

Chapter 24: Penny-Pincher

The sky outside was gradually dyed golden as Klein looked into Melissa's eyes. He was momentarily at a loss for words; none of the lines he prepared could be used.

He coughed lightly twice as he quickly racked his brains.

"Melissa, this isn't a waste of salary. In the future, my colleagues, as well as Benson's colleagues might visit. Are we going to host them in such a place? When Benson and I get married and have wives, are we still going to sleep in bunk beds?"

"None of you have fiancées yet, right? We can wait a little while and save up more money in the meantime," answered Melissa in a logically concise manner.

"No, Melissa. This is a societal rule." Klein was stumped and could only count on lofty principles. "Since I'm earning three pounds a week, I should look like I'm earning three pounds a week."

To be honest, having rented an apartment before with others, Zhou Mingrui was no stranger to his present living conditions as Klein. He was very used to it, but it was because of his past experience that he knew how inconvenient such an environment was for a girl. Furthermore, his goal was to become a Beyonder and study mysticism to find his way home. In the future, he was bound to conduct some magical rituals at home. Having too many people in the apartment building made incidents prone to happen.

Klein saw that Melissa was about to continue arguing, and hurriedly added, “Don’t worry. I’m not planning to get a bungalow, but probably a terrace. Basically, it has to have a bathroom we can call ours. Also, I like Mrs. Smyrin’s bread, Tingen biscuits, and lemon cakes too. We can first consider places near Iron Cross Street and Daffodil Street.”

Melissa pouted her lips slightly and fell silent for a moment before nodding slowly.

“Besides, I’m in no rush to move either. We have to wait for Benson to return,” said Klein with a chuckle. “We can’t have him be shocked when he opens the door to find nothing, right? Imagine him saying in astonishment—‘Where are my things? Where are my siblings? Where’s my home? Is this my home? Did I make a mistake? Goddess, wake me up if this is a dream. Why is my home gone after a few days of absence!?’”

His mimicking of Benson’s tone made Melissa involuntarily smile as her eyes scrunched up and revealed her shallow dimples.

“No, Mr. Franky would definitely be waiting by the door to get Benson to hand over the apartment keys. Benson wouldn’t even be able to come up.” The girl disparaged the miserly landlord.

In the Moretti household, all of them would like to make Mr. Franky the butt of their jokes for every trivial and major matter. It was all thanks to Benson who initiated this practice.

“Right, there’s no way he would switch locks for the tenants after us,” Klein echoed with a smile. He pointed at the door and quipped, “Miss Melissa, shall we head to Silver Crown Restaurant for a celebration?”

Melissa sighed gently and said, "Klein, do you know Selena? My classmate and my good friend?"

Selena? An image of a girl with wine-red hair and deep brown eyes surfaced in Klein's mind. Her parents were Evernight Goddess believers. They had named her after St. Selena as a blessing. She was not yet sixteen, and was half a year younger than Melissa. She was a happy, cheerful, and outgoing lady.

"Yes." Klein nodded in affirmation.

"Her elder brother, Chris, is a lawyer. He currently earns close to three pounds a week as well. His fiancée works part time as a typist," described Melissa. "They have been engaged for more than four years. To ensure a decent and stable life after marriage, they are still saving money to this very day. They have yet to go down the wedding aisle and plan to wait for at least another year. According to Selena, there are many people like her brother. They typically get married after twenty-eight. You have to make advanced preparations and save up. Don't squander your money."

It's just a meal at a restaurant. Is there a need to preach at me... Klein was rendered at a loss whether to laugh or cry. After a few seconds of thought, he said, "Melissa, I'm already earning three pounds a week, and I'll have increments every year. There's no need for you to worry."

"But we need to save some money in the case of any unexpected emergencies. For example, what if that security company suddenly closes down? I have a classmate whose father's company went bankrupt. He had to find temporary work at the pier and their living conditions turned terrible instantly. She had no choice but to quit school," advised Melissa with a serious expression.

“...” Klein extended his hand to cover his face. “T-that security company and the government... Yes, it has some connections with the government. It will not easily close down.”

“But even the government isn’t stable. After every election, if the party in power changes, many people will have their positions stripped off. It turns into a mess.” Melissa retorted in an unyielding manner.

...Sis, you sure know a lot... Klein found the humor in his exasperation as he shook his head. “Alright then...”

“Then I’ll boil some soup with the leftovers from yesterday. Buy some pan-fried fish, a slab of black-pepper beef, a small bottle of butter, and a cup of malt beer for me. Anyway, there should still be some celebration.”

They were commonly-sold items by hawkers on Iron Cross Street. A piece of pan-fried fish was six to eight pence; a not-so-big piece of black-peppered beef was five pence; a cup of malt beer was a penny; and a bottle of butter weighing about a quarter pound was four pence, but buying a pound of butter would only cost one soli three pence.

The original Klein was responsible for buying ingredients during holidays, so he was no stranger to the prices. Klein did a mental estimate that Melissa would need about one soli six pence. Therefore, he took out two one-soli notes.

“Alright.” Melissa did not object to Klein’s proposal. She put down her backpack of stationery and took the notes.

When he saw his sister taking out a tiny bottle for the butter and pots for the other food before briskly walking to the door, Klein thought for a moment and shouted out to her. “Melissa, use the

remaining money to buy some fruits.”

There were many hawkers on Iron Cross Street who would buy low-quality or expiring fruits from other places. The residents were not outraged about this because the prices were extremely cheap. They could taste the magnificent flavors after removing the rotten parts, so it was a cheap enjoyment.

With that said, Klein took a few brisk steps forward and took out the remaining copper pennies from his pocket and stuffed it into his sister’s palm.

“Ah?” Melissa’s brown eyes looked at her brother in puzzlement.

Klein took two steps back and smiled. “Remember to go to Mrs. Smyrin’s. Reward yourself with a tiny lemon cake.”

“...” Melissa’s mouth widened as she blinked. Finally, she said a single word, “Okay.”

She quickly turned around, opened the door, and ran toward the stairwell.

...

A river tore through the land, with cedar and maple trees lining the banks; the air so fresh, it was intoxicating.

Klein, who was here to put closure to his interview, had his revolver with him. He held his cane and paid six pence for the public carriage. He walked down a cemented path and approached a three-story stone building which was shaded by

greenery. It was Tingen University's administrative block.

"It's truly worthy of being one of the two major universities of the Loen Kingdom..." With this being his first time here, Klein sighed as he walked.

Compared to Tingen University, Khoy University right across the river could only be described as shabby.

"Heave-ho!"

"Heave-ho!"

Voices approached slowly as two rowing boats made their way upstream across the Khoy River. Oars were being rowed in an orderly and rhythmic manner.

This was a rowing sport that was popular among all the universities in the Loen Kingdom. With Klein requiring a scholarship to finance his university studies, he, Welch, and the others had joined Khoy University's rowing club and were pretty good at it.

"This is youth..." Klein stopped and looked into the distance before sighing wistfully.

Such sights would no longer be seen in another week since school would break for summer.

As he proceeded down a road sheltered by trees, Klein stopped by a three-story stone building. He entered after successfully registering himself and easily found his way to the office of the

person who had tended to him the other time.

Knock! Knock! Knock! He knocked lightly on the half-closed door.

“Come in.” A man’s voice sounded from inside.

A middle-aged instructor dressed in a white shirt and black tuxedo frowned when he saw Klein enter. “There’s another hour until the interview.”

“Mr. Stone, do you still remember me? I’m a student of Senior Associate Professor Cohen, Klein Moretti. You have read my recommendation letter before.” Klein smiled as he took off his hat.

Harvin Stone stroked his black beard and asked, puzzled, “Is there something wrong? I’m not in charge of interviews.”

“Here’s the situation. I’ve already found a job, so I won’t be participating in the interview today.” Klein gave his reason for coming.

“I see...” When Harvin Stone learned of the reason, he stood up and reached out his right hand. “Congratulations. You are really a polite lad. I will inform the professor and senior associate professors.”

Klein shook Harvin’s hand and planned on making a little small talk before bidding him farewell when he heard a familiar voice behind him.

“Moretti, you found another job?”

Klein turned around and saw an elder with a head of silver hair that left a deep impression on his silhouette. His deep, blue eyes sunk deep into his face and he had few wrinkles. The man looked sharp in his black tuxedo.

“Good afternoon, Mentor. Mr. Azik,” he hurriedly greeted. “Why are the two of you here?”

The elder was none other than Senior Associate Professor of Khoy University’s history department, who was also his mentor, Mr. Quentin Cohen. Beside Cohen was a middle-aged man with bronze-colored skin of average build. He did not have any facial hair and held a newspaper in his hand. His hair was black and his pupils brown. His facial features were soft as his eyes revealed an indescribable sense of weariness like it had seen the vicissitudes of life. Beneath his right ear was a black mole which could only be seen if looked at carefully.

Klein recognized him since he was Khoy University’s history department lecturer, Mr. Azik, who often helped the original Klein. He enjoyed debating with his mentor, Senior Associate Professor Cohen. They often had a clash of opinion, but even so, they were best friends; otherwise, they would not have enjoyed meeting up for a chat.

Cohen nodded and said with a relaxed tone, “Azik and I are here to participate in an academic conference. What kind of job did you get?”

“It’s a security company which seeks, collects, and protects ancient relics. They were in need of a professional consultant and are paying me three pounds a week.” Klein repeated what he said to his sister yesterday. Following that, he explained, “As you know, I prefer exploring history, instead of summarizing it.”

Cohen nodded slightly and said, “Everyone has their own

choices. I'm very happy that you bothered to come to Tingen University to inform them instead of just not showing up."

At that moment, Azik interjected, "Klein, do you know what happened to Welch and Naya? I read in the newspapers that they were killed by burglars."

The incident has become a case of armed burglary? And why is it already in the newspapers? Klein was taken aback as he weighed over his words.

"I'm not very clear of the specifics as well. Welch had obtained a diary of the Solomon Empire's Antigonius family from the Fourth Epoch. He sought my help in interpreting it. I helped them for the first few days, but I later got busy with job hunting. The police even came to me two days ago."

He deliberately divulged the matter regarding the Solomon Empire and the Antigonius family in hopes of getting any information from the two history teachers.

"The Fourth Epoch..." Cohen muttered with a frown.

The bronze-skinned and weary eyes of Azik went blank first before he inhaled. He rubbed his temple with his newspaper-wielding left hand and said, "Antigonius... rings a bell... But why can't I remember..."