathematics," "Beginners Science," "Introduction to Technology," and countless other titles filled the room. Mathilda, ever the curious scholar, had borrowed a few additional books from Tyler's growing collection. Her chosen tomes included "Basic Chemistry" and "A Quick Glance at Botany," subjects that fascinated her. Silvia, on the other hand, was immersed in a book titled "Magics and Wonders," her eyes wide with excitement as she learned about new spells and magical theories. Everyone was engrossed in their respective studies, the room filled with the quiet rustling of pages and the soft creaking of the ship's hull.

The door creaked open, and Darla stepped inside, carrying a tray with juice and snacks. She placed them on the table and turned to leave, but before she could take a step, Mathilda's voice broke the silence.

"Oh... Are you not going to seduce Tyler?" Mathilda asked, her tone casual, but with an amused edge.

Darla, unbothered by the sudden question, turned back around with a bored expression. She shrugged nonchalantly. "Not interested in kids," she replied without hesitation, as if the thought hadn't even crossed her mind.

But then, she shifted her gaze to Tyler, her expression turning more serious as she leaned closer, towering over him with a challenging glint in her eyes. "Turn into an adult and push me down, little boy."

In his current child form, Tyler looked up at Darla, her figure now far taller than his own. Darla, who had always been captivated by Tyler's grown-up self, found little interest in his youthful appearance despite its inherent cuteness. It was clear—Darla preferred men, not boys.

I don't like them Young - Darla.

Darlas is completely different from Hawk.

"Oh? And what will you do if you become young?" Tyler asked with a mischievous smile.

Before Darla could even respond, a glowing orb flew toward her with incredible speed. The shining ball hit her directly, entering her mouth. She froze, expecting pain, but instead, a warm, rejuvenating sensation spread throughout her body as the orb melted away.

"Aahhhh..." she moaned, a strange sound coming from her throat as her body began to change.

Her transformation was immediate. The tall, curvaceous Darla—who had stood confidently in her mid-twenties—began to regress in age. Her body shrank, her limbs became smaller, and her clothes, which had fit snugly moments ago, now hung loosely from her frame. Her mind felt sharper, as if her very consciousness was refreshing itself. Finally, she opened her eyes and found herself looking directly at Tyler, now standing at the same height as her. The once-confident woman had become a confused little girl.

"What the f—" Darla's expletive was cut off by the high-pitched, innocent voice that escaped her lips. Her hands, now small and delicate, clutched at her oversized dress, her expression filled with shock.

"Did you record the data?" Tyler asked, turning to Mathilda, who was standing nearby.

Mathilda nodded, retrieving an array that had been carefully hidden beneath Darla's feet. "Got it." She smiled, clearly pleased with the success of their experiment.

It was only then that Darla noticed the complex array that had been placed under her. Her wide eyes darted back and forth between Tyler and Mathilda as the realization dawned on her. Tyler gave her a treasure.

This wasn't some random array—it was a carefully crafted experiment, one that Tyler had been working on for some time. It was Mathilda who brought the knowledge to Tyler, it was an ancient array used in labyrinth to test body when it undergoes transformation. With Tyler's help, they had perfected an array. Though it had taken hundreds of tries and countless materials, the two had finally succeeded. Tyler doesn't care about Materials.

Still in shock, Darla stood frozen.

"Now we're the same age," Tyler teased, his hand gently patting her head like an older brother teasing his younger sibling. "So, can I push you down now?" he asked with a cheeky grin.

When he saw the confused little girl Darla, he couldn't help but pat her head. Cuteness could be eaten by both men and women, old and young.

Darla, still adjusting to her new form, felt a strange mixture of embarrassment and indignation. She opened her mouth to retort but found herself unable to find the words. Flustered and overwhelmed, she turned on her heel and bolted for the door, her now oversized dress swishing comically around her legs as she fled.

"Baka!" she shouted, her voice cracking as she ran. Her departure, clumsy and awkward in her current state, left both Tyler and Mathilda staring after her, amusement sparkling in their eyes.

"Cute," they said in unison, sharing a look of mutual agreement. There is nothing bad going on their dirty mind. It's like admiring a cat for its cuteness

"What could be more delightful than a bouncing little girl?" Tyler said.

"Her mother." Mathilda instantly replied.

"..."

"She has two bouncy bouncy. Hehehe...." Mathilda let a mischievous grin. Tyler recalled Darla's mom when departing floating Island. Now he regret turning Darla into a little girl.

Suddenly Silvia, who is blushing red, raised her hand.

Tyler, noticing her timid gesture, looked at her with mild confusion. "What is it, Silvia?"

Fidgeting, Silvia's blush deepened as she struggled to get the words out.

"If you want, You can p- pus- push me down..." she mumbled, barely audible but the meaning clear.