

All R. Artist 77

Chapter 77: Death of a Small Civil Servant

“Death of a Small Civil Servant?”

Upon seeing the title, Wei Long subconsciously assumed it was a detective short story. Given the open genre, it was no surprise to find content in that vein among the works submitted by the thirty short story authors.

He clicked on it.

Wei Long glanced at the word count and then froze.

One thousand eight hundred words?

He suspected he might be seeing things wrong.

Although short stories aren’t necessarily lengthy and he even advised Chu Kuang that shorter was generally better and to avoid excessive word counts...

But isn’t this a bit too short?

The whole piece is not even two thousand words?

I told him to keep it short, meaning around three to five thousand words!

Did Chu Kuang misunderstand my suggestion and intentionally minimize the word count —

Believing that the shorter, the better?

If it affects the quality of the work due to this misunderstanding, then it’s all my fault. Wei Long couldn’t help but hold his forehead.

Still, better start reading it:

[It was an ordinary night. The small civil servant sat in the second row of the main hall, watching a play through opera glasses. He was experiencing a moment of tranquility.]

Tranquility?

This kind of description was new to Wei Long, but he seemed to understand the implicit meaning of the phrase without having to ponder it.

“Interesting description.”

The following description was even more intriguing: [Suddenly, his face contorted; his eyes disappeared; his breath stopped. He removed the opera glasses from his eyes and bent over...]

Was he having a heart attack?

Is this the death of the civil servant?

A small civil servant without a name?

Wei Long was baffled until he continued reading and found out the civil servant had simply sneezed.

“Pff.”

Looking back, the previous description was actually depicting the state of a person sneezing. Chu Kuang’s description, although seemingly convoluted, gave a peculiar sense of precision that formed an image of a person sneezing in Wei Long’s mind.

Just a sneeze, the civil servant was naturally not worried, everybody sneezes.

The worst consequence of this action was probably catching a cold.

That's what Wei Long thought, too.

However, the plot twist occurred here: [The small civil servant panicked because he saw the little old man sitting in front of him in the first row of the main hall intensely scrubbing his bald head and neck with his glove and mumbling something.]

Clearly.

The civil servant's sneeze had landed on the little old man.

And the civil servant's panic was because...

The civil servant recognized the old man as a retired general who had served in a government department!

"Is he going to get killed by the general?"

Wei Long inevitably made another association with the story's title.

Readers will always tend to imagine the next part of the story.

However, it's hard to picture exactly where a short story is heading.

As expected, the civil servant started apologizing.

But the general, contrary to Wei Long's imagination, did not explode in anger

— he simply expressed understanding generously.

"Was this general a smiling tiger? Seeming magnanimous in public but likely to take revenge on the civil servant privately?"

That was a new idea in Wei Long's thoughts.

And this nameless civil servant was naturally harboring similar worries.

So he apologized again, going so far as to make all kinds of solemn promises, insisting it was unintentional.

The general seemed annoyed and said, ["Ah, please do sit down! Let me watch the play!"]

Had the general become angry? The civil servant grew even more frantic.

He could no longer concentrate on the drama unfolding on stage.

It was only when the intermission started, and the general went to the restroom, that he followed suit, taking the opportunity to apologize for the third time.

[Enough... I've already forgotten it, but you just won't let it go!]

The general shook out his trousers, buckled his belt, and, sounding helpless and rather impatient, pursed his lips.

Wei Long had a sudden realization: "It seems the general really wasn't angry."

Influenced by the title, he always thought the general would kill the civil servant for this, but according to the descriptions in the novel, this general expressed forgiveness many times over, which clearly indicates he's not such a petty person.

For the civil servant, this sneeze was just a false alarm.

Wei Long found relief.

But the civil servant did not find relief.

He was still full of mental gymnastics: [He said he's already forgotten, but there's a fierce light in his eyes. Moreover, he doesn't want to talk more, I should explain to him, clarify my unintentional action, clarify that sneezing is a law of nature, otherwise, he might assume that I meant to spit on him. Even if he doesn't think this way at the moment, he will definitely think so eventually!]

Isn't this a bit too timid?

Wei Long suddenly found the civil servant somewhat amusing.

When he got home, the civil servant confessed his blunder to his wife. She too was frightened and urged her husband to apologize.

The civil servant complained: [I know, right? I already apologized, but for some reason, his reaction felt strange, as if he doesn't want to hear my explanation.]

He has already forgiven you!

Do you have some sort of persecution complex?

The civil servant's overthinking made Wei Long's laughter grow louder.

But this civil servant just couldn't get the hint. The second day he seriously dressed in his uniform, brought a gift, and once again formally apologized at the general's residence-

Not only the general, but-

Wei Long thought if it was himself being pursued by someone apologizing endlessly, even he would be utterly confused.

The general was receiving guests at the moment, apparently important ones.

The civil servant could only wait for the general to finish receiving his guests before apologizing once again.

Just like before.

The general expressed his understanding, only when talking, he couldn't help but reveal a troubled and distressed look.

“A troubled look.”

These four words almost brought Wei Long to a laughter outburst.

Apologizing is supposed to be a courtesy, but if it's someone who keeps pressing on with their apologies, no matter how much you forgive them, like this civil servant, wouldn't you naturally look vexed?

Amid the ludicrousness, Wei Long actually started to feel some sympathy for the general.

Being an overthinker, the civil servant naturally noticed the general's troubled look. He was uneasy, feeling that the general obviously had no intent of forgiving him.

For the sake of his future-

Although he thought the general was too petty, holding onto his minor error, he still wanted to make up for it.

So he decided to write a letter to the general, explaining the situation sincerely.

Unfortunately, his mind was blank, and he couldn't even write a letter.

He could only visit the general again the next day, expressing his apology once again.

The story basically ends here.

The past few passages follow the Civil Servant's constant apologies, simply and concisely forming an ending, an anticipated ending.

[“Get out!” The general shouted, his face turning green, his body trembling.]

[“What?” The civil servant asked, his body numbing with fear.]

[“Get out!” The general said again, stamping his foot.]

[It felt as if something was churning in the civil servant’s stomach, he saw nothing, heard nothing, retreated to the door, onto the streets, walking slowly all the way home... He walked into his house without removing his uniform, collapsed on the couch... And died.]

[...]

Yes, the civil servant died.

This is the origin of the title, Death of a Small Civil Servant.

He constantly badgered with apologies, until he completely enraged the general. As a result, when the general lost his temper, he was scared to death by his own overthinking!

So this is a thousand-word novel?

Not the detective story one might imagine, nor a story where the general kills, but a story about a man frightened to death by his own imagination.

Although just over a thousand words, the content is rich and exaggerated, yet it seems to fit some kind of logic, allowing readers to naturally accept the novel’s premise to the extent that the whole story is full of interest!

At this moment-

Wei Long was amused to the point of slapping his thigh. He didn’t expect Chu Kuang to have a sense of humor too.

But halfway through his laughter, Wei Long’s smile suddenly froze, as if the scene was paused.

As if a charge surged through his entire body, Wei Long's eyes widened suddenly in shock: "Wait... this story..."