Empress 53

Chapter 53: Do You Think She Understands?

Wald couldn't understand Roland and Sylph, and neither could Alben.

In fact, he kept his head down, silently drinking, occasionally intimidating any who attempted to toast with him with his bloodshot eyes.

He's been feeling off these past few days.

Upset by Her Majesty the Empress.

Always feeling wronged by a devious woman.

After all, he is a dignified Minister of Justice and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, ranking fourth within the Cabinet.

He has a deep foundation in the Empire's legal circles, an exalted and unmovable status.

The Emperor has the power to replace certain Cabinet members, but cannot abuse it.

Sylph hasn't ascended the throne; if she forcibly uses her power, Alben might be pressured to resign, but she would face impeachment.

Sylph has the ability to trade places with him, but it would backfire on her.

This is the balance between Imperial Authority and the Prime Minister's power.

In any case, his power and influence surpass that of an overshadowed Empress who appears naive.

Imperial Authority is indeed supreme, but without strength to support it, it is merely an empty pledge that fails to extend beyond Sheffield Palace.

Sylph approached him for help; after brief consideration, he decided to assist wholeheartedly.

The reason is simple: with his help, Sylph's likelihood of reclaiming power increases greatly, securing the achievement of support, and with Wald being old and frail, it would be impolite not to become Chief Minister.

He's not afraid of Sylph; he simply wants more.

In witnessing a promising future, he condescends to personally handle a criminal case, working overnight to present Sylph with a satisfactory outcome.

Concurrently, he displays unwavering support.

In his understanding, Sylph is bound to accept his "loyalty."

After all, they need each other.

Yet Sylph rebuffed him, making him feel like an idiot running naked in the cold winter.

Alben had never experienced such humiliation; since leaving the Imperial Palace, he was resolute in overshadowing the Empress.

If Sylph chooses to be a perfect White Rose, then she should quietly remain in the garden and not emerge.

Out of sight, out of mind; in these days, he has avoided going to the Imperial Palace.

Having finally calmed down, upon seeing Sylph seemingly descend like a goddess, he felt a headache returning.

Clearly a vase, why won’t she just stay quiet and insist on pretending to understand politics?

As his headache persists, a figure both familiar and unfamiliar appeared before him.

Familiar because he’s heard of this person many times.

Unfamiliar because it was their first face-to-face meeting.

"Mr. Alben, I am Roland, nearly killed by Lori’s scheme. I’ve never had the chance to express my gratitude, so allow me to toast you with the Empress’s delightful wine this time."

"Oh, it’s Captain Roland, what a pleasure to meet."

Alben spoke of pleasure to meet, yet didn’t raise his glass.

It’s not that he couldn’t raise it, he simply didn’t understand what Roland intended.

He couldn’t see any connection between them.

Alben’s refusal was something Roland anticipated. After all, he’s a Cabinet Minister with real power; there’s no way he wouldn’t have some temper.

Roland, without the slightest awkwardness, confidently raised his glass and took a sip.

As long as he’s not embarrassed, the embarrassment falls upon others.

Sure enough, facing Roland’s shamelessness, Alben hesitated momentarily and reluctantly raised his glass for a sip.

No matter the circumstances, it’s not Roland who made him hold his breath, but the Empress.

Though there are rumors Roland is the Empress’s paramour, Alben trusted his judgment; the Empress remains the flawless White Rose—a mere rumor.

To ignore a friendly toast would not reflect poorly on Roland but on Alben himself.

A subtle sip, giving face while silently expressing dissatisfaction.

A mature politician can communicate intentions subtly and clearly with the simplest words or gestures.

Alben’s intentions were very clear.

Roland understood.

After all, he’s not like Sylph, a political novice.

Though he lacks political experience, he’s learned a bit from classics like "The Name of the XX" and "Hello, Prime Minister."

He smiled, raised his glass again, and softly remarked, "You resolved a major case in three days that would likely take others half a year; the Empress always speaks highly of you when mentioning you."

"What do you mean?"

Alben squinted, suppressing his anger.

Is this bastard deliberately poking at his wound?

Roland did not reply but instead looked toward the most dazzling star in the crowd.

He nodded and lowered his voice, speaking only loud enough for Alben to hear:

"Mr. Alben, does she seem like someone who understands politics?"

Alben’s complexion subtly changed, his knuckles slightly whitening as he clenched his glass.

She understands politics?

Politics my foot!

Even if she understood a little, could she make him so embarrassed?

Alben refrained from lashing out and instead whispered a question back: "Mr. Roland, what do you mean by this? If you don’t clarify, I will consider it an affront."

"Please, Mr. Alben, calm down."

Using the gesture of raising his glass to slightly conceal, Roland whispered:

"As you see, she understands nothing about politics. Her mind for political affairs is deposited with Wald, and if her mentor isn’t around, she’s prone to making blunders."

"Think about it, a month ago, Her Majesty was merely a beauty-loving, pure girl; she refused your suggestions with good intentions, unwittingly offending you."

Alben stayed silent, intently staring into Sylph’s eyes.

After a moment, he could essentially affirm that Roland spoke rightly.

Sylph was simply a White Rose in a greenhouse, both white and pure.

Expecting her to understand what it means to build a community of interests was indeed too much.

Alben squinted at Roland.

Was this message sent on behalf of the Empress or did Roland take it upon himself?

Regardless of which, it shows Roland's unusual status with the Empress.

Could the rumors be true, that he indeed has an unspeakable relationship with Her Majesty?

Alben slightly shook his head, extinguishing the gossiping spirit.

Such matters are the private affairs of Her Majesty, unrelated to him.

Realizing that Roland may have attained his position by getting close to the Empress, he couldn't help but feel a tinge of scorn towards Roland.

Though he didn't directly classify Roland as a jesting court fool, his respect for him plummeted.

He lightly clinked glasses with Roland.

"Mr. Roland, if the words you've spoken were brought to the Noble House, you could be charged with lèse-majesté and lose your barely-secured position as Captain."

"Would you tell?" Roland asked earnestly.

Alben was slightly bewildered, then cracked a smile.

He clinked glasses again with Roland.

The two exchanged a glance, both smiling.

There are multiple ways to bond between men, and commiserating about women is one of them.

Alben suddenly found Roland not entirely worthless.

Perhaps a court minstrel, but certainly no fool.

This time, he finished his drink, showing respect to Roland.

While holding his glass, he seemed like a lovable, chubby middle-aged man.

But when he lowered his glass, there was no trace of amusement in his eyes—only cool detachment.

"Captain Roland, there’s something I don’t quite understand: after Her Majesty assumes power, will you be Chief Minister or Grand General?"

Roland knew this was Alben’s major concern.

Nobody wants to take significant risks only to pave the way for others.

He knew the answer.

"Mr. Alben, perhaps you're unaware, but I am a Transcendent. Secular power is merely a scenic view on my path to greater strength. Neither Chief Minister nor Grand General are for me."

Seeing Roland's sincere gaze, Alben suddenly grasped the truth.

He was truly foolish.

Roland aims to become a Prince; who cares about competing with you for that?

Absent of conflicting interests, drinking together naturally becomes more amicable.

Alben proactively toasted Roland again, quietly reminding:

"Be cautious of the Macbeth Clan; they plan to challenge you to an honor duel during the banquet, determined to compare both literary accolades and life and death."