

R Cultivator 216

Chapter 216: six months later...

Six months later...

In a secluded village within the region of Lafitia, a group of cloaked figures moved silently through the forest, blending with the shadows cast by the dense canopy above. The team members communicated with hand signals, their movements swift and practiced as they maneuvered through the trees. Somewhere ahead, their target was moving as well—someone they had to observe without interference unless absolutely necessary.

In a clearing not far from them, a young girl, around sixteen, walked cautiously through the woods. She seemed unaware of the men tailing her, though her every movement was calculated. The group following her were rough-looking, with wild, predatory eyes that gleamed as they closed in.

The girl suddenly halted. The men, realizing they'd been spotted, stopped concealing themselves and stepped forward with menacing smirks.

"Haha, look at this," one of the men sneered. "Seems like our prey's all ready for us. Boss, let's get her."

The man in charge grinned, his eyes gleaming with a twisted pleasure. "Capture her! We're in for a real treat tonight!"

They lunged at the girl, reaching to grab her, and one even tried to tear her dress. But the scene didn't go as they expected.

From the shadows, one of the cloaked observers tensed, ready to intervene. But just as they took a step forward, a hand reached out and stopped them. The silent command was clear: wait. Something was off.

The silence of the forest was soon shattered by screams echoing through the trees—but not the girl's. It was the men's screams.

The cloaked figures watched in stunned silence as the girl transformed, her body morphing grotesquely until she became a massive, slimy creature with writhing tentacles extending from her body. She was no ordinary girl; she was an Acid-type Demon. The monster's tentacles wrapped around each man, pulling them close, and with horrifying efficiency, began absorbing them. Skin, blood, and bones dissolved as the men melted into her body, one by one.

"An Acid-type Demon... we need ice magic," one of the cloaked figures muttered grimly.

"Fire could work," another suggested.

"No, we can't. We'll set the whole forest ablaze," came a firm female voice. "Does anyone have ice magic?"

A young man in the group hesitated. "I can use it, but it's not my primary element. The effects won't be strong."

"Let's call him in. We could use his help," another voice suggested, almost reluctantly. The group fell silent at the suggestion.

"That spoiled, nouveau riche kid?" one of the men muttered. "He'd only be a nuisance."

"But he is cute, though," one of the girls giggled. "I'd love to see him fight that ugly thing." The other girls in the group exchanged mischievous smiles and nodded in agreement.

"This... is exactly why I don't want him around," the man groaned.

"Alright, enough," the woman said, rolling her eyes. "I'll just use the ice charms."

One of the men frowned. "If you had ice charms this whole time, why'd you ask us for help?"

"Because these were gifts from my cute junior, and I didn't want to use them unless I had to!" she replied with a pout. The boys groaned in frustration.

"You... wait, junior gave you those charms? Did he make them himself?" another man asked, his tone softening with curiosity.

"Yep, he's gotten good at making high-level charms." The girl sounded proud as she carefully withdrew the ice charms from her cloak.

She threw a dozen ice pendants toward the Acid-type Demon. Upon contact, the pendants released a flash of blue light, and an intense cold began to spread. The demon, unable to react in time, was encased in solid ice, each slimy tentacle frozen mid-motion.

The cloaked group observed the transformation from the safety of the trees. One figure, a girl with vibrant red hair and pointed ears, jumped down, landing gracefully in the clearing. She pushed back her hood, revealing a mischievous grin as she examined the frozen demon.

"Junior's charms really are something," she remarked, tapping the ice to test its solidity.

Meanwhile, they failed to notice a figure slipping away from the scene, moving stealthily into the depths of the forest. Once safely out of range, this figure took out a peculiar-looking watch, pressed a few buttons, and sent a message.

Back in the village of Lafitia, a loud bang echoed, disrupting the otherwise peaceful evening. However, the villagers seemed unfazed. In fact, a few nearby elders chuckled as they observed black smoke rising from a particular house.

"Hahaha, did you dismantle another machine?" an old man called out, amused.

Inside, a young boy emerged from a smoky workshop, dirt smudging his face as he sheepishly scratched his head.

A notification chimed on the boy's watch. Wiping the grime from his fingers, he tapped the screen and read the message:

[They are safe]

The boy, Tyler White, exhaled in relief. He gazed up at the night sky, where three moons shone down through scattered clouds, casting a soft glow over the village. It had been six months since he and his companions joined the academy, and now, he was on an outdoor training assignment with his seniors.

As he watched the night sky, Tyler received a message on his watch. It was from one of the adventurers he'd hired to monitor his seniors during their missions, ensuring they stayed safe. His decision to do so had been driven by his concern for their well-being, even though they were 'technically' more experienced than him. A soft chime brought him back from his thoughts, and he read the message:

"[Good job... Just intervene only if they are in danger.]"

With a nod of satisfaction, he sent his reply and turned back to his modest workshop. There, he resumed his work, picking up a copper pot. He began to copy materials that are needed to practice.

Tyler's knack for quickly mastering rune crafting was aided by his wealth, allowing him access to high-quality materials like rare inks and specialized papers for enchantments, which many of his classmates could only dream of using. Expensive tools and supplies weren't a problem for Tyler; he just needs to copy them. Yet, even with all his advantages, he couldn't help but feel both admiration and a hint of envy for one of his crewmate.

His watch buzzed, breaking his focus. He clicked it, and a holographic projection of a blonde girl appeared. It was Astrid, her eyes gleaming with excitement.

'Speak of the devil' Tyler thought.

"Tyler!" she greeted him, a bright smile lighting up her face. "Guess what—I'm finally able to engrave Elite-Level Arrays! I'm moving up to the Master-Level Array Class tomorrow."

Tyler's eyes widened, and he felt a pang of disbelief mixed with pride. "Already? Astrid, that's incredible." He let out a laugh, though his eye twitched ever so slightly. "I've spent years and a small fortune getting to this level, and you've just...blown right past me."

Astrid chuckled, brushing off his compliment modestly. "I've just been lucky with good teachers and a lot of practice. And honestly, I couldn't have come this far without your help, Tyler. Your advice has been invaluable."

"Well, I guess this means we'll be attending the Master-Level Array Class together." He gave her a genuine smile. Despite the slight sting of envy, Tyler was proud to see her progress so rapidly. Astrid chose Same department out of whim but she turned out to be a genius array master.

"What about the others?" he asked, curious about how their friends were doing.

Astrid leaned back, thinking. "Lily is out on a group task and Mathilda..." She chuckled. "Well, she's been flirting with practically every girl in the dormitory. Silvia's preparing for her summoning magic test; she's been practicing like crazy. And Darla is already asleep, poor thing. She's had a rough day with all the assignments piling up."

Tyler nodded, amused by the updates.

"Thanks for the update, Astrid. Guess I'll see you in class tomorrow, then." He gave her a small wave.

"Good night, Tyler," she replied with a warm smile before disconnecting the call.

Just as he put down his watch, a soft flutter caught his attention. He looked up to see a small, winged cat hovering in front of him, its big eyes blinking curiously at him.

"Zuzia, I'm busy right now," Tyler said, raising an eyebrow. Zuzia tilted her head, looking slightly offended at being brushed off.

But, in the next instant, the winged cat transformed, her form shifting until she became a beautiful young girl with horns, wings and tail. She had grown slightly, with her appearance now possessing same age as Tyler. Her deep gaze fixated on him, a mischievous glint flickering in her eyes. Tyler felt a hint of unease, knowing that look all too well.

Before he could utter another word, Zuzia leaned in, her lips pressing softly against his. He froze in surprise as she deepened the kiss, her tongue tracing his lips before slipping inside, leaving him momentarily breathless.

"Zuzia..." he whispered, managing to regain his senses after a few moments. She smiled at him, a playful spark in her eyes as if daring him to protest.

"Tyler, tasty." she licked her lips with satisfaction.

Chapter 217: Class

"Miss Astrid, you are a natural genius in Array Making. Shall we go for a cup of coffee after class? I'd love to share some insights on Array work with you." A hopeful young man in a pristine white and purple-striped uniform lingered beside Astrid, his tone trying to sound casual yet betraying his eagerness.

Astrid, seated comfortably in the classroom, barely glanced up. She was preoccupied, browsing through virtual resources on her VR glasses, which looked like a sleek pair of regular frames but housed a full network interface. Controlled by her divine sense, the glasses let her manage any data she needed with no hand gestures or visible movement. The glasses themselves were a luxury most students could only dream of owning, yet Tyler had bought them for her without a second thought. For him, there was never a question of cost when it came to supporting his crew.

Among her peers, Astrid's noble demeanor, half-angel heritage, and rumored high status had led to quite a few admirers, both in and outside her classes. And though she was used to the attention by now, she found it more amusing than flattering.

"Sorry. Not interested," she replied flatly, her tone enough to freeze the poor young man's hopes on the spot.

He hesitated, visibly thrown off. Rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly, he managed to stammer, "Uh... may I ask who you're interested in, then?" His voice attempted a casual laugh, but the slight tremor betrayed his nerves.

"Of course, it's me," came a confident voice from behind him.

The young man turned around and found himself face-to-face with Tyler White, who stood just a few feet away, arms crossed and smiling as if he'd been there all along.

"Tyler White?" The young man muttered his name with a mixture of frustration and resignation. Shoulders slumping, he backed away with a sheepish nod, heading to his seat without another word.

Tyler had earned quite a reputation in the Department of Technology for his extraordinary skills with Arrays and Runes, skills that bordered on the revolutionary. Even among upperclassmen, his presence was respected, sometimes feared. Coupled with his remarkable wealth and easygoing attitude, Tyler was not a student most dared to challenge. He freely attended advanced training classes reserved for seniors and often impressed his instructors, making him even more popular.

"You're as popular as ever," Tyler remarked, taking the seat beside Astrid with a smirk.

"Look who's talking," Astrid replied, her gaze sliding over to a group of girls across the room, who were openly admiring Tyler with lovestruck expressions.

Their exchange was interrupted as everyone's devices pinged with a sudden notification. A message appeared on their screens:

"[Attention: Due to unforeseen circumstances, Professor Ray is on leave, and today's Master Level Array class is canceled.]"

"Oh, that's disappointing," Tyler said with a mock sigh, turning to Astrid. "Want to go grab a coffee?"

Astrid smiled and nodded. "Sure."

The young nobleman, still lingering near the door, overheard the exchange and nearly tripped over his own feet as he left, muttering something about "luck" and "undeserved" under his breath.

The hallways of the academy bustled with students and instructors as Tyler and Astrid left the classroom, walking side-by-side. The academy was an expansive, multi-storied building that housed countless classrooms, labs, and lounges, blending technology with classical architecture in a way that felt both timeless and futuristic.

"So, since when did you become the one I am interested in?" Astrid asked, a teasing smile playing on her lips.

"Isn't that even better?" Tyler shrugged, grinning back. "Now they'll stay away."

Astrid raised an eyebrow, nodding. "I guess. They do tend to keep their distance when I'm with certain people."

"Certain people? Who could be scarier than me?" Tyler joked, feigning a dramatic gasp.

"Of course, me!" a cheerful voice piped up from behind, and suddenly, Mathilda's arms were around their shoulders, squeezing them playfully.

Tyler wrinkled his nose, taking a sniff. "You smell like potions."

Mathilda, dressed in a slightly stained lab coat, flashed a mischievous grin. The faint scent of herbs and arcane potions clung to her clothes. "The labs here are amazing! I've been trying out so many new formulas—it's a dream come true! Also there are lot of things I am learning."

Tyler chuckled. "Well, just don't forget the Life potion. Remember that it is a Billions Of Lydia project."

Mathilda's grin shifted to a determined expression. "As I've said before, I need a proper lab. The academy's setup is great, but I need something even more specialized if I'm going to make real progress on it."

"Well, hang in there until next semester," Tyler said with a slight shrug. "I heard a certain news about our branch academy. If it happens then don't worry about the lab and stuffs."

Tyler said confidently.

"Oh, speaking of classes," Astrid interjected, "after coffee, we're going to history class."

Tyler and Mathilda groaned in perfect unison. "Not history..."

"Yes, history," Astrid replied, with a firm nod that brooked no argument. Her dedication to her studies was something they unexpected she is surprisingly strict and diligent when it comes to this kind of things. Though history class wasn't a required class for their department, Astrid had a habit of dragging them along for every lecture, believing it added depth to their other studies. Reluctantly, Tyler and Mathilda exchanged glances before nodding.

The history classroom was buzzing with conversation as they found their seats. Their teacher, a dignified, silver-haired elf with a scholarly air, stood at the front, adjusting his glasses as he prepared his notes. The lecture began with the familiar, sonorous tone the elf always used.

"In the north, there were once two great continents: Valaria and Ixia," he started, his voice resonant. "But when the first Abyss erupted, Valaria fractured into countless fragments, scattering over the oceans. For centuries, the Abyss has relentlessly encroached upon Ixia, nearly breaking it as well. But through a heroic effort, many brave immortals and practitioners came together to mend the broken land and seal the Abyss. The surviving continent came to be known as Ixalaria."

Tyler stifled a yawn, the lecture's slow pace and intricate details beginning to blur together. The teacher continued, undeterred. "Today, academies, sects, and other organizations maintain a watch over the Abyss, each working to suppress its dark influence. Even some of you students have completed some Abyss Demon suppression task, right? Can anyone explain what an Abyss Passage is?"

The teacher's gaze settled on Tyler, catching him just as he was halfway through another yawn. Blinking, Tyler quickly straightened up and responded, "An Abyss Passage is a spatial rift, formed in the upper layers of the Abyss, that connects to other realms and worlds at random. For some reason, these passages only seem to open in the north."

The teacher nodded, a faint smile crossing his face. "Correct, Mr. White. Though, please try to suppress those yawns during my lectures."

Several students chuckled as Tyler gave an embarrassed scratch of his head.

Mathilda leaned over, whispering to him with a grin, "Hey, the girl with the thigh-high boots is staring at you. Think you could introduce her to me?"

Tyler rolled his eyes, clicking his tongue. "How about no?"

But Tyler also took a peek at the girl. The girl blushed and turned away. She has cute rabbit ears. Her legs are the main attraction.

"Maybe... I should introduce myself." Mathilda whispered.

Just then, his watch buzzed, and Tyler glanced down to see a message from Lily: [I found the target.]

A spark of interest lit up Tyler's eyes. The elusive signal from his enchanted copper pot—a resonance he'd been trying to track down for months—was finally within reach. Now, it seemed like Lily had located the source of the anomaly.

As class wrapped up, Tyler made his way to the academy's common area with Astrid and Mathilda. They found a quiet corner in the student lounge, where Tyler could read Lily's message in more detail. The lounges were bustling with activity, but the area they'd chosen was near a stained-glass window that cast colorful light over the cushioned seats and small tables, offering them a bit of privacy.

"Tf... I've been searching for a clue for six months, and she found the person in just two days," Tyler muttered as he messaged Lily to come over.

"Lily onee-sama is scary as always," Mathilda remarked, with Astrid nodding in agreement.

"You haven't managed to touch Lily onee-sama yet, right?" Tyler asked, smiling.

"So what? You're just as bad. I mean, every girl in the crew is ready, you coward."

Astrid kicked Mathilda's leg. "Except our angel," Mathilda added with a smirk.

"Why are you even talking about this?" Astrid sighed. These people are always so... incorrigible.

Tyler shrugged.

"To drag you down into the pit with us," Mathilda whispered mischievously.

Astrid clicked her tongue and put on her VR glasses, though a faint blush appeared on her cheeks.

Chapter 218: Detective Lily is Back

"Why do you always talk to Astrid like that? Are you... hitting on her?" Tyler asked Mathilda through divine sense.

Mathilda shot him a serious reply, "Bruh, I'm hitting on very cute girls, not her." She glanced over at Astrid, her voice softening. "It's just that... sometimes she seems lonely. I'm just reminding her that we're here for her, you know?"

Tyler fell silent, understanding her intentions. Beneath her teasing and playful nature, Mathilda was always perceptive, picking up on the subtle things others often missed. There were depths to her care for the crew that Tyler respected.

They didn't have a chance to continue the conversation because, just then, Lily appeared, breezing in with her usual lively energy. "Tyler White, yo! What're you up to, yo?" she called out, plopping down beside Astrid.

"Hey, Astrid, yo! And pervert yo," she added, waving at Mathilda and giving Astrid a playful fist bump on the shoulder.

"What's with the 'yo'?" Tyler asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Huh... I just came back from a place called Hood Town. Everyone talks like that," Lily said, sighing dramatically. "I guess it rubbed off on me. Anyway, I'll stop if it's that weird."

"Alright, let's get to the point," Tyler said, leaning forward. "I want answers: who, what, where, and how?"

Lily tilted her head in confusion. "I get 'where,' 'who,' and 'what,' but... 'how'?"

Mathilda grinned, leaning in as well. "Yeah, how did you find a clue this fast, Vice Captain?"

Lily gave them a sly smile. "You guys forget my previous job? I was a top detective back at the old sect. This stuff is nothing."

Tyler and Mathilda nodded in agreement, impressed but not surprised. Before joining Tyler's crew, Lily had earned a reputation for her investigative skills, often uncovering mysteries that even seasoned elders failed to solve.

"Alright, listen up. Here's what I found," Lily began, taking a deep breath. "First question: who? So, Tyler, you told me that the resonance happened once when we first arrived on Cedar Island, and then again during the afternoon, right before the final interview, correct?"

Tyler nodded, while Mathilda and Astrid leaned in with rapt attention.

"Good. You also mentioned that the resonance stopped within a few hours of reaching the island. So, I figured I'd start by tracking down everyone who used the teleportation arrays that day. I paid some Lydia to get me info on who used the teleportation arrays—both on Cedar Island and at the academy," Lily explained.

Tyler raised an eyebrow. "Wait... wasn't that admission day? thousands of people, maybe more than that used it. That's a huge list."

Lily shrugged, undeterred. "I know. But think about it. You said the resonance led you to the dormitory area, right? That means it's likely one of the students or staff members living or working there. It's a way to narrow it down."

"Smart," Astrid murmured, nodding.

"Once I had the list of teleportation array users on Cedar Island that day, I compared it to the academy's records. After some careful cross-referencing, I found five names that matched. Five people. That means one of these five is the person who used the teleportation array six months ago on Cedar Island and again during the admissions period here."

"As expected of Lily Onee-sama," Mathilda said with genuine admiration.

"You understood any of that?" Tyler teased her.

Mathilda looked at him with a proud grin. "Not a word," she replied, clearly unfazed.

Tyler chuckled, returning his attention to Lily. "Seems straightforward, but that's a lot of groundwork. Nice job."

Lily shrugged, her casual expression unbothered. "Eh, wasn't hard. This is only the beginning, though." She paused, letting her words sink in before giving Tyler a knowing look. "So, we've somehow managed to narrow down 'who.' Now it's time to figure out 'what.'"

She gestured to Tyler, who responded by pulling a small, unassuming cube from his pocket and placing it on the table. As he set it down, a slight shimmer covered the table area, like the glimmer of heat over a road in summer. It was a Voice Isolation Array— Tyler had come up with during a recent array class. With it active, they could talk freely without anyone overhearing their conversation, no matter how close they got.

A student passing by glanced curiously at them, noticing their lips moving but hearing nothing. Tyler paid them no mind, leaning in as he focused on Lily's words.

"Alright, spill it," Tyler said, eyes intent. "What do you think the 'what' is?"

Lily took a breath, settling into her seat. "Well, you said the copper pot resonated with... something, right? So, my theory is that whatever this 'thing' is, it probably has a similar ability to your copper pot—like copying things. It could be another copper pot or something with the same properties."

Mathilda, who had been listening closely, raised an eyebrow. "You think someone else might have an artifact with copying abilities? Like unlimited copy as Tyler's?"

Lily nodded. "It's possible. Artifacts like that never existed. But somehow this guy brought one from another world."

"It's a risk." Tyler suddenly said.

"What risk?" Astrid asked.

"If someone out there has one that resonates with Tyler's copper pot, they might be able to track him just as easily as he's trying to track them." Lily explained.

Tyler's face hardened. "If there's really something like that out there, we need to find it. I don't want anyone—or anything—tracing my copper pot through resonance. It's a risk."

Lily's gaze shifted, concern flickering across her face. "Agreed. If the other side also guessed the same. They might get greedy and try to kill you and snatch that thing from you. They might also leak the news and hide into the vast ocean."

Tyler glanced at Mathilda and Astrid, who were both listening with focused expressions. He nodded, his mind already spinning through possible scenarios. "Alright. So, we have an idea of who and what. But now we're left with the toughest question."

"The 'where,' right?" Mathilda chimed in, finishing his thought.

"Exactly," Tyler said, folding his arms. "That person seems to be hiding, and he or she doesn't even tried to contact me. They probably don't want anyone to track them down, which means they're smart. Cautious."

Lily leaned forward, her voice dropping slightly as she looked Tyler in the eye. "This is the trickiest part. Where could they have hidden this artifact? They either escaped right after that last resonance or managed to stash it somewhere safe. If they have something that powerful, they wouldn't leave it somewhere random. It would be well-protected, out of reach for most people."

Astrid, who had been quietly observing, finally spoke up. "So, the only way we'll find it is by using everything we know from answering the 'who.' If we can track down one of those five people and figure out if they're involved, it might lead us to the location."

Lily nodded in agreement, her mind racing through the possibilities. "Exactly. We can start with the information we have, piece together a pattern, and try to anticipate 'who' that person is and where he or she might be hiding. And, if we're lucky, the artifact's resonance might just give itself away."

Tyler exhaled slowly, processing everything. This mysterious artifact—whatever it was—had just become a top priority. If it posed a threat to him and his crew, he couldn't afford to ignore it. They needed answers, and fast.

He looked at Lily, giving her a nod of determination. "Alright. Let's do this. I want us to be ready to track down whoever—or whatever—has this thing."

Lily's gaze was still thoughtful, though. "There's something else, too. If that person is actively trying to avoid resonance, they probably don't want any trouble. They might even be running from something else."

Tyler raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

Lily shook her head, her expression uncertain. "It's just a theory. But think about it: if they're hiding every time there's resonance, it could mean they're scared of being discovered. Maybe they know what they have is dangerous. Or maybe they're worried that someone—other than us—is hunting them."

The group fell silent, the weight of Lily's words settling heavily over them. If someone else was after this artifact, it meant there might be lot of people who knows about this Artifact.

Mathilda finally broke the silence with a wry smile. "Well, sounds like we're in for a wild chase. This isn't going to be easy, is it?"

Astrid chuckled, though there was a hard edge to his voice. "When is it ever easy with us? But that's why we have each other. We'll get through this. All of us."

"..."

"What?" Astrid asked with innocence.

"That was too cring-" Lily was about to say something but Mathilda blocked her mouth.

"It was so cool." Tyler said immediately with a thumbs up.

Astrid gave a small smile, the camaraderie lifting her spirits.

Lily licked Mathilda's hand, which was covering her mouth to keep her quiet.

"Lick me more... Onee-sama."

"..."

Lily had underestimated Mathilda's perversion.

Chapter 219: Art of Heartbreaking

Donald was a student in the Combat Department. He wasn't at the top of the class, but he wasn't far from the top ranks either. Among the academy's diverse mix of students—who ranged across different

age groups and skill levels—he often found it challenging to make friends. The academy was a vast and competitive place, where standing out could be difficult, especially for someone still working to carve out a name for himself.

One day, Donald spotted a girl who was probably a few years younger than him, and yet, she caught his attention immediately. She was clearly a prodigy; her skills in the Combat Classes were exceptional, far beyond what he'd expect from someone her age. She moved with an effortless grace and precision that set her apart from the rest, and her reputation around the academy was growing fast.

Her name was Lily Gomes. Donald wasn't sure what her exact rank or level was, but he was certain of one thing: there was no way she was stronger than him. After all, he was three years older than her. He thinks he has more experience because of his age, and felt confident that his own skills were solid. Surely, she couldn't be that strong. At least, that's what he told himself.

Curious and somewhat intrigued, Donald decided he wanted to befriend her. Maybe make her fall in love with him. He figured that if he approached her sympathetically, he might make a good impression. Sympathy was often a reliable way to start a conversation, especially if he wanted to make her feel comfortable and relatable. He thought, She's younger, maybe she'll appreciate some friendly support.

With his plan in mind, Donald approached her with a friendly smile, hoping his charm would do the trick.

"Hey..." he began, trying to sound casual yet warm. He expected her to respond well; after all, he was putting in the effort to seem approachable. But as he spoke, he couldn't shake the feeling that Lily was looking at him... strangely. It was almost as if she was observing him the way an adult might humor a child who was nervously trying to make a good impression.

Lily listened to him with a mild, polite expression, but in her mind, she was far from charmed. In fact, she found the whole scene rather amusing. She knew this type all too well—a young man, with a touch of naivety, reaching out with a bashful smile and an air of confidence. To her, it looked like nothing more than a childish crush.

'Aww... How many young hearts am I going to break in this place?' Lily thought to herself, fighting the urge to roll her eyes. Her inner voice was laced with a hint of narcissism, though it was more playful than anything else. She was used to boys like Donald being drawn to her, but that didn't make it any less amusing.

As the conversation went on, Donald decided to play the sympathy card. Maybe that would spark a connection, he thought. "Yesterday was my grandmother's one-year death anniversary," he said, with a sad expression. "I had to miss the practical test because of it. And, well, according to the academy rules, missing a test automatically means failing. So... they failed me." He sighed, trying to look as disappointed as possible.

Lily simply nodded, showing little reaction. To her, grades and tests weren't that important. She hadn't expected this conversation to take such a turn, and frankly, she didn't see why Donald was sharing all of this. But she humored him, curious to see where he was going with it.

Seeing her lack of response, Donald doubled down, putting on a sad puppy expression. "So... could you maybe tell me something to cheer me up?" he asked, doing his best to look pitiful.

Lily's eyes brightened with a mischievous spark. "Sure," she replied with a smile. "How about a joke?"

Donald perked up, feeling a bit more hopeful. "Hmm, okay!" He nodded, eager to hear what she had in mind.

"What's the difference between you and your grandmother?" Lily asked innocently, her expression completely serious.

Donald blinked, caught off guard. "Uh... what?"

"Your grandma passed away," she answered, nodding as if she'd just shared a deep, thoughtful observation. A smirk played at the corners of her lips. "Did that cheer you up?"

Donald's expression fell, and his face turned pale. His eyes reddened, and his body began to tremble with a mix of shock and anger. He hadn't expected this response at all, and her deadpan delivery left him speechless.

"Hey, why are your eyes all red? And... why are you shaking?" Lily asked, tilting her head in apparent confusion. "Oh, and why are you reaching for your sword?" she added, noticing the intensity of his glare as he drew his weapon, trembling with frustration.

At that moment, Tyler headed toward the Combat Department. He stopped in his tracks, taking in the scene in front of him: Lily, looking mildly amused, and a young man practically vibrating with anger as he gripped his sword. But his face is touching the ground and his pose is weird. It seems like Lily K.O.ed the young boy.

"Huh? Having a sparring match?" Tyler asked, glancing between the two with raised eyebrows.

"Something like that," Lily replied with an awkward smile. She quickly took a step toward Tyler, trying to usher him away before things got out of hand.

But Donald, fueled by his wounded pride and humiliated ego, struggled to his feet, pointing his sword in Tyler's direction. "I challenge you!" he declared, his voice filled with determination.

Tyler raised an eyebrow, crossing his arms with an amused grin. "Bruh... I don't even know you. And I am from Tech Department," he remarked, casting a quick glance at Donald's visibly shaking form.

But Donald wasn't listening. Driven by a combination of embarrassment and stubbornness, he was already charging at Tyler, sword raised high.

Tyler and Lily exchanged a glance, then turned and walked away, leaving behind the astonished students who had gathered to watch. Whispers and murmurs spread through the crowd as everyone stared at the newly made ice statue of Donald, standing in the middle of the training ground. His body encased in a solid layer of shimmering ice. His face was frozen in a look of shock, sword still raised.

"Who was that guy?" Tyler asked.

"He's one of the guys on our list. But it seems he's not the one," Lily replied.

"How can you tell?" Tyler asked.

"He doesn't seem like the cautious type. He couldn't even hold back his emotions. Remember, the person we're looking for is careful and wants to stay low-key," Lily explained.

"I was planning to have a conversation with him, but he came to me on his own... Guess my luck's pretty good," Lily smiled.

Tyler's mouth twitched. It was probably his own abnormal luck at work again. Both helpful and a little terrifying at the same time.

"So who are we gonna see next?" Tyler asked.

"This next one is outside the academy. He is little suspicious because he never returned to the academy after the resonance stopped. So you are going Thanes Town." Lily nodded.

Tyler noticed something and asked, "Just me?"

"Yeah... I am going for an assignment to guard a city with other seniors in my department. An Abyss passage might open there. One of the teacher in charge is also in our suspicion list. I will watch him. If you want bring others girls with you." Lily said.

In a Coffee Shop

"Nooo... I have a date..." Mathilda announced with a hint of excitement.

"A date? Who's the poor girl?" Tyler replied, unfazed.

"It's a boy." Mathilda's response caught him off guard, and for a split second, a flicker of surprise crossed Tyler's face.

Mathilda watched him closely, clearly hoping for a stronger reaction, but he quickly brushed it off.

"At least pretend to be a little shocked," Mathilda sighed, crossing her arms with mock disappointment.

Tyler shrugged. "Nah... Why would I care if you go on a date with a boy?" he replied, playing it cool.

Mathilda shook her head with a smirk. "Well, technically, it's a girl who crossdresses as a boy," she explained, relishing the confusion in Tyler's eyes. "She's got this whole act going on, pretending to be a guy. But she can't fool me. I can smell a woman from a mile away. So it's a win-win for me."

"Oh..." Tyler said, unable to hide a subtle sigh of relief.

Mathilda's sharp gaze didn't miss a beat. "Did you just sigh in relief?" she teased, raising an eyebrow.

"No..." Tyler denied quickly, his tone casual. "Anyway, have fun on your... date." He gave a quick wave and started to walk away.

Mathilda watched him go, shaking her head with a small laugh, but then she noticed something that made her smile grow even wider: the cup Tyler had been holding had faint cracks along its surface. He had subconsciously squeezed it harder than he realized when she mentioned dating someone else.

"Hehe... So he does care," Mathilda murmured to herself, laughing softly.

Chapter 220: Thane Town

The evening breeze swept through the academy courtyard as Tyler sat under a shady tree, enjoying a moment of quiet.

'It's not like before,' he thought 'Before it's just the girls and me out there on the sea... Now They've got their own lives in the academy. They got their childhood back. They might even find someone they like.'

"Here's your tea." Darla's voice interrupted his musings, pulling him back to the present. She stood beside him, holding a steaming teapot, her face radiating a sense of pride.

He glanced up, surprised to see her. "Join me."

Darla nodded and gracefully sat beside him. She poured herself a cup of tea, her movements reflecting her growing confidence. Though she'd faced challenges in her other classes, she'd excelled in the academy's cooking course, where she was quickly making a name for herself. Yet, even with her success, she never forgot her role as Tyler's ship cook.

"Taka would definitely love learning here," she remarked, her thoughts drifting to the octopus fishman who'd often helped her in the ship's kitchen. Taka had always been a better cook, but now Darla was certain she could rival his skills.

"We'll bring him here next semester," Tyler replied with a grin, taking a sip of tea. Almost instantly, he felt a subtle shift in his mind, a refreshing clarity washing over him. It was as if his mental energy had been gently replenished.

"Huh... Wow. Even your tea has buffs?" he asked, slightly astonished.

Darla chuckled. "Foods work differently here. They're split between normal dishes and special ones that have temporary effects. They don't last as long as pills, but the taste... well, it's something even pills can't offer. Since arriving in the North, I've learned a lot about preparing immortal dishes."

Tyler also know that. The academy canteen always gives them immortal dishes to concentrate on studies.

Tyler laughed, impressed. "Good to see you improving. Keep it up," he said, reaching over to pat her head.

Darla blushed and mumbled shyly, "I'd love a kiss as a reward..."

"What was that?" Tyler asked, raising an eyebrow, uncertain he'd heard her correctly.

"N-nothing!" Darla quickly covered her face, hiding her blush, and took a quick sip of her tea, trying to regain her composure. However, in her flustered state, she drank a bit too hastily, spilling a few drops on her lap.

"Careful, girl," Tyler said, a hint of amusement in his voice.

"Sorry, I'm just... clumsy," she mumbled, reaching for a cloth to clean up. But Tyler was quicker, pulling out a handkerchief and wiping her leg gently.

"There's a bit of tea near your mouth, too," he said, lifting the cloth to her face. But before it could reach her, he paused, his hand stilling. Instead of using the handkerchief, he tilted her chin up slightly and, to her shock, leaned in to gently lick the drop of tea off the corner of her lips, finishing with a light peck.

Darla froze, her cheeks burning as she processed what had just happened. Tyler, oblivious to her daze, stood up casually, brushing off his pants.

"All right, I'm leaving for an assignment. Take care, Darla." He waved and turned to go, leaving her in a state of shock and surprise.

Darla stayed rooted in place, staring after him as if time itself had slowed. After he left, she slowly brought her fingers to her cheek, touching the spot where his lips had met her skin, her heart pounding in her chest.

Not long after, a group of her classmates entered the room, giggling and chattering. They stopped when they saw Darla's dreamy expression.

"Is that your boyfriend?" one of them asked, raising an eyebrow with a playful smile.

"He's so cute!" another girl squealed. "What's his name?"

"What department is he from?" someone else chimed in, eyes sparkling with curiosity.

Darla snapped back to reality, blinking at the barrage of questions. "Oh... uh, no, he's not my boyfriend," she stammered, her cheeks growing even redder.

The questions kept coming, each one more enthusiastic than the last. "Is he okay with polygamy?" one girl teased with a mischievous grin.

Darla's mind was still in a daze, barely able to keep up with the whirlwind of excitement around her. She found herself unconsciously touching her cheek again, her thoughts replaying the moment over and over.

Meanwhile, Tyler strolled into the bustling Teleportation Hub. His thoughts, however, were not on his upcoming journey but on the memory of the small, unexpected kiss he'd given Darla.

"Ahh... I'm so selfish," he murmured to himself, his lips curling into a small smile. It was a brief, impulsive gesture, but he couldn't help the slight thrill it gave him. He shook his head, amused at how easily these moments could distract him from his responsibilities.

Approaching the registration device, Tyler entered his destination and swiped his card to pay the fee. As he did, the staff member overseeing the teleportation arrays looked up, recognizing him instantly.

"Oh... headed to Thane Town again?" the staff member asked, a mix of surprise and curiosity in his tone. "Using the teleportation array quite a lot, aren't you?"

The remark was fair. Each student at the academy received one free pass every six months for personal use of the teleportation arrays, yet Tyler had already exceeded this limit, treating the array almost like his personal mode of transport. Still, he never hesitated to pay, not once batting an eye at the fee.

"Yeah," Tyler replied with a nod, his expression relaxed. "Got an assignment to replace some of the arrays in the Town Chief's office. I'll need to inspect them and report back."

The staff member smiled. "Well, enjoy your trip."

With a quick nod, Tyler stepped into the glowing circle, feeling the familiar hum of energy around him as the array activated. In seconds, he was enveloped in a flash of light, and when he opened his eyes again, he found himself standing in the center of Thane Town.

The town itself looked unremarkable, nestled amid gently sloping hills and thick forests. There was a rustic charm to it, but no particular specialty except for some mines in the outskirts. Slightly isolated, it wasn't a bustling hub like the academy's surrounding cities. Still, Tyler appreciated the peace and simplicity the town offered.

After a quick glance around, Tyler decided to secure a place to stay. He found a small inn down the main road and checked in, noting the quietness of the place. Yet, as he entered his room, a small sigh escaped him. He'd hoped for some sign or resonance on his copper pot, but everything seemed as ordinary as ever.

With a shrug, he left the inn and crossed the street to a small food shop. The enticing aroma of baked goods drifted from the shop, drawing him inside. Behind the counter stood a young girl, likely no older than sixteen, radiating a cheerful, youthful aura. Her eyes lit up as she spotted him, and she flashed a bright smile.

"What would little brother like?" she asked in a sweet voice.

Tyler's mouth twitched at her choice of words. "Two cream buns," he replied, a bit amused by her casual tone.

She nodded and went to the kitchen, calling back the order to her parents who seemed to be working diligently behind the scenes. Tyler found himself leaning against the counter, letting his thoughts wander. He had a few things on his to-do list for this trip, but none were particularly urgent. Replacing the array in the chief's office could wait for a few days.

As he drifted in thought, a plate with two cream buns was set in front of him. Tyler took a bite, savoring the warm, creamy sweetness that melted in his mouth.

"Mm, it's good," he remarked, nodding approvingly to the girl.

She smiled brightly, evidently pleased with his reaction. "Glad you liked it."

Curious, Tyler extended his hand in greeting. "I'm Tyler White. What's your name, big sis?"

She laughed, a hint of a blush coloring her cheeks. "I'm Moeko," she replied, brushing a stray hair behind her ear. Then, with a small wave, she hurried off to attend to other customers, her energy brightening the entire shop.

Finished with his snack, Tyler stepped out of the shop and looked around, considering his next move.

A woman with black and white hair walked past him, wearing a veil that covered her face.

Tyler turned and looked at her. She seemed familiar—at least her hair color did. It reminded him of his senior sister Priscilla, who had come with him to this world.

But he sighed, brushing off the thought. It probably wasn't her. The woman had only glanced at him before entering the food shop. With that thought, Tyler went back to his inn.

Just to be sure, he returned later to check if the woman could be Priscilla. She had also ordered cream buns. He waited, hoping she'd lift her veil to eat, but instead, the bun went right through it. Tyler's mouth twitched as he turned to leave. After he left, the woman glanced in his direction.

'He seems familiar,' she thought.