

WRITTEN BY
Kumanano
ILLUSTRATED BY
O29

15
novel



KUMA KUMA KUMA BEAR

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– Bear Bear Bear Kuma –

- VOLUME 15 -

-AUTHOR-
Kumanano

-ILLUSTRATOR-
029

[SEVEN SEAS]



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Seven Seas Entertainment

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Illustrated by 029

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TRANSLATION: Jan Cash & Vincent Castaneda

ADAPTATION: Lorin Christie

COVER DESIGN: Kris Aubin

LOGO DESIGN: H. Qi

INTERIOR DESIGN: Clay Gardner

INTERIOR LAYOUT: Jennifer Elgabrowny

COPY EDITOR: Meg van Huygen

LIGHT NOVEL EDITOR: Cypress Catwell

PREPRESS TECHNICIAN: Melanie Ujimori, Jules Valera

MANAGING EDITOR: Alyssa Scavetta

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Julie Davis

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER: Adam Arnold

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Name: Yuna
Age: 15
Gender: Female

► Yuna's Status

► BEAR HOOD (NONTRANSFERABLE)

Can see the effects of weapons and tools through the beary good eyes of the hood.

► BLACK BEAR GLOVE (NONTRANSFERABLE)

Attack glove, increases power based on the user's level. Can summon the black bear Kumayuru.

► WHITE BEAR GLOVE (NONTRANSFERABLE)

Defense glove, increases defense based on the user's level. Can summon the white bear Kumakyu.

► BLACK AND WHITE BEAR CLOTHES (NONTRANSFERABLE)

Appears to be a onesie. Reversible.

Front: Black Bear Clothes

Increases physical and magic resistance based on the user's level.
Gives heat and cold resistance.

Reverse: White Bear Clothes

Automatically restores health and mana while worn.
Restoration amount and speed is based on the user's level.
Gives heat and cold resistance.

► BLACK BEAR SHOE (NONTRANSFERABLE)

► WHITE BEAR SHOE (NONTRANSFERABLE)

Increases speed based on the user's level.

Prevents fatigue walking long distances based on the user's level.

Gives heat and cold resistance.

◀ KUMAYURU (CUB FORM)

▼ KUMAKYU



► BEAR UNDERWEAR (NONTRANSFERABLE)

Won't get dirty no matter how much they're used.

An excellent item that won't retain sweat or smells.

Will grow with the user.

► BEAR SUMMONS

Can be summoned from the bear gloves.

Can be changed into cub forms.

Skills

► FANTASY WORLD LANGUAGE

The fantasy world's language will sound like Japanese. Spoken words are conveyed to the other party in the fantasy world language.

► FANTASY WORLD LITERACY

The ability to read the fantasy world writing. Written words become the fantasy world's words.

► BEAR EXTRADIMENSIONAL STORAGE

The white bear's mouth opens into infinite space. It can hold (eat) anything.

However, it cannot hold (eat) living things.

Time will stop for objects that are inside of it.

Anything that is put into the extradimensional storage can be pulled out at any time.

► BEAR IDENTIFICATION

By looking through the bear eyes on the Bear Clothes' hood, one can see the effects of a weapon or tool. Doesn't work without wearing the hood.

► BEAR DETECTION

Using the wild abilities of bears, can detect monsters or people.

► BEAR MAP 2.0

Any area looked at by the bear eyes can be made into a map.

► BEAR SUMMONING

Bears can be summoned from the bear gloves.

A black bear can be summoned from the black glove.

A white bear can be summoned from the white glove.

Summons, Beast Cubification: The bear summons can be transformed into bear cubs.

► BEAR TRANSPORTER GATE

By setting up a gate, can move between gates.

When more than three gates are in place, can travel to a location by picturing it.

This gate can only be opened with the bear hand.

► BEAR PHONE

Can have long-distance conversations with others. Phone persists until caster dispels it. Physically indestructible.

Can call people a bear phone is given to by picturing the person.

Incoming call is announced by the sound of a bear's cry.

By using mana to turn the phone on or off, user can make calls.

► BEAR WATER WALKING

Gain the ability to traverse water.

Summons gain the ability to travel on water.

► BEAR TELEPATHIC COMMUNICATION

You can call your summoned beasts from a distance.

Magic

► BEAR LIGHT

Mana collected in the bear glove creates a light in the shape of a bear.

► BEAR PHYSICAL ENHANCEMENT

Routing mana through the bear gear allows for physical enhancement.

► BEAR FIRE MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use fire elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR WATER MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use water elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR WIND MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use wind elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR EARTH MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use earth elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR ELECTRICITY MAGIC

Gathering mana in the bear glove gives one the ability to use electricity elemental magic.

Power is proportional to mana and the mental image.

When imagining a bear, power increases even more.

► BEAR HEALING MAGIC

Can give treatment by means of the bear's kind heart.

CRIMONIA**FINA**

A ten-year-old girl. The first person Yuna met when she came to the other world. Yuna saved her mother. She harvests the monsters Yuna defeats. Yuna likes bringing her along.

**SHURI**

Seven years old. Little sister of Fina. An admirable young girl who sticks by her mother, Tiermina, and helps her with the Bear's Lounge. Loves bears.

**TIERMINA**

Fina's and Shuri's mother. Yuna cured her illness. After that she married Gentz. Yuna entrusts the accounting work, among other things, of the Bear's Dining Room and Bear's Lounge to her.

GENTZ

In charge of harvesting monsters at the Crimonia Adventurers' Guild. Cares for Fina and later marries Tiermina.

**NOIRE FOCHROSÉ**

Nicknamed Noa. Ten years old. Second daughter of the Fochrosé family. A cheerful girl who loves bears.

**CLIFF FOCHROSÉ**

Noa's father and the Lord of Crimonia. A man well-acquainted with Yuna's hijinks. Friendly and liked by his subjects.

**SHERRY**

An orphan girl. Apprenticing at a tailor because she's good with her hands. Accepts a commission from Yuna to create stuffed animals of Kumayuru and Kumakyu.

BO

Headmistress of the orphanage. When funding was cut and the orphanage was struggling, she continued to devote herself to helping the children.

LIZ

A teacher at the orphanage. Takes good care of the orphans with the headmistress Bo.

TEMOKA

Tailor in Crimonia who takes the orphan Sherry as an apprentice.

NAR

Temoka's wife. Serves customers and assists at her husband's tailoring shop.

MORIN

A capital baker. Yuna helps when her bakery is in trouble. After that, she's put in charge of the "Bear's Lounge."

KARIN

Yuna saves her mother Morin's bakery from loan sharks in the capital. After that, Karin and her mother bake bread at the "Bear's Lounge."

NERIN

Morin's relative. She runs into Yuna when she comes to the capital to see Morin. Later on, she takes over cake production in Morin's shop.

**ANZ**

Daughter of an innkeeper in Mileela. Yuna brought her to Crimonia because of her cooking skills. Is in charge of the "Bear's Dining Room."

NEAF

Travels from Mileela to Crimonia to work at Anz's shop but ends up working at the orphanage.

SENO

The youngest of the group who came to work at Anz's shop.

FORNE

Comes to work at Anz's shop. Is like an older sister to Anz and Seno.

BETTLE

Comes to work in Anz's shop. A hardworking girl.

RULINA

Female adventurer who was part of Deboranay's party. Becomes a guard for Yuna's shop and has a budding friendship with Yuna.

GIL

An adventurer of few words from Deboranay's party. Later leaves Deboranay and starts working with Rulina more often.

CAPITAL



SHIA FOCHROSE

Noa's older sister, fifteen years old. Wears pigtails. Attends the capital academy. Yuna met her while escorting Noa to the capital. After that, Yuna guards Shia during her practical training for the academy.

SHEELIN



MISANA FAHRENGRAM

Nicknamed Misa. Ten years old. Saved from monsters on the way to the king's birthday festival by Yuna. She invites Yuna to her birthday party.

GRAN FAHRENGRAM

Misa's grandfather. Yuna saves him from monsters on the way to the capital. Feudal lord of the Eastern district of Sheelin.

MARINA

An adventurer who protected Gran. Reunites with Yuna in Sheelin. Exterminates big moles with Yuna.

ELLE

A well-endowed mage from Marina's party. Yuna has forgotten her name when they reunite in Sheelin.

MILEELA



ATOLA

Mileela's Adventurers' Guild's master. A little apathetic in some ways, but once Yuna brings peace back to the town, she starts working hard again.

OLD MAN KURO

One of the elders of Mileela. Asks Yuna to mediate between Cliff and the town.

DEIGHA

Innkeeper at Mileela. Anz's father. Yuna is impressed by his seafood cooking.

DAMON

A Mileela fisherman whom Yuna saves while on the way to see the ocean.

ANABELL

Jeremo's mentor.

SEI

Adventurers' Guild employee in Mileela. Like an assistant to Atola.

JEREMO

Mileela Merchants' Guild employee. When peace comes to Mileela, he becomes the guild master because of his likability.

YUULA

Damon's wife. A strong woman who knows how to manage Damon.



CHAPTER 379

THE BEAR GOES GREETING

PART ONE (DAY 3)

SLAP SLAP. *Slap slap.*

I felt something soft against my face. Reflexively, I tugged whatever it was closer and hugged it tight.

“Cwoom...!” Something let out a little cry in my arms.

When I opened my eyes, I found a white stuffed animal—wait, no, it was actually Kumakyu. Looks I’d unconsciously thwarted my bears’ plans to wake me up by grabbing them. Behind me, Kumayuru was doing their very best to try getting me up.

“...Good morning, you two,” I said.

I got out of bed and opened the curtains to greet the bright, morning sunshine. Out the window, I found a beautiful, clear blue sky waiting for me.

It was perfect weather for a dip in the ocean.

We were planning on splitting up today: some kids would be riding on the boats and the rest would be heading into town. Naturally, not all of them would be interested in boats, so we were letting them pick what they’d get to do.

“You two really aren’t going to ride the boats?”

I was going to at least say hello to the people who’d been so nice to me last time I was here, and I was bringing Fina and Shuri with me. Yesterday, I’d talked to Tiermina about it, and it helped me realize I needed to at least make an appearance—just to be polite and all that. Anz had been shocked I was going to visit her dad, but Tiermina had a point. I was in charge of his precious daughter. I had to at least say hi to him. I kind of wished I’d gone with Tiermina yesterday, but I hadn’t wanted to be a third wheel.

"We actually rode on a boat last time," I explained.

"Ah, I see. I do remember you said you came here once already with Fina," Noa said. She gave Fina a slightly jealous look.

"We're going to see some people who were nice to us last time we were here," I said. "You have fun in the meantime, though."

"I'm disappointed we won't be riding the boat together, but... all right, I guess," she said.

Then the two contingents headed out to the boats or the town. Morin, Karin, and Nerin would be the adults on the boats. Liz was also taking care of the kids and Marina and Elle were guarding Noa and the other nobles. Rulina also wanted to ride the boats, and Gil seemed to be tagging along with her. Oh, and Tiermina and Gentz were also going.

Meanwhile, Anz, Seno, Forne, Bettle, and Neaf were leading the party that was headed into town since they were locals. The headmistress had been planning to stay behind at the bear house, but Anz and the kids convinced her to walk around town with them.

I waved from the third floor to see all the kids off. With that, the bear house was deserted. Only Fina, Shuri, and I were home now.

"You two really don't want to go? I thought you wanted to ride the boats, Shuri." When I'd told the two of them I was seeing Deigha, they'd both volunteered to join me.

"I want to go with you."

"Me too! I wanted to ride the boats, but I wanna see Uncle Deigha," Shuri said. So, with that, I took Fina and Shuri along with me as we strolled on over to Deigha's inn.

We headed over on foot, taking our time. After all, it was such a nice day out. The water was calm, and the sky was clear. It was the perfect day to get a boat out on the water.

Once we got in town, the townspeople stared, but not in the same way as they did at the capital. In the capital, everyone seemed bewildered to see me. Here, they looked more grateful than curious. Thankfully, I wasn't swamped by grateful fans. I'd been told that the townspeople were all in agreement that no one would bother me. I felt like they were taking this all waaay too seriously, but I liked this better than being surrounded by a crowd.

We got to the inn without a problem and were greeted by the muscleman.

"Welcome. Hm? Well, I'll be, if it isn't the bear girl!"

"Nice to see you again, Deigha," I greeted him. Fina and Shuri followed suit, bobbing their heads.

"Well, don't you all look dandy!" Deigha continued. "You have no idea how surprised I was when Anz came waltzing back home yesterday."

"You didn't get her letter?"

"I did, but she never said anything about coming back. She must have thought it'd worry us if she mentioned it in the letter. She probably didn't think she'd end up back here so soon."

Actually, I did remember her saying something like that...

"I wanted to see you as soon as I heard you were back in Mileela, but I was just too busy here."

"Do you have a lot of customers then?"

"Aye, thanks to that tunnel and the influx of people coming our way. Place is packed with lodgers every single night!"

"Then does that mean you need Anz back?"

I didn't know what I'd do if he did say he needed her. I knew I had to put Deigha and Anz's feelings first though.

"Anz asked the same thing yesterday when I talked to her about it," Deigha told me.

"She did? She didn't say anything yesterday or today to me though," I said. I'd seen her both days too, but she hadn't even hinted that it'd been on her mind.

"Is Anz leaving...?" Shuri asked.

If Anz said she wanted to go home, it wasn't like I could stop her.

Deigha placed his large hand on Shuri's sullen head.

"I already told her no, so you haven't got anything to worry about. She's got Yuna's restaurant to take care of, after all. I told her she can't just go quitting something like that willy-nilly. Besides, Tiermina told me that Anz is having a great time over there. In fact, it was written all over her face what a nice life she's living with y'all. I would have taken her right back home if she seemed to be having a hard time or if I thought she was miserable."

"Isn't that normally when parents tell their kids to suck it up and not to come back until they can act like an adult...?"

"You think I'd ever say that to my lovely daughter, bear girl?! Now, if it were my lad we were talking about, I'd give him a proper kick him in the tush and send him right on back!"

Apparently, doting fathers existed in any world—at least when it came to daughters.

"But don't tell her I said that. I'd be mortified if she knew."

I wish he'd stop acting all bashful. It wasn't like I thought Deigha looked cute acting like that, considering he was the father of my employee and a block of pure muscle to boot.

"I'm glad Anz is doing well though."

The inn's clientele had brought him updates on Anz, too. The Bear Dining Room seemed to have been making a name for itself. People made their way from Mileela to Crimonia and brought news in the other direction as well. That's why nothing seemed to surprise Deigha when it came to news about Anz.

Well, this was an inn and it wasn't like my restaurant was top secret, so I shouldn't have been surprised that Deigha was so good at gathering intel when he set his mind to it. At the same time, if the customers were heading to Anz's restaurant, that probably meant that she was getting updates about Deigha too. Well, they could spy and pass notes with one another all they wanted. That probably assuaged their worries about each other.

After we were done telling Deigha about how Anz was doing in Crimonia, we left the inn.

“Are we going to Atola next?”

“She got really mad last time we didn’t visit her,” I said.

I didn’t know why she’d been mad though. It wasn’t like we had done anything bad to her by not stopping by. I couldn’t see the point in visiting someone when I didn’t have a purpose to meet with them. Then again, maybe I only thought that way because I’d been a shut-in for so long? I guess it was sort of customary to pop in with people you knew when you were in the area.

So, without protest, I headed off to the Adventurers’ Guild to see Atola. When I got inside, curious stares immediately fell on me. It’d been a hot second since I’d been the center of attention like this.

“What’s the bear doing here...?”

“You haven’t heard? The bear girl’s here on a trip with her *employees!*” one of the adventurers said, seeming rather prideful.

“And how do you know that?”

Yeah, how do you know that?

“I saw the poster about their break on the shops, so I know what I’m talking about. Also, I’m a regular at the bakery and the restaurant!”

If he knew about our announcement, that had to mean he’d come over to Mileela from Crimonia recently. I guess that just goes to show how much easier it was to travel between the towns now.

Right as I was about to make my way to the front desk to ask about Atola, one of the male guild workers noticed me and came over to us instead. *Uh, what was his name again...*

“Miss Yuna, it’s been a while.”

His name, his name, his name...! All the gears in my head were turning trying to remember. He’d been with Atola before and had even come with her to the inn that one time.

“It’s been a while, S-Sei,” I said.

Whew! That was close. I almost hadn’t remembered. It didn’t seem like he’d noticed though. That, or he was pretending not to. He smiled at me in response.

“Is Atola here?” I asked. “I wanted to say hello since we’re here in Mileela.”

“Oh, yes, she’s in. Please come this way to the back room.”

As we passed by the other guild workers, they bowed at us, but ah... they really didn’t need to do that. I hurried off into the room, ushering Fina and Shuri in my wake.

“What is it? If you have more work, it’ll need to wait until the afternoon!” Atola answered, her eyes trained on the documents in front of her.

“Guild Master, it’s not work-related. Miss Yuna has come for a visit.”

“Yuna?” Atola looked up from the paperwork on her desk at that. “Yuna! And Fina and Shuri too!”

“It’s been a while, Atola,” I said. Fina and Shuri greeted her after me.

Atola was in one of her usual skimpy outfits, one that only worked for people with a little confidence about their figure and body overall. There was no way I could ever pull off her look.

“I had no idea you were in Mileela!” she exclaimed. Unlike Deigha, it seemed Atola had no idea I planned to come here.



With a “I’ll bring in some tea, so please take your time,” Sei exited the room.

“I got here two days ago,” I said. “You complained that I didn’t see you last time, so I dropped by.”

“I wasn’t complaining,” Atola said. “But you really should have come by after everything we did.” Yeah, sure, so I’d come this time. “So, what’s up? Did you bring those two with you just for fun again?”

I gave her the gist of what’d brought us in town.

“A *work* trip? With all those children? You do some awfully strange things, Yuna...”

I guess it was kind of strange to vacation with your employees, when you think about it. Well, I didn’t really care if anybody called me strange anyway. I wanted to do this, so I did it. It wasn’t like I was bothering anybody. But then the moment I had that thought, Tiermina’s face loomed in my mind. I shook my head to try to jostle the strange image loose. She was out there enjoying this trip, so I didn’t need to worry. She was even out riding a boat with the kids right now. But Tiermina had also said she’d gone to see how they caught seafood. She had to be enjoying herself too, right?

Right...?

“Actually, did two people named Tiermina and Gentz come by yesterday?”

“Tiermina and Gentz? Oh, yes, they did visit. But they said they were here on work for Crimonia’s Adventurers’ Guild.”

“Funny story—they’re these two’s parents, actually,” I told her.

“Ah, were they? If only I’d known. I would have asked them about you!”

“Anyway, looks like you’re pretty busy,” I said, looking over the documents heaped on her desk.

“Well, yes. The Adventurers’ Guild was tasked with filling out the town’s guard duties, so I’ve been a tad bit busy.”

“You don’t have a group of guards?”

"Mm. We do have a small troop, but there are so many more visitors stopping by that we're shorthanded. That's why the Adventurers' Guild accepted quests to guard the town."

"Well, if that's all it is then..." I started to say.

"I'm also managing the work for the troops we already have," Atola added. "Having to manage both the adventurers and the guards has my hands full with all sorts of tasks. I can also have adventurers handle anything that the troops can't manage, and it makes getting news out about monsters and such in the town's vicinity much faster. There are advantages to the arrangement. Unfortunately, the downside is that I'm much, much busier."

Atola let out a chuckle as she said that, but she didn't seem all too bent out of shape about it.

"We need all hands on deck right now, considering we're short-staffed."

"Come to think of it, I had a question," I said to Atola. "Do you know why there hasn't been any construction work near my house?"

The area around my house hadn't been cleared away, so the stone-paved path leading up was still surrounded by groves of trees. It felt kind of like the pathway up to a temple or shrine, except leading up to a bear house instead.

"Oh, right, *that*." Atola's eyes slid away from me. "We're planning on leaving that area as is."

"Why?"

"Well, it's not like we could have built anything nearby that building. No one wanted to build anything there and it almost felt like we couldn't develop the land, so they left it undeveloped."

In other words, the bear house was the issue.

"Also, with trees surrounding it, your very distinct house won't be as visible."

I suppose she had a point. It wouldn't be noticeable right away, in the very least. On the other hand, it was also super conspicuous because it was the only wooded area

around. And obviously they'd gone to great lengths to make the paved path up look tidy. It's not like the bear faces were hidden from view.

Maybe I could hide them if I made the walls taller. Hmm.

"If you'd really prefer some neighbors, then please tell the townspeople directly," Atola told me.

Was she handing off the work to me because she couldn't be bothered with it? I mean, it wasn't like I wanted to bother with it either. I wasn't going out of my way to ask the townspeople to go develop the land around my house.

"Everyone's so grateful to you that they'd never want to do anything to make you disappointed. So just know that they're not doing this to make you upset."

I could tell from the fishermen who'd visited the other day. I could see from how they acted that they just wanted to thank me and were trying to avoid being a nuisance.

They really didn't have to go to all that trouble just because I'd taken care of the kraken and the tunnel, though—and I'd done that to get my hands on rice, soy sauce, and miso. The tunnel I'd made just to make sure there was a trade route for seafood and so I could take Anz back with me. I wasn't a hero in the least: I didn't deserve all this fuss.

I couldn't tell them the truth anymore though, so all I could do was accept all their goodwill.

CHAPTER 380

THE BEAR GOES GREETING

PART TWO (DAY 3)

AFTER WE LEFT the Adventurers' Guild, we headed over to the Merchants' Guild so I could thank Jeremo for the regular rice and seafood deliveries to my restaurant. Once we got there, the stares stuck to me all over again, just like they had at the Adventurers' Guild.

"A bear?"

"Is that the bear girl...?"

"The bear girl is here...!"

"I heard she was taking a swim in the ocean."

"In *that* outfit?"

"Apparently someone spotted her dressed like that out at the beach."

"Wouldn't it be hot?"

"Well, she is the bear girl, so why are you acting so surprised?"

I guess word had gotten around about my beach outing, though I didn't really know how to take that last statement.

Anyway, the Merchants' Guild was a lot busier than I'd expected it to be. There was a whole crowd inside. I headed over to the reception desk to ask about Jeremo when a familiar woman made her way over to me.

"No wonder there was a commotion. Am I to understand we've been graced with a visit from Miss Yuna herself?"

Anabell, an employee from Crimonia's guild who'd come to train Jeremo so he could be a guild master, had come up to me. I hadn't known she was still stuck in Mileela.

"It's been a while, Anabell," I said in reply.

"I already heard you were in the area. So, it sounds like you brought the kids who work for you all the way to Mileela for fun, yeah? How kind of you. I can't believe you'd give kids jobs and keep them in your thoughts like this. I wish the other merchants would take a page from your book..."

Anabell glanced around the guild. The merchants quickly avoided her gaze.

"I'm just thanking them for working so hard. Besides, they need breaks to work efficiently."

I didn't want them getting bored doing the same thing day in, day out. Sometimes life required a change of pace. Ideally, I wanted to give the kids breaks a couple of times a year.

"Ha ha ha, you won't see normal merchants doing that. It's not in the interest of the shop," Anabell said.

I didn't give a flying fig what normal merchants did as long as my businesses stayed out of the red. But we weren't in danger of that—far from it. According to Tiermina, thanks to everyone's work, sales were actually steadily increasing. A short break wasn't going to ruin us. I just wanted them to get a breather before going back to the grindstone.

"So, that aside, Anabell," I said, "I'm surprised you're still in Mileela."

"Yes, I thought of returning to Crimonia, but I asked Milaine to let me work at this guild instead."

"Huh? But aren't you married with a little kid at home?"

"Yes, so I brought them here with me."

Anabell glanced at another employee. A slender male worker bobbed his head at us from further into the room.

"Oh, is that him?"

He seemed like a nice guy. Anabell seemed to have him a little bit whipped, though I guess it was better for him to have come here to live with her than to work a long commute away. Plus, that was better for the kid.

"I had no idea your husband also worked at the guild," I said.

"Actually, we met each other there. It was love at first sight..." Anabell trailed off. "Wait, Yuna, are you prying?"

Uh, this wasn't an inquisition—Anabell had very freely divulged all of that by herself. I didn't exactly want to hear this mushy stuff about her husband and their life together. That said, if he was willing to relocate all the way to Mileela, maybe he was worth gushing about a little bit.

"Well, I decided to stick around here because the guild staff asked me to." Anabell glanced at said staff and sighed.

"We couldn't rein in Jeremo without Anabell here," one of them said.

"We really need her here!" said another.

I guess they really had decided she was indispensable.

"So, as you can see, that's why I decided to stay," Anabell told me.

"Is Jeremo just a terrible guild master or...?"

"That's not the case. He has the makings of a great one, but he has a bad habit of ditching his work. The moment I take my eyes off of him, he tries to make a break for it. Nevertheless, the townspeople like him quite well. Everyone knows him and they take orders from him without issue. If only he would stop leaving behind his work, he'd be perfect."

I think old man Kuro and the other elders had said just about the same thing. I guess being in an important position kind of meant you needed the townspeople to like you.

"Is Jeremo here, actually?" I asked. "I wanted to say hello to him. That's why we came."

"He's working in a back room. I can take you there," Anabell said and did exactly that. But when we got to the office, we couldn't find any sign of Jeremo. The only clues were a mountain of paperwork on his desk and an open window.

"That man..." Anabell held her head.

Um, so he'd abandoned his work and escaped.

"Haaah, please take a seat and give me a moment. I'll bring some refreshments."

"You're not going to look for him?"

"He'll be back right away," she said. Then Anabell left the room herself.

"Yuna, are we really waiting?"

"What would you like to do?"

Anabell claimed he'd be right back, but maybe it'd be best to see old man Kuro first and then to loop back around. As I was trying to figure out a plan, Shuri became alarmed.

"Fina! Yuna! There's a weird man at the window!"

"The window?"

I looked over to see Jeremo in the process of climbing back in. Our eyes met.

"What are you doing here, bear girl?"

"We stopped by to say hello to you," I said. "But then you'd disappeared."

"Sorry about that, just needed a breather so I took a little walk." Jeremo hitched himself over the window frame and made it into the room.

"Anabell seemed unhappy with you," I informed him.

"Really? Normally she's too busy with her own work at this time of day to check up on me in here."

"I guess that's my fault then," I said. "She brought us to this room. Sorry."

"Oh, no worries, you're fine! I'll just tell her I was out on a bathroom break... she'll buy it."

"Oh, is there a bathroom outside the window?"

Anabell was standing at the door to the room with refreshments in hand. Jeremo looked flustered.

"So, um, well... It's a shortcut, you see," Jeremo finally said.

"And here I thought the bathrooms were just outside *this* door, not the window. What a clever shortcut," Anabell replied, face completely neutral, as she set the drinks out in front of us.

"It was an emergency!" Jeremo insisted.

"Ah, so you used nature's bathroom, did you?" Anabell's disdain was evident in her eyes.

"You went *outside*?" Now Shuri was giving Jeremo an innocent wide-eyed stare.

This was what broke him. He couldn't bring himself to continue the charade in front of pure, sweet Shuri.

"I-I didn't," he said. "I was lying."

I didn't really see the point of lying when it was so obvious he'd ditched work.

Meanwhile, Jeremo awkwardly took a seat. Something about him gave the impression he had another scheme cooking in the back of his mind.

"Come to think of it, a woman named Tiermina stopped by yesterday. Do you happen to know each other?"

Ah, so his plan was to redirect the topic of conversation. I was a fan of that tactic myself, so I couldn't fault him for it. I cooperated with it, just this once.

"Yeah, she works for me," I said. "And she's also their mother."

I glanced at Fina and Shuri, who were sipping their tea.

"I see. So, did you need anything from me?"

"Nothing in particular. You always make sure quality seafood and rice are sent our way, so I wanted to come thank you in person."

Anz had told me he always made sure we got high-quality stock whenever we got a delivery from Mileela. I hadn't even asked for him to do that, but Anz could tell just by looking at the fish.

"That wasn't me," he said. "The fishermen took initiative on that."

"Actually, I do believe I've seen them even fight about who gets to send their fish to your restaurant, Miss Yuna," Anabell said. "They were arguing about whose fish were the biggest and leanest and quibbling about which ones would taste the best."

Anabell recounted the events to the best of her recollection. I was glad for the high-quality stock, but I didn't want to be the cause of any fights. Apparently old man Kuro had stepped in to put a stop to that particular fight. People always seemed to be creating work for him. I hoped that he'd live a long, healthy life despite that stress. Maybe I could gift him some of the sacred tree tea to help.

"You know, it would be nice if someone let the guild workers have a break to enjoy themselves, like some working kids I've heard about," Jeremo said. I got a little sense of *déjà vu*.

"Are you talking about me? I just gave you time off three days ago."

"You sent me on an *inspection*. Do you know how many places I had to visit for that?"

"I simply granted your request to spend time outside," Anabell replied. "And it's your duty as a guild master to be aware of the conditions on-site."

I'd heard offhand that leaders who refused to see how the work was done up close weren't very good bosses.

"Yeah, so it was work, not a break!" Jeremo insisted.

"I believe I heard you had a little bit to drink on your trips out, though? Or are you

going to tell me you were just sampling the fares?"

"H-how did you—"

"Of course I know! I wasn't upset about it because you're entitled to a break. Which you took, regardless."

Anabell had a point. Was he really working if he was drinking on the job? I guess it depended on Jeremo's reasons for drinking. If someone forced him to drink with them, that was entirely different from drinking with someone for fun. I'd been in both situations in the game. And when I thought it over, whether I was going along with things willingly or not usually depended on who I was with.

"But if you were working, I take it I should scold you next time you go out to drinks on the job, yes?"

"I'd prefer it if you didn't scold me at all..." Jeremo *definitely* lost this round.

"Also, old man Kuro should be on his way here soon, so please get some work done before he arrives. Ah, since you were in the bathroom up until now."

Jeremo had tried to change the subject, but Anabell looped right back around to the matter at hand—his shoddy work ethic.

There was one item of interest buried in there, though.

"You said old man Kuro is on his way?"

"We've left him in charge of the sea, so he regularly comes by to make reports. He mostly tells us about the seafood that's being sent to Crimonia as well as the types of fish we catch and size of the hauls, which depend on the season. We need all the details about those things at the Merchants' Guild, so we've asked him to come report to us every once in a while."

So, looked like old man Kuro would be here any second. In that case, I guess all we had to do was ask to wait for him to come to me.

"Fina, Shuri, I'd like to see old man Kuro. Would you two be okay hanging around the guild for a while? You two could go on a walk instead if you'd prefer that."

"Shuri, what would you like to do? Want to go outside, or stay here?" Fina asked her sister.

"I wanna play with Kumayuru and Kumakyu while we wait," Shuri said.

Shuri drove a hard bargain: keeping her waiting patiently required a personal audience with my bears. So I summoned my bears in cub form and let the two girls play with them on a tabletop.

"Oh, miss, did your bears become smaller?"

"Oh, right. I heard that you had large bears, Miss Yuna. Are these new ones?"

"No, same bears, different size," I said. "They're not like other bears, so they can shrink."

After that, we waited for old man Kuro as Anabell strong armed Jeremo back into doing work.

CHAPTER 381

THE BEAR FINDS OUT ABOUT THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND (DAY 3)

FINA AND SHURI squeezed my bears' paws and gave them belly rubs as they played together. They were kind of treating my bears like puppies.

As I watched them from the corner of my eye, I made the wait go faster by asking Anabell and Jeremo about all the recent happenings in the seaport. Jeremo worked on his paper as we talked. Meanwhile, Anabell was keeping a razor-sharp eye on Jeremo as she talked with me.

Old man Kuro made it in as we were in the middle of the conversation.

"I heard the bear girl was here..."

He peered in through the doorway, seemingly looking for me, and then made a beeline over once he'd spotted me.

"I'm so sorry for all the trouble my fishermen caused!" he went straight into apologizing. "I told them not to bother you, but they were so hellbent on thanking you, girl. I just wasn't around to stop them at the time."

"It's all right, really," I said. "Their food was great and the kids loved it too, so please don't be too hard on them. Plus, they offered to take the kids out on their boats today. It sounded so great that we took them up on it."

"I'm so glad to hear you say that. But I'm afraid I already gave them a piece of my mind."

Well, it is what it is. Still, I was glad to have someone as dependable as old man Kuro on my side. One word from him seemed to be enough to get the fishermen to do anything. It was very kind of him to use that power for good.

"Now then, what brings you here, lass?"

"She was waiting for you," Anabell answered in my place.

"You've done a lot for me, so I wanted to stop by to say thank you," I explained.

"It seems it was all for naught," he lamented. Still, the situation could have gotten way worse if he hadn't put his foot down. He was the dam that held the fishermen at bay, and I really did need that from him. I needed him to stay healthy, too—just thinking about the last defense between me and those guys falling gave me full body shivers.

"That's not how I see it," I said. "I'm grateful for all you've done and for everything you might do in the future too."

"I have to keep my promise to you, after all."

Right, our promise.

I'd asked him to make sure the whole thing with the kraken didn't spread about and for the seaport not to make a fuss about it. He'd taken that promise super seriously.

I set a small box of sacred tree tea leaves on the table, which was for his health and longevity, of course.

"And this is...?" he asked.

"It's tea that'll make you less tired," I explained. "I recommend drinking it when you've had a long day. Works good."

I'd already successfully experimented on my guinea pig—uh, that is, I'd gotten *confirmation* from Cliff that it worked well. Supposedly he'd been so rejuvenated that he'd even gotten ahead on work.

"I want to make sure we keep you around for a long time, Kuro," I said. Because I *really* couldn't spare him. "But make sure not to drink too much of this. It won't do you any good to overwork and end up collapsing, even if the tea works."

"Tea for my health? Well lass, I'm mighty grateful to you. I take it that drinking this tea will help me whip those young'uns back into shape when I need them to focus on work."

Old man Kuro giddily collected the box of tea leaves.

Maybe he didn't need more energy for that... I said a silent apology to the young fishermen. Hopefully being driven hard under Kuro's direction would help turn them into great fishermen, someday.

Jeremo was eyeing the box of tea.

"Do you want some too?" I asked.

"No, I don't need any. What if it works and I get even more duties piled on me? That'd be dreadful." Jeremo shook his head. "I'd rather sleep if I'm tired."

Now that I could agree with. Snoozing the day away is better than relying on supplements to recover stamina. Sleeping's a part of my identity, so to me, spending a day lounging around is bed is just the right way to live your life. That clinched it: I wouldn't give Anabell or Jeremo any of the tea leaves, regardless of whether they asked for some or not.

"Well, about the report. Was there anything unusual out there?" Anabell asked old man Kuro, who'd taken a seat after they'd finished talking with me. He pulled a letter out of his bag and handed that off to Anabell.

I'd lost my chance to excuse myself and escape, so I ended up having to stick around in the room while they continued their conversation. Shuri was bored out of her mind by all this adult chit-chat, so she was just playing with Kumakyu. Well, at least she wasn't falling asleep. Fina had set Kumayuru on her lap, so she was listening in while petting my bear.

"It's all in this letter. The short story is that there's nothing much different. The haul's lookin' good. The only problem I can think of is that one of the silly young'uns got too close to that island out there and destroyed his boat."

"Is he all right?!" Anabell looked shocked by that tidbit.

"No need to worry. The boat's sunk, but luckily the whirlpool settled down and another ship saved 'im. Told him not to go near the island, the dummy."

"What's this about?"

An island, a whirlpool, and a sunken ship. I had no idea what to make of the fragments I was picking up. It sounded sorta dangerous.

"Aye, I suppose you wouldn't be aware, lass. Well, I suppose only the fishermen going out to sea would have reason to know. Five days ago, an island turned up."

"An island just showed up?"

I'd heard of a few islands in my time. This didn't sound like normal island behavior. Maybe, like, an undersea volcano erupted or something? Or was this a regular occurrence in this world?

"I really don't understand how we're supposed to believe an island appeared overnight."

Looked like Anabell was pretty skeptical. Well, yeah. Islands don't just—*poof*—appear like magic.

"The fishers head out to sea day in and day out. Course they know when an island wasn't there before. I've been fishin' for decades and even I can tell you that there island is brand-new," old man Kuro insisted.

Well, if he'd been at it for decades, the ocean was basically his backyard. He'd definitely notice something as big as an island appearing.

"If I recall correctly, this isn't the first time. Its last appearance was a big deal for the fishermen," said Jeremo, who'd been listening in and seemed to have just remembered.

"Aye, I believe it was some three years ago. And five before that, then. I remember it happening earlier than that too. That strange island appears for a few days, then vanishes outta nowhere. Strange phenomenon it is."

I wondered if the island was just showing up because the tide was low or something. But the island was pretty far off the coast, based on what I was hearing.

"We looked into the position the island shows up in, but it's different each time."

"It's a *moving* island?"

"Aye, that it be."

"Islands can *move*?"

Shuri perked up, although she kept poking at Kumakyu. That'd caught her attention.

"That's what I believe. The island floats in outta nowhere and floats away without a destination, just like it came."

So it was, like, untethered? Maybe that was it. And I didn't know how big this island was, but it seemed to float into Mileela's waters once in a blue moon.

"Is it the same island each time?"

"We've never gone close enough to check, and we don't remember how it's shaped since it's been years since seeing the last one."

Fair point. I definitely wouldn't remember the shape of something from years ago unless it stuck out in someway—outside of being an island that moved and all.

"The island's got a lot of rocky outcroppings and whirlpools around it, so we can't get to it easily. Some people tried to get there in the past, but all the ships sunk and we've lost a few souls. That's why we've forbidden anyone from going near it, even when it does show up, but one of the youths still headed off there anyway, despite the warnings. They're safe after being rescued by another ship, but them thrill seekers going out there are a problem."

I guess there were some fishermen who didn't listen to old man Kuro. That aside, the island sounded wild. A high difficulty region had to have some serious loot... or that might just be my gamer brain running stats.

"His excuse was that he thought there might be treasure on the island. Chowderhead. What kinda numbskull would that even occur to—who is gonna leave treasure on an island they can't get to? And why put it on an island that moves, anyway? Only reason he headed out there is because he's a half-wit with more spit than sense."

Uh, okay, but the same thing occurred to me, and I was right there, so...

"No treasure...?" Shuri looked pretty disappointed by that.

"Nobody can get to the island, so they wouldn't be able to stash the treasure there in the first place," old man Kuro replied, which made Shuri deflate even more. Was she really that invested in material things? I mean, I was totally into it, but... that's because I'm me.

"That shakes something loose in me old skull, lassies! You didn't want a ride on our boats?" Old man Kuro directed that question to Fina and Shuri, who were still glopping onto my bears.

"Damon let us ride his last time we came, so we didn't go this time."

"Aye, yes, back then. But it was cold weather out at the time. If you take a ride now, it'll be leagues different. It's mighty fine to be on the water."

"Really?"

"Is it really?"

Both of the girls were leaning forward when they heard that.

"Aye, completely different experience. The lay of the water looks different with each season. Sometimes even a day can make a difference in the vistas before ye. The sea's a wondrous place, and right now she's cheery and warm."

I hadn't been on boats very often myself, but I could kind of see what old man Kuro meant. I mean, of course the season's going to make a difference, but even how the sunlight streamed down could make a difference, as could the mood of the wind, of course. You might have a pleasant breeze or a mean and frigid gust blowing at you.

For every day the wind is strong and the waves are choppy, there are going to be days when the seas are quiet and calm. Of course, the time of day also had to be a factor. In the morning, you'd see the sunrise and, in the evening, there'd be a sunset. Totally different from going out and seeing the scenery in the afternoon.

After listening to old man Kuro talk, the two of them seemed eager for their own boat ride. Neither of them piped up to ask, though.

"Should we ask Damon to take us out later?"

"Can we really?!"

"Are you sure?"

The two of them looked ecstatic when I suggested that. I knew it. They wanted another ride out. I knew the two of them could be way too nice sometimes, and maybe I hadn't

done the best thing inviting them on boring grown-up visits.

“I’ll try asking him, but if he says no, that’ll be that, okay?”

I couldn’t promise them a ride out to sea and I’d feel guilty getting their hopes up if it didn’t work out.

“Then what do you say about taking a ride in my boat?”

“Old man Kuro?!”

That shout of surprise wasn’t me, mind you—it was Jeremo.

“What’s so wrong with that? I can let ‘em onto my ship at the very least. And if Damon gets the honor of takin’ them out, the others’ll probably gang up on the poor lad.”

“We get to ride your ship, Grampa?”

“Aye, you can. And I’ve got the best steering skills out there.”

“The best?!”

“Those young’uns haven’t caught up to me yet,” old man Kuro declared as he thrust out his chest proudly.

In the end, we accepted his generosity.

CHAPTER 382

THE BEAR HEADS TO THE HARBOR (DAY 3)

“YUNA, WHAT ABOUT LUNCH?” Shuri rubbed her tummy as she asked me.

Right, I was feeling kind of peckish myself. I had tons of food in my bear box, but we’d traveled all this way to the ocean. I wanted to eat something I’d only be able to find here. While I was trying to figure out what that could be, old man Kuro made a suggestion to us.

“In the case, you ought to eat over at the harbor. The kids you brought by should be eating about now too.”

According to old man Kuro, all the fishermen were prepping their morning catches for lunch. Our cruise was coming with a free lunch. What else could I do beyond thanking him?

Once we got close the harbor, I caught of whiff of something delicious. My stomach growled a little. I glanced over at Fina, who was walking beside me.

“I’m feeling hungry too.”

She’d caught me which was a little embarrassing. I wish my bear gear could block sound as well as it blocked attacks. As a girl, some daintiness-enhancing features would be real nice.

The inviting smells soon led us right into the harbor, where we found the fishermen picking up where they left off yesterday. They were grilling fish and mollusks while they stewed shellfish and seaweed miso soup. Now *that* was a meal! All we needed was some freshly cooked rice.

Old man Kuro headed off to the fishermen and started talking to them about lunch. They glanced over at me, smiled wide, and said, “Of course. Please, eat up!”

And that was how we snagged lunch.

Right as I was loading up a plate with grilled seafood and about to dig in, Tiermina found us.

“Mom!” Shuri hugged her and got a pat on the head.

“Yuna, did you finish everything you had planned?”

“I got to everyone, but it was just a quick visit. Also, old man Kuro is going to give us a ride on his boat. Are you guys eating too, Tiermina?”

“Yes. Apparently, they didn’t just take us out on the water. They also planned a meal for us too. I really feel badly they’re going to all this trouble...”

Couldn’t agree more. We weren’t paying them anything for the boat rides, and they were even feeding us. I couldn’t accept that without some friendly retaliation.

“So, Yuna, what did you do at this town? I know you discovered the tunnel, but I’m sure there’s more to it, isn’t there?” Tiermina asked. Uh oh: Looks like she suspected something.

“Nothing at all. What made you think that?”

“You’re *absolutely* sure?” Tiermina leaned her face close to mine. Her narrowed eyes drilled straight into mine. Those were the eyes of someone wouldn’t accept any BS. I knew I’d be admitting something if I looked away, but I couldn’t stand it and averted my eyes.

“Well, I wonder if my daughters might know what I’m talking about?” Tiermina looked at said daughters.

“You mean what Yuna did? It’s a secret.”

“*So* secret.”

Wow. Fina and Shuri were both rebelling against Tiermina to take my side. Got me right in the feels. Were they hitting their tweens a little early?

“Oh, a secret? From your own mother?” Tiermina teasingly picked them up in a hug and started to tickle them.

“M-Mom, stop it! It tickles!”

“Mom, it tickles! Stop, stop, ha ha ha!”

“See, if you don’t tell me, I’ll tickle it out of you!”

The family kept horsing around in their own little world. This never would’ve happened back when Tiermina was still sick. I kind of started to feel jealous watching them. Actually, Gentz looked just as jealous right now. They were supposed to be his family too. Then again, if stepdad Gentz tried getting in there, it’d seem a little suspicious by technicality or not.

“Y-Yuna, h-help...”

“Yuna...”

I was a little jealous myself. Fina and Shuri were laughing and reaching their little hands out to me, begging for assistance. Tiermina wasn’t going to let them get away though. It looked like they were just playing, but maybe this was the right time for a rescue.

“They were being attacked by a monster, so I just defeated it for them,” I said.

“Really?”

I wasn’t lying. I just left out the part that the monster happened to be a *kraken*.

“Really, so they feel a little indebted toward me,” I continued.

My explanation seemed to be enough, and Tiermina released the girls. The two of them sat down, out of breath and panting from laughing so hard.

“Mom, that was mean...” Fina said.

“Well, that’s what you get for trying to hide something from your dear mother. Then again, it’s Yuna’s secret, so I’m sure that the monster couldn’t have been ordinary. I won’t ask about that though.”

Ah, so Tiermina had seen through me, but wasn’t going to pry any further. I had no idea whether she’d even believe me if I told her the truth though.

"But... that explains a lot of things," Tiermina continued. "When I was walking around town, they were selling bear knickknacks and accessories as protective charms. I don't think that'd be normal in another town. I've never heard of a religion that worships bears, after all."

Wait, what did Tiermina just say? Surely I misheard her. I knew I had to have misheard her. Looks like I was due for an ear cleaning once I got home.

Wait, did I even have an ear cleaner?

"See, I even bought one."

Tiermina produced a little bear from her pocket. My eyes weren't deceiving me, were they? I rubbed my eyes and checked again. There was, in fact, a little bear, right on top of the center of her palm. A string had been stuck through the bear to make it like a key chain, so you could tie it to a bag or something.

Okay, not hallucinating. Totally not hallucinating.

"It's a bear! I want one too!"

Shuri snatched the bear key chain thing from Tiermina's hand.

"Um, they sell those?"

Tiermina told me she found it at a knickknacks shop. They were selling them as protective charms. This one was apparently to help guarantee safe passage when going out to sea.

Hearing that, brain.exe failed. Blue screen of death. Complete and utter shutdown.

"I'm sorry, lass," old man Kuro's voice rebooted my entire system. He'd been listening in on us. "Those bears are like amulets to our fishermen."

Tiermina had described it like a spiritual charm too.

"There are many who still fear the seas and have some apprehension being out there. But having a bear charm with them soothes their worries. Because of that, word's spread that the bear charms guarantee a safe haul and safe return."

But weren't charms and amulets and the like supposed to be divine protections? As in from actual *gods*? Like, most people prayed to—you know, *a god*—for safety. And if these were bear-shaped, that meant they meant me.

No way. They had it wrong. Super, super wrong.

At the same time, I couldn't go around complaining when old man Kuro was working this hard. He'd done so much for me already. And I couldn't exactly forbid people from having the charms if it was the only thing making them feel safe out in the water while fishing. I mean, what if they just stopped fishing altogether? I knew this episode had been traumatic, and if it helped, well, how could I say no?

"Um. Just please make sure they don't spread to other towns," I said. That was as much as I could ask.

"We know not to do that," he said.

I sure hoped so. People from other towns would probably scoff when they saw the bear charms and probably wouldn't buy them, I reassured myself. Then I looked over at Tiermina and her daughters, who seemed ecstatic about the bear charm Tiermina had bought.

Yeah. No one would buy one of those... right?

Right...?

Then, while we were eating the meal the fishermen made for us, Noa came over with a plate full of food.

"Yuna!"

Her mouth was full too. Oh, Noa. You're part of the nobility. You know better than to talk with your mouth full. Remember your manners.

I gave her bulging cheek a poke with my bear puppet hand.

"Wh-what are you doing?"

"It looks like you're enjoying the food, but I'm not sure you're doing it in a very ladylike way," I said.

"But there aren't any nobles around here," she said. "We're all just eating together."

Well, she had a point. When I first met her, I thought she seemed a lot more like an aristocrat. Maybe meeting me changed her? Actually, no, I'd had no influence and she was like that before I got to her.

Let's go with that.

On the other hand, Misa and Shia acted just like little ladies. They sat down to eat. You wouldn't see them walking around with their mouths full.

"Oh, I know. Yuna... I'm going to learn how to fish later. I'm really excited since it'll be my first time. I'll catch a huge fish."

The kids had asked about fishing for themselves while on the boats, so they were going to try it out in the afternoon. Noa seemed to be having a ball too, which might've been because Cliff and Lala weren't around.

"Did you come here to fish too, Yuna?"

"I'm here because Fina and Shuri said they wanted to go on a boat ride too," I explained.

"Then how about they join us when we go fishing?"

I went to ask the two, who were eating a little way away.

"Fishing?" Fina repeated.

"You get to hook your own fish," Noa explained.

"We can catch fish?!" Shuri seemed very excited by the prospect of that.

"Would you like to compete to see who can catch the largest one?" Noa asked. "Shia and Misa are also participating."

Fina and Shuri looked conflicted despite the invite. They seemed interested, but we'd already made an appointment with old man Kuro's boat. They looked at me for help.

"You can choose what you'd like," I said. "I can go ride in old man Kuro's boat on my

own."

"But..."

It didn't seem like they felt comfortable turning down old man Kuro's offer. I talked about it with him after.

"If that's the case, I'll teach 'em myself. I know all the best places to catch a big fish better than anybody else."

And so, old man Kuro didn't just volunteer his boat.

The old master was going to teach us how to fish.

CHAPTER 383

THE BEAR HEADS OUT TO SEA (DAY 3)

AFTER THAT, I asked Tiermina what she was doing today.

“Once we’re done eating, we’re splitting into three groups,” she stated.

According to her, one group would head out to fish, another would head back to the bear houses, and the last group would go swimming again.

Some of the kids had gotten seasick during their outing, too. That’s one thing you won’t know will happen until you’re on the water.

“Were you two fine last time?” I asked Fina and Shuri.

“Yes, I was okay.”

“Me too.”

Actually, now that I thought about it, I didn’t have any issues before.

Some kids didn’t want to ride the boats and others were ready for a nap, so Liz took them back to the bear house. Tiermina and Gentz were interested in heading out with the fishing group. She’d been super active since recovering. I guess this had always been the real version of her.

After we finished eating, we all headed off to our respective activities. Liz held the hands of the sleepy kids and even carried one conked-out kid on her back. Gil took the heavy kid off of her as soon as he spotted what was up, and they headed off to the bear house together.

The fishing group included Marina’s group, of course, since Noa was going, plus Morin, Karin, and Nerin.

“Misa, Fina, Shuri, Shia—let’s see who can catch the biggest fish!” Noa declared suddenly.

“We’re having a competition?”

“Yes.”

“But I’ve never fished before.”

“Me neither. Misa hasn’t either, of course.”

Noa looked over at Shia.

“I have, but only at lakes and in rivers,” Shia replied.

“Then you can compete with Yuna,” Noa said.

“Uh, I’m not fishing,” I told them. I’d never planned to in the first place.

We split up to head to our boats. I went to old man Kuro’s boat with the girls, as promised. Tiermina and Gentz also joined our group. If we were all going to fish, I figured it’d be more fun if the family did it together, so I’d invited the parents along.

“Dad, do you think we can catch a big one?”

“I don’t see why not. I’ve fished before,” Gentz replied. “And I even caught a fish thiis big back then.” Gentz stretched out his arms to answer Shuri’s question, trying to wow her with the huge fish he’d supposedly hooked.

“Oh, did you? I seem to remember Roy catching the fish and you complaining that you couldn’t get a single one.”

If memory served right, Roy was Fina’s late father.

Tiermina was smiling as she needled Gentz’s pride. He instantly deflated.

“I-it was after that! I caught it while no one was watching,” Gentz answered, looking anywhere but at us. Didn’t take a rocket scientist to spot the liar among us.

“Then I’m looking forward to seeing how much you’ve improved,” Tiermina replied.

“Well, it’s been a while, so I wouldn’t be surprised if I’m not as good...”

Wow, full backpedal. Looked like he'd just been trying to impress tiny little Shuri. Tiermina didn't hesitate to rub salt into the wound.

"Shuri, your dad's going to get a huge fish for you. Are you excited?"

"Really? Do your best, Dad!" Shuri innocently cheered him on. When she gave him that irresistible little girl smile, Gentz found himself committed to a path.

"I won't let you down. I'll catch a huge fish. I'll catch the biggest fish there ever was!" he promised her proudly.

Gentz sighed as his face went grim. He should've just come clean and said he was a beginner angler. Instead, he was just causing himself a headache. Or maybe he was the type to rally under pressure?

Man, it sure didn't look like he'd had a plan, here. And Tiermina didn't have to bully him so much. At the same time, Gentz had nobody to blame but himself, so I couldn't come to his rescue.

"Yuna, are you good, too?" Fina asked me.

"At fishing? Nope, never done it."

I didn't lie. No good would come from pretending I could. Gentz had already fallen into that trap for me. Also, I'd been a hermit before now, so it wasn't like I'd ever participated in outdoor activities like fishing.

"Then you're a beginner just like me. Do you think we'll be able to catch a big fish?"

"Well, I think you'll need to try in order to find out." I didn't want to give her false hope. I'd feel bad if she didn't catch one, after all.

And so we headed out into the open sea on old man Kuro's boat. Making the journey was his big boat and another fisherman who accompanied us. He was the old man's youngest son. He did seem like a guy with a lot of sons. His oldest had become the head of the seaport.

They got the sails unfurled, we were really moving. One key difference between ships back home and ships in this world were that they had wind mana gems here to help with sailing. Otherwise, the ships were pretty much the same. According to what

Damon had told me last time I was here, the apprentices were the ones using mana gems. Then, they graduated to using a combination of gems and the natural wind. Fishers wouldn't be recognized as official until they could rely solely on the wind to navigate open water. If you thought of it in bike terms, the gems were kind of like training wheels, in a way.

The boat slowly moved away from the port. Noa and Misa waved at us from another boat, so Fina and Shuri waved back.

But when I looked over at that other boat, I saw... *it*.

I rubbed my eyes. There was no mistake. I saw something that looked unbearably bear-like on the tip of the sail's mast. I rubbed my eyes a couple more times just to be sure I was seeing what I already knew I was seeing.

I checked the boat I was on too. And there it was... It was way up high and hard to make out, but a little bear was perched on the mast. I guess old man Kuro had adopted the bear as a good-luck charm too. Fina and the others were too focused on the sea to notice it, so I pretended not to see it.

Once we were fully out of the harbor, I sidled up to old man Kuro to ask him something.

"So, about that island that suddenly appeared, do you happen to know where it's located?"

I'd seen several little islands out on the water, but I couldn't tell which was the moving one. To be frank, I doubted anyone other than a fisherman going out every day would be able to tell the difference.

"Can't see it hereabouts," old man Kuro said. Then he told me it wasn't visible unless we went way farther out. That was why only the fishermen knew about it: no one this close to land could see it.

Hmm. I at least wanted to know its general direction. If I could figure that out, I'd be able to use my Bear Walking on Water ability to ride Kumayuru or Kumakyu over to the island.

"Can we get near it?"

"Lass, are you really that interested in this island?"

I AM! I wanted to shout. I didn't, though.

"Well, I'm an adventurer, so it's just professional curiosity," I replied instead. I tempered my voice a little so it wouldn't seem like I was super interested. "And you just dealt with a kraken, so I was worried the island might be dangerous and cause you trouble."

"There's no trouble to be had so long as nobody gets near it," he replied. "Other than appearing outta nowhere, it's no different from any other island. Now you're not planning to go for a visit, are ya, lass?"

"No, I'm not," I fibbed. "And I know there are whirlpools around it, so I couldn't even get there if I tried, right? I just wanted to know the direction it's in just in case I need to head there sometime. Only if something happens, of course."

I couldn't flat-out tell him I wanted to go on a treasure hunt on the island. He'd lump me in with the goofus who sank his own boat. He wouldn't tell me if he thought I'd go check it out.

"Well, there is a fishing spot nearby, so why not?" he said as he adjusted the ship's direction. We headed farther and farther away from the harbor.

"The other boats are getting littler," Shuri said as she watched them from afar. The other boats were headed to their own fishing spots, but old man Kuro's boat was the only one headed in this direction.

Fina and the others had no idea we were headed toward the island, so they were just enjoying the ride. After traveling for a while, old man Kuro piped up, "Lass, that's the island right there."

I looked where he pointed. It was pretty far away and looked a lot like any other small island from where we were. I could tell trees were growing around the edges of it though.

I used my mapping skill and checked our location. The map all around us was dark, with the path we'd traveled by boat mapped out. Incomplete, but enough to get me back here—the path the boat had taken would bring me right to the island. That is, if the island wouldn't move again.

"Now, I won't be able to get any closer even if you ask me, lass," old man Kuro was

saying. "I can't break my own orders, after all."

All I needed was the general direction, so cool by me. I thanked him, so he turned the boat around and we took off toward the fishing spot next. Once we arrived, old man Kuro and his son started teaching them all how to fish. Fina listened just as carefully as Gentz, big-time fisher extraordinaire.

Lessons concluded, they each dropped down lines. The rods even had something that looked like a reel. It looked sort of like a mana gem right where a reel would normally go. I guess the cranking would be mana-powered, then?

"Yuna, you really don't want to fish too?"

"I'm just going to sit back and relax so I can watch everyone else doing it."

Honestly, I wasn't interested in fishing. Spacing out's the real sport of kings—or queens, in my case. Ruining my splendid loafing-around time by giving me a fishing line to watch didn't appeal to me. I'd do it if forced, but otherwise?

Hard pass.

"Yuna, please fish with us. Please...?" Shuri clutched my bear onesie.

"I don't need to try it," I told her.

"Aw..."

"Then I'll lend you Kumayuru, so play pretend with them."

"I can have Kumayuru?"

I summoned Kumayuru at my bear's full size. Luckily, that didn't capsize the boat or whatever.

"Kumayuru, could you fish with Shuri?"

Kumayuru crooned in response.

"Does Kumayuru know how to fish?"

"Not sure. But I think Kumayuru will be a lot more helpful than me."

So, Shuri took Kumayuru along and headed off to fish.

Then I summoned Kumakyu at normal size too and had my bear lie down. I collapsed into Kumakyu. Ah, what a nice, fluffy cushion.

Since they were out, I asked them to keep an eye on the water. I doubted a kraken would show up or anything like that. But there was a possibility that dangerous monsters were lurking in the sea, so may as well be cautious.

As the boat rocked me, I people-watched. Fina was watching the ocean as she held the line. Shuri was fishing with Kumayuru. I felt comfy lunging on Kumakyu since I had my bear gear, but I wondered if Shuri was okay. Wasn't she hot with Kumayuru hanging off of her? I saw Gentz psyching himself out under his breath about snaring a huge fish and Tiermina watching him with a smile.

I whiled away the time just watching and listening to them. But leaning against a cushion as pillow as Kumakyu was quickly lulling me to sleep. I let out a big yawn and fell into a doze.

"Yuna, Shuri, wake up."

Someone was shaking me. When I opened my eyes, I realized it was Fina. From beside her, another sleepy voice asked, "Fina...?" Looking over, I saw that was Shuri and that she'd latched onto me to take a nap.

"Come on, we're going home, so you have to get up."

"Fina, did we get any fish?"

Shuri got up while letting out a little yawn. Why had Shuri been sleeping next to me?

"We caught a really big one."

"Really?!"

Shuri actually got up and headed over to check out the haul.

"Did you catch it, Fina?"

"With Kumayuru's help!" she replied.

I heard later that Shuri had given up on fishing pretty quick and started poking around the ship and looking out at the ocean instead. Then, at some point, she'd curled up beside me to have a little snooze. Both Fina and Tiermina had caught a few fish between them. I had pity on Gentz and didn't ask him how his attempt went.

"We got them thanks to Kumayuru. They held onto the rod for us. It was so cool! And then Kumayuru would bite down on the rod and yank the fish out of the water. That's how we caught such a big one."

Fina animatedly waved her hands all around to show exactly how Kumayuru had snagged the fish. Next to her, Kumayuru crooned as though trying to boast about the catch.

Uh, wait. Kumayuru did all that? I had no idea my bear was so capable.

Anyway, I showered Kumayuru with head pats for a job well done and a good catch.

CHAPTER 384

THE BEAR COMES BACK FROM FISHING (DAY 3)

FINA CONFIRMED THAT GENTZ hadn't caught any fish. Shuri had no idea though, so she started asking him questions. I was yelling in my head for her not to, but alas, she resisted my psychic assault.

"Which ones did you get, Dad?" Shuri asked, peering into the box of fish.

"W-well, I..."

Gentz looked like he had no clue what to do. Even I couldn't stand watching him. Meanwhile, Tiermina was watching from nearby with a smile. Wait, was she going to finish him off?! Gentz was definitely at 0HP. Gentz was such a miserable sight. I just had to look away.

"Shuri, here's the fish your dad caught!" Tiermina said.

"This one?"

Wait. There was a fish in the box Tiermina was pointing to. Gentz seemed surprised by what she'd said, too.

"To be more accurate, your father and I caught it *together*. I had a very large fish hooked, but I couldn't manage to reel it in all by myself. So, your dad came to my rescue and looked *very* suave while doing it too."

"Oh, Tiermina..." Gentz said.

"You're amazing, Dad!" Shuri leaped on to Gentz out of joy and he tousled her hair. I glanced over at Tiermina and saw that she was smiling at Gentz.

"You've got a really nice mom," he said.

"Mm-hmm!" Fina chimed in happily as she watched what went down.

Looked like he'd saved face as a father. Old man Kuro also watched the happy family with a smile of his own. I'd be mortified if that were me though.

Once we got back to the harbor, we found all the other boats had already come back. Noa impatiently approached us the moment we were docked.

"Fina, Shuri, did you catch any fish? I caught a very large one myself. Please show me yours."

Noa wanted to get right to sharing the fruits of their labor since she'd apparently snagged herself a big fish.

"Um. This is the largest one I caught," Fina showed off a fish, which was probably the one she'd caught with Kumayuru's help. That wiped the expression on Noa's face off quick.

"Urgh... It's so big. Which one was yours, Shuri?"

"Um, I was sleeping, so I didn't catch one."

"Ugh! Beat at fishing and missed out on naptime? Double unfair..." Noa deflated.

In the end, Fina and Kumayuru had caught the largest fish. Then next was Noa, then Misa, then Shuri. Shuri technically came last for sleeping on the job.

"And it's so unfair that you had Kumayuru help you," Noa said with a pout. "And I'm so jealous you got to nap with Kumakyu and Yuna, Shuri."

Noa, robbed of first place and jealous of her missed out one-on-one bear time, pouted even more. Shia weighed in right then though.

"You had Marina's help too though, Noa, so you're one to talk," Shia said.

"But... that's because the fish was too big for one person to reel in. I had to."

"Then I'm sure the same applies to Fina."

"Urgh... you're right."

Noa had nothing to say after being scolded by her sister. Well, it was their first time

going fishing, so no wonder they'd needed help. I'm sure they could have managed a smaller fish, but they wouldn't be able to catch big ones on their own. I thought it was amazing that they'd made catches at all, whether they had help or not. I'd never even caught one before.

"Then I'll admit defeat this time. Yuna, would you let me borrow Kumayuru next time? Then I'm sure I'll catch an even bigger fish."

Uh, wouldn't that just mean that Kumayuru was catching the fish then? Personally, I was of the opinion that they ought to use their own skills if they were going to have a competition.

"I'll let you next time we're on the same boat, just to be fair," I said.

"That's a promise!" Noa said.

After that, we took a look at the fish that Misa and Shia had caught, and the other kids brought theirs to show off to us as well.

"Yuna, I caught a really, really big one."

"There was an octopus and it was so gross!"

"I only got teeny ones, but I've got a lot of them."

"Yuna, look, look!"

"Yuna, will you eat the one I caught?"

"Eat mine, too!"

"You have to eat mine then, too! Please!"

They all wanted me to eat the fish that they'd caught apparently. It was a cute sentiment, but I couldn't eat that much fish on my own.

"Um, thanks, everyone. But Anz is cooking tonight, so let's save some for the headmistress and Liz to eat as well."

The kids all nodded without a word of complaint at that. If I ate all the fish they'd

caught, I'd go from being a bear girl to a pig girl. While I might have been a former shut-in, I was still a fifteen-year-old girl and sometimes, even a girl like me could feel bashful about certain things. Besides, my upper arms were already getting flabby, so I needed to watch what I ate.

The other kids and even Misa had gotten help from the fishers. Shia claimed to have caught all hers on her own, so maybe she should be awarded first place.

The fishers generously offered to bring the haul over to the bear house, so that's what we ended up doing. This'd been a very one-sided arrangement with them just taking care of us.

After we thanked old man Kuro for the boat ride, we headed back home, where the orphans were already reporting the events of the day back to the headmistress. I could hear them explaining to her all the fish they'd caught, telling her about the gross old octopus they'd caught. She was listening to them with a smile alongside Liz and Neaf.

When I saw the kids had also naturally clumped around Neaf, I could tell that they already got along with her. I'd wondered what would happen once we got to Mileela, but their smiles put all my worries to rest. Anz had hinted she had her own concerns, but it seemed those fears were unfounded.

After a while, the group of kids who'd been at the beach came back too and rushed over to the headmistress just like the fishing group had. The headmistress sure seemed popular. She must have been easy to talk to.

"Hee hee hee, it was so much fun."

As I was soaking away the day's fatigue in the bathtub, Noa smiled and murmured to herself.

"Looks like you're in a good mood," I said.

"Yes. I haven't gotten to have this much fun in a long time."

"What about you two?" Noa asked Misa and Shia.

"Oh, yes! I'm so happy you invited me here, Noa," Misa said. "I might have been cross if you hadn't and I didn't find out until later."

"I'm glad I came in from the capital. I think Mother might have a word with me when I get back though."

Actually, now that I was thinking about it, she'd sort of ditched Ellelaura, hadn't she? Ellelaura had to work though, so not like there was much we could do about that. Shia was still a student, which made all the difference compared to her working mom.

"Actually, Yuna, did you know?"

"Know what?"

"I heard from the fishermen that an island appeared out of nowhere. There'd been nothing there before."

It seemed Noa had heard news of the moving island as well.

"I heard about that too," I said.

"How strange!"

"Supposedly the island moves too."

"Islands can move?" Misa asked Noa.

"Sometimes plants can gather and make a 'floating island,' so maybe it's like that and moves around with the ocean currents?"

I'd never seen one before. That was just the only kind I knew about.

"I asked to see the floating island, but they said no to me."

I guess I was the only one who'd really gotten a look.

"There are supposed to be whirlpools around the island, so it's dangerous. There's not much they can do. One of the boats even sank." I relayed what old man Kuro had said to me.

"Yes, I heard the same from the fisherman. I know I can't ask them since it's too dangerous, but it really is too bad."

It wasn't like I had direct experience of them, but I knew whirlpools were no joke. If the boat sank, anybody on board could (and probably would) die, so visiting the island just out of plain curiosity wasn't a risk most people could take.

"But don't you feel like you gotta go? It's so weird..." Shia chimed in on the conversation after listening in up until now.

Well, I'd only asked old man Kuro to let me look because I *had* planned to go. I couldn't exactly say that if it might encourage everyone else, so I decided to keep my trap shut. After all, I couldn't take Shia and the others to the island when we had no idea what dangers lurked there.

"You can't push the fishers to take you there no matter how bad you want to," I warned.
"You two are the lord of Crimonia's daughters, so don't use your influence to force them either. Got it?"

"We know. If we so much as attempted to do that, Father would give us a stern talking to."

Noa denied any premeditated mischief and pouted at me.

"You're right. And I wouldn't just be in for a scolding from Father. Why, Mother would have plenty to say as well!"

"I think both Grandfather and Father would scold me, too," Misa added.

"If only we could ride Kumayuru and Kumakyu there..." Noa mused while rubbing Kumayuru's miniaturized back as my bear relaxed in the bath. Kumayuru didn't seem to be listening in and was focusing on soaking.

Once we got out of the bath, Noa dried my bears and brushed their fur.

"They're nice and fluffy now," she announced, hugging both bears happily.

After our bath, we had a dinner of cooked fresh from all the catches the kids had made that day. And, of course, all the dishes lining the table were delicious. They were all Anz's handiwork. The kids talked about all the fun things they'd done around the table.

Everyone seemed to be having a good time, which made me feel happy, too.

CHAPTER 385

THE BEAR MAKES A WATERSLIDE (DAY 4)

THE NEXT DAY, after we finished breakfast, the kids headed to their rooms to change into their bathing suits. Liz and Neaf ran off right after them.

“Noa, do you and the others have plans?”

“I’m going into town. Father told me I must go see how things are there, so I can’t simply play.”

“Shia, Misa, are you going too?”

“Yes, I was told to make sure I take a thorough tour as well, so I’m going along with Noa.”

“Uh-huh, Grandfather also said the same to me.”

Jeez, being a part of the nobility sure seemed like a lot of work.

“But we’ll be back before afternoon, so let’s do something then, Yuna.”

Noa’s group headed out of the bear house with their entourage of guards following after.

Tiermina and Gentz were both heading out on their own again as well. Seemed like they were having a grown-ups’ day out, which was good. Since this was like their replacement honeymoon, I was pretty happy for them. They’d invited Fina and Shuri too, but the two turned them down to give the love birds alone time. I also had something I wanted to ask Fina and Shuri, so I had the two of them come with me today.

“Yuna, let’s go to the beach, too. Hurry, hurry!” Shuri tugged on my bear onesie.

“I heard you,” I said. “Then let’s get changed and head to the beach.”

"Uh-huh!"

And so, I headed off to my own room.

After wearing out a bathing suit once, doing it a second time was easy-peasy. It was sort of like the bear onesie: do it enough, you get used to it. I still had some residual resistance as to if the bathing suit would work out, but not nearly as much as I had the first time.

Or so I thought...

On the first day, Sherry had taken a look at my bathing suit and said it looked good. Then she'd asked me to wear the other ones so she could check them out too. I don't need to tell you I that'd given me a total *404, Brain Not Found* moment. I'm talking head empty, zero thoughts. I learned being loss for words isn't just an idiom: you really can forget human language if you're surprised enough. The only thing that'd squeaked out of my mouth was an "Ah" and that was it.

I managed to escape that fate yesterday by heading into town to see people, but today, I was doomed. There was *no* chance of running. In other words, I had to choose a new bathing suit to wear today. On top of that, according to Sherry, I was required to wear a new suit for every day I hit the beach. The one saving grace was that there were so many to choose from and I was allowed to pick for myself.

I set the bathing suits side by side on the bed. I was figuring out which to wear by deciding which ones I wouldn't be caught dead in the first place. That'd surely narrow it down to something reasonable. In the end, the only halfway tolerable one was a black-and-white one-piece. It was a lot less revealing than the bikini Fina had picked for me on the first day, so... yay?

I reassured myself this would hide my tummy, so I didn't have any problems wearing it. Like, to be clear, I didn't have abs or anything and it's not like my belly was huge-huge, but... y'know. Then again, whenever I felt my own pudgy upper arms, I'd feel the urge to do some sort of exercise. I'd tried more than once in the past, but the habit never stuck.

If only I could train while wearing my bear gear. Not like I really could, though.

I let out a little sigh.

After changing into the bathing suit, I pulled my bear gloves and shoes on like usual before heading out the door. I found Fina and Shuri already waiting for me in their swimsuits. Fina's was cute and frilly, while Shuri wore a bear swim cap with hers. It wasn't visible from my angle, but I also knew Shuri's bathing suit featured a cute, round tail on the back.

"You have a different swimsuit on!" Fina said.

"She does," Shuri also said.

They stared at my bathing suit.

"Sherry said she wanted to see how the other suits looked on me," I explained.

"Hee hee hee. You're so nice to everyone, Yuna."

"I'd feel bad not wearing them after she put in so much effort making them."

I mean, it wasn't like I wanted to wear the others, but Sherry had asked me after putting in so much work. Who was I to say no when I was always asking her to do stuff?

"But it's cute. It does look really nice on you."

"Thank you."

She was just saying that—I'm sure.

After that, we headed out.

Once we got to the beach from the bear house, we saw the kids were already playing.

The headmistress and Morin were carrying on like old friends in the beach house. I never saw them together, so that was novel.

"Yuna, you're wearing a swimsuit," Sherry said, running to me from where she'd been playing on the beach. She was wearing a classic school suit with her name written on the front.

"Um. So this is the one I chose for today," I said to her.

Sherry inspected me. I felt a teensy bit embarrassed.

"I liked the one from the day before, but this suit looks nice, as well. Fina, Shuri, don't you think so?" Sherry looked over at the two, trying to get them to agree.

"Yes, it looks so good on you, Yuna."

"You're really pretty, Yuna."

"...Th-thank you."

I probably looked as frazzled as I sounded though. The three of them had always been too nice to me, so I had my doubts about whether they were just kissing up and trying to flatter me. It was all fine as long as Sherry was happy though. Then, Sherry took a closer look at my suit and started talking to herself, saying stuff like, "Maybe I should change this bit...?" and "I think another color might have suited you better..."

She hadn't seemed too sure of herself back when she'd first embroidered bears on the uniforms for Anz's restaurant, but after starting work at the tailor's shop, she'd gained some professional confidence. It was a good thing, but I sure did miss the old Sherry.

Once Sherry was satisfied with her inspection, she headed off back to everyone else.

"So, Yuna, what did you need us to help with?"

"There was something I wanted to check in with you two about," I told Fina. I wanted them to help me make something, but first I wanted to do a test with them.

"Check in with us about? About what?" Fina asked, then nodded slightly.

I took the two of them a short distance away from where the other kids were playing in the sand. This seemed like a good spot. I double-checked to make sure there wasn't anything or anyone in the way. Then I stood facing the ocean and created a giant bear where the beach met the water. The bear was facing the ocean and was standing on two legs. It was more cartoonified than realistic, of course, and I'd made it bear-shaped so the structure would be sturdier.

"A bear!"

"It's really big."

Shuri and Fina craned their necks to look at the bear.

I approached it and opened up a hole behind a leg. The inside was hollow and dark, so I also created an orb of light, which was shaped like a bear head, and lit up the inside of its brethren.

After I'd set up illumination, I also created a spiral staircase climbing up to the bear's head. Then I headed up and created another hole in the bear's stomach area. A view of the ocean opened up ahead of me. After that, I crafted a slide leading to the water. Finally, I attached a water gem to the exit of the slide. With some mana fed to the gem, hey presto, the waterslide was complete.

"Fina, could you slide down this real quick?" I asked Fina, where she was observing the process on the stairs behind me. Then Shuri's face popped up from beside Fina.

"Yuna, what's this?!"

"Um, it's called a waterslide and it's a thing you, well... slide down for fun," I explained.

"You *slide*?"

"Yeah, you sit down right here and slide right into the ocean."

"I wanna try it," Shuri said.

"Go right ahead."

I'd asked Fina, but Shuri seemed more excited about it. Why not?

"Shuri, wait a sec." Fina tried to stop Shuri, but she was already too late: her sister had already pushed herself right down the slide. Fina hollered, but Shuri was already in the ocean without a hitch. It wasn't dangerous as long as everyone followed the rules on how to use it, so Fina hadn't needed to be that worried.

Shuri got out of the ocean and shot up to the stairs.

"Yuna, can I do it again?" Shuri asked, sopping wet but raring to go again. The water was still streaming off her hair. Apparently, Shuri liked this a lot.

"I'll make one up here too, so just wait a sec."

I headed farther up the stairs until I reached the bear's head. Um, the mouth was probably right around here? I opened a hole up, just like I'd done with the stomach. It was higher up, so the view was great. I immediately started making a slide that started at the bear's mouth. This time, I added a curve for the more advanced, excitable slide enthusiasts, along with loops and inclines. I also added safety measures to make sure kids wouldn't shoot off the sides, of course.

Finally, I added a water gem and was done.

"Fina, come over here."

Fina and Shuri both ended up coming over, but Fina seemed scared because we were so high up.

"I wanna slide!"

Shuri raised her hand, but Fina intervened, saying, "I'll go first to make sure it's safe."

I'd made sure to add safety guards, so I was pretty sure it wasn't dangerous. I guess Fina was just worried as the older sister.

"Well, then, sit here." I grabbed Fina's shoulders and sat her down.

"Y-Yuna. W-wait, please."

"Don't stand, okay?"

"D-don't push me, please."

I gave her back a gentle little push as she went into full panic mode. She screamed as she slid down the waterslide. She turned around the curve and twisted round and round at the loop, then down the final incline and into the water.



Yeah, looked pretty good.

The moment Fina stood up and faced me, I could tell she was mad. I guess when she said not to push her, she'd really meant it or whatever.

"Yuna, I wanna slide, too!" Shuri said enthusiastically.

"Then plop yourself down right here. You can't stand up in the middle, okay?"

"Okay!"

When I sat Shuri down she pushed off on her own, unlike Fina. Then Fina came up to replace her.

"Ugh, Yuna, it was so scary..." Fina said.

"It wasn't fun?"

"Well, it was a little fun, but it was still scary. I just wish I would have been prepared."

Since I'd gone through the trouble of making the slide, I decided to take a spin for myself too. I needed to check whether it was safe for myself before I could let kids use it.

I put my bear shoes away in my bear storage and sat down in the waterslide. Then I pushed off to head down, the water flowing beneath me.

Oh! I slid to the right and to the left, to the left and the right, then headed around and around the loop. Finally, I went down the incline and landed in the water, which splashed right in my face.

It was my very first time on a waterslide, and you know what? Not bad. Ten out of ten. I actually considered making it just a tad bit taller. But considering how young the kids were, nah, this was plenty as is.

As a final touch, because the inside of the bear was still pretty dark, I made holes in the eyes to let light in from the outside. Yeah, that'd do it.

CHAPTER 386

THE BEAR PLAYS ON A WATERSLIDE (DAY 4)

WHILE I LOOKED on at the bear waterslide in satisfaction, Karin and Nerin came by with the kids.

“Yuna, what is this?” Karin asked as she stared at the waterslide.

“It’s called a waterslide,” I said. “It’s playground equipment that you slide down for fun.”

“A waterslide?”

“I think it’ll be easier to understand if you see it in action.”

“Fina, try sliding down it.”

“Okay.”

“Me too!”

Fina and Shuri headed into the bear and up the stairs. Then Fina appeared from the bear’s belly and Shuri in bear’s mouth. Fina bravely sat down and slid toward the ocean, and as she hit the water at the bottom, the impact threw up a giant splash of water.

“Now me!” Shuri shouted loudly from overhead, sat down, and slid. She veered side to side, twisted through the loop, and finally slid down the incline right into the water, splashing just the way her sister had.

“Well, that certainly looks fun.”

“Yuna, I’d also like to try.”

“Same here!”

“Me too!”

After seeing how much fun Fina and Shuri were having, the kids volunteered one after another. Well, I made this for them in the first place. It was theirs to use, but they’d need supervision.

Rulina and Gil brought some other kids with them too, so I asked them to keep a watch over everyone and taught them the proper way to slide. I told them they absolutely couldn’t stand up, no running, and to wait their turns. Also, I told them that they couldn’t slide down in a dangerous way and had to wait until the person before them was done.

“Yuna, can we try it out too?” Karin and Nerin were staring at me, bright-eyed.

“Sure,” I said.

“In that case, I’ll go first to see if it’s dangerous.”

“That’s so unfair, Karin. In that case, I’ll go second.”

“That’s so unfair of both of you!” one of the kids said to Karin and Nerin.

“Oh, come on. Don’t make a big deal about it. It’s not like it’s going to go anywhere, so take turns. If you can’t do follow that rule, I’ll *destroy* it.”

As soon as I said the word “destroy,” not only Karin and Nerin but even the kids settled down.

“Well, let’s go, shall we?”

“Yeaah!”

With the kids in tow, Karin and Nerin headed into the bear. Then Karin appeared in the bear’s mouth and slid right down. She screamed as she slid until she finally reached the ocean.

“Yuna, that sure was a lot of fun.”

“I’m glad to hear that.”

After that, Nerin and the kids kept playing with the slide, hollering the whole time. There were two slides, so they didn't have to wait long in line either. The kindergarten-aged kids used the belly-level slide, while the kids in elementary and above used the more advanced one at the mouth.

They were all shouting and goofing around like kids do. Seeing them like this put me at ease. It didn't feel like a world filled with monsters. When one of the kids ran up the stairs, Gil issued a warning, and they slowed down. We'd have a problem on our hands if any of the kids fell and got hurt, after all. Anz and Seno and the others soon joined in on the fun.

As that was all happening, Rulina looked at the waterslide with what seemed like exasperation.

"I can't believe you used magic to make something like this or that you made it so easily. I think I'm jealous of your mana's capabilities, Yuna." Rulina, a mage herself, was super transparent with her thoughts.

I'd actually made the waterslide to distract everyone while I headed to the moving island but seeing everyone so excited was a special little bonus.

Then Rulina said, "Anzy asked me to keep a close eye on everyone, so it might as well be close enough to give it a try myself." She headed off toward the slide.

With that, everyone's eyes were on the waterslide.

Noa's group wasn't around, so after taking a peek to see if they were approaching from somewhere. I considered making toward the island. Suddenly, out of nowhere, someone grabbed my hand from right in my blind spot. I turned to see Shuri and Fina. Don't tell me they noticed?

"Yuna, let's play together."

"Um, no, I'm good," I said. If I joined in on the fun, I'd lose my chance to go to the mysterious island.

"But you promised to play with us today, Yuna."

"That's right, Yuna. Let's play together!"

The two of them tugged on my right and left hands. Shoot, I couldn't say no with Shuri and Fina asking me like that. Sure, I was caving too easily, but I couldn't peel off their little baby hands and just sprint off into the blue. But I wasn't about to totally give in.

So, I ended up telling the two this:

"Just a little," I answered.

"Okay!"

"Uh-huh!"

That did the trick.

It ended up being just a short while, but not because I was only fulfilling the promise. And also, I ran into the hard limits of my own stamina.

We mingled with the kids, waiting our turn for the waterslide, then I slid down with Fina and Shuri. Even though I'd made the thing myself, it was a lot more fun than I thought. I probably hadn't experienced something like this since I was a child.

Fina and Shuri kept asking me for another round, so we headed up the stairs, and slid down. I was enjoying myself too, to be honest, so I didn't feel like saying no. But my little legs started protesting about that spiral staircase and all those steps. My feet just couldn't stand the torment without my bear shoes. I was out of commission pretty quick.

"Yuna, are you okay?" Shuri tugged on my hand, but I couldn't go up anymore stairs. My legs were done for. They were even twitching.

Meanwhile, little kids were dashing up the stairs, no sweat. Every little kid running up yet again for another go was a living reminder of how tenacious kids can be. Meanwhile, I didn't even have the stamina of a child. I needed a rest in the beachside shack.

Fina and Shuri seemed like they still wanted to play, so I told them to go ahead while I staggered alone into the shack. Once inside, I collapsed.

"Hee hee hee, Yuna, you look positively worn out." The headmistress smiled at me as she handed me a cup filled with cold water. I thanked her and took it. Next to the

headmistress, the smaller kids were resting after they'd also tuckered themselves out.

"You really are amazing, Yuna. You made something so large but made it look so easy."

"You're the one who's amazing, headmistress. Watching after kids who don't have family isn't easy."

I'd gotten my abilities from a god, but the headmistress only had her own natural grit. It was apples to oranges. It was just amazing on an entirely different magnitude, and in a completely different life direction. The headmistress had offered a helping hand to the kids, with no special powers to make it any easier. If I hadn't had powers, I doubted I would have offered help to the orphanage. I couldn't have taken care of myself, and I doubt I would have been able to worry about others. The headmistress was amazing if I put it like that, huh?

"Ha ha ha. That's not true," she said. "If you weren't around, the kids never would have been smiling like this. You have my gratitude because of that, Yuna."

I started to get bashful when she praised me again. I finished off the water that the headmistress had given me in one gulp and tried to pretend I wasn't flustered.

After that, the headmistress started in on thanking me for providing work watching the birds and working at the store for the kids, as well as taking them on a trip. Okay, enough already. I wanted to shout every time she pulled out a new thing to thank me for.

I decided to put my plans to visit the moving island on hold and spent the rest of the time hanging out with the headmistress and Morin and helping get lunch ready. Once the kids finished eating, some of them dozed off. As much energy as they had, as tough as it made them, they really were just kids.

Liz and Neaf seemed tired from spending so much time with the kids too and were sleeping along with them. While I was watching them all sleep nice and sound in the shack, Karin and Nerin came by to help with the after-lunch cleanup.

"Looks like they played and ate so much that they needed a nap."

"Kids have too much energy to burn."

"Are you two having fun?"

“Yeah, sure am!”

“It’s been a while since I’ve had this much excitement.”

“At first, I was embarrassed doing things dressed like this, but it wasn’t so bad since everyone was wearing them.”

“Also, we’re almost all girls here.”

“I’m still embarrassed that Gil’s seen us dressed like this...”

Gil was the only adult man around. Thinking about it, this was basically a harem anime starring him. Gil was off playing with the kids who hadn’t become worn out yet along with Rulina. They’d been a huge help.

“So, that thing—the waterslide, I think? That was a lot of fun.”

“I went down it so many times.”

“I built it with safety in mind, but you still can’t stand or horse around in it since it’s dangerous. That applies to you two but keep an eye on the kids as well.”

Both of them agreed they would and then headed off to the ocean for another round of fun.

As I watched them, the thought to go to the moving island occurred to me, but I heard a shout come from outside.

“What is this?! ”

I looked over to see Noa and her gang eyeing the waterslide.

“Noa?”

“Yuna, what is that?! ” she said again.

“It’s called a waterslide. It’s playground equipment you slide down.”

Noa looked at the slide, then back at me.

"Why did you make it while I wasn't here? Is this bullying? Are you bullying me?"

"Not intentionally," I said. "I made it so everyone could enjoy it." I couldn't tell her it was a distraction so I could go to the moving island.

"But how could you make it while I was inspecting the town?"

"Oh hey, you're back so soon!" I replied. "Are you already done walking around the town? Didn't Cliff and Gran say to go take a real good look around?"

"I think I remember saying we would come back at lunch so we could spend time together."

Oh, right, she had.

"Misa, Shia, let's change and go play too."

Noa and gang came into the shack and headed off to the changing room.

"Yuna, could we rest here for a bit?" Marina and Elle looked a little tired. I wondered if guarding Noa's group had taken a lot out of them.

"Sure," I said. "I think it'd be nice if you switched places with Rulina and the others when you're done."

"Got it."

"We'll trade places later." Marina and Elle sat to rest.

Noa came back after they finished changing. I guessed they wouldn't take no for an answer and would make me join them. I headed to the waterslide with Noa and the others.

"How do we play on this?"

"Just like you can see, you go up the stairs. And since it's a slide, all you have to do is sit to slide down."

Coincidentally, a girl was sliding down right then.

“Is that all?”

“Also, it’s dangerous, so you can’t stand up on it or goof around. Oh, and make sure you don’t cut in line, of course.”

“We shall not. Okay, Misa, Shia, let’s go. And you too, Yuna.” Noa tugged my hand and Misa and Shia followed after. There were a ton of kids napping in the shack right then, so it was our turn before we knew it.

“It’s so high up!”

“Oh, it is.”

“The view is really pretty from up here.”

The three of them were looking out from the bear mouth.

“So, who’s going first?”

“I’m a little scared of heights...”

“Then since I’m the eldest, I’ll go first,” Shia offered, sitting down in the slide.

“So, water flows from here to make it easier to slide...? Interesting.”

“Good luck, Shia,” Noa cheered.

“Be careful!” Misa added.

“Here I go!”

Shia let go and slid right down. She veered to the right and left, went through the loop, and finally turned into the slope at lightning speed, landing in the water. She stood up as soon as she landed and turned to wave her hand at us.

“I’ll go next!” Noa sat down, slid, and made a perfect water landing. Then she popped right back up onto her feet and called out, “You too, Misa!”

Misa sat down, slid, and also made it safely into the water.

“This is so much fun, Yuna.”

“It was entertaining.”

“I think this would be a nice addition to the academy’s pool too.”

They each gave me their impressions of the waterslide.

After that, Fina and Shuri joined us, and we played until I almost collapsed.

CHAPTER 387

THE BEAR IS NOTICED (DAY 4)

I WAS BACK at the beach shack and out for the count. I'd fully exhausted myself playing with Fina, Noa, and the others. All of them, even Shia, were looked on with worry.

"It'll be fine. I'm just a little pooped."

"Yuna, what happened to the strong, cool warrior who defeated a black tiger and wolves while escorting me and fought against Lord Lutum?" Shia seemed in awe as she stared at me where I was reclined.

Right—Shia was one of the few people who'd seen me fight multiple times. It wasn't odd that Shia was so confused about this after seeing my battle with the black tiger. Still, I couldn't tell her the bear gear did most of the work for me.

"Back then, I used mana to strengthen my body," I told her. After all, I was basically powerless without any of my bear stuff.

"Really?"

"Really. So I decided not to do anything like that for hanging out at the beach."

And this is where it got me. I told them to go on ahead of me and that I'd rest for a while. They looked at each other, conflicted. When I reiterated that I was just tired and completely fine, they finally headed off to the waterslide.

Since Marina and Elle were accompanying them, I left them in their guards' hands. I'd made the waterslide to go to the island, but I never imagined I'd get sucked into using it and wear myself out. But here was my chance now that everyone was gone.

I stood up.

Supposedly, crisis is another word for opportunity. I pulled out my bear onesie from storage and dressed in full bear gear. Then I had some of the sacred tree tea to give me a bit of energy. I had no idea whether it'd work or not, but it was probably better than

not drinking any at all. I did feel like it might have helped, though, for what that counts.

After that, I just needed to sneak out of the shack undetected. Stealthy, graceful: more cat than bear.

"Yuna, where are you headed out to?" asked the headmistress, who was right next to me because she was still in the shack. Morin was also eyeing me.

"Uh. Just a quick little excursion I wanted to make," I said. "Please watch the kids for me."

"Sure. Have a safe trip!"

"And please make sure you're back by dinner"

After leaving things in the headmistress and Morin's capable hands, I turned to the exit to start leaving when I saw Fina and Shuri right where I was headed.

"Wh-what are you two doing here? I thought you went to hang out with the others?"

They'd really shaken me up by popping up right here. I'd even watched them leave the shack. So why were they here suddenly?

"Shuri said she needed to use the bathroom, so we came back."

Shuri did, in fact, run to the bathroom. I was glad she hadn't peed herself, but this was horrible timing.

"You weren't going out somewhere, were you...?"

I could probably tell Fina the truth. Though, if Shuri knew, she'd probably blurt out that she wanted to come too. As I was trying to decide how to handle this, someone else spoke my name. "Looks like Yuna is leaving to go somewhere on her own."

I looked over to see Shia next to the fridge drinking something.

"You're here too, Shia?"

"I just wanted to get something to drink before going out there again. Then I saw you starting to change into your bear outfit."

I hadn't even noticed. I'd assumed she'd gone over with Noa. Shia had seen absolutely everything, from me changing to talking to the headmistress.

"Ugh..."

"Where are you going?" Now Shuri was asking after she'd come back from the restroom.

Uh, I didn't feel like lying...

I was already dressed in my bear clothes and Shia had already overheard my conversation with the headmistress. I couldn't even come up with a good way to write this off.

"You don't want to play with us, Yuna...?"

Shuri was looking at me with the purest, most innocent eyes imaginable. She'd used those on Gentz too. I couldn't lie to those eyes. I lost my nerve and turned away from her, but Fina was right there to meet me when I did.

"You're not headed to that island that suddenly appeared, are you?"

"H-how did you...?!" I was dumbstruck when Fina hit the bull's-eye.

"Mm, I knew it."

I stopped myself from saying anything else, but it was already too late.

"Well, you were so interested in the island when you were talking to old man Kuro. And you even asked where the island was while we were on the boat. Also, you were trying to pretend you weren't interested when Lady Noa talked about the island."

Fina had all her reasons loaded and ready to fire. This was old news to her. *Had I really been that obvious though?* I wondered. I'd always thought I had a good poker face. I kneaded my traitor face with my bear puppets.

"...Yeah. I was thinking of taking a look at the island, just like you thought," I said. "But I couldn't have everyone saying they wanted to go with me, so I was going to head over without saying anything. We don't know what's on the island, after all."

If I said I was going, I was pretty sure Noa would have insisted on going too.

"I was thinking of taking a quick trip over, so keep it a secret from everyone, would you?" *Especially Noa*, I said to myself.

"So, this is the island that all the fishermen have been talking about? May I go with you, Yuna?"

"...?!"

"Uh, Shia?" I asked. "Did you hear anything I just said?"

"I did, but it seems like it'd be so much fun. I think anyone would want to join you."

Seemed like the apples hadn't fallen far from each other, I guess? I was hearing exactly what I'd feared from Shia. And then, of course, Shuri was asking to come now too. I turned to Fina for assistance, but despite seeing the expression on my face, Fina joined in on the begging.

"If you leave Shuri here, I think Lady Noa will find out anyway," she said.

"And if Shuri doesn't tell, I might," Shia said, a little mischievously.

Friendless. Alone in the world. I was surprised Fina was joining them, though. Normally she'd be the one to stop Shuri.

"Um, I want to spend time with you more," she said, and suddenly I really couldn't say no.

I sighed quietly.

"You have to keep it a secret..."

"Yay!" Shuri shouted,

"Of course!"

"No one will say anything."

I sighed again. My whole plan to make the waterslide and distract everyone had ended

in failure—at least when it came to these three. Well, credit where it's due, it'd been *mostly* a success.

"Also, you have to listen to my directions," I said.

My bears would be with us and I'd be able to use my detection skill, so I'd be able to get the three of them on my bears and send them away if it ever turned dangerous. And then there were those swimsuits. I couldn't take them from the beach and let them go on a hike in swimsuits.

"I can't take you in those outfits though, so go get changed."

Once they were all changed, we snuck out of the shack without anyone else noticing. So, now the issue was how to get to the island. I'd been planning on riding my bears over, but if we headed out from the beach, the kids would see.

The best way to get there was from the harbor, but the fishermen would be around and there were locals and tourists on the beaches near there too. It wasn't like I could just ride out there on my bears in the open like that.

Maybe it'd be best to leave town first. So that's what we did.

"Huh? Yuna, we're not going to the harbor?" Shia asked, realizing the direction we were headed.

"No, not there," I said. "We need to make sure no one notices us. We'll leave town first, then go to the island on Kumayuru and Kumakyu."

"We're riding your bears there? But then we'll get wet," Fina said.

"Maybe we could change back into our bathing suits?" Shia proposed. "We're all wearing them underneath, so we can store our clothes in our item bags." Shia grabbed the hem of her skirt and revealed she really was wearing her bathing suit under it. We'd been in a hurry, so I'd had them do that.

We probably would have gotten wet if my bears were going to be swimming, but actually, the plan was to use a skill and have them run on water. We wouldn't get wet if they were doing that. The only issue was that I was conflicted about telling them about the skill. Then again, they already knew my bears were summons and that I could shrink them at will. Telling them my bears could also walk on water probably

wouldn't shock them, right?

We got to the gate in order to exit town and came across the usual guard.

"Miss, are all of you headed out?"

"Just for a little bit," I said.

"Well, I suppose they're safe as long as they're with you, Miss Yuna. Have a safe trip."

Then we left town. After that, I summoned my bears.

"Okay, so you three get on. Fina and Shia, you ride together. I'll ride with Shuri."

This seemed the best split as far as sizes went. I'd take up the most room in my bear onesie, so I paired with Shuri, the smallest of the group.

Fina and Shia got on Kumayuru while I got on Kumakyu with Shuri. Then my bears galloped off and we headed even farther away from town. After a while, we caught sight of the cliff where I'd fought the kraken.

"Bears...?"

"There are bears in the middle of the ocean."

"There really are. There are actually bears in the ocean...!"

They were talking about the bear statues I'd created to keep the kraken from escaping. Old man Kuro had asked me to leave them as is. Honestly, I'd completely forgotten these things were here.

"Did you make those, Yuna?" Shia asked me in awe.

It was an assumption, but given that everyone associated bears with me, it wasn't completely off the wall. Well, I *had* actually created them, so.

I knew that even if I said I hadn't, they'd never believe me, so I decided that asking them to keep quiet would work the best in this situation.

"Well, yeah, I did. But keep it a secret, okay?"

I knew for a fact that Noa and the kids would definitely want to come and see them if they knew about it.

“I made them for secret reasons,” I added before they could ask any other questions.

“Oh, darn,” Shia pouted, who’d been building toward the question.

Then we got up close to the cliff. They were staring at the bears, as usual. This seemed like a pretty good spot to embark from, though. Mileela was visible in the distance, but you couldn’t make out people or what they were doing. We’d look like sesame seeds to anyone watching from town.

“Well, let’s head out to the island from here,” I said.

“You’ll get wet if you don’t change, Yuna.”

“It’ll be fine. Remember though, everything today is a secret. Kumayuru, Kumakyu, I’m counting on you.”

They both crooned and leapt into the sea.

“My clothes!”

“...!”

“...?!”

But instead of sinking into the water, my bears began to run on its surface.

CHAPTER 388

THE BEAR REACHES THE SHORE OF THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND (DAY 4)

FINA AND THE OTHERS SCREAMED, but my bears ran above the water, jostled by the waves but never sinking below them. This wasn't something small like leaping over a puddle or anything—they were legitimately running across the water's surface.

"K-Kumakyu is running on top of the ocean?!"

Shuri seemed just as ecstatic as the first time she rode on my bears. Meanwhile, Fina and Shia were both too shocked to say anything. There was nothing in our path as we went, not even any ships. There was just the clear skies above and the blue ocean below as my bears skimmed the surface of the sea.

I had no idea where prying eyes might come from, so I ordered my bears to stay away from the shore.

"Yuna! What's going on?!" Fina asked, coming back to her senses.

"It's their ability," I said. "But keep this a secret, please."

"I won't tell anyone else. I don't know who'd believe me!"

"Learning they can shrink was already shocking enough. How do they do this?"

Fina and Shia both couldn't help but commenting.

"I wish you would have warned us. I thought my heart was going to stop the moment they jumped into the ocean."

"I was bracing for my clothes to get wet, too."

"You might still get a little wet from the ocean spray, so be careful," I warned, but I didn't know how they'd be careful about that or what they could even do about it.

"I know Noa says this all the time, but now I even want Kumayuru and Kumakyu for myself."

"Me too!" Shuri blurted out right after Shia.

"Remember, they're my family. I can't just give them away."

"So if I marry you, then I'd be able to be with Kumayuru and Kumakyu, too?" Shia asked with a smile. Pretty sure that was a joke.

"Is that really true?" Shuri was getting silly ideas from Shia now.

"If we get married, yeah, but I'm afraid we're both girls, so we can't."

I obviously couldn't marry Shuri. I couldn't imagine living happily ever after with a dude, so marriage wasn't gonna happen to me regardless. I might be doomed to spinsterhood, never to be wed in my life.

Sounds great, honestly.

"I never imagined I'd be able to list running on top of water as one of my life experiences. Now I have an interesting story to bring back to Mother."

"Like I said, don't tell anyone," I reminded Shia.

"Even Mother?"

I tried imagining it...

Elleaura finds out. Then Cliff and the king find out. Then Cliff tells Noa. Then as for the king, he'd tell Princess Flora, Princess Teilia, and the queen. Probably not the prince, though he didn't seem too looped into things.

Regardless, I didn't want this getting out.

"If Elleaura finds out, I think she'd tell Cliff and the king, so please keep it a secret. Seriously."

"You're right that Mother would likely tell them. I don't want to make you upset, so I'll keep quiet about this."

“Fina, Shuri, no telling Tiermina or Gentz either.”

“Okay.”

“Uh-huh.”

They both were quick to promise me that. They’d even kept my kraken secret under pain of tickle torture. Shuri could sometimes be self-centered, but she’d generally keep promises and was a good kid.

My bears kept running while keeping their distance from the shore. I pulled up the map as I locked my bears on autopilot toward the island. I searched for the location of the island on my bear map. It was inconvenient that my map only showed a limited area, but since old man Kuro had brought me to the island, I knew its general direction. So, if the harbor was that way, then the island had to be over... ah, there!

“Oh, I see the bear you made.”

Shuri pointed at the distant shore. The waterslide was up ahead. It was large and easy to see even from a distance. But we could only vaguely make out the playing kids as they moved. They just barely even looked human shaped from here.

If that was all we could see of them, they probably could barely make us out too.

“You can’t see Noa or anyone else from here, right?”

“Noa?” Shuri said. “I can’t see her.”

“Me either. They’re too small to make out.”

“I’m not surprised we can’t see them from this distance.”

I was glad they weren’t part of some kind of tribe or something that had five times better vision than a regular person. I couldn’t even imagine having vision that good, but someone like that probably would be able to make out stuff no matter how far away it was. But maybe hunters in this world could see like that? If the girls with me couldn’t see Noa though, then I was sure I was in the clear.

I checked on my bear map as we continued to run until we caught sight of the island. It matched the direction old man Kuro had pointed me toward. That had to be it.

According to old man Kuro, it could have disappeared at any time, but luckily it was still here.

“Is that the island?”

“Looks like the info was right,” I said.

Old man Kuro was getting on in the years, but he definitely wasn’t going senile. In fact, he had it together more than most fishermen. If he said this was it, then it was it, no question.

As we approached the island, I had my bears slow down.

“Okay, so before we get there, let’s go over some ground rules. If things get dangerous, we’re going back right away. Don’t do *anything* on your own. So, Shia’s okay, but Fina and Shuri, don’t get off of Kumayuru and Kumakyu unless I tell you to.”

“Okay.”

“Uh-huh.”

They both agreed. If anything happened, my bears could help them escape and protect them.

“So, I’m on my own, then?” Shia asked.

“I know you’d be able to handle protecting yourself if anything small happens, Shia. If it’s really that dangerous, I’ll ask you to follow my directions then.”

Of course I’d protect Shia too, but I wasn’t going to hold her back.

By the time we’d gone over the rules, the island loomed large before us. Just like old man Kuro had said, we saw a giant whirlpool nearby. The waves also seemed unnaturally choppy here. No wonder ships were sinking. The whirlpool couldn’t have made it any easier. Seeing it, I was surprised anyone had even tried to get any closer. Even a complete amateur like me could see that the whirlpool was dangerous. There’s confidence in your sailing and then there’s just plain stupid.

“Yuna, the water’s going around and around.”

“Yuna, I’m scared...” Shuri, basically in my lap, clung tight onto Kumakyu.

I guess it did look sort of scary up close. Just looking at it, I felt like I was going to be sucked right in too.

“We’ll be fine on Kumakyu.”

“But we can’t get near the island like this.”

“My bears can handle this, no problem. We just need to figure out how to get onshore.”

A boat couldn’t reach it, but we weren’t in one. We were on the H.M.S. Kumayuru and Kumakyu. In the past, they’d crossed raging rapids for me: A whirlpool was nothing.

I steered us rightward and searched for the easiest spot to climb ashore. I found a low cliff on one part of the island where it seemed like we wouldn’t have too much trouble.

“We’re going to travel over the whirlpool, so things might get rocky. Make sure to hang on tight, okay?”

It wasn’t like they’d fall or anything, but I still made sure to warn them anyway. Riding on Kumayuru, we’d stick right in our seats, perfectly mounted so we wouldn’t fall off. The issue was, as soon as someone *wanted* to get off, they would actually fall, so everyone needed to be determined not to get off. All three of them hugged my bears.

Once Kumayuru and Kumakyu knew everyone was secure, they started running and leapt over the whirlpool. They jumped a few more times, and just like that, we were on the island.

“We really did get past the whirlpools...!”

“You’re amazing, Kumakyu!”

First, I used my detection skill to check out what was around us. I couldn’t sense anything nearby and my bears weren’t acting like there was any danger around. At the same time, even if there were no monsters, there could be regular old animals.

I got off of Kumakyu.

“You two have to stay on,” I reminded them.

“Yes.”

“Uh-huh.”

They both answered.

“Now that we’re here, I’m so excited,” Shia said as she got off of Kumayuru. She pulled a sword from her item bag and hung it from her hip.

Relatable. The adventure of a new place was getting my blood pumping, too. Maybe it was because I had friends with me. No matter how much you love to play the game solo, it’s always better going multiplayer with friends. And this was me saying that, the world’s undisputed alone time expert.

“Yuna, do you think there’s treasure here?” Shuri’s eyes glittered as she asked. Wait, did she think we were on a treasure hunt?

“I’m not really sure. Do you want to find treasure, Shuri?”

“Yes! I wanna give it to Mom and Dad if we find some.”

To Tiermina and Gentz? I didn’t expect that to be her answer. I looked over at Fina.

“Uh, Fina, do you need money that bad? Is it that bad at home?”

It was kind of weird asking a ten-year-old girl about her household finances, but it bothered me so I asked anyway. I mean, I was their direct employer. If their family was having trouble, then I needed to seriously consider giving them raises.

I was pretty sure I’d already been paying Tiermina a good wage. And Gentz was also working at the Adventurers’ Guild. Money troubles would be a surprise.

Wait. What if Gentz were drinking it all away? The cad!

“Um, we don’t have any money problems. Shuri, why do you want to give Mom and Dad treasure?”

“They said if the family gets bigger, they’d need more money.”

“The family gets what now?! ”

Was Tiermina pregnant?!

“Fina, is that true?”

“I-I’m not sure.”

Apparently Fina didn’t know any more than I did. If Tiermina really was pregnant, then that was reason to celebrate, not worry. I had no idea that had been on Shuri’s mind though.

“We might not be able to find treasure, but we can probably take back a souvenir,” I said.

“Okay!”

I decided that we’d go around the shore of the island first to get a sense of its terrain. Shia and I led the group with my bears following behind, still carrying the other two girls on their backs.

It looked like the island hadn’t been touched by humans for a while, if ever. The vegetation was wild and overgrown. We decided to keep explore the perimeter before venturing deeper.

CHAPTER 389

THE BEAR TAKES A WALK ON THE ISLAND

(DAY 4)

WE EXPLORED the island's shore, which was relatively less overgrown and pretty easy to traverse.

"The ocean is spinning around and around. It looks like it's going to swallow us whole." Shia had stopped, looked down a cliff, and scowled.

"I wouldn't be able to save you if you fall, so be careful."

Even I would have trouble figuring out what to do if someone fell into the ocean. My bear gear wasn't OP in the water: if I'd been able to move freely in the ocean, I would've been able to fight the kraken directly. Water was my sole weakness.

"It's a real pretty view, though."

Fina was right. The blue horizon of the water meeting the sky was very pretty from far away.

"It looks like the ocean goes on forever..."

Fina threw out her arms and inhaled deeply. Shuri copied her.

"Yuna, what's beyond the ocean?"

"Hmm, I haven't been before, so I'm not sure, but I think there's supposed to be a foreign land where people live."

In other fantasy settings, there'd be really powerful monsters living on the continent or people of a different race living there, or maybe even a demon race. But in this world, what lay beyond the ocean was the Land of Wa—the land of *rice*.

"I'd like to see it."

“Me too!”

“Yes, I’d like to visit sometime.”

I wanted to try visiting another continent someday too. If that kind of travel was on the agenda, I’d probably stop by the Land of Wa first.

“Anyway, it’s dangerous, so don’t go too close,” I warned. They all agreed, and my bears moved away from the cliff.

We kept walking along the outer part of the island, avoiding the cliffs as we went. As Kumayuru plodded along, Fina called to me from her mount, “Yuna, I see orans.”

There was an oran tree right ahead of us. In fact, there were several trees and not just one. The fruit basically looked and tasted exactly like an orange. They were available in Crimonia, so I’d buy and eat them pretty often. Nobody’d disturbed them, so there was a ton of fruit for the taking. Looked like it really was deserted here. They looked delicious, so I did a high hop, grabbed some, then handed them off to others.

“They look so good.”

“Thank you.”

“You make amazing things look so easy.”

We peeled the fruit and started eating. No contest, these tasted so much better than normal oranges.

“Kumakyu, say ahhh.”

Shuri held a piece out in front of Kumakyu’s mouth. My bear tilted to the side and neatly ate the oran. Fina copied Shuri and fed Kumayuru.

We kept walking and found an apple tree next. Shuri seemed like she wanted one, so I picked her some fruit. Say, maybe the treasure on this island was actually its delicious fruit?

“Looks like we have a fruit buffet here since no one’s around to pick it.” Shia chomped on a morsel as she said this.

Considering no one could get to the island, maybe so. Plus, with whirlpools all around the island preventing anyone from easily getting to shore, it wasn't like anyone was going to take the risk just to get some fruit.

"The place sure is pretty," Shia said, and I agreed. Everything we'd seen here had been gorgeous. Okay, except maybe that whirlpool. It gurgled waaaaay too forebodingly to be all that pretty. I wouldn't have been surprised if someone had told me this place and that whirlpool were the gates of heaven and hell themselves.

My greatest fear was Fina or Shuri falling off the edge and into the water churning below. They both behaved and stayed on Kumayuru and Kumakyu though, so I knew I didn't have to worry. I glanced over at Shuri to find she was handing off one apple to Kumakyu and holding the other apple I'd picked for her in her small hands, munching on it and relishing it.

"Kumakyu, does it taste good?"

Kumakyu crooned. Fina was also feeding Kumayuru. Considering how much fruit there was around, I thought about setting up a bear gate here so I could come by and pick some whenever I wanted.

As I walked around in thought, Fina spotted something.

"Yuna, there's a weird green thing over there. Do you think we can eat that too?"

I followed Fina's finger to see an actual banana ahead. That I hadn't expected. Then I realized that we couldn't eat the bananas yet if they were still green.

"That's called a banana. It's a kind of food," I said.

"Does it taste good?"

"It does, but you can't eat those ones yet. They're not ready."

"Oh, really?" Shuri seemed disappointed.

I kind of wanted one too, so I made up my mind to come pick them later. With that in mind, I really did need to set up a bear gate to this place.

But there was something odd about this place. I looked around at all the plants.

Something was super fishy here.

“Yuna, do you feel like there’s something *strange* about this island?”

“You noticed it too, Shia?”

Fruit and vegetation from many geographic locations and seasons were growing on this island. Like, right over there was a palm. It was almost like fruits from all over the world were growing on this little island. If this island traveled all over the world, it could be possible for birds to bring seeds in from various locations, but would they germinate? *All* of them?

“I’ve only seen these in reference books at the academy, so I can’t be certain, but I’m pretty sure that this fruit grows in an entirely different region than this island.”

“It does,” I agreed.

At first, I’d just been happy to see orans and apples around, but once the bananas and palms showed up, I started to feel dubious about the plants growing together on the island. Traveling island or not, these plants needed different environments to survive and grow.

Maybe we’d actually come to some bizarro island then? I used my detection skill again but didn’t spot any monsters. Maybe I was overthinking this.

“Is it really all that odd?” Fina asked. She didn’t seem to understand.

“Very. For starters, that tree isn’t supposed to grow near apple trees, for starters.”

I pointed at the bananas.

“Vegetation usually varies by region, so the types of plants that can grow in different places are usually different because of the temperature and amount of precipitation places get.”

“Precipitation?”

“That means how much rain there is. Some places don’t get much rain while others get a ton, so there are certain plants that can’t grow in some regions.”

"Oh. I didn't know that!"

Fina and Shuri hadn't been to school before, so it made sense they didn't know this. They'd also never seen a banana before, so I couldn't expect them to know this stuff.

"I only learned at the academy, so it's nothing to be embarrassed about," Shia followed up.

We kept exploring and had gotten halfway around the island when we came on a clearing. I still hadn't found any monsters yet. It seemed like there weren't any on the island. No animals either, dangerous or otherwise. It was a pretty safe place.

Then Fina interrupted my thoughts again by spotting something new from on top of Kumayuru.

"Yuna, what's that?"

A gigantic and unnatural-looking rock was ahead where Fina pointed. Kumayuru approached it.

"Yuna, there's something written on this rock."

We scrambled after her to look ourselves.

"Is this like a monument or something?"

It was taller than me and writing had been carved into the stone. At first, I'd thought it was a grave marker, but I quickly realized it wasn't. It was grimy, like it hadn't been touched in a while. I used a water spell to wash it off.

Uh, so what did this say, let's see...

"To those who come upon this isle: I pray the visitors of the isle hold no evil intent. Happenchance travelers, hereby be warned: take leave of this island before it stirs once more."

"It's nice they're warning people to leave, but any normal person couldn't get to this island in the first place," Shia said, and she was right. It wasn't like anyone was going to come here by happenstance when there was a whirlpool around the entire island. By the same token, I doubted normal people who somehow got this far could leave

either.

I felt super uneasy about the mention of visitors with evil in their heats and the fact that whoever engraved the stone knew this island moved.

“Kryuna Halk...”

Right as I was about to read the rest, Shia skipped to the last bit and seemed flabbergasted.

“What is it?”

“Kryuna Halk’s name is on this.” Shia pointed at the spot where the person had written their name.

“Who?”

“You haven’t heard of Kryuna, Yuna?!”

Nope, not I, the otherworlder. Maybe this person was super-duper famous and I really should have known them? I looked over at Fina and Shuri.

“I’m not sure who they are.”

“I dunno who that is either.”

Phew. At least they didn’t know the name: I’d have felt silly if I was the only one. So, this person wasn’t that famous then. Shia almost made it seem like everyone knew who this was. If they were super famous and I had no clue who they were, everyone probably would have been suspicious of me.

“What? None of you know?” Shia said. “It’s Kryuna Halk. You know, *the* Kryuna Halk!”

Telling us the name over and over again wasn’t going to make us know who that was. I had no clue if they were a historical figure or someone currently living, but in the last few months I’d been in this world learning about its history, I hadn’t heard of them once.

“So who are they? This Halk person, or whatever their name is?”

"Kryuna Halk is an A-rank adventurer who's famous for being a *professional* even among adventurers." Shia was saying all this with gusto, but I really still had no idea who we were talking about.

"Sorry, never heard of them."

"I haven't heard of them either."

"Haven't either."

Shia seemed nearly despondent when all three of us said that.

"I thought all adventurers knew about Kryuna Halk."

"So, who is this Kryuna Halk person exactly?"

"Some adventurers think of Halk as a role model. There's a section in the academy textbooks about him."

"About an adventurer?"

"Halk isn't famous for being just an adventurer but a *pro adventurer*. He'd travel into perilous regions that no one would dare to enter and discover never before seen vegetation. Even slayed previously unknown monsters. He's *amazing*. Kryuna Halk basically redefined the field of adventuring as we know it, and so many facts, at that." Shia was getting worked up as she explained.

Was this Kryuna Halk person really worth that kind of fuss?

"So, you're saying a professional adventurer named Kryuna Halk made this stone monument then?" I took another look at the stone.

"As long as no one's just using Kryuna Halk's name, I would believe so."

"Well, it's not like someone would pull a prank like that on an island no one can even get to in the first place, so it's probably real."

I started to read the rest of the tablet.

"However, Talgwei is surrounded by a powerful whirlpool that will make crossing over

a great difficulty. For those who cannot traverse the whirlpool, travel left of this stone to find an identical monument. There will be a time when the whirlpool's waves quell near there. The time will be brief, but it will be enough to leave this island. The stone will also contain an item bag, within which you will find a small craft prepared. You should be able to escape, should you time everything right."

And then it talked more about how to get off the island. After all that, Kryuna Halk was engraved at the bottom.

"What a nice person, teaching us how to get off the island."

"There's something on the back too, Yuna," Fina said, looking behind the stone.

I headed over to the other side too.

"If you arrived on this place, visitor, I trust that you are a good person. Touch the stone and imbue it with mana. If you are a chosen one, you will surely be shown the rest."

"What does it mean about showing the rest...?" Shia was peering at the stone as though trying to look through it and touching it.

"What are you doing?"

"Oh, well, it said to touch and imbue the stone with mana."

Ah. So that's what she's been up to.

"But I didn't get a response. Looks like I wasn't one of the chosen ones."

"Doesn't that mean you have evil intent then? Look, it even mentions that."

"You're so mean, Yuna," Shia said, pouting. She really looked like Noa when she did things like that.

"I'm kidding. It probably means that people are chosen by mana then, right? I think you probably just didn't imbue it with enough."

These sorts of things happened a lot in games, where you had to have a certain amount of mana to open a door, or you couldn't use a sword until your strength stat was above a certain level.

"I'll try," I said. I touched the stone and imbued it with mana. The stone started to glitter.

"It's so bright! Owww!"

"Ugh, too bright!"

"So bright...!"

They all closed their eyes. I covered mine with my bear puppet. Gradually, the light disappeared. When I opened my eyes and looked at the stone, I realized a book was coming out of it. The tome slowly drifted to me until it plopped itself right into my bear puppets.

A book? From inside a stone?

"Are you okay, Yuna? And what is that book?"

"It came out of the stone," I said.

I was torn between thinking this was a classic fantasy world trope and just finding it kinda cool.

"Yuna, I think that might be Kryuna Halk's book!"

"What?"

"It must have Kryuna Halk's adventurers chronicled in it. Those types of books are primary sources."

Oh, so like a rare tome straight from a video game? Sweet.

"I'm so surprised a book like that would be in a place like this. Yuna, let me see." She practically pounced on it.

"I wanna too!"

"I'd like to take a peek."

I opened the book so everyone could see.



“If this book has reached your hands, then you have been found to be of good character and have the requisite amount of mana.”

Looked like it did have to do with mana then. But how did they know that I was here on good faith? Was there a such thing as impure mana, and its opposite? I guess manga and light novels had the concept of dark magic or amplifying mana using negative emotions.

I had no idea what the standards for judging that were, but it made me feel a tad sheepish when they said I was of good faith. Wait, was *I* good? I’m a big old ball of ego. They needed to raise their standards. Like, gawd, love yourself, sweaty. Then again, getting all wrapped up in what it meant to be a good person wasn’t going to get me any further on this questline, so I should just be grateful that they basically had said I wasn’t a bad person.

I tried reading the rest as everyone looked in from the sides, but the girls craning over my shoulders to get a look said something surprising.

“It’s blank.”

“There’s nothing in here.”

“Huh? Is it *not* one of Kryuna Halk’s books, then?!”

“What? There are words written right here on it.” I could see them for sure.

“Huh? But it’s totally blank. Right? Fina, Shuri?” Shia asked the other two.

“That’s right. I don’t see anything written on it.”

“Yeah, there’s nothing at all.”

Oh, so there people couldn’t see the writing in this book.

“It *is* one of Kryuna Halk’s books. I guess only I can read it, though.”

Maybe you needed a certain amount of mana to read it too, then? Or maybe only the person who retrieved the book could read it?

“Really? Ugh. I’m so sad I can’t read it. What does it say, Yuna?”

I flipped through the pages, casually skimming the words.

“Looks like the stuff that he researched while on this island.”

Was this book was the key to the island and its mysteries?

CHAPTER 390

THE BEAR LEARNS THE ABOUT THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND (DAY 4)

“TOO BAD WE can’t read it,” Shia said, sounding dejected, but there wasn’t much any of us could do.

“I’d like to read some of it, so how about we have a break?” I proposed.

It didn’t seem like there were any monsters around and my bears would tell us if any dangerous animals came near us. And if the island started moving, we could just hop off. Plus, we’d been walking in really strong sunlight. Fina and Shuri were looking hot after riding on my warm-blooded bears this whole time.

We moved over to the shade of a tree and took a short breather. I helped Fina and Shuri down, then handed them some water.

“This is really good,” Shuri said. She gulped it down with relish.

“Kumakyu is so fluffy but so hot.”

During the winter, my bears were lovely and snug exactly because of that though. Riding on them in summer probably wasn’t so nice, but I wouldn’t know because of my bear onesie.

“Make sure you three top up on your fluids,” I warned.

I leaned on Kumayuru and started reading Kryuna Halk’s book again.

“For those who found this book in their possession with no knowledge of this island, this island is the top of Talgwei.”

Talgwei? I’d never heard that name before. Was it this island’s name?

“You must leave this island quickly if you are able as it will inevitably begin moving.”

So that was why the island would disappear: it moved after some time.

“And please be warned that this book can only be read while on this island.”

I didn’t really know how it worked, but apparently the book would return to the stone monument if you tried to leave with it. I wondered what would happen if I put it in my bear storage.

Kryuna Halk’s books were valuable according to Shia, so I wanted to keep it if I could. But it’d be bad if I lost the ability to ever obtain the book again, so I decided against it. Too bad I couldn’t take it home.

Then again, if I took the book away, I’d be putting the next person in a bind. I guess there was a reason it was set up this way. I could read it whenever I came back to the island, so it wasn’t a big deal anyway. I also had my bear gates and setting one up here would be no big deal.

“Yuna, did you learn anything?”

While I was reading and thinking over things, Shia started talking to me as she sipped oran juice.

“Right, do you know what Talgwei is?”

“Talgwei? You mean *the* Talgwei?”

I had no idea which Talgwei she meant since I’d never heard the name before in the first place. Was Talgwei some common knowledge thing here? I mean, even Kryuna Halk had written “this is Talgwei” without any other explanation.

“You don’t know who Talgwei is?” Shia asked after seeing my reaction.

“No, I don’t, but is it someone as famous as Kryuna Halk?”

I just decided to be honest here. There was no point to pretending I knew. I asked Fina and Shuri if they knew who that was too, but again, they were clueless. Phew. I didn’t know where that’d put me if Fina and Shuri had known the name.

“Hmm. It is famous, I suppose. But I guess there are plenty of people who haven’t heard of it. Talgwei is the name of a legendary sea creature.”

“A legend...?”

A legendary sea creature... so like, a turtle? A whale? Octopus? Squid? Or maybe a creature I hadn’t heard of before?

If this Talgwei creature was a monster, it’d for sure show up on my detection skill. Which meant it wasn’t a monster? Then again, if it wasn’t a monster but was dangerous, my bears would have said something. They didn’t look agitated at all to me. I’m pretty sure they would’ve been crooning about the danger if we were in any.

Hearing Talgwei was a legendary something or other made me immediately think of phoenixes and the four sacred beasts who were the guardians of the cardinal directions back in my world. Well, since we were in the ocean, maybe it was a sacred turtle or sacred whale? I tried thinking of how that’d be written in Japanese in my head and what the kanji readings would sound like to see if they matched up with *Talgwei*, but I had no clue.

“So, what happened with Talgwei?”

“Apparently this island is Talgwei,” I said.

“Are you serious?!” Shia sounded very surprised.

“If what Kryuna Halk’s book says is true, yes. So, what is Talgwei anyway?”

“We’ve confirmed the existence of Talgwei, but we’re not sure what it looks like or where it’s located, just that it’s very big.”

So, if this whole island was Talgwei, then we were dealing with a seriously big creature for sure. And if this island was living, that’d explain why it could move.

“And is Talgwei dangerous?”

That was the most important thing right now. If it was, we needed to escape, pronto.

“Talgwei shows up in a lot of stories. There are stories about ships being decimated after attacking Talgwei and about it saving boats from monsters. Or stories about it letting villagers who went through some disaster ride on its back in order to save people. There are apparently some lands that consider Talgwei a god of salvation because of those. So, it’s believed that it’s not dangerous as long as you don’t hurt it

first."

Basically, this was a god. It sure sounded a whole lot like a sacred beast. Well, Kumayuru and Kumakyu were basically gifts from god, so they could kind of be called sacred beasts too, in a way. I looked over at my sacred bear beasts, which prompted them to cock their heads to the side as though they were asking me, "What is it?"

Never mind. Definitely not dignified enough to be divine.

"Then I can assume that we're not in danger?"

"They say Talgwei has been alive for thousands of years but has never been the cause of any catastrophes," Shia said, telling me that no one had seen confirmed signs of Talgwei's existence for the last century.

I suppose she was right: If Talgwei were attacking people, word would have spread that it was dangerous. People would have been warning others. And it seemed like Talgwei wasn't even coming near people, let alone attacking them.

"But the only things I've heard have come through things passed down or through what's written in books, so take it all with a grain of salt."

Well, that was all we had to go on anyway since everyone who'd seen Talgwei before and knew what it was had long since passed away.

"Yuna, so you're really saying we're on Talgwei? Does that mean we're really on a creature?"

"I'm not quite sure," I said. "Like I said, that's only if whatever Kryuna Halk wrote down is actually true."

There was no proof this island really was Talgwei: that was something I couldn't verify at the moment. If Talgwei had been a monster and shown up on my detection skill, I would have been able to confirm it, but that hadn't happened. I had no way of getting accurate answers right now.

"Does Kryuna Halk's book have any information about Talgwei?" Shia peeked at the book I held.

I skimmed through the book until I found something.

"As has been passed down, Talgwei is of no threat. However, if any ill fate befalls Talgwei, your safety cannot be guaranteed. That you have arrived at this place and are reading this book shows that you are likely a person of good faith. If you can, please leave without doing anything further. And please do not tell others of this. That is my sole request to you."

I didn't mind keeping quiet, but I couldn't just leave. I mean, this was a moving island with never-before-seen food on it. If I set up a bear gate here, I could travel to lands I'd never seen before without even riding in a boat. The only downside was that I couldn't steer.

So, yeah, that last part of that request, keep it secret? No problem, I wouldn't tell a soul. The other part, not so much. Also, based on what I was reading, it seemed like they didn't want the world to know about Talgwei. I'd need to ask the other three to keep quiet too.

"Yuna, does it say anything about Talgwei?"

"Just like you said, it's not dangerous as long as we don't antagonize it."

I guess that was why the stone said it wished the visitors didn't have evil intent. That meant that nothing had happened in the past because fishers hadn't approached with ill intent. Did that mean that if someone did have bad intentions, the island would go on a rampage? I didn't even want to imagine it.

Also, was there even a good reason for fighting Talgwei? I mean, we're talking about fighting an island here—like, an actual island. Seemed to me like the obvious thing to do was leave it alone as long as it didn't do anything bad to you. It'd be a whole other story if the island, like, climbed onto land and started attacking towns. But bobbing around in the ocean wasn't going to hurt anybody.

I told the other three what Kryuna Halk was asking for.

"So we need to keep this to ourselves," I concluded.

"Yes, I understand."

"Okay, I won't tell anyone."

"..."

"Shia?" I looked at Shia, who had gone awfully silent.

"You really want us to keep quiet about such a monumental discovery? This is *the* Talgwei. The legend no one has seen. Don't you feel like boasting, even a little?"

"I really don't. Kryuna Halk is also asking for this. What if word spreads and people swoop in, then Talgwei attacks them? Think about it."

I could see it now: Researchers would come to investigate Talgwei, and adventurers looking to make a name for themselves by defeating it not long after that. It'd be a disaster if that angered Talgwei. It didn't sit right with me to spread this just to get a little glory.

"Even Kryuna Halk is asking for us to keep quiet. I only got the book because I've got good intentions or whatever, which means I can't go around telling everyone about this. So, Shia, do you have good faith? Or bad?" I asked her.

I guess this was what the whole evil intent thing was about.

"Shia, are you a bad person?"

"Lady Shia...?"

My bears also both crooned.

Shuri, Fina, and Kumayuru and Kumakyu were all staring at Shia. She couldn't stand all the eyes on her, so she nodded.

"Ugh...! All right. I won't tell anyone."

Well, considering pure little Shuri had straight-out asked if she was a bad person, I guess she couldn't answer in any other way.

"And that includes Cliff and Elleaura."

"Yes, I promise."

But I did understand Shia's viewpoint. This was the discovery of the century. Of course, she wanted to tell people.

“So, what are we doing now, Yuna?”

“Well, we don’t know for certain we’re actually on top of Talgwei, so I’d like to figure that out.”

And, if I could find an opportunity, I wanted to set up a bear gate. Talgwei or not, I wanted to secure a way to get to this literally fruitful island. If I could, I needed to do it while Shuri and Shia weren’t looking. Maybe I’d ask Fina later to distract them.

But first, I had to be certain—were we really safe here?

CHAPTER 391

THE BEAR DISCOVERS A FIELD OF BLOOMS

(DAY 4)

“KRYUNA HALK’S MAGIC sure is impressive. I was so surprised when that book came out of the stone. Is that a thing people can really do with magic?”

I primarily used offensive magic and compensated for any balance issues with my skills.

“I’ve never heard of a spell like that, but Kryuna Halk is a top-rate mage and also used to make magical devices. Kryuna Halk’s devices still go for a high price even now, so I’d believe Kryuna Halk could use magic like that.”

Sounded like a sage straight from a storybook to me. Like one of those mystics who travels on journeys or lives all alone deep in the woods.

“Way beyond my skills. Amazing,” I said, fully impressed. But dissent bubbled up from the others.

“Well, I think Yuna’s more amazing.”

“I think so too. Yuna is very strong and kind and always protects us no matter the situation.”

“You’re right! She battled with a black tiger to protect everyone and also fought a knight’s captain for me.”

“That wasn’t a big deal though.” It didn’t sound nearly impressive as what I’d heard about Kryuna Halk.

“Plus, you have Kumayuru and Kumakyu who can shrink and run on water, so you’re way more amazing!”

“Yeah!”

“Agreed!”

While I appreciated the kind words, I’d gotten all my strength and even my bears from a god. It wasn’t like I’d done anything. My actual abilities were basically nonexistent.

“I still can’t believe that stone monument though. Can it really tell the difference between good and bad people?”

Shia was still sore over the fact that the stone hadn’t presented her with the book when she touched it.

“I don’t think you’re a bad person, Shia. You probably just needed more mana.”

I was sure it had to be the mana since I couldn’t see Shia being a bad person. Besides, what if a villain forced an innocent kid to touch the stone? That must have been why the mana requirement had also been set. The book all but said so.

Only the person who retrieved the book could read it and the book would also return to the stone after the person left the island, so you had to be physically present to read it. I still had no idea what magic or magical device had made this sort of trick possible though.

Going to all these lengths just showed how badly Kryuna Halk wanted Talgwei to stay hidden. I mean, if this island was actually Talgwei and someone accidentally provoked Talgwei into going on a rampage, that would be a huge problem.

“Looks like we’re safe here, so let’s explore a little more and then head back.”

We wrapped up our break and got ready to head off to explore again.

“So, where should we go first?”

“Hmm, I was thinking about starting with going around the island, but now I’m thinking we should head to the center. Then once we get through to the other side, we can go home for today.”

“I still can’t believe this island is actually Talgwei.”

“We still haven’t decided it is yet. But we can’t attack the island, okay? No matter what,” I ordered.

"I wouldn't do that. Also, I'm not sure how we could even attack an island. Even if I were to thrust my sword into the ground, I'd just go through dirt." Shia touched the ground as she said that.

She was right. Any attempt to attack would basically be the equivalent of a mosquito bite. Plus, since trees were growing here, the soil layer had to be thick. We probably couldn't even reach Talgwei's skin with a sword if we tried.

I guess the only way to launch an attack would be from underwater maybe? That seemed close to impossible. It wasn't like I was going to attack anyway, so none of this mattered though.

Fina and Shia got onto Kumayuru and Shuri and I rode on Kumakyu to get going.

"Looks like there's a path here."

I couldn't tell whether it had been created by Kryuna Halk or the people Talgwei had saved in the past, but there was an old footpath near the stone monument. Riding the bears, we headed down it. Wherever there was a trail, there was a destination.

I asked my bears to take care of getting us there and asked them to alert us if something dangerous was close, then I put my arms around Shuri and opened Kryuna Halk's book in front of her. I read the book from over her head.

"Yuna, is there really writing in the book?" Shuri was angling herself around, trying to get different views of the book in front of her. She fidgeted her head side to side.

"Shuri, could you keep your head still? I can't read the book."

"I'm sorry."

I placed a bear puppet on top of her head as she apologized.

"There definitely is writing, but I'm the only one who can see it since I retrieved the book from the monument. I'll tell you what I can after, so why don't you take in the view while you wait? If you see anything interesting, let me know."

"Okay, I will."

As soon as I asked Shuri to do that, she started scanning all of her surroundings,

looking to the right and left. I guess there was no stopping the fidgeting. Then I started reading again. It seemed like this Kryuna Halk person spent a while on the island.

Wow! They even planted the oran and apple trees. It seemed like they'd been doing experiments.

Plants grew fast here, and the fruit was tastier too. I got the sense that the orans were sweeter than the ones I could buy in Crimonia, even. According to Kryuna Halk's book, that was likely the effect of Talgwei's mana.

So, did that mean the trees were drawing off of Talgwei's mana in order to grow? Was that really okay? Kryuna Halk also claimed that the fruit was normal and wouldn't have any bad effects on humans, so it must be. Granted, it seemed like Kryuna Halk's was only *speculating* it was okay.

Ah. Well, at least Kryuna Halk had tried the fruit themselves before writing that down.

It went on and on about foraging here for a while, so I started skipping through pages. I was kind of surprised that someone would live on an island with nothing on it, even if it was to research Talgwei. In my case, I'd wanted to come here because I had my bear gates. I never would've lived on a deserted island like this long-term.

Maybe Kryuna Halk was a weirdo?

Then I saw something that caught my interest written in the book. It seemed Talgwei had a set route around the world. Since Talgwei generally went to the same locations, Kryuna Halk would use that to get off and go places. So that explained why the island would appear every few years near Mileela.

Every page had something interesting about Talgwei. Looked like the island was well worth exploring.

"Did you see anything interesting?" I asked Shuri after straightening up and closing the book.

"No fruit, no," she said. I guess she'd been looking for more of those.

"And there weren't any animals either."

"I think I just saw some birds."

Fina and Shia also reported to me.

I did hear some chirping, which confirmed Shia's claim. Maybe they'd come from other islands? Some animals could swim, but I guess the whirlpool probably prevented them from getting to the island. That probably meant other animals couldn't live here unless they were brought by someone.

Meanwhile, my bears were making good progress. They plodded up a light slope, then our view abruptly opened up.

"Flowers!"

A field of beautiful flowers of all sorts of colors spread in front of our eyes. Unbelievable. I could imagine a maiden sitting on top of the hill, weaving flower crowns. Shia or Fina would fit perfectly in the role of placid maidens and Shuri would tumble around like a teeny goofball.

Wouldn't make a great fair maiden myself, honestly. Could I sit with my legs folded to the side like some dainty damsel in my bear outfit? Could I have a dignified browse through the flowers as a bear? A shudder went through me just imagining it.

"Yuna, that tree is really pretty." Shuri pointed at what looked a whole lot like cherry blossoms on a gigantic tree. The petals were beautiful and pink.

Wow. You didn't see cherry blossom trees that were this big all that often. The flowers were all fully in bloom. We'd caught them at their brief, glorious peak.

"Yuna, can I get off?"

"One sec," I said, holding Shuri's shoulder. I wanted to check that there weren't any monsters around with my detection skill.

All clear—I didn't sense anything.

"Okay, seems fine."

Shuri got off of Kumakyu and dashed off. Fina and Shia did the same when they saw that.

"It really is such a pretty place."

“The flowers blooming on this tree look so beautiful, too.”

To me, it felt like seeing fragile early spring cherry blossoms in the sweltering heat of August, so I felt a tad weirded out by it. This was such a strange island. I just decided to accept the fact that seasons didn’t matter to the plants blooming here.

Fina and the others were running through the flowers like the happy kids they were. It looked picturesque, watching them do that. There was no way a girl in a bear suit running through a field of flowers could fit in that scene. It’d look surreal, like a gag.

“It’s so pretty. I wish I could show Mom and Dad.”

“Yes, I wish I could show Noa.”

“I wish we could bring them, but it wouldn’t be simple. Because of the strong whirlpool around the island, they couldn’t come by boat. Kumayuru and Kumakyu’s abilities are secret, too. And even if they found out about that, we can only fit so many on them. It just wouldn’t work out.”

“Yes, you’re right.”

“I know how you both feel, but let’s keep it a secret just between us.”

“Yes.”

I headed closer to the cherry blossoms. The tree was pretty big. If someone told me it was a thousand years old, I think I’d believe it without question. Seeing it close, I realized that the flowers weren’t quite the same as cherry blossoms, but they were still pretty, nonetheless. Since I didn’t know their name, I decided to keep calling them cherry blossoms for the time being.

My bears approached and sat down next to me. I sat eased myself down and leaned against them.

“Oh, Yuna, you’re hogging Kumayuru and Kumakyu!”

Shuri ran over and dove on top of the Kumayuru-and-Kumakyu pile. It felt so nice. I could take a nap right there. In fact, yeah, let’s rest a while. If I had any doubt on setting placing a bear gate here, this place had banished it for real.

"Yuna, do you think I could bring Mom some flowers?"

I thought for a bit. Well, flowers wouldn't do any harm.

"All right," I said.

"Then me too!"

Shuri headed off to Fina and started picking flowers as well.

"Fina, the flowers over here are really pretty."

"They really are."

They seemed so girly. I'd never be able to do that with this bear onesie on. And they seemed happy picking flowers too. Yeah, super girly. They were like beautiful flowers, meanwhile here I was, a bear by necessity. Bears Over Flowers, you might say.

I'd make them flower crowns if I could, but unfortunately, I didn't know how. Living in the city all my life was no good for learning girly stuff. It was too bad, since they would have looked cute in them.



I searched for Shia and found her looking for flowers nearby. She was a beautiful blonde vision, straight from a painting. If I did that dressed in my bear suit, I would've been a laughingstock.

I leaned against Kumayuru and Kumakyu as I let time float by, listening to Fina and Shuri's excited voices. A pleasant breeze rustled every flower stem and petal.

I had to come back here. I needed to set up a bear gate.

While I was lazing around for the first time in a while, Fina called me, "Yuna, the flowers are glowing." I followed Fina's pointing finger to find that the cherry blossoms were lighting up one by one.

"The petals are glowing. It's pretty."

I moved away from the tree to take a look at it from afar. It was glowing like a Christmas light display. It was afternoon, but the lights were glittering even in the sunlight. I was moved. I imagined how beautiful it'd be if it were night.

"How lovely."

"Shia, do you know any flowers that glow?"

"I don't know much about it, but I've heard flowers that have stored mana can sometimes glow. I've never seen any before though."

"Then do you think that's what's making this tree glow?"

"I think so, probably."

"Yuna, I want to take home flowers."

"I doubt they would glow if you brought them home," I said.

"Really?"

I reached out to an overhanging branch and plucked a single glowing petal off of it. The light winked out in my bear puppet's mouth.

"Oh, it's gone." Shuri looked at the petal in disappointment.

If I thought the flowers would keep glowing, I would've brought some home too, but it seemed the petals couldn't hold light once they were separated from the source.

"I wonder what kind of tree this is though."

"Does Kryuna Halk's book not say what kind it is?"

I suppose she was right. Considering how many flowers there were, they were probably mentioned somewhere in the book.

I flipped through the pages until I found the one I needed, which had an illustration of the cherry blossom tree. Kryuna Halk was also a great artist. I guess geniuses were just great at everything.

Um, so, did it say anything...?

"When this tree discharges mana from Talgwei, it glows. If it begins to glow, you should leave the area."

The word "dangerous" was written right next to the illustration in bright red ink. Couldn't put my finger on why, but something about the word *dangerous* seemed kinda—I don't know—*dangerous*, y'know?

I kept reading.

"The light originates from the discharged mana. Though beautiful, the luminescence will also attract monsters. It is safe only when no monsters are in the vicinity. If any are present, however, they will all gather at once."

What the—oh, that's *bad*. Like, real, real bad. That meant the monsters could come from the ocean or even the sky. As long as there weren't any around, we'd probably avoid getting hurt, but basically the book was saying that all was up to chance.

I looked at the cherry blossoms in front of me. Were we actually safe here? We probably would be better off getting out of here as soon as possible. But wasn't it weird the flowers chose this exact moment to glow? It wasn't like any of us were the protagonist of some sort of light novel. This was reality, not fiction.

I looked at the others. They were all staring at the glittering tree as though they'd forgotten how to blink.

“Everyone, we've gotta get out of here fast!”

“Aww...”

“Huh? But why?”

“I just want to look at it for a little longer.”

This tree was glowing because of the mana discharge. Even I wanted to keep looking at it, and it wasn't like you could see something this pretty every day, but the monsters could have already been on their way here.

“There's no time to explain. Just get on Kumayuru and Kumakyu as fast as you can!”

I frantically scanned our surroundings using my detection skill. Then right at that moment, Kumayuru and Kumakyu bellowed.

CHAPTER 392

THE BEAR TAKES THE THREE TO A SAFE LOCATION (DAY 4)

“YUNA!”

“Kumakyu?”

Fina looked at me, while Shuri looked at Kumakyu next to her.

“Yuna, are there monsters around?!” Shia asked. She seemed to have remembered when my bears alerted us to monsters back when I’d guarded her.

I checked my detection skill and saw volkrow signals—and they were coming straight for us. In fact, they were already practically on top of us. When I looked up at the sky, everyone followed my lead.

“That’s...”

“Birdies?”

Black birds were circling overhead.

“Don’t tell me those are volkrows...”

Shia was right—those were volkrows, monsters larger than an eagle and recognizable by their characteristic red beaks. My skill was telling me there were ten in total and more were coming in from nearby, gathering overhead.

From previous experience, I knew that they were low-level basis and could be dealt with pretty easily one-on-one. The issue this time was with how many there were. Plus, people were with me. The situation was just completely different from when I’d been at the elven village. I couldn’t just grab everyone and run to Mileela either or we might end up bringing the volkrows with us.

According to Kryuna Halk's book, the monsters were attracted by the cherry blossom tree, but that didn't mean they wouldn't chase us. The nightmare scenario was just that: they would leave here and follow us back to Mileela and start attacking the kids playing on the beach. I'd never forgive myself. Whatever the cost, I needed to prevent that.

Some of the volkrows descended on the tree and started pecking at the blossoms. Were they... eating them?

"Yuna...!"

Fina pointed at glowing rainbow-colored bubbles that had appeared from the tree. They expanded, becoming larger and larger as more bubbles began to form, small and large.

"How pretty..."

The others were mesmerized by the fantastical scene, but I was not similarly enchanted. I had a *bad* feeling. I really wanted to check what this was in the book, but high tailing it out of there as fast as possible was our first priority.

Then I found out the reason for that foreboding feeling. One of the volkrows on the tree was enveloped by a bubble. It struggled for a moment, then calmed as though its strength had been sapped from it. Did the bubble suck out the monster's mana? Or its lifeforce? What even *were* those bubbles?

The bubbles swallowed the volkrows one after another, then I heard a rumble come from the hill. The bubbles, along with the volkrows, were swept into a hole partway up the slope.

Was that hole always here? I checked my detection skill and found the volkrows signals had disappeared when they entered the hole. Did that mean the hole was part of Talgwei?

Was it *eating* the volkrows?

"Let's get out of here."

There were a lot of things I wanted to know about what happened here, but I got everyone onto my bears and sped them to safety first. I brought them all the way back

to the stone monument, then checked out my detection skill and saw volkrows were still coming in.

"Yuna, what does Kryuna Halk's book say?"

"When the flowers glow, they attract monsters, apparently."

"...?!"

All three of them seemed shocked.

"I can beat off a couple volkrows, so you don't have to worry about it," I said, trying to sound gentle so they wouldn't worry. "But I have no idea what could happen at this rate, so you three stay in the bear house, no question."

I pulled out a house from my storage. I was pretty sure the volkrows couldn't get them in there, so it'd be the safest spot on the island.

"We're not leaving the island?"

"If the monsters follow us, we might lead them back to Mileela, which would put the town in danger, so we can't. It'll be fine though. I'll protect you three, so don't worry."

Then both my bears crooned in protest.

"Right, of course. Correction: Kumayuru, Kumakyu, *and* me will protect you three."

That seemed to make my bears happy.

I opened the door to the bear house and we all filed inside. We'd be safe here: I was sure we wouldn't be attacked out of the blue now.

Since I'd gotten the three of them to a safe location, I cracked open Kryuna Halk's book again and read the section about the tree's bubbles. It seemed he only had speculations about this part.

He theorized that the bubbles were made of mana and were part of Talgwei's feeding process. They'd be sucked into a hole on the side of the hill. The book also warned against going near said hole. That seemed like maybe it should have been the headline. What would've happened if we went right into the hole without knowing? Seriously,

dude...

Anyway, apparently when the flowers made those bubbles, the monsters nearby would be sucked into them. Then there was a note that said “hypothesis” prior to this bit: Kryuna Halk believed the bubbles were reacting to the mana gems in the monsters. He’d come to that conclusion because the bubbles wouldn’t go after him when he was nearby. Supposedly, they hadn’t even tried to suck him in when he touched them.

What kind of lunatic would hang out in the middle of a monster storm taking notes?! Ugh, I was probably being too harsh. I had all this useful information because he tested his own advice and wrote it down. I doubt I’d be able to touch those bubbles after seeing that—I’d be too scared.

So, if I understood Kryuna Halk’s book right, Talgwei was attracting monsters using the cherry blossom tree, capturing them with bubbles, then eating them. We’d happen to have visited in the middle of Talgwei mealtime. A really huge meal. I mean, volkrows were one thing, but there were bigger monsters out there.

What then?

I wondered what would have happened if the kraken I’d slayed happened to be around for this. Maybe I would’ve gotten a front-row seat to the Talgwei vs. kraken showdown. The thought terrified me. Could Talgwei even fight a *kraken*?

The book said the mealtimes happened regularly and would last until all the monsters nearby were gone or the tree ran out of mana. Then, once the last of the cherry blossom’s lights dispersed, the monsters would snap out of it and get gone.

I more or less had the gist now from reading the book. If I hadn’t had this, I wouldn’t know what to make of any of it. I was thankful for Kryuna Halk’s insight.

Now the issue was the frequency and duration of Talgwei’s lunches. The book didn’t say, and it’d be a big problem if this kept going for multiple days. I guess I needed to consider revealing the bear gate to Shuri and Shia to get out of here if it that’s what it took. It wasn’t worth our lives to keep it secret.

“Yuna, did you learn anything?” Shia asked, which led me to take my eyes off the book. I saw Fina hugging Shuri when I looked around. I started explaining so they wouldn’t feel as anxious.

"They won't attack us, so it's okay. And worst case, we'll get out of here."

...Through the bear gate, of course.

The three of them looked pretty relieved when they got my explanation. We were okay as long as only weaker monsters like volkrows came by. I was grateful the kraken wasn't around.

Right as I was about to go back to the book to make sure I wasn't missing any other important information, I heard my bears croon a warning call.

I used my detection skill. And there was something there—something I never would have expected.

A kraken *and* a wyvern.

No joke. Time to panic.

I had no idea whether my bear house could withstand those monsters, even if I fortified it. I'd never had a chance to test it either.

"Yuna, your bears...!"

"Looks like there are some monsters nearby, that's all," I said. "It might be dangerous, so let's go somewhere safer."

I was lying through my teeth, but I needed them not to panic. I took them over to the room where I had my bear gate.

"Yuna, are you...?"

"Just follow my lead," I begged Fina quietly.

"Yuna, what is this place?"

A bear gate was set up on one wall. I'd set it up so it'd look like it was a door to a neighboring room.

"I have a room in here that's safe no matter what monster comes by, so I want you to hide there for a while."

I opened the bear gate and headed to a smallish room the size of six tatami mats. This was the basement of my house in Crimonia. I'd made it for the express purpose of an emergency like this one when I needed a bear gate but couldn't explain what was actually going on or didn't have the wherewithal to talk about it. I didn't have time to explain the gate, this would have to do.

Since it was a basement room, there weren't any windows or doors. In other words, there was no way to see where it actually was. Also, Fina already knew about this room since I told only her about it when I made it. She already knew about the gate after all.

"This room is safe, so don't worry," I said.

I hadn't put much into the room. I'd set up a table at the center and some chairs, but that was it.

"Is it really safe?"

"I guarantee it," I said. "Fina, you know this place is safe, right?"

"Yes, absolutely safe. No monsters can get near this room."

Since she knew the secret, she backed me up.

"Well, if you say so, Fina, I suppose it's true."

Shuri also relaxed, probably listening to her sister's tone as much as her words.

"Yuna, are we staying here for a while?"

"It depends on the monsters outside," I said. "I think we're staying put for the time being."

I pulled out a fridge and told them they were free to do whatever they wanted.

"I'm going to check out what's going on outside, so you all just wait in here."

"You're going outside?" Shia nervously asked.

"If someone isn't keeping an eye out, we won't ever be able to get home. Kumakyu, stay with everyone. If there's any danger coming, let everyone know."

“Cwoom.”

I knew nothing dangerous could happen in there, but I said that anyway. Everyone would feel okay as long as Kumakyu wasn't sounding a warning. They didn't strictly need a guard. But since Shuri and Shia still believed they were on the island, I figured they'd feel better with Kumakyu.

“Yuna, let me come too,” Shia said.

“No, you already know I'm powerful enough,” I told her.

“But...”

“Also, we can't leave Fina and Shuri alone. You keep an eye on the two of them.”

She looked at them and gave a little nod.

“Understood. Then I'll take good care of them.”

Shia seemed to understand what she had to do.

CHAPTER 393

THE BEAR FIGHTS THE THREE KRAKEN

SIBLINGS (DAY 4)

I LEFT SHURI AND SHIA to Fina's care—since she knew what was going on—then took Kumayuru with me out of the room. Then, I made sure the bear gate was shut tight. As long as I didn't open the door, the three of them couldn't come back here, which meant they'd be safe for sure.

I'd told Fina that if I didn't come back to use a hidden door to get out of the room. They'd find out they were in Crimonia then, but if I didn't come back, I'd have worse problems than a blown secret or two.

If I couldn't deal with the monsters, I'd also escape through the gate before things got absolutely dire. Hopefully.

I left the house and stowed it away, since I'd be up a creek if it were destroyed. All right, so now, what do I do?

First, I used my skill to scope out the situation. Good news: the volkrows had thinned out. Bad news? They were gone because *wyverns* had taken their spot. I guess that meant that they'd been lured by the tree, same as the volkrows.

I looked up, toward where the tree would be, and could see them circling overhead even from here. Those things were a type of dragon, and as one of the smaller species, they were supposed to be weaker too. But that didn't make them easy to fight. Either way, I couldn't lead them back to Mileela. They'd be worse than the volkrows.

I'd defeated some wyverns back when I fought those ten thousand monsters, but I'd also caught them sleeping so I had no idea how strong they actually could be in a fight. This would be my first real fight against them.

It'd be great if Talgwei could just eat them just like the volkrows. But the wyvern numbers weren't thinning out yet, so if Talgwei couldn't handle them, I'd need to. Even though we weren't near Mileela, the wyverns could end up heading there once they

dispersed.

I didn't just have a wyvern problem now, either. There were krakens along the coast too.

Also, what was up with there just being three kraken casually in the area? There had to be something up with the ocean around here. That made for four krakens overall, if I included the one I'd slayed in that count. Was there a kraken nest nearby? Who was in charge of this?

Anyway, I thought over what I needed to do.

One: I could slay all the monsters.

Two: I watch Talgwei, then decide what to do.

Three: Hightail it off this island, quick, fast, and in a hurry.

Four: Cut down that tree that was causing this whole mess.

The first option worked the best for Mileela since it'd be really bad if the monsters got away and attacked later. It'd be a real hassle, though.

Option two relied on Kryuna Halk's claim that the monsters were Talgwei's food, but I had no idea how many of the monsters Talgwei would pick off. Plus, there was a chance that the monsters Kryuna Halk saw during these feeding times weren't nearly as big as these. I couldn't rely on Talgwei fighting off all the monsters, especially the large ones.

My third idea would have worked if there weren't human settlements nearby—and if I were alone. But Mileela was here and so were the orphans, so three was completely out of the question.

And that brought us to the last option, number four, which seemed the right way to get the monsters off the island, but that'd bring a host of problems by itself.

Like, I doubted I could even cut the tree down, considering it was basically a mass of mana. Also, *Talgwei* might think I'm an enemy if I do that, which would mean I'd have to fight off wyverns, krakens, and then *Talgwei* on top of it. And then what if *Talgwei* was so mad it headed off to land toward Mileela? That'd be chaos even worse than any wyverns or kraken could bring.

Making *Talgwei* my enemy would definitely ruin my plans to set up a bear gate here. And as a Japanese person, I couldn't bring myself to cut down that tree. That'd have to be the absolutely last resort.

While I was thinking, Kumayuru started to croon a warning cry that there was danger around. I checked out my detection skill and saw that wyverns were heading in from the oceanside now. Just how many more were coming?

The same way the ground had rumbled to announce the approach of the wyverns, the ocean was surged and roared.

Wait, *what*!?

Something was coming out of the water. Something towered over me, tall as a building...

"...a neck?"

It looked a heck of a lot like a plesiosaur.

"Is that... *Talgwei*?"

Talgwei took its time turning to face a wyvern and shot out a stream of water like a hyper beam from its mouth. Direct hit on one of the wyverns—it's super effective! The monster dropped without a fight into the ocean.

What the what...? *Talgwei* made that look easy. Way too easy.

Then *Talgwei* bent down to pick the wyvern out of the sea and ate it. It hydro-blasted the other wyverns headed across the ocean toward the tree. Even though they tried to dodge, *Talgwei* just kept shooting until it got them. *Talgwei* turned and did the same to the wyverns near the cherry blossom tree. These wyverns avoided the water jets though, since they were farther away. *Talgwei* didn't relent. With each colossal blast of water, a fraction would fall from overhead and shower me. One of the wyverns

started circling Talgwei's neck while the others scattered and hid somewhere on the island.

They should've just run but I got the sense they didn't want to. I guess the tree really did charm monsters.

Now Talgwei got a little more serious about its match versus the wyverns. Well, I called it a match—this was a no-holds beatdown with Talgwei on the offensive. Like, there's nothing I could have done to help take them down any quicker.

If he could fight them off, great. Better him than me. Flying monsters would be tough for me anyway. It'd be nice if I had the powers of flight or if Kumayuru could soar through the air or something, but that wasn't my particular expertise.

I guess the only way I could make myself useful was to fight the kraken trying to climb onto Talgwei. Talgwei could probably handle it for me, but those fruit trees were, like, right there on shore where the kraken could crush them. And I wanted the fruit, soooo... y'know.

Okay. Time to get into a fight.

Now the issue was how many krakens were around. Even fighting one had been a hassle, but now, there were three of them. Honestly, I didn't want to deal with them, but if I was being super serious, they posed the same kind of threat to Mileela as the wyverns.

I checked up on my detection skill again and saw the krakens were on the move. Were they trying to get onto the island? At first, they'd been by the shoreline, but while I wasn't looking, they'd gotten onto the land somehow. Maybe they wouldn't be so hard to handle out of the water?

Powerful monsters or not, take krakens out of the water and they'd be way less dangerous—and they'd be less trouble than the last one I fought for sure.

So, as for how many there were, it looked like they were slightly separated. If I know my level design right, that means you're supposed to pick them off one by one.

I took off running toward the closest one with Kumayuru following right behind me.

For some reason, something felt *really* odd as I ran.

...Weird.

I was running toward a kraken but I still hadn't seen any sign of it. It should have been right there, considering how big it'd be—still, no sign of the thing anywhere.

I finally reached the spot where the kraken should have been.

Squidtch, squidtch.

“...”

“Cwoom.”

Squidtch, squidtch.

“...”

“Cwoom.”

For a second there, my brain had short-circuited, but I'd finally come back to my senses. Kumayuru had brought me back to reality with a nozzle.

“Uh. Is this a kraken?”

I took a look at the signal's location. Yup, no mistake. This was the kraken. A two-meter-long squid was trying to crawl through the dirt.

This thing just looked like a plain old giant squid—like, if a normal little squid were a giant colossal monster, but, like, the baby version of that. Its long tentacles were wriggling around and slowly dragging it forward. Did that mean it was also attracted to the tree?

I gathered mana in my bear puppet and summoned up a giant bear flame. Then I threw that at the giant squid (kraken?) with all my might. It was enveloped by my bear flames, writhed around trying to get away, then finally died. The kraken signal had disappeared from my detection skill too, so I guess that really had been a kraken.

Maybe it was a juvenile?

I headed to the next location and found another kraken that looked a little bigger than the last one. It still stood no chance.

“Bear fire.”

What was up with all this? I wish I had all that time back that I’d wasted worrying about these things.

I headed over to the third one. My, what a hefty lad. This third one was pretty big. When I say big, though, I was comparing it to the other two. Guess they got bigger as they got older.

I’d defeated all three of them with a single shot of bear fire each. When I first thought I was up against three krakens, I thought this was gonna be serious trouble. Anticlimactically roasting three little dudes wriggling in the dirt wasn’t how I thought this’d play out.

You couldn’t blame me. Baby krakens weren’t a thing in games, and it’s not like I know how more little monsters get made in this world. Apparently giant krakens don’t just spawn from nothing, though.

I guess krakens were subject to survival of the fittest like anything else. The ones that made it were probably the krakens that turned into the giant ones that everyone talked about in legends. Thanks to Talgwei, these guys were being taken care of before they could grow. Guess that was something to be grateful for.

After I defeated that little kraken family, I thought we were done. That’s when Kumayuru cried out again. I looked at Kumayuru and realized my bear was looking up at the sky. When I followed its gaze, I saw that a wyvern was gliding over—straight for me.

What?! Why was it doing that?!

It had its sharp talons out and ready to attack me. I barely dodged in time. I thought Talgwei had those covered!

The wyvern landed, and I squared off to fight it.

CHAPTER 394

THE BEAR FIGHTS A WYVERN (DAY 4)

“GRAAAH!!!”

The wyvern touched down on the ground and opened its giant maw, issuing a loud cry. I’d thought the wyverns were Talgwei’s responsibility: plus, we weren’t even near the tree either. Wasn’t that why the wyvern had come all this way in the first place? Why was I getting pulled into this?

I looked up at Talgwei, who was fighting off multiple wyverns now. I guess the extra ones were looking for a fight and found me. How many *were* there even?

I kept my eyes trained on the one in front of me as another wyvern touched down, then a third joined them from above. The wyverns’ swiveling eyes turned to Kumayuru and they started menacingly opening

and closing their beaks. Something drippy like saliva flowed from their beaks.

Wait. Did they wanna eat Kumayuru...?

No way. I put myself between Kumayuru and the wyverns. No eating Kumayuru, not a chance. I rolled for initiative and fired off flame spells at the group of wyverns. They folded their wings in front of themselves and deflected my fireballs. Weak or not, they were still dragons. I couldn’t defeat them with such weak offensive spells.

In that case, how about this... I threw a bear flame at them. They opened up their wings and cried out, “Graah aaah aah!!!” as they fled back up into the air.

Hey! Face me on my level, cowards.

Anyway, I never expected them to want to eat Kumayuru. I thought they were here to eat the mana tree. Why were they after my bear? Well, I’d protect Kumayuru no matter what happened, so I didn’t need to know.

Just as I was about to recall Kumayuru, my bear crooned and shook their head, then

shied away from me.

“Kumayuru?”

“Cwoom.”

Kumayuru shook their head again.

“If you don’t return, you’ll get eaten,” I warned.

“Cwoom...!”

Kumayuru kept shaking their head. Normally my bears would follow my instructions, but today Kumayuru was being obstinate.

“You mean you want to fight with me?”

“Cwoom!”

Kumayuru gave me an eager cry.

My bears were like family: They were precious to me. I normally, wouldn’t let them go into danger, but Kumayuru wouldn’t leave my side. My heart felt so full.

There were three wyverns versus just the two of us. In any other situation, it’d be out of the question to let Kumayuru fight a monster that thought of my bear as food. I would’ve recalled my bear by force. But Kumayuru wanted to fight by my side. I had to respect their feelings.

“All right,” I said.

I sighed, went up to Kumayuru, and placed a puppet hand on my bear’s head. This time, Kumayuru didn’t avoid me. We understood one another, loud and clear.

“Together, then?”

“Cwoom!”

If things got really bad, I’d recall them anyway. But for now.

“You don’t need to push yourself, okay?”

“Cwoom.”

We readied ourselves for the fight. I fired several aqua arrows into the air. The wyverns dodged those, spread their wings, and hovered midair. One opened its maw wide and aimed a fireball at the ground where I was. I snuffed it out with a wind spell of my own. I was at a real disadvantage with them in the air. And three of them.

“Kumayuru, we’re taking them down one at a time!”

“Cwoom!”

I leapt into the air. I couldn’t fly like a bird or anything, but I could jump very, very high.

I leapt up higher than the wyverns and turned midair, attempting a spinning bear kick in the back. I whiffed it. Completely whiffed it. The wyvern flapped its wings and dodged out of my reach.

No fair. I couldn’t change direction midair, so that skill should be off limits.

After the failed kick, I touched down on the ground. One of the wyverns swiped at me with a sharp claw and I dodged to the side. Jeez, if that thing caught me, I wouldn’t be getting out easily. The claws gouged into the ground where I’d been, raking open holes in the ground. I had no idea if those could have pierced my bear onesie. Regardless, it looked painful, so I wasn’t keen on testing it out.

The wyvern spread its wings to lift off again, but I wasn’t going to let it get airborne. Not when it’d done me the favor of coming to meet me on the ground.

I used another wind spell to create a whirlwind. The wyvern tried to pull its wings to its body to protect itself, but I was already firing off another flame spell. It enveloped the wyvern in a fire tornado.

Okay, that had to have hurt, right?

Once the fire tornado was extinguished, only the toasted body of the wyvern was left.

“Did I get it?”

It slowly opened its wings, which looked worse for wear, but it seemed to have survived the inferno. Were they really that resilient? I knew that monsters with more mana had better defenses, but this one seemed way too sturdy.

I'd slayed a wyvern by catching it off guard before. Seemed like they were a lot harder if they knew they were in a fight. But at least, now that its wings were beat up, it was grounded. I pulled my mithril knives out of my bear storage. One was the black Kumayuru knife, which I held in my similarly black bear puppet. The other was white for Kumakyu: I held in my white puppet. With that, I was double wielding.



Okay, time to see whether these could slice and dice wyverns. If they couldn't, then I'd need to put in a customer service complaint with Ghazal, who'd made these for me.

As I dashed forward to fight, I fed mana into the knives. The wyvern tried to protect itself with its damaged wings, but the mithril knife easily sliced through them. I circled behind it and swung to see if I couldn't cut those annoying wings clean off. Right at that same moment, its giant tail whipped around from the side to bowl me over. I raised my arms to block as fast as I could, but I was still sent flying.

The wyvern opened its wings to flee into the sky, but it couldn't take off. I immediately got back up and readied another attack, but second wyvern blew fire at me, interfering with my plans. I used a wind spell to extinguish the flame.

Ugh. *So* annoying.

I checked on Kumayuru from the side of my eye and saw my bear locked in battle with the third wyvern. I needed to finish these two up quick so I could go over and help. The one bright spot was that two of the wyverns had decided to gang up on me. If Kumayuru were attacked by two wyverns at once, my bear might've been done for. I probably would've taken a few hits if I'd been dealing with three by myself, so I needed to fight these off quickly while Kumayuru still had one occupied.

I gathered mana in my feet to power up my legs. The wyvern tried to whip at me with its tail again, but I dodged that, then I sliced its tail off with my Kumayuru knife. I kept lunging at the wyvern, finally landing a decisive swipe across its neck with the Kumakyu knife as it turned around.

I felt the impact. Unlike with magic, I could feel the blow in my arm. No time to think about that—the cut was too shallow and the wyvern was already moving again to strike back. I slashed the Kumayuru knife to the side and hacked at its neck again.

It spread its wings in one grand, final movement before falling lifeless to the ground.

One down. Two to go.

After the wyvern collapsed, the one in the sky cried out and landed. Once I finished off this one, I'd be able to go help Kumayuru.

I glanced over at my bear. They were still going at it a little way away from me. The wyvern blew fire at Kumayuru, which my bear dodged with a bound. The wyvern was

free to attack from the skies, while Kumayuru was earthbound. That was a serious disadvantage for a bear, but Kumayuru was holding their own.

The wyvern attacked again, trying to catch Kumayuru in its giant claws.

“Kumayuru!”

“Cwoom!”

Kumayuru dodged the wyvern and countered with a body slam, which sent the wyvern sailing down to the ground. Then Kumayuru pounced in for another attack. Kumayuru’s red claws sliced through the wyvern’s wings, sending a spray of blood flying.

Woah. My bear was... *winning*?

Kumayuru poured mana into their claws, which glowed red, before going in for another attack. I knew that Kumayuru could do a little damage to a wyvern’s wings with a direct hit, but I hadn’t thought they’d be able to slice through one so easily. The wyvern tried to fly despite its wounds. My bear was doing great.

“Kumayuru, don’t overdo it, okay? You just need to keep that one occupied until I finish off this wyvern.”

“Cwoom!”

I needed to get this second one down so I could get to Kumayuru’s side.

I held the knife and turned to look up at the wyvern in the sky. It flapped its wings, creating a gust that swept up grit and leaves. I used a wind spell of my own to cancel it out and shot an aqua arrow at it. The wyvern dodged and went straight into its own attack.

I stepped back to dodge, then launched myself from that position into a run. I was headed directly for the wyvern in front of me. I closed the distance and tried to cut at it with a knife, but it whipped its tail around to hit me like a flail.

Fool me once! I crouched under the tail to dodge. It swiped by above me and as soon as it was still enough to land a hit on, I cut it with my knife. The wound ended up shallow. The wyvern attempted to peck at me with its beak, but I gave it a bear punch

to the face from the side. That rocked its head to the side and exposed the wyvern's defenseless neck to me.

An opening!

I swiped the knife up at the neck, but right as I thought I'd gotten it, the tail I'd just dodged came swooping back toward me. The tail got there first and I was sent flying and skidding over the ground. Thanks to my bear gear, however, I was unharmed.

Still, I'd lost that opportunity.

The wyvern opened its wings, escaping to the sky again. If I let it escape here, I'd be peeved. The moment I thought it might get away, Kumayuru flew through the air and body-slammed the wyvern from behind. The wyvern couldn't gain any air like that and lost its balance, tumbling to within reach. Not quite grounded, but close enough.

“Kumayuru!”

The wyvern retaliated on Kumayuru from behind. I threw the Kumayuru knife in my right hand and burst out into a run. The knife hit the wyvern right in the middle of its body and sunk in deep, immediately slowing the monster down. I ran as I gathered mana in my bear puppet and clad them in electricity.

I passed by Kumayuru, getting between them and the wyvern. I leapt, heading straight for the wyvern, which was still set on attacking Kumayuru, and gave it an electro-bear punch. The electricity ran through its torso, paralyzing it in place. It couldn't flap its wings anymore and fell with me to the ground.

Its full body connected with the ground, while I landed properly on my feet. Then I grasped my mithril knife and sliced through the wyvern's neck.

I ran right over to Kumayuru after that. My bear was pummeling the collapsed wyvern with bear punches.

“Kumayuru, move, will you?!” I yelled, and Kumayuru did just that. I used my Kumakyu knife to slice through the fallen wyvern's neck, and with that, all of them were dead.

“It's over...”

“Cwoom...”

“Thanks, Kumayuru,” I said, giving Kumayuru a gentle pat.

CHAPTER 395

FINA DODGES QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HIDDEN ROOM (DAY 4)

YUNA LEFT US in the room.

Her face told us not to worry, and then she left with Kumayuru back to the island where the monsters were gathering. I wanted to tell her not to go, but I couldn't stop her. Then, after she went outside to fight, the door to our room slowly closed behind her. Kumakyu was watching along with us and probably felt as abandoned as we did. Shuri gave them a hug. I knew Shuri felt better just having Kumakyu around. Lady Shia still looked worried though.

"Fina, are you sure this place is safe?" Lady Shia asked nervously.

We were in the basement of Yuna's house in Crimonia, so monsters wouldn't attack us here. I couldn't tell Lady Shia that though since it was a secret where we were. Also, they probably wouldn't believe that the bear door could lead to somewhere hours and hours away even if I told them.

So I said this instead. "Yes, we should be safe in this room no matter what monsters come."

The bear door was connected to lots of places, but I didn't think it was connected to the island anymore now that it was closed on that side. Even if something broke the physical door on the other side, it wouldn't affect the door over here.

That's why I told her that this room was safe no matter what. But also, Yuna joked once that if Crimonia was attacked by monsters, we wouldn't be safe anywhere. She seemed to think she was joking (she for sure found it funnier than I did), but in any case, we were probably safe in the basement here.

Lady Shia stood up from her chair and started pacing around the room. Then she headed to the bear door. It was a double door with bear relief designs on either side. When these doors were opened, you could go to all sorts of places. It was a marvelous

doorway. Yuna might have also used this to get to Crimonia since when I asked her where she came from, she just told me it was super far away. It sounded like she could never go back, so maybe not. I'm sure that she would have gone back if she had a door that could take her there.

Lady Shia inspected the bear doors in the room and tried to open them.

“Huh? It’s not opening...”

She pushed and pulled, but they wouldn’t budge.

“Lady Shia, you can’t open those,” I told her.

“Really?”

“Yuna said that only she can open them. That’s why monsters can’t come in and why this place is guaranteed to be safe.” Even bandits or scary people wouldn’t be able to open them.

“Then what if the wall gets broken?”

Lady Shia started to beat on the wall next to the door.

“I don’t think that you can break them.”

“This room really is sturdy.”

It wasn’t sturdy—it was just a basement. There was probably just more dirt beyond the wall. That was why I was pretty sure that it wouldn’t break no matter how much we hit it. I still felt bad about lying to Lady Shia.

“But there aren’t any windows so we can’t see what’s going on outside. Even if we’re safe here, I feel a little worried that we don’t know what’s going on out there.”

Naturally, there were no windows—it was a basement.

Lady Shia gave up opening the door and joined us at the table again.

“Kumakyu will let us know if anything happens, so we should be fine.”

"You're right. Kumakyu would let us know if monsters come near us."

"Cwoom," Kumakyu replied to Lady Shia. I guess that translates to "Leave it to me," or something?

Unlike Yuna, I couldn't understand Kumakyu. I was jealous Yuna could understand Kumayuru and Kumakyu. I wished I spoke bear.

"Yuna's house is so full of bear stuff. Even the doors are decorated with bears. She hates being teased about it and it seems she's embarrassed about dressing like one."

"I think maybe she likes bears and just doesn't like people making fun of her."

"Well, if you put it like that, I guess it makes sense. But I've never seen anyone who likes bears that much. Is that how she got bear summons?"

It might have been. Her house was filled with bears and she had bear-shaped magical gadgets that helped her talk with people from far away. And Yuna's carriage was shaped like a bear too. She just *had* to love bears.

Lady Shia seemed to feel better the more we talked. I glanced at Shuri and noticed she wasn't with Kumakyu anymore and had opened the refrigerator.

"Shuri?"

"Fina, there's pudding and cake in here. Do you think I can have some?" Shuri seemed to really want it.

We were so concentrated on the monsters while Shuri was like *this*. She really didn't understand the danger we were in. If Yuna said that if she ever needed to use this room, it was absolutely vital to keep everyone calm. Well, that was taking care of itself in Shuri's case.

"I think it should be all right. But don't overeat."

"Okay!"

Shuri pulled out some cake and pudding, then started to eat off of Kumakyu's back like they were a table. I hoped she wouldn't spill any on Kumakyu.

"Shuri, is there enough for me?"

"Yeah."

Lady Shia also pulled out some cake from the refrigerator after seeing Shuri get some.

"Fina, do you want some?" Lady Shia politely asked me.

"Yes. Thank you very much."

She was nice enough to bring some cake for me as well.

I couldn't let them see me worried, so I also ate the cake with Lady Shia. It was really good, of course. But was it really okay for us to relax like this while Yuna was back on that island alone with all those monsters...?

"Do you think Yuna's okay?" Lady Shia murmured as she ate the cake.

"Yuna is strong. I'm sure it'll be okay."

I couldn't make Lady Shia or Shuri worried by saying anything bad.

"Yuna is very strong despite her strange taste," Lady Shia said. "She was amazing when she defeated the black tiger. Then she fought one hundred wolves all by herself."

She also fought tigerwolves, a black viper, a goblin king, and scorpions too. Yuna was so amazing.

"I think Yuna will come back to us no matter what."

"Yes, that's right. She could defeat a black tiger, so she must. I'm sure we don't have to worry about any volkrows with her."

"Lady Shia, are volkrows powerful?" I'd never heard much about them, so I wasn't sure.

"Hmm. They're dangerous for normal people, but I think someone as powerful as Yuna wouldn't be in danger. She can fight with a sword and magic too. And she defeated the knight captain Lord Lutum. She should be able to handle some volkrows."

If I remembered correctly, Lord Lutum was the knight that Yuna fought at the academy festival. That match had been spectacular. Yuna looked so cool!

"Still, it's so boring being stuck in this room," Lady Shia murmured after a while. We didn't have much to do after eating the desserts.

"Oh, there's games here."

Shuri pulled some games out from a box on a shelf. She'd found Othello and some playing cards. I'd totally forgotten that Yuna said to play with these if we didn't have anything to do. When people sit and stare at the wall, their minds tend to go somewhere really negative. Playing a game would be a good distraction for all of us.

Good job, Shuri.

"Those are playing cards, right?" We played together when I was in the capital once before.

"I've never seen that before though."

"That's called Othello. Let's play, Shia," Shuri said.

"All right, but could you teach me how to play?"

"Yeah."

Shuri started to teach Lady Shia the rules of Othello.

"That seems easy enough. Then let's compete for a round."

The games began.

Clack, clack clack. Two white pieces became black ones.

Clack, clack clack clack clack. Four black pieces flipped into white pieces.

The black bear pieces turned into white bear pieces. It was such an overwhelming victory that we didn't even need to count to see who'd won.

"Aw, lost again..."

“Kumakyu, I won!” Shuri happily hugged Kumayuru after winning against Lady Shia.

“I lost against you, Fina, and now I’ve lost against Shuri too.”

“That’s just because it’s your first time playing, Lady Shia. Shuri and I play with the orphans. We know all the tricks to Othello.”

“This game looks simple, but it’s fun because of how many strategies there are. You could let the other person take pieces to get them back later, sacrifice some, or focus on getting the sides. You have to think a lot in order to win.”

“And trying to just get as many pieces as possible won’t necessarily mean you’ll win.”

“Did Yuna make this too?”

“Yes, she said it’s for the kids to play with. I don’t really understand what she meant after that, but she said it would be good to help them learn how to think.”

Yuna said that it was a good game to help you learn what others were thinking. She was right. You had to imagine where the person would put their next piece and think about where to put yours after. And if they put it in a place you didn’t expect, that was a fun surprise.

And there was also a game with the playing cards where you added and subtracted numbers. Everyone wanted to play together so we all worked hard to learn how to add and subtract. That was why all the kids in the orphanage could do simple arithmetic.

“It really does make you think. You can’t win without thinking. If you want to win, you really have to put your mind to it.”

According to Yuna, practicing how to think when you were young would make thinking easier in the long run. She wanted us to become people who could think for ourselves instead of just following directions. And she said being able to think was crucial for survival.

She also told us picture books helped with learning how to read. The headmistress, Liz, and Neaf would read to the kids, so they would naturally learn. There were lots of picture books at the orphanage, but the most popular ones were the ones Yuna made about the bear. I was embarrassed though, since I was in the books too. I wondered if she’d write more of them.

While I was thinking, Lady Shia said, "Fina, Shuri, let's have another round."

"Sure."

"Okay!"

They forgot all about Yuna while they focused on Othello. I'm sure they would start worrying again if she took much longer, so I hoped she would come home soon.

Once we were done playing both games, Lady Shia looked at the door.

"Yuna sure is taking a while. Do you think she's okay? Kumakyu, how's everything outside?" Her anxiety showed a little more on her face, now. Maybe Lady Shia had been protecting Shuri.

"Cwoom."

Somehow, we understood that Kumakyu was telling us that everything was okay though their croon.

"If you say so, Kumakyu. I guess she must be fine." Lady Shia seemed to think the same as me.

"I wish I could go outside, but the door won't budge."

"Yes, Yuna made it that way so even bandits couldn't come in."

"But if something were to happen to Yuna, how would we get out?"

We couldn't leave from that door, but we could from the hidden door. I still couldn't tell her that though.

"Uh, well..."

"It sounds like you know something, Fina."

"I'm sorry."

"Then let's play another round until Yuna comes back. I won't lose this time!" Lady Shia smiled and didn't press any further.

After that, we played Othello and cards again. Then, after a long, long while, the bear door opened.

CHAPTER 396

THE BEAR ESCAPES FROM THE ISLAND (DAY 4)

IT WAS A SLOG AND A HALF, but we defeated the wyvern. I probably don't need to say this, but an attacking wyvern was way harder to deal with than a sleeping one. I was really glad the other ones had been sleeping. If they'd been awake, that battle would have been a real pain.

I looked up at the sky and realized the long neck had disappeared.

"I guess it's done now?"

I used my skill a few times and checked over and over again, but I didn't find any of the previous monster signals. There weren't any new ones coming to us either. It looked like it was really over. Now I just needed to pick up these wyverns and then go get the others.

I thought of resting for a little, but Kumayuru crooned at me.

"What is it?"

Kumayuru was looking out to sea. I headed over in that direction, toward the shore and a nice breeze swept by. There was something odd about the ocean when I looked at it.

When I looked more closely, I realized that the whirlpools had disappeared, and the tides had shifted. The waves were moving to the right and left of the island. It was almost like a ship moving forward on a course. I opened up my bear map. The island was definitely moving and slowly gathering speed.

This was bad. If I waited too long, we'd end up far away from Mileela and getting back would be a headache. I needed to hurry. I decided to handle stowing the three krakens and the wyverns later and took off with Kumayuru following close behind me. There was just one thing I needed to check before leaving.

I ran as fast as I could to the cherry blossom tree. The tree was no longer glowing and

the bubbles had all disappeared. The fantastical sight we'd seen before was gone.

After checking out the vicinity of the tree, I set up a bear gate, which had been the only thing I'd wanted to do in this place. Then, I ran again and got back to Kryuna Halk's stone, where I took out and set down the same bear house as earlier.

I'd left everyone alone for a while. Shuri might have been crying, and there was a chance Shia would be anxious, and Fina, despite knowing them super well, probably wouldn't know what to do about it. They all might have been worried about me.

I headed into the bear house and to the room with the gate. Kumayuru followed close behind. Then I opened the door to the room where I'd left everyone. I was sure I'd find them all worried sick. But instead I saw...

"Agh! My black piece. Shuri, go easy on me. Please!"

"Yuna says that games aren't fun unless you take them seriously."

"I guess she has a point..." Shia had put her head down on the table. "And you're even better than Shuri, Fina. I can't win at all."

"But it was a good game. You're very fast at learning, Lady Shia."

I saw Othello and playing cards set up on the table: everyone seemed to be playing the former. They hadn't been fraying themselves with worry at all. While I was out there dodging wyverns, the three of them had been goofing around. I guess this was better than them being worried, but I wasn't sure I preferred it.

I was fighting wyverns, guys. Wyverns! It was a whole ding dang deal. They had no idea about the wyverns though, so it wasn't their fault, but it still made me feel sad. Kumakyu noticed me first and ran up to me.

"Kumakyu, I'm back," I said.

"Cwoom."

Looks like Kumakyu had been worried. My soul was restored. Of course! Kumayuru. My comfort and strength. I hugged Kumayuru and the others finally noticed I was back.

“Yuna!”

“Fina, I’m back. So, looks like you were all fine.”

“Ah, you’re back, Yuna,” Shia said. “We were so worried. And Fina said that only you can let us out.”

“It’s a safety mechanism,” I said. That was a lie. It just wouldn’t open without my bear puppets.

Shuri came over to give me a hug.

“I’m back, Shuri,” I told her.

“Yuna, welcome back,” she answered, and I gave her a pat on the head. Maybe she *had* been worried for me?

“Yuna, you’re not hurt, are you?”

“I’m not.”

“And Kumayuru?” Shuri asked Kumayuru directly. My bear crooned in response and nuzzled her to show her they were okay.

“I’m sorry for worrying you. Were you all right?”

“We were fine. We played games while you were gone.”

It looked like Fina had been working hard to keep everyone calm.

“Yuna, if you have multiples of this game, could I have one? I’d like to bring it home as a souvenir.”

“Sure,” I said.

“The pudding and cake were really good, Yuna.”

I saw half-eaten and finished cake and pudding cups on the table. They hadn’t seemed that worried. In fact, I kind of wanted to say something about it. Had they forgotten what was going on outside? It’s not like I wanted them pent up and crying for me. I

mean, not really.

"Yuna, is it safe outside?"

"That's right. Yuna... what happened to the monsters?!" Shia asked as though she'd just remembered.

"They're all gone, so it's safe now. But the island's moving, so we need to get off it soon," I said to urge them out the room.

"Wait a second. I'll clean first."

"That can wait for later. If we stay here, we won't know how to get back to Mileela, so we need to get off the island now."

I had my mapping skill, so we wouldn't get lost right now. Though, if we waited too long and got out of the map's range, even I wouldn't know which direction to go in.

It seemed like they'd finally gotten the message, and they all started getting ready to leave the room. Once they were out, I closed the gate, we left the bear house, and I put it away.

They were all looking at the coast since they'd filed out first.

"It's true. The island is moving."

"So, this island really was Talgwei then."

Since Talgwei's head was currently underwater, the three of them still weren't fully sure it was actually real.

"I'll explain later," I said. "Let's hurry and get off the island for now. Get on Kumayuru and Kumakyu!"

Fina and Shia got on Kumayuru and I got on Kumakyu with Shuri. The bears started running to the opposite end of the island. Since we were on the part of the island that was moving forward, we couldn't jump off without risking getting pulled under. So, we headed to what I thought was the back of Talgwei to escape.

Kumayuru and Kumakyu ran. Partway there, we passed by a wyvern body.

“A wyvern?”

They all seemed shocked when they saw that. There were also kraken carcasses, but they’d burned so they were unrecognizable.

“Yuna, what happened?” Shia asked.

“I’ll explain later. Right now, we need to focus on getting off the island.”

Once we were on the tip of the island, my bears leapt off and landed on the surface of the water. We’d successfully escaped the island.

“It’s leaving...!”

Even though my bears were just standing on the waves, Talgwei was heading off away from us. It probably wouldn’t be back here for years.

My bears ran off to Mileela with us on their backs.

“So. Those wyverns?” Shia said.

“It’s probably exactly what you think. Wyverns came by the island.”

“Then you fought them off?”

“I wanted to make sure we got off the island safely and I couldn’t let us take volkrows and wyverns with us to Mileela,” I explained.

We could have escaped through the bear gate, but these monsters attacked thinking Kumayuru was food. Just imagine what might have happened if a boat had passed by. I never would have been able to end our trip and go home to Crimonia worry-free.

“So, while we were safe and playing in the room, you were fighting for us? You really are always saving us.”

“It’s my role to protect you three.”

If the worst were to happen to the three of them, I don’t know what I’d do.

“It’s too bad though. We know Talgwei, a literal legendary creature, is real, but we can’t

research anything about it.”

“That’s probably for the best. Kryuna Halk also said he didn’t want people to know about Talgwei. We were trusted with the book because we’re supposed to be good people and we need to honor that trust. We need to keep this a secret between us.”

“Ugh. I wasn’t able to call the book...”

“I think that you’ll be able to if you can feed enough mana into it. Or maybe it’s because you’ve been planning to break your promise...”

“That’s not true at all!” Shia said. “I wouldn’t spread it. I’m sure it just needed more mana, like you said.”

It sounded like she didn’t want to feel like she was a bad person. Well, we would never know which it was, the mana or her character.

“Please keep it a secret too,” I said to Fina and Shuri.

“I will.”

“Okay, but what will we do since we’ve been out? I’m sure Lady Noa has noticed by now.”

I actually would have liked to leave a little earlier, but now the sun was sinking in the sky. It was true. Noa would definitely realize we’d been missing.

“Then let’s keep Kryuna Halk and the monsters a secret, but we can say we went to explore a nearby island.”

“That seems like it could work.”

“But you’ll need to explain why you didn’t take Noa, Yuna,” Shia told me.

“I was thinking you could, as her older sister.”

“I couldn’t. She’ll start interrogating me since she’ll think I was prancing around having the time of my life with you and Kumayuru and Kumakyu. So please help me.”

Well, Shia was the one who’d said she wanted to come with me. But they were going

to keep this a secret, so maybe I could at least do that for her. If I left it to the three of them, they might accidentally tell my secrets. That would be bad.

“Okay, okay. I’ll handle the excuse, so you all just don’t talk about this.”

“Yes.”

“Yeah.”

“I’ve got it.”

It’d been a *day*, but somehow, we’d made it off the island in one piece.

CHAPTER 397

THE BEAR DECIDES TO MAKE PRESSED FLOWERS (DAY 4)

WE GOT BACK TO THE SHORE we'd started from, then headed back to the town gate still riding my bears. The guard started talking to us when we got there.

"Miss, you're awfully late! I was a little worried."

"We were having so much fun, we lost track of time."

The sun was setting. We'd done more than the exploring I'd planned for—monsters had appeared too, so we were back late. I was just glad we got back before it was night.

After we were done talking to the guard, we headed to the swim area where the kids had been, but they were all gone. It was deserted except for the shack and the waterslide.

"No one's here."

"It looks like they already went back home."

We headed to the bear house. There were lights on and when we got inside, we found the headmistress along with several of the kids in the first-floor dining room.

Delicious smells wafted in from the kitchen in the back. It seemed like Morin and Anz and the others were cooking.

"Welcome back, Yuna," the headmistress said.

"It's good to be home," I replied. "Was everything all right?"

"Yes, all the kids enjoyed their play time today. Though, Miss Noa was looking for all of you."

I knew it.

"Um... did she say anything else?"

"Well, she seemed a bit upset."

The headmistress seemed a little unwilling to talk more about it.

"Even with me?" Shia pointed at herself.

"Yes, she did have some choice words about you, as well as Fina. She said that you'd been unfair."

"Me too?" Fina looked troubled.

I could easily imagine Noa pouting and upset.

"And where is Noa now?"

"I believe she went back to her room."

It seemed like I'd need to go and smooth things over. The four of us turned to the stairs to head up when Tiermina came down.

"Oh, Fina, Shuri. You're back?"

"Mom, we just got home."

"I'm home!"

Fina ran over to Tiermina and Shuri hugged her.

"You're late. Did you go off somewhere?"

"Uh, well..."

"It's a secret."

They were marvelous secret-keepers and terrible liars.

"Oh, another secret? From your own mom?"

"We promised Yuna."

Tiermina patted Shuri on the head as she looked at me.

"You didn't teach them anything bad, did you?"

"Bad like what?" I asked. "We just went to explore a nearby island for a bit." I wasn't lying.

"An island? Really?" Tiermina checked in with Fina and Shuri.

"Yeah." They both looked at me and nodded. Since we hadn't talked synced our stories, they didn't know how much they could say.

"Then why is it a secret?"

"Because... it'd be bad... if other kids knew... and wanted to go too?" I mean, it was true that the other kids might've asked to go, not just Noa.

"I suppose it would be a hassle if everyone decided they wanted to join in." Tiermina seemed to have accepted my excuse. "So, was the island fun?"

"Uh-huh, the apples were good."

"Apples?"

"Yeah." Shuri nodded.

"And also, the flowers were so pretty."

"Flowers?" Tiermina listened with a smile as Shuri hopped from one subject to another. I'm glad their family got along so well.

"Oh, right. We have a gift. Fina, can you show her?" Shuri said, and as though she'd just remembered, Fina pulled the flowers out of her item bag. Were those the ones that were blooming on Talgwei? There'd been such a commotion, but Fina apparently had the sense to put the flowers away that they'd picked.

"Oh, are these for me?"

"Yeah."

"We both picked them."

"Thank you so much. They're beautiful." Tiermina happily took the flowers from Fina.

"There were lots of really pretty flowers there." Shuri jabbered away as though she'd forgotten all about the monsters.

I'd rather she remember the flowers than the monsters, certainly. She was a really tough kid, like Fina.

"I wish I could have seen too," Tiermina said while looking at the flowers. "I'll put these in my room later."

I wondered if we had something tasteful she could use in this house, like a vase. I mean, I'm all about bear necessities, not so much the extraneous, flowery stuff. I didn't have anything we could show off flowers in since I didn't have much interest in girly things like that, so I didn't even have anything in my bear storage.

I could make a vase out of earth magic.

"They really are beautiful flowers though. It's too bad they'll wilt in a few days."

Not much we could do about that. Flowers just don't last long. If we had a camera, we could have taken a picture to keep, but those didn't exist in this world. Even if I drew a picture of them it wouldn't be a present from Shuri and Fina anymore.

I thought for a bit and thought of a good idea.

"Then how about we make pressed flowers?"

"Pressed flowers?" Shuri seemed confused. Maybe she hadn't heard of them.

But someone else said, "Maybe I'll make pressed flowers too." It seemed Shia had heard of them since she was agreeing with my proposal. Maybe pressed flowers were an upper-class thing in this world?

“Yuna, what are pressed flowers?”

“To put it simply, you put flowers in a flat object like a book and dry them out and flatten them. They’ll keep for a long time that way and then you can put them in a picture frame. They’re also really pretty when they’re used as decoration.”

I’d made them in elementary school, so I knew the process well enough. I could make them as long as no one was expecting pro quality or anything.

“As long as they’re made right, they won’t wilt. They might fade just a little, though.”

You had to get all the moisture out of them or they’d end up spoiling. We just needed a desiccant for it to work. I’d seen some sold in this world already. And to keep them from fading, you needed to keep them out of the air, so the way to do that was to seal them away. There were other little details, but it all seemed doable.

“Then shall we make them at home? I think I have the things I need to do it. Oh, but will the flowers keep until then?”

“I can keep the flowers with me. They won’t wilt in my item bag.”

“Yours was special, right, Yuna?”

They’d stay just the way they were in the bear storage.

“Shuri, what would you like to do?”

“They won’t wilt?”

“They’ll keep,” I said.

“Okay then. You can keep them with you,” Shuri said, so Tiermina handed the flowers over to me. I grabbed them in my bear puppet mouth and stored them away.

“Yuna, could I ask you to do the same for mine?” Shia had also been picking flowers. They were all so girly.

“Yeah. Fina, I can store flowers for you too, if you have any.”

“Thank you.”

I took Shia and Fina's flowers and stored them away.

Looks like we'd have a pressed-flower makin' sesh once we were back in Crimonia.

"Oh, Yuna, you're back."

"She really is."

While we were talking about pressed flowers, Noa and Misa had come downstairs. When they spotted me, they ran over.

"Where were you, Yuna? I can't believe you'd leave without a word. If you're going somewhere, bring me along."

"Sorry, I was planning on leaving on my own, but they all caught me and begged to tag along."

Plus Kumayuru and Kumakyu were already at capacity. Noa and Misa were small, so it was theoretically possible we'd be able to squeeze three people per bear. If Marina and Elle had insisted on going too, though, we would have been way overcapacity.

"That's so unfair, you two," Noa said to Fina and Shia.

"I agree," Misa chimed in.

They were both pouting. How cute.

"We weren't trying to ditch you two out though."

"Really? It wasn't because you thought we would get in the way?"

"If I thought that, I'd never have brought you to Mileela. I really had been planning on going alone."

I looked at the three.

"I went with Shuri to take her to the bathroom and caught Yuna on the way out," Fina explained.

"Yuna said she was going out when I came out of the bathroom," Shuri said next.

"I was getting a drink, so I saw Yuna trying to sneak out," Shia explained.

"That's what you were up to while we were playing? Ugh, invite us next time."

It seemed like she wasn't actually that mad. I think she felt more disappointed she'd been left out. Well, that tugged on my heartstrings a little.

"So, where did you run off to then?"

"To explore a nearby island. I was wondering if there were any interesting ones nearby."

We'd already established with Tiermina that we'd gone to an island, so telling them this wasn't an issue. Plus, if we tried to hide everything, they'd get really suspicious and start to dig.

"You explored an island? Yuna, you don't mean the moving one, do you?!" She was sharp.

"No." I couldn't tell her the truth.

"I see then. I was so convinced you'd go actually." She knew me too well. "Then I'd like to also go to the island you went to."

"I wish I could, but there were monsters on it, so I can't take anyone there." That part was true.

"Really?! It was dangerous? Well, I suppose everyone would have been all right since you were there, Yuna."

"We were hiding in Yuna's house, so it was fine. Then Yuna just did her usual thing and got rid of the monsters," Shia followed up.

"Wow. That's just like you, Yuna. I suppose I can't say I want to go somewhere with monsters. I'd only give you trouble by forcing you to protect me. And Mother and Father would be so upset if they found out."

I was actually impressed she didn't say that the monsters weren't an issue because Marina, Elle, and I would be her bodyguards. It seemed like she had a good head on her shoulders.

“But I think you were still very late coming back.”

“There were some pretty flowers, so we took a short break.” I took out the flowers I was storing for everyone. “Once we’re back in Crimonia, we’ll press them. Want to help?”

“Pressing flowers?”

“You dry out the flowers. If you do it well, they’re very pretty.”

“Yes, I’ll help. Please don’t leave me out this time.” Noa seemed happy about the proposal.

“Misa, you should join once we return to Crimonia.”

“Yes, I’ll ask Grandfather.”

Both Noa and Misa seemed to be in a better mood and started telling us about playing on the waterslide with the orphans while we were gone. I was happy all the kids were getting along.

Then the adults in the kitchen brought out dinner and line the tables with the meal, and we dug in.

CHAPTER 398

THE BEAR RETURNS TO THE ISLAND (DAY 4)

“THANK YOU for prepping the bath.”

Since we’d gotten in late, Noa, Misa, Marina, Elle, and Rulina had gotten the bath ready.

“It was a promise, after all.”

Today, the kids and others were getting in first, then Fina and Shuri with Tiermina, and finally, I’d go last. Noa and Misa were coming along with me though.

“You should have taken one first since you cleaned things, Noa,” I said.

“I haven’t gotten to talk with you much since getting to Mileela,” she replied.

I guess she had a point. We weren’t hanging out together on the first day and the second day we were off doing our own things, and the third we went our separate

ways too. Even though I’d told her I would spend time with her in the afternoon, I’d been down and resting instead and headed off to Talgwei in the end.

“So I’d like to talk, even for a little bit,” she said.

“Me too,” Misa said.

“Sorry about all that,” I told them.

“But you promised that you’d spend time with me tomorrow, so I’ll forgive you.”

Because of everything that’d happened today, I’d promised to spend tomorrow with Noa and the others.

“Right, didn’t you say you spent the morning looking around town? Did you learn anything?”

"Yes, we saw many things we've never seen before and learned so much."

Misa nodded in agreement with Noa.

"When I saw things that I've never seen at home before, I felt like it would be nice if we had those things too."

In order to understand something like that, you had to be aware of what things were offered in your own hometown. In other words, Noa and Misa were aware of that. Noa often told me with a smile that taking walks around town was part of her education. I guess that she'd been telling the truth, as the daughter of the town's lord.

"I can walk around outside thanks to you, Yuna, so it's been ever so much fun lately," Misa said, seeming just as happy.

Until just a bit ago, Misa's grandfather, Gran, had been governing the town with that silly family. Since the silly nobles hadn't liked Misa's family, the son had been harassing Misa. But then, after all was said and done, the family was broken up and Gran took the fall for everything, so he handed things over to his son, Leonardo. Now Misa's parents managed the town.

I was glad I'd done something to protect her so she could smile now.

That night, while everyone slept, I headed through the bear gate to Talgwei.

When I opened the door, it was pitch black. There were no streetlights here, so only the moon and the stars lit the way. I cast a spell to create my own light, illuminating my surroundings with a bear-shaped light.

"Kumayuru, Kumakyu," I said. "Let's go."

They both crooned at me. My bears, at normal size, stepped through the threshold of the gate and followed me.

After making sure my bears were all the way through the gate, I closed the doors from the Talgwei side and put it away. I'd set the gate up in a hurry earlier, so I wanted to set it up properly this time.

I looked at the cherry blossom tree. It wasn't glowing, which made me a little disappointed. The illumination of the blossoms probably would have been beautiful in the middle of the night. Then again, monsters would have approached if that happened, and I wouldn't have been able to do much flower viewing.

Anyway, I went to retrieve the wyverns I'd defeated. Since I'd gone through all that trouble, it just seemed like a waste to leave them there.

I was pretty sure they were around here. Since Talgwei was moving, pulling up my map wouldn't have accomplished much. So, I kept an eye on my surroundings as I relied on memory to get me to the wyverns. The island looked different at night compared to the day, so I wasn't really sure where I was though. Most importantly, the biggest issue was that I couldn't see that far ahead of me.

"Kumayuru and Kumakyu, do you know where I battled the wyverns?"

They both crooned.

I conjured up lights above my bears as well. The bear-shaped lights floated above them as they walked. The lights followed. Kumayuru and Kumakyu were even walking in the same direction, so apparently they knew their way around better than me.

I silently followed from behind until we found the wyverns. Since there were no monsters or beasts on the island, they'd remained untouched since their slaying. I retrieved all of them, and now the krakens were all that was left, even though I'd burned them up.

I had my bears take me to them and I found the limp, scorched carcasses, which looked kind of weird.

Hmm. They didn't seem like they'd offer useful materials. In a game, you could fight monsters however you liked and would still get drops, but that didn't seem to apply in real life. Anyway, it was my fault for burning them like this without another thought.

I didn't really want to store them in my bear storage like this either. But I couldn't leave them like this or they might attract monsters. Thinking about it, maybe it made the most sense to throw them out to sea?

"But I do want their mana gems. What to do...?"

As I muttered to myself, my bears crooned and then charged straight at the kraken.

“Kumayuru! Kumakyu!”

They were both already inside the kraken corpse by the time I called their names. After a while, they came out holding a mana gem.

“Um... thank you both. But I’m going to recall you really quick.”

There were kraken bits all over them. After recalling them and summoning them back again, they both came back nice and clean. This feature was pretty useful. I was glad there weren’t summoning limits like in a game. Some games were like that, after all.

Then I used magic to toss the krakens into the sea.

After retrieving the wyverns and kraken gems, I headed to Kryuna Halk’s stone. I didn’t have his book right now—well, more like, it’d disappeared on me. At the very end, the wyverns had come and I’d unconsciously put his book into my bear storage. Then when I checked my storage in Mileela just earlier, I discovered the book was missing.

Once I got to the stone, I touched it and imbued it with mana. Like the last time, the stone glowed and the book returned to me. It seemed the book really would return to the stone no matter what. I panicked when I couldn’t find it in my storage earlier, but it seemed that it’d return just fine on its own.

I wondered how it worked though. I decided to test it out.

These are the things I’ve determined about Kryuna Halk’s book: The stone monument is its center and, after traveling a certain amount of distance, the book disappears. This meant that it wouldn’t disappear out on the sea as long as I was within range. Since the stone was near the front of the island, the book would disappear when going toward the back.

Using the bear gate, the book would continue to exist as long as the gate was open, but once it was closed, the book would disappear. It’d disappear from the bear storage too after I was out of range.

It seemed to me like the stone and book were connected by invisible mana that would make the book disappear after a certain range was reached. The book would also disperse into particles when it disappeared. It looked a lot like something from a game. It was kind of similar to a weapon made from mana in the way it disappeared. There was even a possibility the book was made of my own mana. That might have been why the book would only show up if you had enough mana. That seemed consistent with everything else.

Then again, this was all just me speculating.

Still, it seemed to me that Kryuna Halk was pretty amazing to have created something like this. I hadn't been intending to check on these things in the middle of the night, but I was so curious, I couldn't help myself.

I'd started getting sleepy, so I decided to set up a bear gate and go home. I really wanted to set one up near the stone, but I also wanted to make a bear house and there was a possibility ships would see it if it was too close to the shore. So, I wanted to set one up closer to the center of the island instead.

It seemed too dark to find a good spot, so I thought of coming back in the daytime.

"Kumayuru, Kumakyu, do you know of any inconspicuous places near the stone?" I asked, as a last resort. There was a possibility they'd find one like they'd found the wyverns. But all they did was croon and shake their heads.

Right. It's not like they could lead me to a place they themselves had never been to before. I started walking toward the cherry blossom tree. Then, I spotted a little trail I hadn't seen during the daytime. I wondered whether there was something this way.

I headed down the small trail and arrived at a slightly open area. Hm? I threw my magical light forward. A decrepit house appeared in the light of the bear.

Maybe someone had lived here? Maybe Kryuna Halk or another person from the past had used this place. It was surrounded by trees so it was difficult to spot, but the space was somewhat open and I could even see the sky. Sunlight would probably stream down during the day.

I decided to set my bear house up here. I pulled out my traveling house and set it up beside the decaying one. I was kind of running low on bear houses. I'd need to make a bunch again sometime. Making the outside was easy, but I had to buy the furniture for

the inside. I also had to set up the same little details, like the bath and stuff, for all of them, so it was more efficient to make them all at once. Next time, I'd probably make about ten of them. And maybe I'd make them in big, medium, and small sizes too.

I headed into the bear house and used the bear gate to return to the bear house in Mileela. With that, I'd finished up my work at Talgwei and I could just explore when I had some time.

I was looking forward to seeing where Talgwei went next. It was too bad I couldn't choose where to go, but I could pretend it was like a game event, which meant I had something new to look forward to. I hoped Talgwei would go somewhere far away.

I dozed off with my miniaturized bears.

CHAPTER 399

THE BEAR EATS ICE CREAM (DAY 5)

THINGS HAD BEEN HECTIC yesterday because of Talgwei, but it was an experience I could have only gotten on this world. I'd been tired, but because I spent the night in my white bear onesie, I'd fully recovered all my energy.

Our trip continued and the fifth day of our employee vacation had begun, and a new day meant choosing a new bathing suit.

I really wished I could have just spent all day rolling around at home doing nothing, but I'd already promised Noa and Misa that I'd spend the day with them, so no chance of that happening.

Fina and Shuri were hanging out with their parents at the beach. They'd spent their time with me yesterday, so they said they were handing me over to Noa and Misa. It wasn't like I was an object that they owned though...

"Haaah..." I sighed, resigning myself to it all, and decided to pick out a suit.

The first time, I'd worn that bikini Fina had chosen, and the second was that one-piece, so today I was going to pick out a third one. I personally thought that I could've just worn the same bathing suit each time, but Sherry told me she was looking forward to which one I would wear next, so I couldn't do that. I picked out a black-and-white two-piece suit (not a bikini). Compared to the actual bikini and one-piece suit, it felt the most understated.

After I got changed, I put my bear onesie on over it.

"Have you finished changing, Yuna?" Noa asked from outside the room.

"A-all done," I called out.

Noa, Misa, and Shia, already in their suits, sprang in through the door.

"Why are you in your bear outfit?"

“You’re a bear.”

“Aren’t you swimming?”

“I’m wearing it underneath.”

I was so embarrassed though. It was a slight trek from the bear house to the beach and I wanted to shorten the time I was wearing the suit, even if only by a little bit.

Also, Marina and Elle weren’t with Misa today since they were out on their own free time. Marina had wanted to stay because it was a job, but Misa was having none of it. I think she was trying to be nice to them, so I was protecting her today, and that finally convinced Marina and Elle to go.

After Misa’s mandatory order for them to take a vacation, the two of them had told us they’d be at the Adventurers’ Guild and had reluctantly gone off. They were headed there to exchange information with other adventurers rather than for new jobs. Hearing what was going around town got them a sense of what was happening in the region, so it was apparently fundamental for adventurers to drop by a guild when they got to new places.

They’d talk about what kinds of monsters and jobs were in the area—and other stuff like that. You could apparently find out what state a town was in by checking out the jobs around, too. If there were a lot of monster-slaying quests, that meant that were lots of monster outbreaks as well. You could even tell if a town had a bandit problem, and the escort quests could tell you about how trade was going and the danger level of the area.

According to Noa, the kind of info you could get through the guild was very valuable to the governing lord, which was probably why Cliff and the guild master spent so much time together and were so close. On the other hand, if they weren’t, then the lord wouldn’t get information they needed and they’d potentially end up in a horrible situation like Gran’s. It seemed information was valuable in any world.

I took Noa, Misa, and Shia with me over to the beach.

“We’re spending the day with Yuna.”

Noa and Misa were riding on my bears. Shia and I followed after them.

Once we got to the beach, we found the kids were already playing. Some were off in the ocean swimming, others were racing in the water, playing in the sand, or making use of the waterslide. I saw Fina around with her entire family too. They all looked like they were enjoying themselves.

“Yuna, let’s hurry and get going too.” Noa tugged my hand.

“We should stretch first,” I said. It’d be horrible if anyone’s leg cramped and they drowned. So, they all stretched like I asked them to.

“So, Yuna, what should we do?”

Personally, if anything goes, I actually would have preferred to sleep the day away.

“You’re not thinking ‘this is a pain’ right now, are you, Yuna?”

“N-Not at all.”

Since when was she a mind reader?

“Really? Then let’s go for a swim. Misa, Shia, are you okay with that too?”

“Yes, I’d like to show Yuna how well I can swim.”

“I’m up for that too.”

“Okay, Yuna, time to get that bear costume off.”

I reluctantly pulled off my onesie.

I wondered why I felt so embarrassed undressing despite the fact that I knew I was wearing a swimsuit underneath. Maybe it was because I hadn’t been to a pool since elementary school? It was probably because I hadn’t had much experience with this.

“You’re wearing a new suit today.”

“Sherry made a bunch for me, but they’re all so cute and don’t look good on me, so I feel a little embarrassed wearing them.”

"Is that why you were wearing your bear clothes out here? It's okay though since all the suits look great on you."

"Yes, I agree. I think you look really pretty."

"It's hard to tell normally since you're always wearing your bear clothes, but you're so slight and pretty."

They all gave me a once-over.

"You're embarrassing me, so don't stare like that. Also, you two are so much cuter, and Shia, I'd say you're the one who's actually pretty."

Noa was wearing a blue suit, Misa had a green one on, and they were both bikinis with frills on them. Shia was wearing a red bikini that made her look grown-up.

"Ha ha ha. How can you say all that when you're always dressed in your cute bear clothes?"

I guess she considered my bear onesie embarrassing then.

"It's because I'm used to the bear look," I replied.

"Then you'll get used to wearing that swimsuit too. Let's go and have some fun. Sherry must really like you if she's made so many suits for you, Yuna."

"I think she was just having fun making them," I said, since Sherry herself had admitted as much.

"She enjoyed making them because she was doing it for someone she cares for. She never would have enjoyed making a suit for someone she didn't, and I doubt she would have made multiple either."

"I agree," Misa chimed in, agreeing with Noa. Well, now that the two of them mentioned it, I guess I agreed. I'd feel the same about making food for others—if I liked someone, I'd be happy cooking tons for them but not so much for people I didn't care about.

I put the bear clothes away in my bear storage and left the one remaining white bear puppet I had left with my bears. Then, they headed off to the beach shack and would

bring it to me if there was an emergency.

Now that I was fully in my suit, Noa and Misa tugged my hands as Shia pushed me from behind into the ocean.

It felt nice and cool.



Noa and Shia splashed me, so I formed a tag team with Misa and fought them back. Then I watched Noa and Misa swim, and we played on the waterslide. Like every time, I reached my limit and collapsed in the beach shack.

Kids were *so* energetic...

"I'm tired too."

"Yes, we've played tons."

"I'm also tired, though maybe not as much as Yuna is."

Despite claiming all that, all three of them were in better shape than me.

"It sure is hot today."

It was nice out today. The rays were a little strong though and we had to drink plenty of fluids. While everyone was taking a water break, Fina's family also came in for one too.

"I'm so thirsty!"

"Water!"

Two of them pulled water out of the fridge and chugged it down with relish.

"It really is hot."

Both Tiermina and Gentz were wearing suits too. It seemed Sherry had made some for them.

Seeing how hot everyone was, I remembered the ice cream.

I hadn't forgotten it, but the time never seemed right to bring it out. The first day, the fishermen had all come by, the second was the boat ride and the visits I'd made. Yesterday, I'd made the waterslide and headed off to the moving island, so there just hadn't been a good chance to serve the ice cream.

Now seemed perfect though.

"Fina, could I borrow you for a moment?" I asked as Fina was still drinking water.

"What is it?"

"I was thinking we could have the ice cream, so could you get all the kids on the beach to come over? Plus, I think they need a break anyway."

There were probably some kids who were playing but hadn't taken a water break. I thought it'd be a good idea to get all of them to take one together in that case.

"Okay, I will. I'll go call them over now."

Fina finished her water in one gulp and headed over to get the kids playing at the beach.

"Yuna, what's an 'eyes creem'?" Noa asked as she rested with me.

"It's like a cold treat. I made some because the beach can be hot, and ice cream is refreshing," I told Noa, then all the kids Fina and Shuri called came over to the shack.

"Yuna, what's this about a cold treat?"

"First, take a water break," I told them.

"We wiiill!"

All the kids headed to the fridge and started drinking. Every single one of them had been sunburned. I guess that showed how much they'd been playing on the beach.

While they were drinking water, I pulled out a freezer from my bear storage. Fina and Shuri had come back, so I asked them to help me hand out the ice cream cups and spoons.

"It's cold." Noa looked at the cup as she was handed one. "So this is the 'eye creem'?"

"The *ice cream*. It's a treat you eat when it's warm out. It'll melt though, so hurry and eat it."

I also got some for myself and ate some in front of Noa.

It melted right on top of my tongue. Noa mimicked me and scooped the ice cream, then popped the morsel in her mouth. In that moment, a smile spread across her face.

“It’s cold. It’s melting in my mouth. It’s so good.” Noa started chowing down.

“I thought the same when you made your puddings and cakes too, but you always come up with the most curious ideas for food, Yuna,” Misa said.

“I’ve never had anything as delicious as this before, not even at the capital.” Shia, actual aristocrat, said something I had trouble believing as she ate the ice cream.

“If even aristocrats like you don’t know about it, it must be really rare.”

“That’s right, I haven’t heard of it before.”

“I’ve never tried this before.”

Maybe it would sell well like Tiermina had said? It wasn’t like I needed the money though... though actually, I could save up to build a castle? I thought about it for a moment, then realized I didn’t need one.

While the kids were enjoying their treat, the actual cooks were seeing things from another angle.

“Yuna, what is this?”

“It seems to be made from milk?”

“Mm, and eggs too?”

Nerin, Karin, and Anz started questioning me.

“I guess if you simplify it to its base parts, then yeah, it’s made from milk and eggs. I made it with Fina before we left on the trip.”

“I helped too!” Shuri pouted slightly when I only mentioned Fina.

“You’re right. Shuri also helped.” I praised her while tousling her hair as someone else started to raise a protest:

“Wh-why do you never invite *me* when you make things?!”

I heard Noa mumble that she wished we had included her.

“When I thought of making it, Fina and Shuri were at my house, so they just helped out.”

I’d also nabbed Tiermina, so we’d made it all as a four-person team.

“Yuna, are you going to sell this at the bakery?” Morin asked as she ate.

“Tiermina asked too, but I don’t have plans to.”

“I see. I think it’d sell pretty well if you did though,” Nerin said while still eating.

“If we did, you’d be making it, Nerin.”

“Me?!” Nerin seemed surprised by that.

“Yeah, since ice cream is a type of dessert. You need to use cream for it. Oh, and then there’s ice-cream cake. If we make any, you’d be the one in charge, I think. I can teach you if we do go through with it.”

Nerin seemed conflicted about that. “Are you sure?”

“I don’t need to hide the recipe and I think if we did sell it, it’d only be a summer only thing. If we make it, we’d whip up a large batch and leave it in the freezer. It’d keep for a while, and it’s easier than cakes.”

“Hmm, a cake with ice cream in it...”

“We have time, so just think it over.”

“All right.”

If we were making ice cream for the bakery, it might make things easier on me since I wouldn’t have to make it anymore.

While I was thinking that, my eyes met Noa’s and saw her empty cup.

“Yuna, one more please!”

“I have more, but I’m afraid we’re limited to one per day,” I told her, and she and others made all sorts of dissatisfied noises.

“Aww.”

“I want more...”

“I wanna eat another one!”

“Yuna, seconds!”

Apparently, no one thought one was enough, but I had to be merciless. “If you eat too much, it’ll be too cold for you and you’ll get a stomachache. This is all you’re allowed right now.”

Some of them practically screamed when they heard that. The headmistress and Liz swooped to the rescue and smoothed things over. They were a lot more successful talking to the kids, of course, and everyone started listening to what I’d said.

After the kids were done, they headed to the waterslide and I saw them off.

CHAPTER 400

THE BEAR LETS LOCAL KIDS PLAY (DAY 5)

THE KIDS WHO'D FINISHED their ice cream were excitedly enjoying their playtime. I planned to keep my promise with Noa into the afternoon, but I was still so done in, I took a short break. I sat on the sand and watched everyone chasing each other when Rulina came by.

"Yuna, do you have a moment?"

"Hm? Why?"

Had something happened?

"Look at those kids." She pointed behind me. I turned to see several looking over at us. They seemed like locals.

"I think they're interested in the waterslide you made. They've been staring at the bear this entire time, so I noticed them. I wanted to ask what we should do."

In other words, she was asking if I'd let them play on the slide.

"Would you go talk to them?" she asked.

"Me?"

"Well, you *are* famous in this town, aren't you?"

"I guess I kind of am..."

Since they'd heard of me, I guess I'd be less likely to scare them off compared to some adult they didn't know. But I looked myself over again. I was in my swimsuit. If I talked to them right now, they probably wouldn't realize who I was and I'd end up embarrassing myself when they asked.

"Then I'll go change."

“Why?”

“If I’m not in my bear outfit, they might not realize it’s me.”

Rulina stared at my suit.

“You might be right...”

I took my bear gear from my bears in the beach shack and dressed in my usual clothes before heading over to talk to the kids staring at the waterslide.

“Hello,” I said to them. There were five boys and girls, who seemed between the ages of seven and twelve.

“The bear?”

“The bear girl?”

I knew they’d recognize the bear suit. They never would have recognized me in the swimsuit.

“Did you want to play?”

“Yeah, it looks fun.”

I knew it.

I couldn’t go back and say no to them now.

“Then want to?”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah. But make sure you get along with the others. Also, it’d be dangerous if you fall, so can you promise not to horse around?”

“Yeah.”

“We can share when we play.”

“We won’t do anything dangerous.”

They all made promises with me.

I took them over and headed to the waterslide with them.

“Everyone, these kids are going to be joining you,” I said.

“Okay, that’s fine by me.”

“Sure!”

It seemed like the orphans weren’t going to say no.

The local kids happily dashed off to the slide.

“Thank you, Yuna. I wish I had have realized sooner to talk to them,” Rulina said and headed off to the slide herself.

All the kids were playing together just fine. Seemed like there wouldn’t be any issues.

Feeling relieved, I headed over to the edge of the water to play with Noa and the others.

“Okay, I’m serving, Yuna.”

A leather ball flew at me. I hit it back. I never would have thought I’d be playing a normie game like this.

“Yuna, you’re going so slow.”

Well, without my bear gear, I just had the body of a normal girl. My body wouldn’t do what my brain wanted it to and apparently wearing the bear gear for so long just exacerbated that.

I felt like my brain and body were one when I was wearing the bear gear. My body just moved the way I wanted it to when I did, but without it, I felt uncoordinated.

After running around too much, I was left tired, as usual.

“Are you okay, Yuna?”

“I’m pooped,” I said. “I can’t move anymore.”

I ended up collapsing at the beach shack, as usual, after overdoing it with the physical activity. I couldn’t take another step. Meanwhile, Noa, Misa, and Shia were just fine. I wished they could spare me a little bit of their energy, just any amount.

Since I’d been a shut-in originally in my old world and was basically wearing a super powered onesie suit over here, I hadn’t been getting enough exercise. I really had no physical strength at all.

Maybe I should have worn the bear shoes while playing with the ball?

“I won against Yuna.”

“It’s been so long since I’ve played this much.”

Noa and Misa sat next to where I lay collapsed. Shia had gone to grab us drinks from the fridge.

“Thank you.”

“Thank you, Shia.”

“Thank you.”

We took our drinks from Shia.

The cool water felt so good. It’d been a while since I’d even broken into a sweat from physical activity. I also had Shia spare me some of her sunscreen, so I didn’t need to worry about getting burned. If I *did* get a sunburn, I could always heal it with magic like last time though.

“I’m going to rest for a while, so you three can go play.”

“I’m tired too, so I’d like to also rest,” Noa said, then Misa and Shia decided to rest too.

Something occurred to me, so I asked Noa, “Are you close with the kids from the orphanage?”

I’d seen them talk a little, but for the most part, it seemed like Noa mostly spent her time playing with Misa, Shia, Fina, and Shuri.

“I talk with the kids from the bakery,” she said. “But I’ve never interacted with the other kids much, so I haven’t talked with them.”

Well, that seemed about right.

“And it feels like they start acting less like themselves when I’m around.”

She seemed a little sad when she said that.

Hmm, was that how it was?

It didn’t seem that way to me, looking at them. I guess maybe there was an invisible wall between aristocrats and the commoners, but maybe that was just inevitable. The kids at the orphanage hadn’t had enough to eat and faced hardships because they didn’t have parents. On the other hand, Noa never went hungry and always had pretty clothes and a warm home because she was born an aristocrat. Plus, she had social power, as the lord’s daughter.

The kids likely had no idea how to even interact with Noa because of the big status difference. It was like how Fina used to be in the past. Noa wasn’t really the type to throw her weight around though. I guess just hearing she was the local lord’s daughter was enough to make others afraid since they didn’t know her.

“The kids at the bakery talk to me like normal, so it’s okay,” she said.

Well, considering she’d gone there so many times, they likely knew her personality now.

“I really wish everyone would treat me the same, but it’s all a difficult situation...”

“If the kids from the bakery can, then I’m sure the others will be able to too,” I said.
“Well, as long as you’re not saying anything too bossy to them.”

“I wouldn’t! But maybe I would have in the past... When I met Fina, I learned that I

can't just make demands if I want normal friends since anything I ask for turns into an order for others. That's why I've tried to stop asking for things, but when I really want something, I'll say it."

Was she really just ten? Wouldn't figuring out something like that normally be really difficult at her age?

It seemed like Noa was maturing by the day.

While we were resting at the beach shack, there was a commotion outside.

"What? What's that bear?"

"Well, I'm sure the bear girl built that *thing*."

I recognized those voices.

"Is that Father?" Noa reacted to the voice too.

When we looked over at the shack entrance, we saw Cliff and Gran, and also Milaine.

"Why are you here, Father?"

"And Grandfather, you too?"

Noa and Misa ran over to them.

"For work. And I also wanted to make sure my two daughters weren't being nuisances for everyone else."

"Of course we aren't."

"We're doing no such thing."

"Looks like," Cliff said.

Cliff took a look at the kids playing with my bears by the seaside. I'd sent Kumayuru and Kumakyu out there in my place when I went to rest. Noa had listened to Cliff and

hadn't hogged them all for herself.

"Also, I needed to thank Yuna because of Shia. Is Yuna here?"

I was right here—the one right behind Noa.

"Yuna's over there." Noa looked behind herself at me.

"Is that you, Yuna? I didn't realize since you're not in your bear getup. I had no idea who you were for a moment."

I wish he didn't say all that like I actually was a bear. I guess people really had begun to fully equate me with bears.

"I'm surprised that even you would wear that outfit at the beach." Cliff stared at me, so I hid myself under a towel.

"Father, you can't stare at a girl like that. It's rude!"

Noa stood in front of me to protect me.

Thank you, Noa.

"Don't misinterpret my intentions. I was just staring because I've never seen Yuna wear anything like that before."

"You still can't stare."

"I know, so don't be upset at me." Cliff looked away from me.

"So, even Milaine is with you?"

"Yes, though this would have sufficed as a letter, I thought talks would go more smoothly if I came in person. I also wanted to see how Mileela was doing with my own eyes."

"Actually, Cliff, you mentioned you're here for work?"

According to them, they were thinking of starting up trade with Sheerin so the town could access seafood and salt. With the introduction of new foods, they would

revitalize the town, so apparently Gran had come to Crimonia for that as well.

"Did you really need Crimonia's lord, the guild master of the Merchants' Guild, and the former lord of Sheerin to all come for that?"

"As I always say to my daughters, you have to see things with your own eyes," Cliff said.

"Entirely right," Gran replied.

"I definitely haven't come here just to enjoy myself."

That last one didn't seem very believable—I wonder why.

"So, miss, what is that there?" Gran asked, looking at the waterslide.

"It's a slide," I said. "You slip down from up high and jump into the ocean. It's playground equipment."

"It's so very fun, Grandfather. It twists around and around!" Misa explained to Gran, complete with hand gesturing to demonstrate how fun it was.

"Seems to me you've made another bizarre contraption," Cliff said.

Bizarre? I spent so much effort making something other people would enjoy. Rude.

"But it does look entertaining." Milaine seemed like she wanted to take it out for a spin.
"Yuna, what will you do with that slide?"

"What will I do with it?"

"I mean when you go home."

"I'll put it away," I said.

I'd just made it because I thought only swimming around would be boring. And there were some kids who couldn't swim too. That's why I'd also gotten those flotation toys ready—so they could have fun too.

Once we were done with our trip, I was planning on putting it away since I was worried something bad could happen if I left it.

“Looks like those kids are the locals.”

She meant the ones who weren’t wearing the school swimsuits.

“They are, why?”

“Then I’m sure they would be sad if you took it away,” Milaine said, so I looked at the local kids.

“Waaaaah!”

“Again!”

“Wait for me!”

They all sounded excited as they played on the waterslide.

I understood what Milaine meant. If I took away the waterslide, the local kids probably would miss it. That wasn’t a good reason to leave it out though. It’d be horrible if they got injured on it after we all left.

Also, the slide wasn’t useful anytime except during summer. It’d be in the way in the winter, and there wasn’t much I could do about that fact.

“Maybe we should talk this over,” Milaine said, then went quiet.

CHAPTER 401

THE BEAR GOES TO THE MAYOR'S HOUSE

(DAY 6)

THE NEXT DAY, I headed over to the mayor's house with Cliff, Gran, and Milaine.

"Why do I have to go, too?"

"Because you make us seem more trustworthy. They trust me and Milaine because we helped with the reconstruction, but we don't even compare to you. We also need to introduce Gran to them, and they'll have more confidence in him with you introducing him. Though, it'd be a different matter if you didn't trust Gran or Misa's parents."

"Did you have to say it like that? Now I can't say no."

If I headed home here, then it'd be like saying I didn't trust Misa's family. He'd cornered me.

"I'm sorry, miss. Sheerin would like to stock seafood and salt as well. We'd also like to ask them to accept Sheerin merchants."

"Can't merchants come and go as they please?" I asked.

"Of course they're free to, but a relationship built on trust is another matter. It takes time for someone to gain trust on an individual basis and to determine whether another person is worthy to trade with. We'd also like them to send seafood chefs to Sheerin, just as they had to Crimonia. We'll need trust on both sides for all of these things, so that's the reason I've made this journey myself. Still, that won't be enough, so please, would you lend me some of the goodwill you've built with them, miss?"

"Just because we're nobles, we can't simply give orders or that'll strain the relationship between us. And nobles are already disliked as it is, regardless."

He was right. I'd thought that aristocrats were arrogant and used their power over people however they wanted at first. I hadn't had a good image of them at all. In fact,

my original idea of the aristocracy was basically the equivalent of those silly nobles Gran used to govern with. That was my image of the hated aristocrat. But after meeting Cliff and Gran, I realized that there were nobles who weren't like that.

"Also, I'd like to get the Merchants' Guild's cooperation, as it would help to have their assistance."

"And it seems that everyone gathering knows you," Cliff said.

"The two guild masters, the representative from the fisher association, and also the mayor."

The Adventurers' Guild's master was Atola and the Merchants' Guild's master was Jeremo. I guess the fisher association's rep was old man Kuro? Oh, and if I remembered correctly, the mayor was Kuro's son too?

I hadn't met him before, but I knew everyone else.

"Okay. But don't drag me into anything that's going to become annoying to deal with," I agreed.

Gran and Milaine had helped me out plenty. I'd paid them back, of course, but stuff like this was all give and take.

So, I ended up at the mayor's house.

Just like Cliff said, I pretty much knew everybody there. Even Sei was there—probably as an assistant for Atola, and Anabell was next to Jeremo.

"Thank you all for gathering today. And thank you, Lord Cliff, for traveling such a great distance," a man I didn't recognize greeted us. I guess this had to be old man Kuro's son maybe?

"I was the one who insisted. I'm appreciative you allowed this," Cliff thanked him.

Apparently, when Misa decided to go on the beach trip, Gran decided to come, so they'd brought this up and set an agenda. Since Gran didn't know anyone, Cliff had agreed to make introductions.

"This is Sheerin's former lord, Count Gran Farengram. He's come here today for what we will be discussing. As the lord of Crimonia, I can vouch for his character, as can Yuna, there."

Was that my cue?

"He's not a bad guy," I said. Actually, he was way too nice and almost had his whole town stolen from him.

"Gran Farengram, pleased," Gran said. "I hope we have an amicable discussion today."

Then the reps from Mileela went around making their introductions.

I knew it. The guy who greeted us at the beginning was the mayor and old man Kuro's son. His name was Alam, apparently.

"So, it seems that you are here, Lord Cliff, to ask that we expand the distribution network to Sheerin?"

"Yes, that's right. I was hoping that we could talk about that."

"Then may we start by talking about the state of the Adventurers' Guild?" Atola raised her hand.

"Sure." Cliff gave his permission, so Atola stood and started talking.

"Right now, people are flowing into the seaport because of our trade with Crimonia. Because of that, we have been using adventurers to guard the town and to keep peace and order. We also have escorts to Crimonia, so we cannot increase our adventurer pool."

"You can continue as you are, only providing escorts to Crimonia. Once the goods reach Crimonia, adventurers from there will escort the goods to Sheerin. It would be best to have a direct route from Mileela to Sheerin down the line, but we don't have the highway secured, so that will need to wait another day."

"All right then." Atola sat down.

Then Anabell raised her hand from next to Jeremo. "Milaine, may I?"

“Yes, go ahead,” Milaine said.

“Just as Atola said, we have a greater number of visitors in Mileela. Until now, fishers were only catching hauls to feed themselves, but because they are sending goods to Crimonia, they must catch more fish. However, there are only so many fishers and the amount of seafood, salt, and local merchandise we can procure is finite. I believe we cannot increase that at present.”

She was right that there were a limited number of ships and fishermen, and that increasing that number wouldn’t be easy. Resources were finite. Plus, they couldn’t catch all the fish, or they’d end up overfishing, and they could only do so much in a day anyway. There was even a chance that Crimonia and Sheerin would take everything, and Mileela would end up without seafood.

“I have gathered that as well. Please rest assured that we do not plan to take everything Mileela has.”

“Then what do you plan to do for Crimonia and Sheerin?”

“Crimonia will give Sheerin a grant to build boats, then the Merchants’ Guild will be able to manage those and the fisher association can then train seafarers.”

“In other words, you’re saying that you’ll lend us boats?”

“Yes, then people can even potentially buy the boats from us in the future. There are going to be people unsuited for fishing even if they went into debt to buy a boat, but if we were to lend them instead, there might be more people who will consider trying to become fishers. What do you think, Kuro?”

“Indeed, the youth are only able to obtain a vessel through a parent or acquaintance. But there may be some who would become fishers with the ability to borrow one instead. Now, the issue of the matter is the fee for borrowing a vessel.”

He was right. If it was too expensive, there’d be no point, and too cheap, and people wouldn’t bother buying boat.

“I think we can discuss that as we talk about the hauls.”

“Also, there’s one more matter. I have a condition. The sea has been said to belong to the world—something we’ve been saying since the past. If we overfish, we believe

divine retribution will be upon us, so I'd like to establish regulations to a degree."

Overfishing was an issue even in Japan, but the scale was different and just not comparable. It would destroy the ecosystem though, so I knew that wasn't good.

Milaine looked at Cliff and nodded as though they were confirming something.

"From the perspective of the Merchants' Guild, we are happy to sustain the same level of trade in Crimonia. As hauls increase, we'd like to divert those to Sheerin. If Crimonia receives too much seafood, we won't be able to sell other merchandise. And, at the same time, if we can't procure as much seafood, we wouldn't have enough other resources to make up, so that would put us in a tough situation as well. So, we'd like to increase the hauls by a slight amount and send that to Sheerin. That would suffice."

It seemed Cliff had already talked about this beforehand.

"We will also prohibit the opening of new seafood businesses in Crimonia, so I believe our needs will not increase any further."

So he'd even gone that far in his decision making.

Even in Japan, when there were fads, businesses catering to that trend would boom, then when the trend died, a ton of establishments would go out of business just as suddenly. If there were some controls on that, then they wouldn't need to worry about that sort of thing happening.

"If someone wanted to open a business, I'd introduce them to Sheerin."

"Then that won't be a problem for us."

Old man Kuro went silent.

After that, they talked about increasing salt production, accepting merchandise, and arranging work. There was a lot of stuff to handle.

They also talked about sending people who could teach others how to prep seafood. Then they decided anyone who created trouble in Mileela would be banned from using the tunnel. That would apparently take a weight off the Adventurers' Guild's guarding

responsibilities.

"Lord Cliff, Lord Gran, thank you. I look forward to continuing to work with you," Mayor Alam said, bowing as the representative of Mileela.

"No, thank *you*. We'll be counting on you."

After everything was done, I kind of wondered if there'd been a point to me being here.

I remembered something like this had happened before too.

CHAPTER 402

THE BEAR AND MILAINE GO TO THE BEACH (DAY 6)

CLIFF AND GRAN started talking with Atola while Milaine got into a conversation with Jeremo and Anabell. While that was going on, old man Kuro came over to me with his son, Alam, the mayor.

"I believe I haven't rightly introduced you yet. This is my son Alam," old man Kuro said.

"I've seen you around, but this is my first opportunity to formally greet you. I'm Alam."

The man looked to be in his upper thirties or even almost forty.

"Um, I'm Yuna," I said. "Being mayor must be tough, so keep up the hard work."

"I actually didn't want the job."

"Really?"

"I was pressured into it by my father and others around me," Alam explained.

"There was no one else it coulda been but you, so ya got stuck with it," old man Kuro chimed in.

"Zanna came back, so the job could have gone back to him."

Zanna? I was pretty sure that was the first time I was hearing that name, unless I'd already forgotten it.

"What are you talking about? Someone who abandons the town isn't fit to be mayor. If the going gets tough again, he'd be outta here all over again!"

"Are you saying the old mayor came back?" I asked.

"He did. But since he skipped town, there's no place for him here. The townspeople hold a grudge against him, so he can't be mayor again. 'Sides, neither of the guilds can trust him anymore, and neither can I," old man Kuro said in a bit of a huff.

"What was that? Talking about the former mayor?" Cliff joined in the conversation even though he'd just been talking about Atola. I guess he'd been listening in.

"Did you know him, Cliff?"

I was pretty sure the ex-mayor hadn't been in Mileela when Cliff was here.

"He appealed to me directly to reinstate him as mayor, but I turned him away. I'm responsible for this town, so how could I entrust that position to someone who abandoned it?"

"This about the last mayor? He also came to me." Even Milaine joined in after overhearing.

"Really?"

"Yes, he wanted me to put in a good word for him, but I gave him the boot."

I'd never met the man, and I kinda felt bad for him since both Cliff and Milaine had kicked him out, but since he abandoned the town in the first place, I guess that was what they needed to do. The person in charge had to be someone they could trust.

"When it comes to the Merchants' Guild, trust is of utmost importance—we can't negotiate with someone untrustworthy," Milaine said.

"I feel like it'd be tough to gain your trust," I commented.

"Ha, I have a lot of trust in *you*, Yuna."

"Definitely!" Cliff said.

Then even Gran chimed in. "Agreed."

They were both smiling too.

"I trust you more than anyone else, Yuna," Atola chimed in.

"Well, she did save the town. I trust her too," Jeremo said.

"She put her life on the line to save the town. How could I not trust the lass?" old man Kuro said.

Behind them, Anabell and Sei were nodding. This was kinda getting embarrassing for some reason...

After that Alam, as the mayor, started talking with Cliff and Milaine about next steps. Old man Kuro didn't join in on that conversation, but he did give me a serious look and asked me, "Do you have a moment, lass?"

"Sure," I said. "What is it?"

Kuro checked our surroundings. "Let's go to the next room."

I guess he didn't want it to be overheard, so we left the room and moved to the adjacent one. I wondered what was up.

"Thank you, lass."

Suddenly, he was bowing his head at me.

"Umm, you mean for the meeting? All I did was sit there."

Old man Kuro shook his head though.

"It's not that. I wasn't goin' to say nothin' if you weren't. Thing is, if I kept quiet and no one else saw it, then nobody would've given you the thankin' you deserve."

I had no idea what he was talking about. I couldn't remember doing anything that would have him thanking me like this.

"Sorry. I really don't know what you mean."

"How 'bout if I say it has to do with the moving island?"

All the gears in my head were turning.

"Um, you don't mean..." Had I been spotted on the moving island?

"I went to take a gander at the moving island. I've got a lotta free time since I'm retired, you see. So, that day I sailed my boat close by when all these monsters started appearing in the sky. I thought the whole thing was a crisis, what with all those giant monsters flying about."

He was talking about the wyverns.

"Then a giant neck came straight outta the ocean while the giant monsters flew all around. I hadn't an idea what was happenin'. Then I saw you fightin' with those huge, winged monsters on the island."

He was *definitely* talking about the wyvern fight.

"You fought those monsters to protect the town even though nobody was the wiser."

That hadn't been what I intended, exactly. I just worried about what would happen if I let them near town.

"You saw all that?" I asked.

"By the way, what were those flying monsters? And what was the long-necked thing that came from the ocean?"

"Umm, the small bird-looking things were volkrows and the big ones were wyverns."

"Wyverns?"

"I think they were drawn to the island."

"And that neck?"

Was it okay to tell him? Was it *really* okay?

"Can you not say, lass?"

"Well... I don't know much about it either, really. Apparently, the island is actually a legendary creature. But don't worry—if you don't hurt it, it won't do anything bad. Just pretend it's an actual island that just floats around. It might come by again in a few years, but I think things will be fine as long as you don't go near it."

“I see. I’ll trust you on that, lass.”

“Thank you.”

When we headed back to the other room, Jeremo approached us.

“Miss, do you have a moment?”

“What is it?”

“I wanted to speak with you about the beachside bear,” he said.

“About the waterslide?” asked.

“Yes, about that. I talked with Milaine about it too. Would you mind leaving it even after you head back home?”

“People have actually been coming to us from all over asking about it,” Anabell added. “I took a look at it as well. It is an interesting piece of playground equipment. If possible, I was hoping the kids from the town could still play on it.”

I guess they’d both seen the waterslide too.

“It seems like it could be entertaining even for adults.”

“Milaine informed me earlier that you’re planning on taking it down when you return home, Yuna?”

“I told Milaine this too,” I said, “but if there’s no one watching over it, it’s dangerous to use.”

I didn’t know what the kids would do. They might end up falling from high up, or worse.

“Yes, I asked around a bit and the Merchants’ Guild said that they would manage it for us,” Milaine explained “It would be a pity to take it away from all the local kids, don’t you think?”

I definitely didn’t want to take it away from other kids who wanted to play on it, so as long as there was someone to properly manage it, then I was fine with that. We started

talking about the bear waterslide. I told them I didn't want anyone doing anything dangerous on it and we went over smaller details, like how they'd set up a manager to watch over it.

I also told them if people stopped using it as the seasons changed, I could take it down then. Well, that just meant me popping by to put it away in my bear storage, really.

Since it didn't seem like it'd be a huge pain to deal with, I gave my approval.

After that, each of the conversations wrapped up. Jeremo and Atola headed off to their respective guilds to do the work Cliff and Milaine had asked for, then we left the mayor's house.

"You're a lifesaver, Yuna. Discussions just go so much smoother with you around."

"All I did was attend though," I said.

"That was plenty. Well, I'm going to make the rounds around town with Gran. What will you do, Milaine?"

"Since I'm here in Mileela already, I'm going to the beach."

"What about your work?" I asked.

"That should be fine. I need to look into the details before I can do anything else. I'll have Anabell handle collecting the documents and drawing up the report."

In other words, she meant she didn't have anything else to do today.

We left Cliff and Gran, and headed to the beach.

"Can I use the—was it called a waterslide? Yes, can we use the waterslide too, Yuna?"

"Sure, but you're going to have a bad time if you get your clothes wet."

"Hee hee. Don't you worry about that. Is there a place I can change in that bear house?"

"There is," I said.

"In that case, I'll borrow it," Milaine said and headed inside the beach hut. Did that mean she had a swimsuit to change into? But I didn't think we'd made one for Milaine. After a little while, she came out.

"Milaine... what are you wearing?"

She was, in fact, wearing a swimsuit.

"Does it look good on me? I do feel a tad embarrassed in this."

She was wearing a bikini.

"It looks fine, but where did that come from? Did you have Sherry make it for you?"

"No, no. Temoka made this one."

"Then did he also take your measurements..."

"Nar did that. What are you thinking, Yuna?"

So I might've had a thought I shouldn't have, but it seemed weird to me to let a guy know your measurements. Then again, that'd mean it'd be impossible to make tailored clothes.

"I had no idea Temoka could make swimsuits," I said.

"It seems he used your drawings as a reference."

I guess it made sense Temoka would've seen the illustrations I'd handed off to Sherry. I was surprised Milaine had such a great figure for someone who worked a desk job though. She had curves in all the right places. Sometimes the world is just unfair.

"You change too, and then let's go, Yuna."

While I was staring at Milaine, she grabbed my arm and forced me to change.

"Your suit is cute too."

I'd already given up and changed. Since it was a new day, I cycled right back to the bikini from the first day.

Milaine pulled me along to the waterslide.

"What a cute bear. Just like your bear house."

We lined up just like everyone else, then went up the steps inside the bear.

"This one is shorter since it's for the smaller kids."

"Then I suppose I'll start with this one."

Milaine headed out the bear's belly and sat down in the slide. After checking that no one was below, she started sliding.

It was pretty uneventful and she landed in the water. Then she quickly stood up, headed into the bear again, and joined me.

"Yuna, that was so fun," Milaine said. She had a giant smile even though she was soaked from head to toe.

"That's great."

Next, we went farther up the stairs and came to the slide at the bear's mouth. The kids lined up in front of us were sliding down one after another. Fina and Noa were among them.

Then it was Milaine's turn.

"Ha ha ha, I'm so excited!" Milaine turned toward me, looking as gleeful as a little kid, and sat down on the waterslide.

"I designed it with safety in mind, but be careful," I warned.

"I paid attention to how the kids used it, so I'll be fine."

Milaine let go of the handrail and slid down. She slid to the left and right, around the helix, out onto the incline, then finally splashed into the ocean.

Since the kids were lining up behind me, I sat and slid down as well. I landed in the water just like Milaine.

It was still fun even after all the times I'd slid down it, but using it over and over again made me want to make more interesting slides.

"I understand why the kids slide down it again and again," Milaine said.

After that Milaine used the waterslide some more, went swimming, and fully enjoyed the ocean.

I started to suspect she'd used work as an excuse to come here and enjoy herself.

CHAPTER 403

THE BEAR MAKES CURRY RICE (DAY 7)

OUR LONG JOURNEY was coming to a close and we'd be headed home tomorrow. Since it was our last lunch, I was on cooking duty.

"Fina, after you peel the skins off those onions, cut them like this." I took one of the onions and showed her what I meant.

"Okay, got it." Fina did exactly what I said. She was really good at it too, since she was always helping out around the house.

"Anz, you can peel the potatoes and cut them about this big." I prepared a potato like I had the onion and showed her the size. Anz knew exactly what she was doing as she chopped them.

I took the carrots, peeled them, and cut them into bite-sized pieces.

"Ahh, my eyes are watering." Fina's eyes welled up as she cut the onions. Maybe I should have handled those then?

What were we making, you might ask? Curry rice, of course! It's the meal of choice when you're hitting the beach. Also, since I'd gotten my hands on the spices in Dezelt, I decided this would be our final lunch here.

We had about fifty people in total between the kids and adults, which would be tough to serve by myself, so I enlisted Fina and Anz as helpers. Cooking this amount of food every day had to be tough, which gave me a newfound appreciation for Anz and Morin doing this every day.

"Yuna, I'm done with the potatoes."

"Ugh, I'm done here too," Fina said.

They brought over their chopped ingredients. Fina was rubbing her eyes because of the onions.

I finished up cutting the pork and the prep work was complete. It was just a regular old curry, so we wouldn't need any other ingredients. Besides, adding more stuff would've meant more labor.

Since that was done, I drizzled oil in some pots and added the meat in to sear. Then, once the meat was cooked, I added the vegetables and water. There was a lot to make, so we had three pots going—plus this way I could control the spiciness.

"So, Yuna, what are you making? Boiled veggies?" Anz asked me, not knowing what we were making.

"It's a dish called curry. On my last job, I got some spices, so I thought this would be the perfect seaside meal."

"Curry by the sea? I've lived in Mileela for a long time, but I've never heard of that as a thing to eat."

"It's not specifically a meal you have by the ocean, but where I lived, it was a staple for beach trips for some reason."

Actually, I didn't have any friends, and as a shut-in, it wasn't like I'd ever been to the beach, so I didn't actually know if they sold curry by the seaside. I was going off of manga and anime, where curry and ramen were normally served at the beach.

"I don't know what curry is, but everything you make is delicious so I'm looking forward to it," Anz said.

"It's really good, so I hope you are. Oh, how is the rice coming along?"

"It's fine. It's cooking all right."

I knew I could count on Anz. I left the rice to her while I kept an eye on the three pots and skimmed off any scum.

"I'll help too," Fina offered.

"Then you can watch that pot."

The vegetables boiled while we tackled the scum. Then once the time felt right, we turned off the fire and I pulled spices out of my bear storage.

"Hmm, for this amount, maybe this much?"

I threw in various kinds of spices as I portioned them out. It was good that I'd checked the ratios before coming to Mileela. This one would be mild for the kids, this one medium, and the third spicy. Now we had three options to choose from. I tasted from the medium pot.

"My nose feels prickly, but it smells interesting, and good." Fina rubbed her nose.

"You're right. The aroma is intense on the nose," Anz gave her opinion of the curry's smell as she cooked the rice.

It was true. Curry had that particular kind of smell, which also made me hungry.

"That would be the spices. It's a little hot but it tastes really good."

I ladled some curry onto a small plate to taste it. Yup, that tasted like curry. The best way to eat curry was with some pickled vegetables, but I would've needed to prep those in advance, so I obviously couldn't get any.

"Can I try a small taste too, Yuna?" Anz asked.

I ladled some curry into two small plates and held them out to Anz and Fina. They both gingerly took those and tasted the curry.

"Oh, it's pungent but still tasty."

"I was a little worried since it was a weird color, but it's yummy."

"It's the spices that make it that color. The curry you tried was from this pot, the mild one for the kids. The curry in this one is a little spicier, and this pot is spicy for the adults."

The color of each pot was different—the spicier it was, the darker the curry became.

"Do you want to try this one too?"

I pointed at the spiciest pot.

"That's the spicy one, right?"

“It is, but that also makes the dish tasty too.”

I liked the medium spiciness best. The sweet one was somewhat lacking for me, and the spiciest one didn’t let me enjoy the overall flavor, so I liked the middle of the road, personally.

Anz and Fina tried the spicy curry. Even though it was the “spicy” one, it wasn’t so hot that kids couldn’t eat it. Actually, it was about as spicy as the premade curry packs that were labeled as “spicy.” In my original world, I’d eat those packs a lot on my own, but I wish the manufacturers could’ve agreed on a spiciness scale. I mean, some of the medium ones were even as spicy as the hot ones!

The two of them took a bite of the spicy curry.

“Ah, so spicy!” Fina exclaimed. I handed her some water I’d prepped for this. Fina took it and drained it in one go.

“Oh, it’s so hot.”

So Fina wasn’t ready for the spiciest one. Anz, on the other hand, seemed fine. Maybe that was because she was used to strong flavors, like brininess? Well, intensely salty wasn’t the same as intensely spicy though.

“It *is* spicy, but I think it will pair nicely with the rice.”

“It’s also good with bread and udon.”

I felt an intense craving for curry bread and curry udon. Maybe I’d make some next time. But since I was in Mileela, maybe adding shrimp, shellfish, and squid to make a seafood curry would be more fitting?

The rice finished up, so we went to call in the kids playing on the beach.

“Lunch!”

“I’m starving.”

The kids gathered around. Tiermina, Gentz, Rulina, and the others were with them.

“So, you cooked for us today, Yuna?”

"I helped, too!" Fina corrected Tiermina.

"And was Fina helpful, Yuna?" Tiermina asked me.

"She was so helpful, she'd be ready to take care of a house if she married right now," I said.

"Oh, you think so? Gentz would throw a fit if we let that happen. Though, if we were sending her off to be with you, I suppose that wouldn't be so bad."

"Mom!" Fina was so embarrassed, she softly pummeled her mother with her fists.

I laughed and set the curry up on the table with the cooked rice.

"So, what did you make for us, Yuna?"

"It's called curry. It's a bit spicy, but delicious."

I had everyone line up and served starting with the kids. Fina readied plates next to me, then Anz would serve the rice. Finally, I'd ladle on the curry. We were serving just the mild curry to the kids.

"It smells weird."

"My nose feels itchy."

"It might be a little spicy, but it's yummy."

The kids took the plates and headed back to sit down. Next to them, Tiermina served cups of water, which were an absolute must with curry—it was spicy, after all.

"We have plenty of seconds, so eat your fill."

Eventually it was Noa's group's turn.

"I'm looking forward to your home cooking," Noa said. "But you're still so mean not to have let me help."

"But you and Misa have never cooked before," I said.

When I asked Fina to help, Noa and Misa had also offered, but I'd politely turned them down.

"I mean, I suppose. But we could have at least washed the vegetables."

There was no way I could let a noble wash vegetables. Besides, I had a secret technique to wash veggies super quickly using a bucket of water and wind magic.

"Actually, can you cook, Shia?" I asked.

"I've cooked with Surilina a few times, so while I wouldn't say I'm amazing, I can a bit."

I didn't expect she'd do that since she was a noble.

"But you don't seem like you'd cook, Misa."

"That's mean. I can make simple dishes," Misa countered, puffing up her cheeks.

I guess even the nobility cooked in this world.

"Anyway, this is a spicy dish. There are three levels of spice, so which would you like?" I asked.

"I'll take the mildest one please," Noa said.

"Me too," Misa chimed in.

"I think I'll go with the second spiciest then," Shia said.

"Will you let me try a little bit of yours?" Noa asked Shia.

"Want me to serve a little on your plate, Noa?" I asked her.

"Could you really?"

I served up Noa's plate mostly with the mild curry and a little bit of the medium. Then Marina and Elle ordered the medium curry after Noa's group. I actually wanted to serve up some of the spicy curry to Elle, my rival (in boobosity), but since she'd made her choice right in front of me, I couldn't make the swap.

Rulina and Gil were up next.

"I'm really looking forward to your new dish, Yuna," Rulina said.

"Are you okay with spicy foods?"

"Of course. I like spice."

"In that case, I'll give you the hottest one." I poured the spicy curry over her rice. That was the first spicy order of the day.

"You want the spicy one too, Gil?" I asked.

"The one that's not," he said.

"..."

I stopped right as I was about to ladle him the spicy curry.

"I know he looks like a big, tough man, but he can't handle spicy food," Rulina explained. Go figure.

"My size is irrelevant," Gil said.

Well, I guess body size and spice tolerance were *technically* unrelated. Anz and Rulina both could eat spicy food, but even gender didn't determine that.

Anyway, I served up the mild curry for Gil.

After them, Morin, Karin, and Nerin chose the medium level.

"I'm not very good with spicy stuff."

Seno and Neaf went with the mild, while Forne and Bettle chose the medium. The headmistress and Liz got the mild.

"You want the spicy, right, Gentz?"

"Actually, I could do without." So, Gentz got the kid's meal curry, i.e., the mild one.

Tiermina, Fina, and Shuri all ordered the mild too. Well, the kids would, of course. I was surprised by how few people wanted to try the spicy. At this rate, I'd have a ton left over. Maybe I could knock the edge off the spiciness if I added milk?

Then we all started to eat together. I heard people raving about the curry and had kids who asked for seconds. It'd be good with bread, so I pulled some out of my bear storage.

Then from out of nowhere, Cliff, Gran, and Milaine turned up partway through as though they'd been lured by the smell.

In order to use up some of the spicy curry, I served it up to Cliff and Milaine without telling them, but I was a little disappointed to see them enjoying it anyway. Well, it wasn't so hot they couldn't have eaten it, but I was hoping for a bit more of a reaction. Also, I served the mild curry to Gran. It's important to treat your elders well.

After that, I explained the spiciness levels to Masrika and Itia, who were apparently guarding Gran and Cliff, before serving them.

The curry rice I treated everyone to was well received. Tiermina asked me if I'd serve it at the restaurant or bakery, but I said no. I couldn't just keep increasing the number of menu items, of course, and it would be a pain to source spices. Even if I did get it shipped regularly, it would get expensive.

It'd be a ton of work to go through my bear gates to get spices each time, and I would be in trouble if Karina caught me. Then again, spices did have a long shelf life, so maybe it would work if I bought them in bulk? If I could seal them up and refrigerate them, maybe they'd keep?

Well, I wasn't going to rush a decision. Better to take my time and think about it.

CHAPTER 404

THE BEAR DOES A SUMMER TRADITION

(DAY 7)

WE'D FINISHED THE CURRY and it was supposed to be our last afternoon at the beach.

For some reason though, the kids started cleaning the bear house. I don't even know who brought it up, but they'd all apparently decided they were going to clean before going home.

I told them they didn't have to, but they said they wanted to show me they were grateful, and I just couldn't come up with anything to say to that. I ended up accepting the kids' efforts.

The kids split up the cleaning duties between the large room, the baths, the bathrooms, and even the gardens. Even the nobles said they wanted to show me they were grateful and started cleaning their own rooms and the hallways they'd used. Fina's family were cleaning together too.

The group that was in charge of cooking took the kitchen and dining hall, effectively cleaning the first floor. When the adults saw the kids, they joined them in cleaning. I was shocked to see Rulina and Elle using water magic to wash the outer wall of the bear house.

I tried to lend a hand too, but I got a chorus of "You can't, Yuna," or "No, Yuna," and "We'll take care of this so you can go outside." In the end, I was chased out of all the rooms.

I couldn't really relax being the only one not doing anything. Having been kicked out of every other room, I headed back to my own room. Since I couldn't do much else, I hopped up on my bed with Kumayuru and Kumakyu in their cub forms for the first time in a while to take a nap.

Somehow this month ended up being really busy. It seemed like forever since I'd fought the scorpions in the desert, but it was actually just the other day. And now our

trip would be over in a flash.

Even though the trip was just a one week long, so many things had happened. We'd played in the ocean, been inundated by the fishermen, and ridden on boats. And the biggest thing of all, I'd been shocked by the moving island, Talgwei. I didn't think that kind of creature actually existed.

Also it'd been so hectic when I took Fina's group with me and ran into wyverns. I'd been able to keep that from everyone by getting them into the secret room I'd set up in advance—as they say, you can't be too overprepared.

And finally, the most mentally taxing thing of all was probably choosing the swimsuits.

Still, I was surprised that none of the kids were complaining about going home. Half of them even seemed to want to get home as soon as possible.

The most common reason they wanted to go back so soon was that they were worried about the kokekkos. The kids who worked at the bakery also wanted to return soon to get back to work. There were a lot of them who felt uneasy about not working.

Maybe the vacation was a bit too long? It would've made a perfect Golden Week though. For people who didn't have a concept of an extended vacation, I guess long breaks made them nervous. Morin and Karin also seemed like they wanted to get back to their bakery, while Anz's group spent spare moments visiting Deigha.

As I thought about these past days, I curled up for my nap and ended up sleeping with my bears until Fina came and woke us.

The bear house was spick-and-span thanks to everyone's hard work.

That evening, I wanted to make one more memory on our beach trip, so I decided to do a summer tradition.

I brought everyone onto the roof. Cliff and Gran were there too. Since it was near the end of the day, a few kids looked tired, but since this was special, I wanted them to hang in there and watch.

“Are we going stargazing, Yuna?”

“That would be nice, but not quite.”

The atmosphere in this world was very clear, so the stars were really pretty. It was beautiful for someone like me, who had lived in a city, but this was normal for Noa and the others since they could just look up at the sky any day they wanted. So, instead, I’d planned something else.

“Gran, Cliff, I hope you enjoy this too.”

“I don’t know what you’re going to do, but just don’t do anything stupid,” Cliff said.

What did he mean by something stupid? I was doing my best to wow everyone here.

“I’m looking forward to this,” Milaine said excitedly.

“Indeed. Even at my age, I’m looking forward to what you have in store.” Gran seemed excited too.

“I’ll do my best to live up to your expectations. All right, I need to do a little bit of prep, so have some ice cream while you wait.”

“Ice cream!” the kids cried.

“Just one per person. Don’t fight over it. Also, look toward the ocean. Fina, can you lend me a hand?”

Since Fina was the one person who knew what I was going to do, I asked her to help. Since I couldn’t bother with the stairs, I jumped right off the roof. There were shouts when I did that, but I made a clean landing.

“You’re so amazing, Yuna.”

“So cool.”

I heard their cheers echo in the night.

“No copying me,” I warned.

“I can’t do that!”

“That’s impossible!”

“Please don’t scare us like that.”

I could hear Noa and the kids from up above. I mean, kids were the type to copy others, so I needed to warn them at least. Then again, if I were all that worried, I could’ve just not jumped in the first place.

After warning them, I ran toward the ocean.

* * *

So, going back to what happened earlier. Last night after dinner, I called Tiermina and Fina as they were on the way back to their room.

“Is it okay if I borrow Fina tonight?” I asked Tiermina, since she was a parental guardian after all.

“You want Fina? Of course that’s fine,” Tiermina said without getting permission from the actual person in question. She pushed Fina’s back to give her to me, so I gratefully accepted her.

“Mom!” Fina exclaimed at her mother. Then Shuri looked at me.

“Only Fina?” Shuri asked.

“Hmm, I think we won’t come back until late, so...” I said.

“It’s no fair only she gets to go.”

I guess it would be fine to tell Shuri too. Maybe next time.

“It’ll get late and you’ll get sleepy. They’re not me or Fina, but why don’t you two sleep together,” I said, picking up a mini Kumakyu from the floor and handing them over to Shuri. If Kumakyu was with her, she wouldn’t be lonely. Shuri looked at the bear and me, then gave a small nod.

“Take me with you next time.”

“Sure, next time we’ll go together.”

After that Gentz mumbled, “Why didn’t you ask me?” next to us, but we ignored him. It was obvious Tiermina was the one with the final say, so I could get Fina even without Gentz’s permission.

I took my newly acquired Fina with me to my own room.

“So, Yuna, what are we doing?” she asked.

“Well, there’s something I need to check, but I can’t do it on my own, so I wanted your help.”

I opened the door in my room to the adjacent room—that was where the bear gate was set up.

“Are we going somewhere?”

Wow, Fina could tell just by seeing the gate. She had good intuition. I opened the bear gate, then headed through with Fina in tow. Behind us, Kumayuru toddled along.

I’d brought us to the bear house on Talgwei.

Fina looked at our surroundings restlessly. “Yuna, where are we?” she asked nervously. She’d been asking a lot of questions, but of course she would, considering I hadn’t told her anything. She wouldn’t know where we were by just looking around and seeing trees.

“We’re on the moving island from the other day.”

“Wh-why are we here? There are monsters... wait when did you get a house here...?”

“It’s okay, there aren’t any monsters. As for the house, I made this gate when we came by the other day.”

Fina looked absolutely flabbergasted.

“But what are we going to do on this island? We can’t even see anything since it’s so dark.”

She was right about that, so I created a bear lamp using magic to light our way.

"I thought I'd make some fireworks with magic, but I don't think I can make them properly by myself, so I thought I'd have you give me some feedback."

"Fire... works? What's that?" Fina's head tilted to the side a bit.

Oh, that was right. She wouldn't understand that word. How could I explain it?

"Umm, you launch light magic into the sky and it makes a flower?" I tried.

"Sky flowers...?" Her head tilted to the side a second time.

Ugh, this was hard to explain. I didn't know how to explain something she'd never seen or heard of before, so I picked up a branch off the ground and drew in the dirt to show her.

"So, from the ground, I'll shoot light magic up into the air. You'll be far away and I want you to tell me what it looks like."

I drew a figure on the ground to serve as Fina, and another one a little way away to be me. Then, I sketched the magic I would be firing up above.

"I think I understand. You're saying you're going to draw something with light magic."

Well, I guess that was about right?

I made Kumayuru big before we both hopped on them and set off. We came to the Talgwei's head, where the Kryuna Halk stone monument was.

"Okay, take out your bear phone. Right, look at the sky in that direction."

I pointed at the sky with my bear puppet. Fina took out her bear phone as instructed.

"Okay, Kumayuru. Please take care of Fina."

Kumayuru crooned in response.

I ran in the direction I'd indicated and put some distance between myself and Fina. I guess here would be good enough. Anyway, I took out my bear phone and called Fina.

“Fina, can you hear me?”

“Yes, I can hear you.”

“Okay, look at the sky.”

I fired light magic into the sky. The light magic flickered high into the sky and burst into a circle like I’d imagined.

“How was that Fina? Did it turn into a circle?”

“It looked more like a flat line. Is that a ‘fire work’?”

It was flat?

“So it wasn’t a circle?”

“Umm, maybe a flat sideways circle?”

Agh, right—so not a circle. It looked like a circle since I was under it, but from Fina’s viewpoint it was a line or maybe a long skinny circle at most. I was a dummy. I’d made a ring, not a sphere, and it only looked right from directly below.

I shot some light into the sky again.

“It really became a circle that time! It seems like it spread out from the center,” came Fina’s voice through my bear phone.

Okay, now for some real skills. This time I tried to draw a picture as I fired magic into the sky by layering them to make a flower. I was initially going with fireworks that would look the same from any direction, but Fina was only looking from one. Since it would only be viewed from the bear house, that wouldn’t be a problem.

The only thing was that it wasn’t going very well. Fina was reporting with things like “What is that?” “It didn’t look like that...” and “Nothing that time,” and “I can’t see it.”

But then eventually...

“It’s so pretty.”

"I can see it!"

"You're amazing, Yuna."

"It's flowing like a river."

I could hear Fina's excited voice through my bear phone.

Yup, this would work. I'd finished figuring out the fireworks with Fina's help. But also, it was weird making fireworks without any *fire*. Still, I couldn't think of anything else to call them, so I stuck with that name.

The weirdest thing was the lack of sound. No matter how much light magic I used, it was silent. Even when I mixed in some flames, there wasn't any sound. I also tried using some lightning magic to make it flashy but decided against it.

I gave up on the sounds.

Back in present day, I arrived at the beach and launched my imitation fireworks into the sky.

"Something lit up."

"Pretty."

"Whooooo."

"Another one went up."

I could hear the kids through my bear phone. I had Fina hold her phone for me so I could get real-time reactions from the rooftop. Of course, if they complained I would've ended the show but it seemed like I didn't have to worry about that.

I continued to launch magic into the sky, jumping high into the air myself to fire light to my left and right. I was in my black bear outfit, so even though I was jumping up, I blended into the darkness.

Some of the fireworks spread from where I was, while I made others that looked like

shooting stars. Before long I felt like this wasn't fireworks but more like me drawing with light magic. Then, thinking the kids would get a kick out of it, I thought about making bear fireworks. It'd probably be pretty difficult, or so I thought. But I imagined it, and even though a different animal would be difficult and hard to form, the bear came easily to me. Maybe this was a bear skills, like the bear house and bear magic? As the bear head I created spread across the night sky, I heard the kids cry out in delight.



Despite being silent, the fireworks seemed to be a huge success. Apparently, some people from Mileela had seen them too. They'd been worried about what was happening at first, but after seeing the last bear, they'd apparently calmed down, knowing it was me. I guess the people in Mileela associated me with bears now too. I wanted to deny I did, but sadly, I couldn't.

CHAPTER 405

THE BEAR RETURNS TO CRIMONIA (DAY 8)

THE NEXT MORNING, when we started to get ready to go back to Crimonia, all sorts of people came over to say goodbye.

The first person was Jeremo.

“I’m entrusting the waterslide to you,” I said.

“Right, we’ll manage it properly, so don’t you worry. But why do I get the feeling it’s going to mean trouble though...?”

Supposedly they were going to advertise in Crimonia to increase the number of travelers coming in. The more tourists, the more tolls from the tunnel, and also the more people would spend at the inns, on food, and on local specialties, and the more people would benefit. But with more travelers meant more people who’d be busy too.

Jeremo lamented, “My workload’s going to increase.”

Apparently, even Atola looked a little unhappy, since she ended up in charge of guarding the slide.

And speak of the devil—Atola came over too.

“Next time, I’m going to go to Crimonia,” she told me.

All I said was “Just don’t come dressed like that.” If she came showing off that much cleavage, we’d have a whole lot to deal with.

“But clothes are so hot...”

While she might’ve been fine dressed like that in Mileela, it was a no-go in Crimonia. Same applied to swimsuits. You could wear those on the beach but not in town.

"If you come dressed like that, I'll pretend not to know you."

"All right already. I'll come *properly* dressed then."

That was a relief.

After that old man Kuro, Damon, and Yuula came over. It seemed like the fishermen wanted to send us off too, but Kuro put a stop to that. I was so grateful for that, but he hadn't needed to come by with the others either.

But Kuro said, "We wanted to show ya how grateful we are." I was pretty sure he was talking about Talgwei too. The wyverns were also our secret.

Deigha hadn't been able to make it since he was busy at the inn, so Anz was sent with a message that he'd treat me to a delicious meal next time.

Finally, the local kids came to send off the orphans. I guess they had all gotten along when they were playing. It was nice they made friends in a different town, but they wouldn't be able to see each other. I started thinking of bringing them here again next year.

With our goodbyes complete, I pulled out the bear buses and everyone hopped aboard. Cliff, Gran, and Milaine were there too. Since their work was complete, they were going back with us. Gran was actually needed for some jobs in Crimonia with Cliff and Milaine.

"So, these are the bear carriages Noa mentioned. I wonder if I may ride with Noa in a small one."

"Father, on the way back we're riding the Kumakyu one." On the way here she'd taken the Kumayuru one, so I guess they were switching.

Cliff and Gran went with Noa, Misa, and Shia with Masrika and Itia following behind. Also, Marina's group was supposed to ride with Cliff's back in his carriage, but a slight

issue popped up.

Cliff and Gran had learned from Noa she would be riding home on the bear bus, but that meant the carriage from Crimonia ended up being unnecessary. That meant someone from Marina's group needed to take it home, but all four of them wanted to ride on a bear bus.

Masrika and Itia argued they were guards for Cliff and Gran, while Marina and Elle said they were Misa's. In the end, Masrika and Itia got to ride on the bear bus since this was their first time, while Marina and Elle went back in the carriage Cliff and Gran had come on. The two looked miserable about it, but that was just part of the job.

"Where can I ride?" Milaine asked me.

"Anywhere is fine."

Nine people could fit on a minibus. The Kumakyu bus with Noa's group contained Noa, Misa, Shia, Cliff, Gran, Masrika, and Itia for a total of seven, while the Kumakyu bus had the seven chefs from Morin and Anz's groups. There was also space on the large bus to fit one more. She could basically sit in whichever bus she wanted.

"All right then. In that case, I have things I want to discuss about the birds and shops, so I'll go on the one with Tiermina," she said, then went off.

* * *

A few hours after we departed from Mileela on the bear buses, we arrived at the gate in front of Crimonia. The employee vacation had come to an end without any issues.

The children who had been sleeping in the buses rubbed their eyes as they headed home. Some of the livelier kids ran to go meet the kokekkos, and Liz followed after them.

"Yuna, thank you so much for this. I think the kids had a lot of fun. Ever since you started showing up, they've been smiling more and more. That's all your doing."

The headmistress happily watched the kids as they ran off. She gave me a small nod, then headed off back to the orphanage while holding hands with a small child. Cliff

was also watching.

"That's right. They weren't smiling for a time because of my oversight," he muttered softly. As the leader of this town, I couldn't say he had no responsibility, but one of his subordinates had been embezzling money. He could have realized sooner.

Even in this world, a good leader didn't guarantee good subordinates. I often saw news about embezzlement within companies on TV, but it was the job of their superiors to manage them. Dealing with those people wasn't easy.

Thinking about it that way, would it be my responsibility if a kid working in one of my shops did something bad? Well, they wouldn't do anything to cause Liz or the headmistress trouble anyway. If someone else caused trouble, then an adult had to take the blame—an adult like me—whether I was an adult or not. But I needed to do what I could to prevent that from happening in the first place.

Cliff watched the kids leave, then went with Gran, Noa, and the others back to his residence. As I watched them go, Neaf came over.

"Thank you, Yuna. After I went home and met with friends, I felt like a burden was lifted from my heart. It feels like I can take a step forward. This is all thanks to you and the headmistress," Neaf said. The headmistress had been the one to tell her to go and meet with old friends. I'd just taken her with us to Mileela, so I hadn't done anything. Neaf bowed her head before jogging off after the headmistress and kids.

Anz and the Mileela group happily watched Neaf head off. They weren't going to say they wanted to return to Mileela, were they? If they did, it wasn't like I would be able to stop them.

"Well then, I guess we should do our best at work tomorrow."

"The restaurant opens the day after tomorrow, after all."

"This was fun, Yuna. Thank you so much."

"Thank you, Yuna."

They all waved before walking off in the direction of Anz's restaurant.

Morin, Karin, and Nerin also thanked me, and Milaine said, "I have work I have to get

back to," while heading home.

Then Rulina and Gil headed off with their fellow adventurers Masrika and Itia to get something to eat.

Finally, Fina, Shuri, Tiermina, and Gentz were the last ones left at the end.

"Well, should we get going too?" Tiermina clasped Shuri's hand and set off walking. Gentz started walking beside them as well. Seeing them this way, they really looked like a family.

Then I started walking along with Fina. Since I would have been returning to an empty house, Tiermina invited me to dinner. I refused at first, but Fina and Shuri kept asking me until I eventually gave in.

"Yuna, thank you. I've been having so much fun ever since I met you." Fina was staring straight at me. "Mom got better, Gentz became my dad, Shuri is so much more cheerful, I've gone to the capital and the ocean. I've been so incredibly happy."

"I'm glad I met you too, Fina. I've had so much fun ever since I met you."

"Really?"

"Really really."

"Let's have some more good times."

"That's my line."

"Uh-huh!" Fina grinned ear to ear as she nodded.

I was really glad to have met her.

EXTRA STORY

STROLLING THE TOWN: NOA'S CHRONICLES

I KEPT MY PROMISE with Father and went to see the town today.

I so wished I could play instead, but Father says that I must keep up my studies as his daughter. It was also one of the conditions for allowing me to go to the beach. So yesterday, I observed how the ships are steered and the way in which the fishermen went about their jobs. They told me many things and even allowed me to board their ship to go out to sea.

I learned through my experience on board that working on a ship is just about as dangerous as adventuring.

They voyage out to the open sea, where the waves are high, and bad weather could apparently make the ships heave and toss even worse.

Falling into the waters could be perilous, even resulting in death in some cases, so I heard. Because of this, the fishers warned the children time and time again not to fall off.

In addition, some people are subject to seasickness, though it seemed I was spared. One of the children working at the bakery was not.

They finished their explanations and the voyage out to sea before noon, but we were also offered the chance to learn how to fish after our meal.

I, of course, volunteered myself.

It seemed there is a method to catching many fish at a time using a net; however, we were instead taught how to use fishing rods—in other words, the more traditional method.

Fishing was terribly difficult: much more so than expected. I asked Marina to help and

somehow made a catch.

My, how difficult it was to be a fisher.

Now I knew to be grateful any time I had fish to eat.

Though it was an ordeal, I found the experience greatly useful.

I would need to set down my thoughts on paper to present to Father later.

However, I couldn't only visit the harbor, so today would be dedicated to touring the town itself, and my sister as well as Misa would be joining me. It would be perilous alone, of course, so Marina and Elle were joining us as our guards.

"Noa, where would you like to go?" Misa asked me.

"Yes, well, Shia, where would you like to go?"

I turned and asked Shia.

"Umm. Since we're here early in the morning, I think we should learn about the market. They say that a market shows how a town is distinct, after all."

"But won't it all just be fish for sale?"

"Well, that might be what we find, but it also might not."

I suppose she had a point. I hadn't seen the market itself, after all.

"Then we should observe the people, just as Father and Mother told us, and the shops too."

Sister always knew how to go about these things.

"Then let's go to the market."

We asked one of the passersby how to get there, then headed in that direction ourselves.

"I knew it would be full of their catches."

I observed fish and shells that were displayed in rows.

"It seems that there are many types of fish and shells when we can see them like this."

It seemed Crimonia only received a small amount of the variety there was available.

"Yes, it seems like it. We've eaten so many fish, but there are a lot I've never seen before," Misa said.

We had eaten lots of fish the last few days, but I realized Misa was right. I hadn't seen a lot of these before.

"I wonder if they taste different?"

Even the meat of land animals could taste different.

We asked one of the fishmongers, who laughed and then explained the differences to us.

It seemed that the fish could taste different depending on how they were prepared and what season it was.

The market continued farther in.

I even saw some merchants buying merchandise from the market.

"It looks like there are traders."

They would drive a carriage up and load their purchases on.

"Do you think they're taking that to Crimonia?"

It was very likely Crimonia when I thought about it.

"I wish they would deliver to Sheerin as well. Then I would be able to have the fish here anytime I like."

Misa seemed slightly jealous.

"Could you write to your grandfather about it to ask him to consider it?"

“Yes, I’ll ask Grandfather and not just Father then.”

“Make sure to list both the benefits and issues when you do. If you only list all the good things, you’ll get in trouble because they’ll assume you haven’t given it enough thought.”

“You’re right. That sounds so difficult.”

“Well, that’s all part of our fathers’ work, so I think they’ll understand if you write out all your thoughts.”

“Yes.”

After that, we went to see what kinds of things were being bought and sold, and what types of people were making purchases.

After we finished with the market, we went to the shopping district.

We arrived at a road lined with shops of various varieties, selling everything from clothes to sundries.

I saw things both familiar and not and found that the offerings at shops seemed to vary based on region despite seeing some merchandise Crimonia would have too.

It was so much fun that I nearly forgot that I was here as part of my studies.

As I peeked into the shops while I walked, I saw something that captured my full attention on one of the windowsills.

“Noa, what’s wrong?” Shia asked me when she saw I had stopped.

“There are bears,” I said, pointing at the ones displayed in the window.

“There really are. Do you think they’re for sale?”

It looked to me like a general store.

“Shall we go inside?”

We asked Marina and Elle to wait outside as we entered and went to the shelf of bears.

"They really are bears."

Shia looked at the row on the shelf. They looked like ornaments carved from wood. Some were just the size of the palm of my hand, while others were as large as a human head.

"Why, welcome, lovely ladies," the woman who seemed to work there said to us.

"What are these?"

"You're not from around this town, are you?"

"No, we're not."

"Then I don't think you'd need those."

"Why not?"

"Because these are protective charms for the sea."

"But why would they be bear shaped if they're for the sea?"

Bears were forest creatures, not sea creatures.

I couldn't see anything to tie bears with the sea, in fact.

"The seaport was saved by a bear."

"By a bear?"

Misa looked confused.

I, on the other hand, realized something right away.

"Do you mean Yuna, by any chance?"

"Do you happen to know the girl in the bear outfit, miss?"

“If her outfit is cute, then yes, I do.”

“I suppose if you’re in from Crimonia, you could know her then.”

“Yes, we’re friends.”

Or should I call us besties? But she was more like a big-sister figure, I think.

Well, I suppose I could think of her as a friend.

“I can’t give details, but this town was saved by the bear girl. So, now we’ve adopted the image of bears for the protective charms we sell.”

Actually, Father had said that Yuna created the tunnel connecting Crimonia and Mileela.

That was when Father’s trouble started and he started seeming more tired. I wondered if it was somehow related to this?

“So, these are bear ornaments then?”

“Yes, so I’m afraid they’re not much use to anyone from Crimonia.”

“I quite disagree. I understand exactly how you all feel.”

“That’s right. I was also saved by bears.”

“And she saved me too.”

Misa and Shia both told the woman.

“That’s so unfair of you both. I feel like I’m the only one who hasn’t been rescued by her.”

“I personally think the greatest unfairness is that you’re with Yuna in Crimonia,” Shia said.

“I agree,” Misa chimed in.

“Well, I suppose,” I said.

Shia lived in the capital and Misa was in Sheerin. I lived the closest to Yuna.

"So, what would you like to do? Would you like to buy any?" the woman asked.

I took another look at the bears on the shelf.

They weren't nearly as cute as the bear from Yuna, but that was a given, of course, and they couldn't have done much about that.

But I still wanted one regardless.

"Then please sell me this one."

I pointed at the palm-sized bear.

"Thank you for your business!"

"Then I'd like one of the same."

"If you two are buying your own, I'll buy one too."

Misa and Shia also picked up their own bears.

"You're also buying some?"

"Well, why not, I'd say. I think it'll make for a fun story with my friends at the academy who know Yuna."

"I feel like the charm might be useful as protection."

I watched them pick up the bears, then came up with an idea.

"Please also sell me these three," I said.

"You're buying four of them?"

Misa asked out of surprise when she saw the three extras.

"They're for Fina, Shuri, and Sherry. I'm thinking of buying them for the members of the bear fan club."

We paid, then took our bears and left.

"So, that bear fan club you just mentioned—did you find that, Noa?" Shia asked.

"Yes, it's an organization that adores bears. We share information about bears too, so this will be one of the items we'll talk about."

"How many people are currently part of the club?"

"There are five total, including me."

"Only five?"

"Not anyone can join. I have strict standards, as the chairman of the club."

At first, I was hoping to recruit ten thousand members, but now I valued quality over quantity.

"Then maybe I'll try to join too."

"You will, Shia?"

"I like Yuna too and she's helped me out plenty. And you share information? I can report on what Yuna does at the capital."

I took her hand in mine.

"Shia! Please join!"

I handed her the sixth fan club membership card.

"Number six, huh?"

"I'm number one, as the chairman, then Fina is two as the vice chair, then Misa is three, Shuri is four. And Sherry, who made bear stuffed animals, is five."

"So that makes me six?"

"Would you prefer another number?"

“Six is fine, thank you.”

And, with that, we would now receive reports anytime Yuna went to the capital. If she went to Sheerin, Misa would be there too. Our bear network was growing.

It was unfortunate that we had no one in the fan club to report on Mileela though.

“Then we’ll have a fan club meeting tonight and include you as well, Shia,” I said.

I was so looking forward to it.

Then we continued with our stroll, had lunch, and returned to the beach in order to spend time with Yuna.

EXTRA STORY

THE BEAR FAN CLUB: FINA'S CHRONICLES

ONE NIGHT, while we were in Mileela on our trip, Lady Noa told us we were having a bear fan club meeting. I headed over to Lady Noa's room with Shuri.

"Fina, what are we doing?"

"I'm not sure," I told Shuri, "But we'll probably just talk about Yuna."

Lady Noa had made the bear fan club. It was supposed to be a group for talking about bears, and Shuri and I were members. Somehow, I'd even become the vice president.

When we got to Lady Noa's room, Sherry was there.

"Fina! Shuri!" She seemed relieved when she saw us, and she rushed over. "Oh, good. Lady Noir called me, so I had no idea what to do."

Sherry was also part of the fan club. This reminded me of the past. I used to feel just like Sherry. At first, even talking to Lady Noa had made me nervous.

"Lady Noa is nice, so it'll be okay. Let's go in together."

"Okay."

When I knocked on the door, I heard Lady Noa's voice before the door opened.

"Welcome. We were waiting for you."

She tugged on my hand and brought me into the room. Shuri and Sherry followed behind me. Lady Misa and Lady Shia were also in the room, but Marina and Elle, who were supposed to be staying here, weren't. I guess they'd left?

"We have drinks and snacks, so let's begin the bear fan club meeting."

We each sat down on seats or on the beds.

“First, I’ll introduce everyone. This is our sixth fan club member, and my older sister.”

“I’m Shia. Nice to meet you. This seemed like fun, so I wanted to join. You can count on me to get all the details when Yuna is in the capital.”

This seemed like it would be a lot of trouble for Yuna. Everything she did would be reported on.

“Also, I think you all know Sherry, but I’ll introduce here again. This is our fifth member, Sherry. Sherry, if you could say a word or two.”

“Uh... I’m Sherry. It’s nice to meet you.”

“Is that all? Sherry makes bear stuffed animals and she also made our bathing suits. I had her join because she can make bear stuffed animals.”

Lady Noa introduced Sherry for her.

“Sherry, nice to formally meet you.”

“Y-yes, it’s nice to meet you too.”

Sherry froze while Lady Misa bowed at her.

“You don’t have to be so nervous. You’re among friends here, and you made bathing suits for all of us.”

“No, um... yes.”

I could understand exactly how Sherry felt right now. Saying that to her didn’t change anything. I was like that at first too.

“So, what are we talking about today?” Lady Misa asked Lady Noa.

“Right, let’s share information again. Since Fina never talked about the bear vehicle.”

“It only happened a few days beforehand, so I didn’t have the chance to.”

“I know that. So, let’s talk about it formally.” With that, Lady Noa started the fan club’s meeting.

First, we talked about everything up to when the bear carriages were made. I told them how we tried riding on lots of different versions and how they hurt our butts, but Lady Noa seemed very jealous. It might have sounded fun, but when the carriage flew through the air, it really had hurt a lot.

After that, Lady Noa talked about her walk through Mileela.

“While we were strolling through, I found this.” Lady Noa took a small bear ornament out of her bag.

“What’s this?” I felt like I’d seen it before.

“The shop owner said that it’s a bear made to pray for safe passage when going out to sea.”

That’s right. Mom showed something like this to Yuna too, but she was laughing when she said it was a good-luck charm for the sea.

“We don’t really go out to the ocean, but I purchased everyone else charms as well.”

Shuri reached out and took a bear.

“It’s the same as the one Mom had.”

I tried to stop Shuri, but I didn’t make it in time. Lady Noa seemed like she was having such a fun time showing them off, so I was going to pretend I didn’t know anything.

“You already knew about these?” She looked a little surprised.

“Um, Mom also bought one...” I told her, being honest.

“I see. It’s too bad I wasn’t the first one to discover them.”

“But you two don’t have ones of your own, right?” Lady Shia asked me and Shuri.

“That’s right, we don’t.”

“Yeah, Mom didn’t give it to us.”

Shuri had wanted one, but Mom had only bought one of them, so she hadn’t given it

away because it wouldn't be even. So then Mom told us we could leave it at home, since it would probably protect the whole family that way.

"Noa, the two of them don't have their own, so looks like things worked out."

"You're right. I'd be so happy if all three of you accepted these." Lady Noa offered the bears again. I took one like she told me to.

"Thank you, Lady Noa," I said.

"Noa, thanks."

"You too, Sherry."

"Th-thank you."

After Shuri and I accepted the charms, Sherry did too, but she was nervous the whole time.

"Are you sure we can have these though? What about Lady Shia and Lady Misa?"

If we took them, there wouldn't be enough for them too.

"We're fine since we already bought our own."

Lady Shia and Lady Misa took out their own small bears from their pockets.

"So those are for you."

"They're charms, so I'm sure they'll protect you. Make sure to take care of them."

I looked at the small bear again. They looked a little like Kumayuru and Kumakyu.

"Also, Fina, I wanted to ask—did Yuna do anything in this town? I know she made the tunnel, but I heard she saved the village too."

"Yuna made that tunnel?" Lady Misa seemed shocked when Lady Noa revealed that.

"Now, this is a secret only amongst the bear fan club members, but even though they say Yuna discovered the tunnel, in actuality, she apparently was the one who dug it."

It seemed like Lady Noa already knew the truth. She might have been told because she was the daughter of the lord. She didn't seem to know about the kraken though. Yuna told me not to talk about the kraken, and even if I did tell everyone, I didn't think they'd believe it. I also hadn't been there, so I didn't know any details.

"Um, I don't know too much about that, but I heard Yuna defeated a big monster that appeared here." I made sure to be vague about it being a kraken.

"So there are things even you don't know about, Fina. But that's enough information in and of itself, I suppose. The town is grateful because Yuna fought off a monster that attacked them, I see."

Yes, that was right.

"And that's why they've made these bear ornaments."

Lady Misa and Lady Shia seemed to accept it too.

Then Lady Noa asked Lady Shia, "Actually, I heard that Yuna was called to the capital by His Majesty before the beach trip. Did you hear any details?"

"I don't know much either. Just that it was a direct royal order and that Mother said she had to travel to Dezelt."

"Dezelt, the town?"

Lady Noa tilted her head to the side. Even Lady Noa didn't seem to know where that was.

"It's to the south of the capital. It's very far away, so it's difficult to get to."

"Yuna went all the way there?"

I remembered harvesting the scorpions. So that was when she'd slayed those.

"Fina, what else do you know?" Lady Noa looked me in the face. Wait? Did she notice?

"Uh, well..."

The scorpions were a secret, but also Lady Shia already said that Yuna went to Dezelt (was that what it was called?). Then maybe I could talk about it a little?

"I know a little bit... Yuna slayed a monster called a scorpion and asked me to harvest it. That's about all I know. But that's a secret."

"It's all right. This is a secret for just the bear fan club. No one will tell anyone else. I won't tell even Mother or Father, of course," Lady Noa promised.

"Um, Fina, what are scorpions like?" Lady Misa asked.

"Um, they have very hard shells around them and very hard hands and also a thin, hard tail."

Uh, I didn't know how to explain. All I kept saying was that they were hard.

"So, a scorpion then..." Lady Shia said, taking out a pen and drawing on some paper. "Like this, right?"

She'd drawn one on the paper.

"Yes, like that."

It looked really good. I knew Yuna was good at drawing, but I had no idea Lady Shia would be too. I was so thankful since I hadn't been able to explain.

"It looks scary." Lady Shia murmured as she looked at the drawing.

"They are really dangerous monsters. They have a stinger on the end of their tails, and you can die if they sting you. They also hide in the sand and can attack out of nowhere."

"I had no idea Yuna went somewhere so dangerous."

"His Majesty must have asked her to go precisely because it's that dangerous."

"But that means Yuna went that far away and then went to Mileela right after coming home to Crimonia."

She was right. I hadn't even known, but I went to talk to Yuna and asked her to do so many things right after she came back. She did everything I asked without even showing she was unhappy. Yuna really was so kind.

After that, Sherry talked about the bear bathing suit Shuri had been wearing. We kept the meeting going and had lots of fun until Marina and Elle came back to the room. Lady Noa seemed to still want to talk, but Shuri and Sherry seemed tired, so we ended the meeting.

I had a lot of secrets with Yuna, so I knew there would be trouble in the future just thinking about it.

AFTERWORD

I'M KUMANANO. Thank you for picking up *Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear's* fifteenth volume.

With the manga version, the Kuma series has already reached twenty total volumes.

Thinking back then the first volume was released, I never would have thought back then so many books would make it to publication. I don't even know how to thank everyone who has supported me until now.

In this volume, Yuna makes a waterslide, eats ice cream, and fully enjoys the beach. When Yuna hears about a moving island, she takes Fina, Shuri, and Shia on an exploration mission.

That island turns out to grow all sorts of fruit, so Yuna schemes to set up a bear gate on it, but things can't be that easy and trouble finds a way to Yuna, just as usual.

On top of that, Cliff and Gran stop by Mileela and lots of other things happen, but the company trip otherwise ends without a hitch.

This is the end of the worker vacation arc, but Yuna's adventures will still continue for a long time, and I'd be so happy if you kept following along.

Also, the promotional videos for the anime are done and the voice actors have been recording, so work has been progressing now.

There have been a lot of people involved in getting Kuma produced, including the director, who pulls everyone together. I'm not even sure how to thank everyone. I hope that even I can contribute, though there's little I can do.

I hope that you'll look forward to the anime as well, which is progressing step by step.

Finally, I'd like to thank everyone who strove to get this book out.

Thank you to 029 for drawing such beautiful illustrations, as always, and for taking my many requests.

I'm always relying on my editor as well. And also, to the many people who were involved in the publishing of *Kuma Kuma Kuma Bear* Volume 15, thank you.

I'm grateful for the readers who have read along thus far.

Well, I hope we can meet again in the sixteenth volume.

KUMANANO — ON A DAY IN MAY 2020



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PtFF by: traktorA7EN