Empress 50

Chapter 50: Are You Also with the Imperial Faction?

Magic Era New Calendar, October 26th, 1791, seemed like an ordinary day.

The Sussex sun remained as stingy as ever, unwilling to reveal itself.

A gloomy mist urged people to retire early.

As night fell, the Imperial Capital swiftly hid beneath the pitch-black night.

Yet, where there's darkness, there's light.

The main banquet hall of Sheffield Palace was brightly lit, as if it were daytime.

The darkness outside was irrelevant to this place.

As night descended, carriages drove into Sheffield Palace, joining this grand feast.

In this hierarchically stratified world, even the manner of entering the castle highlighted the differences in status.

Members of the Imperial Family first entered the Sheffield Palace back garden, then took the Imperial Palace's carriage through the back entrance into the banquet hall.

Officials, nobles, and invited guests from various fields entered the Imperial Palace through the front gate, then, organized by identity and status, entered from lowest to highest in order.

Everyone's entry order was meticulously planned.

If a Duke were to enter the banquet scene before a Count, it would be a severe organizational error, even deemed a deliberate offense.

Thankfully, the Imperial Palace steward was seasoned and knowledgeable. He had managed countless high-end banquets with merely two to three hundred attendees without making errors.

Roland was different from them.

He was neither a member of the Imperial Family nor an ordinary guest, so he did not enter through the front or back door but through the side.

Not many were permitted to enter Sheffield Palace through the side door, yet Count Sif was indeed one of them.

Riding in her carriage, Roland naturally had a smooth entry.

The palace guards respectfully opened the gate for him.

They didn’t know Roland, but merely respected Count Sif.

Roland lifted the curtain of the carriage window, looked out briefly, and sighed softly, "What a pity."

"What a pity?" Nervous enough for sweat to bead on her fingertips, Lisa dared not look outside, fearing the guards might mistake her for a thief, causing her a shaky unease.

Listening to Lisa’s slight tremble in her voice, Roland casually leaned closer, whispering in her ear:

"I’ve read many novels; at moments like this, the plot should feature gate guards looking down on the protagonist, blocking him with boasts, only to be proven wrong badly."

Though still nervous, Roland’s jest brought a "pfft" of laughter out of Lisa.

"Nonsense, who would be so foolish? Those working at Sheffield Palace are highly selected, and their discernment is excellent. Moreover, who would employ an arrogant fool to guard the gate?"

Roland chuckled, holding Lisa’s hand in reverse, and softly said, "No longer nervous?"

"Nervous? Utter nonsense! When was I ever nervous?"

"Your left eyelash trembles conspicuously." Roland did not turn around, merely speaking blandly.

"Alright, I admit I am somewhat nervous. Do you have a way to control it?" Lisa bit her lip, abandoning stubborn denial.

Roland applied slight pressure, placing his other hand over her soft palm.

Instantly comprehending, Lisa realized Roland was nervous too, as his palms were sweating.

Of course, he wouldn’t tell Lisa that his nervousness stemmed not from the salon itself, but potential accidents during it.

Alina’s note had clear handwriting but vague content.

"Dear author, remember, more people prefer tragedy."

Damn riddler, what does this mean?

This sentence could have numerous interpretations.

Firstly, the literal meaning, which can be immediately dismissed. Alina wouldn’t be that bored.

Deeming it not a literal meaning, it surely implies a hint.

Do people prefer tragedy?

Tonight's banquet attendees mostly live fortunate lives; during leisure, they likely enjoy reading tragedies and similar stories.

Alina was an astrologer, enjoying playing the riddler.

But she wouldn't be bored enough to send intelligence personnel sneaking into his house to leave this note.

Although the handwriting differed, the spelling error peculiar to Jin Yuan people exposed the identity.

With such elaborate effort, undoubtedly important intel was meant to be conveyed.

Yet, sadly, useful information was scarce; merely implying someone intended to target him.

Without this note, he wouldn't have felt nervous.

He decided to have a good chat with Alina after the banquet, at least understanding her ciphering style to avoid being perplexed by another note in the future.

One way or another, this banquet was destined to be unsettling.

This was his only certain knowledge.

Uncertain of the forthcoming event, Roland was not inclined to ponder extensively.

Holding hands with Lisa, feeling the mutual dampness, eased their tension considerably.

Though nervous, Roland didn’t panic.

After all, this was a literary salon hosted by Empress; even if someone seeks trouble, it would be a verbal challenge.

Pulling out a pistol for a duel at the royal feast was surely impossible.

With her slightly trembling hand held by Roland, Lisa’s nervousness also eased significantly.

Suddenly remembering Teacher Margaret’s advice, "If clueless about what to do, do nothing. Doing nothing is never wrong."

She made up her mind.

Finding a corner to timidly blossom would suffice.

Or simply focusing on various delicacies.

Sussex’s cuisine was known as dark cooking, yet Sheffield Palace’s court dishes were unparalleled.

The top-tier employment option for Jin Yuan chefs was Sussex’s high society.

Nothing surpassed the palace in upper-class status; hence, here were the world’s finest Jin Yuan chefs.

Lisa resolved to occupy her mouth with food to avoid talking excessively, causing blunders.

Count Sif’s carriage entered the palace backyard via the side door; guards promptly greeted them to guide them to temporarily wait in the back garden.

Roland was tonight’s protagonist, naturally he shouldn’t appear too early.

Waiting was dull, so Roland opted to disembark for some air.

Lisa, dressed in an evening gown, wasn’t conveniently suited to alight and accompany him.

Shortly after Roland stepped out, another carriage gradually rolled in.

Curiously observing, Roland recognized the Jinquehua family emblem.

Hoping to avoid encountering people from the Jinquehua family in such settings, however, before retreating into the carriage, a hand waved toward him from that carriage’s window.

Politely responding to an invitation was unavoidable; Roland straightforwardly hopped onto the Jinquehua family’s carriage.

Before greetings commenced, the passenger inside had already removed his hat, slightly bowing towards him.

"Mr. Roland, although you are our newspaper’s long-term author, this is our first meeting. Allow me to introduce myself, Rupert, currently the president of The Sun."

"So, Count Princeton, my apologies."

Meeting within a carriage spared them tedious etiquette.

Roland briefly bowed conveying his greeting.

Feeling a slight chill, was meeting within a carriage Rupert’s intention? Meeting in such a confined space naturally fosters closer interaction.

"Relax, my friend, I hold no ill will."

Rupert remarked with a smile, "You are Count Sif's friend, tonight you will become Captain of the Imperial Knight Order, naturally a member of the Imperial Faction, we are allies."

Roland subtly squinted, pondering a response.

Observing Roland's cautious demeanor, Rupert calmly teased, "You should have seen The Sun's content; to acquire such comprehensive firsthand information, I naturally possess a robust intelligence network."

"As you know, an incompetent intelligence network surpassing the Military Intelligence Bureau doesn't exist in Sussex; knowing some insider news isn't surprising."

Roland eased up, smiling, "I just find the term Imperial Faction somewhat odd, considering the Imperial Knight Order exists solely for the Empress."

"Do you inwardly reject this label?"

Rupert faintly snorted, his voice turning cold, "The Sussex Empire's Imperial Authority reigns supreme, yet now the Imperial Faction hesitates to boldly declare their identity, how lamentable."