

R Cultivator 161

Chapter 161: The Wedding (part 3)

Suddenly, an explicit scene of Tyler with the castle maids appeared the moment Mathilda entered the room. Startled by the abrupt change, she jumped back. Just as quickly, the room shifted again, transforming into a giant birdcage.

"Hmmm?" Tyler muttered, both surprised and suspicious.

Then Lily walked in. The room morphed into a small house where a younger version of herself was eating with her older brother. As she stepped out, the room returned to its normal state.

Tyler, still suspicious, pushed Mathilda back in. The scene of the maids fawning over him reappeared.

He pulled her out, and it vanished.

He pushed her back in, and it returned.

He repeated this three or four times to make sure.

"This room seems to have some kind of mechanism that shows people's current thoughts," Lily said.

"So your mind is full of... *horny* stuff?" Tyler smirked, looking at Mathilda.

Mathilda laughed, as if proud of it.

"What are you even proud of?" Tyler asked, shaking his head.

When Tyler entered the room, it transformed into a vast void, surrounded by countless stars, planets, and galaxies. His eyes lit up as memories of how he first arrived in this world flooded back.

"Why are your thoughts so... clean?" Mathilda asked, raising an eyebrow in suspicion.

"Oh, I was just recalling one of the best moments of my life," Tyler replied, smiling.

"Mr. Tyler? Lily? Mathilda?" Astrid's surprised voice echoed across the room. She ran toward them, tears welling up in her eyes. Mathilda extended her arms, expecting a hug. But Astrid dashed past her and embraced Lily instead. Mathilda's face went blank as she stood frozen, her eyes turning lifeless like a statue.

Tyler chuckled and walked over to her, wrapping her in a warm hug.

"Ah... There's still a little warmth in this cold world," Mathilda sighed, hugging him back with a content smile.

Suddenly, the room shifted again. The moans of maids filled the air as the explicit scene returned.

"Horny girl, stop thinking about that," Tyler muttered, his face flushing with embarrassment.

"Hehehe..." Mathilda giggled sheepishly. Astrid, curious but embarrassed, closed her eyes- though she peeked through the gaps in her fingers to steal glances at the scene.

"What is this place?" Tyler asked, his curiosity piqued.

"This is the Room of Emotions," Astrid explained. "A replica made by copying the original Memories Island. Unlike the original, which can delve into the past, this one only reflects current thoughts, stirred up by emotions. But Prime Minister Rover mentioned there's another replica of Memories Island within the Labyrinth."

"Cool... Well, let's get out of here," Tyler said, casually waving his hand.

"I-I can't," Astrid murmured.

"Why not? Are you being blackmailed?" Lily asked, narrowing her eyes.

"They poisoned my father. They might kill him if I escape. The prime minister promised that he'd save my father if the marriage goes through," Astrid explained, her voice trembling.

"For the sake of my father... and this country, I don't really care about the marriage," Astrid added with a sad smile. But beneath that smile, the weight of her pain was evident.

'Can't we just knock her out and kidnap her?' Tyler thought, glancing at her.

'Can't we just knock her out and kidnap her?' Mathilda thought, mirroring his exact sentiment.

"Can't we just knock her out and kidnap her?" Lily blurted out.

"Why are you saying that out loud?!" Both Tyler and Mathilda shouted in unison, their faces a mix of shock and exasperation.

Astrid blinked in surprise at Lily's suggestion. "W-What? Knock me out?" she stammered, her eyes wide with disbelief.

Lily shrugged, entirely unfazed. "Well, it's a simple solution."

Tyler rubbed his forehead, exhaling a long sigh. "We're not actually going to do that. Besides, knocking her out won't solve the bigger issue—her father's life is still at risk."

Lily crossed her arms, her lips curling into a mischievous grin. "You have a better plan?"

Tyler glanced at Astrid, who looked more fragile than ever, the weight of her decision visibly burdening her. His mind raced. There had to be a way to break this twisted arrangement without endangering her father.

"If we can't just take her, we need to make the prime minister believe she's still following his plan," Tyler said, thinking aloud. "We'll give them what they want—a wedding—but on our terms."

Astrid's brows furrowed. "You're suggesting we go through with the marriage?"

Tyler shook his head. "Not exactly. We're going to stage it. We need a diversion big enough to make them think everything's going as planned, while we work on freeing your father."

Lily leaned in with a smirk. "So, we're going to crash the wedding? Sounds like fun."

Astrid looked hesitant, biting her lip. "But how? The prime minister has people watching me constantly. If they notice anything suspicious, my father's as good as dead."

Tyler smiled confidently. "Leave that part to us. We'll make sure it's so believable that they won't see through it until it's too late."

"Just tell us where your father is," Tyler asked, his tone a little exasperated as he tried to focus on the plan.

Before Astrid could answer, Mana swooped in, hovering mid-air with an excited expression.

"Where have you been?" Tyler asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Oh, Mana found a small blueprint of this castle in one of the concubines' chambers," Mana said excitedly, holding up a crumpled piece of paper.

"Smart Mana," Tyler praised, patting her head.

Mana beamed as Lily took the blueprint and began scanning it. "Alright, this is the wedding hall, here's the emperor's harem..."

"This is the buffet area!" Mana interrupted, pointing at the map with bright eyes.

"Good... your observation skills are improving," Lily said with a teasing smile, trying to stay focused.

"This is the audience chamber, the meeting chamber..." Lily continued, but Mana cut in again, "If we take this route, we'll reach the buffet area."

"..." Lily was speechless, her patience wearing thin. "If you mention the buffet one more time, I swear I'll bite your lips."

"Buffet, buffet, buffet..." Mathilda chimed in with a mischievous grin and a perverted expression, clearly enjoying herself.

Lily sighed, giving up.

"Anyway," she pressed on, "this is where the emperor stays. Him being poisoned is not public knowledge, so it's likely this area is heavily guarded. We should sneak in, locate the emperor, and have Mathilda check his condition."

Tyler and Mathilda both nodded, their faces turning serious as they acknowledged the task ahead.

Mana fidgeted in the air, wanting to say something, but hesitating. She glanced at Lily nervously.

"If you have something to say, just spit it out," Lily said, rolling her eyes.

Mana grinned sheepishly. "Hehehe... if we jump from this balcony here, we'll land right in the buffet area."

"AAHHH—" Mana's triumphant laugh turned into a cry as Lily actually bit her lips, albeit playfully.

"I told you!" Lily huffed, while Mana nursed her bitten lips, pouting.

Tyler couldn't help but laugh, shaking his head. "Alright, everyone, focus. We've got a rescue mission, not a food tour. Let's sneak in, save the emperor, and maybe—just maybe—afterwards we'll visit the buffet."

At the mention of the buffet, Mana perked up instantly, despite her lip, and Mathilda gave a thumbs up.

Astrid, watching their antics, couldn't help but giggle. For the first time in a long while, she felt like she wasn't facing everything alone. This group was crazy, but they were her kind of crazy.

"Alright," Tyler said with a smirk, "let's move out."

"We will move tonight. Astrid, just wait for us. We'll definitely stop the wedding," Tyler said, giving Astrid a reassuring smile.

Astrid nodded, her eyes filled with hope.

As they left the room, silence fell again. The illusion that had once been a locked cage faded, revealing the room's true nature.

Tyler and the others retraced their steps, making their way back through the castle.

"Is there something on your mind?" Lily asked, glancing at Tyler.

"Nope, it's just... the thing Mana mentioned about jumping from the balcony leading us to the buffet area," Tyler replied, his mind still turning over the logistics.

Mana subconsciously covered her mouth and looked at Lily. "What about it?"

"Not that. I was thinking we could try jumping up to the balcony instead," Tyler suggested.

Lily raised an eyebrow. "Well, there are many arrays in the middle. It's not safe."

"But if we could counter those arrays?" Tyler countered.

Lily's eyes narrowed as she thought it over. "Even if you can create arrays to counter them, how many can you make before nightfall—"

Lily's words trailed off as she noticed something.

Lily nodded slowly. "If it works, it could simplify our approach. Let's proceed with the plan."

Tyler, with a calm smile, seemed to have an idea. His copper pot, hanging at his waist, emitted a faint glow, though Tyler didn't notice.

As they made their way through the castle, preparing for the night's mission, the team's spirits were high.

The castle, with its hidden dangers and intricate security, was no match for their determination. Tonight, they would act.

Chapter 162: The Wedding (part 4)

As Tyler worked in a secluded corner of the castle grounds, the map had led them to an ideal hidden spot for creating the arrays without being disturbed. While Tyler was focused, Lily, Mana, and Mathilda stood outside on watch duty, scanning the area to make sure no one approached.

Mana, growing bored of standing guard, floated back to Tyler, her curiosity getting the better of her. "What kind of array is this?" she asked, peeking over his shoulder.

Tyler glanced up from his work, patiently explaining, "The array in that building is a combination of an Alarm Array and a Lightning Array. The Alarm Array sends a signal to the main system somewhere in the castle when it detects an intruder. The Lightning Array stuns the trespasser and paralyzes them."

He handed Mana a small array disk, gesturing for her to take a closer look. "This one, though, diverts that signal. Instead of alerting the main array, it receives the signal and interrupts it. The only problem is the signal doesn't travel in a straight line, so we'll need to set up a bunch of these smaller arrays to cover the entire area and make sure the signal gets disrupted."

Mana's attention waned, her eyelids drooping as she fought off sleep. "What about the paralysis part?" she yawned.

Tyler smirked. "We could use Anti-Lightning Charms, but I doubt they'd be strong enough. So, instead, I'm making Lightning Rod Arrays. They'll absorb the lightning before it can hit us."

He handed her another array disk. "Help me copy these."

Excited to help, Mana grabbed the copper pot hanging at Tyler's side and placed the array disk inside it.

Then she took an array disk out.

Then another one..

And another one...

Another one....

"How satisfying. It's been a while since Mana did this," she said with a smile. But then, in a playful mood, she quickly snuck a chicken leg from her pouch into the pot and copied that as well.

Tyler noticed and raised an eyebrow. "What are you doing?"

Mana gave an awkward laugh. "Nothing..."

"Give me some too," Tyler said, smirking.

A few hours later, Lily came back, checking in on their progress. "Did you finish it?" she asked.

Tyler tossed her two completed array disks. "All done."

Lily examined them, but after a moment, she paused, sniffing the air. "Wait... why do these smell like chicken?"

Tyler and Mana exchanged confused blinks, both trying to stifle their laughter.

"Mana... How could you eat without us?" Lily sighed, but a faint smile tugged at her lips.

Night had fallen over the castle, casting long shadows along the stone walls as the final guests departed for their lodgings. A few special guests, those with deeper ties to the royal family, were allowed to remain within the castle's guest suites. With the bustling of servants and maids fading into the background as they retired to their quarters, only the guards were left, patrolling the empty halls in silence.

In the dark, four individuals moved like shadows themselves, each masked by Phantom Masks that cloaked their presence. Among them, a young lady transformed into a phantom, her body shimmering as she became ethereal. Moving silently, she placed small arrays in every corner, her movements precise and calculated.

Tyler and his team quietly approached the buffet area, slipping through unseen. Their plan was simple but risky: jump to the balcony without triggering the lightning array, avoid detection from patrolling guards, and slip into the king's chamber. Though the plan seemed straightforward, there were countless things that could go wrong, and they all knew it.

Tyler led them forward, using small floating charms to ascend toward the balcony. These charms were delicate and could only be used once, but quantity was never a problem for Tyler.

The group landed lightly on the balcony, with barely a sound to disturb the night. For a brief moment, the array in the building sparked to life, sensing their presence. But, thanks to the small discs Mana had installed earlier, the alarm was intercepted. The signals never reached the main array hidden somewhere deep within the castle.

They moved swiftly, leaping from the balcony into the shadowed hallway beyond. The air was thick with tension; they were now deep within the heart of the castle, closer to the king's chambers where the highest security measures were in place.

"It would be nice if we had Isadora with us," Lily whispered.

Tyler nodded, fully aware that Isadora's hypnotic abilities could have made sneaking past the guards significantly easier. But tonight, they were on their own.

Everyone activated their Phantom Masks, turning invisible. The Phantom Masks cloaked their bodies in invisibility as they moved closer to the heavily guarded doors. Yet, as they neared the entrance, they noticed another set of arrays glowing faintly in the dark.

"Looks like getting inside is harder than expected," Lily murmured, scanning the area.

Tyler, who was already analyzing the complex structure of the array, furrowed his brow. "This particular array can only be deactivated from within. It's designed to trigger automatically if disturbed from the outside."

"Hmm..." Lily began, her voice trailing off.

MODE GHOST

Mana fused herself with Tyler, who was already in Phantom mode. The combination of the Phantom Mask and Mana's powers rendered Tyler nearly non-existent. Even Lily, who stood just a few feet away, couldn't sense him at all. It was as if Tyler had vanished from the physical plane.

Without hesitation, Tyler phased through the array, his form moving like a wisp of air as he slipped inside. He carefully pushed open the door, his movements slow and deliberate to avoid making a sound. The old man lying on the bed didn't stir as Tyler's eyes scanned the room for the core of the array. He ignored the sleeping figure, his focus solely on the glowing rune hidden near the far wall.

"This, hmm... this and that.." With quick precision, Tyler disabled the array. A soft click echoed in the silent room as the protective magic faltered. Outside, the guards patrolling the hall were none the wiser. Tyler's mastery of arrays was impeccable; not even the keenest mage would have sensed the disturbance.

Mana disengaged from Tyler and quickly returned to guide Lily and the others inside. This time, with the array disabled, they could slip in using just their Phantom Masks.

Inside, they found themselves face-to-face with the king, Astrid's father, who lay still on the bed, unconscious. His once regal features were sunken and pale, his breathing shallow.

"So, this is the king," Tyler whispered, his eyes drifting over the frail man. "Astrid's father."

"So Astrid's mother must be beautiful," Lily commented.

"Why do you say that?" Tyler asked.

"I mean, look at his face. Just average. Astrid must have inherited her beauty from her mother," Lily said.

"Is this really the time to discuss that?" Mathilda asked, tilting her head in confusion.

Mathilda began diagnosing the king. She checked his eyes, took his pulse, and used different test tubes to take a blood sample with a needle. After testing it, she frowned.

"He's been poisoned by some sort of soul poison. It's tormenting him. He's in a deep sleep, trapped in nightmares. The poison isn't in his blood; the veins in his head are green, meaning all the poison has rushed to his brain. His thalamus, medial prefrontal cortex, and posterior cingulate cortex are totally affected," Mathilda explained.

"Is there any way to cure it?" Tyler asked.

"Curing this type of poison is difficult but not impossible. With Astrid's angelic powers and healing magic, I'm sure she can heal him," Mathilda said.

"That explains why they didn't let Astrid meet her father," Lily noted.

"So they did all this to take over the country?" Tyler asked.

"Probably personal vendetta," Lily suddenly said.

"Huh?" Mathilda, Mana, and Tyler looked at her.

"They could have used a simple poison. But the fact that they used this kind of poison shows they wanted to torture the king," Lily said. Her expression suddenly changed. "Someone's coming."

Tyler reacted instantly, reactivating the array to mask their presence. They all faded into the background, just as the door creaked open.

A man in a black cloak entered the room, deactivating the array as if it were second nature. His face remained hidden in the shadow of his hood, but his aura was unmistakable.

"He's the one who spied on our ship that day," Lily whispered.

"Probably the same one who knocked Isadora out on the Silver Eye Pirates' ship," Tyler added, recalling what Isadora had mentioned about this mysterious person.

"He's likely the middleman between the prime minister and the Silver Eye Pirates," Tyler said.

The cloaked man knelt beside the bed, his voice low and filled with malice. "Tomorrow, I will marry your daughter. Tomorrow, I will finally..." the man murmured something inaudible.

Tyler and the others were surprised. Tyler's eyes widened in realization, 'So this is the groom.'

Chapter 163: The Wedding (Final Part)

"Can we knock him down?" Tyler asked in a hushed tone, his eyes narrowing as he watched the cloaked figure move through the room.

"Nope... He's strong. We can't take him out in one hit without alerting anyone," Lily replied, her eyes scanning the area for potential traps or alarms.

"Then let's just leave after he's gone," Tyler suggested, his voice calm but resolute.

The group remained perfectly still, their Phantom Masks keeping them concealed in the shadows as the cloaked man completed his inspection of the room. He muttered something under his breath, words too quiet for anyone to make out clearly. His presence lingered like a thick cloud of tension before he finally turned on his heel and left, reactivating the array behind him.

Moonlight filtered in through the stained glass ceiling, casting a delicate, multicolored glow across the polished marble floor. The hall was vast, its grandiosity evident in every carefully carved pillar and detailed mural that adorned the walls. The air was heavy with the scent of incense and freshly polished wood, giving the room an almost ethereal quality.

"So, this is the wedding hall," Tyler remarked quietly, his eyes sweeping the room.

"Oh! There's a buffet area—" Mana started to say with excitement.

"Yup, just shut up," Tyler cut her off with a playful grin. "If you want, you can buy any food in this world and multiply it."

Mana pouted, her fingers tapping the edge of the copper pot hanging from his waist. "Eating the same food with the same taste multiple times or eating different types of food with different flavors... Obviously, Mana prefers the latter," she said, puffing her cheeks in protest.

Tyler chuckled under his breath. Even in such tense circumstances, Mana's obsession with food somehow lightened the atmosphere.

After leaving the king's chamber, Tyler and Mana entered Ghost mode again, sneaking into the wedding hall. The hall itself resembled a grand cathedral, the ceiling arched high above them with intricate carvings of winged creatures spiraling along the edges. The centerpiece of the room was a massive statue of a woman, standing tall at the far end of the hall. She was depicted as a goddess, her stone features calm and serene. She held a staff in one hand, a glowing orb embedded at the top, and a wide-brimmed witch's hat rested upon her head, casting a shadow over her eyes.

The next day, Tyler, Mathilda, Mana, and Lily walked into the grand wedding hall. It had been decorated meticulously, with large, ornate chandeliers hanging from the ceiling and delicate flower arrangements lining the aisles. The air was filled with the scent of roses, lilies, and a touch of magic that made the scene sparkle. Guests were pouring in, dressed in luxurious clothes, their conversations buzzing around the upcoming event.

"Looks like it's gonna be one hell of a wedding," Tyler remarked as his eyes roamed over the crowd. He spotted several high-ranking nobles, merchants, and a few robed mages among them. The grandeur of the event was enough to make anyone feel small, but Tyler and his group didn't blend in—they stood out.

The noise and excitement began to hush when the bride appeared. Dressed in an ethereal white gown, her figure seemed to glow under the soft, multicolored light streaming through the stained glass windows. She was like an angel descended from the heavens, every step she took drawing gasps of admiration from the audience. The Prime Minister, Rover, walked beside her, guiding her down the aisle.

"She's really something," Tyler whispered to Lily, who was seated beside him. Lily simply nodded, her expression unreadable as she scanned the room.

As the bride reached the altar, the crowd waited in anticipation for the groom to appear. However, when he did, murmurs of disappointment rippled through the hall. The groom was wearing a mask that concealed his face entirely, save for his blonde hair that peeked out from beneath. A few of the more curious onlookers tried to pry into his identity using their divine senses, but something blocked their efforts. The air grew tense as people began whispering among themselves, but no one dared to voice their displeasure—after all, the Prime Minister wielded immense power.

Well, almost no one.

"Remove the mask, groom. Are you even the Prime Minister's son?" A loud voice rang out, cutting through the low hum of conversation.

All eyes turned to the source of the voice, and the crowd parted like the sea, revealing Tyler and his group sitting in the center. The sight of Tyler surrounded by beautiful women only added to the shock, and the attention of the room immediately focused on him. Beside him, a man wearing a hat had his head buried in his arms, appearing to be fast asleep.

"Who—who might you be?" the Prime Minister asked, his tone a mix of confusion and irritation.

"Oh, where are my manners?" Tyler stood up and offered a slight bow. "I am Tyler White, Astrid's friend and owner of White Crown Galleria."

Gasps echoed through the hall at the mention of White Crown Galleria. While the name was new to some, most had heard of the business. In less than a month, it had become famous across the entire kingdom.

The Prime Minister's eyes narrowed, but his voice remained controlled. "Due to an omen, the groom is not supposed to show his face," he said smoothly.

Omen. The word hung in the air, immediately silencing any further objections. In this world, omens, fortunes, and seers were taken extremely seriously. No one dared to question the word of a seer, especially not during a sacred ceremony like a wedding.

The Prime Minister continued, "This is my adopted son. He has received all of my teachings, and I can assure you, this country will prosper under his guidance."

The nobles in the crowd nodded their heads in agreement, like chickens pecking at feed, eager to show their loyalty to the Prime Minister.

Tyler smirked, clearly unimpressed. "Nice... Cool... Anyway, Astrid," he said, turning his attention to the bride, "we saw the king yesterday. He's been poisoned with some kind of soul poison. Your magic is the only one that can heal him."

The hall fell silent, the weight of Tyler's words pressing down on everyone present.

"What nonsense are you spouting?" the Prime Minister roared, his face turning red with anger. "Guards, throw them out!"

But Tyler ignored him, his eyes now fixed on Astrid. "Please help him," he said calmly as he reached over and removed the hat from the man sleeping next to him, revealing the face of the king. The guards, who had begun to move toward Tyler, immediately stopped in their tracks.

Gasps erupted from the crowd once again as they realized that the unconscious man was, in fact, the king himself.

The Prime Minister's expression twisted in rage and fear. "Are you declaring war? How dare you kidnap the king?!"

"Nuh uh," Tyler wagged a finger in mock scolding. "We're just waking up the king."

"Father..." Astrid's voice was a whisper, but it was filled with emotion. She was already by her father's side, her hands glowing faintly with magic. Without hesitation, Lily moved forward and unlocked the bracelet on Astrid's wrist. Prana restraints—devices meant to suppress magic.

"Wow... Restraining the crown princess's prana, huh?" Tyler murmured loud enough for the crowd to hear. "I wonder who the real rebel is in this situation?"

The Prime Minister's face paled, but before he could respond, the masked groom spoke up. "Stop them. Capture all of them!" His voice was harsh and commanding, and for a moment, it seemed like the Prime Minister would hesitate. But the masked man's voice brooked no argument.

"Just do it..." he hissed.

As the guards began to move, Astrid's hands trembled. "I need more time," she whispered desperately as she focused on healing her father.

"Okay... That wasn't part of the script," Tyler muttered, rubbing the back of his neck. "I thought he'd wake up sooner. Alright, I'll buy some time."

Tyler stood in front of the guards, arms casually folded, a smirk playing on his lips.

Suddenly, Astrid froze, her magic faltering. She heard a voice—one that sent a chill down her spine.

"Don't heal him. If you value your little lover's life."

It was the masked man's voice, transmitted directly into her mind.

"Lutz..." Astrid's voice trembled.

"Why did you stop?" Mathilda asked, noticing the sudden change in Astrid's demeanor.

"Probably because that guy blackmailed her," Lily said, her eyes narrowing. "Hmm... Let me guess, the only leverage he could use against her is... someone named Lutz."

"What are you talking about?" the masked man asked, feigning ignorance.

"Don't worry, Astrid. Just heal your father," Tyler said confidently. "I'm pretty sure he won't kill Lutz."

"What do you mean?" the masked man asked, his voice suddenly tense.

Tyler's smirk widened. "Because that would be suicide. Are you really going to kill yourself, Lutz?"

The masked man took a step back, visibly shaken. Astrid's eyes widened in shock, and even Mathilda and Mana exchanged surprised glances. Only Lily remained unfazed, as if she had already pieced it together.

"You... are the son of the Hero Evergreen," Tyler said, his voice booming across the hall. "Lutz Evergreen, the one who poisoned the king."

The crowd gasped once again, their whispers turning into a roar of disbelief.

The masked man's hand shook as he reached up and slowly removed his mask, revealing his true face. His blonde hair turned into brown hair, and his features shifted, revealing a familiar face.

"Lutz!?" Astrid's shout echoed throughout the wedding hall, her voice filled with a mixture of shock and betrayal.

Chapter 164: Evergreen

A gentle breeze swept across the village nestled on the outskirts of the Rosefall Kingdom. The sun bathed the fields and cottages in golden light, casting long shadows as the day meandered into late afternoon. The tranquility of the scene contrasted sharply with the peals of innocent laughter echoing from a group of children playing in the village square. They were engaged in a spirited game of hide and seek, their playful shouts filling the air as they darted around hay bales and between wooden fences.

At the edge of the square, just outside the boundary of their game, a small figure stood, quietly observing. A little girl, no more than six years old, with golden hair cascading down her back, stood watching the other children. Her large, sky-blue eyes sparkled with curiosity, while her face—perfectly framed with soft, cherubic features—radiated an ethereal charm that seemed almost out of place amidst the rustic backdrop of the village.

Her name was Astrid. A princess, though the villagers knew her only as the niece of a reclusive nobleman who lived on the outskirts. She had spent most of her short life surrounded by luxury, catered to by servants, and adored by her family. But despite the love showered upon her, there was something magnetic about the carefree laughter of the children that intrigued her. For a moment, she considered approaching them, perhaps even joining in their game. But before she could make a decision, a loud voice called her name.

"Astrid!"

It was one of the house servants, beckoning her back toward the estate. With a final glance at the children, she turned and skipped back toward the grand mansion at the far edge of the village.

Astrid arrived at her uncle's mansion, a large, elegant estate that contrasted with the simple homes of the village. As soon as she stepped through the gate, servants greeted her warmly. The mansion's grand halls echoed with voices—staff bustling about, all of whom doted on her endlessly. Today, however, she had one specific request on her mind.

"Uncle, I want fireworks!" she declared as she found her way into her uncle's study.

Her uncle, a kind man with silver hair and a warm, gentle demeanor, looked up from the stack of papers in front of him. His laugh rumbled through the room as he indulged her whim. Within moments, the mansion's courtyard was filled with a display of colorful fireworks. Vibrant blues, greens, and reds exploded in the sky, painting the late afternoon with brilliant light.

The children from the village square, who had been playing their game of hide and seek, saw the display and ran towards the source of the fireworks. Their awe-struck eyes followed the dazzling patterns in the

sky as they approached the gates of the mansion. Standing just inside, they could see Astrid, the little angelic girl, giggling and clapping her hands in delight.

Her uncle, seeing the children, ordered the gates to be opened. "Let them in," he said with a smile, deciding to share the joy with the village children. As the children hesitantly entered, Astrid spotted them and grinned mischievously.

With a quick flick of her wrist, she tossed a lit firecracker—a long, winding 1000-wala—right in their direction. The kids' eyes widened in horror as the crackling explosion erupted, sending them screaming and running in all directions. Astrid's laughter rang out, as innocent and melodic as it was mischievous, as she watched them flee in terror.

Her uncle, however, did not share her amusement. He reprimanded her sternly for her actions, reminding her that being a princess came with responsibilities, not just privileges.

"Astrid, scaring the village children isn't right. You have to be kind to everyone, not just play with them when it suits you. Remember that," her uncle said, sitting her down for what felt like a lengthy lecture on the importance of empathy and fairness.

Though Astrid listened attentively, nodding with wide eyes and a seemingly contrite expression, the lesson didn't seem to stick. By the next day, she was back to her usual, carefree self.

The next morning, Astrid ventured outside the mansion's gates once again. She wandered the village streets, occasionally catching glimpses of the same children she had scared the day before. This time, she recalled her uncle's words—specifically his advice to play nicely with the village children.

While exploring, her eyes fell upon a young boy with tousled brown hair and a mischievous charm of his own. He stood at the edge of a group of children but didn't seem to be playing along with them. Curious, Astrid approached.

"Hey... boy... I wanna play too," Astrid said, her voice laced with a royal command that made it clear she wasn't used to being told no.

The boy stood there, staring at her in stunned silence. His brown eyes widened as if he had just laid eyes on a real angel.

"H-Hello?" Astrid waved her hand in front of his face, snapping him out of his trance.

"Oh! Uh... hi. I'm Lutz," the boy stammered, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly.

Astrid smiled, her earlier royal demeanor melting away. "I'm Astrid. Let's play hide and seek!"

Before Lutz could respond, Astrid grabbed his hand and led him toward the other children. They agreed to play, though the game turned out to be far from fair.

Whenever it was Astrid's turn to be the seeker, the children couldn't help but give themselves away. The moment her eyes landed on them, her smile—innocent, pure, and far too adorable—would send them into a daze. Even those who had hidden themselves perfectly found themselves walking out into the open, entranced by her angelic charm.

Later, during a game of tag, Astrid managed to win again and again, using her charm to distract anyone who came too close to tagging her. Whenever one of the children would chase her, she would put on a look of feigned sadness, her eyes growing wide and teary. The sight was enough to stop anyone in their tracks, too mesmerized by her cuteness to continue the chase.

"It's not fair," one of the girls finally complained, crossing her arms.

Lutz, standing beside Astrid, couldn't help but laugh. He turned the girl's head back toward Astrid, who flashed another dazzling smile. The girl's expression melted, her complaint forgotten. Lutz turned her head back and forth, watching as she alternated between looking dazed and then normal again.

The forest near the village was filled with the sounds of rustling leaves and birdsong as Lutz and Astrid ventured deeper into the woods. The sunlight filtered through the dense canopy above, casting playful shadows on the ground as the two children walked hand in hand, excitement sparkling in their eyes.

"I've seen it before! It only blooms around this time of year, the pink flower," Lutz explained enthusiastically. "It's so cute."

Astrid, curious but skeptical, raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure it's here, Lutz? It sounds too magical."

"It's real! I swear I saw pink flowers falling like snow. It's called... chakra or sakra... something like that," Lutz said, scratching his head, clearly trying to remember the exact name.

The two shadowy figures following them from a distance exchanged glances. One of the bodyguards whispered to the other, "Should we stop them from going into the forest?"

"As long as we keep an eye on them, it should be fine. We'll bring them back at dusk," the other replied.

Soon enough, Lutz and Astrid arrived at the foot of a towering, ancient tree with wide, sprawling branches that stretched toward the sky.

"Hmph," Astrid pouted, folding her arms in frustration. "There's no pink flower here. You liar, Lutz."

"I'm not lying!" Lutz protested. "I saw it! The flowers were falling, like snow. It's called... um... Sakura, yes! That's the name!"

The bodyguards hidden in the shadows stiffened at the name. One whispered, confused, "A Sakura tree? How could one grow here? That's impossible..."

But before anyone could question further, their senses sharpened. Danger approached. The bodyguards instantly appeared beside the children, grabbing them and pulling them close.

"Run!" one of them shouted.

From the shadows of the trees, a cloaked figure emerged, his form obscured but his intent clear.

"Do you think you can run?" the cloaked man taunted, his voice dripping with malice.

Without hesitation, one bodyguard drew his sword, while the other hoisted Lutz and Astrid into her arms and bolted into the depths of the forest.

The sounds of clashing steel rang out behind them as the bodyguard fought to protect the children. But their safety was short-lived. A sudden whistle split the air, and the bodyguard carrying the children stumbled, an arrow embedded in her leg. She cried out in pain but made sure to place the children carefully on the ground before collapsing.

"We're surrounded," she muttered through gritted teeth, as three more attackers emerged from the trees.

The injured bodyguard tore the arrow from her leg and tied a cloth around the wound before gripping her staff, determined to defend the children. Her fellow guard, still engaged in battle, quickly joined her. The two fought side by side, fending off the bandits with expert skill. But even amidst the chaos, something was terribly wrong.

Suddenly, with one swift strike, the guard wielding the sword turned on his partner. The blow was fatal, and the wounded bodyguard fell to the ground, lifeless.

Lutz and Astrid watched in horror as the betrayal unfolded before them. The guard who had once been Astrid's protector now sneered at them.

Chapter 165: Lutz's Reason

"Hehehe... Well, never mind. Princess, you're coming with me," the traitor said, his voice cold and sinister.

Lutz, trembling with fear, instinctively stepped in front of Astrid, his small frame shaking but determined to protect her.

"Hehehe... a hero, huh?" the traitorous bodyguard mocked before slapping Lutz with enough force to send him flying through the air.

But before he could hit the ground, he was caught—gently, almost effortlessly—by a woman who appeared out of nowhere, her presence commanding and fierce. She set Lutz down with care, her hand lingering on his shoulder protectively.

"You dare touch my son?" she asked, her voice calm but laced with lethal intent.

The traitorous bodyguard's eyes widened in fear. Before he could react, the woman unsheathed her sword and struck with lightning speed. Her blade gleamed for only a second before it was back in its scabbard. In that brief moment, every remaining attacker, including the traitor, fell to the ground, lifeless. There was no sound, no struggle—just swift, merciless justice.

Lutz and Astrid stood in stunned silence, their eyes wide with disbelief.

"Lutz!" Astrid cried out, running to her friend's side, her angelic face filled with worry.

The woman, a figure of grace and power, knelt down to check on her son. With a teasing smile, she glanced between the two children. "Well, would you look at that. My son has an angel for a girlfriend."

Astrid, still innocent to the implications, smiled brightly. "Yeah! I'm a girl, and I'm his friend. I'm his girlfriend!"

Lutz's mother, known as Evergreen, laughed, a melodic sound that cut through the tension. She was a renowned swordswoman, inheriting her skills from her father, a decorated war veteran. Her reputation was one of honor and valor, though few knew she had a son hidden away in the peaceful village.

Evergreen ruffled Lutz's hair. "You're lucky to have a friend like her. But next time, let's avoid wandering off into dangerous forests, hmm?"

Later that evening, as the sun set and the day's excitement settled, a visitor arrived at Evergreen's house. He bore an elegant letter sealed with the royal crest of Rosefall. An invitation to the royal capital had been extended, and it was addressed to none other than Evergreen herself.

The gleaming capital of Rosefall Kingdom stretched out below as a flying boat descended toward the grand castle that stood at its heart. The sun bathed the stone towers in a golden hue, casting long shadows over the bustling streets. As the boat neared the castle grounds, the sound of flapping banners and trumpets greeted its arrival, a fitting welcome for the Crown Princess.

As soon as the boat touched down, the first princess, Astrid, excitedly leapt from it, dragging her friend Lutz behind her by the hand. Her infectious energy made her seem almost weightless, like a fairy darting through the air. Without a second thought, she raced toward the castle, her golden hair flowing behind her.

"Daddy!" she called out with a grin, spotting a dignified man waiting at the castle entrance. The king of Rosefall stood with open arms, his regal expression softening as his daughter approached. His outstretched hand paused in anticipation of a hug.

"Come here, darling," he said warmly.

But to his surprise, Astrid barely slowed her pace as she waved him off with a quick, "Hello, Daddy, I'm going to play!" She dashed past him, dragging Lutz with her.

The king's smile froze, and his hand remained suspended in the air, unacknowledged. For a brief moment, the proud monarch was reduced to just a father left hanging.

Behind him, Evergreen, the legendary swordswoman, watched the scene unfold with a small, amused smile. She quickly concealed her expression, maintaining her respectful demeanor in front of the king.

"Welcome to the capital, Miss Evergreen," the king said, returning to his dignified posture. His voice carried the weight of his authority, though there was a hint of gratitude in his tone.

"It's a lifetime honor to be welcomed by the king himself," Evergreen responded, bowing her head gracefully.

The king nodded, his gaze lingering on her. "Thank you for saving my daughter. I didn't know the famous Evergreen had a son."

Evergreen's expression softened as she spoke, the weight of her past evident in her eyes. "His father passed away because of my enemies. I avenged him, but... I didn't want my son to suffer for my actions. I've tried to keep him safe, away from those who might seek revenge."

She sighed, her voice tinged with regret. "But it seems more people are aware of him now."

The king regarded her with understanding, his expression thoughtful. "You have my deepest condolences. If you're comfortable with it, your son is welcome to grow up here, within the safety of the castle walls."

Evergreen hesitated, her mind racing with possibilities. There was more she had to consider, not just for Lutz, but for their future. Her instincts told her that this offer could provide Lutz with opportunities, but she also knew it would tie them closer to the kingdom's political games.

Before she could respond, they were summoned to the audience chamber. The grand room was filled with courtiers and nobility, all awaiting the king's next proclamation. At the head of the room, seated on his ornate throne, the king stood and raised his hand, calling for silence.

"Today, we honor a true hero," the king announced, his voice resonating through the chamber. "Evergreen, Sword Master of legend, saved the life of the Crown Princess. In recognition of her bravery and her service to this kingdom, I declare her a Hero of Rosefall."

A roar of applause erupted from the chamber. Courtiers clapped, and nobles bowed their heads in respect. Outside the castle, the news spread like wildfire. Soon, the streets were filled with joyous celebrations, and bards began to weave songs of Evergreen's courage and valor, singing her name in taverns and markets alike.

Evergreen bowed her head before the king once more, her face composed, but her mind elsewhere. She knew the title of Hero would bring both admiration and scrutiny. For now, the kingdom celebrated her, but fame had its price.

Throughout the country, Evergreen became a symbol of strength and inspiration, especially to women and young girls who saw in her a role model of unmatched skill and independence. Her story echoed in every corner of the kingdom, sparking dreams of heroism in the hearts of many.

The news came suddenly, like a bolt of lightning from a clear sky: Evergreen, the Hero of Rosefall, was dead.

The kingdom wept. Streets that had once echoed with her name now fell silent, their people struck with disbelief. She had died while saving the Crown Princess, her final act of courage immortalized in sorrow. The bards who had once sung her praises now penned somber elegies, and the people of Rosefall Kingdom dressed in black, grieving the loss of their hero.

And for Astrid, the little Crown Princess, the loss was too great to comprehend. Her heart ached for her best friend, Lutz, who had been taken from her, whisked away before they could say goodbye.

Back to present

"You... are the son of the Hero Evergreen," Tyler said, his voice booming across the hall. "Lutz Evergreen, the one who poisoned the king."

The crowd gasped once again, their whispers turning into a roar of disbelief.

The masked man's hand shook as he reached up and slowly removed his mask, revealing his true face. His blonde hair turned into brown hair, and his features shifted, revealing a familiar face.

"Lutz!?" Astrid's shout echoed throughout the wedding hall, her voice filled with a mixture of shock and betrayal.

"W- why?" She asked.

"Heh." He let out a mocking laughter and said, "The king really didn't tell you what happened, huh?"

"Wh- what?"

"I am just here to avenge My mother. My mother was a Hero in the kingdom, but nothing but a plaything for your father. He forced her by using my name to threaten her and she had no choice but to yield." Lutz said with red eyes filled with anger.

"My father would never, no .. impossible." Astrid muttered she knelt down and vomited. Her stomach feels nauseous by the truth.

"She was killed by some bandits while saving the crown princess? No no... She was killed by your father." Lutz said.

"N-no it can't be..." Astrid Muttered. Lily patted her back.

Lutz walked near her, Lily tried to stop him but Astrid stopped her and moved closer to him.

"I am sorry, I - I really didn't know. I am sorry Lutz." Astrid said while sobbing.

Suddenly her voice stopped. A knife plunged into her heart.

"He took my loved ones from me. I will take his loved ones from him." Lutz whispered in her ears and said, "First you, then this kingdom."

"Noo..." Tyler shouted , it's too late to save her.

"With the Royal blood and the Angel blood. Let the Labyrinth appear." Lutz said.

The whole kingdom shook. A big earthquake appeared.