

In the Name of Empress

Chapter 4: Chapter 4: Need to Pay More!

"Sir, please wait a moment."

A slightly timid voice sounded from behind.

Sweet and soft, with a slight tremor.

Just from the sound, it seemed like the kind of soft girl who could be made to cry with a single punch.

Roland stood at attention and turned around.

The swift motion even startled the girl.

Good, the judgment was entirely correct.

Though the girl's tall, upright figure didn't completely match the expected image, the timidity in her expression matched his guess perfectly.

The corner of his mouth slightly lifted, and Roland smiled with satisfaction.

The girl's face was delicate and pretty, appearing a bit socially anxious, and after taking a few deep breaths, she spoke softly:

"Sir, sorry to bother you, I am Alina, a student at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts. My end-of-term assignment is to paint a portrait of a melancholy noble, can you help me?"

The soft and beautiful girl pleaded in an almost prayerful tone, something no true gentleman would cruelly refuse.

But Roland could.

After all, he wasn't exactly a gentleman.

Even if he was, he didn't have time to waste now. If nothing unexpected happened, he really only had three days of light left.

Even though he didn't want to disappoint the girl, he still firmly shook his head.

"Sorry, I'm not a noble, and my time is extremely precious."

"I know, true nobles wouldn't allow a foreign commoner to paint their portrait. But your demeanor is very noble, you could definitely serve as a model. Oh, and I'll pay, five times the usual rate for a regular model!" The girl mustered her courage and raised the offer.

Five times? Oh my, you should have said so earlier.

If not for the looming scent of death, Roland would have accepted without hesitation, but considering the urgency of time, he could only refuse with regret.

"Not possible now. A portrait requires time, and these days I am very short on time. Give me your detailed address, and I'll provide home service over the weekend, how about that?"

It's Tuesday today, the winners of the essay contest will be announced on Thursday.

If he can survive until Sunday, he'll need to find a way to earn a living.

Life is not just about the immediate challenges, there are even more complexities out there.

The offer she made was truly too much, refusing any further would be impolite.

The girl quickly took out a charcoal pencil she carried, felt around her pocket, and wrote down an address on a handkerchief, handing it to Roland.

"I don't want others to know..."

Roland raised an eyebrow, sensing the smell of added compensation, "A secret commission?"

"Double the pay again!" The girl read Roland's look.

"You are truly a generous employer, as you wish."

Roland casually tucked the handkerchief into his pocket and turned to leave.

Watching his departing figure, the timidity in the girl's eyes gradually disappeared and became clearer.

She pulled out her glasses from her pocket and put them on, squinting as she stared at Roland's back, her lips slightly curved.

Initially, it was Roland's slightly melancholic aura that attracted her, but a woman's sixth sense told her he was different.

After secretly observing with astrology, she found his fate was elusive and untraceable.

For an astrologer, every untraceable person is a valuable resource.

Deciphering the fate of an untraceable person might help her advance to an observer or even a Star Mage.

Forget five times the pay, she wouldn't mind paying another ten times that.

Offering only five times was to prevent scaring Roland away with a too-extravagant offer.

Normal people would be wary of a sudden windfall.

Roland didn't take the promised weekend part-time model job seriously.

His main task now was to stay alive.

He didn't rush back to the post office but instead headed to the grand library.

Here lay the world's most extensive collection of books, many of which were spoils from the Empire's expansions.

All Imperial Citizens could apply for a library card to access various books.

This was a benefit the Empire provided for all its citizens.

Unfortunately, in a time when compulsory education hadn't been popularized, reading was a privilege of the elite, leaving the enormous library rather desolate.

Roland headed straight for the third floor of the library, locating the texts of the Imperial Authority Law and the Imperial Criminal Code, and casually sat in a corner.

Sussex had its national conditions, monarch power was not absolute.

The constitution stipulated that national power was shared by the Emperor, nobles, and Imperial Citizens.

This Imperial Authority Law was both a confirmation and a limitation of imperial power.

Wanting to exploit legal loopholes—excuse me, use legal tools to protect oneself—knowing the legal text was essential.

Roland was eager to find clauses that limited the Emperor's abuse of penal power, but he soon felt disappointed.

Although the Imperial Authority Law imposed many restrictions on the Emperor's power, making him somewhat of a figurehead, the law offered considerable flexibility.

In the final clause regarding the Emperor's power, unsurprisingly, there was an all-encompassing catch-all.

Supplementary clause: Monarch's honor and dignity are inviolable, if the Monarch personally determines an action to be offensive, they can freely adjudicate. The judgment should respectfully consider other legal provisions...

The special clause was lengthy, dictating many scenarios, but in simple terms:

If the Emperor thinks you should die, then you are definitely dead.

Roland closed the lawbook, softly muttering, "Damn autocracy! Totally inhumane."

"Sir, do you also believe that freedom and human nature should not be constrained? I invite you to join the Freedom Utopia Society..."

Just when Roland was preparing to return the book, a deep voice emerged from a dark corner.

As the deep voice prepared to get in a few more persuasive words, Roland had already vanished with lightning speed at the door.

Leave me alone!

Though he deeply detested authoritarian rule, Roland wasn't naive.

Productivity determines relations of production; changing the social structure isn't something a teenage rebellion can achieve with a few slogans. In an era of low productivity, where production resources were mostly controlled by monarchs and lords, there was still a long way to capitalist systems, much less talking about Utopia?

He had no desire to become an ornament on the cross at Monarch Square.

As Roland disappeared without giving even the chance for a meeting, the bearded man emerging from behind the shelves looked thoughtful, deep in contemplation.

Just as Roland rushed out of the library, a newsboy blocked his path.

"Sir, the Sussex Sun special edition, would you like a copy?"

Forget this toilet paper news, no time.

Roland was about to leave but suddenly remembered the Sun's accurate political news that day, stopped, and pulled out two coins.

"If the content is wild enough, give me one."

The newsboy smiled at Roland, shook his head, and whispered, "Sir, this time the special edition includes Princess Sylph's interesting stories and secrets, so the price is a bit higher."

"How much?"

"One shilling."

What? A sixfold price hike, why don't you just rob me?

Roland unhesitatingly fished out a shilling coin, handed it to the newsboy, grabbed the newspaper, and hurried away, reading as he walked.

Almost back to the post office, Roland wadded up the newspaper and tossed it into a trash can.

What a crap paper, truly impressive.

An eight-page special report, and not even a high-resolution picture of the Princess, just two images shrouded in veils.

But the toilet paper news wasn't totally useless.

The paper reported the Princess loves cats, and three years ago during a tsunami, she sold jewelry to generously donate 107 pounds in gold coins.

That's not a small amount, at the time it could buy a stand-alone house with a yard on Belphar Street.

The paper also mentioned the Princess's teacher, the current Minister of Internal Affairs, Wald.

A senior official known for acting justly and with caution.

Having read this information, Roland felt slightly at ease.

An adorable little princess like this shouldn't mind a playful subplot in some novel about her getting pregnant out of wedlock, right...

Her kindness might only make Roland's death a bit less painful then.

Damn that toilet paper news, worth every shilling.

Preparing to go upstairs to clock out for the day with a touch of coldness, Roland bumped into the hurriedly descending Lisa.

Before he could leave, she excitedly stopped him, "Hey, wait! How could you not tell me about the cute girl? You should've said something to your sister."

"What cute girl, you can't just say things like that even to your sister."

Lisa just flashed a small smile at the girl sipping tea inside, without a word, just moving her lips in a silent greeting before disappearing from sight.

As expected, Roland sat expressionless opposite, his voice carrying a shade of aloofness, "Miss Alina, we agreed on the weekend. Why are you here?"