Empress 43

Chapter 43: Completely at Odds

"Genius, truly a genius idea!"

The editor-in-chief of Sun Society, the tall and thin Mr. Duke, slammed the table as he showered Roland's initial draft with high praise.

He adjusted his glasses, and his previously icy expression melted like spring.

"Ah, Mr. Roland, Miss Sif, it is an honor for our society that you both chose to submit manuscripts to us!"

He shook the bell vigorously, harshly scolding the quickly summoned servant to serve tea to the distinguished guests.

Later, he lavished praise on Roland in an excessively sycophantic tone.

"Mr. Roland, your article is in a style I seldom encounter."

"To be frank, the current literary scene in Sussex has gone astray. Many so-called literary bigshots write nothing but pointless lamentations."

Even someone as thick-skinned as Roland felt a bit embarrassed by such straightforward compliments.

Adhering to the principle of mutual commercial flattery, Roland replied with a smile, "You can't say that, the literary bigshots write tragedies, I write comedies, the styles are different."

"Artistic expression comes in many forms, and shouldn't be generalized."

Duke scoffed disdainfully, sneering:

"I’m not targeting anyone specifically, just think many have a twisted understanding of tragedy. True tragedy should tear apart beautiful things for the reader to witness, not throw something repugnant in the reader’s face and smugly declare it art."

"Whether it’s art, the reader has the right to judge."

With heightened emotions, Duke slammed the table and loudly complained:

"I once paid a hefty price to invite several literary giants to write columns for our society, yet these folks completely disregarded my requests and even mocked me for not understanding art."

"Bah, they take the newspaper’s money but refuse to comply, utterly lacking professional ethics!"

Roland suddenly came to realize why Duke held such a grudge against the old figures of the Sussex literary scene—it turned out to be private grievances.

Realizing he was about to say too much, Duke quickly stopped complaining and changed the topic, "Mr. Roland, are you planning to submit just one manuscript or hoping for a long-term collaboration?"

"What are the terms for single submission and long-term collaboration?"

"Single submission is like other authors—submit and get paid. Revenue can be a fixed buyout or a proportional share. Long-term collaboration involves signing as one of our contributing authors for frequent collaborations; the specific price depends on newspaper sales and magazine circulation, offering higher benefits."

Duke elaborated extensively.

Roland understood his terms immediately, respecting him greatly.

Such a distribution model closely resembled the modern composition reward system, with hints of online literature.

Unexpectedly, The Sun's business philosophy was so advanced; no wonder it thrived in the niche field of toilet papers.

Impressive indeed.

Although he didn't rush to express his stance, Roland internally acknowledged Duke and The Sun. He took the two contract versions Duke handed over and mulled over how to maximize benefits.

Sif similarly understood Duke's words, full of contempt.

Is this still called literature?

It's simply business.

Such materialistic things can truly be considered literary works?

She was very certain that Roland wouldn't accept long-term collaboration.

She knew Roland.

Roland would never sell out for money like a shameless scoundrel without principles.

She read several of Roland's novels and never saw him ask her for money.

Clearly, Roland wrote not for profit but for a pure literary dream.

She knew Roland would only accept a single collaboration model because publication of the submission was necessary; otherwise, he wouldn't even consider it.

After reviewing the contract carefully, Roland politely handed it back to Sif to have a look.

Sif glanced through it briefly and further lowered her opinion of Duke and The Sun.

According to the contract Duke provided, the authors are just cash cows for The Sun; they must rack their brains to consider how to please readers, create buzz, and grab attention in order to gain more revenue.

This is entirely different from the traditional method of monetizing literary works.

Literary scholars used to collaborate with the Imperial Family and Nobility, often not writing for years, but could live off the written works for several.

With absolute creative freedom. Without tying revenue to sales, they didn't need to consider the readers' opinions and could freely create astonishing works.

In such creative freedom, few masterpieces of tragedy and countless garbage masked as tragedy emerged.

Yet never questioned.

Because this model persisted for thousands of years.

It had always been this way.

The Sun's approach was rebellious, defying ancestral methods, no wonder it's boycotted by other newspapers and publishers and labeled a toilet paper.

Putting down the contract, Roland and Sif exchanged a glance and simultaneously nodded.

Under Mr. Duke’s expectant gaze, they spoke at the same time.

"We choose long-term collaboration!"

"We choose single submission!"

Duke: "..."

Can’t you two sync your thoughts before responding? Your answers are not just different, they’re complete opposites.

Roland: "..."

Sif: "..."

The air in the meeting room was almost saturated with tension until Sif’s soft voice broke the silence.

"Roland, this is your work, you decide." Sif whispered, biting her lip.

"No, this work carries your efforts too; you decide." Roland spoke generously.

Seeing the situation about to spiral, Duke quickly stepped up to mediate.

"Mr. Roland, Miss Sif, I believe there’s no need to be so tangled up. Since you submitted, this at least indicates the desire to publish the manuscript in our society, right?"

"Yes."

"Hmm."

They spoke simultaneously—just simple syllables, yet with completely different meanings.

With a smile, Duke offered a suggestion, "How about this: we can sign a semi-long-term contract. This submission enjoys long-term collaboration benefits, whether you wish to continue submitting afterwards is up to you."

"If you choose not to continue, the contract simply freezes. If either of you has intentions for further collaborations, the contract reactivates anytime, agreed?"

Duke’s suggestion brimming with sincerity provided Roland and Sif the best deal.

Willing to collaborate would guarantee higher long-term collaboration benefits; unwilling would immediately suspend without penalties.

But the conditions seemed too lenient, arousing Sif’s sharp caution.

Lowering her voice, she asked, "Mr. Duke, my mother once said not to trust a pie falling from the sky, for most have poison. May I know the real reason?"

"Real reason?"

Duke paused briefly, lowered his voice to ask, "Mr. Roland, if I’m not mistaken, you are the champion of the Imperial Literary Competition, right?"

"That’s me."

Knowing The Sun learned of the Emperor’s assassination even before the Military Intelligence Bureau, Roland wasn’t surprised.

Though the Military Intelligence Bureau was jokingly called incompetent, it was still a serious intelligence agency.

The Sun had broader intel channels than the bureau, showcasing their strength.

Their failure to recognize him would indeed be odd.

"Exactly. Our boss greatly admires your talent. Upon your entry, I was instructed to secure this collaboration—that's the real reason."

Is that so?

Roland and Sif exchanged a look, accepting Duke's explanation.

The Sun's boss, Rupert, was a core member of the Duke of Jinquehua Dynasty; given the ability to identify Roland, undoubtedly recognizing Sif too.

It's reasonable for the Empire's loyal subjects to extend goodwill towards Sif.

Sif hurriedly stood up and softly said, "Thank you, Mr. Rupert, for your kindness. We accept the collaboration agreement."

The signing ended swiftly.

The contract came in triplicate; Roland, Sif, and Duke each kept a copy.

After signing, the pair quickly bid farewell.

Holding the contract, Duke clomped upstairs and stood at the president’s door. Before he knocked, the heavy door slowly opened.

A handsome yet almost otherworldly young man sat in the center of the sofa, a smile playing on his lips, raising his right hand casually.

The contract in Duke’s hand flew directly to the young man.

The door quietly closed.

Duke quickly left.

The boss disliked talkative employees; Duke understood the rules.

The strikingly handsome man approached the window, casually flipped through the contract, and turned his gaze to Sif’s carriage, muttering:

"Sylph, is your bloodline finally awakening?"

He then shook his head with self-mockery.

Judging by Sylph’s current performance, it shouldn’t be.

Since not awakening, the Jinquehua family’s secrets must remain frozen temporarily.

He wouldn’t reveal to anyone that the family’s ancestor recognized the Elf Imperial Family bloodline flowing within the Sussex Imperial Family on the battlefield—leading to their voluntary submission.

How could the descendants of the Elf General raise a sword against the Imperial Family bloodline?

Even an unawakened Imperial family member.